

The China Aspiration in Light of Jacob's Narrative (Genesis 25:19-36:43): Toward a Chinese Public Theology for Human Flourishing in the Third Millennium

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Abstract: Compared to the five centuries of global colonial history, China's (semi-)colonial history lasted only a little over one hundred years (1840-1949). However, since 1949, coloniality, anti-colonialization, anti-imperialism, and decolonization have continued to lurk in ideology, philosophy, politics, and most importantly in Chinese theology. This paper argues by engaging with Jacob's narrative (Genesis 25:19-36:43), Chinese public theology can adequately engage in meaningful dialogue with the Aspiration, including the China Dream (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) and a Community of Shared Future for Mankind (*renlei mingyun gongtongti* 人类命运共同体), by articulating a Chinese public theology of human flourishing on domestic and international levels. The paper first analyzes China's (semi-)colonial/anti-colonial history in four stages with its various influences on Chinese theology. Then the paper adopts a three-layered "sandwich" approach to expose the profound epistemic crisis that is deeply embedded in Chinese theology. Finally, the paper attempts at a constructive Chinese public theology for human flourishing in the Third Millennium.

Key words: epistemic crisis, China Dream, a Community of Shared Future for Mankind, human flourishing, Chinese public theology

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I. Introduction

China began to officially advocate the vision of the China Dream (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦)¹ in November 2012 in order to achieve "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."² With the short-term goal of reaching a "moderately well-off society" around 2021 and the long-term goal of becoming a fully developed nation by about 2050, the China Dream is an all-encompassing vision on national, personal, historical, global, and antithetical levels, ranging from physical and mental

1 Also translated as the "Chinese Dream" in other academic journals and media coverages. This paper will use the China Dream. See Tianyong Zhou, *The China Dream and the China Path* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2014).

2 The China Dream was proposed by President Jinping Xi in November 2013 and later elaborated and repeatedly stressed at the parliamentary session which elected Xi to the presidency. See Uking Sun, "'Chinese Dream' Is a World Dream," *China Daily*, updated Mar. 26, 2013, 2013, accessed June 4, 2021, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013chinastudies/2013-03/26/content_16347214.htm. For a comparison between the American Dream and China dream, see Fengxiang Lin and Kui Zhu, "On the Cultural Differences between American Dream and China Dream," *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2017). For an analysis of the China Dream and its projection to the African Dream, see Anny Boc, "The Power of Language: Globalizing 'The Chinese Dream'," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 8, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-015-0102-y>.

well-being of each citizen to ecological, technological, economic, and military improvement.³ If, at the risk of simplification, China Dream may be considered to be primarily focused on domestic prosperity, then a Community of Shared Future for Mankind (*renlei mingyun gongtongti* 人类命运共同体, CSFM)⁴ as a global vision was initially proposed in March 2013.⁵ Its concept and mechanism for realization can only be understood when the paths to its construction are considered not only for the entire global world but also for each individual country and each specific human individual.⁶ Amid the mounting global public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, China has been actively advocating the vision of a Community of Common Health for Mankind as an extension of CSFM.⁷ For the sake of simplicity, this paper coins an “umbrella” term the *China Aspiration* to refer to both the China Dream and CSFM.

Since its inception for more than ten years, interdisciplinary engagements with the China Aspiration (at least partially) have been carried out in the areas of international politics,⁸ economics,⁹ international law,¹⁰ religious freedom,¹¹ semiotics,¹² culture,¹³ and politics,¹⁴ just to

3 The five dimensions include building a strong China, stable China, generous China, harmonious China, civilized China, beautiful China, and creative China on the national level; physical well-being including better education, more stable employment, higher income, a greater degree of social security, better medical and health care, improved housing condition and a better environment, and mental well-being including improving resilience and the sense of fulfillment on the personal level; the implementation of China’s yearning for the stability and transformation of new China on the historical level; making contribution to the development of the world under globalization, and setting a good example for the Third-world countries on the global level; focusing on the primary tradeoff between economic development and its unintended byproducts such as income disparities and environmental degradation on the antithetical level. See Lin and Zhu, “Cultural Differences.”

4 This term is also translated similarly as a Human Community with Shared Future, or Community of Common destiny.

5 Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies,” *The Strategist* 2, no. 1 (November 2018) (2018), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/863>.

6 M. Bondarenko Valentina, “A New Scientific Paradigm as a Key to Building a Community with a Common Future for Humanity,” *Cadmus* 4, no. 3 (2020).

7 Zhong Weixin and Liang Jun, eds, “Belarus receives new batch of Chinese COVID-19 vaccines,” People’s Daily Online (November 12, 2021) para. 1-6 at para. 4, <<http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/1112/c90000-9918872.html>> [accessed December 16, 2021].

8 Fabio Massimo Parenti, *The Chinese Way: Overcoming Challenges for a Shared Future* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2023); David Arase, *The Geopolitics of Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream: Problems and Prospects* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2016).

9 Zhou, *China Dream and the China Path*.

10 Ian Yuying Liu, “The Chinese Dream, Neoliberalism, and International Legal Ideology,” *The Chinese Journal of Global Governance* 4, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/23525207-12340033>; M. Francesca Staiano, *Chinese Law and Its International Projection: Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind* (Singapore: Springer, 2023).

11 Kin Sheung Charetto Yan, “When the Gospel Meets the China Dream: Religious Freedom and the Golden Rule,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939317747149>.

12 Junchen Zhang, “The “Chinese Dream” as a Discursive Symbol: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Study on Political Discursive Construction and Global Media Representations of the “Chinese Dream”,” *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 18, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/css-2022-2082>; Zhide Hou, “Using Semantic Tagging to Examine the American Dream and the Chinese Dream,” *Semiotica* 2019, no. 227 (2019).

