

**Toward a Contextual Theology for the Chinese –  
A Case Study from Translation and Interpretation of the Greek Logos and Chinese Dao  
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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...

John 1:1, 14

Faith...is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin<sup>[1]</sup>

**Purpose Statement**

This paper is a case study of the translation and interpretation of the Greek logos to Chinese dao. The transformation of dao in the Chinese worldview demonstrates the engagement of Chinese philosophical reasoning and the Christian faith, dao thus forms a bridge which gives a prolegomena to a contextual theology for the Chinese.

## **(I) Introduction – Clear a Place to Feel at Home**

Western philosophers have ‘cleared a place’<sup>[2]</sup> for the basis of Christianity’s intellectual expression by bridges in their cultural contexts. The underlying assumption for this paper is that ‘systematic theology from the West’<sup>[3]</sup> is the intellectual expression of the gospel contextualized in its particular historical and cultural context. Asian (and Chinese) believers have ‘inherited’ the gospel from two millennia of theologizing in western church. Together with the blessing of this wealth of theological legacy comes an encrypted and often unrecognized Enlightenment tradition and theological method. There is urgency for systematizing a contextual theology for the Chinese. The process begins with ‘clearing a place to feel at home’.

The paper aims only at finding a prolegomena (way in) to a systematic theology for the Chinese. No attempt is made here to suggest a structure or pattern for a contextual systematic theology. The Chinese dao has become a bridge, a way in to contextualizing the gospel. ‘Way’ and ‘dao’ is synonymous in the Chinese language. Dao is discussed here as a case study to identify the way into the issues of faith, reason and revelation in Chinese context. Self theologizing of the Chinese occurs in this process of contextualization. Systematic theology gets articulated over the period where the Gospel takes roots in the transformed worldview, and its intellectualization of a philosophy of life. I suggest that the process follows three guiding principles, translation, indigenization, and pilgrimage.<sup>[4]</sup> The principles will be subsections for the paper.

Chinese Christians are longing for ‘a place to feel at home’<sup>[5]</sup> in their culture. This longing is expressed by the many recent publications from China’s theological academia seeking for theological reconstruction.<sup>[6]</sup> The current context is a plethora of religious competitors and non-religious ideologies.<sup>[7]</sup> Will Chinese believers allow their thinking to be subjugated by the dominance of philosophical analysis by ‘culture Christians’<sup>[8]</sup>? Missionaries and theologians engaging the Chinese are attempting to cultivate an authentic exegetically based, biblically founded, and historically interpreted Chinese theology.<sup>[9]</sup> The young Chinese Church is wrestling to understand theology that was first inherited by the Jews, then nurtured in the soil of the Anglo-Saxons, and subsequently placed in a Greco-Roman pot.<sup>[10]</sup> Aesthetic as it may be, we do not want to get a Chinese ‘bonsai’ theology, truncated of the power of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

## **(II) The Word of Theology (Theo-Logos) – Logos has camped in My Place.**

The written revelation witnessing to historical revelation came to humanity in the languages and cultures of the Hebrews and later the Greco-Roman world. God’s self revelation has come to be expressed by ‘way of inspiration’<sup>[11]</sup> in the words of the bible. Divine revelation did not occur in a vacuum, but within the contexts of a people and their cultural expression. Central to this revelation is the Incarnate Word Himself, who became flesh and dwelt among humanity in the context of the Greco-Roman world. How has theology camped itself in the Chinese place?

### *Theology Serving As Spectacles*

Reasoning<sup>[12]</sup> of the ‘intelligent living out of an ultimate relationship with God the Creator though Jesus Christ’<sup>[13]</sup> has been coined Christian theology. Chinese Christians wrestle to understand and be understood from the spectacles<sup>[14]</sup> (in the various socio-cultural contexts) of theologizing done by two millennia of faithful work. Theology was done from varied lenses; from the Apostles to the Fathers, from Patristic Creeds to Reformation Confessions, from the mixed bag of articulation by claimants of ‘evangelical theology’ to the entourage of subjectivists with often difficult to recognise mutations of theology.

### *Theology Serving as Sieve*

This gift from the chronicle of doctrinal development from Patristic to modern evangelical theology not only serve as ‘sieve’ for testing and straining out many mistaken notions about God, but also offers many warnings not to choose ‘the broader ways’ other than the Way of discipleship. The study of dao as used in the Chinese bible shows it to be the bridge to discipleship.

### *Theology Serving As Speech*

China has seen unprecedented growth of the number of Christian converts in the last few decades, quite similar to the period soon after Pentecost as described in Acts 2.<sup>[15]</sup> Some have described China in the post Deng era as entering into the situation resembling the first century expansion of Christianity. However, the church in China is ‘one mile wide but an inch deep’. Unprecedented growth simultaneously brought desperate urgency of contextual theology serving as speech to give biblically based verbal resources to articulate the contents and implications of the faith. Multiplication of heresies, as seen in the history of churches in the western world is occurring. This demands the crystallization of two millennia of carefully fought theological debate from the western church, translated and contextualised to the words and meanings of the Chinese, and accommodated to answer their questions.

