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W. T. Chu's *Jesus, the Proletarian*

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Abstract

Best known as a biblical scholar, the two main works by W. T. Chu (Zhu Weizhi 朱維之 1905–1999), *Christianity and Literature* and *Twelve Lectures on Biblical Literature* are regarded as classics in the field. But Chu also used his extensive knowledge of the Bible to portray Jesus in his often overlooked work *Jesus, the Proletarian*, a book deserved of more attention than it has so far received. Touching on many issues central to liberation theology and Christian socialism, *Jesus, the Proletarian* has major implications for our evaluation not only of Chu himself, but also for our understanding of Christian socialism in pre-Communist China, the social and cultural milieu in which it developed, and its influence on how Christians at the time understood the Bible. In contrast to the highly theological approach of T. C. Chao's *The Life of Jesus*, Chu's *Jesus, the Proletarian* attempts to sum up the revolutionary spirit of Christian thought of the time, and can be grouped together with Zhang's *The Revolutionary Carpenter* and N. Z. Xie's *The Gospel of the Oppressed* as one of the three main works on Christian socialism in China. This article examines

Chu's oft-overlooked work, focusing on how he applies a Marxist perspective to his portrayal of Jesus, as well as his ideas on how Christianity has historically been misappropriated and used as a tool of capitalist and imperialist aggression. The article then discusses the reasons why this portrayal of Jesus as a liberator of the oppressed was published in 1950, only to fall into obscurity soon thereafter.

Keywords
Chinese Christian materialism, Jesus, Marxism, the proletarian, W. T. Chu

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Introduction

Amongst the many biographies of Jesus written by Chinese writers during the first half of the twentieth century, one of the best known is Zhao Zichen's[1] (趙紫宸) *The Life of Jesus* (1935),[2] which was used as a prototype for subsequent works on the same topic by such writers as Wu Leichuan (吳雷川), Xie Songgao (謝頌羔), and Zhang Shizhang (張仕章). W.T. Chu (1905–1999, 朱維之) is mostly known in his native China as a biblical scholar, and his two main works: *Christianity and Literature* (1992 [1940]), and *Twelve Lectures on Biblical Literature* are regarded as classics in the field. Chu also applied his extensive knowledge of the Bible to his portrayal of Jesus in *Jesus, the Proletarian* (無產者耶穌), a book deserving of far more attention than it has previously received.[3]

In broaching many issues central to liberation theology and Christian Socialism, *Jesus, the Proletarian* did not gain wide attention on publication in Communist China due to its potential political implications. However, through this little-known book it is possible to gain an insight into understanding not only Chu as a person but also of Christian socialism in pre-Communist China, especially the social and cultural milieu in which it developed and its influence on Chinese Christians' understanding of the Bible. In contrast to Zhao's highly theological approach in *The Life of Jesus* (1935, 耶穌傳), in *Jesus, the Proletarian* Chu attempts to sum

[1] All transliterations of Chinese characters are in Hanyu Pinyin. The only exception is W. T. Chu (朱維之 Zhu Weizhi), since this is the accepted form of his name in English.

[2] All citations are to works written in or translated into Chinese, with the exception of Hevia (2003) which is in English.

[3] See (Lu and Wang 2007: 1–23).

up the revolutionary spirit of Christian thought in China during the first part of the twentieth century. It can therefore be grouped together with Zhang's *The Revolutionary Carpenter* (1939, 革命的木匠) as one of the two main works on Christian socialism in China.[4]

1

Before beginning a discussion of *Jesus, the Proletarian* it should be noted that it can be seen as a reworked version of *Christianity and Literature* (1992 [1940]). Chu's portrayal of Jesus as a revolutionary is foreshadowed in *Christianity and Literature* (where he speaks of Jesus as a poet), and in *Jesus Christ* (耶稣基督), co-written with Wang Zhixin (1948, 王治心).

