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EDITORIAL

We are proud to present the inaugural issue of *QUEST*, and we hope that you find the research papers inspiring and provocative. All of them have undergone rigorous double-blind peer review. *QUEST* is a publication from the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and is funded by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.

The idea of publishing *QUEST* emerged two years ago at a meeting between the two co-editors, who are also dean and associate dean of IASACT,¹ and was first promulgated by Simon Shui-Man Kwan during IASACT 2015. While *QUEST* is ready to publish the peer-reviewed articles authored by IASACT scholars and its alumni, it is not exclusively an IASACT journal. It endeavors to contribute to the ongoing efforts aimed at promoting creative thinking and lively scholarly interchange in the interpretation of all aspects of Christianity and other religions in Asia. So you will read in this inaugural issue and subsequent ones, articles submitted by researchers from the IASACT circle, as well as by other Asian and international scholars. *QUEST* welcome submissions—research papers and book review articles—that span the full spectrum of religious studies, cultural studies, theological studies, and interdisciplinary studies on the cultures and religions in Asia.

Some readers probably know that there was an old *QUEST*, that is, *QUEST: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars*, which was published by the Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. Unfortunately, the old *QUEST* ceased publication after 2007. In its final issue, it disclosed the reason: "The low number of subscribers does not justify the high cost of production." It was a paper journal, and as all of us know, "high cost" is often a heavy yoke that burdens a paper journal. The new *QUEST*, which is no longer a paper journal, sees itself in a relay race on the same team as the old *QUEST*. The new now takes up and renews the vision of the old. Here in this issue, we miss a brotherly name—Professor David Kwang-sun Suh, a globally renowned Minjung theologian. He was editor of the old *QUEST*. It was his excellent editorial skill as well as his academic prowess and passion that transformed the old *QUEST* into an international publication. Without him, the new *QUEST* would not have appeared.

The new *QUEST* is an electronic journal. Actually, we do not only want to publish an e-journal, but we also wish to engage authors and readers interested in Asian religious and cultural studies in the Open Access Movement. Open Access is more than a publishing model. It means e-democracy. For instance, a famous statement of the Budapest Open Access Initiative argues:

Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor, and the poor with the rich...and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation, and quest for knowledge. (Budapest 2002)

¹The Institute for Advanced Study in Asian Cultures and Theologies (IASACT) is a four-week residential program that provides space and time for scholars to deepen their understanding of theologies and traditions. Participants undertake research and writing in the broad area of Asian cultures and theologies and complete a working paper while in residence. Starting from 2015, IASACT is organized by the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and is funded by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. Since IASACT's inception in 2004, more than 200 scholars from over 100 institutions in nearly 20 countries have benefited from the time IASACT affords for reflection, interaction and network-building. For details, pls. refer to <https://www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/en/academics/iasact>.

We believe that there are strong ethical imperatives for making scholarly works public and freely available. John Willinsky (2006), an expert on open access knowledge and director of the Public Knowledge Project, even calls the knowledge gained from scientific and scholarly studies "public knowledge," since it is largely funded from public sources. We hope you will join us.

May we all learn as we share our views and our experience with each other.

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A NEO-CONFUCIAN ENGAGEMENT OF CENTERING PRAYER IN TRANSFORMING THE SELF¹

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ABSTRACT

Based on teachings about human nature and the quiet practice advocated by Thomas Keating (1923-present) and Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200), this paper attempts to draw Neo-Confucian insights (e.g., the *li-qi* theory, the *zhong-yong* principle, and complementary-polarity), into the teaching on Centering Prayer and forming the self. I argue that viewed through the lens of Neo-Confucianism, contemplative practice is indispensable for the transformation of selfhood.

Introduction

This paper explores how Thomas Keating's teaching on Centering Prayer can be supported by and expanded upon with Zhu Xi's cosmology and teaching on quiet-sitting. New insights for Christian anthropology are inspired by three foundational concepts in Zhu's cosmology: a) that the impersonal *li* and *qi* are the two basic cosmic entities; b) that quietude and activity are the two basic modalities of these cosmic entities; and c) that bipolarity and *zhong-yong* are the two basic cosmic rules for maintaining harmonious existence and creativity in this cosmos. Drawing on Zhu's Neo-Confucian insights, I argue that quiet practice is indispensable, because quietude offers an organic connection with human nature and with the Ultimate.

While the methods of quiet practice are widely known both in Asian and Western cultures, and comparative studies are on the surge, the comparative study of quiet practice between these two cultures is only in its initial stages (Eifring 2012, 1). With this article I seek to contribute to this new venture.

Christian-Confucian dialogue reflects Francis Clooney's framework for comparative theology.² According to Clooney (2010), comparative theology is a "practical response to religious diversity" (10), whereby people are motivated to "venture into learning from other faith traditions for fresh theological insights" (69). Clooney urges the reader to read a text "in its own terms," and to be attentive to textual and historical context with the aid of commentators (59-61). Following this principle, I draw on textual, historical and theological analyses of the Centering Prayer literature in order

¹ This paper is an extract from my doctoral dissertation, entitled "From Solitude to Solidarity: A Neo-Confucian Appropriation of Centering Prayer in the Transformation of Self."

² Clooney is a respected and recognized author in the field of interreligious dialogue.

to understand what is meant by the self, as well as the benefits of contemplation in transforming the self. To understand Zhu's teaching on human nature and quiet-sitting, I draw on the textual and philosophical analyses of recognized scholars of Zhu.

Thomas Keating and Zhu Xi

I take Thomas Keating (1923-present) and Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130-1200) as the principal representatives of this religious dialogue, because they both made a significant contribution to quiet practice in their respective traditions. As a Trappist monk, Keating is the co-founder of the Centering Prayer Movement and of Contemplative Outreach. In 2010, the Pitts Theological Library of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, US, established the *Father Thomas Keating Collection* to support scholarly research and promote contemplative spirituality (Emory Pitts Theology Library, 2016). In 2013, a documentary film entitled "Thomas Keating: a Rising Tide of Silence" won the Audience Choice Award. All these achievements indicate the Western world's increasing interest in the practice of silence, and Keating's significant role therein.

As for Zhu Xi, he played a key role in the "completion" of Neo-Confucianism through his teaching and writing (Chan 1986, 1). Neo-Confucianism is a reconstructed form of Confucianism and was the dominant ideology in China for 800 years until the early twentieth century. The influence of Neo-Confucianism has stretched also to East Asia to the present day (Berthrong and Nagai 2000, 4-6, 21-22; Chan 1986, 1). Zhu's teachings present a profound spiritual vision of human life, which is manifested uniquely in his teaching about quiet-sitting as a vital means of self-cultivation. According to Wm. Theodore de Bary, Zhu's two most significant contributions are the development of quiet-sitting and the compilation of *Sishujizhu* 四書集注 (Zhu 1998).³ Together with *Sishu*, quiet-sitting spread to the rest of East Asia as the gem of Neo-Confucianism (de Bary 2011, 45-46). Zhu is the most important theorist of Neo-Confucian quiet-sitting, and is responsible for extending the practice to other East Asian countries, such as Korea and Japan (Yang 2004, 68).⁴ I believe this Keating-Zhu engagement offers fruitful insights for Christian anthropology and Centering Prayer, or for Christian contemplation in general.

Keating's Christian Anthropology and Centering Prayer

The Human Condition: False Self vs. True Self

Today the contribution of the social sciences is critical for understanding the human person (Ruffing 1993, 48). Unlike those Christians who view the relationship between social science and Christian faith as a binary dichotomy, Keating chooses to appreciate and utilize the former in order to enrich the latter. At the same time, Keating's anthropology is solidly in line with the Christian tradition, particularly that of the Eastern Orthodox Church.⁵ Based on Scriptural support and the doctrines of Creation, Christology, and the Trinity, he argues for human oneness and the divinization/evolution of consciousness (Keating 2013, 2; Keating 2004, 1-2). He also emphasizes inner freedom as the essence of the image and likeness of God in which

³ By putting the Confucian classics (*Analects of Confucius* 論語, *Mencius* 孟子, *Daxue* 大學, and *Zhongyong* 中庸) into *Sishu* 四書, and synthesizing their commentaries into coherent interpretations, Zhu structured a new Confucian canon. Both *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* are originally from *Liji* (Book of Rites) 禮記. *Sishu* became the official text for civil service examinations from 1313 to 1905.

⁴ Yang is a professor at the Department of Chinese Literature in National Tsing Hua University. One of his research interests is Neo-Confucianism, and he has published extensively.

⁵ For more information on Christian anthropology related to Keating's viewpoints, see Anderson 1993, 8; Behr 2005, 1:51; Blocher and Dyrness 2008, 43.

humanity is created, with spiritual evolution as the path of liberation from the false self to restore this freedom (Keating 2013, 1-2).

The notion of false versus true self is a significant and unique feature of Keating's anthropology, and is drawn mainly from modern psychology. The psychological concepts of unhealed and repressed childhood wounds/trauma, the unconscious, and defense mechanisms/compensatory strategies are all crucial in Keating's idea of false/true self. Keating (1997) defines the two in this way:

True Self—the image of God in which every human being is created; our participation in the divine life manifested in our uniqueness. (147)

False self—the self developed in our own likeness rather than in the likeness of God; the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood, which seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control, and which bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification. (146)

In Keating's opinion, all persons are deeply distorted by the false self and hindered from manifesting the true self capable of fully participating in the divine life. The concept of false self has two major implications for the human condition. According to Keating, unhealed wounds with unresolved negative emotions beginning in childhood are firstly repressed and stored in the unconscious, and secondly, develop into emotional programs that center around the unmet instinctual needs for security/survival, esteem/affection, and power/control. In desperate attempts to satisfy these unmet instinctual needs, the false self develops various strategies to cope with emotional trauma or perceived threats, and bases its self-worth in cultural or group identification (Berger 2006, 35; Keating 2003, 3, 139). He calls these strategies "emotional programs for happiness." The energy behind these "emotional programs" is addictive, and is aimed at compensating for childhood wounds (Bourgeault 2004, 95). The result is human misery, with the false self programmed to react in harmful ways.

In signifying his model is in line with Christian teaching, Keating explains how "emotional programs for happiness" are the human condition described by classical theology as "original sin." According to Keating, the doctrine of the Fall or original sin was the early Christian theologians' attempt to explain the universal human affliction from the beginning. Other religions or schools of philosophy have their own ways of explaining the universal phenomena of human affliction (Keating 2003, 26). In integrating psychology with theology, Keating understands human suffering through the concepts of "false self" and "emotional programs for happiness." Therefore, he replaces the concept of original sin with ideas of the human condition strained by the false self. In Keating's opinion, change is only possible with divine grace. And he advocates that Centering Prayer, as a divine therapy, helps to transform the false self into the true self.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is basically a period of solitude and silence, as well as inward stillness, to be practiced for twenty minutes, twice a day. During the time of prayer, one centers attention on God's presence within. Participants choose a sacred word as the symbol of God's presence and as an anchoring point, so that they are able to focus on the Divine presence and not be distracted by the ordinary flow of thoughts. Whenever the participant realizes that s/he is being distracted by other thoughts, s/he simply returns to this sacred word/symbol (Keating 2015). For Keating, consenting to God's presence and action within is the essence of Centering Prayer (Keating 2012, 1).

This simple consent to God's presence and letting go of all mental activities to rest in God is closely connected with the contemplative and *apophatic* tradition. The method of Centering

Prayer, based primarily on *The Cloud of Unknowing* (fourteenth century), is an attempt to present the contemplative tradition in an updated format (Keating 1994, 45). *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Walsh 1981) teaches in this way:

For a simple reaching out directly towards God is sufficient, without any other cause except himself. If you like, you can have this reaching out wrapped up and enfolded in a single word... This word is to be your shield and your spear, whether you are riding in peace or in war. With this word you are to beat upon this cloud and his darkness above you. With this word you are to strike down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting... (133-134)

The use of a “word” to fight against distracting thoughts while focusing on God’s presence reminds one of the “sacred word” used in Centering Prayer. Besides *The Cloud of Unknowing*, earlier contemplative practices including *Lectio Divina*, the pure prayer of Evagrius of Pontus (345-399), the silent prayer of John Cassian (365-435), and the prayer of the heart, are also sources of Centering Prayer (Keating 2003, 144; Keating 1986, 7).⁶ Keating (2000) concludes that Centering Prayer is “a blending of the finest elements of the Christian contemplative tradition” (1).

The *apophatic* approach in the Christian tradition can be understood in two ways: a philosophical-theological position to see the incomprehensible God, and a mode of spiritual practice to ascend to God.⁷ An appreciation that God is beyond human comprehension is found in several of the Greek Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and the Cappadocian Fathers (fourth century) (Louth 2012, 138). Both the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the First Vatican Council (1869-70) affirmed that God’s essence is incomprehensible (Egan 1993, 701).

As a mode of ascent to God, the essence of the *apophatic* way is abandonment. Cynthia Bourgeault, an acknowledged scholar of Centering Prayer, understands abandonment as a Christ-centered spiritual practice because it models itself on Jesus’ life of self-emptying (*kenōsis*) and teaches dying to self. Bourgeault argues that in Centering Prayer one experiences losing life and finding life through letting go of the false self and awakening to the true self (Bourgeault 2004, 81). More importantly, these skills developed in meditation can be transferred to daily life so that one can be freed from unhealthy attachments (Bourgeault 2004, 82-83). In short, Centering Prayer is a contemplative practice rooted in the Christian *apophatic* tradition, but put into a contemporary form and language. Centering Prayer enables a person to consent to God’s presence and be open to the Divine Therapy of transforming the false self into true self.

Zhu’s Cosmology and Quiet-sitting

The essence of Neo-Confucianism is learning to be a sage in harmony with the Principle of Heaven through a self-cultivation that leads to moral acts in the world. By claiming that everyone is born with a good nature, and therefore has the capacity for sagehood, Mencius (372-289 B.C.) set the foundation for attaining sagehood as the goal of learning and self-cultivation for everyone. Zhu Xi is arguably the most influential interpreter of Mencius’ teaching. To understand Zhu’s teachings on human nature and quiet-sitting as a form of self-cultivation, it is first necessary to comprehend his cosmology.

Cosmology and Human Nature

⁶ The booklet (Keating 1986) plus a series of video cassettes was published as a teaching tool for Centering Prayer, and is still used in the 10-days intensive retreat for Centering Prayer held at St Benedict Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, USA.

⁷ This understanding of the two aspects is derived from Egan (1993, 700) and Howells (2005, 117).

Zhu's idea is that *li* and *qi* are the Ultimate Reality in the cosmos. They are two different entities, but complementary to and never separate from each other:

天下未有無理之氣，亦未有無氣之理。(《朱子全書》卷 49:1a) In the whole universe there has never been any *qi* without *li*, or *li* without *qi*. (*Zhuziquanshu* 49:1a). (Zhu 1987, 363; translation adapted from Chan 1969, 634).⁸
所謂理與氣決是二物。(《朱子全書》卷 49:5b) What are called *li* and *qi* are certainly two different entities. (*Zhuziquanshu* 49:5b). (Zhu 1987, 366; translation adapted from Chan 1969, 637)

According to Zhu, the existence of all distinct things and events in the universe is constituted by various combinations of *li* and *qi*. While *li*, which is also called *dao* or *taiji*, has no form, but gives each thing, person or event its specific nature and principle, *qi* gives things their specific form:

天地之間有理有氣。理也者，形而上之道也，生物之本也。氣也者，形而下之器也，生物之具也。是以人物之生必稟此理，然後有性，必稟此氣，然後有形。(《朱子全書》卷 49:5b) Throughout the universe there are both *li* and *qi*. *Li* refers to *dao*, which exists before physical form (and is without it) and is the root from which all things are produced. *Qi* refers to material objects, which exists after physical form (and is with it); it is the instrument by which things are produced. Therefore in the production of humans and things, they must be endowed with *li* before they have their nature, and they must be endowed with *qi* before they have physical form. (*Zhuziquanshu* 49:5b). (Zhu 1987, 366; translation adapted from Chan 1969, 636)

Qi is the matter and energy of which the entire universe and all things in it are composed. The particular purity of *qi* endowed in each thing, *person*, or *event* gives each one a specific form and characteristics (Chu 1990, 90). On the other hand, each thing, person, or event has its own nature and principle, which is a manifestation of the fundamental *Li*.

Building on his *li-qi* theory, Zhu asserts that the human mind and human nature are also a production of *li* and *qi*, and are identical with the universal *Li*, capable of knowing the basic principle of reality. However, one's endowment of *qi* may be impure. As a result, the human mind is filled with selfish desires and emotional attachments, obscuring the principle and the original good nature (Chu 1990, 9; Pocesi 2009, 201).⁹ To restore human nature and actualize its goodness, the mind must be cultivated. Zhu illustrates his mind theory concisely in this paragraph:¹⁰

學者須是求放心，然後識得此性之善。人性無不善，只緣自放其心，遂流於惡。「天命之謂性」，即天命在人，便無不善處。發而中節，亦是善；不中節，便是

⁸ Regarding to text numbering for *Zhuziquanshu*, 49 refers to the number of *juan* (chapter), followed by the folio number divided into either a or b. Chan and I follow the same numbering system.

⁹ Innate human nature includes four senses of morality in humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, 仁義禮智 as stated in *Zhuziquanshu* 49:1b; Chan 1969, 634.

¹⁰ Zhu's human mind theory is also well illustrated in "A Treatise on the Examination of the Mind" 觀心說 and "First Letter to the Gentlemen of Hunan on Equilibrium and Harmony" 與湖南諸公論中和第一書.

惡。(《朱子語類》〈學六〉〈持守〉卷 12) Students must seek their lost minds, they'll then understand the goodness of their nature. Human nature is in all instances good; it's simply because one has let go of the mind that one falls into evil. "What heaven has conferred is called human nature" means that the heavenly mandate exists in the human being, and that human nature is completely good. When the feelings have been aroused, and they attain their due measure and degree—this is goodness. When the feelings don't attain their due measure and degree—this is evil. (*Zhuzi yulei* 12.4.4). (Zhu 1986, 1:203; translation adapted from Chu 1990, 165-166).¹¹

This statement indicates two significant points in Zhu's theory of mind and human nature. First, with a fully developed mind, one can know one's nature and know Heaven, because the nature of mind is not clouded and one is equipped to search for *li* in its natural state. With a restored mind, one can serve Heaven because one can follow *li* in its natural state. It is worth noting that this basic teaching on human nature and human mind is very much in line with the teaching of Mencius in 《孟子》〈盡心上〉 (*Mencius*, "Jin Xin I"). Second, in the process of cultivating the mind, Zhu urges people to keep feelings in check so that they might attain their "due measure and degree." This advice is rooted in the teaching of *Zhongyong* chapter 1. *Zhong* literally means equilibrium or centrality while *Yong* means harmony. When dealing with feelings, the goal is to be in equilibrium/harmony with the Principle of Heaven in both states of mind, i.e., before and after feelings are aroused in the mind (Adler 2008, 62; Chan 1987, 187; Taylor 1997, 46; Taylor 1988, 37). Should the mind permit the feelings to get out of control, human nature will become obscured. Preserving and nourishing the mind in equilibrium or harmony is of ultimate concern in Zhu's program of self-cultivation.

Self-cultivation and Quiet-sitting

While Zhu's self-cultivation is intended to purify the mind, its ultimate goal is sagehood in moral perfection, in which a person's experienced mental functioning and moral activity will authentically reflect the Heavenly Principle endowed in human nature (Adler 2008, 59-60).

Quiet-sitting is one form of self-cultivation frequently discussed in Zhu's writings. In his teaching, he is cautious in seeking a balance of meditative practice with other forms of learning and self-cultivation (Taylor 1997, 45). For Zhu, there is a risk of falling into quietism by focusing too much on the unmanifest mind in quietude, and thus ignoring its manifest state, as well as one's moral responsibility in the world. Moreover, a low profile teaching on quiet-sitting might have been intended to prevent criticism against him as a Buddhist or Daoist follower (Taylor 1997, 48-49; de Bary 1989, 232). Nonetheless, Zhu clearly endorses quiet-sitting in his writing as a practice with a wide range of benefits. From a detailed and critical investigation, Rodney Taylor categorizes these benefits into four themes, namely: aiding study, developing *jing* (a state of abiding in reverence), facilitating moral action, and penetrating into the interior mind (Taylor 1988, 33). While all four benefits are crucial to Confucian ideology, the last is of particular importance in understanding quiet-sitting as a spiritual practice. The following statements by Zhu illustrate this point:

近覺讀書損耗心目，不如靜坐省察自己為有功。(《朱子文集》續集，卷 2〈答蔡季通〉第 54 條) Recently I have felt that study and reading are harmful to mind and

¹¹ Regarding the text numbering for *Zhuzi yulei*, only the traditional numbering of chapters is offered in the *Zhonghua shu ju* edition used here. Gardner's set of three numbers is based on the Ch'uan ching t'ang edition. The first digit refers to the chapter, the second is the folio leaf, and the third is the opening line of the translated page. See Chu 1990, 87.

eyes. Quiet-sitting as a way of examining the self is more beneficial. (*Zhuzi wenji*, Sequel, 2). (Zhu 2002, 25: 4686-4687; quoted in Yang 2006, 242; translation mine)
 且靜坐，教他心平氣定，見得道理漸次分曉。(《朱子語類》〈學五〉〈讀書法下〉卷 11) ... the practice of quiet-sitting can calm down one's mind with focus, so that one may gradually see the principles of dao clearly. (*Zhuzi yulei* 11). (Zhu 1986, 1:178; translation mine)

Here Zhu claims that quiet-sitting makes possible a fuller manifestation of the Heavenly Principle within. In quiet-sitting, a person is gathered together inwardly, calming all emotions, examining the conscience, and filling the mind with principles of right actions. In other words, quiet-sitting helps a person attain sagehood by restoring their innate nature and coming to know the Principle of Heaven. Why does quiet-sitting make such a critical contribution? The answer lies in the cosmology of Zhu Xi. In addition to the two basic cosmic entities, *li* and *qi*, Zhu also points out two primal events in the cosmos, namely quietude and activity:

天地之間只有動靜兩端，循環不已更無餘事。(《朱子全書》卷 52:45a) There is no other event in the cosmos except activity and quietude, succeeding each other in an unceasing cycle. (*Zhuiziquanshu* 52:45a). (Zhu1987, 468; translation mine)

而其動其靜，則必有所以動靜之理焉，是則所謂太極者也。……太極者所以指夫天地萬物之根也，周子因之而又謂之無極者，所以著夫無聲無臭之妙也。然而無極而太極，太極本無極。(《朱子全書》卷 52:45a) For this activity and quietude, there must be *li* (the principle) which make them possible. This is the *taiji* *Taiji* is the root of myriad things in the cosmos. Master Zhou also calls it *wuji* for it is without sound and smell. Hence, *wuji* and *taiji*, *taiji* is *wuji*. (*Zhuiziquanshu* 52:45a). (Zhu1987, 468; translation mine)

當初元無一物，只有此理。有此理便會動而生陽，靜而生陰。靜極復動，動極復靜，循環流轉。其實理無窮，氣亦與之無窮。自有天地便是這物事在這裏流轉。

(《朱子全書》卷 49:10a) In the beginning there is nothing, only this *li*. *With this li there will be* movement that generates the *yang*, and there will be quietude that generates the *yin*. When quietude reaches its ultimate, activity resumes; when activity reaches its ultimate, quietude resumes. One after another they keep circulating. In fact, *li* has no end, *qi* together with it has no end either. *Since the existence of heaven and earth, this event has been circulating here.* (*Zhuiziquanshu* 49:10a). (Zhu1987, 368; translation mine)

Here, the concept of polarity is critical. Both *li* and *qi* have their poles in quietude and activity respectively. Implicit in Zhu's cosmology, *Wuji* is the principle of quietude, while *Taiji* is the principle of activity; *yin* is the energy of quietude, while *yang* is the energy of activity. All things in the universe are sustained and produced by *li* (*in wuji-taiji*) and *qi* (*in yin-yang*) through their endless combinations and interaction in the polarity of quietude and activity.

Clearly, the importance of quietude cannot be minimized. The perception of quietude as one of the two basic modalities of *li-qi* in the cosmos is the answer to why it is necessary to cultivate a quiet mind. No wonder Zhu said that the practice of quiet-sitting helps to nourish one's original foundation by providing a resting place.

始學工夫，須是靜坐。靜坐則本原定，雖不免逐物，及收歸來，也有箇安頓處。譬如居家熟了，便是出外，到家便安。如茫茫在外，不曾下工夫，便要收斂向裏面，也無箇著落處。(《朱子語類》〈學六〉〈持守〉卷 12) The effort of

learning at the beginning should be quiet-sitting. Quiet-sitting nourishes the original foundation by settling it down. Even though one does not avoid worldly affairs, there is still a collecting together and a return to a point of rest. It is similar to a person who has been out for a journey. When he returns home, he finds it restful because he has been familiar with this restful dwelling. If no effort has been made (to the nourishment of the original foundation), even when one wants to collect together inward after wandering outside, one still lacks the dwelling place to rest in. (*Zhuzi yulei* 96:12a-b.). (Zhu1986, 1:217; translation adapted from Taylor 1997, 67)

This metaphor of journey effectively illustrates the complementary relationship of activity and quietude in the cosmos. We need both in order to nourish our very nature and existence. After activity, it is in this place of restful quietude that one is nourished and transformed to know the Heavenly Principle. The unique organic connection of quiet-sitting with cosmic quietude makes it a supreme practice in Zhu's program of self-cultivation.

Neo-Confucian Insights for Centering Prayer

As reflected in the above discussion, both Keating and Zhu's teachings on human nature and quiet practice are deeply rooted in their spiritual traditions of Christianity and Confucianism respectively. The valuable contributions they have made owe much to their successful integration of new knowledge into their heritage. In Keating's case, the new knowledge is mainly psychology; while in Zhu's case, it is Buddhist and Daoist teaching. History has informed us of the value of integrating new knowledge to expand tradition in meeting the challenges of a new generation. This paper is another attempt at such an integration.

When engaged in comparative theology, Clooney prefers to work with similarity rather than difference, considering the former a ripe and comparable area for fostering theological conversation (Clooney 2010, 75-76). However, scholars like Judith Berling consider differences and gaps as sources of inspiration (Berling 2004, 40). Instead of seeing the two methods as opposed to each other, I find insights from Zhu's quiet-sitting complement Keating's Centering Prayer. Hence, in the following sections, both similarities and differences between quiet-sitting and Centering Prayer are revealed in order to draw out meaningful insights for the transformation of self in the latter.

Zhu claims that *li* and *qi* constitute all realities in this cosmos, including humanity, which is designated for moral acts according to the embodied heavenly principle, *li*. To be fully human is to be a sage in harmony with *li* and everything under heaven. This foundational understanding of human nature implies that to be fully human is not simply to be an independent individual, but to have a harmonious relationship with the transcendent, as well as with all others in this cosmos, be they human or otherwise. As stated by Wei-ming Tu (1989), "Three interrelated dimensions are involved here: the person, the community, and the transcendent" (94). In dialogue with this core teaching of Neo-Confucianism on human nature, the following paragraphs attempt to enrich Christian anthropology in relation to these three dimensions. The focus is on the way quiet practice can contribute to each of these relational aspects of humanity.

Insights of the Self in Relation to the Ultimate

Neo-Confucian speculation on the origin of humanity and its destiny shares remarkable similarities with the Christian account. According to Genesis 1, God is the Creator of all, and humanity is created in God's image. In the understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as in the Christian mystical tradition, the noblest call of humanity is to act according to God's will and ultimately be one with God. This process is called divinization. Apparently both Neo-Confucian and Christian traditions consider human nature comes from and assembles the Ultimate Reality in

a certain way, and is intrinsically good. In addition, the highest calling of a human in both traditions is to be in accord with the Ultimate. Such similarities in the foundational understanding of humanity and its relationship with the Ultimate across Eastern and Western traditions are noteworthy. They enhance a universal perspective on human transcendence, human dignity and human potential for goodness.

On the other hand, there are also obvious differences between the two traditions when articulating the human relationship with the Ultimate. Zhu's concepts of *li* and *qi*, as well as their polar modalities in quietude and activity, are utterly foreign to the Christian comprehension of God. Yet these contrasts are precisely the points of inspiration needed to stretch Christian ideology on the Divine, and to germinate new insights concerning human-divine relationship. Through the metaphysical lens of Zhu Xi, I argue that quietude is needed for humanity to deepen its relationship with God, and to be in tune with God's will. This is for two reasons. First, if quietude is one of two basic divine modalities, it would be obligatory to encounter God in quietude. Second, Zhu tends to perceive the Ultimate as an impersonal *li* (principle) and *qi* (energy), while quiet-sitting is a helpful means of nurturing one's endowed *li* and *qi*. Hence, quiet-sitting enhances the connection between the practitioner and the Ultimate Reality. The following sections provide further elaboration on these two hypotheses.

Quietude as One of the Two Basic Divine Modalities

The Bible is an authoritative source for Christians in understanding God. Based on the Bible, some Christian theologians attempt to articulate the nature of God and come up with various concepts. For example, there are the famous three O's: omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience, suggesting that God is all powerful, all present, and all knowing. Alternatively, God is perceived as Triune, i.e., one Being in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then there are the less philosophical descriptions, such as God is love and faithful, or the Creator and Savior. This list of the attributes of the divine nature can go on and on, making a sharp contrast with the four elements grasped by Zhu Xi when framing the Ultimate, namely *li* and *qi*, and their polar modalities of quietude and activity.

To understand God in terms of activity is certainly familiar to Christians. The Bible is filled with stories of God's actions relating to creation, salvation or revelation in this world and in human lives. However, to understand God in terms of quietude is alien for most Christians. Compared to action, the Scriptural record on sacred silence is scarce, although not void. With critical analysis of Scriptural exegesis in Jewish tradition, Benjamin Sommer (1999) has made a convincing case for divine revelation through silence at Sinai in Exodus 19-20: "[A]t Sinai, Israel heard nothing, but it did experience a revelation, a wordless, inarticulate signification of God's commanding presence" (440-441).

Encountering God in silence is also noted in Elijah's mysterious account in 1 Kings 19:9-13.¹² The accounts of Abraham (Gen 22:2-3), Moses (Exod 3:5-6), and Job (Job 40:3-5), also shed insight into sacred silence, which is considered the root of meditation and the springboard to action (Bryson 2009, 2).

In addition to Scriptural evidence of the importance of divine silence, there are also teachings in the *apophatic* tradition that assemble divine quietude. The extended history of monastic and contemplative traditions since the desert fathers is a strong support for Christians who are drawn by divine silence. As for recent theological attempts on this subject, Raimundo Panikkar's (1989) *The Silence of God*, and Karl Rahner's (1975) *Encounters with Silence* are two noteworthy works. In the field of interreligious dialogue on silence, Sung Hei Kim proposes that God's revelation as emphasized by Christianity, and the silence of Heaven as stated by Confucius,

¹² See NRSV, 1 Kings 19:12 translation; Sommer 1999, 441-444; God's stillness is translated as a murmur, whisper or small voice by some translators; see Waldman 1994, 228.

can be viewed as two ends of a pole, complementing one another (Kim 1991, 206; quoted in Chen 2005, 130-131).

In spite of all these attempts to explore the divine silence, hardly any Christian theologians have explicitly stated that quietude is the fundamental nature of the Ultimate, as understood by Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi. The few exceptions include Ignatius of Antioch (first century), and John the Solitary (fifth century). Both identified God with silence in their teachings (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 8.2; and *On Prayer*, 4), implying that silence is God's primary nature, or characteristic (Brock 1979, 86, 98; Schoedel 1985, 118, 120). Nonetheless, the visions of Ignatius and John in seeing God as silence have scarcely been noticed in the Christian tradition. To identify God as silence is almost unheard of, at least in mainstream theology. No wonder that when Bernard McGinn (2008) traced the Christian *apophatic* tradition, he did not include this stance as one of the identified forms of negation.¹³ What if quietude is indeed a fundamental aspect of the nature of God? Zhu's cosmology challenges Christians to take God's silence more seriously in theological thinking as well as in spiritual practice. A silent God points out that stillness is essential for encountering the Divine, as stated explicitly in Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

The Ultimate as Immanent and Impersonal

In claiming that everything under heaven is produced by *li* and *qi*, which are impersonal, Zhu sends another challenge to the Christian understanding of the divine-human relationship. Such cosmology indicates that the Ultimate Reality is both immanent and impersonal in relation to humanity.

To see God as impersonal is particularly challenging and may even be blasphemy for some Christians, whose God image is strongly colored by the personal Triune God. Keating is one who emphasizes a personal God supported by the Scriptures, the doctrine of incarnation, and particularly the doctrine of Trinity. However, this traditional emphasis on divine personhood is challenged by some scholars. For example, Chung-ying Cheng (1991, 459; quoted in Chen 2005, 320) and Mark Heim (2001, 34-40) have proposed seeing the Ultimate as both personal and impersonal at the same time.

The Confucian emphasis on the immanent *Dao* in humanity is in contrast with the transcendent emphasis of classical Western theology, which is in turn deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. Again, this traditional emphasis on divine transcendence, which inevitably shapes a distant God, has come under criticism (Torrence 1997, 17-93; quoted in Chen 2005, 340). Keating is one of those who embraces the Orthodox tradition to highlight the doctrine of incarnation for the immanent Word.

As more and more scholars become dissatisfied with the dominant and binary view of the Ultimate as transcendent and personal, Zhu's *li-qi* theory and *zhong-yong* principle can contribute to this debate. Inspired by Zhu's principle of harmony in polarity, God can be seen as both personal and impersonal, transcendent and immanent. This discussion on God's nature is beyond the scope of this paper, however, and would require another project. A better focus here is to investigate the relationship between quiet practice, self-cultivation, and the Ultimate as immanent and impersonal.

The cultivation of the embodied *qi* has long been valued by Confucianism, as testified by Mencius' famous statement: "I'm good at cultivating the vast, flood like *qi*!" 《孟子》〈公孫丑上〉 (Mencius, "Gong Sun Chou I") Building on Mencius' claim, Hyo Dong Lee explains how the cultivation of *qi* may connect one to the cosmic *qi*, and contribute to the growth of humanity

¹³ The three forms of negativity mentioned by McGinn are: a) the conviction that God is beyond human speech; b) an inner detachment and release; and c) divine absence when God withdraws.

