

SECTION 2

SELF-FULFILLMENT

Beyond China's Threat: The Contextual Theology of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

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Abstract

Colonial relations have remained inspiring and vivid in the 21st century. They have provided powerful morale for the Taiwan Independence Movement. In the quest for independent statehood, Taiwan can easily see China's territorial ambition, economic invasion, and violation of liberalism. To gain self-respect, the postcolonial elite could rely best and conveniently on the colonial modernity brought by Japan. This perspective enabled the persistence of the image of inferior China. However, a particular string in the postcolonial relations did not assume Chinese inferiority. Rather, self-reflection on one's practical conditions, which was independent from relations with China, inspired the effort to re-constitute Taiwan's identity. This string of thought is the Presbyterian Church. Contextual theology resulted from the critical reflection and determination emerged to guide the Church's subsequent approach to China. For the independence advocacy informed by colonial relations, the issue of human rights immediately suggests the image of inferior China. However, for the Church, the issue connotes a mission in China that the Church should have cared about equally. This construction of a non-inferior/threatening China is how religion has brought to the intellectual perspective of Taiwan independence.

Keywords: *Taiwan independence, China threat, Presbyterian Church, colonial modernity, contextual theology*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, Taiwan's increasing aversion to China is apparent (Hickey, 2019; Jacob and Kang, 2018; Corcuff, 2012) because of China's rise and the concomitant threat of Mainlandization or re-Sinicization (Shih, 2017; Sun,

2010; Yu and Kwan, 2008; Chen, 2004). Actors perceive China's threat and can understand intellectually the nature of such a threat in various ways. The familiar international relations perspectives of power, interest and identity point to China's tendency to become an expansionist, economic predator, or incorrectly attractive model (Pillsbury, 2016; Nathan, 2003; Yee and Storey, 2002). Internal reasons exist for an active portrayal of the threat, too, especially in electoral systems where, sometimes, a campaign edge can be achieved, reminding people of China's threat (Ho et al., 2019; Sullivan and Lee, 2018; Yang, 2017; Chen, 2010: A1). Taiwan is no exception. In the quest for independent statehood, Taiwan can easily detect China's territorial ambition, economic invasion and violation of liberalism (Lee et al., 2018; Wei and Lai, 2017).

Taiwan's nostalgia for colonial modernity adds a psychological dimension to its advantage (Lee and Chen, 2014; Barclay, 2016; Jacobs, 2014), in which China appears inferior to Japan, which colonized Taiwan from 1895 to 1945. According to this point of view, China's offer of reunification connotes a return to a backward regime. In addition, the leaders of Taiwan's past ruling party, the exiled Kuomintang, had almost passed away 50 years ago fleeing Taiwan in the aftermath of the Civil War. These past leaders believed in reunification. The historical development enables the connection with postcolonial sensibilities among subsequent generations of leaders who have consistently estranged China (Corcuff, 2011).

All the similarities and differences between Taiwan's perceptions of China's threat appear to be familiar. However, a strand of the pro-independence force in Taiwan that does not particularly rely on the intellectual construction of the threat either to attain legitimacy for Taiwan's pursuit or win support from international major powers exists. In other words, the inter-subjective construction of China-Taiwan relations is neither contributive nor determinative of the evolution of a consciousness of independence. Rather, self-reflection on one's practical conditions, which was independent from any prior cultural resemblance to China, inspired the effort to re-constitute Taiwan's identity. Such process renders the threat of China a marginal issue, in which an antagonizing China is no longer essential to the legitimacy of Taiwan's independence.

The paper focuses on the perspective of contextual theology having evolved from Taiwan's Presbyterian tradition. Owing to its Western origin, the Presbyterian history in Taiwan has bred a completely different relational trajectory, that contrasts sharply with those prepared by the colonial and Civil War relations (Kuo, 2008; Lin, 1999). The latter relations come with moral competition, whereas the indigenous Presbyterian relies little on the view of China to drive the quest for independence. Although this tradition had worked within political relations during various periods, confrontation,

othering, or demonization rarely characterize its strategic practices, as often seen elsewhere. Thus, the marginality of China's threat in the Presbyterian pursuit of Taiwan's independence is worth reviewing.

