

## 20th Anniversary Special Issue (1995-2015)

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### Essay

#### In Search of “Between Heaven and the Human”

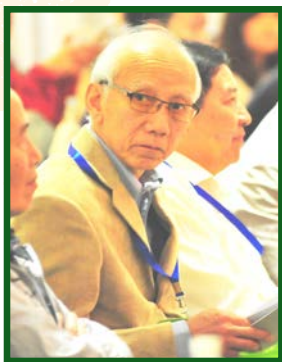
— The Trend of the Sino-Christian Theology Movement

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I’ve never abandoned the understanding of Sino-Christian theology in a “broad sense”, and have always clearly differentiated “Sino-Christian studies” from “Sino-Christian theology”. Thus, I wrote in the “Introduction” to *Sino-Christian Theology Reader* that the writings of the three generations scholars after the Cultural Revolution “are not strictly theological in themselves but about theology or Christian studies.” That is they are studies from outside or external observation. In the same vein I also endorse LI Qiuling’s words: “Many scholars from Mainland China... accept the basic ideas of ‘Sino-Christian theology’. However, they have no intention to construct and develop a kind of theology but use various disciplines to conduct objective studies on Christian faith, doctrines, theology, history and influences on society. They are also concerned with dialogue and exchange between Christian thought and Chinese culture. The promoters of ‘Sino-Christian theology’ share these interests.”<sup>1</sup>

Culture is the essence of human life; society



is the human community. Academic study should produce something beneficial to human life. “Those non-Christian scholars study Christianity and learn “beneficial things” for the sake of resolving questions in Chinese society; this is also beneficial to the Chinese way of life. Those who construct Sino-Christian theology use “the knowledge of natural, human and social sciences to deal with and resolve different issues humans face”. This can also benefit the Chinese way of life. Theology is a discipline for explaining the Christian faith in a systematic way, so that one may better understand and practice it and obtain a meaningful life and even salvation from evil.

In “Cancer and Regeneration” I conducted a study from the perspective of a Christian philosophy of history, pointing out that many Western and Chinese scholars (including me) thought that the classical Greco-Roman culture died in the 5<sup>th</sup> century after it had suffered from cultural cancer for many years. Thereafter a new “Western civilization” was gradually built; its mechanism and spiritual character were in fact created by Christians and thus showed a different quality from “classical culture”. Modern civilization developed from this basis and is still the leading trend in the global village today.

If we regard the use of characters as a sign of human civilization, then the earliest Chinese civilization started with the Yin and Shang Dynasties. The historical evidence indicates that Chinese civilization, like others, embraces some kind of religious faith in its heart, viz the concepts of “God” (上帝 or 天帝). Although in the earliest stage politics emerged from religion and the king was required to



honour Heaven and love his people, a gene for cancer growth was also present. It started from the concept of “the son of the heaven” (天子).

This concept regards the imperfect human as perfect, the non-ultimate as ultimate, the secular as the sacred, so causing the Chinese to dedicate themselves to false destinies and their culture to develop in an unhealthy manner. It has been the intellectual root of numerous disasters in Chinese history. As an important concept in Chinese politics, it has pervaded all Chinese culture. Without treatment, the disease may prove terminal.

Chinese civilization has come to the crossroads. It must take into account differences between its neighbours, North and South Korea and the present and past Japan. It must abandon the frozen concept of “national characters”, and implement an “Opening and Reform Policy” in the intellectual and spiritual realms. Christianity should be studied, reflected on, and absorbed for the sake of renewal and regeneration! Metabolism is vital for life; regeneration of life starts from absorbing new elements and repelling old ones, as the *Book of Poetry* reads, “Chou as a state had long been known. And Heaven’s decree at last was shown.” (周雖舊邦，其命維新！) If Chinese civilization is to survive, be revived, and develop, it must embrace a perspective from the global history of civilization. No other way is available!

In the three decades after 1949 Sino-Christian theology and even Christian studies were taboo. Until 1976 when Mao Zedong passed away, it was not possible for anyone even to mention this topic. In the 1980s the *Dictionary of Religion* (宗教詞典) and *China Encyclopedia* (中國大百科全書) did not present Christianity negative. Since the 1990s, when the Sino-Christian theology movement in a narrow sense emerged, the number of academic articles, monographs, translation, journals, tool books, etc. has increased dramatically,<sup>2</sup> and its influence has spread academic, educational, cultural, and even some research and political sectors. It is a miracle, like the growth of the Christian church! It happened in a time when political pressure was sometimes felt and the screening of publication was always present!