13 Lin and Zhu, “Cultural Differences.”

14 Liu, “Chinese Dream.”

name a few.¹⁵ However, Christian theology in general, and Chinese public theology in particular, have by and large failed to engage with this grandiose and ambitious project. Lai Pan-chiu and Xie Zhibin dedicate a special issue in the interesting topic of public theology in Chinese context.¹⁶ Unfortunately the China Aspiration does not receive any treatment. Alexander Chow develops a Chinese public theology that describes the emergence of growth of public Christian voices in China and their relation to what he calls the “Confucian imagination.”¹⁷ But Chow does not interact with the China Aspiration. This oversight by the Chinese public theology obviously has many reasons. First, the China Dream or the CSFM has been wrongly dismissed “as vague or empty propaganda”¹⁸ or downplayed as being “not the intellectually coherent, robust and wide-ranging philosophy needed to stand up to Western ideas.”¹⁹ Second, according to Harari, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism have become “backward-looking” religions, or perceived as such, with their theology staying more and more irrelevant.²⁰ Third, Xie observes that some Chinese fundamental theologies tend to be against the public and that there exists an “anti-public public theology.”²¹ Therefore, it is the author’s deep conviction that theology ought to respond to the pressing challenges of secular and humanistic development, particularly the China Aspiration with normative ideas related to human flourishing. Thus, there is an urgent need to fill this present theological gap. This paper intends to do so by proposing human flourishing as a Christian project in China to engage with the China Aspiration as its dialogue partner.

The paper argues that by engaging with Jacob’s narrative (Gen 25:19-36:43), Chinese public theology can adequately carry out meaningful dialogue with the China Aspiration in terms of human flourishing on domestic and international levels. The paper is organized into the following structure. First, it will first present the methodology employed for the analysis. Then the paper will provide the social, philosophical, and ideological analysis of the China Aspiration and analyze its challenges to Christianity in China. After identifying the theological and ethical challenges posed to theology, the paper will present Jacob’s narrative (Gen. 25:19-36:43) in the Old Testament and use it as a point of anchor to construct a Chinese public theology of human flourishing. Based

15 For a most recent edited volume on CSFM, the Belt and Road Initiative, etc., by Linggui Wang and Malcolm Thompson, see Linggui Wang and Malcolm Thompson, eds., *China’s Development and the Construction of the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023).

16 For a special issue on public theology in China, see Pan-chiu Lai and Zhibin Xie, “Special Issue: “Public Theology in the Chinese Context,”” *International Journal of Public Theology* 11, no. 4 (2017).

17 Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generation Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

18 Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance,” 155.

19 Javier C. Hernandez, “In China’s State News Media, What Is Said May Not Be What’s Printed,” *New York Times*, 2015, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20151015/c15sino-news/en-us/>.

20 Harari argues that instead of Christianity and other religions, what humanity needs is “small groups of forward-looking innovators.” See Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 271.

21 Zhibin Xie, “Why Public and Theological?: The Problem of Public Theology in the Chinese Context,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 11, no. 4 (2017), 399-400.

on this vision, the paper will conclude by offering its theological and ethical implications in the contemporary Chinese context.

II. Methodology

The paper analyzes the China Aspiration from four perspectives. First, an interdisciplinary—historical, socio-political, philosophical, and theological—approach is adopted. Max Stackhouse argues that “it is impossible today to do good work in theological ethics without drawing on the research and experience of these fields, such as history and social science.”²² Sebastian Kim and Katie Day identify interdisciplinarity as a distinguishing mark of public theology.²³ Due to the need to deal with China’s economic, social, and political issues, the paper realizes the need to incorporate informants outside of academic bibliographies,²⁴ which is especially true when doing Chinese public theology due to limited information in Chinese scholarly publications. To Miroslav Volf, this kind of interdisciplinary approach is not an option for those who do theology. He argues that the failure to take this approach reduces theology to science.²⁵ Consequently, theology is unable to address normative questions.²⁶ Volf and Croasmun believe that these contribute to the theology’s internal crisis (and consequently external crisis), which is manifested in the fact that “the big questions of life are now more or less absent from the academy entirely.”²⁷

The second aspect of the methodology is social analysis. To respond effectively to the social injustice in China, this paper strives to understand the social reality in all its complexity.²⁸ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot define social analysis as an “effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships.”²⁹ While fully aware of the limits of social analysis,³⁰ this paper recognizes that “theological reflection [grows] out of the analysis.”³¹ Thus, social analysis is a helpful tool that “permits us to grasp the reality with

22 Max L. Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” in *God and Globalization*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, Religion and the Powers of the Common Life (New York: T&T Clark, 2000), 1-33, in particular, p. 10.

23 Kim and Day identify six marks of public theology in that it is inherently incarnational, engaging with public sphere(s), interdisciplinary, dialogical, global, and is performed. See Sebastian C. H. Kim and Katie Day, *A Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 10-17.

24 Kim and Day, *A Companion to Public Theology*, 13.

25 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes A Difference*, Theology for the Life of the world, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019), 46-51.

26 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 45-49.

27 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 49.

28 Joe Holland and Peter J. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, revised and enlarged ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 89.

29 Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 14.

30 Holland and Henriot speak of the limits of social analysis in that first, it is not designed to provide an immediate answer to the question “what do we do?” Second, social analysis is not an esoteric activity for intellectuals. Third, social analysis is not value-free. Moreover, social analysis is only a negative instrument, moves only in the scientific thought model, and uses elite language. See Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 15-16, 89-92.

31 Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 93.

which we are dealing-‘*la realidad*’ so often referred to in Latin America”,³² and correspondingly “*xianshi*” (现实, reality) as used in the Chinese context. In particular, social analysis’s historical and structural approaches are employed while maintaining the distinctions between the objective and subjective dimensions of reality in analysis.³³

In addressing the complex constituents in China’s social system, this paper also adopts spherical analysis, a conceptual framework elaborated by Michael Walzer.³⁴ By drawing the entire world of goods within reach of philosophical reflection, Walzer proposes the concept of “distributive spheres” and subsequently a system of complex equality to realize distributive justice.³⁵ While aware of the criticisms towards his theory³⁶ and his position of communitarianism,³⁷ the author finds Walzer’s spherical thinking a useful conceptual framework to tackle issues such as dominance and tyranny by protecting the minimum autonomy of each sphere.

