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Toward a Chinese American Evangelical Theology:
The Promise of Neo-Calvinism

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New College

This thesis is submitted
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Edinburgh 2019

Declaration

I, Andrew Ong, declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Signed, June 23, 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Ong', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Ong

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
ABSTRACT	8
LAY SUMMARY	10
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	14
INTRODUCTION	17
<i>I. Searching for a Chinese American Evangelical Theology</i>	17
<i>II. Literature Review of Asian American Theologies</i>	24
<i>III. Toward a Chinese American Evangelical Theology</i>	30
CHAPTER ONE - Why Chinese American Christians are Predominantly Conservative Evangelicals: The Socio-Historical Context	37
<i>I. Introduction</i>	37
<i>II. Chinese American Christianity Today: Abundantly Evangelical</i>	37
<i>III. Explaining “Evangelical”</i>	41
<i>IV. How Chinese American Christianity Became Distinctly Conservative & Evangelical</i>	45
IV.A. China’s Political Climate: Contextual Theologies Before & After 1949	46
IV.B. Mid-20th Century U.S. Religious Climate: Primed for Chinese American Evangelicalism	52
IV.C. Chinese Christianity Abroad & the 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act.....	59
<i>V. Summary</i>	71
CHAPTER TWO - Bumps Along the Way: American Evangelicalism Meets the Asian American Experience	73
<i>I. Introduction</i>	73
<i>II. The Impact of American Evangelicalism</i>	73
II.A. Absolute Authority & Born-Again Rhetoric: Immigrant Identity Construction.....	75
II.B. Evangelicals Evangelize More.....	76
<i>III. An Agreeable Asian American Subculture & Narrative</i>	80
III.A. The “Model Minority” Narrative	80
III.B. Asian American Experiences: Undergraduate Education.....	82
III.C. Asian American Experiences: Middle-Class Lifestyle & the Status Quo.....	85
<i>IV. Bumps Along the Way: Prominent Issues, Challenges & Concerns in the Chinese American Church</i>	89
IV.A. Leading & Navigating Multi-Lingual, Multi-Generational, & Multi-Cultural Churches	90
IV.B. Contemplating the Grounds for Ethnic Churches.....	92
IV.C. Understanding the Chinese American Church’s Mission.....	98
IV.D. Fleeing Shame as (Model?) Minorities	103
IV.E. Relating to the Cultural Moment	108
<i>V. Summary</i>	116
CHAPTER THREE - Chinese American Evangelicals & the Need for a Constructive Contextualized Theology	119
<i>I. Introduction</i>	119
<i>II. Diagnosing the Theological Defects of Chinese American Evangelicalism</i>	120

II.A. A Depreciating Disregard for Ethnicity.....	121
II.B. A Disharmonized Dynamic of Individualism & Collectivism.....	129
II.C. A Dualistic Doctrine of Creation	152
III. <i>The Need for a Constructive, Contextualized Chinese American Evangelical Theology</i>	164
IV. <i>Summary</i>	170
CHAPTER FOUR - The Possibilities of Amos Yong’s Pentecostal Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals	173
I. <i>Introduction</i>	173
II. <i>Amos Yong’s Theology: Why & What?</i>	174
II.A. Why Consider Yong’s Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals?.....	174
II.B. What is Yong’s Pent-Evangelical Theology?	177
II.C. The Future of Evangelical Theology: Yong’s Exploration of Asian American Evangelical Theology	187
III. <i>Applying Yong’s Theology to the Chinese American Evangelical Context</i>	192
III.A. Pneumatologically Imagining Ethnicity	193
III.B. Pneumatologically Imagining Individualism & Collectivism	198
III.C. Pneumatologically Imagining Creation & Culture	205
IV. <i>Assessing Yong’s Theology</i>	221
IV.A. Ethnicity.....	222
IV.B. Individualism & Collectivism	224
IV.C. Creation & Culture.....	227
V. <i>Summary</i>	234
CHAPTER FIVE - The Promise of Neo-Calvinist Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals.....	237
I. <i>Introduction</i>	237
II. <i>Neo-Calvinism: Why & What?</i>	238
II.A. Why Consider Neo-Calvinism for Chinese American Evangelicals?.....	238
II.B. What is Neo-Calvinism?.....	241
III. <i>Applying Neo-Calvinism to the Chinese American Evangelical Context</i>	248
III.A. Neo-Calvinism on Ethnicity	249
III.B. Neo-Calvinism on Individualism & Collectivism	261
III.C. Neo-Calvinism on Creation & Culture	274
IV. <i>Assessing Neo-Calvinism</i>	294
IV.A. Ethnicity.....	295
IV.B. Individualism & Collectivism	296
IV.C. Creation & Culture.....	299
V. <i>Summary</i>	309
CONCLUSION.....	311
I. <i>Steps Retraced</i>	311
II. <i>Thesis Stated</i>	314
III. <i>Paths to Pursue</i>	316
IV. <i>Challenges Issued</i>	318
BIBLIOGRAPHY	321

ABSTRACT

Recent evangelical scholarship increasingly calls for ethnic theological perspectives in the American context; for just as the center of World Christianity has shifted from the West to the Majority World, the ethnic and cultural center of American evangelicalism is soon to shift – if it has not already. However, among the contextual theologies developed in the U.S., neither an explicitly Chinese American, nor a Chinese American *evangelical* theology have been pursued. This is surprising, given that Chinese Americans are the largest demographic of Asian Americans and that the majority of Chinese American Christians identify as evangelical. Thus, this thesis pursues a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology.

This thesis first begins by explaining the socio-historical factors behind the prevalence of conservative American evangelicalism amongst Chinese American Christians. Secondly, it identifies the most significant ill-effects of American evangelicalism amongst Chinese American Christians, and diagnoses these ill-effects as theologically rooted in anthropological uniformity, individualism vs. collectivism confusion, and a dualistic doctrine of creation. Thirdly, this thesis considers the “pent-evangelical” theology of Amos Yong as a possible path forward. However, this thesis concludes that while Yong has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals, the neo-Calvinist tradition can not only complement Yong at many points, but also bodes greater promise with less obstacles for a robust theology of ethnicity, a harmonic vision of individuals and collectives, and a holistic doctrine of creation that is still able to maintain distinctions. Hence, this thesis takes a step in the direction of a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology that both critiques and benefits not only Chinese American evangelicals, but the broader swath of American Christians who have uncritically embraced some of the problematic assumptions found within popular and conservative American evangelical theology.

LAY SUMMARY

Chinese Americans are Americans who descend from Chinese ancestry, and their history in the United States began in the 19th century. Today, they constitute the largest demographic amongst Asian Americans. Although the history of Chinese American Christianity began in the mid-19th century in the mainline Protestant tradition, Chinese American Christianity since the mid-20th century has taken on a predominantly evangelical character, preferring to mimic popular and conservative American evangelicalism rather than theologically innovate within its own Chinese American Christian context.

The acceptance of American evangelicalism by Chinese American Christians has resulted in Chinese American Christians' inability to satisfactorily address various challenges and concerns that are increasingly voiced from within the unique Chinese American Christian context. From a theological perspective, there are three problematic views which most Chinese American evangelicals are influenced by that have prevented them from theologically addressing the various challenges and concerns raised. Chinese American evangelicals have suffered from a simplistic understanding of ethnicity, confusion over the relationship between individuals and groups, and a strict dualistic separation between the sacred and secular realms, the soul and the body, and Christianity and culture.

Amos Yong is a Chinese American evangelical, who has drawn from and innovated from within his own Pentecostal tradition in order to correct these three problematic views with what he calls a "pneumatological imagination," yet he does so in a way that is unlikely to be palatable amongst most Chinese American evangelicals. While Yong should be consulted, my theological journey as a Chinese American evangelical has led me to suggest the neo-Calvinist tradition of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Geerhardus Vos as an alternative theological resource to address and correct the problematic views that Chinese American evangelicals have inherited from popular and conservative American evangelicals.

For Mom, Dad, Chels, & Cami

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Mom, Dad, Chelsea, and Cami, this work is dedicated to you.

Andrew Ong

2019

INTRODUCTION

I. Searching for a Chinese American Evangelical Theology

On May 11, 2011, Fred Mok, an influential Chinese American evangelical pastor and blogger wrote a blogpost entitled, “WHY ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGY SUCKS.” He began it writing, “Well, it actually does not suck. Something that doesn’t exist cannot suck. Its [*sic*] kind of like saying Shrek 7 sucks. And yet it probably would suck if it had been made.”¹ Though important publications of Asian American theology certainly exist, Mok was writing from his evangelical context, speaking to the lack of Asian American evangelical theology as well as its likely ‘suckiness’ should it actually exist. Mok’s blogpost was inspired by a paper presented by Amos Yong at the 2nd Asian American Equipping Symposium.

According to Yong,

Asian American evangelicals are still a long ways off from thinking theologically as Asian Americans...[A]t a fundamental level the denial of historicity, particularity, and contextuality [is] central to the task of evangelical theology. The result is that the current generation of Asian American evangelicals face a fork in the road – on the one hand to allow non-ethnic (read: ‘white’) evangelicals to continue to set the theological agenda that minimizes or marginalizes their perspectives, or on the other hand to assert why the historicity and particularity of the Asian American history and experience is important, not only for Asian American evangelical theology specifically, but also for evangelical theology as a whole.²

In recognition of this “fork in the road,” this thesis, written by a member of this “current generation of Asian American evangelicals,” aims to engage in the latter. More specifically, this thesis seeks to answer the question: “*How might post-1965 Chinese American Christians engage in a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology?*”

¹ Fred Mok, “Why Asian American Theology Sucks,” *Rant of the Exiles: Americanized Asians in the Immigrant Church* (blog), May 11, 2011, <https://breadbeforerice.blogspot.com/2011/05/why-asian-american-theology-sucks.html> (accessed May 24, 2019).

² Amos Yong, “Asian American Historicity: Problems and Promises for Evangelical Theology.” Paper Presentation, 2nd Asian American Equipping Symposium from The Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity and Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, February 8, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/20826365> (accessed May 24, 2019).

Although the very notion of contextual theology was forged by Taiwanese theologian Shoki Coe amidst conversations surrounding the World Council of Churches' Theological Education Fund,³ a Chinese American contextual theology – let alone an *evangelical* one – has yet to be significantly pursued despite its great potential. Allen Yeh writes: “The potential for overseas Chinese to contribute much to world Christianity is great, especially given their relative freedom of speech compared to their compatriots on the mainland.”⁴ However, Yeh also observes a major obstacle to the development of Chinese American contextual theology:

However, the danger with the diaspora Chinese is their tendency to assimilate to the home culture. This has been both a strength and a weakness. It has allowed Chinese to blend in well and succeed in places like the USA, but has also caused overseas Chinese to lose their unique voice. But a unique voice, speaking out of culture, is absolutely necessary in contributing to an authentic global theology.⁵

Chinese American Christians have most commonly pursued “contextualization” by uncritically assimilating into American Christianity rather than intentionally developing their own unique contextualized expression of a Chinese American Christian faith.

In affirmation of the “unique” voice that Chinese American evangelicals have to offer both evangelical theology specifically, and global theology more broadly, this thesis locates itself within the developing body of scholarship in Chinese American Christianity. While part of this is connected to Asian American studies, especially as it relates to Chinese Americans,⁶ more important for this thesis is the history and experience of Chinese American *Christians*, which has been best researched by Wesley Woo, Sharon Wai-Man Chan, Derek Chang, and Timothy Tseng.

³ Shoki Coe, “In Search of Renewal in Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 9 (Summer 1973): 233-243.

⁴ Allen Yeh, “The Chinese Diaspora” in *Global Diasporas and Mission*, eds. Chandler Im & Amos Yong, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 23 (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Jonathan H.X. Lee, ed., *Chinese Americans: The History and Culture of a People* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2016); Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (London: Penguin, 2004); Xiaojian Zhao, *The New Chinese America: Class, Economy, and Social Hierarchy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

Woo's 1983 PhD dissertation, "Protestant Work Among the Chinese in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1920,"⁷ investigates the Protestant mission work amongst Chinese diasporic communities in America with a particular focus on San Francisco, and the history and beginnings of Chinese American Christianity before "the new Chinese America." This time period marks a significant epoch that is distinct yet inseparable from the post-1965 history of Chinese American evangelicals, which this thesis investigates. Chan's 1996 PhD dissertation focuses on the history of Chinese churches in the Los Angeles basin, another concentrated area of Chinese American Christianity.⁸ In it she describes the effect of the "new Chinese America's" diversity upon Chinese American churches and the need for diversified strategies to accommodate the diversity. Derek Chang's work further elucidates the ideologies of 19th century evangelical missions and their positive and negative effects on Chinese immigrants to the U.S., as well as the ways that the Chinese immigrants received and appropriated evangelicalism, particularly in Oregon.⁹

Tseng's PhD dissertation, "Ministry At Arms' Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952,"¹⁰ sheds light on the history leading up to the post-1965 era of Chinese American Christianity. His subsequent writings, limited primarily to short articles, edited volumes, or blogs, discuss topics, such as public theology amongst Asian American Christians, race theory and the church, and the history and developing future of the Chinese American evangelicals who emerged after 1965.¹¹

⁷ Wesley Woo, "Protestant Work Among the Chinese in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1920" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1983).

⁸ Sharon Wai-Man Chan, "The Dynamics of Expansion of the Chinese Churches in the Los Angeles Basin" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996).

⁹ Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); "Brought Together upon Our Own Continent": Race, Religion, and Evangelical Nationalism in American Baptist Home Missions, 1865-1900" in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel Vasquez, & Jennifer Holdaway (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), 39-66.

¹⁰ Timothy Tseng, "Ministry At Arm's Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952," (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1994).

¹¹ James Chuck and Timothy Tseng, eds. *The Growth of Chinese Churches in the Bay Area: The 2008 Report of the Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project* (Castro Valley, CA: ISAAC, 2009); Timothy

Perhaps the most important sociological piece explicitly reflecting upon Chinese American Christians is Fenggang Yang's *Chinese Christians in America* (1999).¹² As a sociologist, Yang presents an ethnographic study of a representative Chinese church located in Washington, D.C., and offers the academic community a sociological understanding of Chinese Christians in America. From a sociological perspective he opens up a window for his readers into the concerns and interests of contemporary Chinese American Christians, rejecting simplistic theories of ghettoization or melting pot assimilation. Yang argues that Chinese Christians in America have *selectively* assimilated into American culture, *selectively* emphasized and de-emphasized various Christian theological perspectives, and *selectively* held onto their Chinese culture. In the same way that Woo, Chang, and Tseng provide helpful historical backgrounds, Yang provides a helpful sociological background for understanding Chinese American evangelicals. Antony Alumkal and Russell Jeung have also done excellent sociological work on the distinctive subcultural characteristics observed in evangelical Asian American campus ministries and pan-Asian American evangelical churches, discussing Asian American evangelical conversion and highlighting their generally conservative attitudes and postures toward social issues, such as racial formation.¹³ Additionally, Janelle Wong has

Tseng, "Exploring Asian American Christianity: Its Past, Present, and Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 256–382; Timothy Tseng, "Beyond Orientalism and Assimilation: The Asian American as Historical Subject" in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, eds. Eleazar Fernandez & Fumitaka Matsuoka, 55–72. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003); Timothy Tseng, "Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism" in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, edited by Jane Naomi Iwamura & Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2003), 241–271; Timothy Tseng, "Second Generation Chinese North American Evangelical Use of the Bible in Identity Discourse" *Semeia* 90–91 (2002): 251–67; Timothy Tseng, "Protestantism in Twentieth Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13 (2004): 121–48.

¹² Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

¹³ Antony Alumkal, *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation* (New York: LFB Scholarly Pub. LLC, 2003); Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

recently shed light on the growing constituency of Asian American (and Latinx) evangelicals reshaping American evangelicalism and its political constituency.¹⁴

Yet even as the ball has started to roll on the study of Asian and Chinese American Christians, Tseng admits that there is still much work to be done, particularly in the area of theologically constructive engagements with this unique ethno-religious and bicultural context. Hence, the more specific aim of this thesis is to engage the conversation surrounding Asian American contextual theologies. Even more specifically, this thesis has its view toward Asian American *evangelicals* and heeds Soong-Chan Rah's call for the "next evangelicalism," once globally diffused,¹⁵ to be a culturally and ethnically diverse body,¹⁶ reflecting what Philip Jenkins has termed "the next Christendom."¹⁷

Though less prevalent than the historical and sociological literature that has been written, works on Asian American Christian biblical interpretation and social ethics have been pursued in brief and introductory ways relevant to Tseng's hopes for the near future.¹⁸ More relevant to this thesis' interest in theology is Jonathan Tan's *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (2008).¹⁹ Tan surveys the history of Asian American Christianity, what Asian American theologies are, who Asian American theologians are, and even methodological issues, such as how Asian Americans have read the Bible, what challenges they face in their theologizing, how they have thought about race in the process of

¹⁴ Janelle Wong, *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2018), 5, 13, 77.

¹⁵ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2013).

¹⁶ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Books, 2009).

¹⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (3rd ed.; Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *What is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Mary Foskett & Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, eds., *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006); Uriah Kim & Seung Ai Yang, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Grace Kao & Ilsup Ahn, eds., *Asian American Christian Ethics: Voices, Methods, Issues* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Jonathan Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

theologizing, and what may lie ahead in the future. As Asian American Christians increasingly begin to reflect more intentionally upon their experiences and become increasingly sensitive to the distinct expression of Asian American Christianity, a conversation has developed in which a small, but growing and vocal minority, has come to challenge the conservative evangelical ethos amongst Asian American Christians. They do not do so as outsiders, but often insist upon their own evangelical identities, or intentionally identify as ex-evangelicals or post-evangelicals. This emic critique of popular and conservative Asian American evangelicalism has most notably been issued by scholars and pastors such as Timothy Tseng, Russell Jeung, Soong-Chan Rah, Amos Yong, Antony Alumkal, Rudy Busto, Daniel Lee, Ken Fong, and voices from the Progressive Asian American Christians organization²⁰ and *Inheritance Magazine*,²¹ among others.

Amongst East Asian American Christians is a conversation, or perhaps even a debate, revolving around Asian American Christianity's predominantly evangelical identity. The main question is: "What does it mean to be an Asian American Christian and/or evangelical?" Because the majority of East Asian American Christians are conservative evangelicals, it has often simply meant: to be a person of Asian heritage, living in America, who upholds the essential and universal teachings of Scripture (albeit as articulated by conservative evangelicals). Hence, for the majority, being an Asian American evangelical is primarily a matter of holding onto the timeless, propositional evangelical truths of Scripture, and then navigating and practically living life as Asian Americans. Being an evangelical is primary, and being an Asian American is accidental.

Combined with the facts that few Asian American evangelicals – especially Chinese American evangelicals – have pursued advanced theological degrees beyond the Master of

²⁰ "About," *Progressive Asian American Christians* (website) <https://paachristians.org/about/> (accessed April 29, 2019).

²¹ "About," *Inheritance Magazine* (website), <https://www.inheritancemag.com/about> (accessed September 25, 2019).

Divinity, and that those who have theological educations have primarily studied at predominantly white, conservative, and evangelical institutions, it is of no surprise that the theology of most Chinese American evangelical churches often mirrors that of the rest of popular American evangelicalism – their bookshelves filled by authors, such as Rick Warren, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, John MacArthur, Charles Ryrie, and Norman Geisler. However, the increasingly racially-charged climate in the U.S., and particularly the election of Donald Trump and the infamous statistic that 80% of self-identified white evangelical voters voted for him²² has stirred up much discussion amongst many non-white Christians about the evangelical identity and whether to claim it.²³ Such a context begs for new expressions of American Christianity, which could very well include new expressions of evangelicalism, each with contextualized theologies.

Yet while Asian American theologies have been developed by Catholics and Protestants, liberal and evangelical theologians, and also by thinkers with various Asian ethnic backgrounds – whether Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Indian, or some other unmentioned mix of similar backgrounds – and even while various *Chinese* theologies have been constructed and even significantly analyzed,²⁴ a specifically *Chinese*

²² “Exit Polls.” CNN Politics (website). <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls> (accessed April 29, 2019).

²³ Janelle Wong, “We Are All Evangelicals Now.” *Religion and Politics* (website), January 22, 2019. <https://religionandpolitics.org/2019/01/22/we-are-all-evangelicals-now-race-politics/> (accessed April 29, 2019); Campbell Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches.” *The New York Times*. March 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html> (accessed April 29, 2019); “VIDEO: Am I an Evangelical? Perspectives from Women and Black Christians.” The Witness Black Christian Collective (website). December 7, 2019. <https://thewitnessbcc.com/video-evangelical-perspectives-women-black-christians/> (accessed April 29, 2019); CT Editors, “The Significance of Lecrae Leaving White Evangelicalism: Why many align theologically with the movement but feel left out culturally.” Christianity Today Podcasts. October 12, 2017. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/october-web-only/significance-of-lecrae-leaving-white-evangelicalism.html> (accessed April 29, 2019).

²⁴ See Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Paulos Huang, ed., *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2017* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Wing-Hung Lam, *Chinese Theology in Construction* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1983).

American evangelical theology has not yet been explicitly pursued. This further begs the methodological question of how such a contextual theology might be pursued.

II. Literature Review of Asian American Theologies

According to Stephen Bevans, “[t]here is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only *contextual* theology...Doing theology contextually is not an option...The contextualization of theology—the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context—is really a theological imperative,” and contextual theology is done when the experience of the past (recorded in scripture and preserved and defended in tradition) engages the present context (individual and social experience, secular or religious culture, social location, and social change).²⁵ This is helpful. But what does it mean to ‘do theology’ and how should one relate these two realities of past and present experiences? There are many ways that people have sought to do contextual theology, and many ways that Scripture and the church’s tradition(s) have dialogued with contemporary contexts. This is also true amongst the various Asian, Asian American, and Chinese contextual theologies proposed since the mid-20th century.

Early on, C.S. Song fought the same battle as James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez for the acceptance of their contextual theologies of liberation. Song is a Taiwanese theologian who spent significant time in the States and wrote most of his theological work in English, yet specifically identifies culturally and geographically as a diasporic Asian rather than politically as an Asian American. In his *Third-Eye Theology* (1991), he bemoaned the foreignness of Christianity to the “eyes, ears and minds of Asian humanity,” and the mere “reproduction of theological trends and traditions imported from the Euro-American world” in Christian theology.²⁶ His book responds with what he believes to be an explicitly Asian

²⁵ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), xvi-xvii, 3.

²⁶ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 2.

theology. So, for example, he draws from the Zen Buddhist idea of a third eye that connotes spiritual insight to discuss the contextual nature of theology. He also utilizes Asian folk tales and engages in “story theology” or theology by storytelling, allowing both Asian stories and biblical stories to function as sources for his theology, and uses the liberation of Asian people as his criterion for judging theologies.

Examples of explicitly Asian *American* theology include Fumitaka Matsuoka, Heup Young Kim, David Ng, Paul Nagano, Jung Young Lee, Peter Phan, Wonhee Anne Joh, Sang Hyun Lee, and Julius-Kei Kato, most of whom theologize with the postcolonial agenda of liberating Asian Americans and utilizing their distinct autobiographies, stories, narratives, and experiences of marginality, liminality, and hybridity.²⁷ In Christ, they find the marginalized, liminal, and hybrid person par excellence, and thus understand Asian American theology to invite all people to meet in the margins as fellow strangers with Christ and each other for the good of the world. Along with C.S. Song, these Asian American theologians have mostly theologized from Protestant mainline and liberal Roman Catholic contexts, which have little recognition and purchase amongst most Asian – and specifically Chinese – American evangelicals.

Amongst evangelicals, one significant model worth noting is the Asian evangelical theologian, Simon Chan who wrote *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014).²⁸ Though Chan is a Chinese Singaporean who pursues an Asian theology, his critique of most Asian theologies should be noted. For most Asian theologies are not themselves immune from being

²⁷ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press: 1995); See Heup Young Kim, David Ng, Paul Nagano in Peter Phan & Jung Young Lee, eds., *Journeys at the Margins: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999); Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995); Peter Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Julius-Kei Kato, *Religious Language and Asian American Hybridity* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²⁸ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014).

selectively captive to various cultural forces, and can also be quite elitist. To Chan, theologies constructed by many Asian theologians are actually far less Asian than most people think. For example, he sees in Chinese theologian K.H. Ting's theology another expression of liberal Protestant theology, and also mentions C.S. Song's theological advocacy for Communism during the Cultural Revolution. Chan's point is that neither Ting nor Song's theologies appear to authentically arise out of the lived expressions of Asian Christian faith at grassroots levels. Furthermore, Chan would even question how distinctively Christian such theologies are. Instead, Chan proposes that Asian theology emerge out of the lived experience of the Asian church as the church acts out the gospel drama according to the biblical script. Hence, Chan proposes an ecclesial model of contextual theology that is not held captive to any particular essentialized Asian experience (as in Dalit or Minjung theologies). This ecclesial model also ensures that no individualistic experiences norm Asian theology, that folk expressions of Asian Christianity are given proper attention, and that no political or social programs dominate the church's social engagement.

Among steps taken toward an Asian *American evangelical* theology is the combined work of Peter Cha, Timothy Tseng, Paul Lim, David Yoo, James Zo, and Jeff Jue in *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*, which was forged out of a desire for Asian American evangelical scholars to "move out of the shadow of mainstream American evangelical theology" without being a mere "'reactionary' response to [their] evangelical contexts."²⁹ Some other Asian American evangelicals that have pursued or taken steps toward an Asian American evangelical theology are Young Lee Hertig, Samuel Ling, Daniel Lee, and Amos Yong. Though identifying as an evangelical with much admiration for the revivalist heritage of Charles Finney, Hertig's Asian American evangelical

²⁹ Timothy Tseng, "Foreword" in *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*, eds. DJ Chuang & Timothy Tseng (Washington, DC: L2 Foundation, 2006), iii.

theological proposal reflects much of the East/West essentializing that more recent Asian American evangelical theologians have sought to avoid, as she rebuffs the Cartesian framework that she asserts has informed most of Western theology, and as she promotes a holistic “Yinist theological paradigm for an Asian American Evangelical theology that is holistic, Asian, Celtic, and Evangelical, extending good news to all God’s creation.”³⁰

Perhaps the closest thing to a *Chinese* American evangelical theology is Samuel Ling’s *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things* (1999). Ling is a Hong-Kong-born Reformed evangelical, who spent significant time within the North American Chinese Christian context. He moved to the U.S. at the age of fourteen (1.5 generation Chinese American), received his undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the U.S., and was ordained to minister in the Presbyterian Church in America. His work, with its personal anecdotes and broad observations has something of the “grassroots theology” aesthetic that Simon Chan advocated years later. Looking ahead into the 21st century, Ling’s book called for revival within the Chinese American church for the sake of the church in America, as well as the worldwide church.

In *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things*, Ling summarized the history of Chinese Christianity from China to its overseas expressions. He also explored the notion of “Chineseness” from the perspectives of traditional Chinese history and culture. Then he moved to observations about Chinese American Christianity and the church. Drawing mostly from his own and others’ anecdotes, Ling noted the various dynamics at play such as individualism and collectivism or equality and deference. In light of the changing times, Ling then raised

³⁰ Young Lee Hertig, “Why Asian American Evangelical Theologies?” *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 7 (2005-2006): 21. “Yinist refers to the female energy in Daoism. This female energy is comprehensive because she compasses gendered, ecology, nature, health, and God. The *yin* is holistic, dynamic, synthesizing, and complementary with *yang*, the male energy. *Yinist* feminism, therefore, diffuses false sets of dichotomy deriving from the dualistic paradigm: male against female, human being against nature, god apart from human being, this world apart from the other world.” See Young Lee Hertig, “The Asian American Alternative to Feminism: A Yinist Paradigm,” *Missiology: Mission and Marginalization* 26, no. 1 (Jan 1998): 15-22; *The Tao of Asian American Belonging* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019).

questions that the next generation of Chinese American Christians needed to be prepared to answer. How would they navigate secularization, economic inequality, multiculturalism, technology, gender issues, and sexual ethics as Chinese American Christians? With both Chinese and American cultures undergoing constant change, Ling called Chinese American Christians to develop a theology of culture, a theology that takes cultural change into account with an attendant philosophy of ministry.³¹ However, no one has formally or explicitly or academically met Ling's call.

Two promising trajectories, however, have recently emerged that are relevant to Ling's concerns, though neither are an exact answer to his call. Daniel Lee, a Korean American who immigrated to the United States at a young age, utilizes Barth's theology and critiques more progressive Asian American theologies that have been tethered to liberationist agendas. He does this in his book *Double Particularity: Karl Barth, Contextuality, and Asian American Theology* (2017).³² Just as Barth simultaneously recognized the fluidity of identity boundaries and the Jewish flesh of Christ, Lee seeks to uphold the concreteness of the Asian American experience in the intersection of Asian heritage, migration experience, American culture, and racialization without essentializing or absolutizing a single Asian American experience into a stereotype. In Barth's dialectical and actualistic doctrine of revelation, Lee sees a way to affirm God's contextuality. And in Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, which views all creation and hence all cultures as participating in Christ's election and reprobation, Lee finds a nuanced grammar for both affirming and critiquing the Asian American cultural context.

While Ling engaged with Chinese American evangelical theology as a 1.5 generation Chinese American with Reformed and Kuyprian convictions, and Lee engages with Asian

³¹ Samuel Ling, *The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things* (San Gabriel, CA: China Horizon, 1999), 213-216.

³² Daniel Lee, *Double Particularity: Karl Barth, Contextuality, and Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

American evangelical theology as a 1.5 generation Korean American with Barthian convictions, Amos Yong engages Asian American evangelical theology as a 1.5 generation Chinese-Malaysian American with Pentecostal convictions. Yong is a Chinese-Malaysian American, who was born in Malaysia, yet predominantly raised and educated in the States. Yong's work in *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (2014) notes that most Asian American Christians are evangelical, and thus have imbibed the popularized and conservative theology of American evangelicals. He proposes that his Pentecostal theology, with its many tongues of Pentecost motif, its emphasis on religious experience, and its wide acceptance in the Majority World has much to offer for the development of Asian American theology. Whereas Lee critiqued progressive Asian American theologies of liberation, Yong critiques Asian American evangelicals and advocates a "pent-evangelical" theology.³³ Yong's work is, perhaps, the most relevant reflection by a Chinese American evangelical on how Asian American evangelicals, including Chinese Americans, might pursue a more contextualized evangelical theology, unbound by the trappings of white American culture.

Still, while Ling's initial work in *The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things* was a positive start toward a Chinese American evangelical theology, it was written two decades ago on the basis of anecdotes and personal experiences, and raised more questions than answers. Furthermore, while Lee and Yong have done excellent work advancing the conversation surrounding Asian American evangelical theology, an examination of the *Chinese* American evangelical context and a more constructive theological work from within this context are both due.

³³ Yong identifies with evangelicalism according to David Bebbington's quadrilateral consisting of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversion, and activism, while also identifying with pentecostalism, strongly supporting Donald Dayton's thesis that nineteenth-century American holiness movements, particularly in their social engagements, significantly contributed to the formation of 20th century evangelicalism. Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2014), 33-34.

III. Toward a Chinese American Evangelical Theology

Continuing in the Reformed footsteps of Samuel Ling, and heeding the direction proposed by Jeffrey Jue to pursue an Asian American evangelical theology resourced by the neo-Calvinist tradition – especially as it has been mediated in America through Geerhardus Vos and Cornelius Van Til – this thesis pursues a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. According to Jue, “the task of Asian American biblical...theology, is to communicate the supernatural revelation of God, as it has been revealed in redemptive history and recorded in the Bible, to a specific Asian American context with the goal of calling the reader/hearer to respond.”³⁴

As such, the main research question for this thesis is: Can the neo-Calvinist tradition provide resources for developing a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology? This includes three subsidiary questions:

1. What are the main contextual concerns for contemporary Chinese American evangelicals, and how can we understand and analyze these concerns theologically?
2. Given the important constructive work done by Amos Yong, in what ways can his Asian American pent-evangelical theology offer a starting point for addressing the aforementioned concerns of Chinese American evangelicals?
3. In what ways can the neo-Calvinist tradition, especially drawing from Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, and Cornelius Van Til further complement or supplement Amos Yong's attempt to address the contextual concerns of Chinese American evangelicals?

Hence, in light of Bevans' definition of contextual theology as a “dialogue” between the Christian theological past and the individual and contemporary-collective experience of

³⁴ Jeffrey K. Jue, “Asian American Theology: A Modern and Postmodern Dilemma” in DJ Chuang and Timothy Tseng (eds.), *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation* (Washington, DC: L2 Foundation, 2006), 114.

one's present context,³⁵ this thesis understands the dialogue that exists between Scripture and the church's tradition(s) and the Chinese American evangelical context as one of *analysis* and *theological application*. Methodologically, to develop a Chinese American evangelical theology is to consciously, intentionally, and theologically reflect upon the needs and concerns expressed within the Chinese American evangelical context. Hence, the methodology of this thesis differs from past Asian American theologies in that it does not seek to triangulate and isolate some theological components that are "Chinese," some that are "American," and some that are "evangelical," but rather it takes into account the broader Chinese American evangelical context as a whole hybridic context.

The goal of this exercise in contextual theology is to address the needs and concerns of this hybridic context with theological solutions, particularly as a practicing Chinese American evangelical myself, an insider with an emic voice. Even the use of the word "contextualization" is an expression of the language and terminology Asian American evangelicals have preferred to use, as opposed to inculturation, indigenization, or liberation. Though "[i]nculturation is arguably the most far-reaching of the three concepts [inculturation, indigenization, and contextualization], for it implies that the whole body of the Christian message, not just its external wrapping, needs to take flesh, become incarnate, in the patterns of thought, language, and symbols of a particular culture,"³⁶ contextualization is preferred because in its theological methodology it does not explicitly ascribe primacy to culture (as in inculturation), ecclesial establishment (as in indigenization), or politics (as in liberation). Contextualization places "context" more broadly conceived as encompassing the two poles of sociopolitical concerns and religiophilosophical traditions.³⁷

³⁵ Bevens, *Models of Contextual*, 5.

³⁶ Brian Stanley, "Inculturation: Historical Background, Theological Foundations and Contemporary Questions" *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (Jan 2007): 22

³⁷ This is how Alexander Chow conceives of the nature of "context" in his contribution to Chinese contextual theology. See Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment*, 16.

Hence, this exercise in contextual theology is not exclusively focused on the Chinese or American cultures, nor the evangelical church and subculture, nor racial politics. Rather, this contextual theology engages these issues in ways relevant to the actual and contemporary discourse of Chinese American evangelicals living out and discussing their faith and lives. Such discourse surely includes these various elements of culture, ecclesiology and politics, but never exclusively. In agreement with Simon Chan, “the lived theologies from the grassroots” must not be ignored by highly selective elitist theologians who gatekeep what can truly be called “Asian” or “Asian American” theology.³⁸

Thus, the methodology of this contextual theology consists of four steps. First, it begins with a socio-historical *analysis* of contemporary grassroots Chinese American evangelical context. This thesis begins by asking: “What factors (historical and sociological) have shaped Chinese American evangelicalism, and what theological orientation has resulted from such factors?” The analytical conclusion of Chapter One is that due to various historical and sociological factors, contemporary Chinese American evangelicals at the grassroots level have largely imbibed the theologies of popular and conservative American evangelicalism.

The second step is to heed emic voices within the Chinese American evangelical context and enumerate commonly discussed challenges and concerns. The question asked here is: “What are the challenges and concerns most commonly discussed by Chinese American evangelicals?” Chapter Two will draw on the academic voices of Chinese and relevant Asian American evangelical historians, theologians, and sociologists, but also the more anecdotal works of prominent and well-connected Chinese American evangelicals, who have evidenced a keen awareness of the Chinese American evangelical context. Such resources include the writings of Tom Lin, Greg Jao, and Jeanette Yep, blogs such as Fred Mok, DJ Chuang and Daniel Eng’s, and even observational data from the fast-growing

³⁸ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 24.

Facebook group “Progressive Asian American Christians,” led by Fuller graduate and Chinese American ex-evangelical, Liz Lin. Hence, in Chapter Two, various practical issues are raised ranging from the multi-lingual, multi-generational, and multi-cultural challenges Chinese churches face and the question of ethnic churches’ legitimacy in multi-ethnic contexts to contested conversations concerning mission, the problem of shame, and the challenge of engaging this present cultural moment and its pluralities.

The third step is to theologically *interpret* and *diagnose* these challenges and concerns. This third chapter will discern the theological roots underlying the challenges, concerns, and problems discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three seeks to demonstrate that the commonly raised challenges and concerns of Chapter Two are largely due to a lack of critical contextualization, as Chinese and Asian American evangelicals have often uncritically imitated the popular and conservative American evangelicalism that they have been most exposed to. This chapter highlights three major theological views that many Chinese American evangelicals have received and accepted from popular and conservative American evangelicalism: (1) a deficient theology of ethnicity, (2) a difficult dynamic of individualism and collectivism, and (3) an overly dualistic doctrine of creation. These three problematic trends within conservative American evangelical theology will set the agenda and serve as the starting point for how this thesis aims to constructively engage in a more contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology.

The final step is to consider and promote possible theological solutions and resources that might contextually address these three major issues caused by the former lack of critical contextualization. This will be explored in Chapters Four and Five, focused on two case studies of possible theological solutions. Both will focus on the three problematic theological views of ethnicity, individualism/collectivism, and creation and culture. Chapter Four will consider the Pentecostal theology of Chinese-Malaysian American theologian, Amos Yong.

Yong is an ideal theologian to consider because not only is he a Chinese American evangelical theologian, operating within an evangelical context as the dean of the School of Theology and the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary, but he has also published on the topic of Asian American evangelical theology. In addition to Yong's Pentecostal theology, or rather as an alternative, Chapter Five advances the neo-Calvinist tradition – mediated through Kuyper and Bavinck to Vos and Van Til – to resource a Chinese American evangelical theology. Hence, in this final step I endeavor to demonstrate how Yong's Pentecostal theology and my own neo-Calvinist theology can address the needs of Chinese American Christians looking for a more contextualized theology, putting the conservative Chinese American evangelical context, Yong's Pentecostalism, and my neo-Calvinism in dialogue.

Such a methodology respects the strengths of Bevans' six models of contextual theology, while leaning into the synthetic model, "a middle-of-the road model," which presupposes "the composite nature of the human context" and the ability for every culture to borrow and learn from others, while still remaining unique.³⁹ Utilizing a synthetic model respects Jonathan Tan's heuristic criterion for the development of Asian American theology. Tan suggests that an Asian American theological method involves: 1) deep empathy for Asian Americans that leads to commitment, service, and advocacy to Asian Americans, 2) prophetically speaking against assimilationist ideologies and racial/ethnic essentialisms, 3) engaging in strategic and situational ways of constructing theologies that empower Asian Americans in their engagement with their world in response to the challenges of hybridity and multiple contexts, 4) authenticity and credibility that are rooted in both the vertical dimension of the Christian gospel and the horizontal dimension of Asian American life

³⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 88-102.

experiences.⁴⁰ A synthetic model also aligns itself with Daniel Lee's Asian American Quadrilateral, which attempts to offer a helpful way of viewing the Asian American context through the distinctive and dynamic lenses of Asian heritage, migration, American culture, and racialization. As such, Lee's quadrilateral seeks to take the common concrete particularities of Asian Americans seriously without essentializing them.⁴¹

Choosing not to essentialize what it means to be a Chinese American or a Chinese American evangelical, this methodology still takes seriously the concerns of C.S. Song, Fumitaka Matsuoka, Peter Phan, Jung Young Lee, and Sang Hyun Lee, without allowing a narrow agenda of liberation or an absolutized notion of Chinese American-ness to dominate the whole contextual theology. The Western captivity of Chinese American evangelical theology is not ignored, nor are issues of liminality, marginality, politics and racial dynamics. By heeding the emic perspectives of not only scholars, but bloggers and social media voices, this thesis seeks to get as close to the grassroots of Chinese American evangelicalism as possible without doing the extensive ethnographic research that a true grassroots theology would require. Furthermore, this thesis follows the examples of Yong and Lee who unashamedly employ their own pentecostal and Barthian convictions, respectively. Hence, my neo-Calvinist theological convictions will be employed for the development of a Chinese American evangelical theology seeking to progress onward from Samuel Ling's own work and theological presuppositions, and in accordance with Jeffrey Jue's Vosian and Van Tillian proposal.

In summary, the academic material on exclusively Chinese American *theology*, evangelical or not, both with regard to its history and its positive construction, has only been touched upon in introductory ways. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the possibility of a

⁴⁰ Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 162-176.

⁴¹ Lee, *Double Particularity*, 5.

contextually Chinese American evangelical theology with the help and consideration of theological resources from Yong's Pentecostal theology, but more prominently from the neo-Calvinist tradition in order to address three major and problematic theological assumptions commonly found within popular and conservative American evangelicalism: a deficient theology of ethnicity, a disharmonious dynamic of individualism and collectivism, and a dualistic doctrine of creation.

CHAPTER ONE - Why Chinese American Christians are Predominantly Conservative Evangelicals: The Socio-Historical Context

I. Introduction

The aim of this first chapter is to explain and interpret the phenomenon of Chinese American Christianity based on secondary historical and social scientific research, and hence to establish the historical context out of which Chinese American evangelical theology has been practiced between 1950 and the present.

First, I will present the data and literature, which support the conclusion that Chinese American Christianity has taken on a predominantly evangelical orientation. Second, I will clarify what is meant by characterizing Chinese American Christianity as predominantly “evangelical.” Third, I will lay out the political and historical factors behind why Chinese American Christianity became theologically conservative and evangelical after the mid-20th century. By doing so, I hope to establish the prevalent Chinese American Christian ethos during this time period.

The main argument of this chapter is that from the mid-20th century into the 21st century the majority of Chinese American Christians have been conservatively evangelical in their theology because of 1) the political climate in China in 1949, 2) the mid-20th century religious climate in America, and 3) the combination of Chinese Christianity in Asia with the 1965 U.S. Immigration & Nationality Act.

II. Chinese American Christianity Today: Abundantly Evangelical

In one of the most recent sociological works on Chinese Americans, Jonathan Lee writes:

Christianity, with Evangelical Protestants as the predominant majority, is the most practiced religion among the Chinese immigrants in the United States. Christian churches have become the predominant religious institutions in the Chinese American community. Christianity, especially Evangelical Protestantism, has played an increasingly significant role in the lives of Chinese immigrants.⁴²

The statistics speak for themselves. From the 20th century to the 21st century, evangelical Protestantism, as opposed to what is normally described as mainline Protestantism,⁴³ has indeed become the most common expression of Chinese American Christianity.⁴⁴ In 2012 the Pew Research Center indicated that 41.9% of the Chinese Christians in America identified as evangelical versus Catholic (29%) and mainline (25.8%).⁴⁵ Sharon Wai-Man Chan's survey of Chinese churches in California also confirms this.⁴⁶ In 1996, Chan identified 173 Chinese Protestant churches in the Los Angeles Basin.⁴⁷ Only 20 of them (11.6%) belonged to mainline denominations.⁴⁸ Similarly, Carolyn Chen

⁴² Jonathan H. X. Lee, ed. *Chinese Americans: The History and Culture of a People*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2016), 241.

⁴³ In *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, William Hutchison notes that the term "mainline" is almost always used with reference to the following seven church denominations: the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ. Although non-evangelical Protestant churches may exist outside of these seven, "mainline" will largely be understood as referring to these "Seven Sisters of American Protestantism" in this thesis. Also, while self-identified evangelicals may be found in mainline churches, it will be assumed that the ethos of evangelical churches outside of mainline Protestantism best represents evangelicalism as a whole today. See William Hutchison, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-6.

⁴⁴ I am aware that there are those who identify as evangelicals within mainline churches and institutions and that therefore a strict bifurcation between evangelicalism and the mainline in America can be misleading. However, because of the mainline's openness to non-evangelical and liberal/modernist theological convictions, the distinction is helpful. For though some Chinese American Christians within mainline institutions identify as evangelicals, Chinese American evangelicals are best represented by the overwhelming majority of Chinese American Christians who worship outside of mainline churches, and often view mainline churches with theological suspicion.

⁴⁵ "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths," Pew Research Center (Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation), 19 July 2012, p. 4, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf> (accessed: May 4, 2016).

⁴⁶ California hosts 37.4% of the nation's Chinese Americans, according to the *U.S. Census Bureau, 2010: Chinese alone or in any combination (410-419) & (100-299) or (300, A01-Z99) or (400-999)*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey.

⁴⁷ Sharon Wai-Man Chan, "The Dynamics of Expansion of the Chinese Churches in the Los Angeles Basin" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996), 492-496.

⁴⁸ It is quite common that many Chinese churches in America that still belong to mainline denominations remain quite evangelical in their theological orientation and ethos.

counted 195 churches in Southern California in 2014.⁴⁹ Searching the online directories of the mainline denominations' "Seven Sisters" as recently as 2016, one will find less than 30 Chinese/Taiwanese mainline churches in Southern California, a mere 13.8% of the 195 Chinese churches in the region. In Harry Chuck and Timothy Tseng's 2008 Report on Chinese churches in the San Francisco Bay Area, only 32 out of 195 (16.4%) were mainline churches. Over a third of these 195 churches had no denominational affiliation, and yet hosted more than 50% of the San Francisco Bay Area's Chinese church attenders.⁵⁰

Related to evangelicalism's prevalence amongst Chinese American Christians, is the fact that most Chinese American Christians have also imbibed conservative Protestant convictions within conservative churches. This is evident in both denominational and non-denominational churches.⁵¹ For instance, the vast majority of the Chinese churches in America affirm the authority of Scripture with a tendency toward more literal interpretations, often with dispensationalist readings.⁵² Also, they affirm traditional views on gender and sexuality, could be characterized as exclusivists in their theology of religions, and also commonly prioritize evangelism over social activism in their mission philosophy. According to Yang Fenggang in 2002, "[t]he largest group of Chinese churches belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which claimed about 150 Chinese churches in 1995. The second largest is the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) with about 60 Chinese churches in

⁴⁹ Carolyn Chen, *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 27.

⁵⁰ James Chuck and Timothy Tseng, *The 2008 Report, the Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project, Phase II* (San Francisco: Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity, 2009), 184.

⁵¹ Most Chinese churches in America are non-denominational. Amongst DJ Chuang's list of the largest Chinese churches in the U.S., 16 out of 21 were non-denominational, with three being in the Southern Baptist Convention and two being in the Christian & Missionary Alliance. See DJ Chuang, "Largest Chinese churches in North America," *L2 Foundation* (website) <http://l2foundation.org/2007/largest-chinese-churches-in-north-america> (accessed July 11, 2016).

⁵² DJ Chuang, "How many Asian American Churches in the USA," *L2 Foundation* (website) <http://l2foundation.org/2009/how-many-asian-american-churches-in-the-usa> (accessed October 27, 2016).

the United States.”⁵³ Both the SBC and C&MA are recognized as conservative evangelical denominations. Neither ordain women nor affirm same-sex marriage, and both maintain exclusivist postures toward other religions. The C&MA even insists upon inerrancy and premillennialism.⁵⁴

While the SBC and C&MA’s Chinese churches account for less than a quarter of Chinese churches in America, similar theological convictions abound amongst the non-denominational Chinese churches in America too. In fact, the proliferation of non-denominational Chinese churches in America is not unrelated to the conservatism of Chinese American Christianity. Non-denominationalism in America is not only a symptom of America’s congregationalist history, but also of a conservative separatist tendency amongst American evangelicals. In keeping with their strong Biblicist tendency, it is common for Chinese Christians to reject the oversight and accountability of American denominations, in favor of local and autonomous non-denominational churches.⁵⁵ Such non-denominational Chinese churches seek to meet their own specific and felt needs in ways that denominational organizations have not.

Therefore, “conservative evangelicalism” best characterizes the theological orientation of Chinese American Christianity since the mid-20th century. This characterization is recognized and agreed upon by Chinese American evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Catholics alike.⁵⁶

⁵³ Fenggang Yang, “Chapter Three: Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America” in *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, eds. Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 88.

⁵⁴ In DJ Chuang’s list of the largest Chinese churches in America, 16 out of the 21 affirmed that the Bible was “without error” or “inerrant.” See DJ Chuang, “Largest Chinese churches in North America,” <http://12foundation.org/2007/largest-chinese-churches-in-north-america> (accessed July 11, 2016).

⁵⁵ Watchman Nee, Witness Lee, and the ‘Local Church’ are a more extreme example of this anti-denominational spirit.

⁵⁶ Timothy Tseng, “Protestantism in Twentieth Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13 (2004): 121–48; Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 7; Jonathan Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 146.

III. Explaining “Evangelical”

Because of its dynamic history and nature, “Evangelicalism” is a contested term and challenging to define, especially in contemporary political discourse. However, those who suggest that we abandon such an identification label are a minority.⁵⁷ The commonality found amongst the various definitions of “evangelical” is significant and on a practical level the prevalence of its usage remains. The Pew Research Center certainly finds it to be a helpful category of distinction between Catholic, Orthodox, Mainline, and other Christians in America. In Pew’s 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, Evangelical Protestants were the largest religious group.⁵⁸

But what *is* “evangelicalism”? No definition of “evangelicalism” has garnered more popularity than Bebbington’s quadrilateral: Biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism.⁵⁹ Perhaps it is because the vast majority of other definitions quite easily fit within this simple and memorable quadrilateral in one way or another.⁶⁰ Others, such as Brian Stanley, would not necessarily disagree with the quadrilateral, but focus their definitions less on describing convictions, commitments, or values, and more on evangelicalism as a distinctive movement and a contextual response to a particular historical moment. For

⁵⁷ For such minority views see Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, eds. Donald W. Dayton & Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), Michael Horton, “The Battle over the Label ‘Evangelical,’” *Modern Reformation* 10, no. 2 (March/April 2001): 16, and D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 16.

⁵⁸ 25.4% of the nation’s population, and therefore, 35.9% of the nation’s Christians. The next largest group were the Unaffiliated (religious “nones”) at 22.8% of the population. See “2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> (accessed May 28, 2016).

⁵⁹ Biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, & activism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, George M. Marsden, “Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix-x, Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Books, 1995), 51, and Timothy Larsen, “Chapter 1 - Defining and Locating Evangelicalism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

instance, Stanley describes evangelicalism as the contextual response of Protestants seeking to distinguish themselves from nominal Protestants by emphasizing “the bare rudiments of Christian doctrine and vocabulary [to make] possible the verbal proclamation of the gospel” to all.⁶¹ Such definitions, as offered by Stanley or Douglas Sweeney,⁶² helpfully locate definitions (such as Bebbington’s quadrilateral) more specifically in a certain historical context.

Then there are those who add a further layer to the definition of evangelical, by describing the behavior or disposition of the evangelical subculture. Most famously, George Marsden defined evangelicals as “anyone who likes Billy Graham.”⁶³ Molly Worthen describes evangelicals as united by an anxious crisis of authority over how to know Jesus, reconcile faith and reason, and express their faith in modernity.⁶⁴ Christian Smith helpfully describes evangelicals as constituting a distinctive subculture, which strategically negotiates its Protestant identity “by reformulating the way its constructed orthodoxy engages the changing sociocultural environment it confronts.”⁶⁵ And Noll defines American evangelicalism as “culturally adaptive biblical experimentalism.”⁶⁶ This significantly opens up the definition of evangelicalism for the future in that it is “culturally adaptive” and “experimental,” yet also demarcates evangelicalism’s boundaries in that it seeks to be “biblical”. Hence, evangelical theology is Protestant theology that claims its locus and absolute ground in Scripture (in line with the “Biblicism” of Bebbington’s quadrilateral),

⁶¹ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 11-12.

⁶² “[A] movement of orthodox Protestants with an eighteenth-century twist.” Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 24.

⁶³ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 6.

⁶⁴ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 6.

⁶⁵ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 143-144.

⁶⁶ Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 2.

traces its distinctive historical roots to the 18th and 19th centuries' pietistic, gospel-preaching revivalist eras (in line with the "conversionism" and "crucicentrism" of the quadrilateral), and has continually sought to engage the wider culture (in line with the quadrilateral's "activism") on the basis of Scriptural authority (hence "Biblicism" again for good measure).

All such layers and definitions apply to Chinese American evangelicals in one way or another. But for our purposes, further specification is still required. When I speak of Chinese American evangelicalism between the mid-20th century and the present, 18th and 19th century evangelicalism is less in view than mid-20th century evangelicalism. Mid-20th century evangelicalism hosted the neo-evangelical movement, which was to be distinguished from separatist fundamentalism, yet still maintained a basically conservative theological orientation, grounded in the "fundamentals of the faith."⁶⁷ Chinese American evangelicalism generally embodies this understanding of American evangelicalism, for within it both fundamentalist and neo-evangelical churches and Christians exist.

Still, a further specification is necessary when speaking about Chinese American evangelicals in the context of post-1960s American evangelicalism. Since the 1970s, a discernible theological and dispositional fissure has grown within American evangelicalism between conservative and progressive evangelicals.⁶⁸ Progressive evangelicals are often more inclined to embrace the authority of Scripture without the doctrine of inerrancy and they also commonly reject foundationalist epistemologies. Progressive evangelicals demonstrate

⁶⁷ 1) Bible is literally true and without error or contradiction; 2) Virgin Birth & Deity of Christ; 3) Substitutionary Atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross; 4) Bodily Resurrection of Jesus on the third day from the grave & his Physical Return; 5) Authenticity of Jesus' Miracles.

⁶⁸ In the 1970s, evangelicals were challenged to respond to increased civil rights, feminist, and environmental concerns and to revisit the doctrine of Scripture debate among a host of other issues. Hence, Jim Wallis founded Sojourners as an evangelical committed to social justice in 1971. Also in 1971, Fuller Theological Seminary decided to move away from inerrancy language in its doctrinal statement. Then in 1974, the Lausanne Movement began, in which evangelicals, such as Billy Graham, sought to reframe Christian mission and advanced "holistic mission," which included social justice. By 1987, Christians for Biblical Equality was founded by evangelicals, such as Stanley Gundry and Roger Nicole, to advance Christian egalitarianism against traditional gender roles. See Steven Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9-59.

significant enthusiasm for the notion of contextual theology and are generally less likely to be combative toward liberal, and even non-Protestant, Christian traditions. They are generally more sympathetic toward egalitarian gender roles, and are often open to re-thinking traditional sexual ethics, an exclusivist theology of religions, and the role of social justice in the church's mission, especially as it pertains to issues of race. Overall, they are more open and accepting of Western society's dominant and increasingly secular culture. Conservative evangelicals, on the other hand, are more inclined to embrace the doctrine of inerrancy, literal interpretation, complementarian gender roles, traditional sexual ethics, an exclusivist theology of religions, and to prioritize evangelism in the church's mission. It is not uncommon for conservative evangelicals to view race discussions as of secondary importance, and a distraction to the gospel. Many continue to maintain foundationalist epistemologies, and view the notion of contextual theology with far more suspicion and caution than the progressive evangelicals do. Regarding Western culture, conservative evangelicals still strongly resonate with the more critical posture of their evangelical ancestors toward the rising secularization of Western culture. For this reason, Roger Olson's term, "postconservative evangelical," has found much currency in the current evangelical context with its growing cadre of progressives.⁶⁹ And yet, most Chinese American Christians do not identify with the progressive or postconservative evangelicals. The aim of this chapter, then, is not only to explain how Chinese American Christianity between the mid 1900s and the present became evangelical, but also to explain how it became squarely situated within "*conservative* evangelicalism."

Though not using the term "conservative evangelical," Harriet Harris, David Wells, and John Woodbridge all have this in mind when they write of evangelicalism. However,

⁶⁹ Roger Olson, *How to be an Evangelical Without Being Conservative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); *Reformed and Always Reforming: the Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

whereas Harriet Harris ascribes negative value to such a “Biblicist” evangelical identity for its “fundamentalist mentality,”⁷⁰ Wells and Woodbridge quite positively value evangelicalism as that which reaffirms the simple and profound truths of “primitive, biblical Christianity.”⁷¹ This position, as articulated by Wells and Woodbridge, best encapsulates the majority view amongst Chinese American Christians in the latter half of the 21st century. To them, evangelicalism is simply orthodoxy. Thus, most Chinese American Christians have been happy to identify with not only evangelicalism, but conservative evangelicalism. In fact, not only do many Chinese American Christians cherish their evangelical identity, but they have often fought to protect it and more clearly define it against what they perceived to be the “impurities” of other traditions, such as those found in the mainline. But how did Chinese American Christianity become this way?

IV. How Chinese American Christianity Became Distinctly Conservative & Evangelical

In view of the consensus over the conservative evangelical orientation of Chinese American Christians and having explained in what sense they are predominantly “evangelical,” it is time to explore how this came to be. This section will consider the historical and social factors that have shaped Chinese American Christianity toward a predominantly Chinese American evangelicalism with significant dependence upon the works of historians Timothy Tseng and Daniel Bays, and sociologist Fenggang Yang. The four most significant historical and sociological factors behind the prevalent Chinese American evangelical orientation include: 1) the political climate in China in 1949, 2) the

⁷⁰ Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 180.

⁷¹ David F. Wells & John D. Woodbridge, eds. *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 18-19.

mid-20th century American religious climate, 3) the shape of Chinese Diasporic Christianity in Asia, and 4) the United States' 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act.

IV.A. China's Political Climate: Contextual Theologies Before & After 1949

IV.A.1. Chinese American Christianity: Pre-1949 Contextual Theology

While Protestant missionaries were seeking to “win” Chinese souls in China in the early 19th century, so also were they seeking to “win” them in America as early as the mid-19th century. In the mid-19th century there was no fundamentalist-modernist, nor evangelical-mainline divide in the Protestant churches. Chinese American Christianity, though predominantly existing outside of the mainline today, actually began in the mainline Protestant churches.

Protestant missions to the Chinese in the U.S. began almost as soon as the first immigrants arrived, mostly from the Canton province of China. They sought opportunities and work in the mines or as merchants on the Pacific Coast. As the labor unions bemoaned the “job-stealing” Chinese immigrants and anti-Chinese sentiment increased, particularly in the Western and Southern states toward the late 19th century, American Protestants, “enmeshed in a milieu of missionary and anti-slavery sentiment,” compassionately moved toward the Chinese immigrants as mission targets.⁷² A mission house was established by the Presbyterian Missions Board to reach the Chinese in San Francisco as early as 1853. It is currently known as the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown, the oldest Asian American church in North America. Their goal was to facilitate the Chinese immigrants' assimilation into American life through Christian conversion.⁷³

⁷² Timothy Tseng, “Ministry At Arm's Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952,” PhD diss., (Union Theological Seminary, 1994), 23.

⁷³ Wesley Woo, “Presbyterian Mission: Christianizing and Civilizing the Chinese in Nineteenth Century CA,” *American Presbyterians* 68, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 167–178.

However, until the mid-20th century, very few Chinese people in America converted to Christianity. Even those who were Christians maintained a strong sense of Chinese nationalism until the Communist victory in 1949. Suffering from the West's strong backlash against the Boxer Rebellion and seeing the Qing dynasty overthrown, the Chinese sought their nation's modernization in the early 20th century. Hence, as Tseng argues, the Chinese people began to explore which religions might prove most socially and politically relevant for the New China that they so desired.⁷⁴ Christianity appeared to be a top option, especially considering the Christian faith of Republic of China leaders, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek.

This sentiment is well-illustrated in the Chinese Students Christian Association of North America (CSCA). As the 1909 Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program allocated money to support Chinese students in America, the CSCA, an independent organization largely funded by the YMCA, was established to evangelize Chinese students. In many ways, this group of educated Chinese Christians in America, embodied the Chinese hope for a new and modern China.⁷⁵ Its existence (1909-1951) roughly paralleled both the Republic of China (1911-1949) and the final years of mainline Protestantism's cultural dominance in America (1950s).⁷⁶ These two parallels would prove to be of great significance in the shaping of Chinese American Christianity.

Although Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek were Christians, China prioritized its national modernization and sought to subordinate Protestantism to the state. This meant that Chinese Protestants, both in China and in America, either had to subordinate "their transnational universalizing religious commitments to the interest of the nation-state or they

⁷⁴ Timothy Tseng, "Religious Liberalism, International Politics, and Diasporic Realities: The Chinese Students Christian Association of North America, 1909-1951," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 5, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 1996): 305.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁷⁶ Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 11-39

would be cut off from social respectability and political relevance.”⁷⁷ Hence, when some Christian students from China entered America with the evangelical fervor that characterized much of Christianity in China, they encountered intellectual skepticism in the American academy, racism, and pressure from their homeland to make their Christian faiths particularly relevant for a modern China. Theologically, Tseng argues, liberal Protestantism seemed to offer the best contextual resource for these CSCA students.

It is important, however, to note that at the CSCA’s birth it could very much have been described as “evangelical,” particularly in its piety and desire to evangelize. Tseng describes its evangelical character by highlighting the universalizing evangelical tendency, which preferred to view the world through a binary “Christian vs. non-Christian” lens. Overall the CSCA was more ambivalent toward the value of traditional Chinese culture for Christianity, and hardly considered the Western-ness of the Christianity that they were accepting.⁷⁸ Yet, China’s nationalist call for modernization led the CSCA to adopt liberal Christian convictions in the 1920s. According to modernist standards they believed such theology to be more scientifically credible. Instead of their original evangelical convictions, they emphasized Chinese nationalism. When nationalism became the CSCA’s number one priority, a handful of conservative Chinese Christian students left the CSCA for fundamentalist organizations and the CSCA eventually opened themselves to non-Christian leadership.

As evidenced by the shift in the CSCA, liberal Protestant theology was better suited to subordinate itself to the central concern of the Chinese Christians in America. Until 1949 the Republic of China remained central to the Chinese Christian identity. Yet neither Chinese nationalism nor liberal theology would maintain its attractiveness to Chinese Americans for

⁷⁷ Tseng, “Religious Liberalism, International Politics, and Diasporic Realities,” 309.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

long. The authoritative standards of modernism and the liberal theology that failed to prevent two World Wars, would also prove insufficient to establish a new modern China. Chinese nationalism became quite a contested concept for the Chinese, particularly when the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) forced them to choose sides between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CPC). By the 1949 Communist victory in China, the Chinese nationalist hope that liberal and modernist Protestant theology might help modernize and save China was shattered.

IV.A.2. Chinese American Christianity: Post-1949 Contextual Theology

The intense nationalist fervor and state-centered Chinese identity that once existed amongst the Chinese Diaspora were no more. While many students in China opposed Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT, the Chinese Diaspora tended to support the KMT, which fled to Taiwan after its defeat. Even then, the center of Chinese identity did not solely rest in Taiwan. For even the KMT committed distasteful acts in an attempt to control Diasporic Chinese communities. The Chinese could no longer look to the state to define the Chinese identity. Rather, they looked to their collectively shared culture.⁷⁹ Yang and Tseng helpfully demonstrate that many answers to the question: “What does it mean to be Chinese in the modern world?” were to be found *outside* of the nation-state of China by 1949.⁸⁰

In light of these factors, especially the 1949 Communist victory in China, Tseng proposes that the identity confusion caused by such turbulent 20th century events was what has most significantly led to the conservative evangelical orientation of Chinese American Christianity, which originally began in the mainline tradition.⁸¹ He writes: “From the ashes of

⁷⁹ Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *MIT Press* 8, no. 4 (2005): 145-167.

⁸⁰ Tseng, “Religious Liberalism, International Politics, and Diasporic Realities,” 324; Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 7; Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 55.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 305–30; Timothy Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism” in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, ed. Jane Iwamura & Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2003), 241–71; Tseng, “Protestantism in Twentieth Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” 121–48.

failed religious nationalism a vibrant young cohort of evangelicals emerged who pinned their hopes on the Chinese Diaspora rather than China for their vision of the future of Chinese Protestantism.”⁸² Therefore, not only did Chinese people shift from having a state-centered Chinese identity to a culture-centered identity, but also from seeing the center of Chinese Christianity in China to seeing it in the Chinese Diaspora. The Chinese Diaspora entrusted neither the essence of the Chinese culture, nor the locus of Chinese Christianity into the hands of the Communist People’s Republic of China. This is not to say that Christianity in China after the Communist takeover was not vibrant. Christianity in China not only survived, but flourished. However, by 1949 many Chinese became pessimistic about the future of China, and many Chinese Christians could not safely look to China as a suitable place to freely practice their faith. Freedom of religion was not going to be found in China at the moment like it could be found in the Diaspora, particularly in the U.S.

The 1949 Communist victory in China profoundly impacted the American posture toward the Chinese people in America. During the Cold War the U.S was intensely suspicious of China, who not only succumbed to communism, but sided with Russia and North Korea in the Korean War. Thousands of Chinese Americans were interrogated by the U.S. State Department and Immigration Service. Consequently, as Xiaojian Zhao writes, “No leftist groups survived and thousands of Chinese Americans lived in fear.”⁸³ The U.S. had lost interest and hope for China, and any support for that Communist nation was viewed with extreme suspicion. This meant that the civic life of Chinese Americans, which largely centered around a concern for the nation of China, received far less sympathy in the United States. Hence, Timothy Tseng writes: “Chinese evangelical separatists felt that staying clear of politics was the wiser course of action for Chinese in the United States and the Chinese

⁸² Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions,” 258.

⁸³ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 152.

Diaspora. By rejecting entanglement with Sino-American politics or mainline Protestantism, Chinese evangelicals were free to create indigenous expressions of Chinese Christian identity.”⁸⁴

As many Chinese Christians were seeking an identity and a free place to express their faiths, they began to embrace evangelical Christianity. Tseng argues: “During the Cold War years, evangelicalism became the religious expression best suited for the Chinese in the United States and the wider Diaspora.”⁸⁵ In particular, Tseng highlights the attractiveness of the more separatist and even fundamentalist spectrum of evangelicalism. Rather than continuing their interest in politics, many Chinese Christians began to focus on building congregations and organizations that reinforced a more generic evangelical identity. Ignoring political distinctions and identities in favour of a universalized “evangelical” or “Christian” identity allowed Chinese Christians in the Diaspora to bond as Chinese Christians. Evangelical Christianity, with its particular emphasis on absolute truth, one’s true heavenly home, and a present world-denying ethic, gave Chinese Christians something absolute and universal to hold onto together.

