

The Theoretical Approach of Indigenization of Chinese Protestant Theology in the First Half of the 20th Century

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Abstract: From the early 20th century, Chinese “Indigenous Theology” served as the main line in the development of Chinese Protestant theology. It represents an important orientation in the communications between Chinese and Western culture as well as the development of modern Chinese thought. Chinese Indigenous Theology was the theoretical result of the combination of Chinese and Western religious spirit and thought, with a strong background of traditional Chinese culture. Its main purpose was to interpret and develop modern Chinese Protestant thought within the frame of Chinese traditional culture, mainly Confucianism, and to construct a native Christian theology with Chinese characteristics. As will become obvious, the theoretical construction of Indigenous Theology caused Western Protestant theology, with its fundamental spirit of “Dichotomy between God and Man” and its thought pattern of “External Transcendence”, to Chinese Indigenous Theology, grounded on a “Unity of God and Man” and a “Internal Transcendence”. However, due to excessive adherence to the historical experience of Indigenization, modern Chinese Protestant theology came to lack a sufficient response to and discussion of the issues of modernization and universalization. In this paper, both the theoretical achievements and the shortcomings of Chinese Indigenous Theology will be summarized and reviewed carefully.

Key Words: Indigenization; internalization; cultural transformation; Chinese Protestant Theology

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Chinese Protestant theology was founded in the first half of the 20th century. For the sake of integration of Christianity and Chinese culture, some Protestant theologians were committed to interpreting Christian thought based on traditional Chinese culture, mainly Confucianism. Their purpose was to construct a system of Indigenous Protestant theology. This aim manifested as a transformation from Western Protestant theology, with its fundamental spirit of “Dichotomy between God and Man” and a thought pattern of “External Transcendence”, into Chinese Indigenous Theology with a fundamental spirit of “Unity of God and Man” and a thought pattern of “Internal Transcendence”. Hence, Chinese Indigenous Theology was the theoretical result of the combination of Chinese and Western religious spirit, culture, and thought, within a strong background of Chinese traditional culture.

I . Background and Historic Conditions

The modern Protestant missionary movement in China marked a departure from the background of its historical movement. Historically, Christianity was marked by an aggressive Western colonialist culture met by a strong resistance from the Chinese people. Its cultural exclusiveness and the colonial conquest made it difficult for Christianity to be accepted by Chinese culture. Christianity was reduced to the status of a “foreign religion”, wandering on the edge of Chinese society and culture. In order to change this situation, the Western churches reviewed and adjusted old missionary policies in response to the new situation of the era, and launched a movement called “Christianity in China”. In 1919, the Holy See formally issued a decree to initiate the plan for the indigenization of Catholicism. Pope Benedict XV stated in the decree that “Catholicism is not foreign to any country. Therefore, every country should train its own clergy.”^[1] The Holy See appointed a number of Chinese priests, who came forward to preach, which greatly reduced the resistance and obstacles of missionary work, and weakened the color of the “foreign religion” among the Chinese people. In terms of theological theories, the Catholic leaders abandoned their previous position of rejecting heresy by reverting to the “Ricci Rule”, focused on interpreting Catholic doctrines with reference to Confucian classics, and showed respect and recognition to Chinese traditional culture.

In the process of Sinicization, the Protestant Church in China almost kept pace with Catholicism. Thus, the Protestant Church launched an “Indigenous movement”, whose purpose was, “on the one hand, to make Chinese believers take responsibility; on the other hand, to carry forward the inherent Oriental civilization, so that Christianity can eliminate the ugly name of foreign religion”. It declared that it would “marry the Christian Church with Chinese culture and wash away the color of the West”.^[2] Protestants consciously used traditional Confucianism to interpret Christian doctrines and carried out the Chinese transformation of some original rituals. Undoubtedly, these reform measures had a certain progressive significance and fostered a golden period of Christianity’s spread in China in the following decades.

The Protestant Church launched the “Indigenization Movement” in order to cope with the challenges of the “New Culture Movement” and the “non-Christian Movement”, and to adapt to the situation of the new era.^[3] The Chinese Protestant theology in the first half of the 20th century was the ideological result of this movement. Some native Chinese theologians devoted themselves to interpreting Christian thought with Chinese traditional culture, mainly Confucianism, and laid the foundation for the theoretical construction of modern Chinese Protestant theological thought. Zhao Zichen(赵紫宸), Wu Leichuan (吴雷川) and Xie Fuya(谢扶雅) were the influential representatives. Since they were proficient in both Eastern and Western cultures, they could truly understand the relationship between Christianity and Chinese traditional culture from a historical and cultural

[1] See Shanghai “Journal of Missionary Affairs”, April, 1920.

