

A Theology of Chopsticks

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Abstract: This article considers chopsticks as an element of Chinese culture for expressing an existent theology in contemporary China. It seems that the contemporary Christian church in China has advanced into "adulthood" and has had her own experience of growing up, but she is not yet mature, since she is so eager to receive new ideas but so often negatively influenced by them, and has frequent mood swings. She struggles under the burden of traditional authority, a complicated political context, an immature system of church organization, changes in socio-moral ideology, and disordered biblical interpretation. Contemporary China is both politically and culturally complex and the theology of chopsticks is an attempt to achieve a balance between the two. This theology of chopsticks is a form of contextual theology with four core ideas: existence, balance, cooperation, and two as one. These ideas have been utilized to examine the relationship between: 1) gospel and culture, 2) globalization and contextualization, 3) reason and faith, and 4) church and state, in terms of theological viewpoint. Since this paper is only an introduction to a theology of chopsticks, the ideas expressed here are just a starting point and a tentative exploration.

Key words: chopsticks, gospel and culture, globality and locality, faith and reason, church and state.

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An Introduction: Chopsticks as an Element of Chinese Culture for Expressing an Existential Theology

In Chinese, chopsticks are *zhū* (箸/筴), a two-piece instrument for eating food. ^① We do not know when and where chopsticks were invented, but chopsticks are popular tableware in China with a history of more than 3000 years. There is no doubt that China is where chopsticks originated, and today there are many nations in Asia that use chopsticks as tableware, such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam. From the viewpoint of cultural tradition, chopsticks are not only a distinctive part of Chinese traditional culture, but also an element of Asian culture.

The materials of chopsticks are simple. We can imagine that use of chopsticks began as part of agricultural culture in ancient China, when it was easy to make chopsticks from a branch of a tree in wild country. Chopsticks are taken from nature and suggest a simple life; they are closely connected to the context of farmers and labourers. Chopsticks demonstrate how peasants cultivated their lands, farmed their fields, and enjoyed their own lives. Chopsticks are the most popularized tableware in Chinese traditional culture. Sometimes different materials for making chopsticks could identify the users' social status and the amount of wealth they possessed. Generally speaking, chopsticks represent a most popular and egalitarian form of tableware. The materials of chopsticks can be cheap or expensive, light or heavy, such as gold, silver, bronze, steel, black wood, padauk, bone, boxwood, blue-white porcelain, bamboo, ivory, plastic, and so on. Sometimes artists or rich people also try to decorate chopsticks by carving them or inlaying them with precious metals or stones.

① 陆容 著 Lu Rong, 《菽园杂记》Shuyuan zhuji [Bean Garden Notes] 卷一：“民间俗谚，各处有之，而其中为著。如舟行津汛，津州，以箸为快儿，縠布为抹布”。快，谐音为“筷”。（见《辞海》Cihai [Cihai-dictionary], 1989年版, 2122）。

However, no matter the material or how it is decorated, the functional importance of chopsticks as tableware in food-culture remained the same. Therefore, chopsticks represent a simple and pure cultural artifact that can be enjoyed by both the high and the low because they are close to the reality of life.

Chopsticks' cultural particularities and their symbolism are significant, and they are useful for creating a Christian theology in both theory and practice when we add some socio-religious interpretation. The basic idea of this paper is that chopsticks in Chinese tradition represent not only the primary need but also the cultural equality of common people. It seems that chopsticks' purity and simplicity silently reflect the peasants' spiritual perplexity, their needs, their helplessness, their existential dignity, their pursuit of a better and more satisfying life, their eagerness, and their understanding of the fast-changing world. We can say that chopsticks are a special gift and a kind of existential wisdom given by God to Chinese people. Chopsticks can stimulate associative thinking about Jesus' disciples, their boats and their nets on the Sea of Galilee. Chopsticks also lead me to think of Moses' shepherding staff and the twelve baskets used to hold the pieces left from the "five loaves and two fish". The Chinese church needs to express the spirituality of the community of faith in a way that reflects the existential reality of "working with believing". For this reason, chopsticks are an existential sign that conveys the significance of both individual and group faith; tranquility, purity, simplicity, aspiration, and love. In this paper, I understand chopsticks as an important cultural element for developing an existential theology that is culturally contextualized. Therefore, it is entitled "a theology of chopsticks".

A theology of chopsticks is understood as seeking the proper balance between the "bitterness of laboring" and the "happiness of believing". No one can avoid the bitterness of laboring, as God punished Adam and his wife when they sinned. The Bible says, "by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19) Chopsticks were created and refined by peasants in China, they are as cheap and simple as dust, but they are also as expensive and dignified and sincere as dust. As human beings, laborers need faith, God, and reverence, to respect and be respected, to love and be loved. Chopsticks narrate these basic aspects of being human. Both "bitterness of laboring" and "happiness of believing" are important for expressing the originality and the innocence of human beings as well as the civilization of humankind.

Therefore, human beings can receive happiness and hope through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians neither live alone, nor avoid the real world. When Jesus left his disciples, he prayed to his Father; "now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves." (Jn 17:13) This joy comes from belief in The Lord. The theology of chopsticks attempts to seek a harmony between material satisfaction and spiritual need, as well as to keep a balance between the helplessness of poverty and the eagerness to get rich. It is concerned about some basic questions: why do people live? How can people's lives be more significant? These questions are existential and today have become important social/religious/cultural/moral issues. Seeking faith cannot wait for material perfection; rather, pursuing human dignity and rebuilding existential conviction must occur at the same time. Hence, material satisfaction and spiritual need, as well as the helplessness of poverty and the eagerness to get rich are like chopsticks-though their lengths differ and they be neither equal nor complete, yet chopsticks must be two-piece.