In summary, while the nationalist political climate in China provided a more attractive context for liberal Protestant theology during the first half of the 20th-century, the post-1949 political climate provided a more attractive context for conservative evangelical theology.

⁸⁴ Tseng, “Protestantism in Twentieth Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” 123.

⁸⁵ Tseng, “Religious Liberalism, International Politics, and Diasporic Realities: The Chinese Students Christian Association of North America, 1909-1951,” 122.

IV.B. Mid-20th Century U.S. Religious Climate: Primed for Chinese American Evangelicalism

IV.B.1. Mainline Decline & Evangelical Surge: The Liberal/Conservative Fissure

In the mid-20th century the American religious climate was beginning to shift in two ways that would pave the way for the “evangelicalization” of Chinese American Christianity. Most important was a shift in Christian identification amongst American Protestants, such that by the 1970s, evangelicalism had become the most common form of Christianity that American Protestants identified with. America in the 1940s, was witnessing early signs of its evangelical resurgence.⁸⁶ In 1972, Dean Kelley helpfully illustrated the mainline’s membership peak in the 1950s and its decline from the 1967 onward. He also observed the growth of conservative churches since the 1950s.⁸⁷ Robert Wuthnow argues that this was a result of the declining American denominationalism in the mid-20th century and the proliferation of special purpose groups, which ended up redrawing the lines and distinctions amongst Protestants. Similar to James Davison Hunter’s thesis in *Culture Wars*,⁸⁸ Wuthnow argues that these new lines were drawn both inside and outside of denominations between liberals and conservatives. He further argues that as the lines were being redrawn amongst Protestants, the mainline moved to the left, while the conservatives utilized special purpose groups and the media, resulting in an evangelical majority amongst American Protestants.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ The founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), the National Religious Broadcasters (1944), the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association (1945), the National Sunday School Association (1946), the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (1947), Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), the National Association of Christian Schools (1947), the start of Billy Graham’s Crusades (1947), and the Evangelical Theological Society (1949).

⁸⁷ Dean Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1977).

⁸⁸ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁸⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

IV.B.2. Mainline Home Mission Strategy: Assimilationist Racial Ideology

Secondly, there was a shift in the mainline Protestant mission strategy. The mainline denominations were increasingly losing interest in their home missions to the Chinese. While they once hoped missions to the Chinese in America would open doors to missions to the Chinese in China, the Communist takeover in China crushed this dream. Additionally, a survey of the Chinese congregations sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States indicated that only about 10% of the Chinese in the U.S. were Christians, only a few of the Chinese churches in America were self-supporting, few were very influential in the Chinese communities, most were poorly resourced and ineffective, and after three generations of being in America, less than 20% of the Chinese ministers were American-born because Christian work was not appealing to Chinese American Christians.⁹⁰ Overall, home missions amongst the Chinese appeared rather unfruitful.

Futhermore, mainline Protestants began to advocate assimilation and racial “integration” in the 1950s. This push for assimilation was not with malicious intent, as if they planned for the harmful effects of the “model minority” myth. Rather, Tseng argues, in his PhD dissertation, “Ministry At Arm’s Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952,” that the mainline Protestants believed in the assimilation of Asian Americans and argued for it to resist anti-Asian American sentiment in America. Still, this emphasis on assimilation and integration led them to believe that separate ethnic churches were undesirable and temporary at best. The mainline began to eliminate ethnic specific programs from their mission work with the expectation of hastening Asian integration. Based on their experiences with European immigration, many Protestants believed that Asian assimilation, and perhaps also Christianization, was only a matter of time.

⁹⁰ Wilburn Wong Yan Choy, “Survey Needs of Christian Chinese: Conference in San Francisco Discusses How Minority U.S. Churches Can Serve Changing Community.” *The Christian Century* 72, no. 24 (June 15, 1955): 712.

As Joseph Healey writes, “Contrary to the melting pot image, assimilation in the United States generally has been a coercive and largely one-sided process better described by the terms Americanization or Anglo-conformity.”⁹¹

Add to this the severely limiting Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Immigration Act of 1924, which banned all immigration from Asia until 1943, and it appeared that the Chinese and their American-born children would really have hardly any choice but to assimilate. In *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century*, Derek Chang examines and discusses this assimilationist movement within the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, and describes it as an “[e]vangelical nationalism [which] provided a comprehensive vision of America’s exceptional and providential destiny as a Christian nation.”⁹²

However, the mainline churches’ integration scheme was not matched with equal opportunity for Chinese Americans, as “Chinese American seminary graduates found few pastoral positions in mainline Protestant affiliated congregations.”⁹³ For the many Chinese American Christians who wanted to maintain their ethnic congregations, the mainline Protestant churches suddenly became an unfriendly place within an already unfriendly American society, where discrimination and racism were still very much a part of the Chinese American experience. Although a handful of Chinese Americans, such as those in the National Conference of Chinese Churches (CONFAB),⁹⁴ stayed in the mainline and sought unity amongst Chinese American Protestants both inside and outside of the mainline, the

⁹¹ Joseph Healey, *Diversity and Society: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2010), 49.

⁹² Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 21.

⁹³ Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism” in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, 252.

⁹⁴ Timothy Tseng, “Protestantism in Twentieth-Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism on the Chinese Diaspora,” 125-131.

stage was set for the establishment of a dominant Chinese American evangelicalism to thrive primarily outside of the mainline tradition.

IV.B.3. Beginnings of Chinese American Churches Outside of the Mainline

Thus far, the focus has been on Chinese immigrants and students with mainline loyalties and nationalist motivations.⁹⁵ What also needs to be considered, however, are those Chinese American Protestant Christians, particularly the ABCs (American Born Chinese), whose entire Christian experience lay outside of the mainline denominations. Yes, a number of Chinese American Christians left the “impure” mainline tradition and rejected liberal theology to preserve their Chinese identities in Chinese evangelical churches, or because the mainline lost its focus by overemphasizing a social gospel and lacked religious zeal with its cold and rationalistic sermons. However, for many ABC evangelicals, a transition from the mainline churches simply never took place. Since the 1950s, it became increasingly common for evangelicalism to be the main expression of Christianity that most Chinese American Christians would be acquainted with. The mainline Protestant denominations, which tolerated liberal theology, were no longer the only options for Chinese Protestants seeking to attend churches in America. Almost as soon as the Chinese hope in liberal theology was shattered, Chinese churches, swept up in the evangelical resurgence, were being planted.⁹⁶

The post-WWII era was distinctively shaping Chinese American Christianity. By the 1940s, the Chinese Exclusion Acts were repealed when China and the U.S. became allies during WWII with the Magnusson Act of 1943.⁹⁷ As a result of this repeal and the War Brides Act (1945) and the Alien Fiancées and Fiancés Act (1946),⁹⁸ Chinese American

⁹⁵ For example, the CSCA was a ministry which targeted students from China studying in the U.S., rather than American-born Chinese.

⁹⁶ For example, First Chinese Southern Baptist Church in San Francisco (1950), First Chinese Baptist Church Los Angeles (1952), Chinese Community Church of San Francisco (1954), and Bay Area Chinese Bible Church (1956).

⁹⁷ Though Chinese immigration was still severely restricted by a quota system.

⁹⁸ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, 78-93.

families became a viable possibility and the population of 2nd generation ABCs came to outnumber the immigrant population until the 1980s.⁹⁹ The Chinese American community was beginning to transition from being a bachelor society who longed for home in the motherland, to a family society that sought to raise families and establish themselves in their new home, the United States.¹⁰⁰

It was not without effect that just as soon as the ABCs became the majority of the Chinese population in the U.S., and just as soon as the Chinese American community turned its focus toward establishing families, American Christianity was witnessing a popular evangelical resurgence. The effect was the “evangelicalization” of Chinese American Christianity.

This effect could also be seen in the establishment of predominantly English-speaking evangelical Chinese American churches. A good example of this is the Chinese Bible Mission (CBM), started by Rev. Sen Wong (1929-2014) in the Bay Area of Northern California in 1952. Born in Guangzhou, Wong moved to Idaho with his family when he was about 8 years old and converted to a conservative Baptist faith at Roswell Baptist Church, which was across the street from his home. Hoping to be a missionary to China, Wong enrolled in Multnomah Bible School because of their motto: “If it’s the Bible you want, then you want Multnomah!” Wong’s heroes included J. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission, his pastor, Daniel Hager of the Northwest Conservative Baptist Association, and Ezra Gerig, a radio preacher affiliated with the Baptist General Conference.¹⁰¹ Needless to say, Wong’s theological upbringing was overwhelmingly evangelical, conservative and Baptist, and such has been the shape of CBM.

⁹⁹ Sharon M. Lee, “Asian Americans: Diverse and Growing,” *Population Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (June 1998): 13.

¹⁰⁰ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America*, 126-151.

¹⁰¹ Personal Interview (via email) with June Wong, wife of the late Sen Wong, 9 January 2016 to 31 January 2016.

When the first CBM church was planted in 1956, there were fifteen Chinese churches in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁰² Two of the fifteen were conservative and evangelical, yet they differed from the CBM churches in that they separated from the mainline (they both separated from First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco of the American Baptist Churches USA), traced their roots to the indigenous Chinese Baptist movement in Guangzhou, and sought to reach Chinese speakers in San Francisco and Oakland's Chinatowns.¹⁰³ CBM, however, was a reflection of Wong's heart to reach English-speaking ABCs. From 1956 to 2008, there were nine CBM church plants. The first church plant, Bay Area Chinese Bible Church (1956), which began in Wong's Oakland home with a small group of neighbourhood children and a few young people, now hosts approximately 1100 in weekly attendance.¹⁰⁴

These CBM churches, and a few other conservative evangelical Chinese churches in the San Francisco Bay Area have also conducted a summer camp (CBM camp) for junior high and high school students. CBM camp began in 1957 with CBM's first church plant, but has since grown to include twelve to fourteen Chinese churches from the San Francisco Bay Area and annually attracts around 450 students. At CBM camp students are challenged to "receive Christ" or rededicate themselves to him in good evangelical fashion.¹⁰⁵ CBM and the handful of Chinese evangelical youth conferences, helpfully demonstrate that by the 1950s there were already ABC children growing up in Chinese evangelical churches, which never had any affiliation with the historic mission boards of the mainline Protestant churches.

¹⁰² James Chuck and Timothy Tseng, *The 2008 Report, the Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project, Phase II*, 2.

¹⁰³ Chinese Independent Baptist Church San Francisco, History (<http://cibcsf.org/history/>) (accessed May 30, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ James Chuck and Timothy Tseng, *The 2008 Report, the Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project, Phase II*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ Chinese Bible Mission Bay Area, Ministries (<http://www.cbm-bayarea.org/Site/ministry/youth-camps.html>) (accessed May 30, 2016).

In addition to these newly formed Chinese American evangelical churches, one should also note the numerous Chinese American evangelical networks and parachurch organizations that Chinese evangelical immigrants to America have established. They have also significantly contributed to the evangelical orientation of Chinese American Christianity. Ambassadors for Christ (AFC) began from a meeting of a few Chinese Christians in 1956 who desired to evangelize Chinese students in the United States. AFC was officially founded in 1963 and has established campus ministries in Dallas, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and even Europe.¹⁰⁶ In addition to campus ministry, AFC is also involved with Christian literature ministries and has held a very influential triennial Chinese Mission Convention since 1983, where thousands of Chinese dedicate themselves to missions.

Another such organization is the Chinese Christian Mission, which was founded by Thomas Wang in 1961 as a humble literature ministry. It has since become a multi-faceted mission organization, centered in Detroit, yet with ministry outposts in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada, Macau, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁰⁷ There is also the Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE), born out of the North American Congress of Chinese Evangelicals (NACOCE) in 1978. FACE sought to maintain conservative evangelical convictions and cultivate ABC church leadership.¹⁰⁸ Such organizations, started by Chinese Christians in America, evidence the success of Chinese American evangelicalism apart from the financial and institutional support of Western missionaries or mainline denominations. Tseng writes: “Insofar as they provide practical

¹⁰⁶ Ambassadors for Christ, “About AFC,” <http://www.afcinc.org/en-us/aboutafc.aspx?articleID=308> (accessed May 25, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Chinese Christian Mission, “A Brief History,” http://ccmusa.org/engl/aboutus/history_en.aspx (accessed May 25, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Tseng, “Protestantism in Twentieth Century Chinese America: The Impact of Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” 141.

resources for pastors and lay leaders and prod congregations to step outside the narrow confines of their own cultural niches, they function much like denominations.”¹⁰⁹

In short, the neo-evangelical movement of the mid-20th century, in combination with the mainline’s loss of interest in missions to the Chinese in America, proved fertile soil for Chinese American evangelicalism. While the focus on missions to the Chinese in America was abandoned by the mainline, the Chinese in America were beginning to make themselves at home and to raise Chinese American families. Hence, the phenomenon of ABC evangelicalism was born, and its vitality has continued into the 21st century.

IV.C. Chinese Christianity Abroad & the 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act

When America opened its doors to large numbers of Asian immigrants in 1965, many Christian immigrants from the Chinese Diaspora brought their conservative and evangelical Christianity to America, adding significantly to the already growing number of Chinese American evangelicals. This section surveys the conservative evangelical impulse latent within Chinese Christianity since the time of Robert Morrison in the 19th century. This section also connects this evangelical impulse to Chinese American Christianity’s evangelical orientation from the mid-20th century onward.

IV.C.1. Chinese Christianity Abroad

Christianity in China and amongst the Chinese Diaspora in Asia was not lacking in conservative influences. Daniel Bays describes Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, as having an “evangelical enthusiasm for missions.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, Morrison’s diligent and disciplined commitment to Bible translation in China also reflected his evangelical spirit. In fact, the Protestant missionaries to China during their first hundred

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁰ Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 43.

years also held to a conservative evangelical theory of missions in the mid-19th century. Bays notes that for these missionaries, it was “more important to preach the Gospel than to educate or heal non-Christian peoples (though they did not oppose the latter).”¹¹¹ Hence, the earliest Protestant missionaries predominantly upheld what we might today call “biblicist” and “exclusivist”¹¹² convictions, with an emphasis on conversion, all the way to 1907. This evangelical and theologically conservative impulse can also be traced through the remarkable influence of faith missions. J. Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission, the largest Protestant mission in China, in tandem with the premillennial push for missions, and the Student Volunteer Movement¹¹³ all contributed to a lively and dynamic force of conservative Protestant missionaries to China.

After the fall of the Qing dynasty, China sensed its need for modernization and suddenly it became open to the modernized West, which included a significantly increased interest in Christianity.¹¹⁴ “Many Chinese Christians saw Christianity as the answer to China’s national dilemma of weakness and underdevelopment” and it also offered “a personal religious identity.”¹¹⁵ Chinese conversion finally began to pick up steam. It was not long, however, until the divisive American Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy found its way into China. In 1927 when the more liberal Church of Christ in China coalition was established, the C&MA, CIM, major Lutheran bodies and Southern Baptists refused to join. Also, the conservatives left many of the seminaries in China, and set up a number of fundamentalist ones, the most important being: North China Theological Seminary (NCTS).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹² Exclusivism is the view that only within the Christian faith can the truth of God’s offer of salvation be found. See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

¹¹³ Dana L. Robert, “‘The Crisis of Missions’: Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter & Wilbert R. Shenk, 29-46 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

¹¹⁴ Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21-24.

¹¹⁵ Daniel H. Bays, “Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, eds. Edith L. Blumhofer & Randall Balmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 162.

In the 1920s and 1930s, NCTS had more students than any other seminary in China.¹¹⁶ In fact, by 1929, fifty delegates convened at North China Theological Seminary to organize a League of Christian Churches “upon a sound, evangelical creedal basis.”¹¹⁷ In summary, while the mainstream denominational missions maintained control of the majority of Protestant institutions (church buildings, schools, and medical clinics), the fastest growing groups were the Southern Baptists, evangelical Scandinavian groups, CIM, and holiness and higher life groups such as the C&MA.

While the conservatives grew as they fervently fought the forces of modernism, the liberals slowed down to rethink missions at the end of the 1920s. Pearl S. Buck’s “Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?” speech and the “Re-Thinking Missions” project advocated an overhaul of missionary thinking on issues, such as Christianity’s exclusivity.¹¹⁸ To many it would have seemed that the Protestant missionary enterprise in China was about to end. Grant Wacker writes: “For the better part of a century—from the 1880s through the 1940s—liberals were in the business of seeking and offering second opinions on almost every aspect of evangelical Protestant thought. And nowhere was that more true than in regard to the evangelical view of foreign missions.”¹¹⁹ However, evangelical missions continued to grow. CIM adapted especially well and even added more missionaries.¹²⁰ While nationalism and China’s social conscience dominated discussions within the National Christian Council of China (NCC) and Church of Christ in China (CCC), the more conservative mission groups stressed conversion and regeneration of individuals, often due to a strong millenarian belief

¹¹⁶ Kevin Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2003), 139.

¹¹⁷ Quoted by Kevin Xiyi Yao from “A Missionary Letter from Hopkins, 9 December 1929” in *The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937*, 216.

¹¹⁸ Pearl S. Buck, *Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?* (London: Methuen, 1933); Laymen’s Foreign Missions Inquiry, *Re-Thinking Missions: a Laymen’s Inquiry after One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

¹¹⁹ Grant Wacker, “Second Thoughts on the Great Commission: Liberal Protestants and Foreign Missions, 1890-1940” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 281.

¹²⁰ Bays, “Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, 169.

that Christ's return was imminent. Hence these mission groups focused on preaching the gospel and winning souls instead of state building.¹²¹

The growing conservative ethos would be largely adopted by independent Chinese churches and leaders, during an intense season of nationalism and in the increased absence of Western missionaries in China. In the early 20th century numerous independent federations, churches and leaders began. The most notable of these were theologically conservative, such as the Shanghai-based Chinese Christian Union (1900s), Watchman Nee's (1903-1972) 'Little Flock,' Wang Mingdao (1900-1991), John Sung (1901-1944), Jia Yuming (1880-1964), and the Bethel Mission (1927). The significance of these independent churches and leaders became evident quickly as many missionaries fled, once again, due to the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and, later, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During these turbulent times, the independent church leaders' "endtimes preaching and rampant millenarianism" called people "not to works of mercy like tending wounded soldiers or easing the ravages of famine or disease, but to repent of their sins and be regenerated before God through Jesus Christ," a message that was "well received by many."¹²² Many emphasized a literal belief in the Bible, were apolitical or tended toward a strict separation of religion and politics, and largely adopted a Dispensationalist view of eschatology.¹²³ The independent churches' low visibility, decentralized nature, and ability to self-support and survive on little kept their momentum going into the 40s and 50s.¹²⁴

Hence, the shape of Chinese Christianity in China, especially at popular and grassroots levels (rather than academic or institutional levels), has very much been influenced by a conservative evangelical ethos. Today, even the China Christian Council and TSPM

¹²¹ Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 128-129.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 145-146.

¹²³ Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 82-85.

¹²⁴ Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 147.

both “acknowledge that most Chinese Christians are evangelical.”¹²⁵ K.H. Ting maintained that they “have a tendency toward fundamentalism, due to the legacy of Western missionaries.”¹²⁶

It is this conservative and evangelically-shaped Christianity that has spread with the greatest vigour outside of China, as well. Commenting on the Chinese Christians in Diaspora, Harry Haines, of the World Council of Churches, who spent 20 years as a Methodist missionary in China and Malaya wrote in 1965: “The dominant theological ethos of the Chinese in the Diaspora is conservative and fundamentalist.”¹²⁷ Haines observed that after the Communist takeover and the subsequent exodus of missionaries, very few of the mainline denominational missionaries were reassigned by their mission boards to engage the overseas Chinese in other regions of Asia. Instead they were sent to work in Africa, Latin America, and with the indigenous peoples of South-east Asia.¹²⁸ The more conservative and exclusively evangelical mission organizations, however, relocated from China to other Asian regions and continued working with the Chinese in these areas. For example, the Christian & Missionary Alliance moved its seminary from the mainland to Hong Kong, the China Inland Mission relocated to Singapore, and the Southern Baptists and the Assemblies of God grew quickly upon arriving in Taiwan in 1948.

In addition to these mission groups, Chinese independent church movements flourished outside of China just as they did within China. During the late 1940s, almost one million refugees poured into Taiwan from mainland China, many of whom were part of such independent church movements.¹²⁹ Because of the various forms of nationalism in Southeast

¹²⁵ Fredrik Fällman, “Hermeneutical Conflict? Reading the Bible in Contemporary China” in *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*, ed. Chloë F. Starr (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 51.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Harry J. Haines, *Chinese of the Diaspora* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965), 28.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁹ Murray Rubinstein, *The Protestant Community on Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary, and Church* (Armonk, NY: An East Gate Book, 1991), 19-44; Allen J. Swanson, *The Church in Taiwan: Profile 1980* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 24.

Asia and because of the strong influence of the independent church and other conservative organizations amongst the Chinese, the Chinese tended to prefer their own churches, rather than the more ecumenical national churches in Southeast Asia. By 1965, in the Philippines, where over two million Filipinos are represented in the National Council of Churches (NCC), only three Chinese congregations were connected with the NCC. The other fifty-one Chinese churches remained independent of the Filipino NCC.¹³⁰ By 1970, the independents were the fastest growing section of churches in Singapore.¹³¹ It is also telling that in the Greater Kuala Lumpur Metro area of Malaysia, the number of independent Chinese-speaking churches (165) was larger than every other Protestant denomination.¹³²

Such independent church movements were largely fuelled by the efforts of conservative Chinese evangelists, such as John Sung, Andrew Gih, and Witness Lee. In 1927, Sung rejected the liberal theology he was taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York and would eventually champion fundamentalist theology all across Asia. Sung's confrontational preaching, largely centering around repentance, faith, and holy living, was said to move crowds to tears and open commitments to Christ in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Taiwan. For lasting impact beyond his itinerant ministry, he also organized several Bible conferences. It has been suggested that John Sung's story "has become a signifier of *Southeast Asian* Christian beginnings."¹³³ Barbara Watson Andaya writes: "In Southeast Asia...he stands alone, for he was the only one

¹³⁰ Harry Haines, *Chinese of the Diaspora*, 26.

¹³¹ Roger E. Hedlund, "Understanding Southeast Asian Christianity" in *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia: A Theological Exploration*, ed. Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd, 2010), 73.

¹³² Assemblies of God was the second largest (145) and the third was the Methodists (55) out of 512 Chinese-speaking Protestant churches in the area. Wilbur Paul Stone, "The Diffusion of Christianity Among Urban Chinese People in Diaspora: The Case of Metropolitan Kuala Lumpur, Malasia," (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003), 16.

¹³³ Michael Poon, "The Theological Locus of Christian Movements in Southeast Asia" in *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia*, ed. Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd, 2010), xxiv-xxv.

to directly engage the overseas Chinese communities at a time when many felt beleaguered by local nationalism, immigration restrictions and racial discrimination.”¹³⁴

Similarly, Andrew Gih, who converted upon hearing a CIM missionary preach at his school, formed the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band with John Sung in 1931, and “over the next four years they travelled 50,000 kilometers, visited 133 cities, conducted 3389 meetings, and preached the Gospel to 500,000 people, of whom 50,000 made professions of faith.”¹³⁵ Before retiring in Los Angeles, Gih extended his evangelistic ministry to Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam where churches were built, schools were established, and where his Christian literature work could serve the nations.

Then there was Witness Lee’s fast-growing ministry in Taiwan. Watchman Nee, whose theological influences demonstrate influences from Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, sent Witness Lee to Taiwan to extend their ministry. From 1949 to 1957 the ‘Little Flock’ presence grew from 500 members to 17,664 members.¹³⁶ They also extended into the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea. The ministry and thought of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee have surely left their mark on Chinese Christianity worldwide.

In summary, it is important to note the growth and vitality of evangelical, conservative, independent, and even fundamentalist Christianity in China and amongst the Chinese Diaspora in Asia. For such was the shape of the Chinese Christianity that came to the United States both before 1965, and especially after.

¹³⁴ Barbara Watson Andaya, “‘Come Home, Come Home!’ – Chineseness, John Sung and Theatrical Evangelism in 1930s Southeast Asia,” Occasional Paper, Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Freiburg, February 2015, 12.

¹³⁵ Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity, (<http://www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/j/ji-zhiwen.php>) (accessed November 1, 2016).

¹³⁶ Norman Cliff, “The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee, Including a Study of the Little Flock Movement which he Founded” (MPhil Thesis, Open University, 1983), 103.

IV.C.2. The 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act: Adding to America's Evangelical Population

Although Asian Americans started viewing America as their primary home since the 1940s and 50s, the mainline Protestant assumption of Asian Americans' gradual assimilation into non-ethnic-specific churches never came to fruition. Tseng writes: "By the late 1960s, rather than assimilating and dissolving, many Asian congregations became self-supporting."¹³⁷ The influence of these "churches within the relatively small and geographically confined Chinese American community remained marginal throughout the first half of the century."¹³⁸ Although Chinese American Christianity began its movement away from the mainline church before 1965, the post-1965 era is when Chinese American evangelicalism gained momentum. In what follows, the post-1965 expansion of Chinese American evangelicalism is explained by considering the influence of immigration.

In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) was passed. It lifted the United States' strict restrictions on Asian immigration to America. The U.S. Census of Population in 1960 numbered 237,292 Chinese people.¹³⁹ The number increased to 806,040 by 1980,¹⁴⁰ to 1,648,696 by 1990,¹⁴¹ to 2,865,232 by 2000, and then to 4,010,114 by 2010.¹⁴² Due to the influx of Chinese immigrants in the U.S., particularly those

¹³⁷ Timothy Tseng, "Exploring Asian American Christianity: Its Past, Present, and Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 256–382.

¹³⁸ Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 351.

¹³⁹ U.S. Census of Population: 1960, "Nonwhite Population by Race: Social and Economic Statistics for Negroes, Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos," Final Report PC (2)-1C, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41927938v2p1a-1ech06.pdf> (accessed May 2, 2016).

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Census, "General Population Characteristics: United States Summary, 1980 Census of Population," Table 62: Persons by Race and Sex for Regions, Divisions, and States: 1980, 1-125, http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980/1980censusofpopu8011u_bw.pdf (accessed May 2, 2016).

¹⁴¹ U.S. Census, "1990 Census of Population: Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States" (1990 CP-3-5), Table 1: "General Characteristics of Selected Asian and Pacific Islander Groups by Nativity, Citizenship, and Year of Entry: 1990, 6, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cp3/cp-3-5.pdf> (accessed May 2, 2016).

¹⁴² U.S. Census, "The Asian Population: 2010 Census Briefs," Issued March 2012, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf> (accessed May 2, 2016).

from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia,¹⁴³ even more Chinese churches were planted. From 1952 to 1979 to 1994, the number of Chinese churches jumped from 66 to 366 to 697.¹⁴⁴ By 2016, the Ambassadors for Christ Directory of Chinese churches and parachurch organizations in the U.S. numbered 1033.¹⁴⁵ Whereas the earliest Chinese churches in America were affiliated with mainline American denominations, the newer churches are more commonly independent or affiliated with theologically conservative and less organizationally centralized denominations.¹⁴⁶ This has significantly affected not only Chinese America, but Chinese American Christianity. In essence, 1965 is when the Chinese Christianities of China and the Chinese Diaspora in Asia finally made significant contact with Chinese American Christianity.

As stated in the previous sections, the shape of Christianity amongst the Chinese in China and other parts of Asia had become quite evangelical due to the influence of conservative missions and revivalists in East and Southeast Asia as well as the fruitful independent church movements. The 1940s resurgence of evangelicalism in America, in which many Chinese Americans participated, provided a rather welcoming context for the many Chinese Christians who immigrated after 1965. In fact, “Christians were disproportionately represented among [the] early wave of Taiwanese immigration because they tended to be more educated and urban than the general Taiwanese population.”¹⁴⁷

Because Communist China was still closed in 1965, the majority of Chinese immigrants who came in response to the 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act were from the

¹⁴³ In 1965 China was still very closed at this point in its Communist history.

¹⁴⁴ Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ambassadors for Christ, “Chinese Church Directory,” <http://church.oursweb.net/> (accessed May 25, 2016).

¹⁴⁶ Yang, “Chapter Three: Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America” in *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, 88. As mentioned earlier, there were about 150 Chinese churches in the SBC and about 60 in the C&MA in 1995, and these two denominations have the most Chinese churches.

¹⁴⁷ Chen, *Getting Saved in America*, 29.

Chinese Diaspora in Asia.¹⁴⁸ Timothy Tseng notes that “[m]ost of the revivalists and pastors who eventually came to the U.S. spent a significant amount of time in the Diaspora even if they were born and raised in China.”¹⁴⁹ Among these were Andrew Gih, of the Bethel Mission, Torrey Shih, who founded Overseas Chinese Mission, Thomas Wang, who founded Chinese Christian Mission, Moses Chow, who founded Ambassadors for Christ and Witness Lee who moved to Los Angeles to establish more ‘local churches’ in the West. Andrew Gih, in particular, devoted himself to evangelizing the Chinese in the Diaspora, and became so well-known that he enjoyed the company of other revivalists, such as J. Edwin Orr and Billy Graham.¹⁵⁰ He established Evangelize China Fellowship, Inc. (ECF), which “built churches, orphanages, and schools while creating a vast network of Chinese Christians in the diaspora.”¹⁵¹ All of these organizations and leaders spent time and conducted evangelical mission work in Asia and North America, and would profoundly shape Chinese Christianity on both continents into a theologically conservative and evangelical mould. As the Chinese Diaspora grew in North America, conservative and mission-minded Chinese Christian leaders, mostly from the Chinese Diaspora, answered the call to minister amongst the Chinese in America.

Coming to the U.S. with their evangelical convictions and revivalist spirit, it was not uncommon for Chinese Christians to find the Chinese churches of the mainline dry, lacking in religious zeal, and doctrinally impure. This trend actually began even before 1965 when a small trickle of Chinese immigrants began coming into the States after the 1943 Magnuson Act, which kept the strict quota limitations on Chinese immigrants, but lifted the 1882 and 1892 Chinese Exclusion Acts that banned virtually all Chinese immigrants. For example, in

¹⁴⁸ Though it is debatable whether Taiwan and Hong Kong are included the Chinese Diaspora in Asia, they are in view here.

¹⁴⁹ Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions,” 258.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 259

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

1958, James Tan left his Chinese Diasporic church in Japan to be an assistant minister at Chinese Christian Church of New England (CCCNE), a church with historic ties to mainline American Protestantism. However, by 1961, Tan planted a new church (Boston Chinese Evangelical Church) out of a Campus Chinese Bible study group he started because of theological differences he had with CCCNE's theologically liberal senior minister. This senior minister participated in the National Council of Churches, graduated from Nanking Theological Seminary, and became a missionary fellow at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, all institutions and organizations that would be quite foreign to most Chinese American Protestants today. With a similar spirit to that of Tan, many Chinese church splits were occurring in the U.S. into the 1960s, often due to the unflinching convictions of newly installed evangelical Chinese ministers from Asia.¹⁵² Also similar to the story of Tan's Boston Chinese Evangelical Church (1961), many churches grew and were established out of campus Chinese Bible study groups, Chinese Christian Fellowships, Sunday School ministries, or other small groups, such as Bay Area Chinese Bible Church (1956), Chinese Evangelical Free Church of Los Angeles (1964),¹⁵³ and Berkeley Chinese Baptist Church (1964).¹⁵⁴

Theological conflict during the post-1965 wave of Chinese immigration was not the only reason for the proliferation of new Chinese churches in America. Language, socio-economic status, and education also played roles. Before the mid-20th century, most Chinese

¹⁵² Other examples include the story of the Chinese Evangelical Church of San Diego's split from Chinese Community Church of San Diego documented in Karl Fung, *The Dragon Pilgrims: A Historical Study of a Chinese-American Church* (San Diego: Providence Press, 1989) and the schismatic history of Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington D.C. documented in Yang Fenggang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 201-204.

¹⁵³ Chinese Evangelical Free Church of Los Angeles was formerly the incorporated Chinese department of First Evangelical Free Church of Los Angeles before becoming Chinese Evangelical Free Church of Los Angeles in 1973.

¹⁵⁴ Some of these churches established out of small groups and bible studies have grown significantly in number. According to DJ Chuang, "Largest Chinese churches in North America" Boston Evangelical Chinese Church has an attendance of ~1350. <http://12foundation.org/2007/largest-chinese-churches-in-north-america> (accessed May 2, 2016). According to Tseng and Chuck in the *2008 Report on Bay Area Chinese Churches*, Berkeley Chinese Baptist Church has ~150 and Bay Area Chinese Bible Church's attendance is ~1100.

Americans traced their lineage to the Canton Province in China. Hence, the Chinese language services at many of these churches, particularly the earlier mainline Chinese congregations, were predominantly conducted in Cantonese. Yet, apart from Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, the majority of Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S. in the mid-20th century were Mandarin speakers. Though a handful of Chinese churches with adequate resources added Mandarin services and ministries, many new churches were planted by Mandarin-speaking Christians. The Evangelical Formosan Church, founded in Los Angeles in 1970, is an example of a whole denomination founded to reach Taiwanese immigrants in the U.S. and to worship in Mandarin.¹⁵⁵

In addition to these differences in language was a difference in social status and education. The Hart-Celler Act gave priority (after children and spouses) to highly skilled professionals, scientists, and artists of exceptional ability. Although by this time many Chinese Americans had become upwardly mobile and were moving out of Chinatown and into suburbs, a large number of those who worshiped in Chinese churches in the Chinatown ghettos were of a starkly different social status than the new Chinese immigrants. Thus, another lack of commonality between the earlier Chinese Americans and the post-1965 Chinese immigrants would lead to new evangelical Chinese churches, both in the cities and in the suburbs. Tseng writes: “Paralleling the emergence of Chinese wealth in the Pacific Rim, many congregations have developed large memberships (over 500) and have become very affluent and highly educated.”¹⁵⁶

The notion of forming churches based on common language, socio-economic status, and education would have found much support amongst broader American evangelicals at the time. In 1959, Donald McGavran published *How Churches Grow: the New Frontiers of*

¹⁵⁵ Evangelical Formosan Church General Assembly Official Website, “EFC History,” <http://efcga.org/Content/EFC-History.aspx> (accessed 2 May 2016).

¹⁵⁶ Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism” in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, 244.

Mission and in 1965 he became the founding Dean of Fuller's School of World Mission.¹⁵⁷ He is known for first describing the 'homogeneous unit principle,' a principle that largely powered the late 20th century Church Growth Movement.¹⁵⁸ As best evidenced by megachurches, Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback Church, this Church Growth Movement, with its underlying homogenous unit principle, took American evangelicalism by storm.¹⁵⁹ Chinese American evangelicalism was no exception. In fact, according to DJ Chuang's list of the largest Chinese churches in America, 15 out of the 21 were established during this post-1965 time period.¹⁶⁰

In summary, the conservative and evangelical orientation of Chinese Christianity abroad was allowed to enter into the U.S. because of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, resulting in many new conservative evangelical churches and vibrant evangelical activity.

V. Summary

This chapter has sought to support the current consensus on Asian and Chinese American Christianity. Chinese American Christianity is predominantly conservative and evangelical in its theological orientation. The most significant historical and political factors that have contributed to this theological orientation are the political climate in China after 1949, the religious climate in America in the mid-20th century, and the impact of Chinese Christianity abroad after the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. After the Communists won, conservative evangelical theology became the most relevant contextual theology for Chinese

¹⁵⁷ Donald McGavran, *How Churches Grow: the New Frontiers of Mission* (London: World Dominion Press, 1959).

¹⁵⁸ According to McGavran's homogeneous unit principle, "[p]eople like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers." See Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 163.

¹⁵⁹ Both averaging over 20,000 in attendance every weekend, Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback are two of the largest evangelical churches in the U.S. As such they were the prime models for the Church Growth Movement.

¹⁶⁰ DJ Chuang, "Largest Chinese churches in North America," <http://12foundation.org/2007/largest-chinese-churches-in-north-america> (accessed July 11, 2016).

Americans. This happened while the mainline was about to decline and neo-evangelicalism was on the rise. Furthermore, the conservative evangelical Christianity of the Chinese outside of the U.S. was imported due to the Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965.

Because of these factors, conservative evangelicalism is the predominant context out of which Chinese Americans have engaged in the task of theology since the mid-20th century. It is only when we understand the Chinese American Christian context that we can begin to critically reflect upon its contemporary status, and explore possible trajectories of theological progress. As Noll described evangelicalism, it is a “culturally adaptive biblical experimentalism.” Hence, even the conservative evangelical outlook of Chinese American Christians is not immune to change, nor should it be afraid to adapt and experiment. This is especially true when one considers the various ways in which the American, Chinese American, and evangelical contexts have all changed since the mid-20th century. In the next chapter, I will examine American evangelicalism and Chinese/Asian American subculture. The following chapter will highlight common challenges and concerns that Chinese American Christians in the 21st century have, which will concretize the context out of which a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology can be constructed.

CHAPTER TWO - Bumps Along the Way: American Evangelicalism Meets the Asian American Experience

I. Introduction

Chapter One focused on the historical and political influences that led Chinese American Christianity toward conservative evangelicalism. In this chapter, I examine the confluence of American evangelicalism and the Chinese American subculture, which is subsumed within the broader Asian American subculture.

First, I will argue that the inherent characteristics of popular American evangelicalism since the mid-20th century have reinforced the conservative evangelical orientation of most Chinese American Christians. Second, I will argue that the Asian American subculture, in which Chinese American Christians are subsumed, has also contributed to Chinese American Christianity's conservative evangelicalism. Finally, this chapter will examine common challenges and contentious issues that have arisen in the Chinese American church as a result of their conservative evangelical orientation. The aim of this chapter is twofold: 1) It will discuss how common characteristics of popular and conservative American evangelicalism have reinforced themselves within Chinese American Christianity, and also how American evangelical dispositions found reinforcement from the emerging Asian American subculture. 2) It will then survey some of the most common challenges Chinese American evangelicals face within their ethno-religious bicultural context.

II. The Impact of American Evangelicalism

While evangelical Chinese immigrants and their resulting churches and parachurches significantly impacted the shape of Chinese American Christianity in the mid-20th century

into the present, what is interesting is that between 1990¹ and 2010² most of the Chinese Christians in America converted *after* they immigrated.³ Hence, Yang writes that factors, such as previous Christian background, are only of “secondary importance” to social and cultural contextual factors.⁴ While only about 3.9% (and declining) of Taiwan’s population identifies as Christian, 25% of Taiwanese Americans do, and Taiwanese American religious leaders claim that 50-70% of their congregants converted after immigrating.⁵ While recognizing that Christianity was previously stigmatized as an “alien” religion amongst the Chinese, Yang Fenggang believes that Christians have significantly countered and clarified modern Chinese historical narratives, which wed Christian evangelism with Western imperialism. He believes that 1) the Japanese invasion and China’s WWII alliance with the U.S. has further superseded the historical memory of Western imperialism, 2) that Christianity has increasingly taken on its own indigenous expression, 3) that foreignness is not much of an obstacle anymore after decades of modern Marxist indoctrination, and 4) that China has noticed how advanced “Christian countries” have become.⁶ But why has *evangelical* Christianity been so widely embraced? In this section, it will be argued that the distinctive characteristics of evangelicalism, namely its emphasis upon absolute authority, conversion experiences, and evangelism, have all contributed to the Chinese American embrace of evangelical Christianity.

¹ Per the 1990 U.S. census, 69% of the Chinese in the U.S. were foreign-born.

² Per the 2010 U.S. census, 61% of the Chinese in the U.S. were foreign-born.

³ Fenggang Yang, “ABC and XYZ: Religious, Ethnic and Racial Identities of the New Second Generation Chinese in Christian Churches,” *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 1 (1999): 90.

⁴ Fenggang Yang, “Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts,” *Sociology of Religion* 53, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 245.

⁵ Carolyn Chen, *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 39.

⁶ Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 93.

II.A. Absolute Authority & Born-Again Rhetoric: Immigrant Identity Construction

Yang Fenggang and Carolyn Chen helpfully discuss how the characteristics of evangelicalism itself support Chinese immigrants' identity construction and the interpretation of their experience. Regarding the common Chinese immigrant feeling of homelessness, Yang writes: "Third World experiences of the immigrants before coming to America and immigration experiences as racial minorities in the United States have intensified the desire for religious interpretations about the meaning of life and world events."⁷ Yang also argues that as Chinese immigrants face a pluralistic American society, many find doctrines of absoluteness, love, and certainty in conservative expressions of Christianity.⁸ Conservative Christianity, with its emphasis on the absolute authority of Scripture allows them to maintain what he calls, "adhesive identities," allowing them to be selectively Chinese and selectively American on the basis of authoritative doctrines from Scripture.⁹ For example, to be more American, Chinese Americans can reject ancestor worship as unbiblical and idolatrous. However, wishing to preserve their Confucian values, it is common for Chinese Americans to interpret the fifth commandment more rigidly and with a greater emphasis than other American Christians.

Carolyn Chen argues that Taiwanese immigrants reconstruct community and form new bonds of kinship through the process of Christian conversion in the U.S., shifting the locus of their community from the family to the church. Evangelical Christianity has not only created a culture of conversion, but offers a new way of life, which guides Chinese immigrants through the struggles of life in America. The "born again" experience offers a

⁷ Fenggang Yang, "Chapter Three: Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America." In *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, eds. Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, 71–98 (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 89.

⁸ Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 2 (April 2001): 279-281.

⁹ Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 187-200.

helpful transition narrative.¹⁰ The combination of a culture of individual conversion and individual submission to Jesus as a way of life helps Taiwanese immigrants fit into the larger American religious conscience with its emphasis on personal choice, making them more American.¹¹ Like Yang, she also argues that evangelical Christianity helps them selectively perpetuate certain traditional Chinese values and selectively adopt certain American values. It subtly replaces Confucian filial piety with Christian religious piety. And yet evangelical Christianity simultaneously critiques the Confucian generational hierarchy and lack of emotion, by promoting individualism, less domineering relationships between parents and children, and new practices that cultivate open communication and sharing. Hence, conservative evangelical Christianity aids Chinese immigrants in the reconstruction of their identities as both Chinese *and* American.¹²

II.B. Evangelicals Evangelize More

Another factor behind Chinese American Christianity's proclivity toward conservative evangelicalism, simple as it might be, is that conservative evangelicals evangelize far more vigorously than liberal Christians. More than social justice issues, such as fighting poverty or racial reconciliation, "winning souls" from the threat of eternal damnation is the absolute priority with little integration of both concerns. Because of their Biblicism, emphasis on conversion, and exclusivist crucicentrism, conservative evangelicals have a strong motivation to evangelize. As they evangelize more actively than liberal Protestants or Roman Catholics, it makes sense that the number of Chinese American evangelicals would grow more.

¹⁰ Chen, *Getting Saved in America*, 8-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38-76.

¹² Carolyn Chen, "From Filial Piety to Religious Piety: Evangelical Christianity Reconstructing Taiwanese Immigrant Families in the United States," *The International Migration Review* 40, no. 3 (Fall, 2006): 573-602; Yi-Hsuan Chelsea Kuo, "Identity Formation in Chinese Christian Churches in the United States," *Sociology Mind* 4, no. 4 (October 2014): 341-347.

The distinctive emphasis on evangelism within Chinese American Christianity has existed since the mid-20th century. It is evident in Chinese American church vision statements, mission objectives, church growth strategies, and weekly practices. For example, the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown, an unmistakably liberal congregation of the PCUSA, describes itself online this way: “We’re a family oriented church active in the community, and fully embraced in the spirit of Micah 6:8 To do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.” Compare that with, First Chinese Baptist Church LA (FCBCLA), which was started by a Southern Baptist missionary and a Chinese couple in 1952. On FCBCLA’s website, they describe themselves this way: “We are a multi-generational, multi-lingual church in the heart of Chinatown. We are passionate about teaching the Bible, growing authentic disciples, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.” Their mission statement states: “FCBCLA exists to carry out the Great Commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).” This ethos at FCBCLA is the most common amongst Chinese churches and parachurches across America.

One could also compare the mainline’s Chinese youth conferences to the more evangelical Chinese youth conferences. Chinese Christian Youth Conference (CCYC) of the mainline, was explicitly non-evangelistic in nature, and sought to encourage open inquiry about the Christian faith without any dogmatic assertions. Topics such as how to navigate issues such as discrimination, building a “new China,” and bicultural identity were covered and conference theme titles included: “Personal and Social Living,” “Towards Interracial Understanding,” “The Basis of Chinese Civilizations,” and “California Chinese History.” The goals of these conferences were to organize a common meeting place for young Chinese people to discuss and exchange opinions, to encourage them to care about world peace, to encourage them to fight for Chinese-American rights, to contribute to the reconstruction of

China, and to do all these things through the instruction of liberal and progressive instructors.¹³

However, at the evangelical Chinese Bible Mission camp students are challenged to receive Christ or rededicate themselves to him, in good evangelical fashion. The Eastern Chinese Bible Conference continues to maintain its original evangelical objectives: 1) To present Jesus Christ, our Savior, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, 2) To present Jesus Christ in His redemptive work, 3) To offer facilities for Christian growth and maturity, 4) To bring Chinese young people together in Christian fellowship, 5) To extend evangelical work among the Chinese.¹⁴ Ambassadors for Christ's Chinese Mission Convention (CMC) understands itself as "a ministry whose ultimate purpose is to challenge and mobilize Christian-Chinese and non-Chinese of the calling to be ambassadors for Christ in all walks of life, locally & globally, to reach Chinese, non-Chinese and unreached people groups. CMC is dedicated to empower individuals and churches to reach the world for Christ." This convention has been attended by over 27,000 people over the last 30 years and has been sponsored by such institutions as Dallas Theological Seminary. On the CMC 2019 website is a declaration of their "uncompromised commitment to the gospel message":

We believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for our world. CMC is committed to the Gospel message of redemption, the call to repentance, and the timeless biblical truth of salvation by grace through faith. We believe in the urgency of the Gospel message, for apart from faith in Christ there is no salvation. At every convention we call men and women to take up the cross in obedience to the call of Jesus.¹⁵

Lest any doubt remains concerning the evangelistic priority within Chinese American Christianity in the latter half of the 20th century, one might also observe Chinese American churches' practices and programs. Xuefeng Zhang has observed the evangelical mechanisms

¹³ Paul Louie, "Chinese Christian Youth Conferences in America, with a Focus on the East Coast" *Chinese America: History & Perspectives*, (January 2001).

¹⁴ Eastern Chinese Bible Conference, Inc. Constitution & By-Laws, p.1. <http://ecbcusa.org/ECBCCConstitution.pdf> (accessed May 30, 2016).

¹⁵ "About," *CMC 2019* (website), <http://cmc2019.org/about/> (accessed June 17, 2019).

used by Chinese evangelical churches to elicit conversions.¹⁶ She highlights the evangelistic impulse of the Chinese evangelical church by showing how many programs, conferences, and resources are devoted to evangelism, whether through children's youth programs, weekly fellowship groups, bible studies, Sunday school classes designed for 'seekers', or simply being intentional about welcoming newcomers to church and to America by offering practical help to new immigrants, visiting the sick and needy, and inviting new immigrants to potluck dinner socials with gospel presentations. She notes that these churches also spend a lot of time and resources training new believers to equip them to evangelize. They are also known to financially support mission work, such as campus ministries and overseas missions, quite heavily. In her observations, she found that many conversions occurred during evangelistic camps and conferences. Along with the Christian books, periodicals, audio and video material on apologetics, Christian living, Christianity and Chinese culture, and Bible study, the evangelical conversionist ethos is hardly lacking amongst Chinese churches in the U.S. Andrew Abel has also noticed that even the altruism of Chinese churches is centered around evangelism.¹⁷

In summary, evangelical insistence upon Scripture's absolute authority and its "born-again" language offered Chinese immigrants in America helpful standards and narratives for their own identity construction in a new country. Furthermore, the evangelistic fervor of American evangelicalism is very much alive amongst Chinese evangelicals. It is not surprising, then, that they, who evangelize more, see more growth in numbers.

¹⁶ Xuefeng Zhang, "How Religious Organizations Influence Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Protestantism in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 2 (2006): 149–159.

¹⁷ Andrew Abel, "Favor Fishing and Punch-Bowl Christians: Ritual and Conversion in a Chinese Protestant Church," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 2 (2006): 161–178.

III. An Agreeable Asian American Subculture & Narrative

The most contemporary factor that has led to the “evangelicalization” of Chinese American Christianity is the Asian American subculture that has developed over the last 60 years. Despite the particularities that do exist within Chinese American Christianity, a Chinese American subculture, enveloped within a wider Asian American subculture, has emerged often bolstering their evangelical theology.

III.A. The “Model Minority” Narrative

Since the mid-20th century, a common Chinese American narrative could be discerned amongst 1.5, 2nd, and 3rd generation Chinese Americans. The narrative consisted of Chinese Americans establishing themselves in their new home country and pursuing the American Dream. Chinese Americans were establishing themselves and their families in America, hence leading to what Zhao calls the “new Chinese America.”¹⁸ This began as early as the 1940s, which saw WWII and the Communist victory in China. Because of the War Brides Act (1945) and Alien Fiancées and Fiancés Act (1946),¹⁹ Chinese American families became a viable possibility, and the population of ABCs grew to outnumber the immigrant population at the mid-century. Additionally, because of the Communist Victory and turbulence in China, the U.S. was increasingly seen as a new homeland. The Chinese American community was transitioning from being a bachelor society who longed for home in the motherland of China, to a family society seeking to raise families and establish itself in their new home, the United States.²⁰ As the Chinese achieved greater upward mobility, they, and many of the highly-skilled and educated post-1965 immigrants, increasingly moved into the suburbs (sometimes

¹⁸ Xiaojian Zhao, *The New Chinese America: Class, Economy, and Social Hierarchy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965*, 78-93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-151.

creating “ethnoburbs”),²¹ and embraced the middle-class American way of life. By 2014 the Asian American population’s median household income was recorded at \$74,297, while the white population’s was \$60,256, and the general population’s was \$63,657.²² Also, 53.9% of the Asian population had bachelor’s degrees versus 32.8% of the white population.²³ Such statistics have often been used to support the “model minority” hypothesis, which asserts that Asian Americans are a good model for racial minority success in America.²⁴

While the “model minority” narrative has been rightfully critiqued and exposed as something of a myth, a significant proportion of Asian Americans have subconsciously embodied and even embraced it as an honorable identity. So although the “model minority” narrative has perpetuated the foreignness of Asian Americans, fostered white American exceptionalism, and ignored Asians who continue to live in poverty on the margins of society, this narrative has been internalized by many, particularly East Asian Americans, such as the Chinese. Russell Jeung, a professor of Asian American studies, writes:

“Confucian filial piety encourages a sense of responsibility and work ethic to provide for one’s family. This traditional ethic, when coupled with immigrants’ drive to survive and the capitalist system’s ideology of meritocracy, becomes easily passed on as one of the defining characteristics of being Chinese...Most Asian Americans take pride in their model minority status because it congratulates them for their own efforts and accomplishments. Because of this ethnic pride and because the model minority thesis reinforces [*sic*] American ideology of equal opportunity, Asian Americans and others buy into the stereotype as hard workers. Asian culture thus gets distilled to

²¹ “Ethnoburbs” are suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large metropolitan areas. They are multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual, and often multinational communities in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration but does not necessarily constitute a majority. See Wei Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).

²² Carmen DeNavas-Walt & Bernadette D. Proctor, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014,” US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.pdf>, p.5. (accessed May 24, 2019).

²³ Camille Ryan & Kurt Bauman, “Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015,” US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>, p.2. (accessed May 24, 2019).

²⁴ William Pettersen, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *New York Times* (January, 9, 1966); Varaxy Yi & Samuel D. Museus, “Model Minority Myth,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, eds. John Stone, Dennis M. Rutledge, Anthony D. Smith, Polly S. Rizova, & Xiaoshuo Hou, (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781118663202> (accessed May 25, 2019).

encompassing hierarchical family relations, duty and obligation, and drivenness.”²⁵

As Jeung points out, Chinese Americans are no exception. The internalization of the “model minority” narrative amongst Chinese Americans has not left Chinese American Christianity unaffected. In fact, “[a]lthough Asians are stereotypically oriented toward education and business, more Asians participate in churches than in parent-teacher associations or business/professional groups.”²⁶ Hence, the “model minority” effect is bound to affect Asian American Christianity. The effect of the “model minority” narrative on Chinese American Christianity is particularly evident in the way that the undergraduate experiences and lifestyles of many Chinese American Christians have reinforced their conservative evangelical convictions.

III.B. Asian American Experiences: Undergraduate Education

For almost half a century, an undergraduate education has featured prominently in the narratives of many Chinese Americans. Between 1976 and 1986, Asian American undergraduate attendance almost tripled.²⁷ In 2015, about 54% of Asian Americans (compared to 32% of white Americans) over the age of 25 had received bachelor degrees.²⁸ Concurrently, evangelical undergraduate campus ministry has experienced a boom of its own since the 1970s.²⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Asian evangelicalism has become a familiar phenomenon to Christians and non-Christians alike on undergraduate campuses.³⁰ The largest and best known evangelical parachurch ministries, Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ)

²⁵ Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 34-35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ Jayjia Hsia & Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi, "The Demographics of Diversity: Asian Americans and Higher Education" *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* (November/December 1989), 20.

²⁸ U.S. Census, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015," <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>.

²⁹ John Schmalzbauer, "Campus Religious Life in America: Revitalization and Renewal," *Society* 50, no. 2 (2013): 116-118.

³⁰ Neil Swidey, "God on the Quad," *Boston Globe*, November, 30 2003.

and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), have even launched initiatives and chapters of Asian American-specific ministries.³¹ In fact, among the non-Asian students whom sociologist Rudy Busto spoke to at Stanford University, IVCF and Cru were associated with Asian American students, and about 65% of the 300 IVCF students at UC Berkeley were Asian Americans.³² Additionally, those groups which were Asian campus ministries from the start, such as Asian American Christian Fellowship, have also flourished. Through such campus ministries, many Chinese Americans find community and belonging, and convert to evangelical Christianity.³³ Furthermore, for the many Chinese American Christians who grew up attending evangelical churches, their transition from high school youth groups in Chinese churches to Asian American campus fellowship groups is often quite seamless. They have already been socialized into the evangelical subculture.³⁴ They sing the same songs, hear the same kinds of messages, and engage in the same kinds of activities. In short, the proliferation of Asian American evangelical campus ministries has served to preserve the evangelical orientation of many Chinese American Christians.

It is not the mere proliferation of Asian American evangelical campus ministries alone that has reinforced Chinese American evangelicalism. Another related aspect of the Asian American undergraduate experience is the identity formation that often occurs on undergraduate campuses, particularly Asian American identity and religious identity. Today, it is quite common for Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese students to join together in evangelical campus ministries where they find more familiarity with other Asians on campus than with black, Latino, and white students.

³¹ George Thomas Kurian & Mark Lamport, eds., *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States, Volume 5* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 386, 801.

³² Rudy V. Busto, "The Gospel according to the Model Minority? Hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students" in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, eds. David Yoo & Russell Leong (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 169-187.

³³ Brian Hall, "Social and Cultural Contexts in Conversion to Christianity Among Chinese American College Students," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 2 (2006): 131.

³⁴ Antony Alumkal, "American Evangelicalism in the Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 206.

Not only do evangelical campus ministries assist racial identity construction, but also *religious* identity formation for Asian Americans. Busto notes that Asian American evangelicals, finding themselves to be both racial and religious minorities, find a safe haven in campus ministries, away from the secular academy. He argues that such ministries foster a “fortress mentality.”³⁵ Alumkal confirms this when he writes, drawing on postcolonial discourse: “the culturally and racially ‘liminal’ space that second-generation Asian Americans inhabit can heighten their need for certainty and encourage their acceptance of contemporary American evangelical theology.”³⁶

It should also be noted that in this world of Asian American evangelical campus ministry, where racial and religious identity are solidified, conservative evangelical groups have wielded much influence upon the Asian American evangelical scene in recent years, whether through the influence of the Korean church’s prevalent Presbyterianism or through the rise of “New Calvinism.”³⁷ For example, John MacArthur’s Grace Community Church has a campus ministry at UCLA called Grace on Campus. UCLA is a top choice university for many Chinese Americans. Consequently, Grace on Campus is likely the largest campus ministry at UCLA and is almost completely Asian, with the majority of students being Chinese according to its previous campus pastor, Christopher Gee.³⁸ This pan-Asian evangelical movement on undergraduate campuses has also been paralleled by the proliferation of pan-Asian evangelical churches.³⁹

Another way that the undergraduate experience further confirms the theological conservatism of Chinese Americans is the tendency of Chinese Americans to study in certain

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Antony Alumkal, “The Scandal of the ‘Model Minority’ Mind? The Bible and Second-Generation Asian American Evangelicals,” *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 248.

³⁷ New Calvinism, also known as the Young Restless Reformed Movement, is a movement that peaked into the first decade of the 21st century amongst conservative evangelicals. It embraces a Calvinistic/Dortian soteriology, and is best represented by Christian leaders and organizations, such as John Piper, Don Carson, Mark Dever, Matt Chandler, Desiring God, the Gospel Coalition, 9Marks, and Acts 29.

³⁸ Christopher Gee, Facebook Messenger conversation with author, August 26, 2016.

³⁹ Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

disciplines. Alumkal posits that “university-level training in scientific fields did not lead [Asian Americans] to read the Bible more critically, but rather seemed to reinforce biblical literalism by encouraging them to treat the Bible as a scientific text.”⁴⁰ Ironically, the undergraduate experience has not resulted in liberal skepticism, but in a more literalist approach to the Bible that lends itself to conservative theologies, such as dispensationalism.

III.C. Asian American Experiences: Middle-Class Lifestyle & the Status Quo

For all the reasons stated above, the Asian American undergraduate experience has significantly supported the evangelical orientation of Chinese American Christianity. Furthermore, the Asian American undergraduate experience often leads to common lifestyle patterns that also reinforce conservative evangelicalism amongst Chinese American Christians. Busto suggests that “campus Christian organizations, besides offering a supportive and familial structure for Asian American students, reinforce an upwardly mobile middle-class ethic consonant with the model minority image.”⁴¹ For example, it is almost second nature for Asian American evangelicals to assume that they will all go out and spend money to enjoy soft tofu soup, pho, or bubble tea after church on Sundays. When Asian American evangelicals meet, one of the first get-to-know-you questions is where you received your undergraduate education. These examples demonstrate that Asian American evangelicals assume a certain standard of living and a certain educational background in their interactions with each other.

As was mentioned earlier, Asian Americans have the highest median annual household income in the U.S. This status often comes with an attendant lifestyle, characterized by middle-class stability and comfort. According to a Pew Research Center

⁴⁰ Antony Alumkal, “The Scandal of the ‘Model Minority’ Mind? The Bible and Second-Generation Asian American Evangelicals,” 237.

⁴¹ Rudy V. Busto, “The Gospel according to the Model Minority? Hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students,” 169-187.

survey conducted in 2012, Asian Americans “are more satisfied than the general public with their lives overall (82% vs. 75%), their personal finances (51% vs. 35%) and the general direction of the country (43% vs. 21%).”⁴² Hence, it should not be surprising that “Asian Americans have a pervasive belief in the rewards of hard work.”⁴³ Similarly, while less than 20% said that being Asian American helped them secure jobs and get promotions and less than 20% said that being Asian American hurt their job and promotion prospects, over 60% said that it made no difference.⁴⁴ Pew Research also notes: “Compared with the nation’s two largest minority groups—Hispanics and blacks—Asian Americans appear to be less inclined to view discrimination against their group as a major problem. Just 13% of Asian Americans say it is, while about half (48%) say it is a minor problem, and a third (35%) say it is not a problem.”⁴⁵

But how do such factors relate to the conservative evangelical orientation of Chinese American Christians? Timothy Tseng helpfully explains: “The current neo-conservative ideological practice of bashing affirmative action policies in favor of so-called ‘color-blind’ policies is slowly seeping into our Asian Pacific American congregations.”⁴⁶ While it would be unfair to equate neo-conservative political ideology with conservative evangelicalism, there is an overlap that unfortunately exists. Neo-conservatives are far more likely to find a home in conservative evangelicalism than in progressive evangelicalism. As many Chinese Americans embrace their “model minority” status, taking pride in their parents’ and their own accomplishments in the U.S., a certain lack of empathy and social conscience often results. The embrace of the “model minority” narrative easily shapes the social perspective of

⁴² “The Rise of Asian Americans,” Pew Research Center, June 19, 2012, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/>

⁴³ 69% of Asian Americans say people can get ahead if they are willing to work hard, compared to 58% of the general American public. “The Rise of Asian Americans,” Pew Research Center, June 19, 2012, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/> (accessed May 24, 2019).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Timothy Tseng, “Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 278.

Chinese Americans, who believe that hard work is all that is necessary for the poor and marginalized to secure a better life. Hence, many Chinese American Christians bash affirmative action policies, and do not perceive social and systemic injustice issues as very relevant to the church's mission. Rather, they continue to emphasize "soul-winning."

Even amongst those who do not necessarily lack empathy, the evangelical language of "calling" is often used to affirm Chinese American career and lifestyle decisions. By this notion "everyday life becomes enchanted as the idea of a calling bridges the taken-for-granted boundaries—however fixed or permeable, actual or perceived—that exist between other-worldly and this-worldly contexts, relationships, and resources."⁴⁷ It is common for this notion of "calling" to free Chinese Americans from radically re-thinking their common lifestyle choices. This willingness to accept the American status quo has also translated into a willingness to accept the American evangelical status quo. For the majority of Chinese American Christians, especially since the mid-20th century, have simply sought to follow the lead of American evangelical leaders. Rather than deliberately developing a distinctively Chinese American expression of Christianity, they have passively received American evangelical Christianity, perhaps even furthering the stereotype of Asian passivity.

The result of Chinese American Christians seeking to maintain the evangelical status quo is best seen in their choice of seminaries. Amos Yong writes: "This confluence of Confucian and evangelical conservatism has been strengthened through the process of theological education. Asian American Evangelicals tend to attend solidly evangelical seminaries because of their conservative commitments."⁴⁸ This is confirmed by observing the theological educational backgrounds of the largest U.S. Chinese churches' pastors.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷ Roman Williams, "Constructing a Calling: The Case of Evangelical Christian International Students in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2013): 275.

⁴⁸ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 105.

⁴⁹ DJ Chuang, "Largest Chinese churches in North America," <http://l2foundation.org/2007/largest-chinese-churches-in-north-america> (accessed July 11, 2016).

most common seminaries attended were Talbot School of Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Theological Seminary, with a sprinkling of diversity from confessional Reformed seminaries, such as Westminster Theological Seminary and Covenant Theological Seminary, and other evangelical institutions, such as Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, some of which are becoming more moderate or even progressive, but none of which are overtly liberal. In California, the most common seminaries attended by Chinese Americans are all conservative evangelical schools: Western Seminary in Northern California, and Talbot School of Theology and The Master's Seminary in Southern California. All of them hold an exclusivist theology of religions, and are committed to inerrancy and the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. The latter two also maintain notable sympathies toward dispensational theology. All of them deny the legitimacy of homosexual marriage, and on the issue of gender roles, the Master's Seminary does not even admit women into their seminary. Chinese American preference for such theological institutions has inevitably led to conservatively evangelical theological convictions.

In short, the Chinese American subcultural model minority narrative, which includes undergraduate experiences and middle class lifestyles, very much reinforces the evangelical status-quo amongst Chinese American Christians. The undergraduate years are when many of their evangelical convictions are solidified, and much of conservative evangelicalism has been amenable to a conservative middle-class lifestyle. As Jeung writes of Chinese American Christians who uncritically perpetuate this narrative: “those affirming the model minority may have assimilated into the mainstream so much that they take more conservative stances toward the Bible.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Russell Jeung, “Familism, Racialization, and Other Key Factors Shaping Chinese American Perspectives,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, eds. Uriah Kim & Seung Ai Yang (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 33.

IV. Bumps Along the Way: Prominent Issues, Challenges & Concerns in the Chinese American Church

The resulting prevalence of popular and conservative evangelicalism amongst Chinese American Protestants over the past half-century has led to what some might describe as a conservative or even fundamentalist ethos. Although, in many respects, the conservative evangelicalism embraced by most Chinese American Christians provided them with a suitable contextual theology in the latter half of the 20th century, American evangelical theology, as a contextual theology for the latter half of the 20th century, was not without its own limitations. As early as the 1980s, one can discern the growing consternation of Chinese American Christians within their churches. Chinese American Christians, along with most Asian American Christians, had largely bought into the dominant evangelical moment in America, but still faced a handful of challenges that were unique to their Chinese American experiences, largely subsumed within the Asian American experience.

In the following subsections, I will discuss these various challenges that Chinese American Christians have faced and have continued to discuss since the 1980s. In this discussion, one will discover that while Chinese American Christianity cannot simply be equated with Asian American Christianity, Chinese American Christianity is very much enveloped within it. Chinese American Christianity features prominently in the realm of Asian American Christianity. In fact, most of the Chinese Americans who discuss the unique challenges that they and their churches face do so in the more general context of Asian American Christian discourse rather than in the context of explicitly Chinese American Christian discourse. While not hiding their Chinese American identities, many *Chinese* Americans who write and reflect on the intersection between their faith and their ethnic or

racial identities more strongly identify with (or foreground) their *Asian* American identities.⁵¹ This is likely due to the strengthened Asian American subculture and united sense of identity that has emerged in the U.S. over the past 50 years. Chinese Americans not only share a Confucian background with many other Asian Americans, but a history of social and systemic oppression that differs from other non-Asian racial communities' oppression stories. Hence, in what follows the reader should neither be surprised nor confused by the significant overlap between Chinese American and Asian American Christian discourse.

IV.A. Leading & Navigating Multi-Lingual, Multi-Generational, & Multi-Cultural Churches

The problem of cultural differences between ABCs (American-born Chinese) and ARCs (American-raised Chinese), and OBCs (Overseas-born Chinese) in the Chinese American church became more and more acute as OBCs increasingly sought to establish families in the U.S. and raise their ABC children in Chinese American churches. It was also more keenly felt as many new post-1965 OBCs immigrated to the U.S., such that the population of ABCs became outnumbered by OBCs once again.

