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From Rationality to Empathy: Christianity in the 20th Century Chinese Literary World

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Abstract

Looking back at the 20th century Chinese literary world, we may notice that the generation of writers that grew up during the May 4th period, the generation that grew up during the beginning of People's Republic, and the generation that showed up after the Cultural Revolution all have respectively showed their own attitudes towards Christianity: rationality, partial recognition, and enthusiasm. This article chooses three distinguished representatives of the three generations – Qian Zhongshu, Wang Meng and Hai Zi, to sketchily illustrate this phenomenon.

Keywords: Christianity, Cross-culture Comparison, Warning to the Wickedness of the World, the Lamb of the Poetry God

1 First spiritual encounter between Chinese intellectuals of the beginning of the 19th century and Christianity

China had gone through many radical changes during the twentieth century: the termination of the semi feudal and semi colonial late Qing Dynasty (1911), the establishment of the Republic of China (1912), the reign of the Warlords Government (1912–1918), the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Civil War (1927–1949), the various political movements after the establishment of People's Republic of China (1949), and the Reform and Opening Up (since 1978) after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). All these changes turned the history of this century into a kaleidoscope of events.

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Just at the very beginning of this century, Christianity in China suffered a tragic fate: the Boxer Rebellion (1900) brought a disastrous disruption to churches in China and produced many martyrs, both missionaries and Chinese believers. The tragedy taught Western missionary agencies a harsh lesson and aroused their awareness in their pitfall of evangelization. They realized that although Christianity spread rapidly into inner China under the refuge of gunboats and the protection of unfair treaties after the Opium War (1839–1842; 1856–1860), evangelization accompanied by conquest could not really plant the belief in people's heart. Therefore they changed their strategy. They raised pro-western intellectuals by education, used the Boxer Indemnity to send Chinese students to study abroad, and established church schools in mainland China. These approaches were compatible with Chinese people's desire to salvage and strengthen China.

In 1905, the traditional imperial examination system that lasted for 1300 years, which was used for choosing scholar bureaucrats, was ended. The old-style private schools were then quickly replaced by missionary education facilities. In order to advocate the primary Christian education to influence plebeians, the missionary organizations in China prepared to publish a Mandarin Bible to replace former classic versions. In fact, as a result of the violent impact of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Rebellion (1851–1864), missionaries in China had already recognized that a Mandarin Bible would be more powerful than the classical Chinese version. After decades of effort, the Union Version of the New Testament and later, the whole Bible were published respectively in 1905 and in 1919 (Zetzsche J. 1999: 133–134, 402–403). Chinese intellectuals raised by new education progressively replaced old scholar-bureaucrats and became China's elites since the second decade of 20th century; they called for the abandonment of old cultures and the transformation of Chinese society with advanced Western science and democracy.

The pioneers of the New Culture Movement (around the time of the May fourth Movement in 1919) thought that the moral characteristics of Jesus could help to improve the ethical quality of the Chinese people; therefore they introduced and popularized the Bible energetically. Some modern writers even directly used the language style of the Union Version as a reference, which launched the movement of writing in Modern Chinese instead of traditional writing style.

However, the teachings of Jesus could hardly help Chinese intellectuals to achieve their goal, which is to educate the people and strengthen the nation in practice. China at that time still had many hardships to get rid of, such as her poverty and weakness, and her disadvantage of being discriminated and oppressed by advanced capitalist

countries. After the First World War was ended in November 1918, the Allies¹ held the Paris Peace Conference. Although China was one of the triumphant countries, she had once again become an object of oppression and exploitation. Britain, the United States, and France handed the ownership of the Shandong Peninsular from Germany to Japan despite China's request of returning it after decades of being occupied by Germany. This action aroused the Chinese people's nationalism, and directly triggered the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

Famous scholars who participated in the May Fourth Movement such as Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962), returned to China in 1917 after studying in Cornell University and Columbia University in the United States with the Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship), referred to the May Fourth Movement as the Chinese Enlightenment because there was an intense focus on science and democracy. The “Enlightenment” also taught the Chinese intellectuals to be aware of the truth: the teaching of Christianity was merely a “fantasy sun” which is neither bright nor warm enough to enlighten the hearts of the Chinese people and the dark Chinese society (Ma Jia 1995: 249). The participants of the Non-Christian Movement (1922–1927) even accused Christianity as a tool for imperialistic invasion against China. From then on Chinese intellectuals gave up the spiritual function of Christianity; the Bible then was simply referred to as a piece of Western literature in comparison to Chinese literatures. The famous modern writer Qian Zhongshu (錢鐘書, 1910–1998) was an exemplary representative of the intellectuals who grew up during the “May Fourth epoch”.

2 Qian Zhongshu's literary approach to Christianity

Qian Zhongshu was born in 1910 in a traditional Confucian scholar's family. With his father as his strict mentor, he mastered classical Chinese early in his childhood. Then he was sent to an English-speaking missionary school at the age of 14. Five years later, he was enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages of Tsinghua University. And after his graduation he received the 3rd Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship to study in the University of Oxford in Britain for two years. After that, he studied for one more year in the University of Paris in France. And then he came back to China and became a Chinese literary scholar and writer, well known for his erudition which traversed the knowledge of both the West and the East.

¹ The Allies of World War I: The main allies were France, Russia, Britain, Italy and the United States. France, Russia and the United Kingdom, entered World War I in 1914, as a result of their Triple Entente alliance. Many other countries later joined the Allied side in the war. The Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) lost the war in 1918.