In his portrayal of Jesus as a poet in *Christianity and Literature*, Chu writes that "Jesus was the embodiment of poetic genius" (Chu 1992 [1940]: 2), and later that "Poets are born, not made" (Chu 1992 [1940]: 8). In the first chapter, "Jesus and Literature," Chu describes the influence of Jesus' image on world literature, substantiating his portrayal of Jesus as a poet with quotes from the four Gospels, noting that Jesus was the descendent of poets (David and Mary), and endowed with the affective and imaginative qualities of a poet. Chu also emphasizes that Jesus expressed his teachings in a literary style; the way in which poetry seemed to roll off his tongue, Chu suggests, demonstrated that Jesus belonged to the classical literary tradition of the Hebrews.

Published in 1940, *Christianity and Literature* was written before the Marxian influence on Chu's literary criticism became apparent. Yet, although not overtly adopting this critical approach, he was probably familiar with it due to his extensive knowledge of the biblical exegesis of Russian scholars. In *Christianity and Literature,* the conventional approach Chu takes to interpreting Jesus as a poet does not particularly emphasize a relationship between literature and social structure, going some way to justify the claim that this book was written before Marxism had entered his worldview. This view is supported by a chapter in *Jesus Christ* entitled "The Official Biography of Jesus," a book published as part of a textbook series for junior high schools (Chu and Wang 1948). As Chu states in his preface of *Jesus, the Proletarian*: "*Jesus Christ* was written from a purely religious perspective. It does touch on the topic of revolution, but mainly in an idealistic or figurative sense" (Chu 1950: 3).[5]

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[4] For some reason, none of these three significant books are mentioned in overviews of Chinese Christian scholarship presented in Lin Ronghong's article "Models of Christian Theology" (1998: 102–31).

[5] Chu's preface is dated "May 1, 1950," International Workers' Day, a clear hint of his change in perspective.

Undoubtedly, *Jesus Christ* is limited in scope. Although written around two years earlier than *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu's contribution betrays little indication of the approach he was to take in his later work. The most likely explanation for this is that Chu's chapter in *Jesus Christ* was written at the request of Wang, his co-author. In fact, in comparison to his portrayal of Jesus as a poet in *Christianity and Literature*, Chu's "The Official Biography of Jesus" in *Jesus Christ* is rather insipid. This may well be because Wang was not keen on the idea of presenting Jesus in the guise of a literary figure (Chu and Wang 1948: 2–3).

Although absent in *Jesus Christ*, in his portrayal of Jesus as a poet in *Christianity and Literature* Chu had already begun to pay attention to the political environment in which Jesus lived. Far from merely describing the political background of the time, Chu emphasized that as a colonial subject of the Roman Empire, Jesus felt compelled to use his poetic genius to bring about change, considering himself the Messiah whose coming had been foretold by the ancient prophets. In support of his position, Chu quotes from Chapter 4 of the Gospel of Luke,

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
> and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to set the oppressed free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Chu 1940: 7–8).

Clearly Chu had already come to regard Jesus not only as a literary genius, but also a revolutionary dedicated to countering sources of oppression such as imperialism, colonialism, and poverty. In other words, Chu's conception of Jesus as a visionary poet presented in his earlier work can be seen to have evolved gradually into his portrayal of Jesus as a full-fledged revolutionary in *Jesus, the Proletarian*. It was undoubtedly during this same period that Chu began to adopt a Marxist perspective to his literary criticism. It would seem that this transformation of Jesus from poet to proletarian was not complete until 1948 or 1949, for no such change in perspective is indicated in the preface of the 1947 reprint of *Christianity and Literature*.

Ten years passed between the publication of *Christianity and Literature* and *Jesus, the Proletarian*, and it was during this time that Chu's vision of Jesus evolved from poet to revolutionary. Although the two versions of Jesus do overlap, as a proletarian Jesus lacks many of the markings of a man of letters, mainly because these characteristics are largely incompatible with his new role as revolutionary. Interestingly, at no point does Chu offer an explanation for this shift in his portrayal of Jesus.