Because of the flood of Chinese immigrants, and because most Chinese churches in America were established and led by OBCs, it was easy for ABCs to feel marginalized by their own Chinese churches. ABCs and OBCs were growing apart. For ABCs growing up in the latter half of the 20th century, English was their dominant language, and assimilation into the wider (white-dominant) American culture was key for their success in society. However, after straining themselves to assimilate to the dominant culture on the weekdays at school and at work, they would find themselves culturally estranged from their ethnic religious

⁵¹ This is especially evident if one merely peruses the works published by Chinese American Christians that deal with faith and cultural identity. The Asian American identity is more commonly alluded to than the Chinese American identity.

communities on Sundays in the Chinese church. Each week ABC Christians would endure translated (or sometimes even untranslated) sermons in Cantonese or Mandarin instead of hearing preaching in their primary language, English. They would often be treated as less important members of the Chinese church. Little to no resources, mentors, training, or even understanding were sufficiently extended to them. These growing pains of Chinese American Christianity were becoming too serious to ignore. They threatened to divide many Chinese American churches, or worse yet, to drive ABCs away from what many were beginning to perceive as an irrelevant faith.

Much of Chinese American church division had to do with the Confucian collectivism, engendered by common leadership styles within many Asian American churches. In *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, Helen Lee wrote a chapter on healthy leadership and listed four common stumbling blocks for Asian American churches and leaders: 1) Confucian-based perspectives, 2) false humility, 3) face-saving, shame-based approaches, and 4) inability to resolve conflict.⁵² The strong Confucian impulses of hierarchy and patriarchy within many Asian American churches has often led to authoritarian leaders who are impossible to question. Additionally, the false humility of a collectivist mindset prevents many congregation members from speaking up to provide critical feedback to their leaders or from pursuing leadership roles themselves. The Asian aversion to shame adds another dimension. Asian American leaders have been known to utilize shame as a motivational technique to assist their authoritarian leadership. Because of this overwhelming desire to save face and not bring one's problems to light, healthy conflict resolution is sorely lacking and often unheard of in Asian American churches. Some people bottle up their

⁵² Helen Lee, "Healthy Leaders, Healthy Households 1: Challenges and Models" in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, eds. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 61.

grievances and let themselves become jaded, others leave the church and become a statistic for the “Silent Exodus,”⁵³ and others start their own churches.

Lest one think that multi-generational challenges and conflicts are solely caused by draconian Asian American leaders, it is important to understand strife in the Asian American church from the perspective of the later generations. Simply put, “Westernised children’s attitudes contrast with those of their Asian-born parents.”⁵⁴ In addition to primarily speaking English, the later generations of Asian Americans are simply more Americanized. This means that they tend to be more influenced by democratic values and American individualism (especially for those growing up within the American youth group culture). So it is not only that primarily Chinese-speaking church leaders can be authoritarian, but that the later generations find the face-saving, collectivist approach of their leaders impractical and unjust. They feel that their freedom is infringed upon by cultural obligations and that they do not have a voice in the church.⁵⁵ The result is that the first generation is often critiqued by the following generations for being too Chinese and restrictive, while the first generation often critiques the following generations for being too American and self-absorbed.

IV.B. Contemplating the Grounds for Ethnic Churches

After the first decade of the 21st century, it appears that the “Silent Exodus” may have ended amongst Asian Americans in many ways, or at least that it may not have been the final chapter in the story of Asian American Christianity. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

⁵³ In 1996, *Christianity Today* published Helen Lee’s famous “Silent Exodus” article. Lee confronted her readers with the alarming church dropout rate amongst Asian Americans. Worryingly, many were not simply switching churches, but were leaving the Christian faith too. See Helen Lee, “Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian church in America reverse the flight of its next generation?” *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1996.

⁵⁴ Paul Woods & Allen Yeh, “The Chinese Diaspora Church and Cross-Cultural Mission,” in *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, eds. Sadiri Joy Tira & Tetsunao Yamamori (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 385.

⁵⁵ See Clarence Cheuk, “Agonies of the Heart: ABC Christians Speak Out” in Samuel Ling, *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things* (San Gabriel, CA: China Horizon, 1999), 15-54.

professor Peter Cha calls this the “Boomerang Effect.”⁵⁶ The same is true for the Chinese American church. Partially due to ministries such as FACE and the critical reflection of others concerned with Chinese churches, stronger English ministries are now retaining and attracting ABCs more than in the past.⁵⁷ In 1999 Samuel Ling wrote: “The difference in today’s climate, so much more favourable to ABC ministries, is due to the awakening of OBC leadership. Simply put, they now recognize the needs of ABC people.”⁵⁸ Even more so, this “Boomerang Effect,” should be traced to the overwhelming growth and influence of Asian American campus ministries and Asian American church planters.

However, with the vitality of ABC ministries, often known as the churches’ English ministries (EM), and with the growth of Asian American campus ministries and church planters, an ecclesial question has surfaced within the Chinese American church. One way to put the question is: “What is the future of the Asian American church?”⁵⁹ But more specifically, the question is this: “Are churches in America that pastorally and evangelistically target a specific ethnic or racial group (though not excluding those outside of the targeted group) legitimate and biblical?” The question becomes more acute when specifically reflecting upon the Chinese or Asian American churches that only conduct their services in English and are located in communities that already have churches which are not explicitly ethnic and would gladly welcome Asians.

⁵⁶ Helen Lee, “The Boomerang Effect: The generation of the ‘silent exodus’ has now started coming back,” *Christianity Today*, October 10, 2014.

⁵⁷ See James Theodore Pricskett, “Toward Retaining American-Born Chinese Youth in the Chinese-American Church,” (ThM thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997); Benjamin S. Yu, “A Strategy for Empowering Disciples in God’s Kingdom at the Chinese Presbyterian Church of Orange County,” (DMin Focus Paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2002); Matthew Chao-Ying Liu, “The Exercise of Power in Chinese Churches in the Los Angeles Area,” (DMiss diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003); Walter C. Lau, “Shepherding the Shepherds: Effective Leadership Development in Chinese American Churches,” (DMin diss., Talbot School of Theology, 2012).

⁵⁸ Ling, *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things*, xvii.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Timothy Tseng, “Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 277-292. This was also a topic discussed at a conservative evangelical conference breakout session in 2016. See Geoff Chang, Jeff Jue, Jeremy Yong, Julius Kim, Won Kwak, “The Future of the Asian American Church: Protesting the Status Quo,” Together for the Gospel 2016, <http://t4g.org/media/2016/04/the-future-of-the-asian-american-church-protesting-the-status-quo/> (accessed May 26, 2019).

For over a century, the Chinese American church could somewhat ignore this question because of the substantial Chinese immigrant population in America and because of the racism that they faced outside the Chinese community. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Chinese church in America was established out of necessity as a mission work. Chinese-speaking churches were necessary for evangelizing and discipling the waves of Chinese immigrants entering the U.S. During the 60 years or so of anti-Chinese sentiment and Chinese exclusion, it made sense for Chinese churches to exist, even English-speaking ones. Today, Chinese churches in America have continued to find relevance, especially after 1965, as Chinese speakers continue to move to the U.S. However, for ABCs, whose primary language is English and who are raised in the States, Chinese-speaking churches are no longer an absolute necessity. Some even propose that Chinese churches' English ministries move toward multi-ethnic or at least multi-asian ministry.⁶⁰ Moreover, Post-Civil Rights era evangelicalism offers a somewhat more inviting church environment for ABCs to worship in. Gazing upon the horizon, many have pondered: "What is the future of the Chinese American church? What will its purpose be?" Although Chinese immigrants continue to come to America, the hypothetical question is more and more commonly entertained: "If immigrants stop coming, or if Chinese-speaking services are no longer needed in America, and especially if racism is decreased, will Chinese churches be obsolete?"

Some continue to shrug off this question, as they believe that the need for ministries to Chinese speakers in America will pretty much always exist in the foreseeable future. Others entertain the hypothetical situation that ministries for Chinese speakers will no longer be needed, but argue that the Chinese church should remain because it offers a more comfortable place of worship for many Chinese Americans than other churches due to the

⁶⁰ Stephen Quen, "Reaching and Retaining American-Born Asian Millennials at Bay Area Chinese Bible Church," DMin diss., Talbot School of Theology, 2018, 160-163.

“homogeneous unit principle.”⁶¹ Some go on the defensive and argue that just because churches filled with white Americans are not designated as “white churches,” they are no less racially particular than the Chinese church, and hence, Chinese churches are no less guilty of ethnocentrism than “white American churches.”⁶² Others warn of the false premises of “color-blindness” and advocate ethnic churches for the sake of contextualized ministry and discipleship.⁶³ Still others see the homogenous unit principle as contrary to the gospel, and believe that the ethnic Chinese church could possibly become obsolete if Chinese-speaking ministries are no longer needed.⁶⁴ Hence, they believe that assimilation should occur in both directions, whether it be Chinese Christians worshipping at non-Chinese churches, or non-Chinese Christians worshipping at formerly Chinese churches. This last view is particularly common amongst conservative evangelical ABCs. Like Jeremy Yong and Rev. Dr. Bruce Fong of Dallas Theological Seminary,⁶⁵ they want to take more woodenly the passages of Scripture that speak of no distinctions and barriers between people groups, but unity in Christ as one chosen and holy nation.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 74. An example of a pastor who believes this is Stephen Quen quoted in Helen Lee, “Silent No More: Asian American Christians are growing in influence and audience. Will they be embraced by their broader church family?” *Christianity Today*, October 1, 2014, 39. A slightly more nuanced example is Ken Fong, who is critical of the homogenous unit principle, yet believes that removing cultural and sociological barriers is helpful and that there is a place for targeting specific groups of people in the grand scheme of the church’s mission. See Ken Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl: A Comprehensive Resource for Multi-Asian Ministry* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1999), 4-8.

⁶² In Timothy Tseng’s “Second Generation Chinese North American Evangelical Use of the Bible in Identity Discourse.” *Semeia* 90–91 (2002): 251–67, he recounts an interview with Ken Fong, in which Fong’s well-intentioned seminary professor called for Asian Americans to join his congregation for the sake of racial reconciliation. Fong, however, questioned why that professor did not think about joining Fong’s pan-Asian congregation instead.

⁶³ Daniel K. Eng “Is being in an ethnic church ‘staying comfortable’?” *Asian American Pastor* (blog), 28 January 2017, <https://aapastor.wordpress.com/2017/01/28/is-being-in-an-ethnic-church-staying-comfortable/> (accessed September 22, 2017).

⁶⁴ Bruce W. Fong, *The Wall: Jesus destroyed the wall of hostility; His church must never rebuild it. Ephesians 2:14*, (USA: Bruce W. Fong, 2011), 291-325.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Yong in “The Future of the Asian American Church: Protesting the Status Quo,” *Together for the Gospel* 2016, (<http://t4g.org/media/2016/04/the-future-of-the-asian-american-church-protesting-the-status-quo/>); Bruce W. Fong, “Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Ephesians 2:11-22,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 4 (December 1995): 565-580.

⁶⁶ For example: Romans 3:22, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Galatians 3:28-29, Ephesians 2:11ff, Colossians 3:10-11, and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

This diversity of opinions concerning the Chinese church's purpose and future in America largely reflects the influence of American evangelicalism on the Chinese American church. Those who escape from thinking about the grounds for ethnic churches in America because it does not seem necessary at the moment exhibit the pragmatism that characterizes so much of American evangelicalism.⁶⁷ Those who believe that Chinese churches should remain, even apart from the need for Chinese-speaking services, exhibit pragmatism as well. They also exhibit the psychosocial evangelistic strategies that are so common in American evangelicalism, such as the Church Growth Movement's Homogenous Unit Principle. Those who reverse the script and point out that the "white churches" do the same thing as the ethnic churches exhibit the postcolonial impulse that is catching on amongst progressive evangelicals.⁶⁸ Then there is the concession, by others, that the ethnic Chinese church could one day be obsolete, which reflects a conservative evangelical impulse that often insists upon a racially "color-blind" Christianity or assimilation.

Amongst many Asian American Christians whose primary language is English, it is this final position that is often embraced or at least reluctantly accepted. The evangelical vision of cross-cultural and multi-ethnic unity in the local church has arrested many Asian American evangelicals, especially in a Post-Civil Rights era. Contrary to what might appear to be racial exclusivity, the beginnings of cross-cultural and multi-ethnic unity and inclusivity are on display in the rise of Asian American Christianity. The proliferation of Asian American campus ministries across the nation has undoubtedly contributed to this multi-ethnic impulse in significant ways.⁶⁹ Sociologist Russell Jeung calls this the "institutional legitimization of Asian American panethnicity," and distinctly notes how it occurs amongst

⁶⁷ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 12.

⁶⁸ Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, & L. Daniel Hawk, *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁶⁹ Rebecca Y. Kim, "Asian Americans for Jesus: Changing the Face of Campus Evangelicalism," Social Science Research Council web forum on "The Religious Engagements of American Undergraduates," February 6, 2007, <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Kim.pdf>.

evangelical organizations.⁷⁰ As was already mentioned in Chapter One, Cru has launched a successful Asian American chapter called EPIC. Asian American Christian Fellowship (AACF), which was originally formed by the Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS), now probably hosts more Chinese than Japanese students. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) has also seen an increase in Asian American participation, particularly at its Urbana conference, as they continue to emphasize racial reconciliation and have even intentionally selected Asian American leaders, such as their president Tom Lin and vice president Greg Jao.⁷¹ This “institutional legitimation of Asian American panethnicity” is not simply a campus ministry phenomenon. From 1990 to 2015, the number of “multi-Asian” churches grew from 17 to 291.⁷² A significant number of ABC Christians have been attracted to this explosion of multi-Asian churches, as these churches often represent a stepping stone between the mono-ethnic churches of ABC Christians’ pasts and even greater cross-cultural unity that hopefully includes non-Asians in the near future.⁷³

It remains to be seen how successful multi-Asian ministries and churches will be in attracting, welcoming, and engaging more non-Asians in order to better reflect their locational demographics. Yet still, multi-Asian churches represent a very common evangelical answer to the Asian American questions about the church and ethnicity. This common answer is that ethnic churches are but temporary, and only necessary insofar as non-English language worship is required. Such multi-Asian churches represent a temporal and progressive trajectory toward the conservative evangelical interpretation of ideal Christian unity.

⁷⁰ Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, 47.

⁷¹ Helen Lee, “InterVarsity’s Plan for a Culturally Diverse Staff,” *Christianity Today*, October 8, 2014.

⁷² In *MultiAsian.Church* Chuang notes the growing number of churches that do not explicitly identify as Asian, but more commonly as “multi-ethnic/multi-cultural,” yet are attended by Asian American majorities. He defines these as “multi-Asian churches.” See DJ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church: A Future for Asian Americans in a Multiethnic World* (Orange County: DJ Chuang, 2015), 138-141.

⁷³ Helen Lee, “Silent No More,” 44.

IV.C. Understanding the Chinese American Church's Mission

Reflection upon the grounds for an ethnic church is, in many ways, a missiological question. It is a question about what task or mission the church is meant to achieve. Such missiological questions bring into focus another even more basic question that Chinese American Christians are beginning to debate: "What is the mission of the church?" While this question is not unique to the Chinese or Asian American Christian context,⁷⁴ Chinese American Christians grapple with it in distinct ways. The earliest Chinese churches in America did not linger upon this question the way that Chinese churches do today. In the late 19th century and the early 20th century the Protestant mainline mission boards, though influenced by the anti-slavery sentiment of the time, were most strongly influenced by the foreign missionary movement. This translated into a desire to first save the souls of the Chinese population in America, and secondly to thus facilitate their transition into the American society and culture.⁷⁵ Hence, at the beginning of Chinese American Christianity, social concerns, though definitely in view, were subordinate to the church's mission. Saving souls was primary for the missionaries working amongst the Chinese in America, and this emphasis was not questioned or problematized.

This emphasis on saving souls, though less prevalent amongst the Chinese churches that remained within the mainline denominations, is overwhelmingly witnessed within most of Chinese American Christianity today. As highlighted previously, it is hard to miss the

⁷⁴ The Lausanne 1974 Congress demonstrates the worldwide prevalence of this debate amongst evangelicals, a debate which continues today. See also C. Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); John R. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World: What the Church Should Be Doing Now!* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975); Roger E. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission: Mission in Historical and Theological Perspective*, second edition, revised and enlarged (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1993); Kevin Deyoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crosswalk, 2011).

⁷⁵ Timothy Tseng, "Ministry At Arm's Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952," PhD diss., (Union Theological Seminary, 1994), 31-35.

evangelistic impulse that drives Chinese American evangelicalism. Although Chinese churches in America have facilitated social action, such as cultural preservation through Chinese language classes and service projects to Chinese immigrants as a central part of many Chinese communities in America, “mission” is predominantly equated with evangelistic outreach. However, this soul-saving emphasis in Chinese American Christianity is not without concerned critics, especially from the growing number of Chinese American Christians who imbibe more progressive convictions.

Rev. Dr. James Chuck, pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church, San Francisco and a theological educator at American Baptist Seminary of the West, was among the first Chinese American Christians to voice such a concern. For Chuck, the central function of the church was indeed evangelism, but evangelism was “nothing less than the totality of all that the church does.”⁷⁶ Chuck acknowledged that the Chinese American church was not “sufficiently concerned about the large social issues such as injustice: war, the pollution of the environment, etc.,” but was “preoccupied exclusively with personal morality and the salvation of the individual’s soul.”⁷⁷ He attributed this to the fundamentalist-liberal controversy. He wondered: “Why could we not have said that the more deeply we are committed to Christ, the more we will be committed to the world and its needs? And conversely, the more we are committed to the world and its needs, the more we will see the need for the new life in Christ.”⁷⁸ However, as Tseng notes, “Chuck’s call for a more holistic Chinese Christian ministry in the 1970s probably fell on deaf ears among those who viewed separation as a fundamental Christian tenet.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ James Chuck, “Where are the Chinese Churches Heading in the 1970’s?” Paper presented before the Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco, Feb. 28, 1980.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Timothy Tseng, “Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism” in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, ed. Jane Iwamura & Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2003), 263-264.

Still, a handful of Chinese American Christians resonated with Chuck and continue to voice their concerned critiques regarding the Chinese American church's understanding of mission. In an article for the *American Baptist Quarterly*, Timothy Tseng writes: "Christians are to fulfil the Abrahamic covenant to be a 'blessing to the world' through both personal evangelism and social justice efforts...If anything, what is amiss...is a truncated understanding of the biblical mission of the Church."⁸⁰ Although Tseng argued that conservative evangelicalism, even with its other-worldly and separatist strands, provided Chinese Americans with helpful contextual theology during the socio-political crises of the mid-20th century, he also faults this separatism – largely adopted from fundamentalist revivalist immigrants – for the Chinese American church's truncated view of mission:

Despite separatism's ability to help Diasporic Chinese weather the storm of socio-political dislocation, it has not been able to generate any unified Chinese Christian public witness and fails to appreciate the significance of the historical development of the Chinese mainline Protestant experience...separatism supplies the ideological structure for the formation of distinctive ethno-religious identities during periods of great turbulence— but offers few resources for Chinese evangelical engagement in their host societies.⁸¹

Tseng strongly believes that social engagement is an essential part of the church's mission.

Inspired by "radical Evangelicals," Allen Yeh would strongly agree with Tseng and Chuck. "Radical Evangelicals" is the term Yeh uses to describe evangelicals, such as Orlando Costas, Ron Sider, Richard Cizik, and Jim Wallis, who have expressed their faith with an emphasis upon social justice and creation care, to the dismay of Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, and their Religious Right evangelicalism. Yeh writes: "Politics, social justice, personal pietism, religious revival – these can all be summed up as 'Real Christianity'...In radical Evangelicalism, no part of life is left untouched; it is a holistic transformation along the lines

⁸⁰ Timothy Tseng, "Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 285.

⁸¹ Timothy Tseng, "Trans-Pacific Transpositions," 264.

of Bonhoeffer’s ‘costly discipleship’ and Wilberforce’s ‘Real Christianity.’⁸² In this same vein, David Leong argues that we need an understanding of mission that is informed by the New Jerusalem and a robust Christian theology of place. In response to being sent by God, faithful people of God “are agents and instruments of God’s peace and justice through the power of the Holy Spirit” on their way to New Jerusalem.⁸³ And the New Jerusalem is not only an eschatological destination, but “a place we pursue and cultivate in the here and now, as a sign of God’s kingdom breaking into the present moment of our immediate geography.”⁸⁴

It should be noted that Tseng, Yeh, and Leong participate in a wider Asian American Christian discourse that increasingly affirms the conviction of holistic integrated mission and critiques Asian American churches. Well-known preacher, Eugene Cho of Quest Church in Seattle also advocates a less truncated gospel.⁸⁵ Another example is Soong-Chan Rah, a Korean American who has become somewhat of a leading voice for younger Asian American evangelicals of the 21st century – especially Chinese American evangelicals. Rah confronts Asian American tendencies and calls for concrete action, even when such action is uncomfortable or costly. In *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, Rah writes:

Asian culture tends to shy away from confrontation. When faced with institutional injustice, confrontation is sometimes necessary. A collective voice addressing issues of systemic evil reflects a deepening concern for social justice ministry. While ministering to the immediate needs of the poor can yield short-term results, seeking long-term solutions usually involves addressing social injustice on a systemic and structural level. Will the emerging Asian American church be willing to confront issues such as poverty and racism?⁸⁶

⁸² Allen Yeh, “The Road We Travel: A Brief History of Evangelicalism” in *Routes & Radishes: And Other Things to Talk About at the Evangelical Crossroads*, eds. Mark Russell, Allen Yeh, Michelle Sanchez, Chelle Stearns, & Dwight Friesen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 30-31.

⁸³ David Leong, *Race & Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 77.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Eugene Cho, “Social Justice Matters Because the Gospel Matters,” *EugeneCho.com*, (blog), 5 January 2011, <https://eugenecho.com/2011/01/05/because-the-gospel-matters/#more-8199> (accessed January 21, 2017).

⁸⁶ Soong-Chan Rah, “Households of Mercy and Justice” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, eds. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 197.

However, those concerned about Chinese American Christianity's "truncated" view of mission, are hopeful for the future and already see signs of change.⁸⁷ In over thirty years of networking and ministering with and to Asian Americans, Rev. Louis Lee, the founder of MESA (Ministries for English Speaking Asians), also encouragingly confirms that "justice and racism are now on [Asian American evangelicals'] screens," though there is certainly much room for improvement.⁸⁸ They have seen Jonathan Wu, Ken Fong, and Shirly Lew, who while pastoring Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles, mobilized their church to engage in various community projects in the city. They also see younger evangelicals getting more and more passionate about social justice and racial reconciliation, and seeking out churches and denominations that are committed to such causes. They see pastors, such as Brian Hui, of Great Exchange Church East Bay, and Steve Wong, of Grace Community Covenant Church, moving out of the Chinese church context and joining denominations, such as the fast-growing Evangelical Covenant Church, which distinctively advocates for holistic mission. As for Jeung, he is not just critical, nor merely hopeful from a distance. Rather, he continues to embody his conviction about holistic mission by residing in and serving his local neighbourhood, the "Murder Dubs" of Oakland, California.⁸⁹ Another indication that Asian American Christians are beginning to see God's mission in a more holistic way is "The Statement on God's Justice,"⁹⁰ which confesses "that the pursuit of social justice is essential

⁸⁷ Timothy Tseng, "Trans-Pacific Transpositions," 264-265; Timothy Tseng & Janet Furness, "The Reawakening of Evangelical Social Consciousness" in *The Social Gospel Today*, ed. Christopher Evans (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 114-125; James Chuck and Timothy Tseng, *The 2008 Report, the Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project, Phase II* (San Francisco, CA: Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity, ISAAC, 2009), 193-194; Jeung *Faithful Generations*, 154-167.

⁸⁸ Louis Lee, "Louis Lee: Asian American Christian Trends," *Asian American Christian* (blog), November 20, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161013175343/http://asianamericanchristian.org/2015/11/louis-lee-trends-that-hes-seen-over-30-years-obcabc-ministry/> (accessed May 17, 2019); "Louis Lee: Heart for Justice and Racism," *Asian American Christian* (blog), November 20, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161013230434/http://asianamericanchristian.org/2015/11/louis-lee-justice-and-racism/> (accessed May 17, 2019).

⁸⁹ Russell Jeung, *At Home in Exile: Finding Jesus among My Ancestors and Refugee Neighbors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

⁹⁰ "Statement on God's Justice." 2019. <https://www.statementongodsjustice.com/> (accessed April 29, 2019).

to a life of faith in Jesus and is a present-day calling of the church.” This statement was drafted by members of Progressive Asian American Christians (PAAC),⁹¹ in which PAAC members responded to “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel,” a conservative evangelical statement which sought to protect the church from “values borrowed from secular culture,” that are “currently undermining Scripture in the areas of race and ethnicity, manhood and womanhood, and human sexuality...under the broad and somewhat nebulous rubric of concern for ‘social justice.’”⁹² Just as American evangelicalism at large has shifted toward holistic mission through the influence of socially conscious institutions, leaders, and movements such as InterVarsity, Fuller Seminary, Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Lausanne, and Urbana, so also are Chinese and Asian American Christians.

IV.D. Fleeing Shame as (Model?) Minorities

Shame is not a problem exclusive to Chinese American Christians.⁹³ However, it is important to wrestle with Ken Fong’s observation:

[F]or many [Asian American Christians], the cleansing, restorative power of the gospel has not accessed one of the deepest aspects of our identity as Asian Americans, both in the individual and in the corporate sense. Even those of us who have been actively serving in churches for years are afflicted with this malady: we are still toxically shame-bound people.⁹⁴

In *Compelled to Excel*, Vivian Louie observes the various contextual influences that urge Chinese Americans toward the perfectionist, achievement-centered mind-set that so

⁹¹Ophelia Hu Kinney, “Crafting the Statement on God’s Justice: Why Not Us?” *Queering the Kingdom: The Unfurling Story of Two Women Who Love Jesus, Justice, and Each Other* (blog), September 17, 2018, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, edited by Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, & Helen Lee, 58-76. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006).

⁹² “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel.” 2019. <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/> (accessed April 29, 2019).

⁹³ On the topic of shame, I draw upon Eleonore Stump’s understanding of shame as anxiety about marginalization or isolation stemming from anticipation of warranted rejection and abandonment by others. Hence, I see shame as an issue of identity within a community of others. See Eleonore Stump, “The Atonement and the Problem of Shame,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 41, supplement (September 2016): 113.

⁹⁴ Ken Fong, *Insights for Growing Asian-American Ministries: How to reach the increasing numbers of ‘Americanized’ Asian Americans for Christ* (Rosemead, CA: EverGrowing Publications, 1990), 92.

often threatens shame upon failure.⁹⁵ Through her interviews, she notices that most Chinese Americans regularly sense the influence of their Confucian roots, in which filial piety is emphasized along with the meritorious notion that success comes by effort. These Confucian values are further intensified by the Chinese American experience, in which Chinese Americans live under the shadow of all the great sacrifices that their immigrant parents made to secure a “better life” for their families in America. Filial piety demands gratitude and an obligation to reciprocate such sacrificial actions. This is often done through achieving highly in education, which Chinese American parents strongly emphasize to their children. Aware of the racial obstacles that non-whites face in America, these parents impress upon them the need to work extra hard in school and in their respective careers to be secure and successful. This narrative has given way to the ‘model minority’ discourse, which some have utilized to interpret the experience of those Asian Americans who have achieved at high educational and vocational levels, though this discourse has also unwittingly consigned shame upon the many others who have not attained to such standards.

The Chinese American experience, with its Confucian roots, immigration challenges, and its ‘model minority’ discourse all contribute to the prevalence of shame amongst Chinese American evangelicals, who often seek to cover their shame or to escape its threat by hard work and achievement. The notion that success primarily requires one’s effort and diligence can easily be translated into Christian living, such that faithfulness or a godly lifestyle are seen as merely a matter of effort, willpower, and determination, rather than matters of faith and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Discipline, self-control, and personal piety are seen as the highest character traits.

⁹⁵ Vivian Louie, *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

Worse yet, sometimes the perfectionist Chinese American emphasis on achievement through effort, often accompanied by moralistic and obedience-centered teaching in the church, has led many Chinese Americans to question, often on a subconscious rather than credal level, whether they have achieved enough to reciprocate *God's* loving acceptance.⁹⁶ In a chapter entitled “Grace-Filled Households,” Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong write:

The Asian American church in particular struggles with this most central gospel message, the message of the outrageously generous father of Luke 15...If we are church leaders, we probably rose to leadership by being like the older son: responsible and careful...Honor and righteousness, living according to standards and expectations, are all of high value in Eastern cultures.⁹⁷

Ken Fong agrees and in a video from Fuller's Asian American Initiative says: “Left unexamined, this pharisaical predisposition will keep producing generation after generation of Asian and Asian American Christians who aren't convinced that God is extremely fond of them. And just like the older brother, they're gonna work long and hard trying to convince the Father that they are worth liking and loving.”⁹⁸

For this reason, Bible study material has even been written to focus on these common obstacles that Asian American Christians face. In a booklet, titled *Losing Face and Finding Grace*, Tom Lin lists such obstacles: 1) low self-esteem, 2) distorted images of God, 3) drivenness and emphasis on security, 4) being unreal.⁹⁹ This helpfully illustrates the various manifestations of shame and legalism that Chinese Americans struggle with as bicultural children of immigrants, who are held up to the model minority standard and pressured to succeed and fit in.

⁹⁶ Jeremy Yong, “Why Grace is Hard for Me as an Asian American,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), November 17, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-grace-is-hard-for-me-as-asian-american> (accessed December 9, 2016).

⁹⁷ Nancy Sugikawa & Steve Wong, “Grace-Filled Households” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, eds. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, & Helen Lee, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22.

⁹⁸ Ken Fong in Fuller Theological Seminary, “Exceedingly Fond: The Asian American Initiative at Fuller Theological Seminary.” YouTube video, 7 minutes. Posted [January 2015]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMkJEPIEtUU> (accessed December 9, 2016).

⁹⁹ Tom Lin, *Losing Face and Finding Grace: 12 Bible Studies for Asian-Americans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 18.

Unfortunately, success is often measured by consumeristic standards. Many Asian Americans, particularly East Asian Americans, such as the Chinese, have witnessed significant socioeconomic advancement over the last half-century. In 2011, the median household income in the U.S. was \$50,502.¹⁰⁰ The Chinese American median household income was estimated to be \$68,420, and this was separated from the estimated Taiwanese American median household income of \$77,596.¹⁰¹ Although neither financial stability nor wealth automatically translate into consumeristic lifestyles, the temptation is real for Chinese Americans. Chinese American evangelicals are not immune to this temptation. While recognizing the fallacy of the ‘model minority’ stereotype, Jeung writes “The danger for the Asian American Christian community is to become too inward and self-satisfied. As people who generally have attained a high level of affluence and enjoy career mobility, the lifestyle orientation and group patterns of those in Asian American churches promotes self-sufficiency and a sense of selfish entitlement.”¹⁰² Lisa Sun-Hee Park has argued that such consumeristic behavior is especially prevalent amongst Asian Americans because they often sense the need to demonstrate their social citizenship as Americans through consumeristic behavior, while they negotiate their bicultural identities.¹⁰³ In other words, many Asian Americans consume to conceal their shameful bicultural identities, for consumption is one avenue of assimilating into the majority culture. Hence, they consume to belong, and they seek belonging to escape the shame of exclusion.

¹⁰⁰ Amanda Noss, “Household Income for States: 2010 & 2011,” US Census Bureau, American Survey Briefs, September 2012, p.1, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-02.pdf> (accessed December 8, 2016).

¹⁰¹ Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, “Demographic and Socioeconomic Profiles of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in the United States,” July 2011, p. 10, http://www.apiahf.org/sites/default/files/Demographic_Socioeconomic_Profiles_AANHPI.pdf (accessed December 8, 2016).

¹⁰² Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, 164.

¹⁰³ Lisa Sun-Hee Park, *Consuming Citizenship: Children of Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

The consumeristic mentality of many Asian Americans has had no small impact upon Chinese American Christianity. Writers in the Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE) even believed that the educational, professional, and material gains and pursuits of Chinese American Christians were becoming obstacles to Chinese American mission efforts. Such benefits, they observed, made it harder for Chinese Americans to pursue vocational ministry, especially for those Christians with non-Christian parents.¹⁰⁴ It also does not help that Chinese American churches, predominantly influenced by American evangelicalism, have drunk from the same waters of the Church Growth Movement as many of the rest of America's evangelicals. For according to Soong-Chan Rah, "The culmination of the captivity of the evangelical church to materialistic values is the church growth movement and the American megachurch."¹⁰⁵

The story of Tom Lin, president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, illustrates the pressures to avoid shame by consumeristic standards of success well. In *Pursuing God's Call*, Lin recounts how he gave up his dreams of wealth and watched his Harvard classmates find career success, while he, instead, chose to pursue vocational campus ministry.¹⁰⁶ Even more striking was his mother's threat to him after making this decision that she would hurt herself if he continued this pursuit. Although Lin's parents were professing Christians, their son's decision had made their worst nightmare come to life. They even stopped attending church and isolated themselves from their friends and family in shame. Although this is but one example, the fact that *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents* was written by a team of Asian Americans who minister to other Asian Americans indicates that Lin's

¹⁰⁴ William L. Eng et al., *Completing the FACE of the Chinese Church in America: Promoting Effective Ministries to American-Born Chinese* (Oakland: Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals, 2009), 157.

¹⁰⁵ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 98.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Lin, *Pursuing God's Call* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

experience is not unique.¹⁰⁷ Hence, shame pervasively plagues the Chinese American Christian context in a rather particular way. It pervades their socioeconomic rise, their bicultural experience, and the model minority narrative, and has toxically bred both legalism and consumerism.

IV.E. Relating to the Cultural Moment

Because Chinese American Christianity is very much shaped by pietistic missions and conservative evangelical theology, the prevalent posture that Chinese Americans take toward modernistic liberal theology and the secular pluralism of their late-modern American context is one of apprehension, suspicion, and contention. For many Chinese American Christians, modernism and the liberal theology that has emerged from it are the archenemies of their fundamental Christian convictions and their commitment to Scripture's authority.¹⁰⁸ To many, modernism and liberal theology have threatened orthodoxy with "man-centered" reasoning (as opposed to "God-centered" or "biblical" reasoning). According to this conservative evangelical narrative, such reasoning has allowed modern secularism to dominate American society with its liberal values, quieting the theological voices of religious authority in various civil matters under the auspices of tolerance and neutrality. According to Thomas Wang, modern secularism is the great evil of contemporary American society, for it promotes 1) "Tolerance of different views including tolerance of evil; otherwise, you are a hate-monger," 2) Freedom "to do anything; otherwise you are a bigot," 3) Multi-lateralism, such that "[a]ll isms and religions are equal and none can claim to be unique," 4) Unity, peace, and love if everyone would just agree on points 1-3, cast off sexual restrictions, and be pro-choice.¹⁰⁹ These views reflect the ideological echo chambers in which Chinese American

¹⁰⁷ Jeanette Yep et al., eds., *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Sugikawa & Steve Wong, "Grace-Filled Households," 25.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Wang, "My People Have Changed God" in *America, Return to God* ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006),

Christians most commonly dwell, such as the conservative evangelical seminaries that they usually attend and other parachurch organizations and conventions that they participate in (i.e. Ambassadors for Christ and Chinese Mission Convention).

Thus “Christ against culture” and “Christ and culture in paradox” postures are quite prevalent within Chinese America Christianity. Chinese American Christians are not known to consign themselves to separate monastic orders outside of popular American culture, but they are known to view the currents of American popular culture (particularly since the mid-20th century) with much suspicion and discouragement. This sentiment is observable in FACE’s *Completing the Face of the Chinese American Church in America*, in which the challenge of “secular” threats is mentioned six times.¹¹⁰ There is a fear of the “secular and evil influences prevalent in America.”¹¹¹ Such influences are thought to threaten the Christian worldview, often by way of the secular undergraduate campuses and professors that Chinese Americans frequently encounter. Instrumental Chinese American evangelical Thomas Wang certainly dreads this threat. In 2006, he edited an anthology in which he bemoaned the post-war secularization movement, for which he blames the moral, ethical, and religious downfall of America.¹¹²

The widespread distrust of modernism is particularly pronounced when one observes how Chinese American Christians associate with the non-evangelical academy. To many Chinese American Christians, the non-evangelical academy, from the natural and social sciences to academic theology, embodies and advances everything that was wrong with modernity. They lament over modernism’s often anti-supernatural worldview, which has threatened their foundational Creationist worldview. As for academic theology, it is not

¹¹⁰ William L. Eng et al., *Completing the FACE of the Chinese Church in America: Promoting Effective Ministries to American-Born Chinese*, 5, 83, 111, 137, 179.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹² Thomas Wang, “Introduction” in *America, Return to God* ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006), 4.

uncommon for them to view anything beyond their evangelical seminary educations as practically irrelevant for real-life church ministry at best, or principally compromised by “man-centered” reasoning at worst.

This strong aversion to modernity and the non-evangelical academy has been classified as theological “anti-intellectualism” by some. The wider American neo-evangelical movement, as a whole, has done much to combat this stigma and to less abrasively engage the wider culture. But still, it is believed that the Chinese church “has a long way to go before she catches up to share this new vision of interacting with and penetrating contemporary culture.”¹¹³ In fact, a disproportionately small number of Chinese American seminarians pursue advanced degrees after seminary. The ones who do are generally sympathetic toward more liberal theological convictions and institutions, which marginalizes them from mainstream Chinese American Christianity. At the moment, the majority of Chinese American theologians with doctoral degrees and academic publications find themselves on the theological margins of Chinese American Christianity, and would be considered as too liberal by most Chinese American churches.¹¹⁴ Most Chinese American churches could not care less about such academic work. Instead of combating what they deem to be “too liberal” by engaging such theologians in the academic arena, most Chinese American evangelicals virtually ignore them. This is easy for them to do because liberal theology is held by a minority within Chinese American Christianity and most Chinese American Christians view themselves as more concerned with the spiritual, pastoral, and practical dealings of church ministry. Peter Cha’s broader reflection on many Asian Americans’ theological complacency illustrates this well, and applies equally to Chinese Americans. Speaking of Asian Americans, he said:

¹¹³ Ling, *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things*, 91.

¹¹⁴ DJ Chuang and Timothy Tseng, eds. *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*. (Lulu.com, 2013), vi, 103.

[W]hen they graduate from seminary, they're done with *theological* education. They then go into ministry thinking that theology is to be left in a seminary for theologians to write about and teach. They think they are done with theology—they've passed their exams and their ordination exam—and now theology doesn't matter. It's almost the end of theological reflections. And it concerns me in that churches are being guided by theologically unreflective pastors and leaders.¹¹⁵

Though some may wonder how the large numbers of Asian American Christians – highly educated in secular institutions – might succumb to this scandal of the mind, Antony Alumkal interestingly argues that the powerful strength of the evangelical subculture has led them to read the Bible more literally, and less critically, hence reinforcing their suspicion and their rejection of the modern academy.¹¹⁶ Alumkal believes that such literalism only facilitates an unhealthy relationship with the modern academy.

Meanwhile, a growing number of Chinese American evangelicals eschew the anti-intellectual fundamentalism that is found in much of Chinese American Christian discourse. They are concerned about the lack of theological reflection within the Chinese American church. They fear the “scandal of the evangelical mind,”¹¹⁷ which they especially witness amongst Chinese American evangelicals, and there is a growing discontentment amongst Chinese American Christians with the prevalent “Christ against culture” and “Christ and culture in paradox” postures. This discontentment signals an emerging shift in Chinese American Christianity. The anti-intellectual aspects of fundamentalism are increasingly challenged amongst Chinese American Christians. The status quo of disregarding modern questions and critiques is becoming harder and harder for Chinese American evangelicals to maintain. Thus, today's Chinese American evangelicals are confronted with how they will engage with the cultural forces of modernity and the challenge of secularism. Accusations of

¹¹⁵ Peter Cha quoted in S. Steve Kang, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Antony Alumkal, “The Scandal of the ‘Model Minority’ Mind? The Bible and Second-Generation Asian American Evangelicals,” *Semeia*, 90-91 (2002).

¹¹⁷ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

naiveté, anti-intellectualism, and apathy continue to mount against those who continue to disregard these concerns, and division amongst Asian American Christians grows.

The growing discontentment amongst a handful of Chinese and Asian American Christians has given way to a growing division between those who share different views concerning how to relate to contemporary culture. The context for this division is what James Davison Hunter has helpfully termed “the culture wars,” a conflict between traditionalists who are committed to “an external, definable, and transcendent authority,” and progressives who tend “to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life.”¹¹⁸ In line with the trends that Hunter noted when he wrote *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* in 1987, evangelical theology has become increasingly de-ghettoized, evangelical moral boundaries and family convictions have loosened, and the political positions of evangelicals has become more divided with a growing tolerance for liberal views.¹¹⁹

It is out of this context that the loudest critique against Chinese American Christianity is levelled from within its own ranks. Though obviously not the clearest or most helpful critique, the most dominant and all-encompassing critique of Chinese American Christianity is that it is “too conservative.” Packed into this broad and general critique are a vast number of descriptions having to do with both political conservatism, theological conservatism, and an overall conservative disposition.

While predominantly maintaining “Christ against culture” and “Christ in paradox with culture” postures, Chinese American Christians have also been known and critiqued for largely adopting supposedly divisive and exclusive social positions. Most Chinese American Christians have held to traditional positions on racial issues, gender, sexuality, and other

¹¹⁸ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 44-45.

¹¹⁹ James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 46-49, 72, 111, 151.

faiths. Hence, they are less vocal about racial injustice in their churches, many tend toward complementarian gender roles, most believe that homosexual marriage is unbiblical, and also that Christianity is the only true faith.¹²⁰

However, the growing number of progressive Asian American evangelicals are challenging their churches and parachurches for their silence on issues of misogyny, sexual discrimination, or on racial injustice (such as their silence over #BlackLivesMatter or the perpetuation of the model minority myth). Recently, a handful of prominent Asian American Christian leaders signed “An Open Letter to the Evangelical Church” calling out the American evangelical institution as a whole for its racially unjust treatment toward Asian Americans.¹²¹ More and more are wary of Asian American Christians who bash affirmative action and who do not sympathize with movements such as #BlackLivesMatter.¹²² And strong voices are emerging that firmly believe that equality demands egalitarian views of gender in the church.¹²³ On the issue of sexuality, while most are maintaining the traditional

¹²⁰ Timothy Tseng, “What if Vincent Chin was an Evangelical Chinese Christian? (Expanded),” *Timothy Tseng* (blog), December 5, 2016, <https://timtseng.net/2016/12/05/what-if-vincent-chin-was-an-evangelical-chinese-christian-expanded/> (accessed February 18, 2017); Fenggang Yang, “Gender and Generation in a Chinese Christian Church” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, eds. Tony Carnes & Fenggang Yang (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2004), 205-222; Gerry Shih, “Chinese Christians Are the Focus of Same-Sex Marriage Case,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/us/22sftam.html> (accessed February 18, 2017); “Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths,” Pew Research Center (Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation), 19 July 2012, p. 21, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf> (accessed: 4 May 2016).

¹²¹ Asian American Christians United, “An Open Letter to the Evangelical Church,” *On Cultural Sensitivity and Reconciliation in the Church*, October 2013, http://nextgenerasianchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Open-Letter_AAU_PDF1.pdf (accessed April 19, 2017).

¹²² Timothy Tseng, “Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 278; Liz Lin, “Why Asian Americans Might Not Talk About Ferguson,” *The Salt Collective* (blog), August 27, 2014, <http://thesaltcollective.org/asian-americans-might-talk-ferguson/>; Erna Kim Hackett, “Asian Immigrants And Black Lives Matter,” *Feisty Thoughts* (blog), January 11, 2016, <http://feistythoughts.com/2016/01/11/asian-immigrants-and-black-lives-matter/> (accessed February 19, 2017); “The Unacceptable Silence of Asian American Christians In Response to Ferguson,” *Feisty Thoughts* (blog), August 16, 2014, <http://feistythoughts.com/2014/08/16/the-unacceptable-silence-of-asian-american-christians-in-response-to-ferguson/> (accessed February 19, 2017).

¹²³ See Amos Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit: A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2011), 146-148; Timothy Tseng, “Unbinding Their Souls: Chinese Protestant Women in Twentieth-Century America” in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, eds. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth & Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 136-163.

position along with Tom Lin, Greg Jao, and Christopher Yuan,¹²⁴ some, such as Deborah Jian Lee, Ken Fong, Liz Lin, and Bianca Louie are pushing the envelope further and have come to openly affirm homosexual marriage as blessed by God.¹²⁵ On the issue of other religions, it is too early to tell how progressives view the traditional exclusivist position of the Asian American churches and organizations that they came from. However, inclusivity is a significant part of the progressive evangelical ethos, and it would not be surprising for that to be reflected in their theology of religions.

To the quiet majority of Chinese American Christians, these shifts represent a capitulation to modern cultural trends and a subordination of Scripture to culture and secular society. So, for example, Christians who accept egalitarianism are often seen as those who have given in to the growing feminist forces in the public square. Christians who affirm #BlackLivesMatter and urge their Chinese churches to be more vocal about racial and other social injustices are often waved off as having accepted a compromised “social gospel” or being too concerned with the secular concerns of identity politics. Those churches who are open and affirming toward gay marriage are seen as having compromised and given over to the secular culture’s notion of equality. And Christians who do not hold an exclusivist theology of religions are also seen as being fooled by the relativism of a secularized pluralistic society.

¹²⁴ InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, “A Theological Summary of Human Sexuality,” InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA Position Paper, 2016, <http://www.movements.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/InterVarsity-Christian-Fellowship-Theology-of-Human-Sexuality-Paper.pdf> (accessed December 23, 2016); Christopher Yuan, *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God. A Broken Mother’s Search for Hope* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2011)

¹²⁵ Deborah Jian Lee, *Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women & Queer Christians Are Reclaiming Evangelicalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015); Ken Fong, “Bianca Louie #078,” *Asian America: the Ken Fong Podcast*. Podcast audio, November 2, 2016. <http://asianamericapodcast.com/?podcasts=bianca-louie> (accessed December 23, 2016); Serena Poon in Martin Shaw, “Gay Asian (“Gaysian”) and Christian: A Coming Out Story – Ep. 7” *Psych Rally* (Podcast), August 11, 2016, http://s102.podbean.com/pb/d11522336123948cb1a0dfb1ec9ca03d/58a8e37a/data1/fs60/967357/uploads/PRP_007_Serena.mp3 (accessed February 19, 2017).

But the name-calling between conservatives and progressives, whether it be “backwards, dogmatic tribalists” or “compromised, heretical relativists” has resulted in great tension. So much, in fact, that many progressive Asian American Christians no longer feel comfortable or even welcomed in the churches and evangelical parachurches in which they grew up and participated. Such was the impetus for Liz Lin’s, widely read blog post at *The Salt Collective*.¹²⁶ In this blog post, which was eventually published by *The Huffington Post* and shared over five thousand times on Facebook, Lin identified as a progressive Asian American Christian, and spoke of the loneliness she felt for being ideologically alienated within Asian American Christian circles, yet racially and culturally alienated within progressive Christian circles.

Lin’s blog post even precipitated a Facebook group of over six thousand members, called “Progressive Asian American Christians.” In an informal survey conducted in this Facebook group, 100% of the (over 80) participants, when asked if they had previously participated in evangelical churches or organizations answered in the affirmative. Numerous participants in this group have shared similar stories of alienation and spiritual homelessness, since they have left their conservative evangelical Asian churches and organizations, and many have even started meeting together in their own respective regions. Among the more vocal participants are Jonathan Tan and Ken Fong. Other notable members of the group include Timothy Tseng, Russell Jeung, Daniel Lee, Deborah Jian Lee, and Soong-Chan Rah. Though the group is by no means homogenous in its beliefs, and not every member of the group need subscribe to the group’s stated ethos, it seeks to be “an LGBT-affirming, feminist, pro-justice, anti-racist, pro-immigrant, anti-ableist space that holds a wide range of

¹²⁶ Liz Lin, “The Loneliness of the Progressive Asian American Christian,” *The Salt Collective* (blog), December 22, 2016, <http://thesaltcollective.org/loneliness-progressive-asian-american-christian/> (accessed February 16, 2017).

theologies.”¹²⁷ The birth of the PAAC Facebook group marks a significant moment for the emergence of progressive Asian American Christians, altering the face of Asian American Christianity.

However, the progressives still remain a minority amongst Asian American Christians, and division is only increasing in the Asian American church, for as soon as Liz Lin’s blog voiced the concerns of progressive Asian American Christians, Korean American Thomas Hwang, a graduate of Talbot School of Theology, responded by complimenting some of Lin’s points, but also accusing her of adopting the “social gospel.”¹²⁸ Furthermore, Chinese American Jimmy Li, a graduate of The Master’s Seminary, took exception to the more sociological arguments that Lin made concerning why so many Asian American Christians are politically and theologically conservative. Li is convinced that Chinese American Christians are conservative simply because they believe the Bible, and accused Lin of identity obsession and approving sin.¹²⁹ This points to the unfortunate reality that not only are Chinese Americans struggling with a plurality of political views in American society, but also with a plurality of theological views amongst themselves. Hence, Asian American Christians are increasingly divided amongst a plurality of viewpoints and theological convictions, and this is most evident in their responses to secularism.

V. Summary

The characteristics inherent to American evangelicalism in combination with the Asian American subculture’s model minority narrative have reinforced the conservative

¹²⁷ “About,” *Progressive Asian American Christians* (website) <https://paachristians.org/about/> (accessed April 29, 2019).

¹²⁸ Thomas Hwang, “A Response to Progressive Asian-Americans Who Are Lonely in Traditional Churches,” *Tom-Talks* (blog), January 18, 2017, <http://www.tom-talks.org/blog/2017/1/17/a-response-to-progressive-asian-americans-who-are-lonely-in-traditional-churches> (accessed March 3, 2017).

¹²⁹ Jimmy Li, “Huff Po Religion Misses Important Reason Why Conservative Asian American Churches are Pro-life and Pro-Family,” *The Domain For Truth* (blog), January 11, 2017, <https://veritasdomain.wordpress.com/2017/01/11/huff-po-religion-misses-important-reason-why-conservative-asian-american-churches-are-pro-life-and-pro-family/#comment-50363> (accessed March 3, 2017).

evangelical orientation of Chinese American Protestants. American evangelicalism resonated well with Chinese immigrants because its notions of authority, born-again conversion, and evangelism, helped the immigrants interpret their new transitional identities in America, and offered them community in their new home. Additionally, the flawed, yet influential model minority narrative has contributed to the conservative evangelical orientation of Chinese Americans through the undergraduate experience of evangelical campus ministries and the status quo-maintaining mentality of a middle-class lifestyle.

However, Chinese American Christianity's amicability with American evangelicalism over the past half-century or so has not carried on without its own problems. The Chinese American evangelical church has struggled to consistently find harmony in the midst of its multi-generational, multi-lingual dynamics. It has also largely shirked the question of how we ought to conceive of ethnic-specific churches in the American context, especially those where the majority of its attenders speak English. And like many other conservative evangelical churches, Chinese American churches have been known to take a quite narrow view of mission, with a virtually exclusive focus on saving souls. Furthermore, Chinese American evangelicals continue to struggle with a culture of shame, which underlies much of their legalistic and consumeristic tendencies. Finally, in response to the rise of a pluralistic secular society, the Chinese American church has been prone toward anti-intellectualism and a failure to deeply engage the questions and critiques of the modern non-evangelical academy. This has led to sharp division between them and the energetic and growing minority of progressive Asian American Christians who have chosen to respond to secularism quite differently.

In the next chapter, I aim to theologically diagnose these problems. I will argue that these problems have largely resulted from Chinese American Christians uncritically imbibing most of popular and conservative American evangelicalism. By theologically diagnosing the

concerns that have arisen from their uncritical acceptance of popular and conservative evangelicalism, and by demonstrating the lack of deep engagement with these problems on a theological level, I will argue that Chinese American evangelicals need a more constructive contextualized theology.

CHAPTER THREE - Chinese American Evangelicals & the Need for a Constructive Contextualized Theology

I. Introduction

In Chapter One, I sought to demonstrate how Chinese American Christianity took on a theologically conservative and evangelical orientation from the mid-twentieth century into the twenty-first. In Chapter Two I noted the confluence between American evangelicalism and the emergent Asian American subculture, and the consequent problems that have arisen within the predominantly evangelical Chinese American church. The aim of this chapter is to *theologically diagnose* these various problems that have arisen. By diagnosing these problems theologically, my aim is to expose Chinese American evangelicalism's need for contextual theology, with a focus on the needs of primarily English-speaking Chinese American Christians. I hope to answer the questions: 1) What are the theological issues underlying the aforementioned problems in Chinese American Christianity? 2) Why do the issues and concerns that Chinese American evangelicals face demand a more contextualized theology than what popular and conservative mainstream evangelicalism in America has typically offered?

My argument is that popular American evangelicalism and the conservative evangelical theology that has so dominated Chinese American Christianity (and much of Asian American evangelicalism) over the past half-century have plagued the Chinese American church with their depreciating disregard for ethnicity, a disharmonious dynamic of individualism and collectivism, and their dualistic doctrine of creation. As such, popular and conservative American evangelicalism has proven itself insufficient and under-contextualized for the Chinese American church. Furthermore, the dearth of explicitly theological reflection

upon the concerns of Chinese American evangelicals demands a conscious effort toward constructing a contextualized Chinese American theology. Chinese American evangelicals need a more constructive contextualized theology to better meet the challenges of their unique ethno-religious and bicultural context for the 21st century.

II. Diagnosing the Theological Defects of Chinese American Evangelicalism

Without reducing the Chinese American church's challenges to mere matters of theology, it is important to recognize the theological nature of the issues that were summarized in Chapter Two. While such issues indicate problematic behaviors and actions within Chinese American Christian churches and communities, I want to focus on the problematic theological underpinnings that lie underneath such behaviors and actions. This section will seek to diagnose the challenges and issues that Chinese American Christians face. It will then attempt to connect these diagnoses to theological strands within the popular and conservative American evangelicalism that most Chinese American Christians imbibe. The goal is to demonstrate how their predominant theological paradigm over the past fifty to sixty years has failed to sufficiently address the specific contextual concerns of Chinese American Christianity. The inability of most Chinese American Christians' conservative evangelical theologies to remedy the issues previously raised demonstrates their need for theological resources that can 1) help them appreciate the theological significance of their ethnicity, 2) help them harmonize the individual vs. collective dynamics of their situations, and also 3) help them more robustly affirm the goodness of creation and culture.

II.A. A Depreciating Disregard for Ethnicity

According to the Asian American sociologist, Antony Alumkal, American evangelicalism hosts a spectrum of racial projects.¹ On the far right are people like Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition, who insists on fighting for America's (white) "traditional values." On the left, Alumkal sees Jim Wallis of Sojourners and Tony Campolo, who represent the social justice-oriented wing of evangelicalism and strongly advocate for racial reconciliation. In between these two is where he locates "the center of gravity of American evangelical leadership reflecting the median racial values of the broader American society."² He describes this middle position as supportive of "formal legal equality for members of different races, but [in] opposition to programs such as affirmative action designed to redistribute economic and political resources, views that have much in common with the neoconservative racial project."³ Emerson and Smith, in *Divided By Faith*, argue that this prevalent center position is largely due to a theological worldview that emphasizes individualism, free will, and personal relationships.⁴ Furthermore, this theological worldview obscures from their sight the realities of systemic injustice leading many to believe that America's problems with race can be solved by the repentance and conversion of sinful individuals. Hence, a kind of "color-blind" equality is emphasized that does not pay much attention to systemic disparities involved. As David Leong writes: "Colorblindness hastily glosses over [the] scars that have become structural realities and instead imagines a premature arrival to the land of equal opportunity and pure meritocracy."⁵

¹ Antony Alumkal, "American Evangelicalism in the Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (Autumn, 2004): 195-213.

² *Ibid.*, 201.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Michael Emerson & Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵ David Leong, *Race & Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 40.

Alumkal believes this perspective has made its way into Asian American evangelicalism through conservative evangelical campus ministries and churches. He notes the downplaying of racial and ethnic identity amongst Asian Americans because they prefer to emphasize their transcendent Christian identity. In the conservative evangelical worldview of many Asian Americans, “distinctions based on ethnicity...and race...are transcended by relationship to God.”⁶

Furthermore, the relative economic and social success of East Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, has also led many to sympathize with “color-blind” approaches to race or “ethnic groups.”⁷ It has allowed them to focus on their transcendent Christian identities with little cost to themselves. However, by adopting the “color-blind” Christianity that is found in much of conservative evangelicalism, Chinese American Christians have found themselves unable to engage with some of the ecclesial and theological issues that increasingly face them. Because Chinese American Christians have lacked a robust theology that affirmed their ethnic identities, many have somewhat condemned themselves by being unable to account for their participation in ethnically-Chinese churches. Others have abandoned their ethnic churches as illegitimate and unfaithful altogether. Chinese American Christians have also been largely unable or unwilling to utilize their unique ethnic perspectives in their engagement with theology, leading them to merely parrot the Western theology that they receive in the conservative evangelical seminaries that they most frequently attend. In short, most Chinese American Christians have not deeply reflected

⁶ Antony Alumkal, *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation (New Americans)* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2003), 82.

⁷ Lisa Sung argues that “ethnic groups” is a more fruitful term for reconstructing the problematic concept of race. She follows Richard Schermerhorn’s definition, which understands that there are subsections that are distinct within populations, and that ethnic groups are collective subsections that have “real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood.” See Richard Schermerhorn quoted in Elizabeth Yao-Hwa Sung, “‘Race’ and ethnicity discourse and the Christian doctrine of humanity: A systematic sociological and theological appraisal,” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2011), 199-200.

upon the unique particularity of their individual ethnicity, and how it relates to the broad collective unity of the church catholic.

II.A.1. Ethnic Churches: Agents of Disunity?

Daniel Eng, a Chinese American, tells a story from his undergraduate days in his blog “Asian American Pastor.”⁸ While attending Boston Chinese Evangelical Church he also participated in a predominantly white campus fellowship. While engaging in theological discussion at this fellowship, he recalls them saying: “Your church is not biblical. Your (Asian) fellowship goes against what God desires.” They cited proof texts, such as Revelation 7, arguing that God desired for all races to worship together, and that ethnic churches were guilty of “voluntary segregation.” As they offered him a “better” alternative saying, “Come to my church! Come and experience diversity,” what was communicated to Daniel was that they saw their own churches as, not only more biblical, but as also being more “pleasing to God.” According to their logic, the individual ethnic distinctiveness of ethnic churches prevented them from upholding the collective unity of the church catholic.

Lest one think that this multi-ethnic unity argument against ethnic churches is merely utilized by unthoughtful undergraduate students, one need go no further than reading evangelical thinkers such as, René Padilla,⁹ J.H. Yoder,¹⁰ David Bosch,¹¹ or Charles Van Engen.¹² The prevailing view is that multi-ethnic unity must be prioritized over ethnic particularity for the church because the barriers of race, social class, and nationality have

⁸ Daniel Eng, “‘Your church is not biblical.’ –Why Ethnic-Specific Ministries Exist in America, part 2,” *Asian American Pastor: Grace, race, and the Kingdom of God* (blog), June 20, 2008, <https://aapastor.wordpress.com/2008/06/20/your-church-is-not-biblical-why-ethnic-specific-ministries-exist-in-america-part-2/> (accessed December 29, 2016).

⁹ René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 142-169.

¹⁰ J.H. Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel” in *Exploring Church Growth* ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), 283.

¹¹ David Bosch, “The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20” in *Exploring Church Growth*, 235-240.

¹² Charles Van Engen, “Is the Church for Everyone? Planting Multi-Ethnic Congregations in North America,” *Global Missiology* 1, no. 2 (October 2004).

been removed in Christ. According to this view, ethnicity is relativized in the New Testament church.

Because Chinese American Christians have largely adopted conservative evangelical theology, many have had little to say in response to such arguments against ethnic churches. There are a couple, however, who do insist on the legitimacy and appropriateness of ethnic specific churches in multi-ethnic contexts. Steve Quen, for example, has affirmed the legitimacy of ethnic churches on the basis of their ability to provide more comfort to particular ethnicities than a typical Anglo-evangelical church.¹³ Of course, such an argument stems more from practicality than from Scripture or theology. A more substantial engagement by a Chinese American evangelical on the legitimacy of ethnic churches is found in Daniel Eng's blog, *Asian American Pastor: Grace, race, and the Kingdom of God*. In his blog, Eng critiques common arguments levelled against ethnic specific churches and ministries, and the people who participate in them. For example, Eng argues 1) that multi-racial churches are more homogeneous than people usually admit, 2) that accusing ethnic churches of segregation is misleading, manipulative and divisive, and 3) that Revelation 7 and Galatians 3:28 are not very strong prooftexts against ethnic-specific ministries.¹⁴ He has also argued for the legitimacy of ethnic churches on the basis of "contextualized discipleship."¹⁵

Bruce Fong, on the other hand, has reflected exegetically on ethnic and multi-ethnic churches, and has come to a different conclusion than Quen and Eng. Fong strongly promotes

¹³ Stephen Quen quoted in Helen Lee, "Silent No More: Asian American Christians are growing in influence and audience. Will they be embraced by their broader church family?" *Christianity Today*, October 1, 2014, 39.

¹⁴ See "Why using 'Segregation' to refer to the ethnic church is misleading, manipulative, and divisive," "The Myth of Diversity: Multi-racial churches are homogeneous, and it's great!," "Why the double standard when judging an ethnic church?," "Do Ethnic Churches Breed Ethnocentrism?," "Is being in an ethnic church 'staying comfortable'?", "Why Ethnic Specific Ministries?," "Why Revelation 7 is a poor reason to condemn ethnic specific ministries," "Why Galatians 3:28 is a poor reason to condemn ethnic specific ministries," "'Your church is not biblical.' –Why Ethnic-Specific Ministries Exist in America, part 2," and "Why Ethnic-Specific Ministries Exist in America, part 1" at <https://aapastor.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁵ Daniel Eng quoted in Andrew Ong, "Ethnic Churches in America: A Conversation," *Reformed Margins* (blog), March 20, 2017, <http://reformedmargins.com/ethnic-churches-america-conversation/> (accessed May 2, 2017).

multi-ethnic churches on the basis of Paul's discussion of unity in Ephesians 2.¹⁶ Fong's theology of multi-ethnic unity is quite common among conservative evangelicals, and used to justify a "color-blind" approach to ministry. According to the "color-blind" approach, which tends to flatten ethnicities and their value, it would appear to be true that churches that have ethnic identifiers in their name or specifically target certain ethnic groups are less faithful in at least one aspect of their ministry. After all, is not the church to strive to reach all people? Hence, it would appear that ethnic churches exist contrary to Jesus' vision of unity for the church. For this reason, many Chinese Americans have left their Chinese home churches for more multi-ethnic churches, even if they have often merely fled to multi-Asian churches or predominantly white churches, which are often homogenous in their own ways.

Without a thoughtful theology of ethnicity and its relationship to ecclesiology, Chinese Americans who imbibe "color-blind" view of ethnicity, yet continue to worship in Chinese churches, condemn themselves as being less biblical. At the same time, those Chinese Americans who imbibe this view of ethnicity and therefore leave their ethnic home churches often cannot seem to spiritually thrive or even relationally connect in supposedly "multi-cultural" or non-ethnic-specific churches. Ben Shin observes this phenomenon in which Asian Americans leave their ethnic home churches for a time to worship at hip, young multi-ethnic churches, and yet rarely stay for very long because they cannot connect in the same way that they could in their ethnic churches.¹⁷

Chinese American Christians lack a theology that validates and affirms the positive aspects of ethnic culture which can be preserved and displayed in ethnic churches. Chinese American Christians also lack a theology that can see past the façade of the blatantly Westernized American evangelical churches that claim to be multi-cultural and diverse. They

¹⁶ Bruce W. Fong, *The Wall: Jesus destroyed the wall of hostility; His church must never rebuild it. Ephesians 2:14*, (USA: Bruce W. Fong, 2011).

¹⁷ Benjamin Shin, *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 18-19.

lack a theology that can both critique and affirm non-Western and Western church subcultures. Such a theology would affirm collective church unity and the diversity of individual ethnicities in its ecclesiology, appreciating both ethnic and multi-ethnic churches.

II.A.2. Ethnic Perspectives in Theology: Help or Hindrance?

In the introduction of *Christianity with an Asian Face*, Peter Phan wrote: “Whereas black and Hispanic (Latino/a) theologies have made significant strides and have been recognized as “adults” in the theological world, Asian American theology is still in its infancy.”¹⁸ Similarly, Amos Yong writes: “While Asian American evangelical theology has been by and large consonant with that of the (white) evangelical establishment, it has not found much of its own voice.”¹⁹ However, most Chinese American Christians would not lose sleep over these critiques, nor would most even attempt to engage in Asian American theology seriously. Having internalized a “color-blind” racial ideology “for the sake of unity,” most Chinese American Christians align themselves with the conservative evangelicals who, just as Charles Kraft observed of evangelicals in 1973, are “more concerned with defending [Evangelical Theology’s] basic tenets [than] with developing them.”²⁰ At the mention of any contextual theology that goes beyond the mere application of eternal absolute truths, Chinese American evangelicals can become quite fearful. They express what Harvie Conn observed amongst evangelicals in 1977: a fear “that the growing interest in...ethno-theology or ‘contextual theology’...may be done without sufficient attention to biblically critical analysis of the systems of anthropology and sociology...”²¹ While it is honorable to seek to be faithful to the Bible and not to allow anthropology or

¹⁸ Peter Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), xiii.

¹⁹ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 97.

²⁰ Charles Kraft, *Culture, Communication and Christianity: A Selection of Writings by Charles H. Kraft* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 366.

