

**A MISSIONAL ENCOUNTER IN CHINA: GOVERNMENTALITY,
RELATIONS OF POWER, AND ESCHATOLOGICAL PRAXIS**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the encounter of a Protestant missional agent with the state apparatuses of the Chinese Communist Party in the Hu Jintao era. By the construction of an interdisciplinary theo-political framework through the theological concepts of J. Moltmann (supplemented by concepts of J. Metz, R. Niebuhr and J. Ellul) and the non-theological conceptual toolbox of M. Foucault, this study attempts to analyze and interpret in an integrative manner the interacting relationship between the missional agent and respective state apparatuses via collaborative undertakings that were characterized by the productive nature of power and love. Collaborative engagement is argued as dialogical interaction in the anthropological operative dimension within a dynamic web of power and love relations mediated via a politically constructed matrix of governmental rationalities. Theological discernment and historical theo-political analysis of this study point out that, amid the forces of the power of the party-state, which tended to oppress the Christian communities, there was a specific resurgence of possible enlarged spaces that emerged and re-emerged again via the forces of the power of the future in the mission field. Eschatological praxis of the missional agent in the form of missional initiatives functioned to channel reality out of previously pre-defined categories and acted as a force to transform

historical events in the missional arena. The Chinese Communist Party can be dominating, but it is not absolute. Dynamic mutuality between the missional agent and the regime was enhanced when power relations were mobilized correlatively.

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A note on Nomenclature of Chinese Names

Names of Chinese characters in this thesis follow the traditional norm of putting the last name before the given name(s). For example, Deng Xiaoping signifies Deng is the last name. As regards to transliteration, the *hanyu pinyin* system is used herein.

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

This thesis examines a Protestant missionary organization serving in the People's Republic of China (PRC). To maintain its anonymity, this missional agent is abbreviated as AHF of which I am a member of the board of directors. At the time of submitting this thesis, AHF is continuing its ministry in the PRC, though the scope and scale of operation has been much minimized. This is a study focusing on comprehending AHF's missional collaborative undertakings to bring God's blessings to the people of the PRC in the Hu Jintao era (2002-2012) from a theological perspective.¹

Missional strategies are impacted by the agent's missiological orientation and ideological discourses of isolation, hostility, or collaboration, together with the discernment about and interaction with the matrix of dialectical endeavor of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on religious policy and implementation. By making use of an interdisciplinary conceptual framework through the theological concepts of J. Moltmann (supplemented by that of J. Metz, R. Niebuhr and J. Ellul) and the

¹ Hu Jintao was the fourth-generation official top leader of the PRC from 2002 to 2012. His positions held within the party-state included: i) General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (from 2002 to 2012), ii) President of the People's Republic of China (from 2003 to 2012), and iii) Chairman of the Central Military Commission (from 2004 to 2012).

non-theological conceptual toolbox of M. Foucault, this study attempts to analyze and interpret, in an integrative manner, the interacting relationship between AHF and respective state apparatuses of the CCP via collaborative undertakings in church ministries and social charity services.

The core thesis is that, with a distinct Christian realism, AHF survived in the Hu Jintao authoritarian regime through exercising its *concrete and finite freedom of struggle and resistance*.² It advanced its ministry of reconciliation through identifying the specific governmentality in a renewed state-Christianity relationship and conducting eschatological praxis in its collaborative undertaking characterized by the productive nature of power and love in a matrix of power relations. Partaking in a mission requires various sources of continual inspiration and stimulation for theological thinking. To speak meaningfully of a missional venture in the PRC, AHF did not assume the Chinese Communists to be enemies but *others* with whom dialectical relationship within a matrix of theo-political dynamics prevailed.

Christian realism in hope directs people to understand God is with humanity

² The Foucauldian concept of a concrete and finite freedom is opposed to an abstract freedom. See Rajchman, J (1985) *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p.92-93.

in worldly events. It allows Christians to acknowledge happenings on earth are not merely as they are but to view them as possibilities and potentials. Riding on the tension between Christianity and Chinese Communism, a critical undertaking of Christian realism enables the discovery of the *tendency* or *specific lean*. The mission field is an arena where a faithful past, an expectant future, and a loving present interweave in missional eschatology and socio-political dynamics. Tension is constantly shaped and reshaped by unbearable incongruities and absurd incompatibility amid seeking a common platform via freedom for creativity. Eschatological praxis³ in the form of missional initiatives functions to channel reality out of previously pre-defined categories, and act as a force to transform historical events in the missional arena.

Through the lens of M. Foucault, the mission field in the PRC is characterized by the regime's matrix of power relations and changing governmental rationalities. These governmental rationalities frame policy-making and implementation as a process of dialectical change, tension management, and repeated experimentation under constant reassessment of socialism in China. Collaborative

³ Moltmann maintains the Church needs eschatological praxis. Quoted in Braaten, C. (1968) "Toward a Theology of Hope", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.111.

undertakings require dialogical interactions. AHF's collaborative engagement is argued as dialogical interaction in the anthropological operative dimension within a dynamic web of power relations mediated via a politically constructed governmentality of love associated with a matrix of harmonism and scientific developmentalism in the Hu Jintao era. There was a political dynamic of love in this mission field. The governmentality of love in the Hu Jintao era was understood as political rationality functioning as an art of governing in the name of love. Such a matrix of governmental rationalities enabled an enlarged spectrum of possibilities (the *Enlarged*) for Christian ministerial existence, with a dynamic operative orientation toward the future. The *Enlarged* signified an extended range of spaces for missional ministry in divergence, possibility, and diversity.

Historical realities change; past Chinese Communist suppression and antagonism against Christianity do not dictate the present and future of the missional endeavor. The CCP party-state is not in a position to wither Christianity away. While the CCP is dominating, it is not totalizing. A tendency in the Hu Jintao era was reflected in the governmental rationality of love constructed by scholastic state apparatuses⁴ that functioned to legitimize policy formation and

⁴ This term is employed in this study to signify the importance of scholastic work within the socio-political realm of the Hu Jintao era.

implementation in association with the articulation of socio-political discourses of mutual adaptation, harmonism and scientific developmentalism, particularly for those related to Christianity. Governmentality carries an effect of truth and functions as “truth,”—which is an effect-in-the-real. In a Foucauldian sense, it belongs to a belief system that generates knowledge and practices to construct reality. The governmentality of love was merely a construction by the CCP for political purposes; in itself, it was neither true nor false. It could be articulated or truncated depending on its utilization by the CCP. For this thesis, the terms *governmentality of love* and “truth” of love are interchangeable because governmentality internally frames “truth.”⁵

In the Hu Jintao era, atheism as a core component of the fundamental dimension of Communist ideology had become less primary in the practice of Chinese Communist authoritarian political realism in the operative dimension. As a sign of the time, scholastic governmental rationality of love enabled the missional agent to locate the *Enlarged* which was the reality in anticipation of the expectant future. This governmentality construction enabled *love-relations-in-action*, which drove and strengthened dialogical relations. At the same time, a new

⁵ Allan explains that “truth” is created and framed internal to a particular discourse. See Allan, B. (1991) “Government in Foucault”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 21 (4), pp.421-440.

power/knowledge (nexus of power and knowledge) mobilized *power-relations-in-motion*, which worked toward the realization of blessings to the targeted group in terms of their physical wellbeing and their opportunity for education and faith-seeking through the ministries offered via the collaboration.

Missional Agent AHF: The Background

As a Protestant missionary entity, AHF was started in Hong Kong in 1999 in the form of a Christian charitable organization with a motto “to preach good news to the poor,.....to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”⁶ At the time of finalizing this thesis, AHF is still continuing its operation in the PRC even though the scale of operation has been much reduced due to stringent socio-political situation. To inform supporters about its activities and progress in the mission field, AHF produces seasonal updates in the form of *AHF Update* (in English), pamphlets and other newsletters and materials (either in Chinese or English). In addition to being information on project-events, these publications also reveal the “thoughts” and “ideas” of AHF leaders and missionaries. In an

⁶ Luke 4:18 (New International Version).

article entitled “Who We are?” in *AHF Update 2007*, AHF founder L affirmed AHF’s Christian identity and self-understanding as “a Christian charitable organization established to spread the gospel and to share the love of Christ in Mainland China, targeting on the ethnic minorities. [AHF partners] with Christian evangelical churches and groups to develop local communities, and to set up relational links with them through meeting their needs.”⁷ It is a “Ministry of Reconciliation” with God being the center.⁸ Its vision reads: “Following Jesus’ command of the Great Commission, we endeavor to share the love of Christ with the unreached minorities in the remote regions of China. We hope that through our efforts, they will become Great Commission-minded communities as well.”⁹ This missional task is undertaken not in a vacuum but in “an anthropological world of history”¹⁰ where, according to AHF director Y, “God has continuously revealed His plan.”¹¹ With an outward-looking character, AHF operates as “a platform” that supports “those who are interested in serving [the] Lord in China.”¹²

⁷ AHF founder L, “Who We Are?”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

⁸ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

⁹ AHF founder L, “Who We Are?”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

¹⁰ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns and Oates, p. 55.

¹¹ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

¹² AHF founder L, “Who We Are?”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

The governing board of AHF consists of the following:

- a. The Board- The directors in the Board are elected for a two-year term according to the Constitution. The Board consists of members who stand firm on [AHF's] doctrinal statement and undertake to comply and to adhere to all the terms and provisions of this Principles and Practices. The purpose of the Board is to ensure that [AHF] achieves the vision and mission to the glory of God.
- b. The Executive Committee: an executive committee is appointed by the Board of [AHF] to administrate and manage the daily business of [AHF] according to the organization's vision and strategy.¹³

With a set of ministerial values that included simplicity, flexibility, efficiency, and trust, AHF operated in the Hu Jintao era with a critical strategy to collaborate with government-registered Protestant churches to serve the local communities, through establishing long-term relational links with them.¹⁴ Ministerial projects which aimed to help improve the livelihood of the targeted impoverished communities are summarized in the following¹⁵ :

a. Community work

- Micro-loan goat project
- Emergency relief for flood victims
- Road construction and maintenance
- Works to facilitate water and power supplies

¹³ *AHF Principles and Practices*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See AHF pamphlet captioned "Partner with us to reach China's minorities."

- Methane wells for lighting, cooking and fertilizing purposes
- Computer and English training centers

b. Educational work

- Student scholarships
- Building and renovation of schools and dormitories
- Student follow-up service

c. Medical and Healthcare work

- Building of new clinics
- Provision of medical equipment and medical supplies
- Helping local physicians to become self-sufficient

d. Church ministries

- Building new churches
- Supporting pastors and meet their needs
- Scholarships for bible school students
- Organizing training courses and programs

The training and development programs offered to the local churches aimed to establish Christian communities that would become faithful witnesses and service to the local society without compromising commitment to God. After a

five-month service in southern China, volunteer short-term trainer EL from overseas shared in *AHF Update 2007*: “In this city, AHF works closely with a local church and provides value-added programs that enhance the development of the local church.”¹⁶ He also shared that “[the] local people confided and shared easily their struggles and hopes for their future. There were many opportunities to learn from one another. It was a blessing on meaningful fellowship.”¹⁷ While it was a journey of hope, expectation and enthusiasm, it was also one of difficulties and controversies. In the process, AHF attempted to proclaim the moral, spiritual and constructive values of Protestant Christianity in a materialistic socio-political arena. Its ministry was supported and encouraged by the generosity of churches and Christian communities, mainly from Hong Kong. Through prayers and financial donations, they worked closely with AHF for services to local churches and communities in the PRC. In the words of Paul, they had given themselves “first to the Lord and then to [the people] in keeping with God’s will.”¹⁸

The theological foundation that supported AHF’s ministry was that the theme of love overshadows the theme of antagonism. As revealed by AHF founder L in

¹⁶ Volunteer trainer EL, “Five months of Blessings”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:5 (New International Version).

AHF Update 2011, AHF decisions were made with the local interests in key consideration, i.e. to ensure the initiatives were as relevant to the mission field as possible.¹⁹ Also, AHF described its “strategies, policies, administration and decisions [were] contrived to cause neither harm nor inconvenience” to the “targeted groups, supporting churches, believers, and team members.”²⁰ AHF missionaries worked “as pioneers, teachers and trainers,” and they worked toward providing “resources, suggestions, leadership, and knowledge with love” as the need arises.²¹ In the eyes of AHF missionaries, the targeted “minority people [were] neglected groups who [lived] in distant, backward and barren areas.”²² The reasons to target them included: 1) the need was quite apparent, 2) the service became very relevant to the local communities, 3) a larger space was made available for ministry, 4) stronger collaborative linkage became possible, and 5) power relations were relatively more predictable.

AHF missionaries were “committed to serve” the targeted groups.²³ They chose “to live among them” because they believed that was the way to experience

¹⁹ AHF founder L, “A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

“lasting, legitimate and deep relationships.”²⁴ Volunteer trainer EL witnessed that AHF missionaries “taught and demonstrated the need to work alongside the people, to have patience to wait on God’s timing, to look for the right opportunity and situation to share the burden on [people’s] hearts; to respect and be mindful of God’s will in the people’s lives; to be watchful for their spiritual wellbeing and to pray for them always in upholding one another. It was a blessing with a deeper appreciation of God’s provision and care.”²⁵

Relationship was key in the AHF initiatives. The mission was a ministry directed to bringing blessings to the people by working in collaboration with local churches and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM)/China Christian Council (CCC), which together are generally known as the “Two Associations.”²⁶ Locally it is called *Lianghui*, which literally means two associations.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) was established in the 1950s by the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), through the establishment of The National

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Volunteer trainer EL, “Five months of Blessings”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

²⁶ See Chan, K. (2013) “Tensions and Reconciliation between the autonomous Christian Community and the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement”, in R. Schreiter and K. Jørgensen (eds.), *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, Oxford, UK: Regnum Books.

Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China. Under the Three-Self idea, churches are meant to disconnect from foreign influences and be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. Both the TSPM and the CCC (established in the 1980s) are government organized Protestant Christian entities in the PRC. They have monopoly over Protestant churches. Leaders of these entities are considered as representatives of the government in the Protestant domain. While both are said to be “non-governmental,” they paradoxically are set up by the government to support government interests and actions in the Protestant circles. Practically, they are de facto extension of the government. These two organizations were tasked in the 1980s to ensure orderly re-opening of churches and seminaries after the Cultural Revolution. Their functions also included the printing of the Bible and related materials. Connection with global Christian organizations such as the World Council of Churches (in 1993) was also made possible.

TSPM and CCC are state apparatuses because the United Front Work Department (or simply termed the United Front) controls them. In such a context, AHF’s collaborative engagement was within a network of polyvalent power relations with the local government under the scrutiny of the United Front and the National Security Bureau behind the scene. The United Front, an intelligence unit,

is a Leninist censoring and controlling mechanism that originated from the Soviet Union and adopted by the CCP to mobilize friends of the CCP and to attack and assault its enemies.²⁷ In the concise words of Hamilton and Ohlberg, the core task of the United Front is “to induce, co-opt and coerce those outside the Party to form a ‘united front’—or coalition of groups that act in ways that suit the Party’s interests—and to undermine those it designates as enemies.”²⁸

Collaborative undertaking with local churches and the TSPM/CCC was not purely theological but in the category of the “theo-political”²⁹ because AHF and those whom it served and with whom it interacted were subject to the PRC's social, economic and political conditions. Therefore, it became impossible to think of the missional agent itself without considering the same spectrum of the arena to which it was sent.

The services and ministries were developed along a promising avenue—in a spirit of love and faithful service—that created innovative ways in which the Good

²⁷ Gertz, B. (2019) *Deceiving the Sky: Inside Communist China’s Drive for Global Supremacy*, New York, NY: Encounter Books, p.136.

²⁸ Hamilton, C. and Ohlberg, M. (2020) *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party Is Reshaping The World*, Toronto, Canada: Optimum Publishing, p.14.

²⁹ Bosch highlights that the church mission belongs to the “theo-political category.” See Bosch, D. (2011) *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.386.

News met with creditable opportunities and the paradox of the time. AHF founder L elaborated this point in the *AHF Update 2011* by saying: “We encourage ‘creativity.’ Staying stagnant is not permissible. Working flexibility is our challenge. We encourage trial and error; if you failed, try again; if you make a mistake, correct it, if mistakes are repeated, readjust.”³⁰ There was a prevailing spirit of experiment and hope (we will further discuss this as the thesis unfolds). While creativity and flexibility were stressed, two other essentials were in the minds of the leadership: “1. Adhere to the right direction, and 2. Stay focused on the specific goal.”³¹ Meanwhile, the ministry pointed to an expectant future—a future in harmony and reconciliation instead of dissonance and defensiveness. Amid its provisional nature, AHF’s endeavor embodied the understanding that God’s promises to the poor and the estranged point to the Spirit of liberty toward His glory.

It is worth mentioning that AHF’s collaborative ministry was not unique in an era where TSPM churches operated a range of religious community services and charity projects with different local and foreign organizations. They included nursing homes, orphanages, poverty alleviation, disaster relief, medical care and

³⁰ AHF founder L, “A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

³¹ Ibid.

various forms of evangelism.³² A survey of AHF documents provided a list of major

historical events in the following:

Major Historical Events of AHF

Year	Events/ Ministries
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHF was established as a charitable organization in Hong Kong. • Initial discussion with a Hong Kong church to jointly set up an English training center with local church in ZS.
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial contact in GX, worked with local churches in BS. • Started building the first AHF water supply facility in BS. • Joint effort with BS local Christians to turn an old cinema into a church facility. • Opened a training center in ZS.
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruited 4 missionaries from Hong Kong and stationed them in ZS
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built bridges to facilitate primary students to go to school (in GX)
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study and pioneering work in HN • Feasibility study and pioneering work in HB
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised money to help build a church in HB
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up bible training program for 50 church leaders in HB. It was a two-year part-time program. The first course was started in June 2005. • Organized English Summer Camps (with teachers from Western countries) in HB, ZS and GX.
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built a new bible training center in QH • Built a local church in QZ • Feasibility study to build a local church in the Hui area • Expanded scholarship program • Set up bible training program in HN. It was a two-year part-time program.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built/refurbished 4 local churches in HB • Continued The bible training program in HB • Helped build a primary school in BS • Organized English Summer Camp (with teachers from Western countries) in HB • Continued the bible training program in HN.

³² Vala, C., Huang, J. and Sun, J. (2015) "Protestantism, community service and evangelism in contemporary China", *International Journal For The Study of The Christian Church*, Vol. 15, No.4, pp.305-319.

2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHF was invited by the local government to participate in disaster relief events for GY after a snow storm • Set up “Home of AHF” to accommodate orphans affected by the snow storm • Rebuilt a local church in CB after a snow storm • Expanded scholarship program to include university and seminary students • Expanded financial support program to local church ministers • Continued the bible training program in HN. • Built a local church in QZ • There were 60 participants in the HB bible training program
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHF was invited by the local government to participate in local social service in HN • Set up a small missionary group in QZ • Built/refurbished local churches in QH and QZ • Continued the bible training program in HN
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built a local church in JL • Raised money and participated in a drought relief program in BS • Raised money for a new building for a secondary school in BS • Continued the bible training program in HN
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported several ministers from HB and HN to study in seminaries in Hong Kong • Raised money and re-built a local church in HN • Continued the HN bible training program. • Raised money and built classrooms, washrooms and administration building for several schools in GY
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The GY local government granted official status to “Home of AHF” with an official title “Home of AHF Poverty Relief Center”. • Continued the HN bible training program

To minister effectively in the PRC, AHF has acquired a distinct realism that is Christian in the center and realistic and sensitive enough to engage with the socio-political dynamics of the missional domain (AHF’s realism will be elaborated in Chapter One and illustrated as the thesis unfolds). AHF’s realism is Christian so as to bear witness in proclaiming Christianity; it is realistic so as to interact with the missional domain within a web of power relations for achieving the goal of

bringing God's blessings to and establishing Great Commissioned-minded communities in the PRC. J. Sacks reminds believers that the mission of God's servants is not about conquering the world, not about leading everyone to the faith, but becoming the blessings of the world.³³

Research questions

The core research question in this study is: How did AHF manage to survive and advance its ministry effectively in the socio-political reality of the Hu Jintao era where the Chinese Communist regime continued its doctrinal antagonism against Christianity? As mentioned earlier, the thesis is that, with a distinct Christian realism, AHF survived in the Hu Jintao authoritarian regime and advanced ministry through identifying the specific governmentality in a renewed state-Christianity relationship and conducting eschatological praxis characterized by the productive nature of power and love in a matrix of power relations. When AHF's Christian eschatological praxis in love under its Christian realism correlated with the distinct character of the mission field, it offered a foundation for effective collaboration between AHF missionaries and the Chinese communists. This

³³ Sacks, J. (2015) *Not in God's name: confronting religious violence*, London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.

approach aligns with Chung's framework of missiology that, as a hermeneutical-practical discipline, aims to formulate effective endeavor in a missional process and to offer diakonia in view of God's salvation and reconciliation with the world.³⁴ This hermeneutical-practical discipline involves interdisciplinary engagement of Christian theology with non-Christian disciplines; it engages the methodologies of theology, hermeneutics, socio-political studies, history and intercultural relations.³⁵

In order to address the core research question, the following sub-questions are asked and engaged in this study:

- 1) Why did atheist Chinese Communists, who were extremely antagonistic against Christianity and other religions at one point in history, work collaboratively with a Hong Kong Protestant charitable organization AHF to solve their local problems?
- 2) Under what condition was this collaboration made possible? (The researcher is mindful of the complexity of the historical process. As Moltmann maintains, no one can discover all the conditions or causes of

³⁴ Chung, P. (2012) *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, p.12.

³⁵ Ibid.

events that happened.³⁶⁾

- 3) Why was the possibility of collaboration absent previously?
- 4) What were the theo-political dynamics in the missional domain and how did AHF's strategic initiatives facilitate its survival and ministry advancement?

There are many missiological approaches to answer these questions. An understanding of Bevans' study on the paradigm shifts of contemporary mission helps to set the boundaries of this study.³⁷ His study reveals the following:

- i. the context of mission: the shift is decentering from the previously Western/Euro-centric view to recognizing the Church participating in the mission of God from everywhere to everywhere.
- ii. the attitude of mission: instead of adhering to the Enlightenment values that emphasize universality and certainty that have been questioned and critiqued, there has been a shift to post-modern attitudes. The post-modern attitudes stress the need to question

³⁶ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.242.

³⁷ Bevans, S. (2010) "From Edinburgh to Edinburgh: Towards a Missiology for a World Church", in Peter Vethanayagomony, et al (eds.), *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 1-11.

previously established discourses and narratives, to pay attention to the particulars and to express explicitly about one's specific assumptions and subjectivity.³⁸ There is an increasing recognition of the importance of human experience in missional endeavor if it is to gain valuable knowledge of its significance and manifestation.³⁹

iii. the means of mission: the shift is from considering mission as the specialist endeavor of Christ "soldiers" to conquer toward viewing mission as *missio Dei*, the participation in God's mission in reconciliation. In turn, this changes in agency for mission leads to viewing mission as partnership with others outside the Christian communities. Such a shift entails the understanding of mission as the "Church-with-Others", as *missio Dei* and as "Ministry of the Whole People of God."⁴⁰

iv. the content of mission: the shift is from the "evangelization of the

³⁸ Wild-Wood, E. and Rajkumar, P. (2013) (ed.) *Foundations For Mission*, Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, p.10.

³⁹ Ibid, p.12.

⁴⁰ More elaboration is available in Thomas, N. (1995) (ed.) *Readings in World Mission*, London, UK: SPCK.

others” to a multi-dimensional understanding of mission. In a contemporary context, mission can be understood from the perspectives of action of hope⁴¹, mediating salvation, pursuit for justice and liberation and interfaith witness.

Based on the above-mentioned contemporary missiological trend, this study frames the content of AHF’s mission as action of hope, its means of operation is participation in God’s mission through collaboration with others, the context of its venture is from Hong Kong to the PRC, and the attitude toward its endeavor is post-modern in the sense that attention has been focused on the particulars of AHF’s missional endeavor and its context, not seeking universality.

Methodological Approach

Based on the understanding that missiology is a hermeneutical-practical discipline⁴² and that “Christian mission must be seen in light of God’s historical-eschatological dealings with the world”⁴³, this study used a historical-hermeneutical approach with a theo-political lens to understand and examine

⁴¹ Thomas, N. (1995) (ed.) *Readings in World Mission*, London, UK: SPCK, p.301.

⁴² Chung, P. (2012) *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, p.12.

⁴³ Rottenberg, I. (1980) *The Promise and The Presence: Toward a Theology of the Kingdom of God*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, p. 87.

AHF's missional strategic initiatives and phenomena, stressing the engagement with the socio-political in the mission field. This study adopts Moltmann's notion of "historical" as "the unity of past and present in the vista of the future," it is not only the "past".⁴⁴ It embraces political activities and events.⁴⁵ This study also follows Moltmann's view that the "historian's concern with the past as scholar is only one part of the 'historical' interpretation of history."⁴⁶ The word "hermeneutics" in this study means "the comprehending experience and praxis of present history. The theoretical understanding of written testimonies to the experience and praxis of past history is one part of this."⁴⁷ The gaining of knowledge is "not just through observation but through participation too, and not just through participation, but also through our own responsible action in history."⁴⁸ Hence, part of the knowledge discussed in this thesis is through the responsible action of AHF missionaries in history. For Moltmann, a useful hermeneutical tool is political theology⁴⁹ which is to be used in this study.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. M. Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p. 118.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, p.103.

Theologically, Moltmann maintains history “as a scholarly discipline is based on history as remembrance.”⁵⁰ This “history as remembrance” is about “future in the past” or “past future.”⁵¹ For Moltmann, the past “points beyond itself into a future not yet reached by the present” and remembrance of the past is “based on openness to the future of historical processes, that is to say of ‘past future’.”⁵²

Historical-hermeneutical study “in the vista of the future”⁵³ is used herein to understand and explain the phenomena, discourse(s) and ideological framework of the socio-political matrix to get hold of the subjective meaning, interpretation and significance of socio-political events of the object of investigation. From the viewpoint of research on missional phenomena, the positioning of hermeneutical understanding is based on the assumption that missional phenomena are built on inter-subjective value-creative activities. The task of hermeneutics is “to interpret, to advance hypotheses regarding the hidden meaning”⁵⁴ of the event and textual material. In addition to interpreting the meaning of a text, hermeneutics also

⁵⁰ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p.104.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. M. Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p. 118.

⁵⁴ Bauman, Z. (1978) *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding*, London, UK: Hutchinson and Co., p.47

applies to activities to locate expressed or intended meanings of acts.⁵⁵

Hermeneutics brings in variety and flexibility of experience and understanding in the attempt of human beings to acquire knowledge.

“Understanding is always.....interpretation,” according to Freeden, and is always tentative and determined by its historicity.⁵⁶ Extending Freeden’s approach to this

study, religious regulations, policies, literature from Chinese communist scholastic

state apparatuses and related documents are read through a missional lens of

interpretation. Barclay correctly points out that Christians “must be willing to

weigh one interpretation against another.”⁵⁷ The hermeneutical approach affirms

that missional activities, including collaborative engagement initiatives, carry the

meaning of actions. Missiological and socio-political activities constitute missional

endeavors meaningful to the missionaries and the others in the mission field.

While Redford points out that hermeneutics with a missiological orientation

addresses challenges servants of God face in the mission field through an emphasis

⁵⁵ Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁵⁶ Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p.116.

⁵⁷ Duncan, D. (1971) (ed.) *Through the year with William Barclay: Devotional readings for everyday*, London, UK: Hodderand and Stoughton, p. 22.

on the missional nature of the Scripture⁵⁸, this study also extends such an approach to reading literature and documents, seeking to interpret missional activities in order to question, frame and comprehend our understanding of the participation of missionaries in the mission of God.

My Insider/Outsider Positionality in the Research

As a member of the board of directors of AHF, I am fully aware of the complexity and sensitivity of my position as an insider in this study. Tension existed in being a Ph.D. student researcher and a director of AHF. For the purpose of this study, the AHF leadership has granted me an official approval to access and assess the AHF archive of documents and publications (no interview was involved in this study). This would ensure ethical access to its documents as part of the data to be depended upon in understanding AHF's initiatives, practices and/or self understanding. While stressing the importance of keeping the anonymity of the missional agent, the founder of AHF wrote in the approval letter to me: "the AHF leadership is pleased to grant you access to and make use of our documents, including those labelled confidential. In fact, as a member of the board of directors,

⁵⁸ Redford, S. (2016) "Innovations in Missiological Hermeneutics", in *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

you already have access to most of the official materials. We trust you would take every precaution to minimize the risk of exposing our identity, given our understanding of CCP's immense power in scrutiny and surveillance through advanced technology."

As an insider researcher, I am a partaker involved in the activities and experiences within the domain and subject being studied. Insider knowledge was needed to access and assess the evidence/data available for the research and to understand the context of the events/experiences/phenomena being studied. By reflecting on the interactions and experiences in the events/phenomena under study, my insider role, as in Van de Ven's description, nurtured context-specific knowledge that guided responsive actions in the research process, and provided input in emerging hypotheses to direct additional inquiries.⁵⁹ Through an insider lens, research questions that arose from experience were developed, and new areas of examination after conferring with the literature were generated.⁶⁰ The research process was not mechanical and linear; it was also not a step-by-step rigid piece of work. Instead, it was framed and reframed as a result of active dialogue

⁵⁹ See Van de Ven, A. H. (2007) *Engaged scholarship: A guide for Organisational and Social Research*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p.270.

⁶⁰ Salmons, J. (2016) *Doing qualitative research online*, London, UK: Sage, p.102.

and interaction with the data and scholarly literature in a continuous analysis and development of clarification of understanding and meaning. This research called for a dynamic development approach. Change was an essential component of it. The dynamic research strategy involved adjustment as knowledge was gained through the research process about what made sense and what did not. This required “a dynamic evaluation approach that is process oriented, capable of capturing and monitoring not only anticipated outcomes but also unanticipated consequences, treatment changes, and the larger context.”⁶¹

Stake describes the insider position of researchers as *emic*.⁶² In an *emic* position, researchers identify research questions based on their own experience and knowledge of the problems and issues. Conversely, the outsider position is described as *etic*. Working in an *etic* position, researchers find research problems and questions from literature.⁶³ However, depending on the topic or nature of the research, an “either/or” model may not always be helpful. Salmon’s illustration of a continuum between the *etic* and *emic* (Schematic 1) provides a more

⁶¹ Patton, M. Q. (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, p.51.

⁶² Stake, R. (1995) *The Art of case study research*, Thousand Islands, CA: Sage.

⁶³ Ibid.

comprehensive understanding of researcher positionality, and she maintains that “many studies can be conducted from a full range of positions.”⁶⁴

Schematic 1: Diagram of the etic-emic continuum



This research did not involve interviews. Data about AHF that was available and was relied on include the following:

- “Principles and Practices” of AHF (this is a confidential document)
- AHF pamphlets, newsletters and *AHF Updates* (they are information sheets, seasonal or annual newsletters for supporters, not confidential document)
- AHF internal documents regarding project plans.

These materials reflected the thoughts, ideas and testimonies of AHF that are interlinked discursively to its intentions/wills regarding the missional venture and provided evidence of its project-events and practices. As Bebbington has

⁶⁴ Salmons, J. (2016) *Doing qualitative research online*, London, UK: Sage, p.101.

demonstrated, researchers can examine the written articles, journals, photographs and letters of missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and David Livingstone to gain the knowledge of their motivation for missional endeavor and how their socio-political and cultural situation affected their missional approach.⁶⁵ When the data/evidence regarding AHF's initiatives and collaborative events was worked on, analyzed, and interpreted, my "insider" lens in the *etic-emic* continuum became functional because my AHF role allowed me to know the kind of AHF missional language and to draw on my insights and knowledge of AHF in the specific context.

In addition to my insider role, I also carried an outsider researcher role because this research also examines the socio-political domain, the local churches and the CCP state apparatuses with which AHF collaborated. Hence, the following data was accessed and depended upon:

- Speeches and articles of CCP leaders including Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.
- Official policies, regulations, and laws of the PRC.

⁶⁵ Bebbington, D. W. (1989) *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London, UK: Unwin Hyman.

- Official documents and chronicle records on significant activities of the PRC (study on these provided an awareness of the changes in the religious realm of the PRC).

This study was also supported by other materials including:

- Magazines and journals on religion
- Documents relating to academic interpretations of Protestant Christianity and other religions in the PRC.
- Literature of scholars who have done research on related subjects.

When data/material about the CCP and the mission field was collected and analyzed, my “outsider” role started to function. In the research process, both my “insider” and my “outsider” roles merged, i.e. my dynamic insider-outsider role was a critical part of the research. Being simultaneously an insider and an outsider, I drew on both scholarship and experience to understand the research problem and generate questions, and from there initiated adjustment in the research process. The complicated reality required me to take extra precaution to minimize researcher biases. Nevertheless, researcher biases are inherent in any research

endeavor and cannot be fully eliminated.⁶⁶ My own experiences, values, and assumptions likely affected the research process and/or the findings. There was an ongoing reminder in the research process: the subjectivity of qualitative research means that several interpretations may become possible, and different researchers may result in different interpretation of the same data.⁶⁷ A way to minimize them was through reflexivity. Such an approach required me to acknowledge my role and the nature of this research in its specific context in an attempt to bolster greater transparency and quality of the research. It involved a critical evaluation of my positionality and the potential influence on the research process and outcomes. There was the need to acknowledge and examine my personal biases, beliefs, and assumptions, and admitting my potential influence on the research process.

Despite the potential biases, a dynamic insider-outsider role was supported by Van de Ven's study.⁶⁸ He revealed the advantages generated by the complementarity of knowledge initiated from a study that used the insider outlook

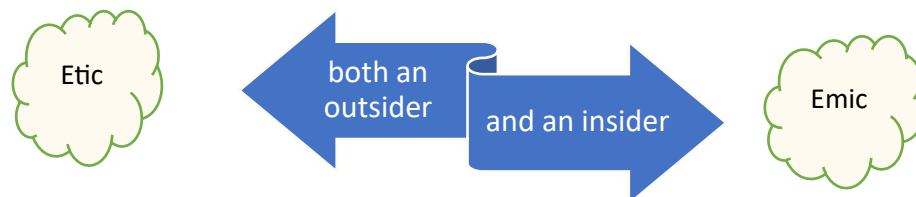
⁶⁶ Finlay, L. & Gough, B. (2003) *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences*, Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Science. And Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶⁷ Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶⁸ Van de Ven, A. H. (2007) *Engaged scholarship: A guide for Organisational and Social Research*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 269-270.

to provide a solid grounding in the research problem within a specific setting together with the analysis from an outsider perspective to build a broader understanding and knowledge of the study. Labaree also suggested that the researcher may vacillate between “insider” and “outsider” outlooks at different phases of the research process.⁶⁹ My positionality in this research is represented in Schematic 2:

Schematic 2: My Positionality in This Research



⁶⁹ Labaree, R. V. (2002) The risk of ‘going observationalist’: negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer, *Qualitative Research*, 2(1), pp.97-122.

Additional considerations, contribution and limitation

Based on the understanding that mission is “the act in hope”⁷⁰ and that a missional domain without power relations “can only be an abstraction,”⁷¹ this study is set within the field of missiology with a focus in the sub-field of Moltmann’s matrix of theologies. A critical part of Moltmann’s theology is political theology that engages with the political awareness and realization of theology.⁷² Additionally, Moltmann maintains that theology comes from “a passion for God’s kingdom”, and, under such a passion, “theology becomes imagination for the kingdom of God in the world, and for the world in God’s kingdom.”⁷³ Moltmann further argues that the “kingdom-of-God theology” is “of necessity *missionary* theology” which also becomes “a *public* theology” because it is connected with worldly events and people.⁷⁴ Hence, Moltmann’s “kingdom-of-God theology”, or

⁷⁰ Thomas, N. (1995) (ed.) *Readings in World Mission*, London, UK: SPCK, p.301.

⁷¹ Foucault, M (1983) “The Subject and Power”, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edn, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p.222.

⁷² Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, p. 102.

⁷³ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. M. Kohl, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. xx.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

simply his theology, is inclusive of political theology, *missionary* theology and *public* theology in association with his theology of hope.

Moltmann's theological matrix and realism of hope, supported by Foucauldian concepts, would be sufficiently rich for this study to address, analyze and interpret the theo-political aspects of AHF's missional venture. The transformative and dynamic nature of Christian hope, that informed theo-political decision-making, affirmed the central theme of Christian realism in AHF's missional endeavor (this will be elaborated in Chapter One). While Moltmann has discussed briefly the notion and the role of power in his work in the European context, he has not offered details as to how power functions practically. To illustrate how power relations functioned in a missional encounter in the Hu Jintao era, this study addresses and analyzes, through a Foucauldian lens, the dynamic web of relations of power and the governmentality of love at play, such that innovative state apparatuses and active missional agent AHF intervened in the relationship that governed the dynamic interconnectedness between them. Prevailing contradiction (atheism against theism) in the fundamental theoretical dimension did not prohibit the creation of space for collaborative engagement in the operative dimension of Hu Jintao's party-state. An outcome of the

collaborative engagement was reflected in a “friendly relationship”⁷⁵ between AHF and respective governmental offices that functioned to enable effective ministry (this will be elaborated in Chapter Two).

Missiology is understood in this study as “the science of biblical narrative and mission in an academic setting, including biblical, theological, historical, hermeneutical, and practical reflection and research about evangelization and missionary work and structure in non-Christian contexts.”⁷⁶ It is a vast field of study that contains a range of sub-fields, including theology, history, sociology, anthropology, politics and other academic disciplines. It would not be a surprise to find different parts of the world would have different views regarding the study of mission. For instance, missiology, in a German setting, is classified by Schleiermacher as a sub-field of practical theology and envisioned as theological reflection on the ministerial endeavors of Christian communities.⁷⁷ Deiors stressed, through a Latin American lens, the need to “reflect on [their] theology and propose [their] missiology from a perspective (or context) that is situated in

⁷⁵ This “friendly relationship” was revealed in a 2014 newsletter celebrating the 15th Anniversary of AHF (original in Chinese).

⁷⁶ Chung, P. (2012) *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, p.9.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp.9-10.

the future, not in the present.”⁷⁸ Regarding the scope and dimension of mission, Wild-Wood and Rajkumar suggest missionaries and scholars “to resist the temptation to systematize” the foundations of mission “in a parochial and monochromatic manner.”⁷⁹ “Missiology is richest when it is polyvalent and polyvocal.”⁸⁰

Yeo argues that “all forms of Christian theologies and all forms of politics are acts of imagining.....a better world,”⁸¹ and Bevans maintains the importance of “missiological imagination” in practical theology which is rooted in experiences and practice.⁸² For Bevans, missiology is a “historically conscious theology” that started with the discernment of God’s acts on earth by the Christian communities on earth. Kim critically highlights the study of mission is about the participation of Christian communities in the mission of God’s activities in this world and places the focus on the actual, empirical Christian church instead of the ideal church. For

⁷⁸ Deiros, P. (2016) “Eschatology and Mission”, in C. van Engen (ed.), *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p.267.

⁷⁹ Wild-Wood, E. and Rajkumar, P. (2013) (eds.) *Foundations For Mission*, Eugene, OR: Wipe & Stock, p.5.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Yeo, K. (2002) *chairman mao meets the apostle paul: Christianity, Communism and the Hope of China*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, p. 17.

⁸² Bevans, S. (2005) “Wisdom from the Margins: Systemic Theology and the Missiological Imagination”, *Australian ejournal of Theology* 5 (August).

her, interacting with the specific socio-political, cultural and economic contexts is essential.⁸³

While Moltmann maintains God's mission is eschatological, Thomas elaborates mission as *action in hope*.⁸⁴ Thomas maintains that missional endeavor is part of God's plan of salvation and the eschatological foretaste of God's kingdom.⁸⁵ It is the critical motivational force in hopeful action that transforms the world.⁸⁶ Chester's work *Mission and the Coming of God* stresses Moltmann's eschatology as the "framework or starting point" for Christian mission and life, with an elaboration of the relationship between eschatology and mission that emphasize the importance of continuity between project-events in the presence of the kingdom in history and the new creation.⁸⁷ Cornelison's work on *The Realism of Hope* provides an account of Moltmann's realistic approach to the transformative nature of hope and stresses God's activity on earth entails the possibility of socio-

⁸³ Kim, K. (2010) "Mission Theology of the Church", *International Review of Mission*, Vol 99, Number 1, p.39.

⁸⁴ Thomas, N. (1995) (ed.) *Readings in World Mission*, London, UK: SPCK, p. 304.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.307.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.314.

⁸⁷ Chester, T. (2006) *Mission and the Coming of God: Eschatology, the Trinity and Mission in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Contemporary Evangelicalism*, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster.

political transformation and relationships.⁸⁸ Cornelison argues that Moltmann's realism of hope is "true realism."⁸⁹ By bringing R. Niebuhr's realism into dialogue with Moltmann's realism, Cornelison maintains that "it is possible to do justice to both the critical and transformative aspects of Christian hope."⁹⁰ The understanding that participation in God's mission as eschatological action in hope on earth constitutes a framework to support this missiological study regarding AHF's venture in the Hu Jintao era, with a "realist" vision that stresses the necessity to understand the fundamental power realities of the socio-political domain in the mission field. As Deiros maintains, studying mission from an eschatological hermeneutical lens would generate different understandings of reality than if one adopts the viewpoint of the past, as many used to do.⁹¹ This study attempts to contribute in this perspective.

In the sub-field of politics in Christian mission, there are some scholars, such as Moltmann, Metz and Yeo, who emphasize the significance of political engagement in ministerial ventures. Yeo argues that hope exists amid all historical

⁸⁸ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. xii.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. xiii.

⁹¹ Deiros, P. (2016) "Eschatology and Mission", in C. van Engen (ed.), *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p.270.

ambiguities, and that theology and politics work together when their boundaries meet.⁹² There are others who negatively critique the impact of politics in Christian mission. Alawode is one of those scholars who study the setbacks and hindrances of political engagement in Christian missional activities. He maintains that “politics is useful in political science and state governance but is not ideal for religion or Christian activities.”⁹³ For him, “politics does no good to the work of mission” because “politics dominates, manipulates and overrules issues with power and authority without considering the effects on others.”⁹⁴ Instead of seeing the productive dynamics in power relations, Alawode is limited by the repressive mode of power. In a direction differ from Alawode’s view, this study illustrates that an appropriate knowledge of the power dynamics of mission can result in an effective missional venture.

While Moltmann opens avenues for missional endeavors through eschatological praxis, Foucault provides a way for this study to understand the *Enlarged* in the socio-political domain through mobilization of power relations.

⁹² Yeo, K. (2002) *chairman mao meets the apostle paul: Christianity, Communism and the Hope of China*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, pp. 17-18.

⁹³ Alawode, A. (2020) “Politics in Christian missions”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(1), a5657. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5657> (accessed June 05, 2023).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Foucault also allows a framework for the study of new rationalities in missional undertakings, the reality of which is the outcome of discursive practices with a set of intentionality and relations of power, yet not always specified. When the PRC missional domain is considered as a dynamic matrix of power relations, an investigation about its power analytics becomes possible.

Foucault's concept of governmentality provides an additional dimension of thought in the theo-political aspect of missiological study. The matrix of interlinked concepts in this thesis illustrates it is worthwhile to deepen our efforts to consider the issues of "truth" and reason in historical modes of political rationality and truth-telling in the mission field. Instead of focusing on socio-political changes from the investigation of state institutions, the missional agent would gain a new horizon by exploring the changes in rationality and the thoughts behind the practices of the CCP and that of the agent of Christianity. The underlining presupposition is that these rationalities involve some degree of investigation, study, critical reflection and refined assessment.

Theological and non-theological concepts can be complementary in missional undertakings and allow a more comprehensive understanding of AHF's missional encounter. A pluralistic approach enables this study to be more receptive and attain a broader spectrum of perspectives and possibilities of knowing the Divine

and the missional project-events under the sky.

Every research project has its specific limitation. This study is limited to the study of the AHF's missional encounter in the Hu Jintao era. Although this missional encounter is a historical experience over many years, only essential but limited historical details of the actual project-events are provided. Chronological events are not the focus of this study. Instead, this study places its core interest in addressing theo-political elements and the associated discourses, "truths," knowledge, power, and governing (conduct of conduct) together with their respective interrelations.

The theo-political mode of thinking in this study is not solidly defined by a single school of thought. Instead, it combines different conceptual tools organically, in dialogical motions and, ironically, in conflicts (in some aspects). The set of conceptual tools used in this research requires extensions of them to support an organic "core", which will be discussed in Chapter One. In dialogue and conflict, exposure to a range of other thoughts—to ideas that are differentiated, contrasting, and at times oppositional—is realized in the process.

One of the questions to address in this study is "under what condition was this missional collaboration made possible?" The study can argue from outcome/effect to cause(s). Yet, it is difficult to argue from cause to effect because

the real influencing factors in history lie in possibility instead of necessity.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, we do not find all possibilities becoming unambiguous necessities.

Consequently, the findings in this study can only be of empirical significance.

My own limitation, including researcher's bias (as a researcher, my subjective role in formulating and transforming the research process is inevitable), also becomes apparent as new problems and questions emerge during the research process for which the answer may not always be readily accessible.

A brief account of Protestant Christianity in China

Although this thesis studies a Protestant missional encounter with the Chinese Communists in the Hu Jintao era, a brief history of the movement of Christianity from the West to China would be helpful to put the upcoming examination and discussion in perspective. In her book *From Jerusalem to Irian Java: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, Tucker depicts the movement of Christianity to China in four stages. These include: i) the Nestorians' venture in the 7th century, ii) the Roman Catholics' attempt at the end of the 13th century, followed by iii) the re-entry of Francis Xavier and other Catholics in the 16th century, and iv) the Protestant missional movement started by Robert Morrison, a

⁹⁵ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implication of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.242.

missionary of the London Missionary Society, in the early 19th century.⁹⁶ For this thesis, it is helpful to briefly discuss the movement of Protestant Christianity in China starting from the 19th century.

Imperialistic Protestant Christianity in the 19th century

Upon boarding a ship bound for Guangzhou, China, R. Morrison was asked, “And so, Mr. Morrison, you really expect to make an impression on the idolatry of the great China Empire?” His characteristic response was: “No, sir, but I expect God will.”⁹⁷ Morrison’s missional venture was amid the expansion of Western imperialism, which impacted China and its people with embarrassment and humiliation. Wars were waged, resulting in many unequal treaties that costed China vast indemnity and sovereignty over some parts of its land. One critical unequal treaty was the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing (after the Opium War) which demanded that Hong Kong be ceded to the British Empire and that five treaty ports be opened to the British Empire for residence and trade.⁹⁸ Two years later, the

⁹⁶ Tucker, R. (1983) *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹⁷ Kane, J. H. (1977) *A Global View of Christian Missions from Pentecost to the Present*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p.212.

⁹⁸ Darwan, J. (2012) *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*, London, UK: Penguin Books.

United States of America forced the Chinese government to agree that any privileges and concessions provided to any one country be automatically made applicable to all.⁹⁹ Under such an agreement, the United States of America and other countries started to benefit from many of the same advantages the British Empire enjoyed. Subsequent treaties resulting from conflicts or wars allowed foreigners to annex additional trading ports, access the inland, and gain religious freedom.¹⁰⁰

The missional movement of Christianity is never merely a religious matter; it always involves socio-political elements relating to national and cultural interests and denominational objectives. The power of imperialism, the discourse of “Chinese is the sick man of the East,” and the arrogance of some missionaries had linked the Christian missionary movement with the aggressive imperialistic Western culture which attempted to dominate and intoxicate China.¹⁰¹ In the eyes of most Chinese, Christianity and the Western power of imperialism were identical. The local Chinese had difficulty distinguishing between foreign officers, soldiers,

⁹⁹ Coulson, G. (1996) *The Enduring Church: Christians in China and Hong Kong*, New York, NY: Friendship Press, p.9.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, G. T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p26.

¹⁰¹ Yeo, K. K. (2002) *chairman mao meets the apostle paul: Christianity, Communism, and the Hope of China*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, p.164.

merchants, and missionaries. Even today, the humiliation, resentment, and hostility entailed by war and unequal treaties proves to be formidable challenges for missional ventures.

Although not every missionary was associated with or agreed with the acts of imperialism, many lacked the critical missiology to engage and interact with the local culture and the socio-political in China. In this perspective, Yeo critically provides a summary of the acts of many missionaries of the 19th century:

“But as preachers of truth and love and justice, their lack of interest in the relationship between theology and culture resulted in the hegemonic and unreflective dogmatism of the missionary gospel. Missionaries were concerned with their privileges and their safety in treaty ports and in remote places in China, and they were unconcerned with the injustice of the unequal treaties. Missionaries were concerned getting on board opium-trading ships and were unconcerned with the social redemption of China from such toxicity. Missionaries were concerned with saving souls and unconcerned with saving bodies. Missionaries were concerned with being Christian to the point of prohibiting Christians from being Chinese. In short, missionaries were concerned with “pure” truth only and unconcerned with incarnate truth. Most missionaries of the nineteenth century therefore created a virtual reality akin to that created by opium consumption.”¹⁰²

Protestant churches and TSPM in the Mao Zedong era

The inception of the PRC in 1949 marked the beginning of the forced escape

¹⁰² Ibid., p.167.

of Christian missionaries. Some attempted to remain in the “New China.” However, this option was eventually found to be impossible as the regime shifted its policy from toleration with freedom, to toleration with control and finally to active opposition.¹⁰³ Missionaries also came to realize that “their presence brought embarrassment and even danger to Chinese Christians.”¹⁰⁴ Reluctantly, they left China when exit-visas became available.

At the same time, the newly formed government tried to reorganize the religious circles. The beginning of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) was signaled by the publication of the Protestant “Christian Manifesto” in the *People’s Daily* on September 23, 1950. It was signed by many church leaders from different denominations and some ordinary churchgoers. The fundamental purposes of the manifesto included: i) to separate Chinese Christianity from the influence and the financial support of the West, ii) to cleanse all traces of impact from imperialism, and iii) to establish a standard structure for the Protestant communities for

¹⁰³ Crawley, W. (1986) *Partners Across the Pacific: China and Southern Baptists-- Into the Second Century*, Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press.

¹⁰⁴ Terry, J. (2003) “Baptist Missions in the Twentieth Century”, in J. Bonk (ed.), *Between Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-First Century*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, p.90.

nurturing a new form of patriotic support to the newly established PRC.¹⁰⁵ Simply put, this was the initial attempt to reform Protestant Christianity in the PRC with Chinese characteristics. Upon the publication of this manifesto endorsed by the United Front, the Three-Self Reform Committee was soon formed and administered under the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB, which was replaced in 1998 by establishing the State Administration of Religious Affairs, SARA).¹⁰⁶ Eventually, the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM) was officially formed in 1954 under a team of leaders, including Wu Yaozong and Ding Guangxun. The critical function was to reorganize Protestant Christians, so the CCP could control them and remold their loyalty to the Party through their “self-governance, self-propagation, and self-support,” and finally, to guide Christianity to its withering.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the “three-self” idea did not originate from China but was borrowed from western missionaries. It was firstly developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the nineteenth century as

¹⁰⁵ See Kane, J. (1977) *A Global View of Christian Missions from Pentecost to the Present*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p.221. And Covell, R. (2004) *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, p.225.

¹⁰⁶ Covell, R. (2004) *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, p.225.

¹⁰⁷ Marsh, C. (2011) *Religion and the State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival, and Revival*, London, UK: Continuum, p.167.

a Protestant mission strategy and later imported into China by John Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary, in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸

The establishment of the TSPM was not without resistance. First, two of the original vital founders, Wu Yaozong and Ding Guangxun, were negatively affected by their liberal-rationality theological training from the Union Seminary of the USA.¹⁰⁹ Hence, one can expect the division of the TSPM leadership and those who were against a liberal approach to theology, similar to the debate between fundamentalists and liberals that have stirred the Western world. Second, under the control of the atheistic CCP, the TSPM was obliged to submit to the party-state and to take instructions accordingly, not to mention that the TSPM had to carry the responsibility of “political indoctrination within the church.”¹¹⁰ Through political indoctrination, the CCP attempted to diminish and ultimately eliminate religion in the regime in the longer term. As a result, the spirituality of the church began to deteriorate, the evangelical ministry was restricted, the number of churchgoers was reduced, and the number of open churches was diminishing

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Aikman, D. (2003) *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, p.147.

¹¹⁰ Adeney, D. (1983) “Division Time in China: To Join the TSPM or Not”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 19, no. 3, pp.200-204.

quickly.¹¹¹ In other words, the Chinese Communists in the Mao Zedong era effectively stopped the proliferation of Protestant Christianity. As the situation worsened, many Protestants refrained from going to TSPM churches and separated from the TSPM church communities to begin what was later called the Chinese house or unregistered churches. Lambert's research reveals that by 1958 virtually all non-official churches were

ruthlessly crushed and amalgamated under government control through the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement.....the majority of churches had been closed across the guise of a campaign for church unity, [and] pulpits became vehicles for CCP propaganda..... faithful Christians quietly withdrew from the few remaining city churches to meet together for worship in the home. This was the beginning of the new flourishing underground..... unregistered Protestant house-churches.¹¹²

Yet, the formulation of religious policies of the party-state has not been a rigid structure but has been constantly under tension within the CCP. As Lambert mentions, there had been ongoing arguments, in the Mao era, between the extreme leftist ideologues and the soft-liners as to whether religion should be totally suppressed and eliminated or censored and manipulated, allowing it to wither away naturally.¹¹³ By the late 1950s, the extreme leftist ideologues won the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Lambert, T. (2001) "The Present Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party", *Religion, State & Society*, 29: 122.

¹¹³ Ibid.

argument. Adversity deepened when Mao began the Cultural Revolution in 1966 in his attempt to eliminate all former remnants of the old society that held up the advancement of “New China.” The remaining few churches were vandalized and completely closed. There were many martyrs.

Protestant churches, TSPM and CCC in the post-Mao eras

Itinerant evangelism was (and still is) illegal, the number of qualified leaders was restricted, and there was a cap on the number of meeting points and churches allowed to operate in any given location. Yet Protestant Christianity has grown in the post-Mao era. Dunch estimated there were about one million registered churchgoers in the early 1950s, and by 1986, the estimated number reached 3 million, which grew to 17 million by 2003.¹¹⁴ Cao provided an estimate of 60 million churchgoers in 2011, of which 20 percent belonged to the registered churches.¹¹⁵

One of the Deng Xiaoping era characteristics was the critical reassessment and reconceptualization of socialism in the PRC.¹¹⁶ The core intention was to break

¹¹⁴ Dunch, R. (2008) “Christianity and Adaptation to Socialism”, in M, Yang (ed.), *Chinese Religiosities: Affections of Modernity and State Formation*, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, p. 169.

¹¹⁵ Cao, N. (2011) *Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p.5.

¹¹⁶ Sun, Y. (1995) *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism, 1976-1992*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

away from the unrealistic approach to the socialism of the past; and to move forward to formulate feasible modes of socialism in China with a more flexible interpretation of Marx's ideology and Leninism, together with an enlarged spectrum of effective means for socialist development. The discovery of a pluralistic notion and interpretation of official Marxist dogma made it possible for the CCP to articulate political realism and practical criteria against the idealist Maoist model.¹¹⁷ The reform of Deng directed the party-state away from Mao's dogma. It changed to pursue the policy of "Four Modernizations,"¹¹⁸ which required the regime to be more open and re-establish new relationships with the rest of the world. One symbol that shows its willingness and readiness to form a new alliance with the West is to renew the regime's relationship with religious bodies. As Brown reveals, "freedom of religion," as depicted by the CCP, "is a part—a small part—of a much bigger picture. It is simply one of the risks that must be taken to gain the international support China needs."¹¹⁹ The rationality behind this was that such a move would enable the party-state to build a constructive linkage

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.269.

¹¹⁸ Deng planned to modernize and strengthen PRC's industry, agriculture, science and technology, and military.

¹¹⁹ Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.163.

between the masses of faith-seekers and the regime, strengthen patriotism, and mobilize productive components contributing to the Four Modernizations.¹²⁰ The attempt was to redefine a new state-mandated socio-political-religious order with the articulation of patriotism, i.e. a new order of things was happening. As Cooke points out, patriotism is an essential component of national religious policy and remains the ideological foundation on which socio-political discourses relating to religious policy are structured.¹²¹

In January 1979, the Bureau of Religious Affairs (RAB) and the Institute for the Study of World Religions were reactivated after remaining dormant for over a decade because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In an editorial in *the People's Daily*, the government announced that the country would “staunchly and consistently uphold Article 46 of the [1978] Constitution,” which pledged that the people of the PRC would have “freedom to believe in religion and freedom not to believe in religion.”¹²² One should note that it was freedom “to believe” and “not

¹²⁰ Lambert, T. (1994) *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, p.37.

¹²¹ Cooke, S. (2009) “‘Religious Work’: Governing religion in reform-era China”, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *China's Governmentalities: Governing changes, changing government*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.141.

¹²² See Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.161.

to believe” in religion. However, religious acts and behaviors were not free from the control of the party-state. This “freedom,” however, was also not without condition; the provision for freedom “to believe” and “not to believe” was granted based on the mandate that it did not pull back production or interfere with the socio-political order.¹²³ The control of religion, for the CCP, could be relaxed; but never eliminated. The party-state was quick to act. Two months later, a delegation of Protestant ministers from Hong Kong was invited to visit churches in Beijing and Shanghai. This tour was greeted and accompanied by the RAB and the TSPM committee members.¹²⁴ On the international front, in September of the same year, an official delegation of eight religion leaders of the PRC joined the Third Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in Princeton, New Jersey, the USA—engaging in free and constructive exchanges.¹²⁵

Amid gradual restoration of the TSPM and the reopening of churches, they slowly gained momentum according to the instruction of the party-state. One of

¹²³ Lambert, T. (1994) *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, p.27.

¹²⁴ Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.161.

¹²⁵ According to Brown, leaders of Protestants, Muslims, and Buddhists are included. However, leader of Roman Catholics was excluded. See Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.161.

the top priorities was to facilitate ministers to discuss with the government to return confiscated church assets, including land and church buildings.¹²⁶ Other priorities include printing the Bible and Christian literature, training young ministers, raising patriotism in Christian communities, and enhancing pastoral work.¹²⁷

Concurrently, the China Christian Council (CCC) was formed in 1980 with the core task of structuring unity among Protestants.¹²⁸ The CCC was said to work together with TSPM in a “division of labour” mode with core attention to pastoral care, training ministers and printing and publication of bible and Protestant literature. As for the function and accountability of the TSPM, it was not so clearly stated. The basic assumption was that TSPM was responsible for drafting policies regarding the Three-Self codes, promoting patriotism, and maintaining a bridge between the churches and the party-state.¹²⁹ By the end of the 20th century, many local TSPM/CCC offices were headed by the same person; i.e., the two associations

¹²⁶ Lambert, T. (1994) *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, p.38.

¹²⁷ Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.165.

¹²⁸ Coulson, G. (1996) *The Enduring Church: Christians in China and Hong Kong*, New York, NY: Friendship Press, p.37.

¹²⁹ Brown, T. (1983) *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p.168.

(Lianghui) were virtually one. In Chinese terms, it is “one signpost, two names.”

