

Incarnation and the Unity of Heaven and Humans: Zia Nai-zin's Christian Reinterpretation of *Zhongyong*

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Abstract

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, Xie Fu-ya or Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991), a remarkable Chinese Christian philosopher, theologian, and translator, developed his unique philosophy of “in-ism” (唯中論) from the 1960s to 1980s to indigenize Christianity into the ideal “Chinese Christianity” (中華基督教). Zia declared that the essence of Confucianism is the concept of *Zhong* 中 (neutrality, avoidance of extremes) and compared the Confucian teaching of the Unity of Heaven and Humans (天人合一) with the Christian Christology, which argues that Jesus Christ is the unity of divinity and humanity. Zia further stated that New Confucians emphasize the Way of Humans over the Way of Heaven, while the Christian doctrine of incarnation balanced both divinity and humanity and achieved the Unity of Heaven and Humans.

While Zia's reinterpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* is controversial, following the recently developed method of sublation, this paper aims to evaluate whether Zia's Christian reinterpretation of *Zhongyong* 中庸 has successfully sublated Confucianism and Christianity. I argue that although Zia's interpretation of *Zhongyong* contains certain philological flaws, overall he successfully produced new insights enriching both Christianity and Confucianism by grounding both on the same ontological ground of *Zhong*.

Keywords: *Zhongyong*, Christianity, Confucianism, Zia Nai-zin, Chinese philosophy

Inkarnacija in enost neba ter človeka: Zia Nai-zinova krščanska reinterpretacija *Zhongyonga*

Izvilleček

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, znan tudi kot Xie Fuya ali Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991), izjemen kitajski krščanski filozof, teolog in prevajalec, je med letoma 1960 in 1980 razvil svojo edinstveno filozofijo »teorije ravnovesja« (唯中論), s katero je želel krščanstvo »prirediti v idealno kitajsko krščanstvo« (中華基督教). Zia je izjavil, da je bistvo konfucianizma koncept *zhong* 中 (nepriustranskost, izogibanje skrajnostim), ter primerjal konfucijanski

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nauk o enoti neba in človeka (天人合一) s krščansko kristologijo, ki zagovarja, da je Jezus Kristus enotnost božanskosti in človečnosti. Zia je nadalje izjavil, da moderni novi konfucijanci poudarjajo Pot človeka, ki jo vidijo kot bolj primarno od Poti neba, medtem ko krščanski nauk o utelešenju božanskosti in človečnosti oba vidika uravnoteži ter s tem doseže enotnost neba in človeka.

Čeprav je Ziajeva reinterpretacija *Nauka o sredini* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) sporna, ta članek s pomočjo nedavno razvite metode sublacije ugotavlja, ali je njegova krščanska razlaga *Zhongyonga* uspešno kombinirala konfucianizem in krščanstvo. Četudi njegova interpretacija *Zhongyonga* vsebuje določene filološke napake, menim, da se je Zia dokaj uspešno dokopal do novih spoznanj, ki lahko obogatijo tako krščanstvo kot tudi konfucianizem, saj oba idejna sistema temeljita na istem ontološkem temelju, to je *zhongu* oziroma uravnovešenosti.

Ključne besede: *Zhongyong*, krščanstvo, konfucianizem, Zia Nai-zin, kitajska filozofija

Introduction

“The International Seminar on Academic Xie Fuya’s Sino Christian Thought” was recently convened from 25–28 April 2023 at Drew University, New Jersey, in the United States. This conference was organized by the editorial board of Zia Nai-zin’s complete works, where some volumes have already been published by the Chinese Baptist Press. All these publications and conferences reiterated Zia’s remarkable yet widely disregarded academic contribution to modern Chinese philosophy and Sino-Christian theology. This timely paper echoes the recent wave of research on Zia’s philosophy and theology in the Chinese academic circle and aims to encourage further studies on Zia in the English academic circle.

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, Xie Fu-ya or Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991) was a significant Chinese scholar in modern Chinese history with a wide range of interests in philosophy, theology, pedagogy, literature and history. He was also a well-known translator and editor who participated in the project of the *Christian Classics Library*, led by Francis P. Jones, George Thomas and John Smith from 1958 to 1974 at Drew University. The project aimed to translate Christian writings from Greek, Latin, German and English, into Chinese and produced 32 volumes.

Besides translation, Zia also developed his philosophy and theology of “in-ism” (唯中論) during his stay in the United States. According to Zia, the concept of *Zhong* 中 (neutrality, avoidance of extremes) in the *Doctrine of the Mean* is the essence of Confucianism. Yet Zia argued that Confucians failed to maintain *Zhong* because they overemphasized humans over Heaven and failed to achieve their ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. By contrast, Zia argued that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation fulfilled the Unity of Heaven and Humans because Jesus Christ

is the unity of divinity and humanity. Zia's redefinition of Confucianism and his controversial claim for the unity of Confucianism and Christianity led to a debate between him and contemporary New Confucians (and notably Tang Jung-yi and Mou Zongsan) from the 1950s to 1970s (Ho 2006). In this, Zia proposed the idea of constructing "Chinese Christianity" (中華基督教) so that Chinese Christians could understand the Christian faith in terms of the Confucian, Daoist and even Buddhist canons. Yet as we shall see, New Confucians criticized Zia for putting too many Christian concepts into Confucian texts. However, they did not provide a clear methodology to evaluate the success and failure of Zia's in-ism but merely condemned Zia's approach because Zia's ontology contradicts New Confucianism.

To evaluate Zia's strategy of integrating Christianity with Confucianism, this paper introduces the recently developed method of sublation. The method proceeds from the presumption according to which an ideal comparative philosophy should not only highlight the similarities and differences between two philosophies, but also "help us raise our ideas to a new level and provide new insights by preserving certain elements of both aspects and eliminating others" (Rošker 2022a, 307).

Zia' Biography

Zia's profound understanding of both Chinese and Western philosophies is deeply related to his family background and life experience. Zia was born in a traditional Chinese literati family in Shaohing, Chekiang province, China in 1892. Since the age of four, Zia studied Confucian texts like the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* for the imperial examination. However, when the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) abolished the imperial examination in 1905, Zia had to give up studying such Confucian texts.

Zia was converted to Christianity during his undergraduate studies in Tokyo, Japan. He went to Tokyo in 1911 with his cousin to study Japanese and English at the age of nineteen. However, shortly after Zia's enrolment at Rikkyo University in 1915, he was hospitalized for some months because of acute retinal necrosis. It was during this time, according to his autobiography, that he was very much moved by the care he received from the Christians he shared an apartment with. After what he saw as a miraculous recovery, Zia was baptised at St Paul's Church, part of the Anglican Church in Japan, in 1916 (Zia 1978, 48–49). In the same year, Zia returned to China and became an editor and translator for the National Committee of China Young Men's Christian Association. From 1916 to 1925, Zia translated several philosophical and theological writings from English to Chinese, which built up his knowledge of Western philosophy and Christian theology.

Zia continued to deepen his knowledge of Western philosophy when he was working in the YMCA. From 1925 to 1927, the Chinese YMCA even sent Zia to study Western philosophy at the University of Chicago and Harvard University, where he attended lectures given by Alfred North Whitehead and George Edward Moore. When Zia returned to China in 1928 he was appointed a professor at Lingnan University, although between 1936 and 1939 he left this position and served as a teacher at the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement. Unfortunately, after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), Zia had to flee with his family, colleagues and students to Chungking. When the Communists' final victory in the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949) was confirmed in 1949, Zia fled to Hong Kong with his family and taught philosophy at Chung Ching College and the Hong Kong Baptist College until 1958, when Francis P. Jones invited him to be the translator and editor of the *Christian Classics Library* (基督教歷代名著集成). Zia and his family accepted the offer and moved to Drew University, New Jersey, the United States. During Zia's living in the United States, he also developed his theology of in-ism. In 1986, Zia finally decided to move back to Guangzhou, China, and died there in 1991 at the age of 99.

