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Scriptural Contextualization: Understanding Chinese Philosophical Narratives

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXTUALIZATION:
UNDERSTANDING CHINESE PHILOSOPHICAL NARRATIVES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Whether one is overseas or within their own home culture, when working cross-culturally scriptural contextualization is necessary to reduce confusion. When developing Chinese leaders, differing world views have caused conflict and confusion especially concerning an understanding of Scripture and the person of Christ. Westerners teaching, working, and living in a Chinese context participate in either widening or narrowing the philosophical gap between the East and the West concerning their understanding of Scripture. My hope is that Western leaders will see the value in alternative interpretations and understanding of the Scripture based on Chinese foundational narratives. Misunderstandings of cultural differences have led to conflict, heresy, and racial bias. In Section 1, Scriptural contextualization is explained in the identified three foundational Chinese narratives. First is Confucian Hierarchy and the influence that it has on leadership models in family and work as well as the church. Secondly, the concept of shame both individually and communally is explored. Lastly, Chinese Pragmatism with an emphasis on those actions the end justifies within a communal ethic. Understanding that these three influences the Chinese communities and their worldview opens one up to begin to see Scriptures from a different perspective.

In Section 2, the three foundation Chinese narratives are viewed through the lenses of Chinese historical and political challenges. In Section 3, I look at how Westerners can begin to change some of their preconceptions when the Chinese narratives are understood. Within this are also alternative views and values when viewing particular Scripture verses and themes. Sections 4 through 6 explain the five-part video series that helps introduce culture, common understandings, misunderstandings, and

dominant narratives that will assist a Westerner working with and/or teaching in a Han Chinese context. These videos will help one reflect on the importance of Scriptural contextualization and Chinese cultural adaptability.

SECTION 1:
THREE CHINESE FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVES

Introduction

When the West interacts with China, the potential for miscommunication and misstep is great as cultures clash. China is developing into an influencing power as Chinese are active in Africa, immigrating to the West, and involved in Global politics. When interacting with the West, special attention is needed to limit confusion and misunderstandings; particularly with the gospel. Differing world views between China and the West, traditionally seen as philosophically opposed, can lead to misunderstandings. We can see that leadership, theology, and Christology are viewed differently across cultural lines, particularly from West to East. Many well intended individuals from the West come to China to teach or train, who speak with authority concepts resulting in more confusion than clarity. When a teacher from the West crosses cultures without understanding the context that they are entering, then introduces Western concepts as Christian ones, misunderstandings and confusion often result. When developing Han Chinese leaders, differing world views have caused conflict and confusion, especially concerning an understanding of Scripture and the person of Christ.¹

This dissertation is using an ethnographic approach to study the interactions and misunderstandings between Chinese and Westerner leadership development. The goal of

¹ 'Han Chinese' consist of 92% of the global Chinese population. This author acknowledges that there are many minority cultures that will not be represented within the scope of this dissertation. However, for simplicity and clarity, from this point forward this author will use 'Chinese' in place of 'Han Chinese'.

this ethnographic study is to assist those entering the Chinese culture and beginning to work with and develop Christian leaders in a cross-cultural setting.

Ethnography is a research method that looks at how a particular culture understands the world by looking at its social relationships. It is the primary mode for studying social and anthropological interactions within a particular culture.² Sarah Pink says ethnography is,

an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing experience, culture, society and material and sensory environments... As we encounter each other, we see our diversity — of background, race, ethnicity, belief — and how we handle that diversity will have much to say about whether we will in the end be able to rise successfully to the great challenges we face today.³

Ethnography is a methodology usually involving participant-observation within a community.⁴ Muriel Saville-Troike agrees stating, “Ethnography is a field of study which is concerned primarily with the description and analysis of culture.”⁵ It involves investigating not only other cultures but one’s own community as well. Many ethnographers try utilizing a comparative technique, between several cultures, to overcome some of the problems of objectivity.⁶

The result of ethnographic studies can be seen as one utilizes techniques either outside one’s context or culture in trying to find paths for understanding either one’s own culture or another’s. For example, if one incorporates tools from the business world

² Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Ethnography. Series in Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

³ Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), Kindle Edition, 34.

⁴ Harrison, *Ethnography*, 5.

⁵ Muriel Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication an Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003), 1.

⁶ Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication*, 3.

without recognizing the cross-cultural significance, then one makes the same mistakes as those that move from one country to another without recognizing one culture is not synonymous with another. Failure, depression, frustration, and sometimes brokenness can occur because of the desire to look for an easier route.⁷ This is where ethnography is important.

True ethnographers find ways not to impose their own ideas, but rather to understand the culture they are focused on. In our world, we often assume we understand the contexts and even the questions that those in our realm of influence have. Author of *The Ethnographic Interview*, James P. Spradley said, “I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?”⁸ Understanding the cultural setting one is surrounded by allows an openness to learning and a receptiveness to seeing one’s own hinderances to that learning. My goal with this dissertation is to take an ethnographic look at the differences between Chinese and Western leadership development. The church could look very different if leaders could take the time to study and know the culture of the communities that one is placed in.

⁷ Saville-Troike, 30, 43, 256.

⁸ James P. Spadley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 34.

Culture and Contextualization

Therefore, in cross-cultural and contextualized leadership development, there needs to be ongoing critical thinking about what is taught and how the concepts generated are lived out in ways that enhance both Christ and the culture. Geert Hofstede noted that “[w]hen we speak of the culture of a group, a tribe, a geographical region, a national minority, or a nation, culture refers to the collective mental programming that these people have in common; the programming that is different from that of other groups, tribes, regions, minorities or majorities, or nations.”⁹ These collective ideological frameworks indeed cause each culture to react differently to new situations or knowledge. Fear arises when cultures seem contradictory to one’s own belief system.

Dean McFarlin and Paul D. Sweeney wrote, “Culture has a pervasive impact on human resource practices, strategy formation, conflict management, and leadership. Culture is a complex concept. The collective programming of the mind of a particular culture can have roots in...events, geography, shared traditions, economic developments, language, and religion.”¹⁰ With this idea of culture in mind, one begins to see the importance of contextualization, especially concerning the gospel as it fits into our understanding of the world. It becomes easy to revert back to one’s own culture and not take the time to value another’s. Contextualizing the gospel means being open to let God mold and shape our understanding of the Scriptures within each cultural setting. Crossing cultures without understanding both the potential cultural pitfalls and the baggage each of

⁹ Geert Hofstede, “Motivation, Leadership, and Organization: Do American Theories Apply Abroad?” *Organizational Dynamics* 9, no. 1 (1980): 45.

¹⁰ Dean B. McFarlin and Paul D. Sweeney, *International Organizational Behavior: Transcending Borders and Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 66.

us carry will create unnecessary problems and could lead to avoidable distractions, especially when sharing the gospel message of Christ.

Crossing the culture barrier can have long lasting ramifications regardless of context. People react differently to new knowledge or ideas and are sometimes afraid when cultures seem contradictory to their own belief system. Manlio Del Giudice, et al. notes, “Cultures reflect sets of values and beliefs into which members are socialized. Culture may also affect the meanings that managers attach to issues that confront them.”¹¹ Whether in a business or church context, understanding the divergent points between cultures opens a conversation to avoid misunderstanding.

High and Low Contextualization

There are two different types of communication: high and low context. High context communication is nuanced and sophisticated; this is sometimes called indirect communication. G. J. Shepherd calls this type relational communication.¹² Messages are often implied and not plainly spoken. It is mainly non-verbal and conveyed in subtle ways, such that meaning is often missed from someone outside their cultural context.¹³ The focus is on relationships between those communicating while emphasizing the

¹¹ Giudice et al., “Cross-cultural Knowledge Management Fostering Innovation and Collaboration inside the Multicultural Enterprise,” *Innovation, Technology, and Knowledge Management*, no. 11 (New York: Springer, 2012): 2.

¹² G.J. Shepherd, “Communication as Influence: Definitional Exclusion,” *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 203-204.

¹³ G.Z. Liu, “Best Practices: Developing Cross-Cultural Competence from a Chinese Perspective,” *Multicultural Aspects of Counseling Series*, no. 21 (2005): 65-86.

harmony, respect and cooperation within a society.¹⁴ Alternately, low context communication is deeply rooted in classical Greek argumentation.¹⁵ Therefore precise, simple, clear, and direct communication is desired. The messages received are taken at face value with very little hidden or layered meaning. What is said is what is meant.¹⁶ G.Z. Lui argues that, “Chinese styles of communication were different than those from the United States... Chinese communication belong to high context [communication], in which case speakers, to a large extent, did not express their opinions directly, and they expected others to understand the meanings by reading between the lines or interpreting through their body language.”¹⁷ Dong Qingwen and Kenneth Day state the Chinese have a high context, nonverbal way of communicating that uses, “implied meanings nonverbal cues, indirect statements and symbolic language. In addition, they are comfortable with a considerable amount of silence.”¹⁸ The long history of close families and relational nature of the Chinese culture lends itself to a communication style where there is not a need to repeat information that has acquired over time. T. Fang says,

It assumes a shared understanding between communicants. The emphasis on nonverbal communication is largely tied to the emphasis on long-term relationships and the importance of face and social harmony. The pursuit of harmonious relationship is seen in the effort not to offend, break relationships, nor upset the order of society by using indirect or nonverbal cues.¹⁹

¹⁴ Qingwen Dong and Kenneth Day, *Relational Orientation to Communication: Origins, Foundations, and Theorists*. University of the Pacific. 09-Qingwen-Dong-Kenneth-D.-Day.pdf. 110

¹⁵ Ming-Jer Chen, “Transcending Paradox: The Chinese ‘Middle Way’ Perspective,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 19, no. 2 (2002): 179-99.

¹⁶ Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 39-40.

¹⁷ Liu, “Best Practices,” 65-86.

¹⁸ Qingwen and Day, *Relational Orientation*, 205.

¹⁹ T. Fang, “Understanding Chinese Culture and Communication: The Yin Yang Approach,” in *Global Leadership Practices*, ed. Bettina Gehrke and Marie-Therese Claes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 171-187.

For example, a Chinese businessperson will rarely say ‘no’ in response to a direct suggestion. He or she might state that more discussion or further study needs to take place. On the same note, Chinese use open-ended questions to help those around them from being forced to give a definite ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ A higher value is placed on ambiguity and tact.²⁰

High context communication is deeply rooted in all aspect of Chinese cultural philosophies and beliefs, including Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucian ancestral worship. It is not the scope of this dissertation to explain in great detail how this takes place, however it is important to briefly and simply explain some aspects of how these three Chinese philosophies contribute to high context communication.

Buddhism has a holistic view of life and therefore communication is interconnected. For Buddhists interconnected communication only becomes meaningful when in relation with others in a unifying way.²¹ This harmonious way of speaking is the basis for high contextual communication. G. Chen and J. Chung state, “The intuitive style of communication influenced by Buddhism rejects the Western linear or abstract thinking pattern.”²²

This desire for harmony can be seen throughout the culture. Chuang and Chen state, “traditional Chinese culture was mixed by a group of different philosophical thoughts, which were partially and mutually contradictory towards each other. Among

²⁰ G. Chen and J. Chung, (1994). “The Impact of Confucianism on Organizational Communication,” *Communication Quarterly* 42 (1994): 93-105.

²¹ Rueyling Chuang and Guo-Ming Chen, “Buddhist Perspectives and Human Communication”, *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 73.

²² Chuang and Chen, “Buddhist Perspectives,” 73.

them, the most important ones were Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism), and Buddhism”²³ Fang pointed out that Chinese culture was mainly composed of three philosophical traditions, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. He stated that, “Confucianism dealt with human relationship, [Daoism]Taoism dealt with life in harmony with nature, and Buddhism with people’s immortal world.”²⁴ Even though each of the three mentioned beliefs can be seen as separate philosophies and beliefs, there has been a syncretism that has taken place within the culture.

High context communication can be seen in this countrywide aspiration for harmony and unity. Confucius’ fourth principle of *Zhongyung* 中庸 (the middle way) has been set as a foundation for disputes and conflicts.²⁵ When one avoids the extremes and seeks the middle, then people are slow to shame and that brings about a harmony that is desired. For the most part, Chinese tend to seek compromise rather than arguing. Lao Tzu (considered the founder of Daoism) promoted harmony through nature. He emphasized that humans should seek benevolence and harmony. This Daoist concept of Yin/Yang (or balance of light and shadow) when applied to relationships can be equated with Confucian and Buddhist philosophies of the middle way. Daoist and their path of virtue and goodness reflects the way Chinese communicate with one another.²⁶ Even within Confucian ancestral worship there is a belief to find a path that brings honor and respect

²³ Chuang and Chen, 35

²⁴ T. Fang, “Negotiation: The Chinese Style,” *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* 21, no. 1 (2006): 50-60.

²⁵ Qingwen and Day, 115.

²⁶ Qingwen and Day, 115.

to all.²⁷ With much of the Chinese culture, this longing for harmony is rooted in the way Chinese have learned to communicate with one another.

Another aspect of high context is action-oriented communication, or non-verbal communication. The ritual sides of what takes place at the Buddhist temple, Daoist temple, and even within one's home concerning as the worship of ancestors is practiced, are all an expression of this high contextual communication. All involved in each of these rituals will understand the depth of need, the purpose of the ceremonies, and the unity it brings those that are involved in these practices. There is so much that is being said through these rituals without words being expressed. "Man's most secret words resound to Heaven as loudly as thunder, and his most secret actions are seen as plain as lightning."²⁸ Non-verbal high context communication unites the Chinese people in a cultural way that can be difficult for an outsider to comprehend. As one could surmise, this can create much confusion and frustration when communicating across the line between high and low context cultures. Stepping into any cross-cultural setting without understanding both the potential cultural pitfalls and the cultural baggage each of us carry will create unnecessary problems and could potentially lead to avoidable distractions; especially when sharing the gospel of Christ.

In this dissertation, I seek to assist Western leaders in contextualizing Christian leadership development by identifying three foundational Chinese narratives that influence their worldview. These narratives are 'Confucian hierarchy', 'Shame', and 'Chinese Pragmatism'. The term 'Foundational narratives' describes ideological

²⁷ "Confucianism and Ancestral Worship. (Illustrated.)," *The Open Court* 1906, no. 10 (1906): 601, <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ocj/vol1906/iss10/3>.

²⁸ "Confucianism and Ancestral Worship. (Illustrated.)," 615.

frameworks. These frameworks are the philosophical and cultural stories and influences that colors each person's worldview; including one's understanding of Scripture. When Christianity is preached and taught, contextualization needs to take place to demonstrate cultural sensitivity. When discipleship and evangelism are being taught, special attention needs to be paid to contextualizing the methods for each culture. Contextualization demands that all read the Scriptures through cultural lenses.²⁹ Contextualization must take into account the historical and political backgrounds of a culture; this will be explored here within Chinese culture. We will also look at effective ways to contextualize the gospel while developing Chinese leaders. It is my desire that through an understanding of these narratives, Western leaders can begin to reshape their own worldview and develop, through dialogue and humility, a path forward. As we seek the ultimate authority, we cannot turn away from the messy cultural and spiritual issues leaders need to address. Though humanity has found and struggled to keep these cultural barriers in place, I believe God desires bridges to cross the gaps created between cultures. When developing Protestant leaders among the Chinese, understanding the dominant narratives of the culture can alleviate some of the confusion when Western and Eastern philosophies interact. God desires cross-cultural leadership development as long as we critically analyze our own interpretations, agendas, and culture.

²⁹ E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 15.

Culturally Conflicting Narratives

If Westerners understand even some of the Chinese foundational narratives that influence the Chinese worldview, they can avoid some misunderstandings and open conversations between equals in pursuit of God's truth. As one navigates the wealth of culture, history, and philosophy that makes up civilization, one must take care to be at times the teacher and at others the student.³⁰ Foundational beliefs influence culture, and diving into those beliefs helps one begin to move toward greater clarity.

Chinese view the world through several narratives. Due to limited scope and space, only three of these narratives were chosen to begin the journey of understanding Chinese culture. Once again, these major narratives are 'Confucian hierarchy', 'Shame', and 'Chinese Pragmatism' (or the belief that the end result is what matters most). These are not comprehensive but will help bridge the philosophical and theological gaps created when Western and Eastern cultures interact.

In a recent training with Chinese students, Pastor Bob began teaching what it means to be a leader within the church. He described the role of a pastor and definition of a church using Western models and ways of thinking. To describe one that was truly committed to their call, he used verses talking about leaving father and mother. Using Luke 14 :25-27 to emphasize what this teacher saw as true submission; students were challenged to a choice: commitment to God or to family. Pastor Bob then took time to talk about what he called 'the Jesus model:' a team-based model. As one of the students, Lu Feng, heard this teacher from the West speak about what it means to be a pastor, he

³⁰ Jerusha Hull McCormack and John G. Blair, *Thinking through China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 10.

began to question his own commitment. His family was a priority to him, and he did not realize that his call from God would conflict with his idea of filial piety. Lu Feng wondered how some of the principles being taught could be incorporated into the small groups he led. Even though he did not understand the reason behind some of the steps that the teacher told him to do, he attempted to incorporate them because Bob was the respected teacher and pastor. The result was that Lu Feng introduced elements into worship, discipleship training, and family life that were based in a Western reading of the Scriptures. He spoke against traditional house church models with flexible meeting times and in small locations claiming if they did not have a designated pastor, a specific location, and meet on Sunday morning, they were not a church. His abandonment of extended family responsibilities left a brokenness with siblings and parents. With the alienation of his family and the Westernization of his church, Lu Feng became very discouraged as he sought to build what he was taught was the church.

Confucian Hierarchy

Harmony over Conformity

When a Chinese philosopher was asked why he thought the East and West had developed such different ways of thinking, he responded, “because you had Aristotle and we had Confucius.”³¹ Although this Chinese scholar was joking, we do see that Confucianism had a strong influence upon Chinese society. Confucius, who lived from 551 to 479 B.C., was less a religious leader than an ethical philosopher. His concern was

³¹ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2019), 29.

with the proper relations among people, which in his system were hierarchical and strictly spelled out. Each member had an obligation to one another, as well as a role that produced harmonious order for the betterment of the whole society.³² Creating a stable and orderly society was one of the keys to Confucian philosophy. This pull toward unity can be seen in the Chinese creation of musical form. In ancient days, Chinese monophonic music reflected this concern for unity. Richard E. Nisbett tells us, “Singers would all sing the same melody and musical instruments played the same notes at the same time. Not surprisingly, it was the Greeks who invented polyphonic music, where different instruments, and different voices, take different parts.”³³

China’s desire for harmony should not be confused with conformity. Nisbett emphasizes this with a cooking metaphor: “A good cook blends the flavors and creates something harmonious and delicious. No flavor is completely submerged, and the savory taste is due to the blended but distinctive contributions of each flavor.” So true harmony is where all are acknowledged without the individual superseding the others. Like the music being played or the spices used to cook, each is contributing but not spotlighted.

Confucius says that “[b]eing a good family member reverberates through society. A person who is good to their parents, siblings, and children will be good to others as well.”³⁴ He wrote about a world and specifically a society that epitomizes an understanding of order that utilizes three types of hierarchal systems. The first is between master and servant in which the ruler of the land had ultimate authority over all things.

³² Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought*, 15.

³³ Nisbett, 7.

³⁴ Nisbett, 8.

The second is in family between brothers. Upon the father's death, the eldest brother would assume responsibility and take on the role of head of the household. The third system states that the man of the house is the ruler.³⁵ Confucius also taught that the group takes precedence over the individual, or individuals serve the needs of the group first to create a harmonious society. For a society to function well, a social hierarchy with a designated authority figure needs to be in place. Social hierarchy is apparent in every aspect of Chinese society, from state leader organization to the organization of business leaders. A worker needs to understand one's place in society - understanding that they exist within and have a responsibility to the group. With the proper harmony and unity, according to Confucius, there will be prosperity. Confucius argues, "When a country is well governed, poverty and a mean condition are things to be ashamed of. When a country is ill governed, riches and honor are things to be ashamed of."³⁶ For Confucius, true societal harmony equates to a perfect society.

Harmony and Anxiety

Sociologist Hofstede characterizes China as a long-term-oriented nation that scores low on individualism saying,

Nothing is more characteristic of China than her system of social organization, resting as it does on the family and the clan...Moreover, the social organization within the family group tends not only to influence but actually to shape the larger organizations of government and trade into which its members pass as they assume their hereditary responsibilities. The patriarchal family, in which

³⁵ Confucius, *Confucian Analects: The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean*, ed. by James Legge (Newburyport, MA: Dover Publications, 2013), 11-32.

