

中西文化比較的探究: 意識形態及神學形態
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SINO-AMERICAN COGNITIVE &
 THEOLOGICAL PATTERN & PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Intention, purpose and assumption

In line with the emphasis and the theme of this consultation, my intention in writing this paper is to improve communication between Chinese and American scholars, and to enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and American researchers. A secondary purpose is to conduct a comparative study (sections III and IV) of Sino-American cognitive and theological pattern with the intention to propose alternative to traditional way of the West.¹ The thesis of this paper is that relationship is foundational in Christian faith and practice, and a prerequisite to systematic and practical theology (sections V and VI).

If there is a maxim to this paper, it is “‘I AM’ therefore i am” ontologically (i.e. relational realism paradigm) and, ‘I know therefore (in light of) ‘I AM’ ” is essential epistemologically (i.e. relational theological paradigm). (See Figures 9, 10, 11)

1.2 Definition of key-terms

For the sake of clarity, several key-terms are briefly defined below:

- - “Culture” is “the context and consequence of patterned interaction between personal beings (Beings), inclusive of observable elements (e.g. artifact, action and institution) and non-observable elements (e.g. attitude, value and worldview) shared by members of the same group.”
- - “Comparative methodology”
The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology gives more explanations with two definitions: (1) “any method that involves examination of similarities and differences between phenomena or classes of phenomena” (Jary and Jary 1991, 71), (2) “any specifically cross-cultural or cross-societal, including historical, comparison of similarities and differences between social phenomena” (Jary and Jary 1991, 71).²

¹ There are several earlier studies of comparative study of Sino-American culture on cultural theme (Wan 1997b, 1999 - in Chinese), perspective and methodology (Wan 1997a, 1995). This paper is a synopsis from these previous publications and “The Paradigm of relational Realism” 2006)

² Jary, David and Julia Jary. 1991. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology*. NY: HarperCollins Pub.

- - “Sino-American”
“Sino” is a prefix from Late Latin “*Sinae*” for *China*.³ Sino-American is a reference to matters related to China and America.
- - “paradigm” – is a coherent conceptual model for philosophical postulation and scholarly research (Kuhn 1970, Barbour 1974) or “the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises” or “interpretive framework” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19)
- - “Pattern” - In comparison to “paradigm,” “pattern” is of lower level abstraction and can be used in reference to a description of certain structural element. For example, “theological pattern” refers to systematic/schematic understanding of things pertaining to God (e.g. His nature, His creation and redemption) whereas “cognitive pattern” refers to the way the mind operates in conceptualization.
- - “Ontology” – the systematic study of issues related to the nature of being and the reality of existence.
- - “Epistemology” – the systematic study of issues related to the nature, essence and means of knowledge and truth.
- - “Relationship” the interactive connection between personal beings (Beings) whereas “relationality” is the generic quality of being connected.
- “theologizing” is the systematic study of God (e.g. His attributes) and His Word and works, and “theology” is the resulting understanding and practice.

II. THE METHODOLOGY OF COMPARING SINO-AMERICAN CULTURES (COGNITIVE AND THEOLOGICAL PATTERNS) IN THIS STUDY

2.1 Historical baseline for comparison

The base line of this comparative study chronologically is drawn to be prior to the A.D. 1910s. Traditional Chinese culture remained relatively stable until the end of the Qing Dynasty in A.D. 1911 – the formation of the Republic of China. American culture (i.e. the middle-class WASP culture) was relatively stable prior to World War I (A.D. 1914-1918) - with Greco-Roman cultural tradition and Judeo-Christian ethical heritage. This culture-specific description ("what/how") approach is neither to be confused with simplistic East-West, Oriental-Occidental comparison (Nakamura 1964) nor the explanatory approach ("why") (Fraser 1966).

³ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2003. Published by [Houghton Mifflin Company](#).

2.2 Cross-cultural comparative study

This is a study of cross-cultural comparison between the Chinese and American religio-cultural systems. It is done in the spirit of Balslev & Mohanty (1993:12) who rightly stated that “Religious pluralism, a phenomenon which can neither be eliminated nor to be underscored, calls for a forum where meaningful exchanges amongst those who deal with theology and philosophy of religion can take place.” This study is conducted in the framework of cognitive anthropology (Tyler 1969).

The comparative methodology employed here can be found in authors of various disciplines and of different ethnic backgrounds: i.e. the sinologists, Britisher Joseph Needham (1966) and Chinese-American Francis Hsu (1970), the German theologian Thorleif Boman (1960), the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1983), German sociologist Max Weber (1958), Japanese philosopher Hajime Nakamura (1964), and American philosopher Charles Moore (1941). Max Weber’s (1958) concept of “ideal types” is helpful in the comparison of Sino-American cultures of this study (Hall 1983).