The paper begins with a broader review of the different kinds of relations in which the pro-independence forces have embedded themselves to demonstrate the importance of their intellectual understanding of China to their pursuit. Then, we will demonstrate how the Presbyterian Church evolved differently. This process illustrates how individual prescription can be essential to the evolution of greater relations. These greater relations additionally suggest how a peculiar way of failing to understand China can practically add strength in the formation of approaches to China. The paper argues that religion plays a significant role in this development.

2. Taiwan's Approach to China Embedded in Colonial Relations

The two earliest Presbyterian priests arrived in Taiwan in 1867 and 1872, prior to Japan's colonization in 1895. Japan would have a considerable influence with regard to determining Taiwan's fate in the next half-century. In many aspects, colonial relations with Taiwan were the same as with other colonies (Aguilar, 2011; Shin and Robinson, 1999). Most importantly, Japan imposed colonial modernity which, for the purpose of this paper, refers to the process of modernization to facilitate the extraction of resources according to the need of colonial governance (Chen, 2002; Komagome, 2006; Lo, 2002). Despite Japan's resorting to suppressive control in general, the Presbyterian Church encountered little intrusion. In contrast, the indigenous population underwent colonization, with the most deeply-rooted influences resulting from education and war. Education and war had reconstituted the political identities of Taiwan, especially in the higher strata of society.

Education was an effective mechanism of assimilation (Peng and Chu, 2017). Young people acquired Japanese values, language, identities, and learned to be loyal to the emperor. The social hierarchy was clear, but the colonized population had the opportunity to rise up from the past Chineseness qua inferiority. The colonial migrants equated Chineseness to slavery in nature, given the conquest of China by northern Manchurian barbarians. The colonized population was inferior not only because they were at the bottom of the colonized society but also because of their Chinese identity.¹ Such cultural configuration had a strong influence on the elite because of the need to demonstrate high culture to attain acknowledgment from the colonizing forces (Ching, 2001; Henry, 2016). An aversion to China was strategically spontaneous to establish self-respect (Huang, 2011). With the colony and Japan joining forces to inflict war on China, this disposition was strengthened.

On the other hand, the war tore the identities of those who perceived and maintained hybrid identities in Taiwan.² Nevertheless, the war expanded and deepened “Japanization.”

Having planned to enforce the idea of the Greater East Asian Sphere of Co-prosperity, the colonial government actively recruited Taiwanese youths. The Taiwanese draftees were initially military servants. As the war escalated, these draftees were able to serve officially as soldiers, which gave them an enhanced sense of pride. Many followed the Japanese army to Southeast Asia, Manchuria, Hainan, or other sites in China. This pride was an even stronger inspiration for becoming Japanese. By the end of the war, most of them had never experienced defeat. Some still recalled participating in impressive modernization projects in Southeast Asia. This inspiration explained how the soldiers’ pride continued even in the war’s aftermath. Except for soldiers who were sent to fight in the Chinese Civil War, returnees were unable to apprehend defeat (Louzon, 2017). The arriving Kuomintang appeared similarly inferior to them in the same way as the Chinese troops appeared to the Japanese army during the war. Ironically, because Japan handed Taiwan over to China, the Taiwanese soldiers who unexpectedly belonged to the Allies were suddenly largely exempt from war trials. As a result, the Japanese identity remained superior in Taiwan’s consciousness. Neither was decolonization seriously attempted in Taiwan.