The third aspect is an ethological approach proposed by Stackhouse. For Stackhouse, theological ethics not only discern the “ethos,” namely, the subtle web of “values” and “norms,” the obligations, virtues, convictions, mores, purposes, expectations and legitimations that constitute the operating norms of a culture in relation to a social entity or set of social practices, but also engage in “ethology” studies which “seek, with the more profound social analysts and historians, for example, to articulate the vision of ultimate reality thought to stand behind the ethos.”³⁸ By highlighting the vision of “ultimate reality” (*zhongji xianshi* 终极现实), this paper delves into the explicit or implicit view of what is holy, sacred, or inviolable about values or norms in the ethos of the China Aspiration and assesses whether what is going on ought to go on.³⁹

32 Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 14.

33 To Holland and Henriot, the social system needs to be analyzed both in terms of time-historical analysis-and space-structural analysis. More specially, historical analysis is a study of the changes of a social system through time. The structural analysis provides a cross-section of a system’s framework in a given moment of time. Moreover, the objective dimension includes the various organizations, behavior patterns, and institutions that take on external structural expressions, while the subjective dimension includes consciousness, values, and ideologies. See Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 14-15.

34 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

35 Walzer, *Spheres*, 3, 17-20.

36 Rustin argues that it is “difficult to find grounds within Walzer’s relativist position for intervention to end or mitigate gross social injustices (for example, the oppression of women) where these injustices have not already become the subject of contention within a society.” See Michael Rustin, “Equality in Post-Modern Times,” in *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, ed. David Miller and Michael Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17-44, in particular at p. 31. Ripstein opines that if distributive justice is determined by the meaning of the goods as “socially conceived” in the presence of naïve ignorance of one party or the overwhelming power of force in another, such notion of justice can all too easily be co-opted by the more powerful, who determines the shape of “social consensus,” in the absence of a limiting framework of a basic set of rights endowed to individual persons themselves apart from the goods with which they interact. See Ripstein Arthur, “Universal and General Wills: Hegel and Rousseau,” *Political Theory* 22, no. 3 (1994), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591794022003004>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0090591794022003004>; 444-67.

37 Hak Joon Lee provides a helpful criticism of communitarianism in pointing out that “in general communitarians tend to take a sectarian, parochial posture.” Instead, Lee advocates covenantalism as an alternative. See Hak Joon Lee, *God and Community Organizing: A Covenantal Approach* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 215-16.

38 Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” in Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, eds, *God and Globalization*, 10-11.

39 Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” 11.

The fourth aspect is its global approach.⁴⁰ While it is true that “globalization has different meanings for different groups,”⁴¹ this paper adopts what Manfred Steger defines as global imaginary, or the consciousness of the world as a single whole.⁴² In dealing with the China Aspiration, this paper also refers to globalization as a specific process “by which capitalism expands across the globe as powerful economic actors seek profit in global markets and impose their rules everywhere, a process often labeled ‘neoliberalism.’”⁴³ This paper intends to establish vital connections between the China Aspiration with these imaginary and economic aspects of globalization.

In sum, this paper adopts an eclectic and hybrid methodology that employs interdisciplinary, spherical, ethological, and global approaches. Next, the paper analyzes the China Aspiration and presents its theological implications and challenges.

III. The China Aspiration and Its Fourfold Analysis

(1) Interdisciplinary Analysis

First, the China Aspiration is analyzed through the lens of modernity. Miroslav Volf is right in following Charles Taylor, who speaks of “multiple modernities.”⁴⁴ As a relatively new and active partner in globalization, China experiences modernity in a unique, non-Western way. China’s previous encounter with globalization in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century left on the country an indelible mark of humiliation due to military and economic invasions by the western powers and Japan;⁴⁵ hence the buzzword “the Century of Humiliation.”⁴⁶

40 Voluminous literatures exist in the academic field regarding globalization. For a comprehensive elucidation of leading theoretical approaches to understanding globalization, see Barrie Axford, *Theories of Globalization* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014). For a comprehensive treatment from the perspective of public theologians, see Max L. Stackhouse, Peter J. Paris, Don S. Browning, and Diane Obenchain, *God and Globalization: Theological Ethics and the Spheres of Life*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse, Peter J. Paris, Don S. Browning, and Diane Obenchain, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2000).

41 Frank J. Lechner and John Boli, *The Globalization Reader*, fifth ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 5.

42 Steger defines globalization in its general sense by dissecting the highly complex system into three layers, namely, globality as social conditions, global imaginary as consciousness of the world as a single whole, and globalization as a spatial concept signifying a matrix of social processes that are transforming our present social condition of conventional nationality into one of globality. See Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2-3.

43 Lechner and Boli, *The Globalization Reader*, 5.

44 Volf follows Charles Taylor, who speaks of “multiple modernities,” See Miroslav Volf, *Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014), 120.

45 For a detailed historical analysis related to the ethos of national humiliation, see Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Also see Michael Yahuda, “China’s Win-Win Globalization,” YaleGlobal Online, Yale University, updated February 19, 2003, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://archive-yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/chinas-win-win-globalization>.

46 Alison Adcock Kaufman, “The ‘Century of Humiliation,’ Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order,” *Pacific Focus* 25, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x>.

Following (perhaps along with) the military invasion, the western missionaries brought Protestantism to China.⁴⁷ One of the disruptive effects of globalization at that time was the breaking down of traditional Confucian system under the pressures of globalization as these were forcibly brought to bear upon China. The communist takeover in 1949 and the character of the Maoist regime that lasted until the mid-1970s were shaped by a nationalist reaction to this experience.⁴⁸ External influences were seen as polluting, which resulted in the expulsion of all foreign missionaries and culminated in the confiscation and even the burning of Bibles and other religious artifacts. The self-reliance and minimum toleration of external influences, an approach that was fundamentally antagonistic to globalization, culminated in the self-destructive, internally generated chaos of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which led the country to the brink of economic bankruptcy.

Deng Xiaoping's economic reform in late 1978 was a sign of embracing modernity and globalization in earnest. China quickly absorbed itself into the international or global building blocks of neoliberalism, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) system, and became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Indeed, China rapidly became a World Bank poster child for successful globalization and the most favorite customer.⁴⁹ To implement CSFM, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R) in 2013 together with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) to strengthen infrastructure both on westward land route from China through Central Asia and on the southerly maritime routes from China through Southeast Asia and on to South Asia, Africa, and Europe.⁵⁰

In sum, China is a beneficiary of the current phase of neoliberalism and the economic aspect of globalization and intends to gradually change its role from passive participation to active engagement as a global leader. Moreover, the unfortunate association between Western imperialism and Christianity contributes to the exclusion of Christianity from the China Aspiration toward a full scale of national and personal prosperity.

