Jesus as 'Teacher-Savior' or 'Savior-Teacher':
Reading the Gospel of Matthew in Chinese Contexts

John Y. H. Yieh
Virginia Theological Seminary

Reading the Gospel of Matthew in global contexts with critical hermeneutical reflection may reward the reader with similar benefits that a *Wirkungsgeschicht* approach can garner from examining influential interpretations in the past and from assessing their historical effects in the Western interpretive traditions, i.e. horizon-broadening and self-correction.[1] When we study the reception history of Matthew diachronically through history and synchronically across cultures, much can be learned about sound exegesis and ethical appropriation of the scripture, if we recognize that, while every interpretation is culturally particular and context-specific, some historical examples and fundamental principles in hermeneutics can be critically observed, assessed, and applied to facilitate fresh readings of the scripture with creative imagination, theological integrity, and ethical responsibility.

This paper attempts to investigate three contextual interpretations of Matthew's Gospel by well-known Christian leaders in China. These influential leaders cannot be farther apart from one another in their theological convictions and political positions, but remarkably all of them see Matthew's Jesus play a combined role of savior and teacher and all have focused their expositions on the Sermon on the Mount. My first goal is to find out why Christology and ethics in Matthew are favored by Chinese readers, how they are appropriated in different cultural and social contexts, and what impact they have

[1] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 23-38; idem., *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 333-369.

exerted on their readers. Answers to these questions may give us new lenses to see Matthew's Jesus afresh. These Chinese readings of Matthew also provide fascinating examples of "minority hermeneutics" to show how the Christian Bible, with no claim to authority among the Chinese people, justifies its usefulness and gets its voice heard in a multi-religious and multi-scriptural society in the last two centuries. Finally, these readings raise interesting questions about finding scriptural meaning in cross-cultural settings (West vs. East) and in colonial and post-colonial discourses. A hermeneutical reflection may open a new window for us to look into and appreciate the cultural assumptions and social contexts of the Chinese people, a huge population in the global South, and ponder how Matthew may yet speak to them.

I. Reading Matthew in China

The first Gospel of Matthew in Chinese was translated by Joshua Marshman of the Serampore Mission in Calcutta and his assistant Johannes Lassar, published in Serampore in 1810, but the Chinese readers had to wait until 1814 to see another version in the Chinese New Testament translated and published by Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society. Morrison's translation was done in China with help from Chinese scholars, so it was widely accepted and became the basis of later revisions and versions.[2] In the short history of the Protestant Christianity in China, three distinctive readings of Matthew and their particular views of Jesus are worth scrutiny. Significantly, all three share the focus of interest on Jesus' inspiring personality and moral teachings.

[2] I-Jin Loh, "Chinese translations of the Bible," in Chan Sin-wai and David E. Pollard eds. *An Encyclopaedia of Translation* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), 55.

1. Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864): Jesus the Savior as Law-Giver

One early Chinese convert to Protestant Christianity was Hong Xiuchuan, the famous rebel king of Taiping Tianguo (the Great Peace Kingdom of Heaven). Born in a poor family in Guangxi Province, Hong studied Chinese Classics hoping to pass the Civil Examination to find a government job. Unfortunately he tried many times but failed. Once he fell very ill to the brink of death and saw a serious of visions in which he was taken up to the heavenly court to meet with a dignified bearded old man. After reading a Christian pamphlet written by Liang A-fa, one of Morrison's Chinese assistants, Hong came to believe that the old man he saw in the visions was God. As Jesus' brother, he was sent to this world to fight demons, so he decided to baptize himself and gathered a group of followers, called *Baishangdihui* (the Society of the Worshippers of God). Because of its iconoclastic zeal and frequent conflicts with Confucian scholars and Buddhist believers, Hong's "Christian" group was suppressed by the authorities and consequently turned into a rebel force against the Qing government. Despite of military struggles, hundreds and thousands of hungry peasants were attracted by the loving care, gender equality, and strict discipline of his group and joined them. Three years later and quite miraculously, they established a new kingdom in Nanking and occupied half of the nation south of the Yangtze River including some of the richest provinces and regions.

The impact of Matthew's Gospel on Hong is immediately clear in the naming of his kingdom as Taiping Tianguo (the Great Peace Kingdom of Heaven), in which the peculiar Matthean phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used. With visionary dreams and military successes made sense by an idiosyncratic reading of the Bible, Hong constructed an apocalyptic belief system and became convinced that he was the Second Son of God

whose mission was to establish God's heavenly kingdom, which his elder brother Jesus had ushered in, among the Chinese.[3] Thus, Jonathan Spence the Yale Historian called him "God's Chinese Son."[4] In his capital city Nanking which he called the "Little Paradise," Hong erected a Monument of the Beatitudes to make a political statement saying that the blessings Jesus announced in the Sermon on the Mount had now been fulfilled in his kingdom. This monument begins with these words: "Heavenly Elder-brother Christ savior of the world says" and is followed by the beatitudes taken from Matt 5:3-11.[5]

In 1853 Hong Xiuquan published a New Testament with his annotations entitled *Qinding qianyizhao shengshu* (The Sacred Book of the Formerly Bequeathed Oracles [Former Testament] annotated by his Royal Majesty).[6] In this Bible we can find three repeated themes in Hong's usually brief comments on select texts in Matthew's Gospel.

(1) Jesus' identity as the Son of God. On the upper margin of 2.15ff,[7] for instance, Hong wrote, "Isaiah proves that Jesus is the Son of God, so declares the Emperor."[8] Other similar comments include: "The demons recognize the Princely Brother as the Son of God, so declares the Emperor" (8.29); "The Princely Brother proves himself to be the Son of God" (10.32, 37); "Both the Princely Brother and his disciples prove Christ to be

[3] Rudolf Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (UC Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1982).
[4] Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, New York: Norton, 1996.
[5] Thomas Jenner, *The Nanking Monument of the Beatitudes* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1911), 37.
[6] *Qinding qianyizhao shengshu* (*Ch'in-ting ch'ien-i-chao sheng-shu*; The Sacred Book of the Formerly Bequeathed Oracles [Former Testament] annotated by his Royal Majesty), 8 vols (the third volume is missing), published in Nanking, 1853. It is now preserved in London: the British Library, Asian and African Reading Room MS. 15117.e.19. See also Franz Michael ed. The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents (3 vols.; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), I:227-229; Luo Ergang and Wang Qingchen eds., Taiping Tianguo (10 vols.; Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue, 2004), Vol, 1:113-150.
[7] All the references in this section refer to the beginning of a pericope in Matthew. Hong wrote his annotations on the upper margin of the running text.
[8] Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Chinese are mine.

the Son of God, so declares the Emperor" (16.16); and again "The voice from the clouds announces Christ to be the Son of God. It is evident, then; so declares the Emperor" (17.5). Hong also noted how Jesus "descended from heaven to the world" (3.11; 10.34) and, with God the Father's presence, was able to cast out demons, eliminate evil powers (10.34; 13.37) and perform healing miracles (8.2, 15; 9.29). Moreover, Jesus Christ reveals God's will by giving prophecies ("The Princely Brother declared in advance that the kingdom of heaven had come near, and now it has" 5.17); by plain teaching ("the Princely Brother announced that he preferred mercy to offering" 9.13); and by metaphor saying that the Emperor is the Sun while the Queen the Moon (24.29) and that Hong himself shall be the Lord to rebuild the destructed Temple of God (27.40). These comments demonstrate that, for Hong, Matthew's Gospel provided significant scriptural evidences to prove that Jesus Christ, his Princely Brother, was indeed the Son of God. They also indicate Hong's belief in Jesus' divinity as a mighty savior who came to the world to rescue his people from all kinds of demons, idols, and tyrants as well as Jesus' authority as an esoteric revealer who can foretell the mystery of the kingdom of heaven.