The theology of chopsticks here has four core ideas: coexistence, balance, cooperation, and two for one. Chopsticks are plural. A single stick cannot become zh? (箸/筴/筷). Only when two sticks are combined, keep balance, mutually cooperate, and work together properly do they become

chopsticks. In this way, chopsticks symbolize bringing out the best in one another. A good Christian theologian is like a skilled user of chopsticks—he/she can proficiently handle chopsticks to take fine food and taste great theological cuisine. A pair of chopsticks cannot be separated, but depend on each other. For this reason, I suggest using these four core ideas: coexistence, balance, cooperation, and two-as-one to build a theology of chopsticks. “Coexistence” here means two sticks mutually exist in combination. “Balance” refers to a proper tension through which the efficiency of using chopsticks can be optimized. “Cooperation” has to do with “working-together” and refers to the skillful practice of using chopsticks and looking after one another. Finally, “two-as-one” means “walking-together” and implies that a theology of chopsticks is a theology of “two legs walking”, where both share a joint target. Thus, “walking together well” gradually becomes “working together well”.

It seems that the Christian church in contemporary China has entered into “adolescence”, she has had her own experience of growing up, but she is not yet mature, since she is so eager to receive new ideas, but so often negatively influenced by them, and has frequent mood swings. She struggles under the burden of traditional authority, a complicated political context, an immature system of church organization, changes in socio-moral ideology, and disordered biblical interpretation. In this article, I develop a theology of chopsticks based on the above-mentioned four core ideas—coexistence, balance, cooperation, and two-as-one—to examine theologically the relationship between: 1) gospel and culture; 2) globalization and contextualization; 3) reason and faith; and 4) church and state.

1. The Relationship between Gospel and Culture

Christianity has developed for 2000 years since the time of Jesus. The relationship between gospel and culture has been very complicated. In Christian history, the relationship between gospel and culture has experienced many changes, at times harmonious and at times in conflict, even to the point of causing religious wars. Do gospel and culture necessarily conflict when Christianity enters different cultures? I would rather think not.

H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) in *Christ and Culture* (1951) describes five different forms that the relationship between Christianity and culture can take, namely, Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture.^② In these different forms of interaction between the gospel and culture, Niebuhr does not say that the gospel and culture must be “tit for tat” nor does he relativize them. On the contrary, his main idea is not only to promote dialogue between Christianity and local culture, but also to propose the possibility of mutual accommodation and adaptation between the gospel and culture. Niebuhr hopes to prevent conflict between Christianity and local culture, but not all conflict is unavoidable. Thus, he seeks a proper method for promoting mutual accommodation that is also applicable in the case of Christianity encountering a non-Christian cultural context.

In the past thirty years, Christian development in China has not encountered great opposition. Religious policy has been relatively tolerant, the number of Christians is increasing rapidly, theological education is blooming, the positive influence of Christianity is well recognized, and more and more Chinese people have learned from Christian civilization. At the same time, the rapid development of Christianity in China has aroused social attention, and many scholars keep a watchful

② Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 45-729

eye on the contemporary development of Christianity. Some attitudes toward Christianity are rational and calm; however, others are critical, especially those from the viewpoint of cultural-sociology. Consider the following two cases:

Case I: On 18th Dec. 2006, ten scholars from different universities published a public proposal together titled "Our Viewpoints on Christmas".^③ The article argues that the Chinese people should deal cautiously with "Christmas Fever". They see Christmas as a form of western cultural expansion in contemporary China, and are concerned that the rise of Christmas and its prevalence in China can lead to a de-emphasis on Chinese traditional culture. They urge business persons to profoundly rethink their commercial actions, and remind the younger generation of the reality of Christmas. They argue that the blind following of Christmas reflects a "mass cultural unconsciousness", hence they propose that China should reemphasize the importance of Chinese traditional culture and strengthen traditional cultural education and be deeply concerned about folkways and customs. However, they also declare that their article does not aim at opposing the Christmas of Christians or the activities of Christmas organized by and for the Christian churches.

Case II: On 27th Dec. 2010, an author named Chixian Mingyi published an article on the Internet titled, "They Want to Crucify Confucius: A Comment on the Event of Building a Church at Qufu".^④ Qufu was Confucius' hometown 2500 years ago and is now still an attractive, well-known and symbolic place of Chinese traditional culture. The article asserts that the Confucians who worship in the Confucian temple will feel a great pressure if Christians want to build a church only three kilometers away from Confucian temple, more than ten meters above the height of the temple, and which can accommodate three thousand Christians. They feel that such a Christian church would be like a big frog in a small pond, as Qufu is a small city with an architectural style of Ming-Qing dynasties. They also suggest that the number "3000" is a sarcastic action toward Confucius. The author also argues that building a Christian church at Qufu is a plot, and that the local government does not understand that it is firstly a political event, secondly a cultural event, and thirdly an economic event. Culturally speaking, the author says that the issue of Qufu local people's cultural mentality and emotion must be taken into consideration. Building a Christian church does consider the wishes of Qufu's Christians, but it does not respect the feelings of Qufu's 600,000 non-Christians. Christians at Qufu are only about 10,000. According to the author, Qufu belongs to Chinese over the world, therefore building a Christian church at Qufu needs to consult all Chinese people. They feel that they cannot tolerate the event, and they neither want to see religious-cultural conflict in Confucius' hometown, nor to see Confucius and Mencius kneel to a foreign Christian culture. The author also asks for supporters in many ways, and the article has already attracted significant support from Confucian persons and organizations around the world.