The quotations of and allusions to the Bible scatter in his various works that range from his greater works such as the literary collection *Guan zhui bian* (《管錐編》, The Pipe-Awl Chapters) and the novel *Weicheng* (《圍城》, Fortress Besieged) to the smaller ones such as the short story *Shangdi de meng* (《上帝的夢》, God's Dream) and proses *Mogui ye fang Qian Zhongshu xiansheng* (《魔鬼夜訪錢鍾書先生》, Satan Pays an Evening Visit to Mr. Qian Zhongshu), *Tan jiaoxun* (《談教訓》, Discussing Instructions), *Lun kuaile* (《論快樂》, Discussing Happiness), *Yige pianjian* (《一個偏見》, A Prejudice) etc. Qian not only quoted verses from the Bible frequently, but also cited many other Christian literatures as secondary sources, e.g. John Milton's (1608–1674) *Paradise Lost*, J.W. Goethe's (1749–1832) *Faust*, Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) *The Divine Comedy* and Daniel Defoe's (1660?–1731) *Political History of the Devil*. The quotations are so numerous that just in the five volumes of *Guan zhui bian*, Qian has already cited *Paradise Lost* more than a score of times.

Mr. Zhao Yiheng (赵毅衡) deemed that: “The publishing of *Guan zhui bian* is recognized by worldwide scholars as a great event in the history of Chinese-Western comparative literature studies.” (Zhao Yiheng 1980: 103) He also stated that Qian wrote in *Guan zhui bian* his little discovery about the existence of “more than 20 passages from Classical Chinese literatures produced as early as the narrative history *Zuozhuan* (《左傳》, The Chronicle of Zuo), that express a similar idea as the metaphor from the Old Testament about ‘spilt water can not be gathered again’ does” (Zhao Yiheng 1981: 41). The author exerted the following from *Guan zhui bian* in order to certify Zhao's statement above: “The Old Testament also has a metaphor like this: ‘As water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again’ (II Samuel, 14: 14).” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 246–247) However, the author noticed that this quotation has been taken out of context. The full verse from the Old Testament is “For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (II Samuel 14: 14, *King James Version*), which basically means that human life is like water; once spilt out, it may never return. Qian only kept the literary meaning of this verse; the doxy of it has been discarded. From this we can see that Qian regarded the Bible only as one of the various famous Western literatures that he used to compare with Chinese literatures.

“The positive and the negative reinforce each other; the wax and the wane depend upon each other to exist (正反相成、盈缺相生)” is an idiom from ancient Chinese philosophy book *Zhouyi* (《周易》, The Book of Changes). Qian wrote the following regarding this idiom: “The Old Testament also has a passage with similar connotation: ‘Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low’. (Isaiah,

XL. 3; Luke, III. 5. Cf. W.Y. Tindall, John Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher, 115)” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 53). An error here that the author has noticed is that such verse does not exist in Isaiah 40: 3. Instead this verse is from Isaiah 40: 4 (*KJV*). This is a minor mistake made by either the writer or the editor. Although Qian’s other source (Luke, III. 5) is correct, Luke is not a book from the Old Testament, but a gospel from the New Testament.

Qian explained that the ancient poem *Shijing-zhengyue* (《詩經•正月》), The Book of Songs • The First Month of the Lunar Year’s expression of “complaining against the heavens” “is like what Martin Luther meant by saying: ‘We must now and then wake up our Lord with such words.’ (Martin Luther, Table Talk, tr. W. Hazlitt, ‘Bohn’s Library’, 153).” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 145) And its emotional outburst of “cursing ancestors” “is similar to the prophets cursing their birth and their mothers’ pregnancy in the Old Testament, (Jeremiah cursing the day of his birth). (Jeremiah, 22.14; Job, 3.3 Cf. Scott: ‘He [Swift] early adopted the custom of observing his birthday as a term not of joy but of sorrow, and of reading ...the striking passage of Scripture in which Job laments’ etc. J.G. Lockhart, The Life of Sir Walter Scott, ch.7, ‘Everyman’s’, 250)” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 149) Here again we can only find one correct citing, which is Job 3: 3; The verse which Qian claimed to be from Jeremiah 22: 14 is actually from Jeremiah 20: 14 (*KJV*), “Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.” It is obvious that the writer and the editor did not double-check the citations carefully. Moreover, Qian used other reference books too; therefore it is likely that there are other errors as well.

Guan zhui bian’s quotations from the Bible are too numerous to be listed one by one, below is only a small portion of them: volume 1, p. 183 cited 1 Kings, Ezekiel, Isaiah and 2 Thessalonians; p. 197 cited II Samuel; volume 2, p. 429 cited Romans, p. 431 cited Matthew, p. 541 cited Genesis; volume 3, p. 1003 cited 1 Kings, p. 1017 cited 1 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, Revelation, Luke and Matthew and volume 4, p. 1216 cited Acts; etc. All the citations are there “trying to break through ... the boundary between China and the West.” (Zhang Quan 1991: 29) Qian paid special attention to similarities between Chinese literary expressions and Biblical expressions. He displayed as many materials as he could find in order to provide evidence for his comparisons, like what Mr. Theodore Hutters said when studying Qian’s *Mogui ye fang Qian Zhongshu xiansheng*: “The author cannot resist the temptation to indulge his own pedantry” (Huters 1982: 96). When Hutters read Qian’s “a young man’s work” [i.e., *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄, *On the Art of Poetry*] (Huters 1982: 37), he noticed that: “He [Qian] supports his point by quotations from Western critics” (Huters 1982: 44). He even exclaimed that: “*Tan Yi Lu*’s sheer number of allusions would be staggering testimony to its author’s erudition even had he had ready access to the best libraries in

the world.” (Huters 1982: 37) When Huters made this exclamation in his book “*Qian Zhongshu*”, “the publication of what he [Qian] regards as the *summa* of his career – *The Pipe-Awl Chapters* – has not reached North America” (Huters 1982: *Preface*), otherwise, Huters’ amazement would definitely be about the “*summa*”.