(2) The fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies. In several comments, Hong called attention to the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies in his Taiping Kingdom with these words: "Jesus said …. It is now fulfilled; so declares the Emperor." For instance, the heavenly kingdom that was approaching near has now been realized on earth (5.17); the demons referring to the corrupted Qing officials have been defeated (10.34); the righteous people are enjoying the blessings in the kingdom of the heavenly Father (13.37); the Princely Brother has returned to the earth to gather peoples from all directions into Taiping Kingdom (24.29) and have received his glory in Hong's palace (25.31). These pesher-

like comments may be easily condemned as eisegesis, but to Hong and his followers, they relate Matthew's text to their life experiences with amazing credence. In fact, with the fourteen so-called formula or fulfillment quotations of OT prophecies, Matthew may have provided Hong with the same interpretive move. Not unlike the Qumran pesherim and Matthew's OT quotations, the argument of prophetic fulfillment functions to legitimate the Taiping rebels' self-identity and boost their confidence as they struggled to accomplish their military missions to defeat what they called "Qing demons."

(3) Hong's role in God's plan. It is fascinating to see how Hong used Matthew as God's authoritative word to prove his claim as the Second Son of God and therefore his legitimacy to the throne of the Taiping Kingdom. On the upper margin of 4.1ff, Hong wrote,

> God is fire. The Sun is also fire, so God and the Sun come together. So declares the Emperor. … God is fire, so God has divine light; the Princely Brother is fire, so he is the great light; the Emperor is the Sun, so he is also the light. So declares the Emperor.

In 4.15-16 Matthew quoted Isaiah 9.1-2 "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light" to show that Jesus' moving from Nazareth to Capernaum by the sea "in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali" fulfilled another messianic prophecy (4.14). This quotation may have prompted Hong to comment on God the divine light, Jesus the great light, and he himself the Sun and to say that all of them bring light to the dark world to give it new life and hope. Why did Hong consider himself the Sun? It may have come from a fantastic reading of his name in Chinese onomatology (study of the significance of personal names in Taoist tradition). In a comment on 27.40, where the on-lookers at the scene of crucifixion derided Jesus saying "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself," Hong wrote:

> Hong (洪;his last name in Chinese writing) has three dots (on the left) and three days (三日; which in Chinese also means "three sun") means Hong Sun. (Thus,) the Princely Brother implies that Hong as the Sun shall be the Lord to rebuild the destroyed temple of God. So declares the Emperor.

This onomatological comment probably makes no sense to others but himself and his followers, but again this interpretive strategy resembles the esoteric interpretation of the Qumran *pesherim,* and involves a Chinese interpretive tradition using hidden meanings and associations of names and symbols. Believing himself to be the Sun that gives life to the earth, an important symbol for the Chinese people living in agricultural society, Hong also commented on 24.29 where Jesus talked about the frightening change of the natural signs at the end of the age after the suffering days and before the coming of the Son of Man:

> The Princely Brother was concerned not to let loose the secrets, so he gave an implicit teaching saying that the Emperor is the Sun that turned dark when becoming a human on earth, and the Queen is the Moon that does not shine when becoming a human on earth … (24.29)

Hong believed that he was the Second Son of God formerly living in heavenly court with God the Father and Jesus his Elder Brother. He was then sent to the earth by incarnation on a mission to defeat the brutal Qing government and save his people from oppression. Now that he had gathered the suffering people from all places into his Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, Jesus' prophecy regarding the coming of the Son of Man had been fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven was now realized on earth in China.

Hong's reading of Matthew is esoteric, sectarian, and indeed personalized. It is obviously not a systematic exposition of the Gospel's text or Matthew's intention, but a series of random comments on select passages to present Hong's view of Jesus on behalf of his Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. This use of text does highlight one of Matthew's

Christological emphases on Jesus as the "Son of God" that most critical scholars in the West can accept.[9] Hong also imitates Matthew's use of prophecy-fulfillment argument to prove Jesus' messianic identity. By claiming that Jesus' eschatological prophecies are fulfilled in his Taiping Kingdom, he wishes to legitimate his own identity as God's Second Son and his divine mandate to rule over the new kingdom. To insert himself in Jesus' prophecy about the Sun at the end of time, as noted above, he also adopts a Taoist onomatological interpretation. Hong's pesher-like interpretation of Matthew is prompted and emboldened by the many miracles he experiences in sickness and in military campaigns. To him, Matthew's Gospel is thus undoubtedly a divine and heavenly book that reveals God's plan and authenticate his role as king. This legitimation in turn gives him absolute authority to rule over his people with strict laws and severe punishment. He may be called a "Chinese Constantine" who built a "Christian" kingdom in China for 14 years. In the excitement of his early success, the British and Foreign Bible Society in London ran a successful campaign, "One Million Bibles for China," which excited and mobilized the women's clubs as well as Sunday school children to raise two and half times of the estimated budget in just four years. Looking back to the history of Taiping Tianguo, however, the consequences of Hong's self-appointment as God's Second Son and the loss of twenty millions more of lives throughout his ruthless rule by biblical law could not but raise high brows and a huge red flag about the appropriateness of his biblical interpretation. The scripture may indeed speak to believing individuals in various cultural, historical, and social settings, but is there any sort of critical apparatus that the community of faith may use to discern the validity and appropriateness of individual interpretation? Evidently, the historical-critical reading of the Bible being

[9] J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

developed in Europe had not found its way into China during this time. Without much help from missionaries, Hong read the Bible as a heavenly book that spoke to him personally, and his own concerns for self-identity and purposes of life became the only lens through which the Bible was read.

2. Wu Leichuan (1870-1944): Jesus the Teacher as Social Reformer

Just as Hong Xiuchuan considered the "kingdom of heaven" the central theme of Matthew's Gospel, so did Wu Leichuan, another Christian leader with scholarly expertise in Chinese Classics. Different from Hong who regarded Jesus as the Son of God who came to save his people from the oppression of tyrants, however, Wu honored Jesus as a wise sage who inspired his followers by example and words to cultivate their moral character in order to build an ideal society of self-sacrifice and love. Whereas Hong's view of the kingdom of heaven is military and political, Wu's is moral and social.