Nevertheless, as YOU Xilin wrote, “Sino-Christian theology emerged with the modernization of Mainland China in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since Christianity and Protestantism in particular has a profound relationship with modernity, China developed a positive attitude towards Christian culture even more than that in the period between the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty and the declaration of People’s Republic and, in fact, even more than in

the post-modern West.”<sup>3</sup> As Daniel Yeung mentions, it is important that Sino-Christian theology can “enhance the dialogue between Christian thought and Chinese cultural traditions in a contemporary social context”, and “make use of Christian resources” to communicate with Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Marxism on a whole range of issues -nationalism, capitalism, social ethics, liberation of women, and the ecological crisis, and so on.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, XIE Zhibin said, “Christianity may provide a constructive agenda for these complicated public issues from a specific perspective and position. This approach may let Christianity and theology have a chance to provide services for society and culture beyond the walls of the church.”<sup>5</sup> I would like to add that this academic approach will start from outside to inside, from “Christian cultural studies” to “Christian studies” and then to “Sino-Christian theology”; but the influence is from inside to outside, from “Sino-Christian theology” to Chinese Christianity and then Chinese culture. In other words, the developing trend of Sino-Christian theology will ultimately contribute to the regeneration of Chinese culture.

A rapid review of Christianity’s reception in China, shows it enjoyed hospitality in the Tang and Yuan Dynasties and encountered conflicts at the end of the Ming and the early Qing Dynasties. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to late 20<sup>th</sup> century it was prohibited in certain periods and had to go underground. Nevertheless, it has been reborn! We are now living in a period of contradictions and hardships like those of the Roman Empire, and we may at least hope that Sino-Christian theology, which has been born again from the ashes, shall have an abundant life!

(This is an adapted version of the speech delivered at the 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium of Sino-Christian Studies. The original version can be found in *Logos & Pneuma* 44 [2016].)

1. LI Qiuling, “‘Sino-Christian Theology’: A Brand New Type of Theological Movement”, in HE Guanghu & Daniel Yeung eds., *Sino-Christian Theology Reader*, Vol.1 (HK: Logos & Pneuma, 2009), p. 12.

2. ISCS has published 570 articles by 256 scholars in *Logos & Pneuma*, 158 translated works and 61 monographs in the last two decades. Most of the scholars are from Mainland China.

3. YOU Xilin, “Modernity and the Origin of the History of Sino-Christian Theological Thought in Contemporary China”, *Logos & Pneuma* 41 (2014), pp. 63-64.

4. Daniel Yeung, “Interdisciplinary, Universal and Contextual Sino-Christian Theology”, *Institute of Sino-Christian Studies Newsletter* Spring 2013.

5. XIE Zhibin, “From ‘Multidisciplinary Studies’ to ‘Interdisciplinary Studies’: An Overview and Prospect for ‘Across Disciplines’ Character of Sino-Christian Studies”, *Logos & Pneuma* 41 (2014), pp. 122-123.



# 20th Anniversary Activities



## 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium on Sino-Christian Studies

The 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium of Sino-Christian Studies was successfully held by ISCS and the School of Humanities, Tongji University from 27 to 30 Nov., 2015 at Shenzhen Airland Hotel. It is one of a series of activities to celebrate ISCS's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. From Hong Kong and the Mainland, about 70 specialists of the Human and Social Sciences participated in this conference. According to the statistics, 18 female and 51 male participants came from 34 institutes in 18 cities, which basically covered ISCS's cooperative academic network. The proportion of junior scholars was especially increased this year: 12 scholars were 55-years-old or over and the other 57 scholars were under that age. Another group of numbers shows that 34 professors, 17 associate professors, 17 assistant professors and 1 postdoctoral researcher presented over 50 papers from departments of literature, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, etc.



Director Daniel Yeung of ISCS and Dean SUN Zhouxing of Tongji co-hosted the opening ceremony and gave the welcome speeches. Then, hosted by Prof. ZHUO Xinping, director of the Institute of World Religions (Chinese Academy of Social Science), the key-note speeches were given by Prof. HE Guanghu (Renmin University of China) and Prof. LAI Pan-chiu (Chinese University of Hong Kong) respectively titled "In search of 'Between the Heaven

and the Human': the Macro-history, Macro-paradox and Macro-trend of 'Sino-Christian Theology' Movement" and "Sino-Christian Theology and Soteriology".

