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BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ASIAN TRADITIONS IN 20TH-CENTURY
CHINA: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF WU LEICHUAN

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Abstract: This article focuses on the religious hybridity propagated by Wu Leichuan, a reformatory Christian thinker from China. The article centers on the question of how to understand the social praxis as well as the interaction and religious hybridity involving modern Western thoughts and traditional Asian thoughts. Wu's Christian thought contains elements of social praxis that purport to understand sufferings of common people and thus differs from existing dominant Christian theology characterized by materialism and secular success. Wu claims that "benevolence" is inherent in both humanity and in the myriad aspects of the universe, and is deemed identical to the Holy Spirit in Christianity that embraces "love". He develops his own vision of heaven, which is very similar to the idea of "Society of Great Unity" propounded by Kang Youwei, an adherent of Confucianism, in his theory of Great Unity. The article shows Wu's contribution as a unique thinker and staunch advocate of Christianity within the context of social praxis that emphasizes the praxis-oriented role of Christianity within socialism. In fact, through profound immersion into and cultivation of diverse areas of Asian philosophy and by deeply reflecting the innermost core of humanity, Wu was able to develop his own vision of social ideals.

Key Words: Wu Leichuan, Christianity, Confucianism, China, Heaven, Benevolence.

Introduction

How did Christian civilization encounter and assimilate into Asian traditions in China in the early twentieth century?¹ Highlighting the Christian thought of Wu Leichuan (1870-1944), a Chinese Christian thinker, I focus on and analyze the question of how to understand the social praxis as well as the interaction and religious hybridity involving modern Western thoughts and traditional Asian thoughts.

In critically considering the formation of knowledge on Christianity in China, I explore an analytical basis for investigating and analyzing contemporary Chinese society by considering how to comprehend the hybridity of mutable thoughts and cultures that interact with each other, with their nascent state of disorganization followed by transcending conventional boundaries. In investigating how Wu Leichuan's historical consciousness interacted with Christianity and how he formulated his religious theory that came to be deeply entrenched in China, I focus on the religious hybridity of Wu's thought and his theory of social praxis.

Wu did not see Christianity as a foreign culture or religion but as a universal faith. In order to render Christianity into a holy and universal faith, he saw the need to interpret Christianity in harmony with the framework of his own cultural traditions. Wu's Christian worldview is thus transformed and integrated within the context of Asian philosophy, and the transcendental vision of Christianity is changed into a new vision that embraces Asian introspective self-cultivation or internalizes the idea of self-actualization. Wu's Christian faith emphasizes social praxis, and this point of emphasis opens a new interpretative horizon by seeing his view of Christianity being jointly shaped by the confluence of both Asian philosophy and Christian thought.

The era in which Wu's thought took shape saw Chinese intellectuals of the time strongly advocating a cultural movement for the liberation of all people. In the Christian community, Chinese intellectuals also devoted their lives to the shaping and forming of the Chinese national consciousness and educational campaigns. At the time, the Christian community commenced a pervasive cultural and religious movement in an attempt to adapt Christianity, a foreign religion, to China's national conditions and culture. On the one hand, there was a religious movement calling for massive repentance, which focused on saving individual souls. On the other hand, a new thought movement was being formed and spread that focused on creating a new Chinese Christian school of thought while embedding it in the context of Chinese traditional thought. In this era, there were massive educational movements that emphasized the autonomous cultural spirit of the Chinese people and at the same time, there were concentrated efforts at adapting the foreign religion,

Christianity, to China's national conditions and crafting a fully adapted Chinese version of Christianity.

In North East Asian area, many thinkers who worked on reforming their country's systematic degeneration paid great attention to the idea of nationalist autonomy and self-determination. Not limited to this self-autonomy, these thinkers were also deeply interested in how to harmonize or integrate Asian traditions with Western Christianity. These reform-minded thinkers in China at the time are such dignified thinkers as Wu Leichuan, Zhao Zichen, Wu Yaozong, Liu, Tingfang and Xu Baoqian.² Korean reformatory thinkers, counterparts of these Chinese thinkers, are such diverse luminaries as Kim Kyo-sin, RyuYŏng-mo, and Ham Sŏk-hŏn.

These days, what appears to be the dominant theology of Christianity is often found in fervent, single-minded emphasis on material possessions and successes. In stark contrast to this, unduly leaning on more power and possessions, Wu's Christianity contains components of serious social praxis that purport to understand the sufferings of the common people.