In the PRC, there are five state-recognized religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. They are respectively governed and controlled by the China Buddhist Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the China Islamic Association, the Chinese Catholic Association and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council. Protestant churches, and other approved religious bodies, entered a period of mutual adaptation with the party-state in the Jiang Zemin era after Deng.¹³⁰ On religious matters, Jiang’s core governmentality was his guiding principle of “mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society (*yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiang shiying*),” which he proposed as early as 1993 in a national United Front meeting.¹³¹ In 2001 at the National Religious Work Conference, Jiang reaffirmed the ideological foundation of *adaptation* as an essential component of the “new phase” of religious work for the twenty-first century and stressed that interpretation and explanation of religious doctrine must

¹³⁰ Jiang Zemin was the third-generation leader. He was the General Secretary of the CCP from 1989 to 2002, the President of the PRC from 1993 to 2003, and the Chairman of the General Military Commission of the state.

¹³¹ Wang, D. (2013) *Zhongguo Gongchandang De Zongjiaoguan (Views on Religion of the Chinese Communist Party)*. Beijing, PRC: China Minsu University Press, p.176.

be made “in compliance with the requirements of social progress.”¹³² Those responsible for training and monitoring religious personnel, as demanded by Jiang, must frame up “normal” beliefs with “normal” activities.¹³³ While no objective definition of normalcy for the five state-recognized religions¹³⁴ was provided, a prerequisite for the normalcy of religious activities was vested in compliance with policy and regulatory provisions and specific conformities. For instance, Protestant services must be conducted in TSPM/CCC registered sites, not in unregistered locations.¹³⁵

As the party-state continued to evaluate religion from the perspective of religion’s potential danger and its possible contribution to the advancement of the regime, it translated the assessment outcome into the readjustment of religious policy and implementation.

¹³² “New Phase appeared in China’s religious work: commentary”, *People’s Daily*, December 13, 2001.

¹³³ “Meeting outlines China’s policy on religion for the new century”, *People’s Daily*, December 13, 2001

¹³⁴ The five state-recognized religions are: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. They are respectively governed and controlled by the China Buddhist Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the China Islamic Association, the Chinese Catholic Association and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council.

¹³⁵ Cooke, S. (2009) “‘Religious Work’: Governing religion in reform-era China”, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *China’s Governmentalities: Governing changes, changing government*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.131.

Ideological re-configuration of the CCP: Chinese Marxist glocalism

It is difficult for AHF missionaries to have a clear and accurate understanding of the mission field in Communist China because, as Hebblethwaite says, when they face Marxism "in its multiple forms," they bear "a difficult task of discernment."¹³⁶ Notwithstanding this difficulty, Scalapino provides a direction for this task. He maintains that the inter-relationships of "tradition, timing and ideology" are essential components in comprehending events in the PRC.¹³⁷ Scalapino also highlights that particular ideo-political discourses allow the Chinese Communists a platform for searching and understanding the world, acting as a source of motives and commanding socio-political actions. Thus, studying ideology and related discourses often provide a significant path to knowing and analyzing Chinese communist subjects—which is substantial for AHF. When governmental rationality is used as an essential tool to understand the mission field, it is critical to note that ideologies function as rationalities.¹³⁸

On a general understanding of ideology, Seliger's analysis informs this study

¹³⁶ Hebblethwaite, P. (1977) *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue: Beginnings, Present Status, and Beyond*, London, U.K.: Darton, Longman & Todd, p.113.

¹³⁷ Scalapino, R. (1977) "On the study of Contemporary Chinese Communism", in *Zhongguo Xiao Dai Shi ZhuanTi Yan Jiu Bao Gao*, Taipei, ROC: Zhonghua Min Guo Shi Liao Yan Jiu Zhong Xin, Vol. 7, pp.73-81.

¹³⁸ Girardi, G. (1968) *Marxism and Christianity*, New York, N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, p.41.

of a two-dimensional approach to ideology — fundamental ideology and operative ideology.¹³⁹ Fundamental ideology defines the critical value of the goal, while operative ideology guides and rationalizes actions, including formulating and implementing various policies. In applying this to the context of this research, fundamental ideology legitimizes the value of the definitive aim of the CCP regime. It is about the communist truth and the associated philosophical ideas in the core of CCP's framework of thoughts. On the other hand, operative ideologies are structured to ensure the performance of pragmatic tasks, including legitimizing the authority of the CCP leadership. It provides direction to practices, policy formation and means of action in the pragmatic operative dimension. Operative ideology is essentially a matrix of ideas that offers rational instruments for the regime to act. Without operative ideology, the regime could not effectively transform its communist ideals into constant actions. Thus, ideology can be understood as "a continuum whose components have different orders of importance to the belief system,"¹⁴⁰ i.e. ideological discourse(s) function at different stages with different

¹³⁹ Political scientists often categorize framework of communist ideology into two parts: Seliger's "fundamental" and "operative" ideology or Schurman's "pure" and "practical" ideology. See Seliger, M. (1976) *Ideology and Politics*, New York, N.Y.: The Free Press. And Schurman, F. (1968) *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

¹⁴⁰ Sun, Y. (1995) "Ideology and the Demise or Maintenance of Soviet-type Regimes: Perspectives on the Chinese Case", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 28 (3), p.321.

degrees of importance in the Chinese Marxist belief system. Arguably, the CCP is an ideological state apparatus in itself and simultaneously controls other ideological state apparatuses such as the United Front, governmental departments, religious set-ups, educational entities and state-owned enterprises. Moreover, it continues to renovate the Chinese Communist “truth” system by reconfiguring ideo-political discourses and rationalities, creating webs of various subject positions. Knowledge of CCP’s ideological structure enables missional agents to formulate their ministry with a more effective approach.

The Chinese Communist party-state requires the construction of “truths” from time to time to legitimize its power. Here, “truth” is understood as “a system of ordered procedures for production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements” and “is linked to in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it.”¹⁴¹ These “truths” form part of the power/knowledge for the CCP to sustain the regime. In a Foucauldian sense, knowledge and power imply each other and create a power/knowledge nexus in governing. Changes in the ideo-political “truth” system of the Chinese Communist regime, including ideo-political discourses and government rationalities, bear

¹⁴¹ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, Sussex: U.K.: Harvester Press, p.133.

broad implications for the changes in religious policy. Reconfiguring ideo-political discourses and "truths" promulgated by the CCP is constituted by a dialectical endeavor of Marxist globalism and localism (Marxist glocalism).¹⁴² This dialectical endeavor, which will be further elaborated in this thesis, forms an essential element of the official ideological framework of the Chinese leadership and influences the ideological positioning and implementation of policies, including religious policy. The outcome of the dialectical undertaking is not the objective truth of the world but, in a Foucauldian sense, forms part of the "regime of truth"—a matrix system that distinguishes true and false statements.¹⁴³ The regime of truth points to the specific ways of constructing discourses that function as "truth(s)" at particular historicity. It legitimizes the position of the CCP in the party-state, which operates through a closely knitted network of ideological state apparatuses.

In the CCP's reassessment process, Chinese Marxism has been configured and reconfigured over time with different ideological discourses that open important

¹⁴² Dirlik maintains that in the globalization of Marxism, contradictory conflicts of localization exist in the PRC. See Dirlik, A. (1994) *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism*, Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, p. 26.

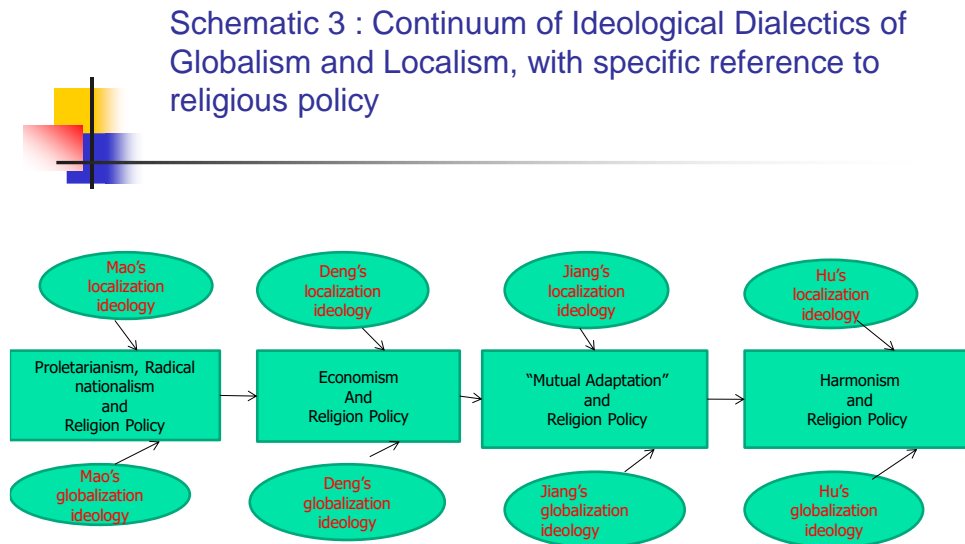
¹⁴³ Foucault, M. (2010) "Truth and Power", in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p. 73.

avenues to comprehending its structuring, diversity, and refinement. A dialectical approach allows the analysis of changes and transitions to grasp the temporal character of things — change is conceptualized relationally. In this study, *dialectic* refers to the discipline itself, and *dialectics* refers to the application and use of the discipline. Dialectics is “a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occurs in the world.”¹⁴⁴ For this study, dialectics of the mission field refers to how it is epistemologically understood. Ontologically, it relates to a supposition of the mission field’s dynamic, inter-connected and contradictory nature; and, methodologically, a means to discover and understand changes within the missional arena.

The long-term survival and prosperity of the CCP depend on its ideological flexibility and construction of political "truths," which in turn are outcomes of its ideological dialectics of Marxist glocalism. Governmental rationality and ideological discourse become eminent or truncated in the shifts from one mode of thought to another in the socio-political arena. In a Foucauldian sense, they are different forms of power/knowledge that shapes power relations. A continuum of the CCP ideological dialectics of globalism and localism with specific reference to

¹⁴⁴ Ollman, B. (1993) *Dialectical Investigations*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.10.

religious policy (from Mao to Hu) is shown in Schematic 3.



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The dominating ideologies, in various forms of "truths," leading to governmental actions on religious matters are functions of the ideological dialectics of Chinese Marxist glocalism. These "truths" are initiated, structured, and eventually inscribed by Mao Zedong's radical nationalism and proletarian revolutionism, Deng Xiaoping's modernization-initiated economism, Jiang Zemin's "mutual adaptation," and Hu Jintao's humanist harmonism. The changes in dialectical undertakings result in altered degrees of impact and interaction under

different leaderships.

The reconstruction of distinctive discourses and "truths" of respective Chinese leaders underpins the framework of religious policies at various stages. Consequently, they have had different degrees of impact on Chinese Christian communities. For instance, the formulation of the discourse of *harmonism* as a "truth" in the Hu Jintao era facilitated linkage toward peace and love, which revealed affinity toward the Christian faith.

Regarding the narrative of Christian missions toward the PRC, it is worth noting that there is a lack of clear periodization. Amid various missiological approaches, theocentric fundamental missiology and anthropocentric operative missiology exist dialectically. Theocentric fundamental missiology determines the core theological basis and elements of the mission's objective. In contrast, anthropocentric operative missiology provides direction to rationalize and support actions, focusing on formulating various strategies and their implementation.¹⁴⁵ It functions to structure pragmatic rationality to support missional operative efforts.

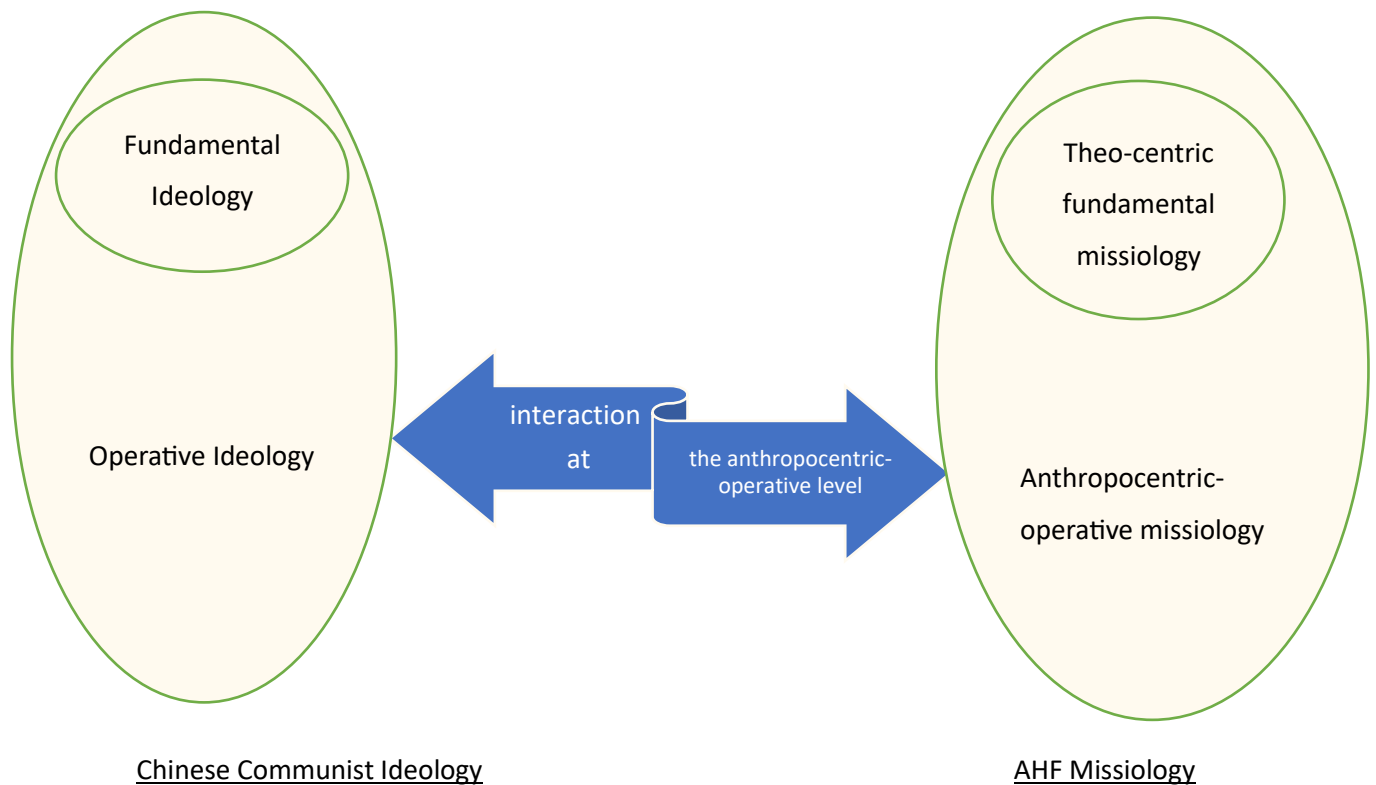
¹⁴⁵ Juan Luis Segundo maintains there is an anthropological aspect linking faith and human being to the historical past and the present world. See Segundo, J. (1982) *Faith and Ideologies*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., p.322. See also Metz's point on anthropological approach to understand God's work on earth. Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates.

It may include discourses of isolation, hostility, competition, or collaboration, which simultaneously carry theological and ideological dimensions.¹⁴⁶ While these two dimensions are not identical, they cannot be separated.¹⁴⁷ Missiologically, “various free historical actions and interpretations” occur in “an anthropological world of history.”¹⁴⁸ These theological and ideological dimensions, together with discourses of isolation, hostility, competition or collaboration, will lead the task of the agent(s) of Christianity to differing degrees. In the mission field, it is in the anthropocentric-operative dimension that AHF plans, interacts, experiences, and mobilizes power relations with the Communist regime. Schematic 4 illustrates the respective relations.

¹⁴⁶ See Lochhead, D. (1988) *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, London, U.K.: SCM Press., p.27.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p. 55.



Schematic 4: Interplay between CCP's operative ideology and AHF's anthropocentric operative missiology

Through such an understanding, this study will investigate CCP's operational ideo-political "truths" (under political realism) that constitute its approaches toward Christianity while locating AHF's operative theo-political "truths" (under its Christian realism) that significantly impact its missional engagement. Nevertheless, the theological dimension determines the ideological dimension in the Christian domain.¹⁴⁹ Lochhead rightly argues that non-Christian

¹⁴⁹ Lochhead, D. (1988) *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: SCM Press.

groups or faith systems are rarely treated equally by the agents of Christianity. Some are deemed to hold the knowledge of reality, some are considered hostile to God, some are labelled as competitors, and some are potentially treated as partners in some aspect of the mission.¹⁵⁰ From these perspectives, state apparatuses in the PRC may be deemed by Christian agents as enemies, competitors, collaborators, or friends, depending on the agent's prevalent theological and ideological prevalence. While the study of ideology and faith is a limitless subject¹⁵¹, understanding the situation of Christianity to Chinese Communist traditions and practices in the PRC requires that missionaries engage in theo-political analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized in the following manner:

Introduction provides a briefing of AHF's missional collaboration with the Chinese Communists, outlining the purpose and focus of the study and the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Segundo, J. (1982) *Faith and Ideologies*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., p.322.

research questions. The academic contribution of this study and its limitation are also discussed.

Chapter One: Conceptual Framework establishes the conceptual toolkit and structure of this research through the description, interpretation, elaboration and application of the conceptions of M. Foucault, J. Moltmann, J. Metz and R. Niebuhr.

Chapter Two: Toward a Missiological Initiative of Relevance describes and analyzes the collaborative establishment from a theo-political perspective. It starts with a critical understanding that for a long(er)-term ministry in the PRC, it is necessary that AHF positioned itself within the allowable boundaries in a “permissible” manner via a web of multi-dimensional collaborative engagement with respective state apparatuses. The formation of a web of relations in the form of conscious visibility made the specific functioning of power relations possible. This new web of relations became possible because the atheist regime is arguably not positioned to prohibit religious activities in totality. In pursuing its political realism, the CCP created a set of new “truths” to sustain the formation of new state-religion relations in the initial stage of Chinese socialism. Such a new set of “truths” allowed new spaces for the party-state to exercise distinguished co-

optation with religious entities among which AHF was part. Co-existence became possible when AHF strategically applied its operative missiology, allowing rationalized practices to be positioned within the boundaries limited by the operative space of the regime.

Chapter Three: Harmonism: An Enlarged Spectrum of Possibilities for The Religious Realm attempts to analyze the discourse of harmonism under Hu Jintao's political realism and how the regime enabled an enlarged spectrum of real possibilities through engaging with problematics, new challenges and a variety of governmentalities. It argues that Hu Jintao's government engaged in activities of problematization, trying to resolve them to sustain the CCP regime in the name of "betterment for the people." The "truth" of harmonism was not constructed randomly but was arguably defined by a particular way of thinking of the Chinese Communists, namely a dialectical endeavor of Marxist and Confucian political conceptions. Practiced explicitly in the religious sphere was a renewed governmental technology of "religious work." It also reveals that the emergence of a new normalizing power became effective through the innovative work of the regime's scholastic state apparatuses.

Chapter Four: Governmentality of Love and Relations of Power argues that missional encounter, as a relational work of the Divine, was both secular and sacred. This understanding entails a foundation for using theological and secular conceptions to study historical missional events. Stranger and stranger relations were mediated by framing a political “truth” of love by the CCP, which formed a new power/knowledge for AHF’s dialogical mission. The chapter continues to move into analyzing the mobilizing power relations between AHF and respective state apparatuses in open and dynamic ways, moving away from the traditional understanding of power in the negative and prohibitive mode. It is then followed by the argument, after an analysis of the function and power of the “truth” of love as constructed, that AHF’s mission was to co-frame with the regime a new theo-political reality through the integration of relations of power and love.

Chapter Five: An Eschatological Mission in the Making interprets the missional venture from the perspective of Christian realism as an encounter between Christian hope and Chinese Communist hope. While AHF’s mission was a hopeful venture without a blueprint, it was not without a direction. By recognizing the sign of hope as reviewed in CCP’s statement of the “long-term existence of religion” in the PRC, it became possible for AHF to discover tendencies of ministry

in the making. Missional endeavor in a mode of Christian realism pointed AHF to face an intense and crucial tension framed and reframed by incongruities and incompatibility in the fundamental dimension while searching for common ground in the anthropological operative dimension.

Chapter Six: Missional Initiatives in the Freedom of Possibilities:

Eschatological Praxis examines time-specific missional initiatives as eschatological praxis. Following an analysis of the endeavors of AHF from the perspective of Christian realism in the previous chapter, this chapter goes on to explore the missional task of AHF as eschatological praxis via time-specific initiatives. It reveals that AHF's missional initiatives were nurtured with a faithful past, an expectant future and a loving present so that the collaborative engagement with the regime moved into an emerging future and a submerging reality. Through a process of de-limitation in which dialogue and interaction functioned in the freedom of possibilities, missional venture proceeded in the socio-political reality of the mission field.

Conclusion: The thesis ends by stressing that capturing credible reasoning and permissible space entailed an enlarged spectrum of real possibilities with

hope-in-the-making. Love-in-action and power-in-relation navigated fruitfully in the mission field in the Hu Jintao era.

Chapter One

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter establishes an interdisciplinary theo-political conceptual framework to explore AHF's missional venture through its Christian realism in the PRC. On the theological side, J. Moltmann's matrix of concepts are employed as the core conceptual framework (supplemented by concepts of J. Metz, R. Niebuhr and J. Ellul) because it contains an eschatological focus that is appropriate for Christian mission—action of hope. With Moltmann's dynamic and relational approaches that function as a hermeneutical toolkit, this conceptual framework is able to comprehend and interpret the missional reality of AHF. By emphasizing the interdependent and dialectical character of human beings Moltmann inspires Christians to have an open attitude toward others which is critical for missionaries. On the non-theological side, the Foucauldian toolbox functions to explore AHF's struggle and resistance in *concrete and finite freedom*¹⁵² in the missional domain through the ideas of power relations, governmentality and other Foucauldian concepts. To make sense of the conceptual framework, interaction with AHF

¹⁵² See Rajchman, J (1985) *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p.92-93.

“thoughts” and “ideas” as reflected in AHF documents are introduced.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the interdisciplinary approach of this study and the multi-dimensional character of Christian realism. Although the realism of Moltmann’s theology forms the center of this conceptual framework, it would be lacking if no reference is made to R. Niebuhr’s Christian Realism. To include Metz’s theology in the framework is quite logical because both Moltmann and Metz emphasize the creative activities of God’s redemptive act on earth. Around the middle of 1960s both Moltmann and Metz started the task of converging constituents of the “dialectic of reconciliation” into a critical theory of hope as *political theology* which can act as a hermeneutical tool.¹⁵³ For them, the concrete foundation of theology is established by socio-political practices.¹⁵⁴ While Niebuhr’s “pessimistic optimism”¹⁵⁵ is not a pure and simple pessimism about God’s work on earth, he urges Christians to act responsibly which is a critical missional attribute. Linking Moltmann, Metz and Niebuhr by drawing the best of each of them can offer this study a more comprehensive understanding of “the realism of hope” and nurture “a realistic theology which includes an adequate

¹⁵³ Meeks, D. (1974) *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp.129-130.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁵⁵ McAfee Brown, R. (1987) “Introduction”, in R. McAfee Brown (ed.) *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, New Haven, CT: Yale University press, pp. xi-xxiv.

impetus and grounds for hope for the transformation”¹⁵⁶ in the mission field.

Although a direct comparison of Moltmann and Niebuhr is difficult because they give priority to different component of their concepts, both of them share common concerns regarding sin, a solid pragmatism and a thoughtful discernment of reality as their initiatives.¹⁵⁷ Despite differences, some of their theo-political concepts can be complementary to each other.

Based on the understanding that “Christian mission must be seen in light of God’s historical-eschatological dealings with the world,”¹⁵⁸ establishing a framework for realism of hope becomes the first foundation to explore the complexity of AHF’s endeavor. A matrix of realisms interwoven by these three theologians would enable this study a platform to examine AHF’s missional encounter in its realistic theo-political dynamics with a futuristic character. They suggested the need to understand the power politics in the real world but lack of empirical discussions for the mission field. To fill the void, Foucault’s conceptual toolbox functions in this framework to address the power dynamics in concrete

¹⁵⁶ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.194.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. xiv.

¹⁵⁸ Rottenberg, I. (1980) *The Promise and The Presence: Toward a Theology of the Kingdom of God*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, p. 87.

and finite freedom in the mission field.

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Inquiry

An interdisciplinary approach in this study attempts to grasp the prospects for a more collaborative way of envisioning God and His missional acts on earth through a set of theological and non-theological concepts. Such an approach is supported by Lovin and Mauldin's advocate that theology should be taken as interdisciplinary inquiry. A "collaborative impulse" allows a panoramic intent and a drive to interpret realities that may also be construed in non-theological terms.¹⁵⁹ The multifaceted conceptual framework to be deployed herein is also supported by Harvey's study in critical social research¹⁶⁰ and Brocklesby and Cummings' argument for "complementarism" and "methodological pluralism."¹⁶¹ Methods and concepts carry different assumptions about situations, and it is advisable to use them complementarily so that different conditions can be dealt with appropriately. "Partitioning" also helps manage diverse aspects of the same

¹⁵⁹ Lovin, R. and Mauldin, J. (ed.) (2017) *Theology as interdisciplinary inquiry: Learning with and from the Natural and Human Sciences*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. Be. Eerdmans Publishing, p.136.

¹⁶⁰ Harvey, L. (1990) *Critical Social Research*, London, UK: Allen and Unwin.

¹⁶¹ Brocklesby, J. and Cummings, S. (1996) "Foucault Plays Habermas: An Alternative Philosophical Underpinning for Critical Systems Thinking", *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 47, pp.747-754.

circumstance or even similar elements construed differently.¹⁶² Informed by these integrative ideas on critical socio-political and theological research, one can go beyond the restriction of a single theoretical approach to study.

Perspectives of Christian realism in this study

Before discussing of the realisms of Moltmann, Metz and Niebuhr, a foundational understanding of Christian realism is needed. The term *Christian realism* used in this study refers to the notion that “Christian” is the adjective qualifying a generic noun “realism”. Although Niebuhr was the most influential voice of the “Christian Realism” movement in the USA, he was reluctant to use “Christian Realism” as a proper name for his matrix of ideas.¹⁶³ Instead, the term Christian Realism “nearly always appears as a generic noun qualified by a proper adjective, viz. ‘Christian realism’.”¹⁶⁴ The term Christian realism used in this thesis follows this notion of meaning and does not refer specifically to Niebuhr’s Christian Realism.

The word “realism” usually comes with a negative notion. It often is

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Lovin, R. (!995) *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

associated with the opposition to idealism. However, the opposite is true for Christian realism.¹⁶⁵ Tsonchev's depiction of Christian realism is used in this study. He writes, "Realism in the Christian political perspective is based on principles, it resolves the immediate and contingent problems of daily politics through the application of Christian ethics; it is also a perspective of compromise and common good, a political temper that respects and permits the diversity of interests. Christian 'realism' is pragmatic, yet not inspired by the will-to-power."¹⁶⁶

Christian realism is a set of concepts that constitutes a nuanced theological domain that weaves together the Christian faith and a pragmatic approach to engage with the complexities of the world. It consists explicitly of two correspondingly essential components— *Christian* and *realism*. In this respect, the *Christian* side emphasizes i) God's act in judgment and redemption, ii) the distinctiveness of God's revelation, iii) the solemn appropriation of biblical themes and iv) the unique quality of Christian love through the grace of God.¹⁶⁷ The

¹⁶⁵ Tsonchev, T. (2018) *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr: Essays in Political Theology and Christian Realism*, Montreal, Quebec: The Montreal Review E-publishing, p.6.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Shinn, R. (1970) "Theological Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect", in E. Long, Jr. and R. Handy (eds.), *Theology and Church in Times of Change: Essays in Honor of John Coleman Bennett*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.

realistic perspective refers to the need to confront the cruel facts and power dynamics in the contemporary socio-political arenas amid its critique of utopianism or idealism.¹⁶⁸ For AHF, its Christian realism involves an active interplay between the *Christian* and *realism* components. Such a synthesis seeks to navigate the tension between the transcendent and the immanent, the divine and the mundane, attempting to offer a comprehensive framework for Christian engagement with others in the missional domain. As missional activities are grounded in an understanding of the socio-political context in which they occur, it is crucial to include Christian realism in missional comprehensions.

Providing Christian realism with a short and concise definition is challenging and, in fact, limiting since the term is not homogeneous but a multi-dimensional matrix of ideas. Different theologians such as Niebuhr, Moltmann and Metz would have their own dimensions of understanding (and emphasis) of the God-world relationship, and how the Christian faith should and would engage with the world. Tsonchev's work on the political theologies of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Reinhold Niebuhr illustrates that "Christianity itself as a system of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

faith, thought, and perception is genuinely realistic.”¹⁶⁹ Essentially, Christian realism is a domain of diverse realisms that includes a set of political, moral and meta-physical realisms that interacts within a matrix of Christian theological principles and ideas.¹⁷⁰ These realisms carry a specific meaning in their respective domain of application. They are simultaneously qualifying each other instead of constricted logical implication, i.e. they collectively interpret and expound each other.¹⁷¹ A twenty-first-century version of Christian realism is a Christian interpretation of global and local politics based on the teachings of prophets of the Old Testament and Saint Augustine’s insight of the fifth century.¹⁷² It is about wisdom with profound intellectual roots from the old Christian tradition that guides Christians to cope with contemporary politics and social order. Imagination becomes an essential component of it. On this Yeo writes, “Imagination works in

¹⁶⁹ Tsonchev, T. (2018) *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr: Essays in Political Theology and Christian Realism*, Montreal, Quebec: The Montreal Review E-publishing, p.88.

¹⁷⁰ Lovin, R. (1995) *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.3.

¹⁷¹ Lovin, R. (2008) *The Christian Realism and the New Realities*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.6.

¹⁷² Lovin, R. (2009) “Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century”, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 669-682.

metaphorization as human interpreters reimagine and redescribe reality.”¹⁷³ For Yeo, “all forms of Christian theologies and all forms of politics are acts of imagining (in the classical sense of poetics and *mythos* and not in the modern sense of unreality or wild fantasy) a better world.”¹⁷⁴ In the mission field, it is about reimagining and redescribing reality in hope.

Rienhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism

The “Christian Realism” movement occurred in the United States of America in the first half of the twentieth century in which Protestant theologians paid special attention to the socio-political forces that frame and restrain human possibilities.¹⁷⁵ While Niebuhr was a prominent scholar in this movement, he was not interested in defining his work. His main contribution was in synthesis of ideas into a complex matrix dialectically.¹⁷⁶ Niebuhr’s main devotion was to validate the Christian understanding of sinful human nature, and to assess the socio-political choices and issues rested on it.

¹⁷³ Yeo, K. (2002) *chairman mao meets the apostle paul: Christianity, Communism and the Hope of China*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Lovin, R. (!995) *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.1.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p.3.

The politics of Niebuhr's Christian realism occurred in the context of a chaotic world between 1920 and 1960 (different from that of Moltmann and Metz). It was a kind of theological realism contingent to mobilize possible resources to combat Communism and Fascism through Christian principles and practices. As American Christians in that period were greatly affected by idealism, Niebuhr's writings were full of polemic against social, liberal and pacifist utopianism.¹⁷⁷ Politically, he saw power from a repressive perspective and the accumulation of power as a potential destructive force that keeps humanity from peace and justice.¹⁷⁸

For Niebuhr, the existence of sin that causes the restrictions of human reasoning and virtue is the root cause of evil in history (as reflected in will-to-power, pride, hypocrisy and selfishness). In an imperfect world, "the kingdom" could not be achieved on earth. His emphasis on a sinful world led him to believe that the choice to do unmitigated good does not exist.¹⁷⁹ Niebuhr's Christian

¹⁷⁷ J. Moltmann's introduction to Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p. ii.

¹⁷⁸ Barreto Jr., R. (2003) "Christian Realism and Latin American Liberation Theology: Expanding the Dialogue", *Koinonia*, XV.1, p.103.

¹⁷⁹ McKeogh, C. (1977) *The Political Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr: A Pragmatic Approach to Just War*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, p.7.

realism tends to be pessimistic which is evident in at least the following ways. First, his belief in inherent sinfulness of human nature suggests that aggression and conflict are inevitable and that collaboration and peace are improbable outcomes. Second, Niebuhr's realism is heavily centered on the restrictive and repressive notions of power. For him, power is necessary to restrain human sinfulness and to maintain order. He argues that without power, human sinfulness would lead to chaos and anarchy. On this, McKeogh points out that central to Niebuhr's realism is "his grasp of significance and nature of power and its relation to the struggle for justice. All politics is power-politics and the task of securing proximate justice therefore requires the use of power against power."¹⁸⁰ Third, love, for Niebuhr, is an ideal standard and cannot be a mediator for resolving conflicts between socio-political groups. He argues that love cannot be a simple solution for every social problem.¹⁸¹

Niebuhr's inclination to the repressive notion of power and "the use of power against power"¹⁸² suggests that peace and cooperation are difficult to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 51.

¹⁸¹ Niebuhr, R. (1992) *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, D.B. Robertson (ed.) Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, p.25.

¹⁸² McKeogh, C. (1977) *The Political Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr: A Pragmatic Approach to Just War*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, p.7.

achieve and that conflict and competition are more likely outcomes. What is deficient in Niebuhr's Christian realism is that he underrated the power concealed in hope of the people and had a very restrictive view on what might be possible.¹⁸³ Yet, Niebuhr's realism is not absolute pessimism. Niebuhr did recognize the attribute of God's redemption and urged Christians to act responsibly.¹⁸⁴ Hence, McAfee Brown comments Niebuhr's realism as "pessimistic optimism," not a pure and simple pessimism.¹⁸⁵ From a missional perspective, this "pessimistic optimism" can serve as an effective attitude in addressing the inherent limitation of humanity to handle the complexities of the mission field. Missionaries are reminded not to yield to idealism that often failed to address critically the existing socio-political dynamics and power relations in the mission field.

The realism and potency in Moltmann's theology

Moltmann's theology, in his "true realism"¹⁸⁶ with a theo-political

¹⁸³ Lovin, R. (2010) "Reinhold Niebuhr in Historical Perspective", in R. Harries and S. Platten (eds.) *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ McAfee Brown, R. (1987) "Introduction", in McAfee Brown, R. (ed.) *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. xi-xxiv.

¹⁸⁶ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p. xii.

character, forms the key components of the conceptual framework in this study because it carries the Christian message of hope, grace and freedom to actual manifestation under worldly socio-political context. Moltmann's overall objective is "to promote the revolutionary praxis of the Christian mission."¹⁸⁷ According to Bauckham, the first theme of Moltmann's theology is hope and that the second theme is mission.¹⁸⁸ It is a Christian realistic approach to understand and act in the missional domain. In a similar direction, Meeks maintains that the center of Moltmann's theology of hope is his political theology which "is essentially the theology of practice and realization of Christian mission in the world."¹⁸⁹ For Moltmann himself, his theology as a "kingdom-of-God theology" is both *missionary* theology and *public* theology.¹⁹⁰ This "kingdom-of-God theology" takes part in "the suffering of this present time"¹⁹¹ and "formulates its hopes for God at the places where contemporaries are and exist."¹⁹² Based on the integrative character of Moltmann's realism, his theology of hope, political theology,

¹⁸⁷ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Morgan and Scott, p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁸⁹ Meeks, D. (1974) *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 129.

¹⁹⁰ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. M. Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. xx.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

missionary theology and public theology can be interchangeably applied in this study.

In constructing his theology, Moltmann adopts a perspective that is founded on the possibility of the arrival of the qualitatively *new* on earth because the power of God's *novum* creates an open and new future for humanity.¹⁹³ The future, for Moltmann, is *adventus*.¹⁹⁴ It is the approach of a profoundly new situation, instead of *futurum*, an extension of what has happened in the past.¹⁹⁵ Moltmann's views on history, interrelated with his eschatology, provides a distinct view for understanding history in a contemporary world of swift change. It forms a critical part of the framework for understanding AHF's missional venture.

Viewed as *futurum*, the future, the "will be", is that which emerges from foundations already existed in the past and present.¹⁹⁶ From this perspective, the future is a calculable extrapolation from the past and present.¹⁹⁷ This view stresses the linking of the past, present and future in continuity. What "will be"

¹⁹³ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.191.

¹⁹⁴ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, Edited and translated by D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.52.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.53.

¹⁹⁶ Moltmann, J. (1979) *The Future of Creation*, trans M. Kohl, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, p.29.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 41-45.

presupposes what has already happened.¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, the future, viewed as *adventus*, is anticipative. It is not an extrapolation from the past and the present but is existent in itself, it is “coming to” the present and the past. It anticipates the arrival of something “new”, something “other”, that has not been present before.¹⁹⁹ Future as *adventus* stresses the discontinuity of the past and the present from the coming future. It looks forward to the possibility for true innovation, of really new arrangements and forms.

In essence, Moltmann’s eschatology stresses the *adventus* notion of the future, “the open future”, more than *futurum*:

Past ages..... were not the background of the new existing present, but were themselves the present and the front-line towards the future. It is the open future that gives us a common front with earlier ages and a certain contemporaneity, which makes it possible to enter into discussion with them, to criticize and accept them.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p.30.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.29.

²⁰⁰ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.269.

Notwithstanding that, Moltmann affirms that “[i]n practice, of course, we always combine what we hope shall come with what is and what can become. We combine what we hope for and want with what we are subjectively able to do and what is objectively possible. But theoretically we must distinguish the two.”²⁰¹ Relating this to ministerial praxis, Bauckham writes, “*planning*, which corresponds to a concept of the future as calculable *futurum*, and hope, which corresponds to *adventus*, must be combined in practice.”²⁰² Hope generates a vision, directs planning by extrapolating a desirable futurity and then search for the tangible possibilities of the present that correlate with the anticipated.²⁰³ This is true of AHF’s missional praxis in that the missionaries combine what they hope for and want with what they are subjectively able to do and what is objectively possible in the PRC, even to this day.

In Moltmann’s theology, the *novum* in history carries several meanings.²⁰⁴

First, it means the dynamic forces of the future existing in the present. God’s

²⁰¹ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.53.

²⁰² Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Basingstoke, UK: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, p. 44.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.191.

involvement on earthly events opens up possibilities of overcoming worldly problems. Second, the *novum* is the anticipatory grace of God operating on earth. God acts to empower His servants and the powerless, the enslaved and the despaired, through the acts of the Holy Spirit. Third, the *novum* turns the past into “dangerous memories” that contest the constructs/events of the past and the present through the possibilities of the coming future.

With this understanding, Moltmann’s theology takes transformation to a wide spectrum of applications. The past is disconnected from the expectant future in a causative sense. Former constructs/events that resulted in despair can be overcome as a result of the coming of the *new* that is always emerging, attracting people toward it. Instead of stressing caution in participating in God’s mission, Moltmann’s theology offers confidence and an impetus of partaking in the process. For AHF, this confidence reminds missionaries that new possibilities would arise beyond its plan(s). Stressing on hope and the possibilities of the *new*, Moltmann’s theology offers an avenue and a motive for missionaries to look beyond the prevalent situation and forms a vision and strategy for overcoming challenges of the present. It demands that missionaries not to give in to difficult situations, but

to generate momentum for a new future based on God's power. On this point, AHF founder L, reflecting on AHF's challenges and the driving force to overcome them, wrote, "There were times of immense burden, there were times when we were wounded, but in each trial, we received refreshment and encouragement from God to give us the endurance to press on. 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair' (II Corinthians 4:8)."²⁰⁵ His witness revealed that AHF missionaries recounted "God's immeasurable grace and mercy over [them]", they were "filled with inexpressible joy" and "through the experience of the past" they were "polished, refined and given a deepened motivation and joy to march forward."²⁰⁶ That marching forward with motivation and joy energized hopeful participations in the mission of God.

Moltmann's dynamic theo-political approach rooted in the concepts of hope, freedom and love would offer more distinctive understanding in Christian mission because his conceptual domain is oriented toward motivation and hopeful outcomes. Contrary to Niebuhr's emphasis on human limitation due to sin, Moltmann reminds Christians of Paul's human experience: "Where sin abounds,

²⁰⁵ AHF founder L, "A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years", in *AHF Update 2011*.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

grace abounds even more" (Romans: 5:20).²⁰⁷ For Moltmann, "the truly realistic Christian is a person of hope. Precisely because of the realistic attitude toward sin it is possible to understand that the experience of the powerful grace of God leads to the optimism of hope. This is no blind or delusive optimism. Rather, it is an optimism through which one becomes smart through experience and, for God's sake, hopes."²⁰⁸

Moltmann's theology was developed in a context very different from that of Niebuhr's. It emerged as a response first in the 1960s to the aftermath of Auschwitz and the silence of the Christian communities in Germany. On this Moltmann writes, "The incomprehensible thing about 'Auschwitz' for us was not executioners.....[nor] the hiddenness of God. For us it was the silence of people who watched or looked away or closed their eyes in order to deliver the victims alone and forsaken to mass murder."²⁰⁹ Moltmann explained that the reason behind Christian's detachment from the horrible event was not the lack of courage, but the estrangement of religion and politics and the privatization of the Christian

²⁰⁷ J. Moltmann's introduction to Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p. iv.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Moltmann, J. (1989) *Creating a Just Future*, London, UK: SCM, p.29

faith.²¹⁰ This reflected his realism regarding historical events of the world and seeking possibilities for solutions through engaging with the world. On worldly engagement, Moltmann writes, “The theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different *interpretation* of the world, of history and of human nature, but to *transform* them in expectation of a divine transformation.”²¹¹ His theological direction is to shape the mission of the Church on earth “in the service of the coming universal Kingdom of God.”²¹² In this direction, he integrates the missional responsibility of the Church with the socio-political realm of the world in “a period when an open future seemed to offer unlimited possibilities in every area of life.”²¹³ The realism in Moltmann’s theology is explicitly expressed in the following:

“Hope alone is to be called realistic, because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught. Hope and the kind of thinking that goes with it consequently cannot submit to the reproach of being utopian, for they do not strive after things that have ‘no place’, but after things that have ‘no place as yet’ but can acquire one.”²¹⁴

Truly, there was “no place” for a Hong Kong Protestant missional agent to

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.84

²¹² Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Morgan and Scott, p. 5.

²¹³ Ibid, p.4.

²¹⁴ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.25.

collaborate with the Chinese Communist state apparatuses in the Mao era. However, it was merely “no place as yet.” Ecclesiastes teaches that “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NIV). AHF director W shared his observation in *AHF Update 2008* that the need for AHF’s ministry in China was evident. He wrote, “The door is open. People are eager and willing to go. It is for [AHF] to facilitate this openness and eagerness while [AHF has] the opportunity. Many people care deeply about the people of China. This care is a fruit of God’s work in their heart.”²¹⁵

Based on the sovereignty and freedom of God in the past, present and the future, Moltmann’s motivational realism is hopeful of the potential for transforming the material world through the power of God’s love.²¹⁶ For Moltmann, hope entails realism that it is possible to work toward something and take one to achieve the goal that is yet to come. His realism focuses on the transformative nature of hope that works on current relevance, pragmatic effectiveness and efficiency that are achieved through the interconnectedness of all things in the world. His eschatological approach to realism provides a

²¹⁵ AHF director W, “Why I care about AHF ministries”, in *AHF Update 2008*.

²¹⁶ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.32.

framework for understanding the ultimate purpose of creation and the role of humanity in realizing that purpose.²¹⁷

The key strength of Moltmann's realism rests in his advocating the liberative and transformative nature of Christian hope:

The hope of the gospel has a polemic and liberating relation not only to the religions and ideologies of men, but still more to the factual, practical life of men and to the relationships in which this life is lived.²¹⁸

This specific character of hope generates a momentum in socio-political decision-making; and instead of carrying an illusory idealism, Moltmann's Christian hope "is true realism", Cornelison maintains.²¹⁹ This "true realism" of Moltmann stresses God's "temporal" transcendence over the world, with the relationship between God and the world being creative and flexible.²²⁰ God and the world are in the presence of each other; they interpenetrate each other, providing the possibilities of transformation in the socio-political arena, structurally and relationship-wise.²²¹ This is in contrast to Niebuhr's perspective that sees no

²¹⁷ Moltmann, J. (1996) *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

²¹⁸ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.330.

²¹⁹ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.xii.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. xv.

²²¹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *God in Creation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p. 13.

relevance of Christian hope to socio-political decision-making because, for Niebuhr, Christian hope generates unrealistic expectations.²²² For Niebuhr, God's transcendence is above over the world and he maintains a distinction between God and the world.²²³

Moltmann's insight reminds servants of God, AHF included, of the open space of the future and the possibilities for innovation associated with the freedom of the future; and hence there is a possible linkage with Foucault's concept of concrete and finite freedom for something new. Old frameworks and systems need not remain in force into the coming future. In the case of AHF's venture, the old framework and systems of the Mao era need not remain in force in the Hu era; and the historical antagonism need not function as the core driving force. Change and dynamic transformative events are possible because the future is free and open. We will further explore this in the coming chapters.

With a theological foundation rooted in the concepts of hope and liberation based on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus, Moltmann contends that

²²² Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.xii.

²²³ Niebuhr, R. (1949) *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, One Volume Edition*, New York, NY: Charles Scribnew's Sons: pp. 150-177.

God's engagement with human suffering signifies a redemptive narrative that ultimately transforms the world. Such a theological approach suggests that socio-political expectations should be guided by a vision of eschatological hope, wherein socio-political transformation is not only possible but also divinely ordained. Hence, "theology is not only a reflection on the proclamation of the minister but also a reflection on the tasks and experiences of Christianity in the world."²²⁴ Based on his theology of hope, Moltmann holds an optimistic view on human beings who are partners in God's ongoing creative and redemptive process. In his view, human beings possess the capacity for positive change and transformation, both individually and collectively. This view encourages socio-political expectations that are aligned with the eschatological vision of a just and compassionate world under God's redemptive plan. Such expectations call for a proactive engagement in transforming worldly events and structures to align with the kingdom of God's values, with a sense of urgency and optimism for addressing systemic injustices and promote human flourishing.

²²⁴ Moltmann, J. (1971) *Hope and Planning*, trans. M. Clarkson. London, UK: SCM Press.

Evaluation of Moltmann's realism

While there is substantial evidence of realism in Moltmann's theology, Cone, in his discussion of Black theology, comments that "the future about which [Moltmann] speaks is too abstract and too unrelated to the history and culture of black people."²²⁵ Bonino argues that Moltmann's root problem is his failure to engage in any sociological analysis.²²⁶ Gilkey maintains that Moltmann's argument on the totally new of the future contravenes his own political interests. Gilkey argues that "[i]n any political understanding of history and even more in an effective revolutionary one, the relevant idea for the future cannot be understood as *utterly new*, as a *creatio ex nihilo* out of the future, as totally unrelated to the latent forces or conditions of the past and present."²²⁷ Alves argues that Moltmann's thesis is unhistorical, that he has deserted history in favor of the future.²²⁸ Walsh questions if Moltmann is able to affirm the present with certainty despite his attempts to do so. For Walsh, the theology of hope does not provide

²²⁵ Cited in Chapman, C. (1979) "Black Theology and Theology of Hope: What have they to say to each other?", in G. Wilmore and J. Cone (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, p. 199.

²²⁶ Bonino, J. (1975) *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*, London, UK: SPCK, p.147.

²²⁷ Gilkey, L. (1976) *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History*, New York: NY: Seabury, p.235.

²²⁸ Alves, R. (1969) *A Theology of Human Hope*, New York, NY: Corpus, p. 59.

crucial confirmation of the present.²²⁹ Nevertheless, Bauckham argues that Moltmann maintains a certain degree of continuity between the present reality on earth and the *new*, even while initiating a new *ex nihilo*.²³⁰ He contends that the *new*, the recreation, in Moltmann's work "is not, strictly speaking, creation *ex nihilo*, but creation from no-longer-being."²³¹ He reminds readers that, for Moltmann, it is "the promise as announcement of the eschatological future which creates history" and the promise is a motivating force in the medium of hope.²³² And it is this hopeful momentum that "thrusts believers into the worldly reality" and becomes "the source of continual new impulses towards the realisation of righteousness, freedom and humanity here in the light of the promised future that is to come."²³³ Thus, Bauckham supports Moltmann's view that the promise of worldly transformation makes history "in the form of the universal mission of the Church."²³⁴ A linkage of missionary consciousness and hope is hence established.

²²⁹ Walsh, B. (1987) "Theology of Hope and the Doctrine of Creation: An Appraisal of Jürgen Moltmann", *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 59, pp.53-76.

²³⁰ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Basingstoke, UK: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, p. 152.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid, p. 38.

²³³ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.22.

²³⁴ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Basingstoke, UK: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, p. 39.

J. Metz's Christian realism:

To enrich the theo-political framework used in this study, Metz's realism in his theology of the world is going to supplement that of Moltmann. Metz's *theology of the world* focuses on the role of the world in shaping human experience and understanding.²³⁵ For Metz, human beings are not merely passive recipients of tradition and culture, but rather active participants in shaping them. Metz's realism emphasizes the importance of human agency and the need for individuals to take responsibility for their actions and their role in shaping the world. Hence, it would be helpful to examine AHF's function in the Hu Jintao era as an active participant in mutually shaping the mission field with the lens of Metz. For Metz, "[an] eschatological faith and an engagement in the world do not exclude one another."²³⁶ In the eschatological dimension of hope, the world appears as "an *arising* reality."²³⁷ This will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Metz cares much for the suffering and vulnerability of the marginalized and oppressed. He contends that socio-political expectations must be grounded in solidarity with the suffering, making liberation from injustice a central goal. Metz's

²³⁵ Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 95.

²³⁷ Ibid, p.90.

hope-oriented theology, like that of Moltmann, underscores the transformative potential of human action and resistance against oppressive structures. He encourages Christians to accept the world “in its worldliness” as “an eschatological event” because humanity exists in hope.²³⁸ His emphasis on solidarity and hope underpins a call for active socio-political engagement based on ethical principles. He advocates for a theology of memory, where the collective memory of past suffering motivates a commitment to social justice. For Metz, the prophetic role of Christianity is to critique oppressive political systems. He believes that faith communities have a responsibility to challenge injustice and to be a voice for the marginalized. The political expectations of Metz underscore the transformative potential of religious values in shaping political discourse. Through the lens of Metz, the renewed socio-political domain as “an *arising* reality”²³⁹ in the Hu Jintao era can be innovated by God’s servants toward its expectant future through their historically free endeavor.

²³⁸ Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.45.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p.90.

Reality and Power of the Future in Mission: Interweaving the Concepts of J. Moltmann, J. Metz, and R. Niebuhr

One of the reasons to employ the Christian realisms of Moltmann, Metz and Niebuhr in this study is that their theological considerations do not stop at the “pure” theological dimension but expand into the theo-political realistic dimension. They offer distinctive views, to various degree, regarding God’s characteristic revelation with the solemn appropriation of biblical themes and God’s redemptive action through the unique quality of Christian love in God’s grace, and with cautionary attribute needed in the missional practices. As with any complex analysis, an appreciation of the multifaceted nature of the realisms of these three theologians would provide a more comprehensive understanding of AHF’s missional venture. This framework is designed to provide enriched and nuanced perspectives on the relationship of God and the world in a hopeful way, highlight the interconnectedness of the components and the role of human agency in shaping the world and stress the importance of love and caring for missionaries to take responsibility for their actions. It also takes into account Niebuhr’s stress for humility and caution in the face of human limitations. Cautionary Christian praxis based on socio-political analysis is required to avoid crossing the “red line” unnecessarily in Communist China.

Past persecution of Christians in the PRC has generated pessimism among Christian missionaries, and ongoing political boundaries set up by the CCP continue the momentum of negativity. Yet, hope exists within pessimism on earth. On this, AHF founder L expressed: “We hope that through our efforts, [the unreached minorities in the remote regions of China] will become Great Commission-minded communities as well.”²⁴⁰ This is the ongoing hope, the anticipation for the *new* in the expectant future. The harshness and unbearableness of the mission field are only understood and endured through solid realism in hope. Hence, AHF’s realism is reflected in its acts to “partner with Christian evangelical churches and groups to develop local communities and to set up relational links with them through meeting their needs”²⁴¹ in the midst of “an arising reality.”²⁴² Without ongoing and active hope, there can hardly be any capability to study, discern, evaluate, make decisions, and act upon the actual difficult circumstance. As missional endeavor is action in hope, an eschatological approach is essential in the missional venture because it is a defining attribute of

²⁴⁰ AHF founder L, “Who we are?”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.45.

Christian existence.²⁴³ The realism of hope is linked to the transformation of the present reality.²⁴⁴

While missional initiatives are oriented toward the future, the *present* must not be ignored as an eschatological time. It is crucial to locate a new hermeneutical key to comprehend the present, the mission of God on earth and what the Church in the world is experiencing currently through an eschatological lens.²⁴⁵ Christian missional endeavors exist in an ongoing tension of the *already* and the *not-yet*, and they are framed by the eschatological hope of the upcoming kingdom of God.²⁴⁶ This eschatological hope is not abstract but *realistic*. It entails realistic avenues of observing the scope of real possibilities and organizing various elements on earth in motion and constant change.²⁴⁷ From this perspective, Moltmann's theological concepts, which carry eschatological emphasis and

²⁴³ Cox, H. (1967) "Ernest Bloch and the 'Pull of the Future'", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, pp.195-96.

²⁴⁴ Moltmann, J. and Thiele, G. A. (1969) "The Realism of Hope: The Feast of the Resurrection and the Transformation of the Present Reality", *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 40, Article 13.

²⁴⁵ Deiros, P. (2016) "Eschatology and Mission", in C. van Engen (ed.), *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

²⁴⁶ Chung, P. (2012) *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, p.260.

²⁴⁷ See Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. 25.

perform a hermeneutical function to comprehend and interpret reality, together with the theologies of Metz and Niebuhr, become relevant to this study. For Moltmann, Christianity is principally eschatological.²⁴⁸ His dynamic and relational approach provokes thought, dialogue and interaction through the proposition of possibilities in reality. By saying, “everything real and everything living is simply a concentration and manifestation of its relationships, interconnections and surrounding,”²⁴⁹ Moltmann maintains relationality is essential in comprehending reality. Thus, it provides a direction to explore AHF’s relationship with the respective CCP state apparatuses.

Furthermore, by emphasizing the dialectical and interdependent nature of one’s being, Moltmann encourages Christians to be open-minded toward others and their ideas.²⁵⁰ From the perspective of a missional agent working in the PRC, Moltmann’s idea of “the political task of Christianity” points in the direction of not

²⁴⁸ Cox, H. (1967) “Ernest Bloch and the ‘Pull of the Future’”, in M. Marty and D. Peerman (ed.), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.195.

²⁴⁹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *God in Creation: a new theology of creation and the spirit of God*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p.3.

²⁵⁰ See Hitching, R. (2003) *The Church and Deaf People: A Study of Identity, Communication and Relationships with Special Reference to the Ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann*, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, p. xviii.

only existing in the prevalent socio-political order but participating in shaping it.²⁵¹

For AHF, this “shaping”, however, does not mean forming a political alliance with the CCP or partaking in the CCP's political activities. It merely points to the direction of co-creating a new order of inter-dependence with the CCP state apparatuses regarding a new ministerial order for the Christian communities in which AHF served. At the same time, it is to generate an affinity to a new form of Christianity-state relationship within the regime. Although the Christian faith interacts with the political arena, it does not carry a “political agenda” and does not demand a political regime change.

A missional agent carries a task to comprehend its temporality and eschatological nature. A re-construal of the understanding of the biblical God linked to a temporal ontology of the coming future facilitates missionaries to bring together the conceptions of transcendence and the coming future.²⁵² This connectedness, in turn, produces an effect of nurturing an approach to “dissolve the related dichotomies of freedom and grace, time and eternity, finitude and

²⁵¹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Church in the Power of the Spirit: a contribution to messianic ecclesiology*, Minneapolis. MN: Fortress Press, p.178.

²⁵² Metz, J. (1966) “The Church and the World”, in T. Burke (ed.), *The Word in History*, New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, p.74.

infinity, the relative and the absolute.”²⁵³ The eternal being of God is then reframed as His “preeminent temporality and futurity.”²⁵⁴ Meantime, God's unlimitedness, infinity, and absolute being are understood as His “temporal openness to, and transcendence of, every present state or actuality of being.”²⁵⁵ Understood from this perspective, the participation of AHF in God’s mission, embraced in His grace and presence, is experienced in the power of the future, which is open. In the words of the leadership of AHF, this power of the future works on AHF’s missional task of the present with “a deepened motivation and joy [for AHF missionaries] to march forward,”²⁵⁶ resulting in “getting human action into conformity with His.”²⁵⁷ Hence, in the words of AHF director Y, the AHF team “strive to minister together with God as the head of [AHF] and humbly discern God’s messages with each of [AHF’s] co-workers, partnering churches and everyone who participates in this ministry of God.”²⁵⁸

Any creative theological endeavor, a reconstructed framing of the grace of

²⁵³ Dean, T. (1975) *Post-Theistic Thinking: The Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Radical Perspectives*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p.21.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ AHF founder L, “A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

²⁵⁷ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

God as a power of the open future, offers a crucial ontological source and assurance of human freedom to act (or not to act). The doctrine of God does not enslave humanity as often expressed in Marxist's recurring argument that God's doctrine unavoidably compromises the freedom of humanity. Contrary to the Marxist view, Metz argues that God's grace as a power of the open future would "in no way contradict the autonomy of the human race" because "it is this openness to the future that constitutes the very essence of man."²⁵⁹ Now, as the power of the future dwells in the present, God is also the foundation of the missional agent's ability to venture and project itself and the missional events into the coming future. It is this *pressure-of-the-future-on-the-present*, a pressure that, paradoxically, energizes and liberates with dynamic effects, not one that constrains. This pressure becomes "the power of the future to contradict the negative moments of present existence"²⁶⁰ and allows freedom of the forces through which the ministerial goal is achieved; i.e., it is freedom *for* achieving the ministerial goal on earth in specific historicity.

²⁵⁹ Metz, J., as quoted in Novak, M. (1968) "The Absolute Future", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.209.

²⁶⁰ Moltmann, J. (1966) "Hope without faith: An Eschatological Humanism without God", in J. Metz (ed.), *Is God Dead?: Fundamental Theology*, New York, NY: Paulist Press, p.38.

In a missional context, hope is the power of missional endeavor in freedom.²⁶¹ Servants of God venture into the mission field as an empirical ground that allows them to conceive an open future and make further inquiries. There is a need to nurture an aptitude to change direction, shift presuppositions, and imagine new options as the missional context changes. Hence, it is not a surprise to note that the founder of AHF stressed flexibility in the missional venture to cope with changes. “We need initiative, flexibility and fearlessness.....”, AHF founder L expressed in *AHF Update 2011*.²⁶² The ground of the concept of the open future is an unrestricted drive of humanity to raise questions, their relentless openness.²⁶³ This is required of any missional agent and is a critical element of its endeavor. A solid plan as “a merely projected future” does not represent the full realization of possibility on earth.²⁶⁴

To interpret the power of the grace of God in terms of the pressure of the future on AHF’s present does not mean contradiction to its freedom to formulate

²⁶¹ Moltmann, J. and Thiele, G. A. (1969) “The Realism of Hope: The Feast of the Resurrection and the Transformation of the Present Reality”, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 40, Article 13.

