Exploring Sino-Spirituality
「中西」屬靈觀初探

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Dichotomized Views: Western and Chinese Cultural Influence

Chinese ministers from different backgrounds tend to hold different views on the spirituality of a servant. Generally speaking, those who receive Western theological training insist that the spirituality of a servant should include: having been called by God and ordained by the church, blessed with spiritual gifts and employed by a congregation, authorized by the government to officiate wedding, baptism, funeral, etc., competent in administration, and efficient in his profession. However, ministers from a more traditional Chinese background see these qualities as secularized and Westernized. They believe that the spiritual qualities of God’s servants should be: saved and called by God’s grace, pious in orientation, humble in attitude, and faithful in service.

Both views are correct and incorrect at the same time. They are both correct in that each identifies one dimension of the true spirituality of a servant of the Lord. They are both wrong because they insist on only one dimension of spirituality, operating on the “either-or” assumption and orientation. According to the Bible, the characteristics listed in these two views should be in a “both-and” relationship (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19; Jn. 1:14, 18, 15:26, 17:24; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Heb. 1:5-6).

Rethinking Spirituality from the Chinese Cultural Viewpoint

The “Western Cognitive Pattern,” inherited from Europe and represented in current American culture, is dualistic. Take English as an example. There is a distinction between subject and predicate in any sentence, e.g. “He is a boy.” Names of people and places begin from the parts to the whole, e.g. James Smith; 7 Main St.; Paradise, PA, USA. As shown in Figure 1, the circle is partitioned into two halves, A & B. According to Aristotelian logic and the law of non-contradiction, A is not B, and B is not A, each half being either A or B.

Figure 1: Western "Either-or" Dualistic / dichotomistic Pattern

Figure 2: Sino "Both-and" Dualistic / complementary Pattern

Middle Cultural Chinese View

The middle cultural Chinese view is complementary. It is represented by the Chinese symbolic “陰陽” (Yin-Yang). As shown in Figure 2, the circle is partitioned into four quadrants, A, B, C, and D, with each quadrant representing a unique combination of Yin and Yang.

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Chinese have a very different cognitive pattern. For instance, since Chinese is monosyllabic and ideographic, the formation of words and sentences has to do with the complementary parts forming the whole. Names for people and places begin with the clan, and then move to family, and onto the individual. Formation of phrasal words is the combination of opposite pairs. Figure 2 illustrates the complementary parts of “yin-yang” in an equilibrium, forming the whole. It is holistic (the whole circle) with the complementary parts of yin and yang. It is integrationistic but not dichotomistic, for there is “yang in yin” and “yin in yang”. The two are neither dialectic nor mutually exclusive, but are both-and, and holistic.

Similarly, we learn from the doctrine of the Trinity that there is only one God who is supreme above all and yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit sharing in honor, power and glory. As shown in Figure 3, the three are distinct in identity, one in essence. It is a three in existence, unity with diversity, union in fellowship and holistic in harmony. This is the Trinitarian model, complementary to the Chinese pattern (both-and).

Figure 4 illustrates the formation of various theological issues from the perspectives of church history and systematic theology. Chinese ministers, in receiving Western theological training, often find the following debates boring: the christological controversies of the early years in church history, the conflict (Calvinism vs. Arminianism) on the doctrine of salvation in the Reformation, the debates on the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the search and study of the “historical Jesus,” and the phenomenon of the “Jesus seminar” in recent years, etc. This is because they operate from a Sino “both-and” mindset whereas the root of the contentions and conflicts, and contrast sprang from the Western “either-or” cognitive pattern. Figure 5 compares and contrasts the strengths and weaknesses of the Western and Sino-cognitive patterns.
### Figure 4

**Western "Either-or" Pattern and Theological Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theological Topics</th>
<th>Western Pattern 西方型式</th>
<th>Either-Or: Contradictory &amp; Dialectical 非此即彼 互異相斥</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christology</strong> 耶穌論</td>
<td>- Christ’s divinity 耶穌的神性</td>
<td>- Christ’s humanity 耶穌的人性</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Christ of “kerygma” 聖言中的基督</td>
<td>- The historical Jesus 歷史性的耶穌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soteriology</strong> 救恩論</td>
<td>- God’s sovereignty &amp; predestination 神的主權</td>
<td>- Man’s choice &amp; free will 人的自由與抉擇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Faith 傳信</td>
<td>- Reason 理據</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Grace 救恩</td>
<td>- Works 行為</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evangelize to save souls 佈道救靈</td>
<td>- Social gospel: being light &amp; salt 社會福音：作光和鹽</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecclesiology</strong> 教會論</td>
<td>- Universal church 普世教會</td>
<td>- Local congregation 地方教會</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Organismic union 生命契合</td>
<td>- Organizational structure 結構聯繫</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eschatology</strong> 末世論</td>
<td>- Already 已經</td>
<td>- Not yet 未到</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliology</strong> 聖經論</td>
<td>- Divine revelation &amp; inspiration 神聖啓示/默示</td>
<td>- Human communication &amp; interpretation 人為溝通/詮釋</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 5