Owing to his profound understanding of Chinese and Western philosophies, the majority of Zia's works in philosophy and theology are related to comparative studies between the Eastern and Western Traditions. For example, in Zia's early work *Philosophy of Religion* 宗教哲學 (1928), Zia applied Whitehead's formulation of religion to analyse the religiousness of Confucianism and Buddhism. Furthermore, Zia's remarkable work in his late period, *Christianity and Chinese Thought* 基督教與中國思想 (1972), explicitly compared the *Doctrine of the Mean* to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation when he formulated his theology of Chinese Christianity. Since comparative philosophy accounts for a significant portion of Zia's works, in the following section we shall introduce an innovative, recently proposed methodology—the method of sublation—to evaluate Zia's philosophy and theology.

Methodology: Method of Sublation

While comparative methods are widely adopted by both Western researchers studying Chinese philosophy and modern Chinese philosophers who reformulate Chinese philosophy with the help of Western philosophy, contemporary philosophers' are still undecided over the best method of comparison. Some philosophers try to find an objective method to bridge Chinese and Western philosophies, and

Lin Ma and Jaap van Brakel proposed three necessary conditions for “interpretation in comparative and Chinese philosophy: the interpreter must presuppose that there are mutually recognizable human practices; the interpreter must presuppose that ‘the other’ is, on the whole, sincere, consistent, and right; the interpreter must be committed to certain epistemic virtues” (Ma and Brakel 2016, 575).

By contrast, instead of looking for a methodology that transcends Eastern and Western traditions, Jana Rošker argues that “the methodology in question is a system underlying one of the philosophies under comparison, namely the Western one. There is no third, ‘objective’ methodology” (Rošker 2022a, 306). She thus proposes a “framework of post-comparative approaches, i.e. the method of trans-cultural sublation” as follows:

- Step 1. *Similarities*: first we identify the similarities of the two *comparata*.
- Step 2. *Differences*: then we identify the differences between them by considering the main paradigms of the respective frames of reference to which they belong.
- Step 3. *Dialectic of eliminating and preserving*: in the next step we eliminate certain aspects of the two *comparata* and preserve certain other elements. This decision does not arise automatically from the internal structure of dialectical thinking (as, for example, in Hegelian dialectics), but is the result of a conscious choice made on the basis of inspiration arising from the tension between the differences identified in Step 2.
- Step 4. *Sublation*: the process established in steps 1–3 leads us to a cognitive shift that is the condition for the possibility of the realization of step 5.
- Step 5. *New insight*: this new insight is the result of the shift accomplished in step 4. This new insight can manifest itself in one or more new ideas, propositions or theses. (Rošker 2022a, 307)

Step 3 is a critical point because, from this step onwards the two *comparata* are no longer themselves, as certain aspects are eliminated while certain other elements are preserved, but there is no objective standard determining which parts are preserved or eliminated, for different philosophers may have different preferences.¹

1 On an online seminar organized by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Macau on 20 April 2022, the author asked Rošker whether she would propose any general standard to preserve or eliminate elements in the method of sublation, but Rošker explicitly refused to provide any standard because she thought every philosopher should have their own subjective criteria to decide which elements should be preserved or eliminated.

As Rošker clarifies, “There is no third, external methodology which could equip us with some objective criteria of comparison”, (Rošker 2022b, 170) because one cannot transcend from one’s own cultural horizon of understanding when comparing two cultural traditions.

Nevertheless, the impossibility of having a set of objective criteria for comparison does not mean that comparative studies are meaningless. By contrast, Rošker argues that the “translations” of concepts and accounts from one tradition to another can bring new insights to both traditions. “Knowledge of the specific frame of reference that has emerged in the historical development of Chinese philosophy is of paramount importance in order to interpret certain concepts and transfer them into the framework of global philosophy”. (Rošker 2023, 132) The ultimate goal of comparative studies under such a framework is to generate new insights answering existing philosophical questions by creating a “new cognitive substances”, which integrates two different referential frameworks. As Rošker puts it: “if we consider fusion as a metaphor for a particular kind of philosophical thinking, then we must admit that new philosophical insights are always based on new cognitive substances” (Rošker 2023, 133). As we shall see, Zia has also created a new cognitive substance generating new insights, because his neo-in-ism theology integrated the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean* to address the problems of insufficient religiousness in Confucianism and extremism in Christianity.

Preservation and elimination of elements are conditioned by the philosophical concerns and tasks prioritized by post-comparative philosophers. These are necessary tasks in post-comparative philosophy because, as Rošker claims,

Different referential frames can lead to different descriptions and interpretations of the same objective reality. This is also the reason why trans-cultural research can sometimes produce misunderstandings between different cultures instead of eliminating or at least diminishing them. (Rošker 2022b, 170)

In other words, to show the contributions of two philosophies to a particular philosophical question, one must select only relevant elements from them. For instance, Rošker was interested in Zeno’s Flying Arrow Problem and how Zeno and Hui Shi offered different formulations and solutions to this. While “Zeno actually deni[ed]the continuity of motion”, Hui Shi believed that “every object or entity has a multifaceted nature and can change depending on the point of observance, which is always relative” (Rošker 2022a, 308). For Hui Shi, whether an arrow is at rest or in motion is relative to different points of view. Here Rošker

states: “Hui Shi’s proposition includes and expands on Zeno’s argument, but due to its insufficiency it also negates it. Zeno argues the flying arrow stands still. In Hui Shi’s view, it does not stand still, (although it also doesn’t move)” (ibid., 309). Then Rošker proposes the “processual view, which is closer to Hui Shi’s theory” as the standard to decide which elements should be preserved and eliminated. “The processual view can include both static and moving phases, whereas the unmovable and unchangeable being cannot include any motion. In other words, the dynamic can include the static, but not vice versa.” (ibid.) Since Hui Shi’s view can include Zeno’s but Zeno’s cannot include Hui Shi’s, Zeno’s assumption that all motions are illusions is eliminated.

Based on the decision made in step 3, a new theory which is different from the two *comparata* is formed in step 4. In Rošker’s case, inspired by Hui Shi, she proposed the processual view that “the flying arrow is simultaneously moving and at a standstill”, but what Hui Shi claimed was that “there is a time in which a flying arrow is simultaneously not moving and not standing still” (ibid., 310). So Rošker was not simply interpreting Hui Shi’s argument but actually proposed a new one based on Hui Shi’s philosophy. In this sense, Rošker “sublated” Hui Shi’s discussion on the flying arrow, leading to a new insight in step 5.

A direct challenge to Rošker’s method of sublation is the problem of subjectivity and bias. Rošker did not propose a method to interpret Chinese philosophy with the help of the Western philosophical framework “properly”, but instead a method to produce “new insights” by comparing different philosophies. Moreover, Rošker did not propose any explicit standard to decide which elements to preserve or eliminate, as she believes that the *dialectic of eliminating and preserving* varies with persons and contexts.

Nevertheless, instead of viewing Rošker’s method of sublation as a *normative* principle evaluating the success and failure of comparative philosophy, one may regard it as a *narrative* explanation of how philosophers create a *new* philosophy. In doing so, the method of sublation helps one appreciate the *new insights* proposed by philosophers (remarkably modern Chinese philosophers) who formulate their innovative philosophies by comparing and criticizing existing philosophical frameworks, rather than criticizing their “misinterpretations” of Western or Eastern philosophical texts.

