

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF FAITH:
WANG TAO'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY

by

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Abstract

The Christian faith of Wang Tao 王韜 (1823-1897) has long been a focus of study among scholars. Throughout his life, Wang displayed different or even contradictory attitudes towards Christianity, at once praising and criticizing the religion to which he officially converted. Wang's faith seemed to waver according to circumstances and hence he is often viewed as an opportunist. In addition, his wavering attitudes towards Christianity reflect the complexity witnessed in the dissemination of Christianity in late-Qing China and serve to underscore the problem of using "conversion" as a marker of one's religious identity. Wang's differing attitudes towards Christianity thus complicate our understanding of what it means to be a "true Christian" as well as what constitutes "faith" and one's "religious identity." Rather than treating religious identities as fixed entities, I argue that we should think of them as spectrums, along which individuals might locate themselves differently depending on their current circumstances.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished and independent work by the author, Xuan Huang.

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List of Abbreviations

JDJYZGWH *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua* 基督教與中國文化

[Christianity and Chinese Culture]

ZLYSM *Zenli yu shengming* 真理與生命 [Truth and Life]

SM *Shengming* 生命[Life]

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To God, if any.

Introduction: “A Puzzling Chapter”

I came here in autumn of last year, and now it is autumn once more. One year has passed, and I have a stirring of feelings for what I have witnessed. Alas! Life is like a white steed swiftly leaping over a crevasse [i.e. life is fleeting], and I cannot even recognize that I'm getting old. Why should one be ashamed of poverty? Wealth is not something that one should pursue. What I should do is but be content with my circumstances. Nowadays, as long as someone can dress warmly and eat his fill, then integrity means nothing to him. What a pity! I'm repeating the same mistake now. How can people not speak ill of me?

我自去歲抄秋至此，今已又及秋矣，時物一周，不禁觸目生感。嗚呼，人生如白駒過隙，不知老之將至。貧賤何足恥，富貴不可求，但當安吾貞守吾素而已，今人得溫飽便不識名節為何物，可嗤可惜，我今亦蹈此轍，能不令人訾我短耶？¹

When Wang Tao (1823-1897) wrote the above letter to his brother in 1850, he had been working as a translator at the London Missionary Society Press 墨海書館 [LMS Press hereafter] in Shanghai for about one year. With much remorse, he often described the job to his friends and relatives as merely a means to filling his financial needs, despite claiming in his autobiography: “I would like to learn their [Westerners’s] sciences such as astronomy and cartography, and therefore I went to teach at the LMS Press” 老民欲窺其象緯輿圖諸學，遂往館授書焉。² However, in his letter quoted above, we see Wang acting as a big brother, painfully recognizing his mistakes and cautioning his younger sibling not to commit the same error.

To understand why Wang claimed that taking the job was a “mistake,” it is helpful for us to learn what kind of place the LMS Press was. It was an institution established by several

¹ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1983), 51-52.

² Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, ed. Chen Zhengqing (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2002), 269.

British missionaries, including Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1854), who became an important friend for Wang Tao. As one of the earliest modern publishing houses in China, the LMS Press was the first publisher to implement metal movable-type printing in Shanghai. As an employee at the LMS Press, Wang was primarily responsible for polishing missionaries' translations of the Bible (Wang himself did not know English). Along with his Chinese colleagues at the LMS Press, Wang both helped missionaries translate various texts and also co-authored many books on Western politics, science and Christianity. Throughout his journals and letters, Wang describes this decision as being against his true will, and he maintained the job as a means of making a living to support his family.³ Wang also frequently complained about his job to others. He once had a conversation with his co-worker Guan Sifu 管嗣復, who asserted in front of Wang that translating Christian texts for missionaries was against Confucian teachings and would bring shame upon Chinese scholars. Wang seemed moved by Guan's words and lamented: "If I could discern the correct principle of behavior, I wouldn't have chosen to work here [LMS] even if I had to starve to death under my window" 苟能辨其大閑，雖餓死牖下，亦不往矣。⁴

It seems reasonable for us, based on Wang's own words, to think that he must have suffered much (at least morally) as a result of working at the LMS Press. After all, he appeared to be dissatisfied with his situation, constantly viewing his job as a translator of Christian texts as contrary to Confucian teachings. Oftentimes, he described in great detail

³ For instance, see Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 5-6, 10-11, 13.

⁴ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, eds. Fong Xin and Chang Zhijun (Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 92.

how much he disliked Western teachings and Christianity, asserting that the doctrines and teachings of Christianity were absurd.⁵

If so, it might be difficult for us to imagine how such a person as Wang would voluntarily request to be baptized. Moreover, he records in his journal that he held an approving attitude when one of his friends decided to convert. He specifically indicated that he was the only person who supported the decision and criticized those who argued against the conversion: “Alas, their minds, so narrow! I do not feel sorry for Yingu, but I feel deeply sorry for us Chinese people. I also feel sorry for us [Chinese scholars]” 噫！所見如此，隘亦甚矣！隱谷固不足惜，而深為吾華人惜也，亦為吾黨惜也。⁶ Evidently, as someone whose mind was not “so narrow,” Wang himself was baptized on August 22, 1854, claiming that it was God’s calling.

What should we make of Wang’s Christian faith? Why does Wang’s religiosity matter to us and what does it teach us about his life and times? In fact, in scholarship on late Qing intellectual history, the special life experiences of Wang Tao have rendered him one of the most frequently studied literati of the late-Qing China. Due to his residences in Shanghai and Hong Kong, Wang was exposed to extensive Western influences. Not only did he spend a significant amount of time working/interacting with foreigners in China, he was even able to make a long journey to Europe. Paul Cohen argues that Wang was “probably the first classically trained Chinese scholar in the modern era to spend a meaningful period of time

⁵ For instance, see Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 83.

⁶ Wang Tao, “Henhuaguan riji,” September 23, 1855, Fu Ssu-nien Library, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

living in the West.”⁷ Different from his contemporaries who were educated in the Western system (such as Yung Wing), Wang was trained in traditional Chinese curriculum and always identified himself with traditional Chinese literati. Interestingly, as someone who was deeply trained in traditional Chinese classics, Wang spent most of his life in Hong Kong and Shanghai, two cities abundant with cross-cultural exchange. Indeed, Wang seemed to be a somewhat incongruous figure, constantly showing mixed and complicated feelings towards Western influences. His response to Western influences, similar to some other late-Qing literati, represents an uneasy accommodation of Western learning, traditional Chinese heritage, and individual perception.

This thesis aims to examine an aspect of the aforementioned “uneasy accommodation” shown in Wang Tao: his attitudes towards Christianity. Whether or not Wang Tao was a “true Christian” has sparked tremendous debate among scholars. In the appendix to *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 弢園文錄外編 edited by Chen Huan 陳桓 and Fang Yiner 方銀兒, Wang Tao’s Christian faith is listed as one of the most crucial issues in the study of Wang Tao. Not all scholars would describe Wang as a Christian, but most recognize Wang’s involvement with Christianity to a certain extent, either through his translation work for the LMS Press or his personal interaction with several missionaries at the LMS Press. Nonetheless, there is still great skepticism amongst scholars. For instance, in discussing Christian influence on Wang Tao, Henry McAleavy claims: “Certainly, [Wang’s] mind never received the slightest tincture of Christianity.”⁸ As Wang’s status as a “true Christian” has become a topic of

⁷ Paul Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang Tao and Reform in Late Ch’ing China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 67.

⁸ Henry McAleavy, *Wang T’ao: the Life and Writings of a Displaced Person* (London: The China Society, 1953), 21.

scholarly debate, I believe the discussion around this question has typically obscured rather than revealed Wang's complex relationship to the Christian faith. The significance of revisiting Wang Tao's relationship with Christianity is not merely to determine whether he was ever a true Christian. Such a question ultimately reveals less about Wang's faith and instead highlights the problems in defining what it actually means to be a "true" Christian. Hence, this thesis seeks to elucidate what Christianity meant to Wang and what complexities there were in his Christian faith. Certainly, when discussing if someone's Christian beliefs are genuine, it unavoidably entails our consideration of his role as a Christian. Nonetheless, in a broader sense, Wang's reactions and perceptions reflected predicaments experienced by late-Qing literati and problems regarding the dissemination of Christianity in late-Qing China. This study will analyze this relationship by drawing connections to the intellectual and emotional world of late-Qing and early Republican treaty port scholars, portraying religious faith as a spectrum to which one continues to be creatively engaged.

Scope and Purpose

In order to provide an accurate account of Wang's Christianity, this thesis integrates a wide range of primary and secondary sources. As a historical study, this thesis closely examines Wang's journals, letters and published monographs. The two most noteworthy sources are the manuscripts in the LMS archives located at the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) library in London, and Wang's unpublished journals collected at the Fu Ssu-nien Library at the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. Although rarely used by scholars (possibly due to their inaccessibility), both are of great significance: First, the LMS archives include incoming correspondences from missionaries overseas. Every half a year, missionaries would report on their progress to the LMS in London. Before Wang's application for baptism was found in the LMS archives by Patrick Hanan, there had been great debates among scholars

regarding whether he was baptized. Second, while Cohen claims that there is a “complete break” in Wang’s journals from the summer of 1853 to the fall of 1854,⁹ Wang’s six volumes of unpublished journals in Taiwan are dated from 1852 to 1855. These unpublished volumes are crucial as they cover a period overlapping with the aforementioned break in Wang’s journals. Some entries are especially revealing of Wang’s Christian faith as there are records of him going to church every Sunday or expressing his opinion regarding a friend’s baptism.

A large part of this thesis will be devoted to examining Wang’s journals and letters. Many studies on Wang’s Christian faith have been conducted based on these two sources, yet I believe these sources have not been effectively utilized as many scholars tend to ignore contradictory entries throughout Wang’s corpus and ultimately oversimplify his thoughts. In fact, in Wang’s corpus, he demonstrates contradictory views on several topics. This thesis thus elucidates the complicated and sometimes incongruous nature of Wang’s Christian faith.

I begin my analysis with a biographical study of Wang Tao (Chapter 1) to provide a comprehensive background of Wang’s employment at the LMS Press, his involvement with the Church and his religious beliefs. To better discuss Wang’s Christian faith, this chapter aims to contextualize the development of his religious thought in its historical and cultural context. In the following chapter (Chapter 2), I will provide a detailed analysis of Wang’s application for baptism, which was originally an attachment of Walter H. Medhurst’s letter to the LMS in London in 1853. In Chapter 3, I then discuss selected passages from Wang’s journals and letters in order to draw a broader picture of Wang’s wavering attitudes towards Christianity.

These three chapters will then be followed by a conclusion with a comparison to Wu Leichuan 吳雷川 (1870-1944), an important and interesting Chinese Christian scholar in the

⁹ Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 19.

early Republican period. Like Wang, Wu is also a controversial Christian, although in a different way. Throughout his life, Wu publicly proclaimed his Christianity and was a significant defender of Christianity in the heyday of the Anti-Christianity Movement in China in the 1920s. However, he also frequently averred that he did not believe in concepts such as the Trinity, or the Virgin birth. The controversies surrounding Wu's faith thus render him a particularly riveting Christian intellectual.

Some arguments of this thesis are inspired by a particularly interesting metaphor proposed in *Bianyuan yu zhijian* 邊緣與之間, a monograph by Leung Yuen-shang 梁元生. This monograph discusses intellectuals, cities and cultures with great diversities due to their multifaceted “in-between” characteristics (e.g. between tradition and modernity, between Confucianism and Christianity, between mainstream and marginal, etc.). The chapter on Lim Boon Keng 林文慶 (1869-1957), a Chinese physician who promoted social reforms in Singapore, provides a fascinating metaphor: “Yihe Xuan 怡和軒,” a club for Chinese intellectuals in Singapore was a three-storied building. Intellectuals who were educated in China often gathered on the second floor, and intellectuals who were educated overseas or in English gathered on the third floor. However, “On a whim, people on the third floor would go down to the second floor, and people on the second floor would go upstairs as well.”¹⁰ This metaphor well illustrates the mobility in one's thoughts, and I believe it can also be used to describe Wang's and Wu's religious identities. Both Wang and Wu have certain Christian and “un-Christian” characteristics; to label them as merely “true” or “untrue” Christians will unavoidably oversimplify the complexities in their Christian faith. I believe Wu and Wang serve as excellent examples of how Christianity or any religious identity is a diverse dynamic

¹⁰ Leung Yuen-shang, *Bianyuan yu zhijian* 邊緣與之間 (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue chubanshe, 2008), 41-42.

instead of an essentialized label. By comparing and contrasting Wang and Wu, this thesis illuminates the potential problems and prejudices that are in place when we approach the question of religiosity.

Overall, this thesis considers the intellectual and religious odyssey of a late-Qing Chinese scholar. The purpose of my study is two-fold: First, I aim to clarify, contextualize and present Wang's religiosity and Christian beliefs. Secondly, I will analyze the problems in approaching and defining religious identities. Wang's changing attitudes towards Christianity elucidate the complexities in defining and analyzing basic terms such as "*true* Christian," "faith," and "religious identity" whose meanings are often taken for granted. Rather than viewing one's religious identity as a fixed label, this thesis considers it a spectrum abundant with fluidity and mobility. In this regard, one's "faith" is a process to which people are actively and creatively engaged. In conclusion, instead of labeling Wang (and Wu) as "true" or "untrue" Christians, this thesis illuminates the uniqueness of their Christian faith and how they are respectively different Christians of their own kind. This study intends to consider Wang's religiosity with regard to the subtle political, social and intellectual changes of his times and to understand Christian identity and faith as a diverse dynamic full of variegated possibilities.

A Note on Terminology and Romanization

Although no specification was made in this thesis, the Christian branch discussed in this study is Protestantism since both actors (Wang Tao and Wu Leichuan) were Protestant Christians and were both aware of the distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism. Yet, this thesis uses words such as "Christianity," "Christian identity," or "Christian faith" in a general sense to refer to one's religious beliefs, as specifically-defined Christian denominations would not have a significant effect on the discussions at hand.