The issues of contextualisation of the gospel are complex. It is partly related to the language of systematic theology with its syntactic rules of both formal and ‘informal’ logic.<sup>[16]</sup> Contextual systematic theology unfortunately marches behind the heels of imperialism, while also serving a people wrestling with nationalism. Some chose to reject such a thing as ‘systematic Chinese theology’ on the basis that it is a western framework of abstract logical<sup>[17]</sup> thinking unfit for the more cyclical Chinese mind.<sup>[18]</sup> Frederick Ferre also suggests that “theological language relies on the formal logical constants to provide a rigid framework of operations...without this common framework in formal logic, the language of systematic theology could neither be credited with any rational rigor nor even be understood”.<sup>[19]</sup> The necessity of some kind of formal logical framework explains why most Chinese seminaries in the East still continue to have few options available other than to embrace systematic theology from the eyes, sieve, and words of the likes of Berkhoff or Erickson.<sup>[20]</sup> On one path, one is met with cognitive dissonance in working through the word, His purpose, and the way to live. On another path, he is inevitably walking in the footprints of the intellectual imperialists. Contextualising the gospel in China also requires the intellectual expression of our faith in a non-linear, non formal ‘logic’.

Nevertheless, the Chinese equivalents of Irenaeus, Athanasius and Augustine are working. How is contextual systematic Chinese Theology being written? How does it serve as spectacles, sieve and speech for doxology of God expressed in their own unique contexts? How is the Gospel indigenised? How is Chinese language used for theological expression? This paper raises more questions than answers. We begin however with a study of the translation principle.

### **(III) Contextualisation of the Gospel and Dao – The Translation Principle**

Andrew Walls draws this analogy, ‘politics is the art of the possible, translation is the art of the impossible’<sup>[21]</sup>. By the grace of God, the impossible is being done. Despite the structural, cultural, and philosophical obstacles faced in contextualising the gospel, Christian faith has been found and rests in the divine act of translation (Jn. 1:14). God chooses to reveal Himself through our language and culture in his action of salvation for mankind. Indeed, when Word became flesh and dwelt among us, God’s speech lived with humanity. Jesus spoke our language<sup>[22]</sup>, lived

in our culture<sup>[23]</sup>, and exists in our time. Jesus in incarnation, a divine act of translation, becomes the author of our faith. Word became flesh is the ultimate missionary act. Word that is from the beginning translates Himself as human flesh. Word (Logos) is spoken and lives with humanity.<sup>[24]</sup> Taking the case study of the translation and interpretation of logos to dao, this paper explores some issues in the articulation of authentic Chinese systematic theology.

#### *From the Hebrew dabhar to Greco-Roman logos*

In the Septuagint, Logos is used to translate the Hebrew word dabhar. In [Hebrew](#) psychology, a man's dabhar is regarded as in some sense an extension of his personality and further as possessing a substantive existence of its own.<sup>[25]</sup> Hence the use of Logos to refer to the creative word of God relates with the Jewish mind. However, the translation of meaning did not stop there.

In the prologue of John's gospel, the most important component of meaning of Logos may well be Dabhar Yahweh, the Word of the Lord.<sup>[26]</sup> Usage of Logos however does not only link with the Old Testament use of dabhar or with rabbinical teaching concerning the Torah. The context of translation of Dabhar Yahweh to logos communicates with the indigenous Greek philosophical tradition but effectively purging the original Greek logos of its pagan significance.<sup>[27]</sup> The setting of logos in John's prologue does not allow much of the original Greek significance of impersonal logos to be heard.<sup>[28]</sup> John's gospel brings the existing concepts of the supreme Godhead to a strong, almost crude word that stresses the reality of Christ's manhood that is immanent (John 1:14). The load of this translation also brought Justin and other early Christian writers to what a period of 'antithesis, qualified'<sup>[29]</sup> where Greek philosophy become in some sense understood as preparation for Christ. Christ becomes the criterion of truth within the Greco-Roman heritage. Though early Greek readers have missed many important things about Dabhar Yahweh, the word logos did not mislead them about their salvation.<sup>[30]</sup> The Hermeneutical exchange did not occur uni-directionally. Use of logos doctrine by the Greeks places a hierarchy on the nature of God. This is evidenced in the writings of Justin, Origen, Clement and Tertullian. Logos is thought to be God of a weaker strain, closer to matter than spiritual. Packer points out that the Greek logos thus only served as a bridge, noting that after John's prologue, there is no further mention of logos. This realization begs careful analysis of the Chinese dao. Discerning where the bridge ends and where there is risk of making the context become the text. In the Chinese word dao, the meaning has been transformed and the term became part of the spiritual and moral language of the Chinese people.

Walls highlights a still more daring translation done informally by Jewish Christians. Acts 11:20 tells of unnamed believers from Cyprus and Cyrene who spoke to Greeks in Antioch about "the Lord Jesus". Jesus, previously presented as Messiah (Savior of Israel), is given the title Kyrios in the Hellenistic-pagan context, the name given for cult divinities.<sup>[31]</sup> This has huge implications for contextualizing the gospel. We shall discuss in the following section the different nuances of dao and potential misleads.