2

Two notable works have clearly influenced Chu's portrayal of Jesus as a proletarian: Frederick Engel's essay "On the History of Early Christianty" (1929) and Karl Kautsky's book *The Foundations of Christianity* (1932).[6] In his preface to *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu asks:

> Why did Engels say that the contemporary proletarian movement had much in common with early Christianity? Why did Kautsky have such great respect for Christianity? Why did he see it as one of the most significant movements in human history? (Chu 1950: 3)

As a biblical scholar, Chu was mainly concerned with Christian literature, seemingly less interested in the social sciences, especially Marxist literary criticism. This is evidenced by the fact that of all Chu's writings available to me at present, he only specifically takes up this topic in one article. Written under the pseudonym Bai Chuan, "Art and Truth: Christianity and the Marxist View of the Arts" appeared in the April 1929 edition of the Christian magazine *Tian Feng*. This article, in which Chu strongly identifies with the Marxist approach to literary criticism, was later published in a compilation of Chu's writings titled *A Compilation of Essays on Art and Religion* (1935). In one of these essays, "Writing on the Margins," Chu writes:

> Jesus was a leader of great integrity who led the proletarian masses in the struggle against Roman imperialism. Indeed, Engels himself acknowledges that Christianity began as a revolutionary social movement (Chu 1935: 2).[7]

Chu's understanding of Marxist critiques of the arts and Christianity was largely based on the Chinese translation of Marx and Engels' work by Guo Moruo (郭沫若), published as *The Sacred Family* (1936). Amongst these essays on theology and literary criticism, Chu's attention was particularly caught by the Marxist interpretation of how Christian art and

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[6] *The Foundations of Christianity* was first translated into Chinese and published in 1932 by the Society for Chinese National Glory; Engels' essay "On the History of Early Christianity" was translated by Lin Chaozhen and published in a compilation of Engels' work titled *Religion, Philosophy, and Socialism*, in 1929 by Hubin Books. Undoubtedly, *The Foundations of Christianity* had a considerable influence on Christian intellectuals of the Republican era, as indicated by the praise it receives from Wu Leichuan in *Mozi and Jesus* (1940) and from Shen Sizhuang in *A New History of Socialism* (1934).

[7] This compilation includes an essay very much in the vein of liberation theology entitled "Amos: The People's Prophet."

literature had been essentially corrupted at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Chu subsequently adopted the view that during the latter part of the nineteenth century, bourgeois writers regularly distorted facts in their attempts to advance their own social position (Chu 1935: 24). Chu read the Marxist critique of the arts to mean that Christian literature written by members of the bourgeoisie failed both as a reflection of the actual state of society and as a means of encouraging a struggle for truth. Explaining why bourgeois revolutions never succeeded in bringing about thoroughgoing changes in the structure of society, sometimes even having regressive effects. For Chu, literature should serve as a concrete depiction of the actual state of affairs, rather than providing mere abstractions and generalizations.

> Although Marx and Engels were atheists, they did have certain valid appraisals of religion. In his essay *On the Jewish Question* Marx states that the practice of religion should not be seen as contradictory to national development. He also saw no contradiction between human rights and the freedom to practice ones religion or to own property (Chu 1935: 22).

This shows that at this point Chu had already studied early Marx, even though he interpreted him tendentiously, in a pro-religious way. So equipped with a new theoretical point of view, he promptly applied it to reinterpreting the life and legacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus the inspired poet was transformed into Jesus the revolutionary proletarian, no longer concerned with art and beauty, but rather with freedom and emancipation. This forms the background to understanding Chu's departure from his earlier approach and his radical reinterpretation of Jesus in his writings.

Although little is known about the circumstances under which the Chinese translation of Kautsky's *The Foundations of Christianity* was published in 1932, one certainty is the major impact it had on Chinese intelligentsia at the time. At that time there were very few publications on early Christianity available in the Chinese language. In his preface to *Jesus Christ*, Wang points out that *The Foundations of Christianity* was an important and reliable source of information on the origins of Christianity (Wang and Chu 1948: 6–7). In his preface to *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu specifically mentions that it was through his reading of the Chinese translation of Engels' essay "On the History of Early Christianity" (1929), Kautsky's *The Foundations of Christianity* (1932), and a number of other works on ancient history and the history of society that he gradually arrived at a correct understanding of who Jesus really was. He also states that it was through his reading of these same books that he gained much of his insight into the actual situation of the proletariat (Chu 1950: 3).[8]

[8] It is unclear whether Chu actually read *On the History of Early Christianity*, for

