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Jonathan Chao and “Return Mission”: The Case of the Calvinist Revival in China

Studies on mission and migration have often focused on the propagation of Christianity from a home context to a foreign context. This is true of studies in Catholic and Protestant missions, but also true in the growing discussion of “reverse mission” whereby diasporic African and Korean missionaries evangelize the heathen lands of Europe and North America. This paper proposes the alternative term “return mission” in which Christians from the diaspora return to evangelize the lands of their ancestral origins. It will use the case study of Jonathan Chao (Zhao Tian’en 趙天恩), a return missionary who travelled in and out of China from 1978 until near his death in 2004, who is considered an instrumental figure in the revival of Calvinism in China. This paper suggests that “return mission” provides a new means to understand the subjects of mission and migration, and raises new challenges to questions about paternalism and independency.

Keywords: Jonathan Chao; Calvinism; Chinese Christianity; diaspora; house church; Neo-Calvinism; return mission; reverse mission

1. Introduction

A number of commentators have written about the “foreign factor” or the “foreign element” in the shape of Christianity in contemporary China (Aikman 2006: 265–86; Fällman 2013: 157–8; Wielander 2013: 3–9).[1] Many of these discussions have been in relation to the recently recognized interest in Calvinism amongst mainland Chinese Christians, especially amongst unregistered “house churches” (*jiating jiaohui* 家庭教會). However, a question must be asked: who are these so-called “foreigners”? According to one essay, they are “overseas Chinese and

[1] While Alexander Chow at one point (2014: 170–1) uses the language of “foreign voice,” his more recent publication (2018: 99, 110) uses the phrase “Chinese diaspora.”

Mainland exiles" (Fällman 2013: 157). While this description is true to a certain extent, many of these individuals may in fact challenge their identity as "foreigners," in the strictest sense. Many were born in mainland China or regions such as Taiwan or Hong Kong, but later moved to and became involved in Chinese Christian communities throughout Asia and North America. Generally speaking, instead of "foreigners" they are perhaps best described as "ethnic Chinese" or "overseas Chinese" (*huaqiao* 華僑, *huaren* 華人, *huayi* 華裔, or *haiwai huaren* 海外華人),[2] although some may be considered "returnees" (*haigui* 海歸) if they have returned to China for an extended period of time.[3] It is under this latter term which I find most informative as it captures the overall sentiment of this so-called "foreign factor"—that is, ethnic Chinese who have a particular interest in returning to the country of their ancestral origins, mainland China, to proclaim the Christian message.

Many studies on mission and migration have historically focused on the propagation of the Christian message from a home context to a foreign context. This is true of the literature around early waves of missions from Eastern Christianity or, later, Catholic and Protestant missions.[4] This is likewise true of "reverse mission" which has focused attention on African and Korean missionaries who evangelize the heathen lands of Europe and North America.[5] While it is now becoming common place to hear about mission and migration "from everywhere to everywhere" (see Escobar 2003; Yeh 2016), the tendency is still to look at the move from a home context to a foreign context. As Andrew Walls notes, one need not look farther than the biblical corpus for examples of a multi-directional flow of migration: "There are fugitives (Jacob), transported slaves (Joseph), famine victims (his brothers), migrant workers, even one

[2] Each of these Chinese and English renderings are contested in the academic literature in the field. Some of the best analyses on this subject are written by Wang Gungwu (1981; 1998).

[3] The term *haigui* (海歸) has a metaphoric meaning which draws from its Chinese homophone, the sea turtle (*haigui* 海龜), which travels great distances across the ocean.

[4] Andrew Walls calls this the "great migration" or the "great European migration" of Christianity. He explains, "Christianity, which in 1500 was apparently the European religion, was by 2000 progressively becoming a non-Western religion" (Walls, 2002a: 8).

[5] To cite Andrew Walls again, he describes this as a second great migration, the "great reverse migration." (2017: 49–61). Some discussions of "reverse mission" include Adogame (2013: 169–89), Catto (2013: 81–95), and Kim (2013: 179–202).

with an unresolved claim for residence (Ruth), refugees, traders, invaders, prisoners of war, deportees and returnees" (Walls 2002a: 3). While there is a growing amount of scholarship on many of these forms of migration and the various push and pull factors which initiated them, Walls's last motif of returnees has not seen much academic attention.[6] This essay will examine the case study of perhaps the most well-known missionaries to enter China since the late-1970s, Jonathan Chao (Zhao Tian'en 趙天恩, 1938–2004), before offering some broader observations about the dynamics related to what we shall call "return mission."