The use of “ideal types” with continuum, along with the multi-dimensional comparison (not false antitheses) is helpful and insightful in comparative study. Figure 3.3 shows that the contrast of America culture with that of Chinese in terms of time-orientation (future-present-past) and time management (i.e. monochronic = doing-one-thing-at-a-time vs. polychronic = involving-several-transactions/parties-at-a-time) is not a monolithic comparison; but a continuum with eight other people-groups clustering in between the two. (See Bohannon 1953, Hall 1983, Tedlock 1981, Wan 1988, 1990).

III. COMPARING THE SINO-AMERICAN COGNITIVE PATTERN

The diagrammatic comparison of the cognitive patten and process of Sino-American ways is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – American & Sino cognitive patterns/processes
(Wan 1995:3)

	AREA	AMERICAN	CHINESE
Pattern	1. General	-low-context	-high-context
	2. Perception: 2.1 nature 2.2 self 2.3 other	-material, mechanistic -separate from nature -equality, individualism	-organic, organismic -integrate with nature -hierarchy, communal
	3. Conception: 3.1 deity 3.2 self 3.3 truth 3.4 knowledge. 3.5 time	-monotheism, atheism -independent, unique -Bible/rational-relative <i>-a priori / a posteriori</i> -lineal	-polytheism, animism -member of a group -naturalism, humanism -intuitive, introspective -cyclical
	4. Preference: 4.1 personal 4.2 social 4.3 goal	-achievement/autonomy -egalitarian/voluntary -diversity/self-actualization	-ascription/inter-dependence -hierarchy/inequality -unity/group-solidarity
	5. Predisposition: 5.1 individual social 5.2 ethical 5.3 goal	-doing/program -competition -guilt/universal justice /proselytization -change /effort-optimism	-being/people -cooperation -shame/situational justice /reconciliation/syncretism -equilibrium/conservatism /relation-optimism
Process	1. time-management	-monochronic	-polychronic
	2. logic	-inductive	-deductive
	3. methodology	-empirical, causative (obj.)	-intuitive/introspective (subj.)
	4. tendency	-quantitative, mathematical	-qualitative, ontological
	5. approach	-analytical	-analogical/relational
	6. operation	-dialectic/duality /directive/aggressive	-correlational/holistic /non-directive
	7. direction	-teleological, future	-historical/retrospective

3.1 Comparing Sino-American cognitive pattern and process

Due to the limitation of length, the readers are referred to previous published works along this line for details, e.g. Wan 1995, 1997a 1999a.

IV. COMPARING THE SINO-AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL PATTERN

Instead of being comprehensive, this study will focus on one of the characteristics when theologizing in Western cultural context is the use of “either/or” thought pattern of Greek philosophy. Since the time of Aristotle, scholars of the Western tradition have been strongly influenced by Aristotle's dualistic epistemology. Subsequently, the dualistic thought pattern was reinforced and refined by the Gnostics (Yeung 1986, 27-29). Henceforth the dualistic pattern of "either/or" way has been well entrenched in the Western mind. This "either/or" pattern has several variations: the dualistic cosmology of ancient Greek, the dialectics of Hegel (dialectic idealism), Marx (dialectic materialism), and Augustine (dialectic sociology of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man), etc. The quotation below is Arnold Yeung's comments on Augustine's impact on Western theological tradition in this regard:

“ Unfortunately, since Augustine the Church fell once again into the trap of Hellenist dualism. This impact was prolonged by scholasticism of the Medieval period and naturalism in the West, spreading worldwide...”
(Yeung 1986, 17, translation from Chinese by the present writer)

4.1 The pattern of either/or in traditional Western theology

According to the Aristotelian logic (i.e., the law of non-contradiction: A is A, B is B; A cannot be B and B cannot be A at the same time) -- the left half is A, the right half is B. Thus, each half is either A or B. In contradistinction to the Chinese way of both/and cognitive pattern, the left and right halves both have A & B at the same time. (see Wan 1999d)

Great thinkers of the Western tradition have been forced to follow the path of either/or thought pattern for too long. The compartmentalization of disciplines (extreme, reductionistic and tunnel-vision type of specialization) and dichotomist conceptualization (e.g. scientific vs. spiritual, rationalistic vs. mystical, natural vs. supernatural, cultural vs. supra-cultural, human vs. divine, this-worldly vs. other-worldly, empirical vs. intuitive, etc.) are just manifestations of the either/or dualistic thought pattern in Western way of theologizing. In **Figure 2**, examples in theology are presented in diagram format.

Figure 2 – the either/or pattern of TTW (Wan 1997a 4)

TOPIC	EITHER	OR
Christology	<u>Either</u> the deity of Christ <u>Either</u> the Christ of <u>kerygma</u>	<u>or</u> the humanity of Christ <u>or</u> the historical Jesus
Soteriology	<u>Either</u> God's sovereignty <u>Either</u> faith <u>Either</u> grace <u>Either</u> evangelism for conversion	<u>or</u> human free will <u>or</u> reason <u>or</u> work <u>or</u> social gospel as witness
Ecclesiology	<u>Either</u> the universal church <u>Either</u> organic unity	<u>or</u> local congregation <u>or</u> organizational uniformity
Eschatology	<u>Either</u> already realized	<u>or</u> yet to come
Bibliology	<u>Either</u> divine revelation	<u>or</u> human authorship

The first several hundred years of the Christian church were known for the christological controversy due to the either/or perspective on the nature of Christ. This debate has been revised in the last few decades by biblical scholars in the New Testament studies of the "historical Jesus" as a response to the neo-orthodox insistence on the "Christ of the kerygma".