#### *From the Greco-Roman Logos to Chinese Dao*

John Calvin in his commentary on John 1 points out his wonder at what had induced the Latins to translate logos as Verbum, which is closer in meaning to the Greek word rhema. Calvin writes, 'But granting that they had some plausible reason, still it cannot be denied that Sermo (the Speech) would have been far more appropriate. Hence it is evident, what barbarous tyranny

was exercised by the theologians of the Sorbonne who teased and stormed at Erasmus in such a manner, because he had changed a single word for the better.<sup>[32]</sup> Erasmus has changed the word Sermo for a better, Verbum.

A similar battle was fought over use of dao or speech to translate the word logos in Jn 1.<sup>[33]</sup> The word speech in Chinese is relatively free from religious connotations and literally translates as the ‘spoken word’. On the contrary, on the cultural-philosophical soil of China, Dao breathes of Daoism.<sup>[34]</sup> Laozhu was the sage of Taoism. Dao has however infiltrated all of Chinese life as evidenced by dao-de as the word for ‘morality’, dao-li as the word for ‘reason’, and dao-lu as the word for ‘way or direction’ Additionally, the word for ‘heresy or evil’ is xie-dao. Christianity has to battle an ethnocentric people with high moral ideals derived through millenniums of ancient culture and history. The religiosity, morality and ethics of the Chinese people are intimately twined with understanding of dao. Dao has occupied the minds of Chinese philosophers long before the bible, or the incarnation or resurrection event.

Dao is the Chinese theistic view of God. Hence Chinese Christians need to be aware that with all the desire for ektypal knowledge<sup>[35]</sup> of God, to follow the ‘analogy of faith’ and refining Chinese philosophy, there is the constant threat of ‘relativizing biblical teaching by reference to axioms and absolutes’<sup>[36]</sup> from Dao before it becomes ‘God breathed’<sup>[37]</sup>. The task of Chinese theology demands an engagement with the worldview of dao so that it becomes ‘captive’ fully to Christ, hence ‘liberated’ to become the ontological, soteriological, moral, ethical, sociological, and political center of all things.

#### *Dao Pointing to the Basis of Wisdom*

The pagan Greek logos, as used by Herakleitos around 600 B.C., designate the divine reason or plan which co-ordinates a changing universe.<sup>[38]</sup> Stoa later used it as a term of psychology and metaphysics to signify the divine power of function by which the universe is given unity, coherence and meaning (logos spermatikos), which like seed, gives form to unformed matter. Man is made in accordance with the same principle, and is himself said to possess logos, both inwardly (logos endiathetos, reason), and outwardly, expressed as speech (logos prophorikos).<sup>[39]</sup><sup>[40]</sup> Prior to New Testament usage of Logos, the term already has rich associations with divine communication or revelation. The pagan logos has a sophia tradition that had long existed. Laozhu’s writing speaks of wisdom in creation, a changeless principle which he could not name. For short of a greater or better word, he calls it Dao. Section XXV of the eighty one sections’ poetry and sayings communicates Dao and relationship with creation.

“Before creation a presence existed,  
Self-contained, complete (born before heaven and earth),  
Formless, voiceless, mateless (standing alone),  
Changeless,  
Which yet pervaded itself (ever present and in motion)  
With unending motherhood.  
Though there can be no name for it (I do not know its name),  
I have called it ‘the way of life.’(Dao)  
Perhaps I should have called it ‘the fullness of life,’”<sup>[41]</sup>

Legend has it that Laozhu was born 604 B.C. Western Christian philosophers would have considered Laozhu as a pagan philosopher like Herakleitos. Liang Ch’i-chao (1873-1929) puts it helpfully to clarify meaning of Chinese philosophy: ‘The literal translation of Chinese academic

thought as philosophy is rather misleading. If we borrow the term, it should be qualified as 'philosophy of life'. Chinese philosophy took for its starting point the study of human beings, in which the most important subject was how to behave as a man, how one can truly be called a man, and what kind of relationships exists among men'.<sup>[42]</sup> Part III of the paper will attempt to tackle the relational aspect of 'philosophy of life' in the Chinese mind.

Greek logos, despite pagan philosophy (philo-, 'love of', sophia, 'wisdom'), with all the baggage of Greek wisdom tradition and their implications on creation motif, is baptised, informed, and transformed for use in scriptures. Dao does not refer itself to wisdom but points to presence of 'a fullness of life', who is self contained, complete, and changeless. Dao according to Laozhu is the creator of all things. Dao, which is subsequently used in the bible, like the use of Greek logos, has similarly picked up the broken pagan pieces and transformed for the purposes of His reign. We see usage of the doctrine of creation in teaching wisdom in the Old Testament. Bruce Waltke helpfully highlights the pattern of creation motif mentioned in the book of Proverbs. Two poems depict the creation of the world (3:19-20; 8:22-31). Seven proverbs deal with creation of human beings (14:31; 16:4, 11; 17:5; 20:12; 22:2; 29:13). Augur's poem (30:2-4) uses the 'doctrine of creation as a premise for teaching wisdom'.<sup>[43]</sup> 'All the references to creation are totally consistent with teachings elsewhere in the bible about creation. The (Proverbs) poems also depict creation in imagery and expressions drawn from pagan myths without borrowing their theology... Apart from this faith, the sage's arguments based on creation lose much of their cogency.'<sup>[44]</sup> Contextual theology has to beware of wisdom and creational motifs in the original Chinese dao.