Yet from the perspective of hermeneutics, Rošker’s method of sublation lacks an essential step before “step 1”, namely, *horizons of understanding*. Identifying the similarities between two *comparata* naturally requires a pre-established understanding of both of them. Let there be two sets $\{x\} = \{a1, a2, a3, a4\}$ and $\{y\} = \{a4, a5, a6, a7\}$; without understanding the elements of these two sets, one could

not identify a_4 as a similar element shared by both sets. However, philosophical traditions are not necessarily clearly defined. Different philosophers may have different understandings of the same philosophical tradition and therefore disagree with each other on the elements it contains, or which element is its essence. For example, Zia argued that in-ism is the essence of Confucianism while Mou argued that moral subjectivity is the essence of Confucianism (Zia 1969b, 17). Hermeneutically speaking, it is because humans' understanding is always conditioned by their horizons of understanding.

When one understands a philosophical tradition, one's understanding is inevitably conditioned by one's horizons of understanding. As Gadamer stated:

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. ... A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, 'to have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond. (Gadamer 1975, 301)

Therefore, to understand how Zia picked up similarities between Confucianism and Christianity, it is important to articulate Zia's *horizons of understanding*.

Thus, in the following sections we will first outline Zia's development of his theology of Chinese Christianity before using the revised method of sublation to examine Zia's in-ism and acknowledge its innovativeness, for he sublated both Confucianism and Christianity by bridging the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Doctrine of Incarnation*.

Confucianism According to Zia's in-ism

There are only a few academic discussions on Zia's in-ism in both Chinese and English academic circles. In the former, one of the most comprehensive introductions to Zia's philosophy would be Ho Hing-Cheong's dissertation *Identity Development of Christian Diaspora: Thought Process of N.Z. Zia (1892-1991)* (離散中的基督徒身份建構：謝扶雅思想歷程) (Ho 2013), along with two journal articles, one written by Zhao Qingwen on Zia's concept of "Christian Nobleman (*Jidu tu Junzi* 基督徒君子)" (Zhao 2015) and another one by Jiang Ryh-Shin which criticized Zia for "cutting off the [Confucian] texts from their traditions to highlight the universality of an absolute God to legitimise his own 'vision'" (Jiang 2001, 154). Unfortunately, Jiang did not even articulate Zia's in-ism and merely outlined his misinterpretations of Confucian texts. Jiang did not reconstruct Zia's

philosophical arguments for in-ism, because he claimed that he only wanted to see “how Zia’s new interpretations of the tradition of Chinese Classics may be acknowledged” (ibid., 151). Moreover, Jiang did not mention the history of the concept of *Zhong* as proposed by Zia (as we shall see in the following) and misunderstood things in claiming that Zia’s reinterpretation of *Zhong* “merely focused on *Yi Jing* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*” (ibid.). Contrary to Jiang’s understanding, as we shall see, Zia’s reinterpretation of the Chinese Classics also covers the *Analects* and *Book of Documents*.

In the English-language academic circle, there are currently two journal articles focusing on Zia: one co-authored by Ho Hing-Cheong and Lai Pan-Chiu (Ho and Lai 2008), and another one by Albert Wu (Wu 2017). Unlike Jiang’s article, both articles provide some contextualization of Zia’s theology and philosophy in relation to the trends of Chinese philosophy, Western theology and political ideologies. Owing to the limited secondary literature, this section focuses on Zia’s primary texts and will only occasionally refer to the secondary writings listed above.

Zia’s philosophy and theology of in-ism or meanism² began with his reinterpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. In his article “In-ism—The Unique Philosophy in China” published in 1969, Zia outlined three principles of in-ism: *neutrality* (*Zhongli* 中立), *emptiness* (*Xuzhong* 虛衷) and *synthesis* (*Zonghe* 綜合).

Neutrality refers to the principle of *impedence* from extremes. Zia claimed: “In the *Doctrine of the Mean* it is written that ‘how strong one would be when one is neutral without dependence!’ Here ‘neutral’ merely means independence” (Zia 1969b, 2). Zia’s interpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* here is based on Cheng Yi’s commentary on the *Doctrine*: “Being without extreme is called *Zhong*, being without changes is called *Yong*.” Zia continued:

The form of ‘*Zhong*’ varies with time but its principle remains ‘unchanged.’ Confucius is honoured as the ‘sage of time’ and the Way of *Zhongyong* is called *Shizhong* 時中. *Shizhong* does not refer to mechanical reduction by half or mandatory regulation on comprise but to the natural flow, as it is said that ‘all that depart are like flowing waters which flow ceaselessly by day and night’. (Ibid., 3)

Emptiness refers to the suspension of prejudices and bias. Zia cited the following line from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, “The status when joy, anger, sadness and happiness have yet occurred is called *Zhong*”, and argued that

2 While Ho and Lai translated *weizhonglun* 唯中論 as meanism, Zia himself translated the term as in-ism, hence this article uses the latter term.

Confucians believe that the Being of the universe is neutrality which is neither matter nor mind. [...] Confucians aimed to interact with objects with ‘emptiness’, which means the rejection of all prejudices and the elimination of coloured glasses so that one may interact with the objective objects with a mind without emotions. (Ibid., 4)

Since the *Doctrine of the Mean* transcends all prejudice, it also implies flexibility and freedom from the limitations of particular perspectives.

Synthesis refers to “collecting great achievements” (*Jidaicheng* 集大成). In his article from 1962, Zia did not explain the concept of synthesis in detail but simply cited the *Counsels of the Great Yu*, from the *Book of Documents*, which states that “the minds of humans are vulnerable, while the mind of the Way is mysterious. Being focus and uniform, one can sincerely hold fast the mean (*ren xin wei wei dao xin wei wei wei jing wei yi yun zhi jue Zhong* 人心惟危，道心惟微，惟精惟一，允執厥中)”, and argued that “*zhizhong* 執中 means exquisite synthesis” (ibid., 6).

Zia further elaborated on in-ism in 1967 and argued that

the philosophical perspective of the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a *Zhiliangyongzhong* 執兩用中 [balance between two extremes] of semi-realism and semi-idealism. All the established things we know are the so-called *Zhizhonghe* 致中和 [the achievement of the mean and harmony]. *Zhong* is a purely objective Being while *He* is a purely subjective field. (Ibid., 11).

When Zia wrote a review of Mou Zong-san’s *On the Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy* in 1963, Zia rejected Mou’s claims that “subjectivity” is the essence of Chinese philosophy and that Confucius, Mengzi and the Lu-Wang School are the orthodoxy of Confucianism, because Zia insisted that the essence of Chinese philosophies, including Confucianism, is the teaching of *Zhiliangyongzhong*, which is found in the *Analects*, *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Zia further argued that the in-ism expressed in Confucian classics transcends subjectivity and objectivity. He said:

If you read the *Analects* once, you should experience Confucius’ peacefulness and uprightness and see his magnanimous and cheerful face. [...] Confucius has a nice expression: ‘*Zhongyong* is a virtue so ultimate that people can hardly sustain it for long’ [中庸之為德也，其至矣乎！民鮮久矣。] (*Analects* 6.29). The problems of losing *Zhongyong* are ‘excess or lack’ [過猶不及] (*Analects* 11.16). Subjectivity is merely an ‘excess’ while

objectivity is just a ‘lack’. Individualistic liberalism is an excess while selfless socialism is a lack. However, the method of *Zhiliangyongzhong* is not to eliminate but actually manipulate both extremes as the ‘uses’ of the ‘Mean’. [...] Therefore, on the one hand, Confucius’ teaching on humaneness includes the subject of ‘starting from oneself to become humane’ [為仁由己] (*Analects* 12.1), and, on the other hand, includes the object of ‘suppressing oneself and restoring propriety to achieve humaneness’ [克己復禮為仁]. (Ibid., 16)

One may question Zia in that even if his reading of *Analects* is accurate, it only means that both *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* embrace in-ism but not the *Book of Documents* and *Yi Ching*. Therefore, in 1969, Zia proposed an etymological study on the concept of *Zhong*, arguing that there are four stages of development represented by *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents*, *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* respectively, which are:

- (1) Ancient period (during the mythological period of Fuxi 伏羲), where *Zhong* was understood as “the *Zhong* between the sexual intercourse between male and female” (男女牝牡之『中』) (ibid., 47), as Zia said:

The concept of *Zhong* in the ancient period arises from the observation of the interactions between *Yin* 陰 and *Yang* 陽. As it is written in the commentary on *Xi Ci* I, ‘In the ancient time when Fuxi reigned over the world, he looked up at the signs in Heaven, looked down at the laws on the Earth, and observed the traces of birds and beasts and the suitability of land. He drew inspiration from things close to him and distant from him. It was then that the eight trigrams were first created.’ (Ibid., 47)

- (2) Political period (during the period of Yao and Shun), “*Zhong* as the Mean between two extremes” (執兩用中之『中』): Zia quotes the *Xiong Fan* 洪範 from the *Book of Documents* “Great is the Kingly Way with no preference and no nepotism. Just is the Kingly Way with no nepotism and no preference. Right is the Kingly Way with no opposition and no one-sidedness” (無偏無黨，王道蕩蕩；無黨無偏，王道平平；無反無側，王道正直。) and argued that here *Zhong* refers to political neutrality which belongs to the field of “civic education” (ibid., 47).
- (3) Ethical Period (during the period of Confucius), “*Zhong* as avoidance of both excess and lack” (無過無不及之『中』): Zia argued that in the *Analects* Confucius “moralized the *Zhong* from its political context” and regarded the

Zhong as “the foundation of interpersonal interactions within the five relationships” (ibid., 47).

- (4) Philosophical Period (during the late period of Warring States) “*Zhong* as the foundation of all under Heaven” (天下之大本之『中』): Here *Zhong* argued that a “metaphysics of in-ism” which explained the creation of the universe was formulated because the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* and commentaries on *Yi Ching* “deeply theatricalized and even philosophically systematized the concept of *Zhong* which they had inherited from the orthodoxy” (ibid., 48).

In short, according to Zia’s reconstruction of the history of the concept of *Zhong*, in-ism implies mutuality, the mean, appropriateness and creativity. Here one may realize that there are at least two theoretical weaknesses of Zia’s in-ism: he only explained *Zhong* but disregarded *Yong* and he arbitrarily assumed the continuity and consistency of the concepts of *Zhong* expressed in the *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents*, *Analects*, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Although this paper does not aim to criticize Zia’s interpretation of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, future research should pay attention to these weaknesses when discussing in-ism.

However, according to Zia, Chinese philosophy, which is dominated by Confucianism, failed to achieve the principle of mutuality of in-ism expressed in the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, because of the Confucian emphasis on humans over Heaven. Based on his philological knowledge, Zia argued that Chinese people understand Heaven in terms of humans.

The characters *xin* 信 [belief] and *lun* 倫 [relation] follow the radical of *ren* 人, while in the character *tin* 天 [Heaven] there is *ren* 人 inside. Therefore, *tinwen* 天文, *tindao* 天道, *tinlun* 天倫 and *tinxing* are all embedded in the concepts of *renwen* 人文, *rendao* 人道, *renlun* 人倫 and *renxing* 人性. (Zia 1972, 62)

Here humans and Heaven are not opposites but are interflows because they are defined by each other. In this sense, the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans is actually the restoration of the original common ground shared by Heaven and humans. “Therefore, on the one hand, the Chinese philosophy of life is not individualism; on the other hand, it is not collectivism. Instead, it is the harmony of mutuality. Such mutuality is both the Way of Humans, the Way of Heaven, and the Way of the Unity of Heaven and Humans” (ibid., 61–62).

However, in practice Confucians emphasize humans over Heaven, which fails to keep the mean (*bu Zhong* 不中). Confucians only propose a ‘bottom-up’ approach

to the Unity of Heaven and Humans through humans' moral practices but do not propose any "top-down" approach through revelation.

Chinese thought generally begins with human nature and emphasizes the 'original mind' *benxin* 本心 of humans. By contrast, mainline Western thoughts only desire to pursue an objective 'Being'. The Chinese emphasis on the problem of 'mind nature' *xinxing* 心性 assumed the teaching that 'what Heaven commands is called nature' (天命之為性). Thus, human nature is originally heavenly nature and human's mind can be heavenly mind. (Ibid.)

To overcome the Chinese emphasis on human moral practices, Zia argued that a "neo-in-ism" is needed. As a Christian theologian, Zia naturally turned to Christian tradition to look for solutions.

Christianity According to Zia's Understanding

As mentioned above, owing to his religious experience during his studies in Japan, Zia converted to Christianity, and his knowledge of theology and philosophy was further deepened by his study at Harvard and Chicago in the 1920s and his leading role in the Chinese translation project of *Christian Classics Library*. He finally developed his "incarnational" theology in *Christianity and Chinese Thought* in 1972, which he called "neo-in-ism theology".

Zia began his reformulation of Christian theology by defining Christianity as Jesus Christ's religion (*yesujidude zhongjiao* 耶穌基督的宗教). Zia mentioned Barth's reluctance to name Christianity as a religion because "all religions are bottom-up yet revelation is top-down" (Zia 1972, 22). He then contrasted Barth's views with those of Schleiermacher and Tillich, because Schleiermacher defined religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence" while Tillich defined it in terms of "ultimate concern" (ibid.). Zia was dissatisfied with Barth's views of religion, stating:

Christianity is one kind of religion which is widely acknowledged by Chinese society. It is neither bottom-up nor top-down. What we call 'Jesus Christ's Religion' today refers to an emphasis on our mediator Jesus Christ—to communicate with God 'in the name of Jesus Christ'.³ (Ibid., 23)

3 While Zia's view is similar to Pannenberg's claim that Christianity is both top-down and bottom-up, and thus defining Christianity solely as top-down or bottom-up is one-sided, it is unclear whether Zia was influenced by Pannenberg because he never cited him. Yet since Pannenberg's teacher, Karl Löwith, was the adviser to Zia's translation of the *Selections of Kierkegaard's Writings* in 1963, it is possible that Zia was influenced by both men.

Zia further clarified the relationship between Jesus and the *Old Testament*: Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament. Nevertheless,

the Messiah the saviour who descended to the world does not only save Jews but also Gentiles; he wants to restore Israel but also all nations in the world. In this sense, Jesus Christ expanded a typical national religion—Judaism—to a universal religion. [...] while Christianity is not the sole universal religion, Christianity remarkably highlights the grace of God. (Ibid., 26)

Since the grace of God is for all nations, it is also for the Chinese people. Thus Zia argued that if Christianity was able to be expressed by Greek philosophy in the early church, it could also be expressed by Chinese thought in the Chinese translation of the Bible. “The most obvious case is to translate ‘Logos’ carefully and prayerfully as ‘*Dao*’” (ibid., 28). Zia very much appreciated the Chinese translation of Logos as *Dao* 道, because *Dao* means not only the Way but also the Spoken Word, which are two important meanings implied by Logos:

The *Dao* 道 in the Chinese term *Daoli* 道理 is actually equivalent to the sense of *Dao* as “to speak” (in novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties). [...] But there is a difference between Chinese and Western cultures, as the latter values theories while the former highlights practices and the latter emphasizes “to know” while the former emphasizes ‘to act’. Since Jesus said ‘I am the Way’ (John 14:6) and sincerely asked people to ‘follow me’, his incarnation aligns with the practical teaching of ‘lead by example’ appreciated by the Chinese instead of merely saying some fine words. More concretely, God became a man and descended to the world as a living example to all humans, while the climax of Jesus’ life was his bearing of the cross on the way to Golgotha. (Ibid., 36)

Here one may realize that Zia’s understanding of Christianity is largely influenced by his Chinese Confucian tradition, as he frequently related Christian concepts to Confucian terms (e.g. *Dao*).