³⁶ Confucius, *Confucian Analects*, 29.

unlimited power over each member is possessed by the head, is congenial to autocratic government.³⁷

Chinese are comforted with the sense of order and structure this system provides. Nisbet argues, they are not

...helpless pawns of superiors and family members. On the contrary, there would have been a sense of collective agency.... Chinese society made the individual feel very much a part of a large, complex [system that] served as a guide to ethical conduct. Carrying out prescribed roles—in an organized, hierarchical system provides stability and harmony within a community.³⁸

In a communal society, a person tends to do the same as their family. If individualistic cultures like to spot the creative and stand-alone aspects of a person, then community-minded cultures are about harmony. The Confucian culture emphasizes the great self (大我 dawo), over the individual self (小我xiaowo). For Chinese, there is tension between seeing the good for the larger community (the great self) and their own success (small self).³⁹ This tension is encouraged so the population will focus on harmony at the risk of shame.

Society's sense of strength and anxiety is closely tied to the perception of the strength of its leaders. With change and the loss of a strong leader at the helm of the country or the family, Chinese would feel like their boat was set adrift without direction. When tension in the society arises, it is redirected to those that might want to publicly shame the society. When a strong leader can unite the country toward a particular point of

³⁷ Henry T. Hofstede, *Living Issues in China* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 62.

³⁸ Nisbett, 6.

³⁹ Huajun Zhang, "Individuality beyond the Dichotomy of 'Small Self and Big Self' in Contemporary Chinese Education: Lessons from Hu Shi and Liang Shuming," *Frontiers of Education in China* 8, no. 4 (2013): 540-58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03396990>.

frustration, the anxiety can be alleviated.⁴⁰ Edwin Friedman, Margaret Treadwell and Edward Beal claim that, “Chronic anxiety might be compared to the volatile atmosphere of a room filled with gas fumes, where any sparking incident could set off a conflagration, and where people would then blame the person who struck the match rather than trying to disperse the fumes”⁴¹ In a society whose focus is on harmony, potential ‘sparks’ of disruption can lead to lack of confidence by those that follow. Therefore, this push for harmony reduces the country’s anxiety, thus providing a feeling of global stability which instills trust and pride in their country. This pride is seen as honoring the ‘great self’ and reduces the potential for shame in front of the world. Thus, in many Asian countries, a strong leader is seen as an effective leader.

Contrasting East and West

The Western way of thinking has its roots in Greek analysis: loosening, tearing apart ideas, and breaking them down into bite-size categories. These analytical structures have invaded the way we think about the individual and how an individual function. In this culture, the individual and individual’s accomplishments are glorified. The leader is the one that rises to the top in opposition to everyone else.⁴²

As Western thinking is renowned for its emphasis in analysis, Eastern or Chinese thought is noted for its intertwined and embracing nature. Ming-Jer Chen said, in

⁴⁰ David Bankurski, “‘Super-Strong Leadership’ of Xi Jinping: China’s New Science of Sycophantology,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/06/24/super-strong-leadership-xi-jinping-chinas-new-science-sycophantology/>.

⁴¹ Edwin H. Friedman, Margaret M. Treadwell, and Edward W. Beal, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 58.

⁴² Ming-Jer Chen, “Transcending Paradox: The Chinese ‘Middle Way’ Perspective,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 19, no. 2 (2002): 179-99.

“Confucian philosophy, the set of skills needed for managing across spheres (self, family, community, country) is fundamentally the same: if a man is capable of managing himself, he will also be able to manage his family, and if he is capable of managing his family, he will also be able to manage his business.”⁴³ Interconnectedness in life is at the heart of Chinese philosophy. Similarities can be seen in the Pauline Epistles: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5). If one is to be a church leader, one must first be able to manage one’s own household.

So, the Chinese approach to life is a more holistic and communal way. The ultimate foundation of this philosophy is the interdependency of relationships and how each piece fits into the greater whole. Although there are some exceptions, for the most part, China’s social structure is set up to honor those that honor the community. This can be seen in Chinese characters as well. An example is ren (人) which means person. The character actually means humans or humanity but could also mean core or seed. This idea that a person is the core of society means that no person exists except in a relationship with one another.⁴⁴ This collective culture shapes the way one learns and interacts with others.

In the West, specifically the United States, a leader's role is “motivating others to achieve firm goals; it is the process of successfully influencing people.”⁴⁵ If one is on the

⁴³ Chen, “Transcending Paradox,” 187.

⁴⁴ Chen, “Transcending Paradox,” 186.

⁴⁵ McFarlin and Sweeney, *International Organizational Behavior*, 64.

executive level of leadership, then typically one is seen as important for achieving goals and changing things when circumstances require it. This contrasts with the business environment in a culture like China, where roles and boundaries are clearly defined. One's job title is significant in determining how one is perceived and treated across many life situations. People do only what is required for their job, meeting the bare minimum. In China, when sitting at a restaurant, a common occurrence is to see one person bring the food from the kitchen to a holding area and then the server will bring the plates to the table. If the person bringing the food from the kitchen tries to bring it to the table, that worker will be publicly chastised for overstepping their job. Compartmentalization of jobs is part of the Chinese culture. They are taught in school and later, in the workplace, that they are to do or produce no more than what is asked of them. This brings a sense of comfort, for it is job security in a high-population society.

The Western idea of finding what is wrong and solving it creates chaos for a Confucian hierarchical society. Confucius writes, "When good order prevailed in his country, Ning Wu acted the part of a wise man. When his country was in disorder, he acted the part of a stupid man."⁴⁶ Implied in this quote is that people are to follow after the wise orderly ways and not the stupid chaotic ones.

Contextual Challenges of Confucian Hierarchy

China has a history of being ruled by strong leaders. The emperors ruled over a distinct class system. The common people knew the finality of their life if they defied those in leadership. When communism took over and offered equality to all, the class

⁴⁶ Nicholas Tamblyn, trans., *The Complete Confucius* (Australia: Golding Books, 2016), 20.

system was dissolved, and women were liberated of past societal roles. However, those that began to lead did so as ultimate rulers, like the emperors of the past. Many leaders lacked training and turned into the type of harsh leader they originally replaced. A leader has to appear strong and confident in his or her knowledge and abilities. If they are weak, they will be taken advantage of. In China, if someone is not watching, one does whatever one wants to do. Thus, a leader needs to keep a tight rein on subordinates. This creates a natural separation between levels of leadership. If one is the boss, everyone has to listen to the boss. If one is the teacher, the students need to hear and respect the authority given to the teacher. It is a top-down leadership model that has been ingrained in the society for thousands of years.

When Protestant church leadership began to develop, naturally those in leadership gravitated to emulate the models before them. In their approach to the church, the leaders are to be strong like those of their country. The education system reinforces that the principal or teacher is always right. So, congregants are to follow in line with the leader. When a meeting is called or vision is cast, the people are to respond and do what is expected to fulfill the vision of the Pastor. If there is dissension, the pastor traditionally removes the troublemakers from their positions and asks them to leave. This top down structure is set as the example of what a leader with the church should be.⁴⁷

Confucius encouraged hierarchical thinking when he remarked, “What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others.”⁴⁸ This teaches leaders to think they are superior and know what is right, not seek help from others.

⁴⁷ “Amy,” pseudonym, Interview with Greg Appleby. Personal interview. Southwest China, November 19, 2018.

⁴⁸ Confucius, 58.

Confucius stated that a true leader does not need help in their decision making: “The superior man acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions.”⁴⁹ If a person is to be a leader, then they are in the right. So, in the context of the Chinese church, leaders have come to think of themselves as the boss. There is a belief that if the pastor is called by God, then what the pastor says is law.

With this type of hierarchal structure in place, many are called, but few desire leadership positions. Added to this, when a foreign teacher is seen as an expert, then they are elevated to the status where all that they say is therefore taken as absolute truth regardless of whether or not the teacher has taken the time to tailor their words and teaching to the receiving culture. So great honor is automatically given to teachers, and no one wants to do anything to embarrass their culture, community, or the church by contradicting what an expert has to share.

Shame

The second of the three foundational Chinese narratives is the concept of shame, specifically as related to honor. Jin Li, Lianqin Wang, and Kurt Fischer state,

Shame as a fundamental emotion is found in all humans. While some cultures may regard it as harmful and undesirable to people’s health, the Chinese adopt a different view and practice. For them, shame is an essential social and moral emotion, a virtue. Developing a sense of shame is an important life task in becoming a full member of their culture.⁵⁰

This concept of shame shapes every aspect of Chinese society - communication, decision making, and the value each person has in community. Indirect communication has

⁴⁹ Confucius, 58.

⁵⁰ Jin Li, Lianqin Wang, and Kurt Fischer. "The Organisation of Chinese Shame Concepts?" *Cognition & Emotion* 18, no. 6 (2004): 767.

become the way around direct confrontation. Sometimes this is seen when a third party is added to convey information that would otherwise embarrass the two individuals involved. This allows the information to be shared and prevents either party from losing face.

When we moved to a new city, we knew that there would be patterns, unknown rules and often times that one will overstep without knowing so. Trying to be culturally sensitive in this new city, we thought we would simply bring interested students to the local Three-Self (government sponsored) Patriotic Christian Church. We were told this was legal and it was the one place we would be able to worship together. After attending only two times, we were approached by a foreigner that had lived in that city for more than ten years. She simply stated, “Which of you have been attending the government church?” We raised our hands in this small group of foreigners. She simply said, “yeah, you cannot do that anymore. My police friend asked if you would only come at Christmas and Easter. Which means they do not want you to attend or bring anyone to these services.” I asked her, “why did they tell you and not us?” She responded, “They were given an order from their leadership and they did not want to embarrass you nor themselves.”

Indirect confrontation is the foundation of many honor/shame countries.⁵¹ As a Westerner, working within this system of both hierarchy and face-saving produces some

⁵¹ Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 23, no. 4 (1993): 167-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014610799302300405>.

anxiety as one tries to navigate how best to ask questions while respecting the levels of authority and nuances that are common in a high context society.⁵²

At the time of this indirect confrontation, I began to clearly see some of the foundational ways of confrontation and the dynamics of leadership development. For the Chinese, society's needs overshadowed the needs and achievements of the individual. Just as achievement can add to honor, failure can also reflect on the group.⁵³ Thus actions are calculated to increase honor and reduce shame.

Use of Shame

In the Chinese context, people see two types of shame. Shame that is seen in one's own life and shame viewed in the eyes of others. This difference is an important one and sets shame for Chinese and Westerners apart from one another. Lin Bai and Bee Ng note "It follows to argue that in an interdependent culture where interpersonal relationship and group harmony is highly valued, social variables might play a more prominent role in moderating shame experiences."⁵⁴ Shame is regulated in the context of its relationship to the community. This allows boundaries to be set up for interpersonal, social, and moral interactions; included in this is a family, a group, a village, or a country as a whole. Shame is given to whomever violates accepted societal norms. This brings humiliation to those in that person's community in the attempt to encourage change

⁵² High-context cultures are those that communicate in ways that are implicit and rely heavily on context.

⁵³ Xiaozheng Zhang, "Understanding Chinese and Western Cultures: An Exploration of the Academic Working Environment in Internationalised Higher Education" (PhD diss., Loughborough University, London, 2012), 35-38.

⁵⁴ Lin Bai and Bee Ng, "Self-other Dimension of Chinese Shame Words," *International Journal of Computer Processing of Oriental Languages* 24, no. 1 (2012): 55.

toward the community's values. The concept of Confucian hierarchy and shame cannot be separated into two categories; rather they are layered upon one another. Confucius is known for writings that concern the value of shame. More than ten percent of his book, *The Analects*, deals with these shame concepts.⁵⁵

Examples of shame practices can be found in communities as well. Public shaming has been useful in creating an obedient community. For instance, public humiliation (like wearing a dunce's cap) is a common form of shaming in Confucian societies. It has been documented that criminals were often marched down public streets; sometimes they were allowed a covering for their faces.⁵⁶ This can even be seen today when their faces and crimes are broadcast on local TV and/or shown in theaters before a movie begins. Jin Li et al. says,

The importance of shame in Chinese culture is associated with the dominant social and moral thought of Confucianism. According to Confucian teaching, life's highest purpose is seeking self-perfection, (as represented by the concept of 'ren'), which means becoming the most genuine, most sincere, and most humane person one can be.⁵⁷

As one walks down the streets of any Mainland Chinese city today, there are large billboards displaying individual cars committing traffic offenses. All can see that these drivers have committed an offense and are publicly shamed into the correct way of driving. Public shaming has traditionally served as motivation to change the offender as well as a public deterrent for the community.

⁵⁵ Bai and Ng, 776.

⁵⁶ David Yau-Fai Ho, Wai Fu, and S. M Ng, "Guilt, Shame and Embarrassment: Revelations of Face and Self," *Culture & Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2004): 67.

⁵⁷ Li, Wang, and Fischer. "The Organisation of Chinese Shame Concepts" 769.

Two Faces

Another aspect of shame that has its origins in Chinese culture is the concept of face, or saving face. Social scientists have identified two concepts of face: *mianzi* (面子), achieved by one's own ability; and *lian* (脸), which represents the way the community views one's moral character. Losing face is damaging because it affects one's ability to interact socially and communally. It is not an on-going process but an event that is often public because there need to be witnesses. Strictly speaking, losing face is not a private event, rather a discrete and damaging social event for the person involved.⁵⁸ Thus, D.Y. Ho agrees that "Avoiding shame is of overriding concern—as is the avoidance of losing face, rather than gaining face."⁵⁹ This type of shame is commonly associated with the fear of being laughed at and, as a result, feeling one's weaknesses and failures are exposed for all to see. This poem reflects some of this feeling of having one's life stripped and exposed before the community:

I dreamt I was on stage,
naked,
In front of a thousand piercing eyes,
staring at me.

My face is a face that does not dare to show itself.
Nowhere to hide,
not even from myself.
But what have I done wrong?⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Li, Wang, and Fischer, 792.

⁵⁹ D.Y.F Ho, "Face Dynamics: From Conceptualization to Measurement," in *The challenge of Facework*, ed. S. Ting-Toomey (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 277.

⁶⁰ Ho, Fu, and Ng, 73.

Even though the West views this concept of face as a way to gather one's own prestige or gain achievements, for the Chinese, face is seen as maintaining social standing. Shame might not be encouraged in Western cultures, but in a Chinese context, shame is imparted on children when they are young. Shame is used to teach behavior. For example, if a young child asks an adult for sweets, the mother will scold the child with "Shame! Shame! Shame!" while rubbing her own face with her finger. It is thought that the rubbing of the face by the mother is thought to indicate the potential for destruction of the child's 'face.'⁶¹

Contextual Challenges of Shame

Smith argues, "Most classical shame events simply center on failing to meet a minimum standard for social acceptability."⁶² Restoration of one's face is the desire of many in Asia. Chinese relationships are built upon upholding cultural honor. This is how shame and honor are indistinguishably meshed together. They exist interchangeably to bring the unity and harmony that most Chinese desire.

Problems abound between Western and Eastern communication, with the subtlety of a high context society (Eastern) meeting and interacting with a low context one (Western).⁶³ Chinese often communicate in indirect ways that are not often understood or picked up by Westerners accustomed to simple and direct communication. Since avoiding losing face while honoring bosses, family, and pastors is at the forefront of a Chinese's

⁶¹ Ho, Fu, and Ng, 789.

⁶² "Asian Shame and Honor," *Psychology Today*, June 29, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/minority-report/201406/asian-shame-and-honor>.

⁶³ Meyer, 39-40.

mind, clear communication becomes a challenge because these layers of narrative influence all forms of communication. This can especially be true when Western Christians begin to doubt the integrity of a particular group of people. Westerners have long worked from a different playbook than the Chinese and thus easily judge events and situations as unethical simply because there is not cultural sensitivity to the pragmatism that Chinese society has developed.

Chinese Pragmatism

Another aspect that is foundational in Chinese culture is pragmatism, the practical philosophy that only the results are important. If a student is required to pass a class, they do it by any means necessary. If an employee is to produce a report or a product, they are expected to fulfill that demand at all cost.⁶⁴ Deng Xiaoping, leader of China in the 80's, declared, "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice."⁶⁵ The meaning is 'the end justifies the means.' Even though Deng Xiaoping was talking about the economy, this has implications within the society and the church. This pragmatic approach to finding any path can give the impression as being both having great ingenuity and being morally amiss.

⁶⁴ Hofstede, 42-63.

⁶⁵ "The Great Pragmatist: Deng Xiaoping," *The Guardian*, December 18, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/dec/18/globaleconomy-economics>.

Communal Pragmatism

Hofstede states that, “China is a culture that embraces universalism and feels that everyone should follow the same set of rules and practices.”⁶⁶ The Chinese have an idiom that states that the highest nail is always beaten down. The meaning is that a person should conform with the community’s idea of success. The good of one’s community supersedes personal achievement. Its Confucian social system with emphasis on honor and shame have made this country a very pragmatic society, even concerning its communal nature.

Westerners often have difficulty grasping the structure of Chinese society which seems so radically different from their own. Geert Hofstede might not be a social theorist, yet he stressed, “People are supposed to be loyal to the group to which they belong, and, in exchange, the group will defend their interests.”⁶⁷

Many societies choose to place the needs of groups and institutions first, while others place the individuals at the center and thus makes the society a servant of the individual. For Chinese, communal righteousness supersedes the individual. Jonathan Haidt reminds us that,

The ethic of community is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations. These larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them; they are real, they matter, and they must be protected. . . .duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation, and patriotism.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hofstede, 51.

⁶⁷ Hofstede, 51.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 116, Kindle.

These types of societies have diametrically different ways of thinking from the West and thus misunderstandings between cultures abound.

Relational Ethics

Morality for many Western Christians seemingly has nothing to do with culture. However, Mueller promotes a more encompassing Chinese approach to ethics and morality by stating,

As long as the results bring honor, the moral issues are secondary. Success can be measured in wealth, power, or education. For example, a student who fails brings shame. Cheating leads to a positive result (good grades) and as long as they are not caught, the action has brought honor and is acceptable. However, if the student is caught, the same action brings shame. In order to preserve lost honor, the family may choose to hide the wrongful act and its consequence.⁶⁹

Morality, ethics and culture affect our choices, judgments and our witness; especially as morality is interpreted through our own cultural lenses and imparted to those with whom we want to share Christ. Recognizing how a society responds communally helps us start to remove our own preconceived notions. Here is an example of a situation that needs to be seen not through our western views of morality but through the views of communal and familial success. Kelly Yang shares,

In recent years, cheating has got so out of control that, three years ago, in the small town in Hubei, a group of gaokao [University entrance exam] invigilators found themselves under siege as enraged parents and students trapped them in their office and threw rocks at the windows, shouting, 'We want fairness! Let us cheat!'⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2001), quoted in Mark Naylor, "Fear, Shame and Guilt," *Cross-cultural Impact for the 21st Century*, August 1, 2010.

⁷⁰ Kelly Yang, "Why Do Chinese Students Think It's OK to Cheat?," *South China Morning Post*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1974986/why-do-chinese-students-think-its-ok-cheat>.

Parents were outraged because there was a rumor that officials were not allowing their children to cheat, score a higher grade and thus have greater options for school and work. This was seen as an attack on all the community, and retaliation was in order. When the outcome of this one test validates the children of this community and either honors them by placing them in a University or shames them when they do not pass, the communal ethic is set at what honors the community. China is culturally founded on this pragmatic approach to life. Many choose what is best for their own family and community above all others. Morality is linked to the success of the whole community.

While there are many ways to see ethics, such as Virtue, Utilitarian, Postmodern, etc....the western ethic draws of the Greek foundations of right and wrong.⁷¹ Therefore, views morality to be associated with an individual's rights. When encountering a worldview that deviates from that accepted practice, a Westerner may protest. Many Westerners have trouble with many Chinese concepts that do not fit nicely into their worldview. For Jonathon Haidt, "Understanding that morality differs around the world...is the first step toward understanding your [own] righteous mind."⁷² He continues, "The problem isn't that people don't reason. They do reason. But their arguments aim to support their conclusions, not yours."⁷³ Knowing what is considered acceptable within a culture helps us understand the filter in which an individual hears and responds to the gospel message as well as how they respond to leadership development. With this in mind, open conversations on what is Biblical rather than what is Western can take place.

⁷¹ Jeffery Overall, "Eastern and Western Philosophical Positions on Ethics: Lessons for Entrepreneurs from Wisdom of the Ages," *Journal of Ethics & Entrepreneurship* 8, no. 2 (2018): 56.

⁷² Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 4.

⁷³ Haidt, 367.

