

Constructing a Model of Theological Education for Contemporary China: Retrieving Insights from Jia Yuming

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Abstract

This article examines the model of theological education developed by Jia Yuming (1880–1964), who established a Bible school emphasizing spiritual formation. Jia envisioned his school of spirituality as a place that holistically cultivated holy persons by integrating spiritual formation, biblical-theological knowledge, and mission. Jia’s model balanced cultivation of heart and mind to encourage students to be “Christ-human.” This model also dealt with China’s moral issues by connecting Christianity and Confucianism. In light of Jia’s approach, today’s Chinese theological education should be prophetic, heart-transforming, communal, holistic, practical, and contextual. (This paper is revised from a paper presented at the 72nd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (online) on November 20, 2020.)

Introduction

In its modernization, 21st-century China (People’s Republic) is materially rich but spiritually impoverished and morally disordered. These issues open opportunities for Christianity to strengthen China. As China now has the fastest-growing Christian population in the world, what model of theological education will serve China by meeting its needs for moral reconstruction?

Edward Farley called for constructing an integrative and contextualized theological education by retrieving resources from the past (Farley, 1983; Banks, 1999, 19). This article answers that call by examining the model of theological education developed by Jia Yuming (1880-1964), a Chinese Protestant leader in the first half of the 20th century. Jia was the first in the history of Protestantism in China to establish a Bible school emphasizing spiritual formation. It was named the Christian School of Spirituality (also known as CSS) (1936-1956). It operated with a contextualized model that integrated Christianity with elements of Confucianism in order to deal with China’s moral issues. Though Jia’s theology has been studied (Kwok, 2014; Xie, 2008; Wang, 2016, 2017), his vision of education and his school’s

model have often been ignored.

This article argues that Jia's model of integrative and contextualized theological education offers valuable resources for 21st-century China for renewing national morality. The article discusses issues brought up in recent discussions concerning theological education and spiritual/moral formation. It then explores Jia's theology and his approach to education. It concludes with recommendations inspired by Jia's model for today's Chinese theological education.

Theological Education and Spiritual/Moral Formation

The task of theology is to build bridges between eternal truth and ever-shifting human situations. During China's current crisis, morality has become a central issue (He, 2015, 21). For Christianity, morality is genuine human flourishing, entailing living in a Christlike manner and bearing witness to the reign of God through the work of the Spirit (Connors and McCormick, 1998, vi). Spiritual and moral formation have a central role in theological education.

Although spiritual/moral formation and contextualization should be an integral part of theological education, these themes seem to have dropped out of theological education in many contexts. Farley called for significant reform to restore the unity of theological education (Farley, 1983, 151, 156). Richard Neuhaus further argued that the root of problems in theological education arose from the emergence of universities in the twelfth century; these separated holistic education into various disciplines (Neuhaus, 1992, 80-81, 91). Echoing Farley's and Neuhaus's comments, Roberts Banks suggested a retrieval of aspects of the "classic" model and explores a missional model alternative to the current ones (Banks, 1999). In sum, theological educators even today urge a reintegration of academics, professional training, and spiritual formation in theological education so that it will develop God's workers.

Jia's Concern for Spiritual/Moral Formation

During the first two decades of the 20th century, many Chinese intellectuals saw China's moral and social order as collapsing. Many Christian intellectuals regarded Christianity as a tool to rescue the nation and build a modern society (Bays, 2012, 102-103). Intellectuals increasingly agreed that virtue was the way to turn China into a modern nation. However, at the time, missionaries in China ran Westernized institutions in a context different from those in their home countries. The education the missionaries provided focused heavily on intellectual development and demanded that the Chinese altogether abandon their former beliefs and practices in following Christ (Ng, 2014, 70).