2. Reformed Pedigree

Perhaps the best place to begin understanding Jonathan Chao is to briefly explore the story of his father, Charles Chao (Zhao Zhonghui 趙中輝, 1916-2010).[7] The senior Chao was born in 1916 into a non-Christian home in Manchuria. During his high school years he heard the preaching of the well-known fundamentalist Wang Mingdao (王明道, 1900-1991)[8] and became a Christian in 1935. The next year, Charles Chao entered the Yingkou Bible Institute, a theological seminary founded by the Presbyterian Church of Ireland missionary James McCommon who opposed the growing liberalism taught in Mukden Theological College and established the institute "for the training of Chinese preachers in the orthodox faith" (Chao 1991: 35).[9] Though Chao was initially exposed to dispensational theology in Yingkou, in his final year, he studied under a new professor of systematic theology, J. G. Vos, the son of Geerhardus Vos, the famed Princeton Theological Seminary professor of biblical theology. J. G. Vos was a missionary of the

[6] There is, however, some literature which speaks about strategies to evangelize those in the diaspora, at times with an expectation that those migrants will at one point return home and bring the Christian message back with them (see Ling and Bieler 1999; Wan 2014).

[7] This biographical information of Charles Chao is mainly derived from his autobiography (Chao 1991).

[8] Wang Mingdao was famous for his fundamentalist orientation and, later, for his clash with the leaders of the newly-established Three-Self Patriotic Movement whom he described as "modernists" and members of the "party of unbelievers" (Wang 1963).

[9] This pattern of establishing fundamentalist institutions as an alternative to liberal institutions was common both in North America and in China. Perhaps the most famous example in China was the North China Theological Seminary (Yao 2003: 139–82; see Carpenter 1980).

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), one of the few Calvinist missions which did not join the more "modernist" union, the Church of Christ in China (formerly, the Presbyterian Church of China) (Brown 1997: 211–14; Merwin 1974: 53–67). It was through his relationship with J. G. Vos that Charles Chao was thoroughly convinced of the value of Reformed theology as opposed to dispensational theology. Vos later invited Chao to produce the first of many translations of Reformed literature into Chinese. After hardships experienced during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and the subsequent Chinese civil war, Charles Chao fled the mainland with his family in 1949. Now outside of the mainland, Chao and the RPCNA missionaries J. G. Vos and Samuel E. Boyle established the Reformed Translation Fellowship (RTF) to continue producing Chinese translations of Reformed literature.

It would not be an understatement to say that Jonathan Chao was deeply shaped by the Reformed and conservative pedigree of his father.[10] The junior Chao was born in 1938, the same year the senior Chao was first introduced to Reformed theology through J. G. Vos. After fleeing China with his family, Jonathan Chao was raised in Japan before moving to Los Angeles in 1958. He eventually pursued Christian studies—receiving first a BA in Bible and Classics from Geneva College before earning an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia, in 1966. As an institution, Westminster was founded in 1929 under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen as a fundamentalist schism from Princeton Theological Seminary, the latter of which began teaching the modernist theology of the time. Moreover, many of the authors being translated by the RTF included professors affiliated with Westminster Theological Seminary or "Old Princeton,"[11] such as J. Gresham Machem, B. B. Warfield, J. G. Vos, and Cornelius Van Til. It was during his time at Westminster that Chao met a number of Chinese students on campus who together eventually founded the China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) in Hong Kong in 1975. As the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) came to an end in mainland China,

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[10] Aside from a number of obituaries (see Chao 2005: 224–81), the only other short biography I have encountered of Jonathan Chao has been written by David Aikman (2006: 278–80).

[11] "Old Princeton" is a common shorthand for Princeton Theological Seminary in "the good ole days," before it began adopting the more modernist theological position which resulted in the split and the creation of Westminster Theological Seminary.

Chao established the Chinese Church Research Centre in CGST in 1978 to focus on research and ministry in mainland China. His center would eventually be renamed China Ministries International in 1987 and produce a number of periodicals in Chinese and in English reporting on Christianity in China. From 1978 until near his death, Jonathan Chao made over a hundred trips into China, often carrying with him Chinese bibles and Reformed literature produced by the RTF—an organization which he would likewise contribute translations to.