[2] See “Magazine of True Light”, the special issue for the 25th anniversary. You Xilin and Paulos Huang, “The Contemporary Transformation of Educational Mechanism for Knowledge Innovation”, International Journal of Sino-Western Studies (www.SinoWesternStudies.com), 1-20.

[3] See Yang Tianhong: “The All-round Rise of Nationalism and New Challenges Facing Christianity”, “Christianity and Intellectuals of the Republic of China”, Chapter 5, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2005.

perspective, and had the expertise to explore ways to combine theological ideas with the Chinese spirit. They focused on adjusting the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture and constructing a theological theory to pave a way for Christianity to take root in Chinese culture.

Although the Indigenization Movement of Christianity was a response to specific historical events in modern Chinese history and can be called the result of a historical movement in a specific era, the occurrence of indigenous theology belied a deeper motivation and historical-cultural background. The theoretical origins of the development of Indigenous Theology followed the tracts and methods of the past Catholic missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci's "Interpreting Christianity with Confucianism". That is, it used the resources of Confucianism to interpret and understand Christian theology. Therefore, Indigenous Theology could be traced back to the theological practice of missionaries in China in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, and even further (the Nestorian in Tang Dynasty began to interpret theology through the Yijing philosophy)^[4]

The main purpose of Chinese Indigenous Theology was to combine Christianity with Chinese culture. It did so by combining Protestant theology with Chinese traditional culture, mainly Confucian tradition. In other words, it was the theoretical product of Christianity's "marriage with Chinese culture". The essence of the Indigenous Theology was an acceptance and digestion of Christianity by Chinese culture. Most of the representatives of Chinese Indigenous theology, such as Zhao Zichen, Wu Leichuan and Xie Fuya, followed this line of thinking. Zhao Zichen's approach of constructing "Indigenous Theology" was to interpret Christian theology from the perspective of Confucian ethical culture. In his view, Indigenous Theology would integrate the essence of Christianity with the spiritual inheritance of Chinese culture, such that theology "can get rid of the cocoon of the West and put on Chinese elucidation."^[5] Thus, the Christian God, on his interpretation, was a rational, ethical and personified God. Similarly, the premise of Wu Leichuan's acceptance of Christian belief was to understand the Christian doctrine from the standpoint of Confucian traditional culture and life experience. He used Confucian terms to develop Christian theology, in order to construct a kind of Confucianized Christian theology.^[6] Finally, Xie Fuya's theory of Indigenous Theology appropriated Christian faith in terms of Chinese religious terms or ideas. He interpreted Christian theology through the ideas of the Confucian tradition, the "Unity of Heaven and Human" and the "Doctrine of Mean".^[7] Formally speaking, Xie expressed Christian belief and its theological concept in terms of categories, concepts and terms of Confucian philosophy. In essence, the "Indigenous Theology" generally denoted the spirit and thought of Chinese native culture creatively interpreting Christian theology. Consequently, its fundamental spirit and thought were quite different from the original Western Christian theology.

[4] See Xu Qianxin, "Notes on Nestorian Inscriptions in Tang Dynasty", edited by Liu Xiaofeng, "Tao and Language-Chinese Culture Meets Christian Culture", Shanghai: Sanlian Bookstore Publishing House, 1995.

[5] See Zhao Zichen: "Christianity and Chinese Culture", edited by Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xinping: "A Probe into Indigenous Theology - Academic Essays on Chinese Christian Culture in the 20th Century", Beijing: China Radio and Television Press, 1998.

[6] See Li Wei: "Wu Leichuan's Eclectic Theology", edited by Zhao Shilin and Duan Qi: "Christianity in China-Wisdom of Contextualization", Chapter 3, Religious Culture Press, 2009.

[7] See Tang Xiaofeng: "Xie Fuya's Dialectical Theology", edited by Zhao Shilin and Duan Qi: "Christianity in China-Wisdom of Contextualization", Chapter 4.