China’s take-over of Taiwan became dramatic yet bizarre after the Kuomintang lost the Civil War to the Communists. The Kuomintang became an exiled regime. The indigenous population had no effective access to governing positions and was deprived of entitlement to the property left by the former colonizing forces. The Kuomintang thus alienated the postcolonial population, especially the elite and the returnees who had adapted successfully to colonial rules. This alienation came about despite the Kuomintang’s educational and economic policies, which provided equality as opposed to discrimination under colonialism. The Kuomintang’s war on Communist China further inflicted politics of suppression. Although suppression is aimed primarily at Communist infiltration, such politics of moral correctness reinforced the alienation of the postcolonial population (Cook, 2005). The same can be said of the education offered to the postcolonial society. The education was full of Chinese patriotism, which helped neither the decolonization necessary for the postcolonial population to reflect critically upon their assimilation into the Japanese system nor the connection between the colonial and Chinese conditions (Chang, 2015; Morris, Shimazu and Vickers, 2013).

These historical events explain effectively the emergence of the aversion to China after the passing away of the Kuomintang migrant leadership. Liberalism has replaced the Japanese emperor to undergird Taiwan’s

civilizational superiority. Liberalism first appeared to legitimize political reforms that ended the Kuomintang regime. Subsequently, extensive electoral practices benchmarked the difference in sovereign scope between Taiwan and China (Lien, 2014). Taiwan has also been active in establishing solidarity with the Alliance of Liberties to involve India and Australia, in addition to Japan, in containing China. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, their resemblance to one another in terms of liberalism continues to inform the emotional attachment of pro-independence forces to territory consciousness rather than liberalism per se (Pan, 2015; Shih, 2007), which was embedded when defending Japan during WWII. In fact, the reenactment of Taiwan's defeat at the end of World War II in an ironically celebrative narrative has been a popular tactic of pro-independence politicians to avow their allegedly non-Chinese identities (Shih, 2017).

Note the Taiwan Statue, on which former President Lee Teng-hui has inscribed his words, in the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Park. The Statute indicates that Taiwan and Japan resemble to each other in terms of a shared destiny and nationhood that is doomed to estrange China. The statue was installed in 2018. The park displays prefectural statues from all over Japan to memorialize the dead, originating from their respective domains. Lee wrote on the statue established by the then President-elect, Tsai Ing-wen, "Testimony to Nationhood" (為國作見證) (Morgan, 2018). Several observations have been made. First, Taiwan is not a prefecture of Japan. Second, the President of Taiwan is, in every sense, higher than the level of Prefectural Governor of Japan. Third, the names of Taiwanese soldiers who died during the Invasion of Ryukyu, if any, have not been researched or inscribed in the statue as done by the Japanese prefectures. Finally, the term "nationhood" in Lee's inscription on the Taiwan statue summarizes his identification with Japanese nationhood. In fact, for a short time, Lee served in the Japanese military during WWII. Briefly, none of these political sensibilities resonate with the two leaders' quest for independent statehood. That said, their inexpressible comfort with discursively becoming part of the Japanese nation insinuates their aversion to China.

3. Church Relations versus Colonial Relations

On the Taiwan Statute, Lee wrote "testimony." Implicitly, this wording reflects the Presbyterian influence on his discourse. Presbyterian indoctrination clearly had a very different trajectory to colonial relations. If the latter portrayed an inferior China to be excluded, the Church was compulsorily inclusive. Lee's hybrid characteristics of Christianity and colonial modernity enabled him intellectually to sequence his career along bifurcating paths and place China in dramatically different images, simultaneously backward

and worthy of appreciation (Tsai, 2005: 91-109). Lee's adaptive style attests to a highly unstable religious practice. Lee's hybrid identity has been emblematic of Presbyterian followers in Taiwan and, together, they implied the other distinctive approach to the politics of identity that is unavailable to colonial relations. In fact, the evolution of the "contextual theology" of the contemporary Presbyterian Church has not taken inferior China or China's threat as its premise. Eventually, it is this improvised notion of "context" that inspires the exclusionary sense of resemblance among residents of Taiwan and the strangeness of Chineseness.