²⁶² AHF founder L, “A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

²⁶³ Novak, M (1968) “Absolute Future”, in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, pp.208-9.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.208.

strategies and implement them accordingly. On the contrary, it is a new avenue for AHF to consider every freedom, prompting the leadership and the team of missionaries to understand that they, as beings of future character, possess the ability to repudiate the forces of prevalent resistance (limitations set up by the party-state and self-induced resistance to work with the Chinese Communists) and to venture them into the future. From the beginning of the missional venture, this freedom has allowed AHF to undertake the mission in a new collaborative engagement model. In Novak's words, AHF missionaries are "gifted with an imagination and a skeptical attitude which makes it possible"²⁶⁵ for them to partake in shaping the conditions of the future. For missionaries participating in *missio Dei*, the coming future is anchored ontologically in the very mode of the being of God. It is not a matter of subjectivity of humanity because, as Metz reveals, "only a future which is more than a correlative and a projection of our own possibilities can free us for something truly 'new,' for new possibilities, for that which has never been."²⁶⁶ Any missional venture is of a futuristic character, and hence, to be open and free, it must be conceived, paradoxically, as more significant

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Metz, J. (1968) "Creative Hope", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.134.

than the present.

With the nurturing of the coming future as a pressure for the liberation of humanity, it unlocks a way for a theological reconceptualization of the world, humanity and human acts—a reimagination with a set of new possibilities with which AHF is determined to move ahead. In the thoughts of AHF leadership, God is “constantly molding, conforming, and preparing the people of AHF.”²⁶⁷ “The Lord of the Harvest” directs missionaries to anticipate and “to focus on the harvest”²⁶⁸, the coming kingdom, so that they are devoted to “working hard and pressing on toward the goal for the prize that only come from God.”²⁶⁹ The undertaking of anticipation generates openness to the future and also to change. “Future as *adventus Dei*” is historically anticipated; it cannot be extrapolated.²⁷⁰ Within the boundary of the *futurum* paradigm, Mao’s antagonism and repression against Christianity cannot extrapolate into Hu’s “harmonized” state-Christianity relationship. Yet, Christian hope “which looks to the *adventus* of God is able to give

²⁶⁷ AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Herzog, F. (1970) *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, New York, NY: Herder and Herder, p. 14.

direction to planning which looks to the *futurum*.”²⁷¹ AHF missionaries who minister in hope provide a directive for the venture through creative imagination. They “combine what [they] hope for and want with what [they] are subjectively able to do and what is objectively possible.”²⁷² But theologically, they must distinguish *futurum* and *adventus*.²⁷³

For AHF’s hopeful missional endeavor in the Hu Jintao era, a key component of its task was to reimagining the way missional venture was nurtured and operated with an anticipation to witness the growth of churches, the training of ministers, the upgraded education for children, the improved livelihood of the poor and the orphans, and many more other blessings of God to the people. AHF’s ministry existed as “a becoming reality” with an eschatological horizon of which the development was “entrusted to the freedom of men.”²⁷⁴ Combining the thoughts, ideas and testimonies of AHF missionaries and their interaction with the realisms of J. Moltmann, J. Metz and R. Niebuhr, this study reveals that the realism

²⁷¹ Chester, T. (2006) *Mission and the Coming of God: Eschatology, the Trinity and Mission in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Contemporary Evangelicalism*, Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, p.90.

²⁷² Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, p. 53.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Metz, (1968) “Creative Hope”, in M. Marty and D. Peerman (ed.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.135.

of AHF is Christian because it bears witness in proclaiming the Christian faith; it is realistic so as to engage with others in anticipation in a specific missional domain to establish Great Commission-minded Christian communities in the PRC. AHF's realism is based on the transformative character of hope that works on prevalent relevance, practical effectiveness and efficiency that are accomplished via the interdependence of all things on earth. In its realism, AHF missionaries trust that the Christian faith elaborate their capacity for goodness and treat historical dynamics as human activities under God's guidance for ministries beyond current limitations; and hence expanding their theo-political imagination is required. Through the lens of Moltmann that "theological concepts do not give a fixed form to reality, but they are expanded by hope and anticipate future being", AHF's Christian realism is a set of concepts that engage in a dynamic process of formulating anthropocentric operative missiological strategies and "call forth practical movement and change,"²⁷⁵ as reflected in its advocate for creativity and flexibility in AHF ministerial endeavor.

²⁷⁵ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of a Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, pp.35-36.

Michel Foucault: Discourse, Governmentality, Political Rationality and Power Relations

Kung makes use of Molm's notion of *Coercive Power*²⁷⁶ and Nye's notion of *Soft Power*²⁷⁷ in his study of soft power, hard power and exchange relationship in the religious realm in the Hu Jintao regime.²⁷⁸ In his study, the Hu Jintao era is characterized as one where the CCP allowed Christianity to have "a role to play" in "a harmonious society" and the party-state exercised "a soft version of control" that facilitated "exchange relationship."²⁷⁹ Kung advises Christians to seize the hopeful opportunity to cooperate with the government for the common good through the use of *soft power* instead of *hard power*. To capture the opportunity requires engagement in reframing the legitimization of the government, Kung argues. AHF's experience aligns with Kung's argument that politics in the Hu Jintao era was not merely about negative repressive power, there existed exchanges; and exchanges implied relationship. While Kung's study offers a useful foundation for the study of missional venture in the PRC from the dimensions of power and legitimization, this study intends to move a step further by exploring, from a

²⁷⁶ Molm, L. (1997) *Coercive Power in Social Exchange*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

²⁷⁷ Nye, J. (2004) *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, NY: Perseus.

²⁷⁸ Kung, L. (2010) "The Emergence of Exchange Politics in China and its Implications for Church-State Relations", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol.8, No.1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

missiological perspective, also the political rationalities behind the renewed state-Christianity relationship and the respective interactions that facilitated collaborative engagement in Hu's era. To understand the political dynamics in any historical era, it requires the knowledge of the specific forms of political rationality in that era.²⁸⁰

For such a purpose, Kung's hard power/soft power model backed up by Molm and Nye, a non-theological model, is considered not containing sufficient conceptual components for studying the complexity of AHF's encounter in the Hu Jintao era. Hence, this study turns to the Foucauldian conceptual matrix, with a theological linkage, for a fresh understanding of the "soft version of control" and the "exchange relationship" from the perspectives of the arts of government, governmental rationality, power/knowledge and the inter-dynamics regarding legitimization. This is supported by the groundwork of E. Jeffrey and G. Sigley's *Governmentality, governance and China* engaging on Foucauldian concepts.²⁸¹ The appropriation of Foucauldian concepts in theological discussions is encouraged

²⁸⁰ Dean, M. (1994) *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's methods and historical sociology*, London, UK: Routledge, p.181.

²⁸¹ Jeffreys, E. and Sigley, G. (2009) "Governmentality, governance and China", in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *China's Governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp.1-23.

through Tran's *Foucault and Theology*²⁸², Carrette's *Religion and Culture/ by Michel Foucault*²⁸³, Schuld's *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*²⁸⁴ and Pasewark's *a Theology of Power*²⁸⁵. While there are theologians, such as Martin Luther and Paul Tillich who have contributed to the theology of power, the content and dimension of their works appear not adequate for a fruitful application in this study. For Luther, "power has an intrinsic connection only to the office" and "political power operates only negatively."²⁸⁶ For Tillich, his core interest in the ontology of power²⁸⁷ is outside the scope of this study.

The Foucauldian toolbox is considered particular fruitful for this study. While Foucauldian concepts are essentially secular in nature and the use of Foucauldian ideas in Christian studies and missiology is underrated, they do not stay purely secular but offer a "radical framework" for inquiry into the politics of religious and theological matters.²⁸⁸ Considering mission is action in hope,

²⁸² Tran, J. (2011) *Foucault and Theology*, New York, NY: T&T Clark International.

²⁸³ Carrette, J. (ed.) (1999) *Religion and Culture/ by Michel Foucault*, Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press.

²⁸⁴ Schuld, J. (2003) *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

²⁸⁵ Pasewark, K. (1993) *A Theology of Power: Being beyond Domination*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, p.125.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.236-270.

²⁸⁸ Carrette, J. (ed.) (1999) "Prologue to a confession of the flesh", in *Religion and Culture/ by Michel Foucault*, Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, p.32.

Foucault's concepts are of particular relevance to this study because his work is inspired by hope.²⁸⁹ Pessimism, Foucault argues, is not part of the motivating force of his research.²⁹⁰ Reported in one interview, Foucault admitted that he has "a very strong Christian, Catholic background."²⁹¹ With a notion of hope, Foucault's work carries a constant concern "to question and understand the fluctuating possibilities"²⁹² in history, which aligns correlatively with Moltmann's work regarding the need to locate possibilities in Christian ministry. Foucault's emphasis on the need for socio-political observation and analysis fits in well with Christian realism that requires a critical knowledge of the socio-political dominion of the mission field.

In connecting Foucauldian concepts to Christian mission, Chung maintains that Foucault's idea of power/knowledge has become instrumental in reframing socio-politically engaged Christian mission.²⁹³ Schuld also suggests Christians to

²⁸⁹ Schuld, J. (2003) *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p. 1.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, C. Gordon (ed.), Sussex, UK: Harvester Press., p. ix.

²⁹³ Chung, P. (2012) *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, p.269. And Chung, P. (2010) *Public Theology in an age of World Christianity: God's Mission as Word-Event*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.12-17.

"appreciate Foucault's work from a supportive theological position and reconsider some neglected or discarded theological insights that are useful in a post-modern context."²⁹⁴ In her study of Foucault, Schuld concludes that Foucault encourages people not be limited within his conceptual matrix but to "employ whatever is analytically fruitful" because Foucault "makes his writings available for creative analysis and appropriation."²⁹⁵ In a "supportive theological position"²⁹⁶ to Christian realism, Foucauldian concepts, particularly governmentality, power relations and the nexus of power/knowledge, draw people's focus to the spectrum of forces and knowledges that regulate the Christianity-state relationship and the conditions in pursuit of various objectives in the socio-political domain. Foucault draws people's attention to understand that power is not exercised through control or prohibition but through the construction and deployment of different forms of power relations.

Foucault talks about power, but power is not his ultimate object. It is a way to understand something more substantial and primary. While directing people to understand domination, Foucault also takes them, according to Tran's study, to

²⁹⁴ Schuld, J. (2003) *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p. 3.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p.3.

“find ways for freedom to unfold within domination.”²⁹⁷ Facing a complex socio-political domain, AHF must explore ways for freedom to unfold the missional domain. The notion of freedom and the eschatological power of the future enable missionaries to discover the *Enlarged* for actions of hope. Regarding the dimension of hope in Foucault’s work, Carrette argues that Foucault’s hope “is not built on a sense of sin” but “reflects a Christian realism about human imperfection.”²⁹⁸ It hence provides an opportunity for this study to interconnect the Foucauldian toolbox and the realisms of Moltmann, Metz and Niebuhr, in different degrees.

Foucault’s work provides insights regarding the productive tension between constraining limitations and limitless freedom.²⁹⁹ In the case of AHF, it is the productive tension between the intrinsic antagonism against Christianity by the CCP (the constraining limitations) and the Christian freedom in hope (the eschatological freedom) that becomes a critical part of the action in hope in the mission field. Through Foucault’s idea of governmentality, this study is able to address and analyze the legitimization of government policy that aims to control the Christian communities in a soft manner. Extending a Western notion of

²⁹⁷ Tran, J. (2011) *Foucault and Theology*, New York, NY: T&T Clark International, p.21.

²⁹⁸ Carrette, J. (ed.) (1999) *Religion and Culture/by Michel Foucault*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. xvi.

²⁹⁹ See Simons, J. (1995) *Foucault & the political*, London, UK: Routledge, p.3.

“government in the name of the truth” through the Foucauldian lens to the Chinese Communist context allows this study another perspective of understanding the governance of the CCP, which is critical in the missional encounter.

Pinto also informs this thesis to analyze the missional encounter “with a new mind, a new rationality” by Foucauldian concepts from the perspectives of rationality and discursive practices.³⁰⁰ All reality, including religious tradition, ideological practice and, for this study, missional activities, can be considered as a “product of discursive practices, of anonymous, though intentional relations of power.”³⁰¹ If AHF missionaries can rearrange their endeavors around alternative discursive practices through intentional power relations, they can make alternative realities. The Foucauldian concepts enable this study to comprehend the conditions of possibility in the mission field about mutual engagements, including complex relations between discourse(s), knowledge(s) and truth(s) of the missional agent and the ideological framework of the party-state. Their mutual engagement is constituted in the Foucauldian nexus of power/knowledge. For Foucault, it is impossible to exercise power without knowledge, and it is impossible

³⁰⁰ Pinto, H. (2003) *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, London, U.K.: Routledge, p.6.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

for knowledge not to generate power.³⁰² However, knowledge is not power, and power is not knowledge. In the words of Prado, “power and knowledge are dual aspects of the comportment-conditioning environment within which individuals act, and so within which subjects are formed and have their being.”³⁰³ For Foucault, power is action on actions in “a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized.”³⁰⁴ Foucault’s work is hopeful of locating possibilities in reality and so is Moltmann’s theology.

An important part of this research investigates the critical role of ideological political discourse and “truth” in the missional encounter, with the understanding that it is through the generation of “knowledge” and “truth” that socio-political reality is constructed. Objects, conceptions and subjects are seen as socio-political constructs. This is in line with Ryan’s study that “perceptions of reality and truth are shaped within particular discourse regimes. Reality becomes whatever

³⁰² Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Sussex: U.K.: Harvester Press, p.52.

³⁰³ Prado, C. (2000) *Starting with Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy*, Oxford, UK: Westview Press, p.70.

³⁰⁴ Foucault, M. (1983) “Afterword: The subject and power”, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutic*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, p.221.

discourses allow it to be.”³⁰⁵ In a Foucauldian sense, discourses and “truths” constructed by the CCP in the form of knowledge act as the party-state’s technologies to govern. Similarly, the missiological positioning of AHF in the form of knowledge acts as the guiding principle of its missional actions.

While Foucault points this study to the possibility of seeing Christian missiology as part of a framework of discursive practices and power/knowledge relations that instruct missional activities, he offers at the same time a framework to analyze the politics of theological discourse and religious thinking. As Pinto points out, the key is to discern the very complex matrix of relations of power.³⁰⁶ Following Carrette’s comment that Foucault guides people to think differently and in new concepts about religion, this study attempts to extend Foucauldian ideas to AHF’s missional encounter, believing that there is always a space allowing for “difference” and a way to hear the voice of an “other.”³⁰⁷ In its missional venture, AHF’s *love-in-action* became a “truth” in responding to the “truth” of love constructed by Hu’s regime. In so acting, it enhanced a dynamic mutuality which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

³⁰⁵ Ryan, J. (1999) *Race and Ethnicity in Multi-ethnic Schools: A Critical Case Study*, Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, p.22.

³⁰⁶ Pinto, H. (2003) *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, London, UK: Routledge.

³⁰⁷ Carrette, J. (ed.) (1999) *Religion and culture/by Michel Foucault*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.9.

Through a Foucauldian lens, it is possible to study the rationalities that the CCP has constructed and applied and how AHF's undertakings had responded in the Hu Jintao era to conduct missional ministries, including the "historical effects," the "limits," and the "dangers."³⁰⁸ A point not to be missed is that Foucault accepts the existence of irrationality as a reality. In commenting on the Nazi's "flamboyant rationality of social Darwinism that racism was formulated," Foucault says: "This was, of course, an irrationality."³⁰⁹ However, this was not the end of his point; his crucial tenet was that this irrationality "was at the same time, after all, a certain form of rationality."³¹⁰ Viewed from the same perspective, the atheist proclamation that "religion is irrational" is a form of rationality for the CCP to support its governance over an atheist regime. It has become part of the "truth" that formed the fundamental ideological structure of the CCP. Moreover, rationality is historical, i.e., rationality can be constructed and truncated as historical events evolve.³¹¹ Foucault's conception of rationality is not an abstract

³⁰⁸ Foucault, M. (2010) "Space, Knowledge and Power", in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Vintage Books, p.249.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Hoy, D. (1998) "Foucault and Critical Theory", in J. Moss (ed.), *The Later Foucault*, London, U.K.: Sage, p.24.

theory but is entangled in a network of tangible practices.³¹²

Discourse: functioning as truth

The Foucauldian scholarship on governmentality³¹³ and political rationality³¹⁴ informs this study of a new approach to understanding the interaction/dialogue of Christianity and Chinese Communism. A foundation to this is a discussion on discourse. Starting from his early work, Foucault has enlarged the meaning of *discourse* beyond the limits of language and speech. He stresses that discourse is more than a struggle between a language and a reality and is best considered as practice.³¹⁵

For Foucault, discourse is an act amid various practices that carry a vital function in constructing reality.³¹⁶ At the same time, it is a part of reality itself. This comprehensive approach becomes helpful in this study from the view that

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Foucault, M. (1991) "Governmental rationality: an introduction", in Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, London, U.K.: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

³¹⁴ Foucault, M. (1988) "Politics and reason", in L. Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.85.

³¹⁵ Foucault, M. (2010) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York,: Vintage., p.49.

³¹⁶ Foucault, M. (1982) "Afterword: The subject and power", in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, New York, NY: The University of Chicago Press.

discourse that functions as a “truth” is “a belief, practice or knowledge that constructs reality.”³¹⁷ Discourses are not limited to things said but continue to associate with what is not said or must not be said.³¹⁸ In the socio-political arena, some considerations and actions are indeed intentionally excluded. For example, the CCP state apparatuses in interacting with AHF had avoided mentioning the withering away of religion. They also refrained from talking about atheism as a fundamental ideological discourse of the CCP.

From a Foucauldian perspective, there is the need for a missional agent to distinguish between *truth* and *falsehood*, which provides a framework with which knowledge performs in a given socio-political context. The discourses so constructed by the Chinese Communist regime act as technology and instrument and, at the same time, function as an “effect of power” since discourse informs and is shaped by power.³¹⁹ From this perspective, AHF is not powerless in the mission field since its act and proclamation function as discourse. From the perspective of the power effect, the encounter of AHF and state apparatuses can

³¹⁷ McCloskey, R. (2008) “A guide to discourse analysis”, *Nurse Researcher*, 16: 24-44.

³¹⁸ Foucault, M. (2010) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York, NY: Vintage., p.49.

³¹⁹ Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p.101.

be understood as a point of resistance (from both sides) and an opportunity to set up correlative strategies, actively or passively. Discourses structured by the CCP or AHF, each of which is multivalent, are interacting at any given time.

Power/knowledge and truth(s)

Foucault advocates that governmental control does not necessarily require violence. Instead, knowledge-induced forms of normalized behavior constitute some forms of self-discipline. He argues that knowledge and power are intricately linked together to form a nexus: power/knowledge. In Freedman's words, this power/knowledge nexus is "diffuse rather than concentrated, discursive as much as coercive, unstable rather than fixed."³²⁰ For Foucault, power generates knowledge and vice versa; they imply one another. In every relation of power, there is a corresponding domain of knowledge; any knowledge presupposes and constitutes power relations.³²¹ Production of knowledge as a kind of "truth" is critical to mobilizing power. It is also foundational to the manifestation of power relations. For Foucault, power is "not a thing," it is the operation of the "political technologies" throughout the socio-political arena, and it sets up "nonegalitarian,

³²⁰ Freedman, L. (2013) *Strategy: A History*, New York. NY: Oxford University Press, p. 425.

³²¹ Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish*, London, UK: Penguin, p.27.

asymmetrical relations,” which are mobile.³²²

An essential part of power is “truth,” which is “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true.”³²³ “Truth” forms a crucial basis of Foucauldian analysis in socio-political arenas, each of which has its own “regimes of truth.” These “regimes of truth” establish criteria for what is true and false and the measures by which they can be discerned. “Regimes of truth” signify certain discourses are accepted and produce “true” statements. Moreover, structures, operating procedures and practices facilitate these discourses to differentiate “true” statements from “false” ones.³²⁴ In this manner, views of reality can be formed and power structures reinforced, resulting in pre-designed forms of behavior being accepted without unnecessary enforcement. For Foucault, power is not possessed but rather relational in that it is exercised persistently within a network of relations under tension. From this perspective, the relationship between AHF and the CCP regime in the mission field is understood as a network of power relations, always

³²² Foucault, M. (1982) “Afterword: The subject and power”, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Press, p.185.

³²³ Foucault, M. (1980) “Truth and power”, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Sussex: U.K.: Harvester Press, p.131.

³²⁴ Ibid.

in tension, yet not without freedom of mobilization in various directions and dimensions.

The creation of “truth” generates political rationality for the government of the self or others, which becomes an effect-in-the-real.³²⁵ This effect-in-the-real means that Foucault’s study is not something in a vacuum but, in the case of AHF, relates to the missional venture realistically; it is part of the missional present. “Truth” is “historical and heterogeneous,” and it is “different things at different times and is different things at the same time.”³²⁶ In the subsequent chapters, elaboration will be made on CCP’s formulation of a condition under which the possibility of knowledge is enlarged—a particular means of knowing which is critical to the continuance of the party-state. It can be viewed as a defined means of exercising power in terms of administrative endeavors, organizational expertise, or governmental undertakings. With this understanding, we will study how Hu’s CCP constructs governmentality of love that functions as “truth” within its atheistic and anti-religious framework of discourses; and the related interactions with AHF.

³²⁵ Dean, M. (1994) *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault’s methods and historical sociology*, London, U.K.: Routledge, p.186.

³²⁶ Prado, C.G. (2000) *Starting with Foucault: An introduction to Genealogy*, 2ndedn, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, p.138.

Governmentality and Political Rationality

The Foucauldian notion of government does not carry merely a narrowly defined political meaning. Government, in the Foucauldian language, is “conduct of conduct.”³²⁷ Foucault’s problematic of government can be positioned in a broader range of contexts, including philosophical, religious and pedagogical applications. This study applies “government” to signify guidance, management, and operational praxis, alongside “conduct of conduct.” Simply put, government is an organized form of undertaking to shape and influence the conduct of the self and of other(s).

“Governmentality” is a concept that encompasses the many perspectives of Foucault’s thought. As rationality concerning the exercise of governance through the mentality of government, governmentality can also be understood as “governmental rationality”³²⁸ or “political rationality.”³²⁹ These terms/concepts are used almost interchangeably. However, pinning down the exact meaning of the term is not easy because Foucault utilizes them in a wide-ranging spectrum of

³²⁷ Foucault, M. (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan., p.364-365.

³²⁸ Gordon, C. (1991) “Governmental rationality: an introduction”, in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (ed.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

³²⁹ Foucault, M. (1988) “Politics and reason”, in L. Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.85.

ways. While this is said, governmentality presents two broad meanings.³³⁰ First, in general terms, it is *the art of governing*, indicating a way toward thinking about the state's overall interests, operation and sustainability and the various mentalities of governing. Second, it carries a meaning, in specific historicity, of the changes of the first. Governmentality exists in the form of specific activity of the state aiming to rationalize its employment of power, drawing on various areas of knowledge including sociology, economics, political and human sciences, eventually forming an integral part of it.³³¹

Some may suggest that Foucault's study is based on the Western worldviews—traditional virtues of justice, liberality, respect for divine laws and human customs—which do not apply in the Chinese Communist regime. However, Jeffreys and Sigley have favorably argued that the “socialist arts of government” of the PRC also closely resemble the Western world concerning governing the people's activities.³³² In a broad sense, governmentality represents the activities of the state, which rationalizes and legitimizes its existence through knowledge of

³³⁰ Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London, UK: Sage.

³³¹ Foucault, M. (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan., p.364-5.

³³² Jeffreys, E. and Sigley, G. (2009) “Governmentality, governance and China”, in E. Jeffreys (ed.), *China's Governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

expertise integral to the state. At the same time, rationalization and legitimization are established via various forms of sovereign power revised in history and delegated to the different institutional mechanisms.

“Practices” of the CCP party-state “do not exist without a certain regime of rationality.”³³³ However, the CCP governmental rationality varies in “its perception of the limits regarding what can be known about the object to be governed.”³³⁴ CCP’s governmentality, arguably, runs in the same line as that of the Western governments, which refers to the “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal forms of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.”³³⁵ The critical point is that “these institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculation and tactics” are under the tight control of the CCP.

Governmentality studies direct this research to access the realm of

³³³ Foucault, M. (1991) “Questions of method.” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, p.102.

³³⁴ Ibid, p.7.

³³⁵ Ibid, p.102.

practices by focusing on CCP's governing conduct. It involves Foucault's critical insights into the practices of reason and points to "regimes of rationality" that functioned at particular historicity. As an analytical tool, governmentality involves studying the relationship between the practices of the government and the modes of thought that attempt to explain and legitimize governmental acts that are rational and credible. There is interdependence between government practices and the mode of thought that supports and indeed reinforces the practices.

For Foucault, governmental practices depend on "modes of thought" that exert a material impact on the conduct of conduct.³³⁶ Although one of the characteristics of "thought" is that it generally is concealed, it animates behaviors and practices of every institution.³³⁷ "Thought" is complicatedly interconnected to socio-political and economic wills, and in the case of AHF, it is interlinked to its missional intentions; hence, incidents of thought are linked to historical happenings.³³⁸ The materialization of thought occurs in discourse and "truth,"

³³⁶ Foucault, M. (1988) "Practicing Criticism", in L. Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.155.

³³⁷ Foucault, M. (1988) "Practicing Criticism", in L. Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.155.

³³⁸ Foucault, M. (1984) "Preface to The History of Sexuality, Vol. II", in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York, N.Y.: Pantheon, pp. 334-335.

which carry the rules of formation and conditions of existence.³³⁹

Governmental analytics aims to examine “a particular ‘stratum’ of knowing and acting.”³⁴⁰ It is about the different ways discourse, or “truth,” is created in a socio-political domain and the related complex relationships with governmental acts. Accordingly, this research is going to critically diagnose the relationship between CCP’s governing strategies toward Christianity and the strategic missiological initiatives of AHF, paying attention to their “truth” formation and related discourses, assumptions, conventions, exclusions, embraces, vision or blind spots. Governmentality, used as a conceptual tool, can problematize normatively believed statements of the CCP or that of the missional agent and deconstruct the different shifting practices and mechanisms.

In the relatively short history of the Chinese Communist regime, there have existed various stages of unique governmentality which apprehend the birth of specific formulas of reasoning about the mobilization of power relations and practices of government. The CCP governs its members, state apparatuses, and the population by imposing the party’s thoughts about what it takes to be true

³³⁹ Simons, J. (1995) *Foucault & the political*, London, U.K.: Routledge, p.55.

³⁴⁰ Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press., p.19

about who they are, and what they are required to do and perform. In other words, the CCP governs according to what it considers to be the truth about the existence of the party and the party-state. Consequently, the specific ways they govern are set to produce “truth” about the world, the state, society, education, religion, and various socio-political and economic matters, internal and external to China. These specific ways and organized practices to govern are defined as regimes of practices that include the construction of knowledge and “truth(s)” via different forms of calculative and applied rationalities. For example, the CCP’s “religious work” technology is a matrix of these calculative and applied rationalities in the religious realm. This subject will be elaborated in Chapter Two.

Dispositif, Power Relations and Forms of Problematization

Foucault’s term *dispositif* as an analytical tool is a military concept accentuating strategic actions and interactions in the field. It refers to a mechanism with different components surrounded by a dynamic of power relations.³⁴¹ Foucault’s French term *dispositif* can be translated into “dispositive,”

³⁴¹ Walters points out that Foucault uses the concept of *dispositif* to reveal the study of power relations. It is not limited to the examination of discourses. See Walters, W. (2012) *Governmentality: Critical Encounters*, London: Routledge, p.76-77.

“apparatus,” or “deployment” in English. These translations, however, can be misleading in the context of Foucault’s texts as they entail different meanings according to the philosophical trends of France.³⁴² Moreover, *dispositif* carries meaning only in connection with something; when discussed, one must ask: “a *dispositif* of what?” and “what is the purpose?”

While *dispositif* is a multivalent term, Foucault depicts it in the following manner³⁴³:

- The constituents of the *dispositif* are a diverse system of discourses, organizations, regulatory resolutions, laws, administrative operations, statements, and various propositions; the said and the unsaid.
- The essence of the *dispositif* is the relationship among these heterogeneous constituents. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the character of their connections and their functions to produce justification, masking, (re-)interpretation of discourses and practices for opening up a new domain of rationality. Simply put, it is about understanding the discursive and non-discursive components and their

³⁴² Callewaert, S. (2017) “Foucault’s Concept of *Dispositif*”, *Praktische Grunde*. Nr. 1-2, 29-52.

³⁴³ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Sussex: U.K.: Harvester Press, pp194-197.

interplay of changes of position and alterations of function.

- The *dispositif* carries a strategic function by swiftly responding to compelling needs, with a critical objective of maintaining a predominant influence of strategic intent. It entails strategic orientation and articulation of knowledge and power.

In essence, a *dispositif* is a matrix of intellectual elements accumulating different thoughts together to make specific knowledge and actions possible. As such, it is a condition of possibility. From the perspective that collaborative engagement is a network of relations, this thesis will analyze *dispositifs* (intellectual elements) of the CCP and AHF to understand their respective strategic orientation and articulation of knowledge and power toward collaborative interventions.

Such an approach directs this study to consider the mission field in the PRC as an organic matrix of power relations—a *dispositif*—an area for investigation in which power analytics are elaborated. This mechanism supports knowledge and, simultaneously, is backed up by knowledge. In a given historical period, power analytics functions as a specific response to a crisis in the image of a strategic formation. Therefore, analyzing the assembly of heterogeneous elements,

including discourses, truths, rules and regulations, doctrines, moral propositions and institutions, and things said and unsaid, is critical.³⁴⁴ While there are discursive and non-discursive components within a matrix of power relations, their linkage is dynamic and interchangeable.

One of the problems of using Foucauldian concepts is that they are heterogeneous and loosely defined, as illustrated by his changing meaning of discourse. His understanding of forms of problematization is no exception. In his later days, Foucault depicted his study as a process of discovering forms of problematization. The forms of problematization are viewed as an assembly of thoughts generated from an arena of action or behavior that fails to fit in a situation, lacks support or alliance and thus provokes several problems around it.³⁴⁵ By addressing an arena of action or behavior that provokes problems, Foucault affirms he does not think that discursive structure is the sole determinant for people's actions. For him, there exists a relation between "the thing which is problematized" and "the process of problematization." The problematization

³⁴⁴ Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (1982) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, With an Afterword by Michel Foucault*, Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Press, pp. 120-21.

³⁴⁵ Foucault, M. (2010) "Polemics, politics and problematizations", in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York, NY: Vintage Books.

becomes an “answer” to an existing circumstance that is real.³⁴⁶

In line with Foucault, this study understands that the changes from which a problematization is initiated may come from different sources, be it economic, political or social practices. Hence, through a study of how problems have been pondered, reflected and resolved by the CCP or by an agent of Christianity, it is possible to understand their forms of problematization and possibly the “answer” to them.

Concluding Remarks

Christian realism is marked by the concordance between the observation of humanity and God’s revelation. The Christian faith guides missionaries with momentum to discover the mission field. A specific mode of Christian realism supports AHF’s venture that is characterized by its critical understanding of socio-political affairs that require its positive, realistic and constructive response to the prevailing situation. As indicated by AHF director Y, AHF’s realistic approach to mission is not metaphysically or theologically above historical situations but action

³⁴⁶ Foucault, M. (2001) *Fearless speech*, J. Pearson (ed.), Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, p. 172.

to participate in the ministry of God in the PRC.³⁴⁷ The collaborative engagement with the CCP state apparatuses reflects its concrete and finite freedom of struggle and resistance against CCP's specific imposed constraints and opportunities that motivate and energize historical dialogue and engagement. While AHF's Christian realism requires missionaries to consider the possible oppressive/destructive power of the CCP, it is more critical to concurrently identify the possibility to minister away from such oppressive/destructive power. Participating in God's mission, AHF is mindful that God uses not merely His servants but many other worldly powers for His mission.

This conceptual framework points toward dynamic acts of research and the opening of possibilities. The assumption is that the missional agent has a "fundamental subjective capacity of creativity,"³⁴⁸ which, in an eschatological sense, is empowered by the power of the future, as depicted by Moltmann. An interdisciplinary approach to inquiry allows a conceptual framework to discover enabling constraints in the mission field.

³⁴⁷ AHF director Y, "God is the center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation", in *AHF Update 2007*.

³⁴⁸ Simons, J. (1995) *Foucault and the political*, London, UK: Routledge, p. 4.

Through this conceptual framework, one can see enabling limits between the poles of constraining limitations and the openness of God's promises. Essentially, both theological and non-theological approaches help this research examine the *Enlarged* in the mission field. AHF is subject to the power of the party-state. This implies a connotation of being controlled or dominated by forces or limits set by the CCP regime. Nevertheless, this conceptual framework enables one to view AHF as a subject, which is neither totally subjected nor completely self-defining or self-directing. In the words of Simons: "as in grammar, the subject of the sentence is attributed with agency and is thus empowered to act on the object."³⁴⁹ In the collaborative domain, AHF was characterized by its agency and was empowered to act on and with others. AHF was indebted to its constraints for the possibility of presence, uniqueness and capacity to carry out its function. Paradoxically, from a Foucauldian perspective, such subjective capacity of the missional agent consisted of those resisting the dominating power of the CCP that defined AHF's position in the PRC. When the resistant capacities of AHF moved along with contingent conditions, when it worked on the limitations to which it was to a degree indebted and created new contours of subjectivity through

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

mobilization of power, it then reached a stage of open-ended yet unsteady freedom in the mission field.

In the next chapter, we will examine how AHF positioned its endeavor toward a missiological initiative of relevance in the Hu Jintao era.

Chapter Two

TOWARD A MISSIOLOGICAL INITIATIVE OF RELEVANCE

Introduction

Through interweaving with AHF's documented project-events and thoughts, this chapter analyzes its missional initiatives of relevance. After a discussion of the central-local landscape of religious politics, it goes into a critical understanding of the host regime that re-defined the religious domain in the PRC. The chapter argues that for a sustainable ministry in the Hu Jintao era, AHF had positioned itself, under its Christian realism, as a collaborative agent of relevance to the host regime. Through a set of converged agendas, AHF was able to locate itself within the allowable boundaries in a "permissible" manner via a web of multi-dimensional collaborative engagement with respective state apparatuses. The formation of a relational web in the form of conscious visibility made the specific functioning of power relations possible. This new web of relations became possible because the atheist regime was arguably not positioned to prohibit religious activities in totality. In pursuing its political realism, the CCP created a set of new "truths" to sustain a renewed state-religion relationship in the initial stage of Chinese socialism. Such a new set of "truths" allowed innovative spaces for the

party-state to exercise distinct co-optation with religious entities among which AHF was part. Collaborative interaction became possible when AHF strategically applied its operative missiology, allowing rationalized practices to be situated within the boundaries limited by the operative ideology of the regime. The task of AHF was not to fight against Chinese Communism but to serve the local Christian communities in co-existence with the party-state in dialectical tension. This was made possible when the missional agent was able to capture prevailing theopolitical essentials, energize transformation in collaborative undertakings and lead a liberating ministry of life and love.

“Religious Work”: possibility of strategic exchange

At the instrumental level, governmental technology is needed to materialize governmental rationality and synergize the different elements of governance. In the PRC religious sphere, the governmental technology of “religious work” (*zongjiao gogzuo*) functions to enable possible strategic exchanges with the religious domain while performing its critical function of control. It aims to control the conduct of the religious circles to achieve CCP-specified outcomes. With the structuring of “religious work” as a governmental technology that includes a series

of programs, documents and practices to interact with religious circles, the CCP enhances its capacity to strengthen and expand the domain of relations. At the same time, it enlarges the spectrum of possibilities for the party-state in its encounter with agents of Christianity and other religious entities.

Religious revival became a reality since the country's opening in 1978, and the political implication was significant. A major renewal of religious policy was made in 1982 under Document 19, which was initially a classified document circulated internally within the inner political circles; and finally published in the official publication *Red Flag* in June 1982. The document was entitled: "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period." It carried a reconciliatory tone. In it, the Marxist depiction of religion as the "opiate of the masses" was minimized, the CCP-defined "freedom of religious belief" was reiterated, and the CCP's commitment to atheism was firmly retained, both on the ideological and the theoretical basis. Here one should take note of the language used by the CCP. Chow highlighted that the official documents did not promulgate "freedom of religion" (*zongjiao ziyou*). Instead, the authority used "freedom of religious belief" (*zongjiao xinyang ziyou*) which was considered as

private matter.³⁵⁰ Religious activities in the PRC, which are public in nature, are always censored.³⁵¹

By 1993, Jiang Zemin's phraseology "mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society" became a "socialist theory of religion."³⁵² Jiang's "socialist theory of religion" did not come without reason. Changing socio-political reality led regime actors and their religious counterparts to operate under a condition of insecurity. As the religious circles gradually enlarged, officials of the regime feared the religious population would inspire further instability, initiate a rebellion against the state, or threaten the CCP's political advancement and sustainability. Under a sphere of uncertainty, there existed a need, though asymmetrical, for interplay for mutual survival. A dialectical approach pointed the party-state actors to the need for inter-dependence with the religious faith seekers. For Hu's CCP, if the correct structure of ideology and governmental rationality was constructed, it might not have to be always a zero-sum game. The party-state actors and those of the religious sphere both possessed distinctive frame of resources that could

³⁵⁰ Chow, A. (2018) "Stated-Sanctioned Protestantism", in *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp.51-52.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ying, F. (2006) "New wine in old wineskins: an appraisal of religious regulations in China and the regulations on religious affairs of 2005", *Religion, State and Society*, 34,4: 347-73.

contribute to the other side to meet the intricate needs. The party-state advocated that provided there was a possible condition for a strategic exchange, the CCP and respective religious actors could readjust the once intense hostile relationship to become interlocutors with redefined boundaries and power relationships. Changes occurred as a consequence of a dialectical undertaking between traditional Chinese political conceptions and Marxism, entailing a more positive attitude toward religion, its policy formulation and implementation, including the interplay with various agents of Protestant Christianity. (The complex relationship matrix between religious agents, missional entities and political authority will be further elaborated in Chapter Four.)

Hu's governmentality of harmonism expedited state-religion relationships, enabling a condition of adjusting the terms of their relationship and eventually figuring out how to manage a collaborative or conflictual interplay. The relationship between Protestant Christianity and CCP always contains conflictual elements, if not always hostile. First, they represent contending centers of authority. CCP's legitimacy is based on authoritarian principles—secular in character—of providing economic advancement, order, stability and well-being to the population. Hence, it is in tension with Protestant spiritual authorities. Second, it is a demand for loyalty. The state-religion tension comes from the CCP's lack of

prevalent legitimacy even though it is defined as the only party capable of ruling.

Third, the tension comes because religion is seen as threatening to the CCP.

Religion is a community of believers who are considered an institution with a capacity for resource mobilization, including people (dedicated supporters) to act against authority. It is particularly so for Protestant Christianity in China because it is articulated as an invasive foreign religion closely associated with colonialism and imperialism that brought painful experiences to China. Hence, the revival of Protestant Christianity suggests the resurrection of foreign interference, if not an invasion. Historical lessons teach the CCP leadership that the capability of resource mobilization can be a critical factor for the religious leaders to act against the ruling power. In the history of China, religious agents have played a significant role in mobilizing the population to work against the ruler (such as the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864 relating to Protestant Christianity).

Hu's CCP took a global view from a current perspective and learned from more recent international events. While most religions teach love and peace, some religious "truths" are linked with violence.³⁵³ "Jihadist Globalism" continued to

³⁵³ Toft, M. (2007) "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War", *International Security*, 31, no.4, pp.97-131.

adversely affect the world,³⁵⁴ while the rise of Falun Gong became an immediate local challenge to the CCP.³⁵⁵ The lesson for Hu's regime was clear: religion must be critically controlled and, at the same time, may, to a certain extent, be strategically utilized. It was not a matter to be ignored.

In Hu's dialectical exercise, it did not mean there was absolutely no space for interplay. On the contrary, in the process of continuous reassessment, there existed the possibility to seek collaborative religious agents and incorporate possible discourses and symbols into the government to improve its foundation of support and legitimize its position. Strategic use of religion has been demonstrated in history as one of the effective apparatuses of regime-building.³⁵⁶ Taking the example of the Soviet Union in the time of Stalin, the church was allowed to have a role to play, albeit a limited one, in the Russian Communist regime in the war against fascism and performed the function of a patriotic institution.³⁵⁷ There was

³⁵⁴ Steger, M. (2008) *The rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

³⁵⁵ Falun Gong has been denounced by the CCP as an evil cult. See Chen, N. (2003) "Healing sects and anti-cult campaigns", *The China Quarterly*, 174:505-20.

³⁵⁶ Linz, J. (2004) "The Religious Use of Politics and/or the Political Use of Religion: Ersatz Ideology verse Ersatz Religion", in H. Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, London and New York: Routledge, pp.102-19. And Toft, M., Philpott, D. and Shah, T. (2011) *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*. New York, NY: WW Norton.

³⁵⁷ Marsh, C. (2011) *Religion and the State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival and Revival*, London, UK: Continuum International Publishing, p. 71.

a significant adjustment to the Marxist and Leninist interpretation of religion to achieve the strategic goal. The Orthodox Church was also utilized as an apparatus to govern the population in the Communist government of Eastern Europe.³⁵⁸ The lesson was that it is possible to develop a dynamic relationship of exchange in which innovative official leaders and their religious counterparts play the strategic game of “truth” and slowly nurture a new set of governing rules of their relationship through a new mode of power relationships. There is always the possibility of creating a space for collaborative project-events amid emerging future conflicts.

Central-Local Landscape of the religious realm

Entering the mission field under the scrutiny of the Chinese Communist authoritarianism requires a strategy to increase the space of operation with sustainability. For AHF, a key strategic approach is to identify and nurture optimum interplay with the local churches and state apparatuses. Liu and White, after many years of observation and study, concluded that it is “strategic in enhancing interactions with the local state as a way to produce greater space for religious

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

activities.”³⁵⁹ Although the local administrations are obliged to conform to the orders and policies of the central and upper-level government, they have considerable maneuvering space to shape, guide or hinder policy implementation and to manipulate the political system to deliver meaningful results.³⁶⁰ In the reform eras of the PRC, there existed an ongoing conflict and contradiction between the agenda of the political leadership in the central and the priorities of local officials who often misinterpreted, held up or neglected various policies formulated by the central authority.³⁶¹ The notion of “lower-level governments have counter-measures to dilute the policies from upper-level government” or “*shang you zhengce, xia you duice*” prevailed.³⁶² Given that the PRC is a vast state with a complex, yet fragmented, administrative system, central-local information asymmetry and control manoeuvring in the hierarchy are unavoidable.³⁶³

Regarding the religious realm, in addition to the national religious policy, local Religious Affairs Bureaus of some provinces and major municipal cities are

³⁵⁹ Liu, J. and White, C. (2019) “Old Paster and Local Bureaucrats: Recasting Church-State Relations in Contemporary China”, *Modern China*, Vol. 45(5) 564-590.

³⁶⁰ Ahlers, A. (2104) *Rural policy implementation in contemporary China; New Socialist Countryside*, London, UK: Routledge.

³⁶¹ Chou, B. (2009) *Government and Policy-Making Reform in China: The implications of governing capacity*, London, UK: Routledge.

³⁶² Ibid, p. xii.

³⁶³ Ibid.

authorized to produce local regulations for control purpose.³⁶⁴ While these local regulations are basically in tone with the tenets of the national edicts, there are specific provisions catered for the local specific requirements.³⁶⁵ For example, The Regulations of the Shanghai Religious Affairs Bureau (1996) imitate the national regulations in maintaining legal supervision over religious affairs. In Tibet, however, specific provisions are made to regulate religious activities of minority nationalities and to tighten the revival of Buddhism in order to minimize disruption of socio-political order.³⁶⁶

Many studies, including that of Masland³⁶⁷ and Yang³⁶⁸, tended to stress the Three-Self Church system as a Chinese Communist instrument to repressively control the Christian communities by the central authority, due to Marxists' antagonistic character toward Christianity and Mao's cruel repression of Christians. Obviously, there are power differentials between the CCP central regime and the

³⁶⁴ See R. Madsen and J. Tong (2000) (eds.), "Local religious policy in China, 1980-1997", *Chinese Law and Government*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp.5-11. It contains regulations from Fujian, Guangdong, Hebei, Henan, Qinghai, Shandong, Shanghai, Xinjiang, Yunan and Zhejiang.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ See Shakya, T. (1999) *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press. And Goldstein, M. and Kapstein, M. (1998) (eds.) *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

³⁶⁷ Masland, J. (1952) "Communism and Christianity in China", *The Journal of Religion*, 32, (3).

³⁶⁸ Yang, F. (2012) *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Christian communities. The unbalanced power interaction between the Christian communities and the state apparatuses exists, but that does not mean the grid of Christian communities and the party-state should be viewed solely through the conventional paradigm of the repressive notion of power.

There is a growing understanding among scholars that repression, dominance, opposition and resistance are not the only interplays in the local state-religion relationship in the PRC reform eras. Ashiwa and Wank's study (on a Buddhist temple) revealed the existence of "amphibious" religious leaders (borrowed from Ding³⁶⁹) who were committed to their religion but were also linked to the party-state.³⁷⁰ These local leaders were able to lobby on behalf of the benefits and interests of the local faith communities. Cao's study of Christian development in contemporary Wenzhou (a city in the province of Zhejiang) concluded that the way the local Christians construct, consume and interpret Christian values and symbols had an impact on redefining the forms of local socio-political system and power structure toward Christianity that was in tension with

³⁶⁹ Ding, X. (1994) "Institutional amphibiousness and the transition from communism: the case of China", *British Journal of Political Science*, 24: 293-318.

³⁷⁰ Ashiwa, Y. and Wank, D. (2009) "Making religion, making the state in modern China: an introductory essay", in Y. Ashiwa and D. Wank (eds.) *Making Religion, Making the State*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 1-21.

the central government.³⁷¹ He found that Wenzhou Christians, particular those “Boss Christians”, after acquiring economic strength, gained confidence to uphold and emphasize local Christian identity and cultural tradition to the extent of adopting a “strategic approach to engaging with state religious governance.”³⁷² Goossaert and Palmer highlighted the significance of the *guanxi* culture in the state-religion domain in which relationship management became critical.³⁷³ Dunch observed that the state authority encouraged dialogue, and at times even negotiations, between local government cadre and the church.³⁷⁴ Huang demonstrated that through navigating the local official networks, religious leaders were able to expand religious space and benefited the interests of religious communities.³⁷⁵ Liu and White’s study revealed that when a local church was positioned closely to the local government, the local government was less

³⁷¹ Cao, N. (2011) *Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

³⁷² Ibid, p.41.

³⁷³ Goossaert, V. and Palmer, D. (2011) *The Religious Question in Modern China*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

³⁷⁴ Dunch, R. (2008) “Christianity and ‘adaptation to socialism’”, in M. Yang (ed.) *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp.155-78.

³⁷⁵ Huang, K. (2014) “Dyadic nexus fighting two-front battles: a study of the microlevel process of the official religion-state relationship in China”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53,4: 706-21.

concerned about the church, resulting in more freedom for religious activities.³⁷⁶

They found that skillful Protestant church leaders who were able to navigate within the web of local official organs could enlarge religious space and benefited the church's development. Koesel employed an "interest-based theory of religious-state interaction" as a framework for studying the interaction between religious leaders and governing authorities in Russia and China, and provided insights regarding the negotiation, cooperation and conflicts between religious and political authorities.³⁷⁷ She revealed that, practically, implementation of religious policies depended to a great extent on the interests of the local officials.³⁷⁸

McLeister's research revealed the existence of "grey" activities, a "combination of orthodox and unorthodox practice" and the significance of personal relationship between Three-Self church personnel and the local authority in a Chinese coastal city.³⁷⁹ One of his concluding comments was that "the implementation of religious policy is made flexible and therefore negotiable due to the perceived needs of

³⁷⁶ Liu, J. and White, C. (2019) "Old Pastor and Local Bureaucrats: Recasting Church-State Relations in Contemporary China", *Modern China*, 45, 5: 564-590.

³⁷⁷ Koesel, K (2014) *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p.60.

³⁷⁹ McLeister, M. (2013) "A Three-Self Protestant Church, the local state and religious policy implementation in a coastal Chinese city" in F. Lim (ed.) *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, Abingdon: Oxon: Routledge, pp. 234-46.

those involved.”³⁸⁰ His study has provided insightful demonstration that a straight forward compliance-resistance model is no longer sufficient to critically understand the relationship between national religious policy and the implementation at the local level. Wielander’s work illustrated the development and positive impact of Christian values on the PRC’s transformation in the reform eras.³⁸¹

In essence, these studies point to the existence of an enlarged spectrum of options and greater flexibility in state-religion interplays at the local level. Chau summed up that as a result of the various “nested interest in the locale,” the local authorities behaved differently than the central.³⁸² The experience of AHF also affirms Chau’s observation. The local hosts that AHF collaborated with did not treat AHF as a foreign entity even though Article 11 of the *State Council Document 114* dated Jan 13, 1994³⁸³ defines Hong Kong religious organizations as *foreign* religious entities. In collaborating with AHF, the local stakeholders transgressed the central-imposed limit in actual practice. They shifted to articulate that “Hong Kong is part

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p.243.

³⁸¹ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

³⁸² Chau, A. (2006) *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 14.

³⁸³ Article 11 of the *State Council Document 144* dated Jan 13, 1994 regarding management regulations for religious activities of foreigners in the People’s Republic of China.

of China.” The effect was that the “foreign-ness” of AHF as defined by the national regulation was significantly minimized amid maximizing the “Chinese-ness” of AHF, resulting in having more affinity to the local host(s) and being more relevant to the local agenda. This affinity was translated into a kind of functional “friendly relationship” with the local authorities.³⁸⁴ It was out of mutuality that new forms of practices emerged.

A closer look into the regime's central directives, regulations, or laws often reveals vagueness or contradiction; religious policies are no exception. Adam Segal comments that ambiguity is common with Chinese regulations: “Ministries and provinces in the country will interpret the laws differently, until they are called out by the central government.”³⁸⁵ It would be incorrect to view the revisions of religious policies or regulations simply as an artifact of carelessly formulated acts because the *intended* vagueness or contradiction formed part of the tactics by the central authority to govern religious matters. Vaguely formulated directives or policies provided the elasticity needed to readjust its tactic toward religions in the

³⁸⁴ This was revealed in a 2014 AHF newsletter celebrating the 15th Anniversary of AHF (in Chinese).

³⁸⁵ See Kan, M. *China's vague cybersecurity law has foreign businesses guessing*, (cw.com.hk) Accessed March 20, 2017. To understand more on ambiguity of Chinese laws, see also Rose, C. and Ross, L. (1997) “Language and Law: Sources of Systemic Vagueness and Ambiguous Authority in Chinese Statutory Language”, *U.B.C. Law Review*, Vol. 31:1.

midst of ensuring religious communities were patriotic and served the interests and long-term survival of the CCP. Seen from a Maoist Chinese dialectical perspective, it was not surprising because the law of the unity of opposites was fundamental.³⁸⁶ In the Hu Jintao era, the CCP continued to acknowledge the contradictory nature of Chinese Marxism in the party-state's political matters. For them, universality and absoluteness of contradiction, which is never-ending, allowed the government a certain degree of leeway to practice a “two-way approach.” Religious policies with ambiguity and exposed contradictions empower local officials to govern communities according to varied standards.

In depicting a more general picture of the central-local landscape regarding ambiguity of national policies, Tu maintains that “the regions themselves have clearly benefited from the accommodating policies of the Center. They seem to know well how to exploit Beijing’s lack of self-confidence and the ambiguity of the central directives, without totally undermining the system and thus risking the danger of anarchism or, perhaps worse, warlordism. This suggests that the ambiguity on paper can run counter to the Center’s intended goal, and what may represent a tactical advantage for the Center can foster noncompliance or

³⁸⁶ Mao Zedong (1967) “On contradiction”, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Beijing, PRC: Foreign Language Press.

considerable discrepancy in the treatment of religious communities at the local level.”³⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the CCP’s desire to maintain tight ideological and institutional control from the central authority over the Christian communities has continued.³⁸⁸ For instance, by controlling the seminary training programs, the CCP has kept a very limited supply of officially registered ministers, and as a result, the demand for more officially approved Christian ministers has not been met. Hence, Vala argues that the party-state is uneasy about the revival of Christianity and has attempted to hinder its growth through constructing various kinds of barriers.³⁸⁹

The lesson for AHF is that it is critical to formulate strategy and act as relevant to the local agenda as possible. The relationship of the national policy to the local religious policy implementation is a dynamic process of exchange interplay as revealed by the scholarship discussed above. Innovative Communist officials and dynamic religious leaders can mutually readjust the rules of the interaction that manage their relationship. Conflicts continue to arise, but there is possible space for advancement. Power does not station at the Politburo in Beijing

³⁸⁷ Tu, W. (1993) “Introduction: Cultural Perspectives” *Daedalus* 122, no. 2, p. xii.

³⁸⁸ Vala, C. (2009) “Pathways to the pulpit: leadership training in ‘patriotic’ and unregistered Chinese Protestant churches” in Y. Ashiwa and D. Wank (eds.), *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 97.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.118.

(this will be further discussed through a Foucauldian lens in the section “Strategic Selectivity and Effects of Power” in Chapter Four).

Host Regime—toward redefining the religious realm

Although Protestant Christianity in the PRC is state-sanctioned, it does not mean its existence is stagnant.³⁹⁰ Structurally, the PRC remains a Leninist one-party state under the CCP.³⁹¹ Yet, within its rigid organization, the CCP works flexibly to maneuver its ideological framework to achieve the principal objectives of the era and strengthen its legitimacy for long-term survival. After the Cultural Revolution, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of 1978 highlighted the spirit of reform and started a new beginning of a series of theoretical studies in religion and its governing. Such a task was conducted through the matrix of the United Front and associated state apparatuses, including scholastic state apparatuses and governmental research centers.³⁹² These include the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS), the Party School of the Central Committee of

³⁹⁰ Chow, A. (2018) *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp.48-69.

³⁹¹ Hamilton, C. (2018) *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*, London, UK: Hardie Grant Books, p.276.

³⁹² A list of related research works is presented in Lü, D. and Gong, X. (2014) (ed.) *Marxism and Religion*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV

the Chinese Communist Party and various universities.

Scholastic state apparatuses in the Deng Xiaoping period began to (re-)construct, through Chinese Communist dialectics, a new framework to depict religion and its impact under a new “discovery” that the role and functions of religion are different under different historical conditions and should not be summarized in one word—“opiate.”³⁹³ The new “insight” was that “religion can be in harmony with a socialist society.”³⁹⁴ In acknowledging socio-political problems, including poverty, unemployment, income disparity, and educational inequity, the regime came to accept the “passive function” of religion as a solution for the short-term problems under Chinese socialism. In the newly constructed framework of religion, the “passive function” of religion would not last forever but change according to the historical condition. Ostensibly, religion would disappear eventually.

In addition to de-stressing the gap between atheism and theism and between idealism and materialism, the scholastic state apparatuses attempted to engage in a comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to (re-)construct a more

³⁹³ PRC’s ideological system in the Mao Zedong era stressed the metaphor of “opiate” to describe the negative impact of religion. See Luo, Z. (1991) (ed.) *Religion Under Socialism in China*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, pp.152-53.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, p.153.

governable religious domain for the party-state. In the words of Luo, the Chinese

Communists

“have proved that religion can coordinate with a socialist society. By coordination we do not mean that two different ideological systems, such as theism and atheism or materialism and idealism, can be coordinated or can replace each other, we mean coordination in political and social life, coordination on the basis of patriotism and socialism.”³⁹⁵

It means that the CCP started to readjust their ideological framework in a new era to create space for effective interactions with the religious circles as part of the governance of the party-state. Atheism, as a component of the fundamental ideological dimension of Chinese Marxism, has intentionally kept a low profile in religious circles. In contrast, the linkage between Chinese Marxism and religion is strengthened in the operative ideological dimension.

Atheism or Theism? That became less primary

AHF did not enter the new mission field utterly naïve or open to uncritical ideas but focused on those that facilitated and supported its longer-term missions through theological and socio-political interpretations. Thus, a primary question to ask was: “Atheism or theism—how different are they in the eyes of the CCP?”

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p.155.

For AHF, the starting point to find an answer was not theological but ideological. A pure theological approach might lead one to conclude a total opposition of these two “isms.” To answer the question relevant to the mission field required the knowledge of how the CCP reads religion. Admittedly, the CCP declared: “We Communists are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism.”³⁹⁶ However, the Chinese Communist dialectical endeavor in the reform era led the Party to conclude that “it will be fruitless and extremely harmful to use simple coercion in dealing with the people’s ideological and spiritual questions — and this includes religious questions.”³⁹⁷ Ideology is an essential element in CCP’s governing of the state. The CCP structures ideology into a systematic set of ideas that shapes the organization of the party-state and directs the operation to achieve its short- and long-term goals. These ideas are articulated thoughts expressed in a specific language, the language of Marxism-Leninism, and localized with the crafting of Maoism and the language of the prevalent leader of the different eras. Ideology, including the related implication in religious matters, is a critical tool to legitimize the dominant political position of the CCP. While it links practice with

³⁹⁶ Section IV “The Party’s Present Policy toward Religions” in *Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint On The Religious Question During Our Country’s Socialist Period*, issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 31 March 1982.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

theory, it postulates, clarifies and justifies the goals and methods of planned actions.

The party-state is constantly confronted with the conflict between the immediate reality and the ultimate objective of Communism. In Deng's modernization process, Communist China's developmental needs required the regime to adapt to a wide range of changes, such as privatization of state-owned enterprises, monetary incentives, and income and wealth differentials. While these conflicted with its fundamental ideological objectives, it did not mean that the intermediate objectives of modernization and the ultimate goals were mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as a temporal measure, the CCP played a balancing act of the intermediate and the ultimate—their co-existence was stressed to meet the legitimacy requirements and related policy change. As a result, a new dialectical relation between the present and the expectant future was established. To allow such requirements to be effective, the CCP became more tolerant of deviations and more versatile in the operative dimension of ideology; but with a determined affirmation of the ultimate objectives and ideological essentials in the fundamental dimension. To enhance the flexibility of its operative ideological framework relating to the religious realm, the CCP declared:

“We must further understand that at the present historical stage

the difference that exists between the mass of believers and non-believers in matters of ideology and belief is relatively secondary. If we then one-sidedly emphasize this difference, even to the point of giving it primary importance — for example, by discriminating against and attacking the mass of religious believers, while neglecting and denying that the basic political and economic welfare of the mass of both religious believers and non-believers is the same — then we forget that the Party's basic task is to unite all the people (and this includes the broad mass of believers and non-believers alike)."³⁹⁸

The critical point of the CCP's declaration is that the difference between atheism and theism is "relatively secondary." It is because the CCP's immediate core objective was to maintain legitimacy by striving "to construct a modern, powerful Socialist state."³⁹⁹ In other words, atheism as a core component in the fundamental dimension of Communist ideology had become less primary in the immediate practice of Chinese authoritarian pragmatism under CCP's political realism.

Jiang Zemin's governmentality of "mutual adaptation" starting in the 1990s in the religious domain, together with the critical components of the discursive framework of Hu Jintao's "Harmonism" in the 2000s, and the associated matrix of socio-political relations became the ideological toolkit of CCP's contemporary

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

religious policies, regulations, and actions. This ideology-oriented system depended on a distinct and codified framework of socio-political and economic ideas built from Marxism-Leninism as the core and subsequently grafted with Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, Jiang Zemin's "Three Representatives," and Hu Jintao's "Harmonism"—with a function to legitimize the practices and plans of the CCP leadership. It justified the monopoly power of the CCP and nurtured its proclaimed mission of building socialism in China.