II . The theoretical Turn of “Internalization”

Insofar as Indigenous Theology was a preliminary stage of the production of a Chinese Christianity, theologians tended to use the language and terms of the native culture to understand foreign theology, often achieving an analogy and approximate interpretation of theological thinking. This was similar to “Geyi (格义) Buddhism” in history. Just as Chinese Mahayana Buddhism was the product of Chinese culture creatively incorporating Indian Buddhism through the lens of Confucianism and Taoism, simultaneously transforming Indian Buddhism, Indigenous Theology was the product of Chinese theologians reinterpreting, recreating, and differentiating themselves from Western modern theology based on traditional Chinese culture. The Western theological theoretical system was based on the other world centered on “God” and “Heaven”, and had a strong dimension of “Division of God and Man”. Often developed as an antagonism between God and Man, its transcendental spirit and thought was an “External Transcendence”.^[8] By contrast, traditional Chinese culture was mainly an ethical and humanistic culture. Its ideological focus lay in the practical life of this world, reflecting a fundamental spirit and ideological characteristics of “Unity of Man and God”; its transcendental spirit and thought can be classified into “Internal Transcendence”.^[9] Therefore, Indigenous Theology took on the theoretical background and the characteristic of “Unity of Man and God” from traditional Chinese culture and projected it onto Christianity.

Chinese Indigenous Theology must be consciously differentiated from Western modern theology. In fact, it represented a process of cultural transformation from a foreign culture to syncretic or “Geyi” culture. Compared with its Western origin, Chinese Indigenous Theology had evolved in terms of theoretical form, ideological content and fundamental spirit to reflect the unique characteristics of traditional Chinese culture.

In short, in the transition from Western modern theology to the Chinese modern theology, there had been a transformation from Western God-Oriented theology to Human-oriented Chinese theology. This reflected the transformation from the pattern of “External Transcendence” that emphasized the basic spirit and ideological orientation of “Dichotomy between God and Man”, to the pattern of “Internal Transcendence” which highlighted the basic spirit and ideological orientation of “Unity of God and Man”. Correspondingly, compared with its Western matrix, Indigenous Theology manifested a theoretical transformation in its ideological content. First of all, according to Western orthodox theology, God was an existence of “the Wholly Other”.^[10] On the other hand, Indigenous Theology tended to understand “God” from the perspective of “internality”, combining “transcendence” with “internality”, and regarding God’s existence as inherent both in the real world and in practical life, i. e. , as “Internal Transcendence”.

As a result, Indigenous Theology showed a completely different outlook and style of

[8] See Fang Dongmei: “Looking at Human Alienation from the Perspective of Religion, Philosophy and Philosophy of Human Nature”, Creative Creativity, Beijing: Zhonghua publishing house, 2014.

[9] See Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, Zhang Junmai, and Tang Junyi: “Declaration of Chinese Culture to the World People”, edited by Feng Zusheng: “Contemporary Neo-Confucianism”, Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore Publishing House, 1989, p. 15.

[10] See James Livingstone: “the New Orthodoxy”, “Modern Christian Thoughts” (Volume 2), Chapter 11, Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 1999.

understanding and interpreting God. It is worth noting that indeed, there did exist a seed of the concepts of “Unity of God and Man” and “Internal Transcendence” in modern Western theology. It can be said that Indigenous Theology merely chose and emphasized this implicit ideological orientation. Xie Fuya identified with Whiteheadian Process Theology in his early years; while, in his later years he turned to advocate a “Neutrality Theology” in order to establish a dialectical relationship between “transcendence” and “internality”. In doing so, Xie was actually developing a creative compromise and synthesis between Chinese and Western theology on the relationship of Heaven and Human.^[11]

The focus of Western orthodox theology lied on the other world centered with “God” and “Heaven”, taken as a destination. The theory of Indigenous Theology showed that it attached importance to the mundane world and practical life, instead of focusing on the other world of God and Heaven. For example, Wu Leichuan attached great importance to modern Western “social Gospel”. He pointed out that “Christianity is not just a personal Gospel, but a social Gospel. Only its Gospel can lead us to cope with the change of the current world trend.”^[12] Wu Leichuan therefore declared that the “Kingdom of Heaven” of Christianity is set up conveniently to realize the ideal new society of benevolence and justice on earth.

As far as the relationship between God and Man is concerned, Western theology emphasizes God’s omniscience and omnipotence and posits an unbreakable boundary between God and Man. On the other hand, Indigenous theology emphasizes the communication between God and Man and the close relationship between them, advocating that by imitating the moral efforts of Christ, Human can obtain a personality similar to divinity and thus obtain salvation. In addition, Indigenous Theology tends to interpret Christ, who embodies the “Duality of God and Human” in Western theology, as a rational and moral existence and as a “human model”.^[13] In the same way, Indigenous Theology reinterpreted other important Christian doctrines, such as Trinity, Original Sin and Resurrection, to construct a theoretical system of Chinese Indigenous Theology strongly colored by humanism.