Returning to the Chinese education system, Gaokao, literally means 'high test' and is the academic qualification test for almost all high school graduates that hope to attend a University. Students must do well to attend the better universities, where graduation offers a bright future with status, wealth and even power. For most Chinese, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, a high score on the gaokao is their only means to significantly alter their future. Yang tells us that in one particular high school known for having a significant percentage of the students do well,

...students have been given IV drips as they study, believing that it will help them with concentration and focus. Girls are given contraceptive pills to delay their periods until after the exam....Because of the importance of the gaokao, some families are willing to go to unseemly lengths to ensure their children ace it. Some parents hire companies to surreptitiously transmit answers to their children on exam day. Others bribe local officials to get a peek at the test before it is administered.⁷⁴

If reading these examples makes one slightly uncomfortable then one begins to see the gap that is present between pragmatic morality of the West and East. Many Chinese children believe sacrificing one's short term happiness for the good of the community is not only acceptable but expected.⁷⁵

Most Chinese parents tell their children from a very early age that their goal in life is to get into a good school, not learn the right skills or to find inspiration in school to seek meaningful work. Just 'get into a good school.' Children quickly learn what is required of them, the behaviors that will illicit the right responses from parents, teachers and authorities. Yang observes "Kids figure [morality] out for themselves...given the right kinds of experiences....we can't say that it is innate, and we can't say that kids learn

⁷⁴ Yang, "OK to Cheat?"

⁷⁵ Charles Stafford, "Being Careful What You Wish For: The Case of Happiness in China," LSE Research Online, January 1, 1970, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64823/.31&37>

it directly from adults. It is, rather, self-constructed as kids play with other kids.”⁷⁶ Not only do kids observe their surroundings but certain thoughts and practices are then reinforced to be culturally acceptable. They are seeking what will bring the approval of their own way or the approval of the communal ethic. What children learn is pragmatism; that the end result is what is important.

Contextual Challenges with Chinese Pragmatism

An aspect of Chinese pragmatism that some Christians struggle with is trust. In Chinese culture, trust is only given to the one with whom a relationship has been established with. Westerners, especially Christians, misinterpret this as dishonesty. Ethics in family, business, and other communities is laid in the foundation of saving face. In Chinese culture, it is better to lie to someone, for his or her protection, than to risk an embarrassing situation.

People moving to China are often told that when one first get to know someone, only 90% of what they say should be believed. The more one’s relationship develops, the greater the percentage of truth given. “People in diffuse cultures [culture concerned with saving face] may be cautious at first when interacting with new people since giving others access to one sphere of life can mean access to all.”⁷⁷ This may help explain why it takes so much time to build trust and relationships in China. Thus, Scriptures like Matthew 5:37 that state, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond

⁷⁶ Yang.

⁷⁷ McFarlin and Sweeney, 51.

this comes from the evil one” need to be understood, taught, and used in a way that honors both Christ and the Chinese people.

Conclusion

Gaining an understanding of Chinese concepts will help cross cultural workers wanting to have regular interaction with Chinese people; whether in Mainland China, areas in Africa, or living next door to new immigrants in the United States or Europe. Tu Mei Ming, a renowned Neo-Confucian writer, asked, “Who has the right to speak about China?” He then responds to his own question by saying, “Anyone who is interested in China and is prepared to learn about it and from its civilization.”⁷⁸ Within this self-dialogue one finds the reason to engage with a culture one knows little about.

Feng Gang Yang says when missionaries came to China to share the gospel, they came, “full of assumptions about the seamlessness of Christendom... With these assumptions in the minds of the Westerners, a logical corollary would be that in order for a non-Western society to convert properly to Christianity, a ‘cultural conversion’ was necessary as well as a change of religious affiliation or belief.”⁷⁹ In the next section, we will look at how the historical, economic, and political influences of West have expanded this East/West gap, specifically among Christians.

⁷⁸ McCormack and Blair, *Thinking through China*, xxv.

⁷⁹ Fenggang Yang, *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond*, 2012, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215696_016, 233.

SECTION 2: HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND MODERN INFLUENCES

In the previous section, I established the need for an understanding of three Chinese philosophical narratives that are hallmarks of the Chinese worldview. This section will explore some of the influences that have shaped China's/the Chinese people's view of Christianity. China is an old nation with two thousand years of recorded history. The influences of early missionaries, world politics, and Chinese history have all had an impact on how Christianity is understood in China today. Understanding the roots of Christianity in China will help us understand how it was and is perceived by the Chinese people today.

Premodern History

Nestorians (635 C.E.) and Jesuits (1552 C.E.) are seen as the most notable in beginning the work of spreading Christianity in Mainland China. Though they were separated by over 1000 years, early Nestorian and Catholic missionaries used the same mission strategy: they aimed to ingratiate themselves to the monarchs while impressing the royal court with science and technology from the West. The Nestorian Christians and Jesuits primarily worked with the leaders and elite forgoing work among the common folk. The problem of syncretism and cultural confusion became a reality when the Nestorians and Jesuits each sought to find ways of interpreting Christian concepts that could be understood by local Chinese. Kwok Pui-lan states,

The Chinese people had such a dramatically different view of the cosmos that the idea of God was not present in their thought; rather they had the Dao⁸⁰ (The Way) which was far beyond the conception of a personal Creator God. The Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans and Protestants suggested their own dynamic equivalents; such as, tian (heaven), shangdi (supreme ruler), tianzhu (Lord of Heaven) and so on.⁸¹

However, there seems to be a long lasting effect as many converts found themselves “interpreting Jesus in terms of Buddha and Laozi of Tang dynasty Nestorianism, interpreting Jesus in terms of Confucianism since the Ming and Qing dynasty, and the tendency to interpret Jesus in terms of existential experience.”⁸² These historical approaches to helping bridge the gap of misunderstanding have created more confusion than clarity.

Nestorians

The Nestorians, who were fleeing persecution in Europe were among the first to introduce Christianity into China. Nestorian Christianity has often been typified as heretical. This was due to how they viewed the two natures of Christ (human and Divine) as separate persons. Therefore, the Orthodox Church claimed the Nestorians denied the reality of the Incarnation and represented Christ as a God-inspired man rather than as God-made-man.⁸³ However, the Chinese emperor, Tang Tai Zong, welcomed them and allowed translation of Nestorian documents to take place. But because the Nestorians had

⁸⁰ Throughout this paper, the author has used the Chinese Pinyin for ‘the Way’- translated ‘Dao’ and ‘Daoism’ rather than the British interpretation as ‘Tao’ and ‘Taoism’

⁸¹ Pui-lan Kwok, ‘*Images of God in the Chinese Context,*’ *Voices from the Third World*, vol. XXI, no. 2 (1998): 103.

⁸² Yang Huilin and David Lyle Jeffrey, *China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture* (Baylor University Press, 2014), 36.

⁸³ Wiley, 531.

identified themselves as one of the Buddhist sects in China, they were suppressed when Tang emperor Wuzong ordered a ban on Buddhism in 845 C.E. Nestorians briefly came back into favor during the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century under the Mongols. However, because the Nestorian religion was so closely affiliated with the Mongol leadership, it was quickly dissolved after the destruction of Mongolian rule in 1368.⁸⁴

During the Nestorian Christian's time in China, in an attempt to find common ground, local Chinese words and concepts were borrowed from other belief systems and incorporated into Nestorian teachings. Huilin Yang said,

written Scriptures of the Nestorian church frequently used Buddhist terminology to translate important Christian concepts. For example, God was translated as fo (佛, meaning Buddha); Christ as shi zun (世尊, Bhagavat [minor deities of Buddhism]);...faith, hope, and love as san chang (三常, the Three Virtues of Buddha); ... and so forth.⁸⁵

This syncretization might have brought some confusion for Chinese that already followed Buddhism. This can also be seen in some Nestorian books that were written and translated during the Tang Dynasty. Within these texts, one can see common Buddhist and Daoist terms repurposed for the use of Christianity. Yang also says that the Nestorian book called

The Zhi Xuan An Le Jing (志玄安乐经),... puts in Jesus' mouth the Buddhist teaching that 'All those who cultivate the Way (Dao) must first rid themselves of action and desire, for with no action and desire, there is no motive or purpose; and with no motive or purpose, one can be calm and free; and when one is calm and free, one can be comprehensive and sure; and when one can be comprehensive and sure, one can know everything; and knowing everything is the source of peace and happiness.'⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Peter Tze Ming Ng, *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 151.

⁸⁵ Ng, 9.

⁸⁶ Ng, 246.

Taking one's culture and inputting Jesus into it has caused many problems and misunderstandings. When the Nestorian believers borrowed some of the great philosophies of a culture and claimed that they were Christ's words, rather than bringing certainty, they only misconstrued the truth.

Jesuits

The Jesuits were the next notable missionary movement to China during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Enoch Wan notes, "Many Catholic missionaries who entered China from Macau impressed the imperial rulers with their Western learnings (in mathematics, geography, etc.) and earned the royal favor accordingly."⁸⁷ Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and his fellow Jesuits were credited with successfully accessing and ingratiating themselves to the Chinese monarchy. They attempted to accommodate themselves to the Chinese scholarly realm, specifically the Confucian intellectuals and the court elite. Ricci is remembered even today for some of the foundational work in helping to lay some infrastructure for conversations between Confucians and Christians. However, he did misunderstand some key concepts. Ricci simply translated words and did not fully grasp that some terms had particular cultural meanings connected with philosophy, religion, or ways of life. Huang put it this way:

Ricci made some mistakes in certain ways of understanding the Chinese, for example, in not really grasping the central ideas of the various Chinese schools of thought and their historical background of his day. The most obvious example is in Chapter 2 of his book *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主实义 (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven), where he did not quite understand the meanings of the Daoist wu 无

⁸⁷ Enoch Wan, "Christianity In The Eye Of Traditional Chinese," *Global Missiology English*, 2003, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/437/1125>.

(Non-Being, Nothing) , the Buddhist Kong 空 (Empty, Emptiness), and the Neo-Confucian Taiji 太极 Li 理 and Qi 气 .⁸⁸

He used these terms as replacements for Christian concepts without realizing the confusion it would create. However, even though Ricci made these mistakes, he was able to make inroads into the Chinese culture and begin an academic dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism.

During this time, the Jesuits attempted to establish Christianity as a complement to Confucianism, which would effectively replace Buddhism.⁸⁹ These Jesuit missionaries learned Chinese language, its customs and traditions, as well as learned Chinese heritage and history. Their authenticity and capability to adapt to the culture earned them respect and trust of China’s leaders. This once again helped the Chinese adapt to the Western ideas of Christianity. Unfortunately, many Confucians did not accept the ideas and beliefs of Christianity but rather simply sought a desire for the knowledge of the Western sciences.⁹⁰

Eventually, the European church lost confidence in the Jesuits due to a conflict with some of Ricci’s methods. Matteo Ricci had allowed Chinese converts to continue worshipping ancestors on the grounds that it was similar to the veneration of saints.⁹¹ Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond says that mission leaders at this time “feared

⁸⁸Paulos Zhanzhu Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation: A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Basic Problems in the Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 43

⁸⁹ Gregory A. Baker, Stephen E. Gregg, and Desmond Tutu, *Jesus beyond Christianity: the Classic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 226

⁹⁰ Huang, *Confronting Confucian*, 78.

⁹¹ Huang, 170.

that native priests might be more susceptible to the temptations of theological syncretism or ritual overlap with native Chinese religions, or to permit practices which served as a cover for retaining the practice of ancestor veneration or other activities prohibited by the Vatican.”⁹² Even though some have argued against Ricci’s practices, in 1982 Pope John Paul II said, “Just as the Fathers of the Church thought in regard to Christianity and Greek culture, so Matteo Ricci was rightly convinced that faith in Christ would not bring any harm to Chinese culture, but rather would enrich and perfect it.”⁹³

The Jesuits found ways to bridge some aspects of the gap that existed between the Eastern and Western narratives, yet the result was often finding ways for the Chinese to understand the Western world better; be it through comparative Scriptures or science and technology. The Nestorian believers and the Jesuits both focused on the elite and ruling class. As a result, when those in power were overthrown, killed, and replaced, little of their work remained.

The Protestant missionaries (beginning in 1807 C.E.) later offered to the Chinese people social, medical, and educational services. They did make tremendous contributions to the society and the development of modern China. Yet because of these actions, they became a focal point for the Chinese claiming China was being unduly influenced by the West.⁹⁴ Enoch Wan states,

⁹² Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Chichester, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 758.

⁹³ Discourse on 25th October 1982, during the concluding session of the International Ricci Studies Congress which was held at the University of Macerata and the Pontifical Gregorian University to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Ricci’s arrival in China. quoted in Huang, Paulos Zhanzhu., *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation: (Studies in Systematic Theology)* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 44.

⁹⁴ Sanneh and McClymond, *The Wiley Blackwell*, 170.

Many foreign missionaries and Chinese converts took advantage of the trend of Westernization and exploited the circumstances of Western domination in China for the sake of Christian proselytization and missionary expansion without cultural sensitivity and missiological contextualization. The administrative form (e.g. management), organizational pattern (e.g. denominationalism, mission style), leadership development (e.g. co-education), architectural structure (e.g. Gothic design), worship style (e.g. extensive use of classical music, organ, piano, Western religious artifacts, etc.), curricular design (e.g. Catholic convent style or Protestant Bible school format), etc., were all but Chinese. The type of Christianity promoted by Western missionaries and practiced by Chinese converts, with all its trapping and wrapping, was unpretentiously Western.⁹⁵

As a result, the Chinese people saw Christianity as an invasive outsider, in contrast to Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and local folk religions which they considered to be indigenous.

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905 C.E.)

Unfortunately, the Nestorian and Jesuit strategies for missionary work, including focusing on the upper echelon of society, carried over into the modern era. Because of their focus on the rich and powerful, they created separation of clothing, housing locations, food, and even language. Hudson Taylor's model of cross-cultural work had to overcome the stigma of foreigners working with elite. His work focused on a leader's humility in order to pioneer, lead, and model Christ's holiness in ways that others desired to follow.⁹⁶ When Hudson Taylor arrived in China, he questioned what was separating foreigners from locals? How can this gap be bridged? He made a radical decision to dress in Chinese clothes, don a traditional Chinese hairstyle, and eat Chinese

⁹⁵ Wan, "Christianity In The Eye."

⁹⁶ Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard, *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

food.⁹⁷ Taylor was not happy with most missionaries he saw and believed they were more concerned with status and other worldly pursuits. Doyle Wright reminds us of how

Taylor was different:

Unlike the Nestorians in the Tang Dynasty and the Jesuits in the Ming Dynasty who targeted the court, the capital, the politicians and the elite class, Taylor's approach was exactly opposite. It was evangelization from the bottom up. He distanced himself from politics, abandoned the capital, the court, and the elite class, focusing instead on the masses in inland China, indeed on the evangelization of the whole of China.⁹⁸

Taylor desired to create a thoroughly Chinese Church. He wanted missionaries to adapt to the Chinese rather than having Chinese Christians adapt to foreign ways. These views, however, ostracized him from other foreign missionary workers.⁹⁹ Hudson Taylor was not seen as a tool of any Western nation. A.J. Broomhall affirms Taylor: "The spirit of a great missionary pioneer lives on and is respected in the land he loved so much."¹⁰⁰

Yui So Wing emphasized Taylor's passion and quotes him, saying, "If I had a thousand pounds China should have it - if I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China, but Christ. Can we do too much for Him? Can we do enough for such a precious Savior?"¹⁰¹ With his focus in developing a Chinese Church, Taylor began

⁹⁷ Person, "Hudson Taylor," Christian History, July 30, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/missionaries/hudson-taylor.html>.

⁹⁸ Doyle Wright, "Between Two Worlds: J. Hudson Taylor and the Clash between British and Chinese Customs, Cultures, and Laws," China Institute, July 17, 2009, <http://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/lectures/between-two-worlds-j-hudson-taylor-and-the-clash-between-british-and-chinese-customs-cultures-and-laws>.

⁹⁹ A. J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor & China's Open Century* (Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 718.

¹⁰⁰ Broomhall, 718.

¹⁰¹ Yui So Wing, "The Passion, Vision and Strategy of Hudson Taylor," accessed September 18, 2019. <https://sosir.whc.org.hk/sites/sosir.whc.org.hk/files/attachments/Mission%20Strategy%20of%20Hudson%20Taylor.pdf>. 7.

looking for ways of training local leaders. He and his followers were able to not only develop leaders but create a network of indigenous leaders by reaching across cultural and sociological barriers. Yui So Wing states, “Hudson Taylor’s greatest gift was his ability to inspire his followers and fellow-workers, and to pass on his passion and vision to the succeeding generation of leaders.”¹⁰² Hudson Taylor is an example to all Christians that desire to humbly connect and develop those from another culture. He recognized some of the systemic weaknesses and sought to find adequate solutions even as the church was greatly hindered by events beyond their control.

Historical Politics

History and politics have influenced Christianity in China. Although Westerners like Hudson Taylor seem to be teaching and training with a desire to honor both Christ and the Chinese culture, much of what was done in developing Christians leaders was lost due to political and economic turmoil of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Country’s Loss of Face

Beginning in the 1830’s, foreign imports streamed into the many coastal ports of China, including opium, the most fruitful and successful of goods. Beginning in 1839, in what is known as the “Opium Wars,” the Western powers, led by Britain, repeatedly militarily defeated China and forcing the opening of trade ports. Along with the creation of access and importation of goods, Western countries forcefully demanded that they be able to freely spread Christianity and evangelize the Chinese. Wan notes,

¹⁰² Wing, 2.

For decades, until WW II, Western encroachment on China's territory coincided with Christian missionary expansion in China. The importation and the increase of missionary resources coincided with the colonial expansion of the Western powers. The association of Western military aggression and the missionaries' imposition with the Chinese national/ethnic humiliation was for decades repeatedly reinforced until WWII.¹⁰³

Even today in China, the Opium Wars have not been forgotten. The conflicts were a global humiliation to a country that saw itself as the center of economy and power. They set themselves on a journey to rediscover the power it once thought it had. Every Chinese student understands that the country's pursuit of drive for global strength and recognition is a way to recover the loss of face during the Opium Wars.¹⁰⁴ In Humen and Sydenham Hill's article, they describe it as follows:

To President Xi, China's defeats in the Opium Wars are proof that weak countries will be defeated. One of his first public acts after he took over was...to visit an exhibition at the National Museum in Beijing called 'The Road to Revival'. It begins with the outbreak of the first Opium War and ends with China's rise under the Communist Party, represented, among other things, by nuclear missiles. The message is clear: don't mess with us again.¹⁰⁵

Many have seen the 'One Belt One Road' Initiative to be a way to regain 'face' that was lost at the hands of Western powers during the great embarrassment of the Opium Wars. One Belt One Road is a project that focuses on improving connectivity and cooperation among multiple countries spread across the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe.¹⁰⁶

Chinese have a long memory and as a result of China's past and drive to overcome the

¹⁰³ Wan, "Christianity In The Eye,"

¹⁰⁴ Humen Hill and Sydenham Hill, "The Opium Wars Still Shape China's View of the West," *The Economist*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2017/12/19/the-opium-wars-still-shape-chinas-view-of-the-west>.

¹⁰⁵ Hill and Hill, "The Opium Wars."

¹⁰⁶ Lily Kuo and Niko Kommenda, "What Is China's Belt and Road Initiative?" *The Guardian*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer>.

global shame, it has remade itself, building a foundation of wealth and power so it can once again be “Zhongguo” the middle/center kingdom; implying it is the center of the cultural universe.¹⁰⁷

Christianity and Imperialism

During this time, the gospel message was tainted by its association with powerful secular entities that had their own agendas. In China, Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard note, “Most evangelical missionaries spoke against the use of opium and the opium trade, but for the Chinese, Christian identity was foreign identity, and foreign identity included forcing opium on China.”¹⁰⁸ The missionaries’ words were often drowned out by the actions of the other foreigners that allowed opium entry into the country and publicly embarrassed the Chinese in front of the world. The aggressive opening of the Chinese ports during the Opium Wars did allow many Christian missionaries to enter as well. For many Chinese, however, it was precisely this that made it difficult for Christianity to separate itself for this kind of imperialist aggression. Lin Yu Tang was a Chinese Christian and rightly describes this somewhat embarrassing connection that Christianity has with opium and the war. He said,

Chinese Christians keep their distance from opium, and [with] foreign missionaries, denounced opium. [However] a dramatic as well as tragic factor is that the compatriots of those missionaries brought it in and made us accept it at gunpoint. [He goes on to say] Missionaries entered China . . . just as the Chinese people were being awakened by the reek of opium smoke . . . Missionaries and opium both benefited from the protection of warships, causing this both deplorable and most comical situation . . . Missionaries were concerned about

¹⁰⁷ Brendan Scott, “Memories of China’s 1895 Shame Loom Over Envoy’s High-Stakes Talks,” Bloomberg, May 9, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-09/china-trade-envoy-s-unflattering-comparison-shows-high-stakes>.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis and Pierard, 114.

saving our souls, and so when warships blew our bodies to smithereens, we were, of course, destined to go to Heaven. In this way, the two aspects offset one another, and no one was sorry for the other.¹⁰⁹

His description was graphic and sarcastic as he tied the actions of Christians with the embarrassment to his country.