By the mid-1930s, no theological education approach had adapted to the Chinese social situation that could address Chinese culture. Dissatisfaction over Westernized institutions – with little spiritual development and contextual concern – caused Chinese Christian educators to embark on a quest to reexamine the purpose of theological education. Among the most passionate educators was Jia, who began teaching in 1915 at Nanking Theological Seminary (NTS) (Kwok, 2014, 148; Lui, 2013, 111-112). To counter the suffocating intellectual focus of Western seminaries, Jia’s heaviest burden was the spiritual formation of Chinese Christians, leading to national transformation. Jia saw that theological institutions tended to concentrate on imparting knowledge, but the cultivation of intellect did not necessarily result in Christian character. Because church leaders must help believers grow in maturity, theological education must nurture potential leaders so that they will be mature. However, intellect-focused theological schools deviated from the holistic model of theological education revealed in Scripture and church history, Jia believed.

In Jia’s understanding, the true models for all theological schools are “the school of the prophets” – the *naioth* (“dwellings”) in Ramah – and medieval monasteries (Jia, 2011, 2:206-207). Jia took Samuel as a prototypical theological educator, the first to establish prophet schools (1 Sam. 7:17, 10:8-9, 19:29-42; 2 Kings 2:1-6). These schools were places of fellowship where prophet-students assembled to worship and pray, to study God’s Word, and to ask God for wisdom. In church history, the best imitator of Samuel’s schools were medieval monasteries. Thus, Jia held that theological schools should aim to produce “prophets” who serve Christ’s church by preaching God’s words (Jia, 2011, 2:178-180). In Jia’s eyes, the Western model of seminary education did not achieve this goal. The ancient schools of the prophets and medieval monasteries made spiritual formation primary and doctrinal teaching secondary, while Chinese seminaries made doctrinal teaching primary (Jia, 2011, 2:206-207).

Due to his dissatisfaction with North China Theological Seminary, Jia founded a new theological institution, the Christian School of Spirituality, in Nanking (now Nanjing), in October 1936, with a mission to integrate spiritual formation in seminary training (Xie, 2008, 56-64). Following the pattern of medieval institutions, Jia named his institution “school of spirituality” rather than “seminary”, “school of theology”, or “divinity school,” expressing his vision of launching a new category of theological institution in China (Wang, 2016, 117). Jia’s desire for such a paradigm shift in China echoed the fifth pious wish of Philip Jacob Spener, the founder of German Pietism, in his proposal for the correction of theological education (Spener, 1964, 103). Like Spener, Jia rooted theological education in moral formation: “piety,” “holistic formation,” and “spiritual/moral growth” all mean that a student would grow to become a “Christ-human.”

Jia's Theology of the Christ-Human & Confucianism

To reform Chinese theological education to follow the prophetic pattern, Jia established a Christocentric goal – that students become “Christ-humans.” According to his theology, humanity is created for God’s glory in the *Imago Dei*, God’s image. The prototype of human life is the God-man, Christ, in whom the two lives – God’s life and human life – unite perfectly (Jia, 1987, 1.3.1, 1.4.4). Becoming a “Christ-human,” for whom “to live is Christ,” is the purpose for which Christ saved sinners (Jia, 1997, 3:278-282). Christian sanctification means being “Christ-ified” to attain the fullness of Christ (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13) (Jia, 1987, 2.6.3).

For Jia, signs of spiritual maturity are consistency in faith, knowledge, and action (Jia, 1987, 5.10); living according to a high moral standard (Lui, 2013, 152); and bearing spiritual fruit (1 Cor. 4:14-15) (Jia, 1997, 3:335-336). Jia also framed spiritual maturity in parallel with the three stages that Elijah experienced (1 Kings 17:2-24) (Jia, 2011, 2:325-329): living upon God’s daily, heavenly provision and submitting to God’s will (17:2-7); humility before God and people, living among those who have faith in God, and giving before receiving (17:8-16); and trusting God’s promises, healing, and power during trials (17:17-24).