The Foundations of Christianity undoubtedly played a key role in the development of Chu's thought. In this book, Kautsky uses a historical materialist perspective to analyze the origins of Christianity and its early social history. More importantly, he portrays Christianity as a revolutionary movement aimed at countering both Roman imperialism and the vested interests of the Jewish theocracy. For Kautsky, the Church began as a proletarian movement resisting the main sources of oppression of the time, and can therefore be seen as a precursor to communism and socialism. Chu furthers Kautsky's argument in *Jesus, the Proletarian*, claiming that the international outlook of Christianity originated with the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and the significance of Passover.

> Judea was founded on the principle of human rights, and the Jews had a very high regard for democracy. In fact, their history as a people began with Moses leading them out of slavery in Egypt, where they toiled as brick makers. The God they believed in helped them gain emancipation from oppression at the hands of their Egyptian masters. Over the past 4,000 years they have continually commemorated with great zeal their emancipation and flight from Egypt in the annual holiday of Passover. Their God is one who has compassion for workers and the oppressed. (Chu 1950: 28).

Chu emphasizes that Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven has a long history amongst the Jews, and can be understood as a precursor to the doctrine of revolution formulated by such later theoreticians as Marx and Lenin, whom Chu saw as the ideological descendants of the early prophets (who also preached the necessity of proletarian revolution) (Chu 1950: 30). Chu also points out the significance of the Passover festival, inspiring Jesus to martyrdom, seeing himself as the "lamb of God," the sacrifice of whom would serve to redeem not only his own people, but all humanity (Chu 1950: 71). Moreover, Chu points out that the final time Jesus exhorted his disciples to carry out his teachings it was the night of Passover. On this occasion he spoke of his body in a metaphorical way, summing up his ministry by saying that love is the foundation of his teaching and God is the underlying principle of the universe (Chu 1950: 101). Chu also gives great importance to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which he sees as demonstrating the idea that "class solidarity overcomes ethnic chauvinism. This is the true mark of internationalism" (Chu 1950: 85).

For Chu, then, it is highly significant that Jesus advocated liberation and the Kingdom of Heaven not only for the Jews, but for humanity in general. He saw Jesus as the initiator of a worldwide proletariat move-

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in his article "Art and Truth: Christianity and the Marxist View of the Arts" (1929) most of his remarks on Engels come from Kautsky's *The Foundations of Christianity* (1932).

ment, based on ideals of freedom, human rights, and universal love, the culmination of which was to be the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth (Chu 1950: 27).

Chu's understanding of early Christianity was informed by evaluations of the religion's later developments, especially those discussed in *The Foundations of Christianity*. Chu admired early Christianity, but disdained the accretions and corruptions which had crept in over time, distorting its original nature. The very first sentence of the preface to *Jesus, the Proletarian* reads: "Religion is a product of society" (Chu 1950: 1), a statement which echoes the doctrines of both Marxism and materialism. He goes on to state:

> Over the course of 2,000 years Christianity has continually developed and evolved in the context of class struggle and revolution. Looking at only the final phase of the history of capitalism, we fail to get a complete picture. Similarly, if our evaluation of the Church is limited to one particular place and time, the same kind of distortion also results. On a huge flourishing tree there inevitably can be found a few withered leaves and branches, but it would be incorrect to take them as evidence that the tree is dead (Chu 1950: 2).

This idea is one of the keys elements of Chu's understanding of Jesus. Well aware of the validity of much of the criticism leveled at Christianity, Chu adopts the proletarian perspective to reinterpret Jesus and "prune off" the withered leaves and branches which have accumulated on the great tree of Christianity. Thus, Chu questions the way in which the Church and capitalism have understood and presented Christianity. For them, Jesus was primarily a religious leader, but for Chu he was a proletarian revolutionary. In this way, Chu countered a wide range of criticisms leveled at Christianity whereby Jesus was critical of not only a religion which was merely a social product, but also the society which has produced such a religion.