Then Zia argued that the incarnational theology of Christianity is the product of the interactions between Hebrew and Greek traditions:

Westerners are nations of reason, they emphasize reasoning and are good at logic. Unlike Jews who depend on intuition, they want to demonstrate and explain everything. When Jews were governed and suppressed by the Roman Empire, Jews earnestly looked for salvation by the Messiah.

When God responded to their demands, He sent his only begotten Son who became a man in the world. Yet Jews were astonished and did not believe in him. Some of his beloved disciples even betrayed him or denied knowing him. Until he died and was resurrected, when they were awakened and touched, as Jesus fulfilled his teachings: ‘For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’ (Ibid., 34–35)

For this reason, Zia regarded the Christian doctrine of the incarnation as a bridge between Hebrew and Greek traditions, and he also wanted to turn it into a bridge between Chinese culture and Christianity. Since Chinese tradition highlights “to act”, Zia argued that the Chinese may understand the Christian doctrine of incarnation by highlighting Jesus’s teaching “to follow him”. Zia cited Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* to elaborate on the relationship between the incarnation of Christ and following Jesus:

The incarnation, the words and acts of Jesus, and his death on the cross, are all indispensable parts of that image. But it is not the same image as Adam bore in the primal glory of paradise. Rather, it is the image of one who enters a world of sin and death, who takes upon himself all the sorrows of humanity, who meekly bears God’s wrath and judgement against sinners, and who obeys his will with unswerving devotion in suffering and death, the man born to poverty, the friend of publicans and sinners, the man of sorrows, rejected of man and forsaken of God. Here is God made man, here is man in the new image of God. (Bonhoeffer 1979, 340, cited in Zia 1972, 38)

According to Zia’s interpretation, Bonhoeffer argued that Christians should be inspired by the image of Jesus dying on the cross. However, because humans as sinners cannot transform themselves into the image of Christ, they must be transformed by Christ first. “Christ’s works on us must be completed by his image within ourselves, which is the image when Christ incarnated, died on the cross but was glorified. Therefore, in the great event of incarnation, the whole of humanity can restore its dignity in the image of God.” (Zia 1972, 38)

Having clarified Zia’s basic understanding of both Confucianism and Christianity, in the following section we shall examine how Zia’s Confucian reading of Christianity conditioned his sublation of both traditions and produced his theology of Chinese Christianity.

Step 1: Mutuality as the Similarity between Confucianism and Christianity

Zia saw the opportunity to integrate Christianity and Confucianism from the Confucian problem of the Unity of Heaven and Humans, and argued that the Christian doctrine of incarnation fulfils the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. As Zia said:

Only Jesus Christ has both divinity and humanity. To humans, he represented God, but to God, he represented humans to redeem their sins and to reconcile humans with God. Chinese religious thought is about the Unity of Heaven and Humans. Generally speaking, the Chinese idea of the Unity of Heaven and Humans has no contradiction with Christianity. Nevertheless, there is no concept of a mediator with both divinity and humanity like Jesus Christ in any Chinese religious idea or thought. (Zia 1972, 23)

For Zia, Jesus Christ is a perfect *Zhong* between God and humans and therefore the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. On the one hand, Christ is “top-down” because he is the Son of God, descended from Heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, Christ is also “bottom-up” because he died and was resurrected, and represented humans to redeem their sins in front of God the Father. In this sense, the incarnation is a bilateral process and overcomes the problem of the emphasis on humans over Heaven in Confucianism. Therefore, the major similarity between Christianity and Confucianism according to Zia is *mutuality* or *unity*: the Unity of Heaven and Humans in the Confucian ideal and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity in Christ. Yet Zia also realized that there is no one like Christ in Chinese history or tradition, which leads to step 2 of his sublation: differences.

Step 2: Differences between Confucianism and Christianity: Faith, Knowledge Practice and Incarnation

As mentioned above, the Christian doctrine of incarnation is not found in Chinese culture. To articulate the uniqueness of incarnation, Zia returned to the Chinese translation of *Logos* and *Dao*:

We have used the commonly used Chinese character *Dao* 道 to translate *Logos*, *verbum* and word. However, the concept that this *Dao* can become

and must become ‘flesh’ to reveal God’s ‘fullness of grace’ belongs to the realm of ‘faith’ and is not inherent in the Chinese cultural tradition. (Zia 1972, 64–65).

In Confucian tradition, *Dao* is always related to the concept of “corrected names” (*zhengming* 正名): namely, people fulfilling their duties according to their social roles. “The monarch ‘should’ act the *Dao* of being a monarch, a father ‘should’ act the *Dao* of being a father [...] Chinese explains *Dao* in terms of ‘one should do’ but never explains *Logos* in light of ‘God’s fullness of grace’.” (Ibid., 66)

However, Zia argued that *Logos* cannot be understood in terms of moral duties or reasoning but only religious experience:

the Holy name and the Holy word of Christianity are to be sought through Jesus Christ and prayer in His name (John 14:14). ‘Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven’ (Matthew 6:9-10). The sanctity and significance of the Holy name are not merely ethical matters of ‘names and duties’ (*mingfen* 名分) nor are they deductive or inductive logical problems. They are devout religious beliefs and spiritual communion through sincere prayer. (Ibid., 66)

Here Zia pointed out a trichotomy of Faith (*xin* 信), Knowledge (*zhi* 知) and Practice (*xing* 行) to outline the differences among the Hebrew, Greek and Chinese traditions. The doctrine of incarnation comes from the Hebrew tradition of faith, yet in the Chinese tradition practice is emphasized over faith. As Zia put it:

Jews and Indians are born to be religious nations. By contrast, when it comes to religion, Westerners prefer to articulate ‘faith’ by ‘knowing’ while Chinese prefer to manifest ‘faith’ by ‘practice’. Greeks particularly love theories while the Chinese highlight practices. [However,] the root of religion is only found in faith instead of theological doctrines or moral actions. [...]

Chinese’s straight-forward faith is totally different from Hebrew’s because Judaism is totally theocentric while Chinese culture is always human-centric; the religious life in China comes from Heaven, unlike Judaism where everything comes from God’s revelation. (Ibid., 60)

Having studied and translated Western Christian philosophical and theological writings into Chinese, Zia realized an intrinsic problem of Western philosophy and theology: they over-rely on reasoning and dialectics, leading to extremes and conflicts, e.g. nominalism vs. realism in scholasticism, and rationalism vs. empiricism in the Enlightenment (ibid., 52).

Conversely, Zia is more concerned with the intrinsic limitations of Chinese culture which emphasizes humans over Heaven. As mentioned above, because the Confucian ideal is the Unity of Heaven and Humans, and yet Confucians only provided a one-sided approach to achieve this goal through human-centric moral practices, Confucians necessarily failed to achieve their goal. In-ism emphasizes the principle of *Zhong* which the human-centric Chinese tradition could never achieve. This determines Zia's decision to eliminate and preserve the elements of Christianity and Confucianism, respectively.

Step 3: Eliminating Knowing and the *Old Testament* and Preserving Incarnation, Faith and Practice

Surprisingly, Zia did not explicitly eliminate elements from the Chinese Confucian tradition when formulating his theology of neo-in-ism. Instead, he explicitly eliminated the Western or Greek element of Christianity, namely, the overemphasis on knowledge and reasoning, which leads to uncertainty. As he wrote:

The value of Western philosophy lies in its inherent scepticism, as it starts with doubt in everything. However, orthodox philosophy does not end with passive doubt but, instead, strives to investigate thoroughly, analysing every detail. Although the 'ultimate' truth may never be attained, this deep 'ultimate concern' [...] leads us into the realm of religion. (Zia 1972, 50)

Nevertheless, there is a conflict between the Western emphasis on reasoning and knowing and the Jewish emphasis on faith. "Belief leads to salvation while disbelief leads to death. It is straightforward and direct without the need for arguments. [However,] in the Western context where intellectual curiosity is strong, questioning and debating are essential to delve into the reasons behind belief." (ibid., 55–56) Instead, Zia preserved faith and practice so that Christianity and Confucianism can complement each other, as we shall see in step 4.