(Lee 2014, 64). Although Mencius did not connect quiet-sitting with the cultivation of *qi*, it is possible that the two became intimately related in Zhu's time, given the widespread influence of Daoism. Daniel Gardner (2003), who recognizes *qi* cultivation is important for Neo-Confucianism, concludes that meditative reading is a Neo-Confucian method to cultivate *qi* and realize the authentic self:

Through attentiveness and meditative reading, the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism is advocating the cultivation of one's *qi*, one's psychophysical endowment. Body and mind together are to be refined and transformed. The aim of such transformation is transcendence, but not to an "other" realm; rather it is a transcendence of our normal, chronic condition, to realization of our authentic self. (114)

Although meditative reading is not the same as quiet-sitting, Gardner has noted that its methods are similar in certain ways to *Lectio Divina*, an ancient Christian prayer that prepares one for contemplation, according to Keating. In this case, meditative reading may at least be seen as a form of quiet practice to cultivate *qi*.

Keating emphasizes that the goal of Centering Prayer is to deepen a personal relationship with the Personal God who dwells within the individual. This explanation is confusing to those who find it senseless to develop a relationship in silence or even "emptiness." The Neo-Confucian perspective helps to explain this delicate relationship, because the Ultimate is perceived as an impersonal principle and energy. Hence, the deepened "relationship" with the Ultimate is taken as a "deepening understanding" of the Principle and "cultivating the vast, flood like *qi*."

Insights on the Self in Relation to Others and to the Cosmos

"Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39) is an indisputable Christian teaching. Yet its application, particularly in relation to social-political issues, is subject to debate. Keating is very clear in embracing societal concerns in his teaching. In his opinion, transformation or transforming union with the Divine is "a restructuring of consciousness in which the divine reality is perceived to be present in oneself and in all that is" (Keating 2003, 172). Implicit in this teaching is the conviction of the sacredness of all creation. Accordingly, Keating is concerned about the practice of compassion and justice, as well as caring for the earth (Keating 2003, ch.6, 17-18, 20-21). In his response to the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, and in his concern about escalating violence in this world, he advocates Christian love in the following ways:

Thus the attack is a denial of what is most fundamental about human beings, namely, their common unity, a oneness rooted in our common Source. We are individual and social in our very being, manifesting the unity and diversity of the Trinity and its boundless creative activity. (Keating 2004, 2)

...the practice of mutual love in personal relationships and among nations, even to the point of dying for the sake of the survival, enhancement, and transformation of the whole human family, past, present, and to come. (Keating 2008, 3)

Here, Keating's belief in human oneness in the Triune God, and his conviction about the value of mutual love in fostering human prosperity, is clear. According to Keating, the effects of contemplative prayer include bearing spiritual fruit, experiencing oneness with God, and communion with all creatures in Christ (Keating 1985, 20). All these contribute to holistic health and provide a solid base for any human endeavor, especially the pursuit of social justice and peace (Berger 2006, 36-37). However, the fact that he emphasizes human sickness and uses "Divine Therapy" to describe Centering Prayer, has magnified the dimension of personal healing in contemplative practice. As a result, human creativity and the responsibility to build a better

world is overshadowed. In this case, Zhu's ontological structure that emphasizes the organismic unity of humanity with nature, and a profound sense of oneness among human beings, can enrich Keating's teaching on human connection, and extend it to the cosmic realm.

Ultimate Expression of Humanity in Ren

The theme of human relatedness is found in chapter one of *Daxue*, one of Zhu's *Four Books*, which proclaims self-cultivation is at the root of regulating the family, governing the state, and establishing world peace. Implicit in this renowned statement is a relational self, rather than the independent and somewhat isolated individual often emphasized in the West. It is plain that Confucian self-cultivation is not simply a program aimed at personal benefit, but rather a matter of forming one's humanity for social service (Tu 2003, 149). As noted by de Bary (2003):

[T]he Confucian sense of mutuality, reciprocity, and responsiveness to others was seen as fundamental to the virtue of humaneness, with its empathetic feeling for the interrelatedness of all being...(83)

Among the four moral characteristics of humanity, *ren* signifies its fullest manifestation. Confucian *ren* is comparable with Christian love or agape (Yao 1996). To love one's neighbors involves an active social concern in Keating's view. This concern is strengthened by the Confucian emphasis on human relatedness taught in *Daxue* and embraced by Zhu.

Humanity as Co-creator in this Cosmos

In relation to the themes of human-relatedness and social service in *ren*, Wei-ming Tu further emphasizes that human beings, whose nature, abilities, and purpose have been imparted from heaven, have a responsibility to assist the transformation and nourishment of heaven and earth. In Tu's (1989) celebrated commentary on *Zhongyong*, *Centrality and Commonality*, he illustrates how humanity is a co-creator in this cosmos:

It is true that human nature is imparted from heaven, but human beings are not merely creatures and heaven alone does not exhaust the process of creativity. In an ultimate sense, human beings, in order to manifest their humanity, must themselves fully participate in the creative process of the cosmos. They do not create *ex nihilo* (nor for that matter does heaven), yet they are capable of assisting the transforming and nourishing process of heaven and earth. (78)

Here Tu asserts that humanity has a significant and active role in the continual cosmic creativity. This shows a very high regard for human potential and identity. Moreover, it supports and expands Keating's positive regard for the true self in exercising its natural energies in "loving one's neighbors." The teaching of *Zhongyong* as articulated here by Tu is a stimulating enrichment of Keating's notion of true self.

The Socio-cosmic Self and Quiet Practice

How is this socio-cosmic aspect of humanity related to quiet practice? First, quiet-sitting helps one to have a deeper understanding of human nature, of which human-relatedness is a significant element. Second, quiet-sitting enables one's moral actions in society.

One benefit of quiet-sitting, as stated in the previous section on Zhu, is to penetrate into the original mind and deepen the understanding of human nature, which comes from and is a manifestation of the Ultimate *Li*. This implies that quiet-sitting may deepen one's appreciation of human relatedness, which is an essential element for the Confucian understanding of human

nature. Tu (1989) eloquently describes how penetrating one's inner self can realize the true nature of one's human-relatedness:

[S]ince a person in the Confucian tradition is always conceived of as a center of relationships, the more one penetrates into one's inner self, the more one will be capable of realizing the true nature of one's human-relatedness. (27)

Tu and Zhu demonstrate a correlation between quiet-sitting and penetration into one's inner self or original mind, as well as realizing *li* and one's true nature, which includes human-relatedness. In this case, it is fair to say that quiet-sitting helps to enhance the social-cosmic self. In addition, this social-cosmic self is meant to contribute to the world through moral acts.

In short, Zhu's emphasis on the organismic unity of humanity and the contribution of quiet-sitting to this, functions as a good complement in strengthening Keating's socio-cosmic concerns. In healing the false self and awakening the true self, Centering Prayer is a valuable practice for building up human society and the cosmic world at large.

Insights on Quietude as a Spiritual Practice to Transform the Self

In comparing Confucianism and Christianity on humanity, Heup Young Kim points out that both traditions are concerned with how to be fully human, and claim that Jesus Christ is the model to exemplify *dao* in life (Kim 1996, 188). In fact, Zhu's Neo-Confucian teaching can also shed light to Christians on how to be fully human. Below are three insights Christians may learn from Zhu's teaching.

Quietude as an Intrinsic Human Need for a Thriving Life

As argued above, if quietude, as framed by Zhu, is a fundamental modality of the Ultimate Reality, it is inevitably also a required condition for humanity to be in tune with the Ultimate. Similarly, quietude will also be a prerequisite for becoming fully human and leading a thriving life, because humanity comes from the Ultimate and shares its very nature in quietude. Implicit in Zhu's ontology is the simple logic that quietude is an intrinsic human need for a thriving life. Quietude is needed to nurture and preserve humanity. This explains all the benefits quiet practice brings to humanity, as perceived by Keating and Zhu.

The need for quietude is particularly urgent in this twenty-first century. Advanced technologies in communication, computer science, and transportation have intensified interactions and globalization. Busyness and restlessness have become marks of contemporary people, who are overloaded with activities in life, and information in mind. Zhu's cosmology inspires Christians to take contemplation seriously in order to get in tune with God, as well as with our own nature in quietude.

The Principle of Zhongyong: Harmony between Activity and Quietude

While quietude is needed for a thriving human life, so is activity. It is important to cultivate equilibrium and harmony between the two, as stated in the last line of the first chapter in *Zhongyong* (Berthrong 2003, 430; Tu 1989, 8), John Berthrong (2003) further ties this in with the spiritual dimension of humanity:

[T]he specific spiritual dimension of the human response to the *Dao* as immanent or embodied human nature is linked to the cultivation of the states of equilibrium and harmony. Equilibrium and harmony are characterized as the roots of the cosmos and the way the cosmos ought to function when things are in proper balance. (431)

As rightly noted by Berthrong, the states of *zhong* and *yong* are the roots of the cosmos. Therefore, cultivating equilibrium and harmony plays a significant role in self-cultivation. One exercises equilibrium to fit into a specific time and situation, so that one is in harmony with the world, or even contributes to the harmony of the cosmos (Li 2014, 79-80).

This principle of *zhong-yong* is probably the foundational concept that grounds Zhu's teaching in polarities and their balanced interaction. Zhu teaches the modalities of activity and quietude in the Ultimate Reality of *li* and *qi*, claiming that they interact and balance one another perpetually in their cosmic existence and creativity. Likewise, humanity needs to hold both activity and quietude delicately in balance.

The wisdom of *zhong-yong* and its application by Zhu to quiet-sitting is not unknown in the Christian tradition. Although a concern for "balance" and "harmony" is not explicitly stated, major figures of *apophatic* spirituality do embrace the *kataphatic* way at the same time (Johnston 1995, 22). A characteristic of Pseudo-Dionysius's *apophatic* teaching (late fifth to early sixth century), is its complementary existence alongside *kataphatic* theology (*The Divine Names* 7.3.872a-b) (Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite 1987, 108-109). Gregory the Great (540-604) teaches the two complementary aspects of contemplation and action (Butler 1966, 171). Teresa of Avila (1515-82) talks about prayer of quiet, and in the end urges her readers to imitate Christ in "good works." (*Interior Castle* VII: 4, 4-6) (Teresa of Avila 1979, 81).

This inclusive Christian tradition of active and quiet, *kataphatic* and *apophatic*, echoes the advice of *zhong-yong*. Endorsed by the ancient wisdom across East and West, an inclusive approach to activity and quietude becomes compelling. While pursuing Centering Prayer, or other contemplative practices, one should neither neglect active social involvement nor dismiss other *kataphatic* devotions. As stated by Contemplative Outreach, "Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer" (Keating 2015). *Zhong-yong* encourages us to be an active contemplative just as Keating does. It is not just a response to the call of loving our neighbors in active service. It is a holistic way of actualizing our humanity for a balanced life, both in activity and quietude.

Inborn Temperament as Reason for Human Predicament

The third Neo-Confucian insight for self involves the major reason for the human predicament. Inspired by Zhu's *li-qi* theory, I propose that inborn temperament, rather than unhealed emotional wounds as suggested by Keating, could be the major reason for the tendency to sin instead of seeking the good. While both Keating and Zhu believe that everyone has the potential to realize the ideal self of goodness, Keating concludes that it is the emotional program of compensation geared by the false self that hinders a person from realizing the true self as designated by God. In Zhu's opinion, the impure *qi* embodied in the individual upon its production is decisive for the problem of evil. I think Zhu's theory can enrich Keating's in the sense that it explains why certain people act in more destructive ways as a result of unhealed wounds.

Zhongyong chapter 20 acknowledges that although each person is endowed with Heavenly *Dao* for moral action, there are differences in awareness or abilities among people, depending on the clarity of *qi* embodied in the individuals (quoted in Tu 1989, 58). This provides a sensible explanation as to why certain people are more impelled to goodness, while others to evil deeds. Inborn temperament is a logical reason for evil inclination, and unhealed traumas could intensify this tendency. Despite this inequality among human beings in their ability for good deeds, *Zhongyong* claims that once the knowledge is acquired, or the achievement is made, the result is the same. This means one can always improve oneself through self-effort, no matter how adverse the context or how feeble one's natural endowment may be (Tu 1989, 74-75).

Zhu has highlighted the benefits of quiet-sitting in aiding self-examination, the manifestation of *li*, and the actualization of moral acts. Hence, Zhu's insights indicate the value of quiet-sitting in enhancing one's self-awareness, and thus support Keating's claim that Centering

Prayer as a quiet practice can expand consciousness by dissolving the self-defense mechanism, and thus contribute to the emergence of the true self. Again, both Eastern and Western traditions affirm the transformative power of quiet practice in enhancing self-awareness, or self-consciousness.

Conclusion: Contemplation as Indispensable to Transforming the Self

As shown in the above discussion, Zhu's Neo-Confucian teaching on human nature and quiet-sitting has immense insight for Centering Prayer in its claim to transform the self. In summary, these insights are rooted in three important cosmological concepts: a) *li* and *qi* as the two basic cosmic entities; b) quietude and activity as the two basic modalities of cosmic entities; and c) bipolarity and *zhong-yong* as the two basic rules of cosmic relational existence. Such cosmological concepts lay the cornerstone for quiet-sitting to be an indispensable method in Zhu's self-cultivation program. Contrasting these with Keating's teaching on Centering Prayer and true self, we may come up with new insights for the true self in three dimensions, namely with oneself, with others, and with the Ultimate Reality that Christians call God. The major challenge cast by Zhu to Christians is to take quietude more seriously in theological speculation and spiritual practice.

Viewed from Zhu's cosmological perspective, quietude is a fundamental nature of God. Following this line of thinking, quietude becomes an intrinsic nature of a humanity that is created in the image of God. Accordingly, human beings need quietude to be in tune with God and to nourish their own wellbeing so as to participate in harmonious creativity with others in this cosmos. Thus, by applying Zhu's teaching, contemplative practices like Centering Prayer become indispensable for Christians in the transformation of selfhood, because they offer an organismic connection with a person's own nature, with God, and with everything else in this cosmos created by God.

Although quietude is indispensable, activity should not be neglected because the two are poles of a continuum. The principle of *zhong-yong* teaches a harmonious balance in life events, and the principle of bipolarity requires two interrelated poles to complement one another in cosmic existence and creativity. Hence, in Zhu's program of self-cultivation, quiet-sitting as a form of quiet practice is complemented by other activities. It is only one method among many. In addition, Zhu has stated repeatedly that moral acts and one's responsibilities in life should not be neglected while practicing quiet-sitting. Likewise, while undertaking contemplative practices such as Centering Prayer, Christians are reminded not to neglect their other spiritual practices or social responsibilities, and thus fall into quietism.

To claim that contemplation is indispensable and should be in a harmonious balance with activity may make some Christians uneasy. After all, the suspicion of quiet practice by church authorities was in full force from the seventeenth century, until a renewed interest in contemplation began in the late twentieth century, partly due to the challenge of Eastern meditation. As proposed by Clooney, by reviewing two similar realities (quiet-sitting and Centering Prayer in our case) in comparative theology and coming to understand each differently, we begin to comprehend related matters differently, and finally we see ourselves differently. But most of all, we are opened up to greater knowledge of God and more intimate encounters with the Divine (Clooney 2010, 11, 152).

If Christians are serious about the challenge of interfaith dialogue in an era of globalization, serious about learning from one another about transforming individuals and henceforth the world, as designated by God, they need to review the value and practice of Centering or Contemplative Prayer.

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THE RITUAL OF SLAWATAN AND NEO-SUFISM

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* from its traditional Sufi form into a Neo-Sufist form and performance. It details how the rise of religious leaders such as Habib Sheikh has helped in motivating people looking for different experiences in this form of Neo-Sufist practice in urban Indonesia. The work adopts participant observation and the theory of ritual to look at the processes, actions and actors in the performance.

Introduction

Background

One of the fastest growing religious and social gatherings in Java, Indonesia, is the ritual of *Slawatan*. The word *Slawatan* is derived from the Arabic word “*Salah*,” which translated means the five daily obligatory prayers in Islam (Woodward et al. 2012, 126).¹ In Indonesian, *Slawatan* is derived from *Sholawat* (prayers). From the beginning, this form of ritual has been conducted using different expressions of Islamic piety, including “*Maulid Nabi*” (celebration of the birth of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam). The celebration originally included recitation of poetry, and praise of the prophet and his family. Poetry and songs praising the Companion of the Prophet, Saints and religious leaders were included later. The commemoration comes in various forms, such as giving food to the poor, doing *Dhikrs* (venerations of the name of Allah), praising Allah, sending prayers of blessing upon His messenger, and listening to the life histories of the Prophet (Marhaba 2014). According to Pigeuad, as cited by Ricklefs, *Slawatan* is part of the rich variety of popular Javanese performances associated with Islamic piety. In the beginning, *Slawatan* was conducted and followed by traditional *Santri* (religious students) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) sympathizers, and took place primarily in *Pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) (Ricklefs 2012, 32-34). Recently that phenomenon has been considerably transformed. Currently, the followers of *Slawatan* hail from all walks of life. They include *Ulama*, *Santri*, *Kyai*, politicians, businessmen, police officers, students and families of *Kejawen* (Javanese) beliefs. The performance of the ritual follows a systematic pattern. It involves the *Dzikrs* that are the veneration of the names of Allah, followed by the name of the Prophet. The entire crowd of participants do the *Dzikrs* together. People are always overwhelmed with deep spiritual and emotional feeling at this and some shed

¹ In the Qur'an, the word “*Salah*,” from which *Slawatan* might have been derived also has a combined meaning of “saying the benediction” and performing the ritual prayer.

tears. This type of feeling is difficult to explain unless one experiences it. People nod their heads from right to left while they do the *Dzikrs*. After the *Dzikrs*, they shift to songs, mostly about love of the Prophet. The tunes, music and mood of people change into something more relaxed. Participants can be seen waving flags, hands and bodies from right to left while singing. The songs are a combination of Arabic, Indonesian and Javanese languages. The music goes side by side with the singing and changes tune when the song shifts.

This process goes on for one to two hours and Habib Sheikh continually changes from one song to another, sometimes waving his hands to the participants. In the middle of the process is the *Maulid Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet). When the event reaches this stage, everyone is required to stand up and sing “*Tala Al Badru Allainah, Minn Sari Yaa Til wah da I.*” This activity is followed by *Da’wah* (preaching) about the life history of the Prophet Muhammad, His family and companions. Other topics in the preaching include the life histories of Saints and influential religious leaders who have contributed to the propagation and spread of Islam in Java and other parts of the world. The preaching is followed by *Do’a* (recited prayers) and closing remarks. Finally there is distribution of food and beverages to participants, then shaking and kissing of hands and seeking for blessing.

The problem underlying this study is that the ritual has now been significantly transformed by different religious leaders from its original spiritual purpose into a performance of Muslim popular culture. Among these charismatic leaders is Habib Sheikh. Habib sheikh bin Abdulkadir Assegaf was born in 1961 in Solo (Surakarta), a city in Central Java Province in Indonesia. The Habib is among the most influential Hadhrami Arabs of the Diaspora, and his origin can be traced to Hadhramaut, a region located in Yemen, Middle East.² In line with Hadhrami genealogical tradition, Habib Sheikh received religious education and *Slawatan* training from his father and two uncles, one of whom was also an *imam* of the Riyadh mosque in Solo, while the other hails from Yemen (Woodward et al. 2012, 121-122).

Habib Sheikh started his *Slawatan* performance at a young age, after receiving religious education and blessing from his father and uncles. He has a large following, ranging from thousands to tens of thousands at times in a single night of *Slawatan*. He has formal times scheduled for *Slawatans* in Solo and other parts of Central and East Java. Recently he has also been frequently to Melaka and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia as well as to Singapore. His rise to fame has contributed to the revitalization of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a form of Muslim popular culture performed in the public context, which does not necessarily require one to be affiliated with a particular Sufi sect, organization or social obligation (Woodward et al. 2012, 127-128).

A Sufi is a person who practices Sufism. In another translation, the word “Sufi” from its Arabic root means “purity,” or “one who is pure in heart,” or “one of the elect.” According to Noldeke and Nicholson, the name “Sufi” was derived from the word “Suf” which means “wool,” which at its origin applied to those Muslim ascetics who in imitation of Christian hermits clad themselves in coarse woolen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities (Nicholson 1963, 1-4). Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism and philosophy, also referred to as *Tawassuf* (Nicholson 1963, 1-66; Schimmel 1952; Rahman 1964; Suryo 2000; Howell 2001; Morris 2005; Asmawi 2006; Corbin 2013; Nasr 2013; Schimmel 2001; Von Schlegell 2002). According to Schimmel 1975, *Tasawuf* has three categories: the *Sharia* (Islamic Law), the *Tariqa* (mystical path), and the *Haqiqa* (truth). It also has three levels of purification: first from the lower

²Hadhramaut is a region located in Yemen, well known for producing some of the best Islamic scholars in the latter part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them immigrated to Southeast Asia in that period and many settled in Indonesia and other parts of the Malay Archipelago. In most cases they are referred to as *Habibs* and some people link them as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. In Hadhramaut, they have a tradition of passing knowledge to their young ones from generation to generation. This is to maintain the family lineage and genealogy of the *Habib*. Therefore there is no doubt that Habib Sheikh himself had to go under the same tradition, even though he was born and raised in Solo, far away from the land of Yemen.

qualities and the wickedness of the soul, then from the bondage of human qualities, and eventually a purification and election at the level of the attributes (Schimmel 1975, 14-16). Nicholson (1914), states that the practice of Sufism includes individuals or groups of individuals seeking the understanding of divine realities called "*Ahl al-Haqq*" (the followers of the real). The Sufis endeavor to go beyond nature to reach that Reality which is none other than God. They believe that when they reach the Real, they will be united with the Everlasting God.³

Classical Sufi followers had a passion for seeking "union with God." This is what Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) called *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of being), an integral part of metaphysics (Van Bruinessen 1998). Metaphysics in the Sufi context is the process by which the individual reaches a stage of "free flow of forms" associated with mystical experiences (Howell 2007, 22).⁴ Other practices associated with Sufism include *Tariqa*, *Muraqaba*, *Waseela*, *Ziyarah*, and *Bid'ah*. First, in Sufism *Tariqa* refers to the school, order or brotherhood that is related to mystical and spiritual teachings and practices. Schimmel (1975, 16) translated it as "mystical path." A *Tariqa* is a well structured order and consists of the *Murshid* (guide or teacher) as the spiritual leader and the *Murid* (student), who is seeking to know and love Allah. According to Lindholm (2013), in Sufism the acquisition of knowledge depends on the supervision of the *Murshid*. Hence the relationship of the *Murshid* and *Murid* is a core element in the practice of Sufism (Lindholm 2013, 82). One important feature of the *Tariqa* is *Silsila* (the chain or lineage of Sheikhs). In many cases, the Sheikhs claim to have links to the Prophet and His descendants. The *Tariqa* played a major role in spreading Islam in Africa and in Central, South and Southeast Asia.

Some of the dominant *Tariqa* in South and Southeast Asia include the Naqshbandiyya order, the Qadiri order, Chishti order, and the Suhrawardi order. Many *Tariqa* derive their name from the founding father of the order. The founder is always an individual from whom a specific Sufi order is derived and which has distinctive features (Le Gall 2005, 14). For example, the Naqshbandiyya order was named after Khwaja Baha al Din Naqshband (1318-1389), who was a Sufi saint born near Bukhara in Western Turkey (Netton 2014, 63-70). Likewise, the Qadiri order was named after its founder, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani (1077-1166), of Iraq (Schimmel 1975, 18).

Second, *Muraqaba* is the Sufi word for meditation. In Sufism, it is believed that meditation connects people to their spiritual heart or soul, and is thus a source of knowledge about their surroundings and creator (Lindholm 2013, 89; Dressler et al. 2009, 138; Lobel 2007, 225).

Third, *Waseela* is referred to as intercession, that is, a practice of seeking proximity to Allah. In Sufi or *Tawassuf* tradition, it is the act of praying to Allah through a prophet, *imam*, or Sufi saints who are either dead or alive. Followers of Sufism constantly perform this kind of ritual as they believe the spiritual capacity of their Sheikhs can lead them closer to God. Unlike the Sufis, the Salafi consider it unlawful to seek supplication through those who are dead. For them, this may lead to *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) (Zaheer 2014; Keddie 1972, 81, 357; Dehlvi 2012, 35; Osella and Osella 2013, 67; Masud et al. 2009, 131).

Fourth, *Ziyarah* is the Arabic word for "visit." It refers to a visit or pilgrimage to places and graves of the Prophet, His family, descendants, companions and other honored figures in Islam. This includes the Prophets, Sufi Saints, Sheikhs and Islamic scholars. The sites are mostly located in graves, mosques, mountains, caves and battle-fields. *Ziyarah* is a constant practice in Sufism. People believe that visiting the graves of the Prophet or *Awliyā* (friends of Allah) benefits the soul

³ Early Sufism commonly used the term *Ahl al-Haqq*, "the Real and the true," when they referred to God Almighty. Michael Sells translated *Ahl al-Haqq* as "the creator of the worshippers." He believes it is nearest in meaning to what Western theologians call "a personal God." However Schlegel maintains that in many early Sufi texts, *Haqq* is translated in accord with the English sense of "Ultimate Reality," or surely the "truth" (Von Schlegel 2002).

⁴ "*Tawajjuh*," is "coming face to face with one's True Self" and "knowing the Creator" through *ma'rifatullah* [the highest stage of esoteric spiritual knowing in this rendering of Islam's Sufi heritage].

spiritually (Hadith Buhari no. 623 on Ziyarah; Ahmed and Sonn 2010, 328; Rehman 2009, 141-142; Janson 2013, 18).

Fifth, *Bid'ah* refers to innovations in Islam. It is derived from the root word of *Bada'ah*, which means to create a new thing without precedence. Innovation can either be positive or negative. In Islamic tradition, the negative or unwanted innovations are regarded as *Bid'ah* and are considered a sin (Azra 2005, 13). On the other hand, it can mean worshipping Allah in ways that Allah has not stipulated. It is pointed out in one verse of the Qur'an as follows: "or have they partners with Allah 'false gods' who have instituted for them a religion which Allah has not ordained" (Q 42: 21)

The above verse is one of many other verses in the Qur'an that addresses the act or practice usually termed as *Bid'ah*. Also in one Hadith of the Prophet, He is reported to have said: "abstain from innovations, for every kind of innovation is a Bid'ah, and every Bid'ah is misguidance and all misguidance leads to hellfire" (Iqbal et al. 2014, 41)

Critiques of Sufi practices of *Waseela* (intercession) and *Ziyarah* to the shrines of Sufi sheikhs refer to these kinds of rituals as *Bid'ah* (Iqbal et al. 2014, 37-38). Having given a brief description of Sufism, the following paragraph will explain what Neo-Sufism is. According to Von Schlegelld (2002, 578), there has been special interest in the changing landscape of late Sufism in the last two decades. He suggests a form of "Neo-Sufism," in terms of which eighteenth century Sufis shifted their doctrines and practices from "union with God" to "union with the figure of Muhammad." Furthermore, Neo-Sufism produces spiritual concepts of transcendence and immanence in human life. Thus, unlike the old mechanism of isolation by devotees seeking closeness to God, there is no need for such isolation because God is everywhere. People can find God even in their own world (Ahida 1998). Moreover, in Neo-Sufism, followers do not necessarily have to be affiliated with a particular Sufi Order (*Tariqa*), or practice other forms such as *Waseela* (intercession) and *Ziyarah* (visits) to the graves of Sufi Saints. This development is reflected also in the ritual of *Slawatan*. While it is still a ritual, *Slawatan* has seen significant innovations to its original form, becoming a kind of performance in urban spaces. The changes are part of the reason for calling it Neo-Sufism. People come from all directions to experience this performance wherever or whenever it takes place. Hence the ritual is no longer isolated to specific places as it used to be, especially to *Pesantren*, Mosques or holy sites. Instead it now takes place in public spaces such as *Alun Alun* (public squares), main streets or even on university campuses that were traditionally used for State and social functions, community gatherings or special events.

Scholarship concerning Indonesian Sufi orders began around 1960. However, it was not until the 1980s that they started receiving greater attention. According to Van Bruinessen (1998), during that period the orders found a new following in urban and educated circles. Their large numbers of followers soon gave them significant religious and political advantage. In the 1990s, the emergence of famous and charismatic religious leaders led to a social transformation of traditional Sufi practices into a new form of mediated culture. The change created a new kind of social space, where people in urban areas in Java and other parts of the Malay Archipelago actively took part in activities. This is commonly viewed as urban Sufism, and also as part of Neo-Sufism (Woodward et al. 2012). Moreover, it is called urban Sufism because of its practice in towns and cities where people from such places take part in the rituals (Zamhari and Howell 2012).

The study of Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia is incomplete without mentioning the history of the Hadhrami Diasporas and the *Wali Songo* (the nine saints of Java). These are believed to be the flag bearers of this Islamic piety since the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. Some of their followers hold a general belief that the *Wali Songo* (the nine saints of Java) were of Hadhrami descent. However this is highly contested (Woodward et al. 2012, 105-146; Hauser-Schäublin and Harnish 2014; Freitag 2003).

There are also claims that former Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), has both Hadhrami and Javanese antecedents. Gus Dur (1940-2009), initiated the “‘Gusdurian’ Sufi tradition that propagates religious pluralism, democratic governance and local modes of Muslim Piety.” His leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in the 1990s led to the combination of Hadhrami and NU practices in the ritual of *Salawatan* and hence contributed to the Hadhrami and Javanese Islamic civilization (Woodward et al. 2012, 119-120). This also played a crucial role in forming the Neo-Sufist practice that now flourishes in urban life in Indonesia.

The 1980s and 1990s are an important period in the status of Sufism and Islam in Indonesia and other parts of the world. This was a period in which Habib Sheikh himself started to rise—around 1998. This period witnessed the growth of religious revivalism in many parts of the world. This revivalism was a significant factor in the restoration and transformation of groups that may have felt they were being marginalized, particularly across Asia and Indonesia. Hence there seems to be an outpouring of emotion as a by-product of purposively constructed strategies by elites, religious leaders and revivalists to engage and submerge the masses into submission and to shape and sharpen newly-discovered identities. To further understand these processes, we need to take a look at the work of scholars of the theories of ritual.

Scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973), Catherine Bell (1992), Victor Turner (1995), Mark Woodward (2011, 2012), J. D. Howell (2001), James Morris (2005), and Van Bruinessen (1998), have attempted to use the theory of ritual to examine the practices of different societies, including Indonesia. Building on these studies, this inquiry underscores the role of Habib Sheikh and also the complex set of factors that play a substantial role in motivating people looking for different experiences in the religious changes evidenced in Neo-Sufism and exemplified in the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia.

Having situated the research problem and identified the gap in the literature, this article aims to examine the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice, and also the role of Habib Sheikh, along with the complex set of factors that are motivating people to look for different experiences in light of this religious change in Indonesia

Research Question

To what extent has Habib Sheikh transformed the ritual of *Slawatan* from a traditional Sufi practice to a new form of Sufism, and what type of experience and motivation are followers looking for?

Methodology

The main methodological principle of this study is built upon the view that complex sets of factors play substantial roles in motivating people to take part in practices of popular piety and that the religious changes found in Neo-Sufism and the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia require investigation. In answering the research question, this work adopts a primarily qualitative approach and analysis to build a convincing chain of evidence. The data collection involves multiple techniques. Analytic data for this study is obtained through participant observation, print editions of books, reports, magazines, newspapers and journal articles, as well as those published online. A literature review and ethnographical research data will situate the subject of inquiry in its relevant field of study and provide a synthesized interpretative framework to analyze fully the collected data and issues under investigation. This will facilitate a thorough investigation of the research problem and a considered response to the research question.

In addition, selected interviews and discussions with key informants, including actors and other participants, will contribute a key qualitative component to the chain of evidence by allowing for the collation of different perspectives on the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism, and by detailing how sample interviewees understand the problem. For the purpose of this study, adopting multiple data collection techniques, including field work, allows for a more fine-grained investigation of the complex dimensions of the subject of inquiry.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows: Firstly, to further interrogate the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice and to explore the role of Habib Sheik, along with the complex set of factors that motivates people to look for different experiences in this period of religious change in Indonesia. Secondly, it is to offer a time-framed study of qualitative data in the assessment of Habib Sheik, the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism in the daily life of cities in Java, Indonesia. Finally, the study will contribute to the existing literature related to the ritual of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism and highlight avenues for further research on the specific issue under consideration.

The main argument is that although Indonesia is experiencing increased popular piety and religious change, with leaders like Habib Sheikh, and Neo-Sufism playing substantial roles in promoting such transformation, a further complex set of factors and multiple interests also condition people's experience and motivation concerning this form of ritual.

Outline

The study is comprised of four parts. Part one is the introduction, which outlines the rationale for the study; the research problem, and how this relates to the research question; the methodology adopted; and the aims and overall contribution of the study. Part two situates my research inquiry in the related field of study and outlines the synthesized interpretative framework and basis from which the data is analyzed. Part three advances the inquiry by detailing and analyzing the collected data, which includes the complex nature of the ritual process, actors and followers. Finally, part four concludes the inquiry by presenting a summary of the key findings from the foregoing data analysis in support of the study's overall argument.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research views ritual as an anthropological field of study. Anthropology deals with various theories of ritual, which help us understand the essence of the practice in various societies. This approach is selected because it allows an in-depth study of *Slawatan* and Neo-Sufism, while at the same time engaging with wider academic debates relating to the subject of inquiry. Using theories of ritual as part of the research methodology enhances a wider understanding of the ritual of *Slawatan* as a Neo-Sufist practice.

First, the framework departs from Clifford Geertz, one of the famous anthropologists of the twenty-first century, who sees ritual as symbolic. Using Geertz helps in understanding the relationship between the main actor that is Habib Sheikh, who is also the main symbol, and the participants of the ritual, who are part of the social order in the ritual of *Slawatan*. Geertz (1973, 112) argues that ritual shapes social order and imposes meaning on disordered experience. Moreover, Geertz's symbolic approach to ritual influenced scholars such Bronislaw Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, George C. Humans and Edmund Leach, who also see ritual as a description of social order (Lessa and Vogt 1979, 38; Homans 1941, 171; Homans 2013, 155-158; Leach 1970, 12; Tambiah 2002, 355-481). Geertz is convinced that ritual is a means of displaying social passion (Bell 1992, 66-67; Geertz, 1973). Geertz's understanding of ritual as symbolic and shaping social order in society has been extended by scholars such as Munn (1973), Davis-Floyd (2003), Schirch (2005), and Firth (2011), who followed his approach. First, Munn (1973, 593) appears to complement Geertz's efforts, by arguing that ritual symbols set and uphold a coherent, balanced relationship between individual subjectivity and the objective social order. Furthermore, in his contribution to the topic, Davis-Floyd (2003, 10) asserts that rituals work to support the

belief system of the individual with the social group conducting the ritual.⁵ In addition, Firth (2011, 207) maintains that in the sociological and anthropological domains, symbols are characteristic terms for sets or groups of people, for institutions, or for types of situations.