Jia’s theory of the Christ-human shared similarities with Confucianism’s teachings on the original nature of humanity. Jia saw conscience, also called “moral heart” (*dào dé xīn*), as the true nature of human beings, an expression of the true image of an innocent human originally rooted in God’s image (Jia, 1996, 2:128-129). Jia referred to the moral heart as having four functions: “the nature of delighting in good and hating evil,” “the mind to differentiate right and wrong,” “the emotion moved by good and evil,” and “the will to determine obedience or disobedience.” These functions resonated with three aspects of Mencius’ “four sprout of goodness” (*sì shàn duān*) in human hearts: the heart of “shame, right and wrong, and compassion” (Kwok, 2014, 151; *Mencius* 6A; adapted translations of *Mencius* are from Lau 2003). (Mencius was a Chinese Confucian philosopher.) Moreover, Jia’s idea that the true nature of human beings has to be perfected through trials is similar to Mencius’s. Jia held that even if a man was innocent, trials were necessary, given by God for him to be perfected to arrive at a high spirituality (Jia, 1996, 2:131); similarly, Mencius expressed that Heaven always places a man in trials to perfect him before placing a great burden on him (*Mencius* 6B).

Jia’s theory of the Christ-human, however, is characterized by Christ-centeredness, which distinguishes it from Confucianism. Jia explained that God’s image was fully manifested in the life of the incarnated *Logos* – the Christ-human – who, as a perfect human on earth, represented God, reflected the supreme good, learned obedience, and overcame trials (Heb. 5:7-9) (Jia, 1996, 2:128-129). Having been perfected, Christ became the perfect moral exemplar for all human beings (Jia, 1997, 3:24-27).

At the same time, Jia's theory of the Christ-human actually resembles the concept of "the union of heaven and the human" (*tiān rén hé yī*) that lies at the heart of Chinese philosophies (Ching, 1993, 5-6). The ancient Chinese referred to "heaven" (*Tiān*) as their supreme god (*shàngdì*) (Feuchtwang, 2016, 147-148). The union concept, first taught by the 5th-century BC Mozi and later better known through Confucians and other Chinese religions, guides a spiritual quest for harmony between human and heavenly orders. In Confucian teaching, unity arose out of a primeval experience in which human beings possessed heaven and later moved from a natural or cosmic harmony to an increasingly social harmony (Ching, 1993, 5-6). By the early 20th century, China had been under the influence of Confucian ideas of preserving social harmony in accordance with the ordering principle of heaven for over two thousand years.

Jia found a similar concept of union in Christianity in believers' union with Christ. As Jia put it,

The union between the believers and Christ is the greatest mystery. This is the beginning of our Christian spirituality and the deepest fact in the believers' experience... On the night of the betrayal, our Lord Jesus explained this union (John 15:1-7) and prayed for this (John 17). Paul also repeatedly illustrated this union as he has the deepest experience (Gal. 2:20). (Jia, 1997, 3:306)

Referencing Paul's experience illustrated in Philippians 1, Jia maintained that there are three stages in Christian growth, namely, "for Christ (vv. 13-14)," "like Christ (v. 20)," and "be Christ (v. 21)" (Jia, 1987, 6.8.1-3). In the final stage of Christian spirituality, believers will be filled with Christ's life – not that believers will become Christ Himself but that they will live out a life in which "to live is Christ" (Jia, 1987, 6.8.3). In this sense, with a similar *telos*, Jia's theology of the Christ-human connected Christianity to Confucianism (Kwok, 2014, 155-156).

Like Christianity, Confucianism is ultimately concerned for morality and social order. Living in an age when Confucian intellectuals were troubled by disorder, Jia explicitly integrated Confucian moral culture into his theology of the union of humans and Christ (Kwok, 2014, 146). Jia witnessed Confucian culture collapsing because of the New Culture movement (modern liberal culture), which swept China and its churches in his days. He argued that seminarians and evangelists should not blindly abandon all traditional Chinese philosophies but study them critically and renew them with the truth (Jia, 1996, 1:65-68). To withstand the decline in morality of his time, Jia in his *New Apologetics* suggested that mysticism and cultural blending are two elements essential for constructing Chinese theology and carrying on evangelism in China (Jia, 1925, 259) because a search for mystical experiences is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, and some of its moral values that are based on God's general revelation should be retained.

