



神學通譯

Divinity School Newsletter

Issue No. 1

January, 2005

Tel : (852) 2609-6705 Fax : (852) 2603-5224
Email : theology@cuhk.edu.hk
Website : www.cuhk.edu.hk/theology/



CHINESE THEOLOGY OF TOMORROW

Rev. Prof. CHOW Lien-hwa

Senior theological educator among Chinese theologians

This sermon was given by Rev. Prof. CHOW Lien-hwa on the Theology Day 2004. The original text was in Chinese, translated into English with minor modification by Prof. KUNG Lap-yan, Associate Professor of the Divinity School.

When we turn to any book introducing to theologians, we notice that they are accustomed to introduce different theologies developed in different countries. For instance, the book, *Modern Theologians* (David Ford), categorizes theologians by continents or countries like continental Europe, Britain, North America, Latin America, Africa and Asia. Each country has its own ethnicity, and this reflects in its theology.

A. The difficulties of Chinese theology

1 The difficulty of language

The book referred to above does not mention Chinese theology.¹ Perhaps, Chinese write in Chinese, and their writings are not known outside the Chinese world. Or if we are humble enough, we may say that there is not much Chinese theological work that can appeal to the

wider world. The Chinese language itself has its own in-born difficulty, for not so many non-Chinese can read Chinese. Unlike English, German and French, the Western churches cannot understand. Even though the Chinese have their theological works, the non-Chinese cannot have access to and understand them if no translation is provided.

Concept is prior to language, language is the way to express concepts, and the written word is the means to express language. However, since the distant past, language and word reversely restrict concepts and ideas. That is to say, we humans are used to thinking in terms of language, and cannot think without language. Because of this, any kind of written words determines its work, and this also happens to theological works. For instance, the Chinese word, 'sin', denotes all criminal acts, but this is not the meaning of the English word, 'sin'. 'Sin' in English is not the same as 'sin' in Chinese. Put strictly, 'sin' in Chinese is more like 'crime' in English. Chinese is lacking this kind of word. Only when we think in Chinese and write theological works in Chinese, will we then have Chinese theology.

2 The complexity of the Chinese

Apart from the population of 1.3 billion in mainland China, the Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South East Asia, Europe and America are Chinese as well. Their customs and habits are diversified. They live in different contexts, their ways of thinking are very different from one another, and they would not have a similar theology. From the degree of difficulty, Chinese theology is more difficult to develop, for they do not

have much in common. On the contrary, this can be easy, for no one demands that such a huge population should have one theology. In fact, our society is pluralistic, and allows different thoughts and ideas. In recent years, churches in China have seen a great development, but there is no time and no people to nurture them. Despite strenuous efforts, the old generation remains the same as in the past. Without having contact with the outside world for decades, it is unavoidable that they are lagging behind. However, there are still a few church leaders who developed important work during the very difficult time. For instance, WU Yaozong's (Y.T. WU) 'Three-Self Patriotic Movement' is a theology which emerged from the time of the liberation of China.

Bishop TING Guangxun (K.H.Ting), the Chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the President of the China Christian Council, highly appreciates the contribution of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. He says, 'The achievement and result of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement guided by Mr. Wu is tremendous.' God uses the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as an instrument bringing the Chinese churches back to the teaching of the Bible, and makes them more appropriate to the tradition of the Church.