With this foundation laid within China, it became increasingly difficult for Christianity to be seen as anything but Western and a tool for the Western powers. Even the Christianity of foreign missionaries in China and the worship of Chinese converts looked like a Western religion: the pattern of sharing the gospel, the way churches were built, the placement of seats in services, the hymns and musical instruments used, the structure of the whole service gave the impression that if one was a believer in Christ they must adhere to a Western style of God. Lin You Tang claims,

Therefore, it is not a simple matter for a traditional Chinese to become a Christian and whoever does would be considered a ‘cultural traitor’, as this saying indicates, ‘one more Christian conversion; one Chinese less in population’. Christianity should not be transplanted to China in a Western pot; it should be transplanted and rooted in Chinese soil.¹¹⁰

It is no wonder that Chinese have traditionally seen Christianity and the Bible as a Western creation used to infiltrate and tarnish the pure Chinese society. As a result, Sanneh and McClymond notes, “Missionaries and Christianity became targets of mass nationalism from the mid-1920s on and were denounced as agents of cultural imperialism...The obvious continued foreign domination of the church made it hard for Chinese Christians to rebut these charges.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Lin Yu Tang, 信仰之旅：论东西方的哲学与宗教 [*A Journey of Faith: On the Philosophies and Religions of the East and West*] (Taipei: Taiwan Dao Sheng Press, 1996), 36.

¹¹⁰ Tang, *A Journey of Faith*, 36.

¹¹¹ Sanneh and McClymond, 759.

When our actions, or the actions of those we are associated with, diminish the ones we are attempting to reach, we have given up the right to represent Christ in that particular situation. We are not seen as an agent of a restorative Christ rather represent the offending party. St. Ephrem the Syrian wrote in “One Paradise”,

With love and instruction, commingled with truth, the intellect can grow and become rich with new things, as it meditates with discernment on the treasures store of hidden mysteries. Look at how great is our shame in comparison: our very confinement in darkness has become for us a source of pleasure; we are proud of the land of curses, how we love our confinement in a pit! ¹¹²

For China the shame was great, and the hope of restoration was sought in many unhealthy places; one of which was communism.

Communism

Mao Zedong stood on the Gate of Heavenly Peace on October 1, 1949, in the center of Beijing, and proclaimed the “end of the century of humiliation,” thus ushering in the founding of the People’s Republic of China. ¹¹³ Jean-Pierre Cabestan claim, “Chinese nationalism is in many ways specific, because it is based on what is perceived as past humiliation, it has shown since the beginning of the modern era, which is to say since the Opium War of 1840, a profound feeling of insecurity.”¹¹⁴ The founder of Chinese Communism, Chen Duxiu in 1921 said, “People’s happiness in life is the result of their own effort and is neither the gift of God nor a spontaneous natural product. If it

¹¹² Saint Ephrem the Syrian, “On Paradise,” Saint Nicolas Cathedral, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.stnicholasdc.org/files/Orthodoxy/ON-PARADISE.pdf>.

¹¹³ Matt Schiavenza, “How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History,” *The Atlantic*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/10/how-humiliation-drove-modern-chinese-history/280878/>.

¹¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism,” *China Perspectives* 59 (2005) <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/2793>.

were the gift of God, how is it that He was so generous with people today and so stingy with people in the past?”¹¹⁵ Communism was seen as a way to move away from Western dominance furthering the gap that existed between the West and the East.

With the advent of communism, China’s history is retold and rewritten within a newly formed nation. Heroes emerge promoting patriotic living. These pragmatic heroes were seen as the common person influenced by China alone. Chinese connected with Western business, academic, or religious institutions we used as examples for shame of the past. The Chinese word ‘propaganda’ has both a good and bad meaning. This Propaganda (or patriotism) move included songs, language, posters, advertisements of what a true Chinese citizen was to be. Nationalism came as a result of daily digesting the carefully crafted influences of this community. With Confucian authoritarianism elevating the leaders and calling for the people to fall in line, Chinese leaders saw the desire to create a great nation and were willing to try many paths to accomplish the restoration of the country’s honor.

Ramifications on Three Narratives

Taking time to understand how Christianity entered into China, as well as how it was taught, and modeled helps one understand some of the ongoing hurdles that need to be cross as the global church continues to seek to teach and train leaders within Chinese communities. Huang remarked,

the Christian concept of God was strongly influenced by those who introduced it originally into China, i.e., the missionaries. The general knowledge of Chinese Confucians concerning the Christian concept of God is based on original

¹¹⁵ Duxiu Chen, “The True Meaning of Life,” *Asia for Educators* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu>.

Catholic and Protestant teachings. It is very important, therefore, to understand the way the missionaries have presented the Christian concept of God and how Confucians have actually understood it.¹¹⁶

Recognizing some of the baggage that one has when approaching cross-cultural ministry allows one to begin to address the obstacles found in others as well as oneself. Sometimes the most difficult part of that journey is recognizing the cultural lens that each person is seeing and teaching the Scriptures through. E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien cautioned,

...the most powerful cultural values are those that go without being said. It is very hard to know what goes without being said in another culture. But often we are not even aware of what goes without being said in our own culture. This is why misunderstanding, and misinterpretation happen. When a passage of Scripture appears to leave out a piece of the puzzle because something went without being said, we instinctively fill in the gap with a piece from our own culture-usually a piece that goes without being said.¹¹⁷

Admitting that our own personal culture colors the interpretation of the Scripture then allows us to begin to see what we are accomplishing as well as what we are instructing others to do.

Confucianist Communism

Even though in the last 70 years Communism has also been an influencing factor, Confucianism has not been forgotten and still has a strong influence on the daily lives of the Chinese people today. T. Q. Liu and Bruce W. Stening claim, "Confucianism is widely regarded as a moral philosophy, expressing the ethical significance of the family/social system. It has been the major source of morality in China for two thousand

¹¹⁶ Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings*, 69.

¹¹⁷ Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture*, 12-13.

years, and people are today still looking for ways to apply it to restore the moral foundations of society.”¹¹⁸ Confucius promotes this filial piety by saying, “Being a good family member reverberates through society. A person who is good to their parents and siblings and children will be good to others as well.” One’s only obligation is to their own family and community. Confucianism, with its focus on feudal ethics, and Socialism, as its official religion, have laid the foundation for a love of the economic success of both the country and the individual within one’s family at any cost. Confucius believed in the perfectibility of all men.¹¹⁹ He focused on being “a well-balanced person, well-ordered family, a well-governed state, a happy and harmonious world.”¹²⁰ Confucius saw the possibility of all this as the state and the family worked together for a perfected country. These concepts have been ingrained in the Chinese society and emphasized to promote the agendas of the State.

In this country of 1.7 billion people all striving to obtain the perfect dream life at any cost, poverty has soared, and workplace accidents and abuse are ignored. Student suicides due to failing grades or failing to get the job that family desired, have also increased.¹²¹ There is a prevailing thought that with so many people in this country, life is

¹¹⁸ T. Q. Liu and Bruce W. Stening, “The Contextualization and De-Contextualization of Confucian Morality: Making Confucianism Relevant to China’s Contemporary Challenges in Business Ethics,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 33, no. 3 (2015), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10490-015-9415-2>.

¹¹⁹ Confucius and Tambllyn, 77.

¹²⁰ Peter S. H. Tang, “Whither Contemporary Chinese Philosophy: Confucianism, Communism or Christianity?” *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* (1982): 135, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-7689-4_7.

¹²¹ “School Pressure to Blame for Chinese Youth Suicides, Official Study Finds,” *South China Morning Post*, May 14, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1512032/school-pressure-blame-chinese-youth-suicides-official-study-finds>.

cheap, and no one matters outside of the family. Confucian Communism promotes an allegiance to the strong leaders of the country while accepting the fatalistic view that some ‘cogs’ along the way will be sacrificed. Undoubtedly this push to economic revival as well as the pragmatic pursuit of power and wealth has influenced believers and the way they see both themselves and who they are in Christ. When the foundations of the Chinese political landscape changed within the last 70 years, so did the foundations for understanding what is the source of true.

Shaming and Pragmatism Today

Like in the days of Confucius, shame has been used as a tool of both the government and local families to keep the country’s population under control. Through the use of both public and private times of shame, the people of China have understood both what is expected of them and how they are to see the world. In modern China on state-run television, business people, celebrities, and editors have appeared so regularly from behind prison bars about their misdeeds that the Chinese have come to see this as normal.¹²² More than seeking honor, Chinese continue to look for ways to not bring shame to their families.

Ethically, the Chinese do what continues to be important for building up both family and state. With the years of pulling away from Western definitions of right and wrong, what matters to the Chinese is that their country is secure, and their families are

¹²² William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199-218. <http://www.jstor.org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/stable/40645112>.

taken care of. Therefore, what is right is that which honors whom they love and what is wrong is that which bring harm to the same.

So, for Chinese Christians, history and politics of the last two centuries have been a challenge. They have sought to uphold the teachings of Christ while the world invaded China and brought humiliation to them. They have looked for peace while their own country was in chaos. Today, the average Chinese citizen has a single-minded pursuit of wealth as the answer to all of life's problems.¹²³ There is no greater need to the Chinese people than a contextualized understanding of the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The lenses in which we read the Bible are shaped by the cultures that we live in. For the Chinese and their fight for independence and freedom from the Western influence, there have been misunderstandings due to cultural conflicts. The teachings of our parents, schools, and cultural philosophies lay the foundations that create a basic understanding of life. When reading the Christian Scriptures, the philosophies of our culture and the historical lessons our countries have learned shape how we read and understand who Christ is. China's history has presented some major hurdles for Christianity. When we change our understanding of how culture influences society and begin to focus on the way we have traditional read and understood the Bible, then we can

¹²³ Paul Solman, "Cut-Throat China: The Toxic Effects of Its Obsession With Wealth," *PBS*, July 17, 2013, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/chinas-zero-sum-game>.

begin to find ways to dialogue with Chinese about how Christ is understood and the Scripture can be interpreted within their own culture.

When Confucian Hierarchy, Shame, and Chinese Pragmatism are seen through the Chinese historical, political, and family lenses one starts to see the philosophical hurdles that are present in order for true Biblical dialogue to take place. The sins of our forebearers and the heritage one accepts concerning our Christian history helps us humbly approach cross-cultural contextualization of the Scripture. In Section 3, I will attempt to look at some of these potential interpretations, as well as how a Westerner will begin to acknowledge one's own hindrances.

SECTION 3:
IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

From pre-modern historical Christian influences to the modern missionary movement, Western powers have sought to control or manipulate aspects of Chinese culture, including the Chinese understanding of Christianity. Even with few exceptions like Hudson Taylor that developed indigenous leadership and training program that trained many to understand Christ, political conflicts have altered much of the good and sought to label Christianity as a foreign entity. As a result, there has been a move toward national independence of any outside influence, including Christianity.

Difficulty arises when Easterners and Westerners begin to meet and work together. Their distinctive ways of thinking have produced difficult hurdles to overcome. Hall and Ames describe the differences between many Western cultures and the Chinese, depicted in a circle. For Westerners, we see a circle as something to measure, find the circumference, diameter, absolute center, and a fixed object. It gives one a sense of order and understanding to be able to know that these measurements define the circle. Yet for many Easterners, especially Chinese, a circle is more fluid. It is something that defines an area of interest that one wants to focus on. Rather than measuring it, there is a search for what has been placed inside it that would draw focus and relationship to other things inside it. The center is that which one is focused on, the center of attention at that moment. The center changes as the focus changes. A circle is then defined by its relationship with what draws one's attention. For a Westerner to ask an Easterner to find

the center of the circle might sound like an easy question but has a cultural aspect to the answer.¹²⁴

One needs to recognize that there are indeed differences in culture particularly noting the cultural blinders in our own eyes. For cross-cultural individuals working with Chinese, acknowledging these three foundational narratives allows one to begin to see around those particular cultural lenses and hopefully help each of us to recognize one's own obstacles. With this in mind let us look at some ways the Chinese Christian view some of these narratives as well as how Scripture can be interpreted.

Shifting Perceptions

Communication Assumptions

A Western Jesus Christ brought by a colonizing military, including commercial interests, individualistic concepts, and a Western interpretation of Scripture, is contrary to the Christ of the Bible. What is needed is an understanding that Christianity is about a relationship with Jesus and can grow naturally within the soil of Chinese society.¹²⁵ As discussed in Section 1, China is a high context culture, which means they communicate in a less direct and explicit way, and leave listeners and readers to figure out and understand the meanings based on each specific context, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and other nonverbal signals.¹²⁶ In contrast, Western culture tends to be low

¹²⁴ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), xxi-xxiii.

¹²⁵ Enoch Wan, "Jesus Christ for the Chinese: A Contextual Reflection," *Global Missiology English*, 2003, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/439>.

¹²⁶ C. Engholm, *Doing Business in Asia's booming "China Triangle"* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 165.

context, which means they convey their opinions straight-forwardly, and meanings are expected to be understood mainly by relying on formal rules.¹²⁷ Erin Meyer says concerning high context cultures like China, one must “learn to listen to what is meant instead of what is said. This means reflecting more, asking more clarifying questions and making an effort to be more receptive to body language cues.”¹²⁸

Individuals from a low-contextual Western cultural background like to focus on one’s personal choices and salvation. In a high context or collective culture, people tend to think and act as their community does. So, understanding the culture and the audience is important to be able to understand who Jesus Christ is. There can be not only mistaken teachings but misunderstanding when people of different cultures read the Bible.

Richards and O’Brien mention the potential for misunderstanding and hidden meaning when they say,

...that the most powerful cultural values are those that go without being said. It is very hard to know what goes without being said in another culture. But often we are not even aware of what goes without being said in our own culture. This is why misunderstanding and misinterpretation happen. When a passage of Scripture appears to leave out a piece of the puzzle because something went without being said, we instinctively fill in the gap with a piece from our own culture-usually a piece that goes without being said.¹²⁹

Finding culturally significant and consistent ways to express the person of Christ and his relevance is crucial in expressing correct teaching outside our cultural blinders.

¹²⁷ Engholm, PGN.

¹²⁸ Meyer, *The Culture Map*, 50.

¹²⁹ Randolph and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture*, 12-13.

Chinese Illustration

Enoch Wan gives an example of how to speak clearly with the Chinese culture by explaining, “Jesus is 天人合一的道 (heaven- man-unite-one tao)... The incarnate Jesus and the resurrected Christ is Tao – the God- Man model of both-and personal being and theoretical/theological paradigm. There is richness in the terms tien (heaven) and tien-ren-he-yi 天人合一 (heaven-man-unite- one tao) in classical Chinese literature and Chinese philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.”¹³⁰ Utilizing generations of teaching and context, Dr. Wan can explain Christ, his connection to the truth, and ultimately how he is connected to the Father in four words.

Dr. Wan goes deeper by stating, “When we share the Gospel to the Chinese, Jesus Christ should be presented as the ‘zhong- bao(中保)’ (mediator), ‘jiu-shu-zhu(救赎主)’ (redeemer) and ‘fu-hu-zhe(福和者)’ (reconciler) because ‘guan-xi(关系)’ (relationship) is of supreme importance and harmonious relationship is the ideal for Chinese.”¹³¹ In order to bring harmony, the Chinese will seek to bypass any kind of conflict. Relationships are seen as a priority and the breaking of one as a taboo. They will involve others to keep a confrontation from occurring. We see this in the use of a matchmaker for weddings, a real estate agent or business broker for business proposals and have observed this with a person that guarantees a deal without a written contract. All are cultural practices that can be seen in the Chinese culture. Examples like these helps prepare a

¹³⁰ Wan, “Jesus Christ.”

¹³¹ Wan, Enoch, “Biblical Theology from a Chinese Perspective: Interpreting Scripture through the Lens of Honor and Shame,” *Global Missiology*, 2003, https://www.academia.edu/4098177/Biblical_Theology_from_a_Chinese_Perspective_Interpreting_Scripture_through_the_Lens_of_Honor_and_Shame.

Chinese to see Christ as the mediator, debt-payer, and reconciler. We present Christ as the one that goes for us to God because salvation can be best understood by many Chinese as restoring a relationship with God and bringing peace to our relationships with those around us.¹³²

Dean Flemming says that “[a]ll theology is done from a particular location and perspective whether we are conscious of it or not. Contextualized theology is not just desirable; it is the only way theology can be done.”¹³³ Approaching contextualization of the gospel requires one to humbly submit our preconceptions to a God that understands the cultures of the world. It is too easy for us to simply slip back into the interpretation that is easy and fit well into our home cultural boxes. Richards and O’Brien warn us,

While it is easy to tell that you are hearing or reading a foreign language, what is not at all obvious is how our language, and our understanding of how language works, affects everything else we think and do. Few of us ever reflect on the mechanics of our native languages or the values and patterns that lie beneath them. These things reside further down the iceberg, under the water. So we are unlikely to recognize what it is about our own language that goes without being said.¹³⁴

This is what makes contextualization difficult. When working outside one's native culture, assumptions take place as we automatically assume others are seeing, hearing, and experiencing the world that way each of us does. Hall and Ames stress,

More often than not, the filter of one’s own language serves to make otherwise alien ways of thinking seem familiar. For example, when china students see ‘tian’ translated as heaven, they may assume that connotations of transcendental spirituality attaching to the notion of heaven in their tradition apply to tian. tian zhu as master of tian or shangdi as ancestral lord, they contextualize this by

¹³² Wan, “Biblical Theology.”

¹³³ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 298.

¹³⁴ Randolph and O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture*, 71-72.

appealing to an ancestral continuum analogous to our family structure. Westerners are inclined to believe that everyone sees a rabbit while Chinese see a duck.¹³⁵

It is important to surround oneself with others that provide us with an ongoing two-way dialogue over cultural interpretations and adaptations. Also finding and devoting oneself to practice and lifestyle of humility and submission to God gives us that ability to recognize when we are seeing something different from believers around us. This change in one's approach will allow one to begin to see one's own biases and interpretations that hinder a proper and clear understanding of Christ.

Building a Bridge

Recognizing that there is a gap between Eastern and Western ways of thinking is the first plank that is laid to build this bridge. This recognition cannot simply be an acknowledgment but an understanding of the ways each of us participates in enlarging it is key to begin to build a bridge that allows dialogue and two-way understanding. David Hall and Roger Ames state, "For it is only when we become sensitive to indigenous elements that resonate with the important Chinese values and doctrines that we will be able to appropriate elements of that alien culture to enrich our own experience."¹³⁶ For church leaders and denominational missionaries to seek out appropriate bridges is key to true contextualization.

The article "Intercultural Hermeneutics" states,

When the church's faith is genuinely contextual, the shame and stigma imposed on oppressed people begins to be lifted. They find a new dignity as they see not only their own lives but also their culture in God's redeeming light. When faith is contextual, there is a recognition that the gospel speaks to Christians in their

¹³⁵ Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, xvi.

¹³⁶ Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, xxiii.

language, contacts with their symbols, address their needs, and awakens their creative energies.¹³⁷

When one begins to recognize the importance of contextualization of the gospel, its message, and the church, then one can begin interacting with clarity, authenticity, and integrity to bring about equality in our theology.

Need for Contextualization

Recognizing that contextualization has several meanings, let us look for clarity.

Hesselgrave and Rommen, concerning how we should contextualize the gospel, said,

Christian contextualization can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.¹³⁸

This typical evangelical approach sees contextualization as a communication and application problem that needs to take ideas and rework them. However, we need to take this a step further recognizing that culture shapes all of what we read, see, and teach. Contextualization is not taking our ideas and finding a way to share across a culture, but rather seeing how that culture influences each of us in our understanding of the Gospel as we read and see it through our own cultural lenses.¹³⁹ If culture influences a reading of the Word of God, then this focus on culture shifts how we live out our theology. This is a

¹³⁷ "On Intercultural Hermeneutics," *International Review of Mission* 85, no. 337 (1996): 245.

¹³⁸ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 200.

¹³⁹ Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 161.

task that not only cross-cultural missionaries have to grapple with, but it is also something everyone in ministry all over the world should be doing. Flemming says,

There is a burgeoning recognition among Christians around the globe that in order for the Christian message to be meaningful to people it must come to them in language and categories that make sense within their particular culture and life situation... This means that the Scripture must be contextualized... so authenticity comes in new cultural, social, and historical settings.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, context has more to do with the gospel than just making sure one is not proof texting from Scripture. It has to do with understanding the culture that one is speaking to and understanding our preconceived ideas and how they influence us. Elder and Paul said, “humans do not naturally consider the rights and needs of others...As humans, we live with the unrealistic but confident sense that we have fundamentally figured out the way things actually are, and that we have done this objectively.”¹⁴¹ It is easy to see and contextualize the gospel as it fits into our understanding of the world. Contextualizing the gospel means seeing this world and the cultures with it as redeemable by God.