There are two other core terms that this thesis often applies: religiosity and faith. According to the Oxford English dictionary, “religiosity” is a synonym of “religiousness.” It also refers to “religious feelings or beliefs.”¹¹ From a sociological perspective, there are two aspects of religiosity: In a broad sense, religiosity is a comprehensive term that refers to the diverse aspects of religious activity, dedication, and belief. It could be about how one is religious (for instance, in practicing certain rituals, or accepting certain doctrines about deities and afterlife). In a narrow sense, religiosity deals more with a person’s attitude towards religion in general, and less with how a person reacts towards specific denominations or practices. As T. L. Brink points out, there are three major dimensions in one’s religiosity: behavioral, cognitive and affective. First, the behavioral component can be examined through categories such as affiliation (if someone belongs to a specific denomination), attendance (if someone attends worship services), and acceptance of church policies (e.g. The official Catholic teachings do not allow people to use artificial means of birth control, yet some American Catholic churches disagree with this policy). Second, the cognitive dimension of religiosity includes all aspects of people’s beliefs about God, other transcendental beings and the religion *per se*. Lastly, the affective aspect of religiosity deals with people’s emotions, priorities, and values (e.g. if religion is important in someone’s life). All the dimensions are essential when it comes to analyzing and evaluating one’s religious identity.¹²

Faith is a fundamental religious category. Some might even describe it as a fundamental category of human experiences. Contemporary academic endeavors have

¹¹ "religiosity, n.". *OED Online*. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161954?redirectedFrom=religiosity> (accessed April 04, 2014).

¹² T. L. Brink, "Religiosity: Measurement," in *Survey of Social Science: Psychology*, ed. Frank N. Magill (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 1993), 2097-8.

focused on achieving a generic definition of faith. This thesis looks at the faith of a particular interesting Chinese literatus in late imperial China and seeks to ask questions such as: Can we examine faith in intellectual apprehension? Can we discern this particular kind of involvement, both historically or empirically?

According to Wilfred C. Smith, a British theologian: “‘Faith’ [...] shall signify the human quality that has been expressed in, has been elicited, nurtured, and shaped by, the religious traditions in the world.”¹³ The most straightforward definition of faith given in the OED is “belief, trust, confidence.” Yet, it also describes faith as “[t]he spiritual apprehension of divine truths, or of realities beyond the reach of sensible experience or logical proof.”¹⁴ It is exactly this a-logical (or illogical, if one wishes) nature that renders the investigation of faith interesting, complicated, and variegated.

Due to the controversial nature of faith, one must anticipate numerous disagreements when attempting to provide a general definition for the term. In fact, can faith be tediously examined for intellectual apprehension? Can one’s practices reflect his faith? In the introductory chapter of *Death Rituals in Late Imperial China and Modern China*, Watson and Rawski present two very different attitudes toward this question. Watson points out that often the performers of funeral ritual did not necessarily understand the meaning of certain actions. Yet they were perfectly aware when certain rituals were not performed in the “right way.” Performance took precedence over belief and from the standpoints of both imperial

¹³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 6.

¹⁴ "faith, n.". *OED Online*. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67760?rskey=GbdBNI&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 04, 2014).

authorities and ritual performers, the importance of funeral ritual was not whether people believed in it, but whether it was done correctly. Watson asserts that rituals are not indicative of faith and therefore cannot be used as manifestations of faith¹⁵. On the contrary, Rawski disagrees with Watson and points out that orthodoxy was as important as orthopraxy and that the state's concern with people's performances was inseparable from its concern with their moral values¹⁶.

Indeed, the debates surrounding the relationship between faith and rituals reflect the complexities and difficulties of analyzing beliefs. Taking up this debate, this thesis intends to illuminate the paradox in discussing faith through performances. I argue that the conventional way of using religious practices such as baptism or church attendance to determine one's Christianity is in fact ineffective and problematic. In fact, faith encapsulates one's creative involvement with certain creeds, practices and institutions. Although Wang never used the exact Mandarin word for "faith" in his corpus, he did express his opinions on different aspects of Christianity in a variety of writings. This thesis will look at these records, along with a mixture of his journals and letters in order to understand his attitudes towards Christianity. Overall, this thesis uses "faith" when discussing one's beliefs in a specific religion (e.g. "Wang's Christian faith") and "religiosity" when describing one's attitudes, opinions and actions toward religion in a general sense.

As for the transliteration of Chinese names, places and terms, this thesis uses the system of Hanyu Pinyin. However, in citing English sources that utilize the Wade-Giles romanization system, references remain unchanged.

¹⁵ James Watson and Evelyn Rawski, eds, *Death Rituals in Late Imperial and Modern China*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 3-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-25.

Chapter 1

The Road to Baptism: “Misfortunes Come One after Another”

On November 10th, 1828, the famously beautiful Wu 吳 region in China welcomed the birth of yet another influential figure in Chinese history – Wang Tao. He was born as Wang Libin 王利賓 in Suzhou prefecture in Jiangsu, an eastern coastal province in the Jiangnan area, south of the Yangtze River. Wu is the region that surrounds Suzhou, in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces of China. Wang was born in a small town called Fuli 甫里, where numerous famous literati in Chinese history including Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (?~881), Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (ca. 834-883), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) had lived and spent their lives. As a child, Wang had an ordinary upbringing like many others of his time. It might have been difficult, even for himself, to imagine that roughly twenty years after his birth, he would begin working for foreign missionaries and would even apply to be baptized four years into his employment. This chapter chronicles a Chinese intellectual's journey, beginning with training in traditional classics and how this led to requesting application for baptism.

There is very little record of Wang's early life: his father, Wang Changgui 王昌桂, was a teacher, and Wang's three older brothers had passed away from smallpox before he was born. When Wang was young, he lived with his father in a small studio in Baosheng Monastery 寶聖禪院 in Fuli, his hometown. There were dozens of pine trees outside the monastery. Later in his life, Wang recalled how the constant sighing of pine trees “rolled in

waves and surges all through the night” 奔騰澎湃，徹夜不息 and left an indelible impression on his growing mind.¹⁷

In 1846, after failing the provincial level examination to obtain the degree of *juren* 舉人, Wang decided to abandon his examination career. He considered the examination system outdated and unfair, and went on to other pursuits. Starting from 1849, he worked at the London Missionary Society Press 墨海書館 [LMS Press hereafter] and assisted Medhurst in his translation of the New Testament for about 13 years. During the Taiping Rebellion, a massive civil war from 1850 to 1864 in southern China, Wang was believed by local officials to be in contact with the leaders of the Taiping Kingdom and was wanted by the Qing government. In 1862, he escaped to Hong Kong and then became the assistant to James Legge, with whom he translated *The Thirteen Chinese Classics* into English. Legge later invited Wang to stay with him in a small Scottish town called Dollar for two years. During his stay in the United Kingdom, Wang also traveled to other European cities and was even invited to deliver a speech at Oxford University.

The various experiences Wang went through in his travels certainly helped broaden his horizons. After he returned to Hong Kong, Wang wrote two influential books about Europe: *Faguo zhilue* 法國志略 [General History of France] and *Pufa zhanji* 普法戰紀 [Account of the Franco-Prussian War]. In 1874, Wang founded *Tsun-wan Yat-po* (*Xunhuan Ribao*, *Universal Circulating Herald* 循環日報, 1874-1947), the first Chinese daily newspaper. Thus, Wang is widely considered to be the father of modern Chinese journalism. In the newspaper, Wang penned numerous editorials proposing reforms of the Chinese

¹⁷ Wang Tao, *Manyou Suiru*, ed. Wang Xichi (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1962), 49-50.

political, social and educational systems. Scholars generally believe Wang's ideas might have influenced reformers such as Kang Youwei or Sun Yat-sen.¹⁸

This thesis focuses on Wang's attitudes towards Christianity, a particularly complicated aspect of his life. If we wish to analyze Wang's long and complex relationship with the Church and Christianity, a brief history of LMS, where his first encounter with the missionaries/Christianity took place, is a must.

In August 1843, LMS missionaries in China gathered in Hong Kong to discuss strategies and plans for their mission work after the Opium War. They decided to choose two locations – one among Hong Kong, Xiamen, or Fuzhou, and the other between Ningbo and Shanghai – to establish missions. William Lockhart (1811-1896) first arrived in Shanghai in November and stayed for two weeks before he went back again with Medhurst in December. Medhurst had been engaged in missionary labors in Batavia, but he had visited Shanghai in 1835. In the reports from the Shanghai mission to London, Medhurst mentioned he and Lockhart had rented houses in the neighborhoods of Dongmen and Nangmen and here the history of the first Protestant mission began. At first, they were cautious and kept their activities low-key, trying to avoid gathering crowds. However, they found the Shanghainese people were not as hostile as they expected, and the number of people participating in their Sunday worship increased from a couple to a hundred over the course of eight months.¹⁹ In 1845, Medhurst and Lockhart purchased 20 acres of land close to Beimen to build churches, residences for missionaries, a hospital and the London Missionary Society Press. These

¹⁸ For instance, Cohen begins his book on Wang Tao with a comparison to Sun. Based on an oral account given by Chan Siu-bak 陳少白, Cohen asserts that Wang's writings had direct influences on Sun. See Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 3 and 279.

¹⁹ "Medhurst to Tidman," May 1, 1844. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.1.B.

constructions laid the foundation for the LMS Shanghai mission and the establishment of LMS Press would ultimately be of great contribution to the translation of the Bible in China.

The history of Bible translation in China can be traced back to the Jesuit missionaries. For the early Jesuit missions, translating the Bible into Chinese languages was never a high priority concern. The Jesuit superiors in Beijing during the first half of the seventeenth century decided that other biblical texts were more useful than the Bible itself, and thus they produced translations of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, a catechism based on the Bible, and a life of Christ. The first translations of the Bible did not show up until the eighteenth century and they were all incomplete and by individual priests.²⁰ Starting from the early nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries devoted themselves to translating, printing and distributing the Bible in China. The first Protestant translations were also made by individuals, sometimes in consultation with others or based on manuscripts of earlier translations.²¹

The earliest complete Chinese translations of the Bible were all produced by British missionaries: Joshua Marshman (1768-1834), Robert Morrison (1782-1834) and William Milne (1785-1822). The British and Foreign Bible Society published Marshman's translation of the New Testament in 1813, and the whole Bible in 1822. This was the first known complete printed version of the Christian scriptures in Chinese. Morrison also completed his version of the New Testament in 1813, and then was joined by Milne to work on translating

²⁰ Nicholas Standeart, *Handbook of Christianity in China Volume 1: 635-1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 620-624.

²¹ John Y.H Yieh, "The Bible in China: Interpretations and Consequences," in *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume 2: 1800-Present*, ed. R.G. Tiedemann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 891-892.

the Old Testament. The work was finished in 1819 and published in 21 volumes in 1823.²² A common problem of these early editions is that they were translated solely by the missionaries, and so the translations were literal yet uneven at times.

In August 1843, a group of missionaries held a meeting in Hong Kong to discuss a revision of the translations. The plan was to form local committees at five stations and to appoint delegates in each committee to work on a part of the revision. Each committee presented its translation and the final version was determined by votes of the delegates. The committee, which in reality only consisted of Medhurst, Milne, and John Stornach (1810-?), was aided by native scholars (mainly Wang Tao), conducted their work daily from 10:00am to 2:30pm, almost without intermission. Milne detailed the process of producing translations: “Our sessions occurred daily, opened with reading a portion of the Sacred Scriptures and prayer, and extended from 10 o’clock A.M. to half-past 2 o’clock P.M. The method of proceeding [...] was to consider verse by verse, word by word, allowing each individual opportunity to propose any alteration that he might deem desirable. The several members of the delegation had their native tutors with them [...] rendering most valuable assistance.”²³ The translation of the New Testament was finished in July 1850. It was published with the approval of the delegates, and is known as “The Delegates Version.”²⁴

²² Alexander Wylie, "The Bible in China: A Record of Various Translations of the Holy Scriptures," in *Christian Progress in China: Gleanings from the Writings and Speeches of Many Workers*, ed. Arnold Foster (London: Religious Tract Society, 1889), 29-46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-46.

When Wang arrived in Shanghai for the very first time in 1848, he met several LMS missionaries including Medhurst. Wang later described this trip in pleasant terms:

I paid a special visit [to the LMS Press]. With bamboo fences, flower pergolas, beds of chrysanthemum and plots of orchids, the place had an aroma of wilderness to it. Within the building, the shelves were abundant with books, filling one's eyes with glittering jewels [i.e. there was a wide variety of books]. Mr. Medhurst had two daughters [...] who both came to greet me. Soon after we sat down, they poured wine into my glass and solicitously urged me to drink it. The wine was sweet and of a crimson tone [...].

余特往訪之，竹籬花架，菊圃蘭畦，頗有野外風趣。入其室中，縹緗插架，滿目琳琅，麥君有二女 [...] 皆出相見。坐甫定，即從晶杯注葡萄酒殷勤相勸，味甘色紅 [...]

Why Wang was entertained by Medhurst in his first visit might appear puzzling, as Medhurst was one of the most prominent missionaries at that time and Wang was merely a young man who had just failed his provincial examination. As Su Jing 蘇精 points out, the mystery is explained if we look closely at Medhurst's work report to the LMS in London.²⁵ During this time, the LMS missionaries overseas were required to submit reports to London in April and October of each year in order to update their progress. These reports are archived as Central China Incoming Correspondences at the SOAS Library at the University of London. Patrick Hanan also indicates that Wang Tao's much-quoted trip to the LMS Press in Shanghai in 1848 was in fact a visit to his father, who had already been working for the missionaries there.²⁶ According to Medhurst, Wang's father "had an extraordinary amount of

²⁵ Su Jing, "Wang Tao de Jidujiao xili" [Wang Tao's baptism] in *Wan Tao and the Modern World*, eds. Lam Kai Yin and Wong Man Kong. (HK: HKEP, 2000), 440.