Generally speaking, in the past 30 years, Christian development in China has not been troublesome. The above-mentioned cases are not representative of the relationship between local cultural conflict and Christian expansion in contemporary China. However, the cases do reflect how the rap-

③ The article can be seen in internet, in Chinese:《走出文化集体无意识, 挺立中国文化主体性: 我们对“圣诞节”问题的看法》*Zouchu wenhua jiti wu yishi, tingli Zhongguo wenhua zhuti xing: Women dui Shengdanjie wenti de kanfa* [Lessons from the Collective Non-realization of Culture, Support the Objectivity of Chinese Culture; Our Opinions on the Issue of Christmas], (2010/3/12) http://news.xinhuanet.com/cfu/2006-12/21/content_5515642.htm, <http://hbs.5iyq.com/viewthread.php?tid=48640>

④ The article can be seen in internet in Chinese: “祭县明夷 Chixian mingyi”:《他们要把孔子钉死在十字架上——评曲阳建基督大教堂事件》*Tamen yao ba Kongzi ding si zai shizi jiao shang —— Ping Qufu jian jidu da jiaotang shijian* [They want to crucify Confucius on the Cross: Reflection on the Issue of Cathedral Construction in Qufu], (2011/9/11) <http://www.tiany.cn/publicforum/content/true/1/2066811.shtml>

id revival of Christianity in China has caused many concerns, in which some are supportive, some approve, some are neutral, some oppose, and some are uncertain. All these concerns imply that the possibility of the conflicts between the gospel and culture can still be seen. At the same time, these phenomena also show that the contemporary social mentality is complicated, and they imply a lack of cultural-psychological preparation for, and anxiety and apprehension about, the development of Christianity.

Case I "Christmas Fever" as a Christian cultural phenomenon is a reality in contemporary Chinese society and reflects a commercial action under the influence of economical globalization. "Christmas Fever" indicates that a conceptual and commercial Xmas has become fashionable in metropolitan areas and that it has created many commercial chances for businessmen. Xmas has not only become a symbol of consumption and of the economic-cultural strength of upper-middle classes, but has also become an imitation of the western life-style for urban youth. For non-Christians, a commercial Xmas is the result of rapid process of urbanization in contemporary China. This phenomenon reveals the loss of identity of modern Chinese people on one hand; on the other, it displays an external cultural strength and de-emphasis of local traditional cultural. The phenomenon of "Christmas Fever" can be understood as a secularized Christian revival on the surface, as a commercial celebration of a Christian festival and a non-religious fast-food culture.

"Christmas Fever" has been causing a lot of arguments about cultural conflicts. Some people see Xmas as a chance for self-satisfaction through consumption and for getting relief from the pressure and nervousness of urban competition. Some understand Xmas as the expansion of western culture, hence they suggest that it is not only necessary to protect Chinese traditional culture, but also to reject Xmas. Some feel that the young generation is so lacking in traditional cultural education that it is possible for the youth to be blind followers of non-rational westernization. Some also say that it is not necessary to be so worried, perhaps the youth are just looking for fun and relaxation. Some regard Xmas as a phenomenon of economic globalization, and do not consider it necessary to see Xmas as a seriously religious occasion or expression of cultural conflict. Some also complain that Xmas has become a festival of the rich, and because of the gap between rich and poor is getting larger, the story of "The Little Match Girl" has been repeated in contemporary China. Some argue that the youth attending Xmas' eve is like taking part in a temple fair during Spring Festival and that they treat Xmas the same as hip hop street dancing or as participating in Valentine's day.

Case II obviously shows that the possibility of conflict between Christianity and Confucianism still exists. The case reveals a core problem: some (many) people in contemporary China still view Christianity more as "a foreign religion" than a Chinese religious belief. They do not accept Christianity as a Chinese religious community through which the church can be built, and Christian charity and non-profit organizations can be set up. That is why they understand building a Christian church at Qufu not only as "a political/cultural/economic event", but also as a demeaning action towards Confucius and one that implies Confucians kneeling to a foreign religion. This view at least reflects that the process of Chinese contextualization of Christianity has a long way to go. If we can treat Christianity not as an imported religion but as a Chinese mentality, then we may see building a church in our own land as our own business. Perhaps this approach could be useful to reduce the confrontation. At the same time, this case also exposes non-Christian society's lack of a proper attitude toward the rapid development of Christianity in China, and reveals the crisis of Chinese cultural self-confidence that makes it hard to understand, accept, or acknowledge the newcomer.

It does not necessarily matter if Xmas must be religious or if building a church at Qu-fu pressures or challenges others. But religiously speaking, these two cases remind us that Christianity should not be too closely tied to western culture and western life-style. It is not right to tie religious

Christianity to Western Christian culture, because when doing so, Christianity is easily misunderstood as foreign cultural expansion, then it consequently causes the vigilance of Chinese traditional culture, so far as to lead the possibility of so-called "cultural conflicts". Chinese Christians not only need to avoid making Christianity a victim of globalization, but also need to seek a more harmonious existence and positive development in contemporary China within the context of globalization. It is not good to see that Christian development is unharmonious with Chinese traditional culture. It would be very bad if we find that the conflicts between Christian development and Chinese traditional culture cause mutual political distrust between China and the West, a confrontation between the gospel and culture, or cultural relativism. When the development of Christianity deeply touches local culture and ideology, the criticism could occur. Cases similar to "Xmas Fever" and building a church at some culturally influential place can also be seen other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Therefore, we may think of the importance of chopsticks; the gospel and culture must be able to "coexist harmoniously", "accommodate each other", "balance each other", "cooperate with each other", and "walk together". We believe that Christianity is positively alive, Chinese traditional culture is alive, too. Chinese Christians should hold the chopsticks firmly, as they are both Chinese and Christian, and integrate the identity of Christian belief and the identity of Chinese traditional culture. Cultural identity cannot replace one's religious faith, all human beings have the right to choose their own religious belief. At the same time, one's religious faith cannot change his/her cultural identity such as race, complexion, custom, or language. Cultural identity in this sense is congenital. All human beings are born into a certain culture, and while they may change their lives, but they cannot change where they were born. The identity of faith is given by God, and it is accepted by humans through free will and reason as well as spiritual choice. Personal faith belongs to the human pursuit of the ideal. Therefore, both cultural identity and the identity of faith are honorable and indispensable. God never demands that a Christian or a theologian give up their own cultural identity. The Christian gospel and Chinese traditional culture in contemporary China can coexist, and it is unnecessary to create or promote a disharmonious and mutually disadvantageous outcome.