In comparison with the ever-degenerative form of twenty-first century East Asian Christianity in which secularism and materialism dominate, features of Wu's thought embody a stringent critique of secularized faith and behavior. Although his thought may not resonate well among global contemporaries in the era of globally extended capitalism, his pointed criticism still merits serious reconsideration of its timeliness and worth as a critique. Wu's thought is essentially grounded in the faith of Christianity, but his theory of Christianity is a close approximation to commonalities of three main streams of Asian thought: Confucianism, Mohism, and Buddhism. Despite the fact that existing literature eventually recognized the roots of Asian ideology within Wu Leichuan's thought system, this recognition fails to locate the roots of Asian social thought.³ In this context, this article distinguishes itself from previous works on the topic. In fact, through profound immersion into and cultivation of diverse areas of Asian philosophy and by deeply reflecting the innermost core of humanity, Wu was able to develop his own vision of social ideals. The following section focuses on Wu Leichuan's contribution.

Wu Leichuan's "Benevolence (*ren*)" and Christianity

First, let us take a look at Wu's thought. Understanding his concept requires detailed analysis that invokes a broader perspective upon connecting it with modern Chinese thought in Northeast Asia. How did Wu Leichuan combine his thoughts on religion with his understanding of ancient Chinese classics?

Christianity could be viewed as an unfamiliar menace introduced by Western missionaries, with new, threatening, and unpleasant changes.

This attitude and mind-set of being threatened remained even with the positive changes brought about by Christianity. In fact, in the twentieth century, many Chinese were prejudiced against it, regarding it as a part of Western barbarian culture, and a symbol of quislingism. Nevertheless, Wu Leichuan's interpretation enabled Chinese to accept Christianity as a familiar culture and way of thinking. He contended that the concept of God was a recognizable concept for Chinese with deep roots in their culture.

The intellectuals in China also attempted to eliminate biased attitudes hindering new advances and developments, and to maintain a vital religious tradition, whilst enhancing diverse religious cultures. The process of the indigenization of Christianity is one by which an unfamiliar Gospel was introduced through a familiar culture until it established itself.

In socialist China, Wu Leichuan's concern with the role of religion is revealed in both theory and social praxis. As a reformatory Christian thinker and educator, Wu Leichuan is the most representative theologian of the twentieth-century Chinese history. He developed an original thought by fusing traditional Asian classics with Christianity, in the context of a Chinese historical situation. He was also a praxis-oriented educator and social reformer, deeply influencing Chinese society, in particular, the religious aspects of the Chinese society. As a reformatory Christian thinker and educator, his influence in China was significant.⁴

The May Fourth Movement criticized all traditional beliefs and religions. The Anti-Christian movement of the early 1920s and the Northern Expedition of 1925-1927 led to the unification of China under the Nationalist Party. Liberal missionaries welcomed the opportunity to participate in the development of the Chinese nation, but they were attacked. As anti-imperialism grew, Christian schools were subjected to government regulations, requiring all organizations to have Chinese leadership. Many missionaries left China, and support in their home countries waned, partly because of economic problems during the Great Depression.⁵ The anti-Christian movements vehemently attacked Christian communities, especially accusing Chinese Christian missionaries of being in collusion with Western imperialism and criticizing China's superstitiousness that only underscored China's backwardness. Some form of indigenization served as a counterpoise to the movement.⁶

Wu Leichuan, Chancellor of the Yenching University, was a leading Chinese theologian in the early twentieth century.⁷ During the Anti-Christian movement of the 1920s, Wu wrote prolifically in an attempt to connect Christian theology with Confucian concepts. Wu stated that Christianity could complement Confucianism. He argued that Confucianism could be used in the service of Christianity. Wu published this line of argument in the journal *Life*⁸, in 1923, in an article entitled, "The Bible and Confucian classics[Jidujiao jing yu rujiao jing]", which compared scriptures on both philosophical and religious traditions.⁹

He endeavoured to reform ethics by resorting to the concept of “benevolence (*ren*)”. He viewed “benevolence” as the governing principle of the universe. He even went as far as to say that the Confucian “benevolence” is equated with the Holy Spirit of Christianity.¹⁰

What Wu perceived as the real and authentic relation of equality was nothing but human relationships grounded in “benevolence”, wherein every human being communicated with others under conditions of unlimited time and space: “benevolence is inherent in all humanity.”¹¹ Each human could maintain his/her individuality, and the assembled array of such individuality forms diversity. With this individuality and diversity, the “benevolence” is inherent in all individuals and the myriad aspects of the universe. In this light, Wu viewed the essence of “benevolence” as the thought of all things of one body, and believed that this was the axiom of all religions. Wu’s view of “benevolence” as one of ethics and morality was not just applicable to the routine ethical codes of every human being. This view was more expansive in the sense that his view of this concept aimed at reforming the order of traditional social ethics, and reformulating modern Chinese ethical standards.¹² Wu’s concept of the universal axiom of religion was the concept of “benevolence”, which suggested that every human being must maintain his/her own individuality and diversity, and that all things of the universe are created equal and should be treated so accordingly, thus practicing the idea that all things of the universe are embodied into oneness.