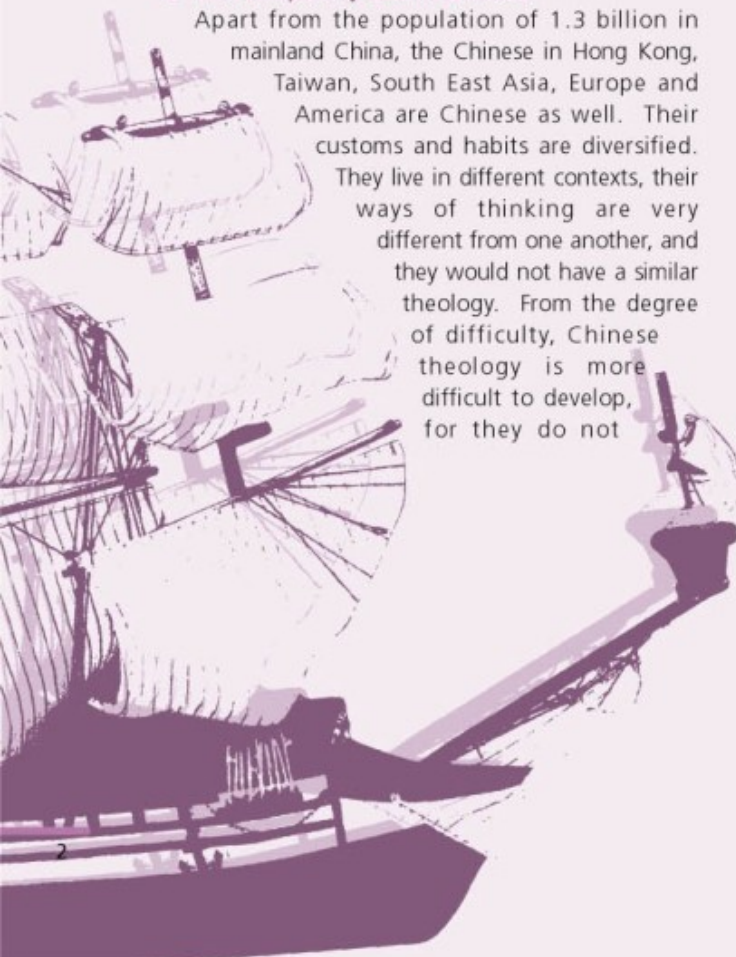
In 1954, the first National Christian Conference was held. Y.T. Wu proposed to change the 'Three-Self Reform Movement' to the 'Three-Self Patriotic Movement' due to the fact that some people hesitated at using the word, 'reform'.

Apart from Wu, Bishop Ting is a defender of the church. All these works are the best example. In fact, what they are writing is Chinese theology.

B. An opportunity for reflection and an environment for writing

1 Anti-Christian Movement

Although the background of the Anti-Christian Movement has a long history, its immediate cause is the conference of the 11th World Christian Student Federation held in Beijing in 1922. This event was opposed by the local students. A month before the conference, the local students made an 'Announcement of the Anti-Christian Student Federation', and its influence was much deeper than any one of the previous Church



controversies, for this event was a struggle of ideology. Until now, the spread of Christianity in some places is still suffering from the effect of this movement.

During this period, an idea of 'indigenous church' emerged, that is, a self-administrated, a self-financed, a self-propagated Chinese church. This is the basis of the 'Three-self' church. At that time, they did not concern much about the importance of 'self-thought'. Perhaps, this can be included in self-propagation, but the trace of 'self-thought' is not emphasized in the writings.

Despite this, Chinese theological writings were still active at that time. For instance, the writings of L.C. Wu, T.C. Chao, T.T. Lew, C.P. Hsu, and N.Z. Zia helped the development of Chinese theology. Unfortunately, due to the socio-political environment, they could not continue their writings. Some of them stopped their theological writings due to a change of interest. Only Zia who lives in the States continues to write.

Strictly speaking, these forerunners are the pioneers, but their writings are mainly about education (Lew), philosophy (Hsu) and emphasis on research rather than proposal (Wu, Zia). It is also applied to H.S. Hsu who moved to Hong Kong from Shanghai. All of them are not seriously involved in theology. Unfortunately, both Wu and Chao did not make a step further. Otherwise, more theological works would be produced.

In mainland China, *Systematic Theology* (3 volumes) written by CHIA Yu-ming is widely read by the pastors. He was a local theological teacher, but his theology cannot be considered as Chinese theology. In his foreword, he said,

As a teacher of theology, I have a responsibility to further develop the Christian teaching. Therefore, I translate the work according to Dr. Augustus Hopkins Strong as well as Frank Price, and edit these into a book.

2. The Cultural Revolution

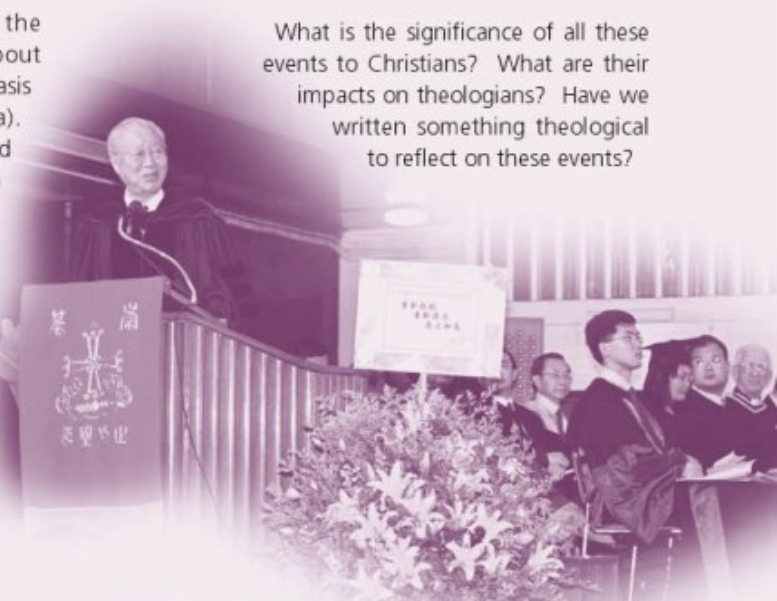
This is an important time, indeed. Many people were killed, and we believe that there should have been a great amount of Christian writings as well as sermons during that period. Because