Apart from faith in the pre-existent Creator, Laotzu's philosophy (of life) and seeking of wisdom does not lead to 'fullness of life'. Pagan philosophy is however not discarded. Just as fragments from Egyptian fabric and Canaanite gold is used in the construction of the Tabernacle and the ark of covenant, God takes up our broken pieces for His worship. Laozhu's Dao can be used to illustrate 'creation ex-nihilo, therefore standing against all forms of pantheism'<sup>[45]</sup>. This poem of Laozhu also affirms the 'utter and unqualifiable dependence of all things'<sup>[46]</sup> upon a transcendent God. It also testifies to a name of God that Laozhu did not know of, but for far short of a greater word, Dao was used. Dao later became miraculously used in the translation of John 1:1. The philosophical attachment without its pagan ideologies<sup>[47]</sup> is helpful for comprehensibility for the Chinese mind, leading to revelation of the truth. Dao becomes flesh, and lives even with the Chinese language and culture, the 'speech' to it and transforming it, points all to the way (dao) to 'fullness of life'.

#### **(IV) Dao as Prolegomena (way in) – The Indigenisation Principle**

The vice chairman of the TSPM<sup>[48]</sup>, Rev. Matthew Cheng says that 'the objective of theological construction in China is for Christian theology to be contextualised with Chinese culture or the incarnation of Logos into China.'<sup>[49]</sup> Rev. Cheng in reference to Logos echoes Hwa Yung, that 'translation is rooted in incarnation.'<sup>[50]</sup> Regardless of whether Rev. Cheng understood the implications of what he says in the context of a sociological theology of China, the discussion leads us to Walls' indigenizing principle:

"He [God] does not wait to tidy up our ideas [our way of reasoning and making meaning, even from the stance of political-sociological idealism] any more than He waits to tidy up our behaviour [highly significant for a virtue philosophy where dao as way to an ideal, virtuous life is the objective for man] before He accepts us sinners into His family... The impossibility of separating an individual from his social relationships and thus from his society leads to one

unvarying feature in Christian history: the desire to “indigenize”, to live as a Christian and yet as a member of one’s own society, to make Church... ‘A place to feel at home’<sup>[51]</sup>  
Laozhu and other Chinese philosophers have formed the Chinese through their culture and history. A Chinese Christian who comes to faith remains influenced by the culture he calls home. Dao serves as a bridge for a way in to indigenisation of the gospel.

### **(V) Dao on a Journey – The Pilgrim Principle**

Walls also points out the dialectic of a pilgrim principle in tension with the indigenising principle.<sup>[52]</sup> Applied here, Greek logos went on a journey and became transformed to a biblical understanding of logos as Word that is Incarnate in humanity. Chinese dao similarly cleansed from its pagan ideologies became identified and universalised with people and things outside Chinese history and culture. The Chinese four word Idiom, dao-chen-ro-shen (meaning Word became flesh) is a universal thought that binds all Chinese Christians to the story of Israel; to a Messiah, a Branch from the root of Jesse (Is 11:1), descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fulfilment of life that dao speaks of became grafted onto the Vine, linked to the people of God of all generations, nations and transcending time. We can see the expression of dao on this journey in the Chinese language not previously used by Laozhu: chuan-dao (evangelism), zhen-dao (witnessing), and xing-dao (live out the faith). Dao having a meaning of way is also pre-loaded with the idea of a journey, giving fruition of Christians as people of the way, pilgrims on a journey.

In the book of Acts, the disciples were described as ‘followers of the Way’ (Acts 9:2, 19:9, 22:4, 24:14). The essence of Christian way is the all-embracing and life giving relationship with the living Christ.<sup>[53]</sup> The way of discipleship is taken up in the Chinese dao, the transforming relationship with the incarnate Way Himself.

Dao when used as a verb is an act of finding, knowing, and meaning. It involves work. Dao when used as a noun is a path, or a word spoken. The two meanings are inseparable. This helpfully avoids the Barth-an and Bultmann-ian debate when Bultmann tries to stress on the Easter faith of Jesus (Word) from the Historical Jesus (Word made flesh) who lived among us. Dao as both verb and noun does not separate the word and work of Christ. Chinese dao gives mission the empowering ministry of the Word of God. Word is kerygma (proclaimed), didache (taught), and paraclesis (related in living and working as an advocate).<sup>[54]</sup>

I began this study with suspicion on the accuracy of translation of logos for dao, wrestling with my own Chinese-ness and ‘unconverted’ parts of me. Lost (could not find the way), to understanding Logos. Leonard Outerbridge’s book, The Lost Churches of China makes me wonder if we had made a mistake in Dao of the bible:

“ It is a sorry commentary on Christianity that although it produced scholars who translated the bible faithfully by adapting the ideas of ‘Shangti’ from Confucius and the idea of ‘Tao’[dao] from Laozhu, yet the use of these terms by the Church has not been accompanied by the same degree of appreciation that the translators had for the teachings of the great sages who first received them...The terms used for God in the Chinese version of the Bible are not the terms used by Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, or Jesus. They are thoughts of Confucius and Lao-tzu are woven into the Chinese bible to give meaning to God and Jesus... unless the Christian humbly and loyalty acknowledges its debt to China’s sages for the terms used for God and the Son Incarnate, found in the Chinese translation of the bible, it is guilty of theft of the noblest ideas of Lao-tzu and Confucius while attempting to supplant them in their own land.”<sup>[55]</sup>

Leonard will be glad to know that the lost churches of China are finding the way. Christians are learning to be humble and loyal to acknowledge every culture and people's sages. The Incarnation itself is translation in the ultimate sense. The noble ideas of Laozhu have been taken captive to the purposes of Christ. Inspiration is in translation indeed!

## **(VI) Toward a Systematic Theology for the Chinese**

Current theological reconstruction in China may largely be the attempt at reconstruction of a socio-political religion compatible and sustainable for Chinese socialism in the demise of Marxist ideology.<sup>[56]</sup> Formation of authentic Chinese contextual theology and the systematisation within its 'philosophy of life' framework of thinking is however the process of continuous conversion of a culture and its people. Intellectualisation of Christian faith by culture Christians and those within Chinese academic disciplines of philosophy and religious studies will ultimately come under the judgement of the final context, the biblical context. Christian doctrine for the Chinese will be the endeavour to systematise within the framework of circular logic and still preserving orthodoxy. This is beginning to shed further understanding to concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation.<sup>[57]</sup>

Chinese history can only make sense under historical theology as understood from the history of humanity. This is as illustrated from Adam to Abraham or from the sayings of Solomon to the sayings of Laozhu. Kingship and dominion is understood from Books of Kings, Samuel, and Judges, and also from the dynastic history of China. Theology is studied from the apostleship of Paul to the fiery ventures of John Sung, Wang Mingdao or Watchman Nee.<sup>[58]</sup> It is relevant to note that Wang Mingdao never wrote a book or a track approximating systematic theology. His sole concern throughout his ministry was the practicalities of living out the Christian life.<sup>[59]</sup> Watchman Nee's theology was centred on the pursuit of spirituality, while John Sung's was centred on evangelism.

Humanity's fall is studied from Augustine's Confessions to the likes of China's Confessions.<sup>[60]</sup> Christian philosophy can be studied from Thomas Aquinas's Summa Contra Gentiles to Yuan Zhi-ming's<sup>[61]</sup> attempts at answering as the 'Aristotle of China'. Chinese theologians are carving the way (dao) for knowledge that ran outside Christian civilisation and learning. Yuan's story presented 'disturbing characterisation of God and humanity'<sup>[62]</sup> but cannot be disengaged. Formation of a systematic Chinese theology needs to continually engage the Chinese worldview, transforming it in the process.

A systematic theology for the Chinese mindset needs to study the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, man, salvation etc. from a more relational and circular manner than predominantly logical or rational. Theology of God the creator, God the Saviour, and God's people here and after is wrestled in the process of translation, indigenisation while recognising our pilgrimage as His elect.

### *The Way the Truth and the Life of Dao (the Word made flesh)*

Jesus is the way (read dao in Chinese bible) and the truth and the life. John 14:6 prepares the Chinese mind. This way (dao) is firstly the way of wisdom, a discerning praxis, which leads to the good and fulfilled life. The Chinese dao became a bridge to link the Chinese mind to the way of Jesus. The way of true wisdom is obedience to Jesus Christ, the true God 'and' true Man.<sup>[63]</sup> The way of Jesus is paying attention to the principles He enunciated from His incarnation, atonement and resurrection. A way is cleared for contextualization of a Christian philosophy accessible to the Chinese; hence the need for writing a contextual systematic theology.



Secondly, this truth is the dao of righteousness.<sup>[64]</sup> Dao-li, means ‘right reasoning’ or thinking truthfully. The ‘way (dao) of righteousness gives a coherent moral vision’<sup>[65]</sup>; this gives reason for the Chinese dao-de (morality). The ‘biblical concept of truth is lodged in the larger concept of righteousness.’<sup>[66]</sup> The concept of the contrast of the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith (Rom. 3: 21, 22) can thus be grasped from the dao of righteousness. Indeed the Chinese concept of truth (zhen-li), is locked onto right reasoning (dao-li) that flows out with dao-de (morality, right living). Bruce Milne’s systematic theology handbook captures it, ‘Know the Truth’ (Jn 8:32). There is no knowing except under the Truth. All reason (dao-li) is lodged in righteousness, the only basis of morality (dao-de). Knowing (dao) and Truth (zhen-li which dao-de (‘morality’) derives) belongs together. Thirdly, this life is the dao of community, an embodied identity. Sin, best understood as lost-ness from truth and relationship with God and men brings the Chinese to repentance and belonging to the abundant life of communion. Communion is in worship of the Triune God. Dao of community calls for scriptural holiness,<sup>[67]</sup> an understanding of ecclesiology,<sup>[68]</sup> and the Christian life.<sup>[69]</sup>