From my point of view, the Christian gospel is an excellent seed, while Chinese traditional culture is a splendid soil; plant an excellent seed on some splendid soil and it is not hard to see it bloom and bear fruit. We are not to intentionally enlarge the conflicts between the gospel and culture, but should seek the wisdom given by God to avoid conflict. The gospel and culture should not war against each other, since they are not enemies, but allies.

2. The Relationship between Globalization and Contextualization

Globalization is defined as "a social process" that produces an existential transformation of humankind whereby people develop cross regional interactive relationships. In this way, globalization reflects the extent and rate of progress of human civilization. Globalization sometimes is seen as "global proximity" and "global interconnectedness". Some directly define globalization as "the world as a whole" or as "a global village" or "deterritorialization". There is another definition given by the UN for describing a close international relationship, which is "our global neighborhood".

The definition of contextualization is not counter to the definition of globalization, and contextualization does not mean "deglobalization". Contextualization is from contextus in Latin, literally meaning "connection" or "coherence". The Latin etymology of the word consists of the Latin preposition cum (with) and the verb texere (to weave), and it then accordingly becomes "weaving to-

gether", and by extension "the time-space boundaries of understanding". Spanish philosopher José Ortega Gasset correctly uses "I am me and my circumstances" to describe a contextualized existential reality; people do not exist outside themselves and their circumstances.^⑤ This philosophical interpretation constitutes an excellent definition of contextualization. In general, contemporary China is experiencing the close interaction of both globalization and contextualization. Challenge and opportunity coexist, particularity and universality are woven together, integration and de-integration, cooperation and competition, as well as independence and interdependence all intersect. Christian theology is both global and contextual. The theological thought of 2000 years of Christian history is characterized both by globality and locality, by universality and particularity. Through the close interaction of globalization and contextualization, the spirit of Christianity can settle in Chinese cultural soil and benefit the revival of China.

The theology of chopsticks is beneficial for dealing with the relationship between global and local. In contemporary China, the relationship between global and local is a hybridized cultural phenomenon, and so is hard to analyze. The global sometimes can be realized in the local; similarly, the local can exist in the global. For example, in the process of globalization, cultural universality is easily perceived, while economic globalization is also spreading. While Coca-Cola becomes more and more popular, the idea of Coca-Cola becomes a globally fashionable cultural sign. Although some Americans still regard the idea of Coca-Cola as American, many people feel that it belongs to the world. A similar phenomenon is evident with Chinese restaurants becoming popular throughout the world, and therefore Chinese food culture belonging both to China and the world. Coca-Cola and Chinese restaurants imply a cultural weaving of "global in local" and "local in global". Coca-Cola and Chinese restaurants do not necessarily lead to cultural homogeneity or cultural hegemony, but can also produce more complicated interactions around the world, leading to greater cultural diversity and cultural heterogeneity. It is not easy to judge the good or bad of such interactive phenomenon, but we hope it will become a virtuous cycle. When the global encounters the local, both undergo a process of close interaction.

From the viewpoint of Christian theological contextualization, in contemporary China there is a reality that Christian ideas and Neo-Marxism are not effectively syncretized, but harmoniously co-exist. Transplanting Christian thought into a non-Christian context needs a localized process of digestion and acceptance. Chinese culture is so tolerant and flexible that the global and the local can become friends. The theology of chopsticks signifies a positive balance between global and local within complex interactive circumstances. Christianity is both global and local, which means that Christian faith is global, but Christian existential contexts are always local. Both global and local are co-existing, balanced, cooperative, and interactive; Christianity as a religion is "international", but it is still "national". In this sense, "national" can be "international". In the past 30 years, Christianity in China has maintained independence; in the meantime, it kept a close relationship and dialogue with ecumenical Christian bodies. For Chinese Christianity, "independence" and "interdependence" can work in concert. Since the 1980s, Chinese Christianity has tried to recover diplomatic relationships with churches all over the world. Chinese Christians do not wish to see Chinese churches isolated from ecumenical churches. The churches in China are strengthening their communication with other churches around the world while stressing their own national independence. The churches in China do not want to establish a branch of Christendom that is separated from other churches around the world. In one sentence, independence and interdependence are simultaneously

⑤ Gustav, Oswald E., *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 4-5. José Ortega Gasset (1883-1955) was a Spanish philosopher, who was teaching metaphysics at the University of Madrid.

important for today's Christianity in China.

Christian theology not only attempts to express human aspirations such as human rights, dignity, freedom, and equality; it also attempts to discover the differences of human existential circumstance such as cultural context, historical background, political structure, human ethos and so on. Christianity as a global religion asks that theology be simultaneously concerned about both the global and the local. However, Christian theology as an academic discipline cannot completely rely on international or regional political transformation, as no theoretical study can always keep up with political changes. It is not right to say that the enterprise of Christian theological contextualization should follow globalization, political idealism, or westernization. China faces both opportunity and challenge, while encountering uncertainty and changeability. Hence, the development of Christian theology should be closely tied to this era, and it would not be a good choice for Chinese Christian churches to shut themselves off from global and local reality.