Moreover, although Zia highlighted the importance of the Hebrew concept of faith, he argued that a Chinese Christian Holy Scripture should be written and certain Hebrew cultural elements that are irrelevant to Chinese Christian life should be eliminated. In 1970, he wrote a letter to Fong Shen-Lei Paul 封尚禮, the editor of *Ching Feng* 景風, arguing that the Chinese Christian Holy Scripture should consist of four sections: (1) the *Complete New Testament*, (2) the Outlines of the *Old Testament*, (3) the Essentials of the Confucian Canon, and (4) References to Daoism and Buddhism. Zia argued that:

the Torah, books of prophets and poems should be studied by Chinese Christians, while the history books of Israel should be left for historians to study. Why should Chinese Christians spend time reading the history books of Israel? [...] If Christianity can accept the canon of Judaism, why cannot it accept the thirteen orthodox classics [of Confucianism] and the collections of Daoist and Buddhist texts? While faithful Chinese Christians and worldwide Christians from different nations and ethnicities share the doctrine of ‘one God, one faith and one baptism’ and in spiritual communion, they do not have to be uniform. (Zia 1977, 155)

Zia also stated that “the West has indeed employed the irony of Socrates to present the concept of ‘God’s irony’ (Kierkegaard) [...] Why cannot Chinese believers also explore the teachings of Jesus Christ through the insights of Confucius, Mozi, Laozi, Cheng-Zhu, Lu-Wang, and others?” (Zia 1972, 64–65). As Zia’s student, Kwok Shu-him 郭書謙, explained:

Although the Scripture represents the Word of God, He and His word are carefully interpreted by Westerners and God’s revelation is not limited to the New and Old Testaments. ... Hebrew culture is about laws and prophets; Greek culture is deduced and developed from the term *Logos*, while Chinese culture is about the morality of humaneness and rightness. If Jesus were born in China, he would also say I have not come to abolish the morality of humaneness and rightness, but to fulfil them. (Kwok 1995, 81)

Zia’s downplaying of the Old Testament is due to his “incarnational” or “Christocentric” interpretation of Christianity, as mentioned in step 0. Because he regarded the books on the history of Israel as something irrelevant to the salvation, incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ, Zia thought Chinese Christianity could simply omit them. Moreover, the parts of the Old Testament that are irrelevant to God’s fullness of grace, salvation and incarnation could actually be replaced by Chinese philosophy.

Step 4: Sublation of the Unity of Heaven and Humans by the Unity of Faith and Practice

As mentioned above, according to Zia’s diagnosis, the main problem of Christianity is extremism, which he argued came from the Western overemphasis on knowing. For this reason, he eliminated knowing and argued that Chinese culture,

as dominated by Confucianism, is more consistent with the Judeo-Christian emphasis on faith because Chinese culture does not highlight knowing and reasoning:

The Hebrew people consider 'faith' as their foundation, and for them God exists enterally (Exodus 3:14) without the need of any evidence. The Chinese people tend to verify 'faith' through 'practice', unlike Western nations that must require 'knowing' to justify 'faith'. Confucius said: 'Studying [*xue* 學] what is below, one comprehends [*da* 達] what is above. If there is anyone who knows me, it is Heaven!' (*Analects* 14.35) [...] Here *xue* and *da* are related to *xing* 行. It should be noted that in Chinese, the character *xue* originally means 'learning' and 'practice' rather than 'knowing'. (Zia 1972, 36)

Zia believed that the Chinese emphasis on practice is more consistent with Hebrew emphasis on faith, because the former does not highlight reasoning but asserts humility, a virtue that Christ also expresses:

In terms of attitudes and behaviour towards life, Chinese people emphasize the principle of 'gaining through humility' (謙受益). They deeply understand the truth of 'excessive gain leads to loss' (滿招損) (see the *Book of Documents*). The doctrines of incarnation, the cross and the glorious resurrection, are merely about the paradoxical truth that the supreme one willingly humbles himself and suffering can become a blessing. (Ibid., 65)

Therefore, for Zia, Confucianism and Christianity complement each other: the Christian belief in a transcendent and immanent God reveals the foundation of moral practices, while the Confucian emphasis on moral practices transforms abstract religious doctrines into concrete virtues.

On the other hand, Zia claimed that the main problem of Chinese Confucianism is the intrinsic and necessary failure to achieve the goal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. Zia believed that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation could help Confucianism overcome the limitations of its human-centric approach. "Jesus Christ is the one who fulfils the human-centric Chinese culture and the idea of the 'mutuality between humans and Heaven'. He must enrich the Chinese thoughts with 'truth' beyond the 'Way' and grant the Chinese nation eternal 'life'." (ibid., 64–65).

A real Unity of Heaven and Humans, according to Zia, can only be achieved by spiritual communication when God and humans meet each other. Zia's emphasis

on communication is possibly influenced by Kierkegaard's concept of religious passion, as Zia repeatedly highlighted that the Chinese people lack this, as seen in the following passage:

The spiritual communication in Christianity is the profound and genuine Unity of Heaven and Humans, transcending the mere reciprocal interactions between Heaven and humans in the Chinese perspective. The Chinese saying 'doing one's best and leaving the rest to fate' reflects a lack of strong and fervent faith and a shallowness of spiritual intimacy. Like the Hebrew people, the Chinese also recognize the supreme and transcendent 'Heaven' and show reverence and piety towards it, even personifying it in some cases. [...] Nevertheless, there has never been a father-son relationship as intimate and sincere as the one expressed by Jesus, where the Father and the Son are inseparable, as stated in 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' and 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son' (John 14:11; 10:38). (Ibid., 66)

Although in the *Classic of Filial Piety* Confucius said that "No filial piety is greater than reverence for father, no reverence for father is greater than the universe," Zia argued that Confucius only "considers the Heaven-human relationship in terms of the kinship between father and son without addressing the aspect of 'spiritual' life. [...] if we can experience 'living in Christ' as the apostle Paul did, this 'new human being' will be blessed as they abide with God eternally" (ibid.). Therefore, the spiritual relationship between God and man in Christianity extended and sublated Confucianism at a religious level.

Step 5: New Insights: Critical Inclusiveness, Dynamic Neutrality and Mystical Practice

Based on Zia's comparison between the Unity of Heaven and Humans and the incarnation discussed above, Zia completed his theology of Chinese Christianity and outlined three characteristics: *critical inclusiveness* (批判的包容性), *dynamic neutrality* (動力的中庸性) and *mystical practice* (密契的實踐), as explained below.

Critical inclusiveness: According to Zia, the *Doctrine of the Mean* implies inclusiveness according to the principle of mutuality. "Therefore, not only does Chinese Christianity embrace the strengths of different Western denominations, but also respects and values other overseas and domestic religious beliefs. It believes in the coexistence of different beliefs, does not exclude others and does not isolate

itself.” (Zia 1972, 308) In doing so, Zia believed that Chinese Christianity avoids the religious extremism and conflicts seen in the West.

However, Zia did not explicitly explain why the *Doctrine of the Mean* implies inclusiveness in *Christianity and Chinese Thought*. He only proposed a brief argument in *Collected Essays on In-ism (Weizhonglunji 唯中論集 1969)*:

The author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* adopted the traditional principle of ‘harmony in differences’ and argued that ‘inclusiveness’ (the ‘Greatness’ of Heaven and Earth) implies the avoidance of paradox and conflicts. Inclusiveness is not unity but harmony. Nor is inclusiveness chaos and disorder, for the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* said in paragraph 10 that ‘the superior man is united [with others] but does not follow [others]’ [君子合而不流]. Therefore, harmony [*he* 和] is the mean [*zhong* 中] between carelessness and manipulation. In this sense, harmony and the mean are de facto equivalent. (Zia 1969b, 165)

Zia’s distinction between *he* 合 and *liu* 流 in the quotation above is related to his criticism of the so-called unity under the state-sanctioned “Three-Self Patriotic Church” which integrated all Protestant denominations in mainland China after 1958. From Zia’s perspective, such unity had nothing to do with ecumenism but was merely a way to limit the freedom of religion.