²¹ Harvie Conn, “Contextualization: Where Do We Begin?” in *Evangelicals and Liberation*, ed. Carl E. Armerding (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 100.

sociology to dominate the theological discipline, ignoring ethnicity and the social aspects which inevitably factor into theology is unwise and hardly even possible. As Daniel Wong has noted in his reflection on preaching to various cultures, “It is important to reflect on one’s social background and how it influences preaching. The temptation for a preacher is to rush to look at others through audience analysis without looking into the mirror.”²²

Chinese American Christians, who have at least some appreciation for their own Protestantism should understand this. Calvin wrote that “[o]ur wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves,” and that the “knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie.”²³ But if Chinese American Christians affirm Calvin’s prolegomena concerning the knowledge of God and man, and that the knowledge of ourselves cannot escape the category of ethnicity, a significant question is raised: “What has ethnicity to do with the knowledge of God – what has ethnicity to do with theology?” If one were to survey the theological discourse among conservative evangelicals, particularly within the streams that most Chinese American evangelicals swim in, the answer would appear to be: “Little to nothing.” Timothy Tseng explains:

I believe that on a “popular” level there are biblical-theological perspectives which universalize Christian identity while erasing particular identities. I will call this a “totalitarian” Christian discipleship which is rooted in a “gnostic” dualism between “spirit and flesh.” One of the consequences of such thinking is the desire to escape one’s particular identities so that one can become simply a “Christian.” “...Why make a big deal about one’s ethnic or racial background? All that matters is being a Christian,” this theology suggests. This “popular” level theology...has greater influence on younger Asian Pacific American Christians today than the more “racial-ethnic-centered” theological views of an earlier generation of Asian Pacific American pastors.²⁴

²² Daniel Wong, “Preaching in a Multicultural World” *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* (Mar/Apr 2008), <https://www.preaching.com/articles/preaching-in-a-multicultural-world/> (accessed May 29, 2019).

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 2nd edition by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, Vol 1, in the Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.1.1, 3.

²⁴ Timothy Tseng, “Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 280.

One such Chinese American evangelical who often seems to relativize and downplay his ethnic and racial background is Francis Chan. Chan is beloved amongst Asian American Christians because he represents an Asian American who has “made it” in the world of evangelical “celebrity preachers.” However, there is hardly anything distinctly Asian American about Chan’s ministry that might particularly serve Asian Americans in a contextualized way. Nate Lee helpfully draws this out in “Francis Chan’s Ethnic Identity Journey.”²⁵ Combing through all the Chan sermons that Lee downloaded over the years, Lee looked for all the times Chan mentioned being Chinese or Asian. He found one sermon where Chan shared about how his faith in Jesus separated him from his Buddhist grandmother in Hong Kong, “almost as if to say that becoming Christian necessitated the abandonment of his Asian roots.” Lee bristles at how Chan, in that sermon to a largely white audience, even spoke some Chinese while telling the story to “accentuate the *otherness* of his grandmother’s culture.” Lee also notes a handful of other sermons where Chan seems only able to utilize his ethnic identity by telling self-deprecating jokes, rather than to shed a unique perspective on truth or to empower those who share his background. In short, few could disagree that Chan’s theology and ministry appear virtually unaffected by his unique experience as an Asian American. Chan is not unique. Many Asian American evangelicals have come to view their Asian cultures similarly. Not wanting their pure universal beliefs to be compromised by their particular Asian cultures, they subscribe to an American evangelicalism which keeps “the so-called historical Christian faith apart from their own cultural heritages.”²⁶

The lack of engagement between ethnicity, culture, and theology amongst Asian Americans is problematic for at least four reasons. First, it perpetuates the simplistic

²⁵ Nate Lee, “Francis Chan’s Ethnic Identity Journey,” *Nate J. Lee* (blog), July 14, 2014, <http://natejlee.com/francis-chans-ethnic-identity-journey/> (accessed March 2, 2017).

²⁶ S. Steve Kang, “Truth-Embodying Households” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, eds. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 43.

assumption that evangelical theology is “a-historical, a-cultural and even a-contextual.”²⁷ Second, it can and often leads to theological complacency and confirms the dominant conservative worldview “that evangelical theology, at least in its dogmatic and systematic configurations, is by and large a finished project with minimal input needed from Asian American or other perspectives.”²⁸ Thirdly, it cannot give an honest affirmative answer to the question: “[A]re we expressing, engaging, and developing the cultures of our worshippers well?”²⁹ Hence, Chinese American Christians need a theology that not only affirms the function of their ethnic churches, but their engagement in ethnically-contextualized theology. They need a theology that values, embraces, and utilizes their particular ethnic perspectives in the service of the worldwide church’s collective theological development.

II.B. A Disharmonized Dynamic of Individualism & Collectivism

One of the most commonly discussed features of American evangelicalism, whether cited negatively or positively, is its individualistic character. Mark Noll describes this double-edged dynamic well:

[T]he individualism of American evangelicalism...is the key to much of the energy, much of the dedication, much of the sacrifice that has characterized American Protestant churches when they have been at their best and most effective....But the good harvest of individualistic Christianity also contains some weeds. Outsiders have often looked upon American Protestants as too individualistic, too much driven by personal concerns, too little concerned about communities of faith.³⁰

Hence, it is not mere individualism, but the disproportionate and excessive individualism of American evangelicalism that has rightly drawn criticism. The excessive individualism of American evangelicalism demonstrates the contextually shaped nature of American

²⁷ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 114.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁹ Russell Yee, *Worship on the Way: Exploring Asian North American Christian Experience* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2012), 17.

³⁰ Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 164.

Christianity. It evidences American Christianity's Americanness, as it has been shaped by American thinkers with American values throughout American history.

George Marsden notes that this individualistic emphasis is an inheritance from older revivalist and pietistic evangelicalism, particularly within conservative and fundamentalist Christianity in America.³¹ Many are quick to affirm this point that individualism is especially emphasized in conservative evangelicalism, and they use this point to critique evangelicals. They fault excessive individualism for American evangelicalism's missional, communal, and theological problems. For example, Emerson and Smith argue that the individualism of evangelicals "limited their ability either to recognize institutional problems or to acknowledge them as important," effectively limiting their mission and cultural engagement.³² Those on the progressive fringes of the evangelical world, such as the emergent Christians and the neo-monastic evangelicals critique American evangelicalism, especially its programmatic megachurch and seeker-sensitive varieties, for its individualism and lack of genuine and organic community.³³ Regarding theology, John Stackhouse writes: "For some time now, contemporary theology—not least among evangelical Christians—has decried individualism in theology in favor of a renewed emphasis upon thinking 'in community.'"³⁴ Grenz and Franke evidence this move away from individualism and toward community in *Beyond Foundationalism*.³⁵

³¹ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7.

³² Michael Emerson & Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 79-80.

³³ Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 88-95.

³⁴ John Stackhouse, *Need to Know: Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 175.

³⁵ Stanley Grenz & James Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 223.

Chinese Americans are generally less individualistic and more collectivist than most white Americans.³⁶ However, they are not immune from the damaging effects of disproportionate and excessive individualism. Being both Americans and (American) evangelicals, Chinese American evangelicals have indeed imbibed some of the individualistic tendencies of American evangelicalism. Their absorption of excessive individualism is evident in their truncated view of missions, the ever-tenuous church dynamics of their multi-generational churches, and their often-simplistic approach to theology.

Yet, as individualistic as Chinese American evangelicalism has become, it has not been immune to the dangerous effects of an overemphasized collectivism either. This is best evidenced in the pervasive shame culture that permeates even the most individualistic Chinese American Christian communities, and breeds such as evils as legalism and consumerism. An even broader way that Chinese American evangelicals have also downplayed specificity and particularity is in their theology of ethnicity, one area in which typically individualistic American evangelicals have chosen to emphasize collective unity. This has led to Chinese American Christians questioning the legitimacy of their own ethnic churches and underutilizing their unique cultural perspectives in their engagement with theology.

The following subsections will discuss the ways in which individualism and collectivism have been disharmoniously overstated to the detriment of Chinese American evangelicals in areas such as their approach to mission, their intergenerational church life, their approaches to dogma and theology, their struggle with shame and identity, and their concept of ethnicity.

³⁶ Daphna Oyserman, Heather Coon, & Markus Kemmelmeier, "Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-Analyses," *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 1 (2002): 3-72.

II.B.1. Excessively Individualistic Missiology

In *Consuming Jesus*, Paul Metzger mentions the detrimental “privatization of spirituality, dissolution of public faith, and loss of an extensive, overarching social consciousness” within conservative and fundamentalist evangelicalism.³⁷ As was mentioned earlier, this has happened within Chinese American Christianity as well. Russell Jeung discerns the tendency of individualism in their “born-again” experience emphasis and in their “personal Savior” rhetoric, both of which often contribute to a therapeutic orientation of self-fulfillment.³⁸ On a theological level, the Christian faith is understood to be personal and individual far more than social and corporate. Following the pattern of conservative evangelicalism over the past fifty years, Chinese American Christians have often found themselves unable to reflect upon the more corporate and communal dimensions of mission.³⁹ The only gospel that they preach, or even know of, is the good news of individual repentance, individual faith, and individual salvation. Whether it be in overseas mission trips or local community outreach, the method is virtually always personal relationship evangelism. The aim is to make friends and then find opportunities to share the gospel via the Four Spiritual Laws, the colorful wordless book, or the steps of Evangelism Explosion.

The extent to which Chinese American Christians have succumb to an overly individualistic understanding of mission is largely the extent to which conservative and popular American evangelicalism has succumb to an overly individualistic understanding of mission. While there have certainly been movements of reform and renewal in response to growing criticisms within American evangelicalism, such renewal has only slowly entered into the Chinese American church. However, a growing number of Chinese American

³⁷ Paul Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 16.

³⁸ Russell Jeung, “Evangelical and Mainline Teachings on Asian American Identity,” *Semeia*, 90-91 (2002): 224-225

³⁹ Samuel Ling, *The “Chinese” Way of Doing Things* (San Gabriel, CA: China Horizon, 1999), 141-145.

Christians are increasingly pushing back against the individualistic understandings of evangelism and mission that they grew up learning. David Leong is one such Chinese American Christian. In *Race and Place*, he repudiates how American evangelicals' individualism has blinded them from the systemic nature of racism and their missionary calling to combat such systems, particularly geographic structures and systems.⁴⁰ Others have been captured by fellow Asian American Soong-Chan Rah's critique of the evangelical church's rampant individualism, one evidence of its Western cultural captivity. Rah writes: "Our approach to evangelism is shaped by an individualized soteriology...Furthermore, an overemphasis on individualism in our theology and practice yields an evangelical Christianity seeing social justice and racial reconciliation as a distraction from the 'real work' of personal evangelism."⁴¹

In addition to the Western evangelical individualism that has led to a truncated understanding of mission amongst Chinese American evangelicals, is the effect of the model minority narrative, which many Chinese Americans believe and take pride in. Because many have ascended to socioeconomic success through individual hard work and moved into wealthy suburbs, they cannot see why other minority groups cannot do the same. Often, many Chinese Americans do not even personally know minority people who struggle. They do not see systems of injustice and oppression or the very systems that helped them succeed while holding back others. They only see people who work hard and people who do not.

Commenting on this phenomenon, Russell Jeung writes:

While the church may call out for compassion and social justice, Asian American church members who are professionals too easily develop privatized lives that can shut out the cries of the poor. They can compartmentalize their lives so that they simultaneously pursue capital accumulation through the workplace and therapeutic righteousness in their spiritual lives without noting the contradictions between their two worlds. Beyond wholeness from personal oppression, the Asian American community must repent of its own complicity in the increasing polarization between

⁴⁰ Leong, *Race & Place*, 47.

⁴¹ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 40-41.

the rich and the poor. Given the socioeconomic status of many Asian American churches is professional and upwardly mobile, they must develop more just relationships with others. This process of group repentance might also bring about revival, effect structural change, and restore community.⁴²

Hence, Chinese American Christians, so steeped in conservative evangelicalism, need a less individualistic missiology. They need a missiology that does not see the church's mission as merely a mission to individual souls, but also to whole groups of people, especially the oppressed and marginalized within unjust systems. They need a missiology that carefully explains the relationship between winning individual souls and opposing the structural injustices of their wider community and the world.

II.B.2 The Intergenerational Challenge

The effects of excessive individualism also manifest themselves amongst Chinese American churches in a unique way that highlights the multi-generational and multi-cultural nature of these churches. As was previously discussed, Chinese churches in America offered first generation immigrants a place of comfort and familiarity. Hence, while Chinese American Christianity has largely received the individualism of conservative evangelicalism, the Chinese American church began as a place where Chinese American Christians could nurture and preserve their collectivist impulses. Yet as much as the first generation valued their shared culture and sought to preserve it in their children, through programs such as weekend Chinese school, they still believed that it was in the best interest of their children to adapt to American culture. Even those who did not believe that their children would benefit from adapting, knew that the Americanization of their children was inevitable. Hence, the bicultural experience became a significant part of Chinese American identity for the later generations, even the 1.5 generation.

⁴² Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, 164-165.

The result was a tension between the first generation's strong Chinese cultural values and the following generation's strong American cultural instincts. In 1984 Sam Moy, a member of FACE commented on the tensions between the first generation's collectivist Chinese mentality and the following generations' more individualistic American mentalities. Moy wrote: "For Americans, the individual is the central figure in life; life revolves around him. For Asians, the family or clan is given prominence over the individual."⁴³ As Moy mentions in the rest of his article, this group (Chinese collectivist) vs. individual (American individualist) tension leads to a variety of other tensions. The Chinese collectivist culture emphasizes duty to the church family and respects hierarchy, while the American individualist culture emphasizes individual rights and promotes equality. The Chinese collectivist culture demands deference and restraint, while the American individualist culture prizes assertiveness and expressiveness. Often, both will blame each other's cultures for the tensions that arise in the church. The first generation blames American culture for the shortcomings they perceive in their children. They are critical of the later generations for being too American, self-centered and disrespectful toward authority. The second and third generations, in turn, critique their parents' generation for being "too Chinese," for their submissive herd mentality, and their face-saving avoidance of conflict at the expense of healthy reconciliation. It is hard for both sides to see the value of both the collectivist and the individualistic mentalities, and to pursue a creative harmony. Instead of marvelling at the possibility of harmony, what often results from the tension between the collectivists and the individualists are functional, if not actual, church divisions.

How this all relates to evangelicalism is that many times the tension between the first and later generations in the Chinese American church is aggravated by ministry practices that

⁴³ Sam Moy, "Cultural Differences between Chinese and Americans," *About FACE* 6, no. 4 (November 1984): 1.

Chinese churches borrow from popular evangelicalism. One example of this is found in Asian American youth ministries. In many Asian churches, the youth pastors, rather than the parents or even the immigrant senior pastor, are seen as the youths' primary spiritual caretakers.⁴⁴ Asian youth ministers, unable and unwilling to follow the pattern of the first generation ministries, then look to the wider evangelical world for examples of how to minister to their American born youth.⁴⁵ Hence, what they often end up adopting is a very individualistic expression of the Christian faith. Chap Clark describes the problem of 21st century youth ministry's individualism well:

For all of the good that youth ministry has done, for all of the lives that have been changed, we have moved into a "post-Christian" culture where the young have fewer relational resources than ever to navigate the complexities of entering interdependent adulthood, and the historic focus on faith as an individual responsibility has left countless young people with an inadequate understanding of the Christian faith.⁴⁶

This approach to youth ministry that began in the 1970s has proven problematic. In 2007 LifeWay Research reported that "70% of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22."⁴⁷ They also reported that continued church attendance by those in this age group was significantly higher among those who had parents and other adults in their church that invested in them spiritually.⁴⁸ Apparently the Silent Exodus was not merely an Asian American phenomenon. Yet still, considering the cultural and linguistic barriers that Chinese American Christians have to overcome with their

⁴⁴ Danny Kwon, "Working With Parents in an Asian American Church" in *Asian American Youth Ministry* edited by DJ Chuang. (L2 Foundation, 2006), 25-34.

⁴⁵ Mike Park, "Rediscovering Grace: Challenges and Opportunities in Asian Youth Ministry: Sticky Faith in Multicultural Contexts," *Fuller Youth Institute* (website), June 21, 2016, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/opportunities-challenges-in-asian-american-youth-ministry> (accessed April 15, 2017).

⁴⁶ Chap Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry" in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: five views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 73-90.

⁴⁷ LifeWay Research, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church between ages 18-22 and Why?" Spring 2007, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Church-Dropouts_How-Many-Leave-Church-and-Why-8.07.2007.pdf (accessed December 28, 2016).

⁴⁸ LifeWay Research, "Parents & Churches Can Help Teens Stay in Church," August 7, 2007, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2007/08/07/parents-churches-can-help-teens-stay-in-church/> (accessed December 27, 2016).

parents and OBC church leaders, it should be quite evident how much they are in danger of the excesses of individualism and separation. Functionally, Chinese American youth ministries can become like completely separate church communities. The faith of the older OBCs is hardly integrated with that of the later generations. In fact, youth ministry is often seen in the Asian American church as glorified “babysitting.”⁴⁹ By the time the second generation grows up and moves on from youth ministry, many are incapable of seamlessly joining their parents in worship and ministry because it is so different from the youth ministries they grew up in. Or they move away for an undergraduate education and grow apart from their home church or their faith all together.

The American individualism that has come to characterize much of conservative evangelicalism has found its way into the Chinese American church, and further aggravates the already strained church dynamic. The excessive individualism found so often in conservative evangelicalism has led to Chinese American parents being unable to see the relationship between their faith and their children’s, and vice versa. Attempts such as the Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE) tended merely to offer pragmatic solutions, such as fostering mutual understanding, communication, and leadership development. However, FACE rarely if ever discussed the multi-lingual and multi-generational realities of the Chinese American church from a deliberately theological perspective. Instead of reflecting on the theological relationship between ecclesiology and multiple languages and generations, the contributors to FACE were more interested in promoting relational wisdom and logistics. Hence, in their newsletter journal *About FACE* and in their book *Completing the Face of the Chinese American Church in America*, readers will find much discussion over the importance of sensitivity toward different cultures,

⁴⁹ Victor Quon, “Do We Really Believe the Great Commission?” in *Asian American Youth Ministry* ed. DJ Chuang (L2 Foundation, 2006), 82.

patience under marginalization, and how to set up a semi-independent ABC ministry without splitting a church. Discussions of theological frameworks were lacking, perhaps because the need for practical solutions was so dire.

The individualistic and conservative evangelicalism of 20th century American Christianity offered little help to Chinese American Christians struggling to keep their churches vibrant and united. Because Chinese American Christianity is so shaped by popular evangelicalism's individualism, it lacks a balanced theology that harmoniously utilizes all the distinct strengths of collectivism and individualism without prioritizing one over another. Chinese American Christians need a theology that better articulates and propagates the relational unity of faith across generations in the local church.

II.B.3. "Me & My Bible" Theology & Dogmatic Absolutism

A third way that individualism has impacted Chinese American Christianity by way of conservative evangelicalism is in many Chinese American Christians' approaches to Scripture and doctrine. There are a handful of factors that have promoted an individualistic approach to Scripture amongst Chinese American Christians. For one, the influential and conservative church leaders, such as Watchman Nee, denounced denominationalism. This influence along with the prevalence of independent Chinese American churches that distinguished themselves from the more liberal mainline Chinese churches in America, has led to generations of Chinese American Christians who read Scripture in isolation from larger church bodies, creeds, and confessions. Hence, most Chinese churches in America are non-denominational.

As noted in Chapter Two, it is also significant that the seminaries that most Chinese Americans study at are conservative, non-confessional, and evangelical in their orientation. Many of these seminaries emphasize a "plain" or literal reading of Scripture and have a

history of dispensationalist sympathies.⁵⁰ There is also the influence of the campus fellowships that attract many Chinese Americans. InterVarsity, in particular, is known to emphasize inductive Bible study. In their promotion of inductive Bible study, their website says: “Inductive Bible Study helps you find the central truth of a passage and build that truth into your life.”⁵¹ It continues: “When you open God’s Word, expect to meet with Him and to learn something about Him. Expect to find more of who He is and what He wants you to be like. In a wonderful way you’ll grow to understand God and His ways if you are open to being changed by what you find in the Scriptures.”⁵² In their promotion of inductive Bible study and in their hints as to how it works, an individualistic emphasis can be discerned.

All of these factors have made it quite easy for Chinese American Christians to adopt the supposedly plain or common-sense approach to Scripture that much of conservative evangelicalism has traditionally affirmed. However, such an approach reveals a modernistic methodology that naively presupposes neutrality and objectivity on the part of every Bible reader. In an increasingly connected world, filled with a variety of convictions, perspectives, and interpretations, optimism about the promise of “common sense” has significantly declined. George Marsden and Mark Noll have documented this phenomenon quite well in the connections they have drawn between American evangelicalism, republicanism, common sense realism, and the Baconian inductive method.⁵³ Due to the republican spirit, American evangelicals, free from authoritative institutions, have often felt “wholly free to examine for [themselves], what is truth without being bound to a catechism, creed, confession of faith,

⁵⁰ For example, Dallas Theological Seminary, Talbot School of Theology, and The Master’s Seminary.

⁵¹ InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, “Inductive Bible Study Hints,” <https://interVarsity.org/bible-studies/inductive-bible-study-hints> (accessed December 28, 2016).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Mark Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought” *American Quarterly* 37.2 (1985): 216-238; Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002); George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter : The Bible, Science, And Authority In Mid-Nineteenth-Century America” in *The Bible in America*, eds. Nathan Hatch & Mark Noll (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982), 79-100.

discipline, or any rule excepting the scripture.”⁵⁴ And commenting on the relationship between common sense realism, Baconian inductivism, and evangelical hermeneutics, Adam Van Wart wrote:

...the terms “plain,” “normal,” or “common sense,” in reference to hermeneutics is to reveal an implicit belief of commonality or normality shared among readers of texts. For the terms “plain,” “normal,” or “common sense” to be intelligible, a certain belief in a shared epistemological commonality universal to human beings must be assumed. “Normal” and “common” are terms which, by definition, imply a transcendent uniform standard of normality or commonality. Such a notion is a key feature of the Baconian philosophy of Thomas Reid and thus, for such phraseology to even appear in the writings of an author is to reveal at the very least a shared epistemological assumption, if not necessarily an explicit dependence on Reid or his thought...⁵⁵

The result of all this is that conservative evangelicals, particularly many Chinese American Christians, have over-confidently approached the Bible with an independent and supposedly neutral spirit.⁵⁶ So many have presupposed a common-sensical epistemology, in which the application of common sense will lead all interpreters of Scripture to the same interpretive conclusions. Many fail to recognize that their own personal and cultural contexts will inevitably shape their readings of Scripture. In particular, they fail to recognize how much their reading of Scripture is shaped by a modernistic epistemology. Yong notes, that the very foundationalist epistemology that many Asian American evangelicals have utilized to combat modernism is itself modernistic:

In their battle against liberalism, Evangelicals have highlighted the importance of developing a biblical worldview...What most Evangelicals do not often interrogate is how rooted the worldview quest is in the Enlightenment project. As such, evangelical worldview formulation operates epistemologically according to modernist canons of rationality. This is reinforced in evangelical seminary education variously, not least in the embrace of some form of foundationalism characteristic of the Enlightenment quest for certainty...Asian Americans educated at conservative evangelical seminaries have unwittingly embraced...the foundationalist epistemology...⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Mark Noll, *America's God*, 375.

⁵⁵ Adam Van Wart, "The Relationship of Common Sense Realism to Dispensationalism's Hermeneutics and A Priori Faith Commitments." Bible.org. Southwest Regional Meeting ETS, 2005.

⁵⁶ Antony Alumkal, "The Scandal of the 'Model Minority' Mind? The Bible and Second-Generation Asian American Evangelicals," *Semeia*, 90-91 (2002): 243.

⁵⁷ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 106-107.

Because of this supposedly neutral approach, unwittingly based on a foundationalist epistemology, many easily fall into an arrogant narrow-mindedness or a naïve absolutism regarding their own theological convictions, having unwittingly co-opted a modernistic theological method with a naïve belief in neutrality. The universalizing tendency of a modernist epistemology, with its assertion of neutrality and common sense, lends itself well to a narrow-minded and absolutist dogmatism. Commenting on this problem of arrogant dogmatism amongst evangelicals, Allen Yeh writes:

I believe that dogmatism is one of the biggest enemies of Evangelicalism (ironically, because a major hallmark of Evangelicalism, as opposed to the world, is our adherence to Truth). This is not to say that we no longer hold doctrine to be important, but...there is a big difference between truth and Truth, and not being able to see the difference contributes to Evangelicalism's parochial mentality.⁵⁸

This dogmatic certitude found within much of Chinese American evangelicalism (which also happens to be predominantly non-denominational) prevents them from engaging humbly and winsomely within increasingly pluralistic contexts. For example, in the secular universities that many Asian Americans attend, Asian Americans are often forced to decide how they will respond to such diversity. Many Asian American millennials choose an agnostic outlook and have been added to the growing number of “nones” in America, while others have chosen the Progressive Asian American Christian path in reaction to their previous evangelical backgrounds. However, the large contingent of Asian American Christians commonly found in evangelical campus ministries have doubled down on their convictions in reaction to the threats they encounter in pluralistic contexts. It is no coincidence that Asian American evangelicals have very much been drawn to the neo-Puritan “New Calvinist” movement, in which Calvinist evangelicals, such as John Piper and Don Carson, proclaim God’s absolute sovereignty, transcendence, and his perspicuous self-

⁵⁸ Allen Yeh, “The Road We Travel: A Brief History of Evangelicalism” in *Routes & Radishes: And Other Things to Talk About at the Evangelical Crossroads*, eds. Mark Russell, Allen Yeh, Michelle Sanchez, Chelle Stearns, & Dwight Friesen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 31.

disclosure in Scripture. Such teachings resonate with their postmodern concerns and their appetite for solid universal truth.

This is much to the dismay of progressive Asian American Christians. Daniel Ra, a former John Piper enthusiast during his undergraduate years, has come to bemoan this conservative evangelical culture that he sees so many of his Asian American Christian peers diving into. Ra warns them of theological idolatry, which he describes as “an active assumption of God-ordained certainty regarding one’s theological worldview.”⁵⁹ Timothy Tseng also expresses concern about the anti-postmodern absolutism that he perceives amongst Asian American evangelicals. From Tseng’s perspective, Asian American Christians are “backsliding into fundamentalism.”⁶⁰ Among various factors, Tseng blames this backsliding on the “suppression of intellectual integrity,” in which there is a “rise of ecclesial echo chambers of absolute certitude.”⁶¹ He continues: “Young people can no longer hear anything other than one perspective, right or wrong. In many of the settings, there is no nuance of biblical or theological interpretation. I believe we are returning to what Mark Noll called the ‘The Intellectual Disaster of Fundamentalism.’”⁶²

Ra and Tseng want Chinese American evangelicals to see that what they often believe to be universal and “common sense” readings of Scripture are not as agreed upon as they think. Postmodernity has revealed the limits and flaws of a classically foundationalist epistemology.⁶³ It has exposed how the modern pursuit of universal truth so often flattens the

⁵⁹ Daniel Ra, “For Asian-American Christians, The Elephant in the Room...” *Next Gener. Asian Church: the collision of faith and Asian American culture* (blog), August 20, 2009, <http://nextgenerasianchurch.com/2009/08/20/for-asian-american-christians-the-elephant-in-the-room/> (accessed April 14, 2017).

⁶⁰ Timothy Tseng, “Backsliding into Fundamentalism and the Promise of Asian American Historical Theology (Part 3 of “Color-Blinded by the Light”),” *Tim Tseng* (blog), October 7, 2016, <https://timtseng.net/2016/10/07/backsliding-to-fundamentalism-and-the-promise-of-asian-american-historical-theology-part-3-of-color-blinded-by-the-light/> (accessed December 21, 2016).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Classical foundationalism requires that justified basic beliefs be infallible, and...restricts the sphere of justified basic beliefs to the testimony of introspection and reason or rational intuition.” Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53.

complexity, diversity, and particularities of reality. But does this mean that Chinese American Christians should abandon their strong convictions about universal Christian truths? And should they unabashedly embrace postmodernity and a non-foundationalist epistemology?⁶⁴ Jeffrey Jue does not think so. According to Jue, a non-foundationalist epistemology cannot be justified and inevitably slips into relativism.⁶⁵

Therefore, Chinese American Christians find themselves in a conundrum.

Postmodernity has revealed the problematic modernistic foundationalism behind much of their supposedly universal evangelical theology, and yet much of postmodern thought is also fraught with the challenge of uniting the particularities of reality. Peter Cha and Greg Jao helpfully describe the conundrum in their chapter “Reaching Out to Postmodern Asian-Americans”:

One of the explicit aims of postmodernism is to decenter any claims of universality while celebrating particularities and discontinuities. Evangelicalism, on the other hand, influenced largely by modernism and its assumptions, tends to overly emphasize the significance of the universal at the expense of recognizing certain transient values and the legitimacy of particularities and diversity.⁶⁶

Cha and Jao believe that Asian American Christians need to avoid both extremes. Hence, Chinese American Christians need a theology of creation that can engage with every culture, whether individualistic modern culture or collectivist postmodern culture, without embracing or dismissing them wholesale.

⁶⁴ “Nonfoundationalists deny that we have any of those alleged strong foundations for our belief-systems and argue instead that all of our beliefs together form part of a groundless web of interrelated beliefs. In a strong reaction against modernist and generic notions of rationality, nonfoundationalism also highlights the crucial epistemic importance of community, arguing that every community and context has its own rationality, and that any and all social activities may in fact function as a test case for human rationality.” J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Jue, “Asian American Theology: A Modern and Postmodern Dilemma” in *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*, eds. DJ Chuang & Timothy Tseng (Lulu.com, 2013), 112.

⁶⁶ Peter Cha & Greg Jao, “Reaching Out to Postmodern Asian-Americans” in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 238.

Chinese American Christians are largely in need of a theological method that is not captive to individualism, nor blind to contextual concerns. They need a multi-perspectival method that acknowledges the influence of culture, community, and tradition in the reading of Scripture without subordinating Scripture to them. Yeh advocates a “Kevlar theology” that is flexible, but also unbreakable – one that majors on the majors and essentials and minors on the minors and non-essentials.⁶⁷ Such a flexible and multi-perspectival method of theologizing would also aid Chinese American evangelical churches in their relationships with those who hold different beliefs and theological convictions, both Christians and non-Christians.

In short, a naively dogmatic theology, arrived upon via individualistic and classical foundationalist theological methodology will simply not do for a thoughtful and developing Chinese American evangelicalism today and into the future.

II.B.4. Shame and the Crisis of Personal Identity

As noted by Bebbington, Biblicism, activism, conversion and crucicentricism have been central to evangelical beliefs, practices, and identity. While Biblicism and activism touch on evangelical identity in terms of describing the behaviors that evangelicals value and identify with, I want to draw attention to how evangelical conversion and crucicentrism shape their identity rhetoric. In conversion, one’s identity is changed from “unbeliever” to “believer,” from “spiritually dead” to “born again,” or from simply “non-Christian” to “Christian.” Evangelical crucicentrism then further shapes of this “born again” identity. What is most commonly meant by crucicentrism is the emphasis upon Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Hence, evangelicals, particularly conservative and popular-level evangelicals in the West, have generally emphasized the forensic and judicial dimensions of Christ’s

⁶⁷ Allen Yeh, “The Road Ahead: Essentials Versus Non-Essentials” in *Routes & Radishes: And Other Things to Talk About at the Evangelical Crossroads*, eds. Mark Russell, Allen Yeh, Michelle Sanchez, Chelle Stearns, & Dwight Friesen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 33-50.

crucifixion, as it dealt with the guilt of sin by penal substitutionary atonement, securing “eternal life.” The identity that evangelical crucicentrism has traditionally declared over those saved in Christ is that of a person “forgiven,” “justified,” and saved from eternal judgment and hell.

Developments in New Testament scholarship, mission studies, and Protestant-Catholic dialogue, however, have picked up momentum since the mid-20th century, and caught the attention of increasing numbers of evangelicals. The New Perspective on Paul has challenged the central focus of soteriology away from penal substitution and justification toward the more social dimensions of Pauline soteriology.⁶⁸ Additionally, evangelical missiologists have been drawn to Ruth Benedict’s distinction between guilt-societies and shame-societies. They increasingly warn of an overemphasis on guilt-centered approaches to ministry and advocate ministering with the category of ‘shame’ to help non-Westerners understand the gospel.⁶⁹ Additionally, re-examinations of the atonement have also brought shame more prominently into theological discussion.⁷⁰ Hence, evangelicals are gradually learning that a contextualized soteriology will not always focus on guilt or the reception of “eternal life.” Rather, focusing on shame, among multiple other themes, can be a fruitful ministerial endeavor, even in Western contexts. Thus, Andy Crouch has signaled “The Return of Shame” in his piece for *Christianity Today* including this subtitle: “We feel less guilty than

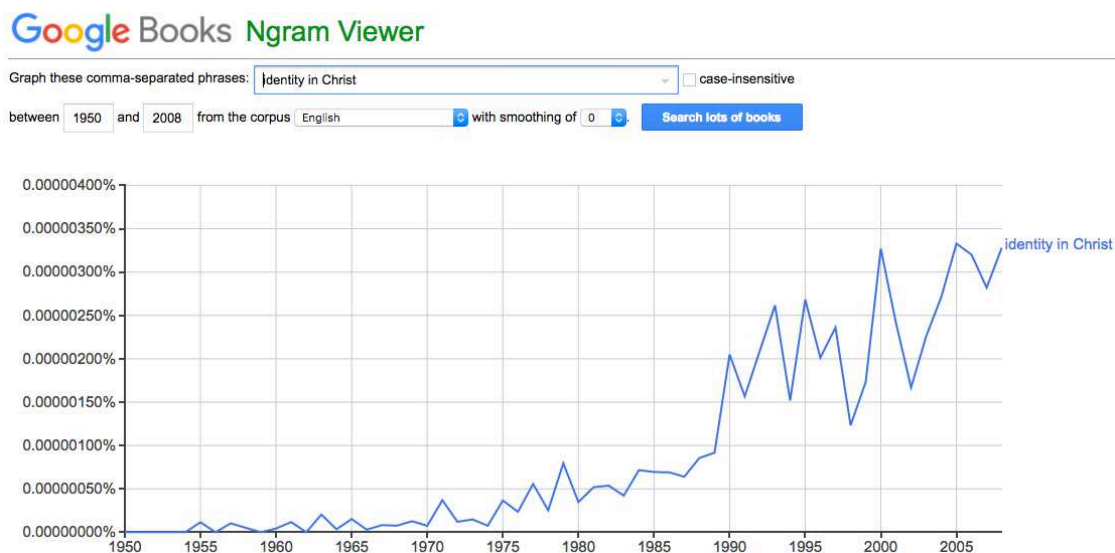
⁶⁸ See Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 56, no. 3 (July 1963): 199-215; E.P. Sanders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1977); James Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” The Manson Memorial Lecture, University of Manchester, November 4, 1982; N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁶⁹ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946); Jayson Georges & Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016); Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena: WCIU Press, 2012); Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); E. Randolph Richards & Brandon O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

⁷⁰ Eleonore Stump, “The Atonement and the Problem of Shame,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 41, supplement (September 2016): 111-129.

ever before—and more ashamed than ever before. How the gospel speaks to a major shift in Western morality.”⁷¹

The shift toward shame amongst American evangelicals may be related to the explicit ascendance of identity discourse over the latter half of the 20th century. In the 60s psychologist Erik Erikson coined the phrase “identity crisis”⁷² and out of the Civil Rights Movement identity politics has come to the forefront of American conversations. People over the past half-century are commonly asking who they are. They are contemplating what criteria might comprise their personal identities, whether it be family, education, vocation, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, personality, abilities, limitations, achievements, or failures. Out of this context, one can discern the evangelical response to this particular identity discourse in American society. The good news of the gospel amongst evangelicals shifted its focus from “Your sins are forgiven” to “Your identity is secure in Christ.” The evangelical “identity in Christ” rhetoric especially took off from the 90s onward as suggested by the chart below.⁷³



⁷¹ Andy Crouch, “The Return of Shame” *Christianity Today* 59, no. 2 (March 2015): 32-41.

⁷² Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1968).

⁷³ Google Books Ngram Viewer, Searched “identity in Christ” 1950-2008.

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=identity+in+Christ&year_start=1950&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=0&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cidentity%20in%20Christ%3B%2Cc0 (accessed February 10, 2017).

Of particular significance is how this new soteriological language shaped and influenced pastoral counselling ministries. Neil Anderson's *Victory Over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* was published in 1990 and Robert McGee published *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth Through God's Eyes*.⁷⁴ Well into the 21st century, bestselling author and preacher Tim Keller along with David Powlison, the executive director of the Christian Counseling Education Foundation and senior editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, have popularized "identity in Christ" language,⁷⁵ following the lead of Jack Miller, whose World Harvest Mission produced "Sonship theology."⁷⁶ Other notable pastors and evangelicals who utilize this language include Rick Warren, Paul David Tripp, John Piper, and Lecrae. This shift has fittingly and contextually matched the existential struggles of Asian American Christians, who feel the pulls from their more collectivist Asian cultures and their more individualistic American cultures.

I am not of the persuasion that there are simply cut and dry guilt-based, individualistic cultures and shame-based, collectivist cultures, and that Asian Americans fall neatly into one or another category. Guilt plays a prominent role in Chinese society, and shame and honor also influence American society, particularly in the South.⁷⁷ Whether the Asian American Christian subculture's emphasis on shame places it in contradistinction from guilt-based cultures is not an argument that I am pursuing. However, because it cannot be ignored that the concept of shame features heavily in Asian American and Asian American Christian

⁷⁴ Neil Anderson, *Victory Over Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990); Robert McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth Through God's Eyes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

⁷⁵ Timothy Keller, "Finding Our Identity in Christ" *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (sermon series), October-November 1989. <http://www.gospelinlife.com/catalogsearch/result/?cat=0&q=finding+our+identity+in+christ> (accessed February 10, 2017); David Powlison, "Finding Your Identity in Christ" Crossway (blog), December 1, 2015. <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2015/12/finding-your-identity-in-christ/> (accessed February 10, 2017).

⁷⁶ Chad Van Dixhoorn, "The *Sonship* Program for Revival: A Summary and Critique," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999): 227-246.

⁷⁷ Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967); Dov Cohen et al., "Insult, Aggression, and the Southern Culture of Honor: An 'Experimental Ethnography,'" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 5 (1996): 945-960.

literature, especially in the dynamics of navigating between their simultaneous individualistic and collectivist intuitions, it is important to take seriously and observe the effects of shame on their lives. As was discussed in Chapter Two, these effects manifest themselves in Asian American legalism and consumerism. The notion of shame is undeniably bound with their identity discourse in an individual-collective dialectic.⁷⁸

Hence, one helpful way to understand legalism and consumerism amongst Chinese American Christians is as means to form and preserve an honorable individual identity within one's community. They are instinctive impulses that protect oneself against shame. As Lisa Sun-Hee Park demonstrated in *Consuming Citizenship*, the consumeristic practices of Asian Americans are often a means of self-formation.⁷⁹ While Park's focus was on how such practices were adopted to reinforce social citizenship, it is not a far cry to connect these practices to the overall Asian American picture of success, which is commonly idealized in the model minority stereotype. By attending prestigious schools, securing high-paying careers, and purchasing certain cars, clothing, homes, and other material signs of wealth, individuals construct individual identities for themselves, namely the identity of being successful according to the collective standards of their communities. The more one's individual identity is equated with collective notions of success, the less it is equated with shame. How does one attain to consumeristic success? By individual achievement and personally following rules. For this reason, perfectionism and legalism are influential forces in Asian American Christianity. Those individuals who, by a perfectionist work ethic and high achievement, fulfill their collective consumeristic standards of success avoid shame. Such individuals often also feel entitled to judge or pity other individuals who shamefully have not attained to the level of success in their collectively shared community. Meanwhile,

⁷⁸ Benjamin Shin, *Tapestry of Grace*, 31.

⁷⁹ Lisa Sun-Hee Park, *Consuming Citizenship: Children of Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

those who fail to achieve struggle to cope with their shame, seeking to eventually erase it through more hard work of their own, all within the context of their collective community.

At the root of this fear of shame and this struggle for individual identity is the collective Asian American desire to belong, to fit in, or to simply understand themselves.⁸⁰ While Timothy Tseng has utilized Said's *Orientalism* to tell the history of Chinese American Christians and recount their racialized experiences,⁸¹ Asian American theologians appear to draw from Homi Bhabha's postcolonial language of "hybridity."⁸² While the majority of evangelicals have not typically been known to utilize postcolonial theology, many are coming to selectively utilize the language of postcolonial theology to helpfully express themselves in ways that more conservative theological traditions have proven less capable.

Marginality, liminality (in-between-ness), and hybridity are commonly employed by contemporary Asian American theologians to describe the collective experience of individual Asian American Christians.⁸³ Such language has emerged, largely in discussions around the question: "Is Asian American Christianity in general and Asian American evangelicalism in particular a form of colonial mimicry or indigenous expression?"⁸⁴ On liminality and marginality, Fumitaka Matsuoka writes: "Asian Americans thus find ourselves in a state of liminality. The liminal person is one who has internalized the norms of a particular group but

⁸⁰ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of the Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 61-65.

⁸¹ Timothy Tseng "Beyond Orientalism and Assimilation: The Asian American as Historical Subject" in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, eds. Eleazar Fernandez and Fumitaka Matsuoka, 55-72. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

⁸² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁸³ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of the Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995); Peter Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); Julius-Kei Kato, *Religious Language and Asian American Hybridity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Daniel Lee, *Double Particularity: Karl Barth, Contextuality, and Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

⁸⁴ Helen Jin Kim, Timothy Tseng, & David K. Yoo, "Asian American Religious History" in *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, eds. David K. Yoo & Eiichiro Azuma (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 366.

is not completely recognized by the members of that group as being a legitimate member.”⁸⁵ Rather than being at the center of mainstream America, Asian Americans have often felt collectively relegated to the margins. They know that they are seen by the majority culture as “other.” Yet, as bicultural people, they do not fully belong in their East Asian contexts either. They are perpetual foreigners.⁸⁶

Because of this mindset, what is more commonly on the minds of Chinese American Christians is not how guilty they are for transgressing certain moral laws. Instead, what more often occupies their minds is what their identity or status is within their collective community and even before God. Is it shameful or honorable? Though not mutually exclusive, the categories of failure/achiever feature more prominently in the minds of Asian Americans than law-breaker/innocent. Sure, none will claim absolute innocence or sinlessness, but that is not what keeps them up at night. What keeps them up at night is the prospect or the actual occasions of failure and their resulting shame. This comes out prominently whenever Jeremy Lin, a prototypical Asian American Christian, shares about his faith and the anxiety he has struggled with over his career in the NBA.⁸⁷ To fight his anxiety, he tries to always remember that his identity is not in his basketball performance, his Harvard education, or his Asian American heritage, but in Christ, and he exhorts and encourages his listeners to do the same.

Lin’s experience is not unique. Redeemer Presbyterian Church has been called the largest Asian American church in New York City.⁸⁸ It was not as though Tim Keller was targeting Asian Americans. Rather, and in addition to the fact that many Asian Americans are upwardly mobile “Manhattanites,” Tim Keller’s consistent message of adoption and of a

⁸⁵ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of the Silence*, 61.

⁸⁶ Eric Chen, “We Were Once Foreigners,” *Inheritance Magazine* 25 (May 2014), <https://www.inheritancemag.com/stories/we-were-once-foreigners> (accessed September 25, 2019).

⁸⁷ Jeremy Lin in The Gospel Herald, “Jeremy Lin Shares Testimony at Identity Unleashed Conference 2013” YouTube Video, 22 minutes. Posted [September 16, 2013]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8shiFOuM_9s (accessed February 10, 2017).

⁸⁸ Laurence Tom, “The Keller Effect and the Largest Asian-American Church,” *ABC Pastor* (blog), February 28, 2008, <https://abcpastor.wordpress.com/2008/02/28/the-keller-effect-and-the-largest-asian-american-church/> (accessed February 14, 2017).

secure and beloved identity in Christ has resonated strongly with this bicultural, shame-averse demographic.

Much of Asian American shame is in the context of collective human community, but this striving to belong and to avoid shame in human communities often translates into how they view their individual identities and statuses of belonging with God.⁸⁹ So, legalism in the Asian American Christian context becomes less about trying to pay God back to be debt-free or innocent in his sight, but more about trying to earn God's favor and merit his fatherly approval and the approval of his church. The emphasis of this legalism is more collectivist in that it is more about one's status of belonging with God and others, than one's clear conscience before him.

Therefore, a gospel that promises eternal life, to take away individuals' sins, pardon individuals' transgressions, deliver individuals from the fiery judgement of hell, or to make them legally innocent before the throne of God does not always resonate with Asian American Christians as acutely as it seemingly did with Martin Luther, Augustine, or Whitefield's converts. Asian Americans' consciences are not as deeply shaped by Christendom and its attendant conscience as the multitudes converted by Whitefield, or even the targets of Western evangelistic methods, such as Evangelism Explosion, the Romans Road, and the colorful wordless book. What does resonate with many contemporary Asian American Christians, though, is a gospel that redeems their identity, a gospel that tells them who God says they are in Christ and to whom they belong regardless of what they may or may not consume or achieve to fit in. More than wanting to hear how innocent they are before God by the blood of Christ, they often want to hear how much they are beloved by their Heavenly Father, such that he would shed his only begotten Son's blood for them, approve of them, and call them his own children. Hence, today's Chinese American

⁸⁹ Tom Lin, *Losing Face and Finding Grace*, 21.

evangelicals need a soteriology that engages their problem of shame and offers them both an individual and a collective identity before God and their communities.

II.C. A Dualistic Doctrine of Creation

According to George Marsden, the 1950s marked the end of broad American consensus over the existence of a Creator, who established natural laws that could be apprehended by reason and discovered by humanity, leading to the evolution of an increasingly just, free, and happy society. Marsden convincingly argues: “[T]he culture wars broke out and persisted in part because the dominant principles of the American heritage did not adequately provide for how to deal with substantive religious differences as they relate to the public domain.”⁹⁰

In light of the culture wars and America’s increasingly pluralistic society, evangelicals have often struggled to articulate how the public domain of creation with its massive diversity of beliefs can relate to their own uniquely Christian faith.⁹¹ One common evangelical way of relating to creation as Christians is by employing a sacred vs. secular framework in their daily lives. Hence, prayer and worship are sacred activities, ministers do sacred work, and churches are sacred spaces, whereas entertainment, sex, politics, academics, and business fall within the secular domain. Mike Goheen and Craig Bartholomew believe that the prominence of this dualism in Western evangelical Christianity is problematic, for it can give the impression that “secular” activities, vocations, and realms within creation do not belong to God, or that they are somehow inferior to “sacred” activities, vocations, and spaces.⁹² Shane Claiborne forcefully echoes this concern: “Dualism has infected the church, a

⁹⁰ George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xxvi.

⁹¹ J.H. Yoder, “The Experiential Etiology of Evangelical Dualism,” *Missiology: An International Review* XI, no. 4 (October 1983): 449-459.

⁹² Michael Goheen & Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Value* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 64-65.

dualism in which folks separate the spiritual from the political or social, as if the political and social issues were of no spiritual significance, and as if God had no better vision to offer this world.”⁹³ Claiborne even boldly accused the famous evangelical church Willow Creek, where he formerly served, for mirroring the prevalent dualism of North American churches.⁹⁴ Calling this a dualistic “Catholic distortion” of nature and grace, Os Guinness does not let Protestants off the hook, who often employ the language of “full-time Christian service,” as if Christians who did not work for churches or Christian organizations were only serving Christ part-time.⁹⁵

Not only have many evangelicals adopted a dualism that radically separates the sacred from the secular, but they have also largely adopted a Platonic dualism in which the soul, a person’s spiritual existence, is seen as a human’s essence, apart from a person’s physical and material existence in creation. As Roger Olson has rightly documented, “evangelical lay people often misinterpret Scripture as promoting a view of human persons as godlike spirits imprisoned in physical bodies.”⁹⁶ Increasingly, evangelical scholars are blaming this on a Platonized dualistic worldview that teaches that every soul is an immaterial substance that must exist forever.⁹⁷ Nancey Murphy, professor of Christian philosophy, rejects body-soul dualism, along with her colleague, Joel Green, a New Testament scholar who rejects this dualism on the basis of neuroscience.⁹⁸ The late Stanley Grenz also critiqued this dualism as a by-product of the Enlightenment, which has led countless numbers of Christians whose

⁹³ Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁵ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2003), 31-32.

⁹⁶ Roger Olson, *Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 205.

⁹⁷ Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 181-182.

⁹⁸ Nancey Murphy, “Human Nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious Issues,” in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 1-2; Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 32.

“primary if not sole concern is that of saving ‘souls.’”⁹⁹ This has undoubtedly affected American evangelicalism and its posture toward creation.

A most notable example of this effect upon American evangelicalism would be the dispensationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, which found its greatest level of acceptance within conservative evangelicalism. Dispensationalism came out of a context in which the fundamentalists sought to answer “the challenge of the supposed exact truths of the sciences with an exaltation of the exactitude of the truths of Scripture.”¹⁰⁰ However, dispensationalism would prove problematic as it “promoted a kind of supernaturalism that, for all of its virtues in defending the faith, failed to give proper attention to the world.”¹⁰¹ It also tended to produce Christians whose main objective was to save and rescue souls, so that they might be raptured before the Great Tribulation. For many dispensationalists, unless one was an ethnic Israelite, the promises of the gospel were predominantly otherworldly. Such a dualism has significantly shaped the Chinese American Christians – many of whom studied under dispensationalist educators – in their understanding of creation and in their engagement with culture.

A dualistic theology of creation not only gives birth to unhealthy sacred/secular and soul/body dualisms, but also a simplistic dualism between the Christian faith and culture. For evangelicals – Chinese American evangelicals in particular – it is more precisely a stark divide between Christianity and the cultures of modernity and postmodernity. Although the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early 20th century inevitably predisposed evangelicals – who had followed the fundamentalists – to view modernism with suspicion, evangelicals could not long ignore the contemporary modernistic concerns of the era. The Neo-evangelical movement, as represented by Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, and Fuller

⁹⁹ Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 171.

¹⁰⁰ Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1987), 58.

¹⁰¹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 132.

Seminary marked a significant shift amongst evangelicals toward engaging the modern American culture with both a critical and an appreciative eye rather than retreating into the obscurity of fundamentalist echo chambers. Noting this evangelical sentiment and the importance of engaging with the modern world, Mark Noll and David Wells wrote in 1988, “Events of recent decades have made it increasingly clear that the process of ‘modernization’ and the practice of religion are not automatically antithetical.”¹⁰² According to Noll and Wells the “long held doctrines of ‘common grace’ or ‘general revelation’ that acknowledge the abilities of humanity in general, and not just Christians, to understand important truths about the world” imply that we rigorously engage with modern thought.¹⁰³

However, Noll clearly still felt the need to write *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* in 1994 because he saw that, at a popular level, many evangelicals were still captivated by anti-intellectual fundamentalism, unwilling to engage with or listen to outsider perspectives. More recently, Molly Worthen reminds us that while “[e]vangelicalism is a far more thoughtful and diverse world than most...usually realize...it does host a potent strain of anti-intellectualism, a pattern of hostility and ambivalence toward the standards of tolerance, logic, and evidence by which most secular thinkers in the West have agreed to abide.”¹⁰⁴ Worthen argues that this anti-intellectualism and lack of tolerance is caused by a crisis of authority that evangelicals face. She describes this crisis of authority as “their struggle to reconcile reason with revelation, heart with head, and private piety with the public square.”¹⁰⁵ Evangelicals face the problem of “how they can reconcile their fervor for evangelism with American pluralism.”¹⁰⁶ Hence, the tension between the modern thought of the Enlightenment and the Post-Enlightenment cultures it has spawned and Christian conviction

¹⁰² Mark Noll & David Wells, “Introduction: Modern Evangelicalism” in *Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World*, eds. Mark Noll & David Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

still very much defines the experience of American evangelicals in their increasingly pluralistic context.

Many conservative evangelicals have continued to engage their pluralistic context by seeking to reconcile modern culture and Christianity, arguing for Scripture's authority via foundationalist and positivist arguments. However, as Nancey Murphy demonstrated in *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, most fundamentalists were subconsciously shaped by modernist assumptions along with the liberal Christians.¹⁰⁷ They were using the same modernist tools and assumptions to assert their convictions. Some evangelicals have heeded this critique and sought to move past the modernist assumptions of conservative evangelicalism. This led to works, such as Grenz and Franke's *Beyond Foundationalism* and Brian McLaren's *Church on the Other Side*.¹⁰⁸ Roger Olson helpfully tells the story of this shift away from modernism from his own evangelical perspective in *The Journey of Modern Theology*.¹⁰⁹ Such thinkers have ushered in the new theological task of engaging with a postmodern context apart from a foundationalist theological method.

At the same time, more conservative evangelicals push back against what they believe to be accommodation to postmodernism, just as their evangelical ancestors pushed back against modernist theology. David Wells and Don Carson are two prominent figures who represent this pushback, though without endorsing the classic foundationalism that Grenz and Franke critique.¹¹⁰ Regardless, postmodernity has set a new theological agenda that cannot be ignored in America's increasingly pluralistic context. Consequently, the last couple of

¹⁰⁷ Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996).

¹⁰⁸ Stanley Grenz & John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

¹⁰⁹ Roger Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013).

¹¹⁰ David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Don Carson (ed), *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Also see Millard Erickson, Paul Helseth, & Justin Taylor (eds.), *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

decades have been filled with more and more contributions to the study of theological method in the context of postmodernity. Such methods have not depended upon a classical foundationalist epistemology, such as Reid's Common Sense Realism.¹¹¹ More and more evangelicals have heeded Alister McGrath's call for evangelicals "to steer [their] way between the Scylla of denying that pluralism exists (or that it is important) and the Charybdis of dealing with the problem by asserting that all religions are basically the same (or that all opinions are equally valid)."¹¹² However, little of these newer contributions and ideas have made very deep inroads into Chinese American churches. Chinese American Christians largely remain quite dismissive of those who are "other" in contemporary culture's increasingly pluralistic context, preferring a posture of dogmatic opposition. For this reason, and as was discussed in Chapter Two, they are still quite often described as fostering an anti-intellectual ethos, which has rendered them insufficiently capable of constructively engaging with others in their pluralistic context.

II.C.1. Two Dangerous Dualisms & Their Consequences: Truncated Mission

As was mentioned in Chapter Two, Chuck and Tseng blame fundamentalism and separatism for the Chinese American church's unwillingness to confront "this-worldly" social justice issues in its view of mission. Jeung and Rah blame Western individualism. But separatist fundamentalism and individualism are not the only contributing factors to Chinese American Christianity's truncated missiology. A more holistic approach to mission requires a theology of creation that approaches dualistic tendencies with nuance rather than propagating strict sacred/secular dichotomies or an otherworldly neglect of human bodies. Such binaries

¹¹¹ John Stackhouse (ed.), *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Jason Sexton & Paul Weston (eds.), *The End of Theology: Shaping Theology for the Sake of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

¹¹² Alister McGrath, "The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Christian Church" *JETS* 35, no. 3 (September 1992): 373.

only perpetuate the myth that religion, salvation, and the work of the Spirit do not significantly concern existence in this present world.

Ontological sacred/secular dualism looms largely amongst Chinese American Christians, who are mostly informed by conservative Western evangelical theology. This can be traced back to the fundamentalist theology of Chinese Christians in the early 20th century. During the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in China, Chinese evangelicals were not only upset about the “liberals’ alleged denial and distortion of biblical teachings, but also their attempt to shift missionaries’ focus from evangelism to social service...Consequently, to differentiate themselves from liberals, these evangelicals placed an almost exclusive emphasis on evangelism over against social involvements,” and because of the sharp split between the fundamentalists and the liberals, “[i]n the minds of Chinese evangelicals, the choice between evangelism and engagement of social concerns seemed to be an ‘either-or’ from the very beginnings.”¹¹³ These Chinese Christians’ “view of society was very negative and pessimistic,” such that “[t]he dominant position was that this world is the domain of the devil, full of sin, and inevitably worsening.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, Kevin Yao argues that “instead of social and moral reform...[Chinese] evangelicals tended to emphasize propagation of the Gospel and saving of souls as the ultimate solutions for social diseases.”¹¹⁵ Yao also notes that while neo-evangelicals in North America revised their social theology, the Communist victory in 1949 prevented the Chinese evangelical church from revising theirs into the latter half of the 20th century.¹¹⁶

Such dualistic thinking continued into the Chinese North American context as well. In his PhD dissertation, Justin Tse argues that Chinese North American Christians’ view of

¹¹³ Kevin Yao, “Chinese Evangelicals and Social Concerns: A Historical and Comparative Review” in *After Imperialism: Christian Identity in China and The Global Evangelical Movement*, eds. Richard Cook and David Pao (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011), 51.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

mission is largely shaped by a flawed sacred/secular spatial binary. He observes how this binary shapes the way they view the church's relationship to the rest of the world. Tse argues that Chinese American Christians have largely "produc[ed] an imagination of congregational space that focused on the religious activities of worship to the exclusion of social engagement. After all, secular issues (it was held) were irrelevant to the spiritual questions of eternal security in the afterlife."¹¹⁷ After observing the different ways that mainline Chinese Protestants and evangelical Chinese Protestants engage in social issues, and the grounds on which they engage such issues, Tse demonstrates that both actually reinforce secularization.¹¹⁸

Following John Milbank, Tse contends that "secular narratives are themselves theological because they purport to define what religion is and what relevance, if any, it has to the public sphere."¹¹⁹ Although coming at the topic of Cantonese Protestant engagement in civil societies from the discipline of geography, Tse rightly understands that theological and metaphysical elements are involved when discussing secularism and the public sphere. Tse affirms Charles Taylor's critique of secularization narratives that view religion and the secular as polar opposites. He believes that this critique should be applied to Cantonese Protestant civil engagement because "the narratives of secularization that are often thought to be Eurocentric are in fact crucial to the intellectual history of Asia-Pacific and Asian North American religions."¹²⁰ Ultimately, Tse argues that if Chinese American Christians wish to transcend the culture wars, the religion-secular spatial binary also needs to be transcended, rather than reinforced. To that same end, Amos Yong suggests that a pneumatological theology of creation can transcend such binaries with the conviction that "God is universally

¹¹⁷ Justin Kin-Hung Tse, "Religious Politics in Pacific Space: Grounding Cantonese Protestant Theologies in Secular Civil Societies" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), 144.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

present and active by the Spirit.”¹²¹ Rather than understanding the Spirit as limited to the sphere of soul-salvation, Yong believes pneumatology is applicable in all spheres of life, and not just in religious or ecclesial contexts. Hence, Tse and Yong represent two Chinese American Christians pursuing a more holistic view of reality with many implications for missiology.

A second kind of dualism, stemming from a deficient theology of creation, has also affected Chinese American evangelicals’ missiology. It is an anthropological soul/body dualism. Regarding dualistic anthropology within Chinese American Christianity, it needs to be reiterated that Chinese American Protestants have largely imbibed the impulses of conservative and popular American evangelicalism, which includes a history of viewing the body quite separately from the soul. Another influencer of Chinese American Christians toward a dualistic anthropology is Watchman Nee, who was very well known and influential amongst the Chinese Christian Diaspora. It has been said that “the very core of Watchman Nee’s theology is his understanding of human nature.”¹²² Although Nee viewed human nature in trichotomy (body, soul, spirit) instead of a dichotomy, the same critique of Platonic separation applies. Furthermore, Chow conjectures that “the reason [Nee] spends less time on the body is because he does not see it as important as the soul and the spirit.”¹²³ Hence, it is not hard to see how a harmful dualistic anthropology would be adopted and reinforced within Chinese American Christianity.

In order for Chinese American Christians to engage in holistic mission, they need an understanding of creation in which religion and the work of the Spirit are not confined to a “sacred” sphere, nor strictly separated from civil society. They also need a creational

¹²¹ Amos Yong, “Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World Religions” in *No Other Gods Before Me?*, ed. John Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 47.

¹²² Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 44.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

anthropology that better respects the organic connection between the soul and the body. A more holistic missiology demands a more holistic worldview, informed by a robust theology of creation.

II.C.2. (Chinese American) Christianity & (Modern) Culture(s)

In Chapter Two, I discussed the division that is beginning to occur between conservative and progressive Chinese American Christians as they encounter modern secularism. I also discussed the strong aversion that most Chinese American Christians have for what they perceive to be the rise of secularism in American culture, an aversion that critical progressives have often ascribed to a pervasive “anti-intellectualism.” It is my contention that the anti-intellectual stigma in the Chinese American church from which progressive Chinese American Christians want to distance themselves, is not necessarily due to anti-intellectualism in the sense of denigrating education, literacy, and the intelligent use of logic. Rather, it is a symptom of the severely dismissive attitude and posture that most Chinese American Christians have toward the popular views of modern secular institutions. While more dependent upon modern secular opinion than many like to admit, the majority of theologically conservative Chinese American Christians find it theologically difficult to articulate a point of contact between modern secular views and their theological convictions. By and large, they are characterized by the dualistic postures of “Christ against culture” or “Christ and culture in paradox”, and for them capitulation to “secularism” best describes the supposedly sad and negative cultural climate of America today.

The theological aversion to the popular beliefs of modern secularism amongst Chinese American Christians is perhaps best represented by Thomas Wang’s anthology, *America, Return to God*.¹²⁴ Thomas Wang was converted under the ministry of the well-

¹²⁴ Thomas Wang (ed.), *America, Return to God* (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006).

known Chinese fundamentalist preacher, John Sung and worshiped with Wang Mingdao for a time. Since then he has ministered in the American evangelical context and was even on the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (1987), working closely with Billy Graham. Although Lausanne is neither known for being dogmatic nor fundamentalist, Wang's anthology reflects a surprisingly different tone.

In his anthology, Wang brazenly lambasts the forces of secularization in America with more alarm than nuance. He writes: "America and the West are showing signs characteristic to pre-exilic Judah. One by one, the Western countries today are turning away from God."¹²⁵ In his telling of Western history, the thought pattern of the West goes as follows: in the Renaissance came the belief in "Man, the measure of all things," then in the Enlightenment came the belief that "Man has come of age and is no longer in need of God," then in Modernism came the belief that "Man overcomes nature (heaven)," and finally now in Post-modernism the belief has come that "Man not only is independent from God but man is God."¹²⁶ Examples of positions that Wang holds include not only his belief that same-sex marriage is sinful before God, but also that it should be illegal according to the state. He also criticizes the Supreme Court, which "threw" prayer and Bible reading out of public schools, and he believes that "Higher education today serves only to build up an apology for atheism."¹²⁷ At one point he asks, "[A]re we being 'judgmental' or 'self-righteous'?" to which he answers, "No, absolutely not! What we have mentioned here are merely a drop in the bucket of all the dark schemes of the other side in their well-planned, well-financed and well-'lawyered' all-out war to tear down brick by brick this great Christian nation founded by

¹²⁵ Thomas Wang, "My People Have Changed God" in *America, Return to God*, ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006).

¹²⁶ Thomas Wang, "Ambush Alert – the Barbarians are Here" in *America, Return to God*, ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006).

¹²⁷ Thomas Wang, "The Neo-Pagan Drift" in *America, Return to God*, ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006).

God through Christians!”¹²⁸ Wang’s hope in all of this is that Chinese American Christians, whom he views as beneficiaries of America and its supposedly Christian founding values, will rise up and contribute to the spiritual renewal of America, fighting passionately against the forces of secularism.

From the language and rhetoric in Wang’s anthology (which includes pieces from other very conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists such as Jerry Falwell, John MacArthur, Tim LaHaye, James Dobson, Erwin Lutzer, Gary DeMar, and Joe Wright) one is led to believe that modern secularism is an absolute evil. Lest one think that Wang is a marginal figure in Chinese American Christianity, it should be noted that at least 450,000 copies of *America, Return to God* have been printed and distributed to American leaders at all levels and professions.¹²⁹ Furthermore, Wang mobilized and led masses of Chinese American Christians in the open-air rally on 19th Street in San Francisco calling Californians to vote against same-sex marriage in 2008. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that Wang’s convictions are widely shared within Chinese American Christianity.

But is such an antithetical, countercultural position necessary or even beneficial? While Chinese American Christians should indeed hold their beliefs with conviction against the negative forces of secular modernism, the seeming inability of most Chinese American Christians to persuasively and thoughtfully engage with today’s secular culture has tended to only further divide the conservatives from both the progressives and the very non-Christians they are trying to reach. Their rhetoric and posture toward contemporary Western culture has alienated them from the very culture they are seeking to influence. Chinese American Christians need a contextual theology that winsomely engages all cultures – especially

¹²⁸ Thomas Wang, “My People Have Changed God” in *America, Return to God*, ed. Thomas Wang (Sunnyvale, CA: Great Commission Center International, 2006).

¹²⁹ Claudia Cheng, “Thomas Wang Introduces ‘America, Return to God’ in Los Angeles,” *The Gospel Herald*, June 15, 2006, <http://www.gospelherald.com/article/church/9850/thomas-wang-introduces-america-return-to-god-in-los-angeles.htm>, (accessed May 10, 2019).

contemporary secular culture – both critiquing and affirming them according to the standard of an organically inspired divine revelation.

III. The Need for a Constructive, Contextualized Chinese American

Evangelical Theology

Although it was a Taiwanese theologian, Shoki Coe, who inserted the notion of “theological contextualization” into modern day missiological discourse at the World Council of Churches in 1972,¹³⁰ Asian American evangelicals have not been known to engage contextual theology with much energy or interest until recently. After all, American evangelicals as a whole only began to seriously discuss contextualization within the last three decades when Hesselgrave and Rommen’s *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* significantly summarized the early and more directly conscious evangelical interaction with contextualization.¹³¹ Hence, it is not surprising that the discussion of contextualization amongst Chinese American Christians is relatively new.

The Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE) was one early attempt toward a contextualized Chinese American Christianity. In 1978, the North American Congress of Chinese Evangelicals (NACOCE)¹³² established FACE to encourage the whole Chinese church to more effectively minister to ABCs. At the 1978 congress, four needs and objectives were clearly identified. They included: 1) Deeper understanding of cultural differences between OBCs and ABCs by the church leadership, 2) Mature wisdom for OBCs and ABCs serving in church together, 3) Recognition of needs and potential ABC ministries so that they might gain a higher priority in the church’s programming and financing, and 4)

¹³⁰ Ray Wheeler, “The Legacy of Shoki Coe,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (April 2002): 77.

¹³¹ David J. Hesselgrave & Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1989).

¹³² The NACOCE was formed in 1972 as an alternative association to the mainlines’ National Conference of Chinese Churches (1955).

Encouragement and development of ABC leadership through each stage—as a potential candidate, as a seminarian, in early pastorate.¹³³ The primary means of communicating to the Chinese churches of North America was through their bi-monthly publication *About FACE*,¹³⁴ which ran from 1979 to 2003. In short, FACE was the Chinese American evangelical response to the growing tensions between ABCs and OBCs in the Chinese churches of the United States. FACE provided resources for navigating their multi-lingual, multi-generational, and ABC-OBC relational issues.

It is difficult to quantify the success of FACE, especially in the face of the many OBC church leaders who ignored their efforts. While, it is probably safe to say that FACE did help some Chinese American Christians, it is more than reasonable to acknowledge that FACE was not enough to solve the issues facing ABCs and OBCs in the Chinese American church. One way in which the impact of FACE was rather limited was that it focused more on practical and pastoral concerns than deeper theological presuppositions. Also, FACE largely operated out of a conservative evangelical framework and often critiqued the first generation for being too Chinese or too Asian to contextually minister to the next generations of Chinese American Christians. While highlighting the real differences between the Chinese and American cultures, FACE never adopted a strong postcolonial critique of Chinese American Christianity being too Western in its theological underpinnings. Hence, reflection from Chinese Americans who are theologically right-of-center is sorely needed, and steps toward this have been quite small.¹³⁵

¹³³ Joseph Wong, “Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals – A Review,” *About FACE* 1 (April 1979): 2.

¹³⁴ Peter Yuen (ed.), *About FACE* (Oakland: Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals, 1979-2003).

¹³⁵ For one such small step, see DJ Chuang & Timothy Tseng (eds.), *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation* (Raleigh, North Carolina: L2 Foundation, 2006).

It is interesting to note, on the other hand, that most of the academic discourse conducted by Chinese American Christian theologians,¹³⁶ biblical scholars,¹³⁷ and historians,¹³⁸ is more progressive and eager to reflect upon what an Asian American theology or an Asian American Christianity might look like and accomplish. Their critique of Chinese and Asian American Christianities being too Western has been enthusiastically embraced by the small, but growing number of progressive Asian American Christians, who are tired of the conservative evangelicalism that they grew up under. In line with Soong-Chan Rah's call for a "next" evangelicalism, freed from its Western cultural captivity, Chinese American Amos Yong observes: "Asian Americans have rarely questioned the modernist, Enlightenment, and Anglo- and Euro-American presuppositions of the evangelical theological endeavour."¹³⁹ Yong is concerned that Western viewpoints, though valuable in their own ways, are unrecognized and even presumed to be normative for Asian American theologians. Andrew Lee echoes Yong's concern:

When Asian American Christian leaders were asked to define what an Asian American theology meant to them, many were unable to do so with much clarity having given little thought to this matter. Others expressed the view that an Asian

¹³⁶ See for example: Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Khiok-Khng Yeo, "Christian Chinese Theology: Theological Ethics of Becoming Human and Holy" in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman & Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 102-115; Steve Hu, "The Importance of Postcolonial Evangelical Conversations" in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2014), 16-18; Jonathan Tran, "Living Out the Gospel: Asian American Perspectives and Contributions," *Annual of the Society of Asian North American Christian Studies* 2 (2010): 13-56, 69-73; Jonathan Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

¹³⁷ See for example: Tat-Siong Benny Liew *What is Asian American biblical hermeneutics?: reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); "Introduction: Whose Bible? Which (Asian) America?" *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 1-26; Gale Yee, "'She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority" in *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. F.F. Segovia (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 119-140; Sze-Kar Wan, "Betwixt and Between: Toward a Hermeneutics of Hyphenation" in *Ways of Being Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Mary F. Foskett & Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 137-151.

¹³⁸ See for example: Timothy Tseng, "Exploring Asian American Christianity: Its Past, Present, and Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002): 256-382; "Beyond Orientalism and Assimilation: The Asian American as Historical Subject" in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, eds. Eleazar Fernandez and Fumitaka Matsuoka, 55-72. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); "Second Generation Chinese North American Evangelical Use of the Bible in Identity Discourse" *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 251-67; "Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (September 2002).

¹³⁹ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 112.

American reading was unnecessary; what was important was interpreting the Scriptures “biblically.” In their minds, there was a normative approach to Scriptures that was over and above culture.¹⁴⁰

What this indicates about most Chinese American evangelicals is that they do not see their ethnic and racial cultures as valuable theological contexts in and out of which to operate. They do not appreciate the potential that their ethnic and racial experiences and histories afford them. Andrew Lee has rightly indicated just how foreign Dennis Loo’s thoughts from the mainline were for most Chinese American Christians. Strongly believing in the value of the Asian American experience and their need for a theology of liberation and self-development,¹⁴¹ Loo wrote:

Asian Americans need to begin the process of developing an interpretation of the Christian faith which encourages self-affirmation and indigenous self-development in Asian churches and communities. It must encourage a critical analysis of ideas, values, customs and structures in America which oppress not only Asians but others as well. It must encourage collective action for changing that oppression. It must also encourage the development of an Asian American frame of reference which can make its own unique contribution to the developing Third World theological dialogue, to the global theological task, and to liberation movements in the United States and in the world.¹⁴²

If Loo’s words are any indication of the latent potential within Chinese American Christianity, or Asian American Christianity for that matter, the sad truth is that Chinese American Christianity has greatly underachieved. As the notable Chinese American Christian leader, DJ Chuang, wrote: “American society needs Asian Americans to be more Asian American.”¹⁴³ Chuang is convinced that the utilization of Asian American experience by Asian American Christians can break stereotypes, allow Asian Americans to be honest about their “otherness” instead of being “colorblind,” build bridges through their bicultural

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Lee, “Reading the Bible as an Asian American: Issues in Asian American Biblical Interpretation” in *Ways of Being Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Mary F. Foskett & Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 67.

¹⁴¹ Dennis Loo, “Why an Asian American Theology of Liberation,” *Church & Society* 64, no. 3 (Jan-Feb 1974), 49-54.

¹⁴² Quoted by Andrew Lee, “Reading the Bible as an Asian American,” 68.

¹⁴³ DJ Chuang, “Why we need Asian Americans to be Asian Americans,” *djchuang.com* (blog), November 26, 2010, <http://djchuang.com/2010/why-we-need-asian-americans-to-be-asian-americans/> (accessed February 7, 2017).

identities, and renew the wider culture by alerting it to its blind spots and enriching it with Asian American cultural insights. Currently, the Chinese American church, and the wider Asian American church is not really known to be doing any of these things.

Instead of embracing their Chinese or Asian American perspectives on the Christian faith, they often just mirror popular and conservative evangelical churches in America. The problem is that, as such, they are largely under-contextualized and often perceived as irrelevant. With a focus on worship, Russell Yee helpfully states the dilemma of Asian and Chinese American churches being far too under-contextualized and reluctant to theologically engage their cultural contexts:

As people come to church, do they sense that Jesus is God come in the flesh *for their people*; that God hears and delights in their particular cultural “voice” that the gospel is truly Good News for every sorrow and joy in their people’s story; that they have uniquely valuable gifts of heritage, history, and experience that very much need to be shared as Good News to others? As far as I can tell, there are scant places in the [Asian North American] church where one could readily and regularly answer yes to such questions. What is worse, there are few places where such needs are even felt and recognized.¹⁴⁴

The problem, however, is that most of this discourse falls on deaf ears as it pertains to the majority of Chinese American evangelicals. In general, Chinese American evangelicals are far more likely to be reading Norman Geisler, Wayne Grudem, or Millard Erickson’s systematic theologies than the contextual theologies of Peter Phan’s *Christianity with an Asian Face* or Amos Yong’s *The Future of Evangelical Theology*. Instead of diving into the academic works of Chinese American Christians who have contributed to Asian American Christian biblical scholarship and theology, they are much more commonly reading popular and conservative evangelical publications by Rick Warren, John Ortberg, John Piper, Tim Keller, and Francis Chan. Reading such works is not wrong, per se. But as I attempted to demonstrate in Chapter Two and in this chapter, the past few decades of Chinese American

¹⁴⁴ Russell Yee, *Worship on the Way: Exploring Asian North American Christian Experience* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2012), 17-18.

Christianity demonstrate that merely adopting popular and conservative American evangelicalism and its theology has still left Chinese American Christians with unique challenges that await engagement.

Unless Chinese American evangelicals develop a more contextualized theology, they will continue to suffer from the insufficiencies of American evangelicalism. They will continue to underappreciate the infinite richness of the Christian faith. Additionally, without a more contextualized theology the fissure between the conservative and progressive Chinese American Christians will only widen as they find less and less common ground.

But where would a Chinese American evangelical turn in pursuit of a more contextualized theology? Unfortunately, there is a dearth of robust Chinese American evangelical engagement with such a contextualized theology. The Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals' *Completing the Face of the Chinese American Church in America* was not theologically robust enough, and Samuel Ling's *The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things* was far too brief, leaving more questions than answers.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, most other Chinese American theologians and biblical scholars who have engaged in depth with Asian/Chinese American contextual theologies, hermeneutics, and ethics, such as David Ng,¹⁴⁶ Kwok Pui-Lan,¹⁴⁷ Grace Kao,¹⁴⁸ Jonathan Tan,¹⁴⁹ Tat-Siong Benny Liew,¹⁵⁰ and Gale Yee,¹⁵¹ write and operate mostly outside of the evangelical world. Hence, they are not likely on the radar of

¹⁴⁵ Samuel Ling, *The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things* (San Gabriel, CA: China Horizon, 1999).

¹⁴⁶ David Ng (ed.), *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁸ Grace Kao & Ilsup Ahn (eds.), *Asian American Christian Ethics* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

¹⁴⁹ Jonathan Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Tat-Siong Benny Liew *What is Asian American biblical hermeneutics?: reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); "Introduction: whose Bible? Which (Asian) America?" *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 1-26.

¹⁵¹ Gale Yee, "'She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority" in *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 119-140.

most Chinese American Christians. As for the more conservative and evangelical Chinese Americans, such as Jeff Louie,¹⁵² Bruce Fong,¹⁵³ and Francis Chan,¹⁵⁴ they have largely preoccupied themselves with mainstream evangelicalism and hardly reflected upon the distinctiveness of their ethnic backgrounds in any theological way. Furthermore, virtually all the Chinese American evangelical theologians and biblical scholars who have engaged with contextual theology, such as Amos Yong,¹⁵⁵ Russell Yee,¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey Jue,¹⁵⁷ and Andrew Lee, have confined themselves to discussing *Asian* American theology and *Asian* American hermeneutical perspectives more broadly, rather than Chinese American theology more specifically.¹⁵⁸ Hence, there is a clear need for the development of a contextualized *Chinese* American evangelical theology.

IV. Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to theologically diagnose the various challenges discussed in Chapter Two. Chinese American Christians have faced challenges in their

¹⁵² Jeff Louie completed his PhD in Biblical Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. He does not have any notable publications, but currently teaches as an associate professor of theology at Western Seminary, sits on the council of The Gospel Coalition, and serves as an elder at his local congregation in the San Francisco Bay Area.

¹⁵³ Bruce Fong teaches as Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. His publications include: Bruce Fong, *Racial Equality in the Church: A Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996); *The Wall: Jesus destroyed the wall of hostility; His church must never rebuild it. Ephesians 2:14*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011); *Shepherd Strong "Living 1 & 2 Timothy": implementing the study of Scripture into our daily lives* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); *Real Life: "Determined to discover that each new day is worth living"* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); *Immediate Obedience: Living Joshua: Slow obedience is no obedience. God desires our immediate compliance to His loving guidance* (Blessed Hope Publishing, 2017).

¹⁵⁴ *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2008); *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009); *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, And the Things We've Made Up* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011); *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012); *You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity* (Crazy Love Ministries, 2014).

¹⁵⁵ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

¹⁵⁶ Russell Yee, *Worship on the Way: Exploring Asian North American Christian Experience* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey Jue, "Asian American Theology: A Modern and Postmodern Dilemma" in *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*, eds. DJ Chuang & Timothy Tseng (Lulu.com, 2013).

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Lee, "Reading the Bible as an Asian American: Issues in Asian American Biblical Interpretation" in *Ways of Being Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Mary F. Foskett & Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006).

churches, in their personal Christian lives, and in their interaction with the wider American culture. I have labored to demonstrate that the popular and conservative American evangelicalism that they have accepted over the past half-century has proven insufficient in a variety of ways for the Chinese American Christian context.

They have inherited an evangelical theology with a deficient theology of ethnicity, a disharmonious dynamic of individualism and collectivism, and a dualistic doctrine of creation. Their simplistic theology of ethnicity has left them wondering if they and their ethnic churches are guilty of disunity within Christ's body, and it has also prevented them from mining their ethnic perspectives in service of theology. The disharmonious dynamics of individualism and collectivism are evident in their overly individualistic approach to mission, the tense dynamics of their intergenerational churches, their individualistic approach to Scripture and theology, and their struggle with shame and personal identity. Meanwhile, the deficiencies of their doctrine of creation are evident in the sharp sacred/secular, soul/body, and Christianity/culture dualisms, which have led to the Chinese American church's truncated mission, and their often-myopic and counterproductive engagement with modern secular culture in their increasingly pluralistic context.

Chinese American Christians need a more constructive contextual theology to make up for the deficiencies of American evangelical theology. Scanning the horizon, Timothy Tseng summarizes the important decisions ahead that Chinese American Christians must face:

Chinese evangelicals around the world have several choices of paths to walk in the future. Some may only focus on serving the Church in China. Others will emphasize cross-cultural, overseas missions. Many are concerned about their host country... Theologically, some want the Chinese church to be grounded into a Reformed perspective. Others want Chinese to develop their own unique theology. Yet others want Chinese Christians to embrace the reality of a post-modern, post-

colonial, and post-Christian world. The choices are many, but the wisdom to decide is lacking.¹⁵⁹

The aim of the rest of this thesis is to pursue wisdom toward the goal of developing a more contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. In what follows I will investigate two possible theological traditions that might assist Chinese American evangelicals in our pursuit of a more contextualized theology: the Pentecostal tradition of Amos Yong and the neo-Calvinist tradition of Bavinck, Kuyper and Vos. In the next chapter, I will observe the Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, who has approached the topic of an Asian American evangelical theology. The chapter will consider Yong's Pentecostal thought as a possible resource and starting point for a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology.

¹⁵⁹ Timothy Tseng, "From Hope to Love – The Future of Chinese Evangelicalism in the United States" in *Logos for Life: Essays Commemorating Logos Evangelical Seminary 20th Anniversary*, eds. Ekron Chen, Jeffrey Lu, & Chloe Sun (El Monte, CA: Logos Evangelical Seminary, 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR - The Possibilities of Amos Yong's Pentecostal Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals

I. Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis sought to uncover the origins of Chinese American evangelicalism, lay out the most discussed challenges and concerns that Chinese American Christians have faced in their predominantly evangelical context over the past 60 years, and diagnose the theological issues underlying these challenges and concerns. The primary aim was to highlight the need for theological contextualization amongst Chinese American evangelicals. The second half of this thesis will head in a more constructive direction. The aim of these last two chapters is to consider two theological traditions that are less prominent amongst Chinese American evangelicals – Pentecostalism and neo-Calvinism – in the hope of discerning a way forward for the many Chinese American Christians entangled within the shortcomings of popular and conservative American evangelicalism.

The first tradition to be considered is the Pentecostal tradition, as it is represented by Amos Yong. Hence, the main question under consideration in this chapter is: How might Amos Yong's "pent-evangelical" theology be helpfully applied within the Chinese American evangelical context? In what follows I will 1) explain some distinctives of Amos Yong's theology and why he is relevant and worth considering for a Chinese American evangelical theology, 2) consider how Yong's thinking addresses the theological problems within the Chinese American evangelical context, and 3) critically assess the merits of Yong's theological reflection.

The main argument of this chapter is that Amos Yong's "pentecostal imagination" may indeed prove a useful starting point for the renewal of Chinese American evangelical

theology insofar as he provides a thoughtful critique of popular and conservative Western evangelicalism and offers a pneumatologically-imagined alternative. Yong helpfully articulates the problematic nature of many conservative evangelical approaches toward ethnicity, individualism and collectivism, and creation and culture. Thus, he merits consideration from Chinese American evangelicals seeking a theological way out of the un(der)-contextualized theology that they have largely accepted from popular and conservative American evangelicalism. However, this chapter will also highlight a number of theological challenges in Yong's pneumatological imagination that may prove difficult for Chinese American evangelicals to accept.

II. Amos Yong's Theology: Why & What?

II.A. Why Consider Yong's Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals?

The decision to consider Yong's theology as a possible resource for renewing Chinese American evangelical theology in a contextualized manner is not arbitrary. One factor that makes Yong a worthy figure to consider is his life experience. Not only is he an ethnically Chinese person (though born in Malaysia) but he was predominantly raised and educated in the United States. It should also be noted that Yong was born in 1965, and in 1975 immigrated with his parents to Stockton, California, just an hour and a half drive east of San Francisco. This is important because the 1960s were when the Asian American movement began in the San Francisco Bay Area. Furthermore, 1965 was when the U.S. reopened its doors to large numbers of Asian immigrants, whose experiences have undoubtedly shaped today's Asian American self-understanding more than any other generation of Asian immigrants. Hence, Amos Yong's life experience has very much been situated within the fomentation of today's general Asian/Chinese American experience.

Though Yong was born outside of the U.S., he spent the majority of his life growing up in the States and primarily speaks English. Hence, Yong is what many – including himself – would call a 1.5 generation Asian American. This is a significant aspect of the Asian American experience. Yong is no stranger to the bicultural, bilingual,¹ and immigrant experience. Another dimension of the common Asian American experience is the experience of being a minority. Yong is familiar with this too. He still remembers being called a “chink” in junior high and working hard to get rid of his accent.² Furthermore, he even fits the admittedly deleterious ‘model minority’ stereotype, having graduated as the valedictorian of his high school, having received multiple postgraduate research degrees, and also having garnered recognition as a prolific and pioneering academic.

In addition to his identity and experiences as a Chinese American, Yong is also worth considering as a theologian for Chinese Americans because he is an evangelical just like the majority of Chinese American Christians. Not only does he self-identify as an evangelical³ and minister in the Assemblies of God, but he also boasts quite an evangelical pedigree, having received a bachelor degree at Bethany College of the Assemblies of God and a master degree at Western Evangelical Seminary (now part of George Fox University in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition). Currently, he is the dean of both the School of Theology and the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary.

However, while Yong definitely falls within evangelicalism, it should be noted here that Yong more frequently foregrounds his pentecostal identity than his evangelical identity. This provides an extra unique dimension, which makes Yong such an intriguing figure to

¹ In 2014 he was even seeking to be trilingual, taking college courses to learn Mandarin. See Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 20.

² Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 18, 35; See also Amos Yong “Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics: A Difficult Relationship or Promising Convergence?” <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/evangelicals-pentecostals-and-charismatics/> (accessed May 10, 2019).

consider for a Chinese American evangelical theology. While pentecostalism is not completely absent from the Chinese American evangelical context, it is definitely a minority tradition amongst Chinese American evangelicals.⁴ Hence, Yong's evangelical identity, coupled with his more deliberately pentecostal identity, means that Yong, while definitely an "insider" also has a more marginal and perhaps overlooked perspective to share with Chinese American Christians. Furthermore, a consideration of Yong's pentecostal convictions for a more contextualized theology amongst Chinese American evangelicals aligns well with the fact that to be "evangelical" in the majority world quite often means that one is influenced by renewal theology. Pentecostalism or renewal theology more broadly, has found much traction in non-Western cultures, for as Philip Jenkins has mentioned in his discussion of global South Christianity:

Often, Christianity grows and spreads in highly charismatic and Pentecostal forms, ecstatic religious styles that are by no means confined to classical Pentecostal denominations, but which span churches with very different origins and traditions. Pentecostal expansion across the Southern continents has been so astonishing as to justify claims of a new Reformation.⁵

There is at least one more factor that makes Yong a worthy figure to consider when thinking about resources for a contextualized Chinese American theology. It is his ascendance as a prolific pent-evangelical theologian. There is no Chinese American evangelical theologian who has published nearly as many publications as Yong. While he has

⁴ According to Joy K.C. Tong and Fenggang Yang, "it is estimated that about 10 percent of Chinese American churches are charismatic, most of them located in metropolitan cities, especially those in California, while in most noncharismatic Chinese churches, about 10 percent of their members are 'proto-charismatic,' namely, individuals who do not belong to a Pentecostal or charismatic church but embrace some of the qualities of this tradition." Joy K.C. Tong & Fenggang Yang, "The Femininity of Chinese Christianity: A Study of a Chinese Charismatic Church and Its Female Leadership" in *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* eds. Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, & Allan H. Anderson (Leiden-Boston, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 331. A few examples of this are the True Jesus churches, Bread of Life churches, Home of Christ churches, and the International House of Prayer Chinese Ministry. Furthermore, the influences of Vineyard, Hillsong, Passion, and Sovereign Grace Ministries within American evangelicalism have also found their way into evangelical Chinese American churches that are not explicitly charismatic or pentecostal.

⁵ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.

written on theological method,⁶ theology of religions,⁷ disability,⁸ the Holy Spirit,⁹ and a range of other topics, he has also managed to write more broadly on global theology and the importance of non-Western perspectives for the renewal of theology.¹⁰ More specifically, he has even delved into Asian American theology, and considered how the Asian American experience might serve the evangelical church's theological reflections.¹¹ Yong bemoans the way that Asian Americans have so thoroughly imbibed the convictions of conservative evangelicals and encourages his readers to take steps toward an Asian American Evangelical theology that is capable of serving not only Asian American evangelicals, but the North American evangelical church, and the global church. For all these reasons, Yong's theology merits significant consideration as a resource for a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology.

II.B. What is Yong's Pent-Evangelical Theology?

II.B.1 Pentecostal Tradition: Luke-Acts Lens

Yong's parents were converted through the labors of Assemblies of God missionaries in Malaysia, and they became Assemblies of God ministers themselves.¹² One might say that pentecostalism is in Yong's DNA. While Amos Yong clearly seeks to refine his pentecostal tradition in dialogue with other Christian traditions and other faiths, he is also an ordained

⁶ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006); Amos Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian Reason and Theological Method in the Third Millennium* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014).

⁷ Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

⁸ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007); Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁹ Amos Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit: A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹¹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*.

¹² Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 19.

minister in the Assemblies of God.¹³ Hence, he deliberately theologizes as a self-identifying Pentecostal, though preferring to describe himself as ‘pentecostal’ in the lower-case form of the word.¹⁴

According to Yong, “a distinctive Pentecostal theology would be *biblically grounded*. Yet its approach to Scripture may be through a *hermeneutical and exegetical perspective informed explicitly by Luke-Acts*.”¹⁵ Here Yong’s pentecostal distinctiveness is pronounced against his broader evangelical identity. He continues: “This Pentecostal vision of original Christianity is animated by the conviction that the accounts in the book of Acts (especially) are not merely of historical interest but an invitation to participate in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ This is the central hermeneutical lens through which Yong interprets Scripture and all reality as a Christian and theologian.

There are several examples of how this hermeneutic has shaped his theological convictions and interests. Inspired by the younger “mission church” of Antioch in Acts 11, who served the church in Jerusalem, Yong affirms the need that Western churches have for theological and ministerial assistance from churches in the global South.¹⁷ Yong’s Luke-Acts starting point also contributes to his thinking about inter-religious hospitality as he considers Peter and Cornelius, and how Jesus constantly breaks the conventional rules of hospitality, welcoming the “other.” On politics, Yong draws upon the many tongues of Pentecost to

¹³ For the sake of consistency, I will accept and follow Yong’s definitions and uses of ‘Pentecostal(-ism)’ and ‘pentecostal(-ism).’ Yong uses “‘Pentecostal’ and ‘Pentecostalism’ (capitalized) to refer to the classical expression, and ‘pentecostal’ and ‘pentecostalism’ (uncapitalized) to refer to the movement in general or to [the classical Pentecost movement connected to Azusa Street revival, the charismatic-renewal movement in the mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches beginning in the 1960s, and the neocharismatic category that comprises thousands of independent groups that share a common emphasis on the Spirit, spiritual gifts, pentecostal-like experiences, signs, wonders, and power encounters] inclusively.” Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 18.

¹⁴ Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt, “Introduction” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 15.

¹⁵ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Amos Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit: A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclite Press, 2011), 198.

reject the exclusivity of any particular political posture, observing that “Luke neither affirms nor rejects capitalism, socialism, or any other economic –ism...”¹⁸ Furthermore the diversity motif, which finds its rich expression at Pentecost, has also shaped his thinking on disability.¹⁹ One last example is his thinking on immigration, which is shaped by the inherent travel emphasis that comes from Acts’ world mission motif.²⁰

Lest one think Yong is naïve or arbitrary in his choice of Luke-Acts as a hermeneutical starting point, Yong is ready with a defense of ‘Lukan privilege.’ First, as a pentecostal, Yong believes that “the return to ‘biblical Christianity’ could be realized only if its defining features were discernible, and where else would this be clearly found except in the book of Acts?”²¹ Secondly, he challenges the strict distinction between Luke as a mere historian and Paul as a didactic theologian, urging readers to view Luke’s authorial intentions as both thoroughly theological *and* undoubtedly historical, hence inviting them to read Luke alongside Paul and not in subordination to Paul.²² He contends that ‘Lukan privilege’ “overcomes the divide between narrative and didactic genres of Scripture” by reinforcing the didactic aspects of all Scriptures’ narratives, and the narratives within which all didactic writings are set.²³ Thirdly, Yong sees it as unavoidable that one start with a part of the biblical canon rather than claiming to enter it as a whole, for “no one can be merely and fully biblical in the exhaustive sense of the term. Better to concede one’s perspective up front, since this better protects against a naïve biblicism that often results in aspirations to be

¹⁸ Martin William Mittelstadt, “Reimagining Luke-Acts” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 40.

¹⁹ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007); Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

²⁰ Amos Yong, “The Im/Migrant Spirit: De/Constructing a Pentecostal Theology of Migration” in *Theology and Migration in World Christianity: Contextual Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, Christianities of the World 2, eds. Peter C. Phan and Elaine Padilla (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²¹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 83.

²² *Ibid.*, 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86.

‘biblical.’”²⁴ Finally, he believes that while a Luke-Acts hermeneutical lens admits the impossibility of arriving at any “purely biblical theology apart from experiential traditions of interpretation” because it is a narrative genre lens, “Lukan privilege” remains a hermeneutical lens that still acknowledges Scripture as a starting point for theology.²⁵

II.B.2. Pneumatological Orientation

For Yong, embracing a pentecostal Luke-Acts hermeneutical lens also means engaging theology with pneumatology as his orienting motif. His pursuit is not simply of pneumatology in and of itself, but “of all things to which pneumatology directs our attention.”²⁶ For Yong, pneumatology inspires an entire imagination, a ‘pneumatological imagination,’ which “encompasses the acts, the objects, and the contexts of interpretation.”²⁷ Hence, he is happy to agree with Kevin Vanhoozer and views the contemporary Christian life as faithful improvisation by Christian actors continuing the drama of Acts to “the ends of the earth.”²⁸ The pneumatological imagination, shaped by the Pentecost narrative, is what guides such faithful improvisation. Summarily, the pneumatological imagination is a Spirit-led intuition, by which Christians live faithfully, creatively, and contextually between Christ’s first and second comings. To exercise a pneumatological imagination is to embody and follow the prominent motifs and trajectories of the Age of the Spirit in order to discern truth and righteousness from falsehood and evil. Yong describes the pneumatological imagination as “a way of seeing God, self, and world that is inspired by the (Christian) experience of the Spirit.”²⁹

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 86.

²⁶ Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt, “Introduction,” 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Martin William Mittelstadt, “Reimagining Luke-Acts,” 31; Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 55-57; Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), chs. 6-7.

²⁹ Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 64.

This Spirit-led intuition has led Yong to theologize with an acute sensitivity toward three central pneumatological categories, which he perceives throughout Scripture's pneumatological narratives: *relationality*, *rationality*,³⁰ and the *dynamism* of life and community.³¹ Hence, when Yong employs his pneumatological imagination, Yong is particularly drawn to these three categories amongst the various traditional theological loci and utilizes them in his theological reflection. For Yong, where there is relationality, rationality, and/or dynamism, there the Spirit is also. And the ubiquity of these three pneumatological categories affirms the ubiquity of the Spirit, legitimizing Yong's insistence on a pneumatological perspective throughout his theology.

Yong derives his emphasis upon the pneumatological category of relation from Irenaeus' two-hands (Word & Spirit) of God model of the Trinity and Augustine's mutual love model. According to Yong, the two-hands model suggests mutuality, coinherence, and reciprocity, while denying any form of subordination between Word and Spirit. Furthermore, it grounds all creation as constituted by both Spirit and Word, such that the Spirit establishes the relatedness of things and the Word establishes the determinateness of things. Also, according to Yong, the mutual love model sees the Spirit as that which relates the Father and Son, as well as God and the world. Hence, all reality is inherently relational.³² Yong understands the Spirit as the one "who through incarnation and Pentecost relates God and the world, and who establishes in relationship the manyness of the world, each to and with the other."³³ His interpreters have also noted his emphasis on relationality on a practical level, and write:

³⁰ Yong does not have Enlightenment rationalism in view, but rather the fundamental notion of intelligibility itself. See Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 35.

³¹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 27.

³² Christopher Stephenson, "Reality, Knowledge, and Life in Community" in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 65-66.

³³ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 28.

Yong's notion of the 'pneumatological imagination' is introduced as an attempt to enlarge the Lukan vision of Pentecost with a central emphasis on inclusivity, intentional unity, and diversity. Pentecostals, like Luke the Evangelist, speak to diverse situations and challenge tensions concerning exclusivity based upon age, gender, race, and ethnicity.³⁴

With regard to the Spirit and rationality, Yong writes that "[t]he scriptural witness provides sufficient warrant to view the Spirit in general terms as rationality itself and the condition of intelligibility,"³⁵ and that "the Holy Spirit is the divine mind that illuminates the rationality of the world to human minds."³⁶ Of course "Jesus is clearly the content of the wisdom of God," but "[i]t is the Spirit who expresses and communicates the mind of God which is embodied and concretely manifested in Jesus."³⁷ Hence, "[t]heological rationality and intelligibility is therefore pneumatological through and through."³⁸

Regarding the Spirit as the *dunamis* of life, Yong points out that the *ruach* swept over the deep void and darkness as the "preparatory means through which the cosmos was created."³⁹ He maintains that the Spirit "fills the world and holds all things together (Ps. 139.6 and Wis. 1:7) and that the Spirit is "the life-breath of God in and for creation."⁴⁰ Furthermore, according to Yong, the Spirit's works "are to birth new life through water and fire," for "[t]he Spirit who breathed life at the beginning is the same Spirit who continues to renew life in the world, and who will someday recreate it completely."⁴¹ This means, then, "that natural processes and existence in historical time do not have the final word," but that "the Spirit continues to lure creation toward its destiny even while she heals the fractures in its various orders."⁴² Hence, the Spirit is not only the power of life in creation, but also the dynamic power that moves the cosmos toward its divinely-intended telos.

³⁴ Vondey & Mittelstadt, "Introduction," 20.

³⁵ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 48.

II.B.3. Yong's Peircean Presuppositions

Readers of Yong will be familiar with his pervasive dependence upon Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of American pragmatism.⁴³ In particular, such readers will note Yong's theological application of Peirce's triadic metaphysics and method of inquiry. In Peirce, Yong finds a resource by which evangelicals can avoid the pitfalls of classical foundationalism and absolute relativism, for Peirce offers a non-foundationalist epistemology that does not jettison the notion of truth as correspondence.⁴⁴ Hence, Peirce believes that truth and fact exist and correspond, but that the *knowledge* of truth is not basically grounded in any fundamental belief or principle that can offer certain and infallible knowledge of the truth. According to Yong, the theory of truth and the fallibilism within Peirce's pragmatism have much relevance for contemporary evangelicals in a pluralistic society.

Peirce argued that Descartes' method of doubt was overly individualistic and unreasonable, and that such universal doubt was practically impossible. At the same time, Peirce distanced himself from Thomas Reid's self-evident first principle of common sense beliefs. Peirce denied immunity to such properly basic common sense beliefs, allowing them to be criticized. Hence, Peirce advocated for what he called "Critical Commonsensism,"⁴⁵ undergirded by a triadic metaphysic. According to his triadic metaphysic, reality could be understood in terms of three fundamental categories: *firstness* (pure possibility that enables the quality of things to be experienced), *secondness* (the facticity of things as they are

⁴³ Charles Sanders Peirce is known as the founder of American pragmatism. He would later call his thought "pragmatism" to differentiate himself from William James, John Dewey, and other pragmatists. Peirce was a theorist of logic, language, communication, and semiotics (general theory of signs), as well as a developer of an evolutionary, psycho-physically monistic metaphysical system. He considered scientific philosophy, and especially logic, to be his true calling. See Cheryl Misak, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1, 41 and "Charles Sanders Peirce," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (November 12, 2014), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce/#bio> (accessed December 6, 2017).

⁴⁴ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-27, fn.22; Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vols. I-VI, eds. Charles Hartshorne & Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1931-58), 5.497-501.

experienced), and *thirdness* (the interpretant that mediates between possibility and actuality, between a sign and its object, between firstness and secondness).⁴⁶ Yong writes: “Peirce considered these three categories to be universally applicable to all phenomena, irreducible, able to comprehend all other categorical distinctions, and not only descriptive of reality, but reality itself.”⁴⁷ This triadic framework was Peirce’s way of combining experience and cognition beyond the common dyadic frameworks of subject and object or knower and known in Western thought. According to this triadic framework, he believed truth to be genuinely and exclusively propositional, for a real proposition in itself (as a first) is a sign that stands against an object (a second) and is capable of determining an interpretation (a third).⁴⁸ Peirce, then, was a genuine realist, maintaining that all truth is supremely objective in that there is a correspondence between reality and propositions, even while he also acknowledged the interpretive dimension that is present in all knowing.⁴⁹ For Peirce, the semiotic or interpretive nature of knowing was not a hindrance to his conviction that “truth is public.”⁵⁰

To further understand the process of inquiry in Peirce’s “*Critical Commonsensism*,” one must also understand his distinction between perceptual judgements and perceptual facts within the framework of his pragmatism. Perceptual judgments are the uncontrollable and continuous current of inferences and hypotheses that the mind registers as reality is encountered, experienced, and initially perceived. They occur in people’s continuous streams of consciousness, uncriticizable and indubitable in themselves, and yet are vague and abstract. What follow upon perceptual judgements are perceptual facts, which are more

⁴⁶ Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 1.300-53; Wolfgang Vondey, “A Passion for the Spirit” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 188.

⁴⁷ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 29-30.

⁴⁸ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 33; See Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 2.327.

⁴⁹ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 34; See Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 5.569.

⁵⁰ Charles Sanders Peirce, Letter to William James, 13 June 1907, quoted in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Briefer Version (New York: George Braziller, 1954), 291.

actively controlled cognitions or ideas. Peirce describes perceptual facts as “the intellect’s description of the evidence of the senses, made by my endeavour.”⁵¹ In their final form, perceptual facts are interpreted propositions produced by actively controlled cognition.

Pragmatism, then, is a process of inquiry that seeks to establish firm beliefs about reality from the hypotheses of perceptual judgments (abduction) by deducing perceptual facts (deduction) and testing the proposed perceptual facts inductively in community with other inquirers (induction). When these interpreted propositions are confirmed inductively, they form provisional habits that enable people to successfully engage reality with a sense of regularity. Such provisional habits are especially reinforced by communal consensus. However, while perceptual judgements are indubitable, the propositionally asserted perceptual facts (propositional interpretations of reality) are provisional and dubitable, and should be criticized when surprises arise that refute them or when they are disconfirmed by further inductive tests within the entire community of inquirers. Hence, Peirce strongly affirms the scientific method of inquiry while also affirming the fallibilistic and provisional nature of all knowledge and interpretation: “the scientific spirit requires a man to be at all times ready to dump his whole cartload of beliefs, the moment experience is against them.”⁵²

Yong summarizes Peirce’s process of inquiry well:

In sum, getting at the truth involves the logic of reasoning, the continuous fallible activity of a community of inquirers, beginning physiologically with vague perceptual mental signs, proceeding cognitively via abduction, deduction, and induction to render them more completely determinate, and while never getting thought to correspond directly to its object, always increasingly approximating this concordance through the potentially indefinite process of inquiry, which terminates when a certain degree of action is made possible and doubt is minimized.⁵³

By this process Peirce avoided universal doubt and affirmed the knowability of reality while also qualifying all interpretative propositions about reality as provisional. He “preferred

⁵¹ Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 2.141.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.55.

⁵³ Yong, *Dialogical Spirit*, 35.

instead to speak of practical certainty and to rely on the accumulated wisdom of human experience and the consensus of the community of inquirers to establish both truth and reality,”⁵⁴ confident that inquiry would sooner or later result in “the real” which exists independently of its inquirers. Hence, Peirce believed he was able to uphold both the propositional nature of truth in line with the correspondence theory *and* a fallibilistic epistemology that did not give in to the naïve realism of classical foundationalism, but admitted the necessarily interpretive element that lies within all inquiry.

Yong believes Peirce’s triadic metaphysic, which “portrays all experienced realities as the coinherence of qualities (firstness), facts (secondness), and laws (thirdness),”⁵⁵ correlates with Trinitarian ontology. According to Yong’s Trinitarian ontology, the Father is the “qualitative source of creative efficacy” (firstness), the Son is “the decisive sign or image of the Father through whom the Godhead is embodied and efficaciously interacts with the world” (secondness), and the Spirit is “the interpretant of the divine relationality both *ad intra* and *ad extra*” (thirdness).⁵⁶ Hence, Yong finds a correlation between his and Peirce’s metaphysics, which can ground their pragmatic epistemology. Following Peirce’s epistemology, Yong is convinced that “[h]uman beings do not need to be sceptical about what they know or believe insofar as the referential signs we negotiate enable us to grasp the qualities, facts, and laws of things in such a way so as to manageably predict with greater rather than lesser accuracy the way the world will respond.”⁵⁷ In Peirce, Yong finds a way to acknowledge the “dynamic nature of reality as existing alongside its concreteness and

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁵ Vondey, “A Passion for the Spirit,” 188.

⁵⁶ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

abstraction,” for “[s]uch a dynamic and relational metaphysic entails *both* unity and continuation in truth *and* plurality, difference, and change.”⁵⁸

II.C. The Future of Evangelical Theology: Yong’s Exploration of Asian American Evangelical Theology

Yong’s step toward an Asian American Evangelical theology is documented in his book *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora*. He argues “that Asian American experiences and perspectives have much to contribute to the broader evangelical theological discussion.”⁵⁹ Aware of the primarily evangelical orientation of Asian American Christianity, his particular focus is on answering what evangelical theology is and how to engage in it from the Asian American perspective. Yong writes with a view toward positively contributing to the theological discourse of evangelicals around the world. He laments that “Asian American evangelical theology [has] been relatively unenergetic, especially compared to Asian American theology in mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic circles,” and points out that this “‘problem’ for Asian American evangelical theology is simultaneously the problem of evangelical theology itself.”⁶⁰

Yong is convinced that pentecostalism (which he understands as broadly within the bounds of evangelicalism) can catalyze the Asian American evangelical theological project and integrate Asian American experiences and perspectives into the global discourse of evangelical theology. In *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, Yong asserts the usefulness of an Asian American pent-evangelical theology for the advancement of both North American

⁵⁸ L. William Oliverio, Jr., “The One and the Many: Amos Yong and the Pluralism and Dissolution of Late Modernity” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 57.

⁵⁹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

evangelical theology and global evangelical theology. He deliberately argues his case, identifying:

as a pentecostal and evangelical theologian by drawing primarily from the biblical motif and metaphor of the Day of Pentecost narrative, highlighting how the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ upon all flesh invites a reconfiguration of the global evangelical theological conversation so as to heed the particularities of various linguistic, cultural and social dynamics.⁶¹

After laying out the state of theology amongst Asian American evangelicals (chapters 1 and 2), explaining their theological lethargy (chapter 3), and pointing to pentecostalism as a remedy for a renewed Asian American evangelical theology (chapter 4), Yong launches into a theology of migration with an Asian American lens (chapters 5 and 6). His theology of migration serves as an example of how Asian American experiences might benefit evangelical theological reflection. Seeking to develop a theology of migration from the vantage point of Asian Americans, Yong does three things. He notes the lack of theological reflection upon migration by evangelicals, he highlights the continuity between Asian Americans and the migrant apostolic community, and he invites further reflection upon issues of social justice, economics, and politics, especially as they pertain to the Asian American context. Here Yong demonstrates the unique ways in which the particular Asian American context can shape and influence one's theology of migration.

One such example would be the undocumented Fuzhounese immigrants of NYC Chinatown, and the informal economy in which many of them operate to financially support themselves and each other. This informal economy is comprised of unregistered/undeclared workers, petty traders, small items producers, casual living arrangements, piece-rate workers, sub- and sub-sub-contractors, homeworkers, farm and agricultural workers, and street vendors. By its nature, its businesses are often unregistered, its transactions are not always

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

computed in gross national products, and its incomes are often untaxed.⁶² With this Chinese American reality in his purview, Yong develops a theology of migration. Rather than rigidly applying Romans 13:1⁶³ to condemn the formally illegal activity of these immigrants, many of whom comprise the church in New York Chinatown, Yong prefers to speak in terms of “extralegality” with regard to this less than ideal informal economy.⁶⁴ He sees parallels between their context and the New Testament church, which fostered a communal economy of its own, consisted of migrants, and defied the political prohibitions levelled against their preaching and healing ministry. Of the early church, Yong writes: “[T]hey would be constrained neither by the formal economy (they were, after all, already sharing all things) nor by the political legalities.”⁶⁵ According to his pent-evangelical reflection, Yong discerns the Spirit of Jubilee and a pneumatological economy of grace, which ought to inform “our own rethinking about political economy vis-à-vis the informality and illegitimacy of Chinatown, NYC, and other like environments in the twenty-first century.”⁶⁶ It is by reflecting upon particular contexts such as this that the church can become more “sensitive to global factors that impinge on unjust economies” and also focus herself “on local projects and initiatives especially at the congregational and parish levels.”⁶⁷

Yong’s theology of migration—informed by an Asian American perspective and in conversation with the evangelical theological context—is but one step into the development of an Asian American evangelical theology. For this reason, Yong concludes *The Future of Evangelical Theology* with suggestions for the next steps that might be taken to develop not only Asian American evangelical theology, but also North American evangelical theology

⁶² *Ibid.*, 194-195.

⁶³ Romans 13:1 “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” (ESV)

⁶⁴ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 195.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

and global evangelical theology with all three in dialogue. He is hopeful that Asian American evangelicals continue to reflect upon their own histories, laden with the stigma of being ‘perpetual foreigners’ and ‘model minorities,’ to develop and contribute to a theology of migration and a theology of citizenship. Yong also sees much potential for the second and later generations of Asian Americans to theologically navigate between ethnic ghettoization and uncritical assimilation.

Furthermore, Yong believes that such reflection on Asian American evangelical theology has the potential to develop a more robust theology of culture, public theology, and socioeconomic theology amongst North American evangelicals. For Asian American evangelicals are more likely than the average North American evangelical to be sensitive to the various ways that the gospel critiques and yet is also mediated through culture. Asian American evangelicals also have a unique social context to reflect upon (e.g., the case of the undocumented Fuzhounese immigrants in an informal economy) that may enrich evangelical engagement in the public square. Related to this, Asian Americans may also advance evangelical socioeconomic theology because they often have “transnational and diasporic connections” that can “open up multiple dialogical avenues that provide perspective on global and environmental issues confronting humankind.”⁶⁸

Yong also “suggests Asian Americans might lead the way in critically retrieving and engaging with Asian cultural and philosophical traditions as a way of doing theology in global context.”⁶⁹ He wonders about the potential of Asian Americans to think across Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and evangelical mindsets in order to engage with and integrate multi-faith and interreligious dialogue into their theological deliberations, especially in the areas of apologetics and theologies of religions. Additionally, Asian American evangelicals are

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

helpfully situated to utilize their liminal positions, in order to mediate theological discussions between Asian evangelical theologians, American evangelical theologians, non-evangelical Asian theologians, and non-evangelical Asian American theologians. They have an opportunity to bear witness to new forms of hybridity in the global evangelical context. In fact, Yong sees himself as one such example of this. Culturally, he finds himself between Eastern and Western cultures as both Asian and American. Racially, he is neither black nor white, but yellow. Indebted to the pentecostal missionaries who converted his parents, and yet painfully aware of the legacy of missionary colonialism, Yong lives uneasily between a colonial and postcolonial world. He has lived in both relative poverty as a Southeast Asian immigrant to America and in comfort as an upper-middle-class citizen and academic professional. He has struggled to harmonize his strong Christian convictions with his uneasiness over religious exclusivism. As a Pentecostal he continues to “ride the tension that persists between more evangelical and more ecumenical forms of Christianity.”⁷⁰ Yong is no stranger to the liminal space. And yet, it is out of that space that he pursues his theological endeavors as an unashamed Asian American pent-evangelical, motivated by the eschatological hope of fullness, unity, and glory when Christ returns. Of Asian Americans, Yong writes:

[O]ur status as aliens and strangers invites us to think about diaspora and hybridity not as marginal or incidental aspects of Christian faith but indeed as central to it. Hybridized identities hold together particularities in productive tension; as such, historical identities are also never pure, as if untinged by otherness...[I]t is the nature of the church as the people of God, the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit to be constituted by manyness, difference and plurality...⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

He calls this a critical “*perpetual foreigner* hermeneutical stance” that does not cave into the model minority temptation of assimilation and domestication but resolves to live into the gospel even when it demands a costly or countercultural lifestyle.⁷²

While Yong’s work in *The Future of Evangelical Theology* has garnered praise from contextual theologians, such as Stephen Bevans, and practical theologians, such as Soong-Chan Rah,⁷³ his theology of migration and guidelines for advancing an Asian American evangelical theology in *The Future of Evangelical Theology* only briefly demonstrate the potential of his pentecostal reflections for the Chinese American evangelical context. In the following sections, I hope to draw out more ways in which Yong’s theology might be a resource for a Chinese American evangelical theology in greater depth.

III. Applying Yong’s Theology to the Chinese American Evangelical Context

This section will consider how Yong’s optimism about the potential of pentecostal theology for the Christian life might contextually serve Chinese American Christians in particular – a people who often see themselves as occupying a culturally liminal space between the East and West, a people who have largely imbibed the conservative evangelical theology of the West, and a people who have generally not given much thought to the value of a Chinese American evangelical theology and what it might look like.

In what follows, I will assess how his pneumatological imagination might assist the enterprise of developing a more contextualized theology for Chinese American evangelicals, using *The Future of Evangelical Theology* as a starting point, but also drawing on his other writings as supplements and complements to resource a more contextualized Chinese

⁷² Amos Yong, “Conclusion: Mission After Colonialism and Whiteness: The Pentecost Witness of the “Perpetual Foreigner” for the Third Millennium,” in *Can “White” People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, eds. Love Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, & Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: Intersarsity Press Academic, 2018), 312-315.

⁷³ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, back cover.

American evangelical theology. I will engage and assess his thought, particularly as it relates to the three major theological problems discerned in Chapter Three: 1) Chinese American evangelicals' deficient theology of ethnicity, 2) their disharmonious dynamics of individualism and collectivism, and 3) their dangerously dualistic doctrine of creation.

III.A. Pneumatologically Imagining Ethnicity

In *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, Yong shares an influential episode from his childhood concerning his understanding of cultural and ethnic identity:

My father said I did not have to worry about cultural aspects of my identity since we were Christians; so, we were culturally Christian, I concluded. I accepted this answer at that time, but I have since learned that it was typical of the kinds of thinking present among AG missionaries, pastors and church leaders during the middle quarters of the twentieth century. Of course, the AG also belonged to a wider North American pentecostal and evangelical world and such ideas were just as prominent there as well.⁷⁴

Since then Yong has come to critique the notion of being “culturally Christian” in a way that ignores ethnic and cultural particularity. As a theologian who has situated so much of his academic work within the fields of World Christianity and missiology, race and ethnicity have undoubtedly been a topic on Yong’s mind. Hence, it only makes sense that he would apply his pneumatological imagination to the concept of ethnicity. According to this imagination, it is clear that the deficient theology of ethnicity so often found amongst Chinese American evangelicals (such as Yong’s own father) – a theology which operates according to a “color-blind” principle – is very much at odds with the Spirit of Pentecost. After all the Spirit has been poured out upon *all* flesh (Acts 2:17), which for Yong means that the Spirit has been poured out upon *every kind of* (human) flesh.⁷⁵

The reconciling power of Pentecost included Semites alongside Africans (the Ethiopian eunuch; Acts 8:26-40) and Arabs. The Spirit of Pentecost broke down and

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

overcame negative stereotypes of ethnic nationalities (such as the Cretans); it anticipated “the eschatological gathering of all peoples, tongues, tribes, and nations in the reign of God (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; cf. 21:22-26).”⁷⁶ Admittedly, the average thoughtful American evangelical would not debate the “ends of the earth” demographics of the people of God. However, the emphasis on unity all too often crosses into uniformity such that cultural diversity is ignored or trivialized. When Yong reads Acts, however, he does not see a church that insists on the uniformity of a “color-blind” approach to ethnicity.⁷⁷ He sees a church that values and utilizes the diverse cultural particularities which were united together by the Spirit. For example, in Acts 6, when the Hellenistic widows “were being neglected in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1), Yong notes that deacons (all with Hellenistic names) were appointed as ministry leaders in the early church. The Hellenistic heritage of these deacons was utilized to serve the entire church’s food distribution ministry in general, but also to ensure equality for the Hellenistic widows on the margins. And “the word of God continued to spread” (Acts 6:7).

Yong is most explicit in his rejection of ethnic color-blindness when he writes:

Pentecost is the Spirit’s establishing the body of Christ, but in a way such that particularity and difference are not effaced by unity and catholicity. Hence the diversity of languages, tribes, peoples, and nations who bring their gifts into the heavenly city (Rev 21:24-25; cf. Rev 5:9 and 7:9). More importantly, the diversity of graces and gifts of Christ through the Spirit are preserved and not erased in and through the ‘unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:13-12). Instead, as on the day of Pentecost, the diversity of tongues—belonging to Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians...Romans, Jews, Cretans, Arab, etc.—were present and operative since ‘each one heard them speaking in the native language of each...Human beings are inspired by the Spirit, but they neither lose the capacity to act (speak in tongues) nor their particular identities (their gifts, ethnicities, etc.).’⁷⁸

He is adamant that ethnic particularity and its attendant gifts are neither erased nor ignored by the Spirit, who is poured out upon all flesh.

⁷⁶ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 94.

⁷⁷ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 181.

⁷⁸ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 103.

It is for this reason that Yong frequently extols the value of racial, ethnic, and cultural particularities and experiences for the church in the 21st century. One example he cites is the Black Pentecostal church. Yong affirms how the Black Pentecostal church has done a tremendous job formulating a pentecostal social ethic, “uniting spirituality and social awareness and...attending to the economic and political dimensions of religious practice,” all of which has provided the wider church with “important perspectives on the nature of Christian worship and piety even as they show that all Christian practice and theory occur within, and need to engage, their social and historical contexts.”⁷⁹

Closer to the subject of Chinese American evangelicals at hand, Yong is also quite positive about the theological value of their culture, history, and experiences:

Asian American Evangelicals must embrace not only the *evangel* but also the historicity of their diasporic experiences. The incarnation of the Son of God consisted, after all, of taking on the concreteness, palpability and temporality of human, Jewish and first-century Palestinian flesh, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost involved the redemption of the diversity of human tongues, languages and cultures so that they might bear witness to the wondrous works of God (Acts 2:11)...My proposal...is that work [*sic*] of God in Christ and by the Spirit redeems us amid, with and through the specificities of our historical and cultural experience (rather than saving us from out of such altogether) and thus that the Word of God speaks into such realities (rather than that we have to deny them or reject them as part of who we are).⁸⁰

He roots the value of concrete and historical ethnic identity in the fact that the Son of God’s very ethnic and cultural particularity was not without significance. In fact, the Spirit’s work is always conducted through and amid specific historical and cultural phenomena. For the gospel always comes in cultural dress, as evidenced by Jesus who came as a first-century male Jewish carpenter.⁸¹ Hence, Yong posits that “we proceed best in our time if our theologies are multiperspectival, multidisciplinary, and multicultural...And multiculturalism

⁷⁹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 188.

⁸⁰ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 123-124.

⁸¹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 240.

requires that we take seriously the insights of the various ethnic and cultural groups and their experiences.”⁸²

Yong’s rejection of a deficient theology of ethnicity and his affirmation of the value of various ethnic perspectives are also manifested in his interest in World Christianity and global and intercultural theologies. In *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* Yong’s first chapter focuses on a phenomenology of pentecostalism in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. He studied these phenomena intentionally with the full admission of his single North American perspective, writing: “Such a phenomenology of world pentecostalism is important also since my own Pentecostal experience is, by and large, limited to the North American context.”⁸³ Moreover, Yong’s very own understanding of pentecostalism compels him to investigate the relevance of cultural particularity for his theological reflection. He writes:

One element of the promise of Pentecostal theology is its capacity to nurture an ‘intercultural theology’ that is global and multicultural, inclusive of voices from the Eastern and especially Southern Hemispheres, and emergent from a genuine dialogue between Western Pentecostal missions churches and the indigenous Pentecostal movements in the two-thirds world.⁸⁴

Yong’s advocacy for diverse ethnic perspectives also comes out in his critiques of Western-dominated theology. He laments the Euro-American colonialism of the 18th and 19th centuries, in which missionaries were “[m]otivated by technological, scientific, and other Enlightenment advances,” and “often sought conversion not only to Christ but also to Western culture,” which devalued non-Western ways of life.⁸⁵ Even now, Yong senses “that Christianity’s contemporary theological formulations remain dominated by Western cultural forms and expressions perpetuated by the missionary movement.”⁸⁶ Simultaneously, he is

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32; Elsewhere Yong also admits in more detail about how he has been assimilated to “systems of marginalization that are extensions of the modern colonial project...as a beneficiary and perpetuator.” See Yong, “Conclusion: Mission After Colonialism and Whiteness: The Pentecost Witness of the “Perpetual Foreigner” for the Third Millennium,” 305.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁵ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

encouraged by the work of scholars such as Philip Jenkins and Lamin Sanneh, which indicate that Christianity is becoming a non-Western religion with a shifting center of gravity moving from the West to the South.⁸⁷

All this is not to say that there is more than one gospel or faith. Rather, Yong pursues a global theology that harmonizes with local theology and takes seriously the changing contexts in which the gospel is communicated, as well as its various forms of expression. Yong writes: “In their preaching and teaching, Christians perennially have attempted to summarize the content of this gospel as they understand it *in their places and times*” [emphasis mine].⁸⁸ Unless the church values the contributions of the various cultures upon which the Spirit has been poured out, Yong believes that the gospel will remain truncated. He is convinced that “the one gospel remains richer than what has so far been articulated by the tradition, and that attending to the dynamics of contemporary global life and the many different ways that the gospel has been imagined in these various locales will reinvigorate Christian thinking about and revitalize Christian living in the twenty-first century.”⁸⁹

Therefore, Yong is clearly not opposed to affirming particularities of various sorts in his theology, even as he is also concerned to promote Christian unity. Within the Chinese American Christian context, combining Yong’s theological appreciation of cultural and ethnic particularity with his ecclesiology might very well legitimize the notion of ethnic churches in multi-ethnic contexts. While Yong’s ecclesiology is permeated with the theme of unity in the Spirit, it is equally permeated by his belief in the “many different ways” of the gospel. For Yong, ecclesial mission involves creativity and experimentation, for “local contextualization and inculturation...will lead to diversification.”⁹⁰ In other words, he is fully convinced that not every church and mission strategy will be identical. Hence, one would be

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

surprised if Yong disapproved of ethnic churches in multi-ethnic contexts, such as the one in which his own parents ministered in California. Furthermore, Yong holds that the “church as the people of God must be understood eschatologically,” suggesting that “the people of God be understood as *in via*, on the way to being fully formed.”⁹¹ He understands that no local church fully represents and encapsulates all that the whole people of God are called to be throughout history, whether it be with regard to the church’s ethnic makeup or even its purity.

III.B. Pneumatologically Imagining Individualism & Collectivism

Having grown up within the Assemblies of God, Yong is very aware that “most renewalists operate under the assumption that God’s fundamental relationship is with individuals rather than mediated through the church, and ‘born again’ spirituality reflects these radically democratizing sensibilities.”⁹² In fact in Article Six of the World Assemblies of God Statement of Faith (WAGF SF),⁹³ the body of Christ is said to consist of all who are ‘born again.’ Yong understands this to implicitly privilege “the baptistic notion of the church being constituted by individuals (through their confession of faith) over and against a more sacramental vision of the church’s ontological primacy.”⁹⁴

However, Yong has come to believe that this is inconsistent with an authentically Pentecost-oriented faith with its attendant pneumatological imagination. Reflecting on his previous youthful understanding of the Christian faith, he has even admitted: “I’ve come to recognize that my own view of the Spirit’s person and work is too individualistic....[I]n the faith of my childhood the Spirit worked only at the level of the individual, focused primarily if not only on the spiritual dimension of individual lives, in order to transform and save

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁹² Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 169.

⁹³ World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith, <http://www.247ag.com/WAGF/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Application-Statement-of-Faith.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2019).

⁹⁴ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 169.

them...”⁹⁵ Today, he now believes “that the Spirit is at work not just at the level of the individual but also at the level of society and its various political and economic structures.”⁹⁶

Reading the book of Acts, Yong sees anything but individualism. In the early church, “all who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44) and “the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” On these passages, Yong comments:

Don’t confuse this early Jewish-Christian way of life with some sort of socialism or communism...[T]he selling of personal possessions was a voluntary practice rather than an institutionalized rejection of private property....At the same time, this early apostolic community embodied values about fellowship, mutual empathy, and solidarity that are also a far cry from what we today call free-market capitalism.⁹⁷

Yong’s rejection of individualism stems from his Trinitarian metaphysics, with a distinct emphasis on the relational role of the Spirit.⁹⁸ Yong writes:

Reality, because of relationality, rationality (understood inter-personally), and dynamism, can be characterized communally. Sociality and community are, after all, brought about by the Spirit, the mutual love of Father and Son. God is, therefore, the supremely communal being, eternally living and subsisting as a triune relationality. The relationality extends to the world which comes forth from God and exists in communal relationship with God, even if such relationship is fractured in some respects.⁹⁹

Hence, for Yong, “pneumatological relationality may be seen to hold the key toward the perennial mysteries of the one and the many.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, “[t]hings in the world are what they are not as individuals but precisely as coordinated and mutually interdependent forms of life. Each form is what it is because of its relationship with another or others.”¹⁰¹ All of reality is relational, and hence pneumatological. As Yong writes: “the constitutedness of the creation

⁹⁵ Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit?*, ix-x.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁸ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 28-34.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

itself can be said to have a relational, and hence, pneumatological, shape...Reality itself is understood in relational terms..."¹⁰²

Guided by his pneumatological imagination, Yong's theology deliberately eschews the excessive individualism he once embraced in other areas of his theological reflection as well. This comes out strongly in his understanding of salvation and mission. In Chapter Nine of *Renewing Christian Theology* (entitled "Salvation in Christ through the Spirit"), he writes: "[N]ew life in Christ is never a solo or individual affair, but involves...adoption into the family of God. This highlights the relational dimension of salvation, thereby indicating that it is an essential rather than incidental aspect of triune redemption."¹⁰³ Yong is willing to speak of "Family salvation," which draws attention to the promise of the Spirit "for your children" (Acts 2:39), and also "the fact that individuals are who they are precisely as members of families."¹⁰⁴ Though he only spends a paragraph elaborating on this dimension of salvation, it is evident that Yong takes seriously the way in which households were converted and baptized in Acts and recognizes Paul's words about believing spouses making their family holy.¹⁰⁵ He observes that in the biblical narrative and throughout history "[t]he salvation of the individual is thus intimately connected with the salvation of his or her family."¹⁰⁶ He is also willing to speak of "Ecclesial salvation," pointing to the communal dimension of what it means to be saved, for believing the gospel leads to believers getting baptized "into a new relationship with Jesus and his body," creating a "real and actual new people of God and a communal way of life."¹⁰⁷

For Yong, this inevitably leads to a socially oriented missional response:

In this case, salvation transforms human beings into human doers, persons who interface with others...The salvation of God both resituates human beings into

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰³ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 251.

¹⁰⁴ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 92.

¹⁰⁵ See Acts 11, 16, & 18, and 1 Corinthians 7:14.

¹⁰⁶ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 92.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

redemptive communities and inspires and empowers redemptive, liberative, and healing social action...Salvation thus includes not just the vertical and internal dimension of experiencing peace with God but also the horizontal and interpersonal nexus of reconciling with others as the body of Christ and fellowship of the Spirit. There is no Christian salvation without human response, appropriation, and transformation by the Spirit's power.¹⁰⁸

Yong is even more explicit about this connection between the unfortunate effects of an individualistic soteriology on missiology in *Who is the Holy Spirit?*: "We might think about repentance, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit in rather individualized terms. That may also explain why our witness to the resurrection of Jesus is rather muted at times without socially explosive potential."¹⁰⁹

One other manifestation of Yong's rejection of individualism is in his theological method, highly dependent upon the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce. Yong locates himself as someone who has moved from the "turn-to-the-subject (Kant)" to the "turn-to-community (Peirce and Royce)."¹¹⁰ Yong's theological method is strongly opposed to the individualistic "me and my Bible" theology that so many Chinese American evangelicals subscribe to. For Yong, theological interpretation is trialogical, engaging Spirit, Word, and Community, and "Community provides the context for the activity of the Spirit and the presence of the Word."¹¹¹ In fact, for Yong, community is "central to theology and the task of theological reflection" and "cannot simply be subordinated to either Spirit or Word."¹¹² When Yong speaks of community, he has in mind "the global human community, which is neither monolithic nor separated by clearly delineated, impenetrable borders."¹¹³ Within this global human community are a variety of identities, narratives, and parochial concerns and perspectives, and all humans inhabit multiple communities and negotiate various and

¹⁰⁸ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 251.

¹⁰⁹ Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 100.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 275.

¹¹³ Christopher Stephenson, "Reality, Knowledge, and Life in Community," 69.

overlapping identities.¹¹⁴ Yong strongly maintains that these all have their place in the hermeneutical circle, for theological hermeneutics is not constituted merely by the knowing subject subjectively, nor by the known object objectively, but also within “the various purposive, semiotic, and socio-historical contexts within and through which the knowing subject engages the known object” communally.¹¹⁵

Theological hermeneutics must be communal to affirm the perspectival nature of human knowing against naïve realism and to reject complete epistemological pluralism, in which all interpretive communities are simply insulated and separate from other interpretive communities. Yong believes tradition and the perspectives and beliefs of all other communities must be taken into account in the process of theological inquiry. And despite the fact that various communities operate out of various contexts, which affect their interpretations, Yong does not fear. Yong is a critical realist and believes we all live in the same world and interpret the same mind-independent reality. Furthermore, it is the same Spirit who enables human minds to understand this one world and reality, and who drives diversified theological dialogue toward theological unity.¹¹⁶

With regard to shame in the dynamics of individualism and collectivism, Yong has not published any substantive articles or chapters on how his pneumatological imagination might deal with shame amongst Asian Americans, yet he acknowledges the need for such an inquiry.¹¹⁷ Thankfully, his multidimensional soteriology provides some resources for such an inquiry. By teasing out the multiple dimensions of soteriology, such as the family, social, ecclesial, cosmic, and eschatological aspects of salvation,¹¹⁸ Yong demonstrates that

¹¹⁴ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 302-304.

¹¹⁵ Amos Yong, “The Hermeneutical Triad: Notes Toward a Consensual Hermeneutic and Theological Method,” *Heythrop Journal* XLV (2004): 33.

¹¹⁶ Christopher Stephenson, “Reality, Knowledge, and Life in Community,” 69; Amos Yong, “The Demise of Foundationalism and the Retention of Truth: What Evangelicals Can Learn from C.S. Peirce,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 586.

¹¹⁷ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 114.

¹¹⁸ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 91-98.

salvation should not be limited by the individualistic, Anselmian, crucicentric, and forensic understandings so common amongst conservative evangelicals. Ecclesial salvation expands this a step further into the church, and more prominently views baptism as entrance into a new Spirit-baptized community. Social salvation refers to Spirit-activated, horizontal human reconciliation. One example that Yong gives of this is Zacchaeus' salvation, in which "[h]is reconciliation to the God of Jesus included reconciliation with others, including his enemies (assuming he had them), and not merely interpersonally but also socially, politically, and economically, indicating these are not extraneous to the gospel."¹¹⁹ Yong would also include racial, class, and gender reconciliation. Yong also discusses cosmic salvation, which entails the redemption of all creation, visible and invisible, along with God's people. Finally, there is eschatological salvation, in which all these dimensions of salvation are experienced now, and yet awaited before the return of Christ.

Salvation has a communal dimension. It results in moral and social transformation and liberates people from numerous problems, which surely includes their legal debt before God, but also their shame and the related structures of legalism and consumerism. The communal dimension of salvation is important with regard to the problem of shame because shame is a feeling that has to do with status and identity within a collective community. Eleonore Stump helpfully describes a shamed person as someone who "anticipates warranted rejection and abandonment on the part of real or imagined others, and...is anxious about marginalization or isolation."¹²⁰ Hence, the salvation needed, within the context of a culture that is more sensitive to the dynamics of honor and shame, is a salvation from marginalization, isolation, rejection, and abandonment. This is not something that the legal dimension of the gospel directly speaks to in its most popular evangelical expressions, such

¹¹⁹ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 227.