Schirch (2005, 16) concludes that in a ritual there is a sense of imagining the world, glued under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, producing distinctive transformation in one's sense of reality. Moreover, sacred symbols induce in people certain moods and enthusiasms. Likewise, they formulate general conceptions of the order of reality for which people meet and reinforce one another. Analyzing this will take us to the understanding of how people behave during the ritual of *Slawatan*. The majority of participants are seen to be so excited, actively waving flags and some even going to the extent of crying due to the emotion derived from the songs and the music of the performance. The leaders are embraced with humility and their hands are kissed to reinforce that sense of belonging to the brotherhood, and to strengthen loyalty to the *Habibs*, *Ulamas* and *Kyias*.

Departing from the approach of Geertz and his followers, Catherine Bell understands ritual as a form of discipline and a process of ritualization. Bell's theory helps us to understand the role of Habib Sheikh as the superior authority, and the participant who takes part in the ritual as the guardian is the one who legitimizes the ritual. Bell's understanding of ritual as a discipline means that it is necessary for a "superior authority" to be there in order to legitimize the ritual performance. In oral societies, for example those in Java, the audience acts as guardians of the superior authority. They hold the power to judge a ritual performance and validate its relation to the past and present (Bell 1992, 120).⁶ Bell goes further in her analyses of ritual as a discipline backed by legitimate superior authority, by describing ritual as a process of ritualization. In her explanation, "ritualization" is a process whereby ritual is created as a cultural form, composed to differentiate and privilege certain things being done in comparison with other daily activities in the society (Bell 1992, 74). Moreover, ritualization always aligns one within a series of relationships connected to the vital sources of power and is one way of acting under certain cultural settings. However, Bell (1992, 141) suggests that acting ritually does not necessarily add up to a neat theoretical model that can be freely applied to other data of various kinds.⁷

Crain and Hughes-Freeland (2003), appear to be followers of Bell. They claim that ritualization provides the dynamic element of ritual as a performance of action. This approach allows us to explore themes such as agency and intentionality and the interaction of creativity and limitation in social action (Crain and Hughes-Freeland 2003, 3). On the other hand, performance as social action and as the dialogical agency of situations, allows us to understand these situations in terms of a participatory and rhetorical model (Tulloch 1999, 85).

This theory helps to explain the transformation of the *Slawatan* ritual from its traditional space in the *Pasentrens* to the public space. The coming of Habib Sheikh has been effective in mobilizing other religious leaders and state authorities who can also be seen as the superior authorities. His ability to write texts in both Arabic and Javanese, which are then published in books and pamphlets, is evidence of the disciplined and skilled actions embodied in the ritual. In doing this, the general audience for the first time has access to read and observe the performance in public spaces. They are thus encouraged to extend the message of the performance to different

⁵ Further explanation on symbolic connection (Leach 1976, 96), ritual symbolism (Rappaport 1999, 244-245), ritual and symbolic meaning (McLaren, 1999, 40). See also Grimes (2010), Watts (2007), and Turner (1995, 42).

⁶ For more analyses on performance and ritual, see for example Grimes (2004), Hughes-Freeland (2008), Brown, Rappaport, and Wang (2013, 202).

⁷ See also Bell (1997, 82) for further explanation on ritualization, ritual theory and ritual practice.

groups in their communities. Those who hear the message based on a successful narrative turn up in large numbers and continue to increase with every event held by the Habib.

In conclusion, the various theories presented in this research outline the multidimensional explanations of ritual theories. The fundamental elements in ritual theories are ritual's purpose to serve as a symbol, discipline and/or a process of ritualization. All these facets are clearly visible in the ritual of *Slawatan* and the people involved therein. However, it is important to be critical of ritual theories, as rituals are not limited to the explanations given here, since they differ from place to place. Moreover, Geertz himself was criticized by other scholars, such as Talal Asad. Asad claims that Geertz tends to separate religious senses from particular social settings and to consider them as independent. In that sense, he tries to discern religious from nonreligious exercises by contending that a religious practice is everything that upholds certain elemental natures of reality. This is a weakness in Geertz's great intellectual masterpiece, but it does not undermine its credibility in metaphysical and anthropological interpretations of religions. Using a genealogical perspective, Asad (1993, 27-54) contentiously argues that Geertz treats religion as primarily issues of meaning, linked to concepts of general order, and that this is an implicitly modern, privatized Christian approach, one that hides the power relations that give rise to religion, to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind. Asad (1993, 48) believes that it is not too unreasonable to maintain that "the basic axiom" in what Geertz called "the religious perspective" is not everywhere the same. On the one hand I agree with Asad's criticism of Geertz, but on the other hand it can also be misleading, because Geertz's definition is helpful in the process of understanding various complex religious phenomena. But of course we should not reify the definition, because realities are always more complex than our understanding of them.

Therefore, it is admissible to say that all the frameworks and approaches for the analysis of rituals and the explanations given are vulnerable to overlooking some other aspect of ritual of which the authors may not be aware. However, the theories described here are helpful in understanding the general pattern involved in the study of the ritual of *Slawatan*, its transformation and people involved. The theoretical framework used in this research was established after studying the ritual of *Slawatan* conducted by Habib Sheikh in central Java of Indonesia. It is important to note, therefore, that the people, background, place, material and environment might differ in societies outside Java, even though the process is similar. Hence, the methodological approaches of the theories are not absolute, something which might contribute to the shortcoming of this research. Moreover, there is need for further research to test the consistency and applicability of these theories in other places where rituals of Sufism take place.

Having given the conceptual framework used in this study, the next section will outline the process and performance of the ritual of *Slawatan* by Habib Sheikh.

The Ritual of *Slawatan*

The performance of the ritual follows a systematic pattern. First, the activities start with various logistics that include the building of tents and stages in the place where the event is to take place. The structures are well decorated, the background covered with a large poster of Habib Sheikh. Also one can see calligraphic writing of his name, the organizers of the ritual, the purpose of the ritual for that specific performance, and the date and place. The ritual is usually performed in the evening between 9 p.m and 12 a.m. There is a dress code whereby people attending are usually dressed in white clothes. Men wear hats, turbans and scarves to cover their heads, while women use veils and scarves. All participants, including Habib Sheikh, sit on the ground.⁸ Proceedings begin after the arrival of Habib Sheikh and his entourage, which includes

⁸ Although the majority of the people use white dress, other colors are also allowed.

members of his group called *Ahbabul Mustapha*. Before this, most of the participants will have arrived and been seated in their respective places, while songs of *Dzikr* and Habib Sheikh are played to evoke passion in the crowd. The *Rebanas* (drummers) and supporting vocalists will have been seated in their positions and will have tested their equipment. The second part starts with the opening statement and prayers.⁹ Third, Habib Sheikh will give a signal to the drummers and supporting vocalists to seek their attention, after which the *Dzikrs* and music will start and the gathering will follow.

This process goes on for one to two hours while Habib Sheikh continuously changes from one song to another, sometimes waving his hands to the participants. In the middle of the process is the *Maulid Nabi* (the birth of the Prophet). When the event reaches this stage, everyone is required to stand up and sing “*Tala Al Badru Allainah, Minn Sari Yaa Til wah da I.*” This is a welcome song for the Prophet when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina. While singing, someone rubs perfume on the hands of the leaders and another sprinkles flowers as signs of blessing.

After the *Dzikrs* and the singing comes the *Da'wah* (preaching). The preaching is about the life history of the Prophet Muhammad, His family and companions. Other topics in the preaching include the life history of Saints and influential religious leaders who have contributed to the propagation and spread of Islam in Java and other parts of the world. Habib Sheikh also preaches about issues of common concern affecting society, including political, economic, social and cultural matters. In some cases, while preaching, he asks people to write notes on things they want him to talk about and questions are then allowed. The preaching is followed by *Do'a* (recitation of prayers). Habib Sheikh usually says the prayers by reciting verses from the Qur'an with the rest in Javanese or Indonesian. The *Do'a* is followed by closing remarks, usually by one of the elders among the group of religious leaders present. Immediately after the *Do'a*, participants prepare to leave. Also at this stage people bring forward their bottles of water. Habib Sheikh blesses the water by dipping his fingers in it and reciting some prayers. When he leaves, along with all the leaders, people form queues to shake and kiss their hands, which is also to seek their blessing (*barakah*). The final part of the ritual involves the distribution of food and beverages to participants (Ilham 2011, 67-75). Habib Sheikh and the religious leaders, including the elites, are usually received in a special room where different kinds of food and beverages are arranged in lines and circles. After eating, they leave with their convoy, while the crowd lines up attempting to shake their hands and take photos.

General Findings

Spirituality

The general findings show that for many people attending this kind of ritual is a reinforcement of their faith. Also, many claim that attending means showing their love for the Prophet. Hence for most people it is specifically religious purposes that motivate them to attend.

The Music

The music provides a form of expression for the entire content of the ritual (Bellah 2011, 140). The findings indicate that the music and songs are recorded at every ritual. These recordings are played in many television and radio programmes. Others are available as studio recordings in

⁹ In some events the opening statements and prayers are given before the arrival of Habib Sheikh, so that when he comes the *Dzikrs*, songs and music start straight away. However, in other events this is done after his arrival. It all depends on how the organizing committee wants it done.

video and musical shops in different part of Indonesia. One can also get them in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore, where the ritual of *Slawatan* is practiced and where Habib Sheikh is also popular among the Malays in those places. Schulz (2006), believes that many supporters of the Islamic moral reform movement, listening to the recordings of their leaders and teachers, are intricately linked to their collective endeavor and orientation. The followers and fans treat these recordings as a source of moral enlightenment and a means of endowing and enriching the material infrastructure of daily matters with a particular spiritual quality. As in other democratic countries in the Muslim world, the mushrooming of local television and radio stations has helped in the pervasive presence of Islam in broadcast media, where religious leaders skillfully disseminate their teachings (Schulz 2006, 210-219).

The use of music by Muslim leaders to create harmony in society has been practiced in different generations since Islam arrived in Indonesia. The *Wali Songo* used traditional Javanese puppet shows with music in their quest to spread Islam in Java. The musical part involved in this ritual of *Slawatan* could be linked to what Nicholson (1963) called “*Sama*” (audition), which explains how the Sufis view music. However, he acknowledges that some agree with this, while others disagree, based on their own understanding of *Sama* (audition). He argues that the Sufis believe that ecstasy can be induced artificially both through concentration of thought and *Dzikr* (veneration of the name of Allah), as well as through music, singing and dancing (Nicholson 1963, 63-66).¹⁰

The Use of Water

Holy water is commonly used for medical purposes in the medical practice of Java. The practice is based on a highly complex notion of personhood derived from the Sufi mystical concept of “the perfection of man.” In addition to water, some techniques, such as reciting passages from the Qur’an and belief in the healing power of the *barakah* (blessing) of those religious practitioners are used for medical purposes. *Zam Zam* (water) from Mecca in Saudi Arabia is among the most efficient and greatly valued water that is used (Woodward 2011, 69-81). In cases where the *Zam Zam* (water) is not available, for instance during the ritual of *Slawatan*, people use ordinary water. Meanwhile, aside from water being used for healing, some believe that if water is blessed by the Habib, it will help increase the intellectual capacity of students when they drink it.

The Handshake

The shaking and kissing of the hands of religious leaders is an attempt at seeking their blessing (*barakah*). This is one of the most common activities observed during the ritual of *Slawatan*. Bellah (2011, 278) argues that the handshake is common practice in the daily life of tribal society and is part of face-to-face rituals which continue in concealed form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has drawn together the analyses of the previous sections and provided an overall summary of the major findings. This responds to the research question by foregrounding the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan* into a Neo-Sufist practice, and the role of Habib Sheikh in this transformation, along with a complex set of factors motivating people who are looking for different experiences as part of the religious change occurring in Indonesia. In

¹⁰ Ecstasy in Sufi tradition is when a person is believed to have died from the emotion that is aroused on hearing a verse of the Qur’an of heavenly voice (*Hatif*), poetry or music. This implies not physical death, but spiritual death, where the soul is believed to be highly connected to God. The person feels nothing is there except God and only God. They don’t hear or feel anything connected to this world.

order to accomplish this task, an initial literature review outlined the role of influential leaders such as Habib Sheik in the transformation of traditional Sufi practices into a new form of performance, including the ritual of *Slawatan*. This transformation has created a new religious and social space in urban life in Java, Indonesia and is referred to as Neo-Sufism.

A literature review of secondary resources related to the field of study informed and framed the analysis of primary data collected through participant observation and various techniques. Adopting this type of qualitative methodological approach allowed a more full exploration of the role of Habib Sheik and the complex set of factors that play a substantial part in motivating people to embrace the popular piety and religious changes such as those occurring in Neo-Sufism and in the ritual of *Slawatan* in Indonesia. Evidently, Habib Sheik's charismatic leadership and skills are one among the primary factors in the transformation of the ritual of *Slawatan*. However, the data reveals that there is also a complex set of other factors and multiple interests that condition people's experience and motivations. The extent to which Habib Sheik transforms the ritual of *Slawatan* is interlinked and mediated by a complex set of factors and interests as are detailed in the study. These include spiritual music, water for healing and seeking of *barakah* (blessing).

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SURVIVALIST SEXUALITY-FAITH STRATEGIES IN BIBLICAL MEANING-MAKINGS: NON-HETERONORMATIVE MALAYSIAN CHRISTIAN MEN AND NEGOTIATIONS OF SEXUAL SELF-AFFIRMATION

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ABSTRACT

This article is a socio-theological investigation into the diverse ways in which non-heteronormative Christian men in Malaysia negotiate with biblical passages to affirm their sexual identifyings, sexual expressions and sense of faith. Such a socio-theological investigation also acts as a critical questioning of official and unofficial attitudes towards non-heteronormative men—and perhaps even towards other non-heteronormative subjects—by Christian communities and churches in and beyond Malaysia. As a qualitative research paper, this article deploys a Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology to analyse the selected narratives of four non-heteronormative Christian men. Various sociological, sexuality, religious and theological studies, particularly Archie C. C. Lee's concept of cross-textual biblical hermeneutics, are also conscripted to frame, articulate and fortify the narrative analyses. Findings indicate that negotiations of the scriptures for self-affirmation among non-heteronormative men are manifested from three perspectives: (i) substituted affirmation; (ii) conditional affirmation; and (iii) ambiguous affirmation.

This article aims at understanding the diverse ways in which non-heteronormative Malaysian Christian men negotiate and make sense of biblical passages for sexual self-affirmation. The *survivalist sexuality faith strategies* of these men who continue to adhere to the Christian faith, including strategies which draw on the scriptures, are personal methods devised to allow their sexual identifying,¹ sexual expressions and sense of faith to co-exist meaningfully.

I use the term “non-heteronormative” as an overarching term for subjects, including gay and bisexual men, whose gender and sexual identifyings and expressions defy normative prescriptions. My article neither focuses on queer biblical hermeneutics, nor engages in a reappraisal of biblical passages that are commonly used to condemn same-sex expressions. Instead, it is a socio-theological investigation which concentrates on the actual lived experiences of non-heteronormative men who continue to look to the bible for spiritual nourishment, despite being embroiled in difficult negotiations of sexuality and faith.

Such a socio-theological investigation also acts as a critical questioning of official and unofficial attitudes towards non-heteronormative men—and perhaps even towards other non-

¹ I use “identifying” and “identifyings” instead of “identity” and “identities” to denote the evolutionary, unstable and contingent processes of identity construction.

heteronormative subjects—by Christian communities and churches in and beyond Malaysia. To this end, my article embarks on a queer analysis of the narratives of those who owe their joys and struggles as non-heteronormative men to a faithful, undivided adherence to both their sexual and spiritual identifyings. A queer analysis is a critical strategy which “creates an intellectual space whereby what is otherwise taken for granted as stable is challenged, interrogated, and explored” (Gedro 2010, 354), particularly in issues relating to gender and sexuality. Thus, my deployment of a queer analysis allows for a reconsideration of essentialized issues of gender, sexuality and faith from alternative and broader perspectives.

Studies, Strategies and Signposts

Queer approaches to biblical scholarship which strive to restore the forgotten, overlooked and dismissed voices of non-heteronormative subjects in biblical scholarship have increased over the years (Guest et al. 2006; Hornsby and Stone 2011; R. Goss and West 2000; Stone 2001). There have also been impressive studies on the difficult relationships between Church hierarchies, popular Christian perceptions and non-heteronormative subjects (Bong 2009; Goh 2015; Rodriguez 2010; Wu 2000; A. K. T. Yip 1997; A. K. T. Yip 2007; L. Yip 2012). Additionally, Asian and Asian-American biblical studies, which focus on a gamut of Asian and Asian-American contextual realities, continue to proliferate (Cheon 2001; deSilva 2013; Goh 2014; A. C. C. Lee 2004b; Setyawan 2007; Sugirtharajah 2005; Tran 2010). My article thus contributes to these diverse studies on the complex relationships between actual human realities and the Christian faith.

In this article, I select narratives from four non-heteronormative Christian men in Malaysia: Rainbowboy, Artisan and Henri who identify as gay men, and Skidiver, who describes himself as a bisexual man. All four men are educated, middle-class urban dwellers. This article draws on a larger research project in which I conducted in-depth interviews with thirty non-heteronormative men in Malaysia on their sexual identifyings, sexual expressions and sacred sensibilities. I use pseudonyms to protect the privacy and confidentiality of these research participants. Their narratives, which are derived from interviews in English, display specific snapshots, rather than overarching nationwide representations of non-heteronormative men in Malaysia.

I analyze the narratives of these four men using the methodology of a Constructivist Grounded Theory. This particular analytical approach provides for a careful understanding and interpretation of narratives which are based on actual, lived experiences. A Constructivist Grounded theoretical method appreciates epistemological co-constructions between researcher and research participant. It resists the idea that knowledge from the research participant is “discovered” by the researcher. It advocates a “middle ground” approach of openness to “grounded” findings among human subjects, while pursuing familiarity with extant academic resources in a field of study (Bryant and Charmaz 2010, 1-28; Charmaz 2000, 509-535). Fundamentally, this approach allows me to construct theories that are grounded in the lived realities of non-heteronormative men themselves, rather than impose grand theories on their lived realities.

My theorizing is assisted primarily by a re-reading of biblical scholar Archie C. C. Lee’s concept of cross-textual hermeneutics, which accords equal importance to the bible and Asian “cultures.” This re-reading is a queer strategy which appreciates, foregrounds and includes the lived experiences, circumstances and insights of non-heteronormative subjects. Queer theologian Patrick S. Cheng (2011) posits that such a strategy reveals how non-heteronormative subjects have “‘taken back’ or ‘reclaimed’ the Bible by interpreting it positively and constructively from their own perspectives” (12).

Thus, my queer re-reading challenges assumptions surrounding the faith and biblical experiences of non-heteronormative men. It reveals and emphasizes the ways in which these men

engage in sexual self-affirmation by utilizing the bible. I concentrate on the manner in which the scriptures speak to subjects who have been and continue to be marginalized through singular, myopic theological interpretations of the bible. I also draw on various sociological, religious, theological and sexuality studies to further articulate and fortify my theorizing.

I first present a brief overview of political and religious attitudes towards non-heteronormative subjects in Malaysia before discussing Lee's strategy of cross-textual hermeneutics through queer lenses. Thereafter, I analyze the ways in which non-heteronormative men who encounter a myriad of confrontational views, yet actively adhere to their Christian faith, adopt diverse strategies for understanding biblical affirmation in relation to their sexual identifying and expressions.

Political and Religious Attitudes towards Non-Heteronormative Subjects in Malaysia

Malaysia is home to 28.3 million inhabitants, comprising 61.3 percent Muslims, 19.8 percent Buddhists, 9.2 percent Christians, 6.3 percent Hindus and 3.4 percent of those who constitute the other-religious, non-religious, unknown and practitioners of "traditional" beliefs (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010). In this predominantly Muslim country, which harbors "conservative Islamic sensibility" (J. C. H. Lee 2011, 56) and in which "sex and sexuality are taboo subjects" (Tan 2007), issues of gender and sexuality are extensively monitored by the State (J. C. H. Lee 2011, 97-108). Non-heteronormative subjects are increasingly vilified by some religio-political quadrants of institutional Islam, chiefly for political mileage (Goh 2013, 15-30). Such subjects, who are popularly and succinctly termed by the Malaysian media as "LGBT" (Hafidz 2012), have often been subjected to various forms of exclusion, stigmatization and even violence in certain political, religious and social circles.

The criminalization of oral and anal penetrative sex in the Penal Code applies to all Malaysians, but bears particular salience for sex between men, due to sodomy charges which were brought against erstwhile Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim (Shah 2013, 261-263). Moreover, various *Syariah* (Islamic) laws and *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinions) exacerbate the vulnerability of non-heteronormative subjects by decrying "*liwat*" [or] sexual relations between male persons" and "*musahaqah*" [or] sexual relations between female persons" (The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia 2006, sec. 2), "male person[s] posing as [women]" (The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia 2006, sec. 28) and "tomboy[s], women whose appearance, behaviour and sexual inclination are like men" (Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan 2008).

Nonetheless, it is not only Malaysian institutional Islam that demonstrates a strong denunciation of non-heteronormative subjectivities. Many Malaysian Christian churches unequivocally express their disapproval of such subjects and advocate celibacy, counseling and conversion from "abnormal," "deviant" and "sinful" ways (Goh 2011, 279-295; Goh 2014b, 150-151; Goh 2015; Teh 2002, 112-117).

Although numerous initiatives have been taken to advocate gender and sexuality rights for all Malaysians in recent years (Joint Action Group for Gender Equality [JAG] 2010; Gender Equality Initiative [GEI] 2016; Justice for Sisters 2014), including efforts by open and affirming Christian churches (Good Samaritan Kuala Lumpur 2013; Yubong 2013), these have yet to gain substantial traction. Non-heteronormative subjects continue to be religiously and theologically invalidated on multiple levels (Goh 2012). Having explained the political and religious ethos in Malaysia in which non-heteronormative subjects find themselves, I now discuss Archie C. C. Lee's concept of cross-textual hermeneutics and how I intend to utilize it from a queer perspective.

Reading Cross-Textual Hermeneutics with Queer Lenses

Archie C. C. Lee (1996) describes the process of cross-textual hermeneutics as recognition “that both the Christian text and the cultural text are equally significant and valid when they independently pose the same religious quest and address the similar human religious dimension of life” (46). For Lee (2004a), “texts” do not merely refer to “written texts—such as religious classics, literary traditions, and historical documents, but also to non-written texts—such as orally transmitted scriptural traditions as well as social contexts, economic and political experiences, and life experiences” (250) of Asian peoples. He sees Asian peoples as inhabiting two realms and living out two life-stories that straddle the “texts” of Christianity and “Asian cultural and religious heritage” (2004a, 249).

Lee calls for a strategy of reading, understanding and interpreting the bible through the prism of Asian “culture,” and Asian “culture” through the bible. He refers to this process as a way “to understand the biblical text in relation to the cultural-religious texts of Asians [in order] to achieve *inter-penetration and integration* of the two texts” (1993, 35; emphasis added). Similarly, the exploration and sense-making of human existence will be wanting if they exclude the rich interventions of biblical testimonies. Lee (2004a) describes this notion as “crossing,” or “*the illumination of one text by the other*, one point of view by the other [in which] new meanings can be discovered, meanings which might never be found by reading only one text” (251; emphasis added).

In other words, the construction of theological and human meanings from the scriptures suffers a sort of deficit for Christians if they overlook Asian “cultures.” By the same token, Asian “cultures” would benefit immensely from Christian insights. Cross-textual hermeneutics thus foster a “transformation of one’s whole life, a process of self-discovery” (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 251) in which Christian lives are enriched through an oscillating process of drawing on scripture and such “cultures.”

Despite agreeing with Lee on the significance of cross-textual hermeneutics and the broad perimeters of culture, which encompass social and religious dimensions, I find Lee’s conceptualization of Asian “culture” rather problematic. For instance, he provides an example of “Chinese cultural identity” as constituted of and circumscribed by material artifacts such as “ancestral tablets, family altars and art, literature, and household items including furniture, beddings, bowls and chopsticks that bore the dragon image” (1996, 39). While such objects may indeed be cultural markers for some, the centralization of such artifacts as “culture” hearkens to a nostalgic, essentialized and reductionist portrayal of the complexities of human-spiritual existence among Asian peoples.

In an intensely globalized and migratory world, notions of “Asian” and “culture” constantly unfetter themselves from the boundaries of more traditional symbols as they embrace and interiorize diverse incarnations of unstable ethnic, nationalistic and geographical belongings, popular entertainment, media, fashion, technology, “new” spiritualities and *self-understandings of gender and sexuality* in a postmodern, neo-liberal world. There are no identifiably monolithic forms of identity that are known as Asian “cultures”—only shifting, permeable and contingent representations and performances of *human lives* that are conveniently taxonomized as “cultures” (see Dervin 2011; Machart and Lim 2013).

Second, I feel that Lee (1993) draws too facile a division between “the biblical text” and “cultural-religious texts” (35). Christian scriptures and “orally transmitted scriptural traditions” (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 250) in Asian cultures appear in this binary as polarizing—even inimical—categories that “need” to be brought to some kind of “integration” within a seamless, harmonic blend. There is a seeming construction of both Christianity and Asianness as *independent*, rather than *interdependent* realities. For many Asian Christians in contemporary societies, such an

integration is already an existing, ongoing, negotiated, inter-penetrating and transformative reality.

As expressed by John C. England (2007), an expert in Asian theologies, “Asian Christians have long possessed different models—of insight and wisdom, discernment and truth-seeing, of heart-knowledge and life-shaping—by which they ‘do theology,’ reflecting upon and living the faith” (245). In other words, many Asian Christians are already “putting two and two together” in making sense of their lives as Asians and Christians in hybridized forms and tension-riddled negotiations. Such processes are well in motion, even if they occur without a demonstrable labeling of religion and/or spirituality, and continue to be characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty.

Third, Lee elides categories of gender and sexuality in his notion of Asian cultural texts. This elision is noteworthy, as Asian feminist theologians constantly emphasize the important contributions of such categories in negotiating with biblical understanding and interpretation (Yong 2009; Kwok 1995; Kwok 1996). Asian “cultures,” as such, must encompass the ways in which Asian peoples understand, represent and perform their gendered and sexual lives in relation to their faith, including their understanding of the scriptures.

Nevertheless, the cross-textual hermeneutical engagement of which Lee speaks provides a valuable lens for understanding how non-heteronormative Christian men negotiate the affirmation of their sexuality based on the bible. In this particular article, I re-read Lee’s (1996) notion of cross-textual readings between “the Christian text and the cultural text” (46) as contextual readings between *Christian texts* and *non-heteronormative sexuality texts*—or specifically, between biblical texts and life texts of sexualities. My re-reading acts as a queer analytical framework in examining the narratives of four non-heteronormative men in their pursuit of the meaning-making of human-divine interrelatedness in relation to their sexuality.

First, a queer analytical framework means that my re-reading, which listens to the testimonies of non-heteronormative men, challenges metanarratives that pronounce the bible as overwhelmingly condemnatory of non-heteronormative sexualities. Second, such a framework teases out the nuances in biblical self-affirmation among non-heteronormative men. Hence, this re-reading acts as a cross-textual hermeneutical trajectory that enlightens the ways in which the scriptures and non-heteronormative sexualities are brought in conversation with each other, based on the lived realities of non-heteronormative men themselves.

Diverse Negotiations of the Bible for Sexual Self-Affirmation

In this section, I showcase diverse negotiations of the scriptures for self-affirmation among non-heteronormative men that are manifested from three perspectives of meaning-making: (i) substituted affirmation; (ii) conditional affirmation; and (iii) ambiguous affirmation.

Substituted Affirmation

Some non-heteronormative Christian men express their belief in a “substituted affirmation” in biblical interpretation. In other words, they deploy a strategy which eclipses and replaces homo-negative biblical interpretations with more affirming and inclusive alternatives. Rainbowboy is a twenty-two year old Cantonese-Hakka Chinese Malaysian who professes to be Lutheran. In this first narrative, which I reproduce here, he shares his insights on what he understands as destructive interpretations of the bible, based on his own life circumstances:

...people...are using God’s name...religious teaching, and some of these teaching have led several people to, I mean like especially my community someone went to suicide...which is a very sad thing, and it also drives people to hate us, because they misinterpreted the meaning, and they misuse it and, they just think that oh...the bible

*says this, the bible says that, you can't be gay. It's like a weapon for them, a reason for them to hate us. So, all in all it comes down to people who actually preaches it, they did not actually preach the correct meaning. So yeah, actually, for me, religion isn't wrong but people who...misuse it and they turn it into something else...*²

Rainbowboy's reference to "people" who are "using God's name [and] religious teaching" is ambiguous. Nevertheless, informed by the context of my conversation with him, I suggest that "people" alludes to both church hierarchy and fellow Christians who are intolerant of non-heteronormative subjects. He underscores a "misuse" and "misinterpret[ation of] the meaning" of the bible among "people" whose antagonism towards non-heteronormative subjects is premised on how "the bible says this, the bible says that." He exposes how the arbitrary misrepresentation of the bible is deployed to deny the actualization of sexuality among non-heteronormative subjects, in which, according to lesbian feminist theologian Elizabeth Stuart (1996), the bible can "create brokenness rather than wholeness, inequality rather than mutuality, injustice rather than justice" (302).

Rainbowboy interprets the distortion of the scriptures from two primary perspectives. First, the bible is brandished as "a weapon" and "a reason" to direct hatred towards non-heteronormative subjects. Second, a "misuse" of the bible has "led several people to [commit] suicide" in "[his] community." Akin to "people," it is unclear if "community" is a reference to the church that Rainbowboy belongs to, or to non-heteronormative subjects in general, or to both. Whichever the case, what is noteworthy is his perception of the ability of biblical hermeneutical malformation to incite hatred and even death, a situation whereby the bible contradictorily becomes not just a source of oppression, but also a *sacralized mechanism of suffering and death*.

In stating that "religion isn't wrong," Rainbowboy demonstrates personal *survivalist strategic differentiation* between God, religion, the bible, and interpretations of the bible. He does not assign a totalizing view of destructiveness to the scriptures. Rather, the bible mutates into "something else"—a source of struggle, an incitement towards homonegativity and condemnation, and an implement of ruination when "people [do not] actually preach the correct meaning." Queer liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (2008) asserts that "the Other, by reason of ... sexuality not only brings a criticism to theology but also incarnates a living criticism" (88). By virtue of his lived realities and first-hand experience of the destruction of another non-heteronormative subject, Rainbowboy becomes a "living criticism," an embodiment of reproof towards homonegative biblico-theological interpretations.

In his eyes, an antagonistic attitude towards non-heteronormative sexuality constitutes an "incorrect meaning," wherein the bible is wielded as a tool of power to exact subservience from those who do not conform to heteronormative expectations. Despite—and because of—such destructive experiences, Rainbowboy adopts a contradictory interpretation of the bible that challenges the hierarchical and popular grasp of scriptural interpretation in relation to non-heteronormative sexuality. As seen in this second narrative, he grounds biblical affirmation of non-heteronormative subjects in the imagery of a loving God within the scriptures:

...of course there's a God for me...a God who's all about love, who won't judge other people, and 'cause actually there's a phrase in the bible where people often overlook that words, which was er God, or Jesus actually said that let the sinners come to him, come to the church, let them come. Instead of being judgmental, instead of discriminating them, we should just let them come and join the church. 'Cause we are

² While certain words have been deleted from these narratives for the sake of coherence and intelligibility, these narratives have otherwise not been edited, manipulated or distorted for any self-serving agendas. The narratives demonstrate the varying levels of proficiency in the English language among my research participants.

humans, we are not in the place to judge other people, we are not to judge that, you're homosexual, you're gay, it's wrong, you can't be Christian or whatever...so yeah, I believe in the God who believes in love.

Rainbowboy imagines God, whom he interprets as one “who won’t judge other people,” as being “all about love.” The concept of a non-judgmental deity is crucial for him, as it lies in stark contrast with his own experiences of church hierarchy and fellow Christians who are discriminatory towards non-heteronormative men. Rainbowboy’s conceptualization of a loving, non-condemnatory God is based on “a phrase in the bible” in which “Jesus actually said ... let the sinners come to him, come to church.” The precise location of this biblical verse is uncertain. It may be a fusion of several verses, including Matthew 11:28, Mark 10:14 and Mark 2:17.

Despite this ambiguity, what is clear is that Rainbowboy draws on his interpretation of biblical texts that showcase the inclusiveness of Christ in word and deed. In using God or Jesus interchangeably, I suggest that Rainbowboy sees Jesus as the embodiment of God’s non-judgment and non-discrimination, in which case he is able “to recognize the radicality of God’s passion as expressed in Jesus’ earthly ministry” (Wu 2000, 87). This embodiment also extends to church hierarchies and communities.

Based on a personal interpretation and image of “a phrase in the bible,” Rainbowboy turns destructive, exclusive and condemnatory interpretations of the bible on their heads. He substitutes them with constructive, inclusive and affirming visions that insist on full inclusion for non-heteronormative men by “let[ting] them come and join the church,” instead of “being judgmental [or] discriminating [against] them.” For Rainbowboy, it is “not in the place” of human subjects “to judge other people” on their sexuality, their faith, and the nexus between their sexuality and faith. The final authority rests in a non-judgmental God who is “all about love,” rather than judgmental and discriminatory “humans.” His affirmation in assigning authority to God instead of human subjects is a “strategy of talking back” (Goh 2014b, 153), which disputes the notion of God and human representations of God as “unproblematically conflated” (Goh 2014b, 154).

Love, as Rainbowboy understands it, is the antithesis of judgment and discrimination, and the “doing” of acceptance and inclusivity. Rainbowboy’s conceptualization of “the God who believes in love” denotes an increasing “inter-penetration and integration” (A. C. C. Lee 1993, 35) of his sexuality, his understanding of biblical interpretation and his sense of God from a carefully selected perspective. Rainbowboy engages in an “illumination of one text by the other” (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 251) in which his conviction in and experience of divine love within and outside the scriptures clarifies his insights of God within and outside the scriptures.

The imaging of a God who believes in love is a particularly salient theological perspective. It hails an imperative for human subjects to demonstrate love, acceptance and inclusivity towards non-heteronormative men in ways that are not merely premised on the conviction in a loving God. This imperative is grounded in a belief that touches the personhood of God’s own self—that God is personally convinced that the qualities of love, acceptance and inclusivity reside in all human subjects, including non-heteronormative subjects. If God is thus convinced, it follows logically that human subjects must be similarly convinced. As Christ is the embodiment of God for Rainbowboy, to interiorize the traits of God is to emulate the example of Christ, and vice versa.