Wu Leichuan was a prominent scholar of Confucian Classics and the first Chinese Chancellor of Yenching University.[10] Converted to Christianity at a mature age, he began to read the Bible fastidiously and published several well-acclaimed books on Christianity and Chinese Culture and hundreds of essays on subjects of faith, education, and public service.[11] Wu's writings were influential among educated elites in Chinese universities. He provided an indigenized version of Christian faith at a volatile time when Nationalism (protest against the Western imperial ambitions and the corrupted

[10] Philip West, "Christianity and Nationalism: The Career of Wu Lei-ch'uan at Yenching University," in J. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 226-246. Chu Sin-Jan, *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republican China* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

[11] See a comprehensive bibliography in Roman Malek, *Verschumerlzung der Horizonte: Mozi und Jesus; Zur Hermeneutik der chinesisch-christlichen Begegnung nach Wu Leichuan (1869-1944)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 533-538.

officials), the May Fourth Movement (an intellectual movement for social-political reform) and the Non-Christian Alliance (an anti-Christian student coalition) were boiling in major universities.[12]

Wu argued that only Jesus' moral character, neither doctrines nor liturgies of the church, is to be considered the essence of Christianity, and Jesus' teaching is meant to guide his followers to obey the truth and reform the society.[13] To separate Jesus the moral sage from the institutionalized church and the Western colonial powers is an important idea that helped him survive, intellectually and spiritually,[14] the attacks and challenges of the fierce anti-Christian movements dominating the Chinese universities in early twentieth century.

Who then is Jesus? In Wu's reading of the Gospels, Jesus emerges as a messianic revolutionary turned wise sage of the kingdom of heaven, who dedicated his life to establishing an ideal society by teaching his followers to cultivate moral character and to affect the renewal of moral virtues. In terms of Chinese culture, Jesus is *Shengtianzi* (the holy Son of God) who has heavenly wisdom to serve as a sage-king.[15] Jesus' miracles are largely neglected or interpreted from a rationalist view to extract moral lessons. The miracle of feeding five thousands is, for instance, interpreted as a miracle of a selfless love of the boy that inspires the large crowds to share the food they have brought with

[12] Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).
[13] Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 10.
[14] Wu Leichuan, "Zongjiao bianhuoshuo" (On discerning religion) in *Zhenlizhoukan* 2:30 (1924); "Duiyu zai zhishijie xuanchuan jidujiao de wojian" (An opinion on evangelism among the intelligentia) in *Shenmingyuekan* 5:1 (1924); "Yesu xinshehui de lixiang ji qi shixian de wenti" (The ideal and practice of Jesus' new society) in *Zhenliyushenming banyuekan* 6:1 (1931). Idem., *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 10.
[15] Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 82-98.

them rather than a supernatural act of multiplying the five loaves and two fish. It is by emulating Jesus' compassion for the poor and willing self-sacrifice and by sincerely obeying his teaching and commandments will Christians be able to reform their Chinese culture and save their weak nation from demise under the Western imperial exploitation and the self-destruction of civil wars. This is why Jesus can be useful to the Chinese, Wu argued: Jesus the Teacher has a universal moral wisdom that may change human hearts and reform a society from inside out. By perfecting moral character first, the Chinese people can then make good use of scientific knowledge and patriotic spirit to build a new China and finally bring freedom, equality, and prosperity to all people, thus the idea of *renge jiuguo* (saving the nation by moral character). Underlying this argument is the traditional Confucian doctrine of *neisheng, waiwang* (Become a sage inside and then rule as a king outside) and the deep-rooted pedagogy for moral formation: *xiushen, qijia, ziguo, pingtianxia* (cultivate personal character, order family life, govern national affairs, and bring peace to the world).

The kingdom of heaven that Jesus proclaims, Wu argued, is not a paradise in heaven beyond death, but an ideal society that can be established in the present world where freedom, equality, and charity are enjoyed by all peoples.[16] To explain the idea of the kingdom of heaven, Wu cited Jesus' words from all four Gospels, mostly from Matthew, for discussion. Wu argued that Jesus' total commitment to the kingdom of heaven came from a strong sense of divine calling, and that Jesus started his ministry with a political plan to build a heavenly kingdom on Palestine for the Jewish people under the brutal oppression of the Romans. When his partner John the Baptist was executed by Herod and his efforts thwarted by mounting oppositions from Jewish leaders,

[16] Wu Leichuan, "Tianguo shi shemo?" (What is the kingdom of heaven?) in *Zhenlizhoukan* 3:9, 11 (1925).

Wu surmised, Jesus came to the realization that he had to revise his political plan to focus on a spiritual one. Hence, he changed gears to seek first to transform the hearts of his followers by words and example, even if it meant he had to sacrifice his life to provide an inspiration for them. Only when people's hearts are transformed, Wu argued, can a corrupted society be cleansed and the kingdom of heaven realized on earth. The kingdom of heaven is, therefore, an ideal society in which old concepts are changed and old organizations reformed so that no boundary exists any more between nations and races. It is also a new society without economic disparity that separates the fortunate from the suffering, without private ownership that encourages greed and competition, and without shortage of provisions because everyone shares works and joys in common.[17]

Wu Leichuan read Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount in particular, as a manual of social program meant to implement Jesus' kingdom of heaven on earth. Three points can be briefly commented as examples.

(1) To emphasize the importance of reforming one's heart, Wu cited Matt 5.17 to say that Jesus came to the world for the purpose of fulfilling the law and the prophets. As testified in the so-called Antitheses (Matt 5.21-48), God will not judge people according to visible behaviors but their secret motivations. He who gets angry with his brother shall be judged as a murderer, and he who looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery. So, Jesus warned his audience to take precautions with their hearts. Jesus admonished them not to give alms, pray or fast for vain glory, because God will not be pleased by

[17] Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 66-72.

hypocrisy. Thus, to enter the kingdom of heaven as an ideal society, one needs to begin with the change of hearts, Wu argued.[18]

(2) Wu highlighted Jesus' exhortation not to worry about food or clothes but to strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt 6.33). This saying does not condone laziness, Wu explained, but rather urges people to make efforts to reform their lives as a community so that an ideal society God planned for us can be established on earth in which everything can be done according to God's righteousness. When people put their minds on food and clothes and selfishly fight with each other for those life provisions, they will live in pains and find no happiness. If, on the other hand, every one seeks first to realize the kingdom of God that calls for equality and love, every one will be able to work hard and be willing to share. Then, an ideal society will be formed.[19]

(3) Wu upheld the Lord's Prayer as the blueprint for the building of the kingdom of heaven.[20] He considered the address to God as "Our Father who art in heaven" an important reminder that all peoples are children of God, so we should love one another as brothers and sisters in a big family. The familial relationship is the basic and necessary condition for success in building the kingdom of heaven as an ideal society. The first divine petition, "Hallowed be thy name," teaches us to obey God's truth and justice. "Thy kingdom come" means to replace hatred and injustice with mercy and justice so that the kingdom of heaven may come. "Thy will be done" is a desire to make sure that the