A separate trajectory that paralleled colonial relations could not be Chinese because this would have invited shaming. The European origin of the Presbyterian Church or, more precisely, the Scottish origin of its contemporary institution, bestowed a superior image on Japan, which once strove to adopt a UK-style of identity. For example, Thomas Barclay (1849-1935), a Glasgow-born Presbyterian missionary, was able to mediate between the colonial troops and the residents of Tainan in 1895 to achieve the Capitulation of Tainan peacefully (Cheng, 2005: 1-2). He received an award from the Japanese Emperor for his services. In the same vein, the Japanese colonial government generally failed to restrict the spread of gospel that originated and was spread prior to the colonial period. James L. Maxwell (1836-1921) started preaching in Southern Taiwan in 1865 and George L. Mackay (1844-1901) in Northern Taiwan in 1872. The colonial government only began to expel Western missionaries from Taiwan when World War II broke out. By then, the Western missionaries had successfully trained over two generations of local priests who could continue the Church's work (Wu, 2003: 172-178).

Christian identity was a possible remedy for transcending colonial relations or explicit scorn toward the inferior. The Church's focus on medical sciences and humanities contrasts with the colonial modernity, which focused mainly on the infrastructure, weaponry, navigation, medicine and extraction. Assimilation only began at a far later stage. As Presbyterian missionaries were from the Calvinist traditions and Protestant Reformation, the humanist and enlightening tendencies in their pedagogical orientation were assured. The bulk of the Church's work in colonial Taiwan was Western-style schooling and medicine (Cheng, 2005: 201). Moreover, the missionaries executed their reform and religion, to a large extent, in local languages whereas the colonial government was eager to substitute the "progressive" Japanese for the allegedly backward Chinese.³ Acquiring Japanese subjected the colonized more deeply to the colonial system whereas acquiring English distanced them from the system. Thus, Church modernity appeared to be heading in a direction that was categorically different from colonial modernity. Neither the Chinese identity of the Han residents nor the primitivity of the aboriginal communities created a barrier to accessing the revelation of Christ.

The important development that made the Presbyterian Church an indigenous religion was the adoption of local conventions and language in teaching and training (Huang, 1999: 20-21). The Church recruited local talents who were more effective in the improvisation of linguistic and racial resemblance to the local. Eventually, an indigenous consciousness could evolve after the Western missionaries had to leave because of pressure from the colonial authorities. An indigenous Church served as the foundation for the indigenous theology. In comparison with postcolonial indigeneity, Church indigeneity was hardly confrontational. Postcolonial indigeneity targeted the exiled Chinese regime by enlisting the identity of colonial modernity. On the contrary, Church modernity that supported Church indigeneity attended to the intrinsic value and solidarity that believers perceived in their service to God. In addition, such service would have to include liberating the Chinese people, even though they did not belong to the postcolonial society. Their exile qualified them for more, rather than less, attention.

The growth of the Presbyterian Church underwent a long cycle of political regimes. The literature has considered the political complexity that is unique and essential to the quest for the indigenization of the Church (Lin, 2009: 41-83; Kang, 1999: 156). Presbyterian missionaries arrived during the Manchurian period. The Church encountered the colonial regime first, then the Chinese regime in exile. The last involved the Chinese Civil War and Cold War. The Church and migrant Kuomintang jointly opposed Communist China, despite their otherwise incongruent purposes.⁴ In any case, each regime presented some difficulties regarding the quest for universal Christianity. Especially the colonial and the Civil War regimes were established after the Church already had its own network in Taiwan. The resulting lesson was that the Church was compelled to develop an indigenous consciousness for the sake of resisting externally-imposed restrictions. In face of the obstacles imposed by these regimes, a cognitive fault line emerged between inside and outside territorially.

Colonial relations inevitably set the most important parameters of Presbyterian identity in Taiwan in this realized territoriality. The simple practice that demarcated Taiwan as a distinctive site or category, independent of China and Japan, comprised the geographical scope of indigenous identity. Such scope not only enabled the colonizers to look down upon the population that could only resist in the name of Taiwan but also enabled the colonized population to acquire a perspective from within the pre-determined boundary. Given that China fell outside this boundary, the exiled Kuomintang could not help but act upon an alien character, which made little sense to its leaders, who conceived of the party as a force for the liberation of the postcolonial society. In the same vein, the Cold War relations, informed by the practice of Containment, reinforced the separation of Taiwan from China as a distinctive site

of geo-strategic significance. These territorially-oriented parameters prepared the emergence of “context” in contextual theology. The colonial modernity and church modernity as two externally bred civilizations have been able to support each other after WWII because of this resemblance of territoriality.