¹²⁰ Eleonore Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame" *Journal of Philosophical Research* 41, Supplement (September 2016): 113.

as Evangelism Explosion, the Four Spiritual Laws, or the Wordless Book approaches that many Chinese American evangelicals commonly use to share the gospel. Yong's multidimensional soteriology encompasses more than the individual and legal dimension of salvation.

Most pertinent to the problem of shame is Yong's understanding of salvation's social dimension. The social dimension of salvation speaks to the possibility of healing relationships, communities, and "fallen and destructive public structures."¹²¹ Hence, for the Chinese American context, such fallen and destructive public structures could include the shadow of the model minority stereotype that threatens shame upon all who fail to succeed according to its consumeristic standards. Such destructive public structures might also include any notion of Confucian-influenced cultures of shame, which can often breed legalism in many Chinese American churches. According to Yong, a Spirit soteriology transforms such structures. Additionally, a Spirit soteriology acknowledges that people are saved into Spirit-baptized communities as new creations. In the transformation of destructive structures and in the entrance of Spirit-baptized communities, those saved by the Spirit experience a status reversal and group incorporation, which Georges and Baker describe as two aspects of salvation that are of prime significance in honor-shame cultures.¹²² Therefore, Yong's multidimensional soteriology may prove helpful to Chinese American evangelicals looking for salvation from shame, making room for the status reversal and group incorporation aspects of salvation and thus offering a glimpse of hope to Chinese Americans.

Still, it must also be noted that in his zeal to critique individualism and uphold the importance of community, Yong makes sure not to swing the pendulum too far. His trialectic is not a Hegelian synthesis that flattens out individual distinctiveness, for "a pneumatological

¹²¹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 93.

¹²² Jayson Georges & Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016), 167-182.

rationality preserves the distinctiveness, particularity and individuality of the original terms of the dialectic in an ongoing relational tension. Only thus is the radicality of difference and plurality preserved.”¹²³ Elaborating on this with the example of theological anthropology, Yong writes: “human beings are...individualistic and yet communal...The Spirit allows us to transcend these as well as other dualisms.”¹²⁴

Therefore, while still affirming individuality, particularity, and distinctiveness, Yong’s theological reflection very much emphasizes the dangers of individualism in comparison to the dangers of collectivism – probably because of the pentecostal and evangelical contexts in which he has predominantly operated. He is not content with an individualistic understanding of salvation that allows for an individualistic and truncated mission. Neither is he content to dispense with the community of faith as the primary context in which people do theology. A “me and my Bible” approach to theology is not only naïve, but excessively individualistic. For Yong, an individualistic soteriology, missiology, and theological method are all contrary to the pneumatological imagination, which pursues a harmonious dynamic between individuals and collectives, analogous to the Creator’s identity as “the supremely communal being, eternally living and subsisting as triune relationality.”¹²⁵

III.C. Pneumatologically Imagining Creation & Culture

III.C.1. Yong’s Pneumatological Critique of Sacred/Secular & Soul/Body Dualisms

Not only does Yong critique color-blind approaches to ethnicity and individualism on the basis of his pneumatological imagination, but also the dualistic otherworldliness of many pentecostals’ and evangelicals’ theologies of creation. Yong rejects a radical sacred/secular dualism, which contributes to the evangelical church’s tendency to uphold an otherworldly

¹²³ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 105-106.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

emphasis. He is sympathetic with postliberal ecclesiologies in their refusal to be “defined by outside cultural forces, whether these be the politics of Constantine or the dictates of (allegedly) universal reason.”¹²⁶ He believes Christians need to overcome “the dichotomies between sacred and secular, between religion and politics, and between Christianity and culture.”¹²⁷ It is incumbent upon Christians to provide an alternative vision to the sacred/secular dichotomy, which can embrace “what modernity separates off as the secular, the political, and the cultural.”¹²⁸ For according to Yong, sacred/secular dualism limits one’s understanding of the Spirit’s realm of activity, and has led many churches to neglect the this-worldly concerns of supposedly “secular” spaces. Rather than confining the church to “sacred” activities, which have “spiritual” significance, Yong is an advocate of holistic mission.¹²⁹ Yong writes:

The church’s social witness— both social welfare for individuals and social action that transforms social systems— makes tangible the church’s kerygmatic proclamation, confirms the truth of and validates the gospel’s claims, and serves to exemplify the church as a countercommunity even as it transmits/bears the church’s moral tradition... In all of this, the church’s social witness remains its most powerful means of proclaiming the full gospel, since the gospel is not just talk but action.¹³⁰

In his understanding of mission, Yong is concerned to preserve the “cosmic horizon” of the church’s identity, for “any overemphasis on the spiritual character of the church tends toward an otherworldliness that is of no earthly good...”¹³¹ For Yong, a radical sacred/secular dualism would entail a denial of the Spirit’s presence and activity in all creation.

To protect against such a sacred/secular dualism that limits the Spirit’s work to the sphere of the church, Yong puts pentecostalism in dialogue with Radical Orthodoxy, and

¹²⁶ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 130-131.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁹ ‘Holistic mission’ is language that comes out of the Lausanne Movement. See Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “Holistic Mission: Occasional Paper No. 3,” (2004 Forum for World Evangelization), https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP33_IG4.pdf (accessed December 6, 2017).

¹³⁰ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 189.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

advocates “a prophetic theology of civil society.”¹³² Such a theology 1) recognizes that allegiances to the state are secondary to allegiances to God, 2) challenges the state to uphold justice, and 3) includes an explicit and politically relevant gospel witness in the public square.¹³³ Yong recognizes that “modernity’s sacralisation (synonymous with privatization) of religion” prevents a prophetic politics and leaves the “hegemony of the state” unrestrained.¹³⁴

Instead of succumbing to modernity’s privatization of religion, Yong employs a pneumatological imagination that he believes can sustain “a post-secular but yet not anti-secular theology of civil society” and can ground “the ontology of peace required for witness to and redemption of the public square.”¹³⁵ While the Radical Orthodoxy of Milbank seeks to counter the hegemony of ideological secularism with the orthodox Christian metanarrative, and while most pentecostals have bemoaned secularism as “a postlapsarian phenomenon in need of a kind of exorcism” to hasten the day of the Lord, Yong wonders if “the secular” might have “its own creational integrity and even autonomy.”¹³⁶ Yong claims to be inspired by Abraham Kuyper and the Dutch Reformed tradition, which insisted that the various spheres of the political, economic, social, etc. were part of the creational intention of God and that God has endowed each sphere with its own realm of sovereignty and responsibility. In Yong’s reading of the Kuyperian tradition, this means that we need to “recognize the foundational character of theology on the one hand without denying the relative autonomy and integrity of other disciplines, spheres, and domains — such as that of the secular and of civil society on the other hand.”¹³⁷

¹³² Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 238.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 239-242.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

Yong also rejects spirit/matter and soul/body dualisms, which radically dichotomizes human souls from human bodies, and has led many Christians to neglect the material creation. Yong aligns himself with more holistic and relational accounts of contemporary theology, as opposed to the former “neoplatonic hierarchical worldview that valued the spiritual or ideal dimensions of reality and tolerated (at best) or despised (at worst) the materiality of the created order.”¹³⁸ In Yong’s theology, one finds a monistic rejection of the distinction between that which some might consider spiritual and that which some might consider natural or material, based on his pneumatologically-assisted emergentist view of the human person.

An emergentist anthropology “insists human souls are new levels of experience constituted by but irreducible to their bodily parts.”¹³⁹ Yong finds the emergentist view of the human person compelling because he believes a) it recognizes the human body and brain as essential features of human identity apart from which consciousness and self-consciousness are impossible, b) it provides building blocks for a scientifically robust understanding of mental or downward causation without recourse to body-soul dualism, c) it emphasizes the holistic character of human nature in line with the Hebrew Bible in terms of embodiment without crass materialism, environmental and social situatedness without determinism, and spiritual relationality without spirit/body or mind/brain dualisms, and d) it is compatible with Christian eschatology’s emphasis on the bodily resurrection.¹⁴⁰ According to Yong, “the biblical narrative acknowledges the dependence and interconnectedness between the human spirit and its material substrate in a way that is consistent with the emergent monist thesis.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 37.

¹³⁹ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 183.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴¹ Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 159.

To Yong, a “spirit-matter contrast...cannot be hardened into a metaphysical dualism without doing violence to the biblical imagery.”¹⁴² His metaphysics is inspired by Irenaeus’ understanding of the Spirit and Word as two hands of the Father. Yong sees the Spirit as “the dynamic anointing and empowering force of God” that dynamically lures entities toward their divinely ordained reasons for being, and the Word as the incarnate—materially embodied and concrete—representation of the divine reality.”¹⁴³ Translated in metaphysical terms, Yong believes that “reality can then be conceived as the togetherness of Spirit and Word: spirituality and materiality,” and that all things exist as constituted within these two modalities.¹⁴⁴ Hence, Yong asserts that there is no created case of existence that is not constituted by spirituality and materiality on the grounds of God’s personal “two-handed” activity in creation. In this way, Yong seeks to avoid the pitfalls of modernity and postmodernity. According to him, the sin of modernity is that it “severed the spiritual from the material and then took leave of the former altogether,” and yet “postmodernity’s reenchanting world threatens to overwhelm the material with the spiritual and leave us levitating in the world of the New Age instead.”¹⁴⁵

Yong’s rejection of this hierarchical soul/body dualism is consistent throughout his eschatology and anthropology. As he reads the Lukan corpus, he notices that “eschatological redemption is conceived of more in terms of a this-worldly (resurrected and embodied) messianic day of the Lord involving Jews and Gentiles than in otherworldly terms,” for “the outpouring Spirit has broken into and begun the transformative redemption of creational time and space.”¹⁴⁶ This makes perfect sense to Yong, since the incarnation not only demonstrates God’s affirmation of creation’s goodness and value, but also his willingness to redeem

¹⁴² Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 139.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88, 90.

¹⁴⁵ Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 48.

creation precisely through its own materiality, which is neither intrinsically impure nor contaminated.¹⁴⁷ Toward this eschatological end, Yong writes:

God’s redemptive work intends to renew and restore the present physical world, originally created good but now tarnished by sin...The resurrection of the body therefore involves a new valuation not only of human persons as embodied but of the material world as the home given by God. The spiritual dimension of human life is thus intimately interrelated with human bodies and their embeddedness in the created world.¹⁴⁸

This rejection of otherworldly dualism is also present in Yong’s understanding of salvation. Yong writes: “God saves people in families and communities, even while people are saved not only as souls but as embodied, as material, economic, social, and political creatures, and as environmentally and ecologically situated—hence the ‘full gospel.’”¹⁴⁹ To him, this is consistent with traditional Pentecostalism’s fourfold gospel, which spoke of “Jesus as Savior, baptizer, healer, and coming king” (and even “sanctifier” if you include the Holiness wing’s additional feature).¹⁵⁰ His emphasis on the salvific nature of healing the physically ill and liberating the oppressed very much coincides with this conviction.¹⁵¹ Hence, Yong strongly rejects body-soul or body-spirit dualisms and advocates the proclamation of a “full gospel” in alignment with a holistic and integral view of mission.

III.C.2 Yong’s Pneumatological Imagination of Christianity & Culture(s)

A pentecostal approach to culture, according to Yong, does not see Christianity and culture as “two disparate and divergent categories and realities,” but “realizes that while distinct, the gospel always comes through culture and that culture can—indeed, must!—be redeemed for the purposes of the gospel.”¹⁵² Yong calls for the simultaneous “rejection and redemption of culture, in different respects”¹⁵³ and appreciates John Howard Yoder’s

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 151; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁵⁰ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 91.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 215-220; Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit?*, 34.

¹⁵² Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 224.

¹⁵³ Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 195.

approach: “to remain social and political guests – i.e., of “not being in charge” – and thus continuing to embrace the social and cultural margins as normative for followers of Jesus, and to nevertheless ‘seek the welfare of the city’ wherever believers find themselves.”¹⁵⁴ True to form, Yong finds this in the book of Acts, which he believes “invites a purification from the world and inspires a vocational mandate directed for its redemption.”¹⁵⁵ Concerning what theological norm should determine how culture can be purified, Yong advocates a Spirit-sanctified aesthetic. Led by the Spirit, God’s people can discern what is good and beautiful and worth affirming in a culture, and what needs to be purified in it, for “the Spirit of holiness is also the Spirit of beauty and the Spirit who enables human perception of the beauty of Christ and the holiness of God.”¹⁵⁶ Yet, Yong humbly admits that “we must still not claim to know too much about God’s ways of redeeming the world,” that we await the eschaton for the final accomplishment of all cultural redemption, that a pneumatological theology of culture cannot provide a once-for-all template to dictate how to engage with culture, and that this work of discernment requires a “communally-and praxis-shaped...eschatological orientation toward the Father whose glory has only yet been partially revealed in the Son, and thus requires an ongoing renewal of the heart and mind of the worshiper.”¹⁵⁷

Hence, Yong rejects Richard Niebuhr’s dualistic bifurcation of Christ and culture, and seeks to maintain a distinction of the two without radical separation. As was discussed in Chapters Two and Three, Chinese American evangelicals have often employed a “Christ against culture” or a “Christ and culture in paradox” posture in their understanding of the relationship between Christianity and culture, implying the same dualistic presuppositions as Niebuhr. These, however, are not postures and presuppositions that Yong is interested in

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

entertaining. Noting Asian American evangelicals' embrace of a "Christ against culture" stance, which has led to sectarianism and the rejection of culture, at worst, or "an ambiguous relationship with culture" and a "cultural hermeneutic of suspicion that is always concerned about syncretism with the world," at best, Yong decries how "[c]ulture, in popular evangelical parlance, is almost equivalent to the world, and in that sense, is what humans need to be saved from rather than partake of."¹⁵⁸ Yong is well aware of the deleterious effects that a sectarian rejection of culture, or even an ambiguous relationship with culture ruled by deep suspicion can have upon the church and her mission.

Many Chinese American evangelicals' dualistic understanding of Christianity and culture has led them to engage pluralistic society with anti-intellectualism, a brash aversion to modern secular culture, and an absolutist dogmatism that hampers dialogue and engagement with those with different convictions in pluralistic contexts. This is because of the conservative evangelical ethos, which is zealous to preserve a biblical worldview and the absolute and universal nature of God's revealed truths. To be sure, Yong confesses that "the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct,"¹⁵⁹ and that "Scripture remains normative."¹⁶⁰ He also openly admits his aspiration toward the universal validity and application of his theological reflection.¹⁶¹ However, Yong's pneumatological imagination of Christianity and culture is not dualistic, but seeks to be fluid and compatible. He is intent to avoid the anti-intellectual and anti-secular dogmatism of conservative evangelicals in general and of Asian American evangelicals in particular. In fact, as will be discussed in what follows, Yong is anything but anti-intellectual. He engages the modern scientific academy, maintains quite a positive view of the secular, and maintains a Peircean

¹⁵⁸ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 104.

¹⁵⁹ World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith (2011)

¹⁶⁰ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 343.

¹⁶¹ Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 109.

fallibilistic epistemology, which he believes allows him to navigate any number of cultures and religions in the pursuit of propositional truth, without compromising his Christian convictions.

L. William Oliverio, Jr. writes, “More than any major Pentecostal theologian before him, Yong has dwelled in the pluralities and the differences,” and that the “foundational context for Yong’s work” is the pluralism and dissolution of meaning in late modernity.¹⁶² In his introduction in *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, entitled “Emerging Global Issues for Pentecostalism and Christian Theology,” Yong writes:

The Christian theological task at the dawn of the twenty-first century—what I call our late modern world...has been further complicated...by several factors [which] include the challenges raised by modern science, by our increasing awareness of the diversity of religions, and by our present transitional situation between modernity and its aftermath (postmodernity, postcolonialism, postpatriarchalism, post-Christendom, etc.)¹⁶³

His theological reflection is conducted in the context of several contemporary questions. How do we relate theology and science or Christianity and the world’s religions? What is the place of reason in theology and how do we avoid the dangers of relativism? How can theology have both universal truth claims, when all theological reflection is particularistic in nature? Can theology speak publicly and authoritatively in context that is not predominantly Christian? Yong is convinced that “Christian theology can continue to speak in this new global context but also that Pentecostal theology in particular can do so.”¹⁶⁴ He is convinced that pentecostal theology can capably engage a plurality of voices, such as the voices of science, other Christian traditions, and other religions – voices which many conservative evangelicals have quite simplistically viewed as threats to Christian orthodoxy.

¹⁶² L. William Oliverio, Jr. “The One and the Many: Amos Yong and the Pluralism and Dissolution of Late Modernity” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 45-46.

¹⁶³ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 17.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

With regard to the modern secular academy, Yong admits that when early pentecostals sided with the fundamentalists in the late 19th and early 20th century, many were led to “foster an anti-intellectualism,” and “science, insofar as it was understood by these early pentecostals, was an enemy of the faith, primarily because of the popularized claims of evolutionary geologists and paleontologists and their apparent presupposition of the nonexistence of God.”¹⁶⁵ Yong’s desire is to move beyond this tenuous relationship: “Pentecostal apologetics in the late modern world will have to acknowledge the cautions of the anti-intellectualism of its ancestors but move beyond that and come of age by engaging the existing conversations with humility and yet conviction.”¹⁶⁶ For not only are pentecostals themselves children of the modern world, but science has defined and will continue to define their lives, and “they can no longer put off critical engagement with it.”¹⁶⁷

Rightly critical of metaphysical naturalism and acknowledging the limits of scientific rationality, Yong still strongly affirms the scientific enterprise, which he understands as “inquiring after the cause-and-effect relations of the natural world involving observation, hypothesis formulation, theory, peer review, testing or experimentation, replicable results, and the communication and application of such findings.”¹⁶⁸ Regarding the relationship between science and theology, Yong writes:

My own view is to accept a present complementarity between theology and science as mutually illuminating, albeit from distinctive perspectives, and to anticipate an ultimate (eschatological) convergence that reveals a unified narrative of the whole. God’s two books—of Scripture and of nature—cannot be finally contradictory, so any appearances of conflict are the results of either mistaken scriptural interpretations, or incomplete scientific data or understanding, or both....A pneumatological approach will treat the many sciences as different voices that bear witness to the truth of God’s creation, even if such tongues—as all utterances—demand interpretation, discernment, and critical assessment....Hence patient and learned dialogue is in order.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, 2-3.

¹⁶⁶ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 282.

Such a view does not threaten his theology of creation in which he affirms that the world is neither self-originated nor self-sustaining, that creation and providence are intertwined, and that the goal of creation is redemption and community with the fellowship of the triune God.¹⁷⁰ Yong sees no contradiction between the scientific enterprise and his theology of creation precisely because of his Peircean presuppositions. Peirce's triadic metaphysics implies that the world is engaged semiotically (through the process of interpreting signs), and according to Yong's Trinitarian ontology the Spirit is the relational one who mediates between the world's factual signs (seconds) and their objects (firsts). Hence, Yong's understanding of the relationship between God and creation is undergirded by his conviction that the Spirit is what mediates the mutual relationship between God and the revelatory phenomenal reality of the world.¹⁷¹ Therefore, guided by a Peircean-shaped understanding of science and theology, Yong is emboldened to engage with the academy, rather than separate himself into an anti-intellectual echo chamber out of fear or irrational skepticism.

Two other helpful examples of how Yong engages diverse cultures and views in the context of late modernity are in the areas of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, areas which normally raise red flags amongst conservative evangelicals. Whereas some might view the notion of ecumenical or interreligious dialogue as futile or signalling compromise, Yong chooses to celebrate the plurality of perspectives that are involved. He is neither combative nor dismissive of other traditions, Christian or not. Rather, he is interested in how the Spirit is working in and through all people, cultures, and traditions. Yong believes that evangelicals have quite a way to go in appreciating those who are religiously "other."

With regard to ecumenism, he readily admits:

[T]he fact that Christians have been bound by their consensus around a lengthy tradition has not prevented a diversity from developing around this unity. As is well known, there are at least three large-scale Christian stories: that of Orthodoxy,

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁷¹ Vondey, "A Passion for the Spirit," 189.

Catholicism, and Protestantism. The narrative of evangelical theology is but one within the last category, and is in itself, surely not homogeneous...[Evangelicals] are slower to develop means by which to acknowledge and lift up truths found in other traditions. We are slower still in acquiring more comprehensive theological frameworks by which to harmonize these truths.¹⁷²

And with regard to other religions, Yong has written that for a while, his “journey within evangelicalism left [him] without any significant resources to develop the kind of broad theology of religions [he] believed to be important for contemporary Christian theology.”¹⁷³

In pursuit of this “more comprehensive theological framework,” a constant theme in Yong’s engagement with his pluralistic context is “the many tongues of Pentecost.” He is especially quick to draw upon this theme in his discussion of ecumenism and other religions. Regarding ecumenism he writes: “The many tongues of Pentecost hence call forth in our time a ‘thoroughly ecumenical theology’...A pneumatologically generated ecumenical theology includes both a reclamation and reappropriation of the various traditions of the churches...”¹⁷⁴ Yong draws attention to the diversity of tongues on the day of Pentecost, which bore witness to the works of God, leading him to conclude that “diversity and pluralism therefore are intrinsic to the church itself.”¹⁷⁵ Contrary to most conservative evangelicals, Yong speaks quite positively of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement, in which “[e]ach church is understood to play a vital role in the overall mission of the church; each contributes to the symphony that declares God’s saving presence and activity in the world by the power of the Spirit; each provides distinct witness to the world and brings its own gifts to the head of the church.”¹⁷⁶ Hence, “[f]or Yong, the

¹⁷² Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 42.

¹⁷³ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 32.

¹⁷⁴ Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 59.

¹⁷⁵ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 174.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

diversity of churches is not a problem to be solved but rather a blessing to be celebrated when viewed through the lenses of Pentecost and divine hospitality.”¹⁷⁷

Yong does not exclusively celebrate the diversity within the Christian tradition. His celebration of diversity extends also into his theology of religions. Affirming that 1) God is universally present and active in the Spirit, that 2) God’s Spirit is the life-breath of the *imago Dei* in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships and communities, and that 3) the religions of the world, like everything else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes, Yong maintains a pneumatologically-focused inclusivist theology of religions.¹⁷⁸ For Yong, a conclusion flowing from these three axioms is the possibility of non-Christian faiths being genuinely salvific. Yong writes: “Divine presence is evidenced by a thing’s fulfilling its created purpose while divine activity can be said to occur when greater and greater degrees of harmony are realized in the processes of history. Non-Christian faiths can be regarded as salvific in the Christian sense when the Spirit’s presence and activity in and through them are evident as hereby defined.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, Yong believes that the full fulfilment of a creature’s created purpose (the Christian sense of salvation) can be observed in non-Christian faiths, and that even in Christianity there is human frailty and demonic activity.¹⁸⁰

Still, Yong also recognizes the challenges of ecumenism and theologies of religion. On the challenge of ecumenism he writes: “Embracing the diversities of the Spirit, however, includes with it potential problems as well...for example, the important matter of an extreme tolerance that might set in, such that truth is compromised. Ecumenists have been charged

¹⁷⁷ Jacob D. Dodson, “Divine Hospitality and Human Diversity,” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, eds. Wolfgang Vondey & Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 131-132.

¹⁷⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 44-46.

¹⁷⁹ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 312.

¹⁸⁰ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 48.

with being pluralistic relativists...”¹⁸¹ Therefore, he suggests “a discerning participation and engagement” without “sectarian withdrawal and condemnation.”¹⁸² Similarly in discussing a theology of religions, Yong is aware of the critique that “inclusivism lays itself open to the charge of relativism because the possibility of divine presence and activity is allowed in the non-Christian religions without any substantive (cognitive) criteria being developed for discerning when this is or is not the case.”¹⁸³ In both cases of ecumenism and theologies of religion, Yong acknowledges that critical discernment is needed to appreciate the diversity of those who are religiously “other” without falling into relativism, and much of his theological corpus is devoted to exploring what such critical discernment could look like.

Yong is confident that a pneumatologically assisted Peircean method of inquiry is sufficient to discern what is divine, human, and demonic when engaging with those who are religiously and culturally “other.” In fact, the central claim of *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* is “that a pneumatological theology of religions not only commits but also enables us to empirically engage the world’s religions in a truly substantive manner with theological questions and concerns.”¹⁸⁴ He encourages discernment by observation, writing: “[O]nly sensitive observation of the behaviors and manifestations of the thing in question enables one to pierce through its outer forms into its inner habits, dispositions, tendencies, and powers.”¹⁸⁵ By “observation,” Yong does not exclusively have in mind that which is visible, but he is thinking about perception as a whole, phenomenologically. To those who question the viability of a phenomenological approach to discernment, Yong responds:

Our response to this should not be to deny that spiritual discernment focuses necessarily on phenomenal appearances but to insist that discernment is and should be an ongoing activity precisely because no phenomenon unveils the totality of its inner

¹⁸¹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 174-175.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸³ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

aspects all at once. We must recognize discernment as a dynamic process attuned to the basic phenomenal features of the world in which we live and to the diverse manifestations of any phenomenon over extended periods of time.”¹⁸⁶

With his Peircean epistemology, Yong is very confident about the potential of discerning the Spirit or spirits in other traditions by empirically investigating them and their phenomenal features: “Discerning the Spirit(s) in the world’s religions has to begin with the empirical actuality of these traditions and therefore requires an interdisciplinary methodology designed to engage that multidimensional phenomenon...[W]e explore religion best by paying attention to its phenomenologically manifest dimensions...”¹⁸⁷ He continues: “A relevant and true theology of religions builds on an empirical engagement with the world of the religions, and such has to be developed from diverse perspectives and approaches.”¹⁸⁸ By leaning on Peirce, Yong believes he can avoid the dogmatic absolutism and divisiveness that he perceives amongst other evangelicals when it comes to other Christian traditions and other faiths. He is confident that evangelicals can and must engage the religious “other” because of the ubiquitous work of the Spirit. He also trusts that phenomenological spiritual discernment, though provisional and ongoing, will not be too great an obstacle for those who employ a pneumatological imagination toward religious “others.”

In *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* Amos Yong asserts that “any argument toward world theology needs to be fallibilistic (reflecting the limitations of reason recognized by our post-Enlightenment situation), multiperspectival (reflecting our postcolonial situation), and self-critical and dialogical (reflecting our post-Christendom situation).”¹⁸⁹ By largely adopting the thought of Peirce, Yong’s theological reflection aims to uphold epistemic fallibility, multiperspectivalism, and a self-critical, dialogical posture that frees him to engage with the sciences, other Christian traditions, and other religions without fear, suspicion, or

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁸⁹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 29.

antagonism. Though critical of secularism, he is not afraid of it, nor does he retreat into anti-intellectualism and ignore the plurality of voices within society that come from the sciences, and religious “others.” Furthermore, even while rejecting relativism and doing constructive theology that strives for universal application, Yong avoids the absolutist dogmatism of many conservative Chinese American evangelicals by admitting the fallibility and provisional nature of his theological reflection. For Yong, “Christian witness...does not have to be antagonistic to those in other faiths, especially not when it is realized that God ‘has not left himself without a witness’ to the nations (Acts 14:17), and that ‘[i]n him [all people] live and move and have [their] being’ (Acts 17:28).”¹⁹⁰ Yong cannot bring himself to such antagonism because he believes that “[h]uman knowledge [including his own] is intrinsically fallible given the epistemic process; yet this does not lead to scepticism or relativism since our knowing aims at an accurate and truthful engagement with the world.”¹⁹¹

This impulse to embrace diversity within a pluralistic context, whether it be within the Christian tradition or without, surely contrasts the sensibilities of most Chinese American evangelicals. However, Chinese American evangelicals would do well to heed Yong’s advice, even if with a grain of salt, when he suggests:

Christians should be open to learning from other religious traditions similarly to the ways in which Christians have learned from the findings of the sciences over the centuries. Christian theologies have adjusted to scientific advances, sometimes easily, other times with considerable difficulty and struggle. Why not with the religions, which themselves are not static entities but are dynamically reconstituting themselves even as Christian traditions are? Christians can refuse to engage the religions as they can reject science, but this would not be a Christian theology *for the twenty-first century*.¹⁹²

For it is certainly true that Christians have much to learn from other religious traditions just as the Jewish lawyer in Luke 10 “was being taught by the good Samaritan.”¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 325.

¹⁹¹ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 44.

¹⁹² Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 240.

¹⁹³ Yong, *Who is the Holy Spirit?*, 94.

Hence, by applying Peirce's logic and metaphysic, Yong demonstrates that he is neither an anti-intellectual, nor dogmatically opposed to all things modern and secular, for Yong is convinced that truth is public and can be found outside of the Christian religion. The combination of Yong's pneumatological imagination and Peirce's epistemology help Yong move past the stark bifurcation between the Christianity he confesses and the created world he inhabits. A pneumatological imagination, aided by Peirce's thought emboldens Yong to engage his pluralistic late modern context – even the supposedly secularized scientific academy and other religions – with confidence that reality is knowable and exists independently from knowing subjects, and also epistemological humility regarding his provisional knowledge about reality. For Yong, Christianity is not at stark odds with culture.

IV. Assessing Yong's Theology

Yong's theology could be assessed and evaluated from a variety of perspectives. For example, one could pursue a detailed critique of his admission to reading Scripture with Lukan privilege, or his co-opting of Irenaeus' "two hands of God" concept.¹⁹⁴ But for the purpose of this thesis, his theology will be assessed upon the merits of its integrity and helpfulness for a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. More specifically, this section evaluates how successfully Yong navigates and addresses the three significant theological issues that challenge Chinese American evangelicals: their deficient theology of ethnicity, their disharmonious dynamic of individualism and collectivism, and their dualistic doctrine of creation.

¹⁹⁴ According to Peter Phan, the intended function and purpose of Irenaeus' "two hands" was not to provide a detailed description of how the Word and the Spirit actually work in history, whether independently, dependently, or in collaboration with each other. Phan asserts that Irenaeus' concern was to affirm against the Gnostics that God the Father has only one plan of action. See Peter Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism: A Personal Journey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 55-56.

IV.A. Ethnicity

With regard to Yong's theology of ethnicity and its promise for Chinese American evangelicals, there is much to affirm. Yong is unbound by a colorblind approach to ethnicity. He utilizes the "Spirit poured out upon all flesh" motif to affirm the beauty and significance of ethnic diversity and cultural particularity, eschewing any notion of a simply "Christian culture." Yong appreciates that pentecostalism has many Eastern, Southern, and Western expressions and offers great promise for intercultural dialogue and theology, while being undergirded by the unity of the Spirit. For example, he delights in the unique and distinctive perspective and contributions of the Black Pentecostal church to the wider church, and wishes that Asian American evangelicals would similarly embrace and engage their social and historical contexts and diasporic experiences, more clearly articulating how the Word of God speaks into their unique realities and elicits diverse ecclesial responses led by the Spirit. Yong's appreciation of ethnic and cultural particularity is also bolstered by his non-dualistic understanding of body and soul. Hence, in Amos Yong's theology, Chinese American evangelicals have much to glean for deepening their theological understanding of ethnicity. In Yong's theology, they find theological arguments to ground and explain the legitimate role and purpose of ethnic churches in which the Spirit diversely works. In Yong's theology they are also confronted with the challenge to embrace their own ethnic perspectives for the sake of enriching the ongoing dialogue of Christian theology around the world, while also learning from other non-Western perspectives.

However, while Yong's theology of ethnicity positively affirms diversity and is optimistic about the theological potential of ethnic diversity unlike many Chinese American evangelicals' deficient theology of ethnicity, one area that Yong does not explore is the origin and telos of ethnicity. Other than pointing to the eschatological vision of the "great

multitude” in Revelation 7:9,¹⁹⁵ Yong has not developed a theology of ethnicity that discusses the divine intention and the creational purpose of ethnicity. To affirm the value of ethnicity is one thing, but to explain and defend its origin and divine intention is another.

To his credit, Yong’s understanding of the Spirit’s dynamic work in creation would seem to guard against the uniformity of an essentialist view that sees ethnicity as fixed, unalterable, and rooted in some primordial *Volk*-identity. However, one wonders how Yong would respond to the charge on the opposite end of the spectrum, namely that ethnicities are purely social constructs and thus insignificant. While leaning away from fixed and simplistic understandings of ethnicity, can Yong’s theology still defend the creational goodness of ethnicity as part of God’s grand design against ethnic relativization? In response to those who espouse colorblind theologies and seek to relativize and downplay ethnic particularity on the basis of arguments about the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of ethnicities, Yong’s theology of ethnicity does not provide much of an answer. Perhaps this has to do with the limitations of Yong’s Peircean epistemological pragmatism. For would not the application of Peirce’s pragmatism to the question of ethnicity effectively lead to the view that ethnicities are merely social constructs, formed by the habitual knowledge of a community of inquirers? A Peircean epistemology only allows one to provisionally affirm the proposition that ethnicities are divinely ordained. Such pragmatism affords no transcendent ground from which to assert the creational reality of ethnicity. It ascribes to ethnicity and culture pragmatic value, without necessarily affirming their inherent creational value. In short, while Yong has correctly identified the importance of ethnicity in his affirmation of diversity, he has not provided firm theological grounds to defend ethnic particularity against anthropological uniformity. Furthermore, his phenomenological epistemology does not seem

¹⁹⁵ Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology in the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 47.

able to sustain the notion of ethnicity as creational, divinely ordained, or something more than a social construct.

IV.B. Individualism & Collectivism

Chinese American evangelicals may certainly glean much from Yong's critique of American evangelicalism's individualism as they reconsider their understanding of salvation and shame, how to engage in mission, and how to do theology without being excessively individualistic. However, should they seek to employ Yong's thought to harmonize both the individualistic and collectivist impulses of their faith and cultures, four difficulties remain.

The first is the challenge of whether Yong's theology, though critical of individualism, offers Chinese American evangelicals concrete, practical resources to calm the tense multi-generational dynamics within Chinese American churches. In other words, what does Yong's theology offer to Chinese American evangelicals who are caught in the tension of a multi-generational church in which the more collectivist first generation and the more individualistic second and third generations have difficulty understanding one another and finding harmony? While his pneumatological imagination certainly commends to them the importance of relationality and dynamism, and even makes room for the communal aspects of salvation, one may wonder whether Chinese American evangelicals might also need a more concrete and practical guide. Other than encouraging Chinese American evangelicals to be more patient with one another, to reflect on their being one body in one baptism, or to contemplate the Trinitarian implications underlying the individual-collective tension, Yong's theology may leave some desiring more ecclesiological guidance. The question lingers: What can we practically do as a church to promote unity between the collectivist and individualistic generations?

A second difficulty concerns Yong's soteriology. While it might prove helpful for the Chinese American evangelicals' collectivist struggles with shame because it acknowledges

the social, communal, and ecclesial dimensions of salvation, further elaboration along with certain clarifications and distinctions are needed. For example, it is unclear how the various dimensions of salvation, such as the social, material, and personal dimensions, all relate to each other. Though all dimensions can certainly be related to salvation, in what sense do they constitute salvation? For example, if, hypothetically, an unrepentant atheist was physically healed by the power of the Spirit, in what sense would they be saved or not be saved, and how would it differ from the lame man that Peter healed by the Spirit in Acts 3? In what ways did the lame man and the community that witnessed his healing experience salvation? Hence, Yong's emphasis on the different ways that God saves different people, such as when he writes, "God saves men in some ways differently from how God saves women...because they face some similar but also many different challenges,"¹⁹⁶ lacks clarity and begs for further elaboration.

What it means to be "saved" or to experience "salvation," according to Yong, and how such salvation is specifically applied in conversion(s) is quite ambiguous as it emphasizes process over a definitive transfer from wrath to grace: "My own view...sees salvation as a dynamic process of experiencing the 'increasing fullness' of the Spirit."¹⁹⁷ Because of Yong's emphasis on salvation as a dynamic process, in which "Christian conversion provides the *impetus* for the renewal of the mind, the healing of the heart, the sanctification of human activities, and the reconciliation of human relationships, all as the Spirit of God assimilates the believer with the mind, heart, and life of Jesus"¹⁹⁸ [emphasis mine], he admits himself that his understanding of "the dynamic, complex, and interactive series of conversion processes mean not only that any theology of conversion will resist systematic definition but also that...finite human beings will never completely convert in this

¹⁹⁶ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 232.

¹⁹⁷ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 64.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

life.”¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, those aware of Yong’s theology of religions, which insists upon the Spirit’s ubiquitous work and presence, may wonder how or if non-Christians’ experiences of the Spirit differ from the salvific experience of the increasing fullness of the Spirit.

A third difficulty with Yong’s treatment of individualism and collectivism is what may be implied by his theological method. Though his theological method eschews excessive individualism, Yong’s trialectic theological method involving Spirit, Word, and Community, does not seem to limit the community of inquirers. This is most evident in Yong’s theology of religions, in which Yong argues – according to his communal theological method – that the Holy Spirit cannot only be discerned within other religions outside of Christianity, but also providentially sustains all the religions of the world.²⁰⁰ Hence, Yong’s communal theological method seeks out “the truths in other narrative traditions”, “both within and without the broad contours of the Christian community.”²⁰¹ This follows from Yong’s foundational pneumatology, which maintains that the Spirit “is God’s way of being present to and active within the world and that the norms and values of all created things are instantiated by the Spirit in relation to all other created things.”²⁰² In Yong’s understanding of the Spirit, readers may find it difficult to parse the difference between how the Spirit works amongst people who are filled with the Spirit and those who are not. Surely such a difference exists, as Paul says:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰⁰ Amos Yong “Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World of Religions: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions” in *No Other Gods Before Me?: Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* ed., John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 48.

²⁰¹ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 42.

²⁰² Stephenson, “Reality, Knowledge, and Life in Community,” 71.

²⁰³ 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 (ESV)

Therefore, while Chinese American evangelicals could certainly appreciate the communal aspect of theological inquiry more, Yong's theological method does not seem to supply adequate guardrails to norm the process of communal reflection or truly resolve the challenge of interpretive pluralism.

The fourth difficulty with Yong's pneumatological approach to individualism and collectivism is his insistence that the Spirit is central to all relationality, whether in the divine life, or in the Creator-creature interface, or within creature to creature interactions. From Irenaeus' two-hands of God model of the Trinity, he understands the Spirit as establishing the relatedness of all creation, and from Augustine's mutual love model of the Trinity, he understands the Spirit as the mutual love relation between the Father and the Son. Such a strong and distinctive link between the Spirit and relationality, however, may strike some as speculative and even curiously individualistic. To pin relationality at all levels of reality on one person of the Trinity, seems to take away from an understanding of relationality involving all three persons. To so explicitly link the Spirit and pneumatology to relationality in the Trinity, the world, and God's relationship to the world seems to ignore the Father and Son's roles in the constitution of relationality. One wonders whether the dynamic of individualism and collectivism within creation might be better addressed with a more fully Trinitarian conception of relationality that does not prioritize the Spirit's role in relationality. Additionally, one may also wonder if Yong's commitment to a pneumatological imagination and the relationality of the Spirit explain why he spends far more time critiquing individualism than collectivism in his theology.

IV.C. Creation & Culture

Yong's theology lends itself quite well to the rejection of the sacred/secular and soul/body dualisms which have tilted Chinese American evangelicals toward an otherworldly focus. Yong's advocacy for holistic mission is supported by his rejection of sacred/secular

dualism, which limits the scope of the Spirit's activity, succumbs to modernity's privatization of religion, and restrains the church's prophetic witness. Furthermore, his advocacy for holistic mission is supported by his understanding of the two hands of God, in which the Word and Spirit hold spirituality and materiality together in one united reality. This means that human beings are not essentially spirits within fleshly shells, but whole persons with spirit and body. This also means that salvation and redemption are not just spiritual realities. Yong is also right in acknowledging that anti-intellectualism, retreating from secularity, and maintaining an absolutist dogmatism will only hamper Christian witness. Culture and Christianity are neither diametrically opposed, nor completely aligned.

While Yong rightly critiques a radical sacred/secular dualism, understanding the Spirit to be at work throughout creation, allowing him to affirm holistic mission, he gives a slight nod to ministries of deed over ministries of word in his understanding of the church's mission. Yong does well to cover his bases in describing the mission of the church as involving edification, proclamation, compassion, and justice.²⁰⁴ However, his slight lean toward ministries of deed becomes evident when he writes: "In all of this, the church's social witness remains its most powerful means of proclaiming the full gospel, since the gospel is not just talk but action."²⁰⁵ While this leaning is a far cry from a de-spiritualized social gospel, one may wonder why it was necessary to demonstrate such a preference and priority of deed over word ministry.

Yong's slightly imbalanced view of the church's mission is likely due to his broad pneumatological ecclesiology, which lacks clarity and specificity regarding the church as a gathered and scattered people of God. Yong himself admits that it is "partly true" that "Pentecostals have yet to develop a cohesive ecclesiology" because renewalists have focused

²⁰⁴ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 187-188.

²⁰⁵ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out On All Flesh*, 189.

much more on what the church is to do than what the church is.²⁰⁶ Yong seeks to remedy this by applying the fivefold gospel of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, healer, and coming king to the church's identity, so that "the church is understood as a redeemed, sanctified, empowered, healing, and eschatological community."²⁰⁷ He seeks to bolster this with an examination of the ecclesiology of Ephesians, but still concludes with a focus on what the church does rather than is, writing: "These very concrete and practical guidelines inform the behaviour and practices of the people of God..."²⁰⁸ Hence, Yong returns to renewalist form, writing: "the church is less a noun than a verb."²⁰⁹

A renewalist emphasis on what the church does, rather than what it is has been beneficial for dynamic Christian activity and mobilization but requires supplementation to helpfully distinguish the various callings and spheres of Christian activity. Without such distinctions, one may be led to believe that the mission of the church is simply everything that Christians are commanded to do. A simplistic understanding of the mission that does not distinguish between the Great Commission and the Great Commandment can become quite distracting and obligate Christians and local churches to do various things that they may not be obligated by God to do. For example, to what extent is the church called to establish orphanages, refugee asylum programs, food banks, and women's shelters, versus preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, and how are local churches and individual Christians to understand their distinct roles and responsibility in all of this? Simply understanding the church as the people of God and her mission as the commandment to love God and neighbour can unintentionally downplay the significance of the church as a gathered institution in favor of the church as a scattered people serving God in the world. In Yong's broad renewalist understanding of the church as the people of God in action, the unique

²⁰⁶ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 165.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

governance and administration of the local church, including the practices of church membership, church polity, church discipline, preaching, baptism, and the Eucharist are not demarcated as exclusive practices of the institutional church as opposed to other practices that both the church and the rest of the world participate in, such as caring for orphans and widows. It is quite telling that Yong chooses Ephesians to discuss his ecclesiology without also discussing the pastoral epistles, for the pastoral epistles helpfully discuss many of the church's institutional dimensions. For while a radical sacred/secular dualism is indeed harmful to the advance of holistic mission, there are indeed practices and activities that are exclusively given to the church as an institution established by Christ. Lacking an institutional dimension in his discussion of the church and leaning into the church as the people of God in action, Yong misses a helpful distinction for clarifying the church's nature and mission.

There are also difficulties with Yong's spirit/matter metaphysic, which serves his critique of soul/body dualism. First, Yong's rejection of dualism in favor of monism, while rightfully critiquing Platonic and Cartesian dualisms, does not give much consideration to alternate and more nuanced forms of dualism that advocate a more integrated or holistic relationship between the body and the soul.²¹⁰ Furthermore, Yong's emergent monist view "suffers the set-back of not having any means for maintaining personal identity through death until that final resurrection," for "[o]n all views apart from dualistic views, when the brain dies, the person dies with it, so the closest a non-dualistic construal could get to identity would be to argue that another body and brain is created by God on the last day which gives rise to another mind that is that person."²¹¹ Yong's emergent monist view is difficult, even for Yong to hold consistently himself. Mikael and Joanna Leidenhag notice that even as Yong

²¹⁰ Matthew John Churchouse, "Renewing the Soul: Towards an Enhanced Pentecostal Philosophical Theological Doctrine of Human Constitution" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2017), 83-101.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

seeks to argue for a monistic theory of emergence from the account of Adam being formed from the dust of the ground, he still ends up saying that Adam only became a living being by the breath of the Lord, such that the beginning of Adam's becoming a living being is realized by the Spirit of God.²¹² One may also wonder how firmly Yong is committed to monism, when in his discussion of post-mortem survival he states that human spirits (i.e., minds) "are capable of surviving and indeed surviving after bodily death."²¹³ Leidenhag and Leidenhag believe that this "breaks the relationship of ontological dependence (or interdependence) between the higher-level property of the mind and its material (i.e., body) parts."²¹⁴ While Yong rightly rejects a radical soul/body dualism, one should pause before accepting his monistic alternative.

Regarding Christianity and culture, Yong rejects a strict dichotomy. His impulse to simultaneously affirm and reject culture as a Christian is admirable, and it leads him to engage the pluralistic context of late modernity without resorting to anti-intellectualism, fear of the modern secular academy, or absolutist dogmatism against other Christian traditions or non-Christian faiths. He should be commended for his desire to engage our pluralistic world with confidence in the objectivity of reality and the truthful correspondence between reality and propositions, while also acknowledging the interpretive dimension of human knowing. He genuinely wants to avoid relativism, and to theologize publicly with authority, maintaining the universality of Christian theology, while always recognizing the particularistic nature of all theological reflection. Thus, while acknowledging the distinct perspective of science and the modern secular academy in comparison to theology, he affirms the scientific enterprise on the basis of his pneumatological ontology, in which the Spirit mediates the mutual relationship between God and the phenomenal reality of the world.

²¹² Mikael Leidenhag & Joanna Leidenhag, "Science and Spirit: A Critical Examination of Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Emergence," *De Gruyter Open Theology* 1 (2015): 428-429.

²¹³ Yong, *Spirit of Creation*, 204.

²¹⁴ Leidenhag, "Science and Spirit," 430.

Other examples of his non-dualistic posture toward Christianity and culture include his ecumenical spirit and his inclusivist theology of religions. He believes that diversity and pluralism are intrinsic to the church because of the many tongues of Pentecost, and that non-Christian faiths can be regarded as salvific when the Spirit's presence and activity are evident in them.

Yong's confidence in engaging other cultures as a Christian and discerning both the good and the bad within them stem from his Peircean epistemology. However, this method for discerning between good and evil, and truth and falsehood within pluralistic cultural contexts is wanting. While Yong and Peirce would not say that human beings cannot genuinely know things, their assertion that humans cannot be certain about anything would seem to contrast the strong way that Scripture speaks about revelation, which is not absolutely impeded by human finitude and fallenness, but sinfully suppressed. In the Old Testament, the LORD speaks and acts that people might know of him with certainty (Ex. 7:5; Isa. 45:6; Ezek. 7:27), Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for not knowing what they ought to have known (Luk. 12:56), and Paul says that what can be known about God is plain to humans because God has shown it to them, and they truly know it (Rom. 1:18-23). Yong's appropriation of Peirce's epistemology leads to a rejection of all certainty before the eschaton, but by this epistemology, how certain can he even be about this rejection of all certainty?

Furthermore, Yong's commitment to fallibilism and rejection of certainty is difficult to reconcile with his optimism toward communal inductive inquiry. Not only does Yong's reflection on science and theology have a problematic transference of scientific concepts into the normative discourse of theology,²¹⁵ but Yong's Peircean approach to science also betrays a certain optimism about human observation and experience that would seem to contradict his

²¹⁵ Leidenhag, "Science and Spirit," 433-434.

commitment to fallibilism, and the fallenness of human observation and experience. The same critique applies to Yong's ecumenism and theology of religions. Yong's faith in the phenomenological method for inductively discerning the divine, human, and demonic amongst a plurality of "others" is less than satisfying. For human knowledge derived from perception and experience is fallible, and Yong admits this himself. After all, the very existence of the pluralistic challenge implies that phenomenologically finding a consensus in the act of discernment based on mere experience and perception is insufficient to the task.

Yong's criteria for discernment (divine presence, absence, activity) are rather vague and ambiguous, which he himself admits. One wonders how far such criteria could truly take those seeking to discern the Spirit and the spirits. Hence, even if one should generally agree with Yong that the Spirit "is at work in the religions, shaping and reshaping them, or else mollifying their resisting spirits,"²¹⁶ his method of discerning between the Spirit and the demonic is quite lacking. Furthermore, while Yong is clear that "the Spirit is...both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"²¹⁷ his theology of religions is sure to be contested as too stark of a distinction between pneumatology and Christology and contrary to the views of many Pentecostals.²¹⁸

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Yong's Peircean epistemology, not unrelated to its rejection of certainty, is its openness to all potentialities and possibilities. When speaking of the necessity of a fallibilistic epistemology, Yong writes in a footnote:

Of course, the ultimate test of evangelical fallibilism is our openness to entertaining the hypothesis that the Bible may not be the revealed word of God after all...My initial reply is that such should theoretically be possible. Yet, I cannot see any chain of circumstances which would cause an upswell of doubt such that further inquiry would not be able to resolve. In this sense, I would follow Peirce in dismissing such a

²¹⁶ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 324.

²¹⁷ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 21.

²¹⁸ James R.A. Merrick, "The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends," *Trinity Journal* 29, no. 1 (2008): 107-125; Simon Chan, "Jesus as Spirit-Baptizer: Its Significance for Pentecostal Ecclesiology," in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. John Christopher Thomas (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 139-156.

potentiality as a “paper doubt” and set about dealing with the issues that demand our faithful attention...²¹⁹

This epistemology also allows him to speak of the possibility of falsifying the resurrection by producing the corpse of Jesus.²²⁰ While Yong may be comfortable with such a paper doubt, other Christians would be justified in their reticence to embrace Yong’s openness to all potentialities. Christian convictions concerning God’s creation of the universe and the resurrection all seem to be non-negotiable convictions for Christian orthodoxy, and not merely provisional. For if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). Can one affirm the lordship of Christ, while also maintaining that such an affirmation is provisional?

V. Summary

This chapter sought to explore the theology of Amos Yong as a possible resource for a more contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. Yong is worth considering because he is an American raised Chinese American evangelical theologian, who has reflected at book length upon Asian American theology, and offers a unique Pentecostal perspective that is less common amongst Chinese American evangelicals. Yong’s Luke-Acts hermeneutical lens, along with his pneumatological orientation, his appreciation for diversity, and his appropriation of Charles Sanders Peirce have helped him reject many of the theological problems that many Chinese American evangelicals have unwittingly accepted. He does not subscribe to a colorblind theology of ethnicity. He is sensitive to the overly individualistic tendencies of evangelicals. He does not indulge radical soul/body or sacred/secular dualisms. And he boldly, though admittedly fallibly, engages his late modern pluralistic context, unafraid to discuss theology and science, as well as ecumenical and interreligious topics. For Yong, Christianity and culture are not at odds at all, for the Spirit is

²¹⁹ Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit*, 44, fn. 50.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

present and powerful in both. Thus, Yong offers an alternative to the popular and conservative American evangelical theology that most Chinese American Christians have come to accept.

However, while Chinese American evangelicals certainly have much to learn from Yong, particularly from his critiques of conservative American evangelicalism, Yong's theology is not without its own difficulties. Though affirming of ethnic diversity and particularly of non-Western cultural perspectives in contemporary theology, Yong has not developed a robust theological ground for the divinely ordained origin and telos of ethnicity. Though unmistakably desiring to be thoroughly Trinitarian and eschewing excessive individualism in many of his publications, Yong does not offer much in the way of practical guidance for the church, his soteriology lacks specificity, his elevation of community in his theological method could be interpreted as affirming almost limitless boundaries, and his pneumatological emphasis may take away from his commitment to be consistently Trinitarian. Though wary of radical sacred/secular, Yong's does not offer clarity on the mission of the local church as opposed to the good that all humankind is obligated to do. Furthermore, recent scholarship has highlighted his problematic monism. And finally, though offering a way to engage pluralistic society with humility and supposed confidence, Yong's criteria for discerning the Spirit(s) may be too unsatisfying and insufficient for the task.

Due to his own presupposition of epistemic fallibilism, Yong himself would probably not lose much sleep over whether or not his theology is enthusiastically embraced by Chinese American evangelicals. After all he wrote: "I present only one Asian American Pentecostal perspective intended toward revitalizing evangelical theology in the twenty-first century. Many other perspectives from many other evangelical families or traditions as well as many

other ethnic or minority group vantage points are needed.”²²¹ In the following chapter, I will heed Yong’s call to hear from another perspective.

²²¹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 12.

CHAPTER FIVE - The Promise of Neo-Calvinist Theology for Chinese American Evangelicals

I. Introduction

In this final chapter, I will consider another tradition, which is also on the margins of Chinese American evangelicalism, the neo-Calvinist tradition. The main questions under consideration are whether the neo-Calvinist tradition might be helpfully applied within the Chinese American evangelical context, and how it compares with Yong's theology for a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. As I sought to apply and critically analyze Yong's theology for the Chinese American evangelical context, so also will I seek to apply and critically analyze the neo-Calvinist tradition in the pursuit of a more contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology.

First, I will consider what neo-Calvinism is and provide a rationale for considering it in the development of Chinese American evangelical theology. Second, I will apply the neo-Calvinist tradition, as predominantly represented by Bavinck, Kuyper, and Vos to the theological challenges discussed within the Chinese American evangelical context. Finally, I will critically assess the suitability of neo-Calvinism for Chinese American evangelicals (especially as it compares with Yong's theology) and suggest areas for constructive development.

The argument of this final chapter is that the neo-Calvinist tradition not only critiques the un(der)-contextualized theology commonly found within the Chinese American evangelical context, but also offers solutions that are more nuanced and agreeable to Chinese American evangelicals' theological sensibilities than Yong's with regard to ethnicity, the individualism versus collectivism dynamic, and dualistic views of creation. Thus, the neo-

Calvinist tradition has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals seeking a more contextualized theology, as well as the broader swath of American evangelicals who face similar challenges in their own respective yet intertwined contexts.

II. Neo-Calvinism: Why & What?

II.A. Why Consider Neo-Calvinism for Chinese American Evangelicals?

Because neo-Calvinism originated in the Netherlands and has been predominantly embraced by Westerners, it might seem strange to appropriate it for a Chinese American evangelical theology. After all, Timothy Tseng has urged Asian American evangelicals “to remove a colonial mentality that assumes that ‘West is Best’ and that ‘East is Least.’”¹

However, appropriating a theological tradition with Western origins in the service of Chinese American evangelical theology need not alarm those seeking to develop Chinese and Asian theologies.

Essentializing and pigeonholing various theological traditions into broad categories of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ is simplistic and usually unhelpful. Even if one conceded the existence of a ‘Western Christianity,’ is there no truth at all to be gleaned within it? Moreover, not every tradition within Western Christianity is equally guilty of a colonial mentality, and of claiming an exclusive possession of all Christian truth. If one would carefully investigate Western Christianity, one would immediately find great diversity and self-critical arguments against the overly Western elements of such a Western Christianity. Is it impossible that certain traditions within Western Christianity might serve as a corrective to certain others within Western Christianity, such as Chinese *American* evangelicalism? For all

¹ Timothy Tseng, “Foreword,” in *Conversations: Asian American Evangelical Theologies in Formation*, eds. DJ Chuang and Timothy Tseng (Lulu.com, 2013), ii-iii.

these reasons, the appropriation of neo-Calvinism for a Chinese American evangelical theology can be accepted as a legitimate enterprise.

When one pauses to reflect upon a variety of Chinese and Chinese American evangelical contexts, the consideration of neo-Calvinism for a Chinese American evangelical theology is not as arbitrary as it may at first seem. Firstly, particular strains of neo-Calvinism, though not largely known by the majority of Chinese American evangelicals, are capable of falling within the umbrella of conservative evangelicalism with its high view of Scripture. Neo-Calvinism offers a non-Barthian response to liberal Protestant critiques of Scripture's infallibility. Some neo-Calvinists would even argue that Kuyper and Bavinck's view of the organic inspiration of Scripture indicates an affirmation of Scripture's inerrancy.² Hence, neo-Calvinism offers Chinese American evangelicals a theological perspective that is both underexplored by Chinese American Christians, and yet trustworthy because of its high view of Scripture. In fact, the time is ripe for Chinese American evangelicals to engage neo-Calvinism, as neo-Calvinist publications and literature are increasingly translated into English.

Perhaps this is why neo-Calvinism, and Reformed theology more broadly, have already begun to be embraced by Chinese Christians worldwide. This is a second reason to consider neo-Calvinism as a potential resource for a Chinese American evangelical theology. Much of these Chinese Christians' interest in neo-Calvinism has had to do with the resurgence of Reformed theology in general across the globe.³ This interest in Reformed

² Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?*" *Westminster Theological Journal* 44, no. 2 (Fall, 1982): 250-289.

³ David Van Biema, "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now: The New Calvinism" *TIME* (Thursday, March 12, 2009), http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html (accessed June 8, 2018); Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Alexander Chow, "Reformed theology in Asia and Oceania" in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, eds. Paul T. Nimmo and David A.S. Fergusson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 311-314; Alexander Chow, "Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today," *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, no. 2 (May 2014): 158-175; Andrew Brown, "Chinese Calvinism Flourishes," *The Guardian* (May 27, 2009),

theology has introduced a growing number of Chinese Christians to neo-Calvinism.⁴ Not only is neo-Calvinism slowly entering the Chinese American church and the Chinese church, but also other Chinese Christian diasporic communities in Asia, such as in Indonesia under the influence of Stephen Tong. This is consistent with Richard Mouw's contention that neo-Calvinism is capable of theologically serving the global church in the twenty-first century.⁵

A third reason why neo-Calvinism may be worth considering as a resource for a Chinese American evangelical theology is the many ways it can speak into the various contextual issues raised in Chapters Two and Three. For example, neo-Calvinism is quite critical of the Enlightenment's humanistic and rationalistic impulses and offers evangelicals a way of engaging their post-Enlightenment context.⁶ In this way, neo-Calvinism, though having Western origins, is itself a tradition that critiques much of Western Christian theology. Unlike Christian traditions that fall into the curse of uniformity, overemphasizing the universality of Christianity, neo-Calvinism can be helpfully employed to encourage the appreciation of diverse cultures with an eye toward an organic harmony of simultaneous unity and diversity.⁷

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/may/27/china-calvin-christianity> (accessed June 8, 2018); Fredrik Fällman, "Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developing of Faith Among Chinese Intellectuals," in *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, ed. Francis Khok Gee Lim (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 153-168; Thomas Harvey, "Sphere Sovereignty, Civil Society and the Pursuit of Holistic Transformation in Asia," *Transformation* 33, no. 1 (2016): 50-64.

⁴ See Ximian Xu, "Appreciative and Faithful? Karl Barth's Use of Herman Bavinck's View of God's Incomprehensibility," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 13, no. 1 (Jun 2019): 26-46; Ximian Xu, "Herman Bavinck's 'Yes' and Karl Barth's 'No': Constructing a Dialectic-in-Organic Approach to the Theology of General Revelation," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 2 (Apr 2019): 323-351; Ximian Xu, "The Dialogue between Herman Bavinck and Mou Zongsan on Human Nature and Its Quality," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 3 (Jan 2017): 298-324; Jeff Liou, "Taking Up #blacklivesmatter: A Neo-Kuyperian Engagement with Critical Race Theory," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 99-120; Michael Chen, "'To See Darkness, To Hear Silence': Herman Bavinck and Augustine on Epistemology," *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 96-106; Andrew Ong, "Neo-Calvinism and Ethnic Churches in Multiethnic Contexts" *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12, no. 1 (2018): 296-320.

⁵ Richard Mouw, "Neo-Calvinism: A Theology for the Global Church in the 21st Century" Herman Bavinck Lecture, Theological University Kampen, June 1, 2015.

⁶ Richard Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 9-10.

⁷ I recognize that neo-Calvinism's ability to appreciate cultural diversity within the unity of an organic harmony may be contested due to the history of South African apartheid and will address with this later in the chapter.

Furthermore, insofar as the shortcomings of Chinese American evangelicalism reflect the shortcomings of American evangelicalism, should we not heed the wisdom of Mark Noll and George Marsden, who both see much promise within neo-Calvinism for American evangelicalism? In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Noll explicitly mentions the appropriation of Abraham Kuyper in such figures as Richard Mouw and Cornelius Van Til as signs of hope for an evangelical intellectual renaissance.⁸ Similarly, Marsden suggests Kuyper as a resource to engage in pluralistic America in his *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: the 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief*.⁹ Even Harriet Harris, who is unconvinced that neo-Calvinism can rescue conservative evangelicals from the fundamentalism that James Barr wrote of, admits that neo-Calvinism rightly challenges the rational empiricism of the fundamentalist mentality amongst evangelicals.¹⁰ If Harris notes that neo-Calvinism offers something quite different from most of evangelicalism, and if Noll and Marsden would even suggest Kuyper and neo-Calvinist thinkers for the improvement of American evangelicalism, why not also suggest them for the improvement of *Chinese* American evangelicalism, which has largely followed after popular and conservative American evangelicalism?

II.B. What is Neo-Calvinism?

Defining any “-ism” is never an easy task. Still, recent scholarship has not shied away from discussing “neo-Calvinism” as a helpful way of describing a distinct tradition and movement within Protestant Christianity.¹¹ There is certainly a diversity of views held by

⁸ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁹ George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief*. (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

¹⁰ Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 205.

¹¹ See for example Eddy Van der Borght, ed., *The Journal of Reformed Theology* Volume 11, Issue 1-2, Special Issue: On Neo-Calvinism and Race, 2017; Peter Escalante & W. Bradford Littlejohn (eds.), *For the Healing of the Nations: essays on creation, redemption, and neo-Calvinism* (Lincoln, New England: Davenant Trust, 2014); J. Glenn Friesen, *Neo-Calvinism and Christian Theosophy* (Calgary: Aevum Books, 2015); Robert Sweetman (ed.), *In the Phrygian Mode: Neo-Calvinism, Antiquity, and the Lamentations of Reformed*

those who either self-identify as neo-Calvinists or are labeled as neo-Calvinists, and yet what unites them is a particular historical lineage of theological influence tracing to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.

From a historical and contextual perspective, neo-Calvinism is a form of Dutch Reformed theology. In *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, neo-Calvinism is said to denote “the attempts between c.1870 and 1920 (with some precursors and subsequent history) to restore classical Reformed theology under the conditions of modernity, bringing it to bear on the church, science, culture, law, and politics,” particularly in the Netherlands, combining “criticism of modernity with elements receptive to modern insights.”¹² It is, however, much more than repristination of a sixteenth century ‘paleo-Calvinism.’ In his famous Stone Lectures at Princeton, Kuyper advocated a return to Calvinism, “not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as, suiting the requirements of our own century, may restore the needed unity to Protestant thought and the lacking energy to Protestant practical life.”¹³ More than a restoration, neo-Calvinism was a movement that sought to develop Calvinism in a post-Enlightenment context in which modern Christians faced issues of revolution, secularization, and pluralization. In the mid to late 19th century Dutch context, in which modern theology made significant inroads into the Dutch Reformed Church, academy, and society, the neo-Calvinist movement arose as a reaction to modernism’s abolition of the supernatural.¹⁴

Philosophy (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007); and James Eglinton and George Harinck (eds.), *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (London, UK: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014).

¹² Matthias Freudenberg, “Neo-Calvinism” in *Religion Past and Present*. Consulted online on 31 March 2018. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1163/1877-5888_rpp_SIM_024057 First published online: 2011.

¹³ Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone-Lectures* (Amsterdam/Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1898), 46.

¹⁴ George Harinck, “Twin sisters with a changing character. How neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between Bible and natural sciences,” in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Vol. 2. 1700-Present*, eds. J. van der Meer and S. Mandelbrote (Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2008), 325-326.

Neo-Calvinism's chief pioneer was Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a theologian, journalist, and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905, later followed by Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), a Reformed dogmatician and neo-Calvinism's chief systematic theologian. Both Kuyper and Bavinck entered theological study "just as Calvin studies was emerging as an exciting discipline" in Europe "at the crest of a new wave of rigorous Calvin scholarship."¹⁵ This led them to spearhead a neo-Confessional revival in the Netherlands, which was quite unique considering their late-19th century European context, in which many deserted confessional Christianity for the modernist and liberal trends of Adolf von Harnack and Friedrich Schleiermacher or the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth. Noting the late arrival of theological modernism in the Netherlands, Hendrikus Berkhof writes of neo-Calvinism: "[T]his theology was consciously forged, next to and after modernism and the theology of mediation, as a third response to the intellectual challenge arising from the Enlightenment."¹⁶ Neo-Calvinism, then, "developed a non-dualistic theistic view of history and revelation, of science (*Wissenschaft*) and faith, and...led to a strong orthodox intellectual tradition..."¹⁷

With Kuyper as its pioneer, and Bavinck as its systematician, neo-Calvinism would find further development from Dutch Reformed philosophers, theologians, biblical scholars, and missiologists, such as Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Dirk Hendrik Theodor Vollenhoven (1892-1978), Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996), Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007), and Bavinck's nephew, Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1964). Admittedly, while Kuyper and Bavinck were generally united in their appropriation of Calvinism, they did

¹⁵ James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 20-22.

¹⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 113.

¹⁷ Harinck, "Twin sisters with a changing character," 319.

contrast one another in a variety of ways.¹⁸ Furthermore, neo-Calvinism is not a monolithic theological movement, and various strains of thought have issued forth from Kuyper and Bavinck's seminal teachings and works. For example, Vern Poythress identifies one strain as the "neo-Kuyperians" such as Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and even Francis Schaeffer, and yet other "Kuyperians," some who want to build positively on nearly everything that Kuyper did, and others who accept the general principle of Christ's universal lordship, but may be more critical of the details in Kuyper's thought.¹⁹ William Dennison takes a narrower view of Dutch neo-Calvinism in the twentieth century and identifies Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven with "creation order neo-Calvinists" who emphasize God's norms in the creation order for social and cultural institutions, and Wolterstorff with the "shalom neo-Calvinists" who emphasize working with society and culture toward the eschatological restoration of creation.²⁰ Harinck also remarks that in the Netherlands, in addition to the neo-Kuyperianism of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven was the more classically Kuyperian theologian, Valentijn Hepp.²¹

Important for my thesis is the fact that neo-Calvinism would also find significant reception in North America at institutions such as Calvin Theological Seminary, where Dutch Americans, such as Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), and Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), would study and engage Kuyper and Bavinck's theology. These three would also undergo postgraduate studies at Princeton Theological Seminary with Vos eventually occupying its first chair in biblical theology in 1894, allowing him to introduce neo-Calvinism to American Presbyterianism.²² Today, Calvin Theological Seminary is home

¹⁸ J. Mark Beach, "Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and 'The Conclusions of Utrecht 1905'" *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 11.