[18] Wu Leichuan, *Modi yu yesu* (*Motze and Jesus*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1950), reprinted in *Motze dachuan* (*Motze Collection*, Vol. 50; Beijing: Library Press), 299-300.
[19] Wu Leichuan, *Modi yu yesu* (*Motze and Jesus*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1950), reprinted in *Motze dachuan* (*Motze Collection*, Vol. 50; Beijing: Library Press), 294.
[20] Wu Leichuan, *Modi yu yesu* (*Motze and Jesus*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1950), reprinted in *Motze dachuan* (*Motze Collection*, Vol. 50; Beijing: Library Press), 302-304. Wu said that it was cited from Luke 11.1-4, though the text is actually quoted from Matt 6.9-13. In the Chinese Bible he used, the longer and more familiar Lord's Prayer in Matthew's version is printed in Luke 11.1-4 to replace the shorter Lukan version. Wu does not seem to be aware of the translator's intention to avoid confusion for the reader.

society may be reformed despite of resistance. The first human petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," teaches us to be equal-minded and without greed; everybody asking only what is needed. The forgiveness petition teaches us how to receive the peace of mind from God and from each other by mutual forgiveness. Finally, the petition, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil," requests divine help to overcome temptations and eliminate disasters. By enlisting the principles of the kingdom of heaven in a prayer for the whole community of faith to recite ritually, Wu argued, Jesus wanted to ensure that his followers work together with one mind to build an ideal society.

Wu's theologically liberal and socially progressive interpretation of the scripture show similarities and affinities with the Protestant liberalism of Germany in the late 19th century and the Social Gospel movement of America in the early 20th century, both of which had found their ways to China through translations, as Wu Yaozong pointed out.[21] The rationalistic approach to biblical interpretation makes good sense to Wu Leichuan as a scholar, because he believed that religion is a driving force for social evolution; as such, religion should also evolve with time and work with science, and a progressive religion should focus on philosophy of life to reform human society.[22]

It is significant to note that Wu was keenly aware of the Western imperialism that has taken away the pride as well as the land of the Chinese people, but he did not look for a mighty savior in Jesus, as Hong Xiuchuan did, to save China from the colonial powers. Instead, Wu saw the political corruption and social malaises as mere symptoms. It was the moral bankruptcy in each citizen and in national leaders that was the root of all

[21] Wu Yaozong, "Preface" in Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 5.
[22] Wu Leichuan, *Jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (*Christianity and Chinese Culture*; Shanghai: Youth Association, 1936), 3-8.

problems. This was a typical Confucian view of social ills. To see Jesus as a supreme teacher who can reform the Chinese society through moral teachings reflects another Confucian conviction in the basic goodness of human nature that can be transformed through effective moral education and that individual moral character can ultimately save a country by removing corruption, greed, and injustice in human hearts. In Wu's reading of Matthew, there is a remarkable mixture of Western rationalist and Chinese moral approaches. Evidently, Wu did not see Chinese culture as an enemy or rival to Christian faith. Jesus did not come to China to abolish Chinese culture but to fulfill it, and Wu's effort to interpret Jesus and his kingdom of heaven in Chinese terms became one of the earliest and best examples of indigenization.

Wu's view of Jesus as an inspiring moral sage found some loud echoes among the Chinese literati in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the most renowned supporters of this view is Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), influential professor and a founding leader of the Chinese Communist Party, who called Jesus, "incarnation of universal love."[23] Many Chinese church leaders educated in the West with a liberal theological perspective held the same view to biblical interpretation in general and Matthew's Jesus in particular. Wu Yaozong (1893-1979), leader of the YMCA and the Three Self Patriotic Movement, confessed that he was converted into Christianity by nothing other than the awe-inspiring Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.[24] Ding Guangxun (K. H. Ting, 1915-), the long time leader of the Protestant Church in China, has insisted on

[23] Chen Duxiu, "Jesus, the Incarnation of Universal Love," in Roman Malek, ed., *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ* (Nettetal: Sankt Augustin, 2005), Vol.3:1208-1214.
[24] Wu Yaozhong, "My Conception of the Universe and of Life since I Knew Jesus," in Roman Malek, ed., *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ* (Nettetal: Sankt Augustin, 2005), Vol.3:1236-1241.

preaching Jesus as the Cosmic Christ who reveals God's love to all people, believers and non-believers.[25]

3. Nee Tuosheng (1903-1972): Jesus the Savior as *Seelsorger* (Spiritual Director)

Contrary to Wu Leichuan's reading of Matthew as a historical text providing information about Jesus the sage and his teaching for an ideal society, Nee Tuosheng, better known as Watchman Nee, reads Matthew as a revelatory text that presents Jesus as the Son of God whose mission was to save his people from sins and to provide guidance for their spiritual life.

Watchman Nee was a charismatic founder of a major independent church, called the "Local Church." He was well known for eloquent preaching and adept teaching of spiritual theology and biblical studies.[26] After the Communist takeover, he refused to sign the so-called "Christian Manifesto" (1950), which demanded church leaders to pledge allegiance to the new government. Under intense political pressure, his churches decided to participate in the so-called "accusation sessions" to show their compliance to the new religious policies. Notwithstanding, he was arrested, but his imprisonment only added to his stature and influence among loyal followers, some of whom had strategically immigrated to major cities overseas to continue his ministry. His books on spiritual life and biblical exposition are very popular in the unregistered house churches today. Most

[25] Ding Guangxun, *Lun Jidu* (*On Christ*; Shanghai: China Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement Committee and China Council of Churches, 2000).
[26] Angus I. Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee* (Eastborne: Victory, 1974). His popular books include: *The Normal Christian Life* (ed. by Angus I. Kinnear; Fort Washington, PA.: Christian Literature Cursade, 1968) and *The Spiritual Man* (3 vols. tr. by Stephen Kaung; New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968).

have been translated into English and are available on the website of Living Stream ministry. His influence on the conservative churches in China cannot be overestimated.