The life of the Christ-humans also mirrors Confucian values in how Christ-humans treat their families and how they act in society. Both Confucius and Mencius taught

that achieving morality, self-sacrificing for others' good, and even being martyred for the sake of society are the highest moral standards. Confucius explained that a humane person has to kill himself/herself to achieve humaneness (*rén*) when there is a conflict between living out humaneness and preserving one's life (*Sha shen chéng rén*) (*The Analects of Confucius*, 15.9; 94). Mencius puts it similarly: a righteous person must sacrifice one's life to achieve justice/righteousness (*yì*) when he/she has to choose between the two (*she shen qu yì*) (*Mencius*, 11.10; Lin, 2017, 77). Paralleling this morality, Jia described Christ-humans as being willing to be submissive to their parents, love and serve their neighbors, and sacrifice their own lives for others (Jia, 1997, 3:293-295). Jia understood the core ethos of Christianity to be Christ's self-sacrificing spirit (Mark 10:45). With this same spirit, Christ-humans are called to give their lives to build up society and to expand Christ's Kingdom (Jia, 1997, 3:334-340).

Although Christianity and Confucianism seem to achieve the same goal, Jia drew a huge redemptive/soteriological difference between Christianity and Confucianism. The union of Christ and the human that Jia taught is a form of heteronomous salvation, while Confucianism's union of heaven and the human is a form of self-cultivation (*xiushen*) (Kwok, 2014, 147). Jia criticized Confucians for a misconception about human perfection: that humans could be perfected through effort. This had caused Confucianism to fall into empty rituals (Jia, 1996, 1:131-6; 1997, 3:225). Instead, Jia emphasized that achieving perfection (Christ-humanity) is made possible only by a mystical union between the spirit of believers and that of Christ (1 Cor. 6:17) (Jia, 1997, 3:12-313). With this spiritual union, Christ infuses his spiritual life into a believer to empower him to live in a new way (Jia, 1997, 3:312). Thus, Christianity is centered on Christ and grace, whereas Confucianism is focused on one's efforts in attaining perfection.

Overall, though, Jia referred to the truths in all religions in the world as "faint lights" of the true light of Christ (John 1:9; Ps. 94:10). They can help shine lights in people's hearts, as seen, for example, in concepts used by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism – "heavens," "hell," "sins," and "repentance." These concepts help prepare people's hearts for Christ (Jia, 1997, 3:12-13). Therefore, Jia retained Confucianism's morality because he believed that Chinese religions had a general revelation from which theological educators could learn. Jia expected that the students of his institution would not blindly abandon traditional Chinese culture but renew it with biblical truths (Jia, 1925, 259). An example of how Jia renewed Confucianism with biblical truths is the concept of fellowship with God in prayer. Confucius taught people to fear "Heaven" and not to sin against him, or "If you offend Heaven, there is no one you can pray to" (*The Analects of Confucius*, 3.13; Jia, 1996, 133). Jia explained that since no one has ever seen God, the ancient Chinese people thought too lowly of themselves. They lost their God-fearing heart and turned to idolatry. In Christianity, human fellowship with God can be renewed because God has revealed Himself to us in the incarnated Christ – the only begotten Son – (John 1:18; Heb. 1:3).

Jia's Approach to Theological Education: The Christ-Human in Action

To illustrate more fully what it means to be a Christ-human in theological education, this article will turn to a few examples from Jia's practices that were unprecedented in contemporary Chinese theological education and that redefined the structure of theological education: laying a foundation of personal spiritual formation; discerning theological truth; pursuing missional revival; learning living faith through prayer; and exercising an ecumenical spirit.

Personal Spiritual Formation

The daily schedule for personal formation at Jia's school included individual and corporate prayer, worship, and Bible reading. The corporate prayer meeting covered intercession for churches, the nations, and evangelism. Students were required to finish reading the whole Bible at least once a semester.

In addition to the individual dimension, Jia realized the importance of the community for personal formation. His institution operated not in the style of an academy but of a family. Teachers and students lived together in Jesus's love (Wang, 2016, 115). For example, during the second Sino-Japanese War, the institution was relocated to an isolated mountain near Chengdu, a central city in Sichuan, an inland province in western China. 20 students studied in a primitive and poorly equipped school building and lived together with simple food and accommodation. Teachers and students not only learned together but also lived, cooked, ate, and even did the household chores together like a big family (Wang, 2016, 116). This kind of secluded living, for Jia, resembled the three years of mystical and hidden experience the apostle Paul had in Arabia before starting his ministry (Gal. 1:13-24) (Jia, 2011, 5:434-436), and was necessary to prepare students for later ministry.