Chinese Christian theologians, therefore, should carefully listen to the revelation of God as it speaks to Chinese Christians and the church in this era, and keep a balance between globalization and contextualization. Doing Christian theology in contemporary China requires a proper attitude: "doing and thinking contextually and globally simultaneously". Global and local are equally important for Christianity in China, where cultural diversity has already long existed. Doing Christian theology and the practice of Christian faith are both in the process of globalization and of contextualization. They are conducive to establishing a healthy, orderly, and highly developed society. That is why Chinese Christianity should pay close attention to both the global and local aspects of contemporary transformation. Locally speaking, utilitarianism, non-realism, and blind optimism are of no use in the construction of a contextual theology; globally speaking, the uncertainty and unpredictability of globalization seem to be possibly influential factors in Chinese Christian theological construction. The emphasis on theological contextualization does not hinder China from becoming a superpower; in the same way, the stress on globalization does not exclude the achievement and constructiveness of Christian development. Chinese Christianity not only stands for contextualization, but also for globalization. Two legs, globalization and contextualization, need to be equally strong, and then they can walk together properly. This view fits with the theology of chopsticks we are considering here.

3. The Relationship between Faith and Reason

The relationship between faith and reason has been one of the most controversial theological issues for long time in the history of Christian theology. For Christians, "faith" not only means "belief" or "dogma", but also the acknowledgement of key Christian ideas such as the authority of the Scriptures, confessional elements, doctrinal thought, spiritual experience, the gospel, the revelation of God, personal salvation, the inner life, the fidelity of believers, and so on. "Reason" not only means "knowledge" or "learning", but it also basic human thinking abilities, such as analysis, criticism, understanding, methodology, epistemology, interpretation, and so on. In the history of Christian theological thought, many Christian theologians have kept a balance between faith and reason. Completely irrational faith easily becomes superstitious; similarly, purely rationalized belief easily declines into atheism. Some of the main viewpoints on the relationship between faith and reason are given below.

The first is "I believe because it is absurd" (*credo quia absurdum est*). It is said that this theological phrase was invented by Tertullian (ca. 196-212). We know that Tertullian was an important theological master who defended Christian orthodoxy. He stressed the idea of "the rule of faith"

(*regula fidei*), and upheld the hermeneutic principle of realism against abstract speculation, philosophy, and metaphysics. His theological thought was full of rational radiance. The phrase, "I believe because it is absurd" emphasized Christian faith as an acceptance of absolute obedience, although many interpretations of Christian dogmas (as such the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Trinity) could not be proved on rational grounds.

For Tertullian, the greater the absurdity of Christian faith, the more Christianity expanded. Similarly, the more difficult God is to understand, the more believers are convinced. For instance, Tertullian argued that the Son of God was crucified, dead and buried, that these things are absurd, but they must be believed. Similarly, the resurrection of the Son was undoubtedly absurd, and the resurrection goes against ordinary experience, but Christians deeply believe it. Faith is above ordinary human reason. Tertullian's thinking of the relationship between faith and reason was highlighted paradox, as he asserted that the gospel is a foolish philosophy, yet that Christian faith and the interpretation of Christian truth can be still rational. The phrase "I believe because it is absurd" refers to a reality that some particular understanding and interpretations of Christian faith transcend reason, and even sometimes go against human reason. Christian faith cannot always be clear within the context of rational analysis, and Christian faith cannot always act in accordance with critically logical speculation.

The second is "faith prior to reason" (*fides precedat rationem/fidei prius credamus*), which was based upon St. Augustine's religious thought. "Natural law" is an important theological idea that was taken from Platonic philosophy. Augustine understood "natural law" as a basic principle of the rational human soul. According to Augustine, "natural law" is a result of human reason and conscience, and the created human can know the existence of "natural law" through their own reason and conscience. This is his theory of illumination, namely, God is the source of grace and of the truth, God illuminates the human spirit, God is the light of the truth, human reason may understand and interpret God's truth through illumination from God. However, Augustine emphasizes that human reason cannot be illuminated unless human reason is under a pious faith. Therefore, faith must be prior to reason, just as the illumination of grace is prior to human cognition. For Augustine, all human cognition is decided not by human reason and conscience, but by the faith of human beings that is the result of the will and illumination of God. Hence, Augustine believes that humans cannot understand and interpret God and His truth unless they trust in and love God. Augustine stresses that faith is more important than reason in a certain sense, although reason always helps us understand and interpret the nature and substance of God. Faith and reason are coincident, and they are given through the Creator's wisdom. Augustine argues that we should not try to understand God's word in order to believe, but believe God's word in order to understand.

The third is "faith seeking understanding" (*fides querens intellectum*), which also means "I believe in order that I may know" (*credo ut intelligam*). It is said that Clement of Alexandria (150-215) was the earliest person to put forward this idea. And later in the Middle Ages, the idea was developed by the early Scholastic theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). Anselm asserted that faith and reason are not contradictory and faith can be relied on reason, but he did not suggest that man can be converted to Christianity solely through depending on reason. He hoped that correctly using reason as an effective weapon could reduce and revise the misunderstandings of unbelievers. At the same time, reason can enrich, strengthen and deepen human faith. This view made a positive contribution to anti-heresy during the Middle Ages.

The final formulation is "I understand in order to believe" (*intelligo ut credam*), which was supported by the Scholastic theologian Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Abelard stressed the importance of human reason for Christian faith, namely, "understanding for believing". He overturned

the idea of "faith seeking understanding" which was given by Anselm of Canterbury. Abelard's theological methodology had a tendency toward rationalism and skepticism. He proposed that seeking and understanding the truth involves interrogation, and raising questions. Doubt is not sinful, but the beginning of the truth. Therefore, for Abelard, Christian theology was an analytical and speculative science.