According to statistics, “The multimillion words work – *Guan zhui bian*, cited from more than one thousand Western writers and quoted their works more than one thousand and seven hundred times.” (Zhang Mingliang 1987: 60) Those are the “staggering testimony to its author’s erudition” (Huters 1982: 37) too. However, Qian is not faultless. We should not ignore the fact that the numerous Western works quoted by *Guan zhui bian* are actually from the earlier reading notes made by its author when he was studying in Europe. When he was writing *Guan zhui bian*, he was not able to go back to Europe to verify his notes. Moreover, *Guan zhui bian* was finished during the pandemoniac years of the Cultural Revolution. During that time, Qian Zhongshu and his wife Yang Jiang (杨绛, 1911–) were not able to escape the fate of being transferred to a labor camp in the countryside. Yang Jiang recalled that: back then, there was only one thing that saddened Qian Zhongshu: the absence of books. Obviously the condition he was under when he wrote *Guan zhui bian* is similar to that of when he wrote *Tan yi lu*, “none of the books lasted during the time of turbulence.” (Shu Zhan 1990: 239)

Tan Yi Lu was produced during the Second World War, when libraries were shut or burned and books in general were difficult to obtain. ... Qian’s work was written while its author was in exile from his customary place of work, and many of its quotations are thus rendered from memory, which accounts for a number of minor errors of misquotation. (Huters 1982: 37)

Here in *Guan zhui bian*, such “minor errors of misquotation” have been repeated for the same reason; thoughtful readers could do further research on this if they are interested in it.

When the fact that Qian made many misquotations is put aside and his actual intention in quoting the Bible comes into focus, we can see that these quotations are mostly used to make comparisons between Chinese and Western culture and literature. And through his comparisons his *weltanschauung* and his attitude towards religion are demonstrated. In volume 1 of *Guan zhui bian*, he quoted the criticisms on religion from Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804–1872), Karl Marx (1818–1883), some earlier romantic poets and later novelists and philosophers. He specifically highlighted Karl Marx’s words: Religion is “a protest against real suffering. ... It is the opium of the people.” He cited this phrase both in Chinese and in German: “die Protestation gegen das wirkliche Elend, das Opium des Volks –, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie’, Die Heilige Familie, usw., Dietz, 12. Cf. Dryden, Religio Laici,

54–61, Poems, Oxford, 100.” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 21) Among these criticisms on religion Qian thinks that “K. Marx’s words are the most lucid and vivid.” (Qian Zhongshu 1986: 22)

Edward Gunn noted that: “Much too skeptical to embrace a conventional belief in God or a benevolent controlling force in nature, Ch’ien [i.e., Qian] nevertheless took considerable interest in the comparisons made by other between mysticism and poetry.” He commented that: “Ch’ien’s own views on notions of a God are rendered in a parody of Genesis titled ‘Shang-ti ti meng’ (God’s Dream),” he considers this story “Oddly Western in its parody of God as the ultimate product of the twentieth-century obsession with progress.” (Gunn 1980: 244) He said, “Although Adam and Eve are originally created by God to flatter his vanity by bowing at his feet and chanting, ‘True Lord, omniscient and omnipotent, we shall praise you ceaselessly,’ God soon grows annoyed at their attempts to play on his vanity to serve their own ends.” He inferred,

The fable implies, then, that even ideals are a product of vanity, and that even God cannot control his creation. Ch’ien’s vision of nature is thus far from an optimistic belief in a benevolent and rational order. It is a dream submitted to a process of chaos and dissolution. (Gunn 1980: 245)

And from this Gunn further discussed the collection of short stories which titled *Ren shou gui* (《人·獸·鬼》, Men, Beasts and Ghosts) (Qian Zhongshu 1983). He analyzed *Mao* (《貓》, Cat) and *Jinian* (《紀念》, Souvenir), and noted that in the story *Jinian*, “The scene repeats the theme that there is no sanctuary from the destructiveness of existence except in the vain imagination of one.” (Gunn 1980: 249) The same theme also exists in Qian’s other works. And Hutters wrote that, “He (i.e., Qian Zhongshu) exhibits a high sense of irony in setting forth all the devices of mysticism – God, the heavens, creation – only to undercut any possible substance to them.” (Hutters 1982: 99) All these comments precisely grasped the ideology of an anti-theistic author.

Professor Gálík thinks Qian Zhongshu’s *Shangdi de meng* is

a literary descendant of Voltaire’s (1694–1778) *Candide*, as an ironic exposition of groundless optimism in this world of woe and tears. The story is ‘told with many comic interludes, comments and allusions to European and Chinese literature and culture, and forms a series of farcical comments on certain concepts and symbols current in European culture.’ [See Zbigniew Slupski’s review, in: A selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900–1949. Vol.2. *The Short Story* (Leiden 1998: 145).] Whereas Voltaire’s ironic mockery is directed against the simple and honest Candide and his mentor Pangloss, professor of metaphysico- theologico-cosmonigology, the same strategy of Qian Zhongshu is aiming at God himself, the sacrifice of his own cosmogony and ontology. ...The almighty God is powerless

not only face to face with his creations, but also with his own dream. (Gálik 2000: 611–612).

Indeed, Qian not only did not give the hero of the story *Shangdi de meng* (God) the powers of Buddha, *Yuhuang* (玉皇, Jade King) or Kwan-yin, but has instead hinted in the very first chapter that God is a mere product of human imagination resulted from us being at the highest level of evolution, just like a doll in a child's hand:

Darwin's evolution has set a concrete law – the newer, fresher beings are always going to wipe out their predecessors as a result of natural selection. Inorganic compounds came from the void of space and time and evolved into flora and fauna. From tranquil flora came introverted and clinging women, and from wild fauna came passionate and adventurous men. Men and women gave birth to children, and from the image of children were dolls (God) created. And therefore, the almighty God is the final product of evolution. (Qian Zhongshu 1983: 2)