4. The Rise of Contextual Theology

Shoki Coe (1914-1988 or Huang Chang-hui, 黃彰輝, Huang Zhanghui), the founder of contextual theology, distinguished himself from contemporary pro-independence advocates due to his attitude toward colonial Japan. Instead of relying on colonial modernity to offset the migrant regime’s obsession with Chinese patriotism and anti-communism, he derived his indigenous sensibilities from critical reflections of his own identity vis-à-vis colonial Japan. Coe’s family background, academic training, and career development contrasted from other important pro-independence leaders since it was not embedded in the colonial system unlike Presbyterian political leaders, such as Lee Teng-hui (1923-), who was the first President of the ROC that supported Taiwan independence, Peng Ming-min (1923-) who led a pro-independence campaign in the States, or Ng Yuzin Chiautong (1932-2011 黃昭堂), the former leader of the world’s Taiwan Independence Movement. These leaders grew up in the colonial system and took a strong view of China. Coe resembled Liao Wen Kwei (1905-1952 Joshua Liao 廖文奎), who was called the “Father of Taiwan Independence,” in the sense that neither were trained in the colonial system and their pro-independence position did not rest upon loathing China.

Liao, likewise a Presbyterian follower, came from an established noble family, was educated in the United States, and returned to China to teach. Liao’s approach and preaching were deeply embedded in liberalism, which was in line with his dissertation subject on liberal philosophy (Liao, 1929; 1933). Liao was married to an American, which was already unusual at the time. His turn to Taiwan independence was the result of the suppression of the Kuomintang during the February 28, 1947 uprising and the loss of election due to the perceived fraud contrived by the Kuomintang (Liao, 1950). The exiled regime from China was blamed for all its political manipulation. However, grievances were not held either against China or Liao’s own Chinese cultural embedding. Liao drafted a declaration for Taiwan’s independence. In his pursuit, the appeal to universal human rights reflected a religious conviction to bring the gospel to all. Nevertheless, his public activities reflect directly the liberal string. In comparison, Coe’s prescription was predominantly religious.

In the beginning, Coe’s personal encounter was influential in his quest for an answer regarding his identity (Chang, 2012: 74-75). He recalled the

enlightening bitterness that he had suffered and reflected critically upon in his younger years. One was a fistfight with Japanese classmates while at school. He was called “the slave of the barbarian” (*qingguo nu*), referring to a social level lower than barbarian. This denotation was imposed by Japan on the colonized population, who were predominantly migrant Han previously ruled by the Manchu, a barbarian regime in the eyes of Japan. Coe was unsure what the terms meant to his folks until his father reversely consented to his fighting upon hearing the insulting label. His father, a second-generation Presbyterian priest, usually insisted on the norms of peace. For Coe, this label created a strong impression that he was an inferior object in colonial relations.

More explicit was the second incident, when he unexpectedly ran into his brother on a cruise to Japan. Both felt elated and burst into their mother tongue. His brother was punished severely by his teacher for speaking the inferior language. Coe was compelled to dress in the most solemn Japanese style and explained to the teacher how the surprise reunion provoked his greeting in his childhood language intuitively. The local dialect and Taiwanese identity were rigorously connected in this experience.⁵

Unlike the quest for independence within the logic of colonial relations, Coe's indigenous sensibility arose from opposition to the colonial relations. His Presbyterian appeal to the universal human rights provided a discursive remedy to the sense of inferiority thus inflicted. For Coe's reflections to prevail, several events took place. First, Western priests were forced to leave during the War, urging more local priests to develop a practice informed by their indigenous identity. Coe actually served as the first Taiwanese head of the Tainan Academy of Theology. Second, the same appeal inspired his successors to face the anti-Communist Kuomintang, as well as the People's Republic in the World Council of Churches. Coe was able to seek a plausible answer in his religious relations. As a third-generation Presbyterian priest, he was well acquainted with the Calvinist doctrine of universal enlightenment. However, he reflected upon this doctrine. He came to the conviction that God has a reason to place him in an indigenous context and, thus, he must delve into this context to relieve the indigenous population from their immediate predicament (Huang, 2014).