¹⁹ Vern Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ: Serving our Savior All of the Time, in All of Life, with All our Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 75-77.

²⁰ William Dennison, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay," *JETS* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 279.

²¹ Harinck, "Twin sisters with a changing character," 354.

²² See John Halsey Wood Jr., "Dutch Neo-Calvinism at old Princeton: Geerhardus Vos and The Rise of Biblical Theology at Princeton Seminary," *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 13, no. 1 (2006): 1-22;

to the Bavinck Institute. Calvin College has the Kuyper Center for Public Theology, and Princeton Theological Seminary, which previously hosted the Kuyper Center for Public Theology, maintains the Abraham Kuyper Collection. Furthermore, due to Vos' influence upon Van Til at Princeton, a Vosian strand of neo-Calvinism has been developing since 1929 when Van Til joined J. Gresham Machen to found Westminster Theological Seminary. Today this Vosian strand of neo-Calvinism is carried on by disciples of Van Til, such as Vern Poythress, William Edgar, and Richard Gaffin. Though not explicitly VanTillian, Richard Mouw another American, and a Kuyperian theologian at Fuller Theological Seminary, has also discussed the significant influence of Van Til on his own thought and formation.²³

As more of Kuyper, Bavinck, and the early neo-Calvinists' works have been translated from Dutch to English, neo-Calvinism has proliferated in English-speaking theological circles outside of Calvin, Princeton, and Westminster. For example, neo-Calvinism made its way into South Africa via the Dutch Reformed Church since the late 19th century with a number of their ministers, such as Bennie Keet (1885-1974),²⁴ studying at the Free University under Kuyper and Bavinck, though admittedly the Dutch Reformed of South Africa have not significantly engaged in the contemporary revival of neo-Calvinism in the 21st century.²⁵ In Toronto, disciples of Dooyeweerd founded the Institute for Christian Studies, focusing on the intersection of Reformational philosophy and contemporary scholarship and society. In California, Richard Mouw, who especially came to appreciate Kuyper's thought during the United States' turbulent 1960s, serves as Professor of Faith and Public Life at Fuller Theological Seminary where he encourages students to appropriate

George Harinck, "Geerhardus Vos as Introducer of Kuyper in America" in *The Dutch-American experience: essays in honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, eds. Hans Krabbendam & Larry J. Wagenaar (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Uitgeverij, 2000), 242-261.

²³ Richard Mouw, "Remember the Antithesis!" *Books & Culture* 15, no. 2 (2009): 9.

²⁴ See George Harinck, "Wipe Out Lines of Division (Not Distinctions): Bennie Keet, Neo-Calvinism and the Struggle against Apartheid," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 81-98.

²⁵ Craig Bartholomew is a neo-Calvinist South African who has participated in the revival of neo-Calvinism, but he is ordained in the Church of England in South Africa.

Kuyper's thought in service of cultural engagement and transformation. At the University of Edinburgh's New College School of Divinity, James Eglinton, a Bavinck scholar and the Meldrum Lecturer in Reformed Theology, has also attracted students interested in studying and developing neo-Calvinist theology, its history, and its implications.

This burgeoning interest in neo-Calvinism is not some fringe movement. Admittedly, neo-Calvinists comprise a diverse group of thinkers, who would disagree on a number of theological issues, such as church polity, the gender roles, and sexual ethics. Yet, neo-Calvinists share a common theological ancestry that can be traced to Kuyper and Bavinck. For the sake of full-disclosure, the particular strain of neo-Calvinism that I am drawing from in this chapter is the North American strain picked up by Vos, Van Til, and their followers. Hence, this chapter's description of neo-Calvinism, when not drawing directly from Kuyper and Bavinck, will draw largely from Vosian and VanTillian developments.²⁶ Thus, the neo-Calvinism articulated in this chapter most strongly presupposes Kuyper's disdain for both uniformity and individualism, Bavinck's Trinitarian organic motif of unity and diversity, Bavinck and Vos' understanding of the progressive nature of special revelation in covenant theology, and Van Til's revelational epistemology.

Certainly my educational background from Westminster Theological Seminary as well as my additional theological formation influenced by recent Bavinck scholarship at the University of Edinburgh factor into my understanding and articulation of neo-Calvinism, but the choice of this particular strain of North American neo-Calvinism is neither arbitrary nor accidental for one Chinese-related reason and one American evangelical-related reason. First, it is this particular strand of neo-Calvinism that has been received and communicated by some of the most significant Reformed Chinese theologians. Stephen Tong, one of the most

²⁶ Additionally, a keen reader will also notice significant dependence upon Mike Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, whose works are particularly relevant because of their neo-Calvinist critiques of the conservative evangelicalism they both experienced as young Christians. Michael Goheen & Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), ix-x.

influential evangelists to Asia in this generation, has read and encouraged his students in Indonesia to read Kuyper, Bavinck, Vos, Van Til, and even Van Til's students and advocates, such as Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, and Vern Poythress.²⁷ Then there are Jonathan Chao and Samuel Ling, two Chinese theologians who received Vosian and VanTillian educations at Westminster Theological Seminary and widely communicated these theological perspectives within both the Chinese church and the Chinese American church.²⁸ Chao was instrumental in drafting a Chinese confession of faith which "received widespread recognition in China among house church movements, and even among some Three-Self pastors dissatisfied with the official theology of that organization" and has been called the "midwife" of this document, helping Chinese Christians formulate their theology.²⁹ Ling, president of China Horizon, has pastored in the States and written in service of both the Chinese and Chinese American contexts.³⁰ It is Ling's call to further develop a culture of theology amongst Chinese American Christians that this thesis seeks to heed.

Secondly, the Vosian and VanTillian development of North American neo-Calvinism, especially as continued by its most loyal followers at Westminster Theological Seminary, is the most theologically conservative strand amongst the variants of North American neo-Calvinism. Westminster Theological Seminary's longstanding tradition in opposition to modernistic and liberal theology and its confessional positions on matters such as Scripture,

²⁷ Stephen Tong, a prominent Reformed evangelist, who ministers largely to Chinese Indonesians, also embraces Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism. See Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Southeast Asian Personalities of Chinese Descent: A Biographical Dictionary: Volume 1* (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 229.

²⁸ Alexander Chow, "Jonathan Chao and 'Return Mission': The case of the Calvinist revival in China," *Mission Studies* 36, no. 3 (forthcoming, 2019): 442-457. See also, Samuel Ling, "In Search of the Chinese Christian Mind: Anti-Intellectualism in the Chinese Church (What Traveled from West to East? Part 3)" *The Gospel Herald* (Opinion), Mar 4, 2005, <https://www.gospelherald.com/article/opinion/17232/in-search-of-the-chinese-christian-mind.htm> (accessed May 10, 2019), Jonathan Chao, "Christianization of Chinese culture: an evangelical approach" *Transformation* 17, no. 3, Chinese Christian Perspectives on Culture (Jul/Sep 2000): 98-104.

²⁹ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster: 2012), 92.

³⁰ Samuel Ling, *The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things* (San Gabriel, CA: China Horizon, 1999).

sexuality, and the theology of religions place it squarely within what one might consider as the conservative evangelical camp. Hence, though a Vosian and VanTillian neo-Calvinism is not a major theological perspective embraced by many Chinese American evangelicals, the hurdles into it are far less than in other strands of neo-Calvinism.

III. Applying Neo-Calvinism to the Chinese American Evangelical Context

It must be reiterated that endeavoring to define any ‘-ism’ is bound to fail from the start. This is true in defining neo-Calvinism which certainly hosts a significant measure of theological diversity. It is not a confessional tradition, but a historical movement, led by common theological ideas that have been developed in certain, and sometimes diverse, ways. At the same time, the recent scholarship surrounding ‘neo-Calvinism’ should not be ignored, indicating that the contested term is not without practical import.³¹ In what follows, I do not claim to define or describe neo-Calvinism comprehensively, or even in a way that every self-proclaimed neo-Calvinist would agree with. Rather, I hope to utilize some of neo-Calvinism’s main themes in ways that might relevantly map onto the Chinese American evangelical context, with its various issues and challenges. This discussion will be guided by the assumption that while Kuyper was the chief pioneer of the movement, Herman Bavinck is its chief systematician. Additionally, it should also be noted that the earliest and most significant mediator of Kuyper and Bavinck to the domain of American theology (which is of importance for this thesis) was Geerhardus Vos. Hence, this chapter seeks to apply the thoughts of Kuyper, Bavinck, Vos, and those consistent with their seminal theological contributions, to the particular theological issues of 1) ethnicity, 2) individualism and collectivism, and 3) dualistic views of creation.

³¹ See footnote 1.

III.A. Neo-Calvinism on Ethnicity

III.A.1. What About South Africa's Apartheid?

The history of neo-Calvinist thought about race and ethnicity is checkered with complexity. Considering Kuyper's racist language and ideas, which were appropriated in support of South African apartheid, it may seem laughable to promote neo-Calvinist theology in support of a productive theology of ethnicity. Any discussion of neo-Calvinism, ethnicity, and race must begin with a discussion of South African apartheid.

Offering what is perhaps the most recent voice to date concerning neo-Calvinism's relationship with Apartheid, Brian Stanley writes: "Contrary to popular belief, the Dutch Reformed churches were not the originators of segregationist policy in South Africa earlier in the [twentieth] century. Rather that unhappy distinction belongs to English-speaking paternalist moderates."³² However, he continues:

[V]arious mission thinkers in the Dutch Reformed churches articulated a more absolute and highly theorized doctrine of separate development...In the 1940s these ideas assumed a more explicitly neo-Calvinist character, deriving in part from the ideas of the Dutch statesman and Calvinist theologian, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)...[T]he principle that God in his sovereignty had separated nations into their allotted spheres within which their distinctive cultures could flourish became one of the ideological foundations of the policy of "apartheid" implemented by the National Party after 1948.³³

With nuance, Stanley neither supports the myth about segregation in South Africa originating in the Dutch Reformed Church, nor does he fail to implicate this church in its doctrinal support of Apartheid. Furthermore, he specifically names Kuyper and neo-Calvinism as sources from which doctrinal support for Apartheid was drawn, though only "in part." This is where the difficulty lies. What "part" did neo-Calvinism have to play, and how significant?

³² Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 247.

³³ *Ibid.*, 248.

It is not difficult to see how Kuyper's neo-Calvinism – with its notions of predestination, chosen covenant people, the God-ordained diversity of creation, sphere sovereignty, and the pillarization of pluralistic societies – could easily be appropriated in ideological support of modern Afrikaner nationalism and Apartheid policy. Predestination and the concept of a chosen covenant people have frequently been cited to connect Afrikaner nationalism with Calvinism (similar to Perry Miller's once accepted argument concerning the Puritans and Manifest Destiny in America).³⁴ Additionally, the God-ordained diversity of peoples in Kuyper's thought and in his interpretation of Genesis 10 and 11 were clearly appropriated by the Dutch Reformed churches in support of segregated churches.³⁵ One could also see how Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and advocacy for the pillarization of society could support the Afrikaner desire for a pluralistic society, in which the individuality of each people group was to be respected and protected:

Our mission policy must differentiate between race and race. God instituted boundary lines between the races which we cannot eradicate in our blind zeal. Calvinism teaches that God has given a special mission to each people...Evangelization may not destroy a people's individuality...For reasons of principle, grounded in the Calvinism of our people, it is necessary therefore that in the mission field there be segregation of black and white.³⁶

And in addition to these theological concepts, which could easily be appropriated for unintended causes, it certainly did not help that Kuyper, being a man of his time, spoke and wrote words that would be considered as terribly racist and offensive to contemporary sensibilities.³⁷

³⁴ For a detailed bibliography of sources that assert, assume, and elaborate upon the Calvinist paradigm of Afrikaner history, see the "Bibliographical Comment" in Andre du Toit, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner 'Calvinism' and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (Apr. 1985): 239-240.

³⁵ 1974 Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture," (Cape Town: National Book Printers Ltd, 1976), 18.

³⁶ Die Federasie van die Calvinistiese Studenteverenigings in Suid-Afrika, "Calvinism and Evangelization" in *Koers in die Krisis*, vol. 1, eds. H.G. Stoker & F.J.M. Potgeiter (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Pro Ecclesia, 1935), 127.

³⁷ See, Abraham Kuyper, translated by James Eglinton, *Varia Americana* (Amsterdam: Höveker and Wormser, 1898), 11-12: "Is it now not understandable that the workman of the Aryan race compares favorably against the dark shadow that continues to rest on the negro population?...As for the majority, though, the negro

Despite Kuyper's disturbing words, and the theological links between neo-Calvinism and Apartheid, some contemporary neo-Calvinists have been quick to push back by adding more nuance to the context of Kuyper's speech, problematizing the various connections made between neo-Calvinism and Apartheid. James Eglinton does identify genuinely racist elements in Kuyper's language, such as his generalizations about the 'black' and 'white' groups, which perpetuated "crude, negative stereotypes about African Americans."³⁸ However, he also challenges readers of Kuyper to recognize Kuyper's assertion of white guilt in America and his criticisms of slavery and its effects. On the topic of predestination's link to Apartheid and nationalism, Andre du Toit argues that linking Apartheid to a robust Calvinism, as opposed to merely linking it to an unthoughtful and generalized idea of providence that could be also found outside of Calvinism, is a tenuous assumption. For the connection between a robust and systematic Calvinism and Afrikaner nationalism is problematized when one considers that there was quite an "absence of a true historically and theologically entrenched Calvinism, comparable to the Puritan and Dutch Calvinist traditions..."³⁹

George Harinck admits the paternalistic character of Dutch colonization under Kuyper, yet unties the significant connections made between Kuyper and the Boers in South Africa. He also reminds us that Kuyper was in favor of one united church in which the different races and nations ought to worship together.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Harinck argues that race did not play a dominant role in the minds and works of neo-Calvinists, but that Kuyper's doctrines of common grace and human pluriformity were poorly appropriated in defense of

population lacks skill and pride and character, and it is not least through the contrast with this abhorrent self-degradation that the white workman, out of *self-respect*, is prompted to act more nobly and to occupy a better social position."

³⁸ James Eglinton, "Varia Americana and Race," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 78-79.

³⁹ Andre du Toit, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner 'Calvinism' and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (Apr. 1985): 209-240.

⁴⁰ George Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 184-187.

Apartheid by South African students, who studied at the Free University of Amsterdam. Harinck is quick to point to the Bavinckian strand of neo-Calvinism, represented by B.B. Keet, J.J. Buskes, and J.H. Bavinck, who also came out of the Free University and strongly critiqued and opposed Apartheid on the basis of humanity's unity.⁴¹

H. Russel Botman also reminds us that one of the fiercest anti-apartheid activists, Allan Boesak, of the colored branch of Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, cited Kuyper in his fight against the social injustice of Apartheid.⁴² In the case of sphere sovereignty's relationship with Apartheid, Mark Rathbone clarifies that sphere sovereignty, was hijacked by the reduction of all reality to race, when sphere sovereignty was actually meant to highlight "the sovereignty of divine ordinances in each sphere of life that functions independently but is irreducibly related to all other aspects through the universal authority of God."⁴³ Baskwell points to Apartheid's enforcement of segregation in South Africa, which differed from Kuyper's notion of the pillarization of society in that for Kuyper, the segmenting of society and the choice to participate in a particular society was voluntary.⁴⁴

In the final analysis, one cannot deny that theological concepts from within the neo-Calvinist tradition were indeed used to support Apartheid and could still potentially be utilized for supporting a particular people's exceptionalism. Yet, one also cannot deny that some of Kuyper's concepts were ignored, misappropriated, inconsistently applied, and taken beyond what he likely would have affirmed. This led to severe and harmfully imbalanced

⁴¹ George Harinck, "Wipe Out Lines of Division (Not Distinctions): Bennie Keet, Neo-Calvinism and the Struggle against Apartheid," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 81-98.

⁴² Allan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1984), 91; H. Russel Botman, "Is Blood Thicker than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis Lugo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 343-344.

⁴³ Mark Rathbone, "Sphere Sovereignty and Irreducibility: The Ambiguous Use of Abraham Kuyper's Ideas During the Time of Apartheid in South Africa," *KOERS – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 80, no. 1, Art. #2208 (Sep. 2015): 2.

⁴⁴ Patrick Baskwell, "Kuyper and Apartheid: A Revisiting" *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 62, no. 4 (2006): 1269-1290.

policies in South Africa – policies which contradict the ‘deep logic’⁴⁵ of neo-Calvinism, particularly Kuyper and Bavinck's commitments to the unity of mankind and of the church. Therefore, the prospect that neo-Calvinism has something to offer contemporary evangelical discussions concerning ethnicity is not completely untenable.

III.A.2. A Neo-Calvinist Theology of Ethnicity

Unlike much of the Christianity that Chinese American evangelicals have imbibed, neo-Calvinism strongly affirms the creational and divinely ordained concept of ethnic particularity. Within neo-Calvinism is an appreciation and affirmation of God's organic creation in all of its unity and diversity – a reflection of the Trinity. One particular reflection of unity and diversity within God's organic creation is the unity of humanity and the diversity of peoples, cultures, and ethnicities. This affirmation is perhaps most helpfully expressed in neo-Calvinist expositions of the Genesis 11 Babel narrative. Eglinton's observation of many Protestant readings of Genesis 11 applies well to American evangelicals when he writes:

The factor of divine judgement, here associated with a movement from mono- to multilingualism, seems to have become fixed in much Protestant consciousness in associating multilingualism with sin and confusion, and monolingualism with pre-judgement ideals. Within this common consciousness, all post-Babel multilingualism is viewed as a continuation of this curse.⁴⁶

However, according to Kuyper, while the sinners at Shinar pursued an empire of uniformity, God scattered them into peoples according to his original pre-Fall plan for human multiformity.⁴⁷ The existence of distinct peoples was part of God's plan all along: “In God's plan vital unity develops by internal strength precisely from the diversity of nations and races...”⁴⁸ This rich diversity of tribes, tongues, and nations was always an eschatological

⁴⁵ James Eglinton, “*Varia Americana* and Race,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 79-80.

⁴⁶ James Eglinton, “From Babel to Pentecost via Paris and Amsterdam” in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, ed. James Eglinton & George Harinck (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014), 32.

⁴⁷ Abraham Kuyper, “The Tower of Babel” in *Common Grace vol. 1*, ed. Jordan Ballor and Stephen Grabill (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016), 357-364.

⁴⁸ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life” in *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader*, ed. James Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 23.

goal.⁴⁹ Hence, a neo-Calvinist interpretation of Genesis 11 does not view the outcome of the Tower of Babel as negative and pure judgement. Rather, Bavinck writes, “[T]hough the division of humanity into peoples and languages was occasioned by sin, it has something good in it, which is brought into the church and thus preserved for eternity.”⁵⁰

Bavinck does not end his discussion of the division of humanity in his discussion of Babel. He also has Pentecost in mind, Eglinton believes, at which time the resulting diversity of Babel “was not removed, but rather was affirmed and clarified.”⁵¹ Moving even beyond Pentecost, Bavinck employs the redemptive-historical approach – so typical of neo-Calvinism – to the notion of distinct peoples, which extends from Genesis to the eschaton described in Revelation. Consistent with the conviction that grace restores nature, when Bavinck writes of the renewal of creation, he writes:

But in the new heaven and new earth...the believing community...which Christ has purchased and gathered from all nations, languages, and tongues (Rev 5:9; etc.), all the nations...maintain their distinct place and calling (Matt 8:11; Rom. 11:25; Rev 21:24; 22:2). And all those nations—each in accordance with its own distinct national character—bring into the new Jerusalem all they have received from God in the way of glory and honor (Rev 21:24, 26).⁵²

In fact, he writes, “Tribes, peoples, and nations all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the new Jerusalem (5:9; 7:9; 21:24, 26)...The great diversity that exists among people in all sorts of ways is not destroyed in eternity but is cleansed from all that is sinful and made serviceable to fellowship with God and each other.”⁵³

It is not merely this more balanced interpretation of Babel in redemptive-historical connection with Pentecost and New Creation that has attuned neo-Calvinists to appreciate

⁴⁹ Abraham Kuyper, “Spiritual Unity” in *Pro Rege vol. 1*, ed. Nelson Kloosterman (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016), 225.

⁵⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Four: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 319.

⁵¹ Eglinton, “From Babel to Pentecost via Paris and Amsterdam” in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, 58.

⁵² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 720.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 727. See also Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 6-11.

ethnic particularity, but other theological considerations as well. Jessica Joustra has drawn upon Bavinck's organic and Trinitarian understanding of the *imago Dei* to ground the particularity and universality of humanity, affirming the uniqueness and value of ethnic identity alongside the deep unity of the human race. Bavinck eschewed any spiritualism that would denigrate the corporeal, insisting that "the human body belongs integrally to the image of God...It is of the essence of humanity to be corporeal and sentient."⁵⁴ Joustra argues: "Given Bavinck's holism, race and ethnicity, physicality and cultural diversity ought to be affirmed. We cannot affirm just the culture and not the body. This functional hierarchy that we have constructed, of culture over body, is necessarily challenged by Bavinck's theological foundation."⁵⁵ Similarly, Jeffrey Liou notes that "for Bavinck, anthropology cannot be fully understood without eschatology," and therefore "Bavinck's doctrine of the image of God grounds intentional race-consciousness in a glorious future where the human community of covenant promise is richly and concretely diverse."⁵⁶

The most recent book-length neo-Calvinist treatment of ethnicity is Mark Kreitzer's *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible: A Theological Analysis* (2008).⁵⁷ Kreitzer's methodology heavily depends on neo-Calvinist principles, such as the authority of Scripture, a revelational epistemology, the antithesis, a Trinitarian ontology that accounts for creation's unity and diversity, covenant theology, and a restorative eschatology in which grace restores nature.⁵⁸ In typical neo-Calvinist fashion, Kreitzer situates his theology of ethnicity between the neo-primordialists' overemphasis upon the diversity of peoples' identities and the social constructionists' overemphasis upon the unity of peoples' identities. The former, as he

⁵⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 559.

⁵⁵ Jessica Joustra, "An Embodied Imago Dei: How Herman Bavinck's Understanding of the Image of God Can Help Inform Conversations on Race," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 22-23.

⁵⁶ Jeff Liou, "Taking Up #blacklivesmatter: A Neo-Kuyperian Engagement with Critical Race Theory," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2017): 114, 119.

⁵⁷ Mark R. Kreitzer, *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible: A Theological Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Kreitzer, *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible*, 8-12.

describes them, tend to define a core and boundaries of ethnic identity, such as language, a shared ancestry, biological unity, endogamy, and shared cultural values. The latter tend to reject the essentialism of ethnicity, preferring to view ethnicity as a constructed identity, with all identities being multiple, chosen, and in constant flux.⁵⁹ While the primordialist understanding of ethnicity often leads to an idolization of ethnicity as an absolute and transcendent influencing factor, the social constructionist understanding often leads to a humanistic disregard for divinely-ordained human diversity. Kreitzer believes that Scripture indicates a mediating position, such that ethnic solidarity is a permeably bounded and centered set.⁶⁰ According to Kreitzer, there is an elasticity and a fluidity to ethnicity, such that while members of each ethnic group perceive themselves as distinct from other ethnic groups in various ways, ethnic groups are interrelated with other ethnic groups. Additionally, he notes that ethnic groups can and should also be discussed from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Therefore, Kreitzer defines an ethnic solidarity group as “an intermarried (endogamous) social group, consisting of implicitly or explicitly covenanted families of similar religion, custom, language, and geo-history, who define themselves in respect to similar and dissimilar groups, in ever-changing internal and external social contexts through time.”⁶¹

While Kreitzer admits, “Defining the boundaries of ethnies is thus is [*sic*] very difficult,” he argues that “divine Providence is continually forming and reforming ethnies in a process begun at creation, resisted and fast-forwarded at Babel, and continuing till the consummation in God’s providential design.”⁶² With particular sensitivity to the cultural mandate and the flow of redemptive history, Kreitzer begins his biblical theological argument by insisting that in Genesis 10’s Table of Nations, “those peoples are listed in the Table as a

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

natural outflow from the command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth given immediately after the Flood (Gen 9:1,7).”⁶³ The point of the Table, which explicitly states that all lands, languages, families, and peoples came from the three sons of Noah, was to define “peopleness” within the universal framework of the entire humanity created by God.⁶⁴ Following the scholarly consensus, Kreitzer notes that the Table of Nations and the Babel narrative are in reverse chronological order and to be read as one literary unit. In agreement with Kuyper and Bavinck, he rejects the assumption that true ethnic diversity was not part of God’s original creation design and is convinced that ethno-linguistic diversity is something essentially good but often twisted and idolized like other good things in creation. It is also important to note that Kreitzer reads Genesis 10 and 11 as true history, rather than non-historical or a-historical saga or myth.

Kreitzer’s theological analysis of ethnicity does not stop at Genesis 10 and 11. For Kreitzer, the Table and Babel are literarily linked to the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12 in which Abram will be made into a great nation and in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. In this way, the universal history of the world and all its peoples histories are eschatologically tethered to the redemptive history of God’s chosen people, who are called to be a blessing to the nations. Kreitzer writes: “What God does through Abraham’s people and in the land of Canaan spans the gap between his Creator’s care for the ethno-nations before Abram and his love shown through King Jesus in the redemption of the peoples after Pentecost.”⁶⁵ In this way, Kreitzer upholds both the unity and diversity of humanity and maps it onto a Reformed covenant theology. He writes: “The Abrahamic covenant, as it works its way out into history through the Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants, teaches that Yahweh is restoring true Spirit-created unity alongside of created ethno-linguistic diversity. In Jesus,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

the Jew of Nazareth, the Seed of Abraham and the Davidic King, all clans and ethno-peoples of earth are to be blessed.”⁶⁶ Pentecost, then, was a demonstration, not of ethnic diversity’s reversal, but of its sanctification in the new covenant.

To further bolster his biblical-theological argument from Genesis to the New Covenant, Kreitzer roots this understanding of ethnicity in an orthodox understanding of Christology and the Trinity. Recognizing that Jesus was resurrected a male, Galilean Jew, Kreitzer writes:

Biblical Christianity is therefore not platonic-gnostic with a departicularized non-ethnic, androgynous person as the ideal...Just as the physical resurrection of the male person of Jesus, the Galilean Jew, guarantees the renewal of the first creation’s gender particularity, so it also secures ethnolinguistic diversity of a people in ethnic solidarity. Redemptive history does not move away from the so-called divisive social identities of the first creation, but rather establishes them in mature and restored form...⁶⁷

Reminiscent of Bavinck’s organic doctrine of creation, rooted in the Trinity *ad intra*, Kreitzer writes: “Biblical Christianity is not like unitarian Islam with its mono-cultural ideal of all people of earth as Arabic individuals, dressed uniformly in white, circling the Kaaba shrine. Instead all peoples, tongues, tribes and nations, dressed probably in diverse ethnically identifiable white robes, surround the throne of the Lamb, as Abraham Kuyper foresaw.”⁶⁸ He continues: “...the Creator intended diverse ethno-linguistic groups to develop. Logically, then, God intends that each of these peoples worship him in their own diverse, faith-inducing, heart-language...with unique liturgy and music in that language and culture...The triune God, then, originally intended the one people of God...to be a plural-unity...in Christ.”⁶⁹ Along with Kuyper, Kreitzer bemoans the modernistic curse of uniformity which “not only

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 394-395.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

unites people with people but prompts the peoples to abandon their own unique character...”⁷⁰

Kreitzer’s neo-Calvinistic theology of ethnicity is helpful because it neither caves in to idolizing or essentializing ethnic particularities, nor to a view of human uniformity. This seems close to Bavinck’s own sensibilities when he wrote: “The significance of the races is alternately exaggerated (as it is by Ammon, Driesmann, H. St. Chamberlain, Dühring, Gumplovicz, Nietzsche, Marx, and so on) and underestimated (as it is by Jentsch, Hertz, Colajanni, esp. Finot)...”⁷¹ Such a robust, and yet nuanced theology of ethnicity has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals, many of whom have imbibed a flat and uniform theology of ethnicity from conservative American evangelicals, who have often ignored the significance of ethnic diversity in the name of Christians’ unity in Christ.

One way this theology of ethnicity can contribute to Chinese American evangelicals is in their difficulties articulating why ethnic churches in multi-ethnic contexts are not agents of ecclesial disunity. Rather than castigating ethnic churches for being agents of ecclesial disunity, neo-Calvinism appreciates and affirms (though, of course, not exclusively) the worship of God in particular cultural and linguistic expressions by specific ethnic groups.⁷² A neo-Calvinistic insistence upon the close tie between theology and history ought to make one sensitive to the history and contexts that theologially legitimize ethnic churches, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was established shortly after a few black Methodists were physically pulled from off their knees while praying because they were not confining themselves to the designated area for colored people at St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church. The historical circumstances of the AME indicate a church founded for black Methodists seeking a place of worship unfettered by racism. It is hard to imagine that

⁷⁰ Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life” in *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader*, 33.

⁷¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, 526n52.

⁷² Andrew Ong, “Neo-Calvinism and Ethnic Churches in Multiethnic Contexts” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12, no. 1 (2018): 296-320.

Bavinck's organic conception of Christian unity would forcefully exclude such ethnic churches in multi-ethnic contexts.

A second way a neo-Calvinistic theology of ethnicity might serve Chinese American evangelicals is by encouraging them to utilize their ethnic particularity in the service of theology. Bavinck understood that Christian theology develops and conjoins itself to the consciousness and life of the times, in which it appears and labors, and that dogmatics must be relevant and take into consideration the corresponding needs of particular generations.⁷³ J.H. Bavinck, more explicitly argued that indigenous theologies were necessary: "We are always profoundly aware that an indigenous Christian theology needs to be developed."⁷⁴ Chinese American evangelicals should heed Richard Mouw and Harvie Conn's words, not just about African-American history, or the Third World church, but also their own histories and churches. Mouw writes: "A theology that pays special attention to particularities of African-American history can be a healthy effort to articulate an understanding of the gospel that is free from the 'white' interests and priorities and illusions that have for so long shaped, in both obvious and subtle ways, the thinking, life, and witness of the Christian community."⁷⁵ Similarly Conn writes: "Third World churches can serve as a mirror for the critical self-understanding of American white Christians. The writings, lectures, and leadership of theologians and church leaders from the Third World and the American black community need to help us see ourselves and the limitations of our communal understanding."⁷⁶ Within neo-Calvinism is an appreciation for the vast catholicity of the church that spans across not only diverse denominational distinctions, but also across diverse

⁷³ Bruce Pass, "Herman Bavinck's *Modernisme en Orthodoxie*: A Translation," *The Bavinck Review* 7 (2017): 103-104; Herman Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System" transl. Nelson Kloosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 97.

⁷⁴ J.H. Bavinck, *The J.H. Bavinck Reader*, eds. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, & Paul J. Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 304.

⁷⁵ Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In*, 95-96.

⁷⁶ Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Dialogue* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1984), 256.

ethnic and cultural expressions of the faith. Such an appreciation of ethnic distinctiveness has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals, as sociological research indicates that “[t]he internalized meaning of their belongingness to their ethnic group helped Chinese Americans experience a deeper connection to the Transcendent...”⁷⁷

III.B. Neo-Calvinism on Individualism & Collectivism

Another area where the neo-Calvinist tradition might contextually serve Chinese American evangelicals is in their reflection upon American evangelicalism’s individualism. Contemporary neo-Calvinists have not shied away from calling out Western individualism, specifically within evangelicalism. Bartholomew and Goheen note the irony of Western individualism: “Even Western individualism, with its stress on the freedom of the individual, is an approach to life that is, ironically, shared by millions in the West today and thus has become a communal vision that gives expression to much of the public life of Western nations.”⁷⁸ Bartholomew is convinced “the Kuyperian tradition can help Christians, and evangelicals in particular, to overcome the pervasive individualism” of Western Christianity.⁷⁹

Bartholomew’s conviction concerning a Kuyperian correction for individualism is well-supported. Bavinck and Kuyper were critical of the individualism that arose out of the Enlightenment, especially its manifestation in the French Revolution. However, they did not simply critique individualism in favor of collectivism, but sought an organic harmony between individualism and collectivism, rooted in a theocentric and explicitly Trinitarian theology and consistent with covenant theology’s federal headship.

⁷⁷ Inna Reddy Edara, “Relation of Individualism-Collectivism and Ethnic Identity to Spiritual Transcendence Among European Americans, Asian Indian Americans, and Chinese Americans,” *Counseling and Values* 61, no. 1 (April 2016): 58.

⁷⁸ Michael Goheen & Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 24.

⁷⁹ Craig Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2017), 242.

Neither rejecting the reality of the individual, nor absolutizing him, Bavinck wrote: “No person is merely an individual; a single individual is not a person. Above the entrance to the history of humanity stands written this saying: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’ [Gen. 2:18].”⁸⁰ Bavinck had an organic anthropology in which the human race was “one entity” called to fill, subdue, and exercise authority over the earth, not as individuals, but as a collective human race.⁸¹ This understanding of humanity’s unity was rooted in his creational theology, and his affirmation of the historical significance of Adam. Bavinck writes:

[H]umanity is not an aggregate of individuals but an organic unity, one race, one family... we are not a heap of souls piled on a piece of ground, but all blood relatives of one another, connected to one another by a host of ties, therefore conditioning one another and being conditioned by one another. And among us the first human again occupies an utterly unique and incomparable place... He was not a private person, not a loose individual alongside other such loose individuals, but a root-source, the base, the seminal beginning of the whole human race, our common natural head.⁸²

He asserts that all human individuals are integrally related and connected organically, and thus are not mere private persons loosened from the corporate body of humanity.

Additionally, Bavinck did not see the unity of humanity in purely physical terms as a community of animals united by blood-likeness. He understood humanity’s unity as tethered to Adam’s federal headship in the covenant of works, giving the unity of humanity moral, ethical, religious, and spiritual dimensions:

Humanity cannot be conceived as a completed organism unless it is united and epitomized in one head... The human race is not only physically of one blood (Acts 17:26), for that would not be enough for humanity... Reformed theologians have expressed this idea in their doctrine of the covenant of works. Only in this covenant does the ethical—not the physical—unity of mankind come into its own. And this ethical unity is requisite for humanity as an organism.⁸³

⁸⁰ Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, transl. Nelson Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2012), 111.

⁸¹ Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 4-5.

⁸² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 102.

⁸³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 578.

Such solidarity “is precisely that which respects the triune and relational shape of those who bear God’s image.”⁸⁴

While eschewing an overemphasized individualism, Bavinck still sees value in an appropriately bounded individualism, moderately affirming the pursuit of equality, independence, freedom, and personal rights. He wrote: “In the name of Christianity we cannot disapprove of much of this, for this religion, more than any other religion or ethics, has highlighted the value of human personality...But this pursuit may enjoy our sympathy and support—and can work beneficially—only to the degree that it is...guided by the law of God.”⁸⁵ Bavinck is realistic about the limits of an individual’s freedom before God and within one’s own environment,⁸⁶ but also acknowledges that each individual is “more than a product of society; he is a unique, independent personality, and from his position he affects his environment through the exercise of his will,” a good thing when guided by reason, conscience, and God’s Word.⁸⁷ With a robust Trinitarian theology, by which he is sensitive to the unity and the diversity of creation, Bavinck affirms the individual and the collective in harmony.

Kuyper is similarly critical of individualism without allowing himself to absolutely embrace collectivism. Critiquing the French Revolutionary spirit, and viewing authority and freedom under divine lordship, he wrote: “In the Christian religion, authority and freedom are bound together by the deeper principle that everything in creation is subject to God. The French Revolution threw out the majesty of the Lord in order to construct an artificial authority based on individual free will.”⁸⁸ Kuyper too, saw the oneness of humanity by blood

⁸⁴ Nathaniel Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 2 (April 2016): 17.

⁸⁵ Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 132.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁸⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James Skillen (Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 2011), 37.

and covenant: “God’s Word teaches that we have all been created from one blood and joined in a single covenant through God. Both the solidarity of our guilt and the mystery of the reconciliation on Golgotha are absolutely incompatible with individualism and point instead to a struggle within the interconnected wholeness of our human society.”⁸⁹

Drawing from Kuyper, Gordon Spykman⁹⁰ helpfully located neo-Calvinist anthropology between extreme individualism and extreme collectivism in *Reformational Theology*.⁹¹ He wrote: “Individualist anthropologies...cannot do justice to the solidarity of the human race, nor to the idea of an organic peoplehood...Collectivist anthropologies, on the other hand, reduce people to mere cogs in a larger societal mechanism.”⁹² At the bottom of both are “a decidedly anti-Christian spirit” that “[defies] the good order of creation for our life together in God’s world,” for “both replace the sovereign will of the Creator with some form of human autonomy.”⁹³ According to Spykman,

The biblical alternative to both individualism and collectivism is a pluralist view of communal living. No man is an island. But neither are people mere components in a totalitarian societal system. By virtue of God’s good order for creation, human life is integrated into a coherent web of familial, social, political, economic, academic, cultic, and other relationships. Such an understanding of our cohumanity is the biblically animated antidote to all individualist notions of human rights as well as to every form of racial ideology, ethnic arrogance, and national superiority complex...⁹⁴

Spykman submits both individual freedom and collective responsibility to God’s divine lordship: “Ours is not an initiating but a responsive and responsible freedom. We are

⁸⁹ Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 59.

⁹⁰ Gordon Spykman (1926-1993) was Professor Emeritus of Religion and Theology at Calvin College and a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He graduated from Calvin College and obtained a ThB from Calvin Theological Seminary and a ThD at the Free University. In *Reformational Theology*, he openly shares the particular Reformed tradition that he sees himself following in, naming Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Schilder, Van Til, Berkhof, and Berkouwer as his greatest influences. See Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 5-7.

⁹¹ Peter S. Heslam, “Prophet of a Third Way: The Shape of Kuyper’s Socio-Political Vision,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 11-33.

⁹² Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 245.

⁹³ Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 245-246.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 247.

responsible *to* God and responsible *for* his other creatures, accountable *to* our Maker *for* his cosmos.”⁹⁵

Bavinck and Kuyper’s nuanced theological perspective on individualism and collectivism contains much promise for Chinese American Christians who often fall prey to an individualistic approach to mission, disharmonious multi-generational church dynamics, a “me & my Bible” theological methodology, and the problem of shame.

First of all, unlike the missiological outlook of many Chinese American evangelicals, the logic of neo-Calvinist theology shuns a purely individualistic approach to mission. J.H. Bavinck saw both individual and institutional dimensions of mission:

It is clear that the official missionary commission rests upon the church in its institutional form. But we have already seen that Paul took express notice of the activity of the ordinary members...The activity of the ordinary church member...can be exercised on an individual basis and it can also be directed by organizations...The concept of missions can thus be so developed as to leave a great deal of room for that which the ordinary church members can do in obedience to Christ’s command, either as individuals or by means of societies or other organizations”⁹⁶

J.H. Bavinck also saw mission as encompassing the entirety of life and vocation, bearing witness to the world, and taking a stand in opposition to the world’s unbelief.⁹⁷ Likewise, rather than seeking to impact the world one person at a time through individual conversion, Kuyper was convinced that it would take more than individualistic piety or charity, but collective, social and structural solutions. In *The Problem of Poverty*, he writes:

If you...think social evil can be exorcised through an increase in piety, or through friendlier treatment or more generous charity, then you may believe that we face a religious question or possibly a philanthropic question, but you will not recognize the social question. This question does not exist for you until you exercise an architectonic critique of human society, which leads to the desire for a different arrangement [*sic*] social order....With regard to the untenability of the present circumstances, spawned as they have been by the individualism of the French Revolution, I think there can be little difference of opinion among Christians. As long as you still feel a human heart beat within and as long as the ideal of our holy gospel inspires you, then every higher aspiration you have must clash with the current state

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁹⁶ J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, transl. David Freeman (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1960), 60-61.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

of affairs...And improvement undoubtedly lies...along a socialistic path, provided that you [mean] a God-willed community, a living, human organism. Not a mechanism put together from separate parts...⁹⁸

Secondly, Bavinck's theology of family, which gives in neither to individualism nor collectivism, may also prove helpful for Chinese American Christians navigating their multi-generational church dynamics. Bavinck reminds his readers that "[f]ather, mother, and child are one soul and one flesh, expanding and unfolding the one image of God, united within threefold diversity and diverse within harmonic unity."⁹⁹ He does not prioritize the individual, but says to individuals:

From your earliest existence, from the moment of your conception, you are the fruit of communion and exist only in and through such community. That community did not come into existence through your will, but existed already long before you, gave you life, nurtured and sustained you. It is a community of members, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, who belong together and live together by divine will, and in which we are members and participants apart from any consent on our part, by virtue of the same divine will. We do not choose them, nor do they choose us; we can do nothing by way of adding to or subtracting from the members; whether we later find it agreeable or disagreeable, we can change nothing about it.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, the collective unity of the family does not ignore individuality and diversity within. The "significance for the family for the individual is increased still further by the fact that the unity of the family unfolds into the richest diversity....The diversity both attracts and repels, unifies and isolates; sometimes the family is a small kingdom divided against itself, but such division can be intense because the unity is generally so deep and solid."¹⁰¹ Hence, Bavinck does not merely see unity in the family, but he sees the family as a brilliant manifestation of diversity too:

Masculine and feminine qualities, physical and spiritual strengths, intellectual, volitional, and emotional gifts, age and youth, strength and weakness, authority and obedience, affection and love, unity and diversity of interests all of these come together in one family, unified and distinguished and blended together...The diversity both attracts and repels...but such division can be intense because the unity is generally so deep...From day to day that unity in diversity is maintained by the

⁹⁸ Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 44-46.

⁹⁹ Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

father...and...the mother; a communal language, religion, and morality, communal traditions, relationships, and interests, communal experiences of love and suffering, of joy and sorrow, of sickness and recovery, of death and grief, all preserve the unity and keep it in balance with the diversity.¹⁰²

Bavinck's vision of the harmonious unity and diversity of the family is also well-supported by his affirmation of covenant theology. This combination of Bavinck's robust theology of family and covenant theology has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals as they consider the place of their ethnic churches. In fact, Chinese American evangelicals embracing covenant theology would not be the first time Chinese people found covenant theology to be a helpful contextual theology. As Kurt Selles has argued, covenant theology turned out to be the one fundamental point of contact between Christian Reformed Church (CRC) missionaries and the Chinese in the Rugao County of the northern Jiangsu Province in the first half of the 20th century.¹⁰³ During China's tumultuous Republican Era (1911-1949), "when almost every aspect of traditional society was under siege, covenant theology, as a way to preserve family and form new communities, proved remarkably resonant..."¹⁰⁴

The CRC, unlike most Chinese American evangelical churches today, has always operated on the assumption that the children of believers already belonged to Christ and his body. Hence, when CRC children are catechized, they confess from the start that they are not their own, but belong to Jesus Christ. The aim of catechesis and children's education is not to join the way of God and convert, but rather to "keep the way of Jehovah" and "to bring the children of the Covenant of grace to spiritual and ecclesiastical maturity..."¹⁰⁵ In addition to catechesis, a covenantal theology of paedobaptism also opposes American evangelical individualism, and has been found to be "quite amenable to a Confucian understanding of

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰³ Kurt Selles, *A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Selles, *A New Way of Belonging*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America; its history, schools, missions, creed and liturgy, distinctive principles and practices and its church government* (Grand Rapids: Eastern Avenue Book Store, 1923), 217.

family.”¹⁰⁶ The covenant of grace emphasizes that “the really saved are not to be viewed as a number of wholly separate suddenly converted individuals but as an organism, as a people, as those who belong together,” a better way than the “methodism and individualism, of evangelicalism and revivalism, [and] of religious subjectivism and sensationalism.”¹⁰⁷ This follows the conviction that God established his covenant with Abraham *and his seed* throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39).¹⁰⁸

While Protestant missionaries to China struggled to dissuade the Chinese from ancestor worship, CRC missionaries found that the covenant of grace and infant baptism resonated with the value of family solidarity in Rugao and even began to prefer baptisms of whole families instead of single individuals.¹⁰⁹ With this emphasis on families, CRC missionaries began to see much fruit, particularly amongst those from the Haimen district with whole families being baptized and an intense fervor to evangelize their neighbors. Though the missionaries lost touch with Rugao shortly after returning home, records indicate that Wang Aiting, the indigenous evangelist that remained to lead the Rugao church after foreign missionaries were ejected from China under the communists, “maintained an emphasis on families coming into the church and...continued to perform infant baptism, all marks of covenant theology.”¹¹⁰ I would suggest that this historical precedent¹¹¹ indicates the usefulness of covenant theology and infant baptism for the cohesion and vitality of the Chinese American evangelical church as well, especially in its challenging multi-generational

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 149.

¹⁰⁷ William Hendriksen, “The Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace,” *Banner* 66 (April 24, 1931): 386.

¹⁰⁸ Admittedly, one might object that advocating paedobaptism in a Chinese American evangelicals’ predominantly baptistic and often dogmatic context could lead to greater division, so the argument here for the efficacy of paedobaptism only applies to whole churches embracing paedobaptism institutionally and confessionally.

¹⁰⁹ Selles, *A New Way of Belonging*, 180.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹¹¹ This early precedent in the indigenous Chinese church is followed and maintained today at Early Rain Reformed church, led by Kuyperian pastor, Wang Yi. See Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology*, 111.

dynamics. For such a robust and covenantal theology of family can guard against the ecclesial separateness of children and adults that often results from the establishment of evangelical youth ministries, particularly Chinese American ones, which have the added challenges of cultural and linguistic differences.

Just as the resources of neo-Calvinism can assist Chinese American Christians to think less individualistically about mission, and to harmoniously navigate multi-generational church dynamics, it also guards against an individualistic “me & my Bible” theological method. Of course Bavinck affirmed *sola scriptura* and Scripture’s perspicuity:

“[P]erspicuity is an attribute Holy Scripture repeatedly predicates of itself...The written word is recommended to the scrutiny of all...and is written for the express purpose of communicating faith...”¹¹² At the same time, Bavinck’s affirmation of *sola scriptura* and the perspicuity of Scripture was not synonymous with a rejection of tradition in his theological method, nor did it deny that “Holy Scripture necessarily has to be interpreted.”¹¹³ Bavinck noted both that “the perspicuity of Scripture is one of the strongest bulwarks of the Reformation,” and yet “[i]t also most certainly brings with it its own serious perils,” for “Protestantism has been hopelessly divided by it, and individualism has developed at the expense of the people’s sense of community.”¹¹⁴

While believing that “the disadvantages [of perspicuity] do not outweigh the advantages,”¹¹⁵ he was wary of the religious individualism amongst Arminians, Baptists, and millenarians – three common theological camps among Chinese American evangelicals.

Bavinck wrote:

Emancipation from tradition, from the creeds, and from ecclesiastical organization culminated in a situation in which every believer was on his own, detached from Scripture, possessing within himself—his mind, the inner light—the source of his

¹¹² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 477.

¹¹³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 475.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 478-479.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

religious life and knowledge. All that which is objective—Scripture, Christ, church, office, sacrament—was set aside. Believers lived by their own principles, distinguishing themselves in a society as well by their own mores, customs, clothing, and so forth....All these individualistic currents paved the way for deism.¹¹⁶

Elsewhere, he writes positively of the value of history, archaeology, tradition, and scholarship in a Reformed theological method:

[H]owever clear the Bible may be in its doctrine of salvation, and however certainly it is and remains the living voice of God, for a correct understanding it still often requires a wide range of historical, archaeological, and geographical skills and information. The times have changed...Therefore, a tradition is needed that preserves the connectedness between Scripture and the religious life of our time. Tradition in its proper sense is the interpretation and application of the eternal truth in the vernacular and life of the present generation. Scripture without such a tradition is impossible. Numerous sects...have attempted to live that way. They wanted nothing to do with anything other than the words and letters of Scripture, rejected all dogmatic terminology not used in Scripture, disapproved of all theological training and scholarship...¹¹⁷

Hence, a neo-Calvinist approach to theological methodology combats the individualism of a “me & my Bible,” *solo scriptura* theology. As Kevin Vanhoozer, writes: “Scripture comes into its own when read by God’s people in God’s way for God’s purpose,”¹¹⁸ and “*sola scriptura* functions properly only in the context of the whole church.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the Reformational principle of the royal priesthood of all believers indicates authority (“royal”), an interpretive community (“priesthood”), and that individuals are not autonomous agents but citizens of the gospel (“all believers”), urging catholicity, rather than individualism.¹²⁰

A final way that neo-Calvinism might aid Chinese American evangelicals as they navigate the dynamics of individualism and collectivism is in their struggle with shame. The problem of shame within the dynamics of Chinese American individualism and collectivism

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 493.

¹¹⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 123.

¹¹⁹ Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel*, 130.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

is largely a matter of identity and belonging to a community.¹²¹ To avoid the collective threat of shame within their communities, Chinese Americans seek individual identities of honor according to collective standards of honor, often by means of legalism and consumerism leading to judgmentalism and increased feelings of shame upon failure. The question, now, is whether neo-Calvinism offers resources to deal with shame, as it relates to identity and belonging. What honorable identity and what collective standards of honor are offered within neo-Calvinism as alternatives to achievement and consumeristic notions of success?

Admittedly, Kuyper, Bavinck, and other neo-Calvinists do not address shame in great depth – especially not as it relates to the dynamics of collectivism – but what they do say is instructive, and the inner logic of their writings on sin and salvation offer much material from which one might develop a neo-Calvinist approach to shame. This is particularly evident when one explores the writings of neo-Calvinists who emphasize union with Christ. According to Kuyper, righteousness and justification are matters of honor and dishonor. He describes justification as restoring a person “to honor as a righteous person,” and the “declaration of being a man of honor.”¹²² And genuine righteousness is “to honor God as [one’s] sovereign Ruler, to acknowledge God as God, and to bow before His majesty.”¹²³ According to Bavinck, shame, though the consequence of violating God’s divine law, is different than guilt. It is the fear of disgrace and a sense of being *involved* with something improper. It is awareness of a gap between what one is and what one knows he or she ought

¹²¹ For more detailed discussions of shame as an issue of identity of belonging and its Christian remedy, namely association with divine honor/glory, see Eleanor Stump, “The Atonement and the Problem of Shame,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 41, supplement (Sep 2016); Jayson Georges & Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); Edward Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, North Carolina: New Growth Press, 2012); Dan Allender, “What Is Shame?” *The Allender Center* (website), August 8, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/284002360> (accessed May 10, 2019); Brené Brown, *Men, Women, & Worthiness: The Experience of Shame and the Power of Being Enough* (Louisville, Colorado: Sounds True, 2013); Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation Through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2012).

¹²² Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 367-368.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 445.

to *be*. It is the feeling of being *associated* with that which is unfitting, ugly, and/or evil.¹²⁴ He also names glory as shame's opposite.¹²⁵ Hence, both Kuyper and Bavinck confirm that shame is a matter of identity and association or belonging, primarily before God. But what is the remedy for shame, and how might one transition from shame to glory? According to Ridderbos it is only those 'in Christ' who will not be put to shame.¹²⁶ This brings union with Christ into view, as the solution to shame – the problem of an identity in crisis and disassociated from honor.

Richard Gaffin, a graduate of Calvin College and Westminster Theological Seminary and former professor of biblical and systematic theology at Westminster has significantly followed in the footsteps of Bavinck and Vos' soteriological emphasis on union with Christ. Gaffin's soteriology, though not excluding the forensic dimension of salvation, does not center on justification versus guilt. It is a multi-dimensional soteriology that has in view a variety of benefits through union with Christ. Rather than viewing sin as strictly legal and penal, Gaffin sees Paul's doctrine of sin and its consequences as "extensive and multi-faceted," and primarily "theocentric," thus "relational or, better, 'anti-relational.'"¹²⁷ Hence, according to Gaffin's interpretation, sinful humanity's greatest problem is not the punishment of a hellish destination, but a broken relationship with the Creator. This reflects Bavinck's understanding that Adam's sin was "a fundamental reversal of all relationships, a revolution by which the creature detached himself from and positioned himself against God, an uprising, a fall in the true sense, which was decisive for the whole world and took it in a direction and on a road away from God..."¹²⁸ Therefore, justification is not the most fundamental category in Gaffin's soteriology, but union with Christ: "But no matter how close justification is to the

¹²⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three*, 173, 197-198.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹²⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1975), 341.

¹²⁷ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing), 34-35.

¹²⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three*, 129.

heart of Paul's gospel, in our salvation there is an antecedent consideration, a reality that is deeper, more fundamental, more decisive, more crucial: Christ and our union with him, the crucified and resurrected, the exalted, Christ. Union with Christ by faith—that is the essence of Paul's *ordo salutis*.”¹²⁹

When united with Christ by a Spirit-wrought faith, a multitude of benefits – both forensic and renovative, individual and corporate – are applied to the believer. Most relevant to the challenge of shame amongst Chinese Americans are the benefits of adoption and ecclesial belonging. This is because shame is fundamentally a matter of identity, belonging, and association with either honor or dishonor. When one is united to Christ by a Spirit-wrought faith, he transitions from being a child of wrath to being a beloved child of God, adopted into God's household.¹³⁰ There is a fundamental shift in identity and belonging, from shame as a child of the dominion of darkness to honor as a child of the glorious kingdom of God's Son. Those who are united with Christ, and thus adopted into the family of God, even share in the glory of resurrection.¹³¹ The concept of union with Christ, then, promises sinful and shamed individuals collective belonging with the Son of God, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and a beloved familial relationship with the Father apart from their individual achievements and successes. Union with Christ offers identity and belonging that are bestowed by the Father, achieved by the Son, and applied by the Spirit. Pursuing honor and belonging by means of consuming to fit in or by meeting legalistic standards is excluded as neither necessary nor possible before a gracious Triune God.

Consequently, union with Christ by the Spirit unto adoption and glory has implications for one's collective sense of identity and belonging in the church. In addition to the specific benefit of belonging to the divine by adoption, union with Christ also includes

¹²⁹ Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 49.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

¹³¹ See Romans 8:18-23 (ESV)

the benefit of ecclesial belonging. Paul's occasional "emphasis on the individual and personal is not meant to deny or downplay the broader corporate, even cosmic dimensions of salvation..."¹³² Fellowship with Christ "is also a call into the fellowship of his Spirit-baptized body... The bodies of believers are, individually, temples of the Holy Spirit..., while the church itself, as a whole, is God's temple."¹³³ Gaffin's union with Christ soteriology, while acknowledging its individual dimensions, refuses to bow to an individualistic soteriology with little bearing on a corporate ecclesiology: "To polarize personal and corporate, or personal and cosmic, concerns in matters of the gospel is simply foreign to Paul. So is allowing either one to eclipse or negate the other."¹³⁴ Those united to Christ do not merely receive a new honorable identity as Spirit-filled children of the Father, but also a new and honorable identity with respect to Christ's church, as brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow citizens and priests in the kingdom, a collective Temple of the Holy Spirit, and members of one body endowed with various gifts.

In this way, neo-Calvinism offers much to Chinese American evangelicals seeking ways to respond to their own excessively individualistic understanding of missions, the individualistic/collectivist dynamics of their intergenerational churches, their individualistic approach to theological method, and their struggles with shame.

III.C. Neo-Calvinism on Creation & Culture

III.C.1. Neo-Calvinism on Sacred/Secular & Soul/Body Dualisms

In addition to helping Chinese American evangelicals theologically navigate their ethnicities and the various dynamics of individualism and collectivism, the neo-Calvinist tradition also eschews the dualisms found within much of Chinese American evangelicalism

¹³² Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 48.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

that truncate their mission and discourage thoughtful engagement with culture. Neo-Calvinism affirms a robust doctrine of creation, contrary to the nature-grace dualism found in some other Christian traditions. According to Bavinck's interpretation of Roman Catholicism, creation (nature), even before the fall, *required grace* in order to be elevated to a higher order. Bavinck, however, would maintain that "[w]hen God had completed the work of creation, he looked down with delight on the work of his hands, for it was all very good (Gen. 1:31),"¹³⁵ and thus grace does not elevate nature, but grace *restores* nature, which was inherently good and did not need grace before the fall.

Within neo-Calvinism new creation is the telos of creation and a future organic development of what was already present at the beginning of creation. Grace restoring nature refers to "that great process of the new creation through which the present universe as an organic whole shall be redeemed from the consequences of sin and restored to its ideal state, which it had originally in the intention of God."¹³⁶ Hence, the inherent goodness of creation is affirmed. In this way, eschatology precedes and conditions soteriology.¹³⁷

This is all consistent with and presupposes the covenant of works according to a classically Reformed covenant theology. In fact, Bavinck asserts that the Reformed concept of the covenant of works is essential to the doctrine of creation.¹³⁸ Referencing Hosea 6:7,¹³⁹ Bavinck understands Adam to have had a covenantal relationship with his Creator before the fall, when he was commanded not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹⁴⁰ In the Garden of Eden, "Adam was not only obligated to keep the law but was confronted in

¹³⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three*, 28.

¹³⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline: Inaugural Address of the Rev. Geerhardus Vos, PhD, DD, as Professor of Biblical Theology*, delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary, May 8, 1894 (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co, 1894), 11.

¹³⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 59-60.

¹³⁸ Brian Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 237.

¹³⁹ Hosea 6:7 "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me." (ESV)

¹⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 565.

the covenant of works with that law as the way to eternal life, a life he did not yet possess.”¹⁴¹ Adam was merely “at the beginning of his ‘career’ not at the end,” his condition being “provisional and temporary,” with the prospect of passing “on to higher glory or to sin and death.”¹⁴² And just as Adam’s condition was only provisional and temporary, so also was the rest of creation’s, for “[t]he world, the earth, humanity are one organic whole. They stand, they fall, they are raised up together.”¹⁴³ The covenant of works demonstrates that all creation awaited advancement unto its final destiny. For “[t]he state of integrity—either through the fall or apart from the fall—is a preparation for the state of glory in which God will impart his glory to all his creatures and be ‘all in all’ [1 Cor. 15:28].”¹⁴⁴

Bavinck’s notion of grace restoring nature and affirmation of creation’s goodness is key for rejecting the sacred/secular dualism of popular and conservative evangelicalism, such as is often found amongst Chinese American evangelicals influenced by dispensationalism. The goodness of creation problematizes any kind of sacred/secular dualism that would either ascribe neutrality to or de-value certain ‘secular’ spaces (i.e., the workplace), institutions (i.e., the academy), or vocations (i.e., professional athletics) as if not every square inch of creation were under the lordship of Christ. While recognizing the principled motivations of evangelicals who sought to avoid liberal Christians’ reduction of the gospel to social and political activity, neo-Calvinists are critical of the way conservative evangelicals have “ended up adopting a false distinction between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ realms of human experience,” for “[i]n limiting its own concerns to the ‘sacred’ matters (prayer, Bible study, evangelism, personal salvation), the evangelical church had largely abandoned Christ’s claim to lordship in the ‘secular’ realm.”¹⁴⁵ Neo-Calvinists are persuaded that “[l]egitimate cultural pursuits

¹⁴¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three*, 379.

¹⁴² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 564.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 588.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Goheen & Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 128.

can be conducted to the glory of God even in a fallen world, simply because the fall has not attenuated the order of creation.”¹⁴⁶ Bavinck did not believe that Christ’s message was merely for some sacred churchly sphere: “Christ has also a message for home and society, for art and science.”¹⁴⁷

Therefore, because neo-Calvinists have neither bound themselves by a simplistic sacred/secular dualism nor a radical soul/body dualism, neo-Calvinists, such as Craig Bartholomew, Mike Goheen, and J.H. Bavinck, have been comfortable speaking about the church’s mission in ways that are not exclusively limited to ministries of the Word, such as evangelism, preaching, and the administration of the sacraments. Ministries of deed may also be included. Over the past half-century, most Chinese American evangelicals have understood mission similarly to D.L. Moody, who famously told people that he looked upon the world as a wrecked vessel, and that God had given him a lifeboat and a command to save all he could. They saw mission as a rescue operation from a sinking and hopeless ship beyond saving. Kuyperian writers, Bartholomew and Goheen write that while “Moody’s concern for evangelism and his sense of urgency are admirable...his understanding of mission ‘between the times’ has been drastically diminished, even disfigured, by an unbiblical view in which salvation is individualistic and concerned with escape from this creation.”¹⁴⁸ As Kuyper wrote, “It is so profoundly false that God’s Word lets us hear only calls for the salvation of our souls. No, God’s Word gives us firm ordinances—even for our national existence and our common social life.”¹⁴⁹ Bartholomew writes elsewhere that a better approach to mission takes both conversion and the broad creational purposes of God’s kingdom into account:

Two dangers confront contemporary Christianity. One is to rightly emphasize conversion but wrongly to fail to connect conversion to the kingdom of God and

¹⁴⁶ William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 155.

¹⁴⁷ Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 62.

¹⁴⁸ Goheen & Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 61.

God's purposes to lead his creation forward to its climax in a new heaven and a new earth. Conversion thus becomes individualistic, related almost exclusively to the institutional church and focused on going to heaven with no concern for the world.¹⁵⁰

While recognizing the invitational proclamation aspect of mission, J.H. Bavinck understood mission as “an extremely varied undertaking,” for “[t]o be a missionary is to stand for Christ in our vocation and in all of our activities.”¹⁵¹ He was not opposed to distinctions between official missionary service and the individual proclamation of the gospel, nor did he ignore the distinction between the church as institution and organism, but for him the “work of missions is too broad and too all-inclusive to be limited to the actions of the church in its institutional form. Missionary activity takes place in life in its entirety, including both the organized and the unorganized activity of believers.”¹⁵² Hence, he believed that mission entailed both the prophetic witness of gospel preaching and the priestly manifestation of mercy issuing from a living faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁵³ According to J.H. Bavinck mission was broad and yet always requiring and motivated by a genuine desire to see the spiritually blind receive salvation:

With the Scriptures in hand we ought to give a broader interpretation to the concept of mission and pay more attention to its diverse aspects. Even outspoken opposition to dangerous deceptions of unbelief can be a part of the missionary task, if it is performed responsibly and motivated by a genuine longing to deliver unbelievers from their blindness by showing them the only way of salvation. Missionary work has room for the most diverse activities and the most varied personalities.¹⁵⁴

J.H. Bavinck was able to understand mission this way because he understood mission as primarily a divine work: “the work of missions is God's work. God in the last days calls the heathen to his glorified people, to Christ, the true Israel, thereby causing them to share in his salvation. Such activity is the great work of God himself, the work of God in the new era,

¹⁵⁰ Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 32.

¹⁵¹ Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 66-67.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

the period following the time when he permitted the nations to go their own way.”¹⁵⁵ This is not to say that he did not also see mission as an activity in which the church participated as “instruments,”¹⁵⁶ but rather to say that he never lost sight of missions as an activity of Christ: “Missions is that activity of the church—in essence it is nothing else than the activity of Christ, exercised through the church—through which the church...calls the peoples of the earth to repentance and faith in Christ, so that they may be made his disciples and through baptism be incorporated into the fellowship of those who await the coming of the kingdom.”¹⁵⁷

Hence, Christians need not retreat from the world, nor play by an utterly different set of rules. They need not exclusively give their time to prayer, public worship, Scripture reading, and evangelism, nor view the rest of their worldly employments as of no spiritual or eternal significance. Rather, they can and must pursue various vocations in the public square, not limited to clerical or ministerial professions. They must also seek the common good alongside those who are not united to Christ by faith, fighting poverty, calling for justice, and seeking the general welfare of their cities. Not only are they to work alongside religious others, but they can also affirm others and “be diligent...to discover, honor, and appreciate any of God’s gifts that might be at work in the larger human community.”¹⁵⁸

This has implications not only for individual Christians, but also for the visible church.¹⁵⁹ Complementing this understanding of the church’s mission and the effort to suppress sacred/secular and soul/body dualisms is the neo-Calvinist notion of the church as organism. The visible church, according to Kuyper, is simultaneously organic and

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Mouw, *He Shines In All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 28.

¹⁵⁹ Within the Reformed tradition, “the church is simultaneously visible in the world, thus being composed of believers and unbelievers, and invisible, made up only of true believers,” and the “visible-invisible distinction accounts for the temporary presence of Judas *et al.* in the visible church, while preserving the purity of the invisible church.” Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 188.

institutional in society. The church not only operates institutionally according to special grace through the church offices and means of grace, but also organically in a community of faith and life alongside common grace in art, education, family, and political life. Kuyper wrote: “[T]he church as organism manifests itself, i.e., where the personal confessors of Jesus in their own circle allow the life of common grace to be controlled by the principle of divine revelation.”¹⁶⁰ Correspondingly, Bavinck writes:

[T]he relationship that has to exist between the church and the world is in the first place organic, moral, and spiritual in character. Christ—even now—is prophet, priest, and king; and by his Word and Spirit he persuasively impacts the entire world. Because of him there radiates from everyone who believes in him a renewing and sanctifying influence upon the family, society, state, occupation, business, art, science, and so forth. The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God. Along this organic path Christian truth and the Christian life are introduced into all the circles of the natural life...¹⁶¹

Because Word and Spirit impact the entire world, Bavinck writes, there is a renewing and sanctifying influence upon every sphere of life, such that the spiritual life of God’s people refashions and enhances their natural and moral lives in an organic fashion.

Hence for Bavinck, the purposes of God for the world both now and in the eschaton have always been both spiritual and corporeal. This is evident in Bavinck’s theological anthropology. As Silva demonstrates, Bavinck affirmed what is now described by John Cooper as “dualistic holism.”¹⁶² Dualistic holism claims that “[b]ody and soul are distinct and normally integrated, but the soul can exist separately, sustained by God. They are unified in creation, redemption, and eternal life, whereas separation is a temporary consequence of sin and death,” and “emphasizes the union of body and soul but recognizes the dichotomy.”¹⁶³ According to Bavinck, “the whole human being is image and likeness of God, in soul and

¹⁶⁰ Kuyper, “Common Grace” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 200.