Wu believed that an awakening of this sort was the existential foundation that stimulated the spontaneity of the masses.¹³ He believed that by recognizing the importance of “benevolence” inherent in one’s own body, and by awakening to the idea that myriad aspects of the universe were embodied as one body, each person would then have to treat others as themselves, and thus as objects of love.¹⁴

He also believed that the concept of “benevolence” entailed the totality of all myriad things, although it was just one unity. This concept can be found within Christianity. In the Christian context, the love between God and humanity is equivalent to “benevolence”. As an identical being under God, each of us should love others and this love signifies the Holy Spirit as substance.¹⁵

Further, Wu argued that Christian teachings such as, “love others as you would love yourselves”, and “love even your enemy” are in full accord with the traditional teachings of both Confucianism and Mohism.¹⁶ I believe that Wu’s concept of love transcends all forms of hierarchical structures in which God’s love is given to humanity in a top-down fashion, and so is an improvement over traditional Christianity. This is primarily because his concept of love highlights the value of the masses’ subjectivity. His concept of “benevolence” is considered more akin to the

unconditional Agape-like love in Christianity than to the concept of “grace as mercy” given by God to humanity.

Indeed, Wu was also well aware that although there were many common chords between Christianity and Confucianism, differences still existed.¹⁷ Notwithstanding these differences, Wu aimed to reinterpret “benevolence” of the *Analects*, and reposition it as a new ethical consciousness for a new society. It has been pointed out that Wu’s concept of love, often connected with “benevolence”, takes on a character that is not only instrumental in shaping the ethical personality of humanity but also reformative in that it acts on, and reforms the universal operative laws in the history of nature and humanity in the grand evolving course of the universe.¹⁸ Typical of Confucian thought in establishing various forms of moral social communities is the reliance on universal operative laws of nature. In this regard, Wu’s interpretation of the concept of “benevolence” transcends the traditional frame of the *Analects*.

Wu introduced the part of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*) in his writings.¹⁹ He argued that human moral nature is innate and forms at birth.²⁰ Inheriting Mengzi’s theory of the innate goodness of human nature²¹ and combining this theory with the *Doctrine of the Mean* in his other book,²² Wu emphasized that the latter implied that human nature is nothing but “the Heavenly Mandate.” The essence of the *Doctrine of the Mean* was also applied to the basic tenets of Christianity, that is, there should be an innate connection between the will of Heaven and human nature.²³

The common thread intersecting Christianity and Confucianism is that God’s holiness may be found in human nature. However, Christian tenets, such as the sacrifice of God’s son, the sinfulness of humans, forgiving of such sins and graces, and the possibility of sinful humans being reborn, are existentially different from what Confucianism offers in regard to the inherent holiness embodied in humans. Considering this, Wu does not emphasize the sinfulness of humanity as an innate human condition.

In his theory of Christianity, Wu focused on cultivation of the self, and because of this, his thought is quite different from dominant forms of faith, termed “blessing-oriented faith”, that pervaded much of the East Asian society. He is said to have positively accepted the dignity of human existence,²⁴ which shows that Wu’s theology is not akin to fundamentalist Christian theory, where humans are viewed not only as creatures but also as sinners. Wu’s view originates from the relevant part of “Genesis” of the Bible.²⁵ His view is in accord with the theological concept that emphasizes that according to God’s grand design, mankind is created in the image and likeness of God. In this respect, his theology is also in accord with the Confucian thinking that heaven and humanity are one, and that the latter should recover its heavenly nature. This way of thinking embraces the

theological position of immanence or existence that positively accepts that divinity resides within humanity as the foundation of human existence. So construed, Wu's theology belongs to the theory of immanent existence, which argues that divinity is not external to human nature but something that resides within as the foundation of our existence. Underlying this line of thinking lies the premise of a common foundation of the holiness of one's existence, and that of the whole world and of all beings in the universe, all organically interlinked in oneness. All of us are thus beings with divinity.²⁶

Rather than following the theory of original sin that purports to emphasize human sinfulness, Wu's theory of existence goes further in the direction of emphasizing the relationship between humanity and Jesus as the Son of God.²⁷ I believe that this point is closely related to the theory of the innate goodness of human nature, and so forms a watershed that distances Wu's theology from Western fundamental theology. An active and flexible nature permeates all realms of becoming, and humanity also partakes in this. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, in particular, and Asian thought in general, also embodies the concept that individuals are interconnected with various beings in the universe, and that each individual maintains one's own individuality and uniqueness by partaking in this continual nexus of interconnections.²⁸ Wu also inherits the theory of immanence and the positive spirit that embraces the Becoming, thus forming a counterpoise to Christian fundamentalism or the theology of fundamentalism, and aids in developing an Asian Christianity in China.