From what has just now been said, we can see that Chinese Indigenous Theology had its significant features “with Chinese-style elucidation”, and its theoretical construction had a strong ideological and spiritual background of Chinese traditional culture. The theoretical differences between Chinese Indigenous Theology and its Western matrix in the aspects such as ideological content, theoretical form and fundamental spirit showed that Indigenous Theology was a theoretical achievement of creative synthesis, a combination of Chinese and Western religious philosophy. Therefore, it is obviously a misunderstanding to take Indigenous theology as the same as its Western matrix. To a certain extent, the view of God elucidated by Indigenous Theology reflected the deviation from the Western pattern of “External Transcendence” and its conception of “the Wholly Other” of the God as the Supreme Creator, and its convergence with the Chinese pattern of “Internal Transcendence” and its conception of “Unity of Heaven and Man”. Its thought embodied the organic

[11] See Tang Xiaofeng: “Xie Fuya’s Dialectical Theology”, edited by Zhao Shilin and Duan Qi: “Christianity in China—Wisdom of Contextualization”, Chapter 4.

[12] See Wu Leichuan: “Christianity and Chinese Culture”, Shanghai: Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008, P. 63.

[13] See Preface, edited by Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xiping, “A Probe into Indigenous Theology—A Collection of Academic Essays on Chinese Christian Culture in the 20th Century”, p. 20.

synthesis of Western theism and Chinese traditional humanism. It emphasized the connotation of ethics and morality, attached importance to the practical life or real world, and highlighted the psychology and humanistic personality of Jesus Christ, all aspects demonstrating the profound influence of Chinese traditional culture. In short, the theoretical construction of Chinese Indigenous Theology reflected an obvious turn of “internalization”, which was fundamentally different from the original type of “External Transcendence” in Western theology. In other words, they are not the same.

III. Several theoretical dimensions and examples

In the Indigenization Movement of Christianity, appeared a group of native theologians represented by Zhao Zichen, Wu Leichuan, Xie Fuya, etc. They argued that under the new historical conditions, Chinese native theology must learn from past experience and follow an ideological line that integrates Chinese and Western cultures. They realized that they must take Chinese traditional culture as the basis to accept and absorb foreign Christian culture and beliefs, in order to create Chinese Christian theology. By and large, the theoretical creation and construction of Indigenous Theology had the common feature of “Chinese-style elucidation” in this historical period. Simultaneously, it reflected the influence of individual theological thinkers and a multiply dimensional theoretical development, with a very rich ideological content.

1. Combination with God and Man; Zhao Zichen's Ethical Theology

Zhao Zichen advocated that in order to integrate Christianity into Chinese culture, it was necessary to “break away from the Western stereotype” with a unique vision, and create a kind of Christian theology with Chinese features. He regarded Christianity and Chinese culture as complementary and compatible. The spiritual nature of this correlation between Christianity and Chinese culture was, according to Zhao Zichen, “the Closest Friendship”.^[14] In his opinion, the deep spiritual agreement between Christianity and Chinese culture provided the ideological basis for the integration of Chinese and Western theology. He called it “Sinicized Christian theology” or “Indigenized Theology”, and described it as the theoretical possibility of a future deep integration of the universal truth and essence of Christianity into the cultural, religious, and spiritual life of the Chinese people .

The “God” interpreted by Zhao Zichen was highly rational and moral. He regarded God as the unity of morality and transcendence, or in essence, the ultimate transcendent basis of human ethical and moral practice. Zhao Zichen further proposed that “religion and ethics are two sides of the same thing, rather than two different trends. Religion is the foundation of morality, and morality is the realization of religion. Morality has no foundation without religion, and religion has no life without morality.”^[15] In his view, Christianity was a real and complete ethical religion, and its religious belief was the root and foundation of ethical and moral life. Zhao Zichen stressed that the injection of

[14] See Zhao Zichen, “Christianity and Chinese Culture”, edited by Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xinping: “A Probe into Indigenous Theology—Academic Essays on Chinese Christian Culture in the 20th Century”.

[15] Zhao Zichen, Religion and the change of environment, published by the Progress of Youth, Vol. 30, Feb. 1920, P. 31.

Christian belief could instill a moral force into the spiritual life of Chinese people and support the construction of a new broad spiritual and moral world in modern social and cultural surroundings.