The CCP endeavored to build a pragmatic relationship with the religious domain and narrow the gap between the party-state and the religious circles. The reason was that, under its dialectical endeavor, to "behave otherwise would only exacerbate the estrangement between the mass of believers and non-believers as well as incite and aggravate religious fanaticism, resulting in serious consequences for [the] Socialist enterprise."⁴⁰⁰ The CCP further elaborated that "its policy of freedom of religious belief on the theory formulated by Marxism-Leninism.....is the only correct policy genuinely consonant with the people's welfare."⁴⁰¹ Simply put, the Chinese Communist regime allowed the theists to be theists as long as they did not act politically against the regime; the party-state attempted not to

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

entangle itself in this subject matter in the fundamental ideological dimension. As for AHF, an enlarged possibility of missional endeavors existed when it cared to identify and locate the possibility of a relevant space in the mission field through its Christian realism and determination to engage with the socio-political of the missional domain. In the eyes of the post-Cultural Revolution CCP leadership, pragmatic, positive relationship with the religious sphere, including Protestantism, was possible if there was no fanaticism, no infiltration, no stirring up trouble, no invasion and, most importantly, no overflowing of the Party.

New “truths”—new space of relevance

Even though the articulation of co-existence prevailed in the newly framed state-religion relationship, the ability and readiness of the party-state to suppress religious forces that challenged the regime never disappeared. Religions are always considered by the CCP as potential rivals on ideo-political, organizational, or even socio-economic grounds. However, the party-state was not in a position to defeat religion in totality; but unceasingly attempted to create new “truths” in its continual experiment to rule. In *Document 19*, the CCP declared that “the long-term influence of religion among a part of the people in Socialist society cannot be avoided. But it will disappear naturally only through the long-term development

of Socialism and Communism, when all objective requirements are met.”⁴⁰² This set of new “truths” was a new knowledge that rationalized the existence of religion in the initial stage of Chinese socialism under the legitimate ruling of the CCP. Under the unique situation, it became necessary for the CCP to exercise “differentiated management, co-optation and selective suppression.”⁴⁰³ And these practices of differentiation, selection and co-optation were accompanied by a new form of rationality and calculation, which were the conditions of the production of knowledge, disciplines and theories of religion in the regime (this will be elaborated in Chapters Three and Four).

At the same time, these rationalities and calculations became conditioned and strengthened by the knowledge, disciplines and theories so produced. To survive in this mission field, effectively carry out its ministry, and contribute to the targeted Christian communities, AHF must ensure that it was outside the “selective suppression” category. To establish and continue its missional operation in the PRC, it must position itself strategically within the domain of relevance to the

⁴⁰² Section I “Religion as a Historical Phenomenon” in *Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint On The Religious Question During Our Country’s Socialist Period*, issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 31 March 1982.

⁴⁰³ Lai, H. (2016) *China’s Governance Model: Flexibility and Durability of pragmatic authoritarianism*, Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, p.149.

prevailing socio-political condition. In a nutshell, it was imperative for AHF to nurture and maintain a “non-political” status and to sustain a role that was relevant to the regime by demonstrating its “truths” and practices within the enlarged spaces for “non-political” social and religious activities. The critical politics of mission in this field was to become relevant and simultaneously keep away from any political agenda, yet not without a theo-political mentality under Christian realism.

Mission Field: an arena of experiments

Traditionally, a Leninist state carries intrinsic weaknesses such as the absence of check-and-balance, suppression of variant opinions and violations of civil rights of the people. A one-party state is also highly inflexible in organizational structure and lacks the ability to enhance administration, coordination, innovation, and capacity to strive globally.⁴⁰⁴ However, this traditional perspective on the communist state is not very helpful in the mission field of Communist China if one attempts to gain knowledge of the dynamics of the CCP party-state. The CCP has

⁴⁰⁴ See Brown, A. (2009) *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, London, UK: Bodley Head. And Bunce, V. (1999) *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

demonstrated to be versatile and able to adapt to new challenges in many areas of policy formulation and implementation. A more helpful comprehension of the field dynamics requires the application of analytics that go beyond preconceived missional typologies. Governmental acts of the CCP system are not stagnant but capable of progressively shaping, formulating, enabling, fine-tuning, and revising as the regime advances its course. In its constant (re-)assessment of socialism, CCP's policy formulation and implementation are not pre-determined in a linear, straightforward mode; instead, they are an open-ended endeavor with uncertainty, driven by contradictory elements, frequent interactions, and constant feedback in a dialectical manner.⁴⁰⁵ Hence, the CCP has developed many experimental initiatives and policy innovations, particularly economic development.⁴⁰⁶ Therefore, it is critical for any missional agent to realize CCP's capacity to manage both prevailing and evolving challenges through experimental trials, with adaptive mechanisms for adjustment in a rapidly changing global

⁴⁰⁵ Sun provides detailed analysis of CCP's constant reassessment of socialism in China. See Sun, Y. (1995) *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism 1976-1992*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁰⁶ One of the well-known examples of experimentation is PRC's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) which have been established to be open for connecting with the outside world with an agenda to acquire modern economic skills and management for advancement. See Heilmann, S. (2018) *Red Swan: How Unorthodox Policy Making Facilitated China's Rise*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

context. For AHF, its realism directed its operation not to turn a blind eye to upcoming and divergent observations of the mission field but to carry out swift response initiatives in experimental modes and coordinated adjustments.

Religious policies and regulations are not stand-alone governmental technologies; they are linked critically to PRC's immediate, medium- and long-term party-state development planning. In the Hu Jintao era, they were strategically connected with their long-term projection to reach a harmonized society. The CCP's strategic policies are generally structured to coordinate and prioritize strategic activities and programs from an anticipative perspective for long-term objectives. They also attempt to mobilize resources to motivate structural changes that facilitate sustainable economic and social development; however, political transformation is much resisted by the CCP. These strategic policies are under the management of the party-state to monitor the level of changes in vital developmental variables, prevent serious local economic failures, minimize external shockwaves, and, most critically, ensure the CCP is in control of the present and the future.

Collaborative engagement with religious circles as a purposive action in the Hu era entailed the regime allowing leeway to decentralize experimentation. At the same time, the CCP leadership attempted to discover new regulatory

technologies and instruments for the local government to administer and enhance its ability to adapt further implementation and adjustment according to swift internal and external changes. As Heilmann reveals, CCP's action plans are repeatedly initiated as experimental exercises with a mentality that they are to be further revised and re-implemented according to the outcome.⁴⁰⁷ It explains why policy-making and implementation are in a perpetual flux and are subject to constant change as the CCP learns new lessons in its experimental exercises. In a socio-political domain of rapid changes, they are rather difficult to predict. Instead of total rigidity, the party-state is equipped with "authoritarian flexibility, adaptability, and assertiveness."⁴⁰⁸

Collaboration with local churches and the TSPM/CCC

Collaboration, Metz maintains, is a crucial component of the driving force of God's act.⁴⁰⁹ The created world is the platform, the medium, through which Christians engage themselves in divine-human dialogical interactions so that they can understand God and His mission via acting as collaborators for peace and

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, p.13.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p.14

⁴⁰⁹ Metz, (1968) "Creative Hope", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (ed.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.138.

justice.⁴¹⁰ In addition to Christian collaborators, God uses many other entities and worldly forces in His missional process for the salvation of human beings and the creation—all-inclusive.⁴¹¹ In the mission field, collaboration as a realization of Christian realism is about finding an arrangement with which collaborators can co-exist and work together toward some agreed objective(s). An insightful comprehension of the dialectical character of reality leads a missional agent to be aware that rigid formulations cannot deal with its endeavor. In other words, any inflexible initiative is unlikely to effectively solve problems as they arise in the mission field. Constructing a rigid system of thought or proposal of strictly Christian or prefabricated solutions is unlikely to resolve missional challenges. Hence, AHF, in its Christian realism, has established “simplicity, flexibility, efficiency, and trust” as its key ministry values (as stated in *AHF Principles and Practices*). Operation-wise, AHF missionaries “opt for quick and decisive actions to achieve clearly defined goals”, “encourage creativity”, “give priority to effectiveness”, “commit to respond speedily to the never-ending demands” and “advocate mutual trust”.⁴¹²

Missional activities must be relevant to the particular setting of the specific

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Wild-Wood, E. and Rajkumar, P. (2013) (ed.) *Foundations for Mission*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, p.8.

⁴¹² AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Year Old! What a milestone!”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

arena. While ambiguity prevailed, it was a venture for AHF to discover new insight in an experimental mode. To carry out its mission as a discovery and further discernment, the motif of hope forced the missional agent to confront the uncertainty amid new historical experiences. From the perspective of Christian realism, hope is not abstract but a present reality that sets missionaries free to transform their thinking and conduct. In terms of Moltmann's experiment hope, AHF's missional endeavor was an experiment with the Divine, with the agent itself and with history.⁴¹³ This experiment hope was hope in anticipation—a hope of harmony and reconciliation instead of blindly defensiveness and conflict. Although it entailed risk and frustration, it also brought in confirmation and astonishment.

In the Hu Jintao era, core ministries of AHF included biblical and theological training to local church ministers, setting up bible study groups and Sunday schools and helping to establish various church administrative functions. In one location (QH), a bible training center was established to train lay ministers for village-level churches and meeting points⁴¹⁴. This was recorded in *AHF Ministry Report March 2007*:

⁴¹³ See Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. M. Meeks, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.188.

⁴¹⁴ Meeting points are venues of worship but have not reached the status of a church.

Bible Training

AHF has sponsored and completed the construction of a Bible training center in the QH area with the full support of the local church staff. By God's grace, the center was finished and the training of new workers in the area has begun. By doing so, it promotes great potential for the future development in the area. We can now focus on training and recruiting local church ministers. We also pray for more teaching pastors and ministers to join this church workers training program. These new students will be the future leaders for the churches in QH.

In a 2014 newsletter (printed in Chinese), AHF recaptured the history of building the QH bible training center and shared it with supporters. It was in 2004 that an AHF team made a field study visit to a number of cities in southern China as an exercise of seeking God's guidance for the ministries ahead. In the city of QH, they met with an old Chinese minister (L) of over 70 years of age. Minister L expressed his will to systematically train a group of young ministers and church planters for furthering the growth of Christianity in rural China. He showed an approval document from the government and an official plaque inscribed with "Bible Training Center" to the AHF team. However, his church lacked the financial and professional resources to build the center. Recognizing the huge demand for new ministers and being able to obtain sufficient funding from Hong Kong supporters, AHF collaborated with the QH church and local government to

establish the “QH Bible Training Center” in 2006.

The students of the bible training center, many were lay ministers, in deep poverty, were farmers in remote areas who earned their daily living by farming and served the local church on a volunteer base. Many of these churches and meeting points in the remote areas were very small and with minimal offerings from the congregation (monthly offerings of less than 100 RMB, i.e. less than Fifteen Pounds Sterling, were not uncommon). Majority of them were impoverished financially and in bad repair. It was impossible for them to support even one full-time salaried minister. After a short-term bible training assignment in the QH bible training center, trainer TW reported and shared that she had the opportunity to visit two local churches in the minority villages. In her eyes, they were “two small, broken churches with simple layouts. One church was even made of bamboo, which [was] susceptible to the penetration of rain and wind. Yet these churches were packed with brothers and sisters who were full of zest and passion for God. These churches definitely needed expansion to accommodate the increasing congregation.”⁴¹⁵ She shared that she “experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in the classroom, and [recognized] the significance of reinforcing the systematic approach to Bible study

⁴¹⁵ Trainer TW, “I pray that God would grant me another opportunity”, in *AHF Update 2008*.

in China. [She] was especially impressed by the students' high motivation and seriousness in knowing God."⁴¹⁶

The biblical and theological training courses organized by AHF, typically carried out in the off-farming seasons, were free to them. The training center also provided accommodation, meals, and transportation from their home villages to the training center in QH. According to an internal document *Project Planning 2006*, AHF "planned to subsidize the training expenses including training materials, food and lodging of students..... The budget for training in 2006 [was] HK\$112,000." Some ministers in extreme poverty also received a monthly living subsidy. As recorded in the same document, AHF pledged "to support the pastors-in-need. The number of pastors supported [was] increased from 23 to 63 as AHF [had] explored more fields in China and found more needs. The budget [was] HK\$226,800. AHF [deemed] this project very important for [the quality of ministers is an essential factor] for church growth."

In addition to the ministries within the church settings, social ministries and services were organized. AHF established a scholarships program for children of low-income families. According to AHF *Project Planning 2006*, the total budget for

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

scholarships was HK\$1,180,100. The document recorded the following:

Scholarships

In 2005, we have sponsored 794 students of different levels and different nature of education. In 2006, we plan to increase to 1,048 students. AHF has received many applications and the new planning for scholarships will be: 856 primary students, 153 middle school students, 25 university students and 14 seminary students..... AHF is looking for 431 new sponsors in order to support all applicants.

Another key project-event was the establishment of an orphanage named Home of AHF. A brief account of Home of AHF was recorded in a 2014 newsletter celebrating the 15th Anniversary of AHF (printed in Chinese); in it AHF revealed that a critical element for AHF to advance its ministry was the “friendly relationship with respective government offices.” The following is my translation of it:

Home of AHF

In early 2008 there was a severe snow storm hitting a Yao village, electricity was disconnected, food supply was disturbed, and houses collapsed with a large group of homeless villagers waiting for help. AHF was invited to help in the disaster relief. Due to the *friendly relationship with respective government offices* [my emphasis], AHF was told that there was a great need to accommodate and sponsor a group of orphans, particularly for a group of young girl orphans who needed a safe place to live.

To share God’s love, AHF found “Home of AHF” on Feb 22, 2008 in order to take care of the “helpless” girls with a home. Since then, “Home of AHF” has been operated with “home” as the core concept of operation. The facilities, the furniture and the set up were arranged to make it feel like home. Co-workers care for and nurture the girls with the love of

Christ. We are blessed to see the girls grow strong in their values, lifestyle, morality, culture, and knowledge. From an early age, they learn to accept and love the Lord, becoming citizens of the world who loves God, love others, and love society. Thanks to the care and teaching of the workers, the children have made progress in all aspects: physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. From timid and insecure little girls, they have transformed into healthy, confident young ladies. One of them even won an award for Outstanding Student of the County.

In the same document, the establishment of the “Poverty Alleviation Center” was recorded as follows:

Poverty Alleviation Center

Thanks be to God! In 2012, AHF received the licence from the local government as a “Poverty Alleviation Center”. Under the leadership of the director, in addition to the orphanage work, various poverty alleviation projects have been carried out, such as helping impoverished communities and families, providing winter clothes, water and sanitation projects for schools and communities, etc. Recently, AHF was invited by the local government to set up a “Children Caring Center”, providing accommodation and care services nearby the school for children whose home was in the mountain areas, so as to allow them to board at the center and the opportunity to receive education at school. The reason is that the children in the mountains have to walk two or three hours to school every day, and their parents would rather keep them at home. May the Lord prepare suitable workers and funds for this work.

Without the collaborative undertakings with local churches under the blessings of the TSPM/CCC and “friendly government offices” (they include the

United Front and National Security Bureau behind the scene), AHF's ministry would not be possibility. Although classified as "non-governmental," TSPM and CCC are part of the massive network of state apparatuses to manage and monitor the activities of Protestant churches. By engaging with registered churches under TSPM/CCC, AHF was in a position to carry out its ministries via a network of polyvalent engagement with official state apparatuses. Furthermore, AHF fostered dialogical forms of relationships in a state of conscious visibility that made appropriate functioning of power possible.⁴¹⁷ This visibility was critical because it acted as a kind of assurance to the regime that AHF was acting within the limits allowed. The interfacing was open and dialogical to ensure the officials were in a position to understand the actual operation of AHF's action-in-love and strengthen the "friendly relationship." From a Christian perspective, truthfulness in relationships entails openness to the eschatological future.

Dialogue as a method of mission

Dialogue (understood not only as conversations but also as project-events

⁴¹⁷ Foucault talks of the need for visibility of power. See Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd edn, trans. A. Sheridan, Vintage Books Edition, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p.201.

or actions) is essential for any missional agent to engage with the world.⁴¹⁸ One of the tasks of Christians is to participate in a candid exchange of beliefs and debate with different disciplines, worldviews, and values.⁴¹⁹ The “truth” of love as promulgated by the CCP under a governmental rationality matrix of mutual adaptation revealed a kind of dialogical Marxism that required a response from Christianity. Dialogical Marxism, Vree argues, is compatible with dialogical Christianity.⁴²⁰ In its engagement with others (including collaborative stakeholders and the general public), AHF re-assessed its position in light of what it learned and heard to reach a new stage of an endeavor to create a new space for practicing dialogical Christianity in mission. It became possible to establish a relationship between a missional agent of dialogical Christianity and a regime of dialogical Marxism because they both acknowledged each other as potential stakeholders in a new engagement.

One of the roles of AHF was to prioritize attentiveness and reflection over proclamation and assertion, which was particularly important in the PRC. It was a

⁴¹⁸ Lochhead, D. (1988) *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, Maryknoll, NY: SCM Press, p. 88.

⁴¹⁹ Neville, D. (2008) “Dialectic as Method in Public Theology: Recalling Jacques Ellul”, *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, p.170.

⁴²⁰ Vree, D. (1976) *On Synthesizing Marxism and Christianity*, New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, p.176.

mission featured by discernment, specifically about the problematics of the *where* and the *when* a speech/a message was delivered and the *where* and the *when* an intentional silence was required (as opposed to passive silence). Christian mission requires contextualization.⁴²¹ In its dialogical mission, AHF was required to locate the critical correlation in a temporal movement to create *a new situation* in a particular historical era. While it was imperative to assess the co-occurrence of contradictory elements, it was more important to realize that the opposing elements could not exist without eliminating each other unless they were correlative in a historical movement that resulted in a new situation.⁴²² Therefore, temporal correlations between the Chinese Marxist endeavor and AHF's interactive venture were critical.

Relevance: a missiological orientation

A theological understanding of the need for relevance, and the associated challenges, comes from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI of 1975):

“Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does

⁴²¹ Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Redwood Press, p.20.

⁴²² Ellul, J. (1989) *What I believe?*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. Eerdmans, p.32.

not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it.” (EN63)

This statement leads Christians to understand the need to hold on to the truthfulness of the Gospel and appreciate the value system of the local culture. The local churches, and respective state apparatuses, received according to their capacity to receive; and this capacity was affected by how they interpreted and ascertained for themselves according to the regime's prevalent ideo-political articulations and policies. The political realism of the CCP determined what was relevant and what was not. Therefore, AHF's proclamation must not merely be empty messages; it must be supported by praxis (which also functioned as discourses and “truths” in a Foucauldian sense) that affected how and why the others viewed the relevance of the message to their actual activities.

Relevance is about connectivity and relationship. The connectivity and relations are eschatologically supported by actions in the hope of Christian endeavors.⁴²³ Moltmann argues that reality can be interpreted through an understanding of relational and dynamic perspectives of project-events on earth.

⁴²³ Moltmann J. (1985) *God in Creation: a new theology of creation and the Spirit of God*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, p.3.

For Moltmann, “everything real and everything living is simply a concentration and manifestation of its relationships, interconnections and surroundings.”⁴²⁴ Viewed from this perspective, the reality in the mission field can be interpreted through an understanding of the relationship and dynamics of the missional project-events. There is a relationship between AHF and the mission field, a socio-politically related relationship because Christianity is joined to and simultaneously dependent on worldly momentum. For AHF, the worldly momentum includes the dynamic network of relationships in the arena in which “its mediations take their bearings from the history of Jesus and his mission.”⁴²⁵ Hence AHF’s vision is “Following Jesus’ command of the Great Commission, we seek to share the love of Christ with the minorities and neglected groups in China. It is our goal that through our ministries, they will become Great Commission-minded communities.”⁴²⁶

The specific missional domain in the Hu Jintao era of transition demanded a refreshed understanding of the mission in the PRC. For AHF, there was a strong impulse toward a renewal of missiology for the PRC. As Bosch writes, “in light of a fundamentally new situation and precisely so as to remain faithful to the true

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.193.

⁴²⁶ AHF vision statement as stated in AHF *Principles and Practices*.

nature of mission—mission must be understood and undertaken in an imaginatively new manner.”⁴²⁷ For AHF, its endeavor through collaborative engagement with Communist state apparatuses did not mean the Gospel of Christ had changed. Instead, it essentially reflected that the missionaries had begun to understand their calling and the mission field better.

This missional domain in the Hu Jintao era was one in which the regime advocated newly-constructed state-religion compatibility (amid censorship) by shifting its ideological framework in response to its internal crisis and the prevalent global-local dialectics.⁴²⁸ From the start, AHF had prepared to ride on the creative tension—the centrifugal and the centripetal forces, the tensions of diversity versus unity, divergence versus integration, and pluralism versus holism. All these had to be considered throughout the missional processes. Awareness of existing creative tension directed AHF to comprehend that it was only within power relations, the domain of forces of apparent opposites, that AHF started to appreciate, evaluate, and strategize a refreshed way of theologizing for its own time in a vivid and meaningful manner. AHF outlined the direction it ought to be going and recognized

⁴²⁷ Bosch, D. (2011) *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.376.

⁴²⁸ Luo Z. (ed,) (1991) *Religion Under Socialism in China*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 113-131.

the specific thrust of the emerging current. Meantime, it anticipated witnessing the promise of the reign of God and took part in a continuous balance of the creative tension, the struggle between the sovereignty of the God of love and the powers of worldly matters. Bosch reminds servants of God that the “history of the world is not only a history of evil but also of love.”⁴²⁹ It is a history of mission in which “the reign of God is being advanced through the work of the Spirit.”⁴³⁰ The mission field in the PRC involves meeting an atheist party-state in which the work of God “has already been operative secretly.”⁴³¹

As manifested in the statement “The Christian world mission is Christ’s, not ours,”⁴³² *missio Dei* provides a core theological foundation for missional agents. Hence, the AHF leadership stressed its commitment to participate in God’s mission and co-work with everyone in the process as revealed by God.⁴³³ Fundamentally, a missional venture starts with God, who leads mission-minded Christians to participate in His mission. Unless God involves shaping participating servants, the

⁴²⁹ Bosch, D. (2011) *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.401.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² A statement of the assembly of International Missionary Council of 1958, in Achimota, Ghana.

⁴³³ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

most carefully formulated preparation methods will finally prove inadequate.⁴³⁴

The theological conception of *missio Dei* leads a missional agent to understand that the initiative and involvement of God in its service are not limited to its missionaries. While God's mission includes all elements of the church domain, regardless of geographical locations, it also involves those outside the Christian domain, which are simultaneously part of the elements in the total missional domain of God. In other words, there are Christian and non-Christian elements in the missional domain of God of which every servant of God should be aware.

Under such a theological bearing, the setting of the socio-political in the Hu Jintao era became only part of the totality of God's mission. There was a need for AHF to appreciate the broader scope of God's preparation for the present and upcoming events with an eschatological horizon. The missional agent did not confine itself merely to the current situation but traced the various linked events to the present amid learning the upcoming tendency or specific leaning. Knowledge of the circumstances was gained through AHF's research and development committee studies from research projects, historical studies, China studies, political and social research reports, and other means. This knowledge

⁴³⁴ Jennings, J. (2015) "Broader Implications of The *Missio Dei*", in S. Bevans et al (eds.), *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Stock, p.34.

became essential for comprehending God's direction for AHF through various avenues coming into the prevalent situation. The initiative, masterminding, and involvement of God in arranging of Christians for the mission embraced the multifaceted heritages and complex socio-political context—including even persecution, oppressive suffering and injustice practiced by the regime—that had formed the complicated settings within which the current missional endeavor took place. For AHF, initiative without relevance to God is futile; ministry without relevance to the regime, the local churches and the people in the PRC will all be in vain. Hence, one AHF director prayed, “Dear Lord,.....As we take each step with Your guidance and providence, we ask for Your peaceful presence.....Bless us with discerning ability so that we are able to know Your will, understand the context within which You allow us to act upon and following through accordingly.”⁴³⁵ Under its Christian realism, AHF practiced a God-centered ministry in engaging with the world.

AHF's collaborative relationship with “friendly” government offices required the knowledge of others. Knowing others by mere “studying” is inadequate and potentially harmful. Jennings cautions missional agents about the

⁴³⁵ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

risk of upholding preconceived conceptions and agendas that can prevent valid interpretation of the Divine, among others.⁴³⁶ Instead, she encourages Christians to learn how the Divine has been at work. By not enforcing stereotypes, missionaries stand a better chance to understand *others*. The realization of God's broader, inclusive, and extra-ecclesiastical effort on humanity involves "both theological articulation of *missio Dei* and existential awakening to how God [has been] at work in the world."⁴³⁷ It means that the Divine realizes His mission across the globe, including through extra-ecclesiastical activities in socio-political-economic spheres. God is not merely the Creator and Redeemer who dwells within the sanctuary, orchestrating cosmic activities from a distance, but the ONE engaging actively with global events. He momentarily reigns in every situation.⁴³⁸

As a new situation arose, a new mode of relevance was required. Change occurred, and grace abounded. For AHF, the *missio*-political reality was experienced, through grace, in the process of a pilgrimage and anticipated in its fullness through hope.

⁴³⁶ Jennings, J. (2015) "Broader Implications of The *Missio Dei*", in S. Bevans et al (eds.), *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, Eugene Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, p.40.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Goodall, N. (1953) (ed.) *Mission Under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting*, London, UK: Edinburgh House Press, p. 190.

In Metz's words, "Grace perfects the true worldliness of the world."⁴³⁹ For the founder of AHF, God's grace was experienced through "many difficult paths" and "immense burden" that ended up with "a deepened motivation and joy to march forward."⁴⁴⁰ As a part of God's mission in this world, AHF is "in the service of the universal will of God for the world."⁴⁴¹

Unless the gospel is meaningful and socio-politically relevant, it will not be embraced in a way that generates life-giving transformation for the local people. In this direction, AHF was commissioned to structure suitable ways and correlative categories for bringing God's blessings and the gospel to the marginalized minorities in rural areas. As mentioned earlier, establishing an orphanage and setting up scholarships for children of low-income families helped to strengthen the meaning and relevance of AHF ministries to the local public, the local church, and the local government.

As the mission proceeded, AHF learned that goodwill alone was insufficient to make the ministry in Communist China possible and operative. Historically, good intentions did not necessarily bring an effective and satisfactory outcome;

⁴³⁹ Metz, J (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.49.

⁴⁴⁰ AHF founder L, "AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!", in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁴⁴¹ Metz, J (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London: Burns & Oates, p.50.

sometimes, it only paved the way to adversity, and could dreadfully compromise the mission.⁴⁴² For AHF missionaries to contemplate various possibilities of making missional sense, it required them, through the lens of Christian realism, to experience the system, the things happening in reality and the value orientation of the Chinese Communist regime.

In its attempt to cultivate a relevant ministerial capacity, making sense to the regime within its prevalent socio-political parameters, AHF facilitated “the freedom of the gospel for new situations.”⁴⁴³ Obviously, the worldview of the Chinese Communists is very different from that of Christians. Yet, this does not mean that missional endeavor must be hindered or blocked by the differences. The mission of Paul teaches missionaries not to adhere to disagreements but to demolish differences.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

⁴⁴³ Congdon, D. (2014) “Dialectical Theology as Theology of Mission: Investigating the Origin of Karl Barth’s Break with Liberalism”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol. 16 Number 4, p.407.

⁴⁴⁴ See Schnabel, E. (2006) *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission*, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster.

Searching for Relevance—Converging Agendas

Traditionally, religions in China have been non-exclusive. Major religions in history have co-existed heterogeneously in this enormous land.⁴⁴⁵ Religious pluralism, which accepts the co-existence of various religious concepts and practices, dates back to Imperial China. To maintain stability after the inception of the PRC, the CCP has not departed from this tradition. It continues to govern the religious domain with a non-exclusive inter-religious tolerance. The TSPM/CCC continues a pluralistic attitude toward religious toleration in the operational dimension. Seeking mutuality and becoming relevant to others has become a critical characteristic of the Chinese Protestant domain.⁴⁴⁶ Under the idea of mutual respect, post-denominational Protestant Christianity in the PRC (after 1950) attempted to nurture a more inclusive and tolerant attitude within the Protestant circle. The aim was to minimize the gap among Protestant Christians of different historical and theological backgrounds and group them as one.⁴⁴⁷

For AHF, it was necessary to interpret the gospel and the socio-political

⁴⁴⁵ Shi, Z. (2008) "Traditional Culture Embodied in Confucianism and China's Search for a Harmonious Society and Peaceful Development", in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.49-51.

⁴⁴⁶ Wickeri, P. (1988) *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-self Movement, and China's United Front*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, p.284.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, p.283.

domain effectively in the Chinese Communist regime context. Barclay is right to point out that Christians “must be a dialectician” and “must be willing to weigh one interpretation against another.”⁴⁴⁸ The critical interpretation of the gospel and the socio-political is not merely a transfer of information. To effectively exercise charity, AHF must assess the validity of its dialogue and interaction with the regime and the local churches. It must ensure the agendas and interests are convergent instead of divergent. Christian missional attempts involve a combination of disciplines, including missional theology, spirituality, sociology, political science, economics and human behavioral science, all of which must be linked explicitly to form the agenda of Christian ministry. It is also critical for the missional agent to acknowledge that at the authoritarian center, there is, paradoxically, a complex domain of meanings different from the Christian domain of meanings.

A missiological orientation toward relevance directed AHF with a missional agenda that converged with that of the local people, without which the missional agent would move on parallel paths that did not meet and never become mutually relevant to the collaborative others. Hence, the AHF team was committed to establish “a long-term relationship with each person and to share in the intricacies

⁴⁴⁸ Duncan, D. (1971) (ed.) *Through the year with William Barclay: Devotional readings for everyday*. London, UK: Hodderand and Stoughton, p. 22.

of their lives.”⁴⁴⁹ To make the ministry of AHF meaningful, effort was dedicated to “embrace [the local] culture even at the expenses of [the team’s] comfort and norms.”⁴⁵⁰ Even though AHF was “perceived as foreign help”, the AHF team was determined “to gradually cross the divide and connect personally with each life and heart.”⁴⁵¹

The CCP spent much effort to alleviate poverty and tried to match actuality and possibility, yet was unsuccessful. Growing disparity and socio-political resistance persisted,⁴⁵² and local officials and churches searched for help outside the governmental systems. AHF’s social services helped reconcile its agenda with the local government and churches. These services included the charitable ministries that were described earlier: scholarship program to sponsor students from low-income families, the funding of projects to improve the physical condition of schools, the establishment of orphanage and student caring center and the building of walking paths and bridges that allow students to go to school.

Initially, AHF’s outsider status put it in a marginal position. Being foreign

⁴⁴⁹ AHF founder L, “Serving China at a New Depth”, in *AHF Update 2008*.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Liu, G. (2008) “Economic Development, Political Stability, and Social Harmony”, in S. Guo and B. Buoy (ed.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.144-147.

was to be in a position of disadvantage. Indeed, it was vulnerable. At the same time, under the complex and closed system of the regime's scrutiny and intelligence, AHF was not able to know with certainty how it was targeted behind the scenes. The ability to continuously embrace ambiguity was a part of its skills to survive in the missional journey. The local churches, TSPM/CCC, and respective state apparatuses could not fully understand the initiatives of AHF. At the same time, AHF could not grasp the full agenda of the local churches and that of the regime. Therefore, there was a need to attempt assiduously to find out the agenda of the others. Only by so doing was AHF able to locate the possibility of becoming relevant and bringing God's blessings to those it claimed to serve and to survive in the field with sustainability. Conversely, ministerial irrelevance could be a terrible waste of missional resources and energy. Gittins correctly says that "missionaries cannot expect to be blessed by God unless their good intentions and dedicated works benefit their brothers and sisters."⁴⁵³ As AHF founder L joyfully reflected in an article entitled "Home of AHF—A Gift from God to us" in *AHF Update 2016*, the Home of AHF project was "accepted by the local neighborhood and government. Many of these local groups appreciate our work....." As a result, AHF was "invited

⁴⁵³ Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.65.

by another Yao village in the mountainous region to start another home.....”⁴⁵⁴ It truly was a gift from God to AHF.

Love, charity act, and dialogical theology: a foundation of relevance

Christian realism points AHF toward a moral obligation of identifying the prevalent forces at work in a situation, the human limitations, *and* the open possibilities.⁴⁵⁵ It also requires the missional agent to identify a God-led theological interpretation of current and historical events because such an initiative would better grasp existing opportunities and those in the making. Such knowledge tends to be critical and confident. It is critical because it makes no absolute claims for its own perspective; it is confident because it is not misled by self-interest or trapped into fanatic excesses.

The theology of Ding Guangxun and his impact on the Protestant domain of the PRC provides a foundation of relevance in the mission field. Ding Guangxun, also known as Ting Kuang-hsun, was a former Chairman of the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China and a former President of the China Christian Council. His dialogical theology impacted how

⁴⁵⁴ AHF founder L, “Home of AHF—A gift of God to us”, in *AHF Update 2016*.

⁴⁵⁵ Lovin, R. (1995) *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.29.

Protestant Christianity was understood in a spirit of dialogical mutuality. Ding Guangxun, albeit negatively nicknamed “the Red Bishop” by some, was instrumental in the relationship between the Protestant church and the party-state in the PRC.⁴⁵⁶ For Ding, religion in Communist China was, in a political sense, a matter of the United Front.⁴⁵⁷ It formed a foundation for him to start searching for a way to secure the socio-political legitimacy of Christianity in the regime. With a critical understanding of the theo-political nature of Christian ministries in the PRC, Ding’s initiative worked through dialogue, not confrontation, with the CCP. For him, starting with understanding socialism in China from a theo-political perspective was logical. He argued that China is only in the stage of socialism before it reaches the ultimate stage of Communism—no one knows precisely when it will arrive.

Are Christianity and Chinese Communism compatible with one and the other? What is the appropriate relationship between the two? For Ding, the Christian faith is not a political ideology like Chinese Marxism. He attempted to disconnect Christianity from capitalism and Western politics, releasing (or at least minimizing) Christianity from the prevalent East-West political conflict. He drew

⁴⁵⁶ Wickeri, P. (2007) *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

⁴⁵⁷ Ting, K. (2000) “On Religion as Opiate: A Talk with Friends Outside the Church”, in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, p.223.

attention to the functionality of socialism and capitalism with the question: “Which will better serve humankind?”. His answer to the question was socialism because the goal of socialism is “universalization of love;” which is “love on a large scale, organized love, love which has taken shape as a social system.”⁴⁵⁸ This articulation became more acceptable to the party-state because a “large-scale” love, the contribution of the CCP, is closer to justice than the greedy capitalism of the West that emphasizes individualism and market competition.

Ding’s argument aligned with CCP’s legitimizing claim that it builds its credibility by resolving many social problems, including massive hunger and exploitation by the capitalist, in China. According to Ding, it is in the foundation of the shared values of justice, love and community that the Christian faith is compatible with Chinese socialism. Ding expressed his hope for socialism in the following manner:

“We attach our hope to socialism, not so much because we know exactly in detail what the socialist way is, but because we are fed up by all the other choices open to us. What is common in these other choices is the large scale of private ownership of the means of production and the unfair distribution of wealth, requiring the masses of the people to bear the cost by enduring endless suffering.”⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ Ting, K. (2000) “Inspirations from Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Teilhard de Chardin”, in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, p.219.

⁴⁵⁹ See Ting, K. (2000) “One Chinese Christian’s View of God”, in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, p.431.

The tension between the Christian faith and Chinese politics could not be denied. On the one hand, Ding declined to identify theological matters with politics. On the other hand, he viewed it as idealistic to isolate theological issues from politics. As Wen puts it, Ding's position was to mediate an organic interaction between theological matters and politics to "engage Christianity and the socialist context in a mutually critical correlation."⁴⁶⁰ By interposing atheists and Christians, Ding structured a platform on shared common truths based on the truth of love and justice. He also attempted to direct Christians in the PRC not to reduce the Christian faith into an ideology. He was hopeful that, given the validity of the freedom of religion stated in the Constitution of the PRC, the room for dialogue between the party-state and the churches in China would be maintained—particularly on the civil aspects of religion. Risking martyrdom was unnecessary for Chinese Christians, Ding articulated.⁴⁶¹

Not every atheist is the same, Ding argued. There are immoral atheists, honest atheists (who are skeptical and nihilistic in character) and humanitarian

⁴⁶⁰ Wen, G. (2015) "Theological Education and Contemporary Mission in China—With Special Reference to Bishop K.H. Ting's Dialogical Theology of Mission", in S. Bevans et al (eds.), *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, Eugene, OR: WIPF & STOCK, p.329-330.

⁴⁶¹ Ting, K. (2000) "An Update on the Church in China", in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, pp.455-56.

atheists (who are charitable and work against oppression and depravity), according to Ding's classification of atheists.⁴⁶² Working with humanitarian atheists offers possibilities for Chinese Christians to purge depravity. At the same time, it provides a synergetic effect to serve the common good in the PRC; and eventually for the whole of humanity.⁴⁶³ In Ding's argument, the Marxist advocate of "religion is opiate" is merely a metaphor. Such an ideological articulation is inadequate to clarify the complexity of global religious phenomena. Ding even argued that erroneous political acts can mislead people with a narcotic effect. If religion is appropriately guided to go through a "correct" socio-political course, it can also contribute positively to social reconstruction and state-building, Ding maintained.⁴⁶⁴ What is needed is to provide a proper platform, legally and organizationally, for the church to re-enter the public domain to serve society.⁴⁶⁵

As formulated by Ding, the foundational view of Christian theology and socialism in the TSPM/CCC domain provided a common ground for local Protestant churches and AHF to work collaboratively with the party-state. Ding advocated

⁴⁶² Ting, K. (2000) "A Chinese Christian's Appreciation of the Atheist", in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, pp.35-6.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, p.37.

⁴⁶⁴ Ting, K. (2000) "On Religion as Opiate: A Talk with Friends Outside the Church", in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, pp.223-33.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

diakonia (gospel in action with a focus on service among others), a Christian theological concept that directs Christians to the call to love, to minister, and to serve the poor and the oppressed—representing the identity and mission of the Church. It has become one of the core ministries of the TSPM churches for the primary reason that Christians are mandated to love God and their neighbors. Under Ding's direction, the TSPM churches' mission was set to become the “carrier of the Incarnation” for the world.⁴⁶⁶ To bear witness to God’s love, Christians are directed to not merely evangelize in words but also to bring Christ to the people through solid charitable ministries. Accordingly, the TSPM churches could gain socio-political recognition and legitimacy through such actions, locate a renewed structural niche, and become a symbol of God's Kingdom. For Ding, contextualizing the faith in a specific socio-political setting was one of the most critical aspects of the Christian mission. His framework of contextual Chinese theology was positioned on the knowledge of the all-embracing Christ, who encompasses his providence to the whole universe with love.⁴⁶⁷

With a foundation based on the love of Jesus Christ for all the people, Ding

⁴⁶⁶ Ting, K. (2000) “Life Should Have a Mission”, in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, p.185.

⁴⁶⁷ Ting, K. (2000) “The Cosmic Christ”, in J. Wickeri (ed.), *Love Never Ends*, Nanjing, PRC: Yilin Press, p.411.

articulated that Christians are to take serious actions to engage with a prevalent socio-political setting; and, through such an engagement, serve and support those in marginalized situations. Such a theological orientation toward *diakonia*, an essential component of holistic mission, eventually shaped the position of many of the TSPM/CCC churches. In other words, Ding's contextualized dialogical theology was not detached from reality. On the contrary, it became a critical form of knowledge that impacted the TSPM/CCC and associated churches with which AHF came to form collaboration.

In discovering the tendency that nurtured a collaborative approach to the venture, AHF searched for the possibility of bringing constructive theo-political interpretation into the interactive endeavor of Christians and Chinese Marxists and about some of the essential ideas and assumptions in both traditions. It required a theological direction in the mission qualified for dialogical interaction with Chinese Marxism and, in general, secular thoughts. According to Moltmann, Christian theology is basically "a theology of dialogue" manifested in dialogue and interaction with others, including their religions and ideologies.⁴⁶⁸ What was at stake for AHF was a mode of collective effort that could generate an influential

⁴⁶⁸ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.12.

new synthesis of essential elements in Christian tradition and prevalent contemporary worldly ideas. It included the crucial role of biblical eschatology, the transitory-dynamic worldview of contemporary secularity, and the obligation or promise of fundamental humanism to the struggle for socio-political deliverance from injustice and poverty through charitable efforts. A theology of dialogue as a component was needed for its survival through relational nurturing. Hence, AHF director Y prayed to God: “As we participate in Your ministry, please guide us to dialogue in Your Word.....”⁴⁶⁹ A theology of dialogue sustained by relationships is simultaneously a living theology. “A theology without relationship is a dead theology,” Moltmann affirms.⁴⁷⁰

Christian Charity in Action: Serving the poor

A common missiological question for AHF and the collaborative churches was to seek for the possible ways related to and acting in the PRC within the prevailing political context.

Upon the establishment of the PRC in 1949, two prominent Chinese Protestants, Zhao Zichen and Wu Yaozong, stressed, with grounding on a theology

⁴⁶⁹ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

⁴⁷⁰ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.13.

of social reconstruction, the importance of social service (*shehui fuwu*) in spreading the gospel amid the work on the enhancement of social conditions.⁴⁷¹ However, the political situation in the 1950s did not allow the continuation of charitable and philanthropy entities because, under the leadership of Mao Zedong in a new China of socialism, they were considered unnecessary. Instead, the state was assumed to take up the function of helping the poor. Mao's propaganda of poverty alleviation advocated that poverty would soon disappear. However, the CCP has not delivered the promise, and poverty has persisted up to these days.⁴⁷²

Decades of modernization and reform after Mao, amid economic growth for a more significant part of the country, led China into a situation where income disparity, inequality and injustice became critical matters for the party-state.⁴⁷³ Gradually, the CCP began to realize its incapacity to deliver sufficient resources for the people's livelihood (*minsheng*), a core pillar for a stable rule, particularly in poor rural areas. Such a problem forced the CCP to reconsider the function of social

⁴⁷¹ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.67.

⁴⁷² Premiere Li Kequiang of the PRC announced in May 2020 that there were over 600 million poor people in China who earned less than 1,000 Yuan (less than US\$140) per month. Source: *South China Morning Post*, 29th May 2020.

⁴⁷³ Liu, G. (2008) "Economic Development, Political Stability, and Social Harmony", in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.144-147.

organizations, including social entities of religious background. In its dialectical exercises, tolerating the presence of such entities posed a prospective risk to the regime's stability since historical lessons have taught the CCP that religious circles, if inappropriately controlled, may become platforms of socio-political disturbance, unrest and instability. Historically, religion has always been a potentially destabilizing element in China.⁴⁷⁴ Despite this danger, the positive function of religion gradually became formally recognized under the new ideological undertakings of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, with particular reference to charitable services.

Regarding the function of Christianity, Wielander's research in the early 21st century revealed that "Christianity, perhaps more than any other religion in China.....is associated in the public mind with charity and the qualities of sincerity and compassion, honesty and efficiency."⁴⁷⁵ As a result, a contemporary, new, and open atmosphere of an enhanced state-Christianity relationship became possible. It was not by accident but reflected the shift in its ideological framing of the party-state's global position. CCP's macro-objective in that period was to secure a more prominent global leadership position. In the words of Zhuo, it was "closely

⁴⁷⁴ Westad, O. (2012) *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750*, New York, NY: Basic Books.

⁴⁷⁵ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.68.

connected with Chinese involvement in the process of globalization.”⁴⁷⁶

AHF entered the mission field in the fullest of time as the era of “mutual adaptation” and “harmonism” gradually became more favorable and conducive to its charitable ministries. It was a time for the emergence of adaptation politics in the PRC in which a renewed state-church relation became prevalent. The regime initiated an enlarged space for collaboration with prospective entities to channel charity to the needy. The first national conference on Harmonious Society and Philanthropy was held in 2004 in Pujiang, Fujian.⁴⁷⁷ Participants included government officials, researchers from state institutions and representatives of a range of organizations, including those with a Christian background, who gathered to discuss the challenges and possible solutions in providing charity to the poor. It was a period in which governance of the party-state was constructed as forward-looking, advocating co-existence and replacing “confrontation with dialogue and chaos with harmony;” and was to be supported by love, affinity, sharing and good-neighborliness.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Zhuo, X. (2015) “Chinese Religions and a Harmonious World”, in P. Huang (ed.), *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2015*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, p.3.

⁴⁷⁷ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.68.

⁴⁷⁸ Zhuo, X. (2015) “Chinese Religions and a Harmonious World”, in P. Huang (ed.), *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2015*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, pp. 4-5.

This articulation was entailed in Marxist hope, a hope for a globe of fraternity, an earth without war and hunger, in which everyone's talent develops to the fullest.⁴⁷⁹ In the midst of the loving response of AHF's collaborative engagement to the needy, which included the poor, the weak, the orphaned, and the widowed, the act of Christian charity started to be recognized and was connected to the ideal of Hu's harmonism; i.e., it became relevant to the agenda of the party-state. In other words, Christian charitable undertaking was being taken as part of the CCP's experimental adaptive governance in the complex dynamics of China.

Christians are called to practice loving acts on fellow Christians and non-Christians, and in fellowship with them, particularly with the poor and the oppressed, so as to generate a historic force adequate to further effective actions on earth. It is not about loving actions merely on the individual but at the community level. As Girardi puts it, the effective praxis of Christian love "is directed towards collaboration."⁴⁸⁰ Even though Christian activities were given larger space for operation, it continued to be illegal for religious charitable entities to carry out

⁴⁷⁹ See Klugmann, J. (1970) "The Marxist Hope", in *The Christian Hope*, SPCK Theological Collections 13.

⁴⁸⁰ Girardi, G. (1968) *Marxism and Christianity*, trans. K. Traynor, New York, NY: Macmillan Company, p.117.

fundraising activities outside the churches. Furthermore, there existed a very stringent requirement for local churches to receive foreign funding. All these led to an extremely narrow range of possible activities, particularly if they were undertaken in the sole efforts of AHF. Within the limited scope of possible religious events, establishing an effective *friendly relationship* is critical for AHF. As Moltmann maintains, relationality is essential to comprehending reality.⁴⁸¹ And Christian realism requires theological discernment of the relationship between the Church and the world. Therefore, it became imperative for AHF to acknowledge that engagement in charitable services, and any long-term ministries, inevitably would have to involve a certain extent of collaboration in a relational matrix with the Communist government, either directly or indirectly. It might be possible for AHF to remain outside the system of Communist governance and to reject embracing the state apparatuses. However, it would have to be content to operate underground, permanently an outsider, and not be relevant. It is critical to note that the CCP is not of solid rigidity. The party-state continuously attempts to make creative constructs to legitimize its existence.⁴⁸² If AHF's initiatives were irrelevant

⁴⁸¹ Moltmann J. (1985) *God in Creation: a new theology of creation and the Spirit of God*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, p.3.

⁴⁸² Holbig, H. and Gilley, B. (2010) "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China", *Politics and Policy*, 38, (3): 398.

and did not have an affinity to the party-state, it would handicap its ability to capitalize on the creative effort of the CCP and miss the possibility of extending the positive impact of Christianity in China on a bigger scale.

The gospel message must be comprehensible but not compromised.⁴⁸³ A task of AHF is always to make the Good News understandable to the local public, the local churches and the local officials through services to the poor and the needy. In an era of economic reform in China, it was a world where the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” was growing wide. For instance, in the realm of education, many children in rural areas could not enjoy the compulsory education promised by the central government. As a result, there were various degrees of educational inequality for students in rural areas. As Tsang has reported, there was inadequate national funding for the nine-year compulsory education; the situation was even worse for those students in remote areas.⁴⁸⁴ Thus, it became the appropriate timing for AHF to focus on bringing God’s blessings to those who were not able to receive compulsory education and those

⁴⁸³ Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.29.

⁴⁸⁴ See Tsang, M. (1994) *The financing of education in Shaanxi and Guizhou, Report prepared for the World Bank*, Washington, DC. And Tsang, M. (1994) “Costs of education in China: Issues of resource mobilisation, equality and efficiency”, *Education Economics*, Vol.2, No.3, pp.287-312.

experiencing injustice, exploitation or despair. In the *2007 Year End Ministry*

Report, AHF Ministry Director reported the following:

“AHF has been emphasizing the need in education throughout all these years. We have supported over 5,000 students. We believe that it is only through proper education and the love of Christ that these children can grow healthily to be a blessing to the country. We presently support a total of 422 students, 292 of whom are primary students, 53 middle high students, 57 senior high students, 13 university students, and 7 seminary students..... we also sponsored 35 Bible students who studied in our Bible Training Centre.”

A range of supports in education became key collaborative initiatives.

Toward being a significant other

Gittins advises God's servants to strategically position as *significant others*, *legitimizers*, or *peers*, depending on the context of ministerial endeavor.⁴⁸⁵

According to him, a significant other can influence others greatly, mainly through value and morality. A legitimator has the legitimate authority or specific status to call others to accountability, and a peer belongs to the same cohort. Standing in front of AHF were choices; it had to define the role it wanted, determined which one it could or could not be, and assessed which one the local collaborators perceived AHF to be. Obviously, as an outsider, AHF was not immediately

⁴⁸⁵ Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp.69-76.

significant. It would be wrong if it took initiatives that were only appropriate to the insiders (those within the party-state system) that functioned within the hierarchical and stratified regime (the religious sphere is dominated by the regime; it is not outside the party-state matrix). As an incoming Protestant organization, the last thing AHF should do was to antagonize or alienate its hosts. It was also not appropriate for AHF to act as peers or expected to be treated as such. AHF was not a peer of the local churches within the local ecclesiastical structure, nor could it hope to become relevant or part of the local agenda if it insisted on becoming peers (the opposite effect was more likely to occur).

Regarding the possibility of becoming a legitimator, AHF was undoubtedly outside the scope. Although a collaboration was possible in the Hu Jintao era, acting as a legitimate authority in the Chinese Communist regime was illegal, destructive, and impossible because the law and regulations allowed no foreign Christian entities to be within the regime's system. AHF as an outsider, would never have legitimate authority within the system. Therefore, achieving the role of a *significant other* became the only possible and optimum tactic for AHF in the domain in which it functioned. Morality in terms of charitable acts and theological truth is a substantial element that shapes the role of a significant other in the Protestant domain. In the TSPM/CCC church matrix, which has developed a socio-

political momentum for morality and benevolence, holding on to morality and theological truth would be recognized as relevant, worth listening to, virtuous and perhaps even worth imitating. Hence, being a significant other became the best option for AHF within the collaborative network.

One of the critical elements for AHF to gradually become a significant other was comprehending Christianity's overall situation in the arena. A notion of Christian realism drove the missional agent to acknowledge the socio-political *tendency or specific leaning* in the PRC. The more AHF examined the prevalent trend and socio-political context, the more it grasped the critical elements of handling contradiction and compatibility between Christianity and the system of Communist China. The crucial role of Christian realism under which AHF operated was not merely about realistic limits but about expanding theo-political imagination. In addition to the pessimistic party-state censorship, viable, honest, and genuine elements existed that answered God's grace toward human beings on earth. As a result, the Christian faith pushed the missionaries to discover what was in the individual, their neighbors, and the mission field. AHF foresaw harmony on the one hand and dissonance on the other. Without maintaining such sensitivity, the biblical Good News would not be adequately conveyed.

In addition to engaging with local agendas through a compelling contextual

analysis, AHF's missional endeavor must be theologically appropriate. As Gittins reveals, classically, many missionaries have held on to a theological understanding of the need to *clean sweep* as the only way to free the worldly ground for planting the Good News.⁴⁸⁶ Many proclaim a "truth" that missional endeavor is about carrying the light of Jesus Christ into a dark, demonized world to portray the missional servant as truly bringing God to the Godless pagan. Such an articulated "truth" of demonization entails a *conquering and destructive mentality* which is counter-productive or detrimental to AHF's missional endeavors.

Converging agendas required forming a network of relevance among the collaborators. It would be destructive for AHF to claim self-legitimation because its role as an outsider remained peripheral. Gittins correctly maintains that outsiders "must be legitimated, but they cannot legitimate themselves."⁴⁸⁷ To become accepted and legitimated was to become part of the local host's agenda and eventually became an integral part of the collaborative stakeholder matrix. Historically, there were many missionaries who, despite diligent work, found themselves unsuccessful because they insisted on their own agenda without

⁴⁸⁶ Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.73.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, p.74.

considering that of the others. The convergence of agendas is always challenging. Such an act is dynamically multifarious because the challenges must be dealt with in its totality; fragmentary work is unlikely to succeed.⁴⁸⁸ It is socio-politically complex because the collaborating actors have diverse perspectives and interests. It is also complex because the yet-to-come is unknown. Applying “best practices” of the past is no guarantee of success for the present and the future. The best possibility of success is through generating new praxis.

Concluding Remarks:

It is dangerous for Christians to assume that evangelization, the proclamation of the Good News, is legitimate or even obligatory to justify their actions on their unique terms. Incorporating “dangerous knowledge” in the gospel would be destructive and fail to respond appropriately to contingent socio-political dynamics.⁴⁸⁹ Although AHF missionaries engaged with others in the field with zeal, they were required to acknowledge the immense difference between them and the others. The local hosts had the right not to receive the Christian messages

⁴⁸⁸ Kahane, A. (2010) *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, p.5.

⁴⁸⁹ Gittins, A. (2003) *Ministry At the Margins: strategy and spirituality for mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p.78..

through foreign agendas but accustomed approaches making sense and meaningful to them. For AHF, awareness of the limitation of its approach was critical.

AHF was not tasked to fight against Communism in China but to serve the local people in co-existence with Communism amid tension within existing systems and structures. Serving the local Christian communities and partnering with them to nurture missional churches took precedence. It was simply because Jesus Christ came to allow abundant life to people, stressing the priority of the life of people over things and laws. Through an understanding of the prevailing socio-political and cultural conditions, AHF was able to facilitate life-enriching transformation in collaboration with the local hosts. Without such transformation and collaborative engagement, the Gospel may become an oppressive load (see Luke 11:46) that attempted to impose rather than a liberating ministry of life and love. Although the spectrum of possibilities for the Christian mission was enlarged in the Hu Jintao era, AHF was mindful that its existence and the persistence of Christianity in the regime continued to be under tension in the CCP's system of dominating control. Divergences and convergences were "co-present everywhere"⁴⁹⁰ in the mission

⁴⁹⁰ Girardi, G, (1968) *Marxism and Christianity*, trans. K. Traynor, New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, p. 130.

field. The specific complexity of interaction and dialogue with the Chinese Marxists was no exception. With this, we will move to explore the socio-political specifics of the Hu Jintao era in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

HARMONISM: AN ENLARGED SPECTRUM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR THE RELIGIOUS REALM

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the discourse of harmonism under Hu Jintao's political realism and how the regime enabled an enlarged spectrum of real possibilities through engaging with problematics, new challenges and a variety of governmentalities.

Specific ideological structures and governmentalities characterize distinct historical eras. The Mao Zedong era was characterized by ideological exclusivism that strategized “hard” *technologies* of containment and denunciation of religion. Yet, Hu Jintao re-calibrated the CCP ideological system to cope with the new socio-political situation and constructed a humanist harmonism under a range of dialectical readjustments—including Confucianization of Marxism, that entailed a more inclusionary version of governmentality that strategized “soft” *technologies* of collaboration. Although the Chinese Communist party-state is an atheist authoritarian regime that maintains a hostile attitude toward religion, its controlling strategy toward religious circles has been adaptive, particularly after

Deng Xiaoping took power in the late 1970s. It aims to direct religious communities to adapt to the Chinese Communist regime. Historically it is possible to classify the measures of the CCP on religion as denunciation, containment or collaboration. In addition to being ideologically framed as an “opiate,” religion is depicted as a tactic and instrument that foreign class-enemies adopt to harm the Chinese people and overthrow the regime.⁴⁹¹

While Jiang Zemin alerted the party-state of the intention of foreign class-enemies to occidentalize or divide China⁴⁹², his political realism allowed pragmatic adjustments toward the governmental rationality of “mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society”⁴⁹³ with practices ranging from hard to soft tactics, depending on whether the regime regarded the religious *others* as enemies or valuable potential collaborators.

⁴⁹¹ Chen, Y. (1996) “Yao gaodu zhongshi liyong zongjiao jinxing shentoude wenti (Great attentions should be paid to the religion-based political and ideological infiltrations)”, in *Shehuizhuyi Jingshen Wenmin Jianshe Wenxian Xuanbian (Selected Documents on Socialist Spiritual Civilisation Construction)*, The Party Literature Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (ed.), Beijing, PRC: Central Party Literature Press.

⁴⁹² Jiang, Z. (1996) “Gaodu zhongshi minzu gongzuo he zongjiao gongzuo (Attach great importance to ethnic and religious affairs)”, in *Shisi Da Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian (Selected Documents since the Fourteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party)*, The Party Literature Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (ed.), Beijing, PRC: The People’s Press.

⁴⁹³ Jiang, Z. (2006) *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan (The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin)*, Beijing: PRC: The People’s Press. And Wang, D. (2013) *Zhongguo Gongchandang De Zongjiaoguan (Views on Religion of the Chinese Communist Party)*, Beijing, PRC: China Minzu University Press.

This chapter argues that Hu Jintao's party-state engaged in activities of problematization, trying to resolve the problems through the construction of a harmonious society and to sustain the CCP regime in the name of "betterment for the people." The "truth" of harmonism was not constructed randomly but was defined by a particular way of thinking of the Chinese Communists, namely a dialectical endeavor of Marxist and Confucian political conceptions. Practiced explicitly in the religious sphere was a renewed governmental technology of "religious work"—as governmental activities to implement the religious policies that was based on CCP's fundamental ideology and in response to its current operative ideology. In the Hu Jintao era, a new normalizing power emerged and became effective through the innovative work of the regime's scholastic state apparatuses. From the eschatological perspective of hope, there was, through Metz' lens, an "arising reality"⁴⁹⁴ in the mission field for AHF to innovate toward an expectant future via its historically free endeavor.

⁴⁹⁴ Metz, J. (1969) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.45.

Hope-laden Responsibility and Historical Newness

Missional endeavor carries historical responsibility in “a world rising toward the future of God” and in which God’s servant “is held responsible.”⁴⁹⁵

Hence, the founder of AHF maintains that AHF missionaries “are duty-bound to bless [the targeted groups].....and this is the purpose of establishing [AHF].”⁴⁹⁶

One of the responsibilities of AHF’s initiatives is undoubtedly to be responsive to the Word of God, His revelation and His work. However, the endeavor is not merely human reactive processes. There is a dimension where missional activity is creative without being mandatory and doctrinal. In the realm of God’s love, human missional activities are co-creative so that both individualities of humans and the uniqueness of the God of history are upheld. From the perspective of the promise of God, which is a motivational force of the future, missional endeavor reflects the active hope of humanity. God’s promise to provide a new history serves its strategic and spiritual importance in facing the challenges in missional engagement. The promise of newness in history and its future entails refusing to canonize the status quo, that is, not to stand inactively before the apparent

⁴⁹⁵ Metz, J., as quoted in Hermann, I. (1966) “Total Humanism” (a report on the Salzburg Colloquium of Marxist and Christian thinkers), in J. Metz (ed.), *Is God Dead?: Fundamental Theology*, New York, NY: Paulist Press, p166.

