

## **The Chinese Dream and the Future Development of the Chinese Church**

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Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the development of the churches in China seem to face numerous difficulties. Many are saying that with the tightening religious regulations, the space for churches to develop has also narrowed. All this seems to be related to Xi Jinping. It is true that in the last five years there have been many new policies, slogans and increased regulation towards churches, especially against the ability for churches to connect with the wider world. Within half a year of becoming General Secretary, Xi Jinping brought up the idea of “the Chinese Dream”. Is this a new innovation or extension in national development strategy? Will it restrict or facilitate the future development of churches?



### **What is the Chinese Dream?**

The marketing slogan called “the Chinese Dream” is composed of the twelve core values of socialism-- “Prosperity, Democracy, Civility, Harmony, Freedom, Equality, Justice, Rule of Law, Patriotism, Dedication, Integrity, Friendship”. These slogans can be seen in every corner of the nation. But if you think carefully about these words, it won’t be hard to see that they are an aggregate of all kinds of slogans and ideas in the last hundred years of modernization in China.

I believe that the Chinese Dream was not “invented” when Xi Jinping came into the picture. Rather, it has been percolating for some time now. We won’t speak about the distant

past, but in the two years when Hu Jintao was General Secretary, there was a mention of this idea of a “harmonious society” in 2004. On a certain level, this Chinese Dream is an extension of the idea of a “harmonious society”.

## **Confucian Culture and Economic Power**

The connection between “The Chinese Dream” and “Harmonious Society” is traditional Chinese Confucian culture. “Harmonious Society” is the ideal social environment in Confucian thought. Those 12 “core values” are very much in line with Confucian social morality. “Harmonious Society” is a return to Chinese culture, one can even say that it is a return to Chinese indigenous religion, communism repackaged with Confucian political and social morality.



Xi Jinping has linked the Chinese dream with strengthening and prospering the nation. Thus at the Nineteenth National People’s Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping stated his vision of “National Rejuvenation”. The content of this national rejuvenation is Confucian culture, and political and social morality. In the last decades, through the exertion of “soft power”, “Confucian Institutions” had been established everywhere in the world to promote Confucian culture globally. Economic development is one such means of soft power. Through the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, and every kind of investment and purchase, the use of economic power is to change international attitudes towards China.

In recent years, the Chinese government has greatly increased the space for Chinese tourists through mutual visa exemption. (From 19 countries in 2013, to 67 as of January 2018). This strategy of energetic promotion of tourism has led to tourism destinations around the globe sending employees to China to learn Putonghua. With this there is also the proliferation and popularization of UnionPay, Renminbi exchange, WePay and other Chinese financial instruments.

## The Challenge of Sinicization

Under strong government rule, development in many different areas will be limited by government policies. The government's request that the churches become more sinicized is a primarily political and cultural in nature. Politically, the churches cannot be "used" by foreign nations to disseminate Western human rights and democratic values. Culturally, Christianity should follow the path of Buddhism when it entered China, becoming transformed by Chinese culture. We know that today's Mahayana Buddhism in China is an entirely different religious system to Theravada Buddhism in India. This can be called evolution, or it can be called a massive change caused by Chinese culture. Imagine how soteriology could be changed by sinicization? Could we maintain the doctrine of "no salvation apart from Christ"? Contrasted with forcefully removing crosses, the hanging of the national flag and singing the national anthem within the church building, and other such sinicizations, will have a far greater impact.

In actuality, the influence of sinicization has always been present in the Three Self Church. It is only that the word isn't used. We won't discuss the theological commentaries produced by Y.T. Wu, T.C. Chao and other such figures from around the revolution. Even at the end of the last century, under the proposition of Bishop K.H. Ting's "theological reconstruction" and "justification by love" has been the subject of a lot of discussion, and



much dissatisfaction. There were workers in the Three Self church who stated that if these propositions were adopted they would leave any Three Self organization. So it can be seen that sinicization brings various challenges to the churches in the spheres of politics, doctrinal theology, and ecclesiology.

## The Response of Indigenization

In the situation in mainland China any policies pushed by an empowered government, especially policies that have to do with a national direction, are unavoidable for the churches. Whether a church is registered or not, the churches in China must eventually have reckoning and adjustments regarding indigenization.

The difference between indigenization and sinicization is that the former arises internally in the church as a response to different cultural transmissions, adjustments made in the expression of faith, or even compromises made in church tradition. Yet those doctrines which are perceived as essential remain unchanged. The latter however arises from government suggestions, with Chinese culture as defined by the government as its subject. Thus the churches have to suit the nation. And while the task of making amendments remains the responsibility of the churches, it may be the case that no clear boundaries will be drawn between church and state.