Nee grew up in Christian family, but as a young man his faith was swayed by the intellectual arguments of the anti-religious movement of the time. After a dramatic conversion experience in school, however, he became enthusiastic about the experience of filling by the Holy Spirit. Without formal theological education, he was deeply influenced by the French mysticism of Madame Jeanne de la Motte Guyon, the dispensationalist view of G. H. Pember and Robrt Govett, and the holiness movement of J. Penn-Lewis and Andrew Murray. His biblical interpretation was particularly shaped by C. A. Coats and J. N. Darby of the Brethren Movement in England.[27]

Nee believed that all scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2Tim 3.16), so he advocated the so-called *lingyi jiejing* (spiritual interpretation) that seeks to unveil the spiritual meaning beneath the words of biblical text.[28] In order to find the spiritual meaning in biblical text, he urged the readers to learn the whole Bible by heart as if eating, chewing, and digesting spiritual food so that they may conduct a *xitong chajing* (systematic investigation) into the fundamental themes of the Bible, to the extent that the parts may explain the whole and the whole may illuminate the parts. The idea of systematic investigation is similar to the interpretive principle of *scriptura scripturum* emphasized in the Reformed tradition and in Canonical approach, both of which assume

[27] Lam Wing-hung, *Shuling shenxue: Neetuosheng sixiang de yanjiu* (*The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee*) (Hong Kong: China Alliance, 2003), 21-29. Leung Ka-Lun, *Watchman Nee: His Early Life and Thought* (Hong Kong: Graceful House, 2005).
[28] Watchman Nee, *Shen de huayu de zhishi* (The Normal Christian Preachere; Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1996), 71-170. Leung Ka-Lun, "A Defense for Spiritual Interpretation of the Chinese Church," in Chee-Pang Choong, ed. *The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997),

an internal coherence among varied concepts in biblical books and a thematic unity in the entire canon intended by the Holy Spirit. Since the aim of biblical interpretation is to "instruct" the readers on matters of salvation so that they may be "trained" to do righteousness as spiritual people, the meaning of the text needs to be made clear for easy understanding. Thus, a minister of God's word, he insisted, needs to be inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to receive the light of revelation. Then, it is his duty to translate the light of revelation into human thoughts that can be understood and finally to explain those thoughts in plain words.[29]

Nee ranked Matthew as the most difficult book in the NT; it is "ten times more difficult than the Book of Revelation to understand."[30] He made three attempts to teach this Gospel in its entirety to his followers, but in each case he could not finish it.[31] In fact, it was while he was teaching Matthew's Gospel in a training retreat at Guling Mountain, Fuzhou, he was arrested and later died in jail. His lecture notes in that retreat became the "unfinished last sermons," which were later published with that as the Chinese title.[32] Three things from his lecture notes are illustrative of his understanding of Matthew.

(1) Jesus is the savior of the world. Nee argued that one of Matthew's purposes in writing the Gospel was to show how Jesus the messiah of the Jews became the savior of the world. To suggest that Jesus' salvation was offered to the Gentiles as well as the

[29] Watchman Nee, *Shen de huayu de zhishi* (The Normal Christian Preachere; Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1996), 171-381.
[30] Watchman Nee, *Weiwanchen de zuihou jianzhang* (*The Unfinished Last Sermons*; or *Interpreting Matthew*) (Hong Kong: Living Word, 1989), 22.
[31] The first attempt was made in articles published on the Journal of Morning Star in Yentai, Shandong (Issue 220-239; Aug 1924 – May 1926) which covers only the first two chapters of Matthew. These are published as Watchman Nee, *Matai shiyi* (Hong Kong: Living Word, 1988). The second attempt was made in Shanghai in 1930 and it went as far as Matthew 25. These lecture notes were collected, translated and published in Watchman Nee, *The King and the Kingdom* (Christian Fellowship). The third time was made in 1952 and it went to Matthew 17 but only notes upto Matthew 12 were published in Watchman Nee, *Weiwanchen de zuihou jianzhang* (*The Unfinished Last Sermons*; or *Interpreting Matthew*) (Hong Kong: Living Word, 1989).
[32] See the note above.

Jews, Matthew referred to Jesus as the "son of Abraham" through whom all nations shall be blessed and he included four Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy. Jesus' salvific role is clearly indicated in his Hebrew name "Joshua," which means "Yahweh is savior" or "Yahweh will save." It is further expressed, Nee argued, in his title "Emmanuel," which means God and humans come together in him. Since Jesus came to save his people "from sins," Nee commented, the most serious problem that people faced, as Matthew saw it, was not the brutal oppression of the Roman Empire but the bondage of sins. In other words, Jesus is not a political liberator but a spiritual savior. While commenting on Jesus' miracles (Matthew 8), therefore, Nee said Jesus is the Son of God, so he can easily perform miracles. However, since there is no essential difference between some one who believes in the Lord because of miracles and some one else who believes in demons because of the wonders that demons can do, the purpose of miracles is "not so much to lead us to believe in God's power and wonders as to discern God's mind" (p. 138). God's mind is to save us from all sorts of sins and share Jesus' new life. This view of Jesus is categorically different from that held by Hong Xiuquan and his Taiping Kingdom, and it reflects Nee's consistent warning about the power of sin and its relentless grip over human life. To explain why and how Jesus can save his people from sins, Nee again referred to Jesus' title Emmanuel saying: "Jesus can be the savior (of sinners) because he is Emmanuel, that is, God and humans come together in him. Indeed, only in Emmanuel can there be salvation; otherwise, humans can never even touch God. In Jesus, humans and God have become one." For Nee, then, sin separates humans from God, and salvation means reconciliation with God made possible in Jesus. Nee also said:

> The purpose of salvation is not to save and make a person perfect (in morality), but to make him saved. Even a (morally) perfect person

> remains a natural person, who cannot have a relationship of life with God. The mediator between God and humans is Jesus; and Emmanuel means God in Christ has reconciled with humans. (p. 14).

For Nee, therefore, the salvation Jesus offers means forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and its purpose was to enable believers to enjoy a living relationship with God, not to make them morally perfect as Wu Leichuan and other liberal scholars suggested.

(2) Jesus is also the teacher of Christian life. Jesus saves his people from sins; he also teaches them how to live a Christian life. It is interesting to note that Nee begins his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount with a disclaimer:

> No sinner can be saved by obeying the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount concerns (not salvation, but) Christian life. Christianity does not preach Christ's teaching to the sinners, but Christ's life. (p. 60).

In other words, the Sermon on the Mount is given to Christians who are already saved to learn how to live a life worthy of God's grace. It is not given for the future Millennial Kingdom, but for the present time, so every word of the Lord has to be obeyed now. The Sermon on the Mount is not law, Nee also argued, because law in the Bible functions to reveal our sinfulness. Rather, these high demands of Jesus are challenging "tests" meant to reveal the strength of our inner life. The more we are challenged to obey them, the more we learn to rely on God's power to fulfill them. Thus, Nee described the Beatitudes as seven personalities or temperaments that people of the heavenly kingdom should have in order to receive divine blessings. Because the Sermon on the Mount is intended to help Christians to cultivate spiritual character, the commandment not to resist evil doers or to turn another chick should be understood as a Christian intuitive reaction to violence which takes neither revenge nor non-resistance but complete self-emptiness. Because these teachings concern individual Christian's character, they should not be applied to

political campaign, social movement, or national law either (pp. 91-93). To find biblical teaching on political system, one should consult Romans 13, instead of Matthew 5, he said. (p. 94). To answer the question whether the Sermon on the Mount is law or grace, Nee differentiated the idea of gift from that of reward:

> Gift is what a sinner receives from God free of charge, whereas reward is what a person who has already received the grace of salvation will receive from God in the kingdom because of the good deeds that bring glory to God. Eternal life is absolutely granted by grace and faith, whereas the kingdom of heaven is absolutely received through reward and behavior. (p. 97).