Kevin Vanhoozer said, “Western theologians must be aware of the cultural beams in their own eyes before attempting to remove specks from the non-Western eyes. It is ultimately for the sake of better biblical interpretation that Western theologians need to pay attention to how the Bible is being read and practiced in the non-Western world.”¹⁴²

This means that true contextualization is a two-way street, flowing to and from cultures

¹⁴⁰ Flemming, *Contextualization*, 13-14.

¹⁴¹ Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Foundation for Critical Thinking. Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts & Tools* (Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2001), 39.

¹⁴² Kevin Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule them All?: Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity,” Quoted in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 116.

we are encountering. It is an ongoing conversation between pastors and theologians that is open to understanding the Word of God from multiple cultural perspectives.

Some say that we should simply be faithful to the text. Unfortunately, this does not recognize that each of us (including the translators) have cultural lenses that we read and interpret the Scriptures through. When we recognize that all that we have taught, and all that we teach has been contextualized by our own culture and sifted in order of importance by our mind, we can be open to alternative understandings and ways of teaching that might be understood to the students that we are trying to convey important truths about the Bible to. This is not relativism, but rather a push for theologians and cross-cultural workers to see that their understanding of Scriptures have been influenced by their home cultures.

Jesus said in Mark 16:15-16, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” How one understands this passage will affect how one views the mission that God gives us. Are they to just believe and be baptized? There are some Christians that believe their missional responsibilities only includes this command. When this is taught cross-culturally, then we begin to share our worldview on others. When we teach overly simplistic views in order to make the gospel understood, sometimes we bring confusion where there should have been clarity. Flemming gives us an example how trying to simplify the gospel can cause confusion in a fear-based culture when saying,

When the gospel meets world views that are burdened with fear of unseen powers thought to control practical realities such as crops, health, and family relations...people can easily assume that Jesus is powerless to overcome the forces that influence their daily lives...converts may look for supplements to protect

them from hostile spirits. Ironically, a gospel that neglects such worldview may unwittingly end up promoting syncretism instead of preventing it.”¹⁴³

Sharing the gospel in contextually appropriate ways allows one to minimize some of the potential obstacles that lead to syncretism, heresy, or simple misunderstandings.

With a new perspective on contextualization, we can see that through Scripture the one true God has revealed himself throughout history and through many cultures. He promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17). We see through the Biblical genealogies that the hand of God guiding and directing through multiple cultures for many generations to bring about His promised Messiah (Matthew 1).¹⁴⁴ We still see that God works in and through the people and cultures of this world to bring about the salvation that He desires for us all.

With an understanding that culture shapes the reading of the Word of God, sometime should be spent on understanding how to jump one of the hurdles that are created by some dominant Chinese narratives in order for the Scriptures to be understood.

Working with the Confucian Worldview

Scott Callaham notes, “Important theological concepts such as sin, righteousness, and law carry meanings that vary significantly from Western Christian expectations.”¹⁴⁵ Chinese often understand Scriptural themes that Westerners do not always see. This is

¹⁴³ Flemming, 18-19.

¹⁴⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version*.

¹⁴⁵ Scott Callaham, "Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (2013): 897-99.

due to the cultural lenses that even influence Chinese today. Confucian values including loss of face in all social interactions, ancestor worship, and how a group functions within the society are notions that permeate the Chinese society.

When talking about the Confucian concept of filial piety, Amy Chua said, “Chinese parents believe that their kids owe them everything... The understanding is that Chinese children must spend their lives repaying their parents by obeying them and making them proud.”¹⁴⁶ Kwang-Kuo Hwang says, “Parents are the origins of one’s life. People have the utmost filial obligation to repay the unending debt to their parents.”¹⁴⁷ This begs the question of what we should do with the Scriptures like Matthew 12:48¹⁴⁸ and Matthew 10:34-39¹⁴⁹ that talk about leaving the family?

Within Confucian hierarchy, especially filial piety and family as a foundational aspect of Chinese culture, another way to talk about God’s message is to talk about a theology of the family. Luke 15, for example, gives us the story of the prodigal son showing the father’s love for a child that has dishonored the family. This love of the lost son is a good starting point for conversations about God’s love. The Biblical book of John can be attractive to the Chinese as we see that God the Father gives his Son to save those with broken relationships. This family theology helps the Chinese see and

¹⁴⁶ Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 52-53.

¹⁴⁷ Kwang-Kuo Hwang, “Two Moralities: Reinterpreting the Findings of Empirical Research on Moral Reasoning in Taiwan,” *Asia Journal of Social Psychology* 1, no. 3 (1998): 232.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 12:47-48 (NIV), ...“Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’”

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 10:35-39 (NIV), “...For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ ‘Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...”

understand the importance of a believer's adoption as a child of God. Enoch Wan says, "...the universal fatherhood of God to all believers; the church is inclusive of the universal brotherhood of all believers of all times and all ages; the local church is the household of God (1 Tim 3:15); heaven is the perfect home in eternity with the perfect communion of the saints."¹⁵⁰ For a collective society that values filial piety, joining and enjoying the benefits of the family of God is not only understood, but desired as well. Wan also notes that Chinese believers "want to experience the deliverance from curse, fate, fear, etc. in the here and now. ... It is something that can be declared clearly, demonstrated powerfully and experienced daily."¹⁵¹ Hope and gaining a true family that can be seen, felt, known through the restoration of real relationships. It is a powerful and culturally understood reason to follow God. So how do we handle the Biblical Scriptures that talk about leaving our family? (ie. Luke 14:25-27). Wu says that the meaning within the Scriptures is not to separate believers from families as much as looking at who do we follow. Concerning filial piety, he suggests that "people should repent of familial idolatries and give their allegiance to Christ."¹⁵²

For the Chinese view of Confucian hierarchy and filial piety, it is good to talk about God as the ultimate authority, the strong leader that all other leaders are modeled after. Jackson Wu notes,

Conversion changes our group identity. When we trust Christ, we belong to a new family and enter a new kingdom. Becoming a Christian does not mean rejecting our family and country; rather, we enlarge our sense of family and

¹⁵⁰ Wan, "Biblical Theology."

¹⁵¹ Wan, "Biblical Theology."

¹⁵² Wu, *One Gospel*, 161.

nation. Who do we want to please? Who do we want to accept us? Our faith defines who we are leaning on for support in times of trouble.¹⁵³

Since Chinese place their family at the center of their lives, the biblical teaching on God as heavenly Father, in which we have turned away from, can provide a vivid and powerful tool to talk about restoration.

This paraphrase of Psalm 23 reflects proper contextualization for a Confucian culture:

My patron is Yahweh.
 He generously provides for my every need.
 He gifts me the finest. He brings me to the best places.
 His perfect care delights my heart.
 He gives wise guidance so that I'm never lost.
 This lavish generosity makes his name great.

Even when the clouds of shame and despair gather,
 I do not worry,
 because you, O God, have my back.
 Your strong hand gives me complete assurance.
 You welcome me to a lavish banquet,
 so, everyone sees I'm your honored guest.
 You exalt me to prominence;
 your favor towards me reaches to the heavens.

Without any doubt, you faithfully provide for me every day.
 You always extend hospitality
 and honor me with your presence.¹⁵⁴

Though many Westerners would not be comfortable with this concept of God as our Patron or our owner, we see in a Confucian society with an ordered hierarchy this idea brings clarity more than a shepherd/sheep relationship would bring. The understanding and promises are the same when understood from a Chinese perspective.

¹⁵³ Wu, 161.

¹⁵⁴ "Psalm 23 (HSP)," HonorShame, June 6, 2018, <http://honorshame.com/psalm-23-hsp/>. (accessed December 18, 2018).

Christ and the Salvation from Shame

Similarly, the cultural contexts of honor and shame can be seen within the Scriptures if we are aware of the circumstances. Richards and O'Brien argue that

[We need to] pay attention to where stories take place in Scripture. If an event or conversation is taking place publicly, there's a good chance that honor/shame is at stake, such as in the story of Ruth and Boaz. As we mentioned above, the key difference between the questions Nicodemus and Jesus' disciples asked and those asked by Jerusalem's Jewish leaders was context: Nicodemus and the disciples questioned Jesus privately (John 3:2 and Matt 17:19). The Jewish leaders questioned him publicly. You might object that the primary difference was motive: Nicodemus and the disciples were asking sincere questions, while the religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus. That's true. But context indicates motive. Private questions were not honor challenges. Public questions were.¹⁵⁵

Public shame and private vulnerability are seen in Chinese culture today. As we attempt to grasp some of the cultural narratives within Chinese culture, we see that some passages have greater meaning because of their cultural context. Their views on honor and shame allow them to easily grasp that our choices have not honored God and given Him the respect that He deserves. In a positive sense, Scripture teaches that "none who wait for you shall be put to shame" (Ps. 25:2), a culturally appropriate call to trust Christ.¹⁵⁶

Bill Carmody argues, "Shame keeps us small, resentful and afraid. In shame-prone cultures, where parents, leaders, and administrators consciously or unconsciously encourage people to connect their self-worth to what they produce, I see disengagement, blame, gossip, stagnation, favoritism and a total dearth of creativity and innovation."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture*, 135.

¹⁵⁶ Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation Through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁷ Bill Carmody, *Shame the Secret Killer of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, February 10, 2015, <https://www.inc.com/bill-carmody/shame-the-secret-killer-of-innovation-creativity-amp-change.html>.

Chinese believers walk this tightrope of representing both Christ and the community; balancing who they potentially honor and who they might shame. Georges cautions, “As we proclaim a God who removes shame and restores honor, we must concretely embody that message in our own actions and lives. People will hardly hear from us what they do not see in us.”¹⁵⁸

Chinese Christian’s Understanding of Shame

Jackson Wu suggests “...that honor and shame are much more prominent categories of biblical theology than most presentations grounded in Western cultures would suggest.”¹⁵⁹ The Bible tells us how shame came into this world. Adam and Eve were naked but felt no shame. When they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, their eyes were open to an understanding of shame. They took fig leaves sewing them together to cover themselves. Later, they heard the sound of God, and hid themselves. God asked Adam where he was, in which he responded that he was afraid because he was naked (Genesis 3).¹⁶⁰ This Biblical account depicts the emotions of shame and fear, which according to the Christian Bible have been around since the beginning of humans on earth.

The Biblical account of the story of creation and original sin can have cultural problems with Chinese. The veneration of ancestors seems to be contrary to the idea that the family members that came before us passed on sin rather than blessings. This Chinese

¹⁵⁸ Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

¹⁵⁹ Callaham, “Saving God's Face,” 897-99.

¹⁶⁰ Ho, Wai, and Ng, 64.

Christian poem reflects these ideas creatively and contextually recognizing the perceived concerns over honoring ancestors:

Running naked around, delightful to behold—
 For nothing is hidden from his view—
 In our innocent state, united in one flesh,
 Happy, no shame or guilt, surely it was
 A blissful time; save we didn't know how
 To consummate the command, 'Be fruitful
 And multiply,' until the fruit gave us
 Knowledge to know each other as man and wife.
 Eyes opened, we knew our naked state,
 The first experience of shame. In fear, in vain,
 We hid ourselves; in childlike honesty,
 We confessed to our transgression. Paradise lost
 Self-consciousness gained—never to eat

The fruit of the tree of life, immortality denied!
 What justice condemned our children, for a wrong
 They did not do, stigmatized to be born
 With original sin—repugnant to our Chinese descendants,
 Who worship their ancestors, of whom we rank Utmost
 in all the generations that followed? ¹⁶¹

Christ desires our success to be the restoration of our true face.¹⁶² All of our strivings do not produce what is truly desired, love and acceptance. The Shame that this world uses to distract and bind us needs to ultimately be turned over to the One that transcends the cultures and the problems we find ourselves in. The restoration of our honor comes with a relationship with God.

As we endeavor to continue to understand how honor and shame impact our relationships with Chinese believers, we need to continue to be aware of the cultural obstacles, both our own and that of the Chinese, that can hinder our communication. One

¹⁶¹ Ho, Wai, and Ng, 64.

¹⁶² Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 184.

common communication tool is to make sure we have a cover to keep people from feeling shame. This can be as simple as an excuse for not attending a party or an elaborate story told to excuse one from answering or confronting someone over a perceived wrong. This indirect way of making a request minimizes conflict and avoids exposing others to potential shame.¹⁶³ Westerners might feel this is deceptive, but if everybody fully understands and respects the intention of your indirect request then it is simply a “cover.” Our communication must keep one eye on the issue and one on the relationship.¹⁶⁴ This is also an example of how shame and pragmatism are intertwined.

When we prioritize relationships, we communicate value and honor to those relationships. This is what God has modeled for us. He honors us and desires relationship despite our shame and despite how we have rejected him. I was recently talking with a Chinese couple about the story of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32) We were talking about how people can reconcile damaged relationships with symbolic gestures that bring honor. We see that the father in the story reconciles without saying anything about forgiveness nor restoration of relationship. Instead, he uses symbols of food and clothing. “The father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’” (Luke 15: 22)

In this conversation with this young couple, I said that the entire village knew the son had dishonored the father and they also knew the father fully restored the son’s family status with the robe, ring, sandals, and killing the fattened cow. I told them I have

¹⁶³ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor*, 135.

¹⁶⁴ Georges and Baker, 136.

noticed in China, that fathers often acted this way as well. In situations of reconciliation, symbolic actions often speak louder than words, so they are often the best route for restoring a relationship. This couple only smiled and nodded. The wife eventually said that her father was against their marriage. He had gotten angry and said that he wished she had never been born. Of course, this hurt her, but she knew this was his way of expressing his anger. She told me that a few weeks later, she had called home and he was willing to talk to her. The very act that he was willing to speak with her again told her that her father had forgiven her and restored her status in the family again. She did not expect a conversation about the problem for that would have only reminded everyone of the shameful situation. She saw her father's actions as appropriate and restorative to their relationship.¹⁶⁵

This everyday example shows how powerful the act of Jesus willing to go to the cross for our shame and to restore our honor can be to the Chinese culture. This act spoke louder than words. For Chinese, reconciliation comes through actions more than words. Thus, Christ created a model for Chinese to follow; forgiveness with actions and restoration of honor by faith.

A Few Biblical Examples of Shame

The Bible arises from primarily a shame-based society within its near-east context.¹⁶⁶ Westerners often miss this connection, but it provides some easy links for Chinese. Here are a few examples. Loss of face is as old as the first stories of humanity

¹⁶⁵ "Ellie," pseudonym, interview by author in Southwest China, December 3, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Georges and Baker, 67.

living under sin. Cain did not receive the recognition he expected from God when his sacrifice was disregarded (Genesis 4:5). Jackson Wu talks about Cain modeling what it means to lose one's honor:

Consequently, Cain 'lowered his face' in anger. Cain inherited his face-hiding tendency from his parents who in shame hid their (social) face from God. But God offers restoration of face to Cain. 'If you do what is right, will there not be a lifting up of your face?' Cain's status could change! But Cain's longing for face became recklessly uncontrollable and he removed his brother's face from the picture altogether. Consequently, Cain lost access to God's face. 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face.'¹⁶⁷

If shame is cultural, then a community becomes the judge of what is acceptable in that social group. We can see Biblical examples of this as Ezra confesses his shame and then speaks of Israel's shame.¹⁶⁸ Ezra 9:6–7 says,

O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today.

Also, in Ezekiel 16:62–63 says that the Lord will remember his covenant so that Israel would feel the shame they ought to feel. As a result, he then says to Israel, “[you will] never open your mouth again because of your shame.” Shame is not always bad. In fact, morality and repentance demand that a person be shamed or humbled at least. In Ephesians 4:1, the apostle calls his listeners to “live a life worthy of the calling you have

¹⁶⁷ “Meaning of ‘Seeing God's Face,’” HonorShame, April 3, 2016, <http://honorshame.com/gods-face/>. (accessed October 15, 2018)

¹⁶⁸ Jackson Wu, “Have Theologians No Sense of Shame? How the Bible Reconciles Objective and Subjective Shame,” *Themelios* 43, no. 2 (2018), <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/have-theologians-no-sense-of-shame>.

received”. The word ‘worthy’ should alert us that honor/shame language is being used.¹⁶⁹ If one is worthy then they are honorable for a sinful person is shameless.

Joel B. Green notes, “The gospel is a message of “salvation-as-reversal, of status transposition, of outsiders becoming insiders, and grace for unexpected people.”¹⁷⁰ This is at the heart of what Chinese believers have come to either understand or need to hear for the Gospel of Jesus to be heard. The world has taught them that shame is part of life; there is no escaping it. Yet God’s salvation reverses the condition of shame. Zeph 3:19-20 says, “I [God] will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth...I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.” 1 Peter 2:6-7 states, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame.” So, the honor is for those who believe.

God not only changes but reverses the status of those shamed and excluded by a distorted honor system. God’s honor fully saves us from our own shame. God reverses our status from one of shame to one of honor. His salvation overturns the position this world has placed us in.¹⁷¹ He reverses our identity; brings honor to our shame. Richards and O’Brien comment that, “God worked through the honor/shame system, but we would err if we implied this was merely a system. God himself is concerned about honor/shame

¹⁶⁹ Wu, *One Gospel*, 132.

¹⁷⁰ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86.

¹⁷¹ Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 184-86.

even if we Westerners are not.”¹⁷² For a Chinese, this is the hope that transcends culture, community, and a world filled with opportunities of shame.

Contextualizing Chinese Pragmatism

Westerners often have the impression that because of their pragmatism that Chinese do not believe in right and wrong. This is a false impression. Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker say, “Honor-shame cultures [like China] do have a moral sense of right and wrong, but their basis for right and wrong differs from Western culture. Honor-shame cultures define right and wrong relationally and communally, not abstractly or legally.”¹⁷³ What is best for relationships and people is morally right; what shames is morally wrong. Victor Furnish in his study *Theology and Ethics in Paul* notes a similar perspective within Pauline ethics:

This communal context of the believer’s life is of the greatest importance for Paul’s understanding of how the Christian is able to know what he ought to and ought not to do...For [Paul], moral action is never a matter of an isolated actor choosing from among a variety of abstract ideas on the basis of how inherently “good” or “evil” each may be. Instead it is always a matter of choosing and doing what is good for the brother and what will upbuild the whole community of brethren.¹⁷⁴

This type of ethic does not mean community preferences become the moral standard; quite the opposite. God determines what is honorable and shameful. The Bible

¹⁷² Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture*, 127.

¹⁷³ Georges and Baker, 197.

¹⁷⁴ Victor P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abington, 1968), 233.

acknowledges that people in every context have unique ways of expressing honor and shame however only God defines true shamefulness and honorableness.¹⁷⁵

For example, when comparing two quintessential Western foundational narratives, first being Golden rule - “do to others as you would have done to you”(Luke 6:31) and second, the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), we can see several potential places for misunderstanding. In China there is a significant separation from those considered inside one’s community and those outside.¹⁷⁶ For many new believers or those reading the Scripture for the first time the golden rule would be thought of and directed toward those within one’s own community. Those outside one’s community would not be considered.

However, as we have seen in previous sections, sometimes the community is thought of as the nation. So, in the story of the Good Samaritan, greater emphasis would have been put on hosting a foreigner and representing one’s own country well.¹⁷⁷ This would even be over and above any consideration from their own fellow citizens that was unknown to them. This can be seen in the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games and the honor it brought to the country even at the expense of many relocated homes, destroyed

¹⁷⁵ Romans 14:3(NIV) “The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.”

¹⁷⁶ A.L.Y. Wong, G.H. Shaw, and D.K.C. Ng, “Taiwan Chinese Managers Personality: Is Confucian Influence on the Wane?” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21, no. 7 (2010): 1109.

¹⁷⁷ Anne-Marie Brady, “‘Treat Insiders and Outsiders Differently’: The Use and Control of Foreigners in the PRC,” *The China Quarterly* no. 164, (2000): 943-64, <http://www.jstor.org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/stable/655921>.

buildings, and removal of unsightly or impoverished places.¹⁷⁸ Having Western teachers that can help recognize the subtle differences in relational dynamics when Chinese students reads the Bible, can impact Christian leadership development's longevity.