It is curious to note that when Chao eventually completed his PhD in sinology at the University of Pennsylvania in 1986, he focused on the more progressive intellectuals of Chinese Christianity in the 1920s, such as Cheng Jingyi (誠靜怡, 1881–1939), Xie Fuya (謝扶雅, 1892–1991), Xu Baoqian (徐寶謙, 1892–1944), and T. C. Chao (Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸, 1888–1979). While the bulk of his PhD dissertation explores the various attempts of these individuals to develop an indigenous church, his concluding chapter argued that the real success would come in the 1930s with the flourishing of conservative independent movements such as the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family, and the so-called "Little Flock." He explained that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), both in the 1950s and after the Cultural Revolution, was making unnecessary compromises before speaking of the rise of the house church movement. The last paragraph of his PhD dissertation offered the following claim:

> It is a paradox in modern Chinese history that, although anti-Christian efforts were intended to contain Christian church growth, such pressures produced the opposite effect, and the Protestant church has grown faster than ever before. If anti-Christian pressures in the 1920s produced the concepts for creating indigenous churches, the same kind of pressures have helped to produce a large number of churches in the 1970s and 1980s that are well on their way to becoming indigenous. (Chao 1986: 290)

Was this a prophetic statement or a promise? As we shall see, Jonathan Chao believed he had a very concrete role in these indigenizing developments of contemporary China.

3. The Christianization of Chinese culture

The work of Jonathan Chao can be summarized under his so-called threefold vision: the evangelization of China (*Zhonguo fuyin hua* 中國福音化), the kingdomization of the church (*jiaohui guodu hua* 教會國度化), and the Christianization of culture (*wenhua jidu hua* 文化基督化) (Chao, 1993b). The first two aspects are fairly straight forward. The evangelization of China means to bring the gospel message to non-Christian Chinese. The kingdomization of the church is about building the church as part of God's salvific history, without being restricted by sectarian or cultural idiosyncrasies.

The third aspect, the Christianization of culture, focuses on the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture. Like many Chinese Christians before him, Jonathan Chao had a strong interest in this relationship. While he would write about the Christianization of culture on a number of occasions, Chao saw this as a particularly important work to do in the 1990s when a growing number of Chinese intellectuals began exploring Christianity as a resource for the reconstruction of Chinese civilization (Chao 2000).[12] Reflecting on Richard Niebuhr's classic work *Christ and Culture*, Chao explains that the motif of Christ as transformer of culture is the most biblical.[13] This would not be a surprising position for him to take, given that his Philadelphia alma mater Westminster Theological Seminary has tended to uphold a view of Dutch Neo-Calvinism which argues for a transformative dimension of Christianity.[14] During his time at Westminster, Chao studied under one of the prominent figures of this view: Cornelius

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[12] In the article, Chao refers specifically to Zhuo Xinping (卓新平, born 1955), but undoubtedly he is also speaking of the broader phenomenon of "cultural Christians" (*wenhua Jidutu* 文化基督徒) which include those who self-identify as Christians but do not actively participate in local Christian communities. See Fällman (2008) and Chow (2018: 70–91).

[13] In the 1993 article, he is already speaking about Christianity transforming (*gaizao* 改造) culture, but he develops this much more only in this article published in 2000 (see Chao 1993b: 31).

[14] In recent years, this has been at the center of a debate between the two major Westminster seminaries in the United States—in Philadelphia and in California. Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia would uphold a transformative perspective whereas key figures at Westminster Seminary California would critique this view in lieu of the more traditional Reformed perspective of a "two kingdoms" theology. The Westminster Seminary California theologian David VanDrunen (2010a; 2010b) has written two important texts which initiated much of this debate.

Van Til.[15] In explaining his rationale for embracing the motif of Christ the transformer of culture, Chao explains:

> Transformation as an approach sees the inadequacies of fallen human culture, like Chinese culture, and seeks to bring about changes in the worldview, value system, and pattern of behaviour of one's culture, in line with redemptive revelation. In so doing the Christian cultural workers remain true to their Christian theological commitments as they engage themselves in the task of integrating their faith with their native culture through transformation. They have a clear sense of cultural mandate. (Chao 2000: 100)

However, how does this approach proposed by Chao fit with previous approaches at creating an indigenous Christianity? Chao points out that Chinese Christian intellectuals in the 1920s employed a variety of approaches.[16] But they were all invalid. He explains, "None of them did justice to the scriptural demands for being true to Christ and his word. For the direction taken was to indigenize Christianity in which Christianity is the object of transformation to suit the demands of Chinese culture" (2000: 101). In Chao's view, Chinese culture must be the object of transformation, not Christianity. As he explains in the quote above, this is part of the "cultural mandate"—a key motif of Dutch Neo-Calvinism.