Discerning Theological Truth

Jia was deeply concerned that students learn to discern theological purity. Since retaking control of education in the mid-1920s, the Chinese government had demanded that all missionary schools, except private ones, no longer propagate any religion. In addition, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, modernizing curricular reforms took place in the traditional theological educational system that shifted its focus from a dogmatic, confessional, pastoral, and evangelistic orientation to a more academic, interdisciplinary, pluralistic, and secular orientation (Ng, 2014, 71-74). The reconstruction of the curriculum was best seen in the example of the School of Theology of Yenching University (later renamed "Yenching School of Religion") (Ng, 2014, 74-75). As the dean of Yenching T. C. Chao declared, the Bible had to be reinterpreted as a historical, cultural, and moral text, and the elements of orthodox faith such as virgin birth, miracles,

resurrection, judgment, and Christ's second coming had to be rejected through the lens of science and the social gospel (Chao, 1927). Jia likened these liberal elements to the poison of "wild gourds" (2 Kings 4:38-41; Jia, 2011, 3:32-33). Such false teachings damaged students' faith and deadened their spirituality.

To counteract these poisons, Jia offered classes that gave students a strong foundation in Old Testament/New Testament, doctrines, church history, and spiritual discernment (Wang, 2016, 110). Classes taught students fundamental doctrines, but Jia believed that doctrines should not be connected with students' intellectual development only but also students' personal spirituality. In his view, a sound biblical-theological teaching should be "a pure, spiritual milk" to nourish the soul (1 Pet. 2:1-3) (Jia, 2011, 8:123-128). The rational mind needs to be spiritualized so that it will be renewed, submissive to, and properly used by the spirit (Jia, 1997, 3:322-330).

To have life-impacting teaching, Jia emphasized that in their living teachers must be first permeated themselves with the Holy Spirit and Holy Word through personal fellowship with God in prayer (Jia, 2011, 3:29-32). Course content must be first spiritually digested by teachers to become part of their life so that all their teaching would nourish their students (Jia, 2011, 8:123-128). Jia did not explicitly mention how he chose which faculty to hire, but he expected that teachers' personal spiritual nourishment would be a prerequisite for teaching in his school. This concept that one's doing (teaching) cannot be divorced from one's being and that one's being must come before one's doing is similar to the "sage-king" concept – "being sage inside and being kingly outside" (*nèi shèng wài wáng*) – in Confucianism.

Pursuing Missional Revival

Although Jia believed that personal spirituality would lead to social transformation, he rejected the idea of the social gospel, which was prominent in theological institutions. Jia did not oppose the idea that ministries should reform society, but he questioned the spirituality of "social gospelers." Referencing the failure of the children of Israel (2 Sam. 6:1-11), Jia described social gospels as using an ox-cart to restore the Ark (Jia, 2011, 3:251-252). He argued that unless Christian workers first paid attention to their spiritual growth, their ministries would not be fruitful (Jia, 2011, 3:251), that only after people are regenerated can they truly transform society (Jia, 1987, 5.4.1). He, therefore, ranked preaching the Gospel and winning souls above social improvements. Jia's revivalistic thought that social change begins with individual change echoes Confucius's ethical ordering of the world, as captured in the phrase, "*xiū shēn, qí jiā, zhì guó, píng tiān xià*" in Confucius's *The Great Learning*. In Confucian thought, "moral ordering" begins with disciplining one's self and family life and moves to governing the state, managing society, and finally bringing peace to the world (Zhang, 2016, 60-61). Personal spiritual development serves as the foundation of social and political relations.