At the same time, the Christian belief of men created in God's image was dramatically processed into an intangible “dream” by Qian. He ultimately denied the existence of God through an absurd joke; the mood of the story transformed into absurd humour, through which Qian derided the similar circumstances in real life, such as some very important people (VIP) wanting to “improve” or “transform” those who bootlick them like God does to humans:

God does not realize that He is dreaming, or that his dream is making fun of Him. He does not know that this mixture of water and soil that he created (man) is simply the engine that keeps this dream running. ... God thinks that with the existence of a worshipping man can glory and praise not come from himself but still able to satisfy his desire. ... Everyone of us have a desire like this, and some of us possibly have fulfilled this desire in their dreams. Unfortunately it is not quite likely to be possible for us to create such a worshipping person without anything to begin with. Thus we can only transform and improve those around us. (Qian Zhongshu 1983: 4)

In addition, Qian characterized many human weaknesses in God, such as fear of loneliness, desire for praise, not able to reject temptations from women, jealousy, irascibility, boredom, etc. Qian also depicted two other characters through God's eyes: man and woman. Through them he delineated the picture of lackeys who achieved their goals using flattery. When dealing with them, the omnipotent God seems weak:

One day, woman comes alone to pay respect to God. She sits at His feet and looks up at His face. Her liquid blue eyes are like two beads hailed from the Mediterranean. She speaks coquettishly:

‘Oh, Lord, you are the most kind-hearted and the most almighty, I really do not know how to express my gratitude to you!’

God uses His full strength to resist the temptation of her flashing eyes and asks suspiciously, ‘What do you want?’

Woman, smiles cagily and ingratiatingly; the smile spreads to her shoulders, back, waist and abdomen, adding a quiver to full curves of her body. Her speech seems to float up from the bottom of her heart through this smile; every word is rising and sinking in the smile: ‘You are really the Omniscient! Nothing can be hidden from you; I am really awestruck ...’ (Qian Zhongshu 1983: 6)

It is not difficult to tell that the woman’s “liquid blue eyes”, coquettish voice, “full curves of her body”, and the ingratiating smile are sensed all from God’s eyes, since there is not a third person in that scene. But “to resist the temptation of her flashing eyes”, “God uses His full strength”. What a weak God! Therefore, a researcher commented: “The author imparted a mortal heart to God and broke up His divine nature.” (Yu Zheng 1994: 267)

Another work of Qian that relates to Christianity is the prose *Mogui Ye Fang Qian Zhongshu Xiansheng*. Hutters categorized this prose in the story section when he analyzed Qian’s works, because this prose “meets the minimum requirements of representation in having a storyteller and a story”. (Huters 1982: 96) Although Qian cited a grand amount of Western literatures in description of the devil, the basic characteristics of the devil are still written according to the Bible. Like when the devil introduced himself in the beginning of this prose:

Although you don’t know me, you have been deceived by me many times. When you were tempted by me, your mind was filled with pretty women, reliable friends, and dreams to pursue, but you didn’t see that those were me. Only the people who refuse my temptations, people like Jesus, know my true nature”. (Qian Zhongshu 1990: 1)

Nevertheless, Qian’s goal in writing is not to tell his readers Bible stories, but to deride life and reality. Like when reading about the devil saying that the hell is “burning with sulphur” and that “it could never happen at your place (reality) because of the overly expensive and always rising price of coal” (Qian Zhongshu 1990: 2), the readers will automatically relate to wartime inflation of when Qian wrote this prose. And also when reading about the devil jeering Qian, saying “I did not expect your opinions to be so ordinary that they could fit in newspaper editorials” when Qian criticizes the devil for distorting the idea of biography for wanting to “include some fabricated anecdotes” (Qian Zhongshu 1990: 3) in his future biography because the writers exposed all his secrets, the readers will understand that Qian is deriding the fallacy and plain of celebrity biographies and newspaper editorials.

Qian’s absurdist descriptions of Bible stories not only appeared in *Shangdi de meng* or *Mogui ye fang Qian Zhongshu xiansheng*, but also in his other ironic

productions. For instance, *Linggan* (靈感, Inspiration) “also employs an otherworldly scene – in this case Hell – in which to develop its satire of the contemporary literature culture.” (Huters 1982: 104) At the end of this story, the protagonist – a popular writer who has just died, is sentenced by Hades to reincarnate as a hero in a young writer’s novel. On the way to his reincarnation, the goblins that escort him become shy when they see a young man is making love with his landlord’s daughter. He uses this opportunity to sneak away from the goblins and

hides into the landlord daughter’s ear. Since the girl is in close contact with the young man, only her ears are unobstructed. By sneaking into her ear, he unintentionally confirms the medieval Western theologians’ interpretation for Virgin Mary’s pregnancy, which claims that a woman’s ears are pathways for conceiving (quae per aurem concepisti), Mary got pregnant through her ears. The writer loses his role as a hero in the young writer’s book, but the girl receives her first child. (Qian Zhongshu 1983: 24)

This story is an absurdist combination of Chinese and Western cultures. Through this story, Qian ridicules the fact that cheap literatures are produced everywhere nowadays.

Qian also used Bible quotes purely as a device of expression. An European scholar noticed that Qian Zhongshu jeeringly described Hongjian’s (the protagonist of *Wicheng*) fake Ph.D diploma as Adam’s fig leave that covers up his embarrassment [“Qian Zhongshu ridicules Hongjian (i.e., the protagonist of his novel *Weicheng*) when he purchases a fraudulent diploma and uses it: ‘This diploma, it seemed, would function the same as Adam and Eve’s fig leaf.’” (Benická 1998: 357)] The same usage appears in many places of *Weicheng*. For instance, Hongjian satirizes Miss Bao’s doctor fiancé: “One of the Ten Commandments of Christianity is ‘You shall not murder.’ But, what else does a doctor do except for professional murder?” (Qian Zhongshu 1980: 18); During Hongjian’s first class teaching in *Sanlü* University, he calls out the names of his students as he takes attendance count “just like in Genesis Adam called out animals.” (Qian Zhongshu 1980: 215) These allusions assisted Qian in enhancing his novel’s humor and irony. Jana Benická also noticed, “In the beginning of the chapter on *Fortress Besieged* in his *History of Mordern Chinese Fiction*, C.T. Hsia asserts that, where satire is concerned, it recalls famous Chinese novels such as for example *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史” (C.T. Hsia 1961: 442; Benická 1998: 353). We can examine Qian’s rational perspective towards Christianity through his quotations from and comments on the Bible.