Practically speaking, this is understood in terms of how Christianity is able to address areas where Chinese culture is lacking. In one example, Chao explains that Chinese culture has tended to underscore a strong humanistic impulse—from the ethics of Confucius to the rationalism of Marxism—instead of an understanding of transcendence like in Christianity (2000: 102). Yet through general revelation, ancient China had ideas such as *Shangdi* 上帝 (Lord on high) and *Tian* 天 (Heaven). Present day Chinese should be reminded of this ancient heritage and

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15 Chao would even write his masters thesis on Cornelius Van Til's understanding of "common grace," posthumously translated and published in Chinese (Chao 2012).

16 In his PhD dissertation, Chao organized the various approaches in the 1920s into five models: the model of external expression, the model of injection, the model of sinicization, the model of ethical common ground, and the model of syncretism (Chao 1986: 221–43; see Chao 2000: 100–1).

offered a greater meaning through the special revelation of the bible. This would result in an understanding of a transcendent God who has already been revealed within Chinese culture.[17] In another example, Chao explains how Chinese culture lacks the Christian understanding of unconditional forgiveness (2000: 103). Instead, Chinese literature speaks about revenge and retributive justice. Christianity can only transform this aspect of Chinese culture with a mass demonstration of love and forgiveness. In turn, Chao explains, "The renewal of Chinese culture through personal cleansing will bring about a new release of the moral dynamics for social reform" (Chao, 2000: 103).

What is curious about these examples is that Jonathan Chao differs from other conservative Chinese Christians, such as Wang Mingdao or Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声, 1903–1972), who emphasized individual and otherworldly salvation over engagement with this world. Furthermore, Chao believes that the Christianization of Chinese culture includes a "missionary mandate" and a "cultural mandate" (Chao 2000: 104). On the one hand, this involves responding to the "missionary mandate" found in Christ's Great Commission by evangelizing the Chinese people. On the other hand, drawing from Dutch Neo-Calvinist thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper and Cornelius Van Til, Chao also speaks of a "cultural mandate" as highlighting the need to engage various aspects of Chinese culture such as teaching at all levels of education, being involved in societal reform, and participating in the political process (see Kuyper 1931; Van Til 1971).

4. Orthodoxy and Evil Cults

Jonathan Chao's theological views are interesting in theory, but in his quarter of a century of travels into mainland China, how would he work out his threefold vision in practice? This is mainly seen in his work with house churches. As we noted earlier, the conclusion of his PhD

[17] This closely parallels Cornelius Van Til's distinction between general and special revelation (2007: 176–222).

includes an anticipation that house churches are the future of the indigenous Chinese church. It is worth noting here a distinction Chao makes in his dissertation between an indigenous Christianity and an indigenous church. He explains:

> Indigenous Christianity was concerned with the indigenization of Chinese Christian thought and experience, embracing faith, theology, life, and influence. The creation of an indigenous church was concerned with the indigenization of the organizational and institutional structures of the Chinese church, and included such subjects as architecture, membership, pastors, rituals, financial matters, and church work. (Chao 1986: 224–5)

China needs both an indigenous Christianity and an indigenous church. Put under the light of his threefold vision, the Christianization of Chinese culture results in an indigenous Christianity, whereas the evangelization of China and the kingdomization of the church result in a self-sufficient and indigenous church.

When he returned to the land of his birth, Jonathan Chao brought bibles and Reformed literature to distribute to house church Christians. While many would cherish the bibles he carried, what use would these Chinese translations of Reformed theological treatises be for the average rural Christian? In his travels, Chao focused much of his work on training house church leaders. The early 1980s witnessed a rapid growth of Christianity and Christianity-inspired new religious groups. One such group, the Shouters (*Huhan pai* 呼喊派), would be outlawed by the government as an "evil cult" (*xiejiao* 邪教) in 1983 and denounced by Protestants both inside and outside of the TSPM. Hence, while there was an idealistic aspiration for Christianity to continue to grow, there were also practical concerns of "sheep-stealing" from new religious groups and of potential suppression from government officials. This resulted in a situation in which many Christians were keen to take up the Christian ministry but were uncertain because they felt ill-equipped to do so. In 1985, Jonathan Chao would help establish the first of what he called "seminaries of the fields" (*yedi shenxue yuan* 野地神學院) to provide intensive theological training for itinerant evangelists in clandestine meetings (Chao 1987; Chao 1993: 81–8).