(2) Ethological Analysis

As part of the China Dream, China advocates “the core socialist values,” namely, prosperity, democracy, civilization, harmony, liberty, equality, fairness, rule by law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and amicability. These ethos can be traced to Confucianism, the legitimate and mainstream

47 Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927*, Yale Historical Publications, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

48 Yahuda, “China’s Win-Win Globalization.”

49 Yahuda, “China’s Win-Win Globalization.”

50 David Dollar, “*The AIIB and the ‘One Belt, One Road’*,” Brookings, updated Summer 2015, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-aiib-and-the-one-belt-one-road/>.

ideology of Chinese traditional culture since 134 BC.⁵¹ Thus, the norms associated with the China Dream are a product of the ideologies such as collectivism, benevolence, and integrity that are brought in through Confucianism, mingled with the individualism established wherever secular modernity arose. The former contributes to the national dimension of the China Dream,⁵² and the latter contributes to the personal dimension of the China Dream.⁵³

The ethos behind CSFM is China's global value to develop a new path to peace, prosperity, and modernity. These values are multi-dimensional, including mutual interdependence and cooperation in global power, a joint stakeholder in the common interest, sustainable development in ecology, reduction of poverty, promotion of worldwide mechanism, and win-win cooperation in global governance.⁵⁴ For Tobin, these dimensions "reflect the extraordinarily wide range of arenas in which Beijing believes it must restructure global governance to enable China to integrate with the world while at the same time achieving global leadership."⁵⁵

The deeper levels of motivation and commitment of the China Aspiration can be summarized with twofold significance. First, it is a deep-seated ethos of decoloniality, which has been either neglected or (falsely) reduced to nationalism by Western social science and politics.⁵⁶ Hidden behind the core socialist values lies a deep sense of liberation from the "Century of Humiliation" brought in by Western imperialism and colonialism. Tobin observes correctly that in global governance as proposed in CSFM, "Chinese leaders advocate 'consultative' democracy not only in state-to-state relations but also within states, arguing that it is a valid and even superior model. Chinese official media disparage western democratic regimes as chaotic, confrontational, competitive, inefficient and oligarchic."⁵⁷ But she fails to notice that this is a typical decolonizing view of interculturality which "calls for radical change in the dominant order and in its foundational base of capitalism, Western modernity, and ongoing colonial power."⁵⁸ For Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, decoloniality means "thinking, doing, sharing, and collaborating with people in different parts

51 Shijie Wei, "Harmony in Confucian Thought and Building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind," *SHS Web of Conferences* 153, no. 01006 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202315301006>; Lin and Zhu, "Cultural Differences," 10.

52 The national dimension of the China dream aims to build a strong China, stable China, generous China, harmonious China, civilized China, beautiful China, and creative China. See Lin and Zhu, "Cultural Differences," 12.

53 The personal dimension is composed of two parts: physical and mental well-being. Physically, every individual can enjoy safe food, decent housing, personal security, quality education, modern healthcare and secure retirement. Mentally, each individual can be more resilient, rewarded and fulfilled, thus making a more stable and thriving society. See Lin and Zhu, "Cultural Differences," 12.

54 Xing Qu, "人类命运共同体的价值观基础," *People Daily*, updated Feb 16, 2013, accessed June 5, 2021, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0216/c40531-20496626-2.html>.

55 Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance," 157.

56 Pál Nyíri and Joana Breidenbach, *China inside out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2005); Chris Buckley, "China's Combative Nationalists See a World Turning Their Way," *The New York Times*, updated Dec 14, 2020, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/14/world/asia/china-nationalists-covid.html>.

57 Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance," 157.

58 Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 58.

of the globe engaged in similar paths, people striving ... in their own local histories confronting global designs.”⁵⁹ Such a deeper and more profound motivation is deeply embedded in the China Aspiration.

The second aspect is related to the Confucian philosophical and political concept of “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), which originated three thousand years ago but is still largely unknown in Western countries.⁶⁰ “All-under-heaven” is the Chinese philosophy of world politics that focuses more on “worldness” than “internationality.”⁶¹ For Zhao, a world theory is “impossible until universal well-being takes priority over that of the nation-state.”⁶² Those who penned the China Aspiration would whole-heartedly agree with Zhao in his observation that “[t]he key problem today is that of a failed world as opposed to that of so-called failed states. No country could possibly be successful in a failed world.”⁶³ The ancient Chinese concept of “all-under-heaven” is an institutional system of the world that is “of and for the world, or by the world” to promote universal well-being, and not just the interests of some dominating nations in the current world system. The contemporary world system is “essentially imperialistic in terms of dominance, having evolved from the concept of empire in terms of rule by power.”⁶⁴ The system of “all-under-heaven” is characterized by its global perspective and the principle of harmony amongst all nations. Zhou dissects the dense concepts as a “semantic trinity,” in that it captures three meanings: the earth or all lands under the sky, a common choice made by all peoples in the world, or a universal agreement in the “hearts” of all peoples, and a political system for the world within a global institution to ensure universal order. With the all-under-heaven concept, the world is understood as consisting of the physical world (land), the psychological world (the general sentiment of peoples), and the institutional world (a world institution). The heart of the Chinese political concept “consists of a hierarchy between all-under-heaven, states and then families, as opposed to nation-states, communities and individuals in the West.”⁶⁵

Consequently, from the Chinese viewpoint, the Western political system would seem incomplete and is inherently dangerous in that there is no one to take care of the world.⁶⁶ The spirit of “all-under-heaven” has greatly influenced Chinese politics that even today, without some knowledge of the former, one could not correctly understand the latter.⁶⁷ This philosophy thus plays a vital role as the global consciousness⁶⁸ embedded in CSFM.

59 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 245.