If humans have no freedom of thought, humans lose the essence of human beings. Religion is the highest inwardness in culture and academics. The essence of religion is the inward peacefulness of individuals. The greatest harm of religions is made when religions are sanctioned by the government or when religions intervene in politics. Fighting for the freedom of religion is the most important task of human beings in the modern age. (Zia 1986, 81)

According to Zia, true unity in Christianity does not come from external forces like politics. Furthermore, unity does not mean the cancellation of differences (e.g. the dissolution of denominations) but instead faith in Jesus Christ. Zia’s understanding of ecumenism echoes the principle of “unity in differences” (*heyi feiyi* 合一非一) proclaimed by the Church of Christ in China, founded in 1927. As Zia argued,

The faithful brothers and sisters of Chinese Christianity can naturally revise their doctrines, ecclesiastical polity and liturgies according to their contexts and inherited traditions, for all churches in the world are united

(*beyi* 合一) but not uniform (*tongyi* 統一). Christ is the head while all churches in the world are bodies. (Ibid., 75)

Zia also criticized the prevailing view of certain Chinese fundamentalist Protestants who excluded Catholicism from Christianity, as he argued that Christians should respect the ecclesiastical polity of other churches:

All religions believing in the same Jesus Christ should be called Christianity, which is distinguished from Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, but not from Catholicism. Furthermore, a united Christianity should have a united Chinese translation of the Scripture, yet each Christian may go to different churches with different ecclesiastical polities and become their congregations. (Ibid., 145)

Moreover, Zia highlighted that such inclusiveness is conditional: it must be *critical*. The inclusiveness of Christianity must assume the priority of Christian doctrines, and especially those of incarnation and salvation. In other words, any teaching that contradicts essential Christian doctrines would be rejected:

However, inclusiveness is not careless integration like the arguments for ‘the same origin of three religions’ in the past or the ‘unity of six religions’ nowadays. Christianity is eternally Christianity. It would not be integrated or combined into Confucianism just because it wants to survive in China. (Zia 1972, 309)

While Zia did not clarify which principles were assumed behind the criticism, it seems that he prioritized certain essential Christian doctrines that should not be compromised for the sake of Christian contextualization, for Christianity is defined by these doctrines. These doctrines may include the Trinity and the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, which are frequently highlighted by Zia’s theological writings.

However, and surprisingly, Zia argued that the Holy Scripture could be compromised, which revealed the ambiguity of what should be upheld in critical inclusivism. As mentioned above, in 1977 Zia proposed the writing of a “Sino-Christian Holy Scripture” consisting of the *New Testament*, a summary of the *Old Testament*, the essentials of Confucianism and a selection of Daoist and Buddhist texts. As he said of this proposal:

Why must Chinese Christians spend effort on reading [the histories of Israel]? ... if Christianity adopts Jewish scriptures, why cannot it adopt

the thirteen canons of Confucianism and the classics of Daoism and Buddhism? The faithful in China and the Christians all over the world from different nations only need to keep the covenant of ‘one God, one faith and one baptism’ to maintain the unity of inwardness. Other than that, nothing should be uniform. (Zia 1977, 155)

Here Zia argued that the Old Testament is not something to be upheld in Christian contextualization because it is irrelevant to the covenant of “one God, one faith and one baptism”. However, incarnation, which is the center of Zia’s neo-in-ism theology, is also written in the minor prophets’ books in the *Old Testament* (e.g. Malachi 3:1). One would wonder why Zia could arbitrarily conclude that the minor prophet’s books and history books in the Old Testament are irrelevant to the covenant of “one God, one faith and one baptism” without further explanation. To overcome Zia’s arbitrary and ambiguous concept of critical inclusivism, future contextual theologians should articulate the essential doctrines upheld in Christian contextualization.

Dynamic neutrality: as mentioned above, Zia identified extremism as a major problem of Western Christianity. By contrast, the *Doctrine of the Mean* highlighted the avoidance of extremes. Therefore, Zia argued:

The principle of neutrality is a consistent principle in Chinese cultural thought. Chinese Christianity will also inevitably be guided by this principle. For example, in terms of ecclesiastical polity, it will not lean towards the collectivist structure of Catholicism nor align itself with certain factions of extreme individualistic Protestantism. In theology, it will not lean too far to the right towards the so-called ‘fundamentalist’ doctrines, nor lean too far to the left towards the ‘modernist’ tendencies of liberal interpretation. However, neutrality is not about compromise or ambiguity, but is a creative synthesis. It is not rigid and mechanistic, but rather dynamic and innovative. (Zia 1972, 311)

The problem of extremism in Western Christianity, as identified by Zia, is related to his historical context. Having studied Western theology and lived in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s, Zia witnessed waves of social unrest and the theological divides in Western Christianity, as well as in Chinese Christianity, and notably those due to the divide between the “fundamentalism” and “modernism”. As mentioned above, Chinese Christianity was severely challenged by the Communists during the Anti-Christian movement in the 1920s. To avoid being labelled an “imperialist spy”, two approaches were adopted by the churches in China: fundamentalism, as represented by Sung Shang-chieh 宋尚

節 (1901–1944), Nee Tuo-sheng 倪柝聲 (1903–1972) and Wang Ming-Dao 王明道 (1900–1991), and progressive or liberal theologies, as represented by Wu Yao-tsung 吳耀宗 (1893–1979) and Ting Kuang-hsun 丁光訓 (1915–2012). The progressive campaign was deeply influenced by the Social Gospel movement in the United States led by Reinhold Niebuhr in the early 20th century. Being worried about the invasion of China, progressive theologians sympathized with the Chinese Communist Party and were devoted to social reforms and political movements from the 1920s to the 1950s. While the conservative fundamentalists merely highlighted individual salvation and evangelism, the progressive liberals emphasized social services and political action. Yet Zia identified both extremes as departing from the true Christian faith in his book *Individual Gospel* (個人福音) (Zia 1932). As Ho noted, Zia argued that “the summaries of Christian teachings are loving God and loving others as oneself, while the former is the Individual Gospel, the latter is the Social Gospel” (Ho 2006, 80). Therefore, a comprehensive Christian theology should be both individualistic and societal.

To overcome the problem of extremism in modern Christian theology, Zia introduced dynamic neutralism. Unlike dialectics in Western philosophy, which highlights oppositions (or even struggles, in the case of Marxism), dynamic neutralism emphasizes the dynamic interactions between opposites. As discussed above, according to Zia’s interpretation of the *Yi Ching*, the universe is created by the interactions between *Yin* and *Yang*, but not by the struggle between them. In the case of Christianity, there is no contradiction between the individual gospel (asserted by the fundamentalists) and the social gospel (asserted by the liberals), but the true Christian faith should integrate both aspects to avoid being one-sided, although Zia did not clarify how to manifest such ideal neutralism in evangelism and social actions.

Mystical practice: In the light of the Chinese emphasis on practice and Hebrew emphasis on faith, Zia proposed the concept of mystical practice, and thus that Chinese Christianity could use moral practices to manifest religious passions. As he argued:

Jesus used ‘to do’ to conclude the great teachings of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24–27). Fortunately, Chinese thoughts always experience ‘faith’ through ‘practice’ [...] unlike Westerners who verify ‘faith’ through ‘knowing’. We are good at using experience, love taking action and dislike speculation and arguments. Therefore, the church in China can understand the Lord’s teaching that ‘the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve’ and manifest the teaching sincerely. (Zia 1972, 310)

Zia's comparison of the Chinese emphasis on practicality and the Christian emphasis on faith echoes the perspective of one of his contemporaries, the Chinese philosopher and Kuomintang government officer Chiang Mon-lin 蔣夢麟 (1886–1964), who also studied in the United States, as expressed in his book *Tides from the West* (2012 [1943]). Zia adopted Chiang's categorization of Christian, Greek and Chinese thought, which stated that

Christian thought is heavenly or godly, Chinese thought is worldly, and Greek thought unworldly [...] The fruits of the tree of science ripen in intellectual gardens alone – within the system of Christian dogma or that of Chinese moral precepts no science could have been produced. (Chiang 2012, 384–85).