there was no freedom at that time, those writings that survived are very precious. Perhaps, a Chinese theology based on these materials may be articulated at an appropriate time.

3. The return of Hong Kong and Macau

In Hong Kong and Macau, the people there must have a rich reflection on the 'return'. On the day of the return of Hong Kong to China, I was in Vancouver, Canada. I stayed at the University of British Columbia's Hostel and watched the whole process of the 'return'. At that moment, I recalled the opium trade of the East India Company, burning opium by LIN Zexu, the Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing, the invasion of China by the foreign powers, the Boxing Uprising, the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty, the establishment of the first Republic in Asia, the 918 event, the eight years struggle against invasion, the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the return of Hong Kong. It is a great liberation. Its symbolic meaning is more than 'one country, two systems', and more than just about the return of Hong Kong and Macau.

What is the significance of all these events to Christians? What are their impacts on theologians? Have we written something theological to reflect on these events?



C. A learning process

When missionaries came to China, there were no Chinese biblical scholars, no Chinese theologians, no church historians, and no scholars in theological education. Therefore, the only way was to depend upon the missionaries to teach theology, establish seminaries and bible schools. Later, the Chinese Christians studied theology abroad, and they returned to become either pastors or teachers in theology. Gradually, the

proportion of the local teachers is increasing and the proportion of the foreign teachers is decreasing. Most of the seminaries are at this stage. The Divinity School of Chung Chi College is a sample of this.

Perhaps, until some time in the future, when seminaries in mainland China have enough teachers, books and good facilities, students then no longer need to study abroad. When the standard of the seminaries in mainland China is as high as in the West, students then no longer need to study abroad. What I am recalling is the theological education in the States. During the early 20th century, many teachers of the American seminaries studied in Britain, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, but a generation or two generations later, the students do not need to follow the tide of studying abroad, for the seminaries within their country have the same standard as high as in the Continental Europe and Britain. Certainly, reasons like conducting special research may lead one to study abroad.

In the future, studying theology in mainland China will be better than studying abroad. If our teachers have the same quality of teaching as in the West, our seminaries will be still better, for our teachers are Chinese, the materials have gone through the Chinese mind, and theology is taught in Chinese. Many of the contents have been reformulated, and this will be very helpful to the local pastors. Although we may not have a system of Chinese theology, we are on the way towards making Chinese theology. Through generation and generation, our theology will be more indigenous. We will no longer need to deal with a specific topic about indigenous theology, for we are on the way towards doing indigenous theology.

D. The Pre-requisites of Chinese theology

1. An integration of East and West

If we want to have some kind of Chinese theology, the writer(s) should have a profound understanding of Western theology (including the Orthodox tradition), for these 2000 years of history embraces important research and insight of our forerunners. Without any knowledge of it, it is hard to have

a further development. When someone thinks that he/she has a great idea, he/she does not know that this may have been a 'heresy' in the past.

We also need to have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. We do not need to recite the Confucian Classics (only a small minority of scholars have that), but these ideas are rooted in our 'blood'. Our way of living and dealing with people reflects these 'old' ideas.

2. A clear understanding of the audience

In *Systematic Theology*, volume 1, Paul Tillich wrote,

Theology, as a function of the Christian church, must serve the needs of the church. A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received.

If he is right, most of the theological works that we read were written for the Europeans and Americans. There is a lot of eternal truth in them. But how can we explain this truth to the Chinese? The Chinese are the audience of our theological explanation, and to explain the truth to different classes of the Chinese is our real mission. I have to repeat that the Chinese in Hong Kong and in mainland China have different environments. Those Chinese without experience of the Cultural Revolution are different from this generation. Is this not a great challenge to us?