Realism of Heaven

Does Wu's social idealism have any Christian orientation? If so, is there any common thread connecting his social idealism with conventional Asian traditions? The imagination of heaven in Christianity enables us to consider not just this aspect but also that of peoples' thoughts at the time, considering subsequent propagation of Christianity in later periods. This is because "dreaming" has an ambivalent aspect of truth and fiction, and is converted into social memory through literary communication.

In other words, the imagination of heaven is not only believed by individuals but also passed on to the community, influencing members of the community for posterity. Imagining heaven is in itself a product of one's introspection on oneself and on the world. This reflects collision and an amalgamation of various values appearing at a turning point in the history of civilization. Following Christian idea of eternal life, Christians consider their lives in two ways. The first way of considering life is to look at their lives starting from birth to biological death and thus this way of looking at life resides in our physical realm. The second way of

considering life is about eternal life after the physical death.²⁹ This is why the theory of heaven has an important meaning in Christology. What is eternal life in heaven? What is heaven? Historically, views of heaven have been numerous and constantly changing. These include a reverent and ascetic view, a God-oriented view, and a hedonic view, among others.³⁰

Wu Leichuan innovatively interpreted a concept of “heaven” in Christianity. A characteristic of his concept is that a process of creating heaven implies a process for improving society. In his interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer, he mentioned the following.

When one considers the feasibility of rendering this secular world an approximation of Heaven, the so-called God’s nation should be approached differently. Heaven is not meant to refer to a geographical location or a land beyond the sky, a place where we should go after our physical death, as is frequently repeated and stressed in churches. The Biblical concept of heaven comes to us and so is realized in this physical realm when we transcend the state of our secular existence dominated by absence of love, and unjust social conditions are rendered as fair and just. If this state of our existence is realized by going beyond our pre-existing conflicts, antagonisms, and injustices, then God’s love and justice will be fully restored and will flourish in this secular world.³¹ Wu Leichuan used the term “Kingdom of Heaven” for the word “heaven”, which is apparently more discernible and extensively and more often used in Christian culture. In light of this, Wu can be taken as viewing Christianity as a collection of human values and system.³²

Wu Leichuan referred to the book written in 1936, *Christianity and Chinese Culture*, in which references to “heaven” were systematic and complete. Wu classified Jesus’s words on heaven, in the Gospels, into five categories as follows. First, the concept of heaven should be built from people’s minds. Second, the human being is just the most important in heaven. Third, those who are qualified to be people of heaven are those who are poor, hardworking, modest, of strong faith, and loyal. Fourth, heaven is a more systemized society than the one existing now. He also observed that new wine cannot be put into old wineskins. Fifth, to establish heaven, reformation of the economic system should come first.³³ In another statement, envisioning a new society, Wu Leichuan enumerated five features of heaven different from these categories.³⁴

In heaven, no one will claim his or her personal possessions or properties, since the concept of private property is no longer feasible in heaven.³⁵ And should one consider seriously establishing the Biblical concept of heaven in this secular and physical world, the most critical consideration should be given to reforming the pre-existing economic system and conditions.³⁶ Through these two statements, we see the core of the intention contained in his theory of heaven.

His thoughts are very similar to Chinese traditional intellectuals, who refer to the theory of Great Unity (*datong*) for social reform. He suggested that those who are qualified to have a place in heaven are those who are pauperized yet are industrious workers. Those modest in character are also qualified to enter heaven as also those who are steadfast and loyal in faith. He also stated that, in heaven, it is the most cardinal foundational governing principle of unconditional love that pervades.³⁷ Through this, he suggested and requested a new social moral foundation for the Chinese people. The society he dreamed of was one that demanded moral virtues such as poverty, the strengthening of the lower classes, love, and sincerity.³⁸ All individuals have a common goal, in other words, a desire to establish a fair new society. He argued that better organizations should be formed to build heaven; these should progress mandatorily, as old and new systems do not converge together even though heaven is based on love.

Wu Leichuan's statements on "heaven" are filled with thoughts stating that religion should not be like an opium for people, but should work actively on an existing society. This theory of heaven was not embodied in the real world, but realized by the Chinese peoples in practice. Through this theory of heaven, the ideal world was not merely a utopia, but went beyond this as a power to change the Chinese people's reality and destiny. His theory of heaven, however, is very similar in practice to socialism. This is related to Confucianism's traditional ideology of an ideal society, termed "*datong*", which means Great Unity. Chinese Confucians visualized a peaceful and egalitarian era when the ultimate truth was realized as the ideal world, in other words, *datong*. Kang Youwei explained the ideal world in his book, *The book of Great Unity (datongshu)*. Some aspects in Wu Leichuan's theory of heaven are similar to Kang Youwei's thoughts in *The book of Great Unity*. In this book, Kang Youwei, a representative intellectual of the time, also depicted a world where all people were equal and without a sovereign, where all worked, where no one was lazy, and where the private property system was abolished.³⁹ It seems that Wu Leichuan read Kang Youwei's *The book of Great Unity*, and referred to the book when he described his own theory of an ideal world.⁴⁰

Up to the 1930s, "the Great Community" ideas of both Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao greatly influenced groups of intellectuals from China to Korea and Japan. As per Kang Youwei's political position, in times of peace the name of the country and its designated areas should be replaced with the presupposition of "a unified system" in which a sovereign ruler is placed under a "parliamentary government."