²⁶ Patrick Hanan, "The Bible as Chinese Literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao and the Delegates' Version." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 1 (2003): 224, doi:10.2307/25066695.

book [the word ‘king,’ i.e. 經 *jing* (classics), is added] knowledge, so as to acquire the name of the walking library [~~‘dictionary’~~ is crossed out], but he was most determinately attracted to the doctrines of Confucius, saying that as he had lived a disciple of that sage, so he would die one, and so indeed he did [~~‘as far as we are aware, for he was suddenly taken ill and died’~~ is added], without any change of views. We lamented his departure, not only for his own sake, but for ours, supposing that we should find some difficulty in supplying his place.”

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After his father passed away in 1849, Wang Tao brought his family and returned to Shanghai to work at the LMS Press. The next summer, his wife felt unwell and was sent back to their hometown. She traveled to Shanghai again in September, believing she was pregnant. Yet she fell seriously ill and soon died ten days after her arrival. Facing these devastating blows of life, Wang sighed, “I have lived in this world for merely twenty-three years, and misfortunes come one after another. Within one year, another person lay covered in the coffin again” 寄身塵中，不過二十三載，而不如意事接踵以至，期年之間，蓋棺者再。²⁸ After his wife’s death, Wang continued to stay in Shanghai alone. His job at the LMS Press was to assist Medhurst in translating the New Testament. During his first year of employment, Wang was responsible for polishing and sometimes rewriting translations done by the missionaries. The translation he worked on was later published in July 1850 and known as the aforementioned Delegates’ Version. In Medhurst’s report, he appeared to be impressed with Wang’s devotion to his work, recounting, “Not only did [Wang] maintain a respectable position among the other teachers, much his seniors in point of age, but being of industrious

²⁷ “W.H. Medhurst to Tidman,” October 11, 1854. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.C.

²⁸ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1983), 56.

habits, he took upon himself most of the labor connected with the preparation of the work, which was generally adopted after some corrections by his compeers. In this way, he went through the doctrinal parts of the New Testament, and all the Old. For many of the happy turns of expression to be met with in the translation of Job, and the Proverbs, as well as the chaste and easy style which prevails throughout we are indebted to him."²⁹

Judging from the report, Medhurst was certainly satisfied with Wang's work performance and especially his determination to convert. In fact, Wang did not leave any writing regarding why he wanted to convert, but there exists a translation of his application for baptism in the LMS archives at the SOAS library. According to Medhurst's report, Wang fell seriously ill shortly after his translation work was finished in 1848. When Wang was sick in bed, "[h]is conscience was aroused [...] and the truths about which he had been busied came fresh into his mind, and he resolved to embrace Christianity." According to Medhurst, Wang voluntarily asked to be baptized, but the missionaries were wary of his determination and insisted that he wait for a year. Apparently, Wang maintained his desire to convert and Medhurst thus approved his application one year later. After the baptism, Wang was "employed in revising the whole of our Chinese hymns, and putting them in such a form that they might not be repulsive to the ears of the most refined poetical genius, and at the same time unobjectionable on the score of doctrinal sentiment."³⁰ In addition to the unverified validity of this record, Wang's application for baptism is intriguing in many other ways. In the next chapter, we will further examine the content of this document and its surrounding issues.

²⁹ "W.H. Medhurst to Tidman," October 11, 1854. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.C.

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2

Wang's Application for Baptism: "A Glimpse of the Glories of the Supreme"

Although Wang never publicly proclaimed his Christian identity, there is a record of his baptism in a letter written by Walter Henry Medhurst to the LMS in London on October 11, 1854. This letter includes an application for baptism that is reportedly written by Wang himself. The original Chinese version is lost, and the English letter reproduced in this chapter is translated by Medhurst as an attachment to his report, which is now located in the LMS archives at the SOAS library in London. The application was written when Wang was working on translations of Christian classical texts at the LMS Press in Shanghai, and was first referenced in Paul Cohen's book on Wang³¹, but the source quoted by Cohen is dated incorrectly. According to the original letter from William Medhurst in *Central China Incoming Correspondence*, Wang was baptized on August 22, 1854 instead of August 26, 1854.³²

Wang's baptism process was first noted in the report written by the LMS missionary William Muirhead on October 20, 1853.³³ In this report, Muirhead mentioned that there were two Chinese teachers who were receiving pre-baptismal education. One of them – Muirhead did not record the name – was hired by Medhurst to translate the Bible and to teach him Chinese. According to Muirhead, this Chinese teacher had great literary skills and was

³¹ Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 20.

³² "W.H. Medhurst to Tidman," October 11, 1854. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.C.

³³ "W. Muirhead to A. Tidman," October 20, 1853. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.B.

expected to make great contribution to the translation work at the LMS Press in Shanghai. The next year, Medhurst reported that his Chinese teacher Wang Lanching 王蘭卿 (Wang Tao's *hao* 號, i.e. style name) was baptized on August 22. Medhurst also attached the English translation of Wang's application for baptism in his report. Even though the original application no longer exists, the English translation is likely legitimate for two main reasons: First, some content of the application likely could only have been written by Wang (e.g. he suggested that the missionaries should only accept literati as converts, probably due to his concern about social status as a Christian-to-be himself). Second, although there seems to be a break from 1853 to the fall of 1854 in Wang's journals, we can see records of him attending sermons and receiving Communion immediately after the diary resumes.

This application is worth our attention for two reasons: First, as a first-hand source, it provides us with a close look at Wang's attitude(s) towards Christianity. Second, the content of this document is very interesting because it contains several of Wang's suggestions regarding the dissemination of Christianity in China. As Su Jing points out, Wang is probably the first and the only Chinese Christian that applied for conversion with an application full of personal opinions and advice.³⁴ From a broader perspective, the reformative spirit shown in this application is similar to those submitted later by him to Qing literati such as Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872), Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), and Wu Xu 吳煦 (1809-1872). In a sense, this application can be viewed as one of the very first writings on reforms by Wang.

Overall, this application provides an account of Wang's initial experiences with Christianity. It also records some of Wang's early thoughts and suggestions regarding the

³⁴ Su Jing, "Wang Tao de Jidujiao xili," 445.

dissemination of Christianity in late-Qing China. This application can be roughly divided into three sections: The first part describes how Wang became familiar with and wanted to convert to Christianity; the second part includes what he thinks about some core doctrines; the last part deals with his opinions on the problems faced by Christianity in China. This chapter reproduces this document below in sections followed by analysis and comments.

Part 1: Background of Wang's Conversion

I am now 26 years of age; my abilities are few, and my learning circumscribed. On the one hand I have not been able to cultivate virtue, nor on the other to improve my understanding, living in this neglected state for some time, I became, at length, so engrossed with the love of fame and gain, that I felt no disposition to reform; my mental vision became obscure, and my perceptions were daily more darkened. Had death surprised me in these circumstances, I should have been unable to obtain any deliverance. Thinking of this, I felt my danger, and bitterly regretted my past conduct.

In my early years I was blessed with domestic instruction, and paid much attention to odes and classics; I put myself under a course of training, and ranked myself amongst the rest of the learned, embracing firmly the doctrines of Confucius, not thinking of anything beyond. About this time my father died, and I was engaged to come in his place, where I heard the true doctrine. Although I was the last and least of those employed in the translation of the scriptures, I soon perceived in them a true excellence which I duly appreciated.³⁵

After his father past away in 1849, Wang Tao was selected as his successor by Medhurst. He worked as a translator at the LMS Press until 1862 when a letter of advice to the Taiping Kingdom was traced back to him and he had to flee Shanghai for Hong Kong. Wang Changgui's employment at the LMS Press was never mentioned in Wang Tao's own work; instead, we can only learn it from a report by Medhurst to London on October 11, 1854, in which Wang's application for baptism was also attached. After his father's death,

³⁵ "W.H. Medhurst to Tidman," October 11, 1854. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.C.

Wang was chosen probably based on other assistants' recommendations. Medhurst described Wang Tao as "a man of singular talents, who though not equal to his father in the amount of learning he had acquired, was superior to him in the ability to apply what he knew to be the best uses. His style of writing was said to be elegant, and his judgment mature."³⁶

Permit me now to set before you a few of my views at that period. Jesus, the son of God, in coming down into the world, in giving himself for the salvation of men, and in setting up a religion for the instruction of all ages, so that the whole human race might have some one to look to and depend upon, has certainly established an extraordinary amount of merit. He has also set forth the retribution of the future world, and taught how the soul is to be saved, so that rewards and punishments are made distinct and clear, without any possibility of evasion. His statements regarding heaven and hell are not borrowed from the Buddhists' system, while his declarations respecting the future happiness of the good and the misery of the wicked, supply a great deficiency in the system of the philosophers. Should any wish to enter his religion, the principal requisites seem to be repentance, unbounded veneration for the Deity, the rejection of what is corrupt, and the reverting to what is correct, with the obtaining of the Holy Spirit to renew the heart, the evidences of which are to be shewn in our altered life and conversation. For the adherents of this religion are not merely to come to a settled and sincere intention, they must also abandon all former vicious practices, and pursue an entirely new course, performing every kind of virtuous action, not tiring till they die. They must acknowledge themselves to have been guilty of many faults, and depending on Jesus for redemption, they must own that they have no merit of their own, and rely on the merits of Jesus for deliverance; then Jesus will accept them while they also exhibit the sincerity of their hearts by their outward conduct.

When I first read the New Testament, and found how Jesus suffered in the stead of sinners, in order to redeem them from all iniquity, I had some doubts on the subject. I thought that if men had transgressed, and stifled the voice of conscience, it would have been merely sufficient for Jesus to reprove them, and teach them better, (with uninterrupted carefulness, continuing in this course) until he died, in order to induce men to a virtuous course. It did not seem to me, then, to be necessary for him to give up himself to die for mankind, so that their innumerable sins might be forgiven. On common occasions we deem it improper for men to kill themselves in order to accomplish a virtuous action, how then can we expect an intelligent person like Jesus to do anything of the kind? These were once my musings, the impropriety of which I now perceive. For the death of Jesus was not simply a result of his own determination, it was an act of obedience to the Divine command. Jesus died also, not merely to wash away the sins of the whole world, but that believers at that time, and throughout

³⁶ Letter from Medhurst to LMS, June 30, 1849. CWM archives, Central China, Incoming letters.

all ages might sympathize with him in his sorrows, highly esteem his doctrines, and consider that the object of his mission was to save our souls; if in the attainment of that object he gave his body up to the stroke and shed his blood, enduring at the same time the most unutterable agonies, then his extraordinary virtue and unbounded benevolence exceeded the circle of nature's limits, and his deep love and abundant kindness were vast as the bounds of the habitable globe; knowing this all who believe in him should embody his feelings, and go further to proclaim his gospel for the information of the whole world, so that all might partake of its benefits; for Jesus died for the redemption of mankind.

In Part 1, Wang talks about how he started to have contact with Christianity during his translation of the Bible. His “musings” about the meaning of Jesus’ death are reasonable doubts most people would harbor, and his understanding of the incident as an action for the redemption of mankind is fairly typical, if not clichéd, for a Christian. Nonetheless, even though Wang seemed to conceal his Christian identity deliberately, he was never hesitant to show his admiration for Jesus. He considers Jesus an outstanding person who provided guidance to Westerners and restrained them from wrongdoing.³⁷ For him, Jesus was a sage, much like Confucius – a way in which many Chinese scholars during Wang’s times tended to understand Jesus.

Scholars have pointed out that Wang’s translation of the biblical texts was also more of a creation than a translation as he tended to apply Confucian and Chinese teachings in interpreting Christian doctrines.³⁸ For instance, his version of the Chinese hymns contains traditional Chinese themes such as filial piety, father-son/master-servant relationships and predestination. In a conference on Protestant missions in China in 1890, a missionary offered a precise criticism of the Delegates’ Version (translation of the Bible by Wang): “ that

³⁷ Wang Tao, *Yingruan zaji*, 196-197.

³⁸ For instance, see Duan, “Lun Wang Tao de Jidujiao xinyang,” 25-26, Hanan, “The Bible as Chinese Literature,” 231-234.

important shades of the truth have seen sacrificed too freely to mere rhetoric; that too often combinations of characters are found more suggestive to the doctrines of the sages than of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven [...] to even the experienced spiritual reader, the diamonds are too much eclipsed by their settings, while on the other the inexperienced unspiritual reader, deceived by the familiarity of the rhythm, is liable to mistake CHRIST for Confucius, to his peril.”³⁹

Part 2: Thoughts on Some Core Doctrines

Some have objected, that those who enter this religion do not pay divine honours to spirits, nor sacrifice to ancestors, which they deem necessary things; they are apprehensive, these few, that if they conform entirely to the demands of this new faith, they will fall into a snare. To which it may [be] replied, that the Creator of heaven and earth is the only being who ought to be worshipped. Those individuals who during their lifetime acted uprightly, and at death became intelligent spirits, should be had in due estimation, and held up for imitation; but to bring animals and burn incense, in order to do service to them, would be improper. The offering of sacrifice is a kind of service employed in honouring God alone; departed ancestors are merely the ghosts of men, how could we dare to offend against the great law of propriety by sacrificing to them and thus bring guilt upon ourselves; if we their descendants are enabled to imitate their example, and bring no disgrace upon our progenitors, we shall do all that is necessary to satisfy the claims of the departed. What would be the use of practicing [sic] a number of empty ceremonies?

On the above two questions I formerly had my doubts, but now new light has suddenly broken in upon my mind; if it had not been for the secret aid and inward teaching of God and Christ accompanied by daily hints from my religious instructor how could I have attained to this? Jesus in the course of his instructions has handed down the ten commandments that we might have a settled rule of life; he has also established one day in seven that we might have a settled period for public worship: in employing his doctrine for the instruction of mankind, he has displayed diligence without weariness, and in sacrificing his life for the establishment of his doctrine he

³⁹ The comment was made by Rev. John Wherry. Lewis, W. J., William Theodore, Aquila Barber, and John R. Hyke, *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1890), 52.

has endured ignominy without regret. He has taught us to honour one God with a sincere heart, and to serve one Lord without distraction of mind: and he has told us that although the body may perish the soul will continue to survive. The writings prepared by his disciples dive deep into the true origin of things and open out the profoundest mysteries. They incessantly taught men the duties of benevolence and rectitude, and now after the lapse of eighteen centuries their doctrine becomes more and more clear, exalted and intelligent beyond expression or conception. There is something, however which has occurred to me, and which I should like to lay before you. For a long time I have had this idea, but standing in no very close relation to you, I did not presume to propound it. Now, however, having conceived the desire of ranking myself among your disciples, and thus becoming united as in one body, I do not dare to conceal my views any longer.