Hence, the theology constructed by Zhao Zichen was not the Western orthodox theology, nor the humanism of Chinese traditional culture, but an organic synthesis of both. It is in this sense that he pointed out that “Christianity is not humanism, but the Unity of Man and God, and the Unity of Heaven and Human. Knowing this, we have the foundation of ethical religion.”^[16]

2. “Integrating Confucianism with Christianity”: Wu Leichuan’s Confucian theology

From the standpoint of traditional Chinese culture, Wu Leichuan’s attitude towards Christianity was governed by the values of compromise and comprehensiveness. His theology involved a strong background and the characteristics of Confucian tradition. He regarded Christianity and Chinese traditional culture as a relationship between “fellow travelers” and “friends” who expressed the same truth in different ways, rather than incompatible and hostile rivals.^[17] In fact, Wu Leichuan regarded Confucian tradition as a prerequisite for his acceptance of Christian faith. His interpretation of a series of Christian doctrines, teachings and theological concepts embodied the rational spirit and realistic orientation of Chinese traditional culture. Wu Leichuan attached great importance to understanding the Christian faith from the experience of Confucianism, and paid attention to seeking and discovering the similarities between the two religions’ concepts, and constructing a kind of Confucian Christian theology. He focused on using the core Confucian categories to elucidate the important concepts in Christian theology, such as “Trinity”, “Prayer” and “Heaven”.

Wu Leichuan believed that there was a common “truth” in Christianity and Confucianism. His comparative research was to seek the common ground between them and discover the common truth and spiritual essence behind the apparent differences in their thoughts, contents, words, and habits; along the same lines, he attempted to integrate Christian and Confucian scripture.^[18] Finally, Wu Leichuan’s religious belief showed a strong practical orientation. Firstly, he emphasized that by imitating and following Jesus, Christians could become leaders for Chinese society. Secondly, he emphasized the contribution of Christianity to China’s social reform. Thirdly, he carried forward the Gospel of modern social reform: Wu Leichuan clearly declared that the “Heaven” of Christianity would be an ideal new society that realizes benevolence and justice on Earth.^[19] In order to realize “Heaven”, he even supported Marxist historical materialism and revolutionary struggle theory, and advocated to promote social reform by violent revolution and other radical means.

In the first half of the 20th century, in the increasingly serious and urgent historical environment of China’s social crisis, Wu Leichuan changed his convictions from a Confucian to a Christian accepting the Social Gospel, afterwards seeking inspiration from Marxism. His course of Christian thought and path of seeking truth mixed many elements, but Confucianism was the main background

[16] Zhao Zichen, “New Wine”, published by Truth and Life, December, 1929.

[17] See Wu Leichuan, “A Comparative Study on Christian Scriptures and Confucian Scriptures”, edited by Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xinping: “A Probe into Indigenous Theology—A Collection of Academic Essays on Chinese Christian Culture in the 20th Century”.

[18] See Wu Leichuan, “A Comparative Study on Christian Scriptures and Confucian Scriptures”, edited by Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xinping: “A Probe into Indigenous Theology—A Collection of Academic Essays on Chinese Christian Culture in the 20th Century”.

[19] See Wu Leichuan, “Christianity and Chinese Culture”, p. 63.

of them all.

3. “Directly Exploring Jesus”: Xie Fuya’s Theology of Neutralization

Xie Fuya made Chinese Christianity a combination of the truths of Christian Gospel and Chinese culture. He devoted himself to explaining the truth of the Gospel using Chinese thought. Xie Fuya was deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, but he was also deeply influenced by many Western Christian theology schools, especially the inner theism of Whiteheadian Process Theology, in his early years. His organic combination of Chinese and Western religious thought gave Xie Fuya’s theology a creative, pluralistic, and comprehensive feature. In his later years Xie Fuya advocated the “Neutralization” Theology, with the purpose of establishing a dialectical relationship between “transcendence” and “internality”. As a matter of fact, it was a creative compromise and synthesis based on the integration of Chinese and Western religious spirits and philosophy.^[20]

Xie Fuya’s Neutralization Theology adopted a humanistic approach, and his thought embodied the spiritual characteristics of “the Unity of Heaven and Man” of Chinese traditional culture, while also he fully absorbing and adopting the essence of Western Christianity. Xie Fuya believed that the essence of religion was nothing more than piety, and its purpose was the close relationship between God and Man. It was in the fundamental spirit of religion that Chinese and Western religions found common ground to conduct communications and exchanges.^[21] More specifically, in his opinion, the fundamental spirit of theology was to achieve a close relationship between God and Man and realize the destination of “Unity of God and Man”. However, while the purpose of both was to make Human communicate with God, Confucianism in the East went from Man to God; while, Christianity in the West went from God to Man.^[22] Xie Fuya adopted both the viewpoints of Eastern and Western religions, advocating that the “transcendence” and “internality” of God must be combined dialectically. His “Neutralization” Theology can also be regarded as a compromise and a comprehensive theoretical creation rooted in the shared spirit of both Chinese and Western religions.