Kautsky saw early Christianity as a catalyst for revolution and this is the main point Chu wants to make in *Jesus, the Proletarian*. Chu points out that just as "God stands with us" (the meaning of "Emanuel"), insofar as Jesus and the movement he founded were both dedicated to proletarian revolution, then logically "God stands with the proletariat" in its aspiration for freedom (Chu 1950: 3). Moreover, as Kautsky emphasized, in contrast to the capitalist class, the proletarian class has a natural affinity with the teachings of early Christianity, beginning as it did a revolutionary movement by which the oppressed sought to throw off the shackles of Roman imperialism.

Jesus served as the spiritual leader of this movement, standing in solidarity with the poor and downtrodden in their aspiration to gain freedom from the domination of foreign powers. His goal was nothing less

than the establishment of a new social and political order. Yet, the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven proved to be none too easy. In *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu repeatedly points out the relationship between the dialectic thought of Jesus and the faith in the movement he founded, a faith which could only come to fruition through great sacrifice. In these passages Chu is pointing out that although revolution may seem impossible, it can become a reality through the power of faith and sacrifice. In making this connection, Chu refers to two parables spoken by Jesus: the parable of the mustard seed to illustrate that, unlikely as it may seem, revolution is actually possible; and the parable of the wheat seed to illustrate the power of sacrifice (Chu 1950: 28, 71, 76).

3

The first chapter of *Jesus, the Proletarian* is titled "Come and See."[9] At first glance this may appear merely a clever opening with no particular significance, but is in fact intended as an invitation for the reader to join Chu in bearing witness to some of the ways in which the image of Jesus has been distorted and misused through the centuries. In the attempt to portray him as a feudal lord or capitalist, these images have thereby served as a tool for manipulation and exploitation.

Jesus, the Proletarian both begins and ends with Pontius Pilate. In describing the way in which Pilate sought to humiliate Jesus by placing a crown of thorns on his head, draping him with a purple robe, saying "Have a look at this man" (1950: 4), Chu uses highly subtle irony to point out that we too have failed to recognize Jesus for who he really was. In Chu's view, Christians—be they feudalist or capitalist—have never fully understood the true significance of Jesus. Rather, much like Pilate, they have misunderstood him and hoisted upon him a false identity replete with all manner of strange garb. The feudal lords decked him in ecclesiastical robes and a golden crown, casting him in the role of a monarch or aristocrat. For their part, capitalists created for Jesus a gilded appearance. While Pilate used his status as the representative of the Roman Empire only to ridicule and persecute Jesus, however, the capitalists and feudal lords used him as a tool of oppression—the so-called "opiate of the people." Indeed, Chu clearly states that his purpose in writing *Jesus, the Proletarian*

[9] In his laudatory forward to *Christianity and Literature*, Liu Tingfang (劉廷芳) also uses the phrase "come and see" (Chu 1992 [1940]: 5), serving merely as an invitation to the reader to make a thorough reading of this masterpiece which is bound to become a classic reference work on Chinese Christian literature. Interestingly enough, we can see from the preface to the reprint of *Christianity and Literature* that Chu was highly grateful to Liu, and his use of "come and see" at the beginning of *Jesus, the Proletarian* may well be a way of reiterating his gratitude.

was to set the record straight by clearing away all the undignified misinterpretations of Jesus which have accumulated over the years and to reveal the real Jesus: a man of humble origins born into a working class family (Chu 1950: 2-3). By citing Daniel's invitation to Nathaniel to "Come and see" and the sarcastic "Have a look at this man" of Pilate, Chu is trying to emphasize Jesus as neither blustering politician nor lofty messiah, but rather a humble leader of the proletarian revolution. This is borne out by the Gospels themselves, which Chu sees as records of and by the working class (Chu 1950: 4).

From the perspective of contemporary literary criticism, *Jesus, the Proletarian* can be classified as belonging to the genre of post-colonial criticism. Writing in the context of the Chinese response to imperialism, Chu naturally portrays Jesus as a champion of the proletariat in its resistance to foreign domination and oppression. Jesus was born as a subject of the Roman Empire, and his teachings can be seen as a type of post-colonial discourse on the evils of imperialist oppression, including the internal structure of Jewish society of the time and how it served as a tool of imperialism and foreign domination. In addressing the issue of Jewish society, Chu contends that Christianity took on an international character as a way of countering the similarly international nature of imperialism.