In the second segment, Wang expounds and expresses his opinions regarding some theological issues in Christianity. It did not seem particularly difficult for him to accept the Christian God as the one and only true God of the universe. Moreover, his opposition against worshipping ancestors and sages was highly appreciated by Medhurst. The Chinese tradition of worshipping ancestors and gods has been a significant issue for Christianity in China, Catholicism and Protestantism alike. Since the Jesuits arrived in China in 1601, and Robert Morrison (1782-1832), sent by the LMS, in 1807, there have been tremendous debates and conflicts between the Chinese court and missionaries, or among different missionary sects. The dispute over certain Chinese rituals, including honoring family ancestors, even caused the well-known Rites Controversy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as some Catholic orders deemed the Chinese rituals incompatible with their Christian beliefs. However, in Chinese culture, worshipping ancestors is not the same as asking the Christian God for help. Through ancestor worship, Chinese people pay respect to their history and cultivate kinship values such as filial piety, family loyalty and the continuity of family lineage. Even to this day, Tomb Sweeping Day is one of the three most important holidays for Chinese culture. Su Jing points out that Wang's open attitude towards this Chinese tradition might be one of the crucial reasons why Medhurst agreed to baptize him. In fact,

Medhurst asked Wang to expand one of Medhurst's tracts on tomb sweeping published in 1826. Wang further developed the tract into twelve chapters, which were published the same year as his baptism under the title *Yeke Wennanji* 野客問難記.⁴⁰

Part 3: Suggestions on the Dissemination of Christianity in China

The doctrines of Jesus have entered China ever since the Ming dynasty, for these 240 years. As the first propagation of this faith Seu-kuang-ke (Paul Siu) [Xu Guangqi 徐光啟, 1562-1633] and others composed several elementary works on astronomy, which were admitted into the imperial library, and became famous in history, as may now be verified on reference to the records; at that time this religion of Jesus was widely diffused, and its adherents were numerous, while some clever and distinguished scholars aided the spread of the doctrines and stopped the mouths of gainsayers. How is it that recently no such aids have been called forth? Can it be that modern Europeans, crossing the sea to come hither, possess neither the talent nor learning of Matthew [Matteo] Ricci and his followers? This cannot be the cause; it must certainly be because in inducing Chinese to embrace this religion, its propagators have not lighted upon the right description of individuals. I have heard that in various places, those who enter this religion are for the most part ignorant and incapable men, without either talents or acquirements; when asked as to the doctrines of Jesus, they are confused and can give no correct account of them. On the sabbath day, they merely follow the generality and comply with the usual forms, in order to please their employers, without any desire to pray to God. Although there may be among them some who believe the doctrine and wish to learn, yet which of them has ever distinguished himself from the rest by the composition of works setting forth their views on the subject of the new faith?

It is true indeed that in receiving adherents no distinction should be made between wise and simple, talented or defective, and that it is all one so long as they repent; yet to receive people indiscriminately, interferes with the characteristics of discipleship, and when intelligent men hear of such proceedings they are disposed to halt before making application. For the past ten years there have been various attempts made to introduce the religion of Christ in this part of China, but the native teachers who have been employed for this purpose have been generally speaking possessed of no very extensive acquirements and have had a very superficial acquaintance with books and doctrines. Hence it has come to pass that the books which they have composed, though given out in the morning for distribution, have before evening been shoved

⁴⁰ Su, Jing. "Wang Tao de Jidujiao xili" 446.

into the waste paper basket. One of the commentators on Confucius has said, "When expressions are not polished, they will not travel far." It is true that in the composition of books plainness is essential, but to this some polish must be added, and when plainness and polish are combined, the work becomes beautiful and worthy of perusal. Now the various books of the religion of Jesus are not destitute of excellent meaning, but the style in which they are written being rugged and coarse, the reader before he has got through a single chapter feels inclined to go to sleep. Some of these books have been written in the common brogue of different districts, with the view of rendering them easily intelligible to ploughmen and mechanics, little thinking that by such productions a great waste of funds has been occasioned, without the slightest benefit to the cause. In my humble opinion, whenever a book is written, it should excel both in the principles inculcated and in the mode of statement, combining both the ornate and the substantial. When works are thus composed, accomplished and learned men will praise them in the higher circles, while ploughmen and mechanics among the lower classes will not be uninfluenced by them. There will be no need to accompany such writings by explanations, and they will travel without fear into every region.

Part 3 is perhaps the most interesting section of this document. In this part, Wang offers a few suggestions regarding the dissemination of Protestantism in China and the clashing between Confucianism and Christianity. He advises that Protestantism should take a similar approach to that of Matteo Ricci's, namely to try to attract and convert the literati class as their priority. Worrying that the "indiscriminating" acceptance of converts might bring notoriety to Christianity, Wang considered upper-class literati more suitable for initial conversions. Su Jing points out that as of the time when Wang wrote this application, Protestantism had not even been in China for half a century.⁴¹ Due to the prohibition against Catholicism by the Qing government, the Protestant missionaries focused mainly on the South Seas. Indeed, very few Chinese Protestant converts in the South Sea Islands belonged to the upper class. During the twenty-one years working in Batavia, Medhurst only performed baptisms for two people, neither of whom had converted as a result of his efforts.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 447.

⁴² "Medhurst to the Directors," Batavia Mission, October 7 1841, 5.A.

However, Wang's suggestion was not accepted by Medhurst as the Shanghai mission continued to accept anyone that wished to convert. Contrary to what Wang foresaw, there continued to be educated Chinese scholars like Wang himself among the converts.⁴³ In fact, in the aftermath of The Taiping Rebellion, many people continued to seek peace (or material benefits) from Christianity.

Interestingly, Wang also criticized people employed by missionaries, considering most of them inadequate and ignorant. In addressing this issue, he probably felt confident contributing to the understanding of Christianity for Chinese people. Indeed, soon after his conversion, Medhurst asked Wang to revise their Chinese hymns in order to “[put] them in such a form, that they might not be repulsive to the ears of the most refined poetical genius, and at the same time unobjectionable on the score of doctrinal sentiment.”⁴⁴ Wang also reworked thoroughly one of the aforementioned tracts by Medhurst, *Qingming sao mu zhi lun* 清明掃墓之論. Due to this hard work, he earned Medhurst's great esteem: “He [Wang] has entirely rewritten one of our tracts on the worship of the tombs, and of ancestors, a subject which requires very delicate handling in Chinese, and which he has so treated as to put the question in its true light, and correct many of the erroneous notions previously entertained by the Chinese on the subject.”⁴⁵ After his baptism, Wang continued to polish letters and translations for other missionaries such as Joseph Edkins and Griffith John. Ironically, the

⁴³ For instance, Woo Shih-joo was baptized in 1855, one year after Wang's baptism, and Pwan E-chun in 1856. See Su Jing, “Wang Tao de Jidujiao xili,” 447-448.

⁴⁴ Letter from Medhurst to LMS, June 30, 1849. CWM archives, Central China, Incoming letters.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

great interest in understanding and helping his people understand Christianity did not seem to last long. In a journal entry in 1859, Wang wrote: “People from that country [the British missionaries] rigidly stick to the literal meanings of words. Their phrasing is difficult to read and vulgar. Even if Confucius revived, he would not be able edit their work” 彼邦人士拘文牽義，其詞詰曲鄙俚，即使尼山復生，亦不能加以筆削。⁴⁶ Apparently, in Wang’s opinion, the quality of translation work did not improve significantly, even five years after his baptism.

I wish to make another remark if I be not thought too prolix. The people of China all honor Confucius as the teacher and exemplar of all ages, and it is not suitable to heap indiscriminate censure upon him. Some professing Christians seem very fond of Confucius, and say, our religion with that of Confucius is the same in principle, the difference is merely in minor points. Others abuse Confucius saying, he was mistaken in principle and erred in doctrine. I conceive that each individual religion must have its abstruse speculations and hidden mysteries, in which they cannot all agree; it is not necessary, therefore, to insist on making the religion of Confucius agree with that of Christ, neither is it necessary to reproach Confucius; let each system be studied with a view to the good that may be obtained from it.

The above remarks are the result of observations accumulated during the period of my residence here and of examinations personally made. European scholars treat men liberally, employ them constantly, and trust them thoroughly, but they are rather defective in their estimation of character: hence the Chinese mask their failing in this respect, and make their market of them. They observe their short comings and set to work to cheat them. The great fault lies here – those who are called honest are not honest, and those who are denominated virtuous are not virtuous. In thus treating on the subject of entering religion, I have touched on a few other points, but I will not enlarge. I have merely set forth my humble views, which are presented in all sincerity. If you, my teacher, exercise the requisite penetration in examining the springs of action and the necessary firmness in deciding what is to be done every case will be clearly manifested, and secret motives brought to light, in an extraordinary and unprecedented degree.

If you regard me as worthy of being ranked among the number of your disciples, giving me the necessary instruction and encouragement, so that I can make due progress in the study of religion, I shall then be enabled to get a glimpse of the glories of the supreme, and know something of the mysterious doctrines of Jesus. Cherishing this feeling I shall be contented while I live and happy when I die. Whilst not being

⁴⁶ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 5.

unmindful of your extreme kindness, I should be glad to compose a work on the subject of religion, with the view of explaining the mysteries of Christianity, which, depending on the grace of Jesus, would widely circulate among my country-men, that they might know what they ought to follow and obey. This would only be a fulfillment of my long cherished intention, but, I am persuaded also, be in accordance with your own desire and design. Having thus set forth my views and feelings, I submit the whole to your inspection.

Although Wang easily accepted God as the only Creator, and that only God should be worshipped, he insisted that missionaries should not attack Confucian teachings as he “conceive[s] that each individual religion must have its abstruse speculations and hidden mysteries, in which they cannot all agree.” This is a statement that somehow indicates Wang’s separation and difference from dogma. Regarding the conflicts and contradictions between Confucianism and Christianity, Wang advised that one should “[l]et each system be studied with a view to the good that may be obtained from it.” Patrick Hanan points out Wang’s remarks contain a certain level of detachment, and “carry more than a hint of the religious universalism he was later to embrace.”⁴⁷ Indeed, in one of his later essays, “Yuan Dao” 原道 (In search of the Way), he clearly states that the sages from the West and the East share the same ideals and principles governed by *Tian* 天.

To an extent, Wang’s baptismal application appears to be more of a job application, rather than an application for conversion. For instance, his discussion of Xu Guangchi and Matteo Ricci is particularly suggestive. Wang claimed that Ricci needed Xu’s literary talent in order to make his work respectable for the upper-class audience or be admitted into the imperial library. Compared to the work by the Jesuits and their “clever and distinguished

⁴⁷ Patrick Hannan, “The Bible as Chinese Literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao and the Delegates’ Version.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 1 (2003): 229, doi:10.2307/25066695.

men,” Wang asserted that Protestant missionaries had failed to select the right assistants. Writing this, Wang seemed to imply that he was a suitable collaborator, different from all the ignorant and incapable men. “In fact, Wang’s initial translation work at the LMS Press came to an end shortly before he fell sick and decided to convert in his illness. It is difficult to consider his mention of selecting capable translators as merely a coincidence in his baptismal application. Even so, conversion surely changed his life in certain aspects. As a Christian, Wang began to attend worship every Sunday and several times went on missions to different provinces in China.

Many Christian converts may describe their conversion as a form of rebirth. Yet for Wang the baptism did not seem to provide a complete transformation from disbelief to belief. The complexities and at times contradictions continued to exist in his Christian faith. For instance, in his diary of March 18th 1855, roughly seven months after his baptism, Wang recorded: “Today I went to Wulaofeng to listen to preaching by British people. In the afternoon, I went to visit Jiang Dunfu and then together we attended a brothel to the left of Hong Bridge. The courtesan that tended to us was well-known in Shanghai and came from Yangzhou. She was merely acceptable” 是日禮拜，赴五老峰聽英人佈道。下午往訪蔣劍人一同赴虹橋左邊勾欄訪妓。接客者為滬上名花，來自揚州。稍可人意。⁴⁸ Wang, as a newly converted Christian, could go to church to sing hymns in the morning and then to a brothel in the afternoon without any hesitation. What kind of “Christian life” did he lead from a person who claimed to “bitterly [regret] his past conduct” to someone that spoke ill of the religion he wished to convert to? The contradictory and unsatisfactory characteristics in

⁴⁸ Wang Tao, *Henhuaguan riji*, 83 March 18, 1854.

Wang's Christian faith indeed unveil the problematics in applying religious identity as a label when it comes to discussing one's beliefs.

Chapter 3

Life after Conversion: The Unbearable Lightness of Faith

Filled with contradictory views, Wang's Christian faith remains a puzzling aspect of his life. Scholars who claim that Wang was not a true Christian have tended to focus on certain anti-Christian passages in his writings. For instance, Yang Qimin 楊其民 asserts that Wang was never a Christian because he criticized Christianity and because Wang considered himself a Confucian scholar. Yang also claims that some scholars "consider Wang a Christian based on false materials" without further investigating the authenticity of the materials he refers to.⁴⁹ Henry McAleavy goes so far as to claim: "Certainly, his mind never received the slightest tincture of Christianity" in discussing Christian influence on Wang Tao.⁵⁰ Some scholars recognize Wang's involvement with the Church, but some of their analyses might appear oversimplified or questionable. For example, Zhang Hailin 張海林 points out that Wang's conversion was a result of his extensive interaction with missionaries and thus it is unlikely for him to hold a neutral attitude towards the Western religion.⁵¹ Ye Bin 葉斌 asserts that Wang decided to receive baptism solely due to financial needs.⁵² Indeed, scholars have provided differing (and sometimes contradictory) opinions on Wang's Christianity.