¹⁶¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume Four*, 437.

¹⁶² Thiago Silva, “Herman Bavinck’s Anthropology and the Recent Body-Soul Debate,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (2017): 227.

¹⁶³ John Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 32-33.

body.”¹⁶⁴ Though soul and body are distinct, “[t]he body is not a prison, but a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul.”¹⁶⁵ Allowing the resurrection to inform his understanding of salvation and new creation, Bavinck’s view of creation’s final destiny opposes a strict body/soul dualism:

[T]his identity of the resurrection body with the body that was laid aside at death is of great significance...[I]t is diametrically opposed to all dualistic theories according to which the body is merely an incidental dwelling place or prison of the soul. The essence of a human being consists above all in the most intimate union of soul and body in a single personality. The soul by nature belongs to the body, and the body by nature belongs to the soul.”¹⁶⁶

Hence, in his theological critique of nature/grace dualism, Bavinck avoids a radical soul/body dualism. He upholds the goodness of creation by understanding its distinct final destiny as an organic eschatological development of all creation, rather than an elevation of its ontological nature into some disembodied and ethereal dimension. Therefore the goodness of creation, its corporeality included, problematizes any kind of soul/body dualism that would shift the church’s attention away from the corporeal needs of humanity as if they were unimportant and not part of the church’s missional concern.

III.C.2. Neo-Calvinism on Christianity & Culture(s)

In addition to radical sacred/secular and soul/body dualisms, Chinese American evangelicals have also struggled with a third dualistic understanding of creation, between Christianity and culture, especially with the rise of our modern secular culture. Because of this dualism, they often find themselves unable to winsomely engage with modern secular culture without defaulting to an absolutist dogmatism that is incapable of identifying points of contact between their convictions and the cultural forces around them.

¹⁶⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 561.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 559.

¹⁶⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Four*, 694.

This begs the question of how to define both Christianity and culture in general. For Bavinck, the essence of Christianity is something that is continually unfolding unto its final destination, but two truths are sure: 1) Christ is the starting point and center of Christianity, and 2) “Christianity is no less than the real, supreme work of the Triune God, in which the Father reconciles his created but fallen world through the death of his Son and re-creates it through his Spirit into the kingdom of God.”¹⁶⁷ The telos of Christianity is clear for Bavinck. It is the Triune God’s re-creation of the fallen world into his kingdom. But the essence and telos of Christianity only answer half of the equation concerning Christianity’s relationship with culture.

According to Bavinck, “Culture exists because God bestowed on us the power to exercise rule over the earth. It is the communal calling of the human race to make the world its own and to shape it as the property and instrument of personality.”¹⁶⁸ Taking this calling seriously, and affirming that there is not a square inch in all of creation over which Christ does not cry “Mine!” neo-Calvinists have rightly reflected upon the practical implications of this calling in the lives of Christ’s co-heirs, particularly as they live side by side with those who remain on the wrong side of the antithesis.¹⁶⁹ Within the neo-Calvinist tradition at least five concepts have been emphasized and developed to guide an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and culture: 1) creation as revelational 2) the cultural mandate, 3) antithesis and common grace, 4) the church as institution, and 5) sphere sovereignty. The first three concepts have helped neo-Calvinists articulate the points of

¹⁶⁷ Herman Bavinck, “The Essence of Christianity” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra & Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 46-47.

¹⁶⁸ Herman Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good,” trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 161.

¹⁶⁹ “The ‘antithesis’ is God’s judicial curse sovereignly inflicted on humanity in Gen 3:15 and which form then until now puts enmity between followers of God and followers of Satan at all levels, intellectual and moral, individual and societal.” Daniel Strange, “Not Ashamed! The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology,” *Themelios* 36, no. 2 (2011): 242.

contact between the elect and the non-elect, and the latter two have helped them maintain their distinctive worldview while still living peaceably and charitably in a pluralistic context.

For Bavinck, “creation is the first revelation of God, the beginning and foundation of all subsequent revelation,” for “[c]reating, sustaining, and governing together form one single mighty ongoing revelation of God.”¹⁷⁰ Everything in creation reveals God, even human self-consciousness.¹⁷¹ Thus all people know of God, even those who deny it. Commenting on Romans 1:21 where Paul writes “Although they knew God,” J.H. Bavinck writes: “Here the fact of knowing is posited as a reality. A knowledge of God exists also among those who in the practice of their religion profess not to know him.”¹⁷²

In the revelational theater of creation, God has also revealed humanity’s role – the cultural mandate. The ‘cultural mandate,’ is a creational vocation given to humanity, by virtue of our being made in the image of God. Speaking of the relationship between humanity and the world within Calvinism as a life-system, Kuyper wrote: “the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and...we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.”¹⁷³ Similarly, Bavinck understood humanity’s calling to consist of interacting with the world in two ways: science (which incorporates nature in our understanding and reproduces it in our words and thoughts) and art (which renders nature as an instrument of our wills and transforms it into something serviceable to a higher purpose).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 307.

¹⁷¹ Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, eds. Cory Brock & Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018), 53-57.

¹⁷² J.H. Bavinck, “Religious Consciousness in History” in *The J.H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. John Bolt, James Bratt, and Paul Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 245.

¹⁷³ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 31.

¹⁷⁴ Bavinck, “The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good” *The Bavinck Review* 2, (2011): 161-162. See also Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art* (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2011).

Kuyper and Bavinck understood that when God created humanity, he created humanity in his own image, which was not only constitutive, but also functional.¹⁷⁵ Before God charged humanity with the task to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth, he expressed his intention for making man in his own image when he said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. *And let them have dominion...*” [emphasis mine].¹⁷⁶ In the beginning, God created humanity to create culture. Thus – consistent with Bavinck’s rejection of nature/grace dualism – it was not only creation that was good in the beginning, but also the callings and vocations and activities of creation. For this reason, neo-Calvinists need not disparage the modern institutions such as the scientific academy wholesale. Neo-Calvinists affirm humanity’s calling from God to use their senses in community and to observe, investigate, study, and come to public conclusions about his world for the good of society.

The unfortunate fact, however, is that Adam’s fall not only tarnished creation, but humanity’s interpretation of creation and humanity’s vocations and activities. The fall toxically misdirected humanity’s culture-making vocation. Hence all cultures, including the Chinese, American, Chinese-American, evangelical, and modern secular cultures in which Chinese American evangelicals inhabit are all broken and in need of redemption. The fall introduced an antithesis between the plan and purposes of God (and his Seed) and the plan and purposes of sinners. There became an antithesis between the way of God’s creational intentions, and the way of misdirection. As Daniel Strange writes: “The doctrine of antithesis stresses the starkest of ‘religious’ contrasts and implies a radical discontinuity at all levels of human existence between those who worship the living God and ‘think his thoughts after

¹⁷⁵ Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 166.

¹⁷⁶ Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)

him’, and those who do not worship this God, and believe they are thinking autonomously.”¹⁷⁷ For this reason, Chinese Americans are right in one sense to be critical of culture and of the fallible conclusions of culture-making people and institutions, such as the modern scientific academy.

But, while an antithesis between righteousness and evil entered creation at the fall and humanity’s vocations became misdirected toward sinful ends, neither the essence of humanity’s creational role nor the cultural mandate were abrogated. In fact, God made this clear when he reiterated this mandate after the flood in Genesis 9:1-7. The antithesis between the faithful and righteous offspring of the woman, who share in the benefits of Christ by faith, and the unrepentant and rebellious offspring of the Serpent, who share in the Serpent’s condemnation according to the wages of sin,¹⁷⁸ was epistemological and ethical, but not metaphysical.¹⁷⁹ Because the antithesis is not metaphysical, God’s people were not to retreat from unbelievers nor from the world’s common cultural activities. Hence, while an antithesis exists between the telic-purposes of the two opposing peoples’ cultural activities, there is also a point of contact. This point of contact was and is sustained by God’s continual general revelation, and by the restraining work of his common grace.

In a 1924 Synodical meeting of the Christian Reformed Church, common grace was articulated as applying to (1) “natural” blessings, such as rain and sunshine, (2) the restraining of evil in human affairs, and (3) positive acts of civic righteousness.¹⁸⁰ However, Bavinck was comfortable describing God’s “*generalis gratia*” in a more constructive and positive manner, such that after the fall God not only specially reveals his fatherly love in

¹⁷⁷ Daniel Strange, *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 86.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁷⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2015), 196.

¹⁸⁰ Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, “The Three Points of Common Grace,” Kalamazoo, Michigan, June 18, 1924, <http://www.prc.org/resources/publications/articles/item/291-the-three-points-of-common-grace> (accessed June 20, 2018).

Christ to sinners, but also “dispenses to all men various gifts.”¹⁸¹ It is not merely a restraining of evil, but allows Christians to uphold the absoluteness of the Christian religion on one hand, while on the other hand being “second to none in appreciating all that God continued to give of beauty and worth to sinful men.”¹⁸² After all, the descendants of Seth enjoyed, utilized, and engaged in the cultural developments of Cain’s descendants.¹⁸³ Richard Mouw would even insist that it is according to the “interior” and “exterior”¹⁸⁴ operations of common grace that God would delight in Tiger Woods’ putts and the recovery stories of alcoholics.¹⁸⁵

While God’s general revelation in creation, the cultural mandate, common grace, and the organic nature of the visible church allow and even urge Christians and the church to engage in cultural activity themselves, neo-Calvinists have not consigned Christianity to any kind of sinful compromise, ignoring the antithesis. Affirming the antithesis protects neo-Calvinists from being swept up by the fluctuating waves of culture. Neo-Calvinism is not a naïve tradition expecting a quick and easy triumph of Christianity over society. In fact, neo-Calvinism arose in the context of modernity’s increased secularization and pluralism, such that neo-Calvinists sought ways to maintain their Christian distinctiveness without completely embracing or retreating from society. Understanding the church as institution and the sovereignty of God’s creational spheres has helped neo-Calvinists to do just this.

The church as institution is the other side of the visible church coin. Bavinck reminds us that “the church was never without a government. It was always organized and institutionally arranged in some fashion.”¹⁸⁶ The “institution is a means supplied by God for

¹⁸¹ Herman Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” trans. Geerhardus Vos, *The Princeton Theological Review* 7, no. 3 (1909): 454.

¹⁸² Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 52.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ Abraham Kuyper distinguished between “interior” and “exterior” operations of common grace, with the latter applying to achievements of science and art, and the former applying to wherever civic virtue, a sense of domesticity, natural love, the practice of human virtue, the improvement of public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty, and a feeling for piety leaven life. See Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 181.

¹⁸⁵ Mouw, *He Shines In All That’s Fair*, 31-51.

¹⁸⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 329.

feeding and expanding [the] organism,” writes Kuyper.¹⁸⁷ In this way, the church is distinct from the family, the state, and the academy. Discussing how the church as institution preserves the distinctness of God’s people as an organism, Kuyper continues:

Only through the institution can the church offer us that unique life sphere where the ground we tread, the air we breathe, the language we speak, and the nourishment of our spirit are not those of the world but those of the Holy Spirit. That institution positions itself between us and the world, in order to protect the uniqueness of our life with the power supplied by that unanimity and that order.¹⁸⁸

Spiritual nourishment, through the means of grace administered by God’s ordained ministers and church government, is the unique role of the church as institution within the world, distinguishing the visible church from the rest of society. The church as institution, ensures that the church is in the world, but not of it. The church as institution, then, constitutes one of the many spheres in society, all of which have been given derivative authority from the sovereign God of Scripture.

This notion of derivatively sovereign and authoritative spheres within society was coined by Kuyper as “sphere sovereignty.” Sphere sovereignty recognizes that “original, absolute sovereignty cannot reside in any creature but *must* coincide with God’s majesty,” and yet “at the same time...this supreme Sovereign once and still delegates his authority to human beings, so that on earth one never directly encounters God Himself in visible things but always sees his sovereign authority exercised in *human* office.”¹⁸⁹ God’s absolute sovereignty denies and challenges all absolute sovereignty among sinful men on earth precisely “by dividing life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty.”¹⁹⁰ Such spheres include, but are not limited to, the sphere of nature, the personal sphere, the business sphere, the sphere of art, the family sphere, the state sphere, and the ecclesiastical sphere,

¹⁸⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian Library Press, 2013), Kindle edition, loc. 484.

¹⁸⁸ Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, loc. 499.

¹⁸⁹ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 466.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 467.

each with their own norms, goals, and structures, yet all related in a divinely ordained and organic harmony.

Because of sphere sovereignty, Christians, while called to subject themselves to every governing authority (Romans 13:1), are not subjected to such earthly authorities in an absolute sense. The state is not the Christians' god. In the same way, even the church's authority is limited. The church is not to bear the sword like the state, but to exercise Spiritual power, wielding the sword of the Spirit and holding the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Sphere sovereignty, then protects Christian engagement with culture and society across various creational spheres, and also guides such engagement with the divinely ordained norms of each sphere.

Hence, the neo-Calvinist concepts of general revelation in creation, the cultural mandate, antithesis and common grace, the church as organism and institution, and sphere sovereignty helpfully articulate nuanced ways in which Christians should engage any culture in the pluralistic contexts that they inhabit. There are points of contact seen in the cultural mandate, common grace, and the church as organism, but also lines of distinction, which are helpfully drawn by the antithesis, the church as institution and sphere sovereignty. Affirming the antithesis and the absolute lordship of Christ can protect Chinese American evangelicals from submitting themselves to the hegemony of any one particular culture and confirm their skepticism of various cultural forces. Simultaneously, affirming common grace would allow them to engage and subvert culture rather than retreat from or dismiss it. This is because God has not abandoned his creation and its manifold cultures but restrains their corruption. Common grace prevents Christians from writing off creation and all cultures as unqualified evils, utterly opposed to God, and beyond redemption. No matter the worldview, religion, or ideology, there is always a point of contact and some continuity with the Christian worldview and the gospel.

For this reason, anti-intellectualism and an unhealthy skepticism toward the modern secular academy are unwarranted. Though the academy is definitely subject to the fall, and must be engaged with critically, there is much common grace insight to be gleaned from non-Christian observations of God's general revelation. Kuyper understood the enterprise of science to be "'a unique creature of God,' with its own principle of life, created to develop in conformity with that principle of life, that is, to develop in freedom," independent of the state and church.¹⁹¹ But science's independence and freedom were still ultimately subordinated to its sovereign Creator, for science is ultimately the human activity of "reflecting the thoughts of God from creation."¹⁹² To the extent that humans accurately reflect God's thoughts from creation, "human science will possess greater stability and richer content."¹⁹³ Hence, Kuyperians need not avoid engagement with the modern secular academy. For the creation they study is God's. When it comes to the scientific enterprise, Bavinck writes: "Man can attain to a true, free relation to nature only when he stands in his true relation to God... This free and royal relation to nature (*natuur*) is owed, first of all, to the recognition that the whole world is created by God."¹⁹⁴ In fact, George Marsden, who advocates Kuyperian theology for pluralistic societies, insists that faith-informed scholarship can actually enrich the academy, for "Christian commitments make a difference to scholarship because scholars are whole people and the various aspects of their belief systems are interrelated."¹⁹⁵

All this is not to say that the entire scientific enterprise within the modern secular academy is unaffected by the fall. Like Al Wolters, applying the concept of antithesis, a neo-Calvinist sees through the supposed neutrality of the modern secular academy, remembering

¹⁹¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011), 35.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹⁴ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 87.

¹⁹⁵ George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82.

that in all scholarship “[i]deas have legs in the sense that they are not the disembodied abstractions of some ivory-tower academic, but are real spiritual forces that go somewhere...and that have a widespread effect on our practical, everyday lives.”¹⁹⁶ Therefore, a Kuyperian engagement with the academy would suggest that Christian academics “aim to be critical participants in our culture and its tradition of scholarship, sharing in the academic task even with those of our colleagues who do not share our religious commitments,” for “although Christian academics should feel ‘at home’ in the Western academic tradition, they must never lose sight of the fact that they are also ‘at odds’ with it.”¹⁹⁷ As Goheen and Bartholomew write:

Faithful Christian scholarship will be characterized by both an acknowledgement of the insights of the Western cultural tradition of scholarship and a critique of the ideological settings in which those insights are embedded. Since all academic work is an accounting of the order of creation, and since God has upheld that order and upheld the image of God in humanity, scholarship will always give insight into God’s world. And since human sin and idolatry affect all cultural endeavors, academic insights into God’s creation order will always be distorted to some degree...Christian scholars should attempt to distinguish the creational insight and structure from the idolatrous religious direction in all theories, including their own, working humbly, faithfully, and prayerfully to redirect theoretical work in alignment with a biblical worldview.¹⁹⁸

In addition to the modern secular academy, Chinese American evangelicals need not mockingly and uncarefully disparage non-Christian religions wholesale. While non-Christian faiths are opposed to the gospel, in one sense, they are not as off base as many conservative evangelicals might initially think. Daniel Strange highlights both the idolatry of non-Christian faiths, but also their similarity and closeness to the truth when he writes:

From the presupposition of an epistemologically authoritative biblical revelation, non-Christian religions are sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic, collective human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand deceiving demonic forces. Being antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview, non-Christian religions are ‘subversively fulfilled’ in the

¹⁹⁶ Al Wolters, *Ideas Have Legs* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1987), 5.

¹⁹⁷ Goheen & Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 162-163.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁹

A neo-Calvinist engagement with someone of another faith does not merely say, “you are absolutely and utterly wrong,” but rather, “you are improperly responding to God’s absolutely revealed truth.” According to Strange, who draws heavily from J.H. Bavinck and Van Til, non-Christian worldviews and religions are not simply opposed to God’s revelation, but rather *distortions* of God’s revelation.²⁰⁰ They are pseudo-similar *counterfeits* of divine revelation and operate *parasitically* and *dependently* upon the ‘borrowed capital’ of God’s truth.²⁰¹ For this reason Herman Bavinck could write: “Christianity is not only positioned antithetically toward paganism; it is also paganism’s fulfillment. Christianity is the true religion, therefore also the highest and purest; it is the truth of all religions.”²⁰² Hence, the church’s mission “does not stand in opposition to culture but connects with every culture that merits the name.”²⁰³ Neo-Calvinism seeks to stand against the dualistic bifurcation of Christianity and culture, both affirming and critiquing all cultures in the light of revelation.

Not only can Chinese American evangelicals’ understanding of Christianity’s relationship with culture increase in nuance by embracing neo-Calvinism, but their dispositions, temperaments, and postures can improve. Neo-Calvinism can alleviate their propensity toward cultural retreat and reconfigure their often unthoughtful disregard and antagonism toward other faiths and traditions. The scope of the antithesis and the revelation of God offer Chinese American evangelicals a way to reject their arrogant and absolutist dogmatism without conceding to relativism. Not only do neo-Calvinists affirm the use of tradition and community in the development of dogmatics, but they do so precisely because of their convictions concerning humanity’s sinfulness and fallibility. According to the

¹⁹⁹ Strange, *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock*, 156.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁰² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 319-320.

²⁰³ Herman Bavinck, “Christianity and Natural Science” in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra & Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 104.

antithesis, and the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, Christians themselves are not excluded from the effects of the fall, and thus epistemic humility is always necessary. Bavinck writes that the danger “of making mistakes and falling into error...should predispose the dogmatician, like every practitioner of science, to modesty,” for “the church and in even greater measure the dogmatics of an individual person, is fallible.”²⁰⁴ This is how Bavinck – as convinced as he was of the Reformed tradition – could write that “Calvinism, after all, is not the only truth!”²⁰⁵ Contrary to popular belief about Protestants and their supposed divisiveness, a Bavinckian neo-Calvinist is richly catholic in the best sense of the word. For Bavinck, “interpretive and confessional diversity is actually a goal rather than a hindrance to true Catholic Christianity,” and it is “only a specifically Protestant view of the church [that] can properly ground a catholicity that centers not so much on institutional unity or universality, but a unity-in-diversity...”²⁰⁶

At the same time, while a Bavinckian neo-Calvinism is deeply catholic and ecumenical, and can charitably engage with non-Christian faiths without completely denigrating them, it must be noted that Bavinck was not content to let his appreciation for the diversity of perspectives within the Christian tradition devolve into relativism and absolute uncertainty in the name of epistemic humility.²⁰⁷ As Eglinton writes, “The safeguard against relativism is *Deus dixit*.”²⁰⁸ According to Bavinck, then, “both the absolute tone of voice and the modesty find their unity in the faith that must guide and animate the dogmatician from

²⁰⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 45.

²⁰⁵ Herman Bavinck, “My Journey to America,” transl. James Eglinton, ed. George Harinck, in *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* 14, no. 2 (April 5, 2017): 192.

²⁰⁶ Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Confessional, International, and Cosmopolitan: Herman Bavinck’s Neo-Calvinistic and Protestant Vision of the Catholicity of the Church,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018): 23.

²⁰⁷ This is not to say that all neo-Calvinists have been irenic, charitable, and humble. Some have indeed accented and emphasized the antithesis over other neo-Calvinist principles, leading them to a fundamentalist and dogmatic posture toward religious others, both Christian and non-Christian.

²⁰⁸ James Eglinton, “Vox Theologiae: Boldness and Humility in Public Theological Speech,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 9, no. 1 (Feb 3, 2015): 27

beginning to end in all his labor.”²⁰⁹ The fallibility of humanity and the reality that God has spoken do not pit epistemic humility and theological boldness against each other, but challenge and require Christians “to speak with a deliberate and simultaneous boldness and humility in all theological speech.”²¹⁰ This is what Bavinck did, as he appropriated the theological contributions of classic and modern thinkers, such as Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, and Schleiermacher, in a principled way that also did not give absolute precedence to any of these thinkers over one another, but subjected all to Scripture.²¹¹ A Bavinckian neo-Calvinism affirms plurality, “but without giving up the ideal of objectivity.”²¹²

This both/and approach is a hallmark of the neo-Calvinist tradition in which many have creatively considered what it means to be “in” the world, but not “of” it. While affirming general revelation in creation, the cultural mandate, common grace, and the organic nature of the church have given neo-Calvinists language for how the church is to be “in” the world, affirming the antithesis, the church as institution, and sphere sovereignty has given them language to distinguish themselves from those who are “of” the world.

Therefore, by rejecting the sharp bifurcation of Christianity and culture, neo-Calvinism affirms Chinese American evangelicals in their shared skepticism toward modern secularism, but simultaneously critiques conservative evangelicals’ often dismissive posture toward and retreat from modern secular culture. For while the forces of secularization are tainted by the fall, there is not only much to commend within them, but also a parasitic point of contact which can be subverted for the redemption of modern secular culture’s positive impulses.

²⁰⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One*, 46.

²¹⁰ Eglinton, “Vox Theologiae,” 25

²¹¹ Cory Brock & Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck’s Reformed eclecticism: On catholicity, consciousness and theological epistemology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 3 (2017): 310, 314, 331.

²¹² Harinck, “Twin sisters with a changing character,” 333.

IV. Assessing Neo-Calvinism

In Chapter Four, it was argued that Yong's theology offers an alternative to the popular and conservative evangelicalism that many Chinese American Christians have adopted. Yong's theology speaks to issues of race, ethnicity, and culture, and combats individualism and the dualisms that have typically led evangelicals to fear, retreat from, or criticize creation and culture. Yong's theology affirms ethnic particularity, cultural diversity, and the significance of marginal perspectives in theology. It critiques evangelicals' individualistic approaches to mission, theological method, and soteriology. It also rejects soul/body, sacred/secular, and Christianity/culture dualisms, espousing integral mission and a Spirit-led engagement with culture according to a Peircean epistemology. But Yong's theological alternative was not without its own difficulties.

Admittedly, it may be unfair to critique Yong, a single Pentecostal thinker, with a group of thinkers under the umbrella of 'neo-Calvinism,' and this is indeed a limitation of neo-Calvinism's. My description of neo-Calvinism, though primarily drawing from Kuyper and Bavinck, has also more specifically drawn from a particular strain of neo-Calvinism developed by Vos and Van Til, a strain that others may neither accept as the best interpretation and application of Kuyper and Bavinck nor as the most coherent and faithful development of their thought. I am well aware that Vos, Van Til, and their followers are not the first names that come to mind in a list of neo-Calvinist thinkers. Furthermore, there are those who, like Harriet Harris, have a different vision for the flourishing of evangelicals and remain unconvinced that Kuyper, Bavinck, or Van Til have much to offer conservative evangelicals in the way of escaping the trap of fundamentalism as defined by James Barr.²¹³

However, I remain convinced that this theologically conservative strain of neo-Calvinism is not only a positive development of Kuyper and Bavinck's seminal thought, but

²¹³ Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 276-277.

also the most palatable and beneficial strain of neo-Calvinism for Chinese American evangelicals. Furthermore, if one would read this chapter as an evaluation of Yong's diversely resourced Pentecostalism in comparison with my own understanding of neo-Calvinism, then it becomes a comparison of two theologically minded Chinese American evangelicals. Hence, my argument in this section is that the strain of neo-Calvinism I have endeavored to describe offers similar remedies to Yong's theology when it comes to a theology of ethnicity, individualism and collectivism, and dualistic doctrine of creation, yet without some of the pitfalls within Yong's theology.

IV.A. Ethnicity

Like Yong's theology, the neo-Calvinism articulated in this chapter affirms the diversity of ethnic particularity as a positive reality. According to Kuyper, Bavinck, and Kreitzer, this positive reality invites the establishment of ethnic churches for a variety of contextual reasons, and anticipates the way that people from every nation, tongue, and tribe will make their own particular contributions to the enrichment of life in the new Jerusalem and in the contemporary church.

Unlike Yong's theology, though, the neo-Calvinist tradition has developed a theology of ethnicity along more explicitly biblical-theological lines, discerning God's intention for the diversity of peoples in the cultural mandate, which called for fruitfulness, multiplication, and the filling of the earth. Hence, the multilingual result of Babel is not merely viewed as judgment, but as a seminal blessing later fulfilled at Pentecost, and ultimately fulfilled in the new Jerusalem. Hence, neo-Calvinist theology offers both a protology and an eschatology of ethnicity, indicating not only God's divine telos for ethnicity, but his divine intention for it. This redemptive-historical understanding of ethnicity, in combination with an organic Trinitarian ontology and a Reformed understanding of providence, guards against the opposing dangers of essentializing ethnicity and viewing ethnicity as a mere social construct.

To the neo-Calvinist, the revelational story of Scripture details the rise and fall of whole peoples, the fluid mixing of peoples, and also the providential creation of peoples throughout redemptive history. Admittedly, this mediating position between essentializing ethnicity and viewing it as a social construct may frustrate those wanting clearly delineated lines between one ethnic group and another, or those wanting the erasure of all ethnic distinctions.

However, the neo-Calvinist impulse rejects both desires with its organic Trinitarian ontology. Ethnicity, along with many other creational realities, participates in the unity and diversity of creation, which reflects the unity and diversity of the Triune Creator.

For these reasons, while Chinese American evangelicals can certainly glean from Yong's theology of ethnicity, a neo-Calvinist theology of ethnicity is preferred. Such a theology affirms ethnic-specific churches in multi-ethnic contexts, as well as the promotion of ethnic perspectives in theology. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the history of neo-Calvinism will always bear the stain of South Africa's apartheid, in which a poor and unbalanced appropriation of certain neo-Calvinist concepts evolved into a toxic strain of neo-Calvinism, leading to terrible injustices. Those seeking to glean from neo-Calvinism on the topic of ethnicity must exercise caution, for history is certainly capable of repeating itself. In light of the present rise of Chinese exceptionalism²¹⁴ and the temptation for Chinese Americans to believe the model minority myth, Chinese American evangelicals would do well to tread humbly and carefully when utilizing neo-Calvinist theology to resource their theology of ethnicity.

IV.B. Individualism & Collectivism

Like Yong's theology, neo-Calvinism has also been quite critical of Western individualism in the church. Neo-Calvinist theology critiques individualism, not by preferring

²¹⁴ Benjamin Ho, "Understanding Chinese Exceptionalism: China's Rise, Its Goodness, and Greatness," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 39, no. 3 (Aug 2014): 164-176.

collectivism, but by continually pointing to the Trinitarian organic motif and the notion of federal headship in covenant theology to harmonize both individualistic and collectivist impulses. This has given rise to a neo-Calvinist view of mission that involves much more than the salvation of individual souls, but includes bearing witness to Christ and his kingdom before the unbelieving world in every square inch of life by word and deed. It has also given rise to a robust theology of family, affirming both individuals and the whole as belonging to each other in a covenant community. Neo-Calvinist theology also affirms not only *sola scriptura* and Scripture's perspicuity, but also the communal nature of theology and the importance of creeds and tradition. To address the collectivist problem of shame, neo-Calvinism offers the soteriological solution of union with Christ.

In all these ways, neo-Calvinism complements Yong's theology in dealing with the rampant individualism that Chinese American evangelicals have inherited from popular and conservative American evangelical theology. Further still, neo-Calvinism might even be said to supplement what is lacking in Yong's reflection on individualism and collectivism. For where Yong does not offer practical solutions to the intergenerational challenges of Chinese American churches, Bavinck and the CRC have offered infant baptism, a concrete practice signaling and sealing the children of believers into the covenant community.²¹⁵ Where Yong's theological method opens itself up to a broad community of inquirers, including non-Christians, Bavinck and Vanhoozer emphasize the special importance of the church's present and historic interpretation of Scripture as implied within *sola scriptura*.

While Yong acknowledges the need for theological approaches to shame amongst Asian American evangelicals and his soteriology does briefly discuss the social, ecclesial, and communal dimensions of salvation, he does not adequately address the problem of shame

²¹⁵ Admittedly, infant baptism may not be palatable to the majority of Chinese American evangelicals who lean toward a credobaptism.

with soteriological clarity and coherence. Gaffin's union with Christ soteriology offers a far more detailed and exegetical soteriology that can handle the problem of shame. Furthermore, Gaffin's union with Christ soteriology offers a multidimensional soteriology like Yong's. But whereas Yong's multidimensional soteriology leads to more ambiguity, Gaffin's multidimensional soteriology provides clarity, such that all the benefits of salvation, including justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification, and the remedy of one's shame are all received in one's union with Christ by Spirit-wrought faith.

Lastly, where Yong advocates pneumatological relationality, Bavinck advocates Trinitarian relationality. To be fair, Yong believes being pneumatological is being Trinitarian, but his emphasis on the Spirit indicates at least a slight emphasis upon the Spirit. A Bavinckian neo-Calvinism, however, "is rooted in a richly Trinitarian, catholic and Reformed doctrine of God."²¹⁶ The fourth and final volume of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is aptly titled "Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation," and he begins by writing: "God produces both creation and new creation by his Word and Spirit."²¹⁷ The manifestation and work of the Word and Spirit on earth have always been intertwined in the single mission of God:

Now while the Son and Spirit have visibly appeared in the incarnation and the outpouring, their mission is completed in their invisible coming into the hearts of all believers, in the church of the Son, in the temple of the Holy Spirit. There has been an eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father in order that, through and in them, he himself should come to his people and finally be "all in all."²¹⁸

For Bavinck, Word and Spirit always work together according to the counsel of the Father. Consequently, one could conclude that an emphasis upon either individualism or collectivism is hard to discern in Bavinck and Kuyper's theological reflections because of their commitment to Trinitarian theology.

²¹⁶ Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 82.

²¹⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Four*, 33.

²¹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 321-322.

Admittedly, the organic harmony of creation by which neo-Calvinists seek to engage individualism and collectivism might strike some as ambiguous and mysterious. After all, the organic motif is rooted in the Trinity. It might be said that the Trinitarian organic motif better explains the tension than solves it. While some may personally be satisfied with Bavinck's insistence that "[m]ystery is the lifeblood of dogmatics,"²¹⁹ it is likely that some will be less satisfied. The ambiguity and mystery involved in employing the Trinitarian organic motif might possibly confuse or frustrate those seeking to be faithful to it. By its very nature, there is no uniform or formulaic expression of how unity and diversity ought to look across all contexts. Every context requires special and specific attention. One might even argue that the organic motif is merely a positive renaming of the dialectic tension discussed in other theologies. For while Bavinck employs the 'organic' language with a view toward harmony, Yong employs the words 'dialectic,' 'trialectic,' and 'tension' in his discussion of individuals and particularities and collectives and wholes.²²⁰ Hence, depending on one's presuppositions and desired resolutions, it is understandable why a neo-Calvinist engagement with individualism and collectivism may be less than satisfying. Therefore, while neo-Calvinism has much to offer those pursuing truth as it pertains to the dynamic of individualism and collectivism, it is far from the only and final truth on the matter.

IV.C. Creation & Culture

Like Yong's theology, the neo-Calvinism articulated in this chapter also eschews sacred/secular and soul/body or spirit/matter dualisms that downplay the goodness of God's entire creation, lead to a truncated understanding of the church's mission, and encourage a simplistic engagement with culture. Such neo-Calvinism avoids a sacred/secular dualism by

²¹⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 29.

²²⁰ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 105-106.

viewing all creation and every vocation under the lordship of Christ as both Creator and Redeemer. It also prefers a holistic dualism rather than a radical soul/body dualism by affirming a holistic view of the *imago Dei* and a covenant theology that organically relates protology to eschatology contra nature-grace dualism. Related to neo-Calvinists' rejection of radical sacred/secular and soul/body dualisms, is their approach to Christianity and culture. Because there is neither a sacred/secular divide nor a strict soul/body separation, Christianity and culture must also not be radically divided. Christianity's focal point is Christ, who incarnated a Jewish culture, and Christianity's telos is the re-creation of the fallen world and its cultures into the kingdom of the Triune God. Furthermore, because neo-Calvinists can operate out of the revelational function of creation, the antithesis, common grace, the church as institution and organism, and sphere sovereignty, they are amply supplied to engage pluralistic cultural contexts with wise discernment and gracious humility. They can maintain their ecclesial witness by neither fully accepting any single culture, nor fully rejecting it. This posture guards against the absolutist fundamentalism of many conservative evangelicals and can be applied in both ecumenical and interreligious encounters.

While neo-Calvinism can and should certainly complement and supplement Yong's pneumatological imagination of creation and culture, it also protects against some of the missteps of Yong's theology. Whereas Yong betrays a slight preference for ministries of deed over word, J.H. Bavinck indicated a healthy regard for the ministry of the word. Commenting on the 1928 International Missionary Council conference discussion of a "comprehensive approach" to missions, he noted three concerns with elevating education, medical care, and social-economic aid to the place of preaching in the church's mission. First, he believed the comprehensive approach was based on humanistic anthropological grounds (the "unity of man"), rather than on biblical and theological grounds. Secondly, while he would certainly agree that a person's spiritual life is interwoven with every aspect of a person's life such that

a change in one's spiritual life will have necessary consequences for every other aspect, it does not also follow that education, medical care, and social-economic aid can bring about repentance in a direct reciprocal manner. Thirdly, Bavinck insisted that education, medical care, and social-economic aid are not to be coordinated with equal value to gospel preaching in the church's mission because "Christ has only actually commanded us to preach the gospel to all nations" and gospel preaching "does not stand on the same niveau with education and other services," but "all other services are meaningful to the degree that they assist, clarify, or render possible the preaching of the gospel."²²¹

Lest one think J.H. Bavinck is simply siding with the popular and conservative evangelical understanding of mission that was earlier critiqued, he quickly continues by saying that the missionary's "sole purpose...is to preach the gospel, but in order to preach he must exist, and this very existence involves him in all sorts of activities."²²² Bavinck has a principled understanding of holistic mission that asymmetrically emphasizes gospel preaching, but also a practical understanding of holistic mission in which a missionary "cannot help working in a comprehensive manner," for "[t]hese things are naturally more complicated in reality."²²³ Kuyperian pastor Timothy Keller has similarly described his understanding of the relationship between gospel preaching and social concern as "an asymmetrical, inseparable relationship."²²⁴

Though J.H. Bavinck does not explicitly invoke the neo-Calvinist distinction between the visible church as institution and organism in the passage above, it would certainly contribute to this neo-Calvinist picture of the church's mission. For while word ministry is primary for the church as institution, the church as an organism has a broader calling to make disciples of the nation by bearing witness to Christ's kingdom in diverse ways. In this way,

²²¹ Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 108-109.

²²² *Ibid.*, 110.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Timothy Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor," *Themelios* 33, no. 3 (Dec 2008): 16.

neo-Calvinist theology helps qualify and clarify the church's mission in a way that upholds the importance of both word and deed ministry with an emphasis on gospel proclamation that does not depend on a sacred/secular dualism. Also helpful for maintaining a nuanced understanding of holistic mission is Bavinck's holistic dualism. Such an anthropology maintains a true distinction between body and soul, yet without radically separating them from each other or from the *imago Dei*, guarding itself against the problems and inconsistencies of Yong's monistic metaphysic.

Neo-Calvinism also offers a way past the Christianity/culture dualism of many conservative evangelicals, inviting Christians to discerningly engage their pluralistic context with genuine boldness and humility apart from Yong's Peircean pragmatism and his inclusivist theology of religions. More nuanced than some fundamentalists who insist solely upon the antithesis between Christians and non-Christians, Daniel Strange, following J.H. Bavinck, asserts that all other religions are responding to the same revelation, and thus can be subversively fulfilled. And yet, unlike Yong and other inclusivists, he does not affirm the possibility of the Spirit's salvific work outside of the Christian faith and apart from knowledge of God's special and explicit revelation in Christ, the Word. The Spirit's presence in the world is manifest in varying ways, not all of which are salvific.²²⁵ Christ is not only ontologically necessary for salvation, but epistemologically necessary too.²²⁶ Most Chinese American evangelicals would resoundingly agree.

Furthermore, Yong argues that because of the Spirit's ubiquitous work it is possible that traditions outside of Scripture may be "divinely inspired in some way"²²⁷ and that it is therefore critical to let other religious perspectives "be represented by [themselves] prior to

²²⁵ Daniel Strange, "Presence, Prevenience, or Providence? Deciphering the Conundrum of Pinnock's Pneumatological Inclusivism," in *Reconstructing Theology*, eds. Tony Gray & Christopher Sinkinson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 242-247.

²²⁶ Strange, "Presence, Prevenience, or Providence?" 250.

²²⁷ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 317-318.

the imposition of theoretical constructs.”²²⁸ But even granting that such non-Christian religions reveal truths according to God’s general revelation, special revelation would still be required to interpret God’s general revelation, for “the knowledge that general revelation can supply is not only meager and inadequate but also uncertain, consistently mingled with error...”²²⁹ Van Til wrote: “But only he who looks at nature through the mirror of Scripture *does* understand natural revelation for what it is.”²³⁰ Hence, while a Bavinckian neo-Calvinism does not cast off the exclusivist theology of religions that most conservative evangelicals subscribe to, it does give them language and categories to discern the good and redeemable aspects of other religions, such that an arrogant, dogmatic, and combative posture are never necessary in encounters with religious others.

Perhaps the most important reason, however, that neo-Calvinism may be preferred by Chinese American evangelicals over Yong’s theology for engaging pluralistic culture is Bavinck and Van Til’s revelational epistemology, which offers an epistemological certainty that Yong’s Peircean epistemology does not. Bavinck writes: “Certainty is the normal and natural condition of the spirit as health is of the body...Doubt, on the other hand, is never the true condition of man, but is abnormal, like disease. Sometimes, due to the error and lies that beset our lives, doubt is necessary...But in itself it is always a painful evil.”²³¹ Yong’s epistemology does not reject absolute truth, but it does reject the notion that humans can be certain about the truth before the eschaton. Furthermore, his epistemology is open to all potentialities and possibilities – even the hypotheses that God does not exist and Jesus Christ is not risen. Neo-Calvinism, on the other hand, presupposes God’s existence and the divinely

²²⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 178.

²²⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two*, 313.

²³⁰ Cornelius Van Til, *The Reformed Pastor and The Defense of Christianity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), 11.

²³¹ Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith* (Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1980), 20-21.

inspired Scriptures' account of Jesus, insisting upon the certainty of faith, which rests not on rationalistic or empirical grounds, but on divine revelation. Bavinck writes:

The Christian does not construct his knowledge of the truth from faith, but through faith he penetrates ever deeper into the mysteries of salvation. The Word of God is always the solid ground on which he stands, the rock to which he clings, the starting point of his thought, the source of his knowledge, the rule of his life, the light on his path and the lamp for his feet.²³²

A major presupposition within the neo-Calvinist understanding of revelation is that God is and always has been “an absolute and absolutely self-conscious being,” who “had in himself all knowledge from all eternity.”²³³ And “[t]his God is the one who reveals himself to man.”²³⁴ A second presupposition is that “all knowledge that any finite creature of God would ever have, whether of things that pertain directly to God or of things that pertain to objects in the created universe itself, would, in the last analysis, have to rest upon the revelation of God.”²³⁵ All knowledge rests upon the revelation of God because “Scripture constantly speaks of the whole universe as a revelation of the glory of God.”²³⁶ Thirdly, God’s knowledge of himself and creation is archetypal, whereas all creaturely knowledge is ectypal. Bavinck writes: “[T]he ectypal knowledge of God that is granted to creatures by revelation is not the absolute self-knowledge of God but the knowledge of God as it has been accommodated to and made fit for the finite consciousness—hence anthropomorphized.”²³⁷ Creatures know truly, but they know as creatures, and not as the Creator knows truly. The difference in knowledge is not merely quantitative, but qualitative.

²³² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³³ Cornelius Van Til, ed. William Edgar, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2007), 117-119.

²³⁴ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 118.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

²³⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume One*, 214.

Such presuppositions help neo-Calvinists locate their “revelational” epistemology²³⁸ between the extremes of rationalist idealism and empiricist materialism, between a pure subjectivism and a pure objectivism. A revelational epistemology neither affirms that the knowing human subject’s mind is the source of human knowledge (as in rationalist idealism), nor does it affirm that the sensed perceptions of objects by knowing subjects are the source of human knowledge (as in empiricist materialism). Rather, God’s revelation and communication is the source of all knowledge, the *principium cognoscendi*. Unlike, rationalist idealism and empiricist materialism, revelational epistemology “accepts the gap between mental representations and external objects,” for “mental representations correspond with external objects because both participate in an organically connected cosmos shaped by a Triune God.”²³⁹ Because the Creator is rational, the world is intelligible and rational, and human beings can know this world truly because they are part of its organic whole.²⁴⁰ More specifically, the Logos actively and organically sustains the subject-object relation, and enlightens and guides reason in its attempts to apprehend the world, which “ensures that the ideal representation in the mind is a faithful rendering of the world outside.”²⁴¹ As Van Til writes:

We hold that God has so created the objects in relationship to one another that they exist not as particulars only, but as particulars that are related to universals... Moreover, God has adapted the objects to the subjects of knowledge; that the laws of our minds and the laws of the facts come into fruitful contact with one another is due to God’s creative work and to God’s providence, by which all things are maintained in their existence and in their operation in relation to one another.²⁴²

For the neo-Calvinist, certainty does not stem from fallible human perception, but from the perspicuity of God’s revelation. Though neo-Calvinists would admit the fallibility of

²³⁸ Cornelius Van Til, *In Defense of Biblical Christianity: A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1969), 1.

²³⁹ Nathaniel Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God” *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (2018): 115.

²⁴⁰ Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid,” 128-129.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁴² Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 122.

human interpretation, Bavinck and Van Til, among others, also maintained the clarity of God's communication to human beings, a communication that is not limited by human fallibility. While Yong's theology lacks guardrails for theology and truth and is open to all possibilities, Poythress maintains that language is created by God and sovereignly directed by him in creation, in such a way that true and certain communication is possible. Poythress observes that God was the first speaker who gave and shared language to Adam, and that "Adam's meanings were not meanings imposed on alien material, but meanings from a mind made in the image of God, and therefore a mind in tune with the world."²⁴³ Hence, "[l]anguage is supremely capable of doing what God himself designed it to do."²⁴⁴

For all these reasons, in comparison to Yong's theology, neo-Calvinism offers a more palatable and less problematic theological resource to Chinese American evangelicals seeking to remedy the dualistic doctrines of creation that truncate their mission and encourage simplistic modes of cultural engagement within pluralistic societies. However, it is admittedly reasonable to ponder why neo-Calvinism has not seen overwhelming success from a historical standpoint. It is worth considering the impact of neo-Calvinism on the Netherlands up to the present day, over a century since Kuyper was Prime Minister. While "Kuyper's vision and his energy have empowered a larger movement," producing "an impressive body of ideas and literature" that we can learn from, "we may also have questions about what happened in the long run," as the "forces of secularization and liberal theology have taken a toll in the Netherlands."²⁴⁵ Harinck observes that while "[n]eo-Calvinists exposed the positivistic and naturalistic interpretations of late nineteenth century science and modern theology as assumptions to be argued rather than as...self-evident axioms," and also "defended the objectivity of God's revelation in the Bible over against the naturalism of the

²⁴³ Vern Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 36-37.

²⁴⁴ Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 38.

²⁴⁵ Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ*, 77-78.

modernists and the subjectivism of the ethical,” they welcomed the epistemological turn toward the subject, leading to confusion about the relationship between fact and interpretation.²⁴⁶

According to Harinck, though Bavinck successfully responded to modernism’s anti-supernatural character and transformed the Christian worldview into an all-encompassing worldview oriented on this world and organic in character, he “started...accepting the plural character of modernism,” and that “there would also be a more or less permanent coexistence of different principles.”²⁴⁷ He “lost track with the Nietzschean development in modern culture...and stressed the provisional character of life and reality,” and he failed to unite all Christians in a theistic coalition in the face of “new modernism.”²⁴⁸ Thus, while Bavinck’s theology was certainly capable of affirming diversity in pluralistic contexts, the challenge of discerning and maintaining unity has remained quite elusive.

Additionally – and to the dismay of some – the problem and difficulty of interpretive pluralism is left unsolved by neo-Calvinists on purpose. Though Bavinck was confident in *Deus dixit*, and Poythress affirms the divinely-ordered functionality of language – both of which theoretically limit an infinite number of interpretations for any single passage of Scripture – a plurality of interpretations still remains, and Bavinck would simply affirm this as important for the catholicity of the church:

[N]o matter how harmful the ongoing divisions have been for the unity of church and doctrine, the consequences to Christianity itself have not been unqualifiedly negative. They testify to the vitality of the Christian faith, to its power in a people, a power that still moves thousands. The richness, the many-sidedness, the pluriformity of the Christian faith, has in this way become evident.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Harinck, “Twin sisters with a changing character,” 363-365.

²⁴⁷ George Harinck, “The Religious Character of Modernism and the Modern Character of Religion: A Case Study of Herman Bavinck’s Engagement with Modern Culture,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 74.

²⁴⁸ Harinck, “The Religious Character of Modernism and the Modern Character of Religion,” 77.

²⁴⁹ Herman Bavinck, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 249-250.

Poythress, too, would affirm this as a helpful diversity that can enhance a “symphonic theology.”²⁵⁰

Finally, while neo-Calvinism may offer wisdom for Chinese American evangelicals, it is still a theological movement in need of further development, and complementary theological perspectives. Many of the neo-Calvinist principles discussed above could be worked out in greater detail and tested in a variety of ways. For example, Kuyper never definitively lists the sovereign spheres in his understanding of sphere sovereignty, and the relationships between the spheres and their categorization is not always easy to discern, which can potentially lead to confusion in how to engage the world’s creational structures. One might also benefit from exploring the points of contact between Yong’s Pentecostal theology and Bavinck’s organic neo-Calvinism. For example, it may prove fruitful to compare and seek complementary perspectives between the Logos’ role and function in creation, providence, the sustaining of creation, and in combating the spiritual forces of evil in Bavinck’s theology and the Spirit’s role and function in those areas in Yong’s theology.²⁵¹ For example, how different is it when neo-Calvinists confidently discern truth based on the perspicuity of the Logos and Yong optimistically discerns truth based on the enlightening work of the Spirit? Furthermore, in addition to Richard Mouw’s chapter, “Discerning the Spirit in the World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach,” in *The Spirit is Moving New Pathways in Pneumatology*,²⁵² a more detailed discussion of the Spirit’s function in God’s common grace activity would definitely enrich Reformed pneumatology, and the Reformed community may indeed find Yong’s detailed discussion of the Spirit’s role in creation,

²⁵⁰ Vern Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1987), 43.

²⁵¹ Vern Poythress has waded into this topic of spiritual warfare, but more work is needed. See Vern Poythress, “Territorial Spirits: Some Biblical Perspectives” *Urban Mission* (1995): 37-49.

²⁵² Richard Mouw, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach” in *The Spirit is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, eds. Gijsbert vanden Brink, Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman, & Maarten Wisse (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 200-214.

history, and providence to offer much assistance toward this end, perhaps even as more in-depth and contemporary expansion on Kuyper's reflections in Volume One, Chapter Two of *The Work of the Holy Spirit*.²⁵³

V. Summary

This chapter has argued that a neo-Calvinism, drawing primarily from Bavinck and Kuyper, especially mediated through Vos and Van Til in North America, is relevant for the Chinese American evangelical context, and has much theological promise for them, insofar as they struggle with theologically understanding their own ethnicities, the difficult dynamics of individualism and collectivism, and the dualisms that hinder their missional engagement with culture and society. Neo-Calvinist theology affirms that ethnicities are divinely ordained, and valuable in the expression of Christian faith and the development of Christian theology. Hence, while being wary of the dangers of uniformity, homogeneity, and ethnic supremacy, Christians need not disparage ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts. Neo-Calvinist theology also offers a balanced approach to individualism and collectivism, not giving precedence to either. Kuyper and J.H. Bavinck had a broader understanding of mission than simply individualistic evangelism. Herman Bavinck's theology of family and covenant theology offer steps toward more harmonious intergenerational churches. Further, Bavinck and Vanhoozer's theological method eschew a "me & my Bible" *solo scriptura* approach to Scripture, and Gaffin's union with Christ soteriology can address the collectivist problem of shame. Lastly, neo-Calvinism does not uphold radical soul/body, sacred/secular, or Christianity/culture dualisms. Bavinck wrote against nature/grace dualism, and neo-Calvinists have always intentionally affirmed the goodness of the whole creation, such that a radical spirit/matter dualism is protected against. Neo-Calvinism's persistent worldview

²⁵³ Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 22-42.

thinking and cosmic Christ protect against a radical sacred/secular dualism, and encourage Christian engagement with culture. In this way, neo-Calvinism can support holistic integral mission, and a bold yet humble cultural engagement within pluralistic contexts with various different worldviews, Christian traditions, and faiths.

Furthermore, I have also endeavored to demonstrate the ways in which neo-Calvinism would be a more suitable theological resource for Chinese American evangelicals than Yong's Pentecostal theology. The neo-Calvinism described in this chapter can defend against theologies that flatten ethnicities as social constructs. It offers practical and theological suggestions to directly meet the challenges of shame and intergenerational conflict. And it also clarifies the word and deed mission of the church as both an institution and an organism, while distinguishing soul and body without separating them. Additionally, the neo-Calvinism of this chapter accents the perspicuity of Scripture and God's revelation more than human perception and fallibility in its theological method, encouraging faith and trust, rather than skepticism and doubt as is more likely to happen in a Peircean epistemology.

All this is not to say that neo-Calvinism is the silver bullet for Chinese American evangelicalism. Calvinism is not the only truth, and thus neither is neo-Calvinism. There is still much to explore as Chinese American evangelicals seek a more contextualized theology. Some may be discontent with the organic motif because of its ambiguity and mysteriousness to the human mind. Furthermore, there are many details and complexities that need to be investigated that may test my neo-Calvinist suggestions for Chinese American evangelicals. Nevertheless, neo-Calvinism still has much to offer Chinese American evangelicals in search of a more contextualized theology that avoids many pitfalls within popular and conservative evangelicalism, and even within Yong's Pentecostal alternative.

CONCLUSION

In response to Soong-Chan Rah's vision of the "next evangelicalism," unfettered by the cultural trappings of the West, and also in response to Samuel Ling's call for Chinese American evangelicals to develop a theology of culture to guide their engagement with an American culture constantly in flux, this thesis has emerged as an exercise in Chinese American evangelical theology. It has sought to answer the primary question: "*How might post-1965 Chinese American Christians engage in a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology?*" The aim of this thesis has been to move toward a contemporary and contextualized Asian, and specifically a Chinese American evangelical, theology that does not "suck." Whether or not this thesis has succeeded, any pursuit of a Chinese American evangelical theology requires a first step. That is what this thesis is, a contemporary and emic beginning step toward a Chinese American evangelical theology in conversation with 1) the history and experience of Chinese American evangelicals since the mid-20th century, 2) the theological discourse of contemporary American evangelicals, 3) the pent-evangelical theology of Amos Yong, and 4) the neo-Calvinist theology of Kuyper, Bavinck, Vos, and Van Til.

I. Steps Retraced

This thesis began in Chapter One with an outline of the most significant historical, social, and political factors that have led to the theologically conservative ethos amongst the vast majority of Chinese American Christians since the mid-20th century. Due to the 1949 Communist victory in China, the pilgrim experience of Chinese Christians in the Diaspora found more resonance with the more other-worldly theology of conservative evangelicalism. At the same time, the mid-20th century in America marked the beginning of the mainline denominations' decline and the rise of a popular neo-evangelical movement with many

evangelical institutions established. Chinese American Christians' new interest in conservative evangelical theology was simultaneously met by a proliferation of evangelical initiatives and resources. However, the rise of conservative evangelical theology amongst Chinese American Christians at the mid-20th century mark was perhaps most significantly influenced by the large waves of Chinese immigrants streaming into the U.S. after the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. The Chinese Christians who immigrated to the U.S. brought the conservative evangelical faiths they received all over the Chinese Diaspora in Asia and planted many new churches.

The second step of this thesis' methodology – carried out in Chapter Two – involved an exploration of the confluence of popular American evangelicalism and the Chinese American context and experience, resulting in a list of the major challenges, concerns, and struggles that have been voiced by Asian and Chinese American evangelicals in their unique contexts. These challenges, concerns, and struggles included: the tense relationships within multi-generational and multi-lingual churches, whether or not ethnic-specific churches in multi-ethnic contexts are legitimate, and what the mission of the church is. It also explored the challenge of shame, legalism, and consumerism amongst Chinese American evangelicals, as well as the anti-intellectualism that exists amongst Chinese American churches, and the challenges of how to respond to a pluralistic society, which has led to increasing division between progressives and conservatives in Asian American Christian contexts.

Chapter Three continued into the third step, and offered theological diagnoses for the challenges and concerns explored in Chapter Two, as well as a call for a constructive and contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. In considering the un(der)-contextualized reception of popular and conservative evangelicalism amongst most Chinese American Christians, three significant theological issues were discerned and honed in on, setting the agenda for a Chinese American evangelical theology. First, it was argued that

Chinese American evangelicals had largely received a deficient theology of ethnicity, resulting in their inability to articulate the importance of ethnic-specific churches in multi-ethnic contexts or to utilize their unique experience and perspectives in the service of evangelical theology. Secondly, it was argued that Chinese American evangelicals have also been limited to individualistic approaches to mission, intergenerational church challenges, an individualistic approach to Scripture interpretation and theological discourse, and struggles with shame and identity because of the disharmonious dynamics of individualism and collectivism that they more keenly sense than the average white American evangelical. And thirdly, the truncated mission and dogmatic and antithetical posture of Chinese American evangelicals toward contemporary culture were traced to their dualistic views of creation.

The final step was to offer possible theological solutions to the diagnoses of Chapter Three. Chapter Four investigated the possibility of Amos Yong's pentecostal theology as a helpful resource for developing a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology since he is not only a Chinese American evangelical himself, but has also written a book on Asian American evangelical theology. This chapter sought to apply Yong's theological reflection to the three significant theological issues identified in Chapter Three. When it comes to ethnicity, Yong strongly affirms cultural particularity, especially in the development of global Christian theology, yet his affirmation of ethnic particularity is derived more from his pentecostal appreciation of diversity than deep biblical-theological reflection. On the challenge of individualism and collectivism, Yong's theology is largely focused on critiquing the individualism of much of evangelical and Pentecostal theology. Because the Spirit is the principle of creation's relationality, individualism opposes what he believes the Spirit to be fundamentally about. Also, Yong's view of the omnipresent Spirit who sustains creation also runs counter to sacred/secular, soul/body, and Christianity/culture dualisms, leading him to affirm holistic mission, and also to take a very charitable posture toward culture and

Christianity's engagement with culture. Yong does indeed have much to offer Chinese American evangelicals, especially by way of his critiques of evangelicalism. However, his Peircean epistemology and his general lack of strong distinctions may prove problematic, frustrating, and unpalatable to many Chinese American evangelicals.

Chapter Five explored an alternative theological perspective to Yong's. It discussed the promise of neo-Calvinist theology for a nuanced theology of ethnicity (despite its wrongful appropriation for apartheid in South Africa) due to Kuyper and Kreitzer's interpretation of the Babel narrative and its relation to redemptive history as well as Bavinck's organic and Trinitarian motif of unity and diversity. This same Trinitarian and organic motif also offers much promise for dealing with the various issues that Chinese American evangelicals commonly face around issues of individualism and collectivism, as neither Kuyper nor Bavinck reject or accept one over the other. Neo-Calvinism is also helpful in protecting against the radical dualisms of the body and soul, the sacred and the secular, and Christianity and culture, yet while also affirming the distinctions of each. Chapter Five then concludes by favourably comparing neo-Calvinism with Yong's pentecostalism as theological resources for Chinese American evangelicals.

II. Thesis Stated

Hence, in its entirety, this thesis has argued that Chinese American Christians since the mid-20th century have embraced popular and conservative American evangelicalism, which had led to various contextual challenges and concerns rooted in at least three problematic theological assumptions: 1) a weak theology of ethnicity, 2) confusion around the dynamics of individualism and collectivism, and 3) a radically dualistic doctrine of creation. Thus, a Chinese American evangelical theology would do well to address these theological issues.

In the final analysis, while Amos Yong's pentecostal theology could certainly be consulted as a helpful resource for pursuing a more contextualized theology that can address these three theological issues, neo-Calvinism offers a theological resource that also addresses these issues, yet with less theologically problematic issues and more palatability for Chinese American evangelicals. Informed by a Reformed understanding of providence and a redemptive-historical biblical theology that spans from Genesis to Revelation it offers a theology of ethnicity that views ethnic particularity as divinely intended, theologically significant, real, and yet somewhat fluid, neither essentializing ethnicity nor viewing it as a mere social construct. In the dynamic of individualism and collectivism, neo-Calvinism discerns the original organic harmony of the Triune God. It not only offers practical solutions for Chinese American evangelicals seeking to address the disharmonious dynamics of individualism and collectivism in their churches and lives, but also eschews individualistic understandings of missions, salvation, the Christian life, and Scriptural interpretation without preferring collectivism. Neo-Calvinism also combats sacred/secular dualism, while offering a nuanced view of the church's holistic mission that specially values gospel proclamation, and helpfully locates it in the church as institution, without excusing the church as organism from cultural engagement and the pursuit of mercy, justice, and a flourishing world. It also offers a non-monistic alternative to the radical soul/body dualism of popular and conservative American evangelicalism, distinguishing yet not separating the soul and body in the image of God with a holistic dualism. Furthermore, its understanding of creation as revelational, common grace, antithesis, the church as institution and organism, and sphere sovereignty provide ways of discerning truth and goodness from falsehood and evil within various cultures in pluralistic contexts, rendering a radical Christianity/culture dualism unnecessary, and calling for both humility and boldness in the Christian witness. While avoiding the pitfalls and inconsistencies of Yong's theology, the neo-Calvinism described in this chapter

still maintains an exclusivist theology of religions, a clear *ordo salutis*, a high view of Scripture and revelation as it relates to epistemology, and a high view of gospel proclamation as it relates to the church's mission, thus making it far more palatable to Chinese American evangelicals in their present context.

III. Paths to Pursue

In anticipation of future related studies, this thesis invites alternative approaches to Chinese American evangelical theology in humble recognition that (neo-)Calvinism is not the only truth. Furthermore, on a methodological level, this thesis has approached contextual theology as an explicitly emic exercise, which may not have created enough objective distance. Additionally, there is clearly much work to be done on the various theological loci covered in this thesis. More precision, nuance, and detail would certainly help clarify 1) the ways that humanity is both united and yet filled with ethnic and cultural particularity, 2) the ways that individuals and collectives can find harmony in various unique contexts, and 3) the ways that the sacred and the secular, the soul and the body, and Christianity and culture can all maintain both their distinctions and their holistic relatedness.

Additionally, there is much more conversation to be had between Asian and Chinese American evangelicals, neo-Calvinism, and other traditions. Even in this thesis' own engagement with Yong, further exploration of the ways that Yong's pentecostalism and neo-Calvinism might complement each other are warranted. Though it was beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with Daniel Lee's Barthian approach to Asian American theology in *Double Particularity*, Lee's work would be another concrete example of a tradition for Asian and Chinese American evangelicals, neo-Calvinist or other to engage.¹ Lee's Barthian

¹ For more engagement with *Double Particularity*, see Andrew Ong, Review of *Double Particularity: Karl Barth, Contextuality, and Asian American Theology* by Daniel D. Lee, *Studies in World Christianity* 25, no. 1 (Feb 2019): 121-122.

theology might draw some interesting comparisons with the neo-Calvinism advocated in this thesis since neo-orthodoxy and neo-Calvinism were the “two most historically important attempts to reimagine the Reformed faith in a culturally modern Europe” at the turn of the 20th century.²

Lee is an emerging voice that merits continued conversation in the development of Asian American theology, and a Chinese American evangelical theology cannot ignore the publications he will likely produce in the near future, nor his teaching influence as director of Fuller’s Center for Asian American Theology and Ministry and assistant professor of theology and Asian American ministry, nor the podcast he frequently contributes to, called “Centering.”³ Lee could very well represent a third contemporary alternative for Chinese American evangelicals seeking a Asian American contextual theology. However, it is worth noting that while Lee’s Barthian theology may be palatable for certain Korean contexts, few in the Chinese and Chinese American contexts have taken to Barth in comparison to Neo-Calvinism and Pentecostalism, especially amongst evangelicals at a popular level.

Due to the scope of this thesis, space has not allowed for a comprehensive discussion of certain topics such as issues of gender, patriarchy, and sexuality. This is not only because it would require far more space and attention than this thesis would allow, but also because such issues have not found nearly as much significant and distinctive agreement amongst neo-Calvinists. Any one of these issues would require an entire PhD thesis or monograph to fully engage. Finally, in order for further studies Chinese American Christianity in general to develop and progress, more ethnographic and sociological research and data are needed to elucidate the evolving Chinese American Christian context and landscape. For sharper and

² James Eglinton, “Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (19th and 20th Centuries)” in *Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, eds. Scott Swain & Michael Allen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³ Kevin Doi & Irene Cho, Centering: The Asian American Christian Podcast, podcast audio, 2018-2019, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/centering-the-asian-american-christian-podcast/id1441357034>.

more accurate steps toward a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology, the Chinese American evangelical context requires continual observation and study.

IV. Challenges Issued

By discerning the three major theological issues (ethnicity, individualism & collectivism, and dualism) that Chinese American evangelicals have uncritically received from popular and conservative American evangelicalism, and offering alternative theological resources to address these issues, this thesis has sought to take one step toward a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology. Hence, this thesis seeks to contribute both to the growing study of Asian American theology, providing a neo-Calvinist alternative to both Daniel Lee's most recent Barthian Asian American theology and Amos Yong's pent-evangelical Asian American theology, but also to wider discussions of American evangelical theology as well. Insofar as the three major critiques of Chinese American evangelicals' theology applies to American evangelicals' theology at large, the theological solutions offered should prove beneficial for more than just Chinese American evangelicals. These three theological issues – namely 1) a deficient theology of ethnicity, 2) confusion around individualism and collectivism, and 3) radically dualistic conceptions of creation – are not unique to Chinese American evangelicalism.

This thesis neither claims to be the exclusive Chinese American evangelical theology, nor the last word on the continued reformation of Asian, Chinese, American, and/or evangelical theology. Rather, with a view toward the specific Chinese American evangelical context, it offers possible solutions to concrete problems for all American evangelicals to contemplate and critically engage with, advancing the conversation and exploration of American evangelical theology in the 21st century, but also speaking to the broader swath of American Christians at large in the hope of continuing the discussion of American Christianity's continual reformation.

To theologically conservative Asian American evangelicals, this thesis issues a challenge to value their own unique ethnic and cultural perspectives in all of life, including their spiritual and theological self-understanding, and thus to question colorblind theologies, ideologies of assimilation, and underhanded compliments such as the model minority label. Asian American evangelicals need to continually question and discern both the beneficial and harmful ways that they are influenced by the myriad cultural forces swirling around them, such as American individualism.

To Asian American Christians with more theologically liberal convictions, this thesis issues a challenge to reject simplistic and essentialist theologies of liberation that merely emphasize power dynamics and romanticize static conceptions of “Western/White” and “Eastern/Asian” cultures. Such Asian American Christians need to ask themselves whether they have fallen into the trap of seeking cultural identity as a primary and norming theological source, and then basing their theology on a “fossil culture”⁴ that may have previously existed, but no longer exists due to the dynamism and hybridity involved in cultural identity.

Finally, to non-Asian Americans, and particularly white American evangelicals, this thesis echoes Willie Jennings’ challenge to consider the whiteness of their Christianity, and to ask how it “has been parasitically joined to...Christianity.”⁵ Non-Asian American evangelicals must begin to ask how Asian American Christian expressions of faith and theology might concretely benefit them. Hence, more than seeking to provide an answer to how post-1965 Chinese American Christians might engage in a contextualized Chinese American evangelical theology, this thesis has aimed to provoke the wider range of American

⁴ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 25.

⁵ Willie Jennings, “Can White People Be Saved? Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness” in *Can “White” People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, eds. Love Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, & Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2018), 27.

Christians with questions, not only for the sake of continuing the conversation of Asian American theology, but for the sake of continually enriching American evangelical theology with its beautiful diversity of perspectives.

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