## **(VII) Concluding Thoughts**

Formation of a hub of Chinese theology will lie in ‘the fundamental biblical context [which] is worship [doxology of the Triune God]. It is the only context in which we can recover the depth of the gospel.’<sup>[70]</sup> A way (dao) has been cleared for Chinese Christian philosophy. Dao became the gospel in translation. The dao of the Chinese is both ‘at home’ (indigenous) and also ‘taken on a journey’ (pilgrim). This case study of translation and interpretation of logos and dao illustrates some of the processes for a contextual Christian theology, an inspiration and revelation from God. Pieces of the native culture are the raw materials. This paper is merely a glimpse at the Spirit’s work in Chinese theology, it is only an asking, seeking, and knocking (Lk. 11: 9) at the prolegomena. I wonder at the power of the Gospel at work inside! The strong man in the house (Lk. 11: 21-26) has already been bound. Blessed are the Chinese (as in all man) that hear the word of God and obey it (Lk. 11:28).

A place is cleared for Chinese theology. Theo-Logos camped with the Chinese. Contextual Chinese theology is a place to feel at home and also to identify the people of God in pilgrimage. The gospel is contextualising in China, bearing its fruit in intellectual affirmation with forming an authentic systematised theology. Its fruit flows out as apologetics, ethics, missions, liturgy, spirituality and practical theology. It will not be a bonsai. It is a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season (Ps 1:3), it is in-grafted branches by the grace of God (Rom 11: 22-24), it is branches that abides in the true vine (Jn 15: 1-8).

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## End Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: Institutio Christianae religionis.; Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846, 1997, III, ii, 7.

<sup>[2]</sup> This phrase is used by Packer in class.

<sup>[3]</sup> With the limitation of this paper's length, I make the generalization of 'west' as the sum total of the many varied expressions of Christian theologies across time and place. I am also convinced of Packer's understanding that systematic theology is the hub of theology.

<sup>[4]</sup> The three principles are adapted from Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History- Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002, part 1.

<sup>[5]</sup> This is title of book by F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot about Independent Churches in Africa written 1967, cited in Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p 7.

<sup>[6]</sup> Discussions in English language could be found in recent issues of *China Study Journal* and *China Theological Review*. Study of theology has become an officially recognized assignment in 'post-Communist' China. Chen Zemin comments that intellectuals have undertaken translation and writing on religion and theology thus are creating a fever of religious interest. There has also emerged a new group of religious scholars who are open, competent and

interested in religion, although most are not religious believers themselves. They have 'broken out of bondage of slavery to book learning and being dogmatic doctrinaire. They study and observe religion objectively and scientifically from the academic perspectives of sociology, psychology and history of religions.' (*Chinese Theological Review*, vol.13, p 42).

<sup>[7]</sup> Various 'mutant' Christian like theologies are flourishing in China. Hence, in the words of Millard Erickson, 'careful theological reasoning and affirmation is even more important' (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p 13).

<sup>[8]</sup> The term 'Culture Christians' was popularized by one of the most prominent "Culture Christians", Liu Xiaofeng, who was later instrumental in the development of the academic study of Christianity in China. Cited from "Culture Christians on the Chinese Mainland", *China Notes*, vol. 29, no. 2/3, Spring and Summer 1991, New York 1991, pp. 628ff..

<sup>[9]</sup> According to Packer, exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology is fed into systematic theology, which yields the fruit in apologetics, ethics, missiology, liturgy, spiritual theology and practical theology.

<sup>[10]</sup> Bosh quotes Pieris in the call for "inculturation-fever", a desperate last moment bid to give an Asian façade to a church that failed to strike roots in Asian soil, because no one dares to break the Greco-Roman pot. (See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p 478). I have applied the lesson from how the Jewish story is filtered in the Greco-Roman world and retold to Chinese from western missions.

<sup>[11]</sup> The Chinese bible, I believe is inspired in both the *theopneustos* (Warfield's concept), and instrumentality (Barth). I use way of inspiration with both meaning of approach and *dao* (meaning way). The study of *dao*, I propose, witnesses to both the concepts of God-giveness and its instrumentality.

<sup>[12]</sup> Packer calls this 'the distinctive human activity in analyzing, inferring and testing...' (Packer, *Sys. Theo.* xv.1).

<sup>[13]</sup> Packer, *Systematic Theology*, v.1.

<sup>[14]</sup> The three purposes of theology, 'spectacles, sieve, and speech' used by Packer is adapted here to illustrate the issues with contextualising the Gospel.

<sup>[15]</sup> Aikman, 'China's Jerusalem', *Jesus in Beijing*, pp 179-192 says that at Wenzhou, 12-15% of the local population was Christians. Aikman discusses the self consciousness of Wenzhou Christians about their reputation as 'China's Antioch' and the vision of the 'Back to Jerusalem' band. Aikman however also highlights how the charismatically oriented pastors preaches a 'once-saved-always-saved' theological magic that could ensure Christian salvation once repentance and baptism had taken place, no matter what heinous things the believers did subsequently. Subsequently, Calvinist based reformed theology introduced by Stephen Tong 'destroyed' the leadership structure of the largest Wenzhou house church network. This situation illustrates the urgency of Chinese Theology.