⁴⁹⁶ AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!” in *AHF Update 2011*.

incompatibility between Communism and Christianity, amid the possibility of convergence on some aspects of the two. Functioning as a command, the promise of the Divine points AHF's venture into the future with a kind of creativity in anticipation.

With a spirit of love, AHF was prepared to accept the dignity and liberty of every member of humanity in the engagement, including atheist Communists. In the meantime, collaboration was set up as a sphere within which human potential in working for the Good was developed conductively within an atheist regime. As such, love calls for and involves a conviction in humanity's future and a hope linked to that future. For AHF, it is embraced in its eschatological motto "to preach good news to the poor,.....to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18 NIV). This hope demands the missional agent to a love that not only acts to embody itself in a collaboration, which is collective of the energies of atheists and theists, but also characterizes, differentiates and, gradually, creates with greater intensity the identity and value of Christianity in a time-specific manner. As Genovesi maintains, "what is most indicative and expressive of the liberating and creative energy of hope is the impelling motivation it lends to

Christian love.”⁴⁹⁷ Hence, AHF director Y prayed for a God-led ministry “founded in endless love and amazing grace.”⁴⁹⁸

Too often, missionaries ask if their works on earth are wasted, given the notion of temporality. This is particularly true for those who experienced expulsion from the Chinese Communist regime in the early 1950s. To this question, Genovesi provides an eschatological answer: “the results of our human efforts in history will not be lost, annihilated or cast aside by God when his kingdom is fully established.”⁴⁹⁹ Genovesi is confident that human endeavors will, under the loving and renewing touch of God, continue to be eternal symbols of faith— a faith to participate in God’s mission and “to enter into co-operative creation with him in building of a new future.”⁵⁰⁰ Inspiration allows missionaries to take up their historical responsibility for newness in mission. The wise choice is activities of hopefulness, not hopeless inactivity. Missionaries are to appreciate the complementary appeal of the human and divine endeavors in contemporaneity. In this respect, Emmanuel Mesthene writes:

⁴⁹⁷ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.121.

⁴⁹⁸ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

⁴⁹⁹ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.122.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

“Man’s work is to be wise and good. It is God’s work to reveal himself to man as wisdom and goodness. It is man’s work to discern value and to realize possibility. It is God’s to be ultimate value and eternal possibility, and to imbue man with the grace to know and to worship him. It is man’s work to know God, and God’s to be knowable by man. In other words, God and man are partners in the work of the world, which means at least that man must do his part.”⁵⁰¹

Indeed, God’s people must do their part! In fulfilling missional responsibilities through realizing possibilities, AHF’s endeavor in hope was operated in a way characterized by a committed involvement in the tasks on earth not merely for the good of the Chinese Christian communities but also of all the people of China with a focus on minorities in rural areas. Christian charity can be effective only if Christians hope for others as they hope for themselves.⁵⁰² The continuous urge of hope is to embody charity, both the act and the richness of hope. In discerning problems and challenges of the socio-political of the party-state as a point of entry to locate new possibilities, AHF was enabled to move its ministry forward with an aim to mobilize the act of love effectively.

⁵⁰¹ Mesthene, E. (1967) “Religious Values in the Age of Technology”, in J. Metz (ed), *The Evolving World and Theology*, Concilium Series, Vol. 26, New York, NY: Paulist Press, p.122.

⁵⁰² Alfaro, J. (1970) “Christian Hope and the Hopes of Mankind”, in C. Duquoc (ed.), *Dimensions of Spirituality*, Concilium Series, Vol. 59, New York, NY: Herder & Herder, pp.68-69.

Problematics, New Challenges and Governmentalities

Amid resolving mingling problems, the CCP attempts to reach the ultimate goal of sustaining the regime in the name of betterment for China and its people. Various threats and corresponding challenges are defined by the act of problematization, which also delineates the adverse effects anticipated from the shortcomings of the party-state. This act of problematization also provides a basis for framing governmental practices and programs amid a network of actors (both governmental and non-governmental) “to configure specific locates and relations in ways thought desirable.”⁵⁰³ These practices and programs of government are connected to a matrix of knowledge that hypothesizes and expounds governmental problematics.

After rapid economic growth since the end of the 1970s, the party-state came to a turning point with severe governmental challenges by the end of the 20th century. Amid biased economism came the problem of social and political unrest resulting from emerging corruption and social injustice.⁵⁰⁴ A swelling

⁵⁰³ Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) “Political power beyond the State: Problematics of government”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2), p.181.

⁵⁰⁴ Susan Shirk provides a concise description of mass protest, ethnic unrest and rural unrest. See Shirk, S. (2007) “Domestic Threats”, in *China: Fragile Superpower*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp.35-61.

expectation from the population, coupled with snowballing social and geographic disparity, spawned a thrust for substantial socio-political disturbance and volatility.⁵⁰⁵ The battle against corruption became a critical matter for the CCP.⁵⁰⁶ By the end of the 20th century leading into the early 21st century, corruption escalated to a high level. It continued to intensify due to the rewards in the process up-surged, and more high-ranking officials were involved. One of the critical reasons for the proliferation of the problem was discrepancies between the central government in Beijing and the locals. There was no effective measure to restrain and counter corruption at the local level, which often was empowered, paradoxically, by elites from the central.⁵⁰⁷ When material abundance was only for a few numbers of nobility, the party-state was decaying and fell short of the ideal of Communism. Consequently, mutual trust, courtesy, self-respect, sympathy, and graciousness were silently vanishing in the country.⁵⁰⁸ Extreme tension threatens political stability. Therefore, a top priority of the CCP leadership team was to search

⁵⁰⁵ Wu, G. and Landdowne, H. (2009) (eds.) *Socialist China, Capital China: Social tension and political adaptation under economic globalization*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

⁵⁰⁶ Bergsten, C. et al (2008) (eds.) "Corruption in China: Crisis or Constant?" in *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities*, Peterson Institute For International Economics, Centre For Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, pp.91-104.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Han, A.G. (2008) "Building a Harmonious Society and Achieving Individual Harmony", in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, p.16.

for an innovative platform for stability, advancement and conciliation.⁵⁰⁹

The concept of governmentality supports the notion that political rationality leads to discursive problematization of the government and the categorization of its practices. An emphasis on morality steers the government to idealism and ultimate values. The creation of knowledge in the name of truth rationalizes governmental activities and practices. The set-up of a language and framework that is “thinkable” allows governability. Hu Jintao’s harmonism was created and became prevalent as governmental rationality with these features. Creation of the governmentality of harmonism also opened up more space for the CCP to maneuver while becoming a “major form of knowledge”⁵¹⁰ governing the regime. Innovative conceptions, policies and practices are crucial for strengthening the political legitimacy and longevity of the party-state. With its prominent United Front and associated ideological state apparatuses, the Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao performed one of its essential functions in framing principal discourse(s) and manipulating ideological relations to rejuvenate humanism. It contrasted with

⁵⁰⁹ The leadership team was under Hu Jintao (State President, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and Party General Secretary) and Wen Jiabao (State Premier). Within the Chinese Communist Party, the party general secretary is officially the highest rank official.

⁵¹⁰ Foucault, M. (2007) *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, New York, NY: Palgrave, p.108.

the orthodox articulation of class struggle that prevailed in the Mao Zedong era as one of the critical elements in its ideological framework.

Given its conventional practices, the inner circle of the Politburo of the CCP is accountable for delineating what is regarded as “true” by employing skills and processes that confer value on the construction of “truths” — “truths” defined and manipulated by the CCP. A renewed matrix of politically constructed propaganda functions to strengthen the impact on the governmental system and the public through carefully crafted and attentively reiterated discourses via various official speeches and regime-managed media. By incorporating traditional Chinese political and philosophical concepts with fundamental Marxist tenets, a new governmentality framework was formulated under the names of “Building Socialist Harmonious Society” and “Scientific Outlook on Development.”⁵¹¹ This new matrix of “truths” for governing emphasized i) strengthening equity, ii) advocating and structuring a harmonious social order via equalizing social and economic progress and iii) fostering sustainability via a careful balance of nature and humanity. A focal point was a balanced approach between economic growth, social justice, state security and rule by law. Along with the development was an increased degree of

⁵¹¹ Guo, S. and Guo, B. (2008) (eds.) *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

openness and inclusivism to counteract the exclusivism and disparity developed in the Mao era.

The new set of governmental rationalities that included the discourse of “putting people first” (*yiminweiben*) became possible by articulating a new public consensus through appropriating ancient Chinese political wisdom to maintain a one-party state. Initially, the CCP proposed in September 2001 a renewed Confucian concept termed *yiminweiben* (literally means “putting people first”) in a document advocating strengthening people’s character build-up regarding traditional Chinese culture and ethics. The paper was named: “Implementation Outline for Building Public Ethics,” dated October 24, 2001, and officially endorsed in 2003. Meanwhile, Hu Jintao knew too well that the ability to protect socialist discourses within Marxist tenets was critical to his legitimacy. Even though traditional Confucian concepts were once repudiated by Mao, Hu knew that they would enhance affinity with the public and make the whole ideological matrix appear “Chinese.”

CCP’s practice is an art of “calculation of tactics,”⁵¹² which entails mobilization of power toward a targeted population in a specific and complex

⁵¹² Walters, W. and Haahr, J. (2005) “Governmentality and political studies”, *European Political Science*, 4:291.

form. This mobilization of power occurs in a system of networks within which actors perform their functions “through a profusion of shifting alliances” in projects among various entities.⁵¹³ And it is this “profusion of shifting alliances” that allows new space, the *Enlarged*, for interplays between the party-state and agents of religion. Hence, it is not surprising that the party-state continues to operate in a multitude of practices that are often contradictory and not fully coordinated or may not be complementary to each other.

Hu Jintao’s harmonism, as a discourse and political rationality, aimed to address the government's problematics and provided justification for specific power relations that were based on knowledge and moral orientation. It was structured in a language with a Confucian backbone, making it “thinkable” to the Chinese people—many of whom are culturally embedded in Confucianism. As political rationality and discourse, harmonism was not a mere rhetorical statement; it was epistemically constructed to reveal articulable statements of the CCP authority that were reasonable and made sense of the character and dynamics of the problem of the era. They were codified in terminologies that encompassed morality and advocated hopeful ideals that oriented governmental actions and

⁵¹³ Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) “Political power beyond the State: Problematics of government”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2), p.174.

practices to make intervention possible and effective.

In a Foucauldian sense, CCP's power is considered infused in socio-political relations between different members of the party-state, be them the individuals or institutions, and in technologies that normalize and control the population by attempting to mold and affirm subjectivities in a manner that leads to the alignment of socio-political order and for the survival of the CCP. These technologies are sophisticated frameworks of techniques, documents, practices, evaluations, calculations and programs through which the party-state attempts to achieve and maximize its effect on governmental ambitions. The CCP materializes political rationalities by enabling a multi-dimensional assembly of diverse forces within a network of actors and practices to function, making political choices comprehensible and practices regulated. This specific form of power then becomes dominating with respect to the character of the state and the relationship with those under its control—the governed. In the operational dimension, harmonism functions as “a way of governing.”⁵¹⁴ It arose eventually to be the most strategical of all rationalities of the CCP under Hu Jintao's leadership. However, it was only one among many possible rationalities, the interaction of which depicted

⁵¹⁴ Foucault, M. (2004) *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p.2.

how Communist China was governed during that period.

Dialectic and the Dialectics of Chinese Marxist Glocalism

The dialectics of glocalism (globalism-localism) come with a historical specificity; it is always ongoing.⁵¹⁵ From a Foucauldian perspective, it is being utilized as a part of the socialist discourse in the Chinese political arena. In addition, it forms part of the ideological positioning of religious policy and its strategy toward Christianity, both internally and globally.

Essential elements of dialectics would help missionaries to comprehend missional reality. To focus on the purpose of this thesis, however, there is no attempt to elaborate and discuss the different modes of dialectics of the CCP and the theologians in this thesis. In *Bicoastal China: A Dialectical Paradigmatic Analysis*, Yu summarizes dialectics contains the following essential elements⁵¹⁶:

- Everything is in constant change,
- The source of the change can ultimately be traced to the thing or the process itself,

⁵¹⁵ Allman, P. (2007) *On Marx: An Introduction to the Revolutionary Intellect of Karl Marx*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, p.60.

⁵¹⁶ Yu, P. (1999) *Bicoastal China: A Dialectical Paradigmatic Analysis*, Commack, N.Y., New Science Publishers, pp.11-12.

- This ultimate source is the struggle of opposites—the contradiction—
within each thing or process,
- At nodal points, this contradiction brings in qualitative changes so that
the thing or the process is transformed into another mode, and
- Practical-critical activities resolve the contradictions.

Chinese Communist leaders, particularly Mao Zedong, are renowned for their competence in dialectics and methodological advancement. Believing dialectics is the most powerful tool to formulate strategies and tactics for the progress of China, Mao Zedong once stated that he wanted the whole population of China to become dialecticians.⁵¹⁷ Mao's dialectics was a combination of Marxist and Chinese conceptions. It was constructed with forms, contents and structures that appealed to the Chinese. In addition to its capacity to determine success or failure, it also construed the meaning of success and failure.⁵¹⁸ Hence, it is unsurprising to learn that dialectic competence is vital for many Chinese leaders to survive acute political crises. In his study of Communist China, Mahoney concluded that the CCP "not only views the world in a dialectical manner—it

⁵¹⁷ Ollman, B. (1993) *Dialectical Investigations*, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, p.v.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, p.1.

likewise functions dialectically, through and through.”⁵¹⁹

Dialectical analysis provides missionaries with an effective way of understanding Communist China, a field of dialectical politics.⁵²⁰ Viewed through a theological lens, the works of J. Ellul on dialectical public theology inform missionaries of the functions of dialectics, including its role(s), in theological discourses.⁵²¹ While Rescher defines the core function of dialectic as rational, reasonable argumentation,⁵²² Ellul maintains dialectic is an intellectual approach to comprehending reality, which embraces both the positive and the negative.⁵²³ Amid demonstrating the working of epistemological processes in a framework of socio-politically conditioned interactions, it also illuminates the existence of mutual and controversial dimensions in rational inquiries and debates.⁵²⁴ A

⁵¹⁹ Mahoney, J. (2008) “On the Way to Harmony: Marxism, Confucianism, Hu Jintao’s Hexie Concept”, in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, p. 123.

⁵²⁰ China is a field of dialectical politics. See Yu, P. (1999) *Bicoastal China: A Dialectical Paradigmatic Analysis*, Commack, NY: New Science Publishers.

⁵²¹ See Ellul, J. (1989) *What I believe*, trans. G. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. And Ellul, J. (1981) “Epilogue: On Dialectic”, in C. Christians and J. van Hook (eds.), *Jacques Ellul: interpretive essays*, Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois Press.

⁵²² Rescher, N. (1977) *Dialectics: A Controversy-Oriented Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, p. xiii.

⁵²³ Ellul, J. (1989) *What I believe*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, p.31.

⁵²⁴ Rescher, N. (1977) *Dialectics: A Controversy-Oriented Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, p.xii and xiii.

dialectical approach does not oppose scientific investigations; instead, it considers scientific and dialectical methodologies jointly complementary to rationality in the intellectual effort.⁵²⁵

Ellul's dialectical approach is of particular value in this study relating to Chinese Communism and Christianity because he learned dialectic from the study of the two Karls (Karl Barth and Karl Marx).⁵²⁶ He writes, "Since my two intellectual origins are with Marx and Barth, dialectic is central to me."⁵²⁷ Dialectics, according to Ellul's understanding from Greek, is "to talk with" as in "dialogue," but at the same time, it "carries the sense of distance or contradiction."⁵²⁸ Dialogue "entails both presence (being with, so as to be able to talk together) and distance (being apart, so as to be able to contribute something different)."⁵²⁹ This "something different"—the contribution—points to enabling the formation of a new space in which new possibilities are nurtured.

From a dialectical standpoint, it can be extremely misleading if one puts all

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Neville, D. (2008) "Dialectic as Method in Public Theology: Recalling Jacques Ellul", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2, p.175.

⁵²⁷ Ellul, J. (1989) *What I believe*, Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans, p.31.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, p.30.

⁵²⁹ Neville, D. (2008) "Dialectic as Method in Public Theology: Recalling Jacques Ellul", *International Journal of Public Theology*. 2, p.175.

one's trust on immediate evidence because reality can be much more profound and broader than the immediate appearance; and from a Foucauldian perspective, digging deeper leads to enlarged possibilities. Dialectics enables one to expand one's notion to grasp the spectrum of essential elements of the process by which an issue, a phenomenon or a subject comes into being. Insights are expected in the interconnections within the broad context of reality. In this sense, it becomes possible to locate an answer to the questions of religious policy in Communist China and its interaction with Christianity within the historical domain of socio-political settings so as to allow missionaries a more in-depth appreciation of the forces and power relations that take part in the transformation (this will be elaborated in Chapter Four).

In a dialectical manner, localism accompanies globalism.⁵³⁰ As Marxism attempts to advance globally, a momentum of localization is present in individual countries, which contradicts the global movement. Marxist globalism aims to change the global order structurally and denotes a global propensity to eventually gain global victory through socio-political transformation headed by the

⁵³⁰ Dirlik, A. (2000) *Postmodernity's Histories: the past as legacy and project*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p.63.

proletariat.⁵³¹ It endeavors to initiate progress, unite the human race, eliminate discrimination, and establish a global harmonious classless society. In the case of Communist China, a localized form of Chinese Marxism has promulgated starting as early as the 1930s. Instead of copying Marxism completely from the USSR, voices within the Chinese Communist Party suggested a local version of Marxism built on Chineseness.⁵³² The local is a site of invention, construction and promise.⁵³³

Chinese Communism aims to identify the most appropriate structure, format and content of ideo-political discourses that can survive for the longer term through the art of balancing various political rationalities and calculated risks. “Chineseness” becomes one of the core discourses, eventually generating “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” as a core ideological component to legitimize the party-state. With different degrees of priority at various stages of the regime, globalization as a discourse for the Chinese leadership offers a spatial dimension for consideration. As Hu’s China was “opening wider to the outside

⁵³¹ Kharin, Y. (1981) *Fundamentals of Dialectics*, trans. K. Kostrov, Moscow, U.S.S.R: Progress Publishers, p.48.

⁵³² Dirlik, A. (1994) *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism*, Hanover, NH.: University Press of New England, p.26.

⁵³³ Dirlik, A. (1997) *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, p.85 and p.102.

world,”⁵³⁴ globalism started to define the distinction between the state's internal and external matters, the valuation of the capacity and competence of the government, what was to be regulated and managed, and how.

Re-construction of ideological truth(s) directed toward harmonism

Socio-political complications of injustice, corruption, income disparity, regional development differentials, insufficient social safety networks, etc., all compounded together to jeopardize socio-political stability and cast a shadow over the legitimation of economic reform in the post-Deng era. Facing these problems, Hu's CCP spent tremendous effort to increase and intensify harmonious factors and decrease disharmonious elements to boost socio-political stability. Such an emphasis on socio-political harmony and stability reflected a shift away from the era of Mao's brutal political campaign and class struggle and an attempt to transform from a “revolutionary” party to a “governing” party. In this sense, Hu's CCP was progressively interested in strengthening its governing capability and seeking new political legitimacy foundations. Theoretically, the CCP turned its attention to the traditional Confucian concept of a *datong* society (a great

⁵³⁴ See section III of Hu, Jintao's “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

harmonious society) instead of following the Western welfare state model.

In its search for solutions, CCP's problematization entailed a new wave of construction of ideological truth(s) which was vital for the survival and continuity of the regime. With comprehensive research via a political-scholastic avenue of the party-state (which will be further discussed later in this chapter), a pair of core discourses of "Building Socialist Harmonious Society" (*harmonism*) and "Scientific Outlook on Development" (*scientific-developmentalism*) was pronounced. For these ideological discourses to function effectively, their status was enhanced by official endorsement at the 17th National Congress of 2007 as the new guiding principles of the party-state. It attempted to elevate this pair of discourses to the level of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and Jiang Zemin's Theory of "the Three Represents,"—all have become theoretical foundations of the CCP. Harmonism, as a major-form-of-knowledge, became part of the grand strategies that accentuated, readjusted, reconditioned, recreated and proliferated prevailing relations of forces to sustain the CCP in its ruling position. In a Foucauldian sense, the CCP is a domination class which is neither an abstraction nor a natural entity. For the CCP to become a dominant class, for it to safeguard its domination, and for the domination to recreate itself requires the systemic effect of carefully designed

tactics to function within a matrix of grand strategies.⁵³⁵

One of the tactics was reflected in the political implication of the “scientific outlook on development” discourse. The name “science” entails a strong linkage with truth. For the general public, “science” is linked with discovering the framework, system and rules of long-lasting universal truth(s). Truth is not to be questioned but to be trusted. The effect of scientism is that people who want to challenge it would have to take a second thought and get better prepared for a convincing argument with evidence. The notion of truth also serves as creditable reasoning for the acts and practices of the CCP. It reflects reality and simultaneously carries a unique, historically specific Marxist notion. The Chinese Communists never take the term “science” lightly. They have paid particular political consideration to the interpretation and the role of the Chinese discourse of “science” since the inception of the PRC. Its importance and contribution to the PRC have been associated with the conception of progression and affluence—a belief crucial to China’s leadership role in global interplay. It was very strategic for Hu Jintao to emphasize the discourse of “science” because the scientific nature of Marx’s theory has been maintained and strengthened since its arrival on Chinese

⁵³⁵ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Sussex: U.K.: Harvester Press, p.203.

land. As Machan reveals, Marxists rest their confidence on science because it “will drive the working class toward its deserved salvation.”⁵³⁶

However, Marx did not reveal much about the details of the final stage of Communism. Where is the assurance? The emphasis on the scientific nature of Marxism offers a sense of certainty in realizing the ultimate phase of Communism.⁵³⁷ “Truths” are constructed as part of the theoretical progression of Marxism in an attempt to provide hope and manage them for desired practices. Theoretically, it carries “a vision of humanity’s collective development, its harmonious future!”⁵³⁸ Hope is always explicit in the messages of Marxists. Realization of this hopeful vision requires proper governance and management. As Klugmann reiterates, Marxist hope is linked to a better future for humanity through human efforts on earth.⁵³⁹

Harmony became a promising target for state governing in Hu Jintao’s regime.⁵⁴⁰ It was a value orientation and an ideological core signifying a socio-

⁵³⁶ Machan, T. (2006) *Revisiting Marxism: A Bourgeois Reassessment*, Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, p.6.

⁵³⁷ Ibid, p.5.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Klugmann, J. (1970) “The Marxist Hope”, in *the Christian Hope*, SPCK theological collections 13.

⁵⁴⁰ See Hu Jintao’s “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

political amalgamation of values, concepts, ideas, beliefs and norms; it also functioned as a tool in ruling the regime. With the hope of providing mutual benefits for the population, harmonism contains essential elements such as broad-mindedness, universality and tolerance; it carries a pluralistic character. With a dwindling momentum of globalizing Marxism and facing a strong predominance of capitalist globalization advancement, it was essential for the Hu Jintao government to make sure that the governing rationality, the “truth,” readily appealed to the Chinese population. A top-level strategy, a politics of hope, was to structure one grounded in traditional Chinese culture and concurrently build an open platform for embracing the global *otherness* under the globalization current and in the PRC’s national interests.

On a global horizon, harmonism was constructed as a strategy to promote the worldview of Communist China globally in the process of building a “model for the world.”⁵⁴¹ This discourse reconfiguration came with a different orientation from the past, pronouncing to the international arena that China had reached a new level of socialism after its devoted exploration for modernization in the last

⁵⁴¹ Qin, Xiaoying (2006) “Harmonious Society to Be a Model for the World”, *China Daily*, 13thOct, 2006.

few decades. It was an ideological reconfiguration, a recalibration, of a new stage of Chinese Marxism that was designed to appeal to the Chinese general public, the ruling party of China and the global nations.

To strengthen its message, the CCP affirmed its determination to advance on a peaceful development route that ensured harmony on equal grounds peacefully with friendly states under the “five principles of peaceful co-existence.”⁵⁴² The five principles included mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. This declaration was based on a framework of mutuality, dynamic exchanges, active collaboration, and diligent contribution to the peaceful development of humanity as a whole. At the global event in New York celebrating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, Hu Jintao also invited all nations to a close union, practicing mutual respect, grasping the opportunity and taking up jointly the challenges of constructing a positive future for humanity as a whole, genuinely building up a sustainable, peaceful “harmonious world of

⁵⁴² See Wen, J. (2004) “Carrying Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence in the Promotion of Peace and Development”, *Chinese Journal of International Law*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2004, pp.363-368.

lasting peace” with mutual prosperity.⁵⁴³

Scientific-developmentalism and harmonism were amalgamated by Hu to become a pair of political rationalities structured to reconcile, instead of suppressing, evolving social problems. In Hu’s words, “Scientific development and social harmony are integral to each other, and neither is possible without the other.”⁵⁴⁴ The aim was to be in tune with the anticipated characteristics of China’s traditional *xiaokang* society while generating synergetic outcomes alongside classical core Marxist discourses. These political rationalities were constructed as new Chinese Marxist beliefs that “are hypothetically in continuous flux” and are “in line with the dialectical principles of either nature or at least human thought.”⁵⁴⁵ They navigated the party-state toward structured, inclusive and sustainable progress. As primary components of the crucial objective in the Marxist worldview, the ideal of equity and harmony matches with and appeals to the traditional Chinese ideal worldview of a great harmonious society—*datong*.

⁵⁴³ Hu, J. (2005) “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity.” It was a speech delivered by Hu Jintao to the United Nations Summit in New York on 15th Sept, 2005. www.un.org, webcast, summit2005 (accessed on 10th Sept, 2016).

⁵⁴⁴ See section III of Hu Jintao’s “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

⁵⁴⁵ Machan, T. (2006) *Revisiting Marxism: A Bourgeois Reassessment*, Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, p.47.

Literally, *datong* may be interpreted as “the great harmonious togetherness” or “all together the same.” Hu’s CCP was mindful that the legitimization of socialism as a superior alternative to global capitalism for its economic achievement and affluence should be supported by a world vision that aligns with the Chinese people. Otherwise, the appeal would likely weaken and undermine the regime’s political power.

“Local is a site of promise,” Dirlik maintains.⁵⁴⁶ The concept of “local as a site of promise” is essential in understanding “localization.” The PRC is no exception. There requires a promise for a better life in the coming future for progressive humanity. In the depiction of Hu Jintao, the Chinese Marxist version of harmony is represented in a *xiaokang* society, a well-governed harmonious society. It was depicted as an era of peace with six attributes which included: the democratic rule of law (*minzhufazhi*), equity and justice (*gongpingzhengyi*), honesty and fraternity (*chengxinyouai*), “full of energy” (*chongmanhuoli*), a stable orderliness (*andingyouxu*) and harmony between people and the environment

⁵⁴⁶ See Dirlik, A. (1997) *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Western Press: Boulder, Colorado, p.85.

(*renheziranhexiexiangch*).⁵⁴⁷

Discourse and rationality undergo “constant change as new utterances (*enounces*) are added to it.”⁵⁴⁸ For the CCP, harmonism is both Chinese and Marxist. It became a core component of the unity of Chineseness and Marxist-ness. A combination of the two was expected to generate synergy in forming “a particular temporal manifestation of an ideology.”⁵⁴⁹ Such manifestation led Hu’s CCP to explore a connection with Chinese governmental rationalities, which allied with and pronounced by three Confucian conceptions: humanized governance (*renzheng*), people come first⁵⁵⁰(*yiminweiben*), and global unity (*tianxiaweigong*). The crafting of these ideas onto Marxist discourses starting from the early 21st century has substantially impacted the transformation of governmentalities in the regime.

⁵⁴⁷ See section III of Hu, Jintao’s “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

⁵⁴⁸ Foucault, M. (1991) “Politics and the Study of Discourse”, in G. Burchell *et al* (ed.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with two lectures by and interview with Michel Foucault*, London, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.54.

⁵⁴⁹ Freedon, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p.115.

⁵⁵⁰ Some may say that it is “people as the basis”.

Confucian Political Concepts

Traditional Confucian political concepts provide the CCP with an avenue to connect with contemporary Chinese government and politics. Like many other early civilizations, the political notions of ancient China were interlinked with religious beliefs and rituals. With a basic understanding that the origin of people is Heaven, ancient China started to construct its political concepts. The concept of the “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*) upholds the idea that the Divine is the ultimate source of governing power of the ruler; it is the supernatural force that is in control. It was believed that Heaven wills a ruler among people for their benefit, or else the kingdom on earth would fall away into chaos. The critical point is that the role of a leader is an appointment of the Divine.⁵⁵¹ Since it is a choice of the Divine, it is not for the subjects to reject but to obey. It would not be a surprise to learn that the CCP members, who proclaim themselves atheists and disciples of Marxism, believe it is incorrect to include the concept of “mandate of heaven” as one of the crucial building blocks in the governmental rationality of the party.

However, other components in the matrix of Confucianism contributed

⁵⁵¹ According to the *Book of History*, traditional Chinese political concepts maintain heaven creates people with desires, without a ruler people would fall into disorder. See Waltham, C. (1971) *ShuChing: Book of History. A modernized edition of the translation of James Legge*, Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company Illinois., p.147-148.

significantly to the Chinese political arena in Hu's era. The concept of humanized governance (*renzheng*), linked to virtue, goodness and benevolence (*ren*), is a fundamental component of Confucianism.⁵⁵² For Confucianism, *ren* is a core political concept in the discussion of government. Although the idea of divine appointment is fundamental, it does not necessarily mean that the ruler can practice absolute authoritarianism. Confucianism upholds that a ruler's success is not his authority but his benevolence that leads to the satisfaction of his subjects. For Confucians, the platform of socio-political interactions is "an arena for the manifestation of benevolent (*ren*) conduct."⁵⁵³ Confucian idealism holds a social order of great harmonious togetherness (*datong*) with which the regime is ideally one with socio-political stability, security, the absence of divisive momentum and one in which harmonism triumphs. The *datong* ideal embraces a global community and universal fraternity based on universal harmony. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as one world philosophy.

The concept of "putting people first" (*yiminweiben*) relates to a people-oriented government. It can be literally translated as "to regard people as the

⁵⁵² Hsiao, K. (1979) *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. F. Mote, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp.101-102.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

origin, or the centre, of the state.” It is interrelated with the concept of “humanized governance” (*renzheng*) when viewed from the perspective that the most essential function of the ruler is to take care of the people's interests and to govern accordingly. The ruler is taught to gain legitimacy from his people and win their hearts through practices of benevolence and virtue.⁵⁵⁴

The concept of “global unity” (*tianxiaweigong*) implies that the regime belongs not collectively to the ruler but to the general public. Hence, public interests are more important than the ruler’s interests. Global unity carries the meaning of “global public ownership” and integrates the discourses of equity and great togetherness with inclusivism and harmony. When great harmonious togetherness (*datong*) is accomplished, the socio-political system is governed by a communal spirit. In it, the government is formed by sincere individuals gifted with different skills and virtues and to nurture harmonious relationships.⁵⁵⁵ Inclusivism, to embrace, is deeply incorporated into traditional Chinese political ideologies and endeavors from this perspective.

⁵⁵⁴ See Mencius (2003) *Mencius: Revised Edition. Book IV Part A:9*, trans. D.C. Lau, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, p.159. (Mencius’ work is importance in the development of Confucianism).

⁵⁵⁵ Hsiao, K. (1979) *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p.125.

Morality forms an essential part of Chinese politics.⁵⁵⁶ In a society of great harmonious togetherness, everyone is expected of high morals, with the ruler being the most virtuous. It is a social system that facilitates a multifaceted government embracing people of diverse abilities, diverse capacities and diverse moral visions. This order of socio-political system with multiplicity nurtures harmonious relationships via a corresponding ethic-social framework of severe self-discipline of individual members of the society.⁵⁵⁷ Within this society, material advancement is only of lower order while pursuing moral character (which can be very spiritual) and seeking justice comes with top priority. Confucianism proclaims that people of nobility value justice.⁵⁵⁸

A Dialectical Endeavor of Marxist and Confucian Political Concepts

One of the critical tools that the Chinese Communists use in their political advancement is the adherence to Marxist and Chinese dialectical modalities.⁵⁵⁹ The wisdom in it lies in the dialectical approach of *the unity of opposites*

⁵⁵⁶ Tang, Z. and Zue, B. (1996) *Maoism and Chinese Culture*, New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, p.94.

⁵⁵⁷ Confucius, (1979) *The Analects*, London, UK: The Penguin Group.

⁵⁵⁸ As quoted in Tang, Z. and Zue, B. (1996) *Maoism and Chinese Culture*, New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, p.97.

⁵⁵⁹ See Tian, C. (2005) *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism*, Maryland, Lanham: Lexington Books.

(*dulitongyi*). For the Chinese Communists, “the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of nature and of society and therefore also the fundamental law of thought.”⁵⁶⁰ They consider both identical and contradictory relations of two things or two systems, including distinctiveness, unity, commonality and agreeability, dependent on each other, permeating each other, in correlation and collaboration.

In a Chinese dialectical progression, the attributes of Hu Jintao’s governmental rationalities were articulated in Confucian teachings as the crucial components of an effectively governed *xiaokang* society, eventually reaching the stage of great harmonious togetherness (*datong*). This dialectical undertaking was oriented toward cultural reconstruction through political framing that involved the compounding of innovative ideas in such a way as to refer to an existing common communication frame, thus inspiring certain interpretations and depressing others. The concept of a harmonious society represented a sophisticated synthesis of the central principles of classical Marxism and the Chinese reform era ideological framework. It called for a humanistic praxis amid the initiatives of capitalistic reform.

⁵⁶⁰ Mao, Z. (1967) “On Contradiction”, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Beijing, PRC: Foreign Language Press, p. 315.

This new “truth” in the form of governmental rationality, among other categories of discourse, was defined and situated by a set of relations. This set of ties was determined by “an autonomous discursive formation”⁵⁶¹ with a new structure that carried political significance—it was then made possible to articulate two different categories of previously unrelated concepts (Confucianism and Marxism). Also, it allowed the possibility of developing lateral linkage between various forms of knowledge and made moving the focus of politicization from one to another possible.

In a conventional Marxist character, but with the application of terminology of Chinese Confucianism, Hu’s objective was to establish a Chinese *datong* social system and ultimately extend it globally. He was well aware that there was a spectrum of space for innovative construction because, ironically, Marx had never provided details of the final stage of Communism.⁵⁶² The only description available is that “it is the mature form of humanity”⁵⁶³ with an ideal of “from each according

⁵⁶¹ Foucault, M. (1991) “Politics and the Study of Discourse”, in G. Burchell et al (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with two lectures by and interview with Michel Foucault*, London, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.54.

⁵⁶² Machan, T. (2006) *Revisiting Marxism: A Bourgeois Reassessment*, Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, p.158.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p.159.

to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”⁵⁶⁴ This lack of details has allowed the party-state much space for dialectical undertakings. Thus, Communist China continues to be “a site of invention and construction.”⁵⁶⁵ Through a Foucauldian lens, the invention and construction came as a result of “the exercise of power” that “creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information.”⁵⁶⁶

The formation of discourse, rationality, requires “the existence of a set of rules of formation for *all* its objects,.....*all* its operations,.....*all* its concepts,.....*all* its theoretical options.”⁵⁶⁷ With a foundation constructed on the ideological skeleton of his predecessors, Hu Jintao was able to reaffirm CCP’s political ontology and the advancement to the upcoming eras. There was the need to struggle with the contradictory objectives of socio-political policies (including religious policies) that must align with Marxist-Leninist principles and the immediate pragmatic tasks

⁵⁶⁴ Marx, K. (1977) in D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p.569.

⁵⁶⁵ Dirlik, A. (1997) *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, p.102.

⁵⁶⁶ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage, p. 51.

⁵⁶⁷ Foucault, M. (1991) “Politics and the Study of Discourse”, in G. Burchell et al (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with two lectures by and interview with Michel Foucault*, London, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.54.

of local economic advancement and establish a stronger position in the international arena. Global relations were becoming ever more complex. The objectives for the party-state that aligned with the advanced target of reaching the *xiaokang* society were based on a foundation built on the strategies and tactics of previous leaders. Hu Jintao knew well that the success of his invention rested on the alignment with Deng Xiaoping's reiterated goal of poverty eradication.⁵⁶⁸

To achieve the goal, Hu considered that a dialectical modification was needed to resolve contradictions so that progress would be retained. Harmonism, as the core political rationality, hence must be extended holistically to form a framework of connections with all the challenges faced by the regime, including the state-religion relationship. Simply put, this leading rationality of harmonism was demarcated, related and positioned within a network of other discourses. In this perspective, harmonism acted as a dialectical totality, including reconciliation (*hejie*), as applied to the handling of its relationship with Taiwan for a peaceful reconciliation; peace (*heping*), as promulgated in its connection with the globe for world peace; and harmony (*hexie*), as articulated in the Chinese harmonized

⁵⁶⁸ Source: Deng, X. (1994) "To uphold Socialism We Must Eliminate Poverty" dated April 26, 1987", in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. III (1982-1992)*, Beijing, PRC: Foreign Languages Press, pp.221-223. And Wang, G. and Wong, J. (1998) *China's Political Economy*, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing and Singapore University Press.

xiaokang social system in which religion can play a role to facilitate governance in a positive orientation. For Hu, it was “the Marxist world outlook” from a global perspective.⁵⁶⁹ On a local basis, the work done was for the progress of the Chinese population and of the CCP because it was an “important guiding principle for China’s economic and social development and a major strategic thought that [China] must uphold and apply in developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁵⁷⁰

How did the discourse of “scientific outlook on development” relate to harmonism? Hu Jintao advocated socio-political harmony as an indispensable element of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which was to be structured by crafting the discourse of “scientific outlook on development.” Socio-political harmony joined hands with scientific development. They were integrated. Hu’s glorious mission was to lead the Chinese nation to build up a unified socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and it was the task of scientific development to bring affluence to the people. The goal was to alleviate poverty and assure equity and justice. This approach aimed to reach the Marxist depicted mode of

⁵⁶⁹ See section III of Hu Jintao’s “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

matured humanity composed of equity, democracy, fraternity, the rule of law, justice, stability, order, vigor, vitality and harmony between human beings and nature.

Hu's theoretical innovation is an ongoing exercise within the CCP, his ideological dialectics functioned to "give Marxism of contemporary China distinct characters of practice, of the Chinese nation and the times."⁵⁷¹ His objective was to construct a "Marxism of contemporary China."⁵⁷² Similar to the first arrival of Marxism on China from the Soviet Union, the global theory of Marxism is positioned locally in China. Nevertheless, there was a difference. Hu's era was a contemporary China, not the early 20th-century semi-feudal/semi-colonial China. This contemporary Chinese Marxism upheld "a vigorous development and prosperity of social culture" that represented "the essence of socialist ideology" with a "system of socialist core values."⁵⁷³ It functioned as a dialectical undertaking to "consolidate the guiding position of [global] Marxism" and to guarantee "the latest achievement in adapting [global] Marxism to [the local] Chinese

⁵⁷¹ See section III of Hu Jintao's "Report at the 17th Party Congress" of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

conditions.”⁵⁷⁴ As a target, the people of the PRC would be motivated by a Chinese “common patriotic-centred national spirit and the spirit of the times centring on reform and innovation, guide social ethos with the socialist maxims of honour and disgrace.”⁵⁷⁵

Localization of the communist ideal was accomplished by fusing Marxist concepts with ancient Chinese discourses which the population knew well. It was done wittily by reconstructing cultural discourses molded by a political frame. It required a reassembling of existing and new concepts in a mode that was associated with the prevailing form of public communication and directed by a kind of hermeneutical frame that enabled some pre-agreed interpretations and depressed others.⁵⁷⁶ The task of hermeneutical framing was to formulate a language that articulated a discourse of global view; it was not simply a language.⁵⁷⁷

To ensure Chinese Marxism was viewed as superior to capitalism and as a progressing and appropriate theory of Marx locally in China for its advancement,

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ See Lakoff, G. (2004) *Don't think of an elephant Know your values and frame the debate*, White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, p.3.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p.4..

an amalgamation of science and morality—Chinese morality—was created. In reality, Hu’s politics was ultimately connected to public activities, the value of which depended on “being on the right side, not just of managing to be expedient and practical.”⁵⁷⁸ The newly constructed and amalgamated discourses provided governmental rationalities that directed the public to trust that it was just and hopeful because “[t]he kind of system one believes to be just, is vital to everyone.”⁵⁷⁹

Hu’s theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics advocated that “social harmony is an essential attribute.”⁵⁸⁰ Furthermore, he committed effort to “carry out theoretical innovation and give Marxism of contemporary China distinct characters of practice.....”⁵⁸¹ It was achieved through the “Project to Study and Develop Marxist Theory” conducted by “a group of Marxist theoreticians, especially young and middle-aged ones.”⁵⁸² The task was to “explore effective ways of letting the system of socialist core values guide trends of thought and take

⁵⁷⁸ Machan, T. (2006) *Revisiting Marxism: A Bourgeois Reassessment*, Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, p.8.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ See section III of Hu Jintao’s “Report at the 17th Party Congress” of 15th October, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/24/content_6938749.htm (accessed on 24th September, 2016)

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

the initiative in ideological work, representing divergence and allowing diversity while effectively resisting the influence of erroneous and decadent ideas.”⁵⁸³ This was done amid the commitment to “develop philosophy and social sciences, promoting innovation in academic disciplines, academic viewpoints and research methods.”⁵⁸⁴ Furthermore, by incorporating Confucianism as an elitist technology of government, the party-state was able to relate its role and privilege to the educated and intellectuals since scholars are highly respected under the Confucian mentality.⁵⁸⁵

The result was that by constructing a Marxism infused with Confucian components, moral elitism was enhanced, ideological centralism was justified and political rationalities were solidified. Here, it is essential to point out that Confucianism has not always been upheld in the PRC. After the CCP officially established “New China” on October 01, 1949, academic and intellectual circles made an effort to debate the role of Confucianism and how it could serve the new regime. While the intelligentsia was busy adjusting to the new ideological structure and assessment principles, Confucius still held a certain status in the academic

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Confucius, (1979) *The Analects, Book 12*, London, UK: The Penguin Group.

sphere and the general public during the early days of the “New China.” As the Marxist-Leninist ideological framework began to function effectively in the new regime, Confucianism was re-evaluated under a new set of criteria that included dialectical materialism, class struggle, and Marxist historiography. Instead of a contentious pro/anti dichotomic method, it was shifted to a Marxist dialectical approach whereby Confucianism was evaluated for both its weakness and strength. The initial outcome was that i) Confucianism carried a voice for progression and hence deserved a certain degree of recognition, and ii) Confucianism was considered within the camp of materialistic thinking because it is not about life after death, spirits and ghosts. By 1966, however, the Anti-Confucian Campaign started. It was carried out in a specific communication code characteristic of the Chinese Communist twisted ideas. By early 1967, Confucius was attacked as a feudal mummy, an enemy of the people. For the Red Guards, eradicating Confucianism became an essential task of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁸⁶ Confucianism became unworthy of any kind of serious study and “survived.....only as a museum piece.”⁵⁸⁷ It was only after the ending of the Cultural Revolution that

⁵⁸⁶ Gregor, A. and Chong, M. (1979) “Anti-Confucianism: Mao’s Last Campaign”, *Asian Survey*, Vol 19, no.11, pp.1073-1092.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

the status of Confucianism gradually re-emerged in China.

Although Confucius was denounced as a regressive scholar and feudal, and Confucianism was under heavy attack during the Cultural Revolution, the Confucian system of concepts as part of the traditional culture of China and a significant influence on the mentality of Chinese scholars and elites, were turned by Hu Jintao to becoming supportive of Communist tenets. Once again, it demonstrated that governmentality was constructed to serve the purpose of the party-state. It was created and hence could be truncated and changed according to the “thoughts” of the leaders. Missionaries who are sensitive to the governmental rationalities of the socio-political domain and are able to catch the “thoughts” of the hosts are in a more strategic position for effective ministry.

Scholastic State Apparatuses: the emergence of new normalizing power

Truth induces the effect of power.⁵⁸⁸ Through the construction of “truth,” the party-state advances its governing. In a Foucauldian sense, truth “is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, and media).”⁵⁸⁹ It is

⁵⁸⁸ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage, p. 131.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p.131-132

also “the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‘ideological’ struggles).”⁵⁹⁰ Hu’s CCP effectively used academic institutions, the United Front, publications and the media to construct and disseminate “truths” on religious matters.

The construction of new “truth” for the government generates new knowledge and, simultaneously, new normalizing power, not merely via repression, but through the production of new purposes. An analysis of the CCP’s course of thinking and action without understanding the changes in the Chinese Communist theoretical scholarship on the nature and function of religion in China and its eventual destiny under Chinese socialism is inadequate. There is a relation between Chinese Marxism and its truth construction on religion—a possible mutually supportive framework. Correspondence exists between the changing landscapes of theories and hypotheses on religion and the transformation of Marxism in Communist China. This specific domain of scholastic writing has contributed to formulating and advancing governmental policies.⁵⁹¹

The new knowledge acts as a critical inscription, a means for framing

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p.132.

⁵⁹¹ A collection of papers about theory of religious studies and Marxist approaches to religion and issues about contemporary Chinese religion is available in the works of Lǚ Daji and Gong Xuezheng. See Lǚ, D. and Gong, X. (2014) *Marxism and Religion*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.

problematization and structuring programs and practices of government. While knowledge is not simply an assembly of new ideas or a replication of reality, it is actively shaped and produced by experts. These experts, however, are actors not independent of the state. Experts are tied up in a dual alliance when interwoven with government projects.⁵⁹² On the one hand, the experts establish an alliance with the authorities to solidify their legitimacy and power network. On the other hand, they attempt to construct a knowledge base that informs the people to enhance their identity and livelihood, an act that leads to the minimization of possible threats to a government.⁵⁹³

Some scholars see the re-emergence of religion in China in the last few decades as linked to social displacement shaped by market reforms which are in line with a decline of Marxism as the leading socio-political force, resulting in a spiritual and ideological vacuum.⁵⁹⁴ An easy assumption is that Marxism and religion are elementally incompatible. However, many Chinese scholars,

⁵⁹² Johnson, T.J. (1972) *Professions and Power*, London, UK: Macmillan Press.

⁵⁹³ See Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) "Political power beyond the State: Problematics of government", *British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2).

⁵⁹⁴ Gries, P. (2005) *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. And Kennedy, J. (2009) "Maintaining Popular Support for the Chinese Communist Party: The Influence of Education and the State-Controlled Media", *Political Studies*, 57.3, pp.517-536.

particularly those with an official role in state apparatuses, have attempted to construct a renewed relationship between Marxism and religion that is not mutually exclusive. It is not purely the replacement of one ideology with another. Lǚ Daji, a scholar and a member of the political elite, put forward the prospect of maintaining dialogue between Marxism and religion without being torn apart ideologically.⁵⁹⁵ This prospect of maintaining dialogue became a point of entry for the CCP for possible exchange, formulating strategies and structuring practices.

While the study and understanding of Marxism and religion may go in different directions, there gradually formed a platform in Hu's China, a new space, for both to co-exist because they attended to similar questions. Whereas the study of religion in that period attempted to explore the essence, character, function and system of faith, the analysis of Marxism, as a transformative ideological framework and system of belief, continued to view the progress of religion as a succession of historical events. From the perspective of Hu's scholars, both fields of study are interested in revealing the character of religion and the position and role of religion within a framework of socio-political changes. Instead of being antagonistic all the

⁵⁹⁵ Lǚ was a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). See Lǚ, D. and Gong, X. (ed.) (2014) *Marxism and Religion*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.

time, it was possible for both fields to form dialogical interlocutors, if not partners. Academics in religious studies functioned to serve the Hu's regime as politically engaged intellectuals, running the same political contour that shaped the ideological discourses and the changes of constructed "truths" on religion. In Communist China, scholars are seldom pure academic elites. Most of them go through a career with cross avenues and hold a mix of intellectual, political and official capacities. In other words, there is a dynamic in the academic field that depends on political necessity and is steered to respond to the swift changes in the political arena toward religion. The "truth" on religion in the PRC is dependent on the shifting economic and socio-political provocation.

There were several scholars whose works bore a significant impact on the study of religion in the PRC during the reform period. They included Lǚ Daji, Zhuo Xinping, Jin Ze, Li Xiangping, Wang Xiaochao, Wang Zuoan and Gong Xuezheng.⁵⁹⁶ Their roles included professorship and research directorship of universities and research institutes, as well as being party secretaries and members of the United Front. As an example, Gong Xuezheng graduated from the Department of World Religious Studies of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

⁵⁹⁶ Lǚ, D. and Gong, X. (ed.) (2014) *Marxism and Religion*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.

(CASS). Subsequently, he taught as a professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party—a scholastic apparatus. His research interest focused on Ethics and Religious Theories, particularly their relations with scientific socialism. In his work *Marxism and Religion*, Gong was innovative in re-evaluating Lenin. He attempted to humanize Lenin personally by arguing that those who criticized Lenin had missed the point that his violent clash with the Russian Orthodox Church was due to its political alliance with the tsarist regime.⁵⁹⁷ For Gong, Lenin must act upon the antagonism of the Russian Orthodox Church toward the Soviet Union at its early stage; it would be wrong to take Lenin's ideas and actions out of context. Gong's objective was to restore Lenin as a founding figure of continuous relevance for the advancement of Chinese socialism, bearing in mind Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought formed the core foundation of Chinese Marxist ideology. The implication was that the nature of Marxism was not stagnant but was to be transformed to fit into new circumstances and must be appropriately interpreted accordingly. Gong also stressed the separation of religion by Lenin into the domain of personal belief and the domain of public social

⁵⁹⁷ Gong, X. (2003) "A comprehensive understanding and scientific appraisal of Leninist perspectives on religion", in D. Lü and X. Gong (eds.), *Marxism and Religion*, Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill, pp.263-291.

institutions. His articulation was particularly significant because it aligned with the constructive discourses in the scholarship of religion at the beginning of the 21st century in China. This act became an exercise in redefining the canon by the practice of selective articulation and retrospectively enforced inner rationality about the evolution of Marxist ideas. It was a selective “truth.” What was intentionally omitted was Lenin’s demand that Communist “must combat religion—this is the ABC of all materialism and consequently Marxism.”⁵⁹⁸ For Lenin, the combat of religion must not stay at the abstract-ideological level; practical actions must be implemented to uproot the social foundation of religion.⁵⁹⁹

Local and global events played their respective parts in the selective construction of “truths.” Along with the economic surge, the last decade of the 20th century also experienced the rapid growth of religion in the PRC. As a result, two significant challenges came up. First, the traditional CCP view in which religion was articulated as a symptom of socio-economic dislocation was no longer sufficient to offer a satisfactory answer to explain the new appeal of religion in the

⁵⁹⁸ Lenin, V. (1930) “The Attitude of the Worker’s Party to Religion”, in *Religion*, London, UK: Martin Lawrence, Limited, p. 19.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

party-state. A more appealing and “rational” answer to the “why?” question was needed. Second, it was a “how?” question. The party was required to formulate strategies and tactics and set up operative practices to effectively deal with the religious sphere, which was gradually increasing in power and potentially becoming disruptive with a tendency to move outside the patriotic religious institutions administered by the party. The disturbance created by Falun-gong and the Tibetan lama in China sounded the alarm that more control on religion was needed. It was coupled with the 2001 September 11 incident of the attack on New York and, globally, the subsequent war against terrorism led by the USA with a marked change in the tone and the increased problematization of religious matters of the PRC. Indeed, political leaders who supported a more argumentative position against religion created a certain sense of justification. Within the regime, not everyone favored a harmonious state-religion relationship; a stream of hawkish attitudes against religion coexisted with a trend of “mutual adaptation” and harmonism.

Foucault is right to point out that each society “has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes

function as true.....”⁶⁰⁰ CCP’s antagonism against religion is “well-established knowledge.”⁶⁰¹ After the global alerting events, many would have expected an increased degree of oppression of religion. Yet, a high-level debate and consideration in 2001 by the State Council and the Central Committee of the CCP reiterated religion's socio-political function and contribution to the party-state, finally leading to the 2005 *Regulations on Religious Affairs (Zongjiaoshiwutiali)*.

Although its primary objective was to control the conduct of religious citizens and institutions toward adaptation to the socialist society—a political undertaking of the party—by setting up boundaries of religion, the state-religion adaptation was not depicted as one-way traffic. The emphasis was on “adapt to socialist society” (*yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiangshiyi*) which carried a tone of “two-way” or “mutual adaptation.” The use of Chinese character *xiang* (two) signified mutuality, and in practice, it was about an exchange, leading to benefits for both sides. Thus, *xiangshiyi* pointed to mutually adapting, representing possible change on both sides by exchanging something not firmly defined by the CCP. The plasticity of the meaning of adaptation, in effect, provided a space, a new

⁶⁰⁰ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage, p.131.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., p.83.

network of power relations for manipulation and practical flexibility. It is worth noting that the “adapt to socialist society” discourse was not constructed in the early 21st century; it first appeared in the “Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Circular on the Reinforcement of United Front Work” of 1990. Nevertheless, the imminent need for such a “truth” only materialized in the early 21st century under the advocacy of scholastic state apparatuses.

While control was emphasized, there was also an attempt to readjust power relations with the religious domain. The document *2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs* allowed more rights for religious actors. Article 48 of the document specified that “[a]ny state functionary, in the administration of religious affairs, abuses his power, neglects his duty or commits illegalities for personal gain or by fraudulent means, and a crime is thus constituted, he shall be investigated for criminal liability according to law.”⁶⁰² Although it was a tiny step among many long-standing issues, it was undoubtedly a positive move for protecting practitioners of religion by addressing the issue of abuse of power by the CCP regime.

⁶⁰² Article 48 of “Regulations on Religious Affairs” Adopted 27 July, 2004 by the State Council, effective 1st March, 2005.

Concluding Remarks:

Governmentality provides a distinct angle for investigating the government's ways of doing things, cross-examining the technologies that specific form(s) of knowledge and particular methods are set up by the political authorities to act upon the governed.⁶⁰³ Hu's party-state transformed its government strategy at a nodal point when acute socio-political discontent prevailed. Hence, the engagement of "religious-work" as governmental technology was not incidental. It advanced into the scholastic domain and governmental practice with a compacted form of knowledge, refined actions and comprehensive training formalities. The matrix of technology of "religious-work" offered knowledge of the era and maneuvered for administering the subtle power of the CCP in governing the turbulent religious population.

For the missional agent, to understand the changes in the thoughts of the CCP was to understand simultaneously the need for a fundamental epistemic shift in the strategic approach to the mission field, which envisaged an opening of space of interplay for upcoming missiological endeavors. A critical discernment of the prevailing religious regulation, which was part of the conditions of the interplay of Chinese Communists and AHF, became essential for the analysis of the strategic

⁶⁰³ Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London, UK: Sage.

and tactical acts of the Chinese officials.

Dialogue and interaction between Christianity and Chinese Marxism depend on the condition of the existence of adaptation and inclusiveness as crucial elements of harmonism. Hu's regime exercised adaptation/inclusiveness according to specific historical conditions, including respective power relations, socio-political horizons, and interests. There were also questions such as "to what extent?", "about what?" and "to whom?" At times, a specific historical condition constructed the space for mutual horizons and interests for dialogue on some particular issues and concretized the condition of inclusiveness and openness. There were also times that historical conditions (e.g. the Mao era) strengthened antagonism, destroyed trust and made collaboration impossible. Although control was a core function in governing the religious domain, Hu's CCP was able to frame a condition of dialogue through political praxis with the religious others. AHF's missional endeavor required availability and attentiveness as a form of action in hope. The missionaries, who were attentive enough and made themselves available to identify the possibilities as a Christian reality, would be more effective in formulating specific acts of mission.

By employing the Foucauldian matrix of concepts that reveal power is different from violence and that government mentality determines governmental

practice, we will study in the next chapter how power functions as mutual intervention of forces in the mission field. It also leads us to realize that particular forms of practices of the Hu's regime and that of AHF arose historically through concrete intervention; they could be challenged and reformed through struggles and distinct practices and adjustments of interacting participants via ongoing resistance and constant dialogue.

Chapter Four

GOVERNMENTALITY OF LOVE AND RELATIONS OF POWER

Introduction

This chapter starts with a discussion on the foundation for *love-relation-in-action* and *power-relation-in-motion* in AHF's missional domain. AHF, being a stranger in the PRC, began to mediate the stranger relations through interacting with the state apparatuses, resulting in co-creation of additional space that allowed further interactions. Through discussing the productive nature of power and love, the chapter argues that the formation of a new power/knowledge in terms of a political "truth" of love in the missional domain facilitated AHF's mission. Following that, the chapter enters into analyzing the mobilizing power relations between AHF and respective state apparatuses in open and dynamic ways, moving away from the traditional understanding of power in the negative and repressive mode. Through an exploration of the function and power of the "truth" of love and associated power relations, the chapter concludes that AHF co-framed with the regime a new theo-political reality through the integration of relations of power and love.

Power and love in the mission field

In addressing the politics of religion in the PRC, missionaries must consider the regime's logic and form of domination. The mission field represents a matrix of contemporary and historical ideological and tangible practices that are never totally successful, constantly embodying contradictions, and are always with asymmetrical power relations.

The growth of Christianity and other religions after the Cultural Revolution was dramatic.⁶⁰⁴ This phenomenon was often depicted as “religious fever,” or in the case of Christianity, “Christianity fever,” by the government and research institutes in the PRC. Yet, amid China’s implementation of economic reform and becoming more open to the outside world, religion captured a more sophisticated political profile immediately after the 1989 Tiananmen Square student movement. Core CCP leadership was intimidated by the challenge to its power and continued to intensify censorship upon the society. Oppositional influence of religious institutions, particularly that of Christian entities on the fall of communist

⁶⁰⁴ A survey carried out in 2005 by East China Normal University in Shanghai estimated that there were 300 million religious believers in the PRC. See Sun, Y (2007) “Dangdai Zhonghoren zongjiao xinyan diaocha” (Survey on religious beliefs in contemporary China), *Shanghai liaowang dongfang zhoukan*, 6, 8: 28-33.

governments in Eastern Europe and the USSR, had raised the alertness of the CCP leadership about the regime's instability. To avoid such a fall for the regime, the CCP spent tremendous effort systematically studying the causes of the collapse of these communist regimes.⁶⁰⁵ The prohibition of religious activities in the PRC was imminent. In the words of Hunter and Chan: "In 1990, Chinese government officials reportedly feared that 70 percent of the nation's religious activities were out of control, while Premier Li Peng called for attacks on the underground churches. Other senior leaders warned of a transfer of allegiance, especially in the countryside, from the CCP to religious organizations."⁶⁰⁶ The party-state soon limited the activities of virtually every aspect of religious activities.

Was a prohibitive "close-door" message from the CCP going to cool down the passion of Christians? Self-induced ideologies of hostility or isolation would lead Christian missionaries to work against the prevailing oppositional ideological setting of the CCP by strategizing hostile responses. However, biblical teaching that presented seeds of hope for the future infringed on the apparent dead-end. As Newbigin (former General Secretary of the International Missionary Council)

⁶⁰⁵ Caryl, C. (2013) *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the birth of the 21st century*, New York, NY: Basic Books, p. 353.