(3) Concerns about spiritual life and final judgment. In *The Unfinished Last Sermons* (*Interpreting Matthew*), Nee's main purpose is exegetical, to explain to his followers Matthew's key concepts. However, because he understands the aim of reading the scripture is to acquire biblical instructions to do righteousness, he would often draw implications from Matthew's text to discuss issues of spiritual life. He would add to his commentary something like "editorial notes" to give his audience specific advice on things concerned spiritual life. On the magi, for instance, Nee said that after seeing the star they decided to travel to Jerusalem to enquire about Jesus and learned about his birth place in Bethlehem through the help of the scripture, but they finally found Jesus to worship only when they followed the light of the star. And then he said the following words to teach his followers how to find God's will:

> Therefore, we need to learn the guidance from life situations, and the guidance from scriptural reading. Either one is not reliable, but both combined are much more reliable. When adding the guidance of the Holy Spirit to make three in one, moreover, it becomes most reliable. (pp. 16-17).

On "Do not judge so that you may not be judged" (7.1), Nee discussed the meaning of the Greek word for "judge" and its Chinese translation and brought into discussion Romans

12 and 1Cor 5.12 to say that it means one should not judge other's motivation by one's own opinion. And then he developed the idea of judgment to say: "The judgment that the Lord forbids is your inner feeling. Giving false witness can be a judgment. Telling truth can also be a judgment. If you allow your own feeling to be pleased but not to feel sorrowful, to blame but not to appeal for repentance, that is judgment." (p. 120). Nee seems to have the first hand spiritual experience in his life and is very sensitive to spiritual struggles, so he can often address the subtle issues of human psychology and spiritual life. Nee argued the good tree that bears good fruit (7.17) refers to the words of the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount unlike the words of the false prophets. Citing Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit bearing good fruit (Gal 5.22), Nee said, "The real teaching is: the teaching of the Lord demands us to obey and then the Holy Spirit will bear fruit in us. Teaching plus Holy Spirit is the only way to bear fruit." This statement illustrates Nee's intense interest in practical advice on spiritual life and his discussion of one scriptural idea in light of another scriptural idea (p. 129). Again, when commenting on church leaders who are denied entrance to the kingdom of heaven (7.22), Nee included 1Cor 12 and 14 in his discussion to warn charismatic Christians about the difference between spiritual fruit and spiritual gifts, one is spiritual life and the other ability for special task. He said: "(Spiritual) gift is not necessarily related to the inner (spiritual) life; it can help others' life but not one's own life." (pp. 130-131).

On the kingdom of heaven, Nee said that the OT prophesied about its coming in the future. Then, John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed that it has come near, but it will not be completely manifested until the Millennial Kingdom arrives. The church is situated in the in-between time. However, wherever there are children of God, there are

already little kingdoms of heaven (pp. 104-105). Hong Xiuquan held a similar idea about the little kingdom of heaven or little paradise being realized in his Taiping Kingdom. Nee, however, does not stop at a realized eschatology. He is ever mindful of the future eschatology when the Millennial Kingdom will arrive, and often uses it as a guidepost to encourage spiritual progress. For Nee, therefore, the Lord's Prayer is not a blueprint for establishing an ideal society as Wu Leichuan proposed. Rather, it is a model prayer teaching Christians how to think in God's term and ask for God's protection. On entering the narrow gate that leads to life (7.13-14), Nee argued that the Sermon on the Mount is the narrow gate and the life refers to the reward and punishment that Christians shall receive in the final judgment. Christians will surely be saved because of the grace of God in Christ, but will be rewarded of punished for their obedience or disobedience to Jesus' commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is the norm of Christian life with a serious implication for the final judgment of Christians.

Nee's influence among the conservative circle is deep and wide. His "spiritual interpretation" that seeks to make explicit the spiritual meaning by cross-referencing other biblical passages in the entire canon, by association of words, symbols, or themes, can be seen in popular Chinese commentaries.[33] The effort to relate theological themes in the Bible to the aspects, stages, and challenges of the readers' spiritual life is also evident in those commentaries. Even though Nee's interpretation may be in danger of eisegesis or allowing "personal ideas" to slip in,[34] its hermeneutics is "not ruleless."[35]

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[33] For examples, Stephen C. T. Chen (Chen Zhongdao), *The King of Heaven: Commentary on Matthew* (rev. ed.; Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1998).
[34] Lam Wing-hung, *The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee* (Hong Kong: China Theological School of Theology, 1985), 287-288.
[35] Ka-Lun Leung, "A Defense for Spiritual Interpretation of the Chinese Church," in Chee-Pang Choong, ed. *The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997), 45-46.

In summary, this study of the three interpretations of Matthew shows that "savior" and "teacher" are two dominant Christological views in Chinese readings of Matthew. As a new religion recently imported to China, Christianity has to explain to the Chinese people who it is they believe and worship. Naturally, Christology becomes the first question of concern in these interpretations of Matthew, besides the fact that Jesus is the subject matter of the First Gospel. Since there are already other religious leaders revered and worshipped in China, Christian interpreters are compelled to justify not only Jesus' legitimacy but also his usefulness to the Chinese people. Thus, these interpreters emphasize on his role as the savior who will save their soul, their society, and their nation and as teacher who will teach them to obey God's will and receive blessings. Moreover, because Christianity arrives in China on the gunboat of the imperial powers and at a time when the corrupted government has brutalized its people and lost credibility, Jesus' idea of the kingdom of heaven and his moral teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount, were interpreted to provide visions, inspiration, and guidance in their efforts to address the national, moral and spiritual crises.

II. Hermeneutical Implications

The three interpretations of Matthew discussed above demonstrate how highly the Chinese Christians regard Matthew's Gospel and how seriously they apply its contents, Christology and moral teaching in particular, to every aspect and level of their personal and community life. Chinese Christians read Matthew's Gospel not simply to satisfy their historical curiosity or to appreciate its literary artistry, but to look for doctrinal instruction and ethical guidance. As a minority group seeking acceptance in a multi-

religious society with an anti-foreign atmosphere, Chinese Christians are compelled to find good terms with traditional culture. When they do not, as in Hong's case, their interpretation is rejected. Chinese Christians also shoulder the burden to prove how their Bible might be beneficial to the Chinese society. When they can, as in Wu's case, their interpretation is well respected.