⁴⁹ Yang Qimin, "Wang Tao shi jidutu ma?" *Shilin*, no.3 (1997): 101.

⁵⁰ McAleavy, *Wang T'ao*, 21.

⁵¹ Zhang Hailin, "Wang Tao jiaoanguan tanxi," *Xuzhou Shifan Daxue Xuebao*, no.4 (1995): 116. Zhang also expresses similar views in his biographical study of Wang Tao.

⁵² Ye Bin, "Wang Tao shenqing jiaru Jidujiao wenxi," *Wenxian yu lishi*, no.4 (1994): 67.

In the previous chapter, we examined Wang's application for baptism. For many scholars, the baptism alone might be sufficient evidence to view Wang as a Christian convert. Yet, the numerous disputes on Wang's Christianity identity suggest that his faith was far more complicated. Paul Cohen points out that Wang deliberately concealed or at least downplayed his relationship with the church in his later years. One supporting proof to Cohen's claim is that in his published writings, Wang changed the title he used to address James Legge from "*mushi* 牧師 (Pastor)" to "*jun* 君 (Mister)," possibly to avoid any reference to Christianity.⁵³ All the ambiguities lead us to ask: How much can occurrences such as his baptism, assistance in translating Christian texts or participation in Christian activities reveal about Wang Tao's beliefs? What potential problems may occur when we attempt to provide a descriptive account of one's Christian faith?

This chapter aims to look at more references to Christianity in Wang's corpus in order to present a broader picture of his Christian faith. The passages discussed here are dated from 1854, the year when he received baptism. If Wang is, or ever considered himself a Chinese Christian, it is intriguing that in the remnants of his journals and letters, most comments on Christianity are negative. Oftentimes, he ranted about his denunciation of Christianity both from a theological and a social point of view, criticizing how Christianity as a foreign religion was unsuitable for Chinese society. Paul Cohen points out a noteworthy fact – in Wang's journals, there appear to be omitted entries from the summer of 1853 to the summer of 1854, during which Wang was baptized according to the aforementioned LMS document.⁵⁴ In fact, the Academia Sinica in Taiwan archives six volumes of Wang's unpublished journals, among which there are indeed entries from the interruption specified by

⁵³ Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 19-20

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Cohen. Yet, even in those volumes, there is no reference to his baptism. While baptism may be an important life event in one's Christian life, it is intriguing that we cannot find any reference to his baptism in the whole corpus of Wang's published work, which was selected and edited by himself in his later years.

However, while Wang strived to cut ties with the Church, he held no reservations for showing his admiration for Jesus:

The West is far away on the edge of the ocean. Westerners are tall, strong, capricious, truculent and violent-tempered. However, Jesus is the only person who can make them revert to good deeds, correct their evil doings and to refrain themselves from wrongdoing. His way has existed for hundreds and thousands of years and his teachings have been widely spread across tens of thousands of *li* [measuring unit for distance]. Alas! How can one say he is not an outstanding person among those Westerners?

夫西域遠處海隅，敦龐初變，悍厲成風，而耶穌一人獨能使之遷善改過，以範圍而約束之，道垂于千百年，教訖于數萬里，嗚呼！謂非彼士之傑出哉？⁵⁵

Even though Wang might deliberately conceal his ties with Christianity, his involvement with the Church and the missionaries was in fact an inseparable part of his life, both at work and otherwise. Throughout Wang Tao's journals, there are records of his participation in Christian activities ranging from attending church, listening to sermons, receiving communion, and translating the Bible and other biblical texts. He also built strong relationships with a few missionaries such as Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857), who was a father figure for him, and James Legge (1815-1897), who brought Wang to Europe and with whom Wang had a close ongoing relationship for over ten years.

⁵⁵ Wang Tao, *Yingruan zazhi*, 196-197.

Despite the aforementioned spheres of his life, Wang's conversion never seemed to bring him the long-lasting peace of mind he hoped for. According to Medhurst's incoming correspondence from Shanghai, Wang was eager to receive baptism when he fell extremely sick in 1853. The missionaries feared that his decision was temporary due to his illness, but then Wang seemed to retain the same perseverance and determination one year after he recovered. Therefore, the missionaries granted him the baptism he applied for.⁵⁶ Yet Wang's determination seemed to fade soon after his baptism. In several of his journal entries regarding a mission in Hangzhou from September to October 1858, only four years after his conversion, Wang appeared to focus more on the beautiful scenery and historical sites along the journey rather than the mission itself.⁵⁷ In fact, in another entry of 1858,⁵⁸ he even expressed his regrets about not being able to offer sacrifices to gods or ancestors, a Chinese tradition that he once deemed "a kind of service employed in honoring God alone" as it would be "against the great law of propriety" if one pays divine honors to his departed ancestors.⁵⁹

In fact, even after his baptism, Wang continued to show contradictory attitudes toward Christianity, to Western learning in general, to missionaries he worked with and befriended, and to his work as a translator. For instance, in contrast to his application for conversion where he proclaims being a Christian would enrich his spiritual life, he also

⁵⁶ "W.Muirhead to Tidman," October 20, 1853. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.B.

⁵⁷ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 23-34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁹ "W.Muirhead to Tidman," October 20, 1853. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.B.

asserted that Christian teaching was absurd and conversion was merely a getaway for criminals:

Broadly speaking, the teachings in scriptures of the western religion are absurd, the doctrine is disconnected, and the phrasing is vulgar – we could simply throw those texts to the toilet! If Westerners want to use these teachings to educate we Chinese people, then they overestimate their capabilities. However, in my observation of their motives, they would never stop preaching until they realize their doctrines. If they succeed, then people’s minds will suffer. Besides, since Westerners started trading [with us], the scoundrels and desperadoes of China have all submitted themselves to the western religion, and it became a gathering spot for these run away criminals.

瀚觀西人教中之書，其理誕妄，其說支離，其詞鄙誨，直可投于溷廁，而欲以是訓我華民，亦不量之甚矣。顧瀚窺其意，必欲務行其說而後止，行之則人心受其害矣。況自西人互市以來，中國無賴亡命之徒，皆往歸之其門，一逋逃之藪也。⁶⁰

Intriguingly, while Wang appeared to detest Christian teachings as mentioned above, he showed a strangely supportive attitude (and seemed to be proud of it) towards his friends who wished to convert, as we can see from the following two passages:

I went to the church to listen to preaching at noon. Today, Wu Shiru from Yufeng received his baptism. Shiru gave up his desire to advance on the path to officialdom, and bowed his head and converted. Perhaps he was not ignorant. Alas! China is in extreme poverty. How can we find shelter for this poor scholar?

午刻至講堂聽書，是日玉峰吳式如受洗禮。式如絕志進取，俯首皈依，或非無見。噫！中國貧困至矣，安得廣廈千萬間，大庇此寒士也。⁶¹

⁶⁰ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 83.

⁶¹ Wang Tao, *Henhuaguan riji*, August 19, 1855.

.....then I went to the church and respectfully received dinner. We talked about Yingu's conversion: Zusheng and others thought he [Yingu] shouldn't have converted, while only I thought he should. We held differing opinions, and disagreed on much. In the afternoon, I enjoyed tea in a teahouse with Yanxiang, Xunru, Yingu and my brother Zhiqing. They were all blathering, talking about nothing but Yingu's conversion. Alas, their minds, so narrow! I do not feel sorry for Yingu, but I feel deeply sorry for us Chinese people. I also feel sorry for us [Chinese scholars].

……繼予至會堂，祇受晚餐，同論隱谷入教之事，竹生等以為不可，予獨以為可，兩不相合，頗有齟齬。午后，同研香、恂如、隱谷、芷卿舍弟啜茗茶寮，座中群議紛紛，無非為隱谷受洗一事。噫！所見如此，隘亦甚矣！隱谷固不足惜，而深為吾華人惜也，亦為吾黨惜也！⁶²

Also, in his journals and letters, Wang often criticized the missionaries he worked with. In a letter to Zhu Xuechuang, Wang asserts, "Those [Westerners] who are not our kin are sure to be of a different heart. [...] There are very few gentlemen where I work. My colleagues are but people who stooped to working [for Westerners]; how could any of them be men of virtues? People here and I are never bosom friends. We only act as friends publicly. Being [an employee] here, I have conflicts with people from time to time" 非我族類，其心必異……同處一堂，絕少雅士，屈身謀食，豈有端人。本非知心之交，不過觀面為友，廁身其間，時有抵牾。⁶³

In fact, if we only look at certain letters and journal entries, we probably would think of his employment at the LMS Press as miserable and agonizing. However, Wang was actually very close to Medhurst. In a letter to James Legge, Wang describes his friendship with Medhurst as "throwing stones into water 如石投水," meaning they share a deep and

⁶² Ibid., September 23, 1855.

⁶³ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 23.

profound friendship. Another missionary, Benjamin Hobson (1816-1873), cured Wang's lingering foot disease which had put him in great despair. Wang was extremely grateful for Hobson's help and praised his knowledge and skills in great length in a letter to Ying Yugeng 應雨耕, one of Wang's closest friends.⁶⁴ Regarding Wang's contradictory attitudes towards missionaries, Wang Li-qun 王立群 points out that Wang Tao seemed to have the tendency to criticize missionaries to his relatives and friends in his hometown while complimenting Westerners to his new friends in Shanghai.⁶⁵ This phenomenon might reflect an "opportunistic" aspect of Wang's life – he tried to gain sympathy from his old friends by exaggerating how miserable the work at the LMS Press was and how he detested Westerners. Yet in front of his more westernized friends such as Ying Yugeng or Yu Taifeng 郁泰峰, he then exalted Western learning and Westerners in abundant detail.⁶⁶

Another interesting fact is that Wang showed differing opinions from those of some missionaries towards the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). The Taiping Rebellion was a radical political and religious upheaval and one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history, with an estimated 20 to 50 million casualties. The leader, Hong Xiuquan, (1812-1864) claimed that he received visions from God that showed him he was the younger brother of Jesus. At the beginning of the Taiping Rebellion, many missionaries had a positive attitude towards the Taipings because of their associations with Christianity. However, Wang, still working at the LMS Press during that time, seemed to show no enthusiasm towards the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

⁶⁵ Wang Li-qun, "Cong Wang Tao Mohai Shuguan shiqi xinzha kan Zhongguo zhishi fenzi xixue jieshou licheng. *Beijing Keji Daxue Xuebao* 25, no.4 (2009): 128.

⁶⁶ For instance, see Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1959), 103-4, 106-8, 130.

ridiculous and far-fetched connection between the Taipings and Christianity, as we can see in the passage:

Joseph Edkins wanted to go to Wumen again because of a recruitment letter from Hong Renxuan, the illegitimate king of Gan [a general of the Taipings]. Edkins insisted on asking me to go with him, but I resolutely rejected him and used sickness as an excuse to decline the offer. When I stay at home, I can cross my legs and fan myself, or use high pillows and go to bed early. Why would I want to risk my life in this hot weather to go to that nest of vice? Also, thinking about the real reason for this recruitment issue, I absolutely cannot go back again.

艾君以偽干王洪仁軒有書來招，欲復至吳門，堅邀余去。余固辭不往，託疾以辭之。余在家得以跣腳揮扇，高枕早眠，何為觸熱冒險至此賊窟乎？且顧名思義，斷不可重往者也。⁶⁷

This passage is particularly intriguing given the fact that Wang possibly wrote under a pseudo name “Wang Wan” to a Taiping leader proposing tactics against the Qing government. A position in the Taiping government was probably what he was looking for, even though Wang later described the Taipings as a “nest of vice.” When the letter fell into the hands of the government, Wang had to seek refuge first in the British Consulate and later in Hong Kong. It is interesting to consider why Wang here, in his journals edited by himself, had to specifically point out how he was uninterested in working for the Taipings. It was likely a deliberate cover-up of his past.

Furthermore, Wang’s mixed, if not incongruous, attitudes are also shown towards other related subjects such as the reception of Western learning. Regarding his translator job, Wang on the one hand urged the government to put additional efforts into translating more Western texts because China would certainly benefit from such endeavors:

⁶⁷ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 191.

I think our government should establish several translation institutes in the treaty ports where Westerners trade [with China]. Students who are willing to learn English should be sent to those institutes to study for future contributions. If they do master English, then our government should ask them to translate useful books from the West...If so, then we will not only understand the mindset of Westerners, but also learn their skills.

予以為國家當於西人通商各口設立譯館數處，凡有士子，願肆習英文者，聽入館中，以備他日之用。其果精深英文，則令譯西國有用之書……誠如此，則夷之性情既悉，夷之技巧亦得矣。⁶⁸

On the other hand, Wang appeared to be very displeased with his position at the LMS Press, constantly viewing his translator job as against Confucian teaching. He frequently complained about his work to others: “I had no choice but to scribe in order to make a living” 傭書覓食，計非得已，⁶⁹ “Times have passed and it’s been thirteen years [working at the LMS Press], and this has never been my will” 顧荏苒至一十有三年，則非其志也，⁷⁰ “The salary I earned as a scribe is not sufficient to make ends meet” 筆耕所入，未敷其出，⁷¹ “I have been in this poverty for many years” 坐此貧困，已累年矣，⁷² “To scribe for the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁹ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 24-25.

⁷⁰ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, 269.

⁷¹ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 13.

⁷² Ibid., 13.