Kang Youwei believes that for all humanity to escape from suffering, what is most fundamentally required is to obtain equality and independence. He explains this term as also the reason why all people are equal when viewed through the theory of existence. This is again affirmed in the term "cosmopolitan citizen", which is said to come to pass when all

nations become unified into one all-encompassing, universal nation.⁴¹ The reason why everyone should have equality and independence is explained in his theory of existence. Human beings are the products of Heaven, namely the *qi* (energy) of “*yuan* (primordial origin)”. Thus, all humans are imbued with an identical value. Though originally equal, artificial institutions and customs result in discrimination, enhancing human suffering.⁴² This Confucian theory of existence in fact strikes a chord with the Christian theory of existence, which posits that all beings are created equal in the name of God. This connection may compel us to agree that Wu Leichuan would have adopted this point quite easily.

Datong signifies a communal society where people can share everything, and even the widowers, the childless old men, and orphans can live their lives without any traces of sorrow and loneliness. *Datong* is in fact a Confucian ideal society extensively referenced in Confucian canons.

However, Kang Youwei’s *The book of Great Unity* appears to advocate the negation of the institution of family and liberation of females. In this regard, his way of thought is said to have transcended the traditionally circumscribed scope of conventional Confucian ideology, because conventional Confucianism is primarily based on two pivotal divisions: one is for the maintenance of the institution of family and the other is a socially narrowly defined division of gender and social role between males and females. *The book of Great Unity* can be viewed as containing elements of opposition to traditional customs and practices along with self-criticism of tradition and because of this, the book appears to negate the “respectfulness”, another fundamental principle of Confucianism, although this negation is only an outward manifestation. Wu Leichuan’s theory of heaven has something in common with the spirit of *The book of Great Unity* in the sense that it tends to criticize and attempts to modify traditional customs and practices.

Human beings have dreams. The theory of heaven is not only a view of an afterlife but also represents human dreams of an ideal world. As humans eventually invented the airplane after dreaming of flying like birds, Wu Leichuan’s view of heaven emphasized his concept of an ideal world. His theory of heaven had the primary function of denying and criticizing reality. At the same time, this theory of heaven had another function of revealing a new concept of reality. Wu’s theory of heaven mainly propagates possessing a “critical function” and an “alternative function” regarding an existing system and reality.

Through an analysis of the theory of heaven and related views, I believe that Wu Leichuan’s Christology was receptive to socialism, and formed a creative Chinese Christian ideology based on this. He emphasized a social role for Christianity within a socialist system and made an effort to spread the social praxis of religion. Wu’s interpretation on the relationship between Christianity and materialism as an ontology in socialism was comparatively receptive to both Marxism and

Christianity.⁴³ However, this line of thought cannot be deemed the norm in East Asia.

This is in contrast to that of Ham Sökhön, the reformatory Korean thinker in the twentieth century who maintained a critical perspective on socialism.⁴⁴ Ham resisted statism, industrialism, the use of military forces, and also socialism. Although Ham criticized capitalism, at the same time he lacked a rigorous and scientific analysis of its mechanisms. Considering this, it is no wonder that he was not able to manifest a profound critical assessment of capitalist principles of economy, let alone a sufficient understanding of socialism or communism as an alternative corrective to the capitalist economic system.⁴⁵ Having labelled both capitalism and communism variants of “supreme statism”, Ham stressed the thorough propagation of the spirit of Christianity in an effort to pre-emptively stall the inroads of communism.⁴⁶ He once even went as far as to say that, “Korean Christianity would not be communized.”⁴⁷ Ham appears to play off communism against Christianity in binary opposition instead of searching for a common chord between the two, whereas Wu sought to find commonalities cross-cutting communism, socialism, and Christianity, as is clearly evidenced in his theory of heaven.