After the series of "christological heresy," controversies and conflicts occurred repeatedly for many centuries between the Augustinian and the Pelagians on the sacraments, and later between the Reformer (salvation by grace through faith) and the Catholic (salvation by self-efforts through work). The theological debates on the issue of salvation by God's sovereign will or human free-will has consumed much time and efforts of theologians and church leaders in traditional Western theology.

The "fundamentalist movement" of the early part of the 20th century was mostly a struggle to proclaim and practice evangelism as a matter of personal and spiritual conversion, fighting against the "social gospel" of the liberal first, and later against "institutional salvation" of WCC and liberation/feminist theology. The underlying assumption is that salvation is **either** a matter of spiritual/personal matter **or** institutional/collective matter.

In the last few decades, the Christian church has been preoccupied with the "inerrancy debate" (i.e. the Bible is **either** of divine revelation without error **or** of human authorship and thus not error-free). These historical precedents clearly demonstrated the pattern of either/or thinking in traditional Western theology. The resultant events and the costly undertaking are not to be slighted at all.

4.2 The both/and pattern of the Chinese & the Trinity

The alternative to this either/or pattern is the both/and of the Chinese and that of the doctrine of the Trinity. As shown in “tai-qi” diagram of the Chinese, given A to be “yang” (the left half) and B to be “yin” (the right half), inside A is the darkened dot of B and inside B is the small circle of A; therefore, the left half is both A and B, and the right half is both B and A.

Reader is forewarned that the use of “tai-qi” diagram as illustration is neither a subscription to Taoism nor an endorsement of folk superstition. Please keep in mind that just as no Korean Christian will have conscientious objection to the fact that this symbol is used for his national flag; here it is employed for the sake of scholarly discussion.

This both/and of Sino-theology is totally free from the Aristotelian logic and is in contrast to the **either/or** of traditional Western theology. Theologizing is a matter of conceptualization closely related to cultural conditioning. Perception of reality and conception of spirituality cannot be separated from the enculturation process of members of the cultural group. The cultural theme of the Chinese is unity/harmony/integration/union/equilibrium/wholeness/balance: e.g. emphasis on the unity of “heaven” and man; equilibrium of “yin” and “yang;” social harmony with others; unity of knowledge and action; solidarity of family and nation; inter-dependence of the living and the dead, ancestor and descendents; the balance of “cold” and “hot” for good health; “feng-shui,” etc. Thus focus on and strive for both/and is clearly a cultural characteristic of Chinese in thought, action, relationship, sentiment and institution. Therefore both/and should be the pattern for ST theologizing.

The Jewish thought pattern of the OT, the traditional Chinese and the NT writers all shared the same both/and pattern and all are free from the either/or paradox that had troubled many great thinkers and theologians of traditional Western theology. According to Christian orthodoxy, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is only one God and one only. This God exists eternally in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are fully equal in every divine perfection. They possess alike the fullness of the divine essence. In other word, God is one in essence and three in existence. God is **both** one **and** three. God is **both** the Father **and** the Son **and** the Holy Spirit at the same time. God is not **either** the Father **or** the Son **or** the Holy Spirit as in cases of extremist, heresy and cults. There is **both** unity **and** diversity. This is both/and paradigm is found in both orthodox Christian theology and Chinese cultural tradition.

The menace of dichotomist dualism of either/or is clearly described by Arnold Yeung’s observation quoted below:

“Furthermore, not only NT writers had fought fiercely against dualism. Through out the 2,000 years of church history in theologizing, at the critical moments time again and again, there have been those who discerned the destructive forces of dualism and rallied for an integrative understanding of facts and truth: early

Hebrew patriarch...(of the many schools of Chinese philosophy, Taoism is most distinctive in this aspect); Irenaeus, Damascus, Athanathius of the church fathers; Calvin and some Lutherans of the Reformation; contemporary theologians such as Barth, Pannenburg...Karl Heim, Torrance, etc.” (Yeung 1986, 41, translated from Chinese)

As shown in **Figure 3** below, failing to employ the both/and pattern of theologizing will result in the left-hand column:

Figure 3 – the two patterns of theologizing (Wan 1998:122-123)