Artisan is a Cantonese Chinese Malaysian and Pentecostal Christian in his late forties. He also develops a personal interpretation and image of scripture to affirm his sexuality in the face of antagonism. In response to my enquiry about the relationship between his sexuality and religious beliefs, he intimates a particular prism through which he understands a biblical passage and applies it to his own life:

Interviewer: Your sexuality, and your religious beliefs, your spiritual beliefs. Do you see them related to each other, or not related to each other, and can you say something about them?

Artisan: Ya ... you know that being a gay man is sinful in the mainline church context. And to me, is not, because on the bible, on John 3, 16 that for God so loved the world, and to me the world is inclusive of gay men, and not just straight men, certain sector of the society, is the world ... every human being, is loved by God and I don't think, and I strongly believe that I'm not excluded at all.

Akin to Rainbowboy, Artisan makes mention of antagonism towards non-heteronormative men within Christianity, but specifically refers to "mainline church" as its source. Although he does not specify the perimeters of "mainline church," my conversation with him informs me that Artisan is most probably alluding both to church hierarchy and fellow Christians. He unequivocally rejects hierarchical accusations of non-heteronormative sexualities among men as "sinful." Artisan's erstwhile experiences of "being a gay man" and thus "sinful" demonstrate how the insights and experiences of non-heteronormative men have been excluded from the diversity of biblical interpretation in hierarchical and popular Christianity. As such men are "*spoken about* and *spoken at*" (Goh 2014a, 44; emphasis in the original) rather than *spoken with*, they are excluded from participation as equal dialogue partners in biblico-theological ventures.

Artisan deploys the strategy of talking back by railing against the idea of a heteronormalized "world," or the presumption that every human subject adheres to a specific manner of heterosexual existence that is popularly accepted as "normal." He also talks back by insisting on the "[inclusion] of gay men." He bases this strategy "on the bible" by citing an excerpt from chapter 3 of the gospel of John, which captures a discussion between Christ and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and Sanhedrin member. He singles out a phrase which begins, "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). While Rainbowboy bases his notion of God's love for non-heteronormative men on God's own traits, which are to be embodied in human performances of non-judgment, non-discrimination, acceptance and inclusivity, Artisan locates God's love in an expansive, inclusive notion of "the world" that is not merely constituted by a "certain sector of society."

That "every human being ... is loved by God" also manifests Artisan's imagining of God as lovingly inclusive. Here I wish to provide an extended discussion of Artisan's notion of a loving God by appealing to queer theologian Robert E. Goss's interpretation of John 3:16 within the context of this entire Johannine chapter. Goss (2006, 552) understands this chapter as the failure of Nicodemus to heed divine grace, and who thus remains in fear and withdrawal instead of boldly declaring his discipleship of Christ.

By conceptualizing God as approving, in contrast with Christian hierarchies and communities that are depicted as disapproving, I see Artisan as performing a type of *desirous discipleship of love*. This is a discipleship through which one follows God through one's embodied, sexual body. It is a discipleship premised on the affirmation of divinely-sanctioned non-heteronormative sexuality. As Artisan gradually learns to annex his non-heteronormative sexuality to divine love as "two life-stories" (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 249) within a larger framework of Christian living, he begins to see how he is an indispensable component, rather than a "sinful" breach in the greater scheme of God's love for the world.

To extend this discussion even further, I propose that Artisan demonstrates an *agentic participation in godly grace*. This is a conscious, deliberate orientation towards a personal mindset that affirms one's personal worth as a non-heteronormative man in God's eyes. Consequently, this mindset provides the trajectory for attitudes and actions that amplify God's dynamic presence in one's life as a non-heteronormative man. Therefore, this loving inclusion, which convinces Artisan that "being a gay man" is not sinful, takes on a personal assertion as he "strongly believe[s] that [he's] not excluded at all." Akin to Rainbowboy, Artisan engages in an "illumination of one text by the other" (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 251). His imaging of God within and outside the bible is enlightened by his firm faith in and experience of godly love within and outside the bible.

Although scriptural interpretations can be destructively deployed in the lives of non-heteronormative men, the bible can also be reconstituted as a source of substituted affirmation. Non-heteronormative Christian men engage in agentic strategies of selectively foregrounding biblical passages which they interpret as explicit manifestations of divine love and inclusivity. At the same time, they disavow homonegative and death-dealing scriptural interpretations. They also make strategic distinctions between biblical interpretations, ecclesiastical hierarchies and Jesus and/or God.

Thus, in selecting biblical imageries, these men invert biblical condemnations by conceptualizing God as convinced of love, and unconditionally affirming, non-judgmental, inclusive and accepting towards them. They perform a sort of embodied discipleship which acknowledges that they participate in divine grace and love as non-heteronormative men.

Conditional Affirmation

Not all non-heteronormative men adhere to a perspective on the bible as a source of substituted affirmation. Skidiver is an elderly, married, white Anglican Christian who has been residing in Malaysia for many years. He understands the bible as both condemnatory and affirming of sexual expressions between men:

...the concern that I have is, where in the passage in Leviticus which speaks about a man should not lay with another man as laying with a woman....Anal sex is lying with a man, as with a woman....I don't like the idea that a man should treat another man as though she's a woman. Man to man, fine. But man treating a man as though he's a woman... what is known as top, would be the man, and the bottom is a woman. And he isn't behaving as a real man, you see, so it's not a matter of affection, of mutual masturbation, this sort of thing. That to me, I don't think is included in that. I don't see therefore, as Leviticus forbidding same-sex relationship, but do I see specifically it speaks about treating another man as a woman. On the other hand, we see in contrast, is David and Jonathan relationship, where they embrace, and they kiss each other. Man to man.

Skidiver is alluding to a single line from the book of Leviticus which stipulates that one “shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). For him, the engagement of men in anal intercourse constitutes “lying with a man, as with a woman”—a practice of which he disapproves. The source of Skidiver’s sense of dis-ease, and thus his formulation of the idea of scriptural disapproval of sex between men, lies in his perception of gender role transgression. Just as performing sexually “as top” is to act as man, to participate as a receptive partner in anal penetrative sex is to behave as “a woman” and not “as a real man.”

I propose that Skidiver displays a patriarchal mentality, which adheres to a strict dichotomy between anally penetrating another as the prerogative of “man,” and being anally penetrated by another as the distinctive role of women as “non-man.” To passively submit to another in sexual activity is to succumb to an admission of weakness and self-degradation as “man.” It is an attitude which not only holds that “the receptive person [is] more vulnerable than the insertive partner” (Kippax and Smith 2001, 428), but also underscores a less desirable position of weakness.

Skidiver perceives anal intercourse as a potential avenue of gender and sexual inequality between men, through which men disrespect and objectify each other. With this in mind, he regards anal penetrative sex as the act which is prohibited by Leviticus 18:22, in which “a man should not lay with another man as laying with a woman.” Conversely, Skidiver identifies the legitimacy of sex between men as “a matter of affection.”

For him, such affection is mediated through sexual deeds such as “mutual masturbation” in which equality, respect and personal subjectivity among men are preserved. I argue that that the

term “mutual masturbation” holds additional importance for Skidiver’s notion of legitimacy, as it emphasizes the notion of mutuality, and distinguishes it from self-seeking, objectivizing sexual gratification. Skidiver thus deems the proscription of sexual relations between men in Leviticus as contextualized within distinctive gender and sexual roles. The bible “forbid[s] same-sex relationship” insofar as sexual acts between men diminish societal norms of role and behavior for men, and when they glorify the sexual objectification of men by other men.

At the same time, Skidiver holds that the bible does not denounce sexual acts between men when they are performed within what he deems an atmosphere of affection, mutuality and respect. It is only in such instances, when a man treats another man as a sexual equal by desisting from “treating another man as a woman” that Leviticus can be understood as other than “forbidding same-sex relationship.”

To buttress his argument, Skidiver enlists imagery of the relationship between David and Jonathan from another book in the Hebrew Scriptures, in which “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David,” as Jonathan loved David “as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:3). David and Jonathan are depicted as embracing each other in some translations, while others mention that both men “kissed each other, and wept with each other” (1 Sam. 20:41).

Skidiver’s portrayal of these two men’s relationships is purposeful, as it bolsters his opinion that that “man to man” sexual acts and affections do not automatically fall under biblical censure. In drawing up his notion of legitimate sex between men, Skidiver concedes to a “prescribed gender scripting that ontologically essentializes a man and differentiates him from a woman” (Bong 2011, 654). Nevertheless, his delineation of legitimate and illegitimate sexual deeds between men allows him to make sense of the many contestations that exist in biblical interpretations of “same-sex relationship[s].”

This delineation reflects how “meaning is produced as one encounters and interprets the text” (Lowe 2009, 57) in the scriptures, and which in turn enables Skidiver to carve a space in which it is possible for him to experience and express sexual attraction towards men as a Christian. Unlike substituted affirmation, which denounces homonegative biblical interpretations by replacing them with affirming perspectives, conditional affirmation is marked by an interpretation of the bible as both affirming and condemnatory according to particular sexual roles and circumstances.

Ambiguous Affirmation

For some non-heteronormative men, biblical affirmation remains ambiguous. In such cases, the scriptures are perceived as offering support, yet remaining tethered to condemnatory notions of non-heteronormative sexual identifyings and expressions. Thirty-year-old Henri describes himself as a “liberal Anglican” and Tamil-Indian Malaysian who works in a non-governmental organization. Henri intimates his struggles with the bible in relation to his sexuality in the following narrative:

...over time...I realized...I am who I am because I was created in God's image...my sexuality is not necessarily a flawed image of God, but it is what God intended for me to be and for me to live my life, fulfill whatever vocation I have in this way. But then I also struggle with it at the same time, because...you constantly hear this...how homosexuals are not...ordained by God and it's, seems like you know, when you're talking about gay marriage...the standard arguments come in...even Jesus said that man would leave his father and mother and cling forever to his wife....I confess that the longer I'm here the more I struggle with that because I suddenly think, oh well, is there any truth to that....To me I do believe that the bible is...it's inspired word of God, but at the same time it is also a reflection and an account of ancient Jewish culture, and subsequent, in the New Testament, in a way it is a cultural document as well as a spiritual one...

Henri's growing realization "over time" that "[he is] who [he is]"—an allusion to his desire—stems from his belief that "[he is] created in God's image," and thereby a consequence of purposeful divine involvement. While he does not mention it explicitly, Henri's assertion of the belief in a divine origin for his createdness echoes a specific verse in the book of Genesis, in which "God created humankind in [God's] image" (Gen. 1:27). In extending this statement by saying that "[his] sexuality is not necessarily a flawed image of God," Henri provides several critical insights. First, he makes the choice to believe that he is divinely created as a gay-identifying man. Second, Henri recruits the role of a creator in the meaning-making of his existence, a creator whom he mirrors in his life.

Third, Henri's assertion that his gay-identifying is not "a flawed image of God" implies that he conceives of God as flawless. Lastly, Henri's statement also reveals a consideration that his gay-identifying is not a perversion of this divine flawlessness. Rather than a perversion, his gay-identifying reveals how "God intended for [him] to be and for [him] to live [his] life [and] fulfill whatever vocation [he has] in this way."

As such, Henri's "ontogeneric" (A. K. T. Yip 1999, 55) approach to God—that he is who he is because of divine creation—in relation to his sexuality "de-regulate[s ...] representations of God" (Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007, 306) that are heteronormatively architected. In other words, he destabilizes and deconstructs heteronormative and heterosexist imaginings of God by offering alternative, inclusive perspectives.

Henri's statement that he "[is] who [he is] because [he is] created in God's image" also provides sexually-survivalist perspectives which birth a divine mandate or "vocation" for Henri in relation to his gay-identifying. By ascribing his desire to God as a "God[-]intended" plan, Henri maintains the survival of his sexual subjectivity as flawless because it radiates from God's own self as flawless personhood.

Nevertheless, Henri's confidence in his desire due to divine involvement is destabilized by how he "also struggle[s] with [his desire] at the same time." In referring to the popular rhetoric in which he "constantly hear[s about] how homosexuals are not ... ordained by God," Henri questions his own mis/understandings of gay-identifying in relation to God as in/valid conclusions.

The "standard arguments" that continue to unsettle his convictions include a scriptural quotation, in which "Jesus said that man would leave his father and mother and cling forever to his wife." Here, Henri paraphrases Mark 10:7-8, which states that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Henri finds himself unable to dispute this scriptural passage which seems to arbitrarily but explicitly condemn him as a gay-identifying man, and which I see as retaining his sense of internalized homo-conflictedness.

In straddling the firm belief that he is "created in God's image" and wondering if "there [is] truth to" claims that gay-identifying is "not something ... ordained by God," Henri confesses that "[he] struggle[s]" with a lack of manifest certainty. For Henri, there is no indisputable and unequivocal assurance of the validity of sex between men in the bible. He believes implicitly in the bible as the "inspired word of God," yet he acknowledges that it is "also a reflection and an account of ancient Jewish culture."

For him, the scriptures are simultaneously "cultural" and "spiritual" artifacts. They harbor both human and divine elements, including in matters pertaining to sexuality. While there are some passages in the bible that can be interpreted as affirming, there are other passages that can be construed as condemnatory of non-heteronormative sexualities at the same time. I suggest that Henri's experiences of ambiguities in biblical interpretation also destabilize his seemingly unflinching and resolute imagining of createdness in God's image.

Therefore, Henri's choice to believe that he is divinely created as a gay-identifying man as based on scripture does not eradicate conflict or ambiguity, as he persistently asks himself if there is "any truth" to a biblical invalidation of his sexuality. Henri craves for a safe haven in the bible, yet finds himself unable to luxuriate in such unequivocal clarity.

“The illumination of one text by the other” (A. C. C. Lee 2004a, 251), is in his case not without a considerable measure of doubt and obscurity. His sexually-survivalist perspectives are marked by ambiguity, imprecision and impermanence. Henri’s conceptualization of desire both as “what God intended for [him] to be” and as not “ordained by God” remain as unresolved, peculiar bedfellows. Unlike conditional affirmation, ambiguous affirmation does not bear the absolute certainty of either scriptural endorsement or scriptural disavowal of non-heteronormative sexualities.

Epilogue

The narratives of Rainbowboy, Artisan, Skidiver and Henri reveal how the transformative potency of the scriptures has yet to be uninhibitedly unleashed in their lives, due to a prevailing notion of non-heteronormative sexualities as iniquitous. I am not suggesting that biblical affirmation exists in an absolutely unproblematic manner for non-heteronormative men if theological and ecclesiastical sanctions are removed. The complexities of human lives will ensure that religions continue to be sites of contestation for religious adherents *ad infinitum*.

Nevertheless, in this article, I have showcased socio-theological analyses and theories based on the narratives of non-heteronormative Christian men in Malaysia. These analyses and theories are researcher-research participant collaborative ventures which aim to give voice to those who are often rendered voiceless in religious and theological circles. Hence, this article provides insights into the struggles and dilemmas that non-heteronormative Christian men encounter when they allow their sexuality and biblically-inspired faith to share common spaces of meaning-making. I am hopeful that these insights can provide critical reflections for Christian communities and churches in their official and unofficial attitudes to non-heteronormative men, and perhaps even to non-heteronormative subjects in general. The following questions are aimed at stimulating such reflections.

First, in what ways can the insights of non-heteronormative subjects, particularly their notions of God and the bible, evoke deeper, critical thinking about ways biblical hermeneutics can support a greater celebration of diversity and inclusivity for non-heteronormative subjects within their Christian communities and beyond? Second, in what ways can such insights engender a consideration of the way the bible can be more holistically life-giving for all Christians, particularly those who, within their own specific geographical and socio-cultural locations, are currently beyond the margins of theological and ecclesiastical acceptability?

Christian communities and churches need to realize how important it is to confront, challenge and transform traditional *interpretations* of the bible that support the disapproval of non-heteronormative sexualities with other forms of scholarship that understand the ambiguous, time-specific and socio-cultural contexts of the bible. This is crucial in order to address biblical interpretations that continue to deliver conflicting, “mixed” messages and “half-measure” affirmations to non-heteronormative subjects.

Third, in what ways can such insights spur further conversations on whether or not the struggles and dilemmas of non-heteronormative Christian subjects need to be prolonged due to unyielding proclamations of non-heteronormative sexual expressions as sin? Christian communities and churches must reconsider their present stance on non-heteronormative identifyings and expressions, particularly those modes of perception that advocate a mentality of *loving the sinner while hating the sin*. This reconsideration is imperative, as the ways in which human subjects understand themselves are often deeply intertwined with the ways in which they act, and vice versa.

Queer theologian Rose Wu (2000) writes that “the Church must be willing to engage in a dialogue between biblical authority and contemporary human experience” (87). Taking her poignant insight to heart, I believe that all levels of Church—hierarchical or otherwise—and non-

heteronormative Christians in Malaysia must assume the responsibility and risk of engaging as equal partners in honest and humble dialogue. My final point therefore, and perhaps the most important one, is that such a dialogue must be accompanied by a willingness by all parties involved to listen from the heart and the mind as mutually-respectful peers, without antagonism, defensiveness, pre-conceived ideas, arrogance and condescension. It is only then that the bible can become an unconditional source of life, empowerment and transformation for all human, sexual subjects.

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THE MIS/APPROPRIATION OF BUDDHIST HIERARCHY IN MYANMAR: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception, Buddhism, the major religion in Myanmar, has been appropriated as the unifying principle for national solidarity. The Buddhist hierarchy is therefore influential in the society. This appropriation became manipulative in the postcolonial period, however, with the Buddhist hierarchy used as a political tool to dominate both the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist. The misappropriation has often resulted in undesirable and even tragic incidents including misunderstandings, violence, and murders.

Minority Christians have made efforts to engage in interfaith dialogue in their attempt to end the so-called religious conflicts. The principle for dialogue has been the sameness of the different religions. This article appreciates “sameness,” but does not see “differences,” or even religious hierarchy, as the main problem. The problem lies in the misappropriation of religions. The remedy is therefore the liberation of religions: each religion needs to be emancipated from any form of hegemonic control. With this insight, the article calls for a life-together in religious diversity and a renewed emphasis on practicing “love.”

Introduction

The manipulation of religion is not uncommon in world history. Even today religious beliefs and systems are appropriated, or misappropriated, by different people for various purposes—for building prestige, attaining wealth, legitimizing political power, etc. The same is true in Myanmar. Buddhism, the major religion there, has been used for political ends since its inception in the land. Other minority religions, such as Christianity and Islam, are not excepted from this trend. There were times when the appropriation of Buddhism seemed right and desirable in that it brought about a degree of unity and peace, but for the most part it caused uneasiness and misunderstanding among people of different faiths in the land, even finally rendering Buddhism dreadful to the non-Buddhists. In this paper, the researcher will explore ways in which religions can be liberated from manipulation or misappropriation and will show how Christians can contribute to the process.

With this objective in view, the researcher will first briefly trace the history of Buddhism in Myanmar—how it came to the land and became influential; how it was used at all times by ancient kings down through pre- and post-war politicians to successive military regimes; and how it is now likened to a terror. Next, the researcher will outline the structure of the Buddhist religious hierarchy, its influence on the society, the privileged role of monks in the community, and the martyrdom of those monks who protested against oppressive governments. The researcher will continue by considering Myanmar’s current socio-religio-political scene, which includes the

government's irresponsible actions towards the people and ethnic minorities, and the riots and killings involving some extreme nationalist monks. In the last part of the paper, the researcher will offer a Christian response by making two sincere calls: 1) an existential call in response to the real life situation, that is, a life-together; and 2) a religious call for actualizing love (love in action), a concept which underlies the teachings of different religions.

To this end, the researcher will apply a narrative method for the description of Myanmar's socio-religio-political context. Here narrative simply means an account of connected events or experiences, a method that may or may not include critical comments. To make a call for a life-together in love, the researcher will make use of what can be called a nonfoundational approach. This approach is based on a philosophical view that is defined dialectically by its negation of foundationalism. According to foundationalists, knowledge must be built on a sure foundation—a foundation which consists of a set of incontestable beliefs or first principles that are universal, objective, and discernible to any rational person (Grenz and Franke 2001, 23). In theology the term means that all religions are the same in terms of essence and aims, though they appear to be different in their doctrines. Contrary to this view, nonfoundationalism prioritizes respect for others as others, rather than attempting to relativize them in a doctrinal common ground.

An Interlude

Burma or Myanmar?

Myanmar, formerly called Burma, is made up of several ethnic groups. The dominant majority group has two interchangeable names—*Bamar* and *Myanmar*. For a long time outsiders called the country Burma (the corrupt English pronunciation of *Bamar*), the people Burman or Burmese, and the language Burmese. Until the end of the British colonial period (1948), the Bamar people used the name *Bamar* (alternative English spellings are: Bama, Bamah, Bahma, etc.) more widely than *Myanmar* to name themselves and their country. However, the post-colonial Bamar governments began to use *Bamar* for their own group and *Myanmar* both for all ethnic peoples and the country itself. (*Myanmar* is a more inclusive term which covers all ethnic groups.) From that time on, the people called their country Myanmar, while outsiders continued calling it Burma. In 1989, the military junta attempted to enforce the name Myanmar as the UN-recognized name. This paper follows that name; hence, Bamar for the Bamar people and Myanmar for all groups and the country.

Ethnic Diversity

Modern Myanmar (the Union of Myanmar) began with the Pang Long Treaty signed in 1947, a year before Independence. This was an agreement made between the Bamars and ethnic minorities for the founding of the future Union of Myanmar. The Union government recognizes 135 distinct national races in the country, speaking different languages and dialects. According to the 2014 Census Report, the population totals 51.41 million (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015, 1), but the ethnic distribution of the population is not mentioned in the report. A chart is thus provided to show the percentage share of population, as estimated in 2003 (Than 2007, 197):

| Major Groups | Sub-nationalities | Percentage |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|
| Bamar | 9 | 67.9 |
| Shan | 33 | 9.4 |
| Kayin | 11 | 6.4 |
| Rakhine | 7 | 4.2 |
| Mon | - | 2.7 |
| Chin | 53 | 2.1 |
| Kachin | 12 | 1.4 |
| Kayah | 9 | 0.5 |
| Others* | Non-citizens | 5.4 |

Myanmar has a stratified citizenship system (deriving from the 1982 Citizenship Law), based on how one's forebears obtained citizenship: 1) *Full citizens* are descendants of residents who lived in the country prior to 1823, or were born to parents who were citizens at the time of birth; 2) *Associate citizens* are those who (regardless of origin) acquired citizenship through the 1948 Union Citizenship Law; and 3) *Naturalized citizens* are people who (regardless of origin) lived in British Burma before January 4, 1948 and applied for citizenship after 1982.

The term Others* in the table above therefore refers to people who do not fit in the three categories above and are therefore given Foreign Registration Cards (FRCs). One category among the “Others” is a group of people who prefer to be called “Rohingya” and who wish to be recognized as an ethnic minority group. The government sees these people simply as illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

Buddhism in Myanmar

The Inception

In the mid-eleventh century, Anawrahtar (ruler of Bagan, one of the then city-states), conquered many other city-states and became the king of what can be called the First Bamar Kingdom. Convinced that only a religion of morality could help consolidate his kingdom, Anawrahtar looked for just such a religion. He found it in Theravada Buddhism among the Mons people in the south. When the Mons refused to give the Buddhist canons—the *Pali Tipitaka* or, *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets)—Anawrahtar invaded them and took the canons to Bagan where he became the first Bamar king to make Theravada Buddhism a ruling principle and a unifying factor for national solidarity (En 1995, 397).

The religious beliefs in existence before Anawrahtar's introduction of Theravada Buddhism are not much known. Many of them might have been a mixture of animism and corrupted forms of Mahayana Buddhism (from the Ari monks). In order to realize his goal of a national religion, Anawrahtar executed the leaders of the Ari monks, while at the same time taking some measures of compromise with indigenous *nat* worship (Aung 1967, 30-7).

In the Bamar language, and as explained by Simon En, *nat* is a generic term for various types of invisible spiritual beings (En 1995, 1). A *nat* is a spirit who has some dominion over a person or a group of people, and over a certain object or objects. There were thirty-six leading *nats* in the land then, and to this list Anawrahtar added one more *nat* called *Tha-gya-min* (Sanskrit: *Sakra*), the guardian god of Buddhism, and claimed this *nat* as the head of the pantheon. Then he set up the images of all these thirty-seven *nats* on the platform of his newly built pagoda named Shwe-si-gon, in order to demonstrate their subservience to the Buddha (Smith 1965, 14). (*Nat* worship is still prevalent among Buddhists in Myanmar today.)

The Growing Influence

Most kings after Anawrahtar took the role of defenders and promoters of Buddhism. They traced their origins back to Buddha's *Sakya* dynasty. The Buddhist doctrine of *karma* placed the king in the highest position, since one could only become a ruler after the accumulation of the greatest merit in former lives. The King was also believed to be the *Bodhisattva*, the incarnation of future Buddhas. He appointed the head of the *sangha* (the community of monks) and ensured the rule of order through religious hierarchy. At the same time, he ruled with the support of the Buddhist order and its associated prestige.

As such, Bamar society became totally Buddhist. Pali, the language of Buddhist scriptures, strongly influenced the Bamar language. Pagodas were built largely in the design of Bamar architecture. The integrating influence of Buddhism in Bamar society and culture was so great that there emerged a saying frequently repeated, even in modern Myanmar, which goes: "To be a Myanmar is to be a Buddhist" (Smith 1965, 14, 20, 83). Buddhism became Bamar's national symbol, and as a rule the Bamar people think and speak of the whole national culture as Buddhist. It is said that a Bamar peasant, when asked his race in a census, insistently replied, "I'm a Buddhist" (von der Mehen 1963, 5).

Other Religions

While Buddhism is widely adhered to, minority religions exist as well. Religious affiliations can be seen in the following chart, provided by the Joshua Project (the section identifying "Adherents" was added by the present researcher) (Joshua Project 2015):

| Religion | Adherents | Percentage |
|------------------|---|------------|
| Buddhism | Almost all Bamars, Mons, and Rakhines; most of Shans; half of Kayins; a few from different groups (including Chinese Malaysians) | 75.3% |
| Christianity | Almost all Chins; half of Kayins; many of Kachins; some from different groups (including Indian and Chinese citizens of Myanmar); and a very small number of Bamars | 8.8% |
| Hinduism | Indian citizens of Myanmar | 1.6% |
| Islam | Indian and Bengali citizens of Myanmar; a few from Bamar group and Chinese citizens of Myanmar | 5.6% |
| Ethnic Religions | Various smaller minority groups | 8.1% |
| Non-religious | | 0.5% |
| Others | | 0.1% |

Manipulation

Here manipulation means using or controlling religion and/or making it a hegemonic power for political purposes. In Myanmar, nationalist Buddhism has been strong throughout the country's history. When facing attacks, Buddhists used to urge each other to be united for the sake of "*a-myau, barthar, tharthanar*," that is, "(our) race, (our) language, and (our) religion" (Ling 2007, 156). A good instance of this was the founding of the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) in 1906, modeled on the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). The Association first dealt with religious issues, but later became involved in political activities, such as sending a delegation to the Chelmsford-Montagu hearings in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1917 to ask for Myanmar's separation from India, and organizing a boycott of elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly and Council of State at Delhi (Smith, 1999, 49).

In the period of "Diarchy" (the British-Myanmar joint government system), rival politicians tried to impress people in their political campaigns by inviting monks to deliver speeches before their political talks. On their campaign trips, they would also make public visits and donations to monasteries in the area. In 1946, Major General Aung San, the national leader fighting for

independence, even had to warn politicians who frequently used Buddhism for political purposes, declaring, “We must draw a clear line between politics and religion, because the two are not one and the same thing” (Smith 1965, 118). However, postcolonial leaders did not follow the policy of Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947, a year before independence (Hackett 1975, 121-22). Political leaders sought political legitimacy in the way that ancient kings did and this meant sponsoring and protecting Buddhism. They even purified the religion by renouncing some orders they considered unqualified, as if they were the chief patrons of the *sangha* (Jordt 2007, 175).

U Nu, the first Prime Minister of the postcolonial Myanmar (1948-1962), looked to Buddhism as a means of unifying the country and in 1961 made an unsuccessful attempt to declare Myanmar a Buddhist state (Smith 1965, 22). General Ne Win, the leader of the *coup d'état* of 1962, took an approach of non-involvement in religious affairs until 1974. However, he later set out to unify and purify the *sangha* according to orthodox practice, operating on the assumption that if he could control the monks, he would thereby control the people (Smith 1965, 176-180).

After Ne Win, according to a professor from Yangon University, the junta tried more than any other post-independence government to legitimize itself through the *sangha* (Smith 1965, 185). It abolished religious associations outside the government's control, and, through the state-controlled media, defamed respected monks who took anti-regime stands. Intelligence agents were sent into the monasteries in the disguised form of monks. At the same time, the junta looked for loyal monks to promote to leadership positions on the state-controlled supreme council of monks. The junta publicized its religious activities to gain political legitimacy. Thus it became a common joke among Buddhist Barmars to say, “There are only two colours on Myanmar TV—green and yellow.” This referred to the news on the state-controlled TV consisting largely of military personnel in their green uniforms, giving donations to monks in their yellow robes (Fink 2001, 217-218).

The Role of Buddhist Monks

Venerated Status

In Buddhist societies, monks are highly respected by everyone and occupy the highest positions in the religious hierarchy. In Myanmar, it is estimated there are around 500,000 monks. The motivations to join the monkhood may vary. Melford Spiro identifies the five main motives for becoming a monk as follows: 1) disgust with the world and its misery; 2) the desire to avoid labour; 3) the wish for an easy life; 4) the desire to achieve the state of *nibbana*; and 5) the desire to acquire merit and good *karma* or to promote and teach Buddhism (Spiro 1984, 137). Whatever motives they may have, the monks certainly enjoy the highest respect from society.

What must be understood here is that the general respect they enjoy is not directed towards the monks as individuals, but to the robes they wear, which are the symbol of the Buddha (Gil 2008, 4). The Buddhist reveres *Yadana Thown-par* (the Three Jewels or the Three Refuges—that is, the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*). Since the Buddha is no longer physically on earth, the visible expression of reverence goes to the *Sangha*, who teach the truths discovered by the Buddha. Moreover, the Buddhist believes in an uncountable series of lives, among which human life is one that is very difficult to obtain. (It is as difficult as for a needle falling from the sky to meet an upright needle on the ground.) And how much more difficult it is to become a monk. This belief cultivates reverence in the heart of the Buddhist layperson toward monks. Monks might not be ideal, but what counts is that they strive for an ideal.

As such, Buddhist people not only respect monks, but want to support prospective monks. A son is seldom forced to join the monkhood for life, but if he so wishes, nothing can please his parents more. The parents can be honored officially, if not in daily usage, with the titles *Mehdaw* (Royal Mother) and *Khamehdaw* (Royal Father). These terms are used with pride in ceremonies,

and of course, in their obituaries. A mother with a monk for a son can hold her head high in her community, however poor she may be. A woman without a son can fund the expenses of a man who wants to become a monk and be called *Yahan Ama* (Elder Sister of a Monk), or a man who does the same, *Yahan Dagar* (Sponsor of a Monk). Royal parents, Elder Sisters, and Sponsors have the right to have golden umbrellas (although not opened) over their bodies at their funerals.

Mutual Exchange

Monks live in monasteries. Monasteries are supported through the joint efforts of individuals or organizations in the society. The monastery in a village or in a town in the countryside is very influential. It is a center of social life and also a place for the preservation and transmission of the Bamar cultural heritage. The children are taught basic morals and civics, and social rights and duties towards others. Monasteries usually accept all village children who cannot afford to go to state schools. The education in monastic schools is free, often accompanied by free meals and lodging.

For the laity to make religious progress, they need to practice *dana* (donations to the monks and worship of sacred relics). They earn the highest religious merit through the act of donations. The accumulated merit will bring fruit in one of their next lives and will eventually bring them closer to *nibbana*. This is why important events in the life of a layperson cannot be celebrated without the act of donation. Monks are the vessel through which laity can aspire to a better hereafter. The most generous donors deserve also the highest respect and prestige in society. For their part, due to their vows, monks do not earn their living—they rely on the support of the laity. In this way, both sides live in a state of mutual exchange and depend on each other materially and spiritually.

Socio-Political Engagement

The involvement of Myanmar monks in nationalist movements and activities for freedom and justice can be traced back to the colonial period, particularly the early 1920s. Normally monks in Myanmar do not participate in secular affairs, but there are certain monks who do speak out in protest against oppressive rulers, and many have given their lives for this cause. A few, but significant, examples will be given here, in order to highlight these monks' love for country and their courage to stand with the people at the expense of their own lives.

U Ottama (1879-1939)

U Ottama belonged to Rakhine, one of the seven major nationalities of Myanmar. He entered monkhood at a young age, studied in India, and taught Pali and Sanskrit in Japan. He travelled to France, Egypt, Korea, China, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. He started traveling the country in the 1910s and made anti-colonial speeches, but as an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi he never advocated the use of violence. He was imprisoned in 1921 for his famous "Craddock, Get Out!" speech. (Sir Reginald Craddock was the then Governor of British Burma.) Afterwards he was repeatedly imprisoned, spending more time in prison between 1921 and 1927. During his imprisonment in the late 1930s, he went on hunger strike and died on September 9, 1939.

U Ottama left a significant and admirable legacy. He was the first monk to enter the political arena, the first to be imprisoned as a result of making political speeches, and the first true martyr of Myanmar nationalism. The new generation of monks in his monastery is active in advocating justice and their movements formed a spark for the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

U Wisara (1889-1929)

U Wisara was ordained a monk in 1912, aged twenty-three, and was active in the country's nascent independence movement in 1920s. In 1922, he met U Ottama, who had been imprisoned once for making a political speech. Later, he himself was imprisoned for his "illegal speech"

(1926-1929). In prison, he was forced to take off his monk's robe, but he went on hunger strike and after forty days was allowed to wear it again. Right after his first release, he started to make anti-colonialist speeches and was therefore imprisoned again. He was again forcibly disrobed, and on 6 April 1929, again started a hunger strike. He died on 19 September 1929 after 166 days. The ultimate sacrifice of U Wisara, a previously unknown monk, profoundly "moved many Burmese who had not concerned themselves with politics before" (Fink 2001, 19).

Monks from Pre-/Post- War Period until 2007

In the pre-/post-war period, political parties attempted to make use of monks, and many of them aligned themselves with ambitious politicians. However, there were also monks who continued to keep themselves from party politics and stood with the suffering people. Anti-government protests and demonstrations broke out sporadically in the periods that followed: the parliament democracy period (1948-62); the first phase of the military regime (1962-74); the second phase of the military regime, in the form of a socialist civilian government (1974-88); and the third phase of the military regime (1988-2011). Monks usually took part in these movements, some as supporters or even organizers, and many gave their lives as the army often fired on the protesters. In this connection, an event which is most significant among others, known as Saffron Revolution 2007, will be briefly presented.