Despite the Church being able to find a niche in different regimes in history, the anti-Communist Kuomintang once again reminded the determined priest that an indigenous identity was essential for him to continue his work within this context. The migrant Kuomintang practically treated the indigenous population as secondary citizens. The restriction on the use of the Funkiness dialect in school was particularly poignant and symbolic in this regard, reminding him of the alien character of the former authorities. The strong emotion that had accumulated since childhood re-emerged powerfully. This emotion was a feeling of “unwillingness” (*m̄-goān*) (Coe

1993: 235). Such feeling accompanied each practical surrender to insult. This feeling prompted a desire eventually to enjoy “*chutoutian*” (which means “sticking one’s head out under the sky”) (Coe, 1993: 235), an expression that consistently inspired pro-independence forces in subsequent generations.

Coe began to reassess the Western style and institution of preaching. He concluded that what was proper for Western colonies was no longer suited to the postcolonial independent nations (Coe (Hwang), 1963a: 60-62; Coe (Hwang), 1963b: 1-14). Coe believed that the Church must interact with its nuanced environment everywhere. The Church reached remote mountains and small villages to appreciate the critical relevance of the context to the spread of the gospel. The land and faith purportedly constituted each other. The theory of Contextual Theology was the result (Coe, 1993: 248). In 1972, Coe drafted the Working Policy Statement – Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund. He suggested that the first step for local churches in the Third World was to de-contextualize theology from the West and re-contextualize it in the postcolonial societies (Pobee, 1995: 61). As God creates various contexts in which man attains his image, according to Coe, priests cannot help but learn and gain inspiration from their contexts. All theological understandings are contextual in nature (Cheng, 2001: 30-33). Contextual theology frees up priests to use indigenous legends, folk stories, and songs to expound and exemplify the gospels. In the context of Taiwan, contextual theology led to “*Chutoutian*” theology (Huang, 1990). From there, three declarations came emerged in the 1970s: A Public Statement on Our National Fate (1971), Our Appeal Concerning the Bible, the Church, and the Nation (1975), and Human Rights Declaration (1977). Together, these declarations culminated in the Confession of Faith (1985) (Huang, 1991).

5. Approaching China from the Perspective of Contextual Theology

None of the documents took on China directly as a subject or target. Indirectly, devotion to the land and faith in context has apparent implications regarding the question on China. In a nutshell, all of these religious movements increasingly marginalized China. For the Presbyterian Church, China’s threat is perceived intellectually as being very thin. The threat began with the Kuomintang, who claimed leadership of all China, including Taiwan, and intervened in the Church’s relations accordingly. In the name of anti-Communism, the Kuomintang strongly requested that the Church of Taiwan should become less involved in the World Council of Churches. The Kuomintang was anxious that the Council kept in touch with the Communist areas and the presence of a Taiwanese member could compromise its anti-Communist stance (Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, 1967: 17; Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, 1970: 167; Chin, 2015). This request forced the Church

to face China, if only implicitly, by confronting the Kuomintang's Chinese identity, which justified its anti-Communist policy.

Ironically, the Kuomintang reproduced the contextually-oriented Church through the binary of Communism and anti-Communism embedded in the politics of the Civil War and Cold War. The binary compelled the residents of Taiwan to take a mutually exclusive perspective on the Chinese Mainland, which reproduced the same binary that has existed since the concession of Taiwan to Japan in 1895. The transition from the colonial to the exiled regime did not change the geographical border of the island of Taiwan, which encircled a self-sustaining population with its own regime. The two regimes have shown a superior self-image. The Presbyterian Church was, contrarily, not too embedded in the binary politics of the higher versus the lower. Instead, the Church was preoccupied from the very beginning with how universal gospels could make better sense in the context of Taiwan. The lacuna of a civilizational or religious relationship vis-à-vis China negatively was apparent.