TOPIC	LIBERAL/EXTREMIST/HERETICAL	ORTHODOX & CHINESE
Christology	<u>Either</u> the deity of Christ <u>or</u> the humanity of Christ <u>Either</u> the Christ of <u>kerygma</u> <u>or</u> the historical Jesus	Both/And
Soteriology	<u>Either</u> God’s sovereignty <u>or</u> human free will <u>Either</u> faith <u>or</u> reason <u>Either</u> grace <u>or</u> work <u>Either</u> evangelism for conversion <u>or</u> social gospel as Witness	Both/And
Ecclesiology	<u>Either</u> the universal church <u>or</u> local congregation <u>Either</u> organic unity <u>or</u> organizational uniformity	Both/And
Eschatology	<u>Either</u> realized <u>or</u> yet to come (G.E.Ladd’s “already-but-not-yet” is illustrative)	Both/And
Bibliology	<u>Either</u> divine revelation <u>or</u> human authorship	Both/And

The only exception to **Figure 3** is the few “conservative Christian leaders in China during the period of 1920s to 1940s (such as Chia Yu-ming, Wang Ming-tao, Watchman Nee),” according to Arnold Yeung’s analysis, “they had been influenced by fundamentalist missionaries who fought against humanism and “social gospel,” influenced by Hellenist thought by way of the Renaissance.” (Yeung 1988, 60)

4.3 The sad precedents of Chinese who adopted the either/or way

In recent history, there have been two groups of Chinese who departed from the traditional both/and way with serious consequences. First, there were scholars who chose to embrace the either/or philosophy during the May Fourth Movement as reported by Arnold Yeung,

“...but the ‘law of cause and effect’ of Plato and Aristotle had shaped the Newtonian cosmology via medieval scholasticism. Since then, the Western thought world had been imprisoned by the (dualistic) closed system of cosmology for two thousand years. Pitifully, though the traditional pattern of Chinese thought had been similar to that of the Hebraic being integrative and open; yet ever since the May Fourth, Chinese scholars had indiscriminately embraced Western thought. Taking the tare with the wheat leading to the loss of the distinctively Chinese cultural heritage. Thus under the spell of foreign dualism (of either/or), viewing the ‘law of cause and effect’ as an impenetrable and unbreakable net. Not until the day when the net is broken through, we will still be imprisoned in the dark dungeon of Mediaeval thinking.” (Yeung 1988:24)

Another group is contemporary Chinese Christians, though not in faith but in their practice. Again the prophetic voice of Arnold Yeung should be heard:

“You asked, ‘What do contemporary Chinese have to do with old Hellenist philosophy?’ May I answer by raising some questions? How many of our cosmology that is neither polytheistic nor dualistic compartmentalizing spirit and matter ? ...God’s participation and man’s duty?...Maintaining the balance between God’s work and man’s freedom? Or are we practically living in the 20th century version of dualism? Holding God, eternal life, heaven, hell with one hand and Newtonian causal law in another? ...Are we Christians not impoverishing ourselves by this type of dualism?...” (Yeung 1988:30, translated from Chinese)

Readers are referred to other works by the author illustrating how contextualized Sino-theology would be applicable to evangelism (Wan 2000a 2000d and systematic theology (Wan 2000a, 2000d). The two tables below are helpful to show the comparison diagrammatically.

Figure 4 – Comparing and contrasting the two patterns

Item	Western Style (either-or)	Chinese (both-and)
Nature	dichotomist, dialectical, contradictory & exclusive	integrationist, equilibrium, complementary & holistic
Strength	Analytically powerful at macro level	Integratively powerful at macro level
Weakness	Prompt to be paradoxical and dialectical	Tends to be monistic and syncretistic
Characteristic	Confrontational, changing, individualistic, self-reliant, autonomous	Harmonious, stable, group-solidarity, interdependent, other-directed
Macro-	Dialectical dualism	Complementary equilibrium
Micro-	Competitive, changing, lineal	Cooperative, conservative, cyclical

Figure 5 – Comparing the methodology of Traditional Western & Chinese

CATEGORY	METHODOLOGY	WESTERN	CHINESE
pattern	Time/dimension	lineal	cyclical
	ethics	Guilt (forensic/casual)	Shame (network)
process	approach	Analytical	Relational
	orientation	Dichotomist/ dialectical	Synthetic, holistic

V. POSSIBLE FACTORS PRECLUDING THE EMERGENCE AND CHOICE OF RELATIONAL PARADIGM IN WESTERN LEARNING

To some readers who are not preconditioned by the traditional theological orientation of the West may find “relational paradigm” self-evident even obvious. Others, who are so pro-conditioned in the Western tradition, may immediately dismiss a “relational paradigm” as a corruption by existentialism, postmodernism and neo-orthodoxy. Several factors are identified below to explain “why” that is the case in the West.

5.1 Historical overview

Academic enquiry and former learning in Western civilization began in the Renaissance and the emerging of the modernist paradigm. The dominance of the “scientific paradigm” required an objective and impersonal posture. The motto, “I think therefore I am” of Descartes, provided an impetus for the “critical realism paradigm” with its individualistic tendency. The closest to “relational theology” was Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” existential paradigm which was drowned out by the voices of atheistic scientism, narcissistic individualism, self-indulging hedonism, functionalistic pragmatism, etc.