We can see that Xie Fuya’s “Chinese Indigenous Theology” was both theological and humanistic. The humanistic orientation of his theological construction made him pay special attention to “historical Jesus”, rather than the Christian theological focus in the West. Xie Fuya believed that “the essence of Christianity is Jesus’s great personality and his real life”^[23], and took Jesus’ personality as the core of Christianity, something influenced by the Confucian tradition of emphasizing ethics and morality through a focus on the personality of sages. Xie Fuya advocated “directly exploring Jesus”, stressing the perfection of Jesus’ personality rather than the dimension of Jesus’ divinity. He further put forward that Chinese Christians should imitate and follow the spirit of Jesus’ personality and develop a Christian personality by “combining Confucius and Jesus”, and become a “true Christian” or a “Christian exemplar”.

[20] See Xie Fuya: “The Collection of Xie Fuya’s Christian Thoughts in His Later Years”, Religious Culture Press, 1986.

[21] See Xie Fuya, “Christianity and Chinese Thoughts”, Taiwan Christian Literature Publishing House, 1990, p. 8.

[22] See Xie Fuya: “The Collection of Xie Fuya’s Christian Thoughts in His Later Years”, p. 115.

[23] Xie Fuya: “Christianity and Chinese Thoughts”, p. 308.

IV. From Comparative Perspectives

The Indigenous theologians were influenced by the historical experience of the Sinicization of Buddhism in Chinese history. As a foreign religion and heterogeneous culture, Buddhism underwent a long transitional period of cultural integration before it finally integrated as an organic part of Chinese culture.^[24] The Chinese theologians used this successful historical case as their object of reference and imitation. The Sinicization of Buddhism was doubtless the result of the interpretation and comprehension of Indian Buddhism based on the categories, terms and thoughts of the indigenous religious and philosophical cultures in China, Confucianism and Taoism. Just as Chinese Mahayana Buddhism was the result of creation of Sinicized Buddhism (i. e. the Tiantai Sect, Huayan Sect, and Zen Sect), Indigenous Theology was also the crystallization of foreign Christian thought based on traditional Chinese culture, based on similar fundamental principles of interpretation. The success of the Chinese Christian theologians showed that under modern historical conditions, Sinicization of foreign culture was still an effective method for Chinese culture to absorb foreign culture. Moreover, the result, Indigenous Theology, was a rational product of the study of history as well as of the specific historical circumstances. However, the model of Sinicization was not a perfect fit for the indigenization of Christianity. Due to its over-reliance on the historical experience of the Sinicization of Buddhism, which emphasized the thematic position of Chinese culture and neglected the thematic position of foreign culture, Indigenous Theology can be said to have caused some “misreading” or “misinterpretation” of Christian spirit. Its historical limitations and theoretical problems should also be noticed and considered.

It is obvious that Indigenous Theology had a close connection with its Western matrix. However, although it focused on the Indigenization or Sinicization of Christianity, Indigenous Theology did not pay enough attention to the universalization or globalization that modern Western Christianity emphasized and promoted. Moreover, modern Western theology was itself an outcome of a long process of modification and modernization, stretching from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and Religious Reformation several centuries later. Consequently, the operative word was modern; the spiritual character of Western Protestant theology at the beginning of the 20th century became an integral part of the modern capitalist cultural system and played a vital role in the formation and development of the modern spirit.^[25] Meanwhile, although Indigenous Theology responded to the criticism of the scientific and democratic spirit of modernism in the New Cultural Movement, unlike Western theology, it did not have a cultural consciousness of the modern spirit rooted in its own historical generation. As for the issue of modernization in the development of modern Chinese theology, Indigenous Theology never discussed it much, as it claimed the project of providing an ethical and moral foundation for Chinese culture as its main mission. This is clearly shown by the fact that Chinese theologians never even demonstrated awareness of Weber’s account of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the capitalist spirit.

[24] See Fang Dongmei: “The Prelude to Chinese Mahayana Buddhism”, “Chinese Mahayana Buddhism”, Chapter 2, Taiwan Liming Cultural Corporation, 1984.

[25] See James Livingston: “The Enlightenment and Modern Christianity”, “Modern Christian Thoughts” (Volume 1), Chapter 1.

The “Indigenized” Protestant theology and the “Sinicized” Catholic theology both aimed to communicate and integrate the theology of Christianity with Chinese traditional philosophy, and to interpret the theological truth of Christian religion with the language and ideology of Chinese traditional culture. However, there were some subtle differences in their theological practice. This was because the Catholic Church had a unified official theological theory system: namely, “Neo-Thomism”, which served as an obligatory criterion and basis for Chinese Catholics’ theologies.^[26] By comparison, Chinese Protestant theology was free from any such dogma. “Indigenized” Protestantism used the language and thought of traditional Chinese philosophy to expound the belief in and the theological concept of Christianity. At the same time, it was free to become an innovative interpretation and ideological transformation based on the spirit of Chinese culture. In practice, it meant that the basic spirit of Indigenous Theology was not completely consistent with the original Western theological ideas.