3 Wang Meng's expectation for redemption

A writer who grew up during the beginning of People's Republic, Wang Meng (王蒙, 1934–) – the former Minister of Culture of the PRC, has written some works that relate to the Bible.

Wang Meng was born in 1934. His father was a professor in Catholic Fujin University. He was taught in a missionary primary school, but he accepted communism when he was in middle school in 1948, he was 14. As a prominent writer of the People's Republic of China, Wang Meng is an exemplary representation of the contemporary writers that appeared in Chinese literary world during the foundation time of the PRC. Writers like Wang Meng have experienced all the political movements in mainland China. Their attitude towards Christianity is not as realistic and as rational as the May 4th generation of intellectuals, it was altered by political environments. For instance, Wang Meng's first novel *Qingchun wansui* (青春万岁, Long Live the Youth) in 1953 delineated a crime of a Catholic clergy who hindered a young girl embracing her new life in the People's Republic. This is obviously a literary demonstration of the Socialist Education Movement which targeted Christianity. However, after Wang experienced the political disaster of the Cultural Revolution, he was in extreme suffering to feel the nation's belief on the brink of collapse. So he wished there was a Messiah who could warn people to repent and lead them to be good and kind. This idea is vividly expressed in his story *shizijia shang* (十字架上, On the Cross), which was published in 1988, several months before the Democracy Movement in 1989. It is the greatest allegory that uses the Bible as reference, in which Wang used "a literary form delineating contemporary reality." (Gálik 1995: 449).

In the preface, Wang wrote the below:

假如有人来，另传一个耶稣，不是我们所传过的，或者你们另受一个灵，不是你们所受过的，或者另得一个福音，不是你们所得过的，你们容让他也就是了……《哥林多后书·第十一节》(Wang Meng 1988: 45)

This looks very similar to the 2 Corinthians Chapter 11 Verse 4 in the Union Version, but Wang made some small changes on it. The original verse is:

假如有人来，另传一个耶稣，不是我们所传过的；或者你们另受一个灵，不是你们所受过的；或者另得一个福音，不是你们所得过的；你们容让他也就罢了。。 (The author underlined those differences.)

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. – (2 Corinthians 11: 4, New International Version)

Comparing Wang's quotation to the Bible, we find one character and four punctuations changed. However, these changes reveal sufficiently that the quotation is not serious. And then, when reviewing Wang's notation on the source of this quotation we can see: “《哥林多后书·第十一节》” (Wang Meng 1988: 45). It means “2 Corinthians: 11”. Wang Meng gave up the typical Christian way of writing reference to the Bible, which is: 2 Corinthians 11: 4 (in Chinese it should be: 《哥林多后书·第十一章 4 节》). Although it looks like a careless error, but the author thinks that Wang reveals his special intention through it, that is: he wants to use such a careless omitting to show that he is not a Christian believer, and that he is the one who “comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached” (NIV). This Jesus is a role played by Wang himself in the story for the sake of “delineating contemporary reality” (Gálik 1995: 449). And these small changes to the Bible also tell us that Wang is quite familiar with Christianity and the Bible. Furthermore, the author supposes that Wang has read more than one Chinese versions of the Bible, because his quotation “帝曰：应有光！” (God said, ‘Let there be light!’) (Wang Meng 1996: 43) in the story *Bai xiansheng de meng* (《白先生的梦》, Mr. Bai's Dream) looks like an imitation of Samuel I.J. Schereschewsky's (1831–1906) Easy *Wenli* (淺文理) Version whereas the quotes in *Shizijia shang* are mostly from the Union Version.

Shizijia shang comments that the image of Jesus “functions as a warning to the wickedness of the world” (Wang Meng 1988: 45), and this is why Wang would want to play the role of Jesus, to serve as that warning himself. At the beginning of chapter 2, he wrote that: “I am Jesus. Jesus is in my heart, the Holy Spirit is in my heart, I am holiness.” (Wang Meng 1988: 46) Then from chapters 2 to 8, he enacted the whole life of Jesus: from Birth to the miracles, to the Crucifixion, then to the Resurrection. However, the setting of entire story is in the contemporary Chinese society.

Wang used the story of Jesus to deride the reality. For instance, he asked series of rhetorical questions about the miracles of Jesus: “You don't believe it? Why don't you believe? The miracles could be explained with your own words as well, this is the so-called special ability! Don't you agree that a psychic could move a doubter's watch into a thermos next door in a split second using his mental powers?” (Wang Meng 1988: 47) Through this paragraph, Wang's satire on “special ability” is displayed vividly. Its satirical implication is identical with the figleaf in Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged*.