The Saffron Revolution

In September 2007, tens of thousands of monks and other anti-government demonstrators, an estimated hundred thousand people, assembled peacefully on the streets of cities in defiance of the junta. It was a spontaneous act, without coordination or permission from the highest levels of the monastic hierarchy. This sudden and courageous act was also something unexpected for the opposition.

The monks tried to use their immunity to urge the authorities to consider the economic situation of Myanmar citizens and to protest against a sudden fuel price hike. After some violent events in one city, which ended with the death of a monk, the protests spread over the whole country. The leading group, *All Burma Monks Alliance*, presented four political demands to the military regime, which were as follows:

- (1) to apologize to the monks until they were satisfied and forgave them
- (2) to immediately reduce all commodity prices, fuel prices, rice and cooking oil prices
- (3) to release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all detainees arrested in ongoing demonstrations over the fuel price hike
- (4) to immediately enter a dialogue with democratic forces for national reconciliation, in order to resolve the crises facing the suffering people

As is customary in the history of military regimes, the protest ended with a violent crackdown by the military, with many deaths and arrests. The monasteries were cleared out and most of the monks had to flee to the villages. With this, the military might think that the movement of protest had been completely crushed. However, the monks' united spirit and courageous initiatives had a great impact on the people and the international community. With pressure coming from inside and outside, the junta had to consider holding elections in the near future.

What this section presents is some valid evidence that people are especially impressed and motivated when monks, the highest ranked in the religious hierarchy and the most respected in society, take the initiative in protesting against unjust authorities. In what follows, the way some Buddhist monks have misappropriated this most respected religious position in the hierarchy will be discussed.

Current Socio-Political Situation

Recent Positive Signs of Change

Beginning in 2010, recent years have brought a glimmer of hope to Myanmar, a country that has been in the dark for nearly half a century, ever since the 1962 *coup d'état* (Topich and Leitich 2013, 139ff). A multi-party election was held under the arbitrary supervision of the junta. Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and democracy idol, was released from house arrest. A multi-party parliament came into existence with elected representatives. Early in 2011, the parliament announced the formation of a new civilian and democratic government. The leading opposition party against military totalitarianism, the NLD, boycotted the election and the parliament was therefore dominated by the USDP (the military's proxy party). Furthermore, the top positions in the government were all taken by generals turned civilians. Nevertheless, the change was historic and encouraging.

The months following the transition saw some of the most significant progress in the history of modern Myanmar. The new president proclaimed in his inaugural address a reform agenda with three key goals: to reinvigorate the economy, reform national politics, and improve human rights. Immediate implementation of initial reforms included legalizing trade unions, establishing a human rights commission, the release of some political prisoners, changes to electoral law, and consultation with longtime critics of the regime (Topich and Leitich 2013, 142-43).

Also, and undreamed-of in the past, media restrictions were eased; there were considerable increases to salaries and pensions; public protests were allowed with official permission; and a series of public distributions of phone SIM cards was made by means of drawing lots. (This caused market prices for the cards to drop from K. 1,500,000 to K. 500,000 initially, later to K. 200,000, then to less than K. 10,000, and finally to K. 1500.) Central control of car import licenses was also eased, resulting in a rapidly growing number of cars; and the many unnecessary investigations into travel, both inland and overseas, were cancelled.

The United Nations and international community showed interest in the reform measures and offered helping hands. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in the country in April 2012 and addressed the parliament as the first foreigner to address the legislature since 1962. Among others, the United States promptly engaged Myanmar's new government to boost and ensure the march to democracy. In December 2011, Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar and was the first US Secretary of State to do so since 1955. Then, in November 2012, Barack Obama became the first United States President to set foot in the land of Myanmar. The United States and the European Union eased the burden of economic sanctions. The ASEAN gave Myanmar a turn to take its 2014 chairmanship, and accordingly, Myanmar had the privilege of hosting the ASEAN Summit in June 2014.

In November 2015, the government held a general election for the second term of parliament. This time, the NLD entered the election and won a landslide victory. On March 31, 2016, the USDP government handed over the ruling power to the new government led by the NLD. Because of the law prescribed by the junta in 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi cannot become president, but she is in the parliament and also in the cabinet, holding four different ministries. With this, the country is filled with hope and enthusiasm for a bright future.

A Confusing and Uncertain Situation

Despite the seemingly positive developments mentioned above, along with many others, there have been incidents threatening political stability and peaceful co-existence. It is true that the new government is trustworthy, since Aung San Suu Kyi and faithful NLD representatives are present within it. But the military element is not yet absent. According to the 2010 Constitution, the military chief still wields great power in the ways indicated below:

- (1) Three candidates are recommended for the presidential election, one by the Upper House, another by the Lower House, and the third by the Commander-in-Chief. The one with the highest vote is appointed President, the second Vice President-1, and the third

Vice President-2. Now in the new government, the Vice President-1 is a general turned civilian, and was recommended by the Commander-in-Chief.

- (2) The army takes three seats in the cabinet: Defence, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs. These ministers are appointed by the Commander-in-Chief.
- (3) There is a body named the National Defense and Security Council which holds the highest authority in the nation. The council is comprised of eleven members: President, Vice President-1, Vice President-2, Speaker of the Upper House, Speaker of the Lower House, Commander-in-Chief, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Defense Minister, Home Affairs Minister, Border Affairs Minister, and Foreign Affairs Minister. Out of the eleven, six—more than half—are from the military.
- (4) The procedure and the structure mentioned above imply that the Commander-in-Chief can exercise his power to stage a *coup d'état* if necessary.

Top leaders in the previous government were all army generals turned civilians. What was in their minds could be discerned by such indicators as a growing crony capitalism; land/farm confiscations which left poor peasants nothing to live on and cultivate; violent crackdowns of people protesting against projects by enormous industries that would affect the environment of the areas concerned; and the old dictatorial manner of the cabinet which was often manifested in their meetings with people, etc. Considering the power vested in the Commander-in-Chief, it is clear that the military still wants to perpetuate its power. Ways and means of perpetuating power may vary—implementing superficial reforms for a show, or wearing a different mask to change its outward appearance, or, as the worst and last resort, creating chaos to be followed by a *coup d'état*.

In fact, many are suspicious that the riots and the killings in recent years are the government's scheme to "get two in one attempt"; that is, to seek people's support by taking the role of the defender of Buddhist faith, and at the same time, by fanning the tensions and conflicts among people so that the role of the military remains always important. What is confusing and tragic is to see some extremist monks getting involved in the bloody riots. The following are incidents in which extremist monks were involved as supporters, or even as leaders.

Violence and Murders of 2012-13

The violence and murders of 2012-13 occurred during the conflict between ethnic Rakhine (joined by Buddhist Barmars) and the Rohingya people.¹ The spark was lit in Rakhine State with the rape and murder of a Rakhine girl by three young Rohingyas. The reaction came with the broad daylight murder of ten Rohingyas on a pilgrimage trip. Attacks spread to some other parts of the country in 2013. In one year (2012-13), hundreds of people were killed, thousands of houses ruined, and over a hundred thousand people displaced. Many Buddhist monks were actively involved in these violent actions. Owing to the fact that Rakhines are Buddhist and the other side Muslim, extremist monks took it as a religious conflict and incited the Buddhist people to protect their religion. Many times the monks used hate speech in their talks with people.

For the present researcher, the cause of the conflict is first of all not religious; rather it is a racial conflict arising from issues of land occupation and business expansion, thus causing fear, bitterness and hatred. Some have even labeled it as ethnic cleansing (Press TV 2013). The point is: it is only the different religions of the two sides that make the conflict religious—it is violence committed under the name of religion.

¹ The name "Rohingya" has long been controversial in Myanmar. A group of people in Rakhine State claims Rohingya as their name, but the government persistently refuses to recognize the name Rohingya and simply call them migrant Bengalis (though they are more likely to be Bangladeshis). To delve into this controversy will require a depth study of years, and that is beyond the scope and limitation of this paper. The present researcher therefore uses this name for convenience in recounting the conflict.

The “969 Movement”

The 969 Movement was started in 2001 by a Buddhist monk, U Wirathu, and also revived by him in 2010 (Hodal 2013). The number 969 is a derivation of the 9 attributes of Buddha, the 6 attributes of Dharma, and the 9 attributes of the Sangha. The purpose of the movement is to protect Buddhist faith and practice. The movement can therefore easily be considered religious. However, many observe that its motive is political, or more explicitly, Bamar extreme nationalism.

After the riots in March 2013, the Dalai Lama said killing in the name of religion was “unthinkable” and urged Myanmar’s Buddhists to contemplate the face of the Buddha for guidance (Fuller 2013). (NB. Wirathu was mentioned on the cover of *Time* on July 1, 2013, as “The Face of Buddhist Terror” (Beech 2012).)

“Protection of National Race and Religion” Law

Drafted on January 15, 2014 by leading monks of the 969 movement, the Protection of National Race and Religion law includes four bills: 1) Faith Conversion Bill; 2) Marriage Bill; 3) Monogamy Bill; and 4) Population Control Bill (Aung 2014).

The alleged reason behind this law is to encourage peace between different faiths and to protect Buddhist women from being forced to convert to Islam when they marry Muslim men (Ferrie 2014). The proposed law, as drafted, 1) forbids conversion to another faith; 2) imposes an obligation on Buddhist women planning to marry men from other religious groups to obtain permission from both their parents and local authorities; 3) ends polygamy; and 4) limits the number of children a couple can have (The Law Library of Congress 2014).

The law is in effect designed to protect a particular ethnic group and a particular religion—the Bamar people and Buddhism. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom said on June 11, 2014 that this kind of law, aimed at protecting the country’s majority Buddhist identity by regulating religious conversions and marriages between people of different faiths, has no place in the twenty-first century and that it should be withdrawn. The Commission had other serious concerns about the pending legislation and expressed these to Myanmar government (Brunnstrom 2014). While many are opposed to the law, viewing it as a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the former government showed favor towards it from the beginning. Consequently, the Population Control Bill was passed consecutively by the Upper House of Parliament on February 19, 2015 (Zu Zu 2015) by the Lower House on March 19, 2015 (Zaw 2015a) and by the Union Parliament on April 6, 2015 (Zaw 2015b).

There is a further confusion which affects people’s hope as seriously as the appropriation of religion. This is none other than the silence of Aung San Suu Kyi. People in Myanmar have placed great trust and expectation in the lady, and from the beginning she herself often stated clearly that democratization could not be successful without giving serious consideration to the desire of ethnic nationalities (Hlaing 2010, 144). However, the Nobel Peace Laureate was completely silent about the government’s recent military operations against ethnic armed forces, which caused several thousand ethnic people to leave their villages. She was also silent on the atrocious crimes, committed against Rohingyas living in Rakhine State. Desmond M. Tutu, who came to Myanmar in February 2013 to visit Suu Kyi, was surprised at that, but he refused to criticize his fellow Nobel Prize Laureate and said the lady’s reluctance was linked to her current political situation (McLaughlin 2013).

True, the reason for her silence would surely be the political negotiation/compromise she has made with the government. If this is the case, there is also some reason to predict she will not give sufficient consideration to ethnic issues even when she becomes the President. For, by then there will surely be other pressures preventing her from acting freely on that issue.

A Call for Life-Together

Having described how the Buddhist religious hierarchy was and is misappropriated, not only by politicians and successive governments, but later by certain monks themselves, the present researcher continues by reflecting on the matter from a Christian perspective. The purpose, and of course the concern, is to explore how Christians should respond to the misappropriation of religion.

As a Myanmar, and as a Christian, the present researcher cannot stay aloof and sit back amid the confusing situation and the uncertain future of the nation. He is therefore going to attempt to suggest possible ways through which the nation can come closer to civil society with the Buddhists maintaining their religious hierarchy.

A Focus Shift: Toward Socio-Political Co-struggles

Myanmar is gifted with four major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. The need for mutual learning, mutual understanding, and mutual respect is therefore not even a question. While it is important to pay equal attention to each religion in building healthy relationships, a wider perspective and more sensitive interaction is necessary in dealing with Buddhism, mainly because this is the religion adhered to by the Bamar people, the majority and dominant group in the land. This section is thus devoted to dealing with Buddhist-Christian dialogue, in order that this might also serve in some way as an example in finding possibilities for Buddhist-Muslim dialogue.

Focus on Theological Inclusiveness

None of the world religions originated in Myanmar, but Theravada Buddhism is considered indigenous. The ground is clear. It has the longest history as the religion of the majority group, the Bamar people. When it was introduced and made the state religion by King Anawratha in the eleventh century, Bamar were the only local people in the then Kingdom of Burma. Other groups, like Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, were also Buddhists, but they were not yet subject to the Bamar. Today's Christians, such as Kayin, Kachin, Chin, etc. did not have a part in the history of ancient Burmar. Hindus and Muslims were probably in the land even before Buddhism was introduced, but they were not local Bamar and their religions could not be considered indigenous. Also, they did have some religious activities but none of these could be called missionary. Christian mission was a latecomer compared to the others.

The size of a religion depends largely on the size of the diverse racial/ethnic groups, and government restrictions upon other religions. Buddhism enjoys the far largest population because it has been the religion of Bamar people since long before Christian missions started. The latecomer Christianity finds its dwelling place mainly in the remaining smaller groups, such as the Kayin, Kachin, and Chin, and a very small circle of Bamar people.

Observing the small number of Bamar Christians and the insignificant impact the Christian gospel has had on Buddhist society, the leading theologians in Myanmar view the Christian mission as unsuccessful. The reason for this failure, they believe, is the missionaries' exclusive theological views and their triumphalist missional approach, which bred a "missionary-compound mentality" in the next generations of Christians. For these theologians, some Christian doctrines are unintelligible and unacceptable to Buddhists. They therefore propose to reconsider Christian theology and to make it inclusive of the Buddhist understanding of truth/reality, so that it might be relevant to the context.

A pioneering scholar to express this view was Prof. Khin Maung Din (1975), who in 1975 called for a "Burmese Christian Theology," by reconstructing such Christian themes as God, Christ, and Man. Dr. Kyaw Than (1976, 54), a prominent ecumenical scholar, made the same plea. Many of the younger generation are on the same track. Samuel Ngun Ling (2003), for one, brings forth three doctrines that were problematic for the Burmese language teachers of Adoniram Judson, the first protestant missionary to Myanmar. These are: 1) the problem of knowing the eternal being; 2) the problem of the atonement; and 3) the problem of salvation. Seeing these

doctrines are still problematic for many, he insists that “[to] do a contextual theology in the Burmese Buddhist context would mean to take into consideration the Buddhist philosophy, culture, belief, and practice very seriously in its theological reconstruction” (Ling 2012, 26).

To this the present researcher would add the need to take account of two other faiths—Islam and Hinduism—though their adherents are not many. A theology which strives to be relevant to diverse peoples must be inclusive of all. This is essential, especially in Myanmar in such a confusing and tragic time as this. A Myanmar Christian theology which pays attention to the majority only, but does not take account of the suffering minorities, cannot be relevant to the Myanmar context.

Liberation of Religions for Life-together in Diversity

Even though Christian theologians seldom express the need to take into account Islamic and Hindu faith elements when reconstructing theology, they nevertheless took the initiative in organizing interfaith dialogues between the four religions. Dialogical talks were conducted in a scholarly atmosphere, however, and furthermore, until recent years the talks focused mainly on seeking understanding of those religious teachings that looked strange and unintelligible to the other. The presupposition was that the essence and aims of religions are the same, however different their doctrinal expressions seem. To put it simply, the focus was to seek a religious common ground or contact points through which religions could relate to each other and live together in peace.

The underlying principle of these dialogues is related to Hans Küng’s (2001) famous dictum: “There can be no world peace without religious peace; and no religious peace without religious dialogue” (105). World peace is many a time threatened by religious conflicts, and therefore religious dialogues are essential in order both to solve existing conflicts and to avoid possible future problems.

In order for dialogue to be genuine, Catherine Cornille (2008, 4-5) proposes the following four essential conditions:

- (1) doctrinal humility, which entails a certain degree of admission that religious truths, including those of one’s own religion, are finite and imperfect;
- (2) commitment to one’s particular religious tradition;
- (3) interconnection or some meeting point which occurs through shared concerns such as social or political problems or any other challenge directed to religions; and
- (4) understanding of the other religion as other.

The present researcher is also convinced that besides these conditions, different approaches are necessary depending on the nature of the problem and the desired solution for that particular problem. For instance, the sort of dialogue approach needed in Myanmar, in the present researcher’s opinion, is one that seeks life together in a diversity of religious faiths, not an attempt to relativize or universalize the different faiths. Jurgen Moltmann is explicit in this matter:

[W]e do not so much need interfaith dialogues, interesting though they are (italics mine). What we need is a common struggle for life, for loved and loving life, for life that communicates itself and is shared, life that is human and natural—in short, life that is worth living in the fruitful living space of this earth. (2010, 77)

For the present researcher, interfaith dialogue must continue, but the focus must be reconsidered. In Myanmar, interfaith dialogue is needed, not primarily to discuss theological difficulties, but to build unity and cooperation to protect each religion from being used in the wrong way. Given the current socio-religio-political situation, what are problematic are not theological concepts, though they have some defects. In fact, there is no theory or principle that is free from defects. The problem is the manipulation of religions.

What must be done first and foremost, therefore, is to work together for the liberation of religions from manipulation, from being used for other purposes—political, nationalist, or financial. It is time to stop putting doctrinal difficulties to the fore, and making conceptual discrepancies the problem. It is high time to shift to a focus on the suffering of the people and their struggle for justice and rule of law. To relate this to the recent conflicts, acceptance of others on the part of Buddhist monks, and knowledge of the fear of Buddhists on the part of Rohingyas are necessary – these are the primary steps toward a civil society.

Emphasis on Respect Rather Than Sameness

On the same day that a convention was held by the 969 monks, 1500 in number, for the endorsement of the draft law, the United States Ambassador, Derik J. Mitchell, organized an interreligious meeting (Burma Partnership 2014). It took place on June 27, 2013. The leaders expressed concerns about the draft law and affirmed that peace was the only way forward for the country in order to ensure what the new generation in Myanmar expects, namely, education, healthcare and human development. The leaders wanted to revive the principle of “unity in diversity” and “respect” for *different opinions and ways of doing things* (italics mine).

The then Archbishop Charles Bo (now a Cardinal, appointed by Pope Francis on January 4, 2015), who represented the Catholic Church, said to reporters that no religion promotes hatred. It is therefore the task of the leaders of the various faiths to refrain from speech that fosters hatred, targets someone because of their faith, causes damage or injury, or affects specific groups (Khoo Thwe 2014). His words did not imply the need for doctrinal adjustment, but rather that rules of ethics and etiquette be observed by each religion for the sake of peace and harmony.

Another interfaith dialogue, held on January 10, 2014, was also encouraging. Organized by a civil society group, “Religions for Peace,” and Columbia University, the talks brought together an influential Buddhist abbot (the Venerable Dr. *Ashin* Nyanissara, known as Sitagu Sayadaw), a prominent Muslim leader (Al Haj U Aye Lwin, Chief Convener of the Islamic Center), and a leading Christian ecumenical scholar (Professor Dr. Saw Hlaing Bwa from MIT). Among the participants were the British ambassador and a top official from the United States embassy. Another noted participant was the Venerable *Ashin* Wirathu, the leader of the 969 movement. The theme of the talk was “Religious Roots of Social Harmony” (Yu Wai 2014).

The present researcher is very happy and even feels honored to hear of these meetings and especially the themes which concerned them, such as unity in diversity, respect, and the religious roots of social harmony. It is clear that the leaders did not bother about doctrinal differences; rather, their concern was to respect the different faiths and apply them in the right way for social harmony. These are the very concerns that the present researcher expressed in the form of a question some years ago: “Is it impossible to render service with one’s own religious beliefs, so long as mission is understood as service, and dialogue as learning a different set of religious beliefs and being prepared to respect them?” (Mang 2009, 3–4).

At the same time, the researcher is concerned about what is beginning to take place in the country. The target thus far is Muslims, not Christians, but whoever the target, it is a sad thing to see people being deprived of religious freedom and persecuted in the name of religion. Along with the above question, the present researcher also warned of the possible danger in religious dialogue as follows:

[P]roponents of dialogue should be always aware that their dialogue partners are the majority in terms of religion, ethnicity, and political power. They must take account of Bamar nationalistic Buddhism, controlled and used by the junta for legitimizing its power. It is a very uncertain thing whether Buddhists have a desire to do dialogue with Christians, or whether they would even count Christians as equal partners for dialogue. Therefore, before taking the initiatives to do dialogue, Christians should seriously think about the extent to which they could compromise their stance in case the other side

demands more than the common ground. This is crucial because the nationalistic Buddhists would prefer Buddhistization or Burmanization. (Mang 2009, 53)

The point is: religious beliefs and social service are not contradictory. For those who are willing to serve society and work for peace, religions are not problematic. On the contrary, religious beliefs can even be inspirational. What is needed is not dialogue for doctrinal harmony, but dialogue fostering “respect for other religions” as advocated by Kathryn Tanner (1993).

Love: The Sole Remedy for the Religious Hierarchy

Every religion has its own defects, and there have been miserable tragedies resulting from crimes committed in the name of religions, including Christianity. In the history of Christianity, there were times when the hierarchy was powerful to the extent that Christian faith and practice were distorted. The hierarchical element can be seen in every religion, and since it can be so very destructive, especially when misappropriated, each religion has to be alert not to give way to the love of power and dominion. In fact, religions should cooperate, working hand in hand to protect religion from misappropriation.

It is a shocking and sad thing to see Buddhist Myanmar suffering under its military totalitarians who are also Buddhists. Unlike the past colonial age, Myanmar’s rulers are neither foreigners nor Christians—they are Bamar and Buddhist born and brought up in Myanmar’s Buddhist society. Yet the suffering under them seems much worse than that of the colonial age. Saying this is not at all to find fault with Buddhism or Buddhists, but is an attempt at a first step in an exodus from the long nightmare. Finding fault with each other will not bring any good. In this section, the primary focus is not criticism, but a search for possibilities for Christian participation in the socio-political struggle, not as the know-how guru, but as an active complementary partner.

The Teaching to Love, and the Grace of Being Love

With its famous Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Right Path, Buddhism is especially known as an ethical religion. It is also prestigious for the practice of meditation and victory over self. Gautama Buddha imparted every good thing humans should pursue: Nirvana, love, sympathy, compassion, patience, self-respect, inner peace, and detachment—all these areas are covered in his teachings (Kornfield 1996). Taking account of Myanmar’s totalitarianism, the present researcher will venture to argue, however, that the area where Christians, as Christians, can make a contribution to Buddhist society is by actualizing what he terms “the grace of being loved.”

Richard Gromrich, founder of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, admits that the early Buddhists talked very little about love. Love was discussed mostly in the form of teachings, and the teachings appeared somewhat lacking in warmth. He also explains that the Pali word for “love” is *mettā*, which is a non-erotic love and would be like *agapē* love to Christians, although it has become customary to translate it as “loving kindness” (Gomrich 2009, 78, 85). As a religion that encourages self-reliance, with the belief that there is no supernatural power outside to help humans, Buddhism teaches people to make their own efforts for the attainment of love. A teaching of Buddha mentioned under a topic called “Developing Loving-Kindness,” goes as follows :

Put away all hindrances, let your mind full of love pervade one quarter of the world, and so too the second quarter, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around and everywhere, altogether continue to pervade with love-filled thought, abounding, sublime, beyond measure, free from hatred and ill-will. (Adapted from the Digha Nikaya, translated by Maurice Walshe). (Kornfield 1996, 7)

Harvey Aronson (1980) elucidates the social, psychological and soteriological import of Theravada teachings on love, sympathy, and the sublime attitudes (2). For Aronson, Gautama Buddha is a sympathetic teacher as is clear from the numerous references to his sympathy in Theravada discourse (3). Buddha teaches and exhorts the monks to cultivate the loving mind, which relates to all sentient beings from a wish for their welfare (26). He also explains love in more detail: the acts of love, which are service with love (39); love as a liberation of the mind—the mind conjoined with love is liberated from becoming possessed by anger (40); the power of love, which protects one from the assaults of both human beings and nonhuman spirits (48-50); and the eight benefits of love, including sleeping well, waking well, being dear to humans and to nonhumans, being protected by deities, and not being affected by fire, poison or weapons (56).

According to the teachings mentioned above, the existence of love is taken for granted and what one needs to do is cultivate it and practice it. Love is not received, but is attained. The insight is deep and the process of the practice is systematic. But since it tends to be somewhat technical, it would be very difficult for ordinary people to attain love in its full essence. Sigmund Freud once said those children who were well-cared for by a mother's love were more likely to become better and more mature than those who were not. This can mean that the child must receive love first before s/he can learn to attain a more mature love.

From a Christian standpoint, Freud's notion can be taken as an analogy for divine love. According to the biblical narrative, love does not seem to be a human possession; rather, it is of God. The Bible says that love is from God (1 John 4:7), and God is Love (v.8). God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). The reason He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins is not that we loved Him, but that He loved us (1 John 4:10), and this love enables us to love one another (v.11). The point is: love is received, it is a divine gift granted in grace. Just as a child needs first to receive a mother's love so that s/he may become a mature man/woman, so everyone needs to experience God's love in some way or another so that they may be able to love others. To love is important, but to be loved makes loving possible.

Learning to Love in Order to Offer "Being Loved"

In talking about "being loved," God's love must not be confined to Christian experience. There are many mature people without Christian experience of God's love. A good example among many is Sister Chan Khong, a Buddhist nun from Vietnam and a student of Thich Nhat Hanh. She is well-known for her lifetime commitment to social service and human rights promotion. However, there is no mention of God or the experience of divine love in her autobiography. What then is the source of her maturity and helping spirit?

For the present researcher, Sister Chan Khong was born with love, or in love. Even before she was born, her birthplace was already filled with love. Her paternal grandparents were well-respected in their village community because of their integrity, good hearts, and care for the poor. Her maternal grandparents were rich and spent a lot of their money on the homeless and prisoners. Her parents helped poor farmers in various ways. In their home they looked after twenty-two children, nine of their own and thirteen others. They treated all the children equally, without giving any special privileges to their own (Chan Khong 2009, 12-13). Sister Chan Khong was fortunate enough to descend from a loving family and experience "being loved" from birth.

The present researcher, as a Christian with his hope in God and his commitment to God's world in the present, appreciates anyone who is fortunate or mature enough to become a loving person or a good contributor to the world. But the problem is that not many people are as fortunate as Sister Chan Khong. In the Myanmar context, the main concern therefore is for those who are not fortunate enough to experience love or to feel loved.

It will be an overstatement to say that the root cause of Myanmar's military totalitarianism is the absence of "being loved." Nevertheless, it is also a fact that many people in the land need to feel loved. Many of Nargis' survivors are still suffering from physical and psychological wounds. Thousands of Kachin war victims are in the forest. Many Bengali or Bangladeshi (Rohingya)

people are still landless and homeless. For those who were and will be born into this chaotic situation, to be well-cared for or to feel loved would be a rare opportunity. Therefore, they need to know that they are loved, not only for overcoming their current struggles, but also to prevent them from becoming future loveless terrorists or totalitarians.

In this great task, the present researcher ventures to combine “attaining love by practice” and “the grace of being loved,” so that he can come up with “learning how to love to offer being loved.” To attain love only by practice would be almost impossible for many ordinary and weak people, and also, to rely on being loved alone may make many inactive and unable to share God’s love for others in the most humble but touching and penetrating way. The Christian also needs to learn from the Buddhist how to love.

Myanmar’s Buddhist religious hierarchy, which has been misappropriated by totalitarianism and later by some extremist monks, can be healed only if it is rightly touched by love. Therefore, the present researcher encourages and even challenges his fellow Christians (who are supposed to experience the grace of being loved) to love others in action, to make every good effort to ensure that people in the society feel loved. Only when people feel loved, can they be filled with the courage to be in the present—the courage to love and strive for what is good and the courage to denounce what is evil.

Conclusion

The hierarchical element is a part of religion—every religion has some sort of hierarchical structure. There are ways in which one can say that hierarchy benefits society and, of course, religion. However, the same hierarchy is very vulnerable to manipulation—it is very tempting to ambitious lovers of power. The result is the suffering of religions from manipulation or misappropriation. World history records numerous events of the manipulation of religion by the powers that be. At the same time, it also recounts the misappropriation of religions by religious leaders themselves. Buddhism in Myanmar has suffered both.

To protect religions from misappropriation, religions themselves have to be watchful of the hierarchical element that is present in each of them. To cure the painful results manipulation, they need to work together for the good of all. However, for religions to come to this stage is “easier said than done.” It is not a simple task, not child’s play—it may even demand life itself. Nevertheless, this paper ventures to propose ways through which the desired goal can be achieved. The proposal is a life-together in love.

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AN ACCOUNT OF VIRTUE AND SOLIDARITY FROM *PAKIKIPAGKÁPUWÂ*

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ABSTRACT

There has been a resurgence of interest among philosophers in Asian conceptions of virtue. In this paper I derive and develop an account of virtue in general, and solidarity in particular, from two Filipino concepts: *pakikipagkápuwâ* (comradeship with fellow humans) and *pakikiramdám* (emotional sensitivity). The primary source used for the discussion of these concepts is Filipino psychology, which allows for an account of virtue that is grounded in a particular cultural practice. The ensuing account of virtue, however, is not just context-sensitive; it also showcases an aspect of Filipino culture that has a potential for universality. More specifically, the account of virtue and solidarity from *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám* is shown to have affinities with the interdependent construal of the self, which is discussed by some psychologists; and the relational understanding of autonomy, which is discussed by some philosophers.

Introduction

Although many are now interested in what are sometimes called alternative accounts of virtue from non-Western sources, especially early Confucian texts (Hutton 2015; Mi, Slote, & Sosa 2015; Wong 2004; Wong 2015), little work has been done on developing an account of virtue from the work that psychologists have done on non-Western subjects. Elsewhere I argue that the resurgence of interest in Asian accounts of virtue is impaired by an almost exclusive focus on classical texts, which does not allow for an account of virtue that can be empirically tested and calibrated for contemporary needs (Cleofas 2016a). In this vein, I develop an account of virtue and solidarity from work done by Filipino psychologists.

The account of solidarity developed in this paper turns the focus on two crucial concepts that have been investigated by Filipino psychologists: *pakikipagkápuwâ* (comradeship with fellow humans) and *pakikiramdám* (emotional sensitivity). The discussion below is organized as follows: First, I explain why it is important to use Filipino psychology for developing a conception of virtue and solidarity. Second, I show that virtue and solidarity necessarily involve context-sensitivity. Third, I give a detailed discussion of *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám*. Finally, I provide an initial account of virtue and solidarity from the foregoing Filipino cultural characteristics.

Why Filipino Psychology?

Filipino psychology is an especially important source for developing an account of virtue in general and solidarity in particular. Here is the first reason: it is not possible to develop a distinctly Filipino account of virtue without drawing from psychological research done in the Philippine context. The Philippines does not have classical philosophical texts such as those that are associated with the early Confucians or the Vedas of classical Indian philosophy. Because most forms of theologizing about virtue occur within the Roman Catholic tradition, there is sometimes a tendency to construe virtue in an excessively Western, i.e. Thomistic-Aristotelian, way. Consequently, philosophers and theologians have had to use research from the social sciences and the humanities to develop a culturally-rooted approach to ethics. The moral theologian Eric Genilo rightly points out that the ensuing methodology is interdisciplinary. He says, “Filipino ethicists have taken an interdisciplinary approach in their efforts to fashion an inculturated ethics for Filipinos. For example, in order to propose Filipino images of Christ that can inspire and motivate ethical living, ethicists have referred to the work of scholars in vernacular literature” (Genilo 2010, 16). In this paper I use evidence from psychology instead of literary studies, while nevertheless pursuing the interdisciplinary approach to ethics which was identified by Genilo.

Because the Philippines has a rich tradition of indigenized psychological research, it makes a lot of sense to draw from such a resource to develop an account of virtue. According to David Ho (1998), Filipino psychologists were among the first to advocate a return to and re-validation of psychological conceptual schemes and modes of investigation that are indigenous to Asia. The Indian psychologist, Durnganad Sinha (1997), says, “Of the countries in Asia, the trend to indigenizing psychology is strongest and most articulate in the Philippines” (153). There are two things that support Sinha’s claim. First, there is already a well-developed understanding of indigenous concepts, indigenous research methods, and indigenous personality testing that allow psychologists to contribute to a body of knowledge on Filipino thought and experience (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino 2000). Second, Filipino psychology has influenced social psychologists working in the Philippine context to work on the distinct patterns of social life and pressing social issues (Macapagal et al. 2013). Because this vibrant field of research features investigations that have significant behavioral components, evidence from social psychology in the Philippine context is especially relevant for a contextualized account of virtue that can be empirically tested and calibrated for contemporary needs.

Developing a contextualized account of virtue that can be empirically tested and calibrated for contemporary needs is especially relevant in the face of philosophical situationism, which is an empirically-minded challenge against any and all virtue-theoretic approaches. Situationists believe that evidence from social psychology demonstrates that virtue is neither robust nor reliable in producing morally desirable behavior (Doris 2002; Vranas 2005; Alfano 2013).¹ Because indigenous Filipino psychology was pioneered by social psychologists and because current social psychological research in the Philippines is directly informed by some elements from *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, psychological research done in the Philippine context is especially suited for developing an account of virtue that avoids the situationist challenge. Indeed, if the empirically-grounded approach that I am using in this paper succeeds, then it would later be possible to develop a response that gives situationists a dose of their own medicine.

Before closing this section, it is worth mentioning that Filipino morality is oriented towards character or virtue. According to the theologian Dionisio Miranda (2002), “Philippine morality is more character oriented than ontological, not grounded on a metaphysical order but aiming at a moral balance or harmony of human relationships....In traditional theological language, the Filipino conscience responds to virtue summons more than it does to imposed duties deriving

¹ See my discussion of the situationist challenge in the context of Catholic Social Tradition for a more detailed discussion of situationism (Cleofas 2016).

from norms...” (10). Consequently, an account of virtue developed from Filipino psychology is perfectly in keeping with the overall outlook of Filipinos on morality.

Virtue, Solidarity, and the Particularity of Practice

The task of this section is twofold. The first is to define virtue and solidarity. The second is to show that both these concepts necessarily involve sensitivity to context and a practical understanding of local norms.

Any discussion of virtue requires attention to specific contexts and acknowledgment of the importance of local norms in figuring out what to do. Indeed, what differentiates virtue-theoretic approaches from those that focus on deontological requirements, or the demands of promoting utility, is the rejection of a generalist or theoretical approach to morality. Where deontologists focus on universalizable or rationally justifiable maxims, virtue theorists pay close attention to the properties of a person that enable her to apply moral rules or principles in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reason. Where utilitarians single-mindedly focus on promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number, virtue theorists recognize that there is no single right specification for the good life. There is substantial agreement, however, on what counts as a virtue.