What can we learn about hermeneutical principles from these interpretations of Matthew? Recent Matthean scholarship in the United States and Europe has focused its attention on "the world of the text" and "the world behind the text" using terms in Sandra Schneiders' hermeneutic scheme.[36] Hence, narrative-critical analysis of the First Gospel as a literary text and sociological investigation of Matthew's church as sectarian community in reaction to the emerging Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism have been the major forces in scholarly discourses in the past two decades. Some Chinese scholars trained in Western methodologies have adopted the same historical, redactional, narrative, and sociological approaches to interpret with competence and proficiency Matthew's text, his church, and his messages as communicated to the first readers.[37] However, they still face the challenge of "translating" the results of their critical studies into understandable messages useful for their Chinese readers. Reading the Bible cannot be a mere academic exercise for Chinese Christians. So, we shall now look into "the world before the text" to see what factors may have effected the way the three Chinese interpreters read and make

[36] Sandra Schneiders, The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 97-179.
[37] See, e.g. Daniel Tin Wo Chow, *Shanshang baoxun de yanjiu* (*A Study of the Sermon on the Mount;* Hong Kong: Taosheng, 1984). Eric K. C. Wong, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Multikulturelle Gemeinde im Matthäusevangelium – Zum Verhältnis von Juden – und Heidenchristen im ersten Evangelium* (NTOA 22; Freiburg, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

sense of Matthew. Their hermeneutical process may be visualized in the following diagram and several observations are in order:

1. Hong Xiuquan:
Visions → Reading Matthew as esoteric text → Christian kingdom vs. demonic tyrants

2. Wu Leichuan:
Reason → Reading Matthew as historical text alongside Chinese Classics → Ideal society vs. cultural corruption

3. Watchman Nee:
Holy Spirit → Reading Matthew as revelatory text within the whole Bible → Spiritual life vs. fleshly temptations

1. Hermeneutical Process and Interpretive Logic.

Hong Xiuquan, Wu Leichuan, and Watchman Nee are all competent and perceptive readers of the Bible. As illustrated in the diagram above, several personal factors have contributed to their understandings of Matthew: their special life experiences (visions, reason, or Holy Spirit), their views of the nature of the Bible (esoteric, historical, or revelatory), their frames of references for reading (Matthew alone, Chinese Classics, the whole Bible), and the perceived crises at hand (oppressive tyranny, moral bankruptcy, or fleshly temptations). Other circumstantial factors also shaped their interpretations of Matthew, such as the theological tendencies they received (sectarian, liberal, or dispensationalist), their interpretive purposes (political legitimation, social reform, or spiritual training), and the conditions of their intended readers (citizens of the new kingdom, educated elites in universities, or Christians in spiritual training course). Many factors in the hermeneutical process and interpretive logic illustrated in these Chinese readings can be found in Western interpretations. Even though the mainstream churches and biblical scholars in the West tend to look at conservative and literal reading of the Bible with suspicion and are often shy away from the spiritual teaching and moral

mandates of the Bible in a culture of disbelief, Philip Jenkins' comment on the African and Asian churches is applicable to the Chinese churches: "As in the United States and Europe, global South churches produced a spectrum of theologies and interpretations. The North-South difference is rather one of emphasis."[38]

Based on the three interpretations of Matthew we have examined, the common Chinese *emphases* in biblical interpretation seem to be (1) a strong interest in Jesus' salvific and didactic roles rather than his identities or titles, (2) a high reverence for the authority of biblical text and its claim on individuals, the society and the nation, (3) the aim of interpretation to cultivate new Christian character, temperament, and personality, and (4) the final purpose to improve spiritual life, encourage moral behavior, and benefit the whole nation. As a matter of fact, these four emphases in biblical interpretation can be found in many other Chinese readers and preachers as well.[39] Chinese people have a long tradition of honoring sages as divinely gifted persons knowing heavenly will, natural orders, and human affairs. Time-tested classical texts are respected and studied because they consist of valuable wisdom transcending history and useful foresights to help people deal with the future.[40] Confucianism, among other traditions, has indoctrinated every Chinese with the value of moral character as the essence of an authentic person and as the basis for building healthy family and strong society. Underlying all these emphases is finally a Chinese pragmatic concern for the life at the present time. Compared to Western scholars who tend to keep a cognitive distance from biblical world, these

[38] Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 6.
[39] See Ji Tai, "Hermeneutics in the Chinese Church," in Chee-Pang Choong, ed. *The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997), 3-15.
[40] Ka-Lun Leung, "A Defense for Spiritual Interpretation of the Chinese Church," in Chee-Pang Choong, ed. *The Role and Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church in China* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997), 43-44.

Chinese interpreters read biblical texts with a fusion of horizons because for them the Bible speaks to them directly. Such intimacy with the Bible may indeed make them oblivious of the historical and cultural gaps and thus misinterpret biblical meanings, but it also brings them to a closer contact with biblical text in such a way that they are enabled to find some inner logic of the Bible and its existential claims on reader's life. It should also be pointed out that there is a tension between Wu Leichuan who represents a liberal perspective and Watchman Nee who represents a conservative view. Is Matthew's Gospel a revelatory text or a cultural text? Is Jesus the savior of a nation or individual soul? Is he a moral sage for social reform or a spiritual teacher of Christian life? Is Jesus' teaching meant for the nation to hear or the church to obey? Wu and Nee give contending interpretations of Matthew because they have a fundamental difference on the answers to those questions.

2. Matthew's Gospel and Jesus' Roles

What do these Chinese interpreters have to say about Matthew's Gospel and Jesus, which are noteworthy for Matthean scholarship in the West? These three Chinese interpreters are all aware of Matthew's view of Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews and the Son of God, as Western scholars (e.g. W. D. Davies, J. D. Kingsbury) have long argued. Compared to most Western scholars, however, Chinese interpreters take a keener interest in what Jesus does than who Jesus is. Thus, they explain and argue how Jesus plays the role of the mighty savior of the world and/or the supreme teacher of God's will. It is on Jesus' role and function, rather than titles and identities, that they find a "point of contact" between Matthew's Jesus and the Chinese people in crises. Thus, Hong

Xiuquan finds Jesus to be the mighty savior who saves his people from demonic tyranny, and because of his power as savior, his commandments are considered divine laws to be strictly enforced in Taiping Kingdom. Wu Leichuan honors Jesus as the wise sage whose personal example and moral teachings inspire his followers to reform their moral character and build an ideal society for the new China. Thus, Jesus the teacher is also the savior of Chinese culture. Watchman Nee regards Jesus as the savior of all souls from sins, and so his teaching provides divine guidance for the spiritual progress of Christian life. One may disagree with specific points of their interpretations, but as spotlights they each have shone and highlighted one important aspect of Jesus' role as savior and/or teacher. While lifting up Jesus' salvific or didactic roles to address political, social, or spiritual crises, together they have shown us the surplus of meanings in Matthew's Christology that provide rich resources to be appropriated for each new situation the Chinese church faces. In their appropriations of Matthew's Jesus and his teachings, moreover, we have seen remarkable examples of indigenization and contextualization efforts with both positive and negative consequences on the life of the church in China. The confidence and boldness Hong and Wu have demonstrated in connecting Christian Bible with Chinese culture and in applying Jesus' teachings to the society and nation building are amazing. The firm conviction Nee has shown in his unfailing attention to the reality of the final judgment and the need of Christians to pursue righteousness beyond faith brings out Matthew's eschatological horizon and stern warning about readiness in a way rarely seen among biblical scholars. We are thus reminded, as Ulrich Luz has strongly urged, of the importance of faithfulness as an exegete to seek the "kernel of meaning" within the grammatical-historical structure of biblical text in its first

contexts and the necessity of openness as an interpreter to discern the "directional meanings" that the theological-ethical implications of biblical text may continue to yield to help us address new life-situations.[41]

3. Cross-Cultural Reading and Post-Colonial Criticism

Finally, what do these three interpretations of Matthew say about cross-cultural reading and post-colonial criticism which have caught scholarly attention in recent years? Given their particular historical contexts, these three Chinese interpreters represent early-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial readings of Matthew.