60 Tingyang Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia),” *Diogenes* 56, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192109102149>: 5-18, p. 7.

61 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 6.

62 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 5-6.

63 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 5.

64 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 6.

65 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 11.

66 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 11.

67 Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 9.

68 Lechner and Boli, *The Globalization Reader*, 2.

(3) Spherical Analysis

In present-day China, undoubtedly, the political sphere is the dominating one over all others.⁶⁹ Xie observes that “in the Chinese tradition, despite the emergence of a non-governmental public sphere and its struggle with governmental intervention, the meaning of the public is primarily dominated by the government. There remains a lack of any strong sense of diverse social spheres.”⁷⁰ From this perspective, the China Dream is this dominant political sphere permeating and controlling almost all other spheres, including the religious sphere, thereby breaking the principle of complex equality and creating social injustices.⁷¹ Such a dominance marginalizes and excludes Christianity *de facto* from China’s most ambitious project of human flourishing.

The dominance of the political sphere is true not only domestically but also internationally. In a continual effort to expand China’s cultural influences, China has established hundreds of Confucius Institutes in dozens of countries, driven by a strong political motive. However, Ren argues that due to the insufficiency of cultural content and key concepts which can typify contemporary China, it is hard to see Confucius Institutes as China’s soft power.⁷² Once again, in its consideration of expanding cultural influences, the China Aspiration ignores the Chinese Christians’ contributions to the global church.⁷³

(4) Social Analysis with Globalization in View

It is worth pointing out that the China Aspiration does not remain merely as an ideology. On the contrary, China has been implementing this strategy both on the domestic and international levels with perseverance. Aided by China’s hall-mark capability of “concentrating resources to accomplish large undertaking” (*jizhong lilianqiang bandashi* 集中力量办大事), China has achieved enormous social accomplishments in many areas, including doubling the life expectancy in the

69 Xie argues that in the Chinese tradition, despite the emergence of a non-governmental public sphere and its struggle with governmental intervention, the meaning of the public is primarily dominated by the government. There remains a lack of any strong sense of diverse social spheres. Xie, “Why Public and Theological?,” 397, 402; Zhibin Xie, “Human Nature, Justice, and Society: Reinhold Niebuhr in the Chinese Context,” *Theology Today* 77, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573620926243>, 237.

70 Xie, “Why Public and Theological?,” 402.

71 Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 17-20. For a special issue of bringing Reinhold Niebuhr’s theological methodology into a contextual experiment with the “reality of human experience” in the Chinese context (including mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan), and dealing with issues of human nature, justice and democracy, see Xie, “Human Nature, Justice, and Society.”

72 Ren Zhe, “The Confucius Institutes and China’s Soft Power,” *IDE discussion papers* 330 (2012).

73 For example, Chinese Christian Watchman Nee was honored by Christianity Today to be one of the 100 most influential Christians in the 20th century. Both Nee and his disciple Witness Lee were recognized by the American Congress. See Representative Smith, In Recognition of Watchman Nee, (U.S. Congress, 2009); Rep. Pitts, Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, (Congressional Record, 2014). For the Local Churches’ contribution to the global church, see Jacob Chengwei Feng, “Against the Tide: The Ecclesiology of the Local Churches and Its Contribution to a Global Church,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 2 (2022).

past seventy years,⁷⁴ lifting one hundred million people out of poverty in a decade,⁷⁵ winning its battle against air pollution,⁷⁶ just to name a few.

However, as the beneficiary of neoliberalism, China has also experienced its unavoidable mishaps. The Chinese youths, to whom the former President Mao Zedong paid a well-known tribute and said, “you young people ... are like the sun at eight or nine in the morning ... We put our hopes in you,” have recently demonstrated their increasing control over the narrative on Chinese social media with the growing popularity of buzzwords such as “lying flat” (*tangping* 躺平) and “involution” (*neijuan* 内卷). The former shows Gen Z’s alternative way of thinking to stop striving for mainstream goals such as buying a house whose price has constantly been rising, getting married, and having a child, as a “silent and blameless protest” of living like wage slaves consumed by consumerism, while the latter expresses their resentment towards “[a] highly dynamic trap which consumes a lot of energy” while running in place and constantly having to motivate themselves day in and day out.⁷⁷ Mishra captures this sense of resentment “of people who feel left behind by the globalized economy or contemptuously ignored by its slick overlords and cheerleaders in politics, business, and the media.”⁷⁸ Other domestic problems include widening the gap between the rich and the poor,⁷⁹ the aging problem⁸⁰ reflected by its recent major policy shift of allowing more than one child per family,⁸¹ violation of basic human rights in the preference of “Survival Rights,”⁸² and freedom of religion.⁸³ Internationally, China’s signature Belt and Road

74 Anonymous, “How did life expectancy double in China in 70 years?,” PR Newswire, updated Oct 10, 2019, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/how-did-life-expectancy-double-in-china-in-70-years-300936234.html>.

75 William N. Brown, *Chasing the Chinese Dream: Four Decades of Following China’s War on Poverty* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021 Jun 02, 2021); Jack Goodman, “Has China Lifted 100 Million People out of Poverty?,” BBC News, updated Feb. 28, 2021, 2021, accessed June 7th, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/56213271>.

76 Felix Leung, “How China is Winning Its Battle Against Air Pollution,” Earth.org, 2019, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://earth.org/how-china-is-winning-its-battle-against-air-pollution/>.

77 Heather Mowbray, “Trending in China: Young Chinese Reject Rat Race, Embrace ‘Lying Flat’,” Caixin, updated March 31, 2021, 2021, accessed June 7, 2021.

78 Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, First American ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 274.

79 Huifang He, “China’s ‘Two Sessions’: Wealth Inequality Poses Threat to Beijing’s Post-pandemic Economic Plan,” SCMP, updated March 4, 2021, 2021, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/global-economy/article/3123891/chinas-two-sessions-wealth-inequality-poses-threat-beijings>.

80 Ryan Woo and Kevin Yao, “China Demographic Crisis Looms as Population Growth Slips to Slowest Ever,” Reuters, 2021, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-2020-census-shows-slowest-population-growth-since-1-child-policy-2021-05-11/>.