According to Linda Zagzebski (1996), virtue is “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end” (137). In the moral domain such an excellence arises from an experience that all human beings have and make decisions about (Nussbaum 2013, 632). For instance, all human beings have to cope with the limitedness of available resources and make difficult decisions about their equitable distribution. The virtue of justice characterizes the qualities of a person who reliably makes the right decisions about such matters. Both the Confucian and Aristotelian perspectives on virtue discuss such a quality of a person in terms of a doctrine of the mean (Yu 2007, 79-88). This mean is usually understood as an intermediate state between two extremes, one that involves doing too much and another that involves doing too little of something. One such extreme, which we associate with the term “injustice,” is a distribution of limited resources that unduly favors a certain group while leaving all others with little or no provision. The other extreme probably involves distributing benefits and burdens by thinking in terms of a literal equality, which amounts to a thoughtless understanding of proportion. On this understanding, extreme benefits and burdens are simplistically divided by the number of people involved without any consideration for differences in level of need or the reality that certain resources cannot be divided up or even counted in the way required by a purely mathematical calculation of equal pieces. The foregoing vice of extremism is to justice as recklessness is to courage; in some cases the vice of extremism gives the appearance of an exaggerated distortion of the relevant virtue.

Someone who possesses the virtue of justice does more than avoid both extremes; she manages to do the right thing in particular situations by exercising good practical judgment. The latter involves wisdom in managing the complexities of the situation and competing demands in particular cases. In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (2011) an analogy is drawn between practical wisdom in one’s moral life on the one hand and the arts of medicine and seafaring on the other (NE 1104a 1-5, 1112b1-10).² In the case of medicine, successfully diagnosing and treating illness depends on a practitioner’s ability to navigate her way between the particularities of a given case and general rules, which are in turn based on correct judgment of past cases. The latter implies a commitment to both particularism and objectivity; doing the right thing is a matter of finding

² The convention of using Bekker’s numbers to cite passages from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) is followed here.

objectively correct solutions in particular cases. Such particularism also implies that making decisions about the moral life involves finding a balance between general rules and specific cases, with greater emphasis on the latter. And yet the right decision in both ethics and medicine is an objective matter. The right diagnosis and treatment for a particular patient is analogous to the right distribution of burdens and benefits in a specific case: an elusive mind-independent target that must be hit with unerring precision. Hence, the virtuous person can only do the right thing if she is thoroughly familiar, not only with the particulars of a case, but also with the specific persons and practices involved. Such sensitivity to context and insightful understanding of the particularities of practice is best illustrated by discussing a specific virtue.

But before turning to a discussion of solidarity, let us note that the practice of doing theology in Asia fully coincides with the kind of sensitivity to context and insightful understanding of the particularities of practice that I have mentioned. According to Michael Amaladoss (2008), in contrast with Euro-American theology, Asian theology is “unashamedly contextual.” Amaladoss characterizes Asian theology as a process that begins with faith-experience and then becomes “faith urging transformation” instead of the more familiar process of “faith seeking understanding.” He says:

In Asia, as in Africa and Latin America, theology starts with faith-experience. Lived in a particular historical and cultural context, this experience raises questions to faith-tradition. We try to understand the question more sharply and clearly by analyzing the situation, making use of the sciences, particularly social, like psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Once the question is clear, there is an effort to correlate the faith-experience with faith-tradition mediated by the question. A two-fold hermeneutic or interpretation follows. There is an attempt to reinterpret tradition in the context of experience. There is also an effort to find new meaning in the experience in the light of tradition. This dialectical reflection is philosophical. In the light of this reflection faith may get a new formulation and experience may acquire a new meaning. This new vision suggests new interventions that seek to transform reality and experience. Discernment follows reflection. Theology then becomes “faith urging transformation.”

The point here seems to be that both philosophical and theological reflection on a specific phenomenon, such as the experience of shared humanity, can give rise to a new formulation or account of a dimension of tradition, say, virtue, but only after experience gives rise to a specific question. Here the relevant question is how a specifically Filipino experience of being in solidarity or comradeship with others through emotional sensitivity can bring about a new way of understanding virtue in general and solidarity in particular.

Let us now turn to solidarity, which is an important concept in the Christian ethical tradition even though there is no consensus on what it means and how it ought to be applied in specific contexts (Beyer 2014). Part of the ambiguity lies in different usage or treatment of the concept; solidarity can be considered a state of affairs, a moral principle, a type of action, or a virtue. In this paper the focus is on the last of these. However, the virtue of solidarity is inseparable from the experience or state of affairs that makes it possible. Here is a succinct account of the relevant experience from James Keenan (2013):

We enter solidarity...not from a condescending position of strength but from the vulnerable position of being human. Solidarity is not first and foremost a principle of action; solidarity is affective and spiritual union with others whose life situations are also being challenged and compromised. From that union we are called to act in justice. Solidarity is then first a fundamental, existential, deeply felt sense of union; but

secondly it is a call to engage in certain moral practices to better the life situation of the other. (49-50)

Keenan rightly points out that the entry point to solidarity is a lived experience that allows someone to see the same humanity, vulnerability, and suffering in herself and in others. Virtually all humans have had this experience and make decisions about it. Keenan's account implies that the virtuous response is to improve the situation of the other even though one is similarly troubled and suffering.

We can identify two extreme responses to the grounding experience of solidarity.³ At the extreme of deficiency a person is inclined to negate the experience of union with the other. As soon as she sees herself and another experiencing the same or very similar tribulations, she begins to despise the neediness that she sees both in herself and the other. Here the virtuous response becomes impossible, because a person moves toward concealing or denying any similarity she has with the other and perhaps also concealing and denying her own neediness and peculiarly human vulnerability. At the other extreme lies the complete identification and union of a person with another to the detriment of both herself, the particular other with whom she tries to create a sham union, persons who are somehow excluded from such an experience or encounter, and the relationship between human beings with the supreme Other from whom comes their humanity. Here the virtuous response becomes impossible because a person moves toward sustaining a sham unity between herself and another or particular others, instead of improving the situation of the other without necessarily linking them to herself. The deficient and excessive responses to the grounding experience of solidarity can only be avoided by aiming for the end of solidarity and by being familiar with the contingencies that accompany an agent's exposure to the experience.

Let us take these components of the solidarity in turn. First, to attain the desired intermediate state between the foregoing extremes, it is necessary to recognize that virtue in general and solidarity in particular are means to an end. For Aristotle (2011), virtue is a necessary, but not sufficient means for attaining *eudaimonia* (NE 1098a 15-19); for Confucians, virtue is associated with finding the human *dao* or "the right way which a human life should take" (Yu 2007, 25). Because we are social beings, the good life necessarily involves others so that social virtues such as generosity, justice, and solidarity are integral for our flourishing. To understand the particular end of solidarity let us turn to Meghan J. Clark (2014) who characterizes this social virtue as follows: "For solidarity, the formal object is our common humanity. The end of solidarity is participation in the universal common good. To be more specific, it is the participation by all in the universal common good" (112-113). What Clark calls the formal object has been discussed above as the grounding experience to which solidarity is the appropriate response. To say that the end of solidarity is the participation of all in the common good is to affirm that affective and spiritual union with others who are suffering is not an end in itself. Proper solidarity leads to human flourishing or to the right way that human lives must take.

Second, it is important to look into the way in which the grounding experience is felt in specific circumstances involving local norms and particular practices. Although the grounding experience of solidarity can be described in general terms and defined in a way that makes sense across different cultures, finding the right way to create and sustain union with others in a way that enables all to participate in the common good depends on following local norms and the idiosyncrasies of particular practices to good effect. Here the medical analogy is once again relevant. Promoting the health of a particular patient requires doing different things in different conditions. Similarly, properly practicing the virtue of solidarity is realized in different ways

³ The phrase "grounding experience" comes from Nussbaum (2013, 633). For Nussbaum, the thin or nominal definition of a virtue is whatever it is that consists in choosing and responding well in a specific domain of a human life or a grounding experience.

among different peoples who live in dissimilar conditions and follow unique local norms. In each case there is an objectively right answer, but the application of a virtue to a specific case requires extensive and insightful familiarity with particulars. For instance, living out the virtue of solidarity requires knowledge about the specific ways in which particular peoples experience emotions that are relevant for developing affective and spiritual union with their fellow human beings and the unique interpersonal dynamics that govern specific communities.

To close this section, let us look at the characteristic motivation that stands behind the virtue of solidarity and the moral imperative that goes with it. To illustrate both, Clark cites the following words from Martin Luther King, Jr.:

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than twenty-eight or thirty years, I can never be totally healthy even if I just got a good checkup at Mayo clinic. *I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be....*No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. *We are interdependent.* (Clark 2014, 101; King 2001, 45-46; emphasis added)

Here King nicely captures the connection between affirmation of the interdependence of human beings and promotion of their well-being. At this point we can add that appreciation of such interdependence that moves towards the participation of all in the common good requires familiarity with different ways in which people are interdependent and the unique features of peoples who inhabit such networks of relationships.

Kápuwâ and Pakikiramdám

Let us consider two crucial concepts from Filipino psychology that are relevant for developing a contextualized understanding of virtue and solidarity: *kápuwâ* (the root-word of *pakikipagkápuwâ*; *kápuwâ* literally means co- or fellow human) and *pakikiramdám* (emotional sensitivity). In this section these two concepts will be explained in preparation for the account of virtue and solidarity from a Filipino perspective, which will be given in the following section.

According to Virgilio Enriquez (1978) the core concept in Filipino social psychology is *kápuwâ*, which is a foundational source, not just of a relational, but also a pro-social orientation. He gives several reasons for the claim that *kápuwâ* is the core concept in Filipino psychology. First, recognition of others as *kápuwâ* or fellow human transcends different modes of relating that usually vary according to insider-outsider categories. There are eight different terms for relating with others in the Filipino language that correspond to different types of behavior towards others:

1. *pakikitungo* (transaction/civility with)
 2. *pakikisalamuhà* (interaction with)
 3. *pakikilahók* (joining/participating with)
 4. *pakikibágay* (in conformity with/in accord with)
 5. *pakikisáma* (being along with) [getting or going along with]
-
6. *pakikipagpalagáyan/pakikipagpalagáyang-loób* (being in rapport/understanding/acceptance with)
 7. *pakikisangkót* (getting involved with)
 8. *pakikiisá* (being one with). (Enriquez 1978, 102)

The first five types of relating with others are applied to *ibang tao* (outsiders or those that are not one of us), while the rest are applied to those who are *hindi ibang tao* (literally, not

outsiders or one of us). The line dividing insider-outsider categories is very important for Filipinos and norms that govern dealing with people in these categories are very different. However, *kápuwâ* covers all people: a stranger whom one is only expected to treat with transactional civility is as much one's *kápuwâ* as an intimate friend whose suffering is mirrored in one's own consciousness. The focus on *kápuwâ* is so important that it is a central feature of the language; the prefix *ka-* specifically derives from *kápuwâ* and is used to form nouns that denote companion or fellow in some specific domain or activity. This prefix is used to form familiar terms such as *kaklase*, which means classmate, *kalarô*, which means playmate, and *kababayan*, which can mean compatriot or someone from the same hometown. However *ka-* is also used to form important words that seem to constitute a foundational experience for Filipinos. *Kapatid*, which means sibling, is a combination of *ka-* and *patid*, which means a broken or separated piece. *Kasama*, which is a combination of *ka-* and *sama* (something joined together), covers everything from companion, partner, comrade, fellow traveler, or associate. Some philosophers, most notably Roque Ferriols (1991, 31-34; 1992, 10-12), have reflected on the significance of the prefix *ka-* for the unique way in which Filipinos experience and understand important philosophical concepts such as *katotohánan* (truth) and *kahulugán* (meaning).

Secondly, for Filipinos the *kápuwâ*-orientation is normative. Because I am no different from others and others are no different from me, I should deal with others in the way that I want others to deal with me. When combined with the prefixes *paki-* (denoting a request or an appeal to oblige) and *pag-* (a suffix that expresses the act or manner of doing something),⁴ *kápuwâ* becomes *pakikipagkápuwâ*, which roughly means obliging to interact with others as fellow humans. *Pakikipagkápuwâ* can also be appropriated as "acting with a sense of fellow-being." The University of the Philippines' *Diksyonaryog Filipino* (2010) defines *pakikipagkápuwâ-táo* as the expected behavior or disposition towards society or other people (*táo* means human being). Here I translate *pakikipagkápuwâ* as comradeship to signal its reference to treating others like oneself as in fellowship. The crucial difference from the English term comradeship is that comradeship implies dealings with those who are part of one's community or organization; the term *pakikipagkápuwâ* implies no such exclusivity. Instead it implies that all fellow humans are to be treated as comrades, companions who inhabit the same condition and suffer similar tribulations.

According to Enriquez (1977), *pakikipagkápuwâ* has important implications for Filipinos because it involves "accepting and dealing with the other person as an equal. The company president and the clerk in the office may not have an equivalent role, status, or income but the Filipino way demands and implements the idea that they treat one another as fellow human beings (*kápuwâ táo*). This means a regard for the dignity and being of others" (7). Even though this edifying standard is often recognized, it is not always similarly followed in daily life. Filipinos, like the rest of humanity, are liable to hurt, disrespect, and discriminate against others. But because failure to recognize others as *kápuwâ* is always recognized as a form of wrongdoing, it remains appropriate to characterize the *kápuwâ*-orientation as morally normative. Indeed, Enriquez (1978) notes that for Filipinos the worst kind of person is someone who has no *kápuwâ táo* (106). He says someone who counts no one as a comrade or companion because she always distances and differentiates herself from others can sink no further; she has reached rock bottom. For Filipinos then, excellence importantly consists in recognizing another as *kápuwâ* and sustaining such a connection of comradeship through action.

Finally, the significance of *pakikipagkápuwâ* for Filipino social psychology is supported by its marked difference from similar terms that refer to modes of relating with others. For instance, the term *pakikisáma* (getting or going along with others), is notorious for including mindless conformity with the herd and capitulation to peer pressure. The same is not true for *pakikipagkápuwâ*, which is only taken to include morally desirable behavior. For this reason

⁴ The translation of the prefixes are derived from *Vicassan's Pilipino-English Dictionary* (Santos 1995).

Enriquez claims that Filipinos know “that *pakikibáka* (joining a struggle) is a valid aspect of *pakikipagkápuwâ* in the face of injustice and adversity” (107). It is noteworthy that the term *pakikibáka* is associated with political activism among Filipinos, and is connected with one of the most important slogans of the resistance movement and revolution that ended the Marcos dictatorship: *hindi ka nag-iisa* (you are not alone).

Contemporary Filipino social psychologists, such as Ma. Elizabeth Macapagal, Mira Ofreneo, Crstina Montie, and Jocelyn Nolasco, agree with Enriquez. They say “the core descriptive concept for Filipino psychology is relational rather than personality or value-laden” (Macapagal et al. 2013, 13). Further, they add that patterns of relating that presuppose the concept of *kápuwâ* imply that Filipinos have a relational or interdependent conception of the self. Jaime C. Bulatao (1964) arrives at the same conclusion from his psychological analysis of *hiyâ*, the Filipino sense of social propriety that is sometimes translated into “shame,” but is closer in meaning to “shyness,” “timidity,” “embarrassment,” and “sensitivity.” Bulatao famously depicted the Filipino self by comparing a hard-boiled egg (sharply individuated self) with scrambled eggs (unindividuated selves) and a batch of fried eggs in which the yolks are still clearly separated but the whites of the different eggs have been joined (individuated but unseparated selves). He says that the Filipinos conceive of the self as something that is individuated but not separated from others (431). In other words, the Filipino conception of the self is best illustrated using the last of the three images Bulatao gave: a batch of fried eggs in which the yolks are still clearly separated, but the whites of the different eggs have been joined. Although Filipinos see themselves as individuals, they think of themselves as inseparable from others.

Interaction among interdependent selves requires an ability to have a shared inner perception, which is precisely what *pakikiramdám* (sense of shared inner perception) is all about. *Pakikiramdám* also comes with the prefix *paki-* (denoting a request or an appeal to oblige) and with the root word *ramdám* or *damdám*, which means to feel. *Damdám* is related to the word *damdámin*, which means emotion, so *damdám* literally means to feel emotion. According to Rita Mataragnon (1998), “The combination of a prefix and a root in *pakikiramdám* seems to take on a character of its own” (252). She reports that Filipinos associate the term *pakikiramdám* with the need to give tentative and flexible responses in unknown, ambiguous, or unstructured situations involving other people. Mataragnon offers the following explanatory translation of *pakikiramdám*: “[B]eing sensitive to and feeling one’s way toward another person” (252). Enriquez (1992) considers *pakikiramdám* to be a pivotal aspect of *pakikipagkápuwâ* and central for knowing how to behave in interpersonal contexts (61-64). To understand the significance of *pakikiramdám*, it is necessary to look at how it works and determine in which specific social contexts it plays an important role. According to Mataragnon (1998),

In social interaction, the degree of *pakikiramdám* exercised normally *depends on both the situation and the target person involved*. Novel, ambiguous, or unpredictable situations generally require the exercise of more *pakikiramdám*; so do delicate, emotionally loaded, or threatening situations. The exercise of *pakikiramdám* would be advisable in situations where there is a danger of being misinterpreted, losing face, making social blunders, or hurting others unwittingly. Certain behaviors are likely to be highly charged with *pakikiramdám*: courting, consoling, negotiating, asking for favors, selling, campaigning, striking up a conversation, getting to know someone and so forth. To exercise *pakikiramdám* people have to care enough about the target person or the situation. They have to be...motivated...to please, to make a good impression, to show concern or respect, to size up the target person, and to avoid misunderstanding, hurting someone, or getting hurt. (254; emphasis added)

Pakikiramdám is then necessary for navigating one’s social environment well. It is a kind of affective vigilance directed towards specific persons and/or particular situations that is partly

constitutive of some Filipino social practices. *Pakikiramdám* is also associated with specific character traits such as being thoughtful, caring, humble, and friendly (Mataragnon 1998, 255). So there is an implicit understanding that *pakikiramdám* is a consciously cultivated capacity or skill. Mataragnon goes so far as saying that *pakikiramdám* is “characterized by deliberate thoughtfulness” that helps someone who possesses the skill to deftly manage social interactions. *Pakikiramdám*, however, does not necessarily imply being virtuous; practicing it is not incompatible with promoting self-interest (e.g., anticipating the demands of a temperamental boss, making sure not to lose the esteem of peers, etc.). Nevertheless *pakikiramdám* is still relevant for virtuous behavior. Someone attuned to the feelings and dispositions of the other is in a better position to help, provided that the disposition to help is already present.

It is worth noting that the perspective from which *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám* spring is not exclusive to Filipinos. In the literature on social and cross-cultural psychology, such a perspective is sometimes called “collectivist,”⁵ “relational,” or “interdependent,” and is observed in subjects from Japan, Korea, China, other parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 225). According to Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama (1991), people in these so-called interdependent cultures feel that social interactions require them to be aware of others’ thoughts and feelings. They characterize the interdependent orientation as follows:

[M]any non-Western cultures insist...on the fundamental *connectedness* of human beings to each other. A normative imperative of these cultures is to maintain this interdependence among individuals. Experiencing interdependence entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one’s behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent, organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of *others* in the relationship. (227)

What seems to distinguish *pakikipagkápuwâ* from such a morally-neutral characterization of the interdependent perspective is that it includes only those aspects of the perspective that are relevant for morally desirable behavior, i.e., promoting an individual other and the greater community’s flourishing. And for this reason *pakikipagkápuwâ* is normative in a distinctly moral sense. To say that acting in accordance with other people’s thoughts and feelings is normative can mean only that such action is expected and enforced in the community. This non-moral normativity applies to rules of etiquette or sartorial conventions that do not carry the force of moral norms. Not so with *pakikipagkápuwâ*, which connotes prosocial or altruistic behavior accomplished through affective capacities such as *pakikiramdám*. Indeed, it is on this point that Enriquez’s bold claim about the potential of indigenous Filipino psychology for universality can be realized (Enriquez 1977, 14-16). To say that *pakikipagkápuwâ* is morally normative implies that all peoples, not just Filipinos, are expected to act in accordance with it.

Virtue and Solidarity Based on *Pakikipagkápuwâ*

⁵ Sometimes the term “collectivist” is misunderstood or used misleadingly to characterize non-Western cultures in terms of denigration of the individual in favor of the greater community. For a repudiation of such an interpretation of a specific culture—the Chinese moral tradition—see David B. Wong’s “Relational and Autonomous Selves” (2004). It is also worth noting that as far as psychologists are concerned, collectivist cultures are not monolithic. In an interesting study, participants from Hong Kong and Indonesia, Murphy-Breman and Breman (2002) discovered that there are interesting differences of opinion on choices about the distribution of benefits and burdens, even though both cultures can be considered collectivist. Indeed, Murphy-Breman and Breman emphasize that collectivism is a multidimensional construct and that their study was premised on the understanding that Hong Kong and Indonesia “represent different faces of collectivism” (158).

We are now ready for an initial sketch of virtue and solidarity from *pakikipagkápuwâ*. But before we begin, it is worth noting that what was previously said about the resonance between this unique Filipino cultural characteristic and the interdependent perspective of subjects from Japan, Korea, and China, allows for the establishment of a conceptual connection between *pakikipagkápuwâ* and the interdependent or collectivist orientation of Confucian-heritage cultures. Such a connection is consistent with the agreement among some researchers in the social sciences who think that the Philippines can be considered a contemporary collectivist culture (Church 1987; Guthrie 1961; Triandis 1995). Bulatao's claim about Filipinos' differentiated but interdependent conception of the self, and Enriquez's belief that *kápuwâ* is the core concept in Filipino social psychology, fit well with the aforementioned agreement. In a paper in which he uses the Chinese moral tradition to develop a response to situationism, David Wong characterizes relational autonomy and selfhood in a manner that closely resembles the picture given in the previous section's discussion of *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám*. Establishing a connection between these concepts and the Confucian tradition is potentially fruitful for philosophical reflection on a Filipino account of virtue because, as mentioned earlier, the Philippines does not have classical textual sources such as the ones associated with the early Confucians. Wong (2004) says:

[We] reject the conception of a self who is conceived apart from others and then subordinated to them. In its place stand selves who are not human apart from social relations, who become selves in relationship to others, and who should strive for a kind of autonomy that does not separate them from others but makes them worthy of others' trust (427).

The core features of the understanding of virtue from an interdependent perspective can be derived from the conjunction of Wong's description of relational selfhood and autonomy on the one hand, and *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám* on the other. First, virtue is realized from a relational conception of selfhood or personal identity. In Wong's case, he goes so far as to speak of developmental relationality. He says, "the social conception of the person and the developmental sense in which we are relational by nature are notable and significant features of the Confucian conception of personhood, but they do not provide the sense in which we are *constituted* by our relationships" (Wong 2004, 425).⁶ If one's personal identity is rooted in the unique pattern created by the different roles that one inhabits, then virtue must similarly be rooted in how well one inhabits and coordinates these roles. Here the implication is that whatever admirable traits a person possesses are a by-product of ongoing relationships with specific others from whom one gets specific kinds of support and to whom one owes specific kinds of obligations. Moreover, such a conception of virtue would necessarily include an account of the way in which context-specific group dynamics buttress virtue from potential hazards.

It is striking how Wong's characterization of relational selfhood and autonomy resonates with an account of moral goodness from a Filipino perspective developed by Miranda. According to Miranda (1992, 83), Filipinos' understanding of moral goodness comes with the need to satisfy two principles of *pakikipagkápuwâ*: (1) equality based on the experience of similarity, obtained through communication between myself and an individual other or members of the greater community; (2) reciprocity based on dialogue about differences. Agnes Brazal and Emmanuel de Guzman (2015) express a similar idea when they say, "*Pakikipagkapwa* [sic] in a Philippine Perspective, is rooted in our belief in our shared *loob* (inner self) with others.... Thus

⁶ Some psychologists are making a similar point. See Dien (1982), who argues that Kohlberg's theory of moral development should be replaced by one that recognizes the Confucian understanding of the human being, not as an autonomous individual, but as an integral part of an orderly universe.

pakikipagkapwa (relating justly with the one who is similar and different) in the form of respect for cultural rights embraces the stranger, the migrant, the alien” (Part II, Chapter 4, para. 49). Here we see a direct connection between Filipinos’ relational conception of the self and *pakikipagkápuwâ*.

The foregoing depiction of relationality should, however, feature a reference to the moral force or authority of an agent’s obligation to others. And this is precisely where *pakikipagkápuwâ* is crucial. It reminds us that we owe it to others to behave altruistically towards them, not because they are related to us in a particular way, but because they are human like us. The focus on shared humanity, instead of on similarities that depend on contingent connections such as familial or transactional bonds, can serve as a reminder that relationality should not translate to nepotism or a problematic personalism. At the level of theory, the implication is that an adequate account of virtue must be built on a unit of analysis that does not focus on an isolated individual. Coincidentally, the same conclusion has been reached by at least some psychologists. After considering evidence from indigenous Chinese and Filipino psychology, Ho (1993, 240-259) propose what he calls a social psychological conceptual framework with a relational orientation. On this framework the most basic unit of analysis is the individual-in-relation. Roughly, the idea is that understanding and predicting human behavior without detailed consideration of an individual’s embeddedness in a complex social network would fail (Ho 1993, 254). If Ho’s idea is adopted for philosophical purposes, then it might be possible to develop an account of virtue that makes use of such a relationality to avoid some of the problems associated with the situationist challenge against virtue.

Secondly, the conception of virtue from an interdependent perspective comes with a context-specific understanding of different character traits that constitute virtue. For instance, it makes sense for a mother of young children to manifest warmth and generosity towards members of her family, but not manifest the same traits to people at her workplace. This does not necessarily make her insincere or problematically inconsistent. Perhaps her work requires strict professionalism or careful management of the threat of insubordination. The material point is that on the interdependent view, the hypothetical woman can still be virtuous if she behaves appropriately although differently across various contexts. Insights from *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdâm* indicate that such morally appropriate behavior can only be attained by being attentive to persons with whom one is relating and by regulating one’s emotion-infused responses towards them. The sensitivity and tracking responses associated with *pakikiramdâm* are especially relevant in novel, ambiguous, or unexpected situations. It is not always clear what role we ought to play in relation to specific others, nor is it easy to discern whether we ought to act in a familiar or professional manner towards someone.

Finally, from an interdependent perspective, virtue is a co-authored achievement. Whatever morally desirable qualities or excellences a person possesses are made possible by others whom she trusts and whose trust she tries to be worthy of. This idea is not exclusively associated with interdependent or relational cultures. According to the philosopher Robert Adams (2006), “it is inappropriate and misleading to think of virtue primarily as an individual achievement. But that is no tragedy. We may have a richer as well as less self-centered view of virtue if we regard it largely as a gift—a gift of nature or of grace, or both, and normally also of people with whom one has lived” (165). The important difference is that on the interdependent view there is a greater emphasis on what seems to have been an afterthought for Adams: relating with people whom one encounters in different aspects of one’s life. Moreover, from the perspective of *pakikipagkápuwâ*, virtue crucially depends on being the subject of other people’s vigilance and solicitude. Elsewhere I have argued that this particular aspect of their culture could help Filipino business leaders solve a problem that they have in behaving compassionately towards the poor (Cleofas 2016b).

It is worth reiterating that *pakikipagkápuwâ* involves dealing with others who are not only the recipients of one’s help, but also the focal point of conscientious vigilance that almost

amounts to suspicion. In turn, one is also subjected to other people's conscientious vigilance. This kind of arrangement presupposes that although virtue is attainable for ordinary folk, it needs to be sustained by the concerted effort of a community. The resulting arrangement is not very different from the one described by the Japanese social psychologist Toshio Yamagishi (2003), wherein arrangements that feature mutual monitoring and sanctioning are necessary for generating morally desirable behavior. The material point seems to be that an appreciation of being fellow sufferers from the same weaknesses requires a system of mutual support and group accountability. Albert Alejo's (1990, 86-87) characterization of a deeply rooted awareness of others as *kápuwâ* adds a further dimension to the notion of accountability. He draws a connection between *kápuwâ*-consciousness and the question raised by Cain: am I my brother's keeper? According to Alejo, such a question is a poor attempt to cover up a deeply-rooted connection with others, one's *kápuwâ*, for and towards those to whom one is accountable.

Now let us turn to the narrower account of solidarity from *pakikipagkápuwâ*. The most distinctive point offered by the Filipino perspective is that solidarity is lived out by sustaining an emotional connection and responsiveness towards others. For Filipinos, the opposite of exercising *pakikiramdám* roughly translates to being numb and unfeeling towards others. When someone chooses to thwart relating with others by deliberately taking up this attitude, it becomes impossible to be in solidarity with them and to promote the participation of all in the common good. This gives us a new way of understanding deficient responses to the grounding experience which is associated with solidarity; it is tantamount to deliberately stunting an important dimension of one's life and sabotaging one's own well-being. Becoming numb to an emotional connection with others arguably amounts to being disconnected from emotions altogether. In terms of the response that amounts to a sham union instead of genuine solidarity, the error lies in turning towards treating another as a fellow member of some preferred grouping or association instead of as another human being. On the appropriate response to the grounding experience we see that attention to particulars and sensitivity to context must be centered on persons and focused on cultivating a network of connections with others. But most important of all, *pakikipagkápuwâ* and *pakikiramdám* enable us to appreciate that virtue itself, not just solidarity or the other social virtues, involves appreciation of our relationality and interdependence.

Conclusion

We have seen that an account of virtue and solidarity from *pakikipagkápuwâ* locates excellence in the recognition and proper cultivation of relationship among interdependent human beings. Although *pakikipagkápuwâ* is a distinctly Filipino notion it resonates with the account of the so-called interdependent perspective discussed by some psychologists, and the depiction of selfhood given by philosophers coming from the Chinese moral tradition. And because *pakikipagkápuwâ* carries the distinct force of moral norms, it is linked to a norm that is recognizable across different cultures and that requires us to recognize and honor others as humans like ourselves.⁷

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LUBRICATING THE ROUGH GROUNDS: THE CASE OF PANAGKALANGKANG¹

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ABSTRACT

PanagKalangkang is a small fishing community in Sta. Cruz, Marinduque. Viewed as rough ground, life there is an everyday struggle where, from their need to survive, people have to negotiate and adjust. In this paper, the author attempts to draw on the idea of “rough grounds” as *locus theologicus* and thereby contribute towards a theological methodology sourced from the praxis of the margins, where people find themselves in the midst of friction between the dominant forces of structure/system and the dearth of the ground. To better facilitate the analysis of the frictional dynamics at the ground, this paper makes use of a heuristic device that borrows fundamental ideas from the science of lubricated friction, a branch of engineering science called tribology. It has been discovered that the peculiarity of that locus has implications for theological methodology. Anecdotal narratives of the author’s field research in selected BECs in the Diocese of Boac, Marinduque are integrated to provide concrete “corporeal” structure to an otherwise theoretical abstraction.

Introduction

I can still recall the morning when Edna² was in tears, recalling her difficult journey years ago when tasked to travel for hours to a remote community several kilometers out from Boac, Marinduque, walking over dirt roads, climbing mountainous terrain, and passing a number of rivers and streams. It was not the physical pain she was reminded of, but the agony of being away from her children and family; that for two to three nights or even a week, she would not know of their condition, her children especially. Sitting next to her, Mila’s* recollections of her early days in community-organizing mission to far-flung areas had to do with the struggle to control the “call of nature” in places where there’s practically no toilet to go to. “*Maghihintay ka ng gabi para maka-CR... masundan ka pa ng baboy*” (You’ll wait till it gets dark at night time to pee... even pigs would follow you), she adds. Then Marlon* shared a story: during the course of a long journey, he suddenly heard a chirping sound from his bag and when he opened it, he found a newly-hatched chick from an egg he had brought with him for lunch. “*Patunayyansahaba ng nilalakadnaminmakapuntalangsamga communities, napatiangitlognagigingsisiw*” (Proof of how

¹ The data and findings used in this paper come from field work that was supported by a Research Grant, Project No. 18 N 1TAY14-3TAY14, from the University Research Coordination Office (URCO) of the De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

² Real names are withheld for the sake of confidentiality.

long and hard the journey is to reach certain communities that the eggs in our bags hatched into chicks), he joked fondly.

How these narratives become a source for theologizing is crucial for the nature and design of the theological methodology. Daniel Pilario endorses local cultures/communities, even singling out the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), as a “liberating locus theologicus” in the context of the global world, but adds a caution about the appropriateness of theological methodology in articulating expressions and representations drawn from their praxis.³

The main focus of this paper is a proposal for a theological methodology that can faithfully articulate the lived experiences of the people in such base communities. Against the backdrop of a global world that continually affects the local, doing theology from the standpoint of the local has become far more nuanced and specialized, at least in terms of an appreciation of non-theological methods and lenses, as well as in terms of theology’s expanded venture into the realms of the secular and social. Added to that is the confusion and ambiguity surrounding a “suitable” method that can properly and justifiably capture and articulate the local, its culture and praxis.

In particular, Pilario’s concept of “rough grounds,” which is mainly influenced by the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu, shall be of major consideration, since this paper attempts to return to praxis as both the source and goal of any theological endeavour. The so-called “practical turn”⁴ demands that any theological framework is (re)considered in terms of the “culture-as-lived,” as well as in terms of the researcher’s self-critical awareness of personal biases and interests, as he/she dives into the depths of the peoples’ praxis, replete with their own lifeworlds, worldviews, and cosmologies. From a desire to include a novel ideation, this paper incorporates some fundamental ideals from the engineering science of friction and lubrication, or tribology,⁵ as a heuristic device to better facilitate analysis of the notion of “friction” at the “rough grounds,” along with implications for the future direction of any praxis-based theological methodology.

PanagKalangkang of the Diocese of Boac, Marinduque

PanagKalangkang is a small fishing village situated on a small island off the coast of Sta. Cruz Marinduque, about thirty kilometers away from the capital city of Boac.⁶ To get there, I and my group left Boac midmorning, rode a jeepney, and when we reached the port of Sta. Cruz, had to transfer to a small motor boat. The boat ride was a bit shaky, but in no time our group reached the small fishing village. It was almost noon. The community was very welcoming as men hurled the boat towards the shore and helped us disembark while women started to arrange the chairs and tables for us. The children were in their school uniforms and had just finished their morning daycare classes.

³ Pilario is known to refer to basic human societies as the “rough grounds” (Pilario 2011, 341; Pilario 2002, 86).

⁴ “... the turn away from institutes and (cultural) texts to the everyday social and cultural practices of ordinary people” (Ganzevoort and Roeland 2014, 93).