Moreover, Wang Meng lamented that:

I am living in such a sinful country, one that angers Yahweh! ...fights between siblings, fathers and sons, husbands and wives... Truth overwhelmed by lies; honesty causes more suspicion than duplicity; velvet paws hide sharp claws; talents of literature are used on slander; more traps exist than roads do; more poisons are sold than candies; the purpose of friendship is backstab; prayers are curses on the prayer giver's enemy that he will be infected with AIDS... (Wang Meng 1988: 48)

The society described by these phenomena is completely different from the biblical society which Jesus was born in; these words from Wang paint the picture of a dark contemporary Chinese society, they correspond with another comment in the story: “This is our culture!” (Wang Meng 1988: 48)

The story of *Shizijia shang* progresses. “People start a commotion when Pilate asks whether or not Jesus should be released. They shout out in loud voices: ‘Stab in with a clean knife and pull out a blood stained red one! Kill one to bring equilibrium, and bonus if we kill two!’” (Wang Meng 1988: 52) This was a famous slogan used during the Cultural Revolution. Wang used this slogan to vividly depict the bloody commotion during that period. As Jesus passes the streets on the way to his persecution, an old believer prays to him with poignant jealousy: “Jesus, use your might to collapse my prideful neighbor’s three-floored house! If his house is too tough to collapse on its own, then bring about an earthquake and tear the land his house is built on! May he be killed in this earthquake, even if that means 100 innocent people would be killed by it too!” (Wang Meng 1988: 53) Meanwhile, an unbeliever “spits in my face because his own face has leprosy, because his father died, because his hen crows instead of lays eggs, because his roof top is broken and leaks during rains, because his toes are wet and itchy due to sweat, and also because he wrote more text than Luo Guanzhong (羅貫中, 1330?–1400?), Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹, 1715–1764) and Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881–1936) combined, but none of it has been recognized because the people who read his articles and the people in charge of the literature department could not tell good from bad.” (Wang Meng: 1989: 56) From these sentences we can tell that the story of “I” (Jesus) is obviously the story of Wang’s own life as a person “in charge of the literature department”, and thus a scholar commented the story as “sigh of a virtuoso” (Jiang Yuanlun, Ding Cong 1989: 59).

The last part of this story – Chapter 9 – is entitled “Ni ‘xinyue-qishi lu’” (拟《新约·启示录》, After the ‘Revelation’). Professor Gálík analysed this part in detail in his paper *Parody and Absurd Laughter in Wang Meng’s work concerning Apocalypse. Musings over the Metamorphosis of the Biblical Vision in Contemporary Chinese Literature*. According to him, Wang Meng’s “Ni ‘xinyue-qishi lu’” is a metafictional

work that uses the method of parody for the sake of creativity and critique. In this chapter Wang followed the beginning of the Apocalypse by John, and its end, together with some parts of the Chinese classical novel *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West) by Wu Cheng'en (吳承恩, 1500–1582). Instead of the “strong angel” – The Revelation, 5,2 – standing in the right hand of the “Lord God Almighty”, Wang Meng gave us a “Tuo ta li tianwang” (托塔李天王, Vaisravana), he wrote, “And I saw Vaisravana proclaiming with a loud voice: ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll?’ And instead of a “Lamb as it had been slain”, namely, Jesus Christ himself, the book of mysteries is opened by Niu mowang (Ox Monster King), another well-known demon from the Chinese world, just as Vaisravana, he is also a character from Wu Cheng'en's novel. Professor Gálik indicated, Wang Meng probably created the character of Ox Monster King as Christ's negative mirror. The high moral quality of Jesus, his dignity, wisdom, call for love among human beings, modesty, respect, and namely the virtue of forgiveness, were outweighed in Ox Monster's amoral deeds, hatred, butchering ad invicem, self-glorification and non plus ultra idiocy. But at the end of the story, that Ox Monster King, the hypostasis of Wang Meng's “four oxen”, had been condemned to death by four oxen's mutual wrestling, this declares publicly the ultimate end of a demon. Professor Gálik thinks, such absurd laughter is a kind of protest against an absurd life. (c.f. Gálik 1995: 449–461)

Indeed, the sinful crowds that Wang described in chapters 2–8 have same characters as four oxen in the chapter 9. Who could promise them that they would not be exterminated when the Lamb of God COMES again? Wang Meng expressed his intention to warn against the wickedness of the world circuitously through this absurd allegory of Jesus.

4 The crucified lamb of the God of poetry

At the beginning of 1980s, the so-called “Obscure Poets” appeared to the Chinese literary world. Hai Zi (海子, 1964–1989) was one of the outstanding examples to represent the writers after the Cultural Revolution.

Hai Zi was born in rural countryside. He was enrolled in Beijing University in 1979, where he studied in the capital city. He had stayed there until his suicide in 1989. During these ten years, China was launching her Reform and Opening-up. The society was changing rapidly. While the material life was getting better and better, some important spiritual values were lost. The huge difference between urban and rural lives, the lonely and poor living situation, the flourishing but unfeeling and prideful capital city ... all of these things incessantly oppressed Hai Zi, the son of a poor peasant. He

felt a sharp pain and therefore sheltered himself under his poem writing. He put poetry in the place of God and himself in the place of the son of God. He used the Bible for reference to construct a huge scripture for his own poetry god.

Hai Zi's poetry and life were full of divinities; until his death the Holy Bible was accompanying him. His good friend Luo Yihe 骆一禾 (1961–1989) had commented on his poem, saying his epic *Taiyang* (太阳, The Sun) absorbed the experience of the Holy Bible, that his *Shi* (弑, Patricide) has some imprints of the Kings, *Misaiya* (弥赛亚, Messiah) traced the Song of Songs and Lamentations, *Fushide* (浮士德, Faust) has also some traces of the Book of Job (Xi Chuan 1997: 863). [Henceforth the number in the brackets will always indicate the pages in the book *Hai Zi shi quan bian* (海子诗全编, The Complete Poetry of Hai Zi). For more about Hai Zi see Gálík 2004: 67–69 and Wang Benchao 王本朝 2000: 245–253.]

Reading Hai Zi's poetry we can see that he used the Bible as an artistic conception everywhere, for example:

A'er de taiyang – gei wode shou gege: fan gao (阿尔的太阳——给我的瘦哥哥：凡·高, The Sun of Arles – to my thin brother Van Gogh):

Invite everyone who pulls his chestnut out of the fire / Do not paint again Christ's olive garden / Paint the harvest of olives in case you want to / Paint the violent fire regiment / Instead of the Father of heaven / Cleansing the lives (5).