⁶⁰⁶ Hunter, A. and Chan, K. (1993) *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.4.

maintains, “Christians can live and bear witness under any regime, whatever its ideology.”⁶⁰⁷ Although the CCP regime was notorious for its oppression of Christianity, the attributes of Christian hope provided AHF with a new avenue to reinterpret the present reality with its prevalent meaning. For the missional agent, radical reinterpretation of the real, through reimagining or reimagining, was critical because it entailed “a meaning for the present.”⁶⁰⁸ The present, such as the temporal crack-down of Christian events (and other religious activities), did not “contain its full meaning within itself, but only in its relatedness to what [was] yet to come.”⁶⁰⁹ One of AHF’s tasks was to reimagine the images and forms of the present, unfold the present, and shape it according to the intention of the God of history. To discern the plan of God and His intention has always been a task of the AHF leadership.⁶¹⁰ The power of hope (and imagination), via renewal and transformation, was made available in the existing present, which could be interpreted as a journey navigating relations of power and love in AHF’s endeavor, dispersed into a new matrix of the force of relations.

⁶⁰⁷ Newbigin, L. (1986) *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p.115.

⁶⁰⁸ Hart, T. (1999) “Imagination for the Kingdom of God?”, in R. Bauckham (ed.), *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, Edinburgh, UK: T.&T. Clark, p.63.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation” in *AHF Update 2007*.

Power and love are two critical forces, among others, of the present that any missional endeavor must face. For AHF, a genetic question to ask, after establishing its vision, was, “What is needed, at present, for the missional journey?” And a more specific and critical question to ask was, “How should these two critical forces (power and love) be addressed for the journey ahead?” In the eyes of Martin Luther King, Jr., power is not only the ability to achieve an objective but “the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change.”⁶¹¹ The polemic of power and love is commonly perceived as “polar opposites” when “love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love.”⁶¹² In mediating between these polar opposites, King maintains that “power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.”⁶¹³ The mission of AHF required it to embrace both power and love dialectically. The core task of AHF missionaries was not to prove CCP wrong nor defend Christianity, it was to bring blessings of God to His people in specific parts of rural China. The attitude of “proving the other is wrong” and self-defense would be sterile.⁶¹⁴ The

⁶¹¹ King, M. (2010) *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, p.37.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Ellul, J. (1981) “On Dialectic”, in C. Christians and J. van Hook (eds.), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, p.292.

missional venture of AHF was about bringing God's blessings to His people by entering a new stage in which contradictory notions of power and love are adopted and make transformation possible.

For AHF, a critical challenge was to identify connections with others in its attempt to develop Christian ministries through collaboration with state apparatuses so as to contribute positively to problems prevalent in the time and space concerned. *Love-relation-in-action* created linkage with local churches and respective state apparatuses. At the same time, *power-relation-in-motion* (the mobilization of power with push and pull) worked toward the actualization of a mission possible. The two not only co-existed but also functioned simultaneously in God's mission. If AHF elected only to either mobilize power or practice love in action, AHF would likely minimize the possibility of creating enlarged spaces—the arising missional realities. The missional domain required a dialectical approach to co-formatting a unique circumstance with others. Improving new realities require integrating love-relation-in-action and power-relation-in-motion.

Stranger and stranger relations

In Hu's Communist China, AHF was a stranger to the local socio-political domain—a role that any missionary must be mindful of. As a stranger, AHF was a

potential enemy (if not an actual one) to the host regime and fell outside the allowable boundaries stipulated in the various laws and regulations (missionaries are prohibited in the PRC). Amid being a potentially threatening element to the regime, AHF was fully aware that its presence and associated activities were bound to draw suspicion and hostility. It must contextualize its activities and position itself appropriately within the Chinese Communist socio-political domain. AHF needed to learn how to behave as a stranger in a “foreign” land in its limited action space. The biblical story of Joseph in Egypt indicated that it would be a process in which the starting point of the stranger identity was shifted intentionally to the status of an “accepted one” and then gradually worked toward becoming a significant other of the local Christian community.

Given the ambiguity of the missional domain, it was not the best initiative for AHF to merge fully into the socio-political system. Instead, it sought to maintain a certain distance because the presence of a gap presented more space for creative interactions. Key elements of survival included the ability to ride on the tension and manage the dialectics of connectedness and separateness. Amid the uncertainty, it was, nevertheless, reasonable to expect that AHF, with its correlated positioning, would be accommodated by the local government and, at times, be protected from unpredicted minor political incidents. As discussed earlier, AHF

needed to locate itself at a proper level of relevance, rationalize its position, and enhance its role as a possible and positive contribution to the local agenda, both ministerial and socio-political. However, it would be naïve to expect its role to become a core position within the local Christian community that was constantly under censorship.

The host-stranger dyad was not equal. The local churches were the first-tier hosts. They were the ones in a more favorable position to AHF in the intangible host-stranger hierarchical structure. TSPM/CCC and the other state apparatuses at the second tier of the scene acted from a position of political superiority. In contrast, AHF existed as a stranger and an outsider in a structural and political inferiority position. It was simply a contextual reality. An unequal host-stranger dyad implied unique relations of power between the two. Understanding the operational reality was critical in a field where power was prevalent. For AHF, an uncritical acceptance of the “all-powerful” Chinese Communist regime would be problematic and could block the tasks ahead because it permitted power relations to devolve into a stagnant position of absolutizing the party-state’s authority. Such a position would confine AHF to a highly restricted mode of thought and practices—resulting in a minimized possibility of missional options. Before we analyze power relations in the mission field in the latter part of this chapter, the

role of Christian love and “love” (“truth” of love) in the mission field will be discussed.

Christian Love as a Gateway

As Martin Luther King Jr. proclaims, power and love may not be polar opposites. In the Hu Jintao era of harmonism, the discourse of “love the people” gradually became an articulated element of the ideological framework in an attempt to address the massive socio-political problems that the regime was facing.

Wielander points out that the discourse of “love” was (re-)discovered as part of an ideology project in the Hu Jintao era.⁶¹⁵ The discourse of “love” not merely found its place in popular culture but was also strategically positioned by the government on its websites and in Chinese Marxist philosophical writings. As a specific “truth”, it played a pivotal role as government rationality and an instrument for the regime’s construction of a harmonious society, as revealed in the ideological writings of the CCP and respective Chinese Christian theology. From this perspective, love as a Christian value became increasingly important in influencing governmental rationalities and practices. Wielander further points out

⁶¹⁵ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.46.

that the discourse of “love” in the ideological framework of the regime was not romantic love but “perhaps best represented in the Greek terms of *agape*, the Latin term *caritas* or the German term *Nächstenliebe*.”⁶¹⁶ The generic notion of love was expressed by the CCP as *ai* (a monosyllabic term) in Chinese texts. Such a use of the monosyllabic term by the CCP was relatively new because, in the traditional Chinese context, the notions of love were commonly expressed in bisyllabic terms, including romantic love (*aiqing*), loving emotion (*qinggan*), compassion (*tongging*), and loving heart (*aixin*).⁶¹⁷ Through realizing the prospect of grafting the Christian notion of love (with an appropriate localization of the term and its meaning) into the prevalent governmental rationality of harmonism and locating a favorable interpretation, the regime allowed a complementary relationship between the CCP and Christians.

“Truth” of Love: in the making

The official use of the “truth” of love as governmental rationality in Hu’s era did not happen in a vacuum. On the contrary, it arguably was resulted from the foundational work done by some Christians who had taken a loving approach to

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, p.47.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

initiate change within the Chinese Communist system.

Christianity was re-molded as a positive element of culture from its historical negativity in this era.⁶¹⁸ There was a gradual paradigm shift in viewing the role of Christianity from a “religion of opium” to a “religion of love”⁶¹⁹ due to the concerted efforts of scholars and the momentum of the new governmental discourse of harmonism in the Hu Jintao era. Re-evaluation of Christianity's function and status and other religions was a continuation process amid an ongoing re-assessment of socialism in the PRC. Not only did “love” gradually become a popular term acceptable to the general public, but it was also raised to the governmental propaganda level to motivate and strengthen the general public's devotion to the party-state and benefit socio-political agendas over personal emotions.⁶²⁰ Zhuo Xinping, former Director of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), argues that it would be advisable for the government, in an era of globalization, to re-evaluate

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, p.48.

⁶¹⁹ Zhuo, X. (2006) “The Christian Contribution to China in History”, in M. Poon (ed.), *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Engagement in Asia Today*, Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, pp.157-168.

⁶²⁰ Guo, T. (2020) “Politics of love: Love as a religious and political discourse in modern China through the lens of political leaders”, *Critical Research on Religion*, Vol. 8(1), pp.39-52.

Christianity with a new set of lenses on Christian evangelizing activities in China.⁶²¹

For Zhuo, it was advantageous for the PRC to recognize the positivity of Christianity so as to allow a more solidified foundation for cultural interaction, harmonious advancement and peaceful co-existence with the world value systems outside China. In Zhuo's interpretation, the Christian notion of universal love—*agape*—would enable traditional Chinese benevolence—human love—to rise to a new level. Zhuo maintains that Christianity as a “religion of love” would benefit the regime's governance.⁶²²

Nevertheless, the message of Christian love in the Hu Jintao era was not pioneering in the CCP regime. On the contrary, TSPM/CCC leaders had made critical contributions to preparing the future development of the Christian faith in the PRC.⁶²³ For instance, Ding Guangxun had played a vital role in the advancement of localized Christian theology of love since the Mao Zedong era.⁶²⁴ Although Christian love was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, it was

⁶²¹ Zhuo, X. (2006) “The Christian Contribution to China in History”, in M. Poon (ed.), *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Engagement in Asia Today*, Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, pp.157-168.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Chow, A. (2018) *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*, New York, NY: p.22.

⁶²⁴ Wickeri, P. L. (2007) *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

(re-)strengthened by the TSPM/CCC since the early 1980s and continued to emerge into the Hu Jintao era. Many Christians in Hong Kong and the Western world were critical of Ding and the TSPM churches. Some of their leaders in Communist China were termed as betrayers of the Christian faith. This resulted partially from the hostility and severe criticism by the “house” churches that maintained a strong affinity with the western world. This “betrayal” view, however, may have been too simplistic.

Wolfgang Schmidt's words serve as an appropriate reminder to those who are called to the PRC and must navigate high tension circumstances: “Christianity did not, does not and will not survive just because of its martyrs and rigid doctrine. Christianity had, and still has a chance only because of those who are able to bridge tense and wordless situations.”⁶²⁵ For Schmidt, missionaries are servants delivering blessings of God; their task is not to become martyrs. While it was true that TSPM churches was under scrutiny by the party-state, they were at the same time functioning as the witness of the Christian faith to the general public and the regime. AHF needed to acknowledge the complex reality of Communist China and the ambiguity in which a black-or-white distinction did not exist. There was a line

⁶²⁵ Wolfgang Schmidt was former President of Basel Mission, Switzerland. See Schmidt, W. (2002) *Memoirs in Dialogue, Vol. 1*, Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, p.47.

that separated the TSPM and the “house” churches. However, this line was blurred and had become more indistinct as the regime transformed.⁶²⁶ Stressing the difference between the TSPM church and the “house” church would not be the best approach for ministries seeking enlarged space to advance Christianity.

The relationship between Christianity and various sectors of society altered as the ideological setting of the socio-political domain transformed. It was possible to locate the existence of Christian communities’ relationship with the regime and the general public.⁶²⁷ One of the routes of dialogue was via constitutional channels. Over the years, Ding Guangxun, who, in addition to being a leader of the TSPM/CCC, was one of the vice presidents of the National Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference for over two decades who had enabled hundreds of leaders of TSPM churches to take part at various levels of the conference. Through a localized reconstruction of theological formulation, Ding brought forward his core theological message of “God is love” (*shangdi shi ai*) as a seed into the socio-political domain. “Only by acquiring a Chinese selfhood, a Chinese

⁶²⁶ Cao, N (2007) “Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State”, *Sociology of Religion*, 68(1): 45-66.

⁶²⁷ Cao, S. (2006) “The Role of Chinese Christians in the Development of China”, in M. Poon (ed.), *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Engagement in Asia Today*, Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, pp.147-156.

identity, can the Church of Jesus Christ in China live down its colonial history and its image as something Western,” Ding expressed.⁶²⁸ Rather than merely emphasizing God's power, omniscience or might, the focus on love as the ultimate attribute of God minimized the gap between the Christian faith and Communism. The understanding of the Christian God as the cosmic lover, not the cosmic oppressor or punisher, made available a strategic connection between the communist interpretation of love and a Christian discernment of the love of God as affected by the interpretation of divine presence in a modernist era.⁶²⁹ The de-emphasis on original sin and the fatherhood of God (paternity in the traditional Chinese context did not link with love or kindness) made the conception of God more accommodating to (not embraced by) the Chinese Communist ideals. In an era where harmonism prevailed, it paved the way for framing a platform for an enhanced dialogue between the two.

It was possible to identify elements of communist ideals in Ding’s localized Christian theology, contextualized with relevance to the regime.⁶³⁰ This localized

⁶²⁸ Ting, K.H. (2004) “Love is for those with ears to hear”, in *God is Love*, Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries International, p.57.

⁶²⁹ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.49.

⁶³⁰ Wickeri, P. L. (2007) *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Christian theology gained new importance in the post-Mao era as the party-state attempted to resolve its domestic problems. As the regime gradually became more open to the world and the people were more exposed to ideas beyond the boundaries of China, the “truth” of Communism became questionable to the people. At the same time, the associated ideals discontinued to serve as motivation and inspiration for the general public; the once highly praised Communist role models, such as “Lei Feng,” became obsolete.⁶³¹

In the process of CCP’s ongoing reassessment of its ideological framework, answers or solutions of another configuration or other paradigms were needed to tackle the socio-political problems of the reform. New elements borrowed from Christianity were selected to facilitate building a “harmonious society.” In the words of Wielander, “While in the 1950s Chinese Christians could not help but be impressed by the heroism and selflessness of early communist revolutionaries, contemporary Chinese communists, almost despite themselves, cannot help but be impressed by Christian witness.”⁶³² The mission field was not ignorant of

⁶³¹ “Lei Feng” was a constructed model figure by the CCP who was praised and promoted in the Mao era. It was for propaganda purposes and was part of the Socialist Education Campaign to motivate the public to appreciate Chinese socialism. See Dikötter, F. (2016) *The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976*, London, UK: Bloomsbury, p.33.

⁶³² Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.51.

Christian faith but instead was one where the local Christians had done so much witnessing and nurtured positive impacts. A localized Christian theology originated in God's love gradually became an element of consideration by Hu's CCP, which needed new, positive additives to its ideological formulation. By articulating an essence of Chinese Christianity, molding the conception of love to become a "truth" into its matrix of governmental rationalities, Hu's regime produced a new permissible and articulated space of interaction between itself and respective Christian entities. Viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, the "truth" of love as an articulation in the CCP's "regime of truth" fabricated a specific socio-political meaning that made a new array of activities possible through the experience of the interaction.

While many Christians had demonized Ding and his theology, the TSPM and the CCC, they had not been universally rejected. Ding's localized theology of love (*ai*) for the Chinese Communist socio-political arena had gained support from the Chinese Christians and church communities in other parts of the world.⁶³³ Ding's political role contributed positively to the proliferation of the notion of love (*ai*) in

⁶³³ Bays, D. (2009) "American Public Discourse on the Church in China", *The China Review*, 9 (2): 1-16.

the official literature in China, which began its appearance in the early 2000s.⁶³⁴

With the academic inputs of “Cultural Christians” and the research outcomes of scholastic state apparatuses, the “truth” of love, closely associated with Christianity, began to build momentum in Hu’s regime. In its historical specificity, a Christian truth gradually became one of the “truths” shaping up the framework of political rationalities of the atheist regime.

Christian love and Hu’s harmonism

While Hu’s initial attempt to build a harmonious Chinese society came with the fusion of Marxism and Confucianism, the development indicated the influence of other global values, including Christian values, as the regime continued its experimental exercises. Qin argues that a harmonious society cannot be built independently of global dialogue and interaction with other cultures and values.⁶³⁵

An active learning process that involved open-mindedness and broad vision in assimilating positive and useful features of different cultures and belief systems of the world was needed, and incorporation of these new features into the

⁶³⁴ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.51.

⁶³⁵ Qin, Z. (2008) “Cultural Construction and a Harmonious Society”, in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.61-74.

harmonious society of the PRC was required.⁶³⁶ This open-mindedness led to the critique of local traditional Chinese religion and rituals as “superstitions” amid nurturing a view that held Christianity as a modern religion of rational belief framework. The linkage between Christianity and harmonism was further enhanced by framing a “truth” that the Christian teachings of love, equality and eternal life were favorable to sustaining stability and harmony. Carrying a positivity associated with modernity and science, Christianity slowly gained acceptance in the socio-political arena of China.⁶³⁷

The construction of a localized Christian theology by Ding, combined with the input from various church leaders and researchers from scholastic state apparatuses, led the Christian faith to a new and favorable position in the regime. Instead of being merely “foreign,” it also carried a status of local truth. As a result, constructive elements of Christianity became accepted in the PRC value system. Dynon termed such a repositioning of Christianity in the regime as “the appropriation of *wenming*” (*wenming* is the Chinese equivalent of civilization), through which some components of non-Chinese civilization sustained the

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Cao, N. (2009) “Raising the Quality of Belief: Suzhi and the Production of an Elite Protestantism”, *China Perspectives*, 4: 54-65.

construction of a distinctly Chinese conception of civilization.⁶³⁸

Many possibilities turned out to be viable for the Christian community to contribute positively to the (re-)construction of the wider societal arena. Zhuo linked up the conceptions of Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao in the discourse of harmonism with core Christian ethics that included “faith, hope and love (xin, wang, ai).”⁶³⁹ He attempted to build up a set of knowledge and a new network of relationships of different conceptions that enabled China’s modernization not to be narrowly defined in economic and political terms but to be expanded to embrace ethics as an essential element of modernization. In his view, the complementarity of Christian ethics and traditional Chinese values, the combination of the two, provided a helpful avenue for the PRC to pave its way to the top leadership of the globe. As a result, many obstacles to injecting the Christian belief of “faith, hope and love” into Communist China were removed. Zhuo even suggested that, instead of being affected negatively by Western imperialistic ideologies, Christianity in China under the government of the CCP, in

⁶³⁸ Dynon, N. (2008) “‘Four Civilizations’ and the Evolution of post-Mao Chinese Socialist Ideology”, *The China Journal*, 60: 83-109.

⁶³⁹ Zhuo, X. (2006) “The Christian Contribution to China in History”, in M. Poon (ed.), *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Engagement in Asia Today*, Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, pp.157-168.

its official framework and direction, was able to facilitate the formation of patriotic citizens of China and to spread this vision internationally.⁶⁴⁰

Many initiatives of the party-state strengthened the grafting of the “truth” of love onto the ideo-political articulation of harmonism. In essence, scholastic state apparatuses played a vital role in the process. Wielander’s study showed that a staff of the Zhengzhou Research Centre for the philosophy of Marxism proposed “the spirit of love” (*ai de jianshen*) as the most crucial component in the universal values of traditional Chinese ethics.⁶⁴¹ To him, this “spirit of love” was articulated within the traditional Chinese virtue of benevolence (*ren*) which, when applied to society, brought forth and nurtured a collective spirit of loving the people (*airen*). He advocated that the spirit of love was the center of accomplishments of Chinese civilization and that “love” led to the harmony of nature (*tian ren he yi*) and, in the socio-political arena, enabled the construction of a *xiaokang* society and great harmony on earth (*datong shijie*). He also argued that “love” was crucial in building a Chinese “harmonious society” to resolve socio-political contradictions and facilitate global peace. Similarly, Qin wrote: “the ethical outlook centred on the premise that the humane person loves others is the cornerstone of the

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

harmonious culture.”⁶⁴² Gradually a new knowledge framework of the relationship between love and harmony was established in Hu’s Communist China. Promulgation of the “truth” of love did not stay at the top level of the hierarchy but flowed through the various state apparatuses, including educational institutions.

Under Hu’s regime, the “truth” of love carried a heavy political notion.⁶⁴³ It included a political profile that the CCP defined, but not a universal notion of love. The objective was to make it an instrument to serve the CCP in ways that maximized its legitimacy and the possibility of success in governing. It was a “truth” constructed for a political purpose – a “truth” of love that was turned to act as a “truth of power” in a Foucauldian sense.⁶⁴⁴ It continued “its interrogation, its inquisition,” and “its registration of truth”⁶⁴⁵ through the United Front and various state apparatuses. One should not miss noting that in the traditional Chinese

⁶⁴² Qin, Z. (2008) “Cultural Construction and a Harmonious Society”, in S. Guo and B. Guo (eds.), *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp.61-74.

⁶⁴³ The construction of a communist notion of love in the PRC was not originated in the Hu Jintao era but dates to the initial inception of the PRC. In the forward to the *Xinhua Daily* on September 29, 1949, Mao Zedong talked about articulating the “four love principles” to enhance public morality. Citizens of the newly formed republic were urged to “love the motherland, to love the people, to love labor and to love public property,” pointing to patriotic love (*aiguo*).

⁶⁴⁴ Foucault, F. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p.93..

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

character of love 愛, there is a *heart* (心) in the center of the character. This *heart* signifies a core component of the word and, indeed, the critical meaning of the word. Love without the *heart* is no love. However, the *heart* (心) is absent from the simplified Chinese character of love 爱 (developed by the CCP). In other words, the *heart* is of no essence in the CCP definition of love. In the Hu Jintao regime, this “truth” of love was institutionalized; and those who pursued it were rewarded politically and economically. In the Chinese Communist system, the one to love and the object to be loved were defined politically.⁶⁴⁶ For instance, in the Mao Zedong era, the party-state advocated that not all “people” were to be loved. Only those social classes/citizens who were not labelled as “enemies of the people” would be loved. In this context, the terminology “people” (*renmin*) excluded those who were politically labelled as “enemies of the people.” While Mao used “love” as a governmental technology, he had no intention to pursue the truth of love. Mao’s “truth” of love did not last for long. By 1963, Mao was quoted as denying Communism is about love. Instead, Communism was defined by Mao as a hammer used to destroy the enemy.⁶⁴⁷ It was not a surprise because, in the core teaching

⁶⁴⁶ Lin, M. (2010) *Ethical Reorientation for Christianity in China: The Individual, Community, and Society*, Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture.

⁶⁴⁷ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.54.

of Soviet Communism from which the CCP inherited much, the preaching of “love one’s neighbor” is contrary to the principles of Communism.⁶⁴⁸

“Truth” of Love: a new power/knowledge

Under Hu's matrix of Chinese Marxism, the articulated “love” framed as a “truth” entailed a new power/knowledge formation. Hu’s regime promulgated the “truth” of love in governmental publications. It formed part of the propaganda to promote the message that “love” is a crucial element for establishing a harmonious society, and it gradually became an effective component of localized Chinese Marxism. Wang and Zhou’s *The Spirit of Love and the Construction of Socialist Harmonious Culture*, published in 2009 (a work supported by the central party school of the CCP) was an example of such an attempt to illustrate how the spirit of love was understood as definitively founded in Marxism and socialism.⁶⁴⁹

This work suggested that many had underestimated the “love” component of Marxism. It also stressed the human longing for universal love, manifested in various religions' theology, including the Christian tenet of “love your neighbor like

⁶⁴⁸ Skousen, C. (2018) *The Naked Communist*, Naples, Italy: Albatross Publishing, p. 71.

⁶⁴⁹ Wang, S. and Zhou, Y (2009) *Da'ai Jingshen Yu Shehui Zhuyi Hexie Wenhua Jianshe* (The Spirit of Love and the Construction of Socialist Harmonious Culture), Beijing, PRC: Renmin Chubanshe.

yourself.” Although this argument contrasted against the fundamental teaching of Soviet Communism, it aligned with Ding Guangxun’s Chinese Christian theology of love.

Chinese Marxists emphasized the use of “scientific” approaches to construct a matrix of intellectual elements accumulating different thoughts to make specific knowledge and actions about harmonism possible. They applied readily accepted, articulated positive conceptions and made them meaningful carriers to enhance socialist harmonious culture.⁶⁵⁰ The political notion of the “truth” of love for political power was depicted as “scientific,” constantly affected socio-politically and economically, and was propagated under the control of state apparatuses. In a Foucauldian sense, this “truth” was “a thing of the world” and it induced “regular effects of power.”⁶⁵¹

Another publication *Treatise on an Education in Love (Ai Yu Lun)* suggested implementing “love” through education.⁶⁵² The meaning of love (*ai*) was expounded both in Chinese and Western philosophical terms, and the spirit of love

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p. 131.

⁶⁵² Cui, D. (2011) *Ai Yu Lun (Treatise on an Education in Love)*, Beijing, PRC: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe.

(*ai de jingshen*) and the practice of love (*ai de shijian*) were differentiated. In a regime where ideological tools formed a critical part of the government; a sense of official message was noted when the author defined love as an ideological sentiment that came with subsequent corresponding actions that contributed positively to society. The regime's purpose was to structure the “truth” of love as an ideological tool to nurture and normalize the people to love the general public and the country as part of patriotism and support for the advancement of the CCP. Wen Jiabao, the premier, was reported to have said the following when a group of schoolchildren visited the office of the central government (*Zhongnanhai*) in 2009: “Everything depends on love. We hope that [you] understand love, cherish love, learn and master love. You must turn love into practical action.”⁶⁵³ Foucault rightly points out that truth claims are historically positioned to generate substantial socio-political effects. In the era of harmonism, the “truth” of love constituted part of the framework of moral quality linked with the responsibility to the others amid the CCP’s attempt to establish harmony to stabilize the socio-political domain.

The party-state also attempted to frame the “truth” of love as having a

⁶⁵³ Wang, S. and Zhou, Y. (2009) *Di'ai Jingshen Yu Shehui Zhuyi Hexie Wenhua Jianshe* (The Spirit of Love and the Construction of Socialist Harmonious Culture), *Beijing, PRC: Renmin Chubanshe*, p.3.

capacity to resolve contradictions, remove misapprehensions, and minimize conflict, eventually directing society toward harmony. The chain of actions was to search for and utilize new concepts and recreated terminologies to actively motivate and encourage people to construct an acclaimed harmonious society. Love's transformative power was recognized, propagated and normalized. The official emphasis on love as a signifier attempted to function as a focal point for the individuals to identify with the others in the regime. It also served as a sign of separation from the notorious past, including the Cultural Revolution and other mistakes of the Mao era. "Truth" of love, as an articulable and with the induced socio-political meaning, was organized in a highly unique manner by the CCP. The aim was to maximize its interweaving effects of knowledge and power in a productive network that permeated the socio-political body of the regime.

The Protestant communities under the supervision of the TSPM/CCC responded positively to the invocation of love and, through witness and various means, including publications, expounded the positive role and contribution of the Christian communities to nurturing a harmonious society. Such acts of the Protestant circles helped enhance the effectiveness of the governmental endeavor, which was a function of its relevance to the targeted population and the individual responses. However, while Christian charitable activities became visible as a result

of the new power/knowledge and gathering momentum in the socio-political arena, the United Front and other state apparatuses continued, behind the scene, to perform their manipulation and censoring functions.

Articulation of “love”: toward constructive ventures

It, however, would be too simplistic to say that the “truth” of love as promulgated by the CCP was a direct borrowing from Christianity, even though Ding’s localized Christian theology facilitated the mutual adaptation between Chinese Communism and Christianity. As discussed earlier, in its continual Communist venture, Hu’s CCP constantly searched for new conceptions to distance itself from the notorious past and injected new elements into the system to energize the regime and re-solidify its legitimation. In Communist China, where love was (and still is) most obviously lacking, the critical rationale for Hu’s CCP praising the “truth” of love in its global-local dialectics was its attractiveness with many positive connotations, readily embraced internationally. It helped to build up affinity with the global communities.

Hu’s CCP knew too well that such a “truth” would substantially enhance the regime’s image in global politics. While some within the regime were drawn to the positivity of the “truth” of love in its complicated process of construction, others

did not agree with it and suggested that the propaganda was “meaningless and empty,” “merely another lie,” or “window dressing.”⁶⁵⁴ A reason for this was related to the long-lasting aftermath of the Maoist notion on enemy and class struggle. The polarizing effect of “the people” (to be governed) and “the enemy” (to be destroyed) had become an intrinsic component of the Chinese communist politics that was hard to erase.⁶⁵⁵ As the re-assessment of Chinese Socialism continued under Hu’s leadership, introducing a transcendent God who loves the whole humanity equally, regardless of class, embracing those who are not lovable became an abundant source of comfort and was tremendously empowering. Its healing effect produced a compelling, more powerful message than party exhortations.⁶⁵⁶

Although the “truth” of love used by the CCP was partially borrowed from Christian love, the two are not the same. CCP’s “truth” of love was an ideological adaptation in which the CCP recognized the prominence and attractiveness of Christian love. This “truth” of love was not free from the control of the regime. Amid its strategic position within the predominant ideological framework of

⁶⁵⁴ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.59.

⁶⁵⁵ Sun, Y. (1995) *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism, 1976-1992*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁶⁵⁶ Wielander, G. (2013) *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p.60.

Chinese Communism, its shape, definition, relevance, and importance in the socio-political arena were under direct monitoring of the regime for its function. It was strategically positioned within the predominant ideological framework of Chinese Communism.

Employing a “truth” of love as governmental rationality was wisely positioned to gain legitimacy and solicit the support of a potentially critical population segment. From the perspective that the CCP was working toward maximizing its balanced interest (to the favor of the CCP) by acknowledging the existence of Christian core values, it implied that resources from the Christian communities could be energized and re-directed toward constructive ventures beneficial to the regime, particularly charitable projects that Christian communities were keen to volunteer. Such an approach released the party-state from immediate governmental problems, particularly the local government in rural areas where resources were scarce. Christian charity initiatives such as building schools, offering scholarships to children of low-income families, and disaster relief organized by AHF and the local churches became part of the solution for the local government directly and the national government indirectly. At the same time, these initiatives allowed the government to gain a more embracing image which in turn encouraged new possibilities for the co-creation of additional space—a new

order of things and a new cluster of power relations—that allowed interaction between the government and religious communities, even though it was part of the continual series of experiments.

CCP's view on Christianity has not been an absolute strict jacket without any space to maneuver. As Zhou Enlai once commented on Christians: "It is better for them to speak reform on their own. As long as they are close to our national policy and correct in their general orientation, there is no need to interfere. It is much better if they are a little different from us than if they say things exactly the same as we do. We cannot require them to be faultless in every respect. Our cooperation with people from outside the Party is based upon a common premise. We accept their good suggestions because they enrich our own position. As long as there is commonality on things of major importance, differences on lesser matters may be permitted."⁶⁵⁷ While "lesser matters" were defined by the CCP, the core principle was to seek commonality amid reserving differences. This "thought" of seeking commonality amid reserving differences had been used quite often by the CCP when the regime faced critical problems without immediate solution(s).

⁶⁵⁷ Zhou Enlai was a renowned Chinese Communist leader and former prime minister of the PRC. See "Address at a tea party hosted by the Central United Front Work Department" 20th January, 1951. Zhou, E. (1980) *Selected Writings of Zhou Enlai, Vol 1*, Beijing, PRC: Foreign Languages Press.

While Christianity was considered foreign and was constantly suspected as a potential element causing instability to the regime, the United Front considered tactful supervision of “religious contradiction” as possible and necessary for the party-state's stability and unity.⁶⁵⁸ Positioning Christianity at an appropriate level and “place” had been one of the essential tasks of the United Front.⁶⁵⁹ This tactful supervision of “religious contradiction” implied power relations were not totally rigid—a certain degree of fluidity existed so that the power differential could be altered through mobilizing power relations.

By partnering with local TSPM churches, AHF was mindful that it was effectively developing a purposeful, functional “friendly” relationship with the related state apparatuses while facilitating the relationship between Christianity and Communism. In the process, an innovative platform (the *Enlarged*) was formed to hold a matrix of conjointly accommodating and interdependent relationships among the stakeholders. There was the need for AHF to fit in well with the functioning of the local churches within the sphere allowed by the United Front and, simultaneously, to the larger socio-political arena. The possibility of

⁶⁵⁸ Wickeri, P. (1988) *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, p.282.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

such a “friendly” relationship also depended on the missiological orientation of AHF. The desirability of establishing a purposeful, functional relationship entailed AHF’s commitment to seek a common platform and to identify with the local churches, which in the socio-political arena was an extension of the overall national matrix of state apparatuses.

Love and Power: Dialectical Interplay

In prudence of God, the world can act as a guiding and training role for the church and missional agents. AHF must sometimes listen instead of talk; learn instead of instructing. A dialectical mode of thinking is critical in strategic thinking.⁶⁶⁰ To appreciate the dialectical nature of the mission field and accept “positivity within negativity,” “inevitability of crisis” and “negativity is essential”⁶⁶¹ became critical in the ministry.

To comprehend the fundamental relational dynamics in the PRC required discernment of the most basic interactive notions of power and charity, of Christ’s love. Love facilitated to break through the hindrance and substantive restrictions

⁶⁶⁰ Ellul, J. (1989) “Dialectic” in *What I believe?*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, p.33.

of organizational, judicial, sovereign and economic forces and injected life into daily activities.⁶⁶² The practice of love drew missionaries beyond their boundaries and exposed them to immeasurable possibilities of influencing and being influenced by others as they co-create each other in the encounter. The collaborative domain was a sphere saturated with infinitesimal estrangements and unsteady power relational differentials. In Foucauldian perspectives, there was no chance to act free of power constrictions. In the missional encounter, power relations formed an unavoidable but invisible limit within which participants were required to make specific decisions, and take on defining courses of action that were inter-dependent and yet vulnerable. With historical ambiguity and without total certainty, AHF needed to realize it was participating in power relationships with many *others*. While recognizing power differential could be altered, AHF missionaries developed tactics and techniques that gave them mastery over their endeavors and guarded them against being manipulated to the sole advantage of the CCP. It was required because the existence of the encounter was the outcome of discursive practices of “intentional and non-subjective” power relations.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶² Schuld, J. (2003) *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, p. 32.

⁶⁶³ See Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, p.94.

Moreover, these power relations were full of calculations, for “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives.”⁶⁶⁴ Hence, it was no surprise that AHF constantly (re-)evaluated and (re-)set its schedule of operative initiatives based on ultimate aims and objectives.

Was CCP’s construction of a “truth” of love going to eliminate the repression of religion by the party-state? History revealed that the answer was “no” because the CCP advocated that religion continued to endanger the party-state. Hence, power needed to be mobilized to control religious circles. Meantime, in the foundational ideological framing of Chinese Communism, amid the existence of different religions in the intermediate stage(s) of Chinese socialism, religions remained to be social ideologies that were hypothesized to wither away only when the final communist stage is achieved. Notably, the “truth” of love was merely a construction for the prevalent political maneuver; it would not be needed in the future. The final political control rested in the hands of the CCP.⁶⁶⁵

Power enables control and normalization. It is “always already there.”⁶⁶⁶ In

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid, p.95.

⁶⁶⁵ McGregor, R. (2012) *The Party: The Secret World of China’s Communist Rulers*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, p.121.

⁶⁶⁶ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York: Vintage Books, p.141.

pointing out that contemporary analysis often relates power to “that which represses,” Foucault asks: “So should not the analysis of power be first and foremost an analysis of the mechanism of repression?”⁶⁶⁷ A missional agent is unable to fully appreciate the complicated missiological problematics without first comprehending the elementary relational dynamics of power. The mission field is not unlike other places in the world; it is full of power relations, filled with large and minute breaches and unsteady differentials. In other words, acting independently of the constriction of power relations is impossible. Missional decisions must be made within an unavoidable yet often unnoticeable limit of power relations. The Chinese Communist regime has been notorious for its domination and religious repression—a view ceaselessly repeated today by many Christians and non-Christians.⁶⁶⁸ Yet, a more productive emphasis would not be on repression but the productive character of power and love and their respective relations in the encounter.

The missional domain occurred in a consequential transformation of concurrent techniques of being and thinking and practicing on earth. Through a

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, p.90.

⁶⁶⁸ See Marsh, C. (2011) *Religion and The State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival and Revival*, London, UK: Continuum.

Foucauldian lens, AHF's missional endeavor rested on "modes of thought"⁶⁶⁹ that shaped the rationalities of the practices of the stakeholders of the encounter, and entailed an impact on the power relations between them. The outcome of the collaboration was anticipated to materialize through an enlarged spectrum of thoughts, reshaping expectations and values, and framing a new vision of "bounds of possibility."⁶⁷⁰ Here, Foucault's "modes of thought" and Moltmann's "bounds of possibility" started to intervene and generated an invitation to an inspiration to perceive a prevalent situation in a new way. In AHF's hopeful venture, actions of love and mobilization of power worked together toward the will of God, i.e. reconciliation and blessings to His people.

The authoritarian regime's power was viewed with orientation based on "law" or "sovereignty" by many. Yet, it became more resourceful and productive to renew this thinking and re-apprehend power within the missional context where state-religion mutual adaptation and *harmonism* were made critical socio-political discourses in its historicity. A critical perspective for AHF to consider was that Communism and Christianity might not have to be contrasted dualistically (as

⁶⁶⁹ Foucault, M. (1988) "Practicing Criticism", in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, New York, NY: Routledge, p.154-5.

⁶⁷⁰ Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p.35.

we have discussed earlier). Eschatologically there demanded a “passion for the possible” and inventiveness in “breaking with old and coming to terms with the new.”⁶⁷¹ In discussing the relationship between Marxism and Christianity, Girardi reminds Christians that dialogue through love “excludes no one, though an appropriate measure of prudence must undoubtedly be exercised.”⁶⁷² By highlighting *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 92, Girardi also directs servants of God to include in their endeavor “those who oppress the Church and harass her in manifold ways.”⁶⁷³ As an event of Christian existence, AHF’s missional endeavor occurred at the dynamic, ever-renewed junction of truth and reality. It anticipated the prospects of reality and its upcoming possibilities.

There was a dialectical interplay between the socio-political approach of Communism under its political realism and operative ideology. Similarly, the Christian theological system interpreted things and events on earth under Christian realism (this will be further elaborated on in Chapter Five). AHF’s missional encounter was not composed of separated oppositional secular and

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Girardi, G. (1968) *Marxism and Christianity*, New York, NY: The MacMillian Company, p. x-xi.

⁶⁷³ Ibid, p. xi.

sacred historical narratives, it was one made up of the dependent effort of humanity and the *relational work* of the Divine. In dialectical tension, no single force was restrained; but they were intermingled into a synthesis.⁶⁷⁴ For AHF, this theo-political synthesis was reflected in the enlarged spectrum of possibilities in the mission field that, in the words of one AHF director, “God has continuously revealed.”⁶⁷⁵

As relationality is essential to human existence, so is the reality of all missional endeavors. AHF needed to act within its sphere of relational influence. This sphere of influence was inspired by the formative forcefulness of love and charity. Shaped correlatively, the pervasive forces of charity became positive elements and assets in the new reality instead of being problematic to the CCP regime. The persuading and influencing power in this dynamism so distributed on the platform of joint endeavor meant that various threads and networks of discourse could remain focused on the well-being of humanity. Simply put, this dynamic force of love and charity became a force of unity, a centripetal force drawing energy into the center of the encounter. Simultaneously the mutual concentration of energy creatively endured and supported distinct yet unitive

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

bonds within the enlarged space of encounter, which was co-created by collaborative stakeholders. They continued to be creative to maintain this new reality of encounter in the hope of furthering their respective intentions and advancement—an enlarged platform to hold common Chinese Communist-Christian concerns. This expansion allowed cooperation within their respective beliefs, grounded in the common humanitarian concerns of Hu's regime and Christianity. Given the dialectical nature of the encounter, each engaging participant contributed from different angles, conditioned by their respective interests and situation.

Power and Freedom in the mission field

Power is omnipresent because it emerges everywhere⁶⁷⁶ and is “always already there.”⁶⁷⁷ Therefore, a missiological reality for AHF was its submergence in an ocean of power relations. Foucault is insightful to have argued that if one continues to get attached to a very confined and outdated comprehension of power, one would be unable to navigate new power relations effectively.

⁶⁷⁶ Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, p.93.

⁶⁷⁷ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Vintage Books, p.141.

By not limiting to the repressive notion of power, it was possible to appreciate the interplay of power relations among the collaborative stakeholders through charitable acts that facilitate the operation of the missional undertakings. The sovereignty of the party-state, the related religious laws and regulations and the domination of the Chinese Communist ideological practices might be perceived as “terminal forms;”⁶⁷⁸ they were, however, not absolute.

Religious policies, laws and regulations of the Chinese Communist party-state are often understood in their juridical-discursive character, which is commonly related to the political studies of power. Along with this juridical-discursive thinking, five notable characteristics of power entail:⁶⁷⁹

- Power operates negatively via interdictions.
- Power materializes in the form of law, rule or regulation, resulting in a binary system of “allowed” versus “prohibited” or “legal” versus “illegal.”
- Power functions through a law of prohibition and works via a cycle of forbiddance.

⁶⁷⁸ Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, p.92.

⁶⁷⁹ Lynch, R. (2011) “Foucault’s theory of power”, in D. Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, p.17.

- Power reveals three types of prohibition in a logic of censorship—
"affirming that such a thing is not permitted, preventing it from being
said, denying that it exists."⁶⁸⁰
- Power "operates according to the simple and endlessly reproduced
mechanism of law, taboo, and censorship."⁶⁸¹

However, Foucault's understanding of power takes people to go beyond the above understanding of power. For Foucault, new possibilities come with an attempt to grasp the different elements of the divergent and yet dynamic set of newly constructed beliefs. In view that the CCP belief system was the result of extended interaction and conflict (internally or externally) in a constant-reassessment process, its system of thought was adaptive.⁶⁸² The outcome of this constant reassessment came with ongoing experimentations. While it was possible to identify the main components of Chinese Communist ideologies with reasonable accuracy, other, more refined elements could be identified, segregated and used to tug either certain parts or the whole system of thought in new

⁶⁸⁰ Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, p.84

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Sun, Y. (1995) *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism, 1976-1992*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

directions. The existence of historically changing and diverse mentalities of the CCP kept the socio-political arena supple and open to alteration, but, of course, to the benefit and advantage of the Party.

CCP's act of repression of Christians was a historical reality, but extreme repression was not always necessary or not totally unavoidable. A critical acknowledgement of power relations would prevent missional endeavor from devolving into a static state of stagnation. A confined thought and practice would run the risk of invalidating many modes of missional existence. Hence, the AHF founder proclaimed that staying stagnant was not an option for AHF. In *AHF Update 2011*, he wrote, "We encourage creativity. Staying stagnant is not permissible."⁶⁸³

A discerning comprehension of power relations with the party-state enabled missionaries to capture more possibilities of existence and actions. As Taylor maintains, it is critical to reimagine the conceptions of power and freedom.⁶⁸⁴ Freedom and power are interrelated instead of being in an oppositional relationship with each other.⁶⁸⁵ In a Foucauldian sense, freedom is not a state one possesses but rather a practice one engages in. From this perspective, missionaries

⁶⁸³ AHF founder L, "AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!", in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁶⁸⁴ Taylor, D. (2011) "Introduction: Power, freedom and subjectivity", in D. Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, p.4.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

are required to navigate power relations in open, active and dynamic manners. And in so acting, missionaries identify space for nurturing renewed and alternative ways of thought and existence.

When a relationship between two subjects exists, power takes effect. It is not a balanced relationship, but one acts upon the other and is being acted upon.⁶⁸⁶ Even though there was a significant power differential between the state apparatuses and AHF, AHF was free in so far as it could respond to and influence those in the collaborative domain. AHF did not exist in a state of total domination of Hu's CCP in which no response to the action of the communist regime was possible. AHF's tangible and intangible resources to the collaborative project-events readjusted the power relations. The "truth" of love and renewed religious policy and regulations worked in the governmental matrix to provide an enlarged space for AHF to act upon. Although state censorship continued, many previously prohibited Christian ministries became possible through "the free historical activity of men into a yet greater future."⁶⁸⁷

In the course of missional activities, decisions were made within an

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, p.5.

⁶⁸⁷ Metz, J. (1968) "Creative Hope", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology no. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: The Macmillian Company, p. 134.

unavoidable yet unnoticeable limit of power relations. The awareness of a precarious relational situation with its diverse elements and instabilities led AHF to the drudgery of unending struggles. In a Foucauldian sense, this relationship was co-extensive with the sphere of socio-political relations and was interlinked with and manifested in other types of socio-political relations.⁶⁸⁸ However, it did not mean that power consolidated everything, embraced everything or answered everything.

In a mission field where, constant change is the norm, the missional agent is free to raise awareness of prevalent dangers and be attentive to the spectrum of possibilities to act creatively and responsibly. This freedom is linked to relationality in the mission field, which will be discussed in the next section.

Power and Relationality in the Mission Field

For AHF's collaborative engagement to be sustainable, continual sources of nourishment must be available at an effective level. A pre-requisite was the existence of a "concrete, changing soil"⁶⁸⁹ made up of specific fertile ingredients. These conditions, including the existence of a set of favorable governmentalities,

⁶⁸⁸ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Vintage Books, p.142.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, p.187.

allowed the collaboration to function effectively. The effective level was made available when the CCP's operative ideological practices and AHF's operative missiological acts interacted with the mutually agreed undertakings through defined avenues within the time-space specific power relations.

A few mutually informative and critically enriching attributes of power helped this study understand the specific ways AHF operated relating to its collaborative engagement. First, power was mobilized for the desired effect in the mission field. It was not possessed by anyone. Foucault maintains that power is not given, exchanged, or recovered; it is mobilized and exists only in action.⁶⁹⁰ Second, mobilization of power, either by the state apparatuses, the local churches or AHF, was an activity that was dynamically dispersed and shared. Essentially as a relational force, it was repeatedly co-created by inter-dependent incidences. Third, as an intrinsically inter-active engagement, power was generated through and maintained by participatory relationships and conjointly supporting collaborative engagement. The "truth" of love within a matrix of truths framed by state-religion mutual adaptation facilitated such participatory relations to flourish and were jointly supportive.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 89.

The existence of power in the missional domain, through the lens of Foucault, carried their external and internal dimensions with the intrinsic relationality. While engaging stakeholders participated in numerous external relationships, each of them also engaged in a network of active internal dynamics within its own entity. The different and often divergent objectives, characters, interpretations, and practices existed in the mission field shaped each entity and their relations with others. In a Foucauldian sense, power repeatedly emerged and descended into various intersecting and opposing micro-relations within the collaborative engagement. Each of them was thoroughly mixed with overlapping patterns of power.

The penetrating propensity of power became dispersed in a “cluster of relations”⁶⁹¹ that extended over the whole fabric of the mission field. By connecting, one by one, extensively dispersed interactive power relations progressively reached into the broader socio-political arena, including in various degrees the power networks within the matrix of United Front, SARA, the TSPM/CCC and various state apparatuses. These power relations were recurrently reinforced and sustained by different smaller spheres of power, without which

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, p 199.

power relations would eventually weaken and diminish. The power of the CCP might appear initially as a monolithic force. However, it was, in fact, a convergence of numerous interacting infinitesimal dynamics.

In the mission field, the alliance of power, or the counter-alliance of power, eventually traced back through the daily activities, including the affinities, struggles and responses to the infinitesimal acts of charity and ministry that were constantly defined and re-defined by and articulated through many contending and conjoining passions, norms and practices.⁶⁹² These diverse endeavors were intricately interrelated and eventually supported by the minutest interactions and fortitudes of power.

The profound extension of power throughout the mission field was not a constant, unchanging totality; it was not on its own. Micro-power relations subsisted socio-politically as an elaborately stratified and multi-shaded composite. They were not an inflexibly unifying force among the engaging stakeholders, but they repeatedly generated a creative, diversified, convoluted web of flexible forces. Each power relation interconnected with another, extending from one point to another and from one level to another, eventually interlacing in so many

⁶⁹² See Schuld, J. (2003) *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p.15.

points and on different levels that a matrix was formed. This matrix was strengthened by unendingly drawing from internal and external resources. At the engaging points, interiority and exteriority of power reinforced each other and enhanced the expansiveness of each other. They entered a wider landscape while intermingled tightly at the primary level, consolidating the collaboration that met the shared objectives of the engagement.

The specific context of the collaboration contained specific visions, mentalities and objectives of differentiated but, at the same time, elaborately interwoven socio-political agendas. In other words, each of them carried its own intention(s). For instance, the concerns of the stability of the CCP and the party-state in the name of national security, the provision of universal compulsory primary education to children, and the supply of essential life support to the impoverished rural population through AHF's orphanage and poverty relief center mingled together with the development and nurturing of rural Christian communities. These were entangled in and supportive of one another.

AHF's missional endeavor was not a pure theological engagement. In a Foucauldian sense, AHF was prepared to manage and struggle in the power relations that generated "mobile and transitory points of resistance," which created many "cleavages" in the field that was shifty, fragmented, constantly re-

arranging and re-molding.⁶⁹³ At times, AHF through its Christian realism needed to move a few steps back from the numerous inter-mingling threads of power to discern the configurations that operated across the larger socio-political arena, all of which connected, of course, to a single life-giving relationship with God. Hence, one AHF director prayed to God for “discerning ability so that [AHF missionaries] are able to know [God’s] will, understand the context within which [God allows them] to act upon and following through according.”⁶⁹⁴ The venture was a passionate endeavor about making effective attempts to join the infinitesimal and microscopic into more significant project-events of harmony and meaningful charitable acts. Through realizing that power and relationality were binding and that there were specific conditions and possibilities for their effective functioning, the missional agent was enabled to deepen and enrich its knowledge of the mission of God.

While power relations in the collaborative engagement were not stagnant but changeable, modifying them by mobilizing the “micro-physics” of the relationships was possible. The mechanism of power developed through a

⁶⁹³ Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1, An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, p.96.

⁶⁹⁴ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

structured yet diversified interactive setting. It included a domain of politics and communal governance and all of the casual and “friendly” encounters of normal public activities (such as having a chat over tea or a meal together with representatives of respective state apparatuses) where the exchange of ideas occurred through the “friendly relationship.”

Through the matrix of governmental technology of “religious work,” power was mobilized and acted upon in the religious domain. Simultaneously, the power of charity, of love-in-action, was also mobilized through the act of various charitable initiatives. Love-in-action functioned relationally with synergetic forces.⁶⁹⁵ This love-in-action carried pervasive energies and enhanced influences on others as love was increased with its outflow, relying on dynamic and interactive socio-political passion and practices. These relational activities were part of everything that the missional agent did, and everything it did was based on God's love. In this respect, the founder of AHF expressed: “We work as pioneers, teachers, and trainers. Wherever there is a need, we provide resources, suggestions, leadership and knowledge with love.”⁶⁹⁶ The act of love worked

⁶⁹⁵ St. Francis de Sales maintains that through the love of God, Christian charity participating in hope functions relationally with synergetic forces. See St. Francis de Sales (1962) *The Love of God: A Treatise*, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.90.

⁶⁹⁶ AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

toward collaborative inclination and undertakings that attracted others into flexible and malleable forms of co-operating community.

Foucault maintains that power is not at anyone's total command since power relations are reflected in inter-dependent and socio-politically diffused activities. As relations, power relations engage co-participants. They connect multi-dimensional and diverse actors of heterogeneous characteristics in a matrix that is essentially interdependent, responsive and densely interwoven. Even though there was a significant power differential between the authoritarian party-state and AHF in the collaboration, the party-state did not totally control the power relationship. The CCP state apparatuses, local churches and AHF, respectively, constantly struggled within the tension of the engagement of power and experienced its consequences in part. However, the outcome often went beyond each of their specific character and intention in intricate ways that exceeded their own original capacity. The state apparatuses, local churches or AHF, on each of their own, alone were unable to manipulate the interactive dynamics. Hence, they were unable to fully control the consequences of the outcome.

Power shaped and re-shaped the collaborative stakeholders as active pragmatic relationships performed their socio-political function. As the collaboration was a continually dynamic exercise, power functioned as a formative

force that marked material trajectories in the missional domain. While the Communist regime is notorious for its power in repressing Christians, power, when seen through a Foucauldian lens, does not merely act on an inert target or in the voluntary direction of the Communist leaders as the decisive persons. The power of the regime does not simply accompany the CCP in the manner of an attached restriction or extension of a fully instituted entity.

By not stressing the juridical notions of power and by not taking religious regulations and governmental instructions as a restrictive limitation, AHF was able to consider the manifold and intricate ways in which power relations were creative and profoundly transformative. While power could work heavy-handedly via extraneously persuasive acts in the missional domain, it functioned most effectively, from a Foucauldian perspective, when it substantially entered co-presence, reciprocally investing and changing each actor. Hence, within the space of co-presence, power functioned socio-politically in the collaborative engagement concerning the “acts, attitudes and modes”⁶⁹⁷ of the interacting behavior of engaging participants on which the “truth” of love had a significant impact. What were articulated were the breadth and depth of the molding effect

⁶⁹⁷ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York: Vintage Books, p.125.

of power and the various intricate ways in which diverse subjects appeared “gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted”⁶⁹⁸ by transformative interactions in the missional domain. And in AHF’s missional encounter, the mobilizing and molding effect of power and actions of love became critical in its mutually enhancing development. The outcome was that there was “a relationship of mutual stimulation with new modes of political struggle”⁶⁹⁹ conducted in the missional domain. This “relationship of mutual stimulation” in the eyes of AHF was “the friendly relationship with respective government offices” in the missional domain (as have been discussed in Chapter Two).

Strategic Selectivity and Effects of Power

The Foucauldian lens sees the party-state as a cluster of power relations. It is also an operational effect and mechanism of socio-political strategies that exist among an evolving and multifarious results of struggle and contradictory practices. Through a matrix of “arts of government,”⁷⁰⁰ Hu’s party-state operated a plurality of state project-events in the religious circles of which the collaborative

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, p.97.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, p. ix.

⁷⁰⁰ Foucault, M. (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, New York, NY: The New Press, p.42.

engagement with AHF was one. The combined effect of these project-events defined the provisional and contingent condition of existence and the continued momentum in the religious circles. The arts of government represented an essential component of the party-state's regime of practices that stipulated the objectives of its actions and were monitored by continuous (re-)assessments. However, the party-state was not of secondary importance; it remained to occupy a strategic position in the state-religion relation. In Foucault's words, the party-state was "not simply one of the forms of specific situations of the exercise of power—even if it [was] the most important—but that, in a certain way, all other forms of power relation must refer to it. But this [was] not because they [were] derived from it; rather, it [was] because power relations [had] become more and more under state control."⁷⁰¹ In other words, power relations in the missional arena were expounded, particularized, and consolidated under the dynamic interaction of the party-state and collaborative stakeholders.

The party-state continued to be a locus of strategic action through "strategic selectivity,"⁷⁰² which materially differentiated the impact on the

⁷⁰¹ Foucault, M. (2000) "The Subject and Power", in D. Faubion (ed.), *Power*, New York, NY: The New Press, p.345.

⁷⁰² Jessop, B. (1990) *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, p.9.

capability of various socio-political forces to pursue strategic initiatives and realize the objectives set. This strategic selectivity came as a result of specific forms of the state, preference for certain strategies and tactics over others, and acceptance of the access of specific forces over others.⁷⁰³ It also set up a hierarchy of particular interests, certain time and space dimensions, and specific collaborative prospects over others.⁷⁰⁴ This explained, even though not completely, why in Hu Jintao's harmonious era, with its particular logic of strategy and arts of government, the force of charity became more accessible to the regime. The force of charity in its historical specificity was more compatible with the regime's strategy of mutual adaptation with the religious circles to strengthen its governance. Amid conflicts and confrontations, Hu's party-state continued to make use of governmental rationalities to minimize frictions and resistance. The attempt was to facilitate socio-political consensus, mutual adaptation, and collaborative problem solving, and to explore mechanisms fostering cooperation and harmonization.

Hu's governmental rationalities held political hostilities and antagonism against Christianity at the fundamental ideological level but translated operative ideologies into manageable procedures and practices through articulated mutual

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p.10.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

objectives. By conceiving the difference between Christianity and Chinese Communism as diverse credible “inputs” of positive character, the regime regarded AHF, and the collaborative engagement, not as a primary threat to the socio-political order but as a possible means of progress through an experimental project-event of assimilation. While fundamental Marxist atheism continued in the core as an antagonistic force, prevailing governmental rationality of harmonism with an additive of “love” in the operative dimension sought to locate a new order of things in the space of assimilation in the regime’s socio-political adjustment.

The open cluster of power relations in the mission field was coordinated yet not in a firm order; they were mobile and non-egalitarian.⁷⁰⁵ For AHF to achieve a possible effect of its mission, the CCP central government was not considered as the most “powerful” from the perspectives of sovereignty and organizational strength. Power, in a Foucauldian sense, is not restricted to any part of the CCP political institutions. Power does not station at the center –the Politburo—in Beijing. The discussion below provides further dimensions in understanding the central-local landscape discussed in Chapter Two.

In addition to not being a “thing,” the power of the CCP was also not a

⁷⁰⁵ See Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol 1: An Introduction*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p. 94.

position but an operation of political technologies within the regime.⁷⁰⁶ In the form of a matrix of discourses, these political technologies, truths, regulations and laws functioned by building up a non-egalitarian and asymmetrical system of power relations to strengthen the regime's sustainability. The mobility of these power relations was functionally realized by spreading the political technologies and their localized daily operations in a contingent and temporal manner. It was multidirectional, operated at different levels and performed a productive role. The politico-religious technologies of "religious work" included the tenable "truth" of love, the discourse of collaboration and various religious regulations and laws coordinated and synergized through global partnership and peaceful cooperation with the West. The articulated "truth" of love as a new power/knowledge did not occur autonomously in the matrix of forces. As O'Farrell points out, "no form of knowledge emerges independently of complex networks of power."⁷⁰⁷ These power networks were not systematically ordered and could not be identified with a particular level of the regime system.

The collaborative engagement was neither in equilibrium nor a stable

⁷⁰⁶ See Lemke, T. (2011) *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.

⁷⁰⁷ O'Farrell, C. (2005) *Michael Foucault*, London, UK: Sage, p.101.

system. Instead, directionality at the level of operative praxis was established through calculations, conflicts of will and plexus of interests. All these were shaped and directed by the prevalent political technologies of power of polyvalent nature. Meanwhile, collaborative engagement came with intelligibility that depended on combining abstract conceptualizations schematized in concrete applications in the regime in different dimensions, including the central and the local arenas.

Political technologies in the Hu Jintao era were mobilized to locate a position within a specific level where power started to take effect. Such mobilization was articulated through selected “truth(s)” in terms of statements. It acted in the interactive engagement as a relational matrix of forces (regime of forces) that characterized the setting in which a project-event emerged. Articulated “truths” generated articulated spaces and contributed to structuring the regime of forces. These “truth(s)” generated space but not merely space alone; they also located the points of significance for the regime to act upon according to the matrix of the relation of forces. Through discovering points of significance, it became possible to achieve the common objectives of the collaboration. An articulated “truth” of love generated a new power/knowledge; together with the tangible religious regulations and policies, it further constructed a sphere of experience for the CCP regime to manage the religious others. Such a relationship

between the articulated “truth” and the tangible regulations and policies generated an order of knowing a “new normal.” Under this “new normal,” AHF and the collaborative stakeholders needed to act according to a new normalizing order of power relationships manifested in undertakings toward mutual adaptation. A specific matrix of experience of the new “normal” was fabricated through a chain of interventions to rationalize further successions of collaborative engagements.