Conclusion

Wu Leichuan attempted to constantly keep open the channels of communication between Asian traditions and the modern thought of Christianity and to bring the two into constant contact. Through the works of Christian thinkers such as Wu Leichuan, Christianity in North East Asia was able to settle down as a third tradition which is a continuation of, yet is separate from, Christian universality. What Wu aspires to see and accomplish is to form diverse religious cultures but at the same time to maintain a uniform, holy, and universal tradition of faith, while rising above the exclusive tendencies of both individuals and collectivities that tend to depress and prevent a new leap ahead and further development. Thanks to the works and committed endeavors of thinkers such as Wu Leichuan, common people in China, who were struggling in the turbulent twentieth century when traditional order collapsed and there was a widespread hostility toward militant Western imperialism, were able to change their perceptions of Christianity and adopt it as “their own culture.”

Wu Leichuan of China stated that “benevolence” is inherent in both humanity and in the myriad aspects of the universe, and this is identical to the Holy Spirit in Christianity, a substance that embraces “love”. He further argued that this foundation is based on arousing each individual’s spontaneity. It was also based on developing their points of view that religion is not an opium for the people. He developed his own vision of

heaven that served to criticize existing society. This view of Wu appears very similar to the image of “Society of Great Unity” that was illuminated in the theory of Great Unity by Kang Youwei.

One of the distinctive aspects of Wu’s Christian thought consists in its embracing of social praxis whose sole purpose is to forge a deep empathy with and obtain understanding of the sufferings of common people in China. This emphasis on empathic understanding is in stark contrast to the dominant form of twentieth-first century Christianity in Asia that emphasizes mammonism and secular success. Christianity’s all-embracing egalitarianism is in fact the reason why Wu Leichuan and Zhao Zichen became Christians at the time. Within Asian Christianity, Wu’s thought is distinctive and unique, especially in the sense that in a socialist nation when there were attempts to seek commonalities between Marxism and Christian thought, the collision derivable from disparate theoretical inclinations attributable to both schools of thought was just minimalist or non-existent.

Wu did not connect the antagonism toward socialism with Christianity and succeeded in establishing a unique Chinese Christian school of thought, which may be, among many, represented by his theory of heaven. In light of this, we may see Wu’s contribution as a unique thinker and staunch advocate of Christianity within the context of social praxis that emphasizes the praxis-oriented role of Christianity within socialism.

Notes

¹ The convention in academic writing, the McCune-Reischauer method of translation, is adopted for Korean terms in this paper. For Chinese terms, the Pinyin method is used. The Koreans and Chinese are, according to the accepted naming style, referred to by the conventional order of the family name first and then the given name in this article. For the purpose of Romanizing the Korean given names, I follow the accepted style of including hyphens between characters; for example, Han Sŏk-hŏn, not Ham Sŏkhŏn.

² Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 2: 1800 - Present*, (Boston: Brill Academic, 2010), 615-618.

³ For this matter, see: Chu Sinjan, *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republican China*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 17-62, 107-172; Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), 11-13.; Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 2: 1800-Present*, 616.; Philip West, “Christianity and Nationalism: The Career of Wu Leichuan at Yenching University”, in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 226-246.

⁴ Kang Ji-yeon, “Historical Context and Socialist Inclination of Wu Leichuan’s Theory of Christianity against the Backdrop of Chinese Society in the 1900’s” [*O Roechŏn-ŭi kidokron-ŭi sahoejuŭi-chŏk kyŏnghyangsŏng*], *Humanities Research [Inmun Yon’gu]* 66, (2012): 267.

⁵ Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 694-699.; Kang, "Historical Context and Socialist Inclination of Wu Leichuan's Theory of Christianity against the Backdrop of Chinese Society in the 1900's" [*O Roech'ôn-üi kidokron-üi sahoejuüi-chök kyöngnyangsöng*], 107-134.; Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, Vol. 2: 1800-Present, 604.; West, "Christianity and Nationalism: The Career of Wu Leichuan at Yenching University", 233-234.

⁶ See more: Jonathan T. E. Chao, "The Chinese Indigenous, Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movement in Modern China", (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1986); Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1920-1928*, (Notre Dame: Cross Cultural Publications, 1988), 55-90, 160-208.

⁷ West, "Christianity and Nationalism: The Career of Wu Leichuan at Yenching University", 226-246. Concerning the life of Wu Leichuan, See more Li Wei, *Study on Wu Leichuan's thought of Christian Contextualization* [Wu Leichuan de jidujiao chujinghua sixiang yanjiu], (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2010), 1-4.

⁸ Concerning *Journal Life* [Shengming], See more Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 788.

⁹ Wu Leichuan, "The Bible and Confucian Classics" [Jidujiaojing yu rujiaojing], *Life* [Shengming] 3, 6 (1923): 1-3.