81 Stephen McDonell, “China Allows Three Children in Major Policy Shift,” BBC News, 2021, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57303592>.

82 Baijie An, “Survival, Development Are Basic Human Rights: Xi,” China Daily, 2016, accessed June 8, 2021, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-12/04/content_27563699.htm.

83 Hua Shen, “China Conducts Two Trials in Crackdown on Audio Bibles,” (Dec. 14, 2020), Voice of America, 2020, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/china-conducts-two-trials-crackdown-audio-bibles>.

Initiative (B&R), as the most visible means by which China implements CSFM, receives harsh criticisms.⁸⁴

The China Aspiration is thus the globalization “with the Chinese characteristics.” As a beneficiary of neoliberalism in the narrow sense of globalization, China intends to continue to harness the economic gains from the same globalization process and yet exert its economic and political influences worldwide by its Belt and Road Initiative (B&R). Therefore, the China Aspiration faces insurmountable domestic problems and deep-seated concerns and criticisms from the international community. Such aspiration is yet another implementation of modern humanism in that it “rejected God and the command to love God” but still “retained the moral obligation to love neighbor.”⁸⁵ Harari argues that “[f]or 300 years the world has been dominated by humanism, which sanctifies the life, happiness and power of Homo sapiens.” After investigating who Homo sapiens really is and how humanism became the dominant world religion, Harari concludes that “attempting to fulfill the humanist dream is like to cause its disintegration.”⁸⁶

In sum, the China Aspiration can be analyzed with the following features. First, the China Aspiration is deeply rooted in Confucianism and its ancient philosophy of “all-under-heaven,” undergirded by the ethos of the “Century of humiliation” and the sense of decoloniality. The aspiration is coupled with dissatisfaction or competition with the current Western political system and equipped with a universal touch of caring for the worldness (*tianxia*). Second, led by this aspiration and executed with a strong will, China has achieved significant accomplishments towards human prosperity. However, this grandiose aspiration as another form of humanism has been inevitably repeating the ills of neoliberalism and humanism, inclined to future disintegration with the possibility of turning a dream into an illusion and even a nightmare. Third, of the uttermost concern to Christian theologians, ethicists, and church leaders is that Christianity has been utterly excluded from this all-encompassing design that affects every Chinese citizen.

IV. Jacob’s Narrative: Chinese Public Theology of Human Flourishing for the Third Millennium

The Chinese public theology of human flourishing under construction has two goals. First, it will resist disintegration and interact with the ultimate reality intimately related to heaven. To that end, the article turns to Jacob’s narrative as a sketch of a project of human flourishing in China as a “God-based framework for discernment, evaluation, and transformation.”⁸⁷ Second, Christians are not indifferent to, and therefore, should not be left out of the project of human flourishing in China.

84 Anthony Kleven, “Belt and Road: Colonialism with Chinese Characteristics,” (May 6, 2019), The Lowy Institute, 2019, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/belt-and-road-colonialism-chinese-characteristics>.

85 Volf, *Public Faith*, 59.

86 Harari, *Homo Deus*, 66.

87 Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” 18.

It is imperative that public theologians engage with the public actively by putting forth their vision of human flourishing, which is “the main thing the Christian faith brings into the public debate.”⁸⁸

Volf is correct that the way Christians work toward human flourishing is not by imposing on others their vision of human flourishing and the common good but by bearing witness to Christ, who embodies the good life.⁸⁹ However, Volf’s proposal of human flourishing mainly interacts with Western societies.

To develop a contextualized Chinese public theology, this paper resorts to the Scriptures for inspiration. One of the earliest prominent figures exhibiting human flourishing is Jacob, as illustrated in the Jacob narrative (Gen. 25:19-36:43). The final section in Gen. 32-35 culminates in the nocturnal struggle and concomitant name change from “Jacob” the “supplanter/deceiver” (cf. 25:26; 27:36) to “Israel” the “God-wrestler” (32:29; cf. 35:10). Victor Matthews and Frances Mims argue that with his new name, Jacob at last reaches a level of maturation that allows him to become the rightful heir to the covenant.⁹⁰ Gerhard von Rad labels Jacob’s new name “a name of honor” that will now ensure God’s recognition and acceptance of him.⁹¹ Walter Brueggemann argues for a transference of power between God and humanity whereby Jacob assumes a new identity as both a man and a community in relationship with God.⁹² Therefore, human flourishing is not only exemplified in Jacob as an individual, but also in Israel as a nation.

Brueggemann observes that the Jacob narrative “portrays Israel in its earthiest and most scandalous appearance in Genesis,” and is thus offensive to one who seeks edification in any conventional religious or moral sense:

But for that very reason, the Jacob narrative is most lifelike. It presents Jacob in his crude mixture of motives. This grandson of the promise is a rascal compared to his faithful grandfather Abraham or his successful father Isaac.... The narrator knows that the purposes of God are tangled in a web of self-interest and self-seeking.⁹³

To Brueggemann, God’s initial and inscrutable designation of Jacob (25:23) “brings Jacob to well-being and prosperity,”⁹⁴ namely, a flourishing life. But this affirmation needs to be held in tension with another, namely, the fact that this designation begins the trouble (25:29-34; 27:1-45) that is to mark Jacob’s entire life which “has conflicts with all those around him.”⁹⁵ As the mainspring

88 Volf, *Public Faith*, xv.

89 Volf, *Public Faith*, 99-117.

90 Victor H. Matthews and Frances Mims, “Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation”, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 12 (1985): 185-96, pp. 186-87.

91 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. J. H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 321.

92 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 268-69.

93 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 204.

94 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 204.