The Need for Contextualized Training

Flemming says,

The gospel is both at home in every culture and alien to every culture. The new testament bears witness to the gospel engaging its cultural and social world at a variety of levels. Different circumstances require different approaches (Romans 13 & Rev. 13). The kind of cultural engagement we discover in the New testament can serve as precedents to how Christians respond to various facts of a given culture today.¹⁷⁹

Training within this context has layers that have to be understood. In China, it is part of the culture for a leader to govern unquestionably. There is a clear distinction between who is the master and who is the servant, or who is the leader and who are the ones to be led. A misunderstanding can take place when students are taught about authority without understanding what that teaching means in the culture it is being taught. When leading and training those from other cultures we have to be sensitive to cultural cues and common cross-cultural misunderstandings. Finding ways to bridge the community-minded philosophies of China and the individual self-promoting ideas that come from the west is crucial. By creating open lines of communication, a sense of trust and understanding can be realized. Each culture has value and input. Quality work can be accomplished, and fulfillment can be achieved.

¹⁷⁸ Hyun Bang Shin and Li Bingqin, "Whose Games? The Costs of Being 'Olympic Citizens' in Beijing," *Environment and Urbanization* 25, no. 2, (2013): 560, doi:10.1177/0956247813501139.

¹⁷⁹ Fleming, 306.

Recently I have been a part of a training time in which we dealt with some pastoral theological concepts. During this class, concepts were given and set up that appeared to be revolutionary to some of the students. These were students who are actively involved in house churches either leading or assisting the leader. It made me realize that many knew how to do church but did not always have a clear understanding of the why. They were told by their leadership what needed to be done without being taught the reason or theology behind it. As I reflected upon this particular class, I see the necessity to make sure we have a balanced approach to giving skills as well as giving a clear understanding of the Biblical foundations. I see this as a contextualized view of the typical top down Chinese house churches and a Western approach of full explanation. Finding ways to encourage local leaders to not be limited by either their local understands alone nor those of Westerners is part of the purpose of a contextualized teacher.

Stephen Lawrence Woodworth claims, "Training pastors with the concepts of metaphorical language invites an exploration into the connectedness of pastoral ministry to the life of the community through meaningful symbols and terminology that reinforce...the role of the pastor in their given locale."¹⁸⁰ In China, I have seen churches that have tried to set themselves up like an American church. I have also seen confusion come when Biblical stories were taught from a Western perspective. The Chinese have such a long history of storytelling and mythology that one has to be careful not to allow the stories of the Bible to get slotted into that category.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Lawrence Woodworth, "Prophets, Priests and Kings," *Theology of Leadership Journal*, (2018): 84, <http://theologyofleadership.com/index.php/tlj/article/view/4>.

Even concepts like ‘Prophet, Priest and King’ can be viewed in completely different subtle ways that I will briefly attempt to flush out. Unfortunately, earthly concepts of emperors have influenced the leadership models in China. In a typical Confucian model, in which everyone wants to move up the ladder of success, Christ is seen as the King and the pastor the representative of the King on earth. This creates a view that godly authority (and power) rests with the pastor. So this view is fully embraced by pastors and leaders in Asia but for the wrong reasons.¹⁸¹

With this understanding of a strong, king-like pastor that holds control over a congregation then add prophet and priest. A prophet is the mouthpiece of God sharing the Word of the King. A priest, from the Buddhist influence, is someone wholly dedicated to this cause even willing to leave one’s family. So people have come to believe that being a pastor in Asia means someone administering the church with a strong hand, worthy to represent the King of Kings and able to physically sacrifice self (and family) while proclaiming truth. If we do not take into consideration the cultural lenses when entering a classroom, home or sanctuary, then we are simply teaching our own brand of Christianity rather than recognizing the God-given differences that make the world diverse.

Conclusion

The lenses in which we read the Bible are shaped by the cultures that we live in. For the Chinese and their fight for independence and freedom from Western influence, there have been misunderstandings due to cultural conflicts. One of the most well-known Christians to have endured the hardship of the Communist system was Watchman Nee.

¹⁸¹ “Larry,” pseudonym, interview by author in Northeast China, April 16, 2019.

He spoke insightful truth when asked by China Inland Mission leaders, on the eve of the ejection of foreign Christian workers, about the role that missionaries should play if they were given a chance to return to China. Nee answered, “Please come as teaching elders rather than missionaries (evangelists). What we need most is the right interpretation of the Word of God.”¹⁸² False teachings, years of limited access to Scripture, and cultural pressure has made the need for contextualized teachers all the more prevalent. The artifact that will accompany this dissertation will include ways to help Westerners to begin to see not only some of their own narratives, but also assist in finding ways to help these teachers and trainers to contextualize some of their own language, materials, discipleship, as they prepare to train, live, and work with those that live across this cultural gap.

¹⁸² Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1994), quoted in Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), 123.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Through the journey of researching this dissertation, I have been reminded frequently of the need for Christian workers to see beyond the limited scope of their own culture. For many of us just being willing to begin having this conversation changes our approach to ministry and cross-cultural interactions. The main goal of this video artifact, called *Scriptural Contextualization: Beginning the Journey to Understanding Our Own Narratives and Those within a Chinese Context*, is to not only offer support but also challenge the foundational narratives of those that desire to work cross-culturally in regard to scriptural contextualization. It is designed to help bridge (or at least narrow) the gap that exist between cultures.

As we begin to understand how leadership, theology, and an understanding of Christ are seen across cultural lines, particularly from West to East, we begin to see that the foundational worldviews can strongly influence the way they see the world and understand Christ. Western and Eastern views of the world can be traditionally seen as philosophically opposed. Crossing the barrier of culture can have long lasting ramifications no matter the context. Del Giudice, et al. also states:

Cultures are expressed in different ways, from exterior mannerisms to strong principles. Unless a dramatic event occurs, people generally tend to preserve their values, but within specific contexts...Culture must never hinder cooperation: the contact between two different cultures does not only bring issues to resolve but can be positive for a partnership....The partnership can take advantage of the cultural diversity and change it into an opportunity.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Del Giudice, Elia, and Della, 2.

The strength that comes from cooperation and unity across these cultural boundaries can provide a depth for all willing to be open to learning and growing. When communicating with Chinese Christians, cultural sensitivity toward the usage of key foundational terms can bring clarity for Western Christians

Goal of the Artifact

The artifact is a series of five videos that can be used in training to bring an understanding of contextualization when crossing cultures. I believe when our own foundational narratives are understood then we are able to recognize how those narratives influence the way we see the world and read the Scripture. This is particularly true when those we are working with come to our home country. When living within our home culture, it is easy for us to all forget there is cross-cultural work that needs to be done. In our home culture all the lesson we have learned about contextualization and adaptability are easily forgotten. Taking the journey through understanding how a Westerner can contextualize in a Chinese setting will allow a person to begin to think of their own context, ministry settings, and potential obstacles for cross-cultural interactions.

SECTION 5:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

The video artifact, *Scriptural Contextualization: Beginning the Journey to Understanding our Own Narratives and Those within a Chinese Context*, will provide a means to overcome misperceptions of seeing one's own worldview as the correct worldview. This misconception is often due to our desire for simplicity when encountering difficult or contradictory viewpoints. It is easier to set our worldview as the standard for the world. If used within a classroom setting or a small group, this artifact could provide the beginning that is needed to an ongoing understanding of how each of us have the potential to change the Gospel to meet our own needs. Even though this series is specifically designed for those working in a Chinese context, it can also be used with local churches to assist in the awakening of an understanding of how each of us are shape by the culture around us.

Audience

The target for this video series is individuals that work or desire to work within a Chinese context. This context could be within Western, African, or Asian countries. This is designed as a tool to begin the journey and hopefully ongoing conversation about how our worldview shapes the way we teach. Like any training session, these videos would be most effective if watched with others who seek to understand their own worldview and are willing to engage in a journey. This journey should not be taken alone but within the context of a Christian community so each of our thoughts can be not only tested by the Word of God but by the community God surrounds us with.

Action Plan

The development of two of the five videos has allowed me to see the potential for this project. Speaking specifically with my denominational leadership and regional communication personnel, we plan on developing these videos within the next year. I hope the cost and production of these videos will come from our denominational leadership. I would like to make them access-free to be utilized in effective ways to prepare people around the world from cross-cultural discussions. The format for this video series is as follows:

Video 1: How Our Worldview Shapes Our Understanding of Scripture

Video 2: Westerners understanding the Chinese narrative: Confucian Hierarchy

Video 3: Westerners understanding the Chinese narrative: Shame

Video 4: Westerners understanding the Chinese narrative: Chinese Pragmatism

Video 5: Worldview and the Journey to begin contextualization

SECTION 6:
POSTSCRIPT

The video artifact, *Scriptural Contextualization: Beginning the Journey to Understanding Our Own Narratives and Those within a Chinese Context*, addresses issues of seeing our individual cultures as the lens to interpret the world and the Christian Scriptures. By not only teaching relevant contextualization but also utilizing creative examples, the artifact pushes learners to assess their own ministry interactions and methods. With contextualized leaders trained and willing to openly engage those from others cultures, global-minded Christian leaders can find common ground for the work of the Kingdom of God.

Seeing individuals called by God to interact cross-culturally limit themselves and their ministry by their actions and ways thinking has both frustrated and saddened me. If more time in self-reflection or training would be given to helping make individuals sensitive to the creativeness of a God that utilizes culture, there may have been less missteps and more openness to indigenous leadership development.

Working in Asia for over a decade has allowed me to see individuals come and attempt to teach or train utilizing their own Western views. Initially I desired to interview those being trained in various Western based schools, trying to determine what methods were beneficial and what were detrimental. When political winds began to change a new approach that would provide information yet protect those in the process of being trained needed to emerge. Focusing on culture and how Westerners are influenced led me to see the need for specific training among for those deemed leaders working outside their own cultural world view. This dissertation and video series are the result of that journey.

The chosen video artifact, although not fully realized, has been received well from those involved in its initial production. During production I had many conversations with those that were involved in its production. They referenced material from the videos in daily conversations as they themselves were processing some of the information presented. I am well aware that we are all in need of constant reminders of how we should interact with those not like us.

If used in an effective way, I believe this dissertation and corresponding artifact can benefit those working with Chinese believers, as well as those that are seeking. I don't think we can ever remove our cultural blinders that shapes the way we see the world. However, we do have the ability to be open to others' worldview and allowing their voice to be added to the conversation. The approach of recognizing our own narratives should help each of us see how we converse across those gaps.

APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT SCRIPTS

Video: Scriptural Contextualization Session 1**How Our Worldview Shapes Our Understanding of Scripture**

VIDEO LINK: <https://youtu.be/DAyH47JP3hw>

Script

Scriptural contextualization is an important topic of discussion and so to gain a broader understanding of who each of us are and how we interact with those that God sends our way is foundational to understanding scriptural contextualization.....Any conversation about scriptural contextualization has to begin with Culture...Discussions about culture are unavoidable; all people live in a culture of some sort. There is no neutral position, no cultural vacuum that makes objective pronouncements on the cultures of others. We cannot say “we are not affected by culture”... All people, whether they realize it or not, are shaped by the culture in which they live. A failure to understand this point can actually lead to a form of cultural imperialism. We begin to believe our way, our culture, our thoughts are the right and only way.... A person might begin to believe that their own cultural way of practicing Christianity is the *only* way to practice Christianity. Should such a person begin to minister in a different culture, it will inadvertently shape how they share not only the Gospel but also their cultural traditions.

Contextualization is key. (On Screen) **It means finding a way to understand the meaning of the text**, while removing personal and cultural bias. Christians tend to think of contextualization as something missionaries do “over there,” and many serious

Christians in the Western world worry about how far non-Western churches go in their contextualization efforts.¹⁸⁴

“But in reality, every Christian alive today is actively involved in contextualization. Every Christian worships in a contextualized church that are meeting the needs of the culture we live in. The question is NOT whether or not we are going to contextualize.”¹⁸⁵ In countless ways, whether in North America or South Asia, (on Screen) **every believer alive contextualizes the New Testament gospel to their own culture**, since none of us are first century Palestinian Jews. The question facing every believer and church, therefore, is whether or not they will contextualize well. IF you don’t think you are contextualizing, that you are just reading, and JUST teaching the Word ...then you are simply contextualizing poorly. And quite possibly guilty of adding to Word of God.... adding your culture, adding your interpretation, adding your practices...Syncretism (the meshing together of different religions or 2 different ways of thinking) can happen as easily in Indiana or Iowa as it can in Indonesia!

Over the next 5 sessions we will be exploring the effects and challenges scriptural contextualization presents to ministering cross culturally, as well as creative ways to effectively minister outside ones’ primary setting by guarding against a scriptural contextualized bias.

¹⁸⁴ Zane Pratt, *Four Biblical Foundations for Contextualization*, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/four-biblical-foundations-for-contextualization/>.

¹⁸⁵ Zane Pratt, *Four Biblical Foundations for Contextualization*, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/four-biblical-foundations-for-contextualization/>.

-Culture-

joke:

2 fish were swimming and one said to the other “lately we really have had clear water, the other fish turned to his friend and said, “what’s water”.

Culture, like water, is all around us. We breathe it, live it, teach it knowing that it shapes the realities we live in. Our own Culture influences the way we think, the way we communicate with one another, how we tell jokes...or understand jokes being told.

Culture separates us from those that are not like us. Each person on this planet is part of a unique culture. (add video of cultures) We seem to be drawn to other people that share that same culture as themselves. Those unique qualities about culture are also what makes certain cultures seem different or uncomfortable...even strange. We find ourselves labeling aspects of another culture as “wrong” allowing us to further our sense of rightness. So, what we have done is set up our own culture as the basis for what is right and what makes sense in the world. we subconsciously begin to put other concepts into categories that make sense.... while also judging whether those ideas, concepts, rituals, etc... are beneficial or detrimental.

-Influences-

Unfortunately, we do this subconsciously and if we don’t recognize the danger of this way of thinking we can fall into the trap of seeing the whole world through our own lenses. For example, when reading Charles Dickens relate to the characters and experiences through the filter of our language, worldview, and experiences. Though we can catch the gist of the story, we also recognize that there are many nuances that we undoubtedly miss. We can take a literature class that helps us understand those missing

elements, but we have never lived in the experiences that Dickens describes. So, with our biases and cultural lenses in place, can we ever get to the authors original intention? can we ever get to what the story writer has originally written? These are good questions because we may not be able to fully understand the author's experiences. (on Screen)

Our own journey is totally different and shapes the way we understand the books that we read.

Another example might be if we are traveling in Asia and we see a grandmother requiring their grandchild wash their smelly dirty feet. We are tempted to cry, "foul, this borders on child abuse" rather than discovering the meaning of what is going on. If we were from an Eastern culture where filial piety is practiced, we might see this as a great sign of respect given to this elderly grandmother. The simple act of the child performing this service shows love in a way to help and relieve the grandmother's aches and pains. Where someone from one culture may see this scene as act of cruelty another may see this as an act of kindness and a measure of love. Do we say our understanding is right because it makes sense to us and another's wrong because it goes against our own ethical standards? This is part the journey we hope you take as we look at our own biases and cultural lenses and see how to begin the journey of seeing the scripture from another's perspective.

So what I desire is that all of us are willing to begin to look at **what** our own culture is teaching us about the world, about finances, about politics, about right and wrong, and to begin to see that when we read scripture, when we teach about the Bible, when we are preaching the truth found within the Bible, (on screen) **we are seeing, reading, and teaching from our own cultural perspective.** We can never say that I

only read the Bible, I ONLY teach the Bible. (video of family) We read and teach the Bible through the culture that we were raised, the denominational tradition that we grew up in, and the language we speak.

We have to also recognize that when we are reading, for example, the English translation, that the translators are also influenced by how they have been taught. Whether from a particular denomination or tradition, theological influences can make their way into the translation. I do hope you hear me correctly. I am not talking about relativism or throwing out all of the historical translations, I am wanting us to recognize that when we approach life, our worldview shapes the way we understand it. This is especially true when reading the scriptures. Our pastors, denominational teachings, countries culture, as well as our own experiences shape the way we understand the truths of God. The focus today is not to try and convince you all that we need to take culture and find a way to make every aspect of scripture fit within it reflect that culture we live in.... that is nonsense. My goal is to talk about the cultural lenses that each of us have, each culture we are a part of has foundational stories, foundational narratives that shape the way each of us see the world. In their book, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, Richards and O'Brien cautioned, "...the most powerful cultural values are those that go without being said. It is very hard to know what goes without being said in another culture. But often we are not even aware of what goes without being said in our own culture. This is why misunderstanding, and misinterpretation happen. When a passage of Scripture appears to leave out a piece of the puzzle because something went without being said, we instinctively fill in the gap with a piece from our own culture-usually a piece that goes without being said."

We fill in the gaps with our own cultural norms. That is what makes us human. It is important to note that a person from the western region of the United States and a person from London would not necessarily fill those missing puzzle pieces with the same thing.

Did you know that the famous Italian artisan Michelangelo sculpted Moses with horns?
(picture of Moses)

In the sculpture Moses is holding two tablets of the law. He is descending from Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:29. There, it says in the Latin translation, Moses “did not know his face had become horned.” Some say that this was a simple mistranslation by the latin translator Saint Jerome at the end of the 4th century. there is a Hebrew word that could mean horn or could mean “ray of light”. But we know that Jerome knew this word could be used in 2 ways because he used the alternate translation in his commentary on Amos. So Jerome must truly have believed that Moses came down from Mount Sinai with horns, and not a radiant glow. Jerome was living in the Holy Land at the time and he must have been informed by Jews living there that Moses indeed had horns. The belief in Moses’ literal horns was preserved in a number of Jewish poems from that time. In one of the poem’s verses God tells Moses, (on screen) **“I placed horns of majesty on your head so that if an angel comes near, you will gore him with them.”** I believe this is an instance that Jerome’s culture influenced his interpretation of the scripture. Does it matter if Moses had horns or had a radiant glow? Good question, point is we must be aware of how our own culture, our own pastor, our own teachers, traditions affect our interpretation of the scripture.

-Paul and models of contextualization-

Scripture offers support for this concept of contextualization. For example, Paul's ministry reveals the need for contextualization, Paul intentionally addressed his Jewish listeners one way but addressed secular philosophers differently.

So how do we handle contextualization? How do we begin moving in the right direction concerning this topic? First before we do anything, we need to recognize that throughout the ages and across the globe, there have been other cultural expressions of Christianity that are just as faithful to Scripture as our own. Because of that I want us to look how Paul understood how to contextualize the word of God. So how do each of us begin to look and discover our own cultural lenses? In 1 Cor. 9, Paul models 4 ways for faithful contextualization.

1. Paul gave up his own rights. (on screen)

verse 12: "We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." Paul's didn't want anything unnecessary to stand in the way of someone hearing the gospel. He was willing to endure any inconvenience or personal hardship that might enable the gospel to spread more effectively, including his personal choices and right to what he wanted. He willingly gave up his rights in order not to put any obstacle in the way of the gospel. We struggle with this as Westerners. We are raised to demand our rights. We have the "right" to do a lot of things we want.... wear my shoes indoors, eat or touch someone with my left hand, put up a fence around my own yard without my local

community leader's permission, or leave a birthday party before the rice is served. I have the "right" to dress how I want, eat whatever I want, and decorate my house how I want. The Bible doesn't say I can't do any of those things. The issue in exercising these rights is not obedience to God, but my own comfort and convenience. If anything, that I do, other than those things Scripture commands of me, makes it harder for Muslims, Hindus, or atheists to hear the gospel from me, I need to be willing to give them up voluntarily. I don't have to right, everyone doesn't need to conform to me, my way, my culture.¹⁸⁶

2. Paul was a servant (on screen)

Second Paul approached others as a servant (humbly)- In verse 19 he writes, "Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." He is talking about serving others so that they can see Christ. Not only did he choose to give up his rights, Paul went farther and chose to place himself beneath those whom he is trying to reach with the gospel as their servant.

When we are in the middle of culture shock, we often want to set people straight, not serve them. Tell them why they are not doing things right...sometimes even telling them that they way they worship is not correct because it does not match what we are comfortable with. Yet Jesus himself came not to be served, but to serve. He served people who were wrong, who were in rebellion against him, and who would eventually kill him. Paul knew what Jesus wanted from him-when we serve others, **it breaks cultural down**

¹⁸⁶ Zane Pratt, *Four Biblical Foundations for Contextualization*, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/four-biblical-foundations-for-contextualization/>.

barriers.(on screen) When we approach humbly not as one with all the all the answers but one that is knows little and desires to be taught...a learner putting aside our own needs, our own culture and our own rights.