The above-mentioned four typical relationships between faith and reason have influenced Christians and churches in different ways for a long time. We cannot say that one is better than the others; rather, we need to absorb and learn from all of them for building a stable foundation for our Christians and churches. From the viewpoint of Christian development in China, currently, Chinese churches need to avoid two extremes. The first is over-liberalism and pure rationalism. Since the start of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, western rationalism has been dominant for two hundred years. In contemporary China, the rise of Christian rationalism has caused the decline in Christian piety and division in the churches. A non-religious Christianity could result in a reduction of Christian numbers. Urban Christians and the so-called intellectual Christians have had a tendency toward Christian rationalism. The second extreme that calls for attention is Christian fundamentalism and an overly conservative faith. Chinese Christian faith is sometimes mixed with Chinese folk religious characteristics, so that they are not only uninterested in but also completely ignore church tradition, dogmatics, and church order. Sometimes they are characterized by local traditional piety, social-cultural ideological purity, and personal stubbornness. In some rural areas, Christians still maintain their simple and completely non-rational faith. Nowadays, there is an anxious phenomenon that urban Christians and rural Christians question the reality of one another's faith; they doubt one another just as Christian fundamentalists and liberals have done in the West.

Therefore, we need to deal with this issue using the theology of chopsticks. From the viewpoints of the doctrine of Creation by God and the doctrine of human nature, human beings were created by God in God's own image and likeness (*imago dei*). The image and likeness of God means that God has given humans reason, free will, spiritual sensitivity, conscience, emotions and so on. Faith and reason are from the same root, according to the doctrine of Creation by God. Opposing and depreciating human reason has caused believers to move toward Christian extremism, heresy, and even superstition. On the contrary, opposing and belittling Christian faith and religious experience has led rationalists toward atheism and the loss of religious faith. Faith and reason are intertwined. Like a pair of chopsticks, faith and reason should be equally important.

One would become a robot if their faith was without reason, because they would not be able to think. God has given man free will in order that human beings can use reason to think. Faith and reason should not become the victims of relativism; on the contrary, they should be maintained in a balanced and cooperative coexistence, as they influence and constrain each other. Faith and reason need to be integrated to build a whole "person". In this sense, the theology of chopsticks is helpful. Faith and reason for Christians are like a pair of chopsticks that cannot easily be separated from each other or operate exclusive to one another. Rather, they are mutually attractive and cooperative. God delights in human beings who are reasonable, good at thinking, and full of wisdom, but did not give them reason, knowledge, and the capacity to think so they would oppose Him or give up their faith in Him or be arrogant. Similarly, God is pleased by a faithful and pious and moral person, but he does not bestow faith in order for people to degenerate into ignorance, stubbornness, unreason, and non self-control as well as superstition.

4. The Relationships between Church and State

According to Sun Yat-sen, politics simply means the administration of people. Then we may say that the Christian church as a community of faith existing in the society is also political. Christian faith can be individual, but the Christian church as an assembly of believers cannot be completely isolated from society. The church is multitudinous, social, and a community of faith. It is both *ecclesia* and *koinonia*. Though the Christian church may have its own independent ideology and political system both in theory and practice, it cannot be separated from the reality of worldly politics. Even though the Christian church can have its own independent administration, it is still political as the expression of a political ideal. In the past 2000 years, the relationship between church and state has encountered many difficulties. We cannot subjectively say that one model of the relationship between church and state is better than others in different times. Similarly, we are not able to give an absolute judgment on the relationship between church and state in different contexts. What we can do is to learn from the history, which in Chinese is *yi shi wei jing* 以史为镜, meaning literally "see history as looking into a mirror."

Now let us start by presenting the different forms of relationship between church and state that have occurred over the course of the history of Christianity.

In the first century, when Christianity started, the relationship between church and state had not yet formed. The Christian church was not yet become an organized institution, but a newly born religious phenomenon that encountered many criticisms and strong opposition from different socio-cultural powers. The strongest attacks and persecution came from the dominant classes and political rulers. When Christianity came into existence, the Roman Empire had already long existed. Jesus did not participate in politics, but he did discuss politics. Paul had been a leader, persecuting Christian churches and Christians, and he knew all about politics. Later when he converted to Christianity, he was no longer interested in politics, but became an apostle of the gospel. Christianity in the time of Jesus and Paul had not yet developed a certain type of relationship between church and state.

However, we need to consider how to understand and interpret the saying given by Jesus that is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26). When he was asked whether his disciples should pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus answered, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Many people understand the words as the key theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between church and state. In fact, the sentence of Jesus did not deeply touch upon the principle of the relationship between church and state, nor put forward a conclusion concerning the relationship between church and state. Rather, it was a political opinion of Jesus on the subject of whether his followers should pay taxes to the Roman government. The Jews had political rights, but were under the rule of Roman authority at the time. Jesus suggested that his disciples and followers should pay the taxes to the government and honor secular authority, while maintaining their faith in God and obeying the sovereignty of God and honoring God. This was a political viewpoint and an opinion on paying taxes. Jesus proposed that "the things that are Caesar's" are different from "the things that are God's", which means that church and state belong to different realms of authority and therefore do not have to interfere with each other. According to some biblical commentators, Jesus did not clearly mention how to distinguish between the things that are "Caesar's" and "God's", nor did he suggest how to deal with conflicts between the two. He did not attempt to specifically define the boundaries between government and

church or between political authority and church power.^⑥ Paul basically followed Jesus' idea when he said in Romans 13:1-7, "let every person be subject to the governing authorities." (ESV) Peter, too, took a similar viewpoint (I Peter 2:13-17). Both Paul and Peter emphasized Christian "obedience" or "subjection" to secular authority. The two reasons they gave are as follows: first, they believed that secular authority existed by God's permission; for them, secular authorities and earthly institutions are divinely appointed. The second reason is that they believed that God uses secular authorities to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. Therefore, the existence of political institutions is the will of God. Christians as human beings are social, too. Hence, Christians should accept the supervision, restriction, and administration of secular regimes. In this sense, earthly powers are the servants of God, too.