Things would change again in the 1990s when the government denounced a number of other Christianity-inspired new religious groups such as the Three Grades of Servants (*Sanban puren* 三班僕人) and Eastern Lightning (*Dongfang shandian* 東方閃電) as "evil cults" (see Lian 2010: 224–30; Dunn 2015). Even more than before, house churches became targeted as suspected "evil cults" and were subjected to government suppression. In response to these challenges, Jonathan Chao would bring together networks of house churches to provide united statements of faith underscoring their orthodoxy, denouncing "evil cults," and explaining why they chose not to join the TSPM (Aikman 2006: 311–25). Along with distinguishing themselves from "evil cults" and the TSPM, these house church leaders spoke against the imprisonment of various house church Christians, including:

> Presbyterians (who believe that if one is saved once, he or she is always saved), the Charismatic Church, the Local Church (incorrectly called the "Shouters' Sect"), the Way of Life Church (also called the Full Gospel Church), the Little Flock Church, the Pentecostal Church, Lutherans who do not attend the Three-Self churches, and the Baptist Church. (Aikman 2006: 311–2)

Despite Chao's own denominational and theological disposition, this shows the charity he extended towards other Christian backgrounds and the desire for creating an indigenous church which "was concerned with the indigenization of the organizational and institutional structures of the Chinese church" (Chao 1986: 224–5). Overall, Chao encouraged these leaders to push against sectarianism and to show solidarity across ecclesiastical lines—much of which echoed his proposal for the kingdomization of the church.

Parallel to these developments, the 1990s witnessed another growth in China: a revived interest in Calvinism.[18] First, this period would see a growing number of Calvinist Christian

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[18] Most of the earliest Protestant missionaries to China in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were coming from Reformed, Presbyterian, and Congregational denominations. While efforts were made to homogenize Chinese Protestantism, some groups coming out of the Cultural Revolution would still have historic ties to Calvinist theology and polity. Most of these would be associated with the TSPM, especially in North or Northeast China. However, what is being described here in the 1990s are the revived interests in Calvinism within unregistered

workers traveling to China to evangelize and to train local leaders. Along with Jonathan Chao, other return missionaries like Stephen Tong (Tang Chongrong 唐崇榮, born 1940) and Samuel Ling (Lin Cixin 林慈信, born 1951) and a growing number of South Korean and Korean American missionaries would bring their Calvinist outlook to China. Many of these individuals would be less charitable to ecclesial and theological diversity than Jonathan Chao, emphasizing very rigid understandings of Calvinist or Reformed theology—in many ways, introducing a new form of Chinese fundamentalism. Secondly, the challenges brought upon by "evil cults" resulted in a greater need to identify oneself with an "orthodox" theology. Many would emphasize the need for the "correct" theology and the "correct" theological training, and a "theology fever" (*shenxue re* 神學熱) would ensue in various parts of China (Cao 2011: 103–4). For many Chinese Christians, Reformed theology was an ideal theological tradition to focus on as it esteems the "objective" value of theology and reason above one's "subjective" experiences and emotions—a subjectivity which allows an opening to the heretical teachings of a charismatic leader. This rigidity has also resulted in a somewhat schismatic tendency of these churches, splitting on the "fundamentals" of Calvinist theology and its application.

Thirdly, Calvinism would become the basis for many urban intellectual churches which developed in the late-1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century in their pursuits for theological resources to engage art and literature, education, the state, and the society. Many of these individuals were involved in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and, due to the military clampdown, became disillusioned in their pursuits for change in Chinese society. They would later find existential resolve in Christianity and maintained their earlier fervor to transform Chinese society—but now, from within a newfound Calvinist ideological framework (Sun 2007). Some would be involved in human rights activism and argue for the politically liberal values of the rule of law and constitutionalism, all from a basis in Calvinism (Chow 2018: 104–5). This would include writers and social critics such as Yu Jie (余杰, born 1973, in exile in the United

churches—many of which cannot trace their lineage to pre-Cultural Revolution Calvinist missions. See Fällman (2013: 152–68) and Chow (2018: 92–114).

States since 2012) and Bei Cun (北村, born 1965), who spoke about the need to "evangelize culture" (*wenhua fuyin hua* 文化福音化), echoing the proposals of Jonathan Chao (Fällman 2013: 154, 161, 161n1).

While Jonathan Chao's threefold vision has yet to be fully achieved, it is undeniable that his vision and ministry has left an indelible mark on the developments of Christianity in China today.