3. Paul was the same as those he was working with. (Equality)-**relate to others** (on screen)

Paul identified with the people he was trying to reach and adapted to their lifestyle as much as he could without compromising his understanding of the law of Christ: To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19–23)

When we are moving to a new culture sometimes it is easy for us to begin to make changes in our lives and attitudes. But how about when people move into your local neighborhoods? Have you heard yourself say, I wish they would speak English? I wish they would learn how to drive. Why do they have to come to our area and mess things up? Can't they just learn to stand in line? Have you asked the question, what does God want me to change in my own life to build a relationship with those moving into my neighborhood? If God is the God of the whole world, then as his ambassadors, as his people on this earth, what are we doing to understand those that don't know him yet? Paul valued the gospel more than his own rights, more than his own comfort, more than

his own culture. Are we willing to come to a conversation with people not as an expert but humbly asking to be taught about their culture (without judgement) as child at playground makes friends?

4. Paul believed in the power of God's Word. (on Screen)

He taught about God willing to speak, listen, and converse with those God had called him to. Paul stayed within the bounds of Scripture. Paul did not want the message of the Gospel to be distorted by Jewish or Greek interpretation, yet he wasn't afraid to talk to others about how God was guiding and directing their life. His desire was that as we put Christ first in all avenues of our life.

-HOPE-

As we begin to recognize how even our Western interpretations of God's Word have shaped our hearing and understanding THAN we can begin to have open conversations with theologians, pastors, and laypeople from around the world.(global Biblical picture on screen) If our own churches and Bible studies are made up of people from our own culture then we are limiting God's voice in our life. Opening ourselves up to hearing how God speaks in and through other cultures helps us see how sovereign, majestic, and multicultural our God really is.

Every human culture reflects the grace of God, but every culture also reflects the fall. Therefore contextualization doesn't mean pressing that which contradicts Scripture. Paul did not accommodate the practices of traveling teachers. He definitely did not accommodate the immorality of Corinthian society, even though it was seen as acceptable by the community. When multi-cultural conversations take place, it is messy

and sometimes frustrating as our own preconceived ideas are challenged.

Contextualization is both unavoidable and good. (on screen) **The gospel can—and should—be at home in every culture.** We must identify with those we are trying to reach and adapt to their culture, no matter what discomfort it causes us. However, the gospel also challenges and condemns every culture at some points (including our own). The goal of contextualization is not comfort, but clarity. Our goal is to make sure that we (ourselves) do not put any obstacles in the way of the gospel.¹⁸⁷

This would be wonderful opportunity to discuss the following questions pertaining to scriptural contextualization.

1. Explain Scriptural Contextualization with the group and give an example.
2. Share the stories that help your culture know right and wrong
3. What influences shape the way you read and interpret the Bible?
4. Give an example of a cultural norm that may be misunderstood by another culture?

¹⁸⁷ Zane Pratt, *Four Biblical Foundations for Contextualization*, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/four-biblical-foundations-for-contextualization/>.

Video: Scriptural Contextualization Session 2
Chinese Narrative: Confucian Hierarchy

Script:

When Biblical scholars wrestle with Biblical texts, they are working to contextualize Scripture. They try to find ways to see and hear what might have been the author's original intention. Even though we believe the Word of God is alive and able to speak to us today, we need to seek to understand the historical, political, and cultural context of the teachings we are reading in the Bible. This extends to relationships developed across the street, and even around the world.

In the last video we looked at how our own cultural narratives can shape the way each of us read and understand the Bible. This is the first step to reaching across the cultural gaps that exist in this world. This video, as well as the following two, will focus on Chinese foundational narratives that shape the way they understand the world. My desire is that Westerners working in cities that have a Chinese population will be able to interact with these videos as a way that will help them begin to shape their own understanding of the Chinese culture needed to contextualize their words and work to build long lasting and authentic relationships that can transform lives.

(on Screen) First narrative: Confucian Hierarchy

When a Chinese philosopher was asked why he thought the East and the West had developed such different ways of thinking he responded, "Because you had Aristotle and

we had Confucius.”¹⁸⁸ Although this Chinese scholar was trying to be funny, Confucius was a strong influence upon the Chinese society.

(on Screen, pictures of Confucius while next section is narrated)

Confucius, who lived from 551 to 479 B.C., was less of a religious leader than an ethical philosopher. His concern was with the proper relations among people. For him that meant a culture where everyone lived and worked in an ordered society. Each member had a role and an obligation to one another that produced a harmonious order for the betterment of the whole of society.¹⁸⁹ Creating a stable and orderly society was one of the keys to Confucian philosophy. For Confucius, harmony equals perfection. This pull toward unity and harmony can be seen in the Chinese creation of musical form. In ancient days, Chinese monophonic music reflected this concern for unity. “Singers would all sing the same melody and musical instruments played the same notes at the same time.”¹⁹⁰ For the Chinese, unity was what brought stability in the home, the community, and the country.

(on Screen) **Confucianism explained**

For over two thousand years Confucianism has been foundational to the Chinese way of thinking. Chinese culture today is based on these ethical writings. (on screen) Confucius says, “**Being a good family member reverberates through society. A**

¹⁸⁸ Nisbett, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Nisbett, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Nisbett, 7.

person who is good to their parents and siblings and children will be good to others as well.” ¹⁹¹ Confucius wrote about a world and specifically a society that epitomizes an understanding of order, utilizing three types of hierarchical systems. **(3 points on screen)** The first type is between master and servant in which the ruler of the land had ultimate authority over all things. The second type is in the family between brothers. The eldest brother would assume responsibility upon the father’s death and take on the role of head of the household. The third type of system states that the man of the house is the ruler. ¹⁹² Confucius also taught that the idea of the group takes precedence over the individual, or individuals serve the needs of the group first to create a harmonious society. For a society to function well, there needs to be a boss, a social hierarchy in place--whether that is the state or the head of a business. Workers need to understand their place in society; understanding that they exist in, and have a responsibility to the group. With the proper harmony and unity, then Confucius said there would be prosperity. Confucius argues, “When a country is well governed, poverty and a mean condition are things to be ashamed of. When a country is ill governed, riches and honor are things to be ashamed of.”¹⁹³ For Confucius, true societal harmony equates to a perfect society.

So, we can all imagine that there are crucial differences between East and West **(on screen: East and West)** The Western way of thinking has its roots in Greek analysis; loosening, tearing apart ideas and breaking them down into bite-size categories. These

¹⁹¹ Nesbitt, 8

¹⁹² Confucius, 28

¹⁹³ Confucius, 29

analytical structures have invaded the way we think about the individual and how an individual functions. In this culture, the individual and their accomplishments are glorified. The leader is the one that rises to the top in opposition to everyone else.¹⁹⁴

As Western thinking is renowned for its emphasis on analysis, Eastern, or Chinese thought, is noted for its intertwined and embracing nature. To “Confucian philosophy, the set of skills needed for managing across spheres (self, family, community, country) is fundamentally the same: if a man is capable of managing himself, he will also be able to manage his family, and if he is capable of managing his family, he will also be able to manage his business.”¹⁹⁵ Interconnectedness in life is at the heart of Chinese philosophy.

Contextual Challenges of Confucian Hierarchy (on screen)

With this Confucian hierarchical structure in place, strong leaders are praised and people seek after those that will lead. Understandably, China has a history of being ruled by strong leaders. The emperors ruled over a distinct class system. The common people knew the finality of their life if they defied those in leadership over them. When communism took over and offered equality to all, the class system was dissolved, and women were liberated of past societal roles. However, those that began to lead did so as ultimate rulers, like the emperors of the past. Many leaders lacked training and turned into the type of harsh leader that they originally replaced. A leader has to appear strong and confident in his or her knowledge and abilities. If they are weak, they will be taken advantage of. In China, there is a pervading thought that if someone isn't watching then

¹⁹⁴ Chen, “Transcending Paradox”, 179-99

¹⁹⁵ Chen, 187

there is no order and the people, the employees etc.. do whatever they want to do. Thus a leader needs to keep a close watch on those that are below them. This creates a natural separation between levels of leadership. If you are the boss everyone has to listen to you. If you are a teacher, the students need to hear and respect you and your authority. It is a top-down leadership model that has been ingrained in the society for thousands of years

So as you can imagine when the Protestant church leadership began to develop, naturally those in leadership gravitated to emulate the models before them. In the churches the leaders should be strong like those of their country in their approach to the church. Congregants are to follow in line with the leader. When a meeting is called or vision is cast, the people are to respond and do what is expected to fulfill the vision of the Pastor. If there is dissension, the pastor traditionally removes the troublemakers from their positions and asks them to leave the church. The education system reinforces that the top or teacher is always right. Teachers taught while students listened and remained silent. This top-down structure is set as the example of what a leader of the church should be.

Confucius encouraged this type of thinking when he said, “What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others.”¹⁹⁶ This teaches leaders to think they are superior and know what is right; not seeking help from others. So in the context of the Chinese church, leaders have come to think of themselves as the boss. There is a belief that if the pastor is called by God then what the pastor says is law. The idea is that the pastor is God’s representative and mouthpiece on earth.

¹⁹⁶ Confucius, *Analects*.58.

When a Westerner is able to see this type of cultural structure in a positive way, it helps them become aware of how homes, communities, and many times churches are seen in the eyes of Chinese culture. Westerners also need to be aware that when the Chinese worship within their respective churches, they often view the pastor (even in multi-cultural churches) as one that has ultimate authority. So, if the pastor asks church members to attend a meeting, often times it is heard by Chinese believers as a command rather than a suggestion. Those pastors, teachers, and/or trainers that minister to China/places with Chinese populations must take great care to emphasize that they do not hold the answer to all of Scripture. In these contexts, it is important to emphasize group discussions and freedom to see scripture from a Chinese context.

We are all by-products of our upbringing and culture. Without a proper understanding of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, it is easy for teachers and preachers working outside their home culture to inadvertently give advice may sound appropriate, but is insensitive or contrary to other cultures, specifically the Chinese culture. When we embrace the idea that all cultures have value, then we begin to see that understanding the underlying narratives helps move us toward a greater understanding of the people of every culture.

Group discussion questions:

1. How have you seen Confucian Hierarchical structures with the context of your ministry fields?

2. Give 3 examples of ways in which Westerners can negatively and positively influence the Chinese culture.
3. What can you do to continually remind yourself to see the positive in each country's culture?

Video: Scriptural Contextualization Session 3

Chinese Narrative: Shame

Script:

Culture influences how we all see the world we live in. In the last session, we talked about how we all see and contextualize the world according to our own world view--that is, our own cultural narratives. Chinese foundational narratives shape the way they see the world. The second of the three foundational Chinese narratives is the concept of shame, specifically as related to honor.

Shame as a fundamental emotion is found in all humans. However, the Chinese find that shame is an essential social and moral emotion-- in essence, a virtue. **(on screen: Picture depicting examples Chinese Shame)** They believe developing a sense of shame is an important life task in becoming a full member of their culture. This concept of shame shapes every aspect of Chinese society: communication, decision making, and personal value in the community. Here is an example of how Chinese use indirect communication in order to not bring shame to those they have a relationship with.

Dialogue 1 (foreigner and a Chinese friend)

Foreigner: Hi Chen, did you get the gift I gave you?

Chinese: Yes, it was very nice.

Foreigner: Did you like it? It is a specialty in my country.

Chinese: Yes, (pause) it was very good.

Foreigner: Oh, if you liked it... I can get you more.

Chinese: wow that is great, but I really don't want to bother you.

Foreigner:(not understanding) Oh no bother, it will be great to sit down and eat it together

Chinese: Oh (pause) You are a good friend maybe we can do that some time. I am very busy right now and have some family things to do.

Foreigner: Oh, I can help. What do you need to do? We can get it done and head over to the bakery for more delicious food.

Chinese: That is so kind, but I don't want to inconvenience you. Also, my wife is wanting me to be home early. Maybe we can do it some other time.

This Chinese man did not want to admit that he didn't like the food he was given as a gift. Also, he tries repeatedly to excuse himself and not bring shame on him nor his foreign friend. This type of indirect communication is often lost on those from Western cultures that are used to straight forward conversation. Indirect communication also is seen when a third party is added to convey information that would otherwise embarrass the two individuals involved. This allows the information to be shared and prevents either party from losing face.

Dialogue: (2 foreigners in a hallway)

Man#1: Hi, what is going on?

Man #2: The landlord called me and asked if you would take some time to pay your rent.

Man#1: (loudly) He called you? Why didn't he just call me? Why would he involve you at all?

Man#2: He didn't want to embarrass you, so he had me to ask you about it.

This is a common occurrence to keep all involved in a good relationship. So don't be offended if you are talked to in an indirect way. Really, take it as a compliment that the relationship you have with the confronting person is so important, they did not want to risk it being damaged by confrontation. China is a high context society, meaning that they communicate in ways that are implicit and rely heavily on context. Westerners working in this kind of context often are frustrated until they learn to read the cues of what is not being directly said.

As a Westerner, working within this system of both hierarchy and face-saving produces some anxiety as one tries to navigate how best to ask questions while respecting the levels of authority and nuances that are common in a high context society. For the Chinese, society's needs overshadow the needs and achievements of the individual. Just as achievement can add to honor, failure can also reflect on the group.¹⁹⁷ Thus actions are calculated to increase honor and reduce shame.

UNDERSTANDING FACE

For the Chinese, shame is balanced in its relationship to a community. This allows boundaries to be set up for interpersonal, social, and moral interactions; included in this is a family, a group, a village, or a country as a whole. Shame is given to the one that violates accepted societal norms. This brings humiliation to those in that person's community in an attempt to encourage change toward the community's values.

¹⁹⁷ Zhang, "Understanding Chinese", 35-38.

Even Confucius found value in shame. More than one tenth of his book, *The Analects*, deals with these shame concepts. Shame was also viewed by many Confucian scholars (e.g., Wang Yang-Ming, AD 1472±1529) as a foundational emotion that is needed for moral development and conscience.¹⁹⁸ Examples of shame practices can be found in communities as well. Public shaming has been useful in creating an obedient community. For instance, public humiliation (like wearing a dunce's cap) was a common form of shaming in Confucian societies. It has been documented that criminals were often marched down public streets; sometimes they were allowed a covering for their faces.¹⁹⁹ This can even be seen today when offender's faces and crimes are broadcast on local TV and/or shown in theaters before the movie begins. **(video: show examples of modern public shaming)**

As one walks down the streets of any Mainland Chinese city today, there are large billboards displaying individual cars committing traffic offenses. All can see that these drivers have committed an offense and are publicly shamed into the correct way of driving. Public shaming has traditionally served as motivation to change the offender as well as a public deterrent for the community.

Two Faces

In Chinese there are two words for face that have different meanings. *mianzi* 面子 is achieved by one's own ability; and *lian* 脸 represents the way the community views one's moral character. Losing face is damaging because it affects one's ability to interact

¹⁹⁸ Bai and Ng, 776.

¹⁹⁹ Ho, Wai, and Ng. "Guilt, Shame", 67.

socially and communally. It is not an on-going process but an event that is often public because there needs to be witnesses. Strictly speaking, losing face is not a private event, rather a discrete and damaging social event for the person involved.²⁰⁰ Thus, Chinese sociologist David Ho says “Avoiding shame is of overriding concern—as is the avoidance of losing face, rather than gaining face.”²⁰¹ This type of shame is commonly associated with the fear of being laughed at and, as a result, feeling one’s weaknesses and failures are exposed for all to see. This poem reflects some of this feeling of having one’s life stripped and exposed before the community.

I dreamt I was on stage,
naked,
In front of a thousand piercing eyes,
staring at me.

My face is a face that does not dare to show itself.
Nowhere to hide,
not even from myself.
But what have I done wrong?²⁰²

Even though the West views “face” as a way to gather one’s own prestige or gain achievements, for the Chinese, face is seen as maintaining social standing. Shame might not be encouraged in Western cultures, but in a Chinese context, shame is imparted on young children and is used to teach behavior. For example, if a young child asks an adult for sweets, the mother will scold the child with “Shame! Shame! Shame!” while rubbing

²⁰⁰ Ho, Wai, and Ng., 79

²⁰¹ D.Y.F Ho. “Face dynamics”, 277.

²⁰² Ho, Wai, and Ng,73.

her own face with her finger. It is thought that the rubbing of the face by the mother is thought to indicate the potential for destruction of the child's 'face'.²⁰³

Contextual Challenges

Problems abound between Western and Eastern communication, especially with the subtlety of a Chinese indirect communication style. Since avoiding losing face while honoring bosses, family, and pastors is at the forefront of a Chinese person's mind, clear communication becomes a challenge because these layers of narrative influence all forms of communication. When a Westerner is trying to demand direct communication and a Chinese is respectfully trying to not bring shame, misunderstanding and hurt feelings can occur. Sometimes Westerners have misunderstood Chinese believers and have questioned their integrity because answers were not given in a way that was expected. This can especially be true when Western Christians begin to doubt the integrity of a particular group of people. Westerners have long worked from a different playbook than the Chinese and thus easily judge events and situations as unethical simply because there is no cultural sensitivity to the pragmatism that Chinese society has developed.

Shame is not only individual and communal but can also be felt as a country. Chinese will not soon forget that beginning in the 1830's, foreign nations forced their way into many coastal ports of China. The most profitable and most damaging product to the local Chinese was opium. In what is called the Opium War beginning in 1839, the Western powers, led by Britain, repeatedly defeated China's military. Along with the creation of access and importation of goods, Western countries forcefully demanded that

²⁰³ Bai and Ng, 789.

they be able to freely spread Christianity and evangelize to the Chinese. It is no wonder that Chinese have historically seen Christianity as a foreign religion and one that is contrary to Chinese traditional beliefs.

Even today, The Opium Wars have not been forgotten. These conflicts were seen as a global humiliation to a country that saw itself as the center of economy and power. Every Chinese student understands that the country's current pursuit of drive for global strength and recognition is a way to recover the loss of face during the Opium Wars.

Humen and Sydenham Hill says,

To President Xi, China's defeats in the Opium Wars are proof that weak countries will be defeated. One of his first public acts after he took over was...to visit an exhibition at the National Museum in Beijing called 'The Road to Revival'. It begins with the outbreak of the first Opium War and ends with China's rise under the Communist Party, represented, among other things, by nuclear missiles. The message is clear: don't mess with us again.²⁰⁴

Chinese have a long memory and as a result of China's past and drive to overcome the global shame, it has remade itself, building a foundation of wealth and power so it can once again be "Zhongguo" the middle/center kingdom; implying it is the center of the cultural universe.²⁰⁵

Christianity and Imperialism

Of course, an event of this magnitude of embarrassment shapes a country and they way they move forward. During this time, the gospel message was tainted by its association with powerful secular entities that had their own agendas. In China, most evangelical missionaries spoke against the use of opium and the opium trade, but for the

²⁰⁴ Hill and Hill, "The Opium Wars"

²⁰⁵ Scott, "Memories of China's"

Chinese, Christian identity was foreign identity, and foreign identity included forcing opium on China.”²⁰⁶ The missionaries’ words were often lost to the actions of those that allowed them entry into the country and publicly embarrassed them in front of the world. The aggressive opening of the Chinese ports during the opium war allowed many Christian missionaries to enter as well. For many Chinese, however, it was precisely this that made it difficult for Christianity to separate itself for this kind of imperialist aggression.

It is no wonder that Chinese have traditionally seen Christianity and the Bible as a Western creation used to infiltrate and tarnish the pure Chinese society. When our actions, or the actions of those we are associated with, diminish the ones we are attempting to reach, we have given up the right to represent Christ in that particular situation. We are not seen as an agent of a restorative Christ; rather we represent the offending party. Shame for the Chinese people is something that defines all aspects of their lives. When sharing the Gospel with Chinese people, speaking about a God that overcomes the shame of the world to restore honor to all, can be a powerful thing. Remember to keep Christianity founded directly in the Word and not in each of our own experiences, as this is the key to contextualization.

Questions to discuss.

1. Give example of how is Shame seen in your culture?
2. How would you talk to some from a Chinese (or relational) background about God’s love?

²⁰⁶ Lewis and Pierand. *Global Evangelicalism*. 114.

3. How do you think shame can influence the way Scripture is read and understood?

Video: Scriptural Contextualization Session 4

Chinese Narrative: Chinese Pragmatism

Script:

Once again, this journey into understanding Scriptural contextualization is important, helping us see value in relationships with those around us. We have looked specifically at interactions with those from a Chinese background focusing on 3 foundational narratives that influence the Chinese worldview. This has hopefully allowed Westerners that find themselves crossing cultural gaps to begin to recognize how different they themselves are to the Chinese they desire to develop relationships with. In the second video we briefly looked at how Confucian hierarchy has and can influence a Chinese person's desire for structure and harmony within a family, a country, and even a Christian community. In the third video, we looked at the idea of shame. The Chinese concept of shame is closer to ancient Biblical concepts than many Westerner cultural concepts. For Chinese this reversal of shame to honor is foundational when talking about true peace and true love that can only come from a relationship with Christ. Hopefully we were also challenged to see that some of our Western ways of sharing the Gospel would not necessarily be understood in this context. Long-lasting and genuine relationships are at the heart of Chinese friendships rather than simply trying to convince someone of a decision.