One influential example of the relationship between church and state we need to consider is "the combination of church and state" (in Chinese zhengjiao heyi 政教合一), also called "the integration of church and state" (in Chinese zhengjiao yitihua 政教一体化). When Constantine (288? -337) became Roman emperor, he converted to Christianity and ended the persecution of Christianity. From AD 313 until his death, he vigorously promoted Christianity as the state religion of Rome. From that time on, Christianity was officially protected and enjoyed many privileges. On the surface, making Christianity the official religion of Rome promoted the unity of church and state. However, in fact, the relationship between church and state since Constantine became a complicated and blurry affair. During the Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries), the relationship between church and state became more ambiguous, and political authority and church power often clashed. Generally speaking, "the combination of church and state" in the Middle Ages became the mainstream model. Given the dominant influence of Roman Catholicism both in European culture and in Continental ideology, church authority and political regimes needed to be close, so that European secular politics often intervened in and infiltrated Christian church organizations and personnel systems. In theology, the thought of theocracy and Christian ethics deeply influenced people's lives. All these elements fostered the integration of church and state in the Middle Ages; the relationship between church and state as well as between secular authority and church authority was not separable.

The second model to consider is "church exceeds state" (in Chinese jiao gaoyu zheng 教高于政). In the Church Fathers era, Tertullian (active 196-212) and Cyprian (200-258?) were main supporters of Episcopacy. Practically speaking, in the aspect of church administration, Episcopacy implied that church authority could be more prior to secular authority; however, this did not lead of necessity to the idea of "church exceeds state". In the Middle Ages, there were some Christian theologians who emphasized the importance of the idea of "church exceeds state". For example, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) asserted that church authority must be higher than secular royalty, and he opposed the viewpoint that bishops can be appointed by the King. For this reason, he even clashed with William II (1087-1100) and had to go into exile two times, from 1097 to 1100 and from 1103 to 1106. Similarly, the Pope Gregory VII (? -1085) also emphasized that church au-

⑥ 见《圣经·中译注释本》新约 Shengjing · Xinyue [The Bible · New Testament] 卷分, (上海 Shanghai: 中国基督教协会 Zhongguo jidujiao xiehui | China Christian Council |, 1995), 52. 《圣经新译》新约 Shengjing · Xinyue | The Bible · New Testament | 卷分 Shengjing · Xinyue | The Bible · New Testament |, (南京 Nanjing: 中国基督教协会 Zhongguo jidujiao xiehui | China Christian Council |, 1998), 41. 《21 世纪圣经新解》21 shiji Shengjing xin shi | The New Interpretation of the Bible in the 21st Century |, (香港 Xianggang: 福音证主协会 Fuyin zhengzhu xiehui [The Association of Evangelical Testimony to the Lord] |, 1999), 990. 杨牧谷 Yang Mugu 主编,《当代神学辞典 I 卷》Dangdai shenxue cidian · shangye [The Contemporary Dictionary of Theology, the First Volume], (台北 Beibei: 校园书房出版社 Xiyuan shufang chubanshe [The Campus Bookstore Press], 1997), 215.

thority should be prior to secular authority, and thought that Roman Bishops had global authority, whereas all secular regimes should be limited by political, territorial, national, and cultural factors. In this sense, church authority was above that of nations, geography, culture, and ideology. Later, in the period of Pope Innocent III (Pope 1198-1216), the Pope boasted himself without scruple as the vicar of Christ, so that he alone could lead the world.

One of the most important Christian theologians in the Middle Ages was St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who in theological theory promoted the idea that the Pope had an absolute authority not only over the churches, but also over all nations. In 1274, the infallibility of the Pope was asserted by the Second Lyon Council. In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII even announced that the Pope has two swords; one is spiritual, and the other is secular. For him, the Pope should rule over both the worldly and spiritual realms.

The formation of the idea "church exceeds state" resulted largely from the following factors. First, in the Middle Ages, the conception of nation was not fully developed. Second, basic education, culture, and academic work depended upon the Christian church. Third, secular political science not yet became mature and practical. Therefore, the authority of the Roman Pope became so influential that church exceeded state. Of course, the relationship between church and state in the modern world is very different from that of the Middle Ages, due to the impact of the Reformation and modern civilization. Some countries still treat Christianity as a "State Religion", and the churches still strongly influence public politics; however, in the aspect of church administration, secular and ecclesiastical power are now clearly distinct from each other and church organization has become more democratic. For instance, both Lutheranism and Anglicanism remain national religions, but stress that the church should be subject to the state.

The third example to look at is "the separation between church and state" (zhengjiao fenli 政教分离). The separation between church and state was the outcome of the Reformation after 1517. The outbreak of the Reformation in Europe was partly due to the unreasonable relationship between church and state. On the one hand, the rise of Christian humanism in the 15th century effectively helped Christians realize that church authority had become so dependent on secular political regimes that Christian faith had become dead. On the other hand, secular authority was not satisfied with having to obey church authority. Both Luther and Calvin generally proposed the principle of "the separation of church and state", but both demanded that Christians should obey the authority of secular government, because they believed that secular regimes and national systems are from God, and that God has given rights to secular government by which social order and worldly discipline are justly maintained. Since the Reformation, the principle of "the separation of church and state" has become a consensus both in secular society and in the Christian churches. But some different interpretations on "the separation of church and state" still remain, and the types of relationship between church and state are diverse. Nevertheless, we may say that it is good to avoid opposition between the two as much as possible.