⁵ The word *tribology* derives from the Greek root “trib” of the verb “tribo,” “I rub” in classic Greek; and the suffix -logy from “logia” – “study of,” “knowledge of.” It was coined by the British physicist David Tabor, and also by Peter Jost in 1964, a lubrication expert who noticed the problems with increasing friction on machines, and who started the new discipline of tribology (Field, 2008).

⁶ The community store in *PanagKalangkang* sells various food items, household and school supplies, fishing-related supplies, and even clothing materials. It has for many years been a self-reliant BPK due to its self-sustaining status and successful profit-sharing mechanism, whereby additional income significantly augments peoples’ daily needs.

One of the outstanding features of this community as a *BatayangPamayanangKristiyanoor BPK* (Basic Ecclesial Community or BEC) is their successful management of their MASAMCO community store.⁷ The integration of a socio-economic component into the BPK formation is one of the highlights of this fishing village. One of their female leaders said, “*Naisipkolang kung puro nalangdasalngdasaral at walanamangkabuhayan, mahiraptalagangmabuoang BPK ditosaamin*” (I realize that for BPK to be successful, prayers are never enough, without giving the people livelihood income). She further observed an increased participation and involvement by her neighbors in BPK religious activities and gatherings since the store’s establishment years ago (bible studies, community masses, among others), as compared to the sporadic attendance of the people before the store’s existence. This is a community that depends on the sea for daily sustenance. If the weather is bad, they are barely able to find a way to get by on a daily basis. But with the store, each person feels a sense of security that keeps them from worrying, as the store has become an alternative source of income.

More than that, the store has become like a “public well” for the community—a place and a reason for gathering together, exchanging stories, discussing community problems and needs, and a place where community mass takes place. It is here that their lives interact and it has become a common source of their sustenance. It is here that solidarity becomes alive and communal spirit thrives. In fact, when the store was partially burned, the members cooperatively helped put out the fire and worked together to rebuild it. For them, it was not just a store they were saving; it was their life, their community.

I came in as an outsider, armed with theoretical formulations and conciliar exhortations on BECs and their supposed culture and dynamics, from the standpoint of codified propositions, but I was not ready for what I witnessed. The “surprise of the *praxis*” (Pilario 2007, 52) made the theological categories I had learned in the laboratories hardly seem to relate to people’s everyday lives and struggles to survive. The way these people make sense of their faith in the midst of their obvious limitations is something any theologian cannot fail to see. There is so much to take from a brief encounter and interaction with people who Pilario referred to as from the “rough grounds.” This is where theology must arise—from the community and its praxis. Pilario’s insistence on going “back to the rough grounds” is a demand for theology to focus on the lived experiences, dynamics, and interactions of the people as they occur in a particular, taking-place community.

As the ground is “rough,” it can never be without friction. Anything that strikes the rough ground cannot but “negotiate, adjust, accommodate, respect, and dialogue as there is no other way out if people want to survive” (Pilario 2011, 340). *Theologies as well as theologians need therefore to be immersed in the friction of real life to be able to theologize*. The locus is rough; the people’s lives are intimately connected with a ground that is defined by poverty and dearth. The ground is not ahistorical, as it is always affected by the dominant structures and systems (state, capitalism, religious institution, media, and globalization), that operate not merely as a backdrop to the particular ground but as *another force* that grinds and rubs against the ground.

When the *global rubs against the local* as with the universal against the particular, it creates a friction that to a certain extent aggravates the condition of misery, helplessness, and misfortune. When the sea is uncooperative, the *PanagKalangkang* people feel miserable, as they have to spend time looking for a resource of daily food and sustenance, while the people on the mainland (Marinduque) continue on with their leisure and lives, (hardly) affected by slight weather disturbances and unpredictable sea conditions, since they have other sources of income from the farmlands and service industries. The people of *PanagKalangkang* find themselves in the middle

⁷ It was a livelihood project by the diocesan Social Action Commission (SAC) in cooperation with the diocesan-owned Marinduque Social Action Multi-purpose Cooperative (MASAMCO) to support the members of BatayangPamayanangKristiyano (BPK) in their socio-economic needs by setting up a store. Initial capital was provided by the diocesan cooperative through its loan portfolio, while maintenance and management of the store was entrusted to the BPK after a series of seminars and workshops.

of these two “rubbing” surfaces of the ideology of abundance and the poverty of context—between their desire to attain affluence and the reality of the scarcity of the ground. As the people negotiate and adjust, the obvious choice, if it still qualifies as a choice, is merely to survive.

It is in this scenario of the “local-in-friction-with-the-global” that the people of *PanagKalangkang* are situated. To provide a better illustration, this paper incorporates an engineering scientific concept of lubricated friction, a component of the larger area of the “science of friction and lubrication” or tribology, into an otherwise theological endeavor.

The Science of Lubricated Friction as a Heuristic Device

While the paper’s integration of a non-theological concept is expected, given the nature of theology as a “second act” (Boff 1987, 31), the bold attempt to borrow fundamental notions from the science of lubricated friction, an engineering branch of tribology, is deemed more of a heuristic device, or an artificial construct to assist in the exploration of a social phenomena.⁸ Intended as a form of preliminary analysis, the concept of lubricated friction is to be used mainly for analytical clarity about social events.

In *PanagKalangkang*, the educational infrastructure is different from elsewhere. For children to receive schooling (at least at grade school level), they have to leave their island, board and rent a boat, and from the port of Sta.Cruz (mainland), walk about six to seven kilometers more before reaching their school. Before they even get there, the children are usually tired, a bit hungry, and covered with sweat. This same routine is repeated when they return home from school. Every morning, mothers have to prepare their children as early as 4 a.m., when they have to wake them up, help them bathe, prepare them food or *baon* (breakfast of bread and water usually eaten on the boat or on the road), and accompany them to the shore until they have boarded the rented boat. For lack of other options, the people are forced by situation to negotiate, adjust, and survive. They feel their children’s misery and they pity them, but the community has placed great importance on finishing school and earning at least a high school diploma. A child’s graduation from school is treated not only as a matter of family pride, but as an achievement of the entire community. The people believe that with education, these young members can help improve the community as well as their own lives by offering the knowledge they have learned in the service of the community, be it as teacher-volunteers in the community’s day care center, as leaders of their BPK or barangay council, or even as Overseas Foreign Workers (OFW) whose financial success will trickle down to community projects and activities. This is the double truth (following Bourdieu) of reality for people of this island: seeing the dearth both as a misery that conditions their way of living and as an opportunity to resist the structural dominance through inventive, cunning ways. They find themselves cooperating together as children from this island board the same boat and walk together to the same school. These children have forged strong friendships among themselves, just as their parents (or mothers) have also fostered kinship and affinity with one another.

To better represent the dynamics of this cultural praxis, I propose to use the science of lubricated friction. As it stands, friction is not itself a fundamental force, but arises from interatomic and intermolecular forces between two contacting surfaces. “Frictional contact is usually assumed to be either ‘lubricated’ or ‘dry.’ When bodies are in lubricated contact they are not in real contact at all, a thin layer of liquid or gas separates them” (Ruina and Pratap 2002, 713). The fundamental principle behind this science is the use of lubrication as a technique to

⁸ “A heuristic device is, then, a form of preliminary analysis. Such devices have proved especially useful in studies of social change, by defining bench-marks, around which variation and differences can then be situated. In this context, a heuristic device is usually employed for analytical clarity, although it can also have explanatory value as a model” (Scott and Marshall, 2009).

reduce the wear of one or both surfaces in close proximity and moving against each other, by interposing a substance called a lubricant.

This paper has already identified the surfaces in contact. The rough ground comes in contact with the structure/system and the people feel the friction between these two forces. As capitalism and its utopia of abundance and power impinge upon the poverty and dearth of the ground, the people cannot but find a way to negotiate through as they are pressed in between. They are saddened by the condition of their scarcity, inasmuch as they are driven to find a way to survive by coming together in solidarity and unity—in building and taking good care of their community store.

For the people of *PanagKalangkang*, the store has become like a lubricant for these two forces as it capacitates the people to generate additional income, as well as offering a kind of “appropriated” localized model of an otherwise universal, globalizing structure of mainstream capitalism, characterized by what Adam Smith refers to as “self-interested individuals.”⁹ Each person of the community understands his/her role in relation to the community store. Each day, assigned members of the community, usually in pairs, look after the store. Every item that is bought is listed and at the end of the day, the store audits its sales and inventory. The prices are affordable, within the people’s means, and the bright side of all this is the patronage system that is used when each family of BPK receives a certain amount of money in the form of dividend or profit-sharing after annual sales and auditing. The notion of self-interested individuals is extended to the shared interest of the community in general. Their store allows a “smooth” continuous operation without too much stress among these grinding “surfaces.” In the end, just as the science of lubricated friction states, the lubricant does not stop the metals from contacting each other, the face-off is always there; it is just that this grinding is made tolerable and “adjustable” for people who find themselves in the midst of friction.

The most important property of a lubricant is its viscosity. Loosely defined, “the viscosity is the fluid’s ability to resist motion...viscosity is not a constant property...it depends on the temperature and pressure, especially temperature....Chemistry of the fluid and conditions at the interface also determine the proper lubricant” (Society of Tribologists and Lubrication Engineers 2014). Honestly speaking, the successful narrative of *PanagKalangkang*’s community store is more of a general observation. There are times when rifts among some individuals erupt due to some misunderstanding on store management and policy, especially on the issue of credit and payment. While there are a few individuals who would pay their bill past its due date, this is not significant enough to affect the general operation of the store. It is just minor wear in an otherwise thriving existence.

From what I have seen from the ground, the case of lubricated friction in the interaction of the global with the local, of the universal and particular, is not a cross-fertilization that creates a new offspring or a hybrid. I view it more as the presence of a mediating component that lubricates the friction to attain a sense of tolerance, appreciation, or even enjoyment, given the people’s basic human desire for compassion, belonging, and sustenance. The rubbing components do not disappear, as they continue to operate in their own organic existence.

As explained further in tribology, the science of lubricated friction allows variation or a case of indeterminacy that, when seen by non-scientists or non-experts, can be construed as a violation of determinacy and the “exactness” expected of any field of exact/natural science.

For any pair of objects and any given experiment to measure the friction coefficient, the measured value will likely vary from day to day. This problem of the non-consistency of friction from day to day or sample to sample cannot be overcome by a better law of friction. Unless one

⁹ “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities of their advantages” (Smith 1994, 15).

understands one's materials and their chemical environments extremely well, all friction laws, however sophisticated, are doomed to inaccuracy (Ruina and Pratap 2002, 713).

This is the intricacy of praxis-based social analysis: that it is always indeterminate and never the same in any situation, at least in terms of the people involved, the degree of suffering, and the force of oppression, among others. Pilario insists on the importance of treating each local community in terms of its inherent autonomy and peculiarity.

Of course, the community hears different voices from outside brought by the media, missionaries, business, cultural trends, etc. All of these are hegemonic and universalizing. What is crucial is to uphold the autonomy of the local grassroots communities where all these forces intersect. It is these communities that need to decide what to take in and what to reject, what to keep and what to expel, what helps and what destroys. All these discourses and initiatives from outside can only be arbitrated in the rough grounds of the people's praxis (Pilario 2011, 339-340).

Geographically, *PanagKalangkang* is surrounded by sea and the people's only recourse when the sea is uncooperative is to gather together and find a way to survive. As a community, they cannot afford to be self-interested, because each member largely depends on the same source of income. This explains why the community store has become more than an alternative source of income; it has become the symbol of their survival in the midst of poverty and a tool of resistance against the hegemonic construction of affluence projected in the media and in other universalizing structures of power. The socio-economic conditions of other BPKs are not the same as that of *PanagKalangkang*. Geographically, most BPKs are on the mainland of Marinduque with easier access to commercial goods and jobs, aside from the fact that living on the mainland provides people with more options to get by, and where the nature and condition of the sea hardly matter. This explains, as in the non-constancy of dynamics of friction, why it is that when a theologian or ethnographer analyzes praxis, he/she has to take into consideration the nature of the materials in contact, the extent of pressure, as well as the length of time that the surfaces have remained in contact.

Analysis of the Store's Success and Implications for Religious Faith

One thing is clear about the way tribology enriches the analysis of the community store of *PanagKalangkang*. The science of lubricated friction treats pairs-in-friction *differently* and *uniquely*. There is a certain level of indeterminacy in tribology that emphasizes the need to understand the nature and condition of the materials of each surface. The success of *PanagKalangkang's* community store is hardly replicated in other BPKs of the mainland, where people are found to have other sources of income independent of the sea and weather disturbances. Moreover, the spatial confinement of the *PanagKalangkang* people and the constraint "imposed" upon them by geographical and social controls pushes them to depend on one another, form their own structures and laws, and reinforce their shared identity and communal bonds. Repetitive and routine activities that include boat rides of children to school, communal discussions and gatherings to share stories and celebrate life events, and bible study groups and other religious activities have edified their communal identity with the community store as their focal point. The store has become like a lubricant that shields them from the abrasive nature of dearth and poverty inasmuch as it allows them flexibility and fluidity to negotiate and survive in the midst of friction. When the people's only recourse when the sea is uncooperative is to gather together and find a way to survive as a community, they cannot afford to be self-interested, because each member largely depends on the same source of income. This explains why the community store has become more than an alternative source of income; it has become their symbol of survival and resistance to the forces of domination. In the end, it is their authentic community ethos that has transformed the store, not only as a source of daily food and necessities, but as an instrument to negate/tolerate the pain of the rough grounds.

Moreover, the success of the store in providing economic aid to the people and in edifying their communal sympathy with one another has also had positive implications for their religiosity and faith. More affective than cognitive in terms of expression of religious belief (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 129), their compassionate treatment of one another as belonging to one communal family makes it easier to share faith-stories and expect a more spontaneous empathy and counseling of one's struggles and difficulties. Before the establishment of the store, the community rarely gathered together in BEC activities, due to the uncertainty of the daily source of sustenance and the priority of going to sea to fish as the only means of survival, and thus their readiness to attend to bible studies and liturgical prayers always took second place to economic needs. If and when BEC religious events did take place, people rarely shared with one another because a certain degree of emotional distance and lack of trust prevented them from opening up and empathizing. But with the community store acting like the "public well" of the community, faith-related activities have become enriching and fulfilling.

Conclusion

When globalization pushes millions of people to move out of their settled communities, either in search of jobs or to relocate due to urban development, such displaced or dislocated individuals have to learn new sets of skills and lessons to adapt to new environments. As in the case of the BECs in the Diocese of Boac, the dynamic is peculiarly different. The whole province of Marinduque is "isolated" by its surrounding sea and this can never be more evident than in *PanagKalangkang*, an island that is relatively "cut off," but not necessarily shut off from the main island. The people here have learned to negotiate and adjust, acquiring new sets of strategies and tactics for survival and resistance. They feel the pressure forced upon them by globalization as they are as pinned down unto the rough ground of poverty and dearth.

Finding themselves in the midst of friction, they cannot move out of their settled community. Instead they have found a way to survive through inventive, cunning ways—through the establishment and maintenance of a community store. They have found a way in which the grinding pressure of friction between two contacting forces can be smooth enough to be tolerable for survival and resistance. It is when this store became a lubricant to buffer or cushion the impact of friction that people begin to actively engage and participate in BEC religio-spiritual activities. Once they had secured the socio-economic needs of their families and dependents, they decided to spend more time in the once-ignored activities of bible study, block rosary, and the like.

This paper's use of tribology as a heuristic device highlights the vibrant interconnectedness and interrelationship of the local-in-friction-with-the-global. It is with the use of tribological ideations that this paper has been able to describe the role of the community store for the people of *PanagKalangkang*, who are in the midst of friction. In the end, the author invites every theologian and researcher not to impose uniformity, generalizations, or oversimplified assumptions and findings from one context as being similar or the same as that of another, without first identifying fundamental factors in friction dynamics, such as the nature of the materials in contact, the load of pressure exerted in the friction, and the length of time that the surfaces are in contact.

In the end, a praxis-based theological methodology is an invitation to rethink the way theology is currently practised in the face of the globalizing tendencies of the world and the roughness of the ground. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to this rethinking process.

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ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO EQUALITY IN ZHUANGZI: AN ASIAN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the possibility of an Asian feminist reading of the Zhuangzi as a way of appropriating Asian religious and cultural resources for the liberation of women and men. Through a close reading of Zhuangzi's "discussion about equalizing things" in its original language, it explores alternative paths to equality suggested in the Daoist wisdom tradition. Zhuangzi's subversive wisdom, characterized by radical pluralism based on the respect for difference and otherness, and by an alternative identity politics based on interdependence and mutual transformation between things, provides an alternative to the collectivism rooted in the Confucian tradition and to the individualism rooted in modern Western thought, both of which reflect hierarchical worldviews that create the dichotomy of the subject/self/human and the object/other/nature and marginalize "the Other," including women.

Introduction

This article will explore the possibility of an Asian feminist reading of the Zhuangzi as a way of appropriating Asian religious and cultural resources for the liberation of women and men. It is well known that Confucianism has a reputation for its degrading attitude toward women, and its hierarchical worldview has influenced people's attitudes and behavior in many parts of Asia as it was the dominant ideology underlying the basic structure of society for most of two thousand years. In response to this Asian reality, in which collectivism rooted in the Confucian tradition has served hierarchical structures of power and has been instrumental in women's subordination, feminism, based on the individualism rooted in modern Western thought which focuses on women's independence, has been adopted as an alternative for Asian women's movements. However, both the collectivism rooted in the Confucian tradition and the individualism rooted in modern Western thought share identity politics based on a view of universal humanity as a male property, and on an essentialist view of a "fixed" identity, which justifies ontological difference between men and women and thus the distinction of their roles.

It is at this point that we need to turn to a counter-tradition within Asian religious and cultural resources such as Daoism for an alternative strategy. Therefore, I will explore how Zhuangzi's subversive wisdom can provide an alternative both to the Confucian and to the modern Western frames of identity politics and worldviews. Through reading Zhuangzi's "discussion about equalizing things," which is the second chapter of the Zhuangzi, and which contains the core of his philosophy, I will explore an alternative identity politics based on interdependence and mutual transformation, which deconstructs the dichotomy of the

subject/self/human and the object/other/nature. As this project deals with ancient classical texts, the issue of authorship and hermeneutical problems will be discussed to begin with.

Authorship and Hermeneutical Problems

Authorship

With regard to the production of the text of Zhuangzi, we can surmise that a significant part of the writing of the text would in all probability have been done by Zhuangzi himself (Coutinho 2004, 21). In terms of the figure of Zhuangzi (ca. 375–275 BCE), it is noteworthy that he was born in the village of Meng (蒙), which was located in the southernmost part of Song (宋) in the “borderlands” between Song and Chu (楚), between the central plains and the south. Thus, the borderlands provide the “liminal” setting for the development of Zhuangzi’s particular liminal style of Daoist thinking (27).

The book of Zhuangzi itself contains stories about its author, which provide an invaluable source of information about him. These are “portraits” of Zhuangzi created by his followers to “embody” his teachings; this is not historical information, but information about how Zhuangzi was remembered/presented by his followers in the text. These anecdotes give a vivid impression of an impoverished character living in a wretched state, residing in a small alley, and weaving sandals for a living. At one point he becomes so desperate that he is forced to beg for food, albeit unsuccessfully, from the Marquis of Jianhe (22).

A recurrent theme in these stories is Zhuangzi’s disdain for power. When a ruler offers him a high position, Zhuangzi says that he would rather drag himself through the mud; when Hui Shi is afraid that Zhuangzi will take his place as chief minister, Zhuangzi tells his friend that the position is worth nothing more than a rotting rat (Zhuangzi, ch. 17). These stories, in which the character portrayed is very much in keeping with the company of outcasts in the book, surely reflect the ideals the master taught and embodied, regardless of their historical factuality. He was an unconventional, bohemian figure surviving on the borders, negotiating his way through the interstices of an organized, structured world, aware of its contingency and fragility (Coutinho 2004, 23-24).

About the figure of Zhuangzi, we also find another record from Sima Qian (司馬遷: 145–86 BCE), the Grand Historian of the Han dynasty. In his “biography” of Zhuangzi, Sima Qian (1959) says, “His saying surpassed all bounds and followed his whims. Therefore the men in power could not utilize him” (2144 quoted in Møllgaard 2007, 11). This record of Sima Qian reflects the spirit of Zhuangzi as a radical critique of power (Billeter 1996, 876-77). The early testimony is sparse, but we gather these essential facts about Zhuangzi: he is unique and unclassifiable; he is one of those remarkable people who are liberated from things; his use of language is astonishing and disconcerting; and he puts forward a critique of power so radical that it cannot be assimilated by the tradition (Møllgaard 2007, 11).

Concerning the authorship of the book, we need to consider that the Chinese approach to authorship has been very different from that of the modern West. The writer to whom a Chinese text is attributed is not necessarily a single individual who is the creator and owner of the ideas. The emergence of a text is a cooperative production that often continues after the death of the “author” and that may start before the contribution of the particular individual to whom the text is attributed. Much of the text attributed to Zhuangzi, for example, was produced long after the death of Zhuangzi. Hence, scholars such as Liu Xiaogan (1994) and A. C. Graham (2001) have concerned themselves with the problem of classifying the thirty-three chapters of Zhuangzi according to the schools that produced them (27-29).

Despite some differences of opinion, there is a great deal of agreement with regard to the classification of the major portions of the text. It is generally agreed that the historical Zhuangzi

was in all probability the author of the first seven chapters, the “Inner Chapters,” while the rest, divided into the Outer (8-22) and Miscellaneous Chapters (23-33), which contains some texts that are consistent with and in cases develop and elucidate the thought of the “Inner Chapters” as well as some texts that are deemed inconsistent with them (Møllgaard 2007, 12), are taken to have been written by followers and others, from the time of his death to at least the founding of the Qin empire (Coutinho 2004, 35). Thus the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters provide an interpretive context for the “Inner Chapters” (37). The thirty-three chapters of the Zhuangzi extant today were edited by Guo Xiang (郭象). According to Jean Francois Billeter (2002), Guo Xiang’s commentary transformed Zhuangzi’s thought of radical autonomy into an apology for disengagement that served the Chinese literati’s conservatism (133). The emphasis on harmony and adaptation in recent Western aesthetic-pragmatic interpretations of Zhuangzi is in line with this traditional Chinese view (Møllgaard 2007, 12-13).

Hermeneutical Problems

As interest in Zhuangzi grows in the West, interpretations of the Zhuangzi begin to compete, each apparently attempting to demonstrate what Zhuangzi really thought and believed, what he rejected, and what he was really trying to do. Some say that Zhuangzi was a “relativist”; others, that he was actually some kind of skeptic, perhaps a “methodological skeptic” or a “linguistic skeptic”; still others, that Zhuangzi was an “anti-Rationalist” who rejected “Reason” (Coutinho 2004, 38). Such rival claims concerning the real meaning of the text, based on the naïve idea that there can be a single correct meaning, point to the problem of interpretation. The question is whether it is appropriate to impose such historically conditioned presuppositions based on Western philosophical concepts on an explicitly open and polysemic text written by an ancient Chinese thinker in a different historical, cultural and textual context (39).

To say that the Zhuangzi is an open and polysemic text does not mean that the text can be read to say anything you want it to say. In the same way, it is only with a dualistic, dichotomous, all or nothing attitude that skepticism and radical relativism appear to be the only alternatives to a naïve realism that seeks some fixed and determinate original meaning (40). Rather, a text like the Zhuangzi, in which the world is understood as process in constant change, points to a pluralist attitude that meaning is multivalent, indeterminate, always in process of construction, open to possibilities of change, and replete with contradictions and inconsistencies. While there are always criteria to which one can appeal in order to justify one’s interpretation, such as historical sensitivity, linguistic sensitivity, closeness to the text, coherence, and so on, these criteria arise from our situatedness, for language, culture, and history are not simply given, but are themselves part of what is to be interpreted (41, 43).

The plausibility of an interpretation is ultimately a matter of recognition that is immediate and intuitive (41-42), and requires an act of genius that parallels the genius of the author. Thus, all interpretations are always provisional and awaiting further refinement or revision, just as our situatedness and recognition are always provisional and open to further change and development. The faithful reading of a text produces not a recapturing of ideas and experiences from the past, but an exploration of ideas and experiences yet to emerge in the life of the interpreter, as Paul Ricoeur (1981) notes: “Henceforth, to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self” (143).

Hence, interpretation is a process of experiencing meaning through the interaction between the text, the author, and the reader in their respective situatedness, rather than a result of the reader’s discovering the original meaning that the author intended through the text, as the text, once written, remains outside of the author’s control and has its autonomy as the site of the interactive conversation or play between the author and the reader (Coutinho 2004, 55). One can

intend to say something, and can succeed in saying what one intends, but what one cannot do is to control and contain all possible understandings of what one says. Indeed, one cannot know with complete closure all the ramifications, implications, associations, and development of what one has said (59).

It seems that Zhuangzi is aware of the indeterminacy of meaning, as manifested in his treatment of language (言), when he explicitly says that he himself is not sure if he has really said something with what he has just said: “Now I have just said something, but I don’t know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn’t said something.” (今我則已有謂矣, 而未知吾所謂之其果有謂乎, 其果無謂乎? Zhuangzi, ch. 2, 齊物論) For Zhuangzi language (言) is an unknown, for language or saying always hovers in-between saying something and saying nothing, and so maintains an indeterminacy and openness in relation to that which it speaks about (Møllgaard 2007, 70): “Saying (言) is not just the blowing (of the wind); saying says something. It is only that what it says is not fixed. Is there really saying then? Or has there never been saying?” (夫言非吹也. 言者有言, 其所言者特未定也. 果有言邪? 其未嘗有言邪? ch. 2, 齊物論) For Zhuangzi, it is precisely because what saying (言) says is never fixed and settled (定) and signification is indeterminate, that authentic saying open to the reality of constant change is possible (72).

The Zhuangzi is a text that acknowledges its own openness, and this radical openness fits into Zhuangzi’s deconstructive, unconventional, and subversive way of understanding the world. As an open text, the Zhuangzi also encourages the reader/interpreter to participate in its weaving of meanings through intertextuality—the interaction between texts within the book, both in the context of its authorship and in the mind of the reader, where a piece of the text interprets another and vice versa endlessly, creating a banquet of meanings like the harmony of the sounds of myriad differences made by the interactions between the wind and the holes of pipes in Zhuangzi’s metaphor.

Qi Wu Lun (齊物論): Discussion about Equalizing Things

The second chapter, 齊物論, is the most complex and intricate of the chapters of the Zhuangzi, containing rich theories that point to the core of Zhuangzi’s philosophy (牟宗三 1963, 196). The chapter opens with the theme of “loss of self” in a dialogue between Master Ziqi from the south wall (南郭子綦) and Yan Cheng Zi-You (顏成子游). Here the location of the speakers needs to be noted. The south outer-wall is a plebeian district, if not a ghetto, since the center of the city is occupied by upper class people (Wu and Zhuangzi 1990, 154). Seeing Master Ziqi “falling apart as if he has lost the counterpart of himself,” Yan asks, and the Master answers:

What is this!? Can the body really become like withered wood, and can the mind really become like dead ashes? The one who is leaning on the armrest now is not the one who was leaning on the armrest before.” Zi-Qi said, “It is surely good that you ask, Yan! Just now I lost my self (吾喪我). Did you know that? You may hear the pipes of humans but not yet the pipes of the Earth; or you may hear the pipes of the Earth but not yet the pipes of Heaven.” (何居乎? 形固可使如槁木, 而心固可使如死灰乎? 今之隱几者, 非昔之隱几者也. 子綦曰, 偃, 不亦善乎而問之也! 今者吾喪我, 汝知之乎? 女聞人籟而未聞地籟, 女聞地籟而未聞天籟夫!) (Zhuangzi, ch. 2. 齊物論)

As Zhuangzi says that “the authentic person has no self” (至人無己) in chapter one, Master Ziqi says he has lost his self (我). Kuang-ming Wu points out that in the Zhuangzi the 我 “quite

consistently means objectifiable self,” or “the self identifiable as a particular something”; the self as “completion-formation” (成); and the self that “originates division,” in particular the division between self and other (155, 185). Master Ziqi has not only lost his self (我), he has also lost his “counterpart” (耦). We can understand 耦 as the counterpart, or the other (彼) of the self (我), as Zhuangzi says that “without that/other, there is no I-self” (非彼無我, ch. 2. 齊物論). The loss of self points to the loss of the other as its counterpart. In this way the distinction between self and other is deconstructed.

“I lost my self” (吾喪我) is the beginning of a thread that goes through the entire chapter of “equalizing things,” for it means abandoning the ego-centric self, caught in one’s own prejudice, which is the source of all the disputations about right and wrong, truth and falsity, etc. (陳鼓應 1992, 131). When the objectified self is lost, then the pipes of the Earth (地籟), which were not heard before, are heard, and the true ground of human existence is revealed:

Well, the huge Clod belches out breath; it is called the wind. So long as it doesn’t come forth, (nothing happens); once it comes forth, then ten thousand (myriads) hollows rage-up howling.... Mountain forest’s awe (畏) dwells in the hollows and openings of huge trees a hundred spans around, which are like noses, like mouths, like ears, like basins, like bowls, like mortars, those like pools, and those like puddles. Those turbulent, those shouting, those scolding, those inhaling, those screaming, those wailing, those moaning, those twittering; those ahead sing ‘yu---,’ and those following sing ‘yung----’; breezy wind, then a small harmony (of chorus) follows; whirling wind, then a huge harmony (of chorus) follows. When fierce wind has passed on, then multitudes of hollows are made empty (夫大塊噫氣, 其名為風. 是唯无作, 作則萬竅怒呿. ... 山林之畏佳, 大木百圍之竅穴, 似鼻, 似口, 似耳, 似枅, 似圈, 似臼, 似洼者, 似污者, 激者, 謫者, 叱者, 吸者, 叫者, 譟者, 突者, 咬者, 前者唱于而隨者唱喁. 冷風則小和, 飄風則大和, 厲風濟則眾竅為虛). (ch. 2. 齊物論)

When the wind/breath goes through the myriads of hollows, soundings appear. To what can these soundings be attributed, the wind, or the hollows? It is not the wind alone, nor the hollows alone. Without wind coming forth, hollows never rage-up howling. Again, without hollows (empty space), there is no way for wind to pass through. The wind has no shape, though it has substance so that it can pass through the hollows, filling them, though momentarily. On the other hand, the hollows have shapes, though they do not have substance within them, so they can allow the wind to pass through them. What makes a diversity of soundings and different harmonies are the different sizes and shapes of myriads of hollows. It is not only the hollows that make different soundings. The wind “blows on myriads not in the same way.” It blows, filling each unique hollow, and thus “lets each be itself.”

Now, which acts and which is acted on, the wind, or the hollows? Both of them act and are acted on. While the wind comes forth and passes through the hollows, at the same time it is taken and shaped while passing by different types (shapes/sizes) of hollows. While the hollows take the wind for themselves, at the same time they are moved and reshaped by different modes of wind (i.e. breezy wind, whirling wind, etc.). One can imagine the hollows/openings as myriads of spaces between leaves and branches of huge trees a hundred spans around. They have myriads of types, always changing according to how they are swayed by the wind. Thus they sometimes look “like noses, like mouths, like ears, like sockets, like bowls, like mortars, like pools, like puddles,” etc. Then, do the hollows/openings really have (fixed) shapes if they always change and are thus evasive? If any, these shapes would be momentary, not able to be captured and retained. On the other hand, does the wind really have substance? If it has, it should be able to be contained or

retained. It would be no longer wind, however, if it does not move and thus can be contained or retained even momentarily. When the wind stops its movement, it disappears.

Both wind and hollows/openings thus have no (fixed) shape and substance. By emptying themselves, the hollows allow the wind to pass through them. By emptying itself from the space taken by itself, the wind also can move and pass through. With emptying themselves, they meet, fill, exchange, and abandon each other in the process of soundings of harmony. When they become one in the process, there occur a variety of soundings, which make various harmonies of choruses. This is what heavenly piping is like.

This music of the Earth is what is neglected in the music and rituals of the Confucians, which are instrumental in uniting/assimilating the members of society: the jade bells and drums in the “ensemble of great completions” Mencius ascribes to Confucius (Møllgaard 2007, 129). Confucius believed that music could not only harmonize human sentiments, but also bring order from social chaos (Yao 2000, 171). Zhuangzi’s pipe as music expresses the harmony of the universe, unlike instrumental music for rituals that express the order of the universe. In harmony all things are moving, interacting and equally influencing one another, and in order all things have a proper place (Confucius et al. 1938, 571). According to Zhuangzi, authentic existence is not an outer completion (成), but pure coming-into-being or life (生) itself. In Zhuangzi, the sounds of nature are the only way authentic being can articulate itself without objectifying itself in a self (我) or other/counterpart (耦) (Møllgaard 2007, 130). There is no dichotomy of subject and object between the wind and hollows: both of them are empty, but interact with each other, and from this void and total exposure in their mutual interaction emerges a fuller sense of being.

After the pipes of the Earth we hear the pipes of Heaven (天籟):

blowing at all things (myriads) not in same way, and thus letting each be itself; all of them take (it) for themselves—who is the one raging up (blowing)? (夫吹萬不同, 而使其自己也, 咸其自取, 怒者其誰邪?) (ch. 2. 齊物論)

It is like Dao that moves, goes through all things, and lets them be themselves, but is not seen and known. Things are not the objects that are acted on by the blowing (of Dao), as they take (it) for themselves in their response to the blowing. This phrase shows a strong element of pluralism based on a profound respect for difference: Zhuangzi continually warns us about the dangers of parochialism, of imposing our own particular ways of doing things on others.

Zhuangzi’s pluralism, based on the natural process of constant change, rejects all institutional, ideological, and moral regulations, restrictions, and value systems to command, supervise, utilize, and control individuals, which he thought of as the source of misfortune in humanity. Through a variety of metaphors and parables, Zhuangzi reveals that the institutional, ideological, and moral frames constructed by the other contemporary schools, such as Confucianism, Moism, and Legalism, are oppressive devices to restrict individual freedoms, since they propagate doctrines that reflect and advocate particular concerns and interests of particular groups as the universal truth. For an effective critique of the universalism of other schools, Zhuangzi employs epistemological relativism (not philosophical relativism) to reveal the limitations of human knowledge based on limited human life experiences and intellectual capacity, in comparison to the infinite, boundless, inexhaustible, and eternal Dao that gives rise to the endless changes of all things.