5. Conclusion

Returning to the first query raised in this paper, is Jonathan Chao a foreign element or a Chinese element? I contend that he very much must be understood as both. The first decade of Chao's life was spent in China, followed by decade in Japan, before moving to the United States where he pursued three theological degrees. Yet at the heart of his later travels to China was this threefold vision of the evangelization of China, the kingdomization of the (Chinese) church, and the Christianization of (Chinese) culture. China was at the forefront of Chao's plan. It is quite clear that Chao wanted to play a role in building an indigenous Chinese church and an indigenous Chinese Christianity—both of which he saw himself a part of. Jonathan Chao was both foreign and indigenous to China.

A similar query can be raised for those Daniel Bays describes as the "Sino-Foreign Protestant Enterprise" of the early-twentieth century (2012: 99–104; see Sneller 2015), such as the "liberals" T. C. Chao, Y. T. Wu (Wu Yaozong 吳耀宗, 1893–1979), K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun 丁光訓, 1915–2012)—and even John Song (Song Shangjie 宋尚節, 1901–1944), the conservative revivalist preacher who rejected theological liberalism. Like Jonathan Chao, these Chinese Christians left China for a period of time only to return to their homeland with renewed visions and boundless dreams. Unlike Chao, they are often regarded as "Chinese" as opposed to "overseas Chinese," partly because their lives outside of the mainland were much briefer. Should they too be considered return missionaries?

This motif of departure and return is not idiosyncratic to Chinese Christians. With regards to Africa, one may consider important figures in the late-nineteenth century such as

Samuel Ajayi Crowther or Edward W. Blyden, and the latter's call for African Americans to "return from exile" and evangelize west Africa (Blyden 1891).[19] In Asia, it would be Koreans traveling to China who would bring Christian literature back to the hermit kingdom and eventually establish new Christian communities, such as the first Catholic community in Korea in the eighteenth century and the first Protestant community a hundred years later (Paik 1971: 51–5; Kim and Kim 2014: 19–30, 56–9). Yet in both these regions, there are more recent examples of churches from the African diaspora and from the Korean diaspora who are sending missionaries to new mission frontiers of Africa and North Korea, respectively (Adogame 2013: 189; Kim and Kim 2014: 257–8).

One of the challenges we have when considering these African and Korean examples—as well as the Sino-Foreign Protestant Enterprise of early-twentieth century China—is the question of who should be considered a "return missionary." Undoubtedly, this is a term which can be conceptualized across a spectrum. One of the factors which comes into play is the time a person is away from their ancestral home. Many of those discussed were only away for a matter of a few years for study or work. This is perhaps quite different from someone like Jonathan Chao who spent his formative years outside of his place of birth—or even from those born and raised in a "foreign" land like the United States as a second or third generation immigrant—before returning to their ancestral home.

Even more important than time away from one's ancestral home are the complexities of constructed identities, what is variably described as "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903; Gilroy 1993) or "adhesive identity" (Yang 1999). Even before Chao entered China in the late-1970s, he would have had to negotiate disparate notions of American, Republican Chinese, and Christian identities. Moreover, those who return to their ancestral homes have to navigate the ways they understand themselves and the perceptions of others. While Chinese Americans are described as "forever foreigners" of the United States due to their visible differences from the

[19] I am thankful to Andrew Barnes from Arizona State University for sharing with me this fascinating example of Blyden. See also Walls (2002b), Killingray (2003), and Kwakye (2018).

majority population of European Americans, Chinese Americans who travel and live in China are likewise still described as "foreigners" (*laowai* 老外). To misappropriate the words of Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, there is no place *that is* home. While there is a constant need and desire to indigenize, those who see themselves without a home can be reminded of the Christian call to be pilgrims beyond this world.[20] Furthermore, when these Chinese Americans become return missionaries, this problematizes the traditional challenges of paternalism and independency in China if the "foreigner" is in fact not all that foreign. It raises the question of how one's sense of identity shapes his or her sense of calling, or vice versa. We may ask whether the Apostle Paul was a Jew who was called to work amongst Gentiles or a Roman citizen called to work amongst other Romans. What drives all of these return missionaries is a sense of calling strengthened by a sense of collective identity—a kind of transnational "imagined community" (see Anderson 2006). Importantly, "return mission," like "reverse mission," provides us with yet another dimension by which to explore the complexities of how mission and migration have worked together in the making of world Christianity.

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