On the two-day agenda there were in all 15 sessions. In each session 3-4 scholars presented 20 minute papers. The next 45 minutes was for an appointed commentator and open discussion. The commentator was supposed to have read the papers beforehand and prepared questions to get the debate going. The symposium had set four general topics: 1. discourses of Christianity in the transformation of the state; 2. interdisciplinary Christian studies; 3. the subjectivity and community of Christian studies; 4. Christian studies in the global context. The papers submitted could also be classified into the following disciplines: sociology of religion and anthropology, religious dialogue and comparative theology, history and literature of Christianity, biblical studies, patristics, contemporary theologies, and Sino-Christian Theology. Throughout the symposium, the participants discussed the topics on an equal footing in a warm and friendly manner. The goal of academic exchange was achieved.

In the midst of the event, the 6<sup>th</sup> Tao Fong Literary Prize award ceremony was held. Prof. WU Fei from Peking University was awarded the Paul Hsu Prize (for academic work) for his monograph *Spiritual Order and World History: Augustine's Termination of Western Classical Civilization*, while Prof. CHEN Zemin and his team were awarded the Reichelt Prize (for academic translated work) for his translation of *A History of Christian Thought* by Justo L. Gonzalez. Prof. ZHUO Xinping was invited to be the award presenter.

In the closing session, Prof. ZHUO Xinping and Prof. YANG Huilin (Renmin University of China) as representatives of the working committee of the Prize gave inspiring summary talks, and afterwards all the participated scholars were requested to provide suggestions for the future of ISCS. It was widely agreed that ISCS had accomplished fruitful and solid work during its 20 years, as exemplified in this wonderful symposium. As a well-established academic exchange platform, it has strengthened communications and friendships. ISCS thus constitutes a milestone for the Sino-Christian Theology Movement.

(By CHEN Yuehua, Zhejiang University)



## 20th Anniversary Banquet

About 70 scholars attended the banquet held on 29 Nov., 2015 to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ISCS as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium of Sino-Christian Studies. Former visiting scholars and students, Tao Fong Scholarship students, the participants of the Roundtable Symposium, the translators of Logos and Pneuma Press, **Prof. Lai Pan-chui delivered a speech at the banquet**



Colleagues of ISCS



The banquet gathers scholars of all ages



Colleagues of ISCS Tongji Centre

the partners of joint publications and the colleagues of ISCS Tongji Centre were invited to take group photos before the dinner.

Prof. LAI Pan-chui, the chairperson of the academic committee, delivered a speech at the dinner explaining that ISCS has attracted so many scholars because it provides an excellent platform for their research interests. A video was screened showing photos of ISCS's twenty years.



Participants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Roundtable Symposium in 1996



Participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Roundtable Symposium in 1998



Participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Roundtable Symposium in 2005



Participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium in 2010





Participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> Roundtable Symposium in 2012



Visiting scholars



Academic Committee



Tao Fong Scholarship students

## The 6<sup>th</sup> Tao Fong Literary Prize

Since its establishment in 1995, ISCS's mission has been to promote academic studies of Christianity and develop theology in the Chinese context. The Institute set up the Tao Fong Literary Prizes (including Paul Hsu Prize and Reichelt Prize) in 1999 as recognition for original academic achievements by Chinese scholars in deepening and broadening their studies on Christianity.

There were many nominations to the 6<sup>th</sup> Tao Fong Literary Prize (2015). After a strict evaluation the renowned experts on the panel awarded the Paul Hsu Prize to Prof. WU Fei's monograph, *Spiritual Order and World History: St. Augustine and The End of Classical Western Civilization*. The Reichelt Prize went to the translation of *A History of Christian Thought* led by Prof. CHEN Zemin. Prof. WU obtained his Ph.D. in anthropology at Harvard University and is currently teaching in the Department of Philosophy at Peking University. Prof. CHEN Emeritus taught at the Institute of Religious Studies at Nanjing University and was the Vice-president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.



The awards of the 6<sup>th</sup> Tao Fong Literary Prizes were announced on 29 Nov, 2015 during the Roundtable Symposium for the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ISCS. We had the honor of having Prof. Wu at the

conference to accept the prize and to deliver a speech of acceptance. Unfortunately, Prof. Chen was not able to attend the ceremony due to his high age. His prize was delivered to him by Prof. XIE Zhibin, our research fellow in Mainland China.

## Paul Hsu Prize Acceptance Speech

**WU Fei** Professor, Department of Philosophy,  
Peking University



I feel most honored and grateful that ISCS this year awarded the Paul Hsu prize to my book: *Spiritual Order and World History: St. Augustine and The End of Classical Western Civilization*.

Since the 1990s, Christian studies have developed enormously in China and today they stand out as a significant cultural and academic phenomenon. ISCS has played a pivotal role in this development. Both myself and my close friends have received the most cordial support and help from ISCS in our exploration of Christianity. In the 1990s when China's intellectual development in the humanities was in a stagnant state, it was ISCS, under the