How shall we respond? Firstly, the initiative must return to the body of the church. Indigenization is the responsibility of the Church. After the revolution, overseas Chinese churches had discussed the question of indigenization. The phenomenon of “cultural Christians” that has emerged since the 1990s appears to have been driven by scholars who have been discussing indigenization. With the increasing number of mainland workers receiving graduate level theological training in recent years, could they possibly strengthen the discussion regarding indigenization by their participation?

Secondly, there needs to be a definition for different topics within the broad realm of indigenization. Cultural, philosophy and theology discussions do not have any immediate linkage to the ecology of the church. And this fact has also been discussed under the heading of indigenization since the revolution. It is just like the Lord Jesus’ parable of the sower, where the seeds were scattered on shallow earth and rocks. Because the soil was not deep enough, the seeds were affected by changes in the environment and could not bear fruit. Other areas of discussion include church governance, church expansion and management models, theological training and leadership training methods, Christian education theory and application, modes of evangelism, etc. For some scholars, discussing “applied theology” topics does not have a lot of value, yet this is the environment that church workers have to face every day. Culture affects every part of our lives, we should not underestimate its influence on church life either.

Thirdly, discussions about indigenization has to lay down roots, and it will take time. Hong Kong still has this space. These include library resources, scholars and theologians in different fields, and an atmosphere of academic and intellectual freedom. There are many workers from the mainland who come to Hong Kong for short or long-term theological training. If discussions are added to the training courses, these mainland workers can reflect more. They can also be encouraged to experiment with what they learned when they return to their home churches, so that they can apply their thoughts on indigenization.

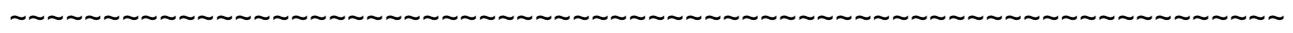
## Summary

I hope that we will not just dwell on these observations and suggestions that I have made, but through time and communication with various co-workers, come up with ways to maximize impact under the influence of the Chinese Dream and sinicization. We have long incorporated elements of these things in our various pastoral training camps and conferences. Our co-workers emphasize the need to reflect on the application of indigenization, whether in regular theological courses, or short-term pastoral trainings. Whether the Chinese Dream will have a positive or negative impact on the churches of China will depend on how we face it.



Mainland pastors come to Hong Kong to join a learning exchange “Leadership Summit”

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## What is Worship?

### ■ “For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship”

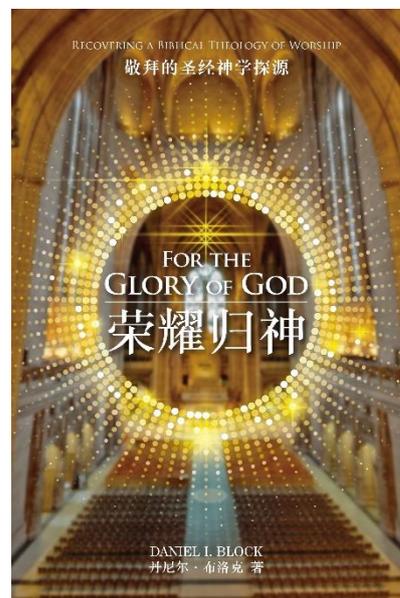
◎ **Matthew Fung**

**Associate General Secretary (Publishing)**

Sometimes you may go to another church to worship just to understand the worship style of another denomination of the church. However, would we also try to find out the theology behind that church’s worship, the target of its worship or whether the congregation’s worship can please the Lord? These are familiar yet seldom asked questions. Very few people seriously ponder over whether our worship can really please the Lord.

In face of great pastoring needs, pastors in mainland churches adopt a people-centred approach in shepherding believers. In worship, pastors often fall into the trap of adopting a people-oriented approach, taking on a wrong focus. Believers also unconsciously adopt a consumer’s mindset, worshipping just to please themselves. Meanwhile, burdened by their huge workload, mainland pastors and church leaders often treat the weekly worship service as a routine. Hence, the format of worship has become rigid, and failed to transform believers.

CCL has recently published a book titled “For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship”. The author, Daniel I. Block, is a renowned Old Testament scholar. He leads readers who would like to truly worship God to find ways through the Bible to overcome the above mentioned challenges. He emphasizes repeatedly that worship should be God-centred. In addition to exploring the subject from the theological and historical perspectives, he also takes care of pastors’ needs and adds in content on how to put his suggestions into practice, making the book more or less a worship manual. Believers are asked to re-focus their worship to glorify God!



The first five chapters of the book discuss the definition of worship – what worship is and the subject and object of worship. The next five chapters explore the topic of public worship – prayers, hymn-singing and Bible-reading. The last three chapters expound on general issues related to worship – the space for worship and those serving in worships, etc.

In every chapter, the author ends with practical tips on how churches can implement his suggestions. Response based on the Bible is also given to tackle the many challenges faced by the church in worship with. The author stresses that worship is an attitude which runs through one's family, work, words and deeds. In everyday life, believers should nurture fear for the Lord and a thankful heart. Only by doing so can they instill vibrancy into their worship and grow spiritually.