<sup>[16]</sup> Ferre, *Language, Logic and God*, p 152.

<sup>[17]</sup> The word 'logic' does not exist in Chinese vocabulary. "*Luo-ji*", the Chinese word used today is a direct transliteration from English and importing the meaning of 'logic'.

<sup>[18]</sup> Hwa Yung summarizes the different 'ways of thinking' between Westerns and Orientals. He cites Kaplan on the spiral (oriental) verses the linear (Anglo-Saxon) logic (Kaplan, Robert. 'Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education.' *Language Learning*, 16: 1-2, 1970, pp 1-20). Hwa Yung also substantiates from Nakamura and Perry on the differing ways of knowing (*Mangoes or Bananas?* pp 79-82).

<sup>[19]</sup> Ferre, *Language, Logic and God*, p 152, emphasis mine.

<sup>[20]</sup> Majority of textbooks of systematic theology used in Asian seminaries are still the contemporary western texts or translated volumes of the well respected western authors.

<sup>[21]</sup> Andrew F. Walls. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History – Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll; New York, 1996, p 26.

<sup>[22]</sup> I am generalizing 'language' here to refer to verbal human communication, a sum expression of 'word' part of our relating to one another. Underlying the discussion on *Logos* and *Dao* is belief that God talks to men in human language that is cognitively meaningful as well as analogical. The Incarnation of God, the words of Jesus is reality of verbal revelation.

<sup>[23]</sup> Andrew Halls suggests (public lecture at Regent College, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2003) that theology is the by-product of cultural conversion. If so, I venture to propose that Christ in living human culture sets the way and becomes the very center of all cultural conversions. Incarnation is translation, says Walls (ref. Walls, p27). Hence I go on to say that the process of contextualization of the gospel is Incarnation occurring in translation. As Chinese Theology is being written there is the process of its cultural conversion.

<sup>[24]</sup> Word and work is not separate. The Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith is the same person. The eternal Word is the flesh that walked and worked as and with humanity.

<sup>[25]</sup> Wood & Marshall *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.). InterVarsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.

<sup>[26]</sup> Walls, 'Translation Principle in Christian History', *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p34.

<sup>[27]</sup> John's use of *logos* in John 1:1 strips the original Greek *logos* of stoicism and its control of the rational. From a foreign concept to the Greek, *logos* became the point of contact between Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy though still oozing with Platonism for many subsequent centuries. I am suggesting that a similar process has taken of the Chinese translation *Dao* for *logos* as a similar contact of Chinese philosophy and Christian doctrine.

<sup>[28]</sup> *Logos* in Hellenistic mind is an impersonal, philosophical principle, a concept never considered as a personal being who would become involved with the things of this world, but the idea that functioned merely as an abstraction necessary to account for the order evident in the universe (Sproul, R. *Following Christ*. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, IL, 1996).

<sup>[29]</sup> This phrase is taken from Packer, *Sys. Theo.* vii.1. In this period, from the stance of Platonism, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen and others wrote to qualify the opposition to Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Gnosticism and mystery religions. This is period where a philosophical two way communication took place before the gradual synthesis and appearance of Western "Christian Philosophy". Chinese theology must also engage at the philosophical battle ground for the Chinese mind against Chinese Gnosticism, Stoicism, Daoism, Confucianism and pantheism.

<sup>[30]</sup> Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, p34.

<sup>[31]</sup> In a personal conversation with Dr. Packer, he helps by pointing out that *Kyrios* as used in the LXX points to Yahweh.

<sup>[32]</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ According to John*. A New translation from the Original Latin by William Pringle. Vol. 1, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI. p 14.

<sup>[33]</sup> The popularly accepted version of Chinese bible used by Protestants in China today is the Union version (This is translated from Hebrew and Greek, the current publication of Amity foundation in China, *Bible 2000 Exhibition*, collaborative publication, eds. Frair Lionel Goh and Rev. Lee Chee Kong, Studium Biblicum Hong Kong, Hong Kong Bible Society and Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2000, pp 60, 76). The union version translates *logos* as *Dao*. It is speculated that Robert Morrison's version first published in 1823 translated *logos* as *Yan* possibly to avoid usage of way with its connotations with Laotzu and Daoism (According to discussions with James Taylor III). *Yan* means 'speech' or 'spoken word'; it however does not carry the meaning of creation by the Word. *Yan* is the common speech of man only. Witness Lee, who claimed himself equal with God, produced a '*Recovery Version*' which translates John 1:1 as *Hua*, a more defined meaning closer to 'speech'. The '*Recovery Version*' bible is a persecuted version used by a contemporary cult group in China, called 'Eastern Lightning'. *Hua* usage makes the human speech equivalent to the word of God. Another heresy begins.

<sup>[34]</sup> Yuan Zhiming in two recently published Chinese books (*Laotzu verses the Bible*, Cosmic Light Publishers: Taipei, Taiwan, 1990 and *Laotzu, Original Text and Explanation*, Cosmic Light Publishers: Taipei, Taiwan, 1991) aims to be a Christian apologetic tool for the Chinese, however, the books despite the attempts at identifying the dao of the bible, oozes with Daoist ideas.