Hai shang hunli (海上婚礼, Wedding on the Sea):

Perhaps like the way of the legend / We are the first / Two people / Living behind a cliff of the faraway Arabia / In an apple garden / The snake and sunshine fall into the beautiful river / At the same time (37).

Rang wo ba jiaoya ge zai huanghun zhong yi wei mujiang de gongju xiang shang (让我把脚丫搁在黄昏中一位木匠的工具箱上, Let Me Put My Toes on the Toolbox of a Carpenter at Dusk):

At the time I was nailed to be a Cross / At the door of my hometown / Let me stop for a rest in a shed for horses / If it is not by reason of the bad time / I was divided with a carpenter's saw, and shaped to be his son's / Cradle. Cross (124).

Hai Zi was wandering in a magnificent framework of the Hebrew legends. He was deeply attracted by those fantastic stories, he was singing with rejoicing. In *Putao yuan zhi xi de huayu* (葡萄园之西的话语, Words at the West Side of Vineyard) we read: "Solomon's poetry / One reel after another / Rolling down to the mountainside / Like a fountain / Beating on my back" (127) Hai Zi hailed from the countryside and loved

the mother earth deeply. He said to himself in *Maidi yu shiren* (麦地与诗人, Corn Field and Poet): “Poet, you cannot compensate / The love from the corn field and the light a kind of dream / A kind of goodness / You cannot compensate” (355). Corn field is certainly a biblical topic (*Matthew*, 12, 1; *Mark*, 2, 23; *Luke*, 6, 1). Hai Zi felt very sad that the countryside was losing its simplicity, goodness and traditional values within the modern era. When he visited his hometown for the last time and came back to Beijing, he talked to his friend sadly: “You can no longer find the things you were familiar with. In your own homeland you became a total stranger.” (924). Hai Zi left his remote village and lived in Peking when he was 15. However this impecunious peasant’s son was incessantly excruciated by mental apathy and overweening capital, he sang in his poem disconsolately: “Oh Homer, we are sitting on the earth and fingering our poem musical instrument / We are both stabbed blind by the reality of survival” (774).

This desolate reality made the poet feel that it is difficult to find his inner peace and happiness. Xi Chuan 西川 (1963–) summarized that: “Hai Zi’ had lived quite secluded.” (924) The ten years that Hai Zi had lived in Beijing (1979–1989) is just the time which Dr. Liu Xiaofeng (刘小枫, 1956–) had mentioned as a period when “the Western Modernism swarmed into China as a tidal wave” (Liu Xiaofeng 1989: 37). Hai Zi was also the same as other earlier obscure poets, such as Gu Cheng (顾城, 1956–1993), Bei Dao (北岛, 1949–) and Shu Ting (舒婷, 1952–) who “drank from this fountain thirstily” (Liu Xiaofeng 1989: 40). And like Gu Cheng’s driftage on a deserted island, the fantasy of happiness did not come singly, but in pairs; as Hai Zi faced the doleful reality that he had actually fantasized the same kind of happiness. Hai Zi sang about this dream in his poem: *Mian chao dahai, chun nuan hua kai* (面朝大海, 春暖花开; Facing the Sea, during the Warmth of Spring When All the Flowers Bloom):

From tomorrow, to be a happy person means / Feeding horses, chopping firewood,
travelling across the world / From tomorrow, I shall care for foodstuff and
greenstuffs / I shall have a house, facing the sea, during the warmth of spring / all
the flowers bloom (436).

But our poet had not found out the time to actualize his dream, and the tremendous desperation “had already pressed him walking towards the life circumstances similar to Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Friedrich Nietzsche (1884–1900) and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843)” (Zhang Fu 1997: 872 in Luo Yihe: *Hai Zi shengya* 海子生涯 Career of Hai Zi). Hai Zi himself described his feeling as:

That time I have already / Walked to the vanishing point of human beings / That
time I’ve already arrived to the equator / That time I’ve already been sawed

asunder by time / Bleeding through top to the end / Having been sawed into pieces
(775).

Thus the poetry became his only spiritual refuge, and became his god. Hai Zi said that he was longing “to raise the poetry to heaven” (897).

In the epic *Taiyang wang* (太阳王, King the Sun), we can see that Hai Zi was creating his god of poetry in his own way. He chose “the Sun” to visualize the god of his poetry and declared that:

I am just, just the Sun / Just the Sun. Either you grow up to be the same as me / Or
to subordinate yourself to me / Let me leaving you going my way, my own way /
My way upon the earth / Let the three sorrow-stricken stomachs start burning /
(Jesus Buddha Muhammad) (777).

Here Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad are all the setoffs of the god of poetry – the Sun. Facing to the Sun they have to imitate him or to be subordinate to him, otherwise they can only feel the burning sorrow.

Hai Zi worshipped his god of poetry with all his works and his own life. The last part of his great epic *Taiyang · qibu shu* (太阳·七部书, The Sun · A Book in Seven Parts) was named as *Taiyang · misaiya* (太阳·弥赛亚, The Sun · Messiah), and was written between the end of 1988 to March of 1989. This is the last epic that Hai Zi created before he went to his death. He wrote in the opening lines: “Consecrate this Sun to the new era! To the truth! / Consecrate this epic to his new poem god who is about to be born” (801). At the end of this epic Hai Zi drew a lovely picture:

The heavy snow in the heaven drop straight into the eyes of blinds / Full of
brightness / Full of the brightness of birth / Loudly sing the Elders / Elders / The
voice of chorus, the heavy snow in the heaven / The odes of the blinds / The odes
of the blinds that seeing the sunshine (866).