**Comparing & Contrasting the Two Patterns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items 項目</th>
<th>Western 西方</th>
<th>Trinitarian (Sino) 三一（中肯）</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature</strong> 本質</td>
<td>Either-or, dichotomistic, dialectical, contradictory &amp; exclusive</td>
<td>Both-and, integrationistic, equilibrium, complementary &amp; holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strength 強處</strong></td>
<td>Analytically powerful at macro level</td>
<td>Integratively powerful at macro level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness 弱點</strong></td>
<td>Prompts to be paradoxical and dialectical</td>
<td>Tends to be monoistic and syncretistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristic 特色</strong></td>
<td>Confrontational, changing, individualistic, self-reliant, autonomous</td>
<td>Harmonious, stable, group-solidaristic, interdependent, other-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro 徑觀</strong></td>
<td>Dialectical dualism</td>
<td>Complementary equilibrium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro 微觀</strong></td>
<td>Competitive, changing, linear</td>
<td>Cooperative, conservative, cyclical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Spiritual Qualities of a Servant

In responding to the issue of “spirituality of a servant,” ministers with a strong Chinese background and the pietistic heritage of traditional Chinese Christians would list the characteristics in the left-hand column of Figure 6. On the contrary, those ministers who are raised and educated in the West and trained under the “either-or” style of theological tradition would emphasize the characteristics in the middle column of the diagram. However, spirituality that is biblically based and compatible with the Sino-type cognitive “both-and” pattern should be the “Trinitarian” model on the right-hand column of Figure 6.

Figure 7 summarizes the principle and practice of spirituality which fits the Sino-type cognitive thinking on the quality of spirituality. Basically, the “both-and” pattern encompasses the two columns under the heading “Principle,” emphasizing the order of priority.

The “spirituality” that adheres to biblical truth and that is compatible with Chinese culture should have 7 aspects. Each aspect has two levels. It is very important to keep the proper order of the components in each level. Mixing the order will distort the truth about spirituality.

1. **Grace → Gifts**

A spiritual man should be a recipient of God’s grace of redemption and regeneration with calling to serve and be a saint (set apart). Experience of God’s life-changing grace should precede the ministry/service gifts (i.e., the manifestation of grace in the form of gifts for service: evangelism, teaching, healing, etc.). Claiming to have received God’s grace but not serving others is hypocritical and selfish. Merely demonstrating gifts without the grace of bearing the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, humility, etc.) renders the presumed gifts questionable, suggesting them to be no more than counterfeits. Grace precedes gifts but not without gifts to serve.

2. **Life Quality → Ministry Productivity**

Before showing any ministry productivity, i.e., “God working through him,” a servant of the Lord should have experienced the transformation of life by “God working in him.” Without the Spirit-indwelling reality, the Spirit endowment of gifts for service is impossible. Otherwise, those who are prone to the busybody, “Martha-like” service will lose that blessing which Mary secured (Lk. 10:42). Those who boast of having high qualities and supreme spirituality but without productive ministry are unwise stewards or...
lazy workers, lacking strong desire to serve effectively with Spirit-empowerment. Life quality precedes ministry productivity but not without the latter.

3. Faithfulness → Effectiveness

Contemporary Christian workers place too much emphasis on efficiency and often forget that ministry opportunities and results are given by God, not man-made, methodology-induced or efficiency-driven. On the other hand, those who talk of being faithful, focusing on minutiae, missing the Kingdom perspective, and losing the vision for worldwide evangelization are not exercising their spiritual gifts in ministry and cannot claim to be faithful at all. Faithfulness precedes effectiveness but not without the latter.

4. Character → Career

Whether serving God vocationally (full-time) or not, no godly servant should think of himself as having a career or a profession alone. Neglecting the primacy of godly character over career is "ministerial professionalism," and not "ministerial spirituality." Many servants of God are conscious of the godly character required for Christian ministry at the early stage of their service. Unfortunately, when Christian organizations grow bigger, institutional organizations become more complex, quantity gradually replaces the quality and the preoccupation of getting things done professionally then crowd out matters of character. True spirituality requires both character and career in their proper order.