The lacuna revealed an unstated alienation from the subsequent colonial and Civil War/Cold War regimes, with each claiming a geographically greater role for Taiwan either as a bridge of colonial modernity for Japan to expand into Greater East Asia or as an unsinkable carrier to contain Communist China. In fact, the Manchukuo established by Japan in China's Northeast was staffed by colonial officials from Taiwan. In contrast, the Presbyterian Church's inattention to China due to the introspective views of contextual theology presented a distinctive perspective, which was that China was outside Taiwan's context. China deserved no immediate attention as opposed to an alarming threat to a territorially broader self, i.e. Japan and China, that these regimes represented. For these regimes, China, as it was perceived by them each according to their values, was an ideological or civilization threat.

This innocent perspective was insufficient to cope with the imminent participation of the Chinese Church in the World Council. Even though the Chinese Church had no intention of harming the Taiwanese Church's religious activities, the Chinese Church had been instructed by its government to request the Taiwanese Church to adopt the Chinese nationality. For the Beijing authorities, the political premise of the Chinese Church to join the World Council was the reassurance of the One-China principle, according to which, the name of the Taiwan Church must reflect its Chinese status. Direct interaction with the Chinese Church, therefore, exerted pressure to ponder the China issue. Nevertheless, the reception of contextual theology among the members of the World Council engendered strong support for the Taiwan Church to remain independent from a Chinese nomenclature. A publication of the Tainan Academy of Theology recorded the position on the China issue in 1985:

... We believe that in Christ the Church is one, holy and catholic. It should transcend division of politics, culture and race. At this time when the church in China is beginning to make increasing contacts with churches in other countries, we affirm the self-hood of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and its role in international church organizations. Moreover, we continue to support its participation in the worldwide mission of the church.⁶

Accordingly, the Taiwanese Church declared that it would not accept the placement under the “C” category in the country listing of the Council. The Church must belong to the “T” category, or would have to withdraw from the Council. In cooperation with the other 13 Churches⁷ that arrived in Taiwan at the invitation of the Church, another joint statement was issued in 1987 to welcome the Chinese Churches upon the foundation of Church autonomy in Taiwan:

We deeply hope that the Taiwan Church, with its continuously renovating spirit and on the aforementioned premise of autonomy, along with all the Churches in the world, including the Chinese Church on the Mainland, shares God’s love and benevolence in a mutually respectful attitude in our joint effort to establish God’s kingdom (Taiwanese Church Mission Association, 1987: 1).

The Church was becoming increasingly keen to emphasize the sovereign status of Taiwan as a nation-state. Accordingly, Taiwan has already entered the world of the Church to be protected by state sovereignty and China is a potential object to be converted. The public statements maintained specifically that sovereignty was the access to universal human rights, for which all Churches work. The other side of the coin was the alert sent to the Chinese Church that the Chinese authorities had violated human rights. The Church demanded that the World Council should react to the Chinese Church’s failure to articulate these issues faithfully on behalf of the suppressed, in accordance with their belief. The Church also urged that the World Council should refrain from assigning an important role to the Chinese Church. However, the quest for sovereignty and attention to Chinese human rights did not occur within the same colonial relations that pro-independence forces in Taiwan usually arise. In short, the issues do not accompany the aversion to Chinese believers or the Chinese Church. The relationship between the two Churches was situated painstakingly within religious relations. (The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 2013: 4.)