The third foundational narrative that this video series has chosen we will call (on screen **CHINESE PRAGMATISM**.) This foundational aspect of Chinese culture is the practical philosophy that the results of an action are all that is important. If a student is

required to pass a class, they do it by any means necessary. If an employee is to produce a report or a product, they are expected to fulfill that demand at all costs.²⁰⁷ Deng Xiaoping, leader of China in the 80's, declared, "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice."²⁰⁸ The meaning is 'the end result is all that matters.' Even though Deng Xiaoping was talking about the economy, this cultural concept has implications within the society and the church. This pragmatic approach may give Westerners the impression that the Chinese have great ingenuity and are also morally amiss.

Some societies choose to place the needs of groups first, while others place the individuals at the center. For the Chinese, communal righteousness supersedes the individual. China's Confucian social system, with an emphasis on honor and shame, have made this country a very pragmatic society, even concerning its communal nature. Sociologist Hofstede states that, "China is a culture that embraces universalism and feels that everyone should follow the same set of rules and practices."²⁰⁹ The Chinese have an idiom that states that the highest nail is always beaten down. This is the idea that no one should stand out in the crowd. The good of one's community supersedes personal achievement.

Westerners often have difficulty grasping the structure of Chinese society which seems so radically different from their own. Geert Hofstede might not be a social theorist, yet he stressed, "People are supposed to be loyal to the group to which they belong, and,

²⁰⁷ Hofstede, *Motivation*, 42-63.

²⁰⁸ "The Great Pragmatist: Deng Xiaoping," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, accessed December 18, 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/dec/18/globaleconomy-economics>.

²⁰⁹ Hofstede, 55

in exchange, the group will defend their interests.”²¹⁰ Haidt reminds us, “The ethic of community is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations. These larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them; they are real, they matter, and they must be protected. ...duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation, and patriotism.”²¹¹ These types of societies have diametrically different ways of thinking from the West and thus misunderstandings between cultures abound.

Relational Ethics

Morality for many Western Christians is straightforward and seemingly has nothing to do with culture. However, Mueller promotes a more encompassing Chinese approach to ethics and morality by stating,

As long as the results bring honor, the moral issues are secondary. Success can be measured in wealth, power, or education. For example, a student who fails brings shame. Cheating leads to a positive result (good grades) and as long as they are not caught, the action has brought honor and is acceptable. However, if the student is caught, the same action brings shame. In order to preserve lost honor, the family may choose to hide the wrongful act and its consequence.²¹²

Morality, ethics, and culture affect our choices, judgments, and our witness; especially as morality is interpreted through our own cultural lenses and imparted to those with whom we want to share Christ. Recognizing how a society responds communally helps us start to remove our own preconceived notions from our own home

²¹⁰ Hofstede, 51

²¹¹ Haidt, 116.

²¹² Muller, *Honor and Shame*.

cultures. Here is an example of a situation that needs to be seen not through our western views of morality but through the views of communal and familial success. Kelly Yang shares, “In recent years, cheating has got so out of control that, three years ago, in the small town in Hubei, a group of gaokao [University entrance exam] invigilators found themselves under siege as enraged parents and students trapped them in their office and threw rocks at the windows, shouting, ‘We want fairness! Let us cheat!’”²¹³

Parents were outraged because there was a rumor that officials were not allowing their children to cheat, score a higher grade and thus have greater options for school and work. This was seen as an attack on all the community, and retaliation was in order. When the outcome of this one test validates the children of this community and either honors them by placing them in a University or shames them when they do not pass, the communal ethic is set at what honors the community. China is culturally founded on this pragmatic approach to life. Many choose what is best for their own family and community above all others. Morality is linked to the success of the whole community.

Westerners view events as moral when associated with fairness, right and wrong, good and evil as it relates to an individual’s rights. When encountering a worldview that deviates from what we think is normal, we want to take a stand and make right everything we see as wrong. Many Westerners have trouble with many Chinese concepts that do not fit nicely into their worldview. Haidt claims “Understanding that morality differs around the world...is the first step toward understanding your [own] righteous mind.”²¹⁴ [He continues] “The problem isn’t that people don’t reason. They do reason.

²¹³ Yang, “Why Do Chinese Students Think It’s OK to Cheat?”.

²¹⁴ Haidt, 4.

But their arguments aim to support their conclusions, not yours.”²¹⁵ Knowing what is considered acceptable within a culture helps us understand the filter in which an individual hears and responds to the gospel message as well as how they respond to leadership development. With this in mind, open conversations on what is Biblical, rather than what is Western, can take place.

So, what is right and wrong is seen in different light in different cultures. Let's return to the education system. Gaokao, literally means 'high test' and is the academic qualification test for almost all high school graduates that hope to attend a University. Students must do well to attend the better universities, where graduation offers a bright future with status, wealth and even power. For most Chinese, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, a high score on the gaokao is their only means to significantly alter their future. Yang tells us that in one particular high school known for having a significant percentage of the students do well,

...students have been given IV drips as they study, believing that it will help them with concentration and focus. Girls are given contraceptive pills to delay their periods until after the exam.... Because of the importance of the gaokao, some families are willing to go to unseemly lengths to ensure their children ace it. Some parents hire companies to surreptitiously transmit answers to their children on exam day. Others bribe local officials to get a peek at the test before it is administered.²¹⁶

If hearing these examples makes you slightly uncomfortable, then you can begin to see the gap that is present between the morality of the West and the East. Many Chinese

²¹⁵ Haidt, 367.

²¹⁶ Yang.

children believe sacrificing one's short term happiness for the good of the community is not only acceptable but expected.²¹⁷

Most Chinese parents tell their children from a very early age that their goal in life is to get into a good school, not learn the right skills or to find inspiration in school to seek meaningful work. Children quickly learn what is required of them, the behaviors that will elicit the right responses from parents, teachers and authorities. Yang observes, "Kids figure [morality] out for themselves...given the right kinds of experiences...we can't say that it is innate, and we can't say that kids learn it directly from adults. It is, rather, self-constructed as kids play with other kids."²¹⁸ Not only do kids observe their surroundings but certain thoughts and practices are then reinforced to be culturally acceptable. They are seeking what will bring the approval of their own way or the approval of the communal ethic. What children learn is pragmatism; that the end result is what is important.

Contextual Challenges with Chinese Pragmatism

An aspect of Chinese pragmatism with which Christians struggle is how trust is viewed. Trust is only given to those whom you have a relationship with. Westerners, especially Christians, misinterpret this as dishonesty. Ethics in family, business, and other communities is laid in the foundation of saving face, another way to say that is not bring shame on yourself nor your community. In Chinese culture, it is better to lie to someone,

²¹⁷ Stafford, "Being Careful"

²¹⁸ Yang.

for his or her protection, then to risk an embarrassing situation. It is better to save the relationship than to let direct confrontation destroy it.

People moving to China are often told that when you first get to know someone you cannot believe 90% of what they say. The more your relationship develops, the greater the percentage of truth given. “People in cultures concerned with saving face may be cautious at first when interacting with new people since giving others access to one sphere of life can mean access to all.”²¹⁹ This may help explain why it takes so much time to build trust and relationships in China. Thus, Scriptures like Matthew 5:37 that state, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” need to be understood, taught, and used in a way that honors both Christ and the Chinese people.

Some societies choose to place the needs of groups first, while others place the individuals at the center. For the Chinese, communal righteousness supersedes the individual. China’s Confucian social system, with an emphasis on honor and shame, have made this country a very pragmatic society, even concerning its communal nature. Sociologist Hofstede states that, “China is a culture that embraces universalism and feels that everyone should follow the same set of rules and practices.”²²⁰ The Chinese have an idiom that states that the highest nail is always beaten down. This is the idea that no one should stand out in the crowd. The good of one’s community supersedes personal achievement.

²¹⁹ McFarlin and Sweeney, 51

²²⁰ McFarlin and Sweeney, *International Organizational Behavior*, 51.

Westerners often have difficulty grasping the structure of Chinese society which seems so radically different from their own. Geert Hofstede might not be a social theorist, yet he stressed, “People are supposed to be loyal to the group to which they belong, and, in exchange, the group will defend their interests.”²²¹ Haidt reminds us, “The ethic of community is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations. These larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them; they are real, they matter, and they must be protected. . . . duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation, and patriotism.”²²² These types of societies have diametrically different ways of thinking from the West, and thus misunderstandings between cultures abound. When Westerners judge Chinese ethics from their own culture, then misunderstanding and frustration occur.

Questions of discussion

1. Give an example of how our own culture can cause frustration for ourselves and for Chinese believers.
2. Explain how Chinese Pragmatism can be seen as a good aspect for the Kingdom of God.
3. These three Chinese narratives are layered upon one another. Explain your understanding of how these 3 concepts can be misunderstood by Westerners.

²²¹ Hofstede, "Motivation, Leadership, and Organization," 51

²²² Haidt, 116.

Video: Scriptural Contextualization Session 5

Worldview and the Journey to Begin Contextualization

VIDEO LINK: <https://youtu.be/gQ26vWOIQBA>

Script:

So, whether you are working in China or within a Chinese community around the world, Scriptural contextualization can have its challenges for Westerners. Especially if we come into these contexts without thinking through our own world views and cultural obstacles. Remember, (on screen) **our worldview is our culture's values, institutions, ethical commitments, life situations, and felt needs.**

Cultural Worldview

For a culture's worldview, their values, shared experiences, symbols, institutions and the like, affects how theology is formulated within that culture. It is unavoidable that culture is going to affect how theology is formulated at some level. To give you the most obvious example, speaking English. The Bible is written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. So, there has to be some kind of cultural linguistic adaptation of Biblical texts, to communicate to another culture. This is an example of how culture affects theology. The language we speak is a big thing.²²³ Just try learning a new language and you will know that words and context are rarely equally transferable from one language to another. So, using illustrations and tapping into people's core centers of values will be completely

²²³ Bruce Ware, *Cultural Contextualization; Theological Systems*, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/cultural-contextualization-theological-systems/systematic-theology-i/bruce-ware>

different from one language to another. . To bridge that gulf between you and another person, you use things that are common. Where do those things come from? They come from their shared understanding and experiences. There is a level at which it is impossible for theology to be formulated in an “a-cultural” (non cultural) way. If it is in a language, that language is rooted in a culture; therefore, it has a cultural influence.

At one level, we understand that all theology is affected by culture and worldview. So when we talk about sharing the gospel.... going to the ends of the earth...(on screen) **why does a person take their own culturally understanding of Christ and bring it to another?** Unfortunately, most people do not realize that is what they do. People usually say that they are bringing Christ and the Bible...but there is no such thing as a non-cultural Christianity, it is impossible. Recognizing our culture’s influences is key to not creating a cultural Christianity. Why do local African preachers wear black coats and white shirts? Because that was a cultural Christianity lesson taught by foreign missionaries. But cultural Christianity gets presented sometimes under the veil of non-cultural Christianity, that is, **I am just teaching the Bible; I am just bringing the Gospel; I am just sharing the Christian faith; there is nothing of my culture attached to this.** The problem with that naive view is that the culture that is attached gets voiced as if it is gospel truth. Hence white shirts, buildings with steeples, and all kinds of things like this get voiced as if it is just the same as, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31).

We see this even in the states. Many multicultural congregations start out with a great task and agenda for bridging the gaps but end up being dominated by one culture. Often times one can look at the church staff to see what culture is considered the correct

way. (on screen) **it is important to be intentional to create space for true dialogue rather than just having token representatives of gender and ethnicity** whether we are Chinese, Indian, African, Canadian or American, we see ourselves as having received the normal Christian faith that is correct to us. If we will have the eyes to see, and the ears to hear, and we repent of our sin, it ought to be just as transforming here as anywhere else. But we have to recognize that we are not Africans, most of us, or Asians, some of you, we have to recognize the distinctive cultures in which we live. We have to recognize that faith has to be put in language, given expression, and connected with symbols or illustrations in ways that will convey it as faithfully as possible, in ways that are understandable and applicable to some contemporary audience; that is the goal.²²⁴

(on screen) **Approaching contextualization of the gospel requires one to humbly submit their preconceptions to a God that understands the cultures of the world.** It is too easy for us to simply slip back into the interpretation that fits well into our home cultural boxes. When working outside one's native culture, assumptions take place as we automatically think others are seeing, hearing, and experiencing the world the way we do.

It is important to surround oneself with others that provide an ongoing two-way dialogue over cultural interpretations and adaptations. Also devoting oneself to practice a lifestyle submission to God gives us the ability to recognize the differences with those whom we are communicating with. This change in approach allows us to see the biases and interpretations that hinder a clear understanding of Christ.

²²⁴ Bruce Ware, *Cultural Contextualization; Theological Systems*, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/cultural-contextualization-theological-systems/systematic-theology-i/bruce-ware>

All of that being said, how do we begin to build a bridge to span the gulf that separates cultures especially those between the east and the west. (insert picture)

Bridging the Gap

Recognizing that there is a gap between Eastern and Western ways of thinking is the first plank that is laid to build this bridge. This recognition cannot simply be an acknowledgment of the problem but owning the way our participation enlarges the gap-is key to begin to building a bridge that allows dialogue that narrows the gap.

An article on Intercultural Hermeneutics states, “When the church’s faith is genuinely contextual, the shame and stigma imposed on oppressed people begins to be lifted. They find a new dignity as they see not only their own lives but also their culture in God’s redeeming light. When faith is contextual, there is a recognition that the gospel speaks to Christians in their language.”²²⁵

Where one begins is to recognize the importance of contextualization of the gospel, its message, and the church then one can begin interacting with clarity, authenticity, and integrity to bring about equality in our theology.

²²⁵ “On Intercultural Hermeneutics”. *International Review of Mission*. 85, no. 337 (ProQuest Central, 1996): 241-52.

Dean Flemming says, There is a burgeoning recognition among Christians around the globe that (on screen) **in order for the Christian message to be meaningful to people it must come to them in language and categories that make sense within their particular culture and life situation...** This means that the Scripture must be contextualized... so authenticity comes in new cultural, social, and historical settings.²²⁶

Vanhoozer said, “Western theologians must be aware of the cultural beams in their own eyes before attempting to remove specks from the non-Western eyes. This means that true contextualization is a two-way street flowing to and from cultures we are encountering. It is an ongoing conversation between pastors and theologians that are open to understanding the Word of God from multiple cultural perspectives.

The purpose of providing this comparative view is not to choose one view over another. Understanding that most people see their own world view as correct, my desire is to challenge each of us to see truth within cultures and worldview that are foreign to us. Sometimes 2 seemly contradictory views may in fact be true but from 2 different vantage points, or 2 very different world views. This can be seen in the differences between eastern and western ways of thinking. Westerners tend to look for concrete solution, a dichotomy of one is right... one is wrong, rather than an eastern view of harmony. There might be aspect of truth found within several answers. Again, this in not relativism rather a cultural view of the search for truth. Trusting that God is omnipotent enough to handle

²²⁶ Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL,: InterVarsity Press, 2005. 13-14

our confusion, our questions, and our arrogance. One way to better conceptualize in a second culture is to better understand our own culture.

I am not sure Westerners see the Good Samaritan as a foundational narrative for them, even though it is. It often shapes how we help one another and desire to be helped ourselves. Have you thought about how others look at this story? It is so easy to lecture with the interpretation that we have been taught for this passage. With Confucian Hierarchy and a society dictating who is considered an insider or outsider, how will that affect the way a typical Chinese person views this story. Add to that the aspect of shame Brought to the family or community by one's actions and things become a little less clear. Chinese pragmatism and what could be seen a fluid communal ethics makes the story more layered than a typical simplistic interpretation that many Westerner like to have.

When arriving in China, often times other foreigners will tell you not to get involved if someone is hurt. If we were to help someone that is hurt it would be understood by everyone, including the law, that you were responsible for not only causing this accident but willing to take on the financial burden of the persons injury which would also include loss of wages and future medical care.

So it is easy for a Westerner to hold fast to the way they view the good Samaritan story and how it has been taught to us over the years, but part of working cross culturally is trying to see how a Chinese interpretation could also hold value and be honoring to God. So a Chinese person would see this story from multiple angles...

1. First regarding Foreigners: Shame helps a Chinese person to know that if they represent their country, community, or family poorly then there is dishonor brought in a great way. So Chinese might see a foreigner and help them especially if there

were lost, if they needed obligatory help. They want people to see them as good citizens of their country or community.

2. Second, if anyone was hurt from their community, they would rise up to help. How could a leader, as in the GS story walk by someone that was obviously from their community? Even if you might not have personally known them, others in your family might. Therefore, you are obligated to help because others will see what you have done and again that will bring blessing or retribution on your family.
3. Third layer is if a Chinese person doesn't have any type of connection with a person, they are not truly seen as a person. Chinese know this sounds harsh and don't want to lose face, so they don't publicly say it that way. They would simply say that they were not responsible and should go and find someone to take care of the man hurt in the good Samaritan story.

Many have said to me they think of this story as something that is culturally not right. If the Samaritan was good, then why didn't he stay and take care of the hurt man himself. This shows the levels of commitment that Chinese have once someone is considered an insider. So even this simple Good Samaritan story can be seen in culturally relevant ways if we are willing to move away from preconceived and comfortable interpretations.

Another practical example is Ps. 23. We all love these verses about how the Lord is our Shepherd...but what happens if we are working with a group of people that don't understand sheep and shepherd relationships. Often in the West we teach those living in cities what a Shepherd is and does. But if we are honest, we might intellectually understand SHEPHERDING but never really having the actual experience of being a

shepherd. The Center for honor and Shame have paraphrased Ps 23 providing contextualized understanding from a Chinese perspective.

(on screen)

**My patron is Yahweh.
He generously provides for my every need.
He gifts me the finest. He brings me to the best places.
His perfect care delights my heart.
He gives wise guidance so that I'm never lost.
This lavish generosity makes his name great.**

**Even when the clouds of shame and despair gather,
I do not worry...²²⁷**

Though many Westerners would not be comfortable with this concept of God as our Patron or our owner, we see in a Confucian society, with an ordered hierarchy, this idea brings clarity more than a Shepherd/ sheep relationship would bring. The understanding and promises are the same when understood from a Chinese perspective.

Gospel as a reversal (on screen)

One of the great hopes that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings to the Chinese is as Joel Green says, **“The gospel is a message of “salvation-as-reversal, of status transposition, of outsiders becoming insiders, and grace for unexpected people.”²²⁸**

This is at the heart of what Chinese need to understand for the Gospel of Jesus to be

²²⁷ Psalm 23 (HSP).” HonorShame, June 6, 2018. <http://honorshame.com/psalm-23-hsp/>. (accessed December 18, 2018).

²²⁸ Green, Joel B. *The Theology*, 86

heard. The world has taught them that shame is part of life; there is no escaping it. Yet God's salvation reverses the condition of shame. Zeph 3:19-20 "I [God] will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth...I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord." 1 Peter 2:6-7 states, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame." So, the honor is for those who believe.

God not only changes but reverses the status of those shamed and excluded by a distorted honor system. God's honor fully saves us from our own shame. (on screen) **He reverses our status from one of shame to one of honor.** His salvation overturns the position this world has placed us in.²²⁹ He reverses our identity; brings honor to our shame. For a Chinese person, this is the hope that transcends culture, community, and a world filled with opportunities of shame.

As we have covered, the lenses in which we read the Bible are shaped by the cultures we live in. One of the most well-known Christians to endure the hardship of the Communist system was Watchman Nee. He spoke insightful truth about the role that missionaries should play if they were given a chance to return to China. Nee answered, "Please come as teaching elders rather than missionaries (evangelists). What we need most is the right interpretation of the Word of God."²³⁰ False teachings, years of limited access to Scripture, and cultural pressure has made the need for contextualized teachers all the more prevalent. Our hope is that this video series will begin to help Westerners to

²²⁹ Wu, Jackson. *Saving God's Face*, 184-186

²³⁰ Lyall, Leslie T. *God Reigns in China*, 123.

not only recognize some of their own narratives, but also assist in finding new ways to narrow the misunderstood gap between western and eastern theological perspectives. By helping teachers and trainers effectively contextualize their own language, materials, and discipleship, my hope is the cultural gap will narrow as authentic dialogue occurs between Westerners and their Chinese counterparts.

Questions for discussion:

1. What stood out to you the most in this final session?
2. What are some new ways to narrow the misunderstood gap between Eastern and Western theological perspectives?
3. What are ways you can begin to shift the way you contextualize Scripture to broaden your cultural lenses?

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