Westerners is as petty and low as to pound rice for others” 傭書西舍，賤等賃舂。⁷³ He also showed deep regrets regarding taking this job only to make a living, considering the act a moral flaw:

Elijah Coleman Bridgman, the American missionary, wants to proceed in translating The Old Testament and *History of America*. Xiaoyi [Guan Sifu] thinks the teachings of Christian texts are against Confucianism and he has always been unwilling to translate those texts. He actually rejected [Bridgman's request]. Hence he told me, “We are Confucian scholars but we cannot reach the level of the ancient sages and carry forward their teachings. Neither can we dismiss those who hold different opinions and enhance our Confucian teachings. But how could we use our pens and ink to produce absurd and baseless treatises and drift with the currents?” I said, “Teaching in Western institutions is already not the way to preserve one's integrity. Rather, it is like being hired by someone to pound rice or as a chapman – only a way to make a living and to find some peace of mind. There's no need to bring up their professions! The authors own the meaning [of the original texts] and we translators simply help them polish the words and phrases. Whether the teachings are against [Confucianism] is none of our business [...] Why would it hurt if we translate those texts?” Xiaoyi said, “I have talked to Ye Hanchi before. When I was working for Benjamin Hobson, my monthly salary was merely 15 *jin*. Hanchi often blamed me for belittling my worth and forfeiting my honor. I once told him, ‘I came here to pursue Western learning, not to escape from Confucian teachings or to join the Moist school. It cannot be described as “forfeiting my honor.” There is no “fixed price” for one's life. One could do anything to support himself in times of hunger and cold and it would not be belittling his worth. As long as I never translate Christian texts to distinctly betray the teachings of our sages, there is no shame in my heart.’” Alas! Hearing what Xiaoyi said, I could not help but sigh in private. When I first came here to work, no one ever analyzed the debate between moral principles and profits to help me determine if I would leave or stay. What I was worried about was merely my family's daily need of food and clothing, and that was certainly my mistake. It is now too late to regret! If I could discern the correct principle of behavior, I wouldn't have chosen to work here even if I had to starve to death under my window.

米利堅教士裨治文延修舊約書，並作亞墨利加志。小異以教中書籍大悖儒教，素不願譯，竟辭不往。因謂予曰：「吾人既入孔門，既不能希於聖賢，造於絕學，又不能攘斥異端，輔翼名教，而豈可親執筆⁴³墨，作不根之論著，悖理之書，隨其流，揚其波哉？」予曰：「教授西館，已非自守之道，譬如賃舂負販，

⁷³ Ibid., 19-20.

只為衣食計，但求心之所安，勿問其所操何業。譯書者彼主其意，我徒塗飾詞句耳，其悖與否，固於我無涉也[……]雖譯之，庸何傷？」小異曰：「吾曾嘗於葉瀚池言之矣，當我就合信之館，修舖月止十五金，瀚池屢責以貶價屈節，以求合於西人，我曾答以來此欲求西學，非逃儒而入墨，不可謂屈節。人之一生，本無定價，迫於飢寒，何所不可，不可謂貶價。惟我終身不譯彼教中書，以顯悖聖人[，]則此心可無慚。」噫！聞小異言，竊自嘆矣。當余初至時，曾無一人剖析義利，以決去留。徒以全家衣食為憂，此足一失，後悔莫追，苟能辨其大閑，雖餓死牖下，亦不往矣。⁷⁴

Moreover, compared to how he urged the government to establish translation institutes for students to learn English, Wang himself showed no effort in learning English because he claimed that he was not interested in Western languages at all – even though this interest might be generally considered crucial and basic in translation:

I have worked in the western institute [the LMS Press] for ten years now. I know a little about western natural sciences, but there are things that I will never master in my whole life: one is calendrical science that requires meticulousness. I am the most impatient person, so I certainly cannot master it. The other is the western language [English] and its characters, which I forget quickly after I learn, and which I dislike...

予在西館十年矣，於格致之學，略有所聞，有終身不能明者：一為歷算，其心最細密，予心氣浮，必不能入；一為西國語言文字，隨學隨忘，心所不喜……⁷⁵

Duan Huaqing 段懷清 thinks Wang's lack of interest is important evidence to show Wang made no effort in understanding foreign cultures, a crucial difference between him and James Legge, whose knowledge in Chinese enabled him to translate vast amount of Chinese

⁷⁴ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 92.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

texts including the Four Books and Five Classics in English.⁷⁶ Ironically, Wang often criticized the missionaries for their low Mandarin competence and arrogance when they interact with Chinese people. Most Westerners, in Wang's opinion, were neither lofty-minded nor worth befriending.⁷⁷

Perhaps most crucially, Wang's contradictory opinions persisted in his attempt to explain the origin of religions. During Wang's times, it was a convenient and common way for missionaries to compare Christian teachings to those of Confucianism so as to appeal to Chinese people. According to Wang, William Muirhead seemed to apply the same method when he discussed the relation among Christianity and the three major religions of China, namely Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Yet Wang regarded Muirhead's analysis as mere nonsense:

[William Muirhead, a missionary at the LMS Press:] "I think the holy western religion [Protestantism; Christianity] shares some similarities with the three religions [Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism] and all of them have the same origin and are indeed homologous. Confucian scholars' emphasis on filial piety to one's father shares the same purpose with serving the Father in Heaven proposed by our religion. [...] What Laozi calls the Way and what our religion calls Christ both share the true origin of all matters in the universe... Our Holy God is formless. He is neither close nor distant. When we reach out, He responds; when we feel Him, He is there, just like how Buddha can see the universe within a split second or a breath. They [Christianity and Buddhism] also share the same spirit. It is insufficient if we differentiate Christianity from the three religions; if we see all of them as a whole, we will have complete knowledge. This is indeed the correct interpretation and wonderful truth of the Trinity in our religion." [Wang Tao:] Although what Mr. Muirhead said was purely farfetched analogies, his words contain some real meaning because he is greatly different from those [Christians] who simply slander Confucian principles and reject Buddhism and Daoism.

⁷⁶ Duan, "Dui yibang wenhua de butong taidu," 46.

⁷⁷ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 21-22, 25-26.

[慕維廉:]而吾謂西天聖教亦有與三教相為表裡者，同源合流，本歸一致[……]儒者之言孝厥父，與吾教之言崇事天父，其大旨同[……]凡老氏所謂道，與吾教所謂基督，皆共此渾渾沕沕之真原[……]聖神之為物也，無形無象，無遠無近，觸而極應，感而遂通，與佛之一剎那，一瞬息間遍覽浮提者無異，而其大旨亦同。蓋以三教分之，則為一偏，合之，則為大全，乃吾教中三位一體之真詮妙諦也。[王韜]慕君此說，純屬附會，而頗有精義，與詆毀儒理，屏斥佛老者迥異。⁷⁸

However, in *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, Wang's representative essay collection, he somehow compared and grouped certain religions together, as William Muirhead had done, in order to elaborate the nuances of similarities and differences among existing religions. Moreover, compared to how Muirhead tried to make connections among different religious teachings or concepts, Wang in his argument merely claimed "Protestantism is close to Confucianism, and Catholicism is close to Buddhism without any further explanation, which was even more simplistic than Muirhead's statement:

There are various religions in the world now: In addition to Confucianism, there is Daoism, which is derived from Confucianism. There is Buddhism, whose teachings go against Confucianism. To extend [this list] further, there are Judaism, Nestorianism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism – all competing with each other. They all establish their own school of teaching and dispute with one another, incompatible as water and fire. [Among them] Protestantism is close to Confucianism, and Catholicism is close to Buddhism. Others have characteristics of both Confucianism and Buddhism.

今天下教亦多術矣，儒之外有道，變乎儒者也；有釋，叛乎儒者也。推而廣之，則有挑筋教、景教、祆教、回教、希臘教、天主教、耶穌教，紛然角立，各自為門戶而互爭如水火。耶穌教則近乎儒者也，天主教則近乎佛者也，自餘參儒佛而雜出。⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 12.

⁷⁹ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, 1-2.

In Wang's application for baptism, he provides yet another perspective on the similarities among religions that is different/contradictory to the two views above: he eagerly describes how Christianity is unique by claiming: "[Jesus'] statements regarding heaven and hell are not borrowed from the Buddhists' system, while his declarations respecting the future happiness of the good and the misery of the wicked, supply a great deficiency in the system of the philosophers."⁸⁰ However, in some of his essays, Wang also claims, "Christianity and Islam are often not far from Confucian teachings" 天主、天方有時皆不出儒教之宗旨,⁸¹ and "Externally, their religion [Christianity] is the enemy of Confucianism; internally, it actually has similarities to Confucianism" 其教外則與吾儒相敵，而內則隱與吾道相消息也。⁸² From the passages above, Wang's opinions on whether religions share similarities and/or what similarities they are was obscure and confusing. I believe this fundamental contradiction in analyzing religions shows how Wang's thoughts might not be systematic and are instead shifting constantly.

What can these contradictory opinions throughout his writings tell us about Wang's Christian beliefs? On the one hand, they elucidate how one's faith, instead of being unwavering as it might be assumed, could actually be changing or situational. On the other

⁸⁰ "W.Muirhead to Tidman," October 20, 1853. CWM Archives, Central China Incoming Letters, 1.4.B.

⁸¹ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, 173. *Tianzhu* 天主 here refers to Christianity instead of Catholicism, different from the modern usage of the phrase. In the original essay, Wang used *tianzhu* and *tianzhu yesu jiao* 天主耶穌教 to refer to Christianity and *jiateli jiao* 加特力教 and *tianzhu jiujiào* 天主舊教 to refer to Catholicism.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 232.

hand, they also suggest how unhelpful it is to use conversion as a means to determine whether one is a true Christian: in Wang's case, his name is frequently brought up in listing Chinese Christians in late-Qing China⁸³, regardless of the problematic nature of his faith. It is interesting to think about why his name is often listed, despite all of his seemingly “unqualified traits” and the mentality behind this phenomenon.

Scholars have provided possible explanations as to the initial forces that propelled Wang to convert: First, as some scholars such as Cohen point out, applying for conversion might be a way for Wang to ingratiate himself with the missionaries and to secure his job at the LMS Press.⁸⁴ According to his journals, Wang's salary was about 200 *jin* 金 every year. This is an amount that would be more than enough for one person; however, he had to provide for six people when he first moved to Shanghai. Wang wrote in a letter to Ying Yugeng that in 1857, he remarried and his brother also had a newborn son, so he had “the burden of eight people” 八口之累 on his shoulders.⁸⁵ After his work on translating the Bible came to an end in the early 1850s, perhaps due to the influences from translating the Bible, or due to mental and financial pressure, Wang might have felt the need to convert. Second, during Wang's times, Chinese people who worked for foreigners were under tremendous pressure. In letters to his friends, Wang often mentioned that some of his friends thought of his job as against Confucian virtues and often gossiped about and slandered him. Some even

⁸³ To only give some examples, see Shi Jinghuan and Wang Lixin, *Jidujiao jiaoyu yu zhongguo zhishi fenzi* [Christian education and Chinese intellectuals]. Fujian: Fujian Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998; You Bin's “Zhongwen shengjing fanyi ji yizhe Wang Tao” [The translation of the Bible in Chinese and its translator Wang Tao] etc.

⁸⁴ Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 14, 21-23.

⁸⁵ Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, eds. Wang Beiping and Liu Lin (Beijing: Beijing zhonghua shuju, 1959), 106-107.

severed communication with him. Given the circumstances, Wang might have felt the need to speak ill of Westerners to his friends and relatives, regardless of what he actually felt. Third, Wang might simply have mixed feelings towards missionaries and his employment. Before he went to Shanghai, Wang was a traditional Chinese scholar that believed in the superiority of Chinese civilization. However, after moving to Shanghai, where foreign cultures collided with the old Chinese world, and with the opportunity to interact with Westerners, he could no longer hold such a biased perspective. Yet, he could not totally embrace foreign culture either. In many passages in Wang's journals and letters, we can witness his struggles and compromises as a Chinese scholar living in a period of intensive cross-cultural encounters. Another possible reason for Wang's conversion might have been his close relationship with Medhurst. On the one hand, he might have felt the emotional pressure to convert. On the other hand, as Wang's job working as a translator for foreigners was considered against Confucian teachings by his contemporaries, he might have felt Medhurst could provide him with better job opportunities. Indeed, Wang often complained about not having a *Bole* 伯樂, namely someone who can appreciate his talents and discover his dark horse potential.⁸⁶ At one point, Medhurst might just be the person Wang had been looking for. Yet, Medhurst suddenly passed away after he went back to London for a vacation in 1857, and Wang's hopes were dashed. He lamented, "When I first learnt the news [of Medhurst's death], I was astonished and grief-stricken, and tears trickled down my cheeks. He is certainly a bosom friend from far away. I was in tremendous sorrow and my heart is broken" 聞信駭悼，潸然出淚。此瀚海外一知己也。悲真徹骨，痛欲剜心。⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5-6, 22-25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

In fact, the conflicts and complexities in Wang's Christianity are representative of the predicaments experienced by late-Qing literati. Different from late Ming when Chinese Christian converts were mostly high-ranking officials, Christianity in late-Qing China was associated with lower-class people or minority groups such as peasants, women or seniors. One important concern of missionaries was how to reduce the number of "Rice Christians," who convert to Christianity for material benefits. The Qing government repressed Christianity for over a century (1724-1842) before the religion rapidly spread across China under the protection of Western military forces. Under these circumstances, Christianity was often attacked by the literati, whose hostile attitude towards the foreign religion provoked constant anti-Christianity outbreaks ("missionary cases," namely *jiaoan* 教案). The traditional elites were all eager to separate Western technology from ideology. Even some "Confucian Christians," namely Christian literati with abundant training in traditional Chinese classics, due to a variety of political and social concerns, often concealed or downplayed their ties with the Church, as Wang Tao did. Perhaps some would say Wang was not a "good" Christian in the strictest sense. Nonetheless, the contradictions in his faith are complicated and worth revisiting. From a socio-historical perspective, his contradictory attitudes reflect the situation Chinese literati faced during his times, when working as a translator for Westerners could be viewed as betraying Confucian teachings. Many Chinese scholars such as Wang's colleagues: Xiao-gong Gong 龔孝拱, Yu-guei Shen 沈毓桂, and Er-kang Tsai 蔡爾康 suffered from a bad reputation due to their employment at the LMS Press.

The different, if not incongruous, attitudes displayed by Wang towards Christianity, might be viewed as an epitome of the broader circumstances experienced by Christian converts in late-Qing. Also, those differing opinions might just be the result of different phases of

Wang's life. Huaiqing Duan⁸⁸ and Su Jing⁸⁹ both point out that Wang's close relationship with Medhurst, who was a father figure to him, may be the most crucial reason for Wang's baptism. After Medhurst passed away in 1857, Wang gradually reduced his involvement with the Church. Wang's application for baptism is certainly evidence of his conversion, but it is certainly insufficient as evidence of his genuine faith. In fact, his life seemed to be characterized by opportunism, regarding both Christianity and other issues (e.g. translation, as shown in the selected passages, or issues regarding the Taipings) where he perceived benefits could be attained.