6. Conclusion

Colonial relations necessarily bred a view of China for the colonized population in Taiwan that confirmed Japan’s civilizational superiority. Taiwan was a hybrid of China and Japan under this circumstance. Decolonization

did not take place after Japan was defeated and Taiwan was returned to China. The abortion of decolonization was due to multiple reasons. First, the regime in exile that took over failed to appreciate the fact that the postcolonial population lacked the prior sense of Chinese ethnicity as the regime, though it could represent legitimately. The regime imposed Chinese patriotic education qua equal Chineseness, as it would have done in China had it not lost the Civil War. This education failed with its audience, who had already adapted to colonialism. The latter did not join the new leadership because the Chinese officialdom was absolutely alien to them. In addition, the property left by the Japanese was confiscated by the Chinese regime in exile. As a result, the postcolonial elite was consistently disadvantaged politically, institutionally and in terms of inheritance. To regain self-respect, the postcolonial elite could rely most conveniently on the colonial modernity brought by Japan. This perspective promoted the persistence of the image of an inferior China.

On top of the postcolonial politics that aborted decolonization, the postcolonial elite, as well as the returning soldiers loyal to the Japanese Emperor, were exempt from war criminal trials because of their membership of the victorious Republican China. Hence, they were not under any pressure whatsoever to engage in critical self-reflection. In fact, many had never been defeated on the battlefield and could not accept the reality that superior Japan surrendered to inferior China. Their experiences ensured that the prior relations informed by colonial modernity would be the perpetual lens that undergirds the image of inferior China. Colonial relations constituted by an antagonistic kind of civilizational Chineseness have remained inspiring and vivid in the 21st century. They have provided a powerful morale for the Taiwan Independence Movement. This is the reason why alienation and aversion from China have been strong in the politically correct Taiwan independence. For Taiwan independence forces, China had posed a threat as an inferior civilization driven to engulf a more progressive Taiwanese civilization.

However, a particular string in the postcolonial relations did not assume Chinese inferiority, even though it had recognized the contemporary human rights problems in China that were unacceptable to the subscribers of this particular string. This string of thought is the Presbyterian Church, which entered Taiwan three decades ahead of the arrival of Japanese colonialism. The Church had continued its preaching and operations during the colonial period and provided vibrant support for independence only after the Chinese migrant regime compelled it to withdraw from the world Christian network lest the Communist participants in the network should harm the legitimacy of the anti-Communist regime. Thereafter, the Presbyterian Church was determined to overcome this ostensible representation of China by the regime in exile.

Contextual theology resulted from the critical reflection and determination that emerged to guide the Church's subsequent approach to China.

The new theological epistemology was initially an individual inspiration, but was upgraded to a prescription for the civilizational identity of politically independent Taiwan. It has its ironic origins in Coe's childhood encounters with the colonizing Japanese. The encounters reproduced a feeling of "being unwilling" to adapt to suppressive control. This feeling explained, partially, why colonial modernity estranged the Presbyterian tradition of Taiwan independence, which established its own rationale. Instead, the tradition engendered "chutoutian," as well as indigeneity in its pursuit of independent sovereignty for Taiwan. These concepts resonate easily with the universal value of liberty and human rights. For the independence advocacy informed by colonial relations, the issue of human rights immediately suggests the image of inferior China. However, for the Church, the issue connotes a mission in China that the Church should have cared about equally. This construction of a non-inferior China is how religion has contributed to the (non-)Chineseness of Taiwan's independence.

Notes

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 1. Interview with Chen Peng-jen, year n.a.
 2. One typical example is Tsai, 1971; also see the comparable case of Korea in Fujitani, 2011.
 3. This has been the Presbyterian tradition (Sanneh, 1993: 17).
 4. Note, though, the first leader of the exiled Kuomintang – Chiang Kai-shek – was a faithful Christian, as were many of his associates, too.
 5. Both incidents were recorded in Coe, 1993: 235.
 6. For a Chinese translation, see Chu, 2009: 55. The joint public statement is at http://english.pct.org.tw/Article/enArticle_public_19851009.html
 7. Including the Council for World Mission, Basel Mission, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ in the USA, Taiwan Christian Church Council of North America, Taiwan Christian Church Council of North America, United Church of Christ in Japan, Jesus Christ Church in Japan, Taipei Korean Community Church of Presbyterian Church of Korea, and Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (Taiwanese Church Mission Association 1987: 1).

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