Jia believed that revival at the church level issues from revival at the personal level. The key to having a personal revival, according to Jia, is confession and prayer. He stated, “Individuals must first understand how to pray a repenting prayer with a contrite heart – asking the Lord to revive the church by reviving me first (Ezra 9:1-5). The flames of the church’s revival always first start with burning in the hearts of a few leaders or members of the congregation, and then the zeal of the revival spreads to the whole congregation” (Jia, 2011, 3:215-216). Jia integrated prayer for revival into his school’s daily schedule: personal prayer from 6:00 to 7:00 a.m. and 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., corporate worship from 8:00 to 8:40 a.m., corporate prayer from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., and other prayers in small groups (Wang, 2016, 113-114).

Thus, differing from other institutions that emphasized academic research, Jia’s institution focused equipping students to become Christ-like evangelists with the goal of national revival (Jia, 1990, 75-76). Jia required all his students to take classes in practical theology and evangelism (Wang, 2016, 110). For this missional purpose, from the very first day of his school, Jia maintained a close relationship with several well-known preachers and revivalists such as John Sung (1901-1944) and Ding Limei (1871-1936) (Bays, 2012, 105). Jia affiliated his school with “the Chinese Christian Evangelistic Band” led by Sung and Ding so that graduates might participate in cross-denominational revivalism (Wang, 2016, 108-110).

Learning Living Faith through Prayer

For Jia, faith is a basic lesson that every student of theological education should learn. This faith is not just a doctrinal but experiential. Faith means depending on Christ moment-by-moment, just as Christ depended on His Father. Jia emphasized that a seminary should be a place that provides students an environment to learn such deep experiential, even mystical, lessons of faith (Jia, 1987, 6.2). Jia demonstrated trust in God’s provision by praying throughout the process of the school’s establishment (Wang, 2016, 108).

Jia was very critical of contemporary seminaries whose finances were heavily dependent on foreign missions, which showed a lack of living faith (Wang, 2017, 112). Jia insisted that his school must be an institution supported by itself rather than by foreign missions. To nurture living faith, his school did not pay a regular salary to faculty or charge tuition (it charged fees for meals, accommodation, and miscellaneous expenses)(Wang, 2016, 117-118). This practice became a test of faith for faculty and students who had to depend on God in prayer for their support. Jia recognized this kind of faith as an indispensable lesson that a seminary must use to help its faculty and students to mature.

Exercising an Ecumenical Spirit

Though he had a conservative theological confession, Jia maintained that a theological institution should not be bound by denominations. Rather, it should

aim to nurture spiritual workers for all churches. Jia distinguished the true church from the visible church, which includes both true and false believers (Matthew 13)(Jia, 2011, 1:24-27; 1987, 7.9.1-2). The true church is a spiritual entity – Christ’s Body and Bride – made up of those who are regenerated (Wang, 2016, 112).

Hence, a theological institution should not be bound by any denomination or theological creed, which emphasize the visible group of believers, not the invisible Body of Christ. Rather, theological institutions should educate all believers so that more souls are saved and more Christians seek not only right faith but also right love, living, and practice (Wang, 2016, 112). Graduates should be encouraged to serve across a wide range of churches.

Recommendations for Today’s Chinese Theological Education

In the history of Christianity in China, Jia was a pioneer who launched a new model of theological institution. Robert Banks lists four criteria to assess how well a theological institution fulfills its goals: (1) if it balances spiritual formation, professional development, and academic excellence; (2) if it relates to its context; (3) if it creates opportunities for intellectual exchange, experience of community, and inclusion of minorities; (4) if it provides a curriculum that integrates theory and practice and relates theology to significant issues (Banks, 1999, 9). According to Banks’s criteria, Jia’s institution was a success.

As 20th-century China struggled with modernization and moral, social, and political disorder, Jia’s school of spirituality revitalized Chinese theological education. It met the urgent need for spiritually mature pastors who would guide believers to live their faith. It contributed to the explosive growth in Christianity in China even before the People’s Republic was founded.