5.2 Theological overview

In various ways, theologies of the Western world have been successfully contextualized to become dichotomist (e.g., either divine or human nature in Christology, either God’s sovereignty or man’s free will in soteriology, either inerrant or not inerrant in bibliology), forensic (“justification”) in emphasis at the expense of “relational reconciliation”, individualistic (i.e., over emphasis on personal decision for salvation and doubting household conversion of multiple individuals or generations), rationalistic (e.g., schematic and analytical system), etc.

Thus, conservative evangelical Christians burned bridges that could lead anywhere close to a relational approach in Christian faith and practice. In Christian faith for example, we are very alarmed by the danger of Karl Barth’s relational understanding of revelation, condemning him as neo-orthodox. We are “allergic” to or hypercritical of a charismatic understanding of spirituality (i.e. a strong emphasis on relational reality of the Holy Spirit in Christian believers’ experience) and branded it to be extremist. Relational Christian doctrines of salvation, spirituality, etc., are rationalistically reduced to schemas, formulae, and non-relational dogma.

Christian in the West also have a tendency to misuse relational approach in practice. For example, the careless use of “friendship evangelism” tends to cheapen relationship to become a means to an end. Christian practice of genuine fellowship, cell groups, accountability groups, pastoral ministry, Christian counseling, etc., are often turned into programmatic, instrumental, entrepreneur approaches for the sake of operational management and quantifiable outcomes for verifiable success in conformity to worldly value system.

5.3 Theoretical overview

Christian scholars have many theoretical options such as rationalism and realism, individualism and socialism, idealism and pragmatism, etc. There are various kinds of realism, e.g., classical realism, naïve realism, critical realism; but not “relational realism.” Christian theologians have many choices in theological paradigms such as dispensationalism, Calvinism, charismatic, etc.; and now “relational theology.”

Many evangelical scholars have sold out to “rationalism” and theological conservatism, that any inklings of a relational emphasis is immediately deemed to be unacceptable as too ‘existentialist,’ “neo-orthodox,” etc.

VI. PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE: RELATIONAL REALISM PARADIGM AND RELATIONAL THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

6.1 Relational Realism Paradigm⁴

Since one’s epistemology is intrinsically bound to his ontology, “relational realism” can be explained at two levels:

Ontologically, “relational realism” is a systematic understanding that God is subsistent existence, the non-contingent necessary cause of all existence, intrinsically perfect in Being, the Sustainer of the universe and the Source of grace, wisdom and truth (Acts 14:14-17, 17:24-31).

Epistemologically, “relational realism” is a systematic understanding that “reality” is primarily based on the “vertical relationship” of God with created order and secondarily on “horizontal relationships” within the created order. Reality and truth are best to be comprehended and experienced in relational networks of God and at least there created systems of existence: angels, humanity and the natural order.

God is the absolute One who transcends time, space and circumstance; whereas His created order remains otherwise. A maxim for “relational realism” is the great “I AM” as self-revealed in Exodus 3:13-15 in contrast-distinction to the confession and lament of Moses “who am I?” (3:11). In that light, we can derive the maxim for “relational realism” - “‘I AM’ therefore i am.”⁵

⁴ For details on “relational realism paradigm,” see Wan 2006.

⁵ For discussion on the theme and text on “I am” of Exodus 3:13-15, see Cronin 2007, Foutz 2007, Freedman 1960, Laney 2007.

Figure 6 – Two Levels of Relational Realism (Wan 2006:3)

T Y P E	TOPIC	CHARACTERISTIC	T H E M E
E P I S E M O L O G Y	Relational theologizing: Systematic understanding of God & His Word/work in relational terms and interactive networks	-not rationalistically propositional only -not existentialist nor positivist (modernist/scientific) - not dichotomist nor dualistic; but integrationist & inter-disciplinary	W I S D O M
O N T O L O G Y	Relational Christianity: Systematic understanding of Christian faith & practice in relational terms and interactive networks	-multi-dimensional -multi-level -multi-contextual -multi-stage	Trini- tarian para- digm ⁶

Returning to the Scriptures, one can easily find “relationship” woven intricately within a complex of multi-dimensional, multi-level and multi-context system as shown in the diagram below.

⁶ For details of “Trinitarian paradigm” including its methodological implications and contextual application for Sino-theology, see the following works: Wan 2003, 2006, and Mark Hedding, “Towards a paradigm of integrated missionary training,” an unpublished dissertation, Western Seminary, 2006.