Thanks to God's grace, CCL had the opportunity to publish this outstanding work. Through the book, we can also walk alongside mainland pastors and church leaders by responding to their needs for more devotional literature. With support from book lovers, 850 teachers from more than 30 mainland seminaries received the book. This is another literature ministry program after "New Morning Mercies – A Daily Gospel Devotional", aiming to equip mainland pastors as genuine worshippers whose lives can influence others'.



Lastly, let me quote from the preamble of the book to encourage readers, "For every piece of advice I render, I hope that you will adopt the attitude of the Berean Jews as described in Books of Acts 17:11. They examined the Scripture every day to see if what Paul and Silas said was true. If the Berean Jews had to check on Paul's words, shouldn't my readers also use the truth in the Bible to examine what I said?" ("For the Glory of God" p.15-16)

### **Please support our Publishing Ministry**

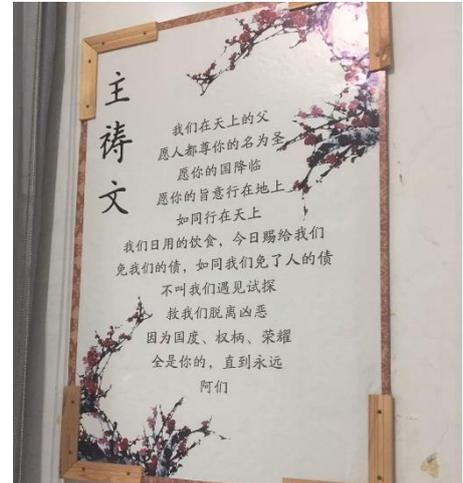
We cannot take the place of local church leaders in serving their congregation. However, we believe that publications can transcend the boundaries of place and time in supporting pastors in shepherding believers and driving the church's growth. Please pray for our Publishing Ministry in 2018, which includes publishing books in simplified Chinese (8 titles) and developing e-publication platforms. The total required funding is US\$121,800. May the Lord touch your heart so that you are willing to walk alongside mainland churches through supporting our publications. Please support and donate to "Publishing Ministry (Simplified Chinese Christian Books and Curriculum)". Thank you!

# Prayers

## 1. Indigenization of Chinese churches

In the past, Christianity entered China with a Western background, requesting believers to stop worshipping ancestors despite traditional Chinese customs. Today, President Xi Jinping has linked the China dream with national strength, and inevitably government policies will affect churches' Indigenization policy.

May the Lord guide Chinese churches, help them uphold the core truths while adjusting their strategies of sharing the gospel with non-believers with considerations for Chinese politics and culture. May the Lord help believers live out His love, bear witness for Him, and may the Holy Spirit move more people to know the Saviour who transcends history, politics, cultural and racial barriers.



## 2. Old pastors and young leaders



Quite many old church leaders today still adopt the ways of nurturing believers and managing churches passed down through generations. But the better educated young leaders are worried that the traditional and conservative mode will cause churches to resist changes, unable to adapt to a new world.

May the Lord broaden the minds of old leaders, so they can help churches grow in response to changing times, and listen to young leaders' views. May the Lord lead young leaders to appreciate and learn from the old leaders' willingness to suffer and steadfast commitment.

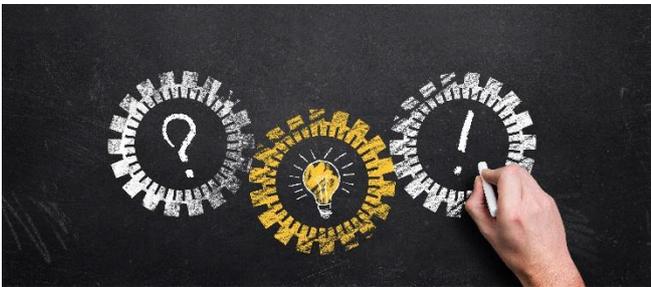
### 3. Hidden risks of poor quality cars

Large and small cities in China face the problem of serious traffic congestion. A report issued early this year by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine showed that one in 10 cars in the country last year needed to be recalled. The 2017 National Consumer Association's Analysis Report on Complaints Against Cars showed that most complaints centred on post-sale service, contracts and quality issues.



May the Lord bless car manufacturers so that they will follow their conscience, rather than focusing on profits alone, and avoid serious accidents or hidden risks by ensuring that their products are up to standard.

### 4. AI and education



AI – Artificial Intelligence has been a buzz word in the mainland education sector in recent years. Its advocates say that AI can liberate students from memorizing facts and spoon-feeding, helping nurture their analytical, collaboration skills. This also prepares them for lifelong learning.

May the Lord guide AI developers and teachers, help them use AI in an appropriate manner, and apart from vocational foundation courses incorporate into it teachings about ethics to help students develop proper moral values.

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