Though all theological schools closed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China’s theological education was rehabilitated in 1981 shortly after the advent of the “open-door” policy. At present, 21 Protestant theological seminaries and Bible schools are registered in the country; all are under restrictive government policy and the overseership of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) (*The Protestant Churches in China*, 2021). Now, as China enters the second stage of modernization, Chinese society again experiences moral decay (Cheng, 2015, xv-xl). Once more, theological education should have a critical role in China’s moral reconstruction. Jia’s school of spirituality offers Chinese theological education today four valuable insights for an integrative and contextualized model of theological education:

1. *Chinese theological education must be heart-transforming* (He, 2015). Faculty at theological institutions must first focus on students’ spiritual growth. They can take practical steps to nurture this growth – overseeing individual prayer and sustained Bible reading, training students to wait on

God for financial provision, equipping students with an ecumenical vision of the church, etc. Heart transformation includes spiritual virtues – not just intellectual virtue but also humility, openness to correction, constructive questioning, an irenic spirit, responsibility, self-sacrificial service, love for one’s neighbors, and care for creation.

2. Heart transformation requires a communal context. Students’ growth in virtue only happens truly in a community (Asaju, 2011, 79-92), so theological institutions must emphasize communal as well as individual maturity. Modernization, globalization, and urbanization in 21st-century China have resulted in a breakdown of traditional community structures (extended family and tribal units) and the growth of Westernized individualism. Living in an increasingly individualistic environment, many Chinese have become selfish, elevating their own needs above the needs of the community. The prevalence of internet addiction affects young people, weakening interpersonal relationships and causing them to become isolated, in contrast with the strong collectivism in Jia’s time. These rapid cultural and technological changes have led to a decline in individual ethics and pose serious risks to China’s social stability. They have led to cheating, environmental pollution, and corruption (Shang et al., 2016).

Character is cultivated and sustained in a community of faith. A school’s communal spirit can have a profound effect on the Chinese theological educational imagination. To strengthen this communal spirit, residential classes cannot be fully replaced with distance classes. On-campus residence should be offered to students so that they may participate in community life not only in class but also through worship, activities, and meals. Educators should endeavor to foster spiritual transformation within the community. School events should develop students’ communal spirit so that students learn to practice love, care, and service.

3. Students with transformed hearts will become prophets to the church and society (Lui, 2013). A theological institution should seek to nurture prophets, those whom God has called to revive the church. Individual moral formation involves being in right relationship with God, oneself, others, and creation – relationships that then influence society (Johnson, 1989, 22).

4. Chinese theological education should be contextual, interacting not only with socio-political concerns but also with religion and philosophy. The curriculum of Chinese theological institutions teach the basics of Confucianism and traditional religions, such as Daoism and Buddhism. Students need elementary knowledge of other beliefs while also discerning the difference between Christianity and Chinese traditional religions. For students serving in China’s atheistic, materialistic, and intercultural context, such theoretical discernment is indispensable. It will enable theological students to find connections with Chinese intellectuals.

To implement these principles, theological institutions in China need to take three steps (Campbell, 1992, 1-21):

1. Faculty and staff should restructure the curriculum to emphasize morality, assessing the values inherent in the current curriculum and re-prioritizing spiritual formation. This would echo Jia's effort to restructure the curriculum to center on spiritual formation. Instead of offering an independent spiritual formation course, curriculum developers can incorporate spiritual formation in curricular offerings by creating morality modules and content within courses and by including spiritual disciplines within courses.
2. Faculty members should rededicate themselves to being spiritual examples. This also parallels the emphasis Jia laid on producing exemplary models. Institutional leaders can promote faculty development that strengthens spiritual growth by assigning morality practices, mentoring young faculty or organizing peer mentoring, and regularly assessing faculty spirituality.
3. Administrators should manage the institution in ways that are consistent with Christian morality. Jia demonstrated a living faith in establishing and managing his school so that the teaching and administrative tasks of theological leaders were inseparable from their being. Similarly, institutional leaders should foster a spiritual climate by equipping staff to engage spiritual realities, developing clear moral guidelines for staff, and providing them with resources for further spiritual formation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Jia applied theology to develop a Chinese theological education that distinctively combines Christian Pietism and Confucianism. His model prioritizes spiritual formation and incorporates contextual ideas into Christian spirituality so that students in the Chinese context could mature to become “Christ-humans.” His integrative and contextualized model of theological education is needed now more than ever, not just for Chinese churches but for the global church.

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