Figure 7 – Relationship: multi-dimension, multi-level, multi-context (Wan 2006:3)

Order/ System	Relationship multi-dimension, multi-level, multi-context		Biblical Reference	
Uncreated order - Triune God	Essence	Absolute, transcendent, infinite	John 17; Phil 2:1-11	
	Existence	Trin-unity of Father, Son & H.S. with perfect harmony		
C R O D E R A D T E R E R D	Angel	Essence	-Not: absolute, perfect, infinite; but superior to humanity & nature -Since the Fall, --disharmony	Heb 1:14, 2:6-8,16
		Existence	Created and ruled by God	
	Human	Essence	-Strife, conflict, disharmony since the Fall -Within the redeemed humanity: reconciled & mediated by Christ with unity restored & harmony obtained	Gen 1:26-30; 2:7-9;5:1-2; 9:1-7; Ps 8, Heb 2; Eph 2:11-22
		Existence	-Willed to existence by God (“let us...”) -Created with God’s breathe & image both male & female (reaffirmed even after the fall and the flood) -Designated by God with authority to rule and subdue, provided with food -Blessed by God to be fruitful & multiply -Sustained by God	
	Nature/ Animal	Essence	-Harmony before the fall -Cursed & groaning for redemption -“Shalom” ushered in by the messianic role of Christ	Acts 17:26; Eph 2:1-14; Col 1:16-18
		Existence	-Created & sustained by God -Cursed after the fall, restored in Christ: by/for/through Him	

6.2 The source of human being & understanding is “relationship”

If ontologically, the maxim for relational approach be “I AM’ therefore i am,” then epistemologically it is “i know therefore (in light of) ’I AM’.” General (or natural) human knowledge stems from the fact that mankind is relationally created in the “image of God” with mental capacity and with perceptual and conceptual competency. Theological knowledge of God and His work (in creation, salvation, etc.) is only possible due to one’s “relationship” with the self-revealing ‘I AM.’

Figure 8 – Human Being & Knowing within a Relational Network

LEVEL	DIMENSION	RELATIONSHIP
BEING (ontology)	beginning	- all life & breath from God - “made of one blood all nations of men” (Ac 17:26) - created in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27)
	sustaining	“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Ro 11:36) “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” Ac 17:28.
	destiny	-“God will judge the world” (Act 17:31)
KNOWING (epistemology)	Natural knowledge	-perception: acquired through senses (relate to natural order) -conception: acquired through mental power (relate to natural, social and spiritual order)
	Revelatory knowledge	-general revelation: creation & conscience (Ps 19:1-2; Rom 1:20); [culturally interpreted]. -special revelation: theophany, miracle, inspiration, Incarnation, etc. of God’s self-revelation (Mal 3:1; Col 1:19; John 14:17;15:26;20:22); [linguistically interpreted] - Spontaneous revelations: prophecy, tongues, words of wisdom and knowledge, sign and wonders (1Cor 12; 14; [personally interpreted])

6.3 Relational theological paradigm

The definition below can help clarifying matters for the subsequent discussion on relational theological paradigm.

- **“relational theologizing”** is systematically doing theology by way of relational approach (i.e. derived from the relational characteristic of the Trinity within a “relational realism” paradigm)
- **“relational theology”** is the resultant theological understanding from “relational theologizing”

A. The basis of human knowledge is “relationship”

As evangelicals, we affirm the close relationship between the Triune God and humanity as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 9 – Relationship between Triune God & Humanity (Wan 2006:4)

TRIUNE GOD	...relationship...	HUMANITY	CHRISTIAN
Father	-Created, ruled & sustained by God (Ps 103:19-22 to Ps 104)	-Male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free...all in one in Christ” (Gal 3:28)	Known, foreordained, called
Son	-“In Him we live, move & have our being” (Acts 17:26) -“...by...for...through Him” (Col 1:15-20)	-“all together...one body...one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 3:1-4:7)	Atoned, mediated, redeemed, reconciled
Holy Spirit	-“...first fruits of the Spirit... those God foreknew... predestined called...justified ...glorified” (Rom 8:1-30; Gal 4:1-7)		Regenerated, indwelled, endowed (gifts)

Due to the limitation of this paper, the following presentation might seem to be “simplistic;” but a “simple fact” of evangelical theology is that there is a relational basis for Christian faith and practice as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 10 – Relational Theological Paradigm: Christian Faith and Practice

relationship dimension	RELATIONAL BASIS	RELATIONAL REALITY
FAITH	-God’s faithfulness & self-revealing -Christian trust/commitment to God	-Doctrine from church history -systematic theology
PRACTICE	-individual level	-Regeneration -Sanctification
	-converging (individual + institution)	-Spiritual Warfare -Discipleship -Evangelism
	-institutional level	-Worship -Fellowship

As the maxim of this study, “I AM’ therefore i am” ontologically expresses relational realism paradigm, so also “I know therefore (in light of) ‘I AM’” epistemologically expresses relational theological paradigm as outlined in Figures 11, 12 13.