(1) Christian Bible and Chinese Culture. Chinese Christians are often caught in a head-on crash between Christian Bible and Chinese culture, both of which have deep-rooted world views, value systems, spiritual expectations, and moral demands. Reading the Bible is a cross-cultural journey, at the end of which no travelers can escape changes. Is it possible for a Chinese reader to be loyal both to the Christian Bible and the Chinese culture? Can one reconcile the biblical world and the Chinese world with authenticity and integrity? In the three examples we examined in this paper, we find three models of cross-cultural reading. (1) Hong Xiuquan seemed to believe that biblical revelation should replace Chinese culture which is full of superstition and idolatry. Hence, after his conversion and in his military campaigns, he destroyed numerous Buddhist temples wherever his army passes and he gave orders to burn Confucian classics in Nanking. In the early-colonial period in China when Christian Bible encounters Chinese culture for the first time, such radical and iconoclastic actions demonstrate the powerful impact the

[41] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Augusburg, 1994), 20.

Christian Bible has exerted on Hong. He may also have felt disillusioned with Chinese culture because he had witnessed the self-fish, hypocritical, and corrupted behaviors of many Confucian scholars and government officials of the Qing Dynasty. (2) In comparison to Hong, Wu Leichuan held a more positive view of Chinese culture. In the encounter between Christian Bible and Chinese culture, Wu believed, traditional Chinese culture can be fulfilled and improved by the moral teachings of the Bible. Chinese culture remains an important heritage and assets of Chinese Christians and it can help them understand and preach the Bible to other Chinese as well. At a time when Western colonial power has made its inroad to China and has established universities, Wu's relative confidence in Chinese culture and critical appreciation of the Bible shows a measured understanding of the cultural crash. In his reading of the Bible, he showed a critical appreciation both of Western liberal theology and Chinese moral traditions. (3) In contrast to Wu, Watchman Nee made no obvious attempt to connect Chinese culture with the Bible in his interpretation of Matthew. His Reformed understanding of human sin may have led him to see mostly depravity in human culture, and his dispensational view of history that waits for judgment day may have led him to see nothing but the Bible as the revelatory text of God for eventual salvation.

(2) Bible Reading and Colonial Discourses. In a provocative essay written for *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (2007), Warren Carter embarks a reading of Matthew's narrative and Matthew's theology form a postcolonial perspective, and brilliantly shows how Matthew's Gospel reflects a "lived imperial experience on the margins, attesting both modes of subjugation and modes of resistance

in an oppositional yet co-opted text."[42] What may be puzzling is that while resisting the all pervasive influences of the Roman Empire, Matthew also imitated the strategies of the empire when he presented Jesus as asserting his authority over heaven and earth and announcing the rule of God's kingdom with enticing blessings and threat of judgment. If one objects any form of imperial power, Matthew's blatant "imperial" discourse may become a troublesome question. Hence, Carter calls for a critical review of Matthew's "imperial" theological assumptions and urges his readers to trust in God's mercy even in the final judgment. Whereas Carter reads Matthew's Gospel with a postcolonial anti-imperial critique, we may briefly look at the way our three Chinese interpreters interact with the imperial powers of their times. It might be helpful to bear in mind that, as converts to a foreign religion, Chinese Christians are often accused of "cultural treason" by believers of traditional religions, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. They are regarded as counter-cultural, because religious conversion means not only a changed mind but also a changed way of life. When they refuse to participate in ancestor worship (a traditional ritual to express filial piety and consolidate familial relationship) or other religious festivals in honor of local gods and goddesses (customary ways to strengthen communal unity), they are condemned for their "anti-social" behaviors and as a result are sometimes harassed or persecuted. There was a tragic precedent, the "Rites Controversy" that took place in the 17th century between the Popes in Rome and Chinese Emperors, resulting in the ban of Catholic missions and the horror of religious persecutions. How did these three Chinese interpreters of Matthew deal with missionary influences and

[42] Warren Carter, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah eds. *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 69-104.

colonial powers of their times? Did they assert their Chinese cultural identity or show any anti-imperial tendencies which the recent postcolonial criticism are concerned about?

It is interesting to note that Hong Xiuquan led his Taiping forces against Qing rulers calling them barbarian rulers but sought cooperation with foreign imperial powers (the English, American, and French naval dispatches in Shanghai) because they shared the same Christian faith. The Qing Dynasty was regarded the demonic "imperial power" that should be eradicated. Hong seemed to believe that all peoples are children of God and Christianity transcends politics. However, in establishing Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, he mimicked every form of imperial maneuvers and strategies to take power and take control. He simply replaced Qing Empire with a quasi Christian Empire. This became one of the reasons why his kingdom failed in the end. Wu Leichuan lived through a time in the modern history of China when foreign aggression and colonial attempts were at their height. Somehow, he was able to turn inward for self-examination and chose moral persuasion instead of empire-like coercion to advocate the idea of an ideal society. He wanted to save China from the imperial exploitation, but was wise enough to combine what is good from both imperial influences (such as reason and science) and Chinese traditions (such as moral character and concern for the community), perhaps because he had seen the benefit of missionary enterprises in education, medicine, and social service as well as the arrogant abuses of Western traders. Thus, he seemed to be able to transform the imperial discourse and pursue a moral discourse. Finally, Watchman Nee was active through colonial and post-colonial times, but he did not seem to react to any particular imperial ideology and was able to resist power of domination; perhaps because his church had been a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-

propagating independent church from its birth, and he had focused his ministry on training Christians to grow mature spiritually in preparation for the final arrival of God's Kingdom. He sought to transcend colonial discourse of power to travel into a new spiritual world.

We have made a short visit with three Chinese colleagues who loved Matthew and revered Jesus as savior and teacher. They have tried to make sense of Jesus and his teachings for themselves and for the Chinese people as they experienced radical social changes and national crises. Their interpretations of Matthew are unapologetically contextual because they wished to use the scripture to address the crises confronting them and to lead and guide their Chinese readers to walk on the way of the kingdom of heaven. I hope this imaginative cross-cultural visit has raised some interesting questions for us all to want to read Matthew's Gospel once again from a different angle and to want to converse some more with Chinese interpreters and others who live in different cultural settings about Jesus and his teachings.