5. Servanthood → Leadership

A true servant of the Lord is a humble servant of all, as Christ was (Lk. 22; Jn. 13; 1 Cor. 9). Leadership, according to the world, is occupying a high position above others. Self-appointed leaders of the world are not Christ's way of servanthood. Only those who serve others with God-fearing, self-abasing humility are leaders of true spirituality. Christ's exaltation by God the Father as Lord/leader above all came only after his lowly service, painful crucifixion, and humiliating death. Moses made many excuses for himself when called by God. This was not a sign of true spirituality. He only sounded humble and seemed spiritual when resisting God's calling and refusing God's commission. Servanthood is a prerequisite attitude/orientation of humility for godly leadership and genuine spirituality.
6. Solidarity → Individuality

He who seeks self-fulfillment above the Kingdom of God or focuses on self-interest before the collective good of the group cannot be really spiritual. Individualism is one of the primary features of Western culture with preoccupation of individual rights, self-actualization, self-autonomy, self-reliance, etc. The emphasis of group (e.g. family, clan, etc.) in Eastern cultures is closer to the teaching on group solidarity of the Bible (e.g. solidarity in Christ, the Church, the Kingdom of God, etc.). Salvation begins with the universal atonement of Christ before an individual’s decision for Christ but not without the latter. The doctrine of the Church gives primacy to the solidarity of the body of Christ, the household of God, etc. over individual members but not without the latter. True spirituality gives priority to collective solidarity over individual persons but not without the latter.

7. People-Oriented → Program-Oriented

Contemporary Christians, living in a technological society, are prompt to place much emphasis on ministry techniques, method of spiritual formation, program-oriented ministry plans, and accomplishment of designated tasks. God takes time to prepare His messengers before He can use them; yet Christians are preoccupied with the "how" or "how to." Spiritual ministry should first and foremost be people-oriented rather than program-oriented. There is the priority of people/personnel over program; but not without the latter.

Spirituality in accordance with Scripture and within the context of Chinese culture as shown in Figure 7 is to integrate the two dimensions in each of the above seven aspects (primary & secondary principles) and yet maintain the proper order. Otherwise it is fragmented, faulty, contradictory to Scriptural teachings and consequently unchristian. The compartmentalization of the two dimensions and the dialectical/dichotomistic orientation of the Western perspective of spirituality can be misleading.

5. 僕人精神 (Servanthood) → 領導才能 (Leadership)

真正的僕人必不看重個人，恭敬順服，不求高位兼名而順服，不爭領導地位而順服；只作僕人。僕人要有忠誠感，甘願卑下，服事在無法理解及接受。這些都是合乎聖經真理的屬靈實踐。同時又應像摩西一樣，謙卑有謙虛的心，口中謙卑而尊榮領導天庭，口述聖經而負使命的大能，不怕不懼。

6. 羣體 (Solidarity) → 個人 (Individuality)

群體的人絕不會單求自我表現或單獨個人成敗；而是先從大處（群體/團體）著想，西方社會崇尚個人主義，講求個人自由 (individual rights)，強求自我實現 (self-actualization)；東方社會重視群體價值 (如大家庭，家族等)。聖經教訓中教懸詠本於基督教而非個人決志，故實實講聖靈同為基督的身體及全體肢體，榮格等；合乎聖經的屬靈觀是群體與個體俱備，相得益彰。

7. 人 (People-Oriented) → 事 (Program-Oriented)

今日教會内外都非常重視方法 (methodology)、設事節目 (program-oriented)、重視要工 (designated task)、按聖經真理原則，屬上帝義工 (messenger)、顧及全人 (people-oriented)、忠於使命 (divine commission)、「人」、「事」倒置不對，「人」、「事」不分不離，「人」、「事」都應為真道開

以上七項有其先後次序，又須二者俱備，不可或缺面相應相成。此種整全性 (holistic)、合體性 (integrationism) 及先後性 (prioritized)，是僕人 (及東方人) 想像型態的特點。正如圖二所示：範圍之整全性 (即整體相容)；不似西方所謂分層性 (非此即彼)；隕隔相隔 (即隔中有隔，隔中有隔)；而非二分法 (dichotomistic) 或歧義法 (dialectical)；或彼此孤立 (exclusive-obessive)。

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