Figure 11 – “I AM’ therefore i am” & “i know therefore I AM” - General

MAXIM LEVEL/PARADIGM	“I AM’	therefore i am”
Ontological – “relational realism”	Triune God -self-existing -intra-Trinitarian Relationship -the One to bless	Man - created in God’s image -dominion & stewardship -marital union: “two → one” -being blessed
	RELATIONALITY	REALITY
Epistemological – “relational theologizing / theology”	“I know	therefore (in light of) ‘I AM’”
	God’s self- revelation to man -the Giver of life & free will; but setting the boundary for man	-positive: good provision & clear instruction/warning given & endowed with free will -negative: tempted to “know” beyond what is revealed, as God knows (Gen 3:5)
	SYSTEMATIC THEOL. RE: GOD	PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF SELF & ACTION

Exodus 3 is a key passage that provides the biblical foundation for the thesis of this study as shown in Figure 10 below.

Figure 12 – “I AM’ therefore i am / I know” - Exodus 3

LEVEL	RELATIONALITY & RELATIONSHIP	
Ontology “relational realism”	“I AM” God’s self-identification: - “I AM THAT I AM” (14) -God of the forefathers (15,16) -name for ever, memorial for all generations (15)	therefore i am” (v.3) Moses: “who am I?”(11) -“This is what you are to say...:”I AM has sent me to you” (14) -“I have watched over...& I have promised...” (16,17) -“I will stretch out my hand... (20,21) -being sent with a mission (9-10)
	RELATIONALITY	REALITY
Epistemology “relational theologizing /theology”	“I know God’s self-revelation: -appeared in a flame of fire (2) -called Moses by name from the bush (4) & identified Himself in relation to three previous generations (5-6) -knew their sorrows, affliction & gave the promise, came down (7-8)	therefore (in light of) “I AM”” (vv.4-5) Moses: “what shall I tell them?” (11) -“God of (forefathers) sent me” (15) -sandals off, face hidden (5,6) -“...be with you...will worship...” (12) -granted the favor (21) -promised to be set free: not go empty handed and would sojourn & spoil the Egyptians (22)
	SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY ABOUT GOD	PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF SELF & ACTION

Built on the ontological foundation of “I AM therefore i am” is the epistemological application as outlines in Figure 11 below.

Figure 13 - Illustration of “I A M’ therefore I am / I know” - Psalm 100

LEVEL	RELATIONALITY & RELATIONSHIP	
Ontology “relational realism”	“I AM” GOD (all powerful, perfect, infinite) -Lord (sovereign) -Creator (self-existing) -King (Ruler) -Shepherd (Care-giver)	therefore i am” (v.3) MAN (powerless, imperfect, finite) -subservient (submit) -creature (limited by time & space) -subject (rules) -sheep (care-receiver)
	RELATIONALITY	REALITY
Epistemology “relational theologizing /theology”	“I know GOD -The Lord is good -His mercy is everlasting -His truth endures to all generations	therefore (in light of) ‘I AM”” (vv.4-5) MAN -enter His gates with thanksgiving -into His court with praise -be thankful unto him -bless His name
	SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY ABOUT GOD	PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF SELF & ACTION

B. The key of Christian doctrine is “relationship”

Since the emphasis of this paper is not a ‘historical theology’ approach that examines carefully the context and content of Christian doctrines through out church history; the following discussion follows an approach that is more a study of “systematic theology.”

Figure 14 – Relational Understanding of Christian Faith Systematically

DOCTRINE	RELATIONALITY	RELATIONAL REALITY
Theology Proper	-Triune God ⁷ -Trinitarian paradigm	-Father, Son, Holy Spirit in perfect communion and harmony
Anthropology	-Man & woman Created in God’s image -In Adam (sinners) vs. in Christ (new creation) (Rom 5-6)	-Given dominion over the created order -in marriage, family & community -fallen but reconciled by Christ -will be judged in the last regenerated/indwelled by the H.S.
Christology	-Sent by & submitted to the Father, justifier -Mediating/reconciling	-Came due to obedience to the Father -Atoning death for man because of love -Exalted to rule supreme over all
Pneumatology	-The Spirit of Jehovah Spirit of Christ (Is 11:2; 61:1; Rom 8:9) -Sanctifier -Comforter	-Inspired...Bible; Illuminate...truth -Regeneration & indwelling -Empowering/endowing gifts -Testifier/Teacher/Guide (Jn 15:26;14:26; Acts 16:6) -Glorifying the Father and the Son
Bibliology	-inspiration -illumination -transforming power	-Aid in knowing God and His will for salvation, edification, sanctification, -Bread of life, light unto path, etc. (Ps 119)
Soteriology	-foreknowledge, love -covenant, calling -atonement, justification	-baptism = union - Christ’s death/resurrection -communion = blood - new covenant -one body/spirit/hope/...X7 (Eph 4:1-7)
Ecclesiology	-In Christ all made one -reconciled: Jews, gentile -joint-heir,	-love, faith, hope = all are relational reality -church local/universal, communion of saints -body/household/temple/priesthood/etc.
Eschatology	-Christ will come back for His own -final victory & glory	-the white throne judgment & the millennium -wedding feast of Lamb & the new Jerusalem -God’s perfect will fulfilled, mankind blessed

⁷ Rinehart, 88.