<sup>[35]</sup> Packer, *Sys. Theo.* xvi.1

<sup>[36]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>[37]</sup> I refer here to the inspiration in translation in transformation of *Dao* to communicate the eternal incarnate Word.

<sup>[38]</sup> Strong, J. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible*. Woodside Bible Fellowship: Ontario. 1996.

<sup>[39]</sup> Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. 1996. *New Bible dictionary*, 3rd ed. InterVarsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.

<sup>[40]</sup> See notes on the *logos* doctrine for explanation on the roots, usage, weakness and opposition to the idea in the Patristic discussion (Packer, *Sys. Theo.* xx.1).

<sup>[41]</sup> Laozhu, *Dao De Zhing: XXV*. This English translation by Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life*, Capricorn Books: New York, 1944, p40. In attempt to draw out the meaning of the original Chinese text, I have added in italics from another translation by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English, *Lao Tsu -Tao Te Ching*, Vintage Books: Random House, New York, 1972.

<sup>[42]</sup> Cited in Hwa Yung, p 25.

<sup>[43]</sup> Bruce Waltke, Old Testament Theology, class notes, lecture 9, Regent College, Fall 2003,

<sup>[44]</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>[45]</sup> Milne, *Know the Truth*, pp 90-96, section on 'The Work of Creation'.

<sup>[46]</sup> *Ibid.*, p 94.

<sup>[47]</sup> Application of *Dao* in the bible does not take the reference point from Laotzu's feelings (as in Schleiermacher) or his ethical resolutions (as in Braithwaite), rather the analogical understanding of *Dao* that is personal, transcendent, Jesus Christ the Incarnate God.

<sup>[48]</sup> The Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) is an administrative entity designed to ensure that all the activities of China's officially approved protestant churches conform to Beijing's political and social objectives. The other broad categorization of evangelical believers in China is grouped under 'house churches'.

<sup>[49]</sup> Accessed from <http://www.christianityinchina.com/>, Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>[50]</sup> Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p62.

<sup>[51]</sup> Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p 7.

<sup>[52]</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 8,9.

<sup>[53]</sup> Michael Green and Paul Stevens. *New Testament Spirituality*. Eagle, Guildford: Surrey, 1994, p 26.

<sup>[54]</sup> Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, p 195-201. The relational aspect of the work of the Word is particularly helpful in the culture of 'guanxi' (relationships) in China.

<sup>[55]</sup> As quoted by Arthur Wright in *Studies in Chinese Thought*, The American Anthropological Association. Vol. 55. Pt. 2, memoir no. 75, December 1953, p 293.

<sup>[56]</sup> See the writings of Bishop Ting and the publications of the three-self church and China Christian Council.

<sup>[57]</sup> For example, *homo-ousion* is within closer grasp for the Chinese thinking of Ying/Yang philosophy.

<sup>[58]</sup> These are torches within Chinese church history that testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in indigenization and spread of the gospel in China. I have laid out their lives under light of the Spirit's work with Paul and the missionary bands in the early church.

<sup>[59]</sup> Lam Wing-hung. *Wang Mingdao and the Chinese Church*. Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1982 (cited in Tan Loe-joo 'The Relevance of the Anabaptist Vision of the Church for the Chinese Church in Singapore', unpublished paper for Regent College, Dec. 2002).

<sup>[60]</sup> *China's Confessions* (China Soul Production, 2000, available from [www.chinasoul.org](http://www.chinasoul.org)) is a six part video that studies in a documentary manner the history of China's plight and fall from the relationship with Tian (God) with the desire to return to find the Savior of the world.

<sup>[61]</sup> Chinese books, *Laotzu verses the Bible*, Cosmic Light Publishers: Taipei, Taiwan, 1990 and *Laotzu, Original Text and Explanation*, Cosmic Light Publishers: Taipei, Taiwan, 1991.

<sup>[62]</sup> Curtis Chang, *Engaging Unbelief*, p 95. Chang talks about a 'captivating strategy from Augustine and Aquinas' (subtitle of Chang's book). He explains Aquinas' Summa Contra Gentiles as response to epochal challenge of Islam, especially Falasifa's appropriation of Aristotle. In the similar vein, Daoism's appropriation of this world and gods becomes Yuan's challenge. It is thus not surprising to find disturbing characterisation of God and Humanity in the process of dialogue with Daoism. Laozhu's *dao* is becoming captive to the Way, the Truth and the Life.

<sup>[63]</sup> I refer here Bloesch's exposition in *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 1, p 120-142.

<sup>[64]</sup> Note that another word: *yi*, the Chinese word for 'righteousness' stems from Confucian philosophy. *Yi* has a moralistic meaning of 'righteousness' different from the Christian understanding of 'righteousness' as a right relationship with the Triune God.

<sup>[65]</sup> Anderson, *The shape of Practical Theology*, p242.

<sup>[66]</sup> *Ibid.*, p242.

<sup>[67]</sup> So the contents of Bloesch, Vol. 2 Chapter III.

<sup>[68]</sup> So the contents on Church in systematic theology.

<sup>[69]</sup> So the contents of the nature of Calvin's work on the 'Christian life' ( III. vi-x).

<sup>[70]</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, p8.