Yet, if we put moral issues aside, Wang's response to Christianity actually reflects the predicaments Christian converts faced in late-Qing, a transitional period in which intruding external intellectual forces were often accompanied by the imperialistic pressures. Among these "intellectual forces," it might be more difficult for Christianity as an essentially foreign religion to be transmitted as a purely material/objective knowledge system such as political institutions or scientific knowledge. Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer believe the Chinese religious landscape before the late-Qing was a dynamic equilibrium of diverse elements (social, political, etc.) in constant interaction; however, from the nineteenth century onwards, "religion" was created as a deliberate category and the balance was therefore lost. Goossaert and Palmer claim, "From the moment it appeared as a distinct category, religion in itself became a 'question,' an anomaly whose very definition and whose place in a new secular order have always been contested, and which, far from disappearing or confining itself to the Western church-style institutions established for it by the state, has consistently resurfaced in

⁸⁸ Duan, "Lun Wang Tao de Jidujiao xinyang," 30.

⁸⁹ Su Jing, "Wang Tao de Jidujiao xili," 452.

a bewildering variety of old and new forms.”⁹⁰ For many late-Qing literati, it was profoundly important to separate Christianity from the “Western learning” they wanted because they believed that to accept the foreign religion is to embrace cultural and political alienation and to abandon their “traditions,” which puzzlingly excluded the material sphere of life. It might seem naïve to attempt to separate the material and the spiritual/cultural, yet it was a crucial problem for many Chinese Confucian literati including Wang Tao. Compared to his efforts in promoting Western political systems and scientific reforms as a means of transforming China, Wang’s involvement with Christianity was obviously not suffused with similar patriotic passion.

From a broader perspective, Wang’s changing attitudes towards Christianity also illuminate the complexities and problematics in defining and analyzing basic terms such as “*true* Christian,” “faith,” and “religious identity” whose meanings are often taken for granted. His conversion seemed less a matter of passing a threshold between unbelief and belief and more a faith that wavered according to circumstantial factors. Oftentimes, Wang seemed to hold an opportunistic attitude towards Christianity, or even towards his Western experiences in general, such as his employment at the LMS Press, or his involvement with the missionaries. In fact, Wang was not the only “opportunist” in his times. His close friend and coworker, Jiang Dunfu, was a devotee to Christianity when he was alive. Nevertheless, Jiang left an article to be published after his death, using Confucian teachings to criticize how ridiculous Christianity was. Joseph Edkins even had to publish an article trying to explain why Jiang would have such different attitudes.⁹¹ Certainly, Wang and Jiang might have been opportunists in some regards, but their “opportunism” reflects great complexities to be

⁹⁰ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question*, 4.

⁹¹ *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, Sep. 18, 1891.

contextualized in the course of history and cannot simply be ignored in the study of Chinese Christianity.

Conclusion
“A Kind of Chinese Christian”:
Towards a More Diverse Dynamic of Chinese Christianity

This study considers the life of a dislocated Chinese scholar, desperately struggling with his identities as a Confucian literatus, a Chinese Christian, and perhaps more importantly, a human being in an era of changes and chaos. Wang’s odyssey began with his intellectual disorientation, wandering into foreign lands such as Christianity before he decided to sail back to the homeland where his world of knowledge began, yet with a greatly altered mind. In a sense, Wang was the epitome of many Chinese literati during his times, frustrated by basic life needs and the decline of the Confucian state and ideology, which was the foundation of almost all their education and beliefs.

What constituted the reluctance in late-Qing Chinese literati to approach or embrace Christianity? To understand why the reception of Christianity in late-Qing Chinese people was full of political and emotional attachments, one must consider the socio-political context of the dissemination of the religion. This particular subject is outside of the scope of this thesis can deal with, yet one important factor for readers to consider is how the Christian missions in China benefited greatly from the “unequal treaties” (*bupingdeng tiaoyue* 不平等條約) of the two Opium War in 1839-1842 and in 1856-1860. Daniel Bays precisely points out, “[T]he foreign missionary movement in China was highly complicit, and some would insist, profited from these events [of the Opium Wars].”⁹² In the minds of late-Qing Chinese

⁹² Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 42.

people, Christianity entered China with various negative associations as a result of the Western invasions and imperialism. This phenomenon continued to exist into the early Republican years. A quote from Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1886-1964), a Chinese educator, well describes the Chinese impressions of Christianity during his times: “Tathagata [the Buddha of the Pali Canon] came to China riding on the back of a white elephant whereas Jesus came flying on canon shells.”⁹³

Yet, a late-Qing Chinese scholar would also not be able to ignore the Western learning, educational opportunities and other charity work – all of the supposedly “positive” contributions brought by the missionaries to the Chinese society. This dilemma well characterizes the complexities of Wang’s (and also many of his contemporaries’) attitudes towards Christianity. In previous Chinese and English scholarship on Wang Tao, he is well recognized as a pioneer in the development of Chinese journalism and in the intellectual revolution of modern China, especially as a transmitter of Western ideas. As a reform thinker, he penned close to one thousand editorials calling for the reforms of the Chinese political and educational systems and the establishments of railway, mining and textile industries. Due to the diverse nature of his thoughts, Wang features in a large number of articles and several monographs, most of which centered on his ideas and writings. His personality and life are well described by the title of Cohen’s biographical study of Wang; he was constantly “between tradition and modernity.” By examining Wang’s Christian faith, this thesis further illuminates the in-between nature of Wang’s character.

In fact, I believe the significance of revisiting Wang’s religiosity is not to determine what his “true beliefs” were, if any, but to examine what sorts of labeling and prejudices were

⁹³ Jiang Menglin , *Xi chao* (Taipei: Yeqiang chubanshe, 1990), 4.

in place when we approach his religiosity. As we could see from discussions on Wang Tao by different scholars in the previous chapter, Wang's religious identity often seems to be more about the scholars' political and social perspective and less about Wang himself. Namely, when scholars claim whether Wang was or has been a Christian, many of them often give essentially illogical reasons why Wang was not a true Christian, be it his "Confucian beliefs," "patriotic tendency" or "nationalist activities." These attributes of Wang, regardless of their accuracy in describing him as a person, are in fact irrelevant to his religious beliefs. I believe the effectiveness of applying these simple categorizations to analyze Wang's religious thoughts similar to using a mere instance of conversion to decide he was a true Christian – both approaches are oversimplifying, unsatisfactory, and accomplish nothing more than to label him. A man's faith, perhaps contradictory to some stereotypes, is never just a simple linear development from disbelief to belief. A conversion is not the only threshold one has to cross to obtain one's religious passport. In this last chapter, I would like to further analyze the complexities and significance of Wang's Christian faith by looking at another interesting Christian convert, Wu Leichuan (1870-1944).

Life and Pursuits

In 1870, Wu Leichuan was born Wu Zhenchun to a poor literati family in the province of Jiangsu, which is also Wang Tao's hometown. While Zhenchun was his name, he is widely known as Leichuan, his courtesy name. The native home of Wu's family was Hangzhou, Zhejiang. Wu's grandfather served as a district magistrate in Xuzhou while his father was a minor local official in Nanhe, residing in Qingjiangpu. Wu lived with his mother and siblings in Xuzhou, serving his grandfather, where they lived on a meager income and could only afford meat twice a month. His mother played important roles in the family as an obedient daughter-in-law, a faithful wife, and a caring mother, and was admired for her

sacrifices for the family. She often told her children how generous and honest their father was.⁹⁴

When he turned seven, Wu's pre-school education began with the Four Books and the Five Classics, as most children of his time did, and practicing the "eight-legged essays" in preparation for the Confucian examinations. He passed the provincial examination in 1886 and obtained the degree of *xiucai*. After three failed attempts in 1888, 1889 and 1891, he eventually passed the second level examination in 1893 with the degree of *juren* 舉人.⁹⁵

In 1898, Wu acquired his *jinshi* degree and was admitted to the Hanlin Imperial Academy shortly before the Hundred Days of Reform that occurred in the same year. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion took place, and because of the turmoil brought by the Hundred Days of Reform and the Boxer Rebellion, Wu failed to secure an official appointment and therefore returned to Qingjianpu to take care of his ailing father and assist him in his work. There they lived in a small reed hut and were in desperate financial need. Nonetheless, Wu refused to seek a more profitable job. After Wu's father passed away in 1905 and his mother in 1906, he served as the superintendent of Zhejiang Provincial College from 1905 to 1909. In 1909, he was admitted to the Court of the Jinshi Holders (*jinshi guan*) for a year, studying and waiting for a job assignment. He later returned to Hangzhou as a headmaster for a high school and also served as an assemblyman and a senior assistant for academic affairs in the Jiangsu governor's office.⁹⁶ During the 1911 Revolution, Hangzhou declared independence from the

⁹⁴ Zhao Zichen, "Wu Leichuan xiansheng xiaozhuang 吳雷川先生小傳" [A brief biography of Mr. Wu Leichuan], *ZLYSM* 10, no.8 (1937): 481-82.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 483.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 484.

Qing government and Wu was asked to serve as the civil magistrate in the Hangzhou military government. He declined the offer, as he disliked being surrounded by job seekers. In 1912, Wu returned to Beijing, first as the head of the Secretariat in the Board of Education and then as the senior assistant while Cai Yuanpei was the Minister of Education.⁹⁷ On Christmas Day in 1915, he converted to the Anglican faith.

Wu started to teach at Yenching University in 1922 in the midst of the Anti-Christian movement. To respond to the Anti-Christian Movement ubiquitous among Chinese intellectuals during the 1920s, he first joined Life Fellowship in 1919 (formerly Peking Apologetic Group) and then founded the Truth Society (*zhen li hui* 真理會) in 1923. He was also the editor-in-chief for the Truth Weekly for three years.⁹⁸ In 1925, he was appointed as a full-time faculty member in the Department of Chinese and was further appointed as the vice president of Yenching University in the following year. He was the vice president for Yenching from 1926 to 1929 and then held the office of Chancellor from 1929 to 1933. He was indeed the first Chinese chancellor of Yenching. He resigned from his position and went back to Hanzhou for two years before he came back to Beijing to resume teaching until Yenching was closed in 1941 under the Japanese occupation.

During the Japanese occupation, many faculty members at Yenching including Zhao Zhichen 趙紫辰 were arrested. However, Wu was spared due to his old age. In his final years, he worked as a scribe at Songbo Library in Beijing and sold his own calligraphy until he

⁹⁷ Ibid., 484-485.

⁹⁸ John, K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 229.

died of apoplexy at the age of 75 on October 26, 1944.⁹⁹ In his life, Wu was an outstanding educator. Due to his Christian identity, he also contributed significantly to the integration and interflow of Christianity and Confucianism. In the midst of the Anti-Christianity Movement, he contemplated upon how Christianity should respond to the challenges of his times in order to be useful in contemporary China. He spared no effort in promoting and practicing Christian beliefs.

Conversion in a New Era

For most of his early life, there seemed to be nothing noteworthy in Wu's role as an intellectual. To a certain extent, his life experiences were commonly shared by numerous literati during his times: He grew up in a "*Shu Xiang Shi Jia*" (書香世家, literati family), spending most of his early life studying the Chinese classics in preparation for examinations. After he was finally admitted to the Hanlin Imperial Academy, the highest academic institution of his time, he realized that his life was not as fulfilling as he expected it to be. Like many of his contemporaries, Wu had neither eminent family background nor extraordinary talent. He did not have abundant opportunities to participate in political activities, did not have the money to study abroad, nor was he sensitive to the changes of times. He spent most of his life practicing *baguwen* 八股文 (eight-legged essays), a must-have skill for traditional Chinese literati. When he was nominated to become a member of the Hanlin Academy 翰林學院, he held hopes to obtain official employment. After he was forced to return home due to the Hundred Days of Reform and the Boxer Rebellion, where he stayed unemployed for six years, he realized his twenty years of studying and preparing for official examinations were all in vain. During his unemployment at home, the revolutions had

⁹⁹ Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 66.

already begun. Yet, Wu did not find a role in the waves of changes. Perhaps he was not interested in revolutions, or he was not sensitive to the changes taking place. Or it could well be that he did not understand what the revolutions signified, and thus could not make sense of them. No matter what the reason was, if any, Wu was never close to his role model Confucius, who knows the impracticable nature of the times yet will be doing in them (*ziqu bukewei erweizhi* 知其不可為而為之).¹⁰⁰ Instead, Wu remained home, studying and practicing calligraphy.

Wu claims, “Confucius’ morality model is aristocratic and it is difficult to take after his composure and calmness [in chaotic times]. On the contrary, Jesus is closer to commoners, and thus young people should model themselves on Jesus.”¹⁰¹ Compared to Wang Tao, there is little struggle or setback in his conversion. When recalling his conversion, Wu states:

I became involve with Christianity starting from the spring of the third year of Min Guo [1914]. At that time, I was working at the Ministry of Education in Beijing, living on Taiping Street near the Xuanwu Gate. I had two friends that were both intellectuals. They lived on the same street with me, so we were in frequent contact. On a Sunday morning, I was relaxing at their place. After a short while, they suddenly stood up and announced, “We are going to church, so we cannot keep your company anymore.” I was very surprised at that time: Why do intellectuals like them believe in Christianity as well? Yet I did not have time to ask them carefully before I went home. I immediately went to purchase a copy of the New Testament, spending two or three days finishing it. I remember my impression was: miracles and divine powers cannot make me believe, but I do admire many lessons in the book. I then read it a second time. Thinking about how Christianity can have such a long history, I believe there must be some reasons – there must be some research value in it. I went to talk to my two friends several times, and they suggested that I could go attend sermons at church, or talk more to fellow churchgoers. Therefore, I went to church every Sunday and I

¹⁰⁰ “*The Analects*, 14:41”. Chinese Text Project. <http://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/xian-wen-di-shi-si> (accessed April 05, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Wu Leichuan, “Jidujiao duiyu zhonghua minzu de fuxing nengyou shime gongxian” [What can Christianity contribute to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation], *ZLYSM* 9, no.2 (1935): 62-66.

felt the solemn and sublime atmosphere in the church enabled me to cast away my petty thoughts. The preachers sincerely serve people, and this my sympathy for society. In the meanwhile I kept rereading the New Testament. On one hand, I understood the lessons in it better. On the other hand, I hoped someone from the church could explain to me the miraculous parts in the New Testament, and so I had intention to join the church. I registered my name at the Chinese Anglican Church that summer, and I was baptized in the winter of the fourth year of Min Guo.