C. The context of Christian practice is “relationship”

For evangelicals, Christian practice is to be based on sound theology that is grounded in biblical truth. The relational reality of Christian practice is outlined in the diagram below.

Figure 15 – Relational Understanding of Christian Practice

DOCTRINE	RELATIONALITY	RELATIONAL REALITY
Regeneration	Divine transformational power on Christians	Christians born again by God’s grace and transforming power through their faith
Sanctification		Christians become more Christ-like, Spirit-led by obedience to God, resistant against Satan, worldliness and the flesh
Spiritual Warfare		Christians victorious by God’s power; Non-believers in the Kingdom of darkness, enslaved by the flesh, conformed to the world
Worship	God glorified by Christians who celebrate together	God receiving adoration & praise from HIS children who have unity in believe and behavior.
Fellowship	The Trinity has perfect fellowship & complete union	Christians joint in unity of faith, common new life and enjoined by divine love. With Christ as the Head of the Church and they as members of His body, the Church is a living reality and public testimony of true love.
Discipleship	Christian responding to Christ’s calling by commitment & consecration	Christ’s follower who are committed with loyalty, disciplined by God’s truth and display a Christ-like life style to glorify Him in individual walk & collective testimony
Evangelism	Sharing the Gospel to win others to Christ	Sharing the good news with others & all who believe in Him shall be reconciled, born again, joining the family of God, be freed from Satan & sin to become God’s children

Figure 16 – – Summary of Relational Missiology of ‘I AM’ and ‘i am’

ELATIONSHIP DISCIPLINE /ACTION		RELATIONALITY ‘I AM’	REALITY ‘i am’
MISSIOLOGY	<i>missio dei</i>	God presses Himself out & His nature of “glory” thus shown , e.g. the Son (Jn 1:14,18; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1, 4,5, 10, 24; 21:19; Mt 9:8; 17:1-8; Lk 13:13)	Likewise Christians are to manifest this quality of God’s glory (Jn 17: Ro 15:6; 1Cor 6:20; 1Pet 2:12;4:16)
	witnessing	-“the Father witness concerning me” (Jn 8:18) -H.S. witnessing (Jn 15:26) -Scripture witnessing (Jn 39)	-“you are my witnesses...” (Ac 1:8) & Christians are to witness (Jn 15:27)
	commission	-“being sent...” (Jn 6) -“...authority given to me” (Mt 18:18)	--heralding” (Ro 10:14) -“therefore make disciple by going...baptizing...teaching” (Mt 28:19-20)
	empowering	-Father on the Son by the Spirit in ministry, resurrection & exaltation (Ac 10:37; Ro 1:4; Phil 3:9-10)	-authority given (Lk 10:19) -examples: disciples + Paul (Act 2,4; Ro 5:16-20)
	evangelizing	-God desires many will be saved (2Pet 3:9) -God’s grace is sufficient for all to be saved	-in obedience to God Christians evangelize: moved by the compassion for the lost, empowered by the H.S. with gifts
	glorifying	-the Father glorified the Son (Act 3:13; Jn 12:28) -The son glorified the Father (Jn 17:4)	-good testimony glorify God (Mt 5:16) -failed to give glory ...serious consequence like Herod (Act 12: 20-23)
	Grace	-God’s nature is gracious & He freely gives to all : - Recipient & vessel of grace, → labor & messenger of Gospel	- common grace to all & - special grace for chosen -UPON PAUL: changed Saul → Apostle Paul (1Cor 15:9-11; Eph 3:7-13; 1Tim 1:14-16)
	Gift	--gifts endowed by Christ & H.S. (1Cor 12:7-11; Eph 4:7-12)	-special form of grace for service: glorify God & build up the Church -be stewards of gifts (1Pet 3:10-11)
	Reconciling	-“God in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself...” (2Cor 18-19; Ro 11:5)	-“he has committed to us the message of reconciliation... therefore Christ’s ambassadors” (2Cor 5:19-20)

VII. CONCLUSION

I believe that such an emphasis on “relationship” is both biblically sound and contextually relevant for the Chinese Christian community. Christian faith and practice are presented within a relational framework. Western, categorical, definitional theologies prove difficult in non-Western contexts, to live out within our intensely relational societies. Since God’s special revelation came to us in mostly narrative forms describing experience in relationship with God, a relational theology may prove more reasonable and more truthful across cultures than those theologies that depend heavily upon semantic categorization of abstract propositions.

In summary:

- “being” - “‘I AM’ therefore i am” ontologically (relational realism paradigm)
- “knowing” - “‘i know therefore (in light of) ‘I AM’” epistemologically (relational theological paradigm).
- “doing” - “‘I AM’ (*missio dei*) therefore ‘i am’ (manifesting His nature – glory) (relational missiological paradigm)

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