Thus, we have the Confucians’ and the Moists’ judgment of “yes/right” (是) and “no/wrong” (非); what one calls right the other calls wrong, and what one calls wrong the other calls right. (故有儒墨之是非, 以是其所非, 而非其所是.) (ch. 2. 齊物論)

From a Zhuangzian perspective, the problem of the Confucians and Moists' distinctions of "yes/right" (是) and "no/wrong" (非) is that they make "yes/right" what is "no/wrong" and make "no/wrong" what is "yes/right." This identification of problems reveals how one's distinctions/judgments can be distorted, no matter how discrete they are. Accordingly, such distinctions/judgments are easily reversed when others right their wrong and also wrong their right. Against the Confucians and the Moists' claims, Zhuangzi says:

There is no thing which is not "that" (彼); there is no thing which is not "this/yes/right" (是); (seeing) from the position of "that" we cannot see (that); (seeing) from the position of knowing (知) it, we can know (知) it. Therefore, I say, "that" comes from "this/yes/right"; "this/yes/right" also is caused by "that"; this is the theory that that and this/yes/right give birth to each other. (物無非彼, 物無非是。自彼則不見, 自知則知之。故曰, 彼出於是, 是亦因彼。彼是方生之說也。) (ch. 2. 齊物論)

The argument begins with the category of 是彼 (Shi Bi)—"this" and "that," rather than with the category of 是非 (Shi Fei)—"yes/right" and "no/wrong." This seems to be an intentional and strategic word choice and use, because the same word 是 means "yes/right" as an antonym to 非, meaning "no/wrong," but also has the meaning of "this" as an antonym to 彼, meaning "that." The effect of setting the category of 是彼 (Shi Bi), instead of 是非 (Shi Fei), is to switch the evaluative category of "right/wrong" to the demonstrative category of "this/that." As a result, an explicit value-laden proposition can be seen as perspectival and value-neutral. In other words, "this" and "that," like other linguistic shifting signifiers, i.e. words such as "I" and "you" and "here" and "there," can be switched with each other on any occasion according to the position from which they are spoken. Indeed, these linguistic shifters as anonymous and empty signs that refer to the present moment of saying are appropriate in representing the reality that things are in constant change and thus are not stable objects. This is why "there are no things which are not 'that' (彼); there are no things which are not 'this' (是)." Thus, simultaneously, it can also mean that there are no things which are not "yes/right" (是).

As a result, it is not only "this" and "that," but also "yes/right" and "no/wrong" which depend on and are subjected to a particular standpoint/perspective. One sees the opposite party in disputation as "other," for s/he can see only from his/her own side. On the other hand, one cannot see oneself from one's own position, which becomes a blind spot. In other words, one cannot see oneself as "other." S/he can only be known or recognized as other by another subject. Thus, seeing "from the position of knowing" may point to knowing that reflects and includes the other's view on oneself. In this way, each of the two parties in disputation depends on the other for recognition of themselves as other (Møllgaard 2007, 90). Likewise, the interdiffusion between the two opposites challenges the boundary and dichotomy between self and other. Zhuangzi says, "'that' comes from 'this/yes/right'; 'this/yes/right' also is caused by 'that,'" which is called the theory that **that** and **this/yes/right** give birth to each other (彼是方生之說). How do they give birth to each other? Their co-birthing inevitably points to paradox and reversal:

Even so, just now it is born, just now it dies; just now it dies, just now it is born; just now it is acceptable, just now it is not acceptable; just now it is not acceptable, just now it is acceptable; "this/yes/right" (是), is based on (or caused by) "no/wrong" (非), "no/wrong" (非) is based on (or caused by) "this/yes/right" (是). Therefore, the sage (聖人) does not reason (由), but illuminates (照) it in the light of heaven (天), and indeed affirms accordingly. "This/yes/right" (是) is also "that" (彼); "that" (彼) is also

“this/yes/right” (是). “That” (彼) also has one “this/yes/right” (是) and “no/wrong” (非); “this” (此) also has one “this/yes/right” (是) and “no/wrong” (非). Indeed, are there really “that” (彼) and “this/yes/right” (是)? Indeed, are there not really “that” and “this/yes/right”? When neither “that” nor “this/yes/right” (是) attains its counterpart (偶), it is called “the pivot/hinge of the Way.” The pivot/hinge begins to get the middle of its ring/circle, with which it responds endlessly. “This/yes/right” (是) also has one endlessness (無窮); “no/wrong” (非) also has one endlessness (無窮). Therefore, I say, there is no way better than to brighten it. (雖然, 方生方死, 方死方生; 方可方不可, 方不可方可; 因是因非, 因非因是. 是以聖人不由, 而照之于天, 亦因是也. 是亦彼也, 彼亦是也. 彼亦一是非, 此亦一是非. 果且有彼是乎哉? 果且無彼是乎哉? 彼是莫得其偶, 謂之道樞. 樞始得其環中, 以應無窮. 是亦一無窮, 非亦一無窮也. 故曰, 莫若以明.) (ch. 2. 齊物論)

Life and death arise almost simultaneously as they alternate, and so do the “acceptable” and the “unacceptable.” It is noteworthy that Zhuangzi extends the temporality of pure emergence manifested in life and death to include propositional discourse such as “acceptable” and “unacceptable.” As he shifts the evaluative category of “right/wrong” (是非) to the demonstrative category of “this/that” (是彼) in order to reveal the arbitrary characteristics of value judgments, Zhuangzi makes a parallel between things that are subject to temporal changes and propositions that are subject to perspectival changes in order to reveal the temporality of our value judgments as well. While the discussion of “this/that” and “right/wrong” deals with the limitation of one’s perspective on value judgments, in terms of the limitation of one’s location as spatial position, the current discussion deals with that in terms of the temporality of things and perspectives that are subject to ceaseless transformations. Any judgment that is current to the moment of enunciation is subject to change as soon as the moment passes into another, just as knowledge cannot pin things down as passing and transient existence (Coutinho 2004, 172).

Therefore, it is almost impossible to make any judgment of “yes/right” and “no/wrong” (是非), good and bad (善惡), beautiful and ugly (美醜), and great and little (大小), etc. In addition, these opposites are interdependent as 非 (“no/wrong”) can be recognized/identified only when 是 (“yes/right”) is recognized/identified, and vice versa. Therefore, the sage does not reason, but illuminates it from heaven. To illuminate it from heaven is to see things as they are, to appreciate the pure self-emergence of things that is concealed in our deeming, reasoning, naming, and judging of them.

Thus, when illuminated from heaven, 是 (this/yes/right) is also 彼 (that), and 彼 (that) is also 是 (this/yes/right), because 彼 (that) also has one 是 (this/yes/right) and 非 (no/wrong), and 此 (this) also has one 是 (this/yes/right) and 非 (no/wrong). Here, an interesting combination of word choices highlights the interchangeability between this and that, or between yes/right and no/wrong. While 是非 (yes/no; right/wrong) is a word pair commonly used for the distinction of yes/no or right/wrong in the situation of argument, 彼此 (that/this) also is a word pair commonly used to refer to the counterparts in pairs engaged in dialogue or discussion. Thus, it would be more common to say, 此 (this) is also 彼 (that), and 彼 (that) is also 此 (this), rather than saying, 是 (this/yes/right) is also 彼 (that), and 彼 (that) is also 是 (this/yes/right).

The reason why 是 is used at the beginning instead of 此 becomes clear in the next sentence, where 彼 also has one 是非 and 此 also has one 是非. An ironic implication would be that, 彼 (that) also has both 是 (this/yes/right) and 非 (not-this/no/wrong), and 此 (this) also has both 是 (this/yes/right) and 非 (not-this/no/wrong). If one takes not-this as that, it would mean that that also has both this and that, and this also has both this and that. In this way, “this” and “that,” used

here as linguistic signifiers (empty signs) representing the pairs of binary opposites, interpenetrate each other. According to this logic, life already has death in it, and vice versa, and it is the same with other dichotomies, such as right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, having and lacking, preservation and loss, failure and success, poverty and wealth, worthiness and unworthiness, slander and fame, beauty and ugliness, emptiness and fullness, greatness and littleness, completion and impairment, etc. Likewise, the permeability of boundaries and the mutual interpenetration of opposites allow us to make sense of much of Zhuangzi's contradictory *shifei* (是非) talk, without having to interpolate reference to points of view, that is, without resorting to imposing on Zhuangzi unstated doctrines of relativism or skepticism (Coutinho 2004, 178).

Are (not) there really “that” and “this”? Such a state in which none of “that” and “this/yes/right” gets its counterpart (as opposite) is called 道樞, Dao Pivot/Hinge. When the pivot/hinge responds endlessly by occupying the middle of its ring/circle, both “this/yes/right” and “no/wrong” alternate endlessly. The endless responses of Dao Pivot allow no fixed standpoint from which to view things as “yes/right” or “no/wrong.”

Then, what makes some “acceptable” and others “unacceptable”? What makes things “so”? Zhuangzi's answer is that “because things are called so, they are so” (物謂之而然) (ch. 2. 齊物論). Things can be acceptable by our calling them “can be acceptable,” and they cannot be acceptable by our calling, that is, *labeling* them “cannot be acceptable” (可乎可, 不可乎不可) (ch. 2. 齊物論). In the same way a road is made by people walking on it (道行之而成) (ch. 2. 齊物論). Seen from Dao Pivot/Hinge, however, there is no division/distinction between “so” and “not-so,” or between “acceptable” and “unacceptable.” Rather, things are what are inherently so, and things are what can inherently be acceptable (物固有所然, 物固有所可) (ch. 2. 齊物論). For there are no things that are not so, and there are no things that cannot be acceptable (無物不然, 無物不可) (ch. 2. 齊物論).

This is an affirmation of transcending the dichotomy between affirmation and negation. It is a radical affirmation of all things, rather than an irresponsible indifference to reality based on skeptical relativity, as long as it challenges the roads of conventions (因習) that people have made by walking on them, and thus affirms the possibility of all imaginable or even unimaginable roads. It is only conventions that make such value-laden judgments and label things. It is not a coincidence, then, that Zhuangzi's “sages” and “teachers” are depicted as ugly, repulsive, and irreverent—anything but noble and dignified; they are depicted as unconventional (Berling 1985, 105).

Zhuangzi's “discussion about equalizing things” (齊物論) ends with the most famous story of Zhuangzhou (Zhuangzi's personal name) and Butterfly, where one subject fluctuates between two identities or different species. However, are they really two identities and different species? The story is as follows:

Once, Zhuang-zhou dreamed, becoming a butterfly. Flitting, flitting, as such, he/it is a butterfly. Telling/informing/enlightening itself/himself, it/he goes with intent. It/he does not know (it/he is) Zhou. Suddenly he awoke. Then, thoroughly, thoroughly, as such, he is Zhou. He does not know—Zhou's dream makes the butterfly? Or the butterfly's dream makes Zhou? Between Zhou and Butterfly, there must be, then, a division/distinction. This, we call it “things changing/transforming.” (昔者莊周夢為胡蝶, 栩栩然胡蝶也, 自喻適志與! 不知周也。俄然覺, 則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與, 胡蝶之夢為周與? 周與胡蝶, 則必有分矣。此之謂物化。) (ch. 2. 齊物論)

How does one know who s/he is? Butterfly (in the dream of Zhou), though it/he is Zhou, does not know (it/he is) Zhou. Then, how can Zhou (in the dream of Butterfly), though he/it is Butterfly, know (he/it is) Butterfly? How can one know if it is a dream/sleep or a waking/awakening? The incompatible alternatives (dream/sleep and waking/awakening; Zhou and Butterfly) are equally weighted in the story, since no one knows for certain which is dreaming. Thus it deconstructs conventions that unbalance things, where waking is given more weight than dream, and Zhou (human) is given more weight than Butterfly (other species). The story goes beyond a transposition of things, which only switch their locations/standpoints while still keeping their fixed identities; it points to an interchange and transformation of things which makes their identities fluctuate endlessly. As a result, it deconstructs the dichotomy of the subject and the object because not only are both Zhou and Butterfly subjects, but also they are virtually one subject that fluctuates between alternative realms, whether it is Zhou, or Butterfly, who dreams.

However, Zhuangzi does not miss the point that “there must be a division/distinction” between Zhou and Butterfly, for they do not have the same identity. They are two different entities that replace and transform into each other, but constitute one subject. They live at the same time in different ways, one dreaming and the other waking, and vice versa. In any case, one cannot eliminate the other and the difference/otherness between them in the realization of its life. If the other does not dream, one cannot be wakened and vice versa. In this way, the identity of the subject cannot be determined: it cannot be one of the two, or both of them at the same time, much less neither of them.

Likewise, an authentic subject forgets “self” to find and live “other” within itself. It has no self-contained identity, for it is already imbued with “other.” This cohabitation of self and other in a subject, and the indeterminacy of its self-identity represent the grammar of Dao. Zhuangzi calls such an event taking place in the grammar of Dao, “transformation of things” (物化), which is the word that ends the entire chapter. In this way, the chapter opening with the story of “I lost myself” (吾喪我) and ending with the word “transformation of things” (物化), unfolds the dialectic of self and other, and the two metaphors constitute the beginning and the end of the thread of the equalization of all things. In the middle we find another metaphor of “Dao Pivot/Hinge” (道樞) that points to the standpoint of Dao, the great equalizer, which is never fixed, with endless responses to ever alternating “yes/right” (是) and “no/wrong” (非). The “loss of self” (喪我) deconstructs self-centered prejudice that causes the disputes of 是非. The “Dao Pivot/Hinge” (道樞) deconstructs in the disputes any fixed standpoints from “this/self” and “that/other” that assume their solid self-identities. In the end, the “transformation of things” (物化) deconstructs any fixed identity through the dialectic of self and other that have equal value. All three metaphors serve the “equalization of things” (齊物).

Zhuangzi as Alternative Recourse for Asian Feminists

Women’s lives in most parts of Asia have been influenced by the imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and post-colonialism that entailed modernization, economic exploitation, and political dictatorship throughout modern history. The imperial powers most relevant to and responsible for the colonial history of most parts of Asia are the United States, China, and Japan. In the modern history of imperialism and colonialism, Americans, Chinese, and Japanese defined themselves as exceptional and as the embodiment of civilization. One of the ways to reinforce the claim of superiority is to define the Other, those beyond the boundaries, as barbarians and savages. This boundary-making between self and the Other—that is, defining who “We” are by emphasizing those who are “not-Us”—as a basic device on which nationalism relies, also creates

and reinforces the othering of all minority groups and citizens, including women, even within the nation-state.

The Chinese worldview was the most coherently realized conception of such a scheme, relegating peoples living beyond the reach of the Confucian system and culture to the outer ring of barbarians (夷), fit to be ruled by force rather than by moral persuasion. Even though the Japanese culture incorporated Confucian ideology, the Chinese still considered the Japanese inferior. China had long defined its identity as an empire by its centrality in the universal order and its superior relationship to the surrounding barbarians. Japan had its own version of the Chinese order, in which various lesser peoples, from the Ainus and Ryukyuans, and later its backward Asian neighboring countries, to the Chinese themselves, were the foil against which Japanese civilization and modernity was defined (Chin 2010, 43).

For Americans, this habit of superiority originated in the Protestant ideology of chosen-ness. Civilization requires barbarians. For early American colonists, native Americans were viewed as the savages surrounding the English settlements, while by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Americans began to see the whole world as a target for spreading the American way of life. Moreover, Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often used Asia as a foil for their notion of civilization, weighing China and Japan against each other (21-22). The Chinese worldview of Confucianism, the American worldview of Christianity and Western modernity, and the Japanese worldview of the combination of Confucianism and Western modernity, which they adopted from China and America, all share imperial schemes and ideologies. In the process of modernization in Asia, these imperial worldviews not only conflicted with, but also intersected and combined with one another. For instance, Korea, which has been under the influence of all three imperial powers through its modern colonial history, ended up with the combination of Confucian, Christian, and Western modern worldviews, and this combination has obstructed Korean women's liberation.

As the Confucian and Western modern worldviews and their combinations, which were instrumental to the imperial powers, influenced many parts of Asian countries, a strategy for Asian women's movements would be to deconstruct those worldviews and find an alternative to them. Confucianism was the dominant school of thought and orthodox ideology for most of two thousand years, and thus underlined the basic structure of society and community in most parts of East Asia (Yao 2000, 31-32). In addition, it is agreed among scholars in Confucian Studies that while the social structure of imperial Confucianism has long been demolished, its doctrinal and idealistic values remain inherent in Chinese psychology and underlie East Asian peoples' attitudes and behavior (Tu 1996, 259; Kim 1996, 203).

One of the reasons why Confucianism continues to have such an influence is that Confucianism has been utilized not only as a social system, but also as ideology and culture through education and religious rites. Laws and regulations change more often and have power only while they are effective, but rituals and culture have more durability, resisting changes. It is ritual/propriety (禮) as the embodiment of the Confucian ideology of morality that made the people obedient to the political authority in the regions that adopted Confucianism as orthodox ideology. 禮 is a political, social, cultural, and ethical system and ideology that subjects the will and purpose of individuals to that of the collective (이숙인 1997, 193). 禮 in pair with 樂 (music) constitutes a political theory in Confucianism, as recorded in *The Record of Rites* (禮記):

Music is to create unity; Ritual is to make a distinction. Unity brings mutual affection; distinction brings mutual respect....The establishment of ritual and righteousness brings the ranking of the noble and the mean; the unity through music and culture brings harmony between high and low. (樂者為同, 禮者為異. 同則相親, 異則相敬...禮義立, 則貴賤等矣, 樂文同, 則上下和矣.) (*The Record of Rites*, 樂記)

In this way, the function of 禮 is to differentiate low from high while that of 樂 is to assimilate the ruled to the superior. In short, 禮樂 as a political theory is a controlling device with which to prevent the conflicts between high and low through the function of 樂, unity/harmony, while keeping social hierarchy through that of 禮, control/regulation (*The Record of Rites*, 樂記). Thus, the theory of 禮樂 was utilized for political and social stability through the logic of “difference” and “sameness” which are made to be “discrimination” and “uniformity.”

In this way, the function of 禮 as a controlling device has much resonance with that of nationalism as a production of Western modernity, and a boundary-making system which serves to create and control citizens and non-citizens/minorities through the differentiation/exclusion and assimilation/subsumption of “the other.” Against the Confucian pursuit of “uniformity” and “assimilation” through ritual music, Zhuangzi presented Heavenly piping, natural music, blowing on myriads not in the same way, and thus letting each be itself, creating a variety of soundings that ever pass and change every moment, and rendering each no fixed self-identity or social roles. Zhuangzi offered alternative metaphors of 道樞 (Dao Pivot/Hinge) and 物化 (Transformation of Things), in which things, including binary opposites, are interdependent with and transferable to each other with equal values; thus difference cannot be the basis of discrimination and equality cannot require uniformity.

What underlies the Confucian system of 禮 is the ideology of “social harmony” (調和), utilized for political and social stability based on hierarchical order. 調和 requires every individual to know the place assigned to him/her and play the part assigned to him/her in the hierarchically ranked social order, as represented by the Five Cardinal Relationships. In terms of gender politics, 調和 requires women’s sacrifices and concessions based on the logic of “difference/distinction” and “sameness/assimilation” that justifies the distinction of the roles between men and women as the condition of social harmony/unity. The Confucian way of distinguishing between the ruler and the ruled—characterized by teaching and bestowing favor on the part of the ruler and learning and being loyal to the ruler on the part of the ruled—is also applied to the division of the roles between men and women: men teach and bestow favor, and women learn and are obedient to men. Likewise, the issue of women’s discrimination in the Confucian tradition derives from the characteristic of giving priority to the collective over individuals, as represented by the system of ritual/propriety (禮) and the ideology of “social harmony” (調和) which seek moral and cultural conformity.

During the Korean modernization period, this collectivism rooted in the Confucian tradition was affirmed and reinforced by Korean nationalism as “community consciousness,” and as an essence of Korean identity in contradistinction to the “Western identity” based on individualism. Furthermore, the nationalist discourse represented “Western individualism” in relation to pursuits of selfish interests, and praised the Korean collective orientation grounded primarily in Confucian social relations (Moon 1998, 48). As women’s issues in Asia derive in general from the tradition of giving priority to collectivity, feminism in some part of Asia has drawn on individualism, rooted in modern Western thought, as an alternative model for women’s movements in seeking women’s independence.

However, feminism based on individualism is very limiting in terms of the issue of women’s agency when it attempts to establish women as subjects with autonomy, independence, and reason—the values represented by the male subjects of Western modernity—and means that the goal is to replace the male subject of reason with a female one. Feminist intellectuals (with a few exceptions) have tended to argue for the necessity of some of those great modernist values (Nicholson 1990). From Plato through Descartes to Kant and Hegel, mainstream Western philosophy thematizes the story of the male subject of reason (Benhabib 1995, 19). As long as the

ideal subject, while being purported to be neutral and universal, represents male standards and values for humanity, replacing the male subject with the female requires the female subject to be assimilated with the ideal of humanity based on male standards and values. Even the ideal of equality and freedom in the Enlightenment often functioned as a device to universalize the bourgeois ideology of universal humanity that at the same time marginalized those who remained outside its standards or the categories of humanity. Within this framework of universality, the feminists' search for equality means the approval of the standard-status of the universal subject to which they seek to be equal, which means they want to resemble or be assimilated to the modern subject.

Therefore, any claim for the universal and self-identical subject, either male or female, which homogenizes humanity and obliterates differences, serves to delegitimize the presence of otherness and differences which do not fit into its categories. For instance, as Black feminists expose the white prism through which the category "woman" has been constructed by White feminists, and as lesbians and disabled feminists challenge the conventional construction of womanhood, the false universalism of womanhood that represents all women obliterates differences of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or bodily impairment (Lister 1997, 72-74). This universalization of women also entails the homogenization of groups regarded as "other," for instance in the creation of "a composite, singular 'third-world' woman" who is denied all agency (Mohanty 1991, 53). It is often a dominant social group that attaches the mantle of universalism to its specific experiences, perspectives, understandings, interests, ethics, ideologies, and institutions, reducing those of subordinate groups to "special" cases (Moon 2005, 121). In this way, universalism is used to create, conceal and perpetuate discrimination between the center and the periphery.

A sense of genuine universal humanity and its vision of homogeneity that makes multiplicity look chaotic and troublesome are shared by both modern Western humanism and Confucian humanism. Universalism found in both these traditions functions as an ideological device that orders differences hierarchically against a privileged singular standard. In particular, the universalization of humanity as the male subject both in Confucianism and Western modernity creates and conceals women's discrimination/alienation. Hence, feminist claims for equality based on the universality of humanity such as the Enlightenment ideal of human dignity and equality cannot achieve their goal within the ideological frame in which humanity is understood as a male property. Within that frame, equality requires women to be like men. However, true equality can be guaranteed by the respect for difference/particularity, not by the assimilation of difference/particularity into uniformity/universality.

As long as the false universalism and the dichotomy of subject and object remains, replacing the existing subject with another cannot be a fundamental solution, as the new subject will continue to participate in the system of objectifying anything categorized as "other." The problem is that any independent subject separated from the world as the object signifies "domination" in the name of achievements and advances through the apparatus of rationality, knowledge, standards, and truth (of particular class/groups) to be universalized and imposed on others. Hence, a fundamental solution should be found in deconstructing the hierarchical frameworks of universalism and the dichotomy of subject and object, which create otherness and discriminate differences. For the task of overcoming these hierarchical frameworks, Zhuangzi's worldview as interpreted in this article can be a useful resource to draw on.

In contrast to the dualistic tradition with its long history in the West—the dualism of form and idea, essence and phenomenon, source and individual entity, body and spirit, reason and sense/emotion, and so on, of which the relation is always interpreted in terms of religious, ethical, political meaning/value of hierarchy, Zhuangzi wholeheartedly rejected such hierarchical dualism. In Zhuangzi things (including opposites) are always in the process of change, characterized by interdependence and mutual transformation that makes no hierarchy between them. Indeed, Dao (道) and Qi (氣), through which all things are generated, changed, and connected, transcend the

evaluative dichotomy of good and bad, or right and wrong. The subject/self in Zhuangzi is characterized by the multiple and fluid identities always “becoming” in the process of the constant interaction with others, the world, rather than “being” independent from them. In this way, the binary opposition between the subject and object is deconstructed.

The subject as represented by Confucian humanism, which emphasizes social relations based on hierarchical structures, demands that social minorities, including women, be subjected to the collectivity, that is, family, society, and state. On the other hand, the subject as represented by modern Western humanism, which emphasizes independence based on reason and the dichotomy of subject/object, obliterates or objectifies social minorities, including women. Both Confucian humanism and modern Western humanism are characterized by the construction of identity achieved through the inscription of boundaries that demarcate and denigrate differences from the universal subject, set up as the standard. In contrast, Zhuangzi’s thought of the mutual dependence of opposites on equal terms reveals that identity/self is constituted in relation to difference/other, and claims that there is no hierarchy between opposites, between the identity/self and difference/other, and thus negates the claim that identity/self has the standard by which difference/other is to be differentiated from and at the same time assimilated to identity/self.

Identity has been conventionally understood within the West as an essential, authentic core of experience (Minh-ha 1998, 71-78). The concept of fixed identity/subject, which is also reflected in the feminist search for the “real me” in the early 1970s, implies the fictive unity of the self and essentialism (Hall 1992, 276). Such an essentialist understanding of identity is a basis of modern Western thought on humanity as an individual entity separated and differentiated from the world. The separation of a subject from the world points to the dichotomy between self/subject/humanity and other/object/nature. The essentialized difference and dichotomy between male and female is based on such a dualist and essentialist understanding of the fixed self that is separated from “other.”

The essentialist understanding of fixed identity is also found in the Confucian worldview that emphasizes “distinction-making” (辨/別) in things; titles; social classes and roles; and ethical duties, by giving them the correct names and definitions according to the fixed identities of those things which make them to be themselves. Underlying this worldview is the idea that we can gain epistemic access to essences, that is, we can give correct names corresponding to *what it is*. In contrast, according to Zhuangzi, it is not only that we have no epistemic access to the reality of things, but also that there is no such thing as essence not subject to change. For we are creatures of becoming in a world of becoming; we are finite temporal beings with finite temporal capacities; things are always changing, understandings are always developing; change as a process of recreation includes the anomaly, the irregularity, or the unanticipated case. Zhuangzi negates the idea of the self as a fixed identity separated from others or the world. There is no essence that makes an individual entity what it is, for all things in the world are composed of one qi (氣), the inseparable one moving through all things.

The distinction between the roles of men and women in Confucianism is based on the idea that there is an ontological and essential difference between men and women. In Zhuangzi, however, there is no essential difference between women and men or between humanity and other creatures as all of them are generated by Dao (道), which transforms and equalizes things. The Confucian theory of “social harmony” is an ideological device to conceal the power relations in the positions and roles assigned to men and women, which requires women’s concessions, conformity, and sacrifices. Hence, for Asian feminists, Confucian relationality, based on essentially differentiated fixed roles to serve collectivity, cannot be an alternative to individualism rooted in modern Western thought.

In Zhuangzi, those in the lower classes of the society, such as artisans, farmers, and merchants, are not only valued; they teach the nobles and superiors, reversing the social roles assigned in the society where the nobles and superiors are supposed to teach the lower classes. In

terms of transferability of social roles, there is no exception in gender roles. For instance, the story of Liezi (列子) is introduced as an exemplar for returning to an ideal way of life, in which he cooks for his wife and feed the pigs as if he were feeding people (Zhuangzi, ch. 7. 應帝王). In that sense, Zhuangzi's relationality, where the related parties are open to the possibility of change, affected by each other on equal terms, and their roles are equally valued and transferable according to circumstances, can be an alternative both to the collectivism rooted in the Confucian tradition and to the individualism rooted in modern Western thought.

Conclusion

As illuminated in the interpretation of the "discussion about equalizing things," employing various metaphors, such as the "loss of self" (喪我), the "Dao Pivot/Hinge" (道樞), and the "transformation of things" (物化), Zhuangzi exposes the limitation of prejudiced self-centeredness and deconstructs the false conception of fixed identity through the dialectic of self and other that have equal value. Thus Zhuangzi's paths to the "equalization of things" (齊物) are found in his radical pluralism based on the respect for difference and otherness, and in an alternative identity politics based on interdependence and mutual transformation between things, which deconstructs the dichotomy of the subject/self/human and the object/other/nature. Therefore, Zhuangzi's subversive wisdom provides useful insights for Asian feminists who seek an alternative strategy to deconstruct the modern Western and Confucian frames of essentialist, universalistic, and hierarchical understandings of humanity, and the world that continues to create and marginalize "the Other," including women.

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Book Reviews

A REVIEW OF LEOPOLD LEEB'S TRANSLATION OF LIU, XIAOFENG. 2015. *SINO-THEOLOGY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY LIU XIAOFENG*. LEIDEN: BRILL.

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Although perhaps originally intended as general terms, “Sino-Theology” (*Hanyu shenxue* 漢語神學), “Chinese-Language Theology” or “Sino-Christian Theology” have come to stand for a distinct academic discourse on Christian theology first popularized among some Chinese-speaking intellectuals in the wake of China’s Reform and Opening Up Policy. It was a time when novel intellectual goods were flourishing and in high demand, especially in the 1980s, and then, beginning in the 1990s, when new ideas and knowledge were introduced and translated in an increasingly systematized manner. Although not representative, the most prolific, well-known, and in many ways pioneering figure among the scholars initially advocating and contributing to this discourse was Liu Xiaofeng 劉小楓, born in Chongqing in 1956. He obtained a doctorate in theology at the University of Basel in 1993, but then moved on to promote liberal education in China according to the classical “reading method” of Leo Strauss (Liu 2015, 171). It is Liu’s period of reflecting on the complex relation between Christian theology and China that Leopold Leeb, Austrian professor and institutional colleague of Liu Xiaofeng’s at Renmin University of China, is most concerned with. In his translator’s introduction to a selective sampling of Liu’s writings, Leeb tells us that this translation is motivated by personal interest, a motivation for writing and a scholarly engagement that he apparently shares with Liu, who he describes as having “a very independent approach.” Liu “is not impressed by public opinion, [and] his intellectual preferences are the result of his genuine personal interests” (Liu 2015, 17).

Leeb’s English translation, which offers a non-Chinese-speaking readership interested in Christian studies in contemporary Chinese thought a first glimpse at several important articles, is divided into two main parts. First, there are eight dense chapters of Liu’s *Sino-Christian Theology and the Philosophy of History* (published in Chinese in his book *The Story of the Coming of the Holy Spirit* in 2003). Here Liu re-construes the “spirit” (*jingshen* 精神) which, according to Hegel, was so “very far away” from the Chinese people, in light of contemporary Chinese scholarship. It is a theme Liu wrestles with, as he returns to it repeatedly (Liu 2003, 7-43), along with the Christian encounter with Chinese modernity more generally, including its “nationalist state-ethics” and other ongoing concerns and debates among Chinese thinkers.

The second part of this collection presents Leeb’s translations of five separate texts, beginning with a preface to the revised version of Liu’s earlier influential work on Christianity, *Delivering and Dallying* (*Zhengjiuyu Xiaoyao* 拯救與逍遙), first published in 1988. It is offered here as a call to readers, perhaps with similar “personal interests,” to translate the whole work, a book Leeb notes “deeply touched” him when he first read it (Liu 2015, 1). Next, Leeb has

included an article previously published as an editorial foreword in Renmin University's *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*. Entitled "Christianity, Paganism, and Modernity," Liu continues therein the conversation between antiquity and modernity in the history of thought, following an approach informed by Chinese learning, Christian theology, and classical reading. (Leeb had already translated the essay into English for this 2010 publication.)

Thirdly, Leeb offers his translation of the preface to *The Confucian Religion and Nation-State* (Liu 2007) before presenting two articles that Liu himself requested be included in the collection: "Leo Strauss and China: Encountering a Classical Disposition" (Liu 2011) and "Hobbes and His 'Apology'" (Liu 2009). The final two essays are significant as they shed light on the direction of Liu's current thought and interests. The division of the book into two parts might thus be drawn between the texts selected by Leeb, reflecting Liu's "theological period," and the final two essays, to which Liu would like to draw our attention.

Leeb's translation of *Sino-Christian Theology and the Philosophy of History*, along with the preface to Liu's revised version of *Zhengjiuyi Xiaoyao* 拯救與逍遙 (*Delivering and Dallying*) are highly significant for three reasons: First of all, although the scope here is limited (and restricted to one scholar's voice), these translated writings of Liu Xiaofeng offer non-Chinese readers a glimpse into what Sino-Theology is or might be; but also, and no less importantly, Liu's work shows what this brand of academic theology is probably not. Some portrayals of the Sino-Christian theological discourse (or movement) liken it to a third manifestation of Chinese Christianity, an image that is at once exaggerated and too confining. Liu's approach is concerned with the history of thought over a wide philosophical range, and this is an approach other Chinese scholars interested in the history of Christian thought share. Liu draws clear distinctions between this approach and a systematic theology and explains as much in his preface (written in 1999) to *Sino-Theology and the Philosophy of History*:

...by using the word "Sino-Theology," I do certainly not express my own concrete theological topic....I do not yet have my personal concrete substantial theological topic, and maybe there will never be a special name for that....I am not interested in establishing a systematic theology with a certain name, and I do not have any similar plans for the future. My personal interest and pursuit is to start from life experience and from the cultural-political context, to observe real, concrete problems of theological thought, and to touch [on] all kinds of arguments in concrete theological discussions—and not to establish any systematic theology. (Liu 2015, ix)

Secondly, Leeb does his audience the favor of placing Liu's works in context, especially those of the 1990s, when, as academic director of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong, Liu was organizing the translation project "Chinese Academic Library of Christian Thought." Leeb does this by offering an extended introduction that familiarizes readers with other leading figures in the Chinese academic religious and Christian studies scene, those of Liu's generation as well as important influences among earlier thinkers (Tang Yi and Deng Xiaomeng). In the appendix, Leeb also provides a useful list of scholars engaged in Christian studies in China.

Finally, and most importantly, Leeb's work offers an invitation: it reminds us that non-Chinese-reading scholars are in many ways woefully ill-equipped to make any meaningful judgments on the state of Christian studies in China today, because some of the most foundational texts have yet to be translated. Leeb, who is part of the Chinese-speaking academic world himself, and who translates prolifically into as well as from Chinese, invites us to work towards changing the "deplorable fact that only very few of [the works by Chinese scholars who have shown a lasting interest in Christianity] have been translated into any Western language so far" (Liu 2015, 1). We are reminded of the words of the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722), quoted by Liu in his preface:

Those Westerners and other commoners (*xiaoren* 小人) of their kind, how could one say that they grasp China's great wisdom (*Zhongguozhidali* 中國之大理)? Besides, nobody of the Westerners really has a good command of the Chinese language, and for this reason their theories and statements are often ridiculous. (Liu 2015, vii-viii)

Need this state of affairs continue indefinitely? Translators of Leeb's caliber and willingness to serve as cultural intermediaries allow us to hope otherwise.

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