When the “truth” of love, “religious work,” and related matrix of discourses (including “Hong Kong is part of China” and the “Chinese-ness” of AHF) took their positions at the local TSPM/CCC level, the political technologies became practically effective, i.e., an effective exercise of love was formed. In this sense, the missional agent experienced the power of charity working in mobility with the political technologies of the regime, and they mutually intervened effectively and productively. Although this new power relationship was framed with an articulated “truth” of love and acts of charity, the TSPM/CCC as state apparatus could not be reduced merely to this new function of charity. Their political position of administration, supervision and controlling of churches and related entities (including AHF) continued. Simultaneously, their function to enhance collaboration with AHF was transformed by correlating renewed political technologies and a new matrix of power relations. This new form of relationship entailed an enlarged and

re-aligned matrix of power relations at its specificity. Unless these new political technologies were firmly positioned at the local level according to the permissible intentionality of the CCP—a re-adjusted state-Christianity relationship—there would not have been collaboration with AHF. As Foucault maintains, power relations are intentional and non-subjective.⁷⁰⁸ This applies to the “friendly relationship” between AHF and the local officials. There is always an objective behind it.

CCP’s mobilization of power relations was saturated thoroughly with calculation—an ongoing exercise to achieve targeted objectives. At the local level of TSPM/CCC and other local state apparatuses, there was a significant degree of cognizant planning and decision-making amid the synchronization of political and religious activities. All these contributed to the central-local landscape in the PRC. As actors in the politico-religious realm, collaborative stakeholders needed to acquire the capability of comprehending (with uncertainty) the “why,” the “what,” the “when,” the “who,” the “where,” and the “how” of the task they were required to perform, amid articulating these attributes for the most effective outcome. When AHF analyzed the prevailing political situation, one of the perspectives was

⁷⁰⁸ Foucault, M. ((1990) *The History of Sexuality: Vol 1: An Introduction*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p. 94.

to comprehend the logic behind the collaborative stakeholders. In a Foucauldian language, there was a “grid of intelligibility”⁷⁰⁹ of the socio-political order that required AHF to grasp, and simultaneously exerted a push toward a missional strategic objective—one that emerged historically, framed in specific forms and stumbling upon particular hurdles, blocks, resistances and conditions. Although will and calculation persisted, the overall consequence was not guaranteed. The outcome might escape the intentions of the actors. Foucault says, “People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what ‘what they do’ does.”⁷¹⁰ Simply put, people do not know the ultimate effect of “what they do.” Yet, missionaries need not be pessimistic. The Christian faith encourages AHF missionaries to learn “patience and perseverance” and to “bow down to [the] steadfast God.”⁷¹¹ For AHF missionaries, God “was constantly molding, conforming, and preparing the people of AHF. The Lord of Harvest was reminding [them] to focus on the harvest.”⁷¹²

The newly enlarged space in a new order of things was not an absolute

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

⁷¹⁰ Foucault, M. (1988) *Madness and Civilization: a history of insanity in the age of Reason*, New York, NY: Vintage Books.

⁷¹¹ AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁷¹² Ibid.

setting for the encounter. Instead, it became epistemic (as an expanded source of reference) to collaborative stakeholders in a changing mode—the very experience of a re-adjusted new order in hope for the state-Christianity relationship. This space belonged to a new order of rationalities, the juxtaposition and arrangement of a new matrix of articulated “truths” and tangible religious regulations and policies, and subsequently to a unique array of acts and practices. While it became the latest manifestation of the “now”—the new present, it also became the epistemic condition that allowed the collaboration to function effectively in its specific historicity. The first collaborative project-event—an English training center jointly organized by AHF and a local church as a unique social service to the local community—generated a new experience in the collaborative domain (as listed in the “Major Historical Events of AHF in the Introduction Chapter). Repetition of each succeeding collaborative project-event then improved the stability of the progressive chain as “normal” functions of the ongoing engagements.

By not limiting itself to the negative notions of power—repression, blockage, exclusion, censorship—AHF worked to actualize the productive effects “at the level of desire and also at the level of knowledge”⁷¹³ of the Chinese

⁷¹³ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p.59.

Communist regime. Through this productive effect of power/knowledge, the missional agent enhanced the tenability of collaborative engagement. In a Foucauldian sense, the CCP did not exercise power merely in a negative mode; it pragmatically produced effects at the level of the knowledge of the “truth” of love and at the level of operation where the regime desired to achieve mutual adaptation with Christianity (and other religions) in a Chinese Communist mode. Power produces knowledge, and vice versa, Foucault maintains.⁷¹⁴

Existence of Hu’s party-state hinged on the maneuver of a matrix of multifarious micro-relations of power at every single level of the regime. Strategies of the party-state depended on the cooperation of an entire matrix of local tactics of power. It followed that the collaborative engagement of which AHF was a component gradually became part of the overall CCP achievement in the era of harmonization. While these multi-dimensional power relations coordinated in a matrix according to the intention of the party-state, they simultaneously worked against each other in continuously shifting permutations (as reflected in the dynamics of the central-local landscape). From this perspective, the CCP party-state could be seen as merely a specific and eventually precarious configuration of

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

multifarious micro-relations of power.

Concluding Remarks:

Foucault argues that repressiveness is only one part of power but not all of it. After all, power traverses, forms knowledge and constructs discourses.⁷¹⁵ Although power works through many networks of relationships and, in the process, shapes people and societies, its molding influences are not totalizing. Power is omnipresent throughout the socio-political domain, yet it does not mean that it pre-eminently defines every aspect of the socio-political world.⁷¹⁶ Not everything is encapsulated in relations of power. Foucault argues that there is “indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power.”⁷¹⁷ Enigmatically, this “something” is “an inverse energy,.... a diversity of forms, [and] irreducibilities.”⁷¹⁸ Even though relations in the missional encounter were inevitably and immensely influenced by power, they were also more complicated than the mere function of

⁷¹⁵ Ibid, p.119.

⁷¹⁶ Bernauer, J. (1990) *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought*. London: Humanities Press, p.147. And Pasewark, K. (1993) *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p.51.

⁷¹⁷ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York: Vintage Books, p.138.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

power alone. It was a field of power relations and subtlety of love existing co-extensively. The party-state is powerful but not absolute.

Hu's CCP continued to dominate Christian communities. However, the party-state did not deny inter-connectedness; power relations continued to shift. There was a "means of escape or possible flight" for AHF because, at the core of power, there existed "an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom."⁷¹⁹ Power relationship in the collaborative domain implied "a strategy of struggle" in which the forces were not superimposed, and each maintained individual specific foundational character without confusion.⁷²⁰ Simply put, Chinese Marxists remained atheists, and AHF missionaries continued to be theists. Each of the engaging collaborators constituted "for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal."⁷²¹

The CCP does not have absolute power over religious matters through a Foucauldian analysis of power. As we have discussed earlier, many of the Chinese

⁷¹⁹ Foucault, M (1983) "The Subject and Power", in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, 2edn*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p225.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

Communist leaders knew well that they had no absolute power to eradicate religion from the PRC. Through the Foucauldian lens, power in the mission field was socio-politically dispersed, not totally under control and subjectively instituted by anyone. Instead of being overwhelmed by power in the challenging situation in Hu's authoritarian PRC, it was possible for AHF to soften the many acute features of the socio-political mechanic of power, to nurture a "friendly" relation and to conduct charitable ministries through acts of liberty that Foucault refers to as the active and concrete manifestation of freedom. Such practices are often provocatively created in challenging situations.

In collaboration, all participants in the encounter mobilized power relations in virtue of their freedom *for* reconciliation, love, peace or justice. In a Foucauldian sense, each participant is free to choose among an array of strategic and tactical preferences. For missionaries, the lesson to be learned is that

A power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.⁷²²

⁷²² Foucault, M (1983) "The Subject and Power", in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edn, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p.220.

And this “open up” is hope-laden, which will be discussed through an eschatological perspective in the following two chapters.

Chapter Five

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL MISSION IN THE MAKING

Introduction

The opening of possibility of missional inventions is hope-filled. For missionaries, “the realism of hope”⁷²³ nurtures a realistic missiology that generates “an adequate impetus and grounds for the transformation”⁷²⁴ needed in the mission field. In a Foucauldian sense, AHF was able to “find ways for freedom to unfold within domination.”⁷²⁵ This chapter argues, from a Christian eschatological perspective, that hope-laden Christian realism facilitated AHF missionaries to identify and capitalize on the potential options available in the mission field. It starts by introducing the importance of eschatological potential in mission, and revealing the “long-term existence of religion” in the PRC as a sign of the hopeful tendency that AHF was able to capture. It then goes on to discuss AHF’s constructive theo-political interpretation of mission with which it strategized its missional position. It was one immersed in the “Chineseness” of AHF, able to

⁷²³ Cornelison, R. (1992) *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, p.194.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Tran, J. (2011) *Foucault and Theology*, New York, NY: T&T Clark International, p.21.

identify common ground and with the ability to make the best use of the governmental rationalities and practices in the Hu Jintao era, so as to bring God's blessing to the people of China. After a discussion on AHF's Christian realism and Hu Jintao's political realism, the chapter concludes that the eschatological affinity between AHF's Christian realism and Hu Jintao's political realism enabled a dialogue and a certain degree of critical collaboration.

Eschatological Potential

Moltmann and Metz maintain that Christianity is fundamentally eschatological. It carries a critical horizon on the present and is loaded with explosive potential.⁷²⁶ Missionaries, being executors of action of hope, must not be frightened by concrete reality; they must not veil it. In the Hu Jintao era, AHF's participation in God's mission was an event of missional history with a reality of agony and astonishment. It was also part of the mighty hope-filled intention of the Divine, which was discernible in the process of missional encounters. On the mysteriousness of biblical hope within the history of mission, the touching words

⁷²⁶ Cox, H. (1967) "Ernest Bloch and the 'Pull of the Future'", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology* No. 5: *The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, pp.195-197.

of Joseph served as a beam of light for missionaries in times of ambiguity, difficulties and despair: “..... but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done.....”⁷²⁷ Past persecution of Christians by the Chinese Communists has established pessimism that persists in the minds of many missionaries. Yet, hope is indissolubly linked to realism which is the vital attitude of Christians toward the world. For Moltmann, the world “is full.....of all the possibilities of the Good of hope.”⁷²⁸ By acknowledging that God does not detach humanity from reality, AHF operates (up till today) under Christian realism that offers an essential knowledge of the prevalent mission field and its contemporary relationship with the Chinese Communist regime in a global context. AHF director Y revealed in his article “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation” that in the center of AHF’s realistic approach to mission is God, His mission and His kingdom.⁷²⁹ It seeks the possibility and freedom of operational strategies and tactics through theological and socio-political interpretations of the past, the present and the expectant future for the common good for God’s people. The synthesis of AHF’s Christian realism pursue to ride on the tension between the divine and the

⁷²⁷ Genesis 50:20 New International Version.

⁷²⁸ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.26.

⁷²⁹ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

immanent in a venture that endured as “a becoming reality”⁷³⁰ with an eschatological outlook. In response to CCP’s “differentiated management, co-optation and selective suppression” approach to Christianity in the Hu Jintao era, AHF’s realism directed its operation toward collaboration which is a key driving force of God’s mission on earth. By being relevant to the missional domain, AFH avoided falling into the “selective suppression” category of the CCP.

Amid radical cynicism and effervescent optimism, not uncommon in the mission field, AHF missionaries were not blinded to the roughness of concrete circumstances. Its realism stressed the relationship of God to humanity and the world. In their own understanding, AHF missionaries “[strived] to minister with God as the head of [AHF] and humbly [discerned] God’s message with each of [their] co-workers, partnering churches and everyone who [participated] in the ministry of God.”⁷³¹ This realism enabled the AHF team to comprehend earthly events not merely as they appeared to be but to consider related potential options. In this orientation, they were directed to see things as they were and were guided to pursue their ministry and experience with truthfulness, rationality and

⁷³⁰ Metz, J. (1968) “Creative Hope”, in M. Marty and D. Peerman (ed.), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.135.

⁷³¹ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

seriousness in hope through a praxis-oriented theology of mission. With that, AHF missionaries developed a sharper discernment of the possibilities and limitations of the field that entailed more relevant initiatives toward emerging realities.

In an article entitled “Serving China at a New Depth” in *AHF Update 2008*, AFH founder L expressed that in the midst of the cynical outlook regarding the future of China as a result of income inequality and people’s addiction to money, AHF was able to see the emerging reality from another angle.⁷³² He shared that through the scholarship program, AHF was able “to sponsor a group of university students from the first day of class to the day of finding employment. In each individual’s life [AHF was] able to walk beside them sharing with them in the good and the bad, hearing their dreams and their struggles. It was through the depth of these relationships over the past few years that [AHF was] able to observe a true hope for the country of China, a light in the midst of cynicism.”⁷³³ His observation was that even though these students were from impoverished families and faced much adversity, they worked much harder than the common people. “They never try to cast the blame on God.....but passionately live their lives, creatively and

⁷³² AHF founder L, “Serving China at a New Depth”, in *AHF Update 2008*.

⁷³³ Ibid.

actively navigating each turn.”⁷³⁴

A combination of theo-political missiology and secular socio-political knowledge leads to a more evident appreciation of the reality of the mission field. Augustine argues that in the present life of Christians the City of Man and the City of God are intermixed, fused together and cannot be separated.⁷³⁵ Servants of God are intellectually enhanced when mutually in dialogue and tension with non-believers in the emerging reality. Cardinal F. Koenig maintains that dialoguing with non-Christians helps “weeding out from Christianity what is not authentic.”⁷³⁶ For him, atheism performs the function of purifying Christian thoughts.⁷³⁷ Hence for a realistic and truthful comprehension of the mission on earth, engagement of non-theological ideas in formulating a framework for missional endeavor substantiates and clarifies the truthfulness of major theological concepts. Separation or disrespect either of theological or non-theological understandings can minimize missionaries’ vision and comprehension of the venture called by God. An interdisciplinary matrix of theology and secular socio-political knowledge

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Bruno, M. (2014) *Political Augustinianism: modern interpretations of Augustine’s political thought*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

⁷³⁶ See Girardi, G. (1968) *Marxism and Christianity*, New York, NY: The MacMillian Company, p. viii.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

generates a realistic and extensive venture for participation in God's mission. Missiologically, Christianity and the world socio-political domains are constantly interacting and forming a more responsible tendency on earth.

Metz's theology of the world teaches missionaries not to neglect "the process of the concrete history of the world"⁷³⁸ and Foucault points them to explore the concrete and finite freedom of struggle and resistance⁷³⁹ in the mission field. The concordance between God's revelation and Christian observations is the central element of Christian realism. Accordingly, it requires the missional agent to investigate the field and locate the faithful, necessary agreement between God's revelation and worldly observation. In AHF's testimony, "God has continuously revealed His plan."⁷⁴⁰ God does not separate the missional agent from the reality of the mission field; quite the opposite, He submerges missionaries into the complexity of existence and not merely one of its transitory dimensions. One of AHF's tasks in the collaborative engagement was to discover not only physical and quantifiable reality, but interactive missional reality with its complexity. There were operational realities and theological considerations in their multiplications

⁷³⁸ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the world*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p. 16.

⁷³⁹ Rajchman, J. (1985) *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 92-93.

⁷⁴⁰ AHF director Y, "God is Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation", in *AHF Update 2007*.

where the attention of AHF was demanded.

The long-term existence of religion in the PRC

Christian realism carries optimism and hope.⁷⁴¹ Christian missional endeavor is always associated with hope—a hope connected with this world and beyond. In the absence of hope, reality becomes unbearable machinery, persistent anathema, a basis of fear that cannot be appeased.⁷⁴² Yet, hope is not limited to Christians; it is a universal phenomenon coexisting with humanity.⁷⁴³ Marxist ventures are also linked with hope—a Marxist hope that a better future for humanity is possible through human-initiated revolutionary changes in this world.⁷⁴⁴ Such a hopeful foundation supported Hu's CCP to operate with affirmation on the coming future and invested heavily in the future. Practically everything Hu's CCP planned and acted upon, experimentally, was done with the expectant future in mind. Thus, the collaborative engagement of AHF was the

⁷⁴¹ Tsonchev, T. (2018) *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr: Essays in Political Theology and Christian Realism*, Montreal, Quebec: The Montreal Review E-publishing, p.7.

⁷⁴² Ellul, J. (1973) *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, New York, NY: The Seabury Press, p. 274.

⁷⁴³ Macquarrie, J. (1978) *Christian Hope*, New York, NY: Seabury Press, p.4.

⁷⁴⁴ Klugmann, J. (1970) "The Marxist Hope" in *the Christian Hope*, S.P.C.K. theological collections 13.

domain where theistic Christian hope met with the atheistic Chinese Communist hope.

From a macro-historical perspective, Chinese history reveals that working against religion through oppressive measures has been relatively ineffective. Mao Zedong realized this by writing: “We cannot abolish religion by administrative decree or force people not to believe in it. We cannot compel people to give up idealism, any more than we can force them to believe in Marxism.”⁷⁴⁵ Zhou Enlai also pointed out that the CCP has “no scientific basis to predict the future of religion. Religion may continue for all time, or it may simply disappear. Only the future can tell.”⁷⁴⁶ The CCP leaders were quite clear that the ultimate effect of Chinese Communist dominance over religion was not certain. Although it is a prediction in the Marxist theory that religion will eventually wither away, certainty is not in the hands of the Chinese Communists. This point is critical because it presents the motivation of hope to Chinese Christians that even though they had

⁷⁴⁵ For Mao, religion is a kind of idealism and ideology. See Mao, Zedong. (1990) “On The Correct Handling of Contradiction Among The People”, in *Mao’s Articles Since Inception of the State Vol. VI*, Beijing, PRC: Central Literature Publishing.

⁷⁴⁶ Zhou Enlai was once the Premier of the PRC. As quoted by Spae, this view of Zhou was recorded in an interview with Rajah Manikam who was a leading minister of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in South India. See Spae, J. (1980) *Church and China: Towards Reconciliation?*, Chicago: The Chicago Institute of Theology and Culture, p.9.

in the Mao era become helpless victims of the Chinese Communist regime, which was of powerful and brutal political strength, they collectively remained as a dynamic organism that had endured and in fact had developed and increased after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), despite the restrictions, the oppressions, the hindrances imposed by an authoritarian party-state.

For a decade, all religious expression was oppressed brutally during the Cultural Revolution. Good news came in 1978 that the Religious Affair Bureau was scheduled to reopen and reunite the religious believers through “patriotic” organizations of the five officially recognized religions as part of the reform program through the Four Modernizations policy. As a result, the religious sphere was revitalized, with a gradual expansion of religious activities; however, they needed to be within the political and legal framework boundaries. As a common phenomenon in the PRC, no (at least not immediate) official documentation was open to the public about the gradual opening of the religious sphere. Yet, despite the lack of official documents, official signs and indications acted as fuel for further anticipation. At the Hong Kong-PRC border, cross-border visitors were told that the bible was no longer on the list of prohibited publications and sporadic public

Protestant worship as part of a revival was observed.⁷⁴⁷ In response to this encouraging trend and after the First Theologian's Colloquium in Hong Kong (an ecumenical meeting), a report confirmed the renewal of relationships on many levels between the Christian communities and the Chinese government.⁷⁴⁸

Religious policies and regulations continued to be guided by the ideological framework of "Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought" with an atheistic, materialistic world view. Later, Deng Xiaoping distinctively clarified the criterion for religions to operate in the PRC. He stressed that religion is free in the PRC. He was not concerned about people's beliefs so long as they contributed to the economy and observed the law.⁷⁴⁹ In such a context, there was a need for Christians to transform their theology, comprehension of mission and operational activities, and to refrain from projecting upon the PRC a distorted image of Christianity which, for the general public of the PRC, was culturally imperialist, institutionally rigid, authoritative and class-divided.⁷⁵⁰ The aim, simply put, was to grasp the opportunity to establish a positive image of Christianity in the PRC, mainly through

⁷⁴⁷ Spae, J. (1980) *Church and China: Towards Reconciliation?*, Chicago: The Chicago Institute of Theology and Culture, p.53.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

the loving witness of the people of God. Meantime, Christians in the PRC recognized they had much to offer to the state and the world about God's revelation by working on a renewed relationship between Christianity and the party-state.⁷⁵¹ Ding Guangxun elaborated on the new kind of relation in the following manner:

We like to think of ourselves as an ellipse with two foci, which are not exclusive but mutually strengthening and enhancing—our particularity and our universality. All the good missionaries of the past have brought to China has not been lost, and we are grateful to them. Today, there are other ways for our church in China to benefit from churches abroad. A relationship of a new kind is not only possible but already emerging. Churches abroad can help us most by understanding our need to keep the two foci in good balance.⁷⁵²

To proclaim the Gospel and increase the number of believers would properly be the first thing in the mind of many Christians. However, Spae, a missionary veteran whom the Chinese government expelled in the early 1950s, suggested that the return of missionaries to the PRC was not to proselytize. For him, "the world Church is still often enmeshed in an unjust world system which

⁷⁵¹ Coulson, G. (1996) *The Enduring Church: Christians in China and Hong Kong*, New York, NY: Friendship Press, p. 97.

⁷⁵² Ting, K. H. (1989) *No Longer Strangers, Selected Writings of K. H. Ting*, R. Whitehead (ed.), Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, p. 58.

compromises the power of the Gospel. Christians rarely, if ever, manifest the joy, forgiveness and unity in such a shining way that it will lend credibility to their words.”⁷⁵³ For Spae, the lesson for missionaries is to avoid unmerited practice and arrogance. Servants of God are directed to speak and conduct themselves in a language and in a format that the people of the PRC care to hear and act so that they are inspired to join and to co-work in a tendency shaped by the eschatological future of God. It has become a credible option and priority for many missional agents, AHF included. To strategize its missiological position, AHF realistically positioned itself as one immersed in the traditional Chinese culture, able to determine a common ground, despite differences, with the ability to capitalize on the governmental rationalities and practices of Hu’s party-state, and taking initiatives to understand the aspiration of the Chinese population in light of Christ’s redemption of the whole of humanity.

In its overall structuring of missional ministry, AHF avoided unjust structures, refrained from a privileged position, and did not use Christ’s forgiveness of sins to cover up possible injustice structured by missionaries. Hu’s party-state, in its prevailing situation was a theological fact, one that was the

⁷⁵³ Spae, J. (1980) *Church and China: Towards Reconciliation?*, Chicago, IL: The Chicago Institute of Theology and Culture, p.54.

subject of AHF's endeavor, one that framed the necessity of dialogical and collaborative engagement within existing tensions and challenges.

Expectant venture without a blueprint, yet not without a bearing

A step-by-step rigid planning as a projected future does not signify the full realization of possibility in this world.⁷⁵⁴ The missional venture of AHF started without a blueprint, yet experiences of past missional endeavors provided many insights. The unfinished character of missional undertakings makes research, study and interpretation of concepts/events necessary to comprehend the visible and the invisible. Recognizing that reality is generally bounded by a broad spectrum of objectively defined real possibilities is critical. Possibility in a missional endeavor is not magic; it entails "partial conditionality"⁷⁵⁵ with an understanding that events and things on earth are not in a closed system but open to a certain degree to changing conditions, i.e., they are not pre-determined totally. There are dynamics and factors of which the missional agent is unaware; they may not have even existed as yet. From this perspective, to consider the future based on a pure

⁷⁵⁴ Novak, M. (1968) "The Absolute Future", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology* No. 5: *The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, p.208.

⁷⁵⁵ Bloch, E. (1970) "Man as Possibility", in W. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.63.

futurum paradigm with calculable extrapolation from the past and present would be insufficient. From this perspective, AHF's venture in the Hu Jintao era, as a ministry of the prevalent present, was not bounded only by existing events and things but encircled and enriched by a spectrum of possibilities pointing to the future. Limitations and openings existed, but they changed as the dynamics of conditionality shifted. As illustrated in the story of Home of AHF, AHF's endeavor was a combination of *futurum* and *advantus*. Hope creates a vision, provides a direction for planning by projecting a favorable futurity and then explore the specific possibilities of the present. In the case of AHF in the Hu Jintao era the outcome was a collaborative engagement with the regime.

While the collaborative engagement involved political consideration and the necessity of dealing with uncertainty—adjusting to changes and simultaneously transforming them, the missional hope of AHF was not based on political endeavor or manifestation. Yet, AHF must mobilize its socio-political imagination in order to cooperate in the transformative task in the missional encounter. As Niebuhr advised Christians, political utopianism that leads to illusion must be avoided. The work of collaboration aimed not at eliminating but at transforming the difference among the collaborative stakeholders. Within the political realm of the PRC, the CCP continuously frames itself as the only legitimate

authority capable of leading and governing China toward the Chinese Communist utopia—including prosperity, equality, justice and harmony. Yet, the most critical task for the CCP is through the “acquisition of power”⁷⁵⁶ to ensure its long-term survival. The CCP's sole aim is to maintain the Party in power and strengthen the existing Leninist organization.⁷⁵⁷ Therefore, its actions are interpreted in the political language to ensure a priori legitimacy of the CCP; meantime, they are automatically assumed to be rational and conceivable. For Christians, it is worthless to put hope totally in the political sphere, which is merely a system of sophisticated techniques that is unable to fully comprehend the complexity and particularity of existential, day-to-day human problems.⁷⁵⁸

AHF's mission in the Hu Jintao era was ongoing with anticipation amid a framework of the political discourse matrix—the vision of building a harmonious society. Calculation within the matrix of “truths” in constant flux was essential. Although a gap between Christianity and Chinese Communism existed, the boundaries of this gap were not fixed. There was the possibility of a discourse or a

⁷⁵⁶ Ellul, J. (1983) *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, p. 235.

⁷⁵⁷ McGregor, R. (2012) *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

⁷⁵⁸ Ellul, J. (1967) *The Political Illusion*, New York, NY: Vintage.

“truth” interpreted and transformed other than its original intention. The new interpretation meant that discourse or “truth” could turn in various directions. There were many dimensions of reality in the missional encounter, which meant that the various aspects of the mission were not solidly inflexible. There was no undeniable force that controlled the mission independently. The forms of missional domain were not closed but open toward the space of tomorrow, within which was the anticipation of the Good as Christian charitable ministry worked to minimize the cruel injustice in rural China. While the venture had to face a matrix of different dimensions of reality which entailed missional flexibility and was obligated to alter, it also anticipated the alternate and enigmatic dimensions outside reality which was not entirely (pre-)determined.⁷⁵⁹

Hope and the Mission of AHF

For AHF, hope is the resilient belief that the processes of missional collaborative engagement are happening with respect to some intervening purposes that prevail in peculiar but categorical ways. Such a belief in a prevailing initiative is articulated as God’s “plans” in the eloquent declaration of the

⁷⁵⁹ Bloch, E. (1970) “Man as Possibility”, in W. Capps (eds.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.53.

Scripture: “For I know the plans I have for you,.....plans to give you hope and a future.”⁷⁶⁰ In the mission field for AHF, it is a hope for co-creating a new reality with which Christianity will survive and continue to flourish in China through establishing more Great Commission-minded Christian communities.

Traditionally, missionaries are indoctrinated in the heritage and wisdom of the past. While missional endeavors have often been backward-looking with a conservative approach to reinforce the status quo, new challenges prompt active missionaries to consider new issues seriously. These are issues that have a bearing not merely on the approaches and means of missional endeavor but also the motivation of mission. Contemporary missional initiatives require a prophetic vision toward a new future and *action in hope*.⁷⁶¹ This hope, as an “internal motor,” is an understanding of God’s promissory history for interpreting the contemporary mission of Christianity.⁷⁶² Missional ministry is a continuous process that entails creative and innovative forces in the mission field, the medium and platform of God’s activities. The mission of God is not to be entirely fulfilled by any single

⁷⁶⁰ Jeremiah 29:11 New International Version.

⁷⁶¹ Bevens, S. (2010) “From Edinburgh to Edinburgh: Towards a Missiology for a World Church”, in Vethanayagomony, et al (eds.), *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 1-11. See also Thomas, N. (1995) (ed.) *Readings in World Mission*, London, UK: SPCK.

⁷⁶² Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press. p.45.

organization or program that Christians, by their hard work and resourcefulness, might accomplish. Co-working *anew* in hope with other forces outside the Christian realm can also be within God's plan in any specific historical era.⁷⁶³ In its dialectical operative mode, hope is a deed of the human will, and at the same time, it is a free gift of the Divine.⁷⁶⁴ In dialectical tension, hope is also constantly "an expression of the Holy Spirit," and a "mysterious phenomenon" revealed and appreciated within the relationship between the human individual and the Divine.⁷⁶⁵

There appears a temptation among Christians to disconnect hope and historical reality—many maintain a hope separated from the realities of historical development.⁷⁶⁶ Many missionaries who had worked in China participated in a history that finished in despair because they did not experience lasting "success." Such an expectation gap that resulted in hopelessness betrays the biblical faith. While negative experiences may persist, missionaries are called to be open to the astonishment and the richness of the scripture that hope is persistently historical

⁷⁶³ Schreiter, R. (2010) "Mission from the Ground Up: Themes in Contemporary Mission", in Vethanayagomony, et al (eds.), *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 1-11.

⁷⁶⁴ Ellul, J. (1973) *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, New York, NY: The Seabury Press, p.241.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid, p.283.

⁷⁶⁶ Brueggemann, W. (1987) *Hope within History*, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, p.3.

and, at the same time, history is resourcefully hope-filled. On this point, the faith of Israel has something to teach missionaries, i.e., Israel is characteristically zealous about religious matters relating to socio-political reality, which is constantly changing. The faith of Israelites always has a socio-political dimension that carries priority and credibility. As Brueggemann maintains, biblical stories teach the importance of interaction in historical events on earth.⁷⁶⁷ The interaction is not merely internal within faith communities but also external. Each participant in the interaction is awakened, criticized, impacted upon or shaped in transformative modes according to the dynamics of and with others. In the presence of substantial external forces, interiority is mainly of second significance. Interaction, in hope, with others in socio-political dimensions is inevitable and primary in every missional project-event.

Pragmatic missional theology in hope became a critical element of AHF's missiological *modus operandi* in Christian realism. This enabled AHF to approach the future with an attempt to initiate a difference in shaping the expectant future. Amid the effort to make a difference from the past, there existed some modes of missional approach engaging with past dogmas, principles and concepts (such as

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, p.9.

ideologies of isolation and antagonism against the Chinese Communist regime) that only carried little significance to the prevailing situation. These dogmas, principles and concepts had substantiated how things had been and rationalized established beliefs and actions against those questioning them. Therefore, a more contemporary missional approach of collaboration was not to preserve, not to defend, but to act as guiding principles by which the missional agent tested and assessed its current reality in the light of its endeavor as the frontline servant of God.

Persecution of Christians by Chinese Communists in the past generated pessimism. The imposed socio-political boundaries of the present set up by Hu's party-state continued to develop negativity and repression. Yet, hope existed within pessimism. Reality's harshness and unbearable burdens were understood and endured through hope grounded in solid realism. "There were times of immerse burden," yet AHF members worked "hard and pressing on," AHF founder expressed.⁷⁶⁸ In line with Moltmann's realism in hope, Ellul says, "Hope finds its substance in realism, and the latter finds its possibility in hope."⁷⁶⁹ Hence, hope is vital for any Christian, particularly for missional agents who are often in situations

⁷⁶⁸ AHF founder L, "AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!", in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁷⁶⁹ Ellul, J. (1970) *Prayer and Modern Man*, New York, NY: Seabury, p.275.

of extreme harshness. Without ongoing and active hope, there is ultimately no capability to study, discern, evaluate, make decisions, and act upon the actual circumstance on earth.⁷⁷⁰

Like the Israelites in Egypt, many local Christians and missionaries in the PRC, under scrutiny and in the presence of the coercive power of the CCP, suffered mistreatment. They existed in a socio-political reality of hard power politics. In a sense, this harshness was part of their identity in suffering. From the outset, the difficulties were expected as an experience of participating in and appropriation of socio-political realities of harshness, limitation and painfulness in which AHF missionaries and the local Christian communities were unavoidably enmeshed. It was a sphere with a huge complicated network of instrumental technologies, including different forms of ideological discourses and “truths.” As AHF founder L acknowledged, the collaboration was not in a socio-political vacuum and “automatic collaboration” was not guaranteed.⁷⁷¹ AHF’s venture was not neutral or in emptiness; AHF missionaries had no protection before the Chinese Communists.

With an expectant mentality, they did not accept their position as

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ AHF founder L, “AHF is 10 Years Old! What a milestone!”, in *AHF Update 2011*.

normative. They understood that the CCP regime, in its authority, desired to define and structure the rule of the activities in the collaborative activities. Yet, the regime's ability to frame reality was not absolute. The possibility existed for AHF to contribute dialectically by demonstrating the workability of its constructive inputs to the local government in terms of charity and acts of morality. Credible solutions were brought by AHF into the regime's enterprise. AHF did not belong to the socio-political domain of the Chinese Communists, yet it did not need to be conflictual, at least in charity and moral-oriented activities in the operative dimension. The productive nature of power and love, as has been discussed in the last chapter, functioned to break through prohibition and limitation. While Christian realism considered the possible destructive and oppressive power of the Communist regime, it was more critical to simultaneously locate the possibility to act apart from such destructive and oppressive power. As an instrument in God's mission, AHF was mindful that God uses not only His servants but "many other powers of the world for his mission for the salvation of humankind and the entire creation."⁷⁷² With this understanding, the foundation of missional endeavor was no longer stressed on the "pure" theological dimension. Instead, the venture

⁷⁷² Vassiliadis, P. (2013) "A Theology of Mission from an Orthodox Perspective", in Wild-Wood et al (eds.), *Foundations for Mission*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, p.157.

became the authentic witness of eschatological experience on earth. Authentic witness in terms of meaningful missional undertaking is not limited to proselytism or growth in numbers. In a mission field where extreme poverty, inequality and a corrosive rich-poor gap persisted to the extent that the party-state was embarrassed, it became realistic for AHF to experiment with the regime in improving the livelihood of the impoverished.

A mission field is a contrived domain in which the arrangements are not accidental but are purposefully designed to serve distinctive era-specific interests. As the Chinese Communist ideological framework is only a fabrication, it is not naturally given. Thus, it may be dismantled or reframed in an alternative manner if AHF (and its collaborating churches) takes the courage and the wits to introduce positive elements to facilitate a change in the operative dimension of the domain. To make the missional process effective, one of the attempts of AHF was to (re-)frame its identity and to initiate thinking through alternatives that rested outside the traditional (and tentative) “hostility” model that was once the articulated model supported by ideologies of isolation and antagonism. The “hostility” model was indeed a model of deficiency.

AHF’s activities of teaming up local church/TSPM/CCC reflected an alignment with the regime in communal social service for the poor as a purposeful

public act. It was based on the understanding that the regime did not deny the reality of social injustice and poverty. Yet, AHF must not entangle itself in the contradictory political discourses or practices. The venture was to engage with the political system (religious matters are always politically oriented) while disengaging from the regime's prevalent critical and sensitive political issues. Simply put, effective collaborative ministerial activities became possible within explicit and implicit boundaries without disrupting CCP's stability. The CCP has no tolerance for anyone who challenges its position to sustain party-state security, territorial integrity, sovereignty and economic development.⁷⁷³

Constructive Theo-political Interpretation for Eschatological Mission

For AHF to establish an effective “missionary theology” (in Moltmann’s term) for its ministry in the Chinese Communist regime, there was a basic need to refresh the understanding of God and the expectant future in a new manner. This refreshed understanding, however, needed not be limited only to the pure theological dimensions. Theologians such as Moltmann, Metz and Pannenberg, in their attempts to revive the biblical approach to understanding God and the

⁷⁷³ McGregor, R. (2012) *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, p. xx.

expectant future, have borrowed their conceptual resources from the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. Bloch's Marxism emphasizes heavily the importance of the future, which provides Christians with insights.⁷⁷⁴ In the words of Pannenberg, Bloch teaches Christians "to understand anew the overwhelming significance of a future which is still open, and of the hope which anticipates the future, for life and thought of mankind; and moreover for the ontological peculiarity of all reality."⁷⁷⁵ Bloch, with a dialectical interpretation of the being of humanity, sees reality as a historical process of coming to be under the forces of the future.⁷⁷⁶

Although Bloch was a Marxist, he admitted explicitly that his insight on human eschatological consciousness came from the Bible.⁷⁷⁷ He was able to cross boundaries by borrowing from the biblical tradition and linking biblical eschatology as the foundation for modern secular philosophy to the open, futuristic logic of being. Hence, a common platform became possible to station the biblical conception of God and Marxist ontology (Bloch's) because of the awareness of this

⁷⁷⁴ Dean, T. (1975) *Post-Theistic Thinking: The Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Radical Perspective*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p.20.

⁷⁷⁵ Pannenberg, W. (1968) "The God of Hope", *Cross Currents*, Vol.18, No.3, p.287.

⁷⁷⁶ Dean, T. (1975) *Post-Theistic Thinking: The Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Radical Perspective*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p.20.

⁷⁷⁷ Ernest Bloch, as quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope without faith: An Eschatological Humanism without God", in Metz, J. (ed.) (1966) *Is God Dead?: Fundamental Theology*, New York, NY: Paulist Press, p.27.

historical reason for relevant connections. What Bloch has contributed is that he has helped Christian theologians re-establish the biblical eschatological mentality as an essential component of Christian theology and philosophical reflection.⁷⁷⁸ With this ontological framework, missionaries can reinterpret the nature and activity of the biblical God as a God who moves ahead of them and brings the future into a tangible reality. God acts and goes ahead of humanity; He is not merely above humankind. His revelation to Israel and humanity is the inventive and emancipating promise of a future inconceivable to mankind and much greater than people's present ability to comprehend.⁷⁷⁹ Regarding the experience in this respect, AHF director Y shared the blessing that "God has continuously revealed His plan"⁷⁸⁰ to AHF missionaries who in the front-line of the mission seized the new possibilities for history. According to Moltmann, this revelation of God regarding the project-events of promise, reveals, provokes and creates the open historical possibilities that are captured in the mission of hope.⁷⁸¹ The Divine is the

⁷⁷⁸ Pannenberg, W. (1968) "The God of Hope", *Cross Currents*, Vol.18, No.3, p.287.

⁷⁷⁹ Metz, J. (1968) "Creative Hope", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, pp.133-34.

⁷⁸⁰ AHF director Y, "God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation" in *AHF Update 2007*.

⁷⁸¹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, pp. 288-289.

transcendental power of the expectant future that conveys new possibilities of reality into being.⁷⁸²

For AHF, in its Christian realistic mode of operation, a political fanaticism that assumed its socio-political achievements as a foundation to build up the Kingdom of God would have no place in its strategic initiatives. Such fanaticism would only work against its very existence in the PRC. There was also no room for antagonism or hatred against the atheistic regime. AHF's charity ministries in the socio-political realm became real and assumed real meaning because, as Staron maintains, people can know the Divine through charity.⁷⁸³ The real meaning of AHF's charitable acts was reflected in their mode of love-in-action and prayer-in-action for the coming of God's Kingdom. Such a foundation enabled the missional endeavor to be theo-politically realistic without cynicism. There also existed a humble acknowledgment that even the most potent socio-political order on earth was, from Niebuhr's perspective, a realm of sinful human beings, be they communist or non-communist, atheist or theist, and hence prone to depravity and distortion. There was no excuse for theo-political quietism. Instead, this

⁷⁸² Dean, T. (1975) *Post-Theistic Thinking: The Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Radical Perspective*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p.21.

⁷⁸³ Staron, A. (2017) *The Gift of Love*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

acknowledgement acted as an inspiration to minister attentively for the best possible outcome among the available missional alternatives, i.e., the possibility of collaborative engagement with the Chinese Marxists.

Viewed from an eschatological perspective, the missiological confidence of AHF reflected its staggering tangible act of hope. This hope was an understanding of history against that of the Chinese Communist regime, which had generated hopelessness for many (because of historical socio-political disasters such as the Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, different forms of persecution, the closing of churches, and the expulsion of missionaries from the PRC). AHF missionaries and the local Christian communities believed that God is the master of their ventures in history. They acknowledged that the prevalent frame and content of reality, and the existing power relations were merely historical specificity. They were kept open for God's acts, which anticipated to come. For them, the biblical notion of hope—active, dynamic, and engaging in the realities of the public domain—entailed the entrusting of life and daily activities to the Divine.

As reflected in the biblical text, the ingredient of hope is a new world of equity, freedom and justice, and the joy and well-being of the people. It is not related to progress in the sense of modernization, for what is promised is shaped

in enigmatic ways by the gift of the Divine, where people least expect it. While hope is shaped enigmatically, it “keeps the present arrangement open and provisional.”⁷⁸⁴ That explains the harshness experienced by Chinese Christians in the Mao Zedong era during the Cultural Revolution was not a dead end for them; such a situation was open and only provisional, not ever-lasting or absolute. It was merely a “specific leaning” of that era. Hope prompts people to take note of the temporality of the present and to refrain from absolutizing it because the present is not going to last forever. Under Christian realism, it was critical to recognize and experience the harsh historical experience of the Christian communities. However, to absolutize it was to become blind to the spaces opened for the expectant future. When AHF looked at the reality of the missional domain with its limitations and opportunities of the contemporary PRC, it attempted not to see simply “the ‘necessary’ negative elements of the movement of history”⁷⁸⁵ as understood by some but turned its attention to that which was positive and forward-moving for Christ-followers. The missional domain was the arena of project-events that emerged “as the occasion of the manifestation in history of the fact that God [had]

⁷⁸⁴ Brueggemann, W. (1987) *Hope within History*, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, p.80

⁷⁸⁵ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns & Oates, p.19.

‘accepted’ it.”⁷⁸⁶

Christian realism urged a critical understanding of earthly affairs in “an anthropological world of history,” which was not merely an enclosed reality but was of “various free historical actions and interpretations.”⁷⁸⁷ Expressed in an extension of Metz’s formulation of a theology of the world, the joint effort with the CCP state apparatuses acted as “a Christian event” that bore witness in a worldly condition to “the power of the ‘hour of Christ’ at work within history.”⁷⁸⁸ This “hour of Christ” pointed to the power of God’s act in “the fullness of time.”⁷⁸⁹

Discovering Tendencies of the Time: Christian Realism of AHF and Political Realism of the Regime

The origin of Christian realism is God’s scriptural words and teaching. As people of faith, Christian realists believe that the Christian faith enlarges the capacity of humanity for goodness and righteousness and, at the same time, acknowledges the temporal character of earthly situations. They consider historical dynamics are driven by human capacity under the guidance of the Holy

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid, p.55.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid, p.20.

⁷⁸⁹ Galatians 4:4 *Holy Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. Chinese Union Version. National TSPM & CCC.

Spirit and are always to imagine ministerial activities beyond current limitations. Hence, AHF missionaries were both limited and free; they could act freely in the mission field according to biblical teaching and ethical requirements and chose the most called-for option(s) for their operation (more elaboration in the next chapter). The faith in God provided the bearing and vision to that capacity for the transcendence needed. Still, they were best able to challenge and mobilize power when they could comprehend what was happening in the field within the prevalent socio-political context. In Christian realist mode, their task was not to create a perfect societal condition in the field for the simple reason of human sinfulness (AHF acknowledges in its Statement of Faith that AHF missionaries believe “the universal sinfulness and guilt of fallen man”). Yet, they were called to serve because their most fundamental nature and natural aspiration is to love and be loved.

While the AHF team did not neglect the importance of material and historical evidence when evaluating historical events and studying the future possibilities, they respected two principles in its realism. First, instead of immersing in “pure” theology, it spent much effort in the operative dimension and considered history unpredictable in its tangible manifestation. It was because missional endeavor relies on humans' free will and God's providence—free will

allows different kinds of human action, and God's providence is beyond the control and imagination of human beings.⁷⁹⁰ Second, it is not possible to discover two historical situations or events absolutely the same, nor a totally different one from the others. Therefore, AHF missionaries were mindful of the particularity of their initiatives as historical events and the general tendency in the field. In the Hu Jintao era, "[the] need [for AHF's ministry] is evident. The door is open. People are eager and willing to go", as AHF director W concluded after his discernment.⁷⁹¹

Missiological orientation is not about a framework of pure theoretical convictions, but the corporeal experience of the servants of God set forth to bring His blessings to the people. Amid AHF leadership asking God to "bless [the team] with discerning ability to know [His] will,"⁷⁹² the missional operation of AHF continued according to God's revelation, it gained a deeper and more accurate understanding of the phenomena than its experience, respective rationale, and senses alone could provide. Overall, there existed a renewed path of knowledge that God had revealed—a wealth of knowledge that AHF must employ solidly and wisely. Even a minor rational view or dialectical observation could link and work

⁷⁹⁰ See Niebuhr, R. (1951) "Coherence, Incoherence, and Christian Faith", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 31, no.3, pp. 156-168.

⁷⁹¹ AHF director W, "Why I Care about AHF ministries", in *AHF Update 2008*.

⁷⁹² AHF director Y, "a prayer", in *AHF Update 2012*.

with related spiritual intention and meaning. The anticipation was that they would be able to “understand the context within which [God allowed them] to act upon and following through accordingly.”⁷⁹³ The revelation of God not only lightened up a path to the knowledge of ecclesiastical history but also revealed that the phenomena, the events that happened and anticipated, were indications of another upcoming reality. In the words of Ellul, phenomena “are never anything but the signs of another reality, of another existence. And it is that which gives both a sense and coherence to these phenomena.”⁷⁹⁴

A distinctive contribution of missional engagement with the Chinese Communist was the hope it brought forth amid the danger, ambiguity and associated disappointment (limitations due to censorship of the CCP) that jeopardized the existence of AHF. AHF missionaries risked being questioned, charged or expelled by the regime. While the Bible provided spiritual resources to the AHF team, Christian realism that functioned through an eschatological context enabled them to extend imagination beyond current events/happenings. As

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ Ellul, J. (1997) *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, Grand Rapids, MI: William b. Eerdmans Publishing, p. 76.

Moltmann argues, “the really historic factor lies in the concept of possibility.”⁷⁹⁵

Connected with the conception of possibility was the knowledge and ability to discover tendencies in the missional operation. For AHF, it was the tendency to renew the relationship between Chinese Communism and Christianity. Instead of seeing missional ministry in a “cause-to-effect” mode of operation, the missional encounter, as a part of historical movement in its specificity, could be understood from the perspective of “from possibility to reality.”⁷⁹⁶

Under its political realism and desire for power, the CCP attempts to build coherence in the political issues of its times. Constituents of political realism are not arbitrary but are “part of an ensemble of phenomena.”⁷⁹⁷ While Chinese Communism contains ideological and materialistic roots, the operative dimension can be examined as the product of contemporary rationality common to the regime’s leadership. As demonstrated earlier, Hu’s scholastic state apparatuses attempted to rationalize the regime’s intention to capitalize on the existence of religions, i.e., to use the faith communities to serve the regime. It was evident that,

⁷⁹⁵ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.242.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid, p.243.

⁷⁹⁷ Ellul, J. (1997) *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, Grand Rapids, MI: William b. Eerdmans Publishing, p.53

as the circumstances differed from the Mao to the Hu era, it was impossible to apply identical principles ubiquitously. For the CCP, even though religion is theoretically classified as ideological, the problem of governing religion is politico-technical in the sense that the Party controls the regime via governmentality, which essentially, in a Foucauldian sense, is a technology for governing. Hu's CCP, identifying the problem of religion in China as a politico-technical problem in the operative dimension. It required a politico-technical solution that did not try to settle the issues of religion in the abstract. In the eyes of political realists: for a politico-technical problem, a politico-technical solution!

Through political realism, Hu's regime considered the problem of religious matters in the most tangible approach possible. It resolved them according to the specific needs of the era. The solution for a manageable and effective policy and regulations on religious matters required studies of various aspects of the problems on a broader spectrum. In effect, it was an amalgamation of numerous components of the situation that finally delivered a solution for the regime. Hu's political realism was not established castles in the air; it was structured based on the foundation of earthly reality—politically, socially, and economically. By catching CCP's intention under political realism, a critical and continuous task for AHF was to reveal to the regime that its church-related ministries and charitable

activities to the poor were within the ideological “truth” matrix of the regime, compatible with the prevalent governmentality and could contribute constructively to the immediate operational goal(s) of the PRC.

For the missional agent, Christian realism in faith existed not in “itself” but within a network of the socio-political and economic context of the mission field. Christian realism is characterized by the concord between God’s revelation and the observations of human beings. The Christian faith directed missionaries with the momentum to (re-)discover the world—to understand the human self, humanity and the worldly events as to what was revealed to human beings by God about the anthropological situation and the actions of the Divine on earth. This revelation was dynamic yet specific, and not about stagnant doctrines. God does not ask missionaries “to manipulate or to interpret the facts in order to make them accord with a so-called Christian doctrine.”⁷⁹⁸ In other words, adhering to rigidity associated with Christian doctrines was not the way to participate in the mission of God. God directs human beings into a matrix of realities—including material reality, eternal reality, spiritual reality and living reality in all their complexities; the divine does not separate humanity from earthly existence.

⁷⁹⁸ Ellul, J. (1997) *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage*, Grand Rapids, MI: William b. Eerdmans Publishing, p.73.

While the Bible does not provide a formula for human participation in God's mission, one of the principles is to grasp the possibilities characterized by "tendency" or "specific leaning" that develops into the real in a particular historical constellation.⁷⁹⁹ The "tendency" or "specific leaning" in the Hu Jintao era was the regime's readiness and the actual administration of religious policies favoring a new state-religion relationship. This tendency mediated between the real, objective possibilities and the subjective decisions of the interlocutors in the missional encounter, with mobilization of power relations. Such a tendency positioned the historical specifics within the current of historical momentum. It framed the decisions of AHF, the local churches and respective state apparatuses—as historical participants and witnesses within the same process.

An objective of AHF in engaging the exploratory medium of discovering tendency was to ascertain a directional trend. Collaborative engagement between atheistic Chinese Communists, theistic AHF and local churches became what was articulated for the present. Far from being idealistic, the promising approach thoughtfully treated the prevalent reality fraught with possibilities. This expectant approach did not take things/events as they were but considered things/events as

⁷⁹⁹ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.243.

progressing “with possibilities of change.”⁸⁰⁰ In anticipatory mode, there existed a great degree of realism. It empowered the missional agent to cooperate with and work on those tendencies that could be actualized to be part of the total reality. They took part in the synergizing momentum under cultivation. What was anticipated at that present moment was a reality in the future—as hope prompted planning and compromise among the collaborative stakeholders. Remarkably, the collaborative engagement gradually structured into a matrix of stakeholders' operations and formed part of the missional platform.

Such a missional matrix, which engaged itself in transformation, was required to grasp the associated historical complexes (AHF had set up a Research and development committee tailored for this purpose). “Historical thinking,” in the form of the anthropological and socio-political knowledge linking actions and events with the prevalent contextual experiences and contemporary views of operation, had to be put into effect.⁸⁰¹ In other words, AHF missionaries gifted with attentiveness to the specific kind of setting were enabled to minister with receptivity toward a particular field of mission. It was an arena consisting of various modes of encounter, involvement, customs of practice and institutions within

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid, p.25.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid, p.243.

which they took actions historically. The outcome was the (re-)discovery of the facts and events that critically enabled the ministry to escape from abstraction.

Experiment and Tendency

As discussed earlier, Hu Jintao's harmonism, under the political realism of CCP, was a matrix of political discourses having traditional Chinese discourses crafted heavily onto an ambitious and highly experimental projection. It took up Chinese Marxism upon itself and, at the same time, transcended the Chinese Marxist tradition. It was one aligned to the future and the unprecedented, an undertaking to construct a framework in the future tense. To Hu's CCP, the world was moving in an unfolding process in which the regime was travelling toward Marx's promise with Chinese characteristics, a promise that was yet to come. It represented "a thought experiment."⁸⁰² As an experimental regime, the CCP party-state took on a journey to opening the PRC to a future that would be formed and structured by human efforts. The purpose of Hu's matrix of political discourses was not only a theoretical interpretation of the regime as it was and anticipated but, as Heilmann puts it, constituted a form of "plasticity" in the regime's

⁸⁰² Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.9.

experimental strategy formulation and policy innovation.⁸⁰³ At the same time, it located the possibilities for Chinese Marxist activities to transform the regime and facilitate opening up the party-state toward a beneficial effect—the achievement of *datong* (the Chinese utopia) in the future.

Concurrently, AHF operated through its Christian realism in a direction toward a reality unfolding into the future of God. Interaction with the regime provided a significant inter-functioning of ideo-political, theo-political and other associated conceptions as they crossed each other in the process. Both the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Christian communities (including AHF) mutually provided additional ways of thinking and means of identifying concepts and “truth(s)” about reality as open to a new future. Understood from a humanistic Marxist perspective which the regime under Hu Jintao attempted to rule, the party-state contained officials who were innovative experimentalists. In constant flux, the party-state and its identity underwent transformations, both in terms of itself and the historical context, in its exploration to reach the final stage of communism—a fulfilment it still lacked. There is always a utopia ahead for the CCP; the Party constantly shifts toward something adventurous and operates in

⁸⁰³ Heilmann, S. (2018) *Red Swan: How Unorthodox Policy Making Facilitated China's Rise*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, p. 29.

the imagination of reaching a desirable future. This utopian consciousness, based on “ontological possibilities of reality,” is not merely a subjective feature of human consciousness, nor is it strictly a human construction of “truths” based on the assessment of the possibilities of reality.⁸⁰⁴ To the Hu Jintao regime, the world was not an enclosed reality, the possibilities within which were not pre-set from the outbreak but gradually unfolding. In other words, the regime was facing real but yet-to-come actual prospects; they were the possibilities that conditions had yet to emerge. Such prospects were anticipated in various stages of hopeful imagination.

Humanistic Marxism is inspired by hopeful imaginations and undertakings that can facilitate “the dialectical leaps of history in which such possibilities become the actual.”⁸⁰⁵ That is to say, the combination of the openness of hope to the new space, the *novum*, the “perspective land,” and the ontological openness of reality to the *novum* allows human mediation in a worldly experimental process to move it in the direction of a humanly desirable outcome.⁸⁰⁶ This sphere of *novum* of Hu’s CCP, as “the reality of the not-yet” and “the realm of fear as well as

⁸⁰⁴ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.10.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, p.11.

⁸⁰⁶ Hudson, W. (1982) *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, p. 119.

hope,”⁸⁰⁷ provided a view, together with meanings and values, of what was lying ahead in the momentum that the CCP was advancing. The “historical meaning of the *novum*”, according to Hudson, is bound up with theory-praxis and “the final *novum* is present in each good new which emerges in the process.”⁸⁰⁸

Marxist hope is an expectancy of utopia, not merely a subjective extrapolation.⁸⁰⁹ For the Marxists, through the work and planning of humanity, experimental projection can be made to the final goal of the process. Hudson’s reading on Bloch’s *novum* provides a more detailed elaboration:

If the *novum* is taken up and experimented for, if initial formulations about it are corrected in accordance with process trends, it becomes the mediated *novum*, which has acquired many but not all of its subjective and objective conditions; and then the ruling mediated *novum* which strains as tendency: the dialectical, explosive *novum* which is objectively pending and only requires the subjective factor to act for it to become actual.⁸¹⁰

From the perspective of experimental projection, Hu Jintao’s scholastic state apparatus introduced a new set of experimental concepts that assisted in

⁸⁰⁷ Bloch, E. (1970) “Man As Possibility”, in W. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.63

⁸⁰⁸ Hudson, W. (1982) *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, p. 119.

⁸⁰⁹ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.11.

⁸¹⁰ Hudson, W. (1982) *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, p. 119.

transcending the confined socio-political and economic objectives of transitional Chinese Marxism. It resulted in a matrix of contemporary Chinese Marxist “truths” that pointed to a future with more space for working together with the religious circles. Although the yet-to-come was anticipated, it might not be foreseeable.

In understanding Hu’s political articulation of harmonism from Bloch’s Marxist perspective, the hope of harmonism was an expectation of the ultimate future, which functioned not as the escapist’s dream but as a critical motivation for the present. The utopian imagination revealed the inadequacies of the present (as reflected in poverty and inequity), counteracted the status quo and stimulated hope, a platform for new ventures. Such a hope turned into “creative expectation,”⁸¹¹ which facilitated the CCP to identify and get hold of the possibilities evolving at the forefront of advancement for the party-state. Meantime, in the era of Hu, some of the previous ideological discourses (including class struggle, hostility toward religion and antagonism against capitalism) that had kept the CCP sustaining became less critical. Inertia to change the present was developed in the bearing of the anticipated harmonious society—the utopia of the people under the CCP. As far as the CCP and its followers could conceive, the

⁸¹¹ A term taken up by Moltmann from Bloch. See Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology or Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of a Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. 335.

possibility of the final state of such a utopia became a positive factor in governing the party-state and a way to sustain the long-term survival of the CCP. By allowing a maximum possible space (within political limitations) for the improvement to come, the regime maintained the hope in constant motion, seeking continually adjustable and manageable future expectations.

In a very similar direction, AHF missionaries discerned the eschatological hope in the venture in intimate association with the immediate anticipation for attainable changes in the mission field, synergizing and comparing them. And it located the ultimate *novum*, not in a far-away heavenly beyond, but toward the immediate hopes of history to which its missional endeavors led. Moltmann argues that the ultimate *novum*, which signified an all-actualizing ending, could not be fully depicted because it only comes about via the upcoming occurrence of new possibilities.⁸¹² Through a Christian knowledge of reality, AHF considered its ongoing worldly task of the present was “open to the future.”⁸¹³ The missionaries,

⁸¹² *Ultimate novum* signifies an all-actualizing ending. Moltmann claims an ontology of the future which realizes itself in advancements of hope in the present and thus makes history. See Dabney, D. (1993) “The Advent of the Spirit: The Turn to Pneumatology in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann”, *The Asbury Theological Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 1.

⁸¹³ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.12.

as God's servants, acted as "creature[s] of hope"⁸¹⁴ who worked on "an anthropology of hope as well as an ontology of the not-yet"⁸¹⁵ with a propensity bearing toward the future in a process that God's promise come in creative ways. AHF's missional venture in hope afforded "possibilities of accepting historic suffering and of recognizing historic tasks, yet without being annihilated."⁸¹⁶ In other words, AHF missionaries were "experiment men" in an "experiment world;" hard and fast rules had no position in the missional realm in which "God [had] joined a hope."⁸¹⁷ Hence, "creativity," "flexibility," and "effectiveness" became key operative principles to guide AHF missionaries to "work diligently in the hope of shouldering the burdens" and "to adjust sacrificially.....to profit and bless" the targeted groups.⁸¹⁸ When correlated with the nature of human beings and that of the world, the missional hope offered a foundation for cooperation in steering the future between Christians and Marxists.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁴ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.20.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid, p.19.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid, p.27.

⁸¹⁸ AHF founder L, "A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years", in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁸¹⁹ See Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.12.

By operating “thoroughly in the present”—being attentive to the current events, people and tendencies—it was already operating “in the future.”⁸²⁰ In concert with actual, factual events and real people (the Chinese Christians, non-Christians and the Chinese Communists), AHF missionaries acted as “people of the future.”⁸²¹ But, unless AHF was acutely sensitive to the *reality-altering effectiveness* of God’s promise in the past and future fulfilment, it would not be operating thoroughly in the present. The missional agency's future could only be assured by the depth of its vow in faith and love. In other words, its operation in hope must be of deep faith and love in the present.