¹⁰ Wu Leichuan, "The Holy Spirit of Christianity and Benevolence of Confucianism" [Jidujiaozhi shengling yu rujiazhiren], *Life* [Shengming] 1, 7 (1923): 11-18; Wu Leichuan, "Meaning of Prayers in Christianity and Moral Cultivation Method of Chinese Ancient Philosophy" [Jidujiaode qidaode yiyi yu zhongguode xianzhe xiuyangde fangfa], *Truth and Life* [Zhenli yu shengming] 2, 6 (1927): 145-150; Kang Ji-yeon, "A Study of Confucianism's Influences in Wu Leichuan's Christianity" [*O Roech'ôn-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yön'gu*], *Oriental Studies* [Tongbanghak] 24 (2012): 274.

¹¹ Wu Leichuan, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], (Xinbei: CCLM Publisher Group [Huaxuan chuban youxian gongsi], 2013), 65.

¹² Wu Leichuan, "Reevaluations of Chinese Old Ethics Value and Christianity" [Zhongguo jiudaodejiazhi de zhonggu yu jidujiao], *Wild Voice* [Yesheng] 2 (1928): 6-9.; Wu Leichuan, "Christian Ethics and Christian Churches in China" [Jidujiaode lunli yu Zhongguode jidujiaojui], *Truth and Life* [Zhenli yu shengming] 2, 2 (1927): 31-34.; Wu, "Christianity in the Light of Confucian Thought" [Congrujia sixiang lunjidujiao], *Truth and Life* [Zhenli yu shengming] 4, 18 (1930): 3-8.; Wu Leichuan, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 64-66.; Kang, "A Study of Confucianism's Influences in Wu Leichuan's Christianity" [*O Roech'ôn-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yön'gu*], 274.

¹³ Wu, "Reevaluations of Chinese Old Ethics Value and Christianity" [Zhongguo jiudaodejiazhi de zhonggu yu jidujiao], 6-9.

¹⁴ "Being a human being entails being equipped with benevolence. Benevolence is what the heart and mind of humanity have." Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 65.

¹⁵ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 64-66.; Kang, "A Study of Confucianism's Influences in Wu Leichuan's Christianity" [*O Roech'ôn-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yön'gu*], 274.

¹⁶ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 150-181. He recognizes the worth of the cultural heritage of China not only in Confucianism

and Buddhism but also in Mohism. He finds that there is a parallel between the socialist ethics of Mohism and Christianity. See more: Wu Leichuan, *Mozi and Jesus* [Mozhaiyu yesu], (Shanghai: The Association Press of China, 1940), 5-77.; Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 283.

¹⁷ “When comparing Confucian thought with Jesus Christ, Wu further argued that the former appears to accentuate human society and human relationships whereas the latter appears to manifest mystical singularities that simply go beyond the human relationships. Wu remarked that what Confucius advocated as a standard of morality boils down to a universally applicable code of conduct whereas what Jesus shows us as a principle contains something transcendental that just goes beyond the common sense of humanity.” Wu Leichuan, “Personality: Jesus and Confucius” [Renge: Yesu yu Kongzi], *Life* [Shengming] 5, 3 (1925): 5-6; Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 274.

¹⁸ Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 274.

¹⁹ Wu Leichuan, “On Christians and Confucianism” [Lun jidujiao yu rujiao], *Truth* [Zhenli] 1 (1924): 30.

²⁰ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 180-181.

²¹ “Theory of the innate goodness of human nature” means the teachings of Mengzi. See Roger Ames and David Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 2-3.

²² Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 180-181.

²³ “When human beings strive to reach the completion of the self, the profound union with the world will be formed. Transmutations of social order and natural order will commence with this self-cultivation. This is what all Confucians like Mencius have stressed and articulated---Sincerity is the beginning and end of things. Without sincerity there would be nothing. When this state forms, then that is the stage where the world and I will be merged into a unity.” Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 180-181. ;Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 276.

²⁴ Wu, “The Bible and Confucian Classics” [Jidujiaojing yu rujiaojing], 1.

²⁵ Relevant phrase is as follows; “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness’---So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them---God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number--.” Genesis 1: 26-28.; Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 276.

²⁶ Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 276-277.

²⁷ Wu, “The Bible and Confucian Classics” [Jidujiaojing yu rujiaojing], 1; Wu, “Meaning of Prayers in Christianity in Christianity and Moral Cultivation Method of Chinese Ancient Philosophy” [Jidujiaode qidaode yi yi yu zhongguode xianzhe xiuyangde fangfa], 146.

²⁸ See more Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yŏn’gu], 276-277.

²⁹ Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 21.

³⁰ McDannell, *Heaven: A History*, XXI.

³¹ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 62-66.

³² Chu, *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republican China*, 134. Wu Leichuan stated in his early work, “Jesus’s Ideal Society and How to Realize it”: “Even though the heaven that they had planned was described in Jewish terms, its essential meaning would not be the same as what Jews had thought. The heaven which Jesus declared can be different from what John understood. We can regard the heaven Jesus mentioned as an ideal society. We will be able to understand it properly if we think in such a way.” Wu Leichuan, “Jesus’s Ideal Society and How to Realize It” [Yesuxinshehuide lixiang jiqi shixiande wenti], *Truth and Life* [Zhenli yu shengming] 6, 1 (1931): 6. ; See more Kang, “A Study of Confucianism’s Influences in Wu Leichuan’s Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi kidokkyo-wa yukyo pikyo yön’gu], 274.