The Sinicization of Catholic theology and the Indigenization of Protestant theology totally differed in their historical development. Catholicism did allow native thinkers to use their native language, concepts, and ideological culture to interpret and elucidate the beliefs and ideas of Catholicism; for example, Ma Xiangbo (马相伯) proposed that Catholics in China should “speak Chinese”, “use Chinese to preach doctrines”, and “use Confucian words to discuss sacred matters”.^[27] However, due to the existence of the unified theological philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in the orthodox thought of Catholic theology, the space available to Native thinkers to make modifications and compromises in their interpretation was limited.

It can be seen that the “Indigenization” of Christianity and the “Sinicization” of Catholicism actually represented two different ways of integrating foreign religions with Native cultures. In dealing with the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture, Indigenous Protestantism tended to digest and understand the beliefs and concepts of its theological philosophy using Chinese culture, while Sinicized Catholicism interpreted and guided Chinese culture based on the principle of the supremacy of faith, showing stronger theological consciousness and ideological tendency. Comparatively speaking, Chinese Catholic theology retained more of the inherent features of Western theology, while Chinese Protestant theology was more marked by those of Chinese culture.

V. Evaluation and Review

In the first half of the 20th century, the theoretical practice of Chinese Indigenous Theology served as an expedient measure to meet the challenge and stimulation of the new trend of thoughts. For the sake of spreading Christianity, the Western missionaries revised and adjusted their policies and launched a Christian Indigenization Movement. They paid attention to the position of Chinese traditional culture and turned from cultural conquest and substitution to cultural adaptation and integration. The theoretical construction of Indigenous Theology promoted the in-depth exchange of

[26] See Liu Fangtong, “New Thomasism”, edited by Liu Fangtong: “Modern Western Philosophy”, Chapter 11, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1995, p. 460.

[27] See Zhu Weizheng: “The Collection of Ma Xiangbo”, Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1996.

Chinese and Western cultures, as well as the spread and development of Christianity in China. Consequently, the ideological path of Indigenization and Sinicization of foreign cultures was progressive and rational under specific historical conditions.

Indigenous Theology did not copy Western theology. It emphasized the understanding and interpretation of Christianity based on the standpoint of Chinese culture. Indeed, it was the ideological achievement of Chinese theologians who were committed to the integration of Chinese and Western religious spirits from the standpoint of Chinese culture. It was a creative interpretation and elucidation of the Christian universal religious spirit based on historical experience and the Chinese cultural tradition, as well as a unique theological theory with the characteristics and style of the Chinese culture. While many Chinese intellectuals used modern thought to reject and attack Christianity, Indigenous Theology opened up lines of communication between Chinese and Western culture on the level of religious spirit, expressing an openness on the part of Chinese culture to foreign culture. Considering the significance that Indigenous Theology thus responded affirmatively to new trends of thought, it should also be regarded as an important facet of the development of modern Chinese culture.

Indigenous Theology was the creation of Chinese thinkers engaged in a far-reaching theoretical exploration. In fact, Indigenous Theology was the first page in the story of theoretical systems created by Chinese theologians. However, it should also be noted that due to the restriction and influence of this Indigenized or Sinicized mode of thinking, Indigenous Theology had certain inevitable theoretical limitations and deficiencies. These were determined by the inherent methodology and mechanism of Indigenization. The theoretical construction of Indigenous Theology followed the historical method taken by traditional Chinese culture dealing with Indian Buddhism. However, this theoretical model of Indigenization of foreign culture in China was merely a method to make foreign culture palatable to Chinese traditional culture. Without a thorough reflection and criticism of modernity, the method of Indigenization retained the Sinocentric attitude of medieval China. It remained premised on the foreign culture adhering to the standard of Chinese culture. There was still a long way to go from this position to an equal and reciprocal cultural exchange. Consequently, Indigenous Theology did not take up a viewpoint of mutual interpretation from the standpoint of equal and reciprocal cultural exchange. In other words, Indigenous Theology emphasized the Sinicization of Christianity, but lacked the perspective of examining and criticizing Chinese culture from the theological standpoint of Christianity. In short, due to the restriction and influence of this fixed mode of thinking of Indigenization, Chinese Indigenous Theology failed to respond to the important theme of universalization and modernization in modern Christian theology.