95 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 204-5.

of the narrative, the juxtaposition of “special designation” for flourishing and “a life of conflict” identifies with Volf’s assertion that:

Flourishing requires the transformative presence of the true life in the midst of the false, which requires that the true world come to be in the midst of the false world, that the world recall, recover, and for the first time fully embody its goodness as the gift of the God who is love.⁹⁶

The four-fold analysis presented in the first part of the paper excavates the China Aspiration and identifies the deeply embedded human conflict. However, as illustrated in Jacob, “the two kinds of narratives, of human conflict and of divine confrontation, cannot be separated from each other.”⁹⁷ Brueggemann argues that, on the one hand, we cannot simply focus on the “religious” encounters; on the other hand, Jacob does not live in a history that is flat and one-dimensional. The same can be said of China. The China Aspiration with a noble and universal goal of human flourishing cannot be accomplished without divine intervention: “The two dimensions of reality is of one peace.”⁹⁸

These two dimensions of reality are manifested first in the vision of Bethel, which comes in Jacob’s flight from his brother, who wants to kill him. Second, the crippling encounter at Penu’el (32:22-32) comes in the midst of great anxiety about reconciliation with that same brother. Similarly, the success or failure of the China Aspiration “will depend in large part on how its proposals are received in other countries.”⁹⁹ While China is engaged in reconciliation with the international community, such as the United States in the trade war,¹⁰⁰ and European Union on the investment deal suspension,¹⁰¹ its leaders need to take heed to Brueggemann’s conclusion that “[t] here are no troubled dimensions of human interaction which are removed from the coming of the Holy God. And there are no meetings with the Holy God apart from the realities of troubled human life.”¹⁰² For Jacob to live in the reality of flourishing life as a gift of God, he, or the narrator, is deeply aware that this juxtaposition in Jacob’s narrative is a statement about “the God who comes and the human life into which he comes.” In the opportunities and struggles of the globalization whose transformative powers of interdependence “reach deeply into all aspects of contemporary

96 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 150.

97 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 210.

98 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 210.

99 Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance,” 156.

100 Sara Hsu, “*The US-China Trade War Is Still Happening: Four Years and A New President later, U.S. tariffs on Chinese Products Remain.*,” *The Diplomat*, 2021, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-us-china-trade-war-is-still-happening/>.

101 Su-Lin Tan, “*China-EU Investment Deal Suspension Seen as More Politically Symbolic than Economic, but Risks to Trade Exist.*,” *South China Morning Post*, updated May 21, 2021, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3134258/eu-china-investment-deal-hold-meps-vote-halt-talks>.

102 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 210.

social life,”¹⁰³ China, as well as the others, may “learn how it is that the Holy God impinges upon power struggles and how it is that human realities are transformed by these assaults from God.”¹⁰⁴

Genesis chapter 28 records Jacob’s encounter with God, who appeared to him in a dream and declared that “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac” (v. 13, NRSV).¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere in Genesis, God is called “the maker of heaven and earth” (14:19, 22) and “the God of heaven and earth” (24:3). Therefore, in Hebrew scriptures, the concept of heaven is closely associated with God as the ultimate reality. The transformative power of Jacob’s encounter with God as the ultimate reality has a two-fold manifestation in his fleeing journey. First, as an exiled and threatened “non-person” who had to stop and rest in an insignificant “non-place,” Jacob is transformed by the coming of God to a person crucial for the promise of human flourishing. Second, the “non-place” is transformed into a crucial place, Bethel.¹⁰⁶

Jacob’s meeting with the ultimate reality happens in a dream. The wakeful world of Jacob was a world of fear, terror, loneliness, and unresolved guilt.¹⁰⁷ However, the dream permits the entry of an alternative into his life. The dream is “not a morbid review of a shameful past,” but “rather the presentation of an alternative future with God.”¹⁰⁸ This future, in the form of promise, “affirms the promise of land for Israel and the promise of well-being for others by Israel.”¹⁰⁹ The promise for the well-being of others protects the narrative from self-interests.¹¹⁰ Gospel moves to Jacob in a time when his guard is down. Likewise, in China, no matter how dominant its political sphere is, the China Dream will be used by God as “a means by which the purpose of God has its say in the life of this family.”¹¹¹

The news brought in by the dream is “that there is traffic between heaven and earth.”¹¹² In the dream, Jacob saw a “ramp,” rather than the conventional “ladder,” which has become “a visual vehicle for a gospel assertion.”¹¹³ For Brueggemann, the earth is not left to its own resources, and heaven is not a remote, self-contained realm for the gods. Heaven has to do with earth, and earth finally may count on the resources of heaven. That is the substance of the vision that shatters the presumed world of Jacob. He had assumed he traveled alone, with his only purpose being survival. It was not hard then to conclude that divine and ultimate reality was not irrelevant. Brueggemann

103 Lechner and Boli, *The Globalization Reader*, xxvi.

104 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 210.

105 Unless otherwise stated, all verse references are from NRSV.

106 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 242.

107 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

108 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

109 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 244.

110 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 244.

111 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

112 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

113 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

alludes to incarnational faith of the power of God being embodied in a historical man, an image Jesus referred to in John 1:51.¹¹⁴

The heaven motif in Jacob's dream has two-fold implications for Chinese public theology. First, heaven is not merely a philosophical abstraction, as in the case of "all-under-heaven" (*tianxia*), above states and families to take care of the world. The concept of *tianxia* is employed to promote the vision of CSFM and seeking wide recognition from the international community with a Confucian phrase: "we are not alone on the Great Way, and the whole *tianxia* is one family."¹¹⁵ While relying on the Human Exhortation of Common Destiny (another translation of CSFM) to persuade the international community, the China Aspiration as a human vision ultimately depends on the conditional acceptance of other states.

In Jacob's narrative, heaven "refers to the reality of promise related to the purpose of God." The earth can only become "a place of possibility because it has not been and will not be cut off from the sustaining role of God."¹¹⁶ Any human aspiration needs the sustaining role of God to become an aspiration of possibility.