Both Chiang and Zia agreed that Chinese thought highlighted moral practicality, or as Chiang put it: “Chinese thought is centred upon the development of human relations. We are interested in natural laws only so far as they are capable of serving as guides for human conduct” (ibid., 376), and “Besides being practical, our people are imbued with a sound moral sense. It may also be said that because we are moral we are practical. For morals refer to conduct, which is necessarily judged by practical results” (ibid., 380).

Nevertheless, unlike Zia, Chiang was only interested in integrating Chinese moral thought with Western science but not religion. Furthermore, Chiang suggested that Chinese Confucianism is a better religion than Christianity because it does not contradict science:

Chinese morals are derived from nature; Christian morals from divine power; for the Chinese, the gods are but part of nature, while to Christians nature is but the creation of God. On these grounds it is plain that the conflicts between Christian dogma and science were bound to be very serious, as Western history has proven in abundance; while the conflicts between science and Chinese moral precepts would be mild since both started from the same ground—nature—only travelling in different directions. (Ibid., 384)

One may criticize Chiang's argument from Zia's perspective by pointing out his disregard for the importance of religiousness in the modern age. As we have seen above, Zia argued that owing to the Chinese one-sided emphasis on moral practicality, Confucians failed to achieve the ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Hu-

mans, which requires faith in a transcendent being.⁴ As mentioned above, Zia argued that mutuality between Heaven and humans was the original theme of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Yi Ching*, yet such an emphasis on mutuality is lost in Confucianism.⁵ As a Minister of Education, Chiang was not interested in the theoretical problem of the Unity of Heaven and Humans but was more concerned with cultural modernization, and he implicitly suggested that Christianity is an obstacle to science. Because of their different intentions, while Chiang and Zia shared a similar understanding of Greek, Christian and Chinese traditions, they proposed contrary conclusions.

In short, while mystical practice directly enriches Christianity by relating religious passions to moral practices, it also enriches Chinese Confucianism and addresses the fundamental problem of in-ism identified by Zia: that Confucianism focus on a human-centric approach to the Unity of Heaven and Humans downplays Heaven and therefore necessarily fails. Conversely, the Christian doctrine of incarnation enables one to establish spiritual God-man relations to achieve the Unity of Heaven and Humans when one believes in Christ and is reconciled with God the Father. Unfortunately, Zia did not further articulate the role of the Holy Spirit when restoring spiritual communication and God-man relations. Zia only advocated for a belief in Christ as the saviour and mediator between God and humans but did not explain how humans can “live in Christ” or how the Holy Spirit may transform transport people to the realm of the Unity of Heaven and Humans, owing to the intrinsic limitation of his incarnational theology: like Barth, Zia’s theology centres Jesus Christ and inevitably underemphasized the role of Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

To conclude, Zia’s theology of Chinese Christianity enriches both Christianity and Chinese Confucianism. It enriches Christianity by overcoming the problem of exclusivism and extremism and replacing knowing with practice. It also en-

4 Here Zia assumed that Heaven is a personal and transcendent God which establishes God-man relation with human beings, revealing the strong influence of Kierkegaard’s philosophy on Zia’s theology. Such an assumption, however, is challenged by the New Confucian Mou Zong-san, who argued that Heaven is merely a metaphysical foundation of humans’ moral capacity (Tam Forthcoming).

Future research may further explore whether the Unity of Heaven and Humans should be understood as a God-man relationship.

5 The exception would be the Korean Confucian Jeong Yagjong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) who identified *Shangdi* as a personal God and discussed the God-man relation expressed in *Five Classics* (Tam 2023).

riches Chinese Confucianism by overcoming the limitation of a human-centric approach to the Unity of Heaven and Humans. While Zia's interpretations of both Confucianism and Christianity contain several flaws and should be further criticized in future research, overall he provided a consistent sublation of both traditions, as we have seen above.

Nevertheless, Zia's emphasis on Christology and incarnation over pneumatology has significantly limited the contributions of his theology of Chinese Christianity to Confucianism. If the fundamental problem of Confucianism, as Zia diagnosed it, was the necessary failure of the human-centric approach to achieve the Unity of Heaven and Humans, merely highlighting the presence of Jesus Christ as the *other* is insufficient. Christ is the unity of divinity and humanity, yet human beings are not Christ. If the unity of divinity and humanity is the true Unity of Heaven and Humans, then people would require a *method to become Christ*. But Zia remained unclear on how humans can do this, and only briefly mentioned that "Christ's works on us must be completed by his image within ourselves" (Zia 1972, 38) without articulating the process of transformation, which requires a pneumatology explaining how human nature is transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit within human beings.

To extend Zia's project and enhance his new insights into Chinese Confucianism, the development of a Sino-pneumatology is necessary. Zia's emphasis on Christology and incarnation over pneumatology is largely because of the historical discussion on the similarities and differences between *Logos* and *Dao* among Catholic and Protestant theologians. By contrast, there are fewer discussions on the comparative studies among the spirit, *sheng* 神 and *ling* 靈. While recently several scholars have been working in this field, they did not focus on the etymologies of these Chinese characters but tried to reformulate the concept of the Holy Spirit in terms of other elements, including Chan Ka-fu Keith's studies of the common ontological ground shared by Confucianism, the Eastern Orthodox Church and Tillich in the light of sacramentality and cosmic anthropology, (Chan 2017), and Yun Koo-Dong's and Kim Ji-sun Grace's articulation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in different cultures in terms of the concept of *Ki* (*Qi* 氣) in the *Yi Ching* (Yun 2012; Kim 2011). None of them addressed the issue of the prevailing Chinese (mis)translation of the Holy Spirit as *Sheng Shen* 聖神 (Catholic) or *Sheng Ling* 聖靈 (Protestant), which originally referred to the spirit of the departed emperors. For example, in the chapter *Xi Yu* 西域 of *Yan Tie Lun* 鹽鐵論, it is written that "owing to the virtuous heritage of the sacred spirits of the departed emperors" (賴先帝聖靈斐然). Similarly, in a poem written by Bao Biao mentioned in the *Story of Ban Biao* 班彪列傳 of *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書, it is written that "going to the ancestry temple to sacrifice for the sacred ghosts" (登祖廟兮享聖神). In Clas-

sical Chinese, *Sheng* and *Ling* are ambiguous as they may refer to God, ghosts or human spirits. It is unknown why Catholic and Protestant missionaries did not realize the potential risk of confusion and adopted the terms *Sheng Shen* or *Sheng Ling* which refer to human spirits to translate the Holy Spirit. Yet the ambiguity of the Chinese characters *Sheng* and *Ling* may also be a resource for Sino-pneumatology, for it further strengthens the inseparability between God and humanity highlighted by Zia: because both humans and Gods share the same *sheng* and *ling* in their nature, one may reformulate a pneumatology of *sheng* and *ling* to explain the unity of God and humans in future research.

Using Rošker's method of sublation, this paper has demonstrated how Zia uses the resources of Christianity and Confucianism to construct his new theology of neo-in-ism, which enriches both traditions by providing new insights. Although Zia's diagnosis of and solutions to the theoretical problems of Christianity and Confucianism are debatable, theologians and philosophers should acknowledge Zia's new insights into both traditions and his contributions to intercultural and inter-religious dialogues rather than merely questioning his "inaccurate" interpretations.

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