我和基督教發生關係，是從民國三年春間起始的。當時我在北京教育部供職，住在宣武門內東太平街。我有兩位朋友都是知識界的人，同我住在一條街裡，我們就時常往來。有一次星期日上午，我到他們那裏去閒坐，坐了不久，他們忽然站起來說：「我們要到禮拜堂去，不能奉陪了。」當時我很詫異：像他們那樣有知識的人何以也要信基督教？但不及細問，就辭別回家，立刻去買了一本新約全書來看。用兩三天的工夫將新約看完了，記得當時的印象是：神蹟奇事都不能使我相信，但其中有許多教訓實使我佩服。接著又看第二遍，就想到基督教能夠流傳久遠，必定有它的原因，必是有研究的價值，又去和那兩位朋友談了幾次，他們都勸我不妨到禮拜堂去聽講，和教會中人多有往來，於是我每個禮拜都到禮拜堂去，就感覺到禮拜儀式的莊嚴靜穆，可使我屏除俗念，傳道的人誠心為人服務，足以引起我對社會的同情，同時我又反覆地看新約書，一方面對義理更多有領會，一方面對神奇的部份很希望教會中人能為我詳細解釋，因此就有意加入教會，那年夏在中華聖公會記名預備，至四年冬就領受洗禮。¹⁰²

The reason to present the complete quote above is that it is one of the most faithful description of how Wu became involved with Christianity. His motivation to convert and how his early stage of faith evolved both help us understand the development of his religious thought. In “My Personal Religious Experience,” Wu further gives three reasons why he decided to convert: First, he was inspired by the kindness and sacrifices of his mother. Second, he was affected by his early family life and education. Lastly, after he was involved

¹⁰² Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* 基督教與中國文化 [Christianity and Chinese culture, *JDJYZGWH* hereafter], (Shanghai: Shanghai qingnian xiehui, 1940), 9.

with politics, he was strongly dissatisfied with his “meaningless life,” and guidance from his Christian friends also played an important role in his conversion.¹⁰³

Although some of his beliefs might seem controversial or problematic to fundamentalists or even ordinary Christians, it would be unfair to negate his contribution to the development of Chinese Christianity, actively responding to different issues Chinese Christianity encountered in different historical periods. Indeed, the history of Chinese Christianity in the early Republican years was full of turmoil and unrest. During the first half of the twentieth century, China was in tremendous chaos due to both internal revolts and foreign invasions. In search of an all-encompassing solution, Chinese intellectuals often referred to various Western doctrines, and Christianity was very popular in the Chinese society during this time. The period from 1900 to 1920 saw rapid growth in conversions and is often described by the Chinese church as the “golden period” of Chinese Christianity. After the Republic of China was established, the constitution of China states that people enjoy the freedom of religion. In the first year of the Republic, over sixty members in the temporary parliament were Christian. Important government heads such as Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙, Wang Chungui 王寵惠 (1881-1958) and Wang Zhengting 王正廷 (1882-1961) were prominent Chinese Christians. During that time, the future of Chinese Christianity must have seemed promising. However, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 attacked all sorts of religions and rejected all superstitions. It inspired and was followed by various nationalist and socialist movements, including the Anti-Christianity Movement from 1922 to 1927. A student movement was founded to oppose the World Student Christian Federation in China and also to counteract the allegedly negative influence of Christianity on the modernization of China. Christianity was attacked as a superstitious institution and cultural imperialism.

¹⁰³ Wu Leichuan, “Wogeren de zhongjiao jingyan,” 1.

The Anti-Christian Movement had greatly shaken Wu's faith. Later in 1934, he revealed how uneasy he was when facing the criticism that Christianity was superstitious, a fact that echoed what had been on his mind regarding all sorts of miracles recorded in the Bible. He eventually settled for a rational Christianity devoid of superstitious elements, basing his faith on the personality of Jesus and believing Christians did not have to believe in all doctrines. To be a good Christian, he argued, did not entail adhering completely to church creeds.¹⁰⁴

This leads us to probably the most interesting and controversial part in Wu's Christian faith. More than once, he proclaimed that he did not believe in concepts such as the Trinity or the Immaculate Conception. He once wrote:

I joined the church and although theologically I could not find a satisfying explanation [to miracles and supernatural aspects in the Bible], the principle of love was sufficient to lead me onto the right path of life [...] When the Anti-Christianity Movement was ubiquitous in China, and I was in frequent contact with people who study Christianity in the academia or political world, I had to answer their inquires so I needed to read all sorts of anti-Christianity criticism in newspapers or books. My faith waivered unavoidably, and I felt much spiritual pain. After a few years, my faith finally regained its strength and I thought: All the doctrines and explanations by the Church cannot be taken literally. Nor should we pay much attention to the regulations and ceremonies of the Church. The core of our faith should lie in Jesus' personality. He led by personal example, teaching us how it is our calling to reform society, and how as humans we must follow the principle of truth because this is our way of life.

¹⁰⁴ Wu Leichuan, "Wo duiyu jidu jiaohui de ganxiang 我個人的宗教經驗" [My religious experiences], *SM* 3, no.7&8 (1923): 1.

To this day my faith remains the same. For some fundamental churches, I may already be considered an apostate.¹⁰⁵

In fact, Wu maintained this kind of rational attitude throughout his Christian faith. After his conversion, he briefly conformed to the basic doctrines of Christianity. Yet he eventually felt suspicious and uncomfortable with certain tenets because they sounded superstitious and irrational. As he stated, after years of contemplating, he deemed those doctrines inessential to Christianity.¹⁰⁶ In Wu's own analysis, the Christian God was no different from "Heaven" in the Neo-Confucian understanding. He is less a supernatural being and more a "supreme principle," a principle over the universe that humans must cope with.¹⁰⁷ For Wu, Jesus was a sage just like Confucius. He acknowledged that Jesus was "the Word became flesh" (*daocheng roushen* 道成肉身) but in Confucian understanding. For most Christians, "the Word became flesh," a phrase appearing in the Gospel of John, means that Jesus is at once godly and human, and that he preexisted with God before he came to the Earth in human form. Yet in Mandarin the "Word" was translated as "Way" and Wu considered "the Word became flesh" compatible with the teaching of Mencius: "Humanity is man. When embodied in man's conduct, it is the Way (*renyeze renye heeryanzhi daoye* 仁也者，人也。合而為之，道也)."¹⁰⁸ For Wu, the personality and social reforms of Jesus were the true essence of

¹⁰⁵ Wu, *JDJYZGWH*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Wu, "Xinyang Jidujiao ershinian de jingyan 信仰基督教二十年的經驗" [My twenty-year experience as a Christian] in *Zhongjiao Jinyentan* 宗教經驗譚, ed. Xu Baochien. (Shanghai: Shanghai qingnianxiehui, 1934), 17.

¹⁰⁸ "Mencius Jinxin:16". Chinese Text Project. <http://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/jin-xin-zhang-ju-xia> (accessed April 05, 2014).

Christianity, and he was only interested in Jesus' "being a man." He wanted to know how Jesus, an ordinary man of humble upbringing, successfully developed his personality. In Wu's portrayal, Jesus was a Confucian *junzi* 君子 anxious to save his country from moral corruption through social reform in the context of the national salvation of Israel in the first century A.D.¹⁰⁹ and thus he was the best moral example for Chinese people due to his hard-earned personal growth. As for the birth of Jesus, his performing exorcism, healing and all sorts of miracles, Wu considered them but unreasonable mythology.¹¹⁰ In fact, he provided a rational explanation: Wu considered that Jesus's healing and exorcism were nothing but the function of human will, arguing that Jesus knew sick people should think positively and this was exactly why after healing, Jesus would say to them "You have been saved by your faith."

Similarly, when it came to Jesus' exorcism through the Holy Spirit, Wu equated the Holy Spirit with the Confucian *ren* 仁 and considered both to have the power to remove evil¹¹¹, just as Confucius points out, "If you set your mind on *ren*, you will be free from evil (*gouzhiyurenzhe wueye* 苟志於仁者，無惡也)."¹¹² Regarding the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish, Wu explained that it was not because of miracles but because people were moved by Jesus' speech and thus voluntarily shared their food.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Wu, *JDJYZGWH*, 27

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹² "The Analects, 4:4". Chinese Text Project. <http://ctext.org/si-shu-zhang-ju-ji-zhu/xian-wen-di-shi-si> (accessed April 05, 2014).

¹¹³ Wu, *JDJYZGWH*, 27 39-40.

Examples of Wu's "alternative" explanations of Christianity such as ones above were numerous in his work. Throughout Wu's interpretations of Christianity, there is strong and ubiquitous Confucian influence. As Chu Sin-Jan precisely describes, "Wu's Confucian mode of thoughts unavoidably made him focus only on Christian teachings which are similar or identical to, if not better than, Confucianism. However, he went beyond his Confucian framework and used Confucianism to interpret Christianity, and not the other way around, adhering adamantly to his Confucian presuppositions [...] Given Wu's preoccupations with Confucian philosophy, it is legitimate to ask why Wu still stayed in Christianity and called himself a Christian."¹¹⁴ Wu never directly answered the question. Chu thinks it might be because Christianity was more successful in achieving what Confucianism did not. I believe there might not be an accurate answer to this question, and even Wu himself might not have been able to provide one. After all, one's religious faith is often a combination of personal choices and preferences.

Wu Leichuan and Wang Tao, two Chinese intellectuals in times of changes and chaos, were very different kinds of Chinese Christians. A shared pursuit in their lives was to search for an all-encompassing solution to China's weakness. On their intellectual odysseys to find the ultimate solution that could turn the tide of China's fate, Christianity played important roles for both individuals. Yet, I believe the juxtaposition of Wu and Wang well demonstrates how Christianity or any religious identity should be viewed as a diverse dynamic instead of an essentialized label. If we examine their Christian faith closely, we could easily identify many Christian virtues as well as "shortcomings" that were not so "Christian" in both actors: Wu was a leading Chinese theologian who contributed greatly to the dissemination of

¹¹⁴ Chu Sin-Jan, "Wu Leichuan: A Confucian Scholar and Christian Reformer in Transforming China" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1993), 223.

Christianity in China. He also wrote prolifically to defend Christianity and to fuse it with Confucianism during the Anti-Christianity Movement in China in the 1920s. Nevertheless, he did not believe in certain core Christian tenets such as Trinity or the virgin birth, and he often proclaimed that all the preaching by the Church should not be taken too seriously.¹¹⁵ For him, to be a Christian is to accept Jesus as his role model, and this act alone is sufficient.

Moreover, as was the case with many Chinese intellectuals during his time, Wu's Christian beliefs were strongly influenced by Confucianism. Throughout his corpus, we can see that he regularly uses Confucian teachings to explain Christianity, an action that often led to discrepancies with the doctrines. On the other hand, as a Christian, Wang was baptized and remained involved with the Church for a long period of time. He went to church every Sunday, received Communion and studied the Bible as any Christian. He even went on missions and maintained close relationships with several missionaries during his time. Yet throughout his life he continued to hold a mixed attitude towards Christianity, at once praising Jesus and criticizing the foreign religion at the same time. Furthermore, he even seemed to deliberately conceal his early involvement with the Church in his later years.

Given their contentious actions, could either Wang or Wu be considered a "true" Christian? Or, should we reconsider the word choice of "true" in framing the question? It is especially interesting to see how some scholars use merely baptism as evidence of Wang's Christian identity, or determine that Wang could never be a true Christian simply because he was a patriotic scholar and had criticized Christianity severely. These approaches seem to polarize religious identities into binary oppositions, treating it as a black-and-white question that entails a straightforward answer. One's religiosity, however, is a multi-faceted process that continues to respond to different changing factors in life. I also believe one's religious identity is a complicated issue that should be treated meticulously and analyzed with as many

¹¹⁵ Wu, *JDJYZGWH*, 10.

details as possible. Contradictory to stereotypical impressions, conversion should not be a step from disbelief to belief; instead, it is a changing dynamic consistently in conversation with one's life circumstances.

The purpose of my research is not to abolish all religious identities (such as Christianity). Instead, this study considers the fluidity of religious faith and presents faith as a more flexible category with different variations. After all, it is without avail to imagine a checklist when analyzing one's religiosity – as if there were certain requirements for one to acquire a sort of “true religious identity.” This thesis is not intended to determine whether Wang Tao and Wu Leichuan were ever true Christians but to encourage people to reframe the question of religiosity. Both Wang and Wu have certain “unsatisfactory” characteristics as a Christian in the strictest standards (if any), but it would be unreasonable to proclaim that they are thus “untrue.” To imagine the existence of some optimal type of Christian would be of little meaning in helping us understand someone's religious identity. What is it that determines someone is a true Christian or not? Is it baptism? Wang was baptized yet he deliberately concealed his involvement with the Church in his later years. Nevertheless, there were also many prominent Chinese Christians who were never baptized such as Zeng Yuenong 曾約農 (1893-1986), great grandson of Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872). How closely should one follow the doctrines in order to be a “good” Christian? Many of Wu's Christian beliefs or Wang's actions were certainly disturbing to many of their fellow churchgoers. The complications in determining one's Christian identity indeed illuminate the potential mobility and diversity when it comes to discussing religious faith. Is someone a Christian or not? The answer might not be a simple yes or no. I believe to contemplate the question in more flexible ways enables us to portray Christianity and Christian identity as a diverse dynamic that can be presented in different ways as one wishes.

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