It seems that the relationship between church and state in contemporary China faces a dilemma. According to contemporary circumstances in China, it is not possible for the current relationship between church and state to be "church exceeds state" (jiao gaoyu zheng 教高于政). Similarly, the politicizing of Christianity would cause the loss of Christians in Chinese society, and the emphasis on complete separation between church and state is quite difficult, too. In other words, both "the combination of church and state" (zheng jiao heyi 政教合一) and "the separation of church and state" (zhengjiao fenli 政教分离) in the current context are not possible. Honestly speaking, in Chinese history, during the four dynasties of the Tang (618-907), Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1644-1911), the existence and development of Christian

churches were without exception under the principle of national control. It has not been possible to find a good model in Chinese history that fits the category of "separation of church and state".

Currently, the relationship between church and state can be described as a new model: "church follows state" (zhongzhu jiaocong 政主教从), as suggested by Dr. Zhuo Kinping.⁽⁷⁾ In my understanding, it does not mean that the Christian church in China blindly follows the government, but that the revival of Christianity in China must be closely linked to China's national benefit and national revival. We do not have to quickly judge whether it is right or not, but it describes a proper relationship between church and state because of its social reality. It is a contextual description, which can indicate the characteristics and current political circumstances. Therefore, the idea "church follows state" is not innovative, but practical and realistic.

This description "church follows state" is also based upon and coincident with current Chinese national conditions and cultural context. National conditions here mean that the country is under the rule of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), the mainstream ideology and central values are officially socialist and neo-Marxist; cultural context means a Chinese-centered-cultural diversity. For this reason, it is not possible for Christianity to be a so-called national religion. The description "church follows state" is useful for highlighting the priority of national benefit, of religious personnel able to participate in political activities, and of government administration of religious affairs by law. In the contemporary atmosphere of national revival, religious legalization is necessary and reasonable, as it helps to promote a national system of administration of justice, by which the personal freedom of all citizens can be protected and national politics can be reasonably carried out. Religious legalization signifies seriously considering the close connections between personal freedom, legalized social construction, and national development. There are some useful limitations on personal freedom and political groups, so that the value of harmony is neither empty propaganda nor simply a media construction, but a necessity for the development of social reality. The nature of law is only to rebuild a system of social organization. Law cannot deal with everything, but a society will fall into disorder if there is no proper legalization.

From the viewpoint of Christian churches in today's China, the relationship between church and state may be traced back to the teaching of the Bible. Generally speaking, the Bible confirms the basic Christian attitude toward secular authority such as obedience, respect, and civil obligation (Roman 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-14). St. Paul mentions some basic ideas such as secular authorities being appointed by God; worldly authority playing a positive role in social function for punishing evildoers and praising those who do good; and the obedience to secular authority as a witness to Christ. Therefore, Christians should be positive toward human social responsibility by protecting and respecting human dignity, for example, providing for the aged with filial piety, loving one another, and respecting other people.

The description "church follows state" is based upon the reality of the contemporary context in China but also accords with the key ideas of the theology of chopsticks, such as coexistence, balance, cooperation, and walking-together. Chinese Christianity has stressed the equal importance of the two "C"s, namely, "Christianity" and "China". Meanwhile, the relationship between church and state in China advocates the idea of "two legs", whereby the church develops in a healthy way and Christianity becomes more influential, while the state gets stronger. Chinese Christianity is also concerned about the two "S"s, namely, "sociability" and "spirituality"; both Christian sociability

(7) 见卓新平 Zhuo Xinqing 的文章:《“全球化”的宗教与当代中国》*Quanshiqian de zongjiao yu dangdai Zhongguo* [The Globalized Religion and the Contemporary China] (Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 *Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe* [China Social Sciences Academic Press], 2008).

and Christian spirituality are important and not opposed to each other. This is the core of the theology of chopsticks. Chopsticks are like a compass, and state benefit and national revival are the centre for all Chinese people, including Chinese Christians. The close relationship between church and state will decide the future development of Christianity in China. Chinese Christianity should not lose its witness in the revival of China in this age.

Conclusion

In this article, we described the cultural elements and symbols of chopsticks, we also analyzed doing Christian contextual theology in contemporary China needs to use Chinese cultural elements, and chopsticks are just one of them. The theology of chopsticks promotes the central ideas of “coexistence”, “balance”, “cooperation”, and “walk-together”, by which we attempt to deal with the complicated relationships between gospel and culture, global and local, faith and reason, and church and state. We have to recognize that the general context in contemporary China is both politically and culturally complex, and the theology of chopsticks is an attempt to achieve a balance between these two elements. The title of this paper in Chinese uses the word *chuyi* 爻议 which means an introduction. Thus, this idea of a theology of chopsticks is just a starting point and a tentative beginning.

中文题目:

筷子神学刍议

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摘要:本文借用筷子作为中华传统文化元素以表达当代中国基督教“生存神学”。当代的中国基督教会好像一个进入“青春期”的孩子,有了自己的成长经验,容易接受新鲜理念但也容易被他人影响,叛逆烦躁又无法自控;在传统权威、政治处境、不成熟的教会体制、变化异常的伦理观念以及混乱的圣经解释中茫然不知所措。在本文中,笔者借用“筷子神学”的“共存”、“平衡”、“合作”、“并行”理念来尝试讨论基督教在中国当代处境中所面对的如下关系:福音与文化的关系、全球化与处境化的关系、知识(理性)与信仰的关系以及教会与国家的关系。本文认为基督教神学有利于使用“筷子”的文化元素和象征意义来表述基督教神学的丰富内涵。当代中国的国情无论在政治还是文化上都极具复杂性,“筷子神学”只是当前的一种尝试。本文是“刍议”,因而只是一个入门的介绍和好奇的窥探,作为基督教处境化神学的抛砖引玉之工作。

关键词:筷子、福音与文化、全球性与本地性、信仰与理性、教会与国家