Such correspondences allowed AHF’s operational tactics an eschatological affinity to the CCP’s ideological system associated with the hope, both in actual contents and the conceptual framework. Amid Hu Jintao’s Marxist humanism within the CCP ideological structure, AHF under Christian realism was not concerned only with providing another interpretation of the world via God’s good news to the regime and its people but with coming to a real test in praxis, in grasping and shaping the momentum, in faith, hope and charity. From the

⁸²⁰ Fransen, P. (1971) “Hope and Anthropology: Is there Still Prophecy in the Church?”, in J. Whelan (ed.), *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, New York, NY: Newman Press. p.167.

⁸²¹ Ibid.

perspective of Moltmann, this eschatological discernment of missional endeavor reshaped the missiological orientation into a provisional, expectant and praxis-orientated principle of what was needed for the present. From this perspective, Moltmann writes:

in the medium of hope our theological concepts become not judgments which nail reality down to what it is, but anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future possibilities. Theological concepts do not give a fixed form to reality, but they are expanded by hope and anticipate future being.....They are thus concepts which are engaged in a process of movement, and which call forth practical movement and change.⁸²²

According to the understanding of AHF director Y, this “practical movement and change” was anticipated in God’s guidance, providence and peaceful presence.⁸²³

Concluding Remarks

By being sensitive to the reality-altering effectiveness of God’s promise, the missional agent was able to operate thoroughly in the present. It allowed eschatological affinity between AHF’s Christian realism and Hu Jintao’s political

⁸²² Moltmann, J. (1993) *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, pp.35-36.

⁸²³ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

realism of harmonious society through dialogue and a certain degree of critical collaboration. Bloch is right to proclaim that “Socialism and Christianity have many kinds of concordance, especially in the most important matters.”⁸²⁴ Should missionaries commissioned to the PRC not rethink and respond positively to their ventures? Should they not work innovatively under a facilitating condition, on a path lighted by an inspiration of hope, where it is possible to deepen the affirmation of Christianity in the PRC? The mission in collaborative engagement with local churches and the regime’s state apparatuses was a joint-search for an expectant future for which the collaborative stakeholders worked together in a medium of hope. AHF looked back into the past to locate God’s promise. At the same time, it held on to the bearing of the existing, the contemporary. Yet, to make timely and crucial decisions, all stakeholders needed to look into a new future, out of which a spectrum of potentials came, for good or evil. As Moltmann suggests, God’s servants need to combine the hoped-for with their subjective capability and the objective possibility; they, however, must differentiate them theologically.⁸²⁵

AHF attempted to contribute to the framing and realization of the yet-to-

⁸²⁴ Bloch, E. (1970) “Man as Possibility”, in W. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p.67.

⁸²⁵ Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 53.

come in its prevalent theology and practical ministry. It was prepared to respond to the hope that it carried. It meant holding on to God's promises and acknowledging that it was required to demonstrate how it was able to deal with the state apparatuses, the prevalent socio-political issues and even the personnel issues through hope in the coming of God. There was a need to connect the present with the future, which required reflection on the ministry of God, hope, and the expectant future through critical and dialectical Christian thinking.

Although the political realism of Hu's CCP differed from AHF's Christian realism, it was not to be ignored. There was a place to acknowledge the specificity of the missional domain by attending to the significance of coherence to prevailing phenomena and tendencies. The observed socio-political facts and information possessed much more valuable insights than the human eyes could see. Amid inconsistency within an incoherent history, a path of a more revealing history could be (re-)discovered, which directed and broke the uncertainty.

Chapter Six

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES IN THE FREEDOM OF POSSIBILITIES:

ESCHATOLOGICAL PRAXIS

Introduction

Following an analysis of AHF's endeavor from the perspective of hope-laden Christian realism in the previous chapter, this chapter goes on to explore the missional task of AHF as eschatological praxis via time-specific initiatives. It reveals that AHF's missional initiatives were nurtured within a faithful past, an expectant future and a loving present so that the collaborative engagement with the regime moved into an emerging future and a submerging reality. Through a process of de-limitation in which dialogue and interaction functioned in the freedom of possibilities, missional venture proceeded in the socio-political reality of the mission field.

Dynamic Participation

Christian hope is a determining attribute of Christian existence.⁸²⁶ Any missional agent must define itself historically and appropriately position its hope-laden venture. For AHF, a realistic approach to hope meant not only building up a

⁸²⁶ Cox, H. (1967) "Ernest Bloch and the 'Pull of the Future'", in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds.), *New Theology No. 5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan, pp.195-96.

sensitivity to the historical events, phenomena, and trends of contemporaries but also seeking to grasp the most profoundly inspiring “spirit of the age.”⁸²⁷ For AHF director W, it was an era for “new agencies and movements spring up.”⁸²⁸ While director W was a part of “a large denominational church and mission structure”, he was eager to participate in such new movements for serving the unreached and remote people of China.⁸²⁹ For him, AHF was relatively small, new and hence was “free to move quickly”, “free to develop new strategy”, “free to develop new methods of recruitment and implementation” and “free from heavy financial property and administrative obligations.”⁸³⁰ He was confident that God had given AHF “the opportunity to prepare the soil and to plant the seed” and affirmed his best to encourage and support the ministry.⁸³¹

The authenticity of any missional agent depends upon its sensitivity to reading the spiritual direction prevailing creatively in its global-local situation. While challenges in ambiguity and uncertainty prevailed, AHF was inspired that the hope it cherished was the hope of God, not the blind hope constructed as insightful and

⁸²⁷ Brueggemann, W. (ed.) (2001) *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p.15.

⁸²⁸ AHF director W, “Why I Care about AHF Ministries”, in *AHF Update 2008*.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

scientific that deceived the Marxists of the USSR, the PRC and elsewhere. These Marxists marched into an abyss while believing they were entering lightness with clear-sightedness and knowledge of the object of their utopian hope. They hoped for liberty, equality, and fraternity, yet the outcome so far has been the opposite of what they had projected and expected.

AHF's encounter with the Chinese Communist regime might seem risky, but essentially it was walking "in God's darkness."⁸³² It was not as dangerous as it appeared because God cares for His people and will "turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth."⁸³³ The hope that the Holy Spirit suffused the doubting and hesitant spirits of the missionaries transformed them anew into missional actions. An important goal was to realize the love of God on earth. The task of AHF missionaries was not to make the world perfect but to anticipate being part of the essential elements for changing it for the better toward the future of God. In the missional domain, AHF missionaries were positioned to participate dynamically in the divine effort of faithful love.

⁸³² Tinder, G. (1999) *The Fabric of Hope: An Essay*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, p.80.

⁸³³ Isaiah 42: 16, New International Version.

Faithful Past, Expectant Future, Loving Present

Missional operation in expectation with a view of the future does not mean that the present is to be excluded; otherwise, as Genovesi reveals, it would easily fall victim to incapacitating forces; for the reason that no theological enterprise (or enterprise of other natures) is able to continue in the long term without engaging in the task of articulating the interests and requests of the present.⁸³⁴ In other words, abstraction had no position in AHF's ministry; its endeavor was action-oriented in present-day reality. The present was the occasion for decision and called for practical initiatives; it was not a passive illusion for the future. As Moltmann insists, "the new is never totally new" and "the place where the future of men and the world is decided is the present."⁸³⁵ In short, the present is at the forefront of the future.

The eschatological light of promises was the entrusted vision of a God-led development of the Christian community in Hu's era. In this light, the prevalent limitations of ministerial space in the mission field (control and boundaries set up

⁸³⁴ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.129.

⁸³⁵ Moltmann, J. (1969) *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, p.6.

by the CCP) were considered “contrast-experiences”⁸³⁶ against which AHF had to struggle in an endeavor of creative initiatives. The function and the influence of the new Good, as it evolved and endured upon the contrast-experiences, could be briefly described in two stages. Initially, it was a pre-reflective reaction in which God’s messages informed missionaries of the difficulties, inequities, and disparities in the local situation. Then, it developed to a degree to which a missional demand for church and social ministries in its attentiveness and sensitivity to the local Christian and non-Christian communities emerged. Following that, a change to the current situation was envisioned with an enlarged space in mind. However, it was only when the second stage in which the Good News message became mature in the mission field, both in terms of theological engagement and an empirical study of the specific context, that the missional agent formulated a God-led, reliable and rational agenda of theologically-oriented socio-charitable action.

Moltmann’s realism points out that “future-seeking missionary practice does not search for eternal orders in the existing reality of the world, but for

⁸³⁶ It is a term borrowed from Edward Schillebeeckx. See Schillebeeckx, E. (1968) *God The Future of Man*, London, UK: Sheed & Ward.

possibilities that exist in the world in the direction of the promised future.”⁸³⁷ For AHF, the critical consideration was the possibilities that existed in the missional domain in the Hu Jintao era with a promising future. An amazing work of God was shared by a girl (XJ) of Home of AHF in her testimony entitled “The Amazing works of God: a girl of Home of AHF and now a university student” in *AHF Update 2016* (XJ’s testimony was originally written in Chinese and then translated into English by the AFH editorial team). She was one of those girls who moved to Home of AHF directly after the snowstorm in 2008 when she was a primary school student and had no prior knowledge of Christianity. As previously described, Home of AHF was designed and set up as a “home.” On this, AHF founder L wrote, “We do not consider our facility as a dormitory where we simply provide a room to stay in and food to fill stomachs. We seek to create a safe and restful place for our girls to truly feel at home in a place where they can daily grow physically and spiritually.”⁸³⁸ XJ’s testimony revealed that for her at Home of AHF “every day was interesting because of the support and encouragement from the teachers there.”⁸³⁹ (There were

⁸³⁷ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.288.

⁸³⁸ AHF founder L, “Homes of AHF—A gift from God to us”, in *AHF Update 2016*.

⁸³⁹ XL, “The Amazing works of God: A girl of Home of AHF and now a university student” in *AHF Update 2016*.

missionaries acting as “teachers” at Home of AHF to help the girls finish their daily school assignments.) After entering secondary school, she had to live at the school dormitory and hence could only come back to Home of AHF during holidays. She wrote, “Every school holiday when I returned home, I would especially care for and help those sisters who were in lower grades. In helping them, I was very happy.”⁸⁴⁰ As regard to the source of her energy to helping others, her witness was: “I knew that the source of all this is from Jesus who loves us.”⁸⁴¹ After secondary school, XJ “stepped into the vocational school full of hope.”⁸⁴² Soon, she learned the dark side of the real world. She wrote, “I saw another side of the school, which is corruption. To my surprise, there were those who took drugs, who smoked, who drank and engaged in other kinds of harmful activities.....Thankfully the Lord kept me and helped me to overcome all temptations.”⁸⁴³ After the three-year vocational school, XJ went to university through a special AHF sponsorship. In her testimony, she wrote, “I never dreamt I could go to university. I didn’t even dare to think about it. I truly became a member of the university campus. I live every day to the fullest and have a very happy campus life. And it is only because I have Jesus. The greatest

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

blessing in life is to know the Lord Jesus.”⁸⁴⁴ It was a history from a faithful past as represented by the establishment of Home of AHF, through a loving present of AHF girls’ experience in the love-in-action endeavor of AHF to anticipating and reaching an expectant future where the spiritual and physical advancement of the girls were observed as the *new*.

God’s blessing did not stop there but ever ongoing. Several years after the establishment of Home of AHF, AHF founder wrote, “we have been accepted by the local neighborhood and government. Many of the local groups appreciate our work.....Last year we were invited by another Yao village in the mountainous region to start another home.”⁸⁴⁵ After a period of prayer and preparation, Home of AHF Number 2 was established in 2016 as another *new*. These are some of the project-events and stories of AHF’s faithful past, loving present and expectant future. In terms of Moltmann’s theological conceptual matrix, the ministerial outcome was “planning, which corresponds to a concept of the future as calculable *futurum*, and hope, which corresponds to *adventus*” combined in practice.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ AHF founder L, “Homes of AHF—A gift from God to us”, in *AHF Update 2016*.

⁸⁴⁶ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Morgan and Scott, p.44.

Hope invited missionaries to act in the radiance of God's ultimate novum and anticipate operations with great expectations but not with total certainty. Uncertainty persisted for AHF because the powerful force of the future is an element of the mystery of the Divine, not under the control of human beings. The Book of Hebrews teaches that "By faith, Abraham when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was to go."⁸⁴⁷ Amid the uncertainty, however, it was a hope-filled spirit that energized the dynamism of Christian hope to sustain its momentum toward the future of God. In the absence of Christian hope, missionaries would have, as Schillebeeckx argues, only an ideological enterprise that would hastily, and in an a priori manner, construe what is "humanly desirable."⁸⁴⁸

As far as strategy formulation and planning were concerned, AHF missionaries did not know for certain the "what," the "when," the "where," the "who," the "why," the "how," or the final details of the fulfilment. Therefore, an openness had to be maintained toward the yet-to-be which could be outside of every imaginable human assumption. Servants of God, as Pieper suggests, are not

⁸⁴⁷ Hebrews 11: 8 New International Version.

⁸⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, E. (1968) *God The Future of Man*, trans. N. Smith, London, UK: Sheed & Ward, p.197.

to stress distinctly planned objectives and eschatological socio-political targets; instead, it is their responsibility to perform present duties that are prudent, just and moral.⁸⁴⁹ The not-yet of God, *adventus Dei*, comes into the present, thereby bringing into the present potentiality and guiding a realistic path toward fulfilment.

Severe persecution of Christians in the PRC and entailing antagonism of the past must not be denied. Yet, Christian hope acknowledges that the completeness of humanity is realized eschatologically and that it enters from out of the future. While the meaning of AHF's venture was deep-rooted in the past and present graciousness of God, AHF was free because its operation was "not locked in the structures of what already is or always has been."⁸⁵⁰ AHF's momentum was to move into newness, migrating beyond the bondage of the framework of antagonism between Christianity and Marxism.

While emphasizing *adventus Dei*, Moltmann also relates it to the *futurum* paradigm, the "will be", in the medium of hope. Having a future of hope did not release AHF from the necessity of formulating actions for the future. In principles

⁸⁴⁹ Pieper, J. (1969) *Hope and History*, New York, NY: Herder & Herder, p.91.

⁸⁵⁰ Braaten, C. (1969) *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamic of Hope*, New York, NY: Harper & Row, p.46.

of hope, its mission pointed to a “methodology of juxtaposition”⁸⁵¹ that tried to expound and interpret the past amid associating a range of components of the current experience without closing the gate to the future. The planning, when linked to the macro and micro perspectives of complex realities of the mission field, was “found in a dialectical relationship to history.”⁸⁵² From the standpoint of eschatology, the traditional enmity between Christianity and Chinese Communism and a transformed (softened) version of antagonism of the present (in the Hu Jintao era) did not have to be carried “with ultimate seriousness” because the past and present reality of the missional domain was merely provisional.⁸⁵³ As Genovesi points out, part of the significance of eschatology is to channel reality out of “its established categories” and to nurture “an element of creative conflict” that entails a transformative effect in the human historical process.⁸⁵⁴ Handled innovatively as a creative conflict, the tension and power relations within the

⁸⁵¹ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.128.

⁸⁵² Moltmann, J. (1971) *Hope and Planning*, London, UK: SCM Press, p.179.

⁸⁵³ See Cox, H. (1969) *The Fest of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁸⁵⁴ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.134-135.

collaborative engagement could function as part of the matrix of forces that transform historical events in the mission field.

Amid attentiveness to situational complexity, the realm of hope takes the present as actual and real with a component of freedom. While the present is unable to operate without the memory of the past, the assertions of the past and the present become relativized insofar as missionaries think and operate in the direction of a future of hope. Moltmann indicates that Christian hope, which arouses the “passion for the possible,” is an inexhaustible resource for mobilizing and empowering forces of the thinking and knowledge of, and reflection on, historical events.⁸⁵⁵ For this reason, effectiveness, meaning and significance are realized when hope embraces and transforms the thought and actions of missionaries. It also generates thoughts of an anticipatory and imaginative kind of love to face the missional realm and to shape the anew emerging possibility in light of the promised yet-to-be because “what is promised is within the bounds of possibility.”⁸⁵⁶ What enabled AHF missionaries to engage in the creative

⁸⁵⁵ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, pp.32-36.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.34-35.

transformation was a sort of “forward memory,”⁸⁵⁷ which urged them to the effort in the current context of operation. With respect to eschatological promises, AHF was facing “the task of remembering the future,”⁸⁵⁸ which was reflected in its motto “to preach good news to the poor,to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”⁸⁵⁹ This future, from the *adventus* perspective, is anticipative.

Nevertheless, the missional agent was mindful that the future is fragmentary and incomplete. The activities of missionaries were not merely to anticipate but also to involve and engage creatively in the present. Thus, the future and the past imposed an effect on the framing of the present. Genovesi confidently says, “For without a doubt, God’s hope for us, and our hope for ourselves and others, is that all may be one in God in the fullness of time.”⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁷ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p.135.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ Luke 4:18 (New International Version)

⁸⁶⁰ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, pp.138-39.

De-limitation Attempt: Dialogue and Interaction in Freedom

Missionaries are in a paradox of the Christian faith, which is exemplified in Schillebeeckx's words: Christians "tread in the footsteps of the God who is to come to us from the future and, in so doing, it is still we who make history."⁸⁶¹ In the case of AHF and in Moltmann's words, it means AHF missionaries "in practice.....always combine what [they] hope shall come with what is and what can become. [They] combine what [they] hope for and want with what [they] are subjectively able to do and what is objectively possible."⁸⁶² With an operative mentality oriented toward creativity-in-anticipation, it was in hope and through hope that AHF missionaries were enlightened to the freedom to plan and act for, and at the same time to welcome and take up, what God promised. God's servants are free to be and perform what they are called to be. Nevertheless, they are not independent and self-sufficient. Hence, AHF director Y prayed to God: "As we participate in Your ministry, please guide us to dialogue in Your Word.....so that we all become one in the Lord. In the moment that You want us to be silent, seal our lips. In the event that You will us to proclaim Your kingdom, guide us not to

⁸⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, E. (1968) *God The Future of Man*, trans. N. Smith, London, UK: Sheed & Ward, p.190.

⁸⁶² Moltmann, J. (1975) *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. D. Meeks. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 53.

conceal Your love and truth but to speak, with strength, of Your faithfulness and salvation.”⁸⁶³ The freedom of AHF missionaries is dialogical and interactive in responsive obedience to a divine directive in the medium of hope and of a form of promise. The critical point is that freedom is not characterized by negative conceptions such as detachment, isolation or division; it is positively expressed, through the lens of Moltmann, as freedom *for* reconciliation, love, peace or justice. In hope, it is *freedom for* reconciliation as AHF director Y revealed in his article “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation.”⁸⁶⁴

In hope, a missional agent is led into new experiences of freedom, which necessitates the shifting of anticipation because the circumstance of conceptualization alters. While there are limitations in the mission field, a Christian “is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none,” as Luther maintains.⁸⁶⁵ The point, however, does not end here. Luther continues: “A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”⁸⁶⁶ He teaches missionaries that their freedom is to do the Good *for* God and His people. Christians emphasize that it is not freedom from

⁸⁶³ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

⁸⁶⁴ AHF director Y, “God is the Center in Our Ministry of Reconciliation”, in *AHF Update 2007*.

⁸⁶⁵ Luther, M. (1989) “The Freedom of a Christian”, in T. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p.596.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

the other's domination, tyranny, oppression or limitation as people typically understand freedom. Instead, Christian freedom is *for* His people's well-being and blessings. Simply put, it is *for* others, *for* those who would benefit from the generosity of Christians, which is a manifestation of the love of God. Missionaries are those who are dutiful servants of all, subject to all. They are not afraid of the pressure and limitations in their working situation. On the contrary, in their freedom, which is spiritual, they serve everyone. Their freedom, their righteousness that is given as a gift from God, makes them dutiful servants. They are free in their service in love because when the "free lord" and the "dutiful servant" fit together correlatively, they would serve God's purpose beautifully. Hence, AHF founder L expressed: "We choose to adjust sacrificially so long as to be able to profit and bless [the targeted group]We are duty-bound to bless them at all costs and this is the purpose of establishing AHF."⁸⁶⁷

While the freedom of AHF was *for* conducting the good and the constructive, it was also freedom *from* the wicked and negatives of humanity on earth, including arrogance, egotism, vanity, anxiety, excessive competition, and toils. Such an

⁸⁶⁷ AHF founder L, "A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years", in *AHF Update 2011*.

orientation of freedom also entailed revolutionary teaching.⁸⁶⁸ However, this “revolutionary teaching” was not about the secular political revolution. Instead, it was about breaking the chains and softening the rigidity of the mind—in the inner world; it was “a *spiritual* revolution,” as Tsonchev would maintain.⁸⁶⁹ Hence, the freedom of AHF missionaries was a path to liberty that was not to conquer a position for Christianity in the PRC through a revolt or a war against an oppressor. Instead, it was the awakening of spirit, liberty and power of freedom *to do* what they were called *for*, i.e., the freedom to bring God’s blessings to the people of China. Of course, AHF missionaries were not free *from* the political limitations set up by the Chinese Communist regime. The political restriction, as a contrast-experience⁸⁷⁰, was, in fact, a condition of AHF’s mission.

The political restriction, however, was not absolute, despite a structure of governmental prohibitions in the regime. The rise of Jiang’s governmental rationality of “mutual adaptation” and Hu’s “harmonism” and the corresponding “truth” of love so constructed opened up a possibility of conceptualizing the

⁸⁶⁸ Tsonchev, T. (2018) *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr: Essays in Political Theology and Christian Realism*, Montreal, Quebec: The Montreal Review E-publishing, p.138.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, E. (1968) *God The Future of Man*, trans. N. Smith, London, UK: Sheed & Ward.

situation in terms of “truths” that were mutually comprehensible and compatible.

While the existence of these governmentalities offered a positive sign of detente between Christianity and Chinese Communism in China’s “road to peaceful rise,”⁸⁷¹ it also became a new era of fruitful dialogue and interaction, providing that the red line was not exceeded.⁸⁷² In other words, in the course of such a dialogical and dynamic encounter, renewed categories and forms of thinking and practices emerged and, at the same time, started to transform. In historical transformation, it was the responsibility of AHF to respond in an anticipative manner to a new governmental language and a set of reconfigured governmental discourses in a restructured ideological framework of the party-state. In response to such a condition, the venture was carried out with an anthropological spirit: “Christians and Marxists could talk together, without exchanging insults and abuse and without aiming to convert the other side.”⁸⁷³

From the perspective of Metz’s theology of the world, an anthropological view of the visibility of freedom in history belongs to “God’s free, original action

⁸⁷¹ Zhang, B. (2011) *China’s Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on its cause, basis, connotations and prospects*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

⁸⁷² Luo, Z. (1991) “Coordinating Religion with Socialist Society”, in *Religion Under Socialism in China*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, pp.113-131.

⁸⁷³ Hebblethwaite, P. (1977) *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue and Beyond*, London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, p. 15.

on it.”⁸⁷⁴ Seen through a Foucauldian lens and mediated through Metz’s theology of the world, AHF missionaries acted as “subjects of action.”⁸⁷⁵ They were also “free subjects”⁸⁷⁶ who were equipped with the capability to act and respond to the needs of the time. In other words, they were equipped with the freedom, which is the power, to perform ministerial functions in an authoritarian regime. The missional domain was framed, formed, and guided by the socio-political context and the organizational arrangement of the practices in which the missionaries existed. Yet, they were free to transgress prevailing limits, not passively duplicating socio-politically imposed forms in their conduct. To move beyond socio-political limits and constraints imposed by the Chinese Communist regime was to bring together a new formulation of “truths” in words and reframed forms of acts. In so doing, a new capability was structured to impact the others in turn. This freedom was a non-normative conception of freedom and was

⁸⁷⁴ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns and Oates, p. 24.

⁸⁷⁵ Foucault, M. (1991) “Questions of Method”, in G. Burchell et al (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

⁸⁷⁶ Foucault, M. (1983) ‘The Subject and Power’, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p221.

understood as the missional ability for transgression.⁸⁷⁷ In exercising such transgression of freedom, a new form of socio-political arrangement and organization was produced, in the form of collaboration, while entailing the influence of other forces into the interactive engagement. Here the eschatological notion and Foucauldian notion of freedom worked in an integrative manner for the missional domain.

At the same time, it also generated constraints on the freedom of others in the collaborative realm. The missional freedom was not attained metaphysically or theologically above historical situations. The venture within “an anthropological world of history”⁸⁷⁸ was not to establish an ideal form of actions or practices but to remain concrete and finite within a historical tendency. Through an Foucauldian lens, this freedom of missional venture existed within history as *concrete and finite freedom* of struggle and resistance against specific socio-politically imposed

⁸⁷⁷ For more details of Foucauldian conception of freedom, see Foucault, M. (1983) “The Subject and Power”, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p. 221-2. And Foucault, M. (2010) “What is Enlightenment?” in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York, NY: Vintage Books. p. 46-7.

⁸⁷⁸ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns and Oates, p. 55.

constraints that motivated and energized historical dialogue.⁸⁷⁹ The primacy of dialogue and interaction drew missionaries to understand specific forms of practices and actions, including forms of suppression and domination by the CCP, emerged historically and derivatively out of the activities of human beings. Since these forms of practices and actions were constructed, they could be challenged, altered and reshaped through the struggles and actions of human beings.

Through Moltmann's lens, freedom in hope can reshape and act as a driving force and provides the motivation and motion to the possibility of resisting and transforming the imposed forms of practices simultaneously in a continuous dialoguing and interplaying. Such freedom in hope holds love alive, produces an effect on the objectives of related activities, and generates evaluative, specific visions according to the particular historicity of the time.⁸⁸⁰ For AHF, it turned into a process of reassessment and readjustment, in which predetermined, fixed, imposed, and congealed forms of practices (including oppression) might be transformed, and new forms of inter-changing practices emerged. It was the existence of otherness, of difference, the making of which (re-)interrupted the

⁸⁷⁹ See Rajchman, J. (1985) *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p.92-3.

⁸⁸⁰ Moltmann, J. (1968) *Hope and Planning*, London, UK: SCM Press, p.196-197.

forms of practices and opened the very possibility of transformation in the mission field that anticipated, in the words of AHF director Y, “a God-led course of [ministries] founded in endless love and amazing grace.”⁸⁸¹

Even though the power of the CCP was allegedly dominating within the mission field, AHF’s encounter with them did not simply yield to either side of the state apparatuses or the missionaries. The missional encounter in the PRC did not merely fall into line with the beliefs and discourses of the Communist party-state, nor did it follow only the theo-political understanding and the will of missionaries. The encounter was dynamically dependent on each other, with mutual resistance affecting each other in turn. In a mission field in which the Hu Jintao regime continued to dominate amid its attempts to soften the tension between the party-state and Christianity, it did not mean that AHF was totally passive, ineffectual or absolutely at the mercy of the regime. In its “non-passive” mode, AHF was free to assimilate the encounter into its categories of comprehension and discernment. The crucial point became that even though the state apparatuses actively organized, managed, controlled and conducted the conduct of the Chinese Christian communities, AHF, as an outsider, was not merely whatever the CCP

⁸⁸¹ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

manipulated it to be, whatever Hu's regime wanted it to be.

The enlarged space for interaction and dialogue was not totally dependent on the beliefs and intent of AHF and, at the same time, not merely relying on the thoughts and intentions of the CCP regime. It forced itself simultaneously upon AHF and the other collaborative stakeholders. As collaborative engagement, it constrained what each interlocutor thought, proclaimed or practiced. In other words, each of them possessed their interpretative activities through which they framed the sphere they were in. While they positively constructed the collaboration interactively, the sphere was not merely unreceptive. It was not a mere invention of the organizing categories of each collaborating participant. It was not simply whatever each of them interpreted it to be but also moved and activated beyond their interpretations, resisted them, and impacted them in turn, exerting a force on them to revisit their assumptions and understanding of the collaboration. It, however, did not necessarily mean that their earlier interpretations were partial or incorrect, but rather that a core character of the interpretations was that they were only provisional and were not absolute and final. Interpretations emerged and, in the course of continuous interaction, were transformed; and retransformed again and again.

While AHF in the mission field was the object of shaping and interpretation

by others, it could also shape and direct others. It meant that even in the initial exchange process and mutual-impacting, where AHF as an outsider was mainly at the mercy of the CCP, its intrinsic Christian character, as reflected in its actions, became an element of exchange. The exchange and mutual-impacting were not actions in the form of socio-political determinism. Instead, it was an extended process of exercise of mutuality and guiding that involved struggle, exchange and resistance to provide a specific shape to its capacities. It revealed a particular bearing or orientation to its activities.

And over and above that, due to the non-passive character of the missional agent, it was not merely shaped by the socio-political situation. AHF was also able to contribute its shaping capability in turn. That is, although the activities of AHF were framed, directed and limited in accordance with the various socio-political forms and policies of the regime in their experimental and flexible characteristics, AHF, as a non-passive agent, did not merely conform to these pre-set policies but, in the operative dimension, was also capable of transgressing the limits set by the regime, reorganized previously preset forms of thought and practice in renewed ways. Respective local state apparatuses were also at the same time going through a change to delimit the policies and regulations imposed on them, as we have discussed earlier in Chapter Two.

As discussed earlier, the “Chinese-ness” of AHF provided an affinity to the local host(s). It was out of mutuality that new forms of practices emerged. In other words, AHF was involved in an open-end mutual dialogue and interaction with the regime. It was a dialogue constitutive of its historical existence. Dialogue among stakeholders of the collaboration was based on recognizing the *otherness of others* and, simultaneously, the *non-otherness of others* in a dialectical manner. In the course of interaction, the stakeholders were subject to continuous self and mutual transformation. From this perspective, Hu’s CCP could merely achieve temporary dominance over the Christian community (as the *others*). Governance of the party-state was not absolute.

AHF’s missional encounter entailed a non-totalizing dialogue with an open-end interplay. There was no pre-ordained path, and it was not a predetermined move. As Moltmann indicates, those who are capable of dialogue are those who merit dialogue. Those who merit dialogue are those “who have arrived at a firm standpoint in their own religion.”⁸⁸² The more deeply one is firm in one’s Christian faith, and the more one takes the faith in one’s own existence, the more radically

⁸⁸² Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, p. 18.

one is made free *for* one's own possibilities.⁸⁸³

In the missional encounter, collaborative interlocutors were not indifferent toward each other, not self-isolating. On the contrary, they co-existed in experimental mode with receptiveness toward a diverse sort of knowledge and “truths,” which opened their own beliefs to challenges. In meaningful dialogue, they attained a new profile in what each of them was. In Moltmann’s words, it was a “dialogue profile” that allowed them to recognize themselves better.⁸⁸⁴ Each of them acted as a mutual witness to the truth of their individual belief system and, simultaneously, enquired more into their respective strengths and weaknesses. Missional dialogue and interaction are “about the question of truth, even if no agreement about the truth can be reached.”⁸⁸⁵ Amid an unbridgeable difference between the atheist Chinese Communist regime and the theist Christian communities in the fundamental dimension of respective faiths, collaboration was made possible in the anthropological operative dimension. In the words of Moltmann, it was an endeavor that moved “from anathema to dialogue—from

⁸⁸³ Metz, J. (1968) *Theology of the World*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, London, UK: Burns and Oates, p. 27.

⁸⁸⁴ Moltmann, J. (2000) *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, pp.18-19.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

dialogue to co-existence—from co-existence to convivence—from convivence to co-operation.”⁸⁸⁶

Dynamics of Missional Eschatology and the Realization of Historical Possibilities

In the collaborative engagement, stakeholders attempted to deal with the given socio-political circumstances in light of a future expected to improve the unsatisfactory situation of the rural minority communities in question. They questioned and decided the suitable form(s) of involvement in the process. Nevertheless, apparent differences in perspectives existed. For the Chinese Marxists, on a theoretical basis of historical materialism, a new future was seen as the outcome solely of historical processes in materialistic terms by human beings. However, for AHF, from a Christian point of view, the historical process was considered the structure within which the missionaries operated in preparing the grounds for a new future that would retain the components of God’s grace. While Hu’s CCP, under historical materialism, maintained that the force of history would determine the significance and the details of the future, AHF missionaries anticipated a future destined by God, who nevertheless persistently calls them to participate in the endeavors of His mission.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid, p.20.

Hu's Marxist governmentality moved in a direction toward political humanism. In contrast, the salvation-oriented humanism of Christianity allowed for and anticipated, in comparison, a different sort of involvement in worldly matters. With a vision strengthened and sustained by hope and faith in a novel future, AHF missionaries confronted prevalent inadequacies in a spirit of love. Tension, however, remained between the commitment to the present and the future expectation. It was also between venturing under the promise and waiting for its fulfilment. As Moltmann points out, the power of hope is revealed in the contradictions and the endurance on earth.⁸⁸⁷

The risen Christ called, sent and justified and in such a way, AHF missionaries were sent into Christ's "eschatological future for the world."⁸⁸⁸ The missional venture with eschatological nature in various forms of witness and proclamation (in terms of charitable and ministerial acts) was understood as an extension of the creative power of God that effected the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and steered the new age in Christ, provided a future and possibility for the people whom AHF served because it acted as an alternative to the oppressive forces of

⁸⁸⁷ Moltmann, J. (1971) *Hope and Planning*, London, UK: SCM Press, p.195.

⁸⁸⁸ Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.325.

inequality and injustice that threaten the wellbeing of the people there. The faith associated with AHF's missional endeavor from the perspective of God's new future enabled missionaries to see beyond the prevalent limitations, frustrations and setbacks as set out by the regime. It was distinguished by the perseverance of missionaries and the preparedness to bear waiting and suffering in the assurance that the sovereignty of God would eventually come. Hence, AHF worked diligently to shoulder the burdens of others.⁸⁸⁹ "Patience is the greatest art of those who hope."⁸⁹⁰ With patience, the effort of AHF to ride on the tension of contradiction is to bear the *cross-of-the-present* in the *power-of-resurrection*, deprived of resignation and without illusion.⁸⁹¹ The vision of the kingdom formed an essential basis for new possibilities for the future; and this indicated a thoughtful and responsible balancing of alternatives in an attempt to locate the optimum response at the intersection of time and space in light of the disclosure of the Holy Spirit.

Do missionaries of AHF have the right to set a limit on the scope and degree of missional activities? Is AHF, or any missional agent, prohibited from forming a

⁸⁸⁹ AHF founder L, "A Sword Sharpened Over 10 Years", in *AHF Update 2011*.

⁸⁹⁰ Moltmann, J. (1971) *Hope and Planning*, London, UK: SCM Press, p.173.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

collaborative working relationship with atheist Chinese Communists? Perhaps Karl Barth's point provides a possible answer to these questions. Barth maintains that Christians "have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ."⁸⁹² In the case of AHF's missional venture, the loving-kindness of God to the people of China manifested in the charitable acts of collaborative engagement with the Chinese Communists is not to be limited. In light of God's open future, missional activities are required to capture, in the sense of the immediate divine-in-breaking, and work in line with the immediacy of the "peaceful presence"⁸⁹³ and action of God. Eschatologically, missional endeavor is essentially concerned with those crucial deeds of God which liberate those who have suffered and the bonded, both internally and externally, for framing a better world, notwithstanding the limitation and deprivation set up by the authoritarian regime. It is precisely the conviction of the future kingdom of God piercing into the present with transformative effects that activate and sustain the tension between the "not-yet" and the "now." Amid the open future of God propelling human beings to the reality of the present, the reality of the present directs human beings toward His open future. In this perspective, ministerial

⁸⁹² Barth, K. (1960) *The Humanity of God*, Atlanta, GA: John Know Press, p.62.

⁸⁹³ AHF director Y, "a prayer" in *AHF Update 2012*.

efforts are needed to steer and work in the present, both in terms of the individual person and the community. In not absolutizing the power of the Chinese Communist regime, it became possible for AHF to minister within a “politics” in which missionaries did not render evil for evil but were able to envision a common good.

As an outcome of discernment of the prevailing circumstances, new mode(s) of mission emerged. The possibility came for Christianity and the socio-political domain of the PRC to work together toward nurturing a new future for China. As Bevans points out, *action-in-hope* is an essential element in a multi-dimensional comprehension of the mission.⁸⁹⁴ Hope is the signification of the possible and inspires ministry to realize real historical possibilities. Christian ministries carry the hope that deliverance from injustice and inequality is an eschatological act of God transcending human reality and creating historical possibilities (the *adventus* paradigm) beyond straightforward human extrapolation (the *futurum* paradigm). The historical understanding and experience of Christian communities generate an alternative mode of assessment of what is possible in the course of history, thereby

⁸⁹⁴ Bevans, S. (2010) “From Edinburgh to Edinburgh: Towards a Missiology for a World Church”, in Vethanayagomony, P. et al (eds.), *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 1-11.

allowing another platform for energizing deliverance from human injustice and inequity. It is a sign of new creation—in the eyes of Moltmann.

Emphasizing engagement and interaction among collaborative participants was facilitated via a multidimensional endeavor to reinterpret some of the essential elements of their thoughts in more open and inspirational ways. It represented a change within the Chinese Communist thought system, from the traditional mode of thinking to contemporary reconstruction in Marxist humanism in the Hu Jintao era and within AHF's thought dynamics of Christian realism, respectively. The result was that each of their views was instigated by a different, more far-reaching outlook, i.e., the reconstruction process was motivated to move to a new dimension. It meant there was an effort to challenge traditional assumptions of the previous framework of truth(s). The outcome was the generation of renewed Christian realism and Chinese Marxist thinking that were compatible to a certain degree in the anthropological operative dimension. It was essentially a (re-)examination of the deeper reasoning and the governing presuppositions, which had exercised a substantial, if not decisive, impact on the overall bearing and vision. Both CCP's ideological presuppositions and AHF's missiological assumptions did not occur in a historical vacuum. They were comprehended within the setting of the possibilities and limitations which typified

the general situation in the prevalent contemporary local-global context.

Within the anthropological operative dimension of dialogue and interaction, the fundamental contention problem over theism and atheism, a core issue at stake in Christian-Marxist dialogue, was left untouched intentionally (The question of theism-atheism was not part of the agendas for the collaborative stakeholders). Hence, the interlocutors set aside the long-standing ideological and philosophical problems of body/mind dualism, optimism/pessimism argument concerning human nature or freedom/determinism dilemma. For AHF, one of its tasks was to reveal and demonstrate that Christians, like the Chinese Marxists, hold a fundamental belief in humanity that appreciates physical and social needs of human beings. At the same time, it was the task of the CCP regime officials to respond by demonstrating that Chinese Communism, similar to Christianity, is capable of and indeed addresses the need to prioritize effort to work for the wellbeing and justice of the people of the PRC. Nevertheless, while locating a suitable means of realizing Chinese Communist worldly visions, the CCP officials did not avoid acknowledging the fundamental difference and the existing struggle between the distinguishing worldview founded on the two different (Marxist and Christian) interpretations of the human relationship to the world and distinguished historical traditions.

To the Chinese Communists, Christianity has alienated human beings from their real-world life and dominated them with worldly authorities and principalities. One of the undertakings of AHF was to demonstrate to the Chinese Communist that whatever the outdated understanding or past historical pursuit of the Christian worldview might have been, an essential component of the contemporary and prevalent function of AHF was to affirm and pursue the wellbeing of the Chinese people. This went together with the possibility of joint commitment with the Chinese regime to struggle against the forces of inequality and alienation in the PRC. It was a commitment in the hope of serving them in the midst of poverty and disparity. And this hope was “a call to creative action in the sphere of the historically possible,” as Moltmann learned from Marxist Roger Garaudy.⁸⁹⁵ In hope, “the demand made by the future may go hand in hand with new powers, in order that the demand can be met.”⁸⁹⁶ The new powers, for AHF, were expressed in the freedom to act in renewed power relations with the regime (as discussed earlier). This act of freedom was not any random act but an act of love through which God could be known.⁸⁹⁷ The lesson for AHF was that in the

⁸⁹⁵ Moltmann, J. (2008) *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p.125.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁷ Staron, A. (2017) *The Gift of Love: Augustine, Jean-Marion, and the Trinity*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

dynamics of hope, the gift provided by God and the tasks assigned by Him were two sides of the same coin.

Chinese Communism, as a localized form of Marxist idealism concerning the future wellbeing and liberation of the Chinese people, functions as the ideological endorsement for Marxist pragmatism that supports the CCP to hold on to state power. With a burden of negative historical evidence, the Hu Jintao regime attempted to shift direction and demonstrate that Chinese Marxism could contribute to the process of humanization through a more open and humanistic conception of history in overcoming alienation within the current socialist regime amid an economic uprising. Instead of deferring human emancipation to a distant future, it attempted to demonstrate the ability of the regime to get hold of humanist initiative in the current era while confessing that there was still a distance to travel before reaching the ultimate harmonious society. While Hu's CCP continued to see the ongoing process of human struggling, the regime attempted new approaches to solve intermediate and prevalent problems. Marxists "can see no end to hope."⁸⁹⁸

Upon reading the situational specifics, AHF distinguished the immediate

⁸⁹⁸ Klugmann, J. (1970) "The Marxist Hope" in *The Christian Hope*, S.P.C.K. theological collections 13.

needs and opportunities available which was absent from the previous eras. What stood out was that, unlike earlier counterparts, the Chinese Marxists of the Hu Jintao regime and the Protestant missional agent AHF were both trying to respond positively, realistically and constructively to each other. They demonstrated that their respective systems of “truth” were receptive to learning and adapting with each other without having to abandon their doctrinal fundamentals. While they were aware of the underlying different ideological, philosophical and other “truths” and principles that separated them, they were prepared to readjust realistically without destructive measures to their respective fundamental “truth” systems— considering CCP’s political realism and AHF’s Christian realism respectively. They realized the need to seek a common platform to address the overall demand as a necessary step to the hoped-for future. The acts from them represented an acknowledgment from the two sides of the necessity and opportunity to bring together new resources into the relationship and interaction between Chinese Marxists and Christians. These new resources included conceptions and pragmatic practices that had been once absent in the two systems of “truth” but were then, in Hu’s era, (re-)constructed through a reframed path of thought. This renewed structure became compatible with and delivered an indispensable basis for reviewing essential principles for managing the immediate

demand with hope for the future. Hope, in this sense, was realized in the changes of the thoughts in the “truth” systems that formed part of the framework of prevailing mentalities. Collaborative stakeholders then operated within these bonds of mentalities and, at the same time, attempted to strive against them in dialectical tension. To them, it was not “either/or” but “both this and that.”

Concluding Remarks

In the course of the collaborative venture, any current moment or situation is a new present of the future, the yet-to-come. Formation of collaborative engagement and related ministries are realized in history; and as history and by transcending historical realizations, which through experimental experience becomes an “element of the future.”⁸⁹⁹ With the associated plans and operations, the hope that AHF relates to the future has missed many set targets (there have been many areas that AHF has attempted to work on but failed). It, however, does not mean that AHF experiences nothing in the course of its venture into the future, but neither does it experience complete fulfilment. Stories of past missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and Robert Morrison confirm that mission is never a task

⁸⁹⁹ Moltmann, J. (1970) “Religion, Revolution, and the Future”, in W. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.112.

fully completed on earth; it is always ongoing.

Faithful missional endeavors are facilitated by the ancient Israelite way of thinking in which “everything is in motion, the accounts never balance, and fulfilment unexpectedly gives rise in turn to another promise of something greater still.”⁹⁰⁰ Any missional endeavor, including forming a collaborative engagement with the Chinese Communists, may not bear an ultimate meaning in itself, but “is always an earnest of something still greater.”⁹⁰¹ As a historical event, AHF’s collaborative encounter with the Chinese Communists entails an emerging future and, simultaneously, a submerging reality. In this event, AHF intends to appropriate the inheritance of the previous understanding of antagonism between Christianity and Chinese Communism and to comprehend its current present in the historical process; it can neither simply assume the ideas and discernment of the traditionally held hostility nor regard the past history as merely a set of data. By translating the conceptions and insights of theologians and scholars into their situation and seeking new realization in their own present, missionaries experience an enriching spiritual journey and, in the words of AHF director Y,

⁹⁰⁰ von Rad. G.; as quoted in Moltmann, J. (1993) *The Theology of Hope: on the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, p.107

⁹⁰¹ Ibid.

“move ahead without raising any objection.”⁹⁰²

⁹⁰² AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

CONCLUSION

AHF was able to survive and advance its missional endeavor in the Hu Jintao authoritarian regime when it exercised its concrete and finite freedom of struggle and resistance⁹⁰³, captured the theo-political dynamics, strengthened transformation in the collaboration with the local churches and state apparatuses and steered a liberating ministry that was characterized by the productive nature of love and power.

Missional tasks are transcending works on limits, in hope. At the same time, they are also an attempt to exercise freedom, which is performed within an arena of forces generated by the creative tension among different poles. On the one hand, Hu Jintao's regime was depicted as constrained by sovereign and governing dominance, in a softened version, of the CCP that oppressed Christians and other religious believers. The continuation of the dangerous situation pointed believers to an entrapment of despair. On the other hand, AHF missionaries were enlightened by God's promises of untrammelled freedom and His revelation that there was a way to go beyond the apparent limitation. AHF's mission was a hopeful venture carrying a vision to establish Great Commission-minded Christian

⁹⁰³ Rajchman, J (1985) *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 92-93.

communities through a ministry of reconciliation with God being the center. With a distinct Christian realism, AHF survived and conducted ministerial services in the Hu Jintao authoritarian regime in an interdependent critical correlation through eschatological praxis characterized by the productive nature of power and love in a matrix of power dynamics. The eschatological praxis was framed by “the task of remembering the future”⁹⁰⁴ that was reflected in AHF’s motto “to preach good news to the poor,to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”⁹⁰⁵ It was a God-led ministry “founded in endless love and amazing grace”⁹⁰⁶ to serve the local churches in co-existence with the host regime through mobilizing the prevailing theo-political essentials and energizing transformation in the collaborative undertakings. The co-existence was a new missional reality through the integration of love-relation-in-action and power-relation-in-motion.

There is no mission to fear but only to discern and face with critical sensitivity. Fear incapacitates; faith empowers. Missional tasks are the intervening effort of human beings and God’s relational work. They are not dualistic oppositional sacred

⁹⁰⁴ Genovesi, V. (1982) *Expectant Creativity: The Action of Hope in Christian Ethics*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, p. 135.

⁹⁰⁵ Luke 4:18 (New International Version)

⁹⁰⁶ AHF director Y, “a prayer”, in *AHF Update 2012*.

and secular events. For AHF, the Hu Jintao era was a unique period to take part in God's mission in China in which governmentalities of "mutual adaptation," "harmonism," and "love" prevailed. When Christian hope correlates with the nature of human beings and that of the world, it offers a basis for cooperation in steering the interactions between Christians and Marxists.⁹⁰⁷ AHF's collaborative engagement as reflected in the "friendly relationship" with the Chinese Communists in the Hu Jintao era to better the Chinese Christian communities was not a betrayal of the Christian faith. On the contrary, it was an event facilitated by the eschatological affinity between AHF's Christian realism and Hu Jintao's political realism that allowed a dialogue and some degree of critical collaboration.

Doctrinally, Marx's followers are desirous of defeating the recognition of God. Leninists proclaim that Marxism cannot be comprehended without atheism, and they challenge Christians and Christianity with hatred.⁹⁰⁸ Mao Zedong expelled Christian missionaries, closed churches and persecuted Christians. Yet, extreme antagonism against Christianity did not continue in the Deng, Jiang and Hu eras. In its constant search for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the CCP has

⁹⁰⁷ Bauckham, R. (1987) *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, Hants, UK: Marshall Pickering, p.12.

⁹⁰⁸ Skousen, C. (2018) *The Naked Communist*, Naples, Italy: Albatross Publishers.

continued its dialectical endeavor to locate effective governmental rationalities for its legitimate survival. One of the keys to the continual legitimization of the CCP is its skill in redefining its historical mission, constructing innovative justification for its rightful authority. Hu Jintao's harmonism as a core governmental rationality generated a creditable "truth" of love via its system of scholastic state apparatuses under the supervision of the United Front and established a renewed state-Christianity relationship. It became part of the party politics that justified CCP's performance as successful and promising, acting in the name of national interest. Consequently, an enlarged spectrum of viable possibilities between the party-state and the Christian communities was formed with re-mobilized power relations. This *Enlarged* carrying a creditable "truth" of love, a renewed state-Christianity relationship and re-mobilized power relations with a re-articulated regime of truth for the betterment of the people enabled the local TSPM/CCC with new space for collaborating with outsiders. In other words, the Chinese Communists gained a new logic of looking forward to the expectant future—new reasoning that provided an initiative to seek collaborative efforts with a Hong Kong-based Christian agent AHF.

God's innovative and loving activities on earth energized the collaborative engagement through the presentation of divine grace and a hopeful future amid

brokenness and ambiguity. The dynamics of love and charity transformed into a force of unity, a centripetal force drawing energy into the core of the encounter. On the other side, the politics of the CCP regime was concerned with framing appropriate governmental rationalities for sustaining the party and its authority and governing the party-state under its censorship. When these two frameworks met historically in the Hu Jintao era, in their respective vision, they shared a joint endeavor of hoping to support a better society of goodness, order, and prosperity. The agendas were converged. Their respective visions functioned in metaphorization when they re-imagined and re-interpreted reality. Imagining a better world is critical to Christian theologies and politics. Imagination enhances human interpreters to redescribe reality.⁹⁰⁹

There was an interweaving of the claim of truth and the respective conduct of the Christian community with the practices and technologies of power of the party-state. Policies, regulations, and research outcomes of state apparatuses on religion and Christianity became the credible reasoning in the regime's justification for more open interactions with Christianity and its agents. A sphere of “permissible” space became available amid a matrix of relationships that

⁹⁰⁹ Yeo, K. (2002) *chairman mao meets the apostle paul: Christianity, Communism, and the Hope of China*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, pp.17-18..

constituted it, allowing specific new openings for (re-)interpreting the world. This sphere of permissible space was reflected in the party-state's exercise of co-optation, differentiated governance and selective repression. By discerning changes in the system of reasoning and production of truth(s), which brought in a corresponding mobilization in the structure of power relations and the mode it functioned in the regime, the missional agent was able to identify credible permissible spaces and established a "friendly relationship" to operate. In other words, for operating a ministry that was a blessing to the Christian communities in the PRC, AHF was in its best position by cultivating and maintaining a character of relevance with affinity to the local government by structuring "truth(s)" and acts that were justified within permissible spaces.

The sustainability of AHF's venture in the Hu Jintao era was supported by the existence of continual sources of nourishment in a "concrete, changing soil"⁹¹⁰ in the form of a set of favorable governmental rationalities that allowed the collaboration to function effectively. The effectiveness became optimum when the operative ideological practices of Hu's CCP and the missional operative acts of AHF interacted in the mutually agreed domain through specific avenues within the

⁹¹⁰ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, p. 142.

time-space distinct power relations.

Love-relations-in-action, Power-relations-in-motion

Although AHF's missional encounter was inevitably and immensely influenced by power, it was more complicated than the mere function of power alone. Relations of power and love co-existed dialectically in the missional realm. Mobilizing or acting on power or love alone would minimize the possibility of creating the *Enlarged*, new realities. In the worst scenario, it would worsen by creating further limitations for the ministry. To the creation of a new realities for betterment, AHF's task was to integrate and work between the tensions of love and power.

The Foucauldian perspective of power relations as forming a matrix where the interactions of collaborators offer an additional perspective for understanding missional encounter. While Foucauldian conceptions point missionaries to acknowledge and to appreciate power relations, they also guide them to appreciate the ability to modify the "microfibers" of the power network and to mobilize power relations correlatively. Missionaries are urged to have the hope and confidence to exercise freedom potently within the broad and pliable power

matrix. A missional venture is not to be “ensnared by power.”⁹¹¹ According to a defined strategy, missionaries can constantly adjust and readjust their influence in specific situations. It becomes advisable for missionaries to constantly maintain, in any given circumstances, a capacity to impact power’s controlling mechanics and functions. The relational processes may be changed by altering tactics, moving the balance more favorably toward a particular objective of the missional endeavor. It is similar to a chess game; collaborators (be they from the CCP sphere or the AHF sphere) have many possibilities of moves before them. It is possible to re-position chess on the board (the platform) and wait with renewed anticipation for another set of configurations toward which a new response is needed. It is impossible to withdraw totally from “games” of power in the mission field.

While power can work heavy-handedly, it functions most effectively when it substantially enters co-presences, reciprocally investing and changing each actor. Power functions socio-politically in relation to the “acts, attitudes and modes”⁹¹² of the interacting behavior of collaborative stakeholders through the modification of micro-linkages of the networks of power. What is to be articulated is the breadth

⁹¹¹ Foucault, M. (1988) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings*, New York: Routledge, Chapman, & Hall, p.123.

⁹¹² Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books, p. 125.

and depth of the molding effect of power and the various intricate ways in which diverse subjects appear materially constituted by gradual transformative interactions in mission within the network of discourses and “truths.”

Eschatological Initiatives in the making

Christian eschatology provides missional ventures with “a critical perspective on the present and loads it with explosive potential.”⁹¹³ It might be daydreaming, in the era of Mao Zedong, for a Hong Kong Christian missional agent to imagine working in collaboration with the CCP state apparatuses. Yet, the “not-yet-existent” anticipates the “real-possible.”⁹¹⁴ Hope is not wishful thinking. It entails a belief that present reality can be changed and renovated—with a vision of the possibility of betterment for Christian communities in the PRC comes a willful pursuit. To gain a broader perspective of its mission in history, a missional enterprise must be equipped with a sensitivity to a faithful past, loving present and expectant future. In the course of a mission, any existing situation is a new present

⁹¹³ Cox, H. (1968) “Ernst Bloch and ‘The Pull of the Future’”, in M. Marty and D. Peerman (ed.), *New Theology No.5: The best way into Bloch, Moltmann, Pannenberg and the new talk of the future, hope and eschatology*, New York, NY: Macmillan.

⁹¹⁴ Bloch, E. (1986) *The Principle of Hope Vol.1*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p.144.

of the future, and at the same time, an experimental arena of the future.⁹¹⁵ Stories of past missional experience confirm that mission is constantly ongoing, a task never fully completed. In hope, one is led into new experiences, which in turn necessitate the shifting of anticipation because the circumstance of one's conceptualization changes. Faithful missional endeavors are facilitated by the ancient Hebrew thinking that everything is in motion with anticipation of something greater.

While AHF's missional endeavor in the Hu Jintao era was a ministry of love-in-action in a context of brokenness and censorship, it carried hope in fragile reality. It involved a ministry of "go-between"⁹¹⁶ and is not "ahistorical."⁹¹⁷ In other words, it was in a certain degree of historical ambiguity. This study has revealed that the missional AHF's endeavor was grasped and discerned as a tendency in which missionaries were engaged, contextually and historically centered, uniquely contributing to their participation in God's mission. It also involved building bridges, establishing networks, mingling in between conflicting accounts and

⁹¹⁵ Moltmann, J. (1970) "Religion, Revolution, and the Future", in W. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.112.

⁹¹⁶ Jørgensen, K. (2013) "Hope in a Fragile World: The Reconciling Mission of the Church", in R. Schreiter and K. Jørgensen (eds.), *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, p.321.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, p.323.

interacting and colliding in various ways that created new spaces, re-constructed relationships and facilitated re-orientation of power relations. It was a ministry conducted in genuine, tangible, visible and concrete ways.

***missio Dei* and Human Action**

God's mission comes with human action. As revealed in this study and other scholastic works, the ideological structure constructed by the Chinese Communist regime and its governing is anything but consistent. By positioning themselves on-site on the socio-political frontiers, AHF missionaries participated in an engaged and sensitive way. Hence, they were in a position to participate actively in the trends and events that signaled openings for missional actions through their attempts to identify problems, threats, and conflicts that troubled the arena while understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

Critical analysis prompted the missional agent to comprehend what was happening. A systematic critical analysis from a theo-political perspective further clarified upcoming tendencies. To comprehend what was forthcoming to the field, AHF weaved its observations of the emerging socio-political warps and wefts into a fabric, the patterns assisting in explaining what was happening and what was upcoming. In the process AHF structured a framework to explain the change in the

missional realm and guided the actions of the venture. Such an exploration further inspired a greater degree of confidence to act. In addition to informing actions, it motivated missionaries to another level of consciousness that facilitated a more concise comprehension of the events happening and better prepared for the expectant future. Such an ability to achieve a breakthrough in discerning and understanding the situation strengthened the sense of missionaries' personal agency and was a catalyst to confident actions.

Collaborative engagement enabled AHF to extend and intensify the reign of God by facilitating others to act together. It required an act of creative imagination that integrated discernment and analysis with pragmatic actions. The outcome was a collective action frame that was to be situationally appropriated. It must be resourcefully adapted to fit the particular issues at hand. It invited an act of imagination that depicted an innovative circumstantially-appropriate framework of actions.

Collaboration with the Chinese Communist regime is a harsh and risky endeavor. Leffel correctly says, "Envisioning new forms of human faithfulness to God's mission that fit our changing world is seldom an easy task."⁹¹⁸ While the

⁹¹⁸ Leffel, G. (2007) *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion*, Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, p.246.

Christian faith tradition in Hong Kong provided no prescription for what AHF must do, it did not prevent a new act of imagination. The collaborative engagement was overwhelming, but faithful missionaries considered it a creative challenge, and as they embraced this realm of creativity, they were led into the freedom of God toward innovation.

Closing Remarks

AHF missionaries who carried a history of their own lives and their irreplaceable collective subjectivity are recognized as faith-seekers. They provided an account of faith in a venture elaborated in an ongoing process of rethinking, becoming, and a recurrent process of giving thanks to God.

The engaging, collaborative mode of operation functioned effectively and meaningfully in the Hu Jintao era amid relational power tensions in its historical specifics. However, it came to another nodal point when, in 2012, it entered another era in which Christianity was being re-rationalized as a critical foreign threat to the regime's stability. The articulation of harmonism as governmentality was discontinued. Instead, the fifth-generation leadership articulated the discourse of "China Dream" through domestic and global struggle as a new "truth"

to legitimize the regime's ambition to become the global leader. With the fading of harmonism and an uptrend of the anti-religion mentality, ministerial space for AHF was gradually minimized. The CCP started to demolish Christian churches in the Zhejiang province in 2014 and nationally promoted "Sinicized" religion.⁹¹⁹ The regime announced in Jan 2020 new measures of control for all religious personnel. Under the new measures, all religious personnel must totally submit to the CCP. As one Chinese Christian minister commented: "In practice, your religion no longer matters..... the only religion allowed is faith in the Chinese Communist Party."⁹²⁰ A new tendency has developed, leading AHF to re-adjust its missional praxis. A significant challenge for AHF in the next stage of ministry is not to stagnate but to enrich its theology and praxis of mission by revisiting its pre-suppositions and re-conceiving the task and function given by God. The anticipation of engaging with and embracing new challenges is ongoing.

⁹¹⁹ Bell, A. (2016) "Revisionist Religion: Xi Jinping's Suppression of Christianity and Elevation of Traditional Culture as Part of a Revisionist Power Agenda", *Research*, Georgetown University.

⁹²⁰ See Mathews, M. (2020) "New Law Requires Chinese Christians Fully Submit to Communist Party", *Christian Headlines*, 07 January, 2020.

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