The changes in modern China posed a great challenge to the development of Chinese native theology. The combination of Chinese Indigenous theology and Confucianism encountered a huge theoretical problem in the modern cultural situation. The dominant Confucianism in the traditional society not only lost its position as the mainstream ideology, but faced criticism and eventual abandonment by intellectuals of the time. Due to historical inertia in cultural exchanges, one of the biggest problems in Chinese Indigenous Theology was that it could not treat foreign cultures with the principle and spirit of equality and reciprocity. It one-sidedly emphasized the thematic position of Chinese Native culture but ignored or even obliterated the thematic position of foreign cultures. While

taking Chinese Native culture as the main body to accept and understand foreign culture was an indispensable stage in the process of Chinese and Western cultural exchange, from the standpoint of theological development, it became necessary for Chinese culture to understand and accept the theological consciousness of Christianity.

Due to the emphasis on the Native consciousness of Chinese culture, Chinese Indigenous Theology met with an unavoidable problem in its theoretical construction, a partial distortion of the fundamental spirit and ideological essence of Christian theology. Insofar as the Internal Transcendental spirit of the Confucian tradition and the External Transcendental spirit of the Christian tradition are two types of transcendence developed by human culture, the comparison and integration between them can enrich and deepen the comprehension of the universal spirit of human culture. However, the one-sided emphasis on understanding Christianity based on the Internal Transcendence of Chinese culture while neglecting the foreign External Transcendence led to a certain degree of “misunderstanding” or “distortion” of the universal spirit of Christianity.

Another major theoretical problem of Chinese Indigenous Theology was its lack of modern consciousness. The focus of Indigenous Theology was the ideological connection between Christianity and native Chinese culture. It focused on the abstract doctrines and theoretical principles such as “God”, “Trinity”, and “Salvation”, which were emphasized by traditional theology and transformed them according to the interpretive morality of Chinese traditional culture. Accordingly, the thematic issues of Indigenous Theology were restrained to a very limited domain; as far as those thoughts and theoretical features were concerned, Indigenous Theology still belonged to the category of traditional theology.

The purpose of the mechanism of “Sinicization” was to make foreign religions compatible with the Confucian culture of the country’s guiding ideology. Confucianism aimed to incorporate foreign religions into the orthodox track of serving imperial power. Under the historical conditions of the collapse of the traditional dynastic politics along with Confucian orthodox culture, the mechanism of theological Sinicization was indeed unsustainable. Therefore, in the Republic of China period, Indigenous Theology embarked on a path of integrating with the Kuomintang (国民党)’s official political thought. In this fixed cultural mechanism, it was not only understandable, but also a natural process to turn from Indigenous Theology to “Three-Self” (三自) Theology.

Within the framework of Indigenous Theology, it is difficult to arrange and deal with a series of basic principles and major issues related to modernity, such as democracy, human rights, separation of church and state, science, economic development and environmental protection, etc. [28] This shows that the mechanism of Sinicization was a set of medieval cultural mechanisms. Without further rational reflection and transformation, it was incompatible with the spirit of modernity. Chinese Indigenous Theology therefore failed to address the issues of universalization and modernization for theological theories. This problem has served and will continue to serve as for the wise as a source of concern and enthusiasm for Chinese theologians’ continued exploration and innovation of the Christian religion.

[28] See Chen Zemin, “Chinese Christianity (Protestant) Facing the Challenge of Modernization”, edited by Gao Shining and He Guanghu, “Christian Culture and Modernization”, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1996. You Xilin and Paulos Huang, “The Contemporary Transformation of Educational Mechanism for Knowledge Innovation”, *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* (www.SinoWesternStudies.com), 16-18.

中文题目：
二十世纪上半叶中国基督教神学本色化的理论进路

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摘 要:中国本色神学是二十世纪初迄今中国基督教神学发展中的一条主线,代表了当代中西文化融合和中国现代思想发展中的一个重要方向。可以说,本色神学是中西宗教精神和思想文化相结合、相融合的理论成果,具有浓厚的中国传统文化的思想背景和底蕴。其思想主旨在于以中国传统文化主要是儒家思想和话语来诠释和发挥基督教思想,建构本色化、本土化的中国神学理论。本色神学的理论建构体现出从西方神学以“神人二分”、“神人对立”为根本精神和外在超越的思想型态向以“神人合一”、“神人和合”为根本精神和内在超越的思想型态的嬗变和转换。由于本色神学偏重中国化的历史经验,对于现代神学发展中的现代化、普世化的论题讨论和回应不够,其思想的成就和不足亟待总结和检讨。

关键词:本色化;内在化;文化嬗变