These verses present a picture of the birthday of Jesus Christ. Hai Zi’s epic poetry stopped here. When after Hai Zi’s death Xi Chuan edited *Hai Zi shi quan bian* (海子诗全编, The Complete Poetry of Hai Zi), he deemed that this epic poem “was not finished” (866). Here the author want to say that the actual “end” of this epic is the “loud crash” (4) of the poet himself on 26th March 1989. He died on that day. We should pay attention to the manner of Hai Zi’s suicide. He carefully chose a rail of a slow train, lay down across the rail and let the train cut his body into two parts through his waist. His body and the rail were shaped as a Cross – a Cross leading to the Kingdom of the Poetry! Hai Zi’s great epic poetry had been finished there; the god of poetry was born then. He himself ultimately became the sacrificed lamb of his own

poetry. Since then many young people who love Hai Zi's poetry believed in Hai Zi's resurrection, which, of course, never came true.

Hai Zi used the Bible for reference to construct an impressive *oeuvre* for his own god of poetry. Not only Luo Yihe noticed that his epic poetry was structured as the Holy Bible. Xi Chuan also considered that "Hai Zi's road was from the New Testament to the Old Testament" (Xi Chuan 1997: 6 *Huainian* 怀念, Cherished Memory). And Hai Zi himself denoted this. In his poem he wrote:

First part of the Holy Bible is my wings, which is matchless bright / Sometimes it's also like the cloudy today. / Second part of the Holy Bible is vigorous but joyous / Sure it's also my wounded wings / My empty earth and sky / Is the combination book of both parts / Of the Holy Bible, that is my body cleaved again / Streaming rain, snow and tears in February (440–441).

About the character on his poetry, Hai Zi claimed that his compositions are not the poems but a religious work of his kingdom of poetry. For instance, the epic poem *Taiyang · misaiya* (太阳·弥赛亚, The Sun · Messiah) constituted of *Taiyang* (太阳, The Sun) and *Yuanshi shishi pianduan* (原始史诗片断, Slices of the Primeval Epic) (796–866), or the whole *Taiyang · qibu shu* (太阳·七部书, The Sun · Seven Parts) (481–866). This assertion is, of course, unquestionable. His lyric pieces are the specimens of the mythopoeic poetry, where the Holy Bible presents tone of the most important sources. There are, of course, many others, too. Let us say, his highlighting of the Sun can hardly be regarded as weighty biblical element, where it was not worshipped, with the exception of the reign of King Manasseh of Judah after 696 B.C. up to King Josiah in 623 B.C.

Hai Zi chose the Sun or *Taiyang wang* (太阳王, King Sun) to make a god of his poetry. All the poets that he adored throughout the history were, according to him, the prophets of the kingdom of poetry: Homer, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), Qu Yuan (屈原, ca. 339–278 BC), Li Bai (李白, 701–762), Wang Wei (王维, 701–761), Li He (李贺, 790–816), and others.

Hai Zi presented himself as a Messiah with his poems in kingdom of poetry. He wrote in *Yesu (sheng zhi gaoyang)* [耶稣 (圣之羔羊), Jesus (Lamb of the Lord)]: "From Rome returned to the mountains / Bronze lips turned into flesh / On my body bronze lips flew away / On my body flesh lips are revived" (307). Here the poet left the Christian scriptures ("Rome") and came back to his own reality ("mountains"), then he felt the mission of "the Lamb of the Lord" had befallen on him. So the "bronze lips" of the Jesus statue had changed to be "flesh lips" "on my body". Thus the poet

had started to preach his gospel of the kingdom of poetry. This, at least, is the author's understanding of this piece. One of his poems ended with these words: "I wrote down my lection in the gloom, the world turned to be bright again" (413). At another occasion he presented his own vision of the bright future of the mankind in the poem *Wuyue de maidi* (五月的麦地, The Corn Field in May):

Brothers in all over the world / Will embrace each other in the corn field / The East, the South, the North and the West / The brothers in the corn field, good brothers / Looking back the yore / Recite their poetry / Will embrace each other in the corn field (353).

These lines are reminiscent of the visionary words of Prophet Isaiah about God who "will settle the disputes among great nations. They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning-knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again" (Isaiah, 2, 4). The vision of everlasting peace will be realized in Hai Zi's kingdom of poetry!

Haizi called himself "the King" many times. Here are few most typical examples: "A bright night / I came in the rose garden / Got off the crown of poetry / And the corselet of the heavy land" (363). He declared that he himself is the Sun: "The Sun is my name / The Sun is my life... / The millenary kingdom and I shall / Ride on a five-thousand years old phoenix and a dragon ... / The poetry and the Sun will certainly triumph" (378). Facing the fate of "the sacrificed lamb", he said: "As the King I cannot endure patiently / On this distant road / The sacrifice of myself" (469). Here the poet tasted to the marrow the suffering that Jesus experienced before he went to the Cross. Jesus had prayed in Gethsemane before he had been arrested: "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark, 14, 36).

Jesus resurrected from death after three days, as he predicted, and Hai Zi, the Chinese poet who died in 20th century will also resurrect, as he predicted, and make "the dead cave or village" "bloom with wild flowers in my (i.e. his) cavern" (245).

It is not difficult to understand why Hai Zi sang about the death again and again, since death is the precondition of the Messiah's resurrection. Just among the 117 lyrics he wrote between 1983 and 1986, death is mentioned 96 times; and in the 125 lyrics he wrote between 1987 and 1989, there are 167 references to death. He said about himself: "This is a child of night, immersed in winter, inclined to death" (470). No wonder his good friend Xi Chuan commented on him: "Hai Zi was a person who had a predisposition for suicide" (922).

It is a very painful reality for the contemporary Chinese literary world that Hai Zi, one of her greatest talents, died so early after only more than six years of creative

work. Especially his unfinished epic “The Sun · A Book in Seven Parts” might have become one of the best poems in Chinese literature of the 20th century (Cf. Gálik 2004: 67–69). Hai Zi’s empathy to the Bible has vividly demonstrated the contemporary Chinese literary world’s enthusiasm for Western culture after a long period of cultural authoritarianism.

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