Second, while China has been using the concept of "Survival Rights" to shy away from its responsibility to protect basic human rights,¹¹⁷ God as the divine and ultimate reality cannot be deemed as irrelevant, just like in Jacob's case. This God is a just God who proclaims justice (Matt. 11:18, 20; 23:23). To achieve human flourishing, social justice as a social condition is necessary because justice "forms the basic architecture of a common life," and "there are certain norms and values, such as dignity, freedom, equality, and human rights, that are universal in nature and authority."¹¹⁸ In China, this entails the cessation of religious persecution.¹¹⁹ Instead of repressing Christianity, China will do well if it adopts a policy of religious flourishing because human flourishing necessarily means religious flourishing. The reason is straightforward: "[t]he world has always been a very religious place,"¹²⁰ and may I add that humanity has always been a very religious being. The once-popular motto $\frac{3}{4}$ "all religions will wither away" $\frac{3}{4}$ has been proven false.¹²¹ On the contrary, "the fastest-growing worldviews today are religious $\frac{3}{4}$ Islam and Christianity."¹²² Therefore, human flourishing is a holistic framework in which religious flourishing is an indispensable constituent. If China continues its policy to allow the

114 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

115 In the English version, *tianxia* is translated to "world." See Jinping Xi, "President Xi Jinping's 2021 New Year Address," *xinhuanet.com*, 2020, accessed June 8, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-12/31/c_1126934359.htm.

116 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 243.

117 Xigen Wang, "生存权发展权是首要的基本人权," *People Daily*, updated Feb 19, 2021, accessed June 8, 2021, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0219/c40531-32031360.html>.

118 Lee, *God and Community Organizing: A Covenantal Approach*, 163.

119 Christians have been prosecuted and sentenced to prison for possessing certain religious publication, whether in print or in multimedia format. See Shen, "China Conducts Two Trials in Crackdown on Audio Bibles."

120 Volf, *Public Faith*, 119.

121 Volf, *Public Faith*, 120.

122 Volf, *Public Faith*, 120.

political sphere to dominate the religious sphere and tighten its control of Christianity, the state-sanctioned churches will continually lose their members to underground churches.¹²³ Therefore, it is imperative that public theologians engage with politics in proposing that given the religious diversity in China, they “affirm freedom of religion” as a basic human right and “reject any form of religious totalitarianism and to embrace pluralism as a political project.”¹²⁴

In sum, the paper has constructed a Chinese public theology of human flourishing based on Jacob’s narrative. As a prominent patriarch featuring human flourishing not only on an individual level but also as a precursor to Israel on a national level, Jacob experienced the transforming power from an exiled and threatened “non-person” to a person crucial for God’s promise. Amid conflicts and striving for survival, Jacob encountered the ultimate reality in his dream. With a ramp connecting heaven and earth, and with God of heaven and earth standing above the ramp, this dream shatters Jacob’s presumed world and makes the earth a place of possibility for genuine human flourishing through the sustaining role of the real ultimate reality, which makes it possible to resist any form of disintegration. To Jacob, God’s promise of human flourishing reaches beyond his own strife for survival but holistic well-being and prosperity for himself and others. Therefore, public theology’s engagement in theory and praxis in China ought to adopt religious pluralism as a political project and advocate religious flourishing as part of holistic human flourishing.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for a Christian proposal of human flourishing in China in dialogue with the China Aspiration, a collective term including the China Dream and the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM). However, there has been a gap in theological treatment from the perspective of Chinese public theology. The paper proposed a detailed, multi-tiered analysis of the China Aspiration by using an eclectic and hybrid methodology that combines interdisciplinary, social, spherical, ethological, and global approaches. The paper then analyzed the history of China’s modernity and highlighted the “Century of humiliation” as an ethos underlying the China Aspiration. Moreover, the ethos of decoloniality and the ancient philosophical and political concept of “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia*) capture the China Aspiration’s deep-seated ethology that resorts to heaven as the ultimate reality. Moreover, what governs the China Aspiration is the dominant political sphere both at home and abroad.

123 In 2017 and 2018, Harris Doshay, a doctoral student at Princeton University, attended and analyzed the sermons delivered by ministers of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the state-controlled Protestant church. Mr. Doshay found that congregants showed their preference by “voting with their eyelids”: if the oration stayed within party lines, many, consistently and sometimes rather demonstratively, decided to nap. Anonymous, “*Protestant Christianity is booming in China*,” *The Economist*, 2020, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/09/15/protestant-christianity-is-booming-in-china>.

124 Volf, *Public Faith*, 144.

The China Aspiration has achieved a certain degree of success. However, as a beneficiary of neoliberalism, China also experienced its unavoidable pitfalls. As globalization with Chinese characteristics, the China Aspiration in actuality is another implementation of humanism heading to likely disintegration. Based on such detailed and extensive analysis, the paper presented a Chinese public theology of human flourishing. By exploring Jacob's narrative in Genesis, the paper presented Jacob as a pioneer and model of individual and national human flourishing. With the help of the juxtaposition between human conflict and divine confrontation, the paper engaged the China Aspiration on the level of heaven as the ultimate reality. Jacob's dream invites God into his life which overcomes his shameful past. Through the traffic between heaven and earth on the ramp, true human flourishing is made possible and holistic by the rich resources of heaven where God dwells.

If there is anything constructive-or perhaps novel-element in this paper, it is the fourfold analysis of the China Aspiration (China Dream and the Community of Shared Future of Mankind), the identification of its deeper motivation of decoloniality and connection with the ancient Chinese philosophy of all-under-heaven, and a constructive Chinese public theology of human flourishing in the Third Millennium. However, due to the paper's limited scope, more in-depth theory and praxis in the field of public theology are needed to respond to the China Aspiration comprehensively.

汉语题目：

从雅各叙事（创二五19-三六43）的视角分析中国抱负：构建为着第三个千年、基于人类繁荣之中国公共神学

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提要：与长达5个世纪的全球殖民历史相比，中国的半殖民历史只有一百多年。但是，自从1949年直到现在，殖民、反殖民、反帝、去殖民主义的思想仍然深深地潜伏在意识形态、哲学、政治，特别是中国神学里。本论文认为，借助创世纪中雅各之叙事（创二五19-三六43），中国公共神学能够在国内及国际层面的人类繁荣上，与统称为“中国抱负”（包括中国梦和人类命运共同体）进行有效的对话。本文首先从四个阶段来分析中国半殖民/反殖民的历史，以及每个阶段对中国神学的影响。然后，本文从三个层次（“三明治”）来剖析中国神学在认识论上的危机。最后，本文尝试构建为着第三个千年、基于人类繁荣的中国公共神学。

关键词：认识论危机·中国梦·人类命运共同体·人类繁荣·中国公共神学