³³ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 73.

³⁴ He spoke of the heaven as follows. First, there is no king in heaven. Second, there is no private property in heaven. Third, one can acquire food if he works. Fourth, everything in heaven is based on love. Fifth, no formal religion is needed in heaven. Wu, “Jesus’s Ideal Society and How to Realize It” [Yesuxinshehuide lixiang jiqi shixiande wenti], 4-8.; Kang Ji-yeon, “Wu Leichuan’s Synthetic Approach: Focusing on His Interpretations of Mozi Thought and Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi mukjök-kua yesu Yön’gu], *Philosophical Research* [Inmun Yön’gu] 124 (2012): 11.

³⁵ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 75.

³⁶ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 75-76.; Kang, “Wu Leichuan’s Synthetic Approach: Focusing on His Interpretations of Mozi Thought and Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi mukjök-kua yesu Yön’gu], 11.

³⁷ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 75.; See more Kang, “Wu Leichuan’s Synthetic Approach: Focusing on His Interpretations of Mozi Thought and Christianity” [O Roech’ön-üi mukjök-kua yesu Yön’gu], 16-17.

³⁸ Wu, *Christianity and Chinese Culture* [Jidujiao yu zhongguowenhua], 74-77.

³⁹ Kang Youwei, *Datongshu*, in *Zhongguo Xueshu Zhongshu: Vol. 3* (Shanghai: Shanghai Publisher, 1994), 426-430.; La’urence G. Thompson, *Ta t’ung shu: The One-World Philosophy of K’ang Yu-wei*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 2007).

⁴⁰ Concerning this, Chu Sinjan remarked that the ultimate goal of evolution can be comparable to the Great Unity. For more detail, see Chu, 53. This tenor of thought can be taken to reflect the cultural phenomena that were pervasively entrenched in Korea, China, and Japan. According to Luo, Christian reformers and Christian missionaries influenced each other and shared a vision of social salvation even in Tokyo from the mid-1890s. Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 39.

⁴¹ “All are the offspring born by the heaven, thus all are equal citizens”. See Kang, *Datongshu*, 18; Thompson, *Ta t’ung shu: The One-World Philosophy of K’ang Yu-wei*, 37-57.

⁴² Sim Hyön-jöng, “Great Community Theory by Kang Youwei” [Kang Yuwei-üi Taedong Sasangnon], (Master’s thesis, Ewha Womans University), 9-27.

⁴³ Concerning the relationship between materialism and the thought of Wu Leichuan, see more Li, *Study on Wu Leichuan's Thought of Christian Contextualization* [Wu Leichuan de jidujiao chujinghua sixiang yanjiu], 154-161.

⁴⁴ Ham Sök-hön (1901-1989) was a key leader in the non-violence movement in Korea. His sobriquet, the “Gandhi of Korea”, speaks volumes of the orientation of his political commitment. He was actively involved in social organising against the ruling authoritarian regimes from the early sixties to the late eighties, and was incarcerated several times. Ham’s religious visions and ideals were hardly put into action, but his thought and active participation in social issues profoundly influenced many Korean social reformers and politicians, such as Kim Tong-gil (1928—), An Pyöng-mu (1922-1996), Kim Tae-chung (1923-2009), Kim Yöng-sam (1928—2015), and others. In 1979 and 1985, Ham was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize by the American Friends Service Committee. In 2002, after his death, he was awarded “the Accolade for Founding a Nation” as a sign of official recognition from Korea. Kim Söng-su, “An Examination of the Life and Legacy of a Korean Quaker, Ham Sök-hön (1901-1989): “Voice of the People and Pioneer of Religious Pluralism in Twentieth Century Korea” (ThD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1998), 13, 360.

⁴⁵ Lee Kyu-söng, *A Study on the History of Korean Modern Philosophy* [Hankuk hyöndae ch’öraksaron], (Seoul: Ewha Woman’s University Publishing, 2012), 592-593.; Ham viewed “communism” as an ideology that not only killed and brainwashed human beings but also utilized inhumane acts and forcibly deprived human beings of their freedom. See Ham Sök-hön, *Minjung Manage the Government* [Minjung-i chöngbu-rül tasüryöya handa], (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 2009), 311.

⁴⁶ Ham, *Minjung Manage the Government* [Minjung-i chöngbu-rül tasüryöya handa], 310.

⁴⁷ Ham, *Minjung Manage the Government* [Minjung-i chöngbu-rül tasüryöya handa], 311.

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