> Rome was highly adept at political organization. Its foreign policy centered not so much on maintaining complete political control over its colonial possessions, as on plundering them. Thus Rome allowed the local elite to retain a modicum of authority in exchange for their cooperation in exploiting the proletariat (Chu 1950: 5).

Inasmuch as economic exploitation of its colonial subjects was the underlying aim of Roman imperialism, this highly effective policy of using the local aristocracy to control the proletariat led to heightened class conflict. The Jewish working classes of the time were beleaguered and exploited both from within and without. Moreover, for Chu the vested interests of Jewish society at the time consisted of two groups who served the interests of the Roman imperialists: the Sadducees, constituting the nobility, and the Pharisees, who made up the bourgeoisie.

The existence of an unequal distribution of wealth is usually reflected in the structure of the local economy. Chu portrays Galilee as the cradle of the proletarian revolution with Capernaum as its base, pointing out that Jesus spent most of his ministry in Galilee amongst the proletariat becoming intimately familiar with their suffering and aspirations (Chu 1950: 35, 43). Eventually, this "dangerous person" decided to go to Jerusalem, the great center of imperial authority, economic might, and religious oppression, where he issued his challenge to the vested interests of the day:

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> Jesus hailed from Galilee, a region where the proletariat eked out a subsistence-level livelihood; Jerusalem was the center of the privileged classes, one of whose favorite terms of abuse was "Galilean pig!" Add to this the fact that he had received no formal religious training whatsoever, and it's easy to see why in the eyes of the social elite he was regarded as uncouth and uneducated (Chu 1950: 33).

In *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu does not quote from the Gospel of Luke—the scripture most frequently cited by liberation theologians. He does, however, cite it in *Christianity and Literature*, where he describes portions of it as "ballads with the power to change the world" (Chu 1992 [1940]: 42). In *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu gives considerable attention to Jesus' first visit to the Temple (Chu 1950: 36–37).[10] It should be noted that Chu refers to two visits to the Temple by Jesus, apparently to emphasize that he was especially concerned with the contemporary condition of organized religion. Although Jesus recognized that religion played a key role in Jewish society of the time and could not be ignored, he recognized that as the Temple had become the center of commercial activities, it had been corrupted and turned into an instrument of oppression. Thus, Jesus saw the prevailing religious institutions of his time as a source of oppression, but also as having the potential to serve as a force of liberation. By making the Temple—the very heart of Jewish society—the starting point of his revolution, he simultaneously brought attention to the reality of class conflict at that time and the need for a religious revival. Together, these form the main issues Chu attempted to address in this work of Christian self-criticism.

On the issue of taxation, Chu interprets Jesus' proverb "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" in terms of power:

> Money represents the colonial oppression and exploitation of the Roman Empire. God represents justice, truth, human rights, and benevolence; he stands in solidarity with the oppressed! (Chu 1950: 36)

For Chu, the irreconcilable nature of the relationship between God and Caesar was reflected in the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. Thus he saw the Kingdom of Heaven as unrelated to political power, with money as more than merely a medium of exchange; the way it flowed through economic activity reflected the social structure. As Chu puts it, "Economic exploitation is one of the greatest calamities afflicting

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[10] Chu describes two separate visits by Jesus to the Temple. One is titled "The First Disturbance," and the other "The Final Battle." In the preface he states that this book is modeled after *The Proletarian Jesus*, written by Yonezawa Shozo (米澤尚三) published in Japanese in 1928, a book which also refers to two separate visits to the Temple.

mankind. [...] At that time Rome was a huge parasite; the prosperity of Rome was made possible by the enslavement of the proletariat" (Chu 1950: 23–24).

This issue also has a bearing on how Chu interprets the three temptations of Christ, which he sees as an indication that Jesus already had a clear plan for his revolutionary movement. He interprets the temptation to turn stones into bread as indicating the primacy of compassion and mutual assistance; the temptation to worship the devil in exchange for sovereignty over the entire world as demonstrating nonresistance to evil; and the temptation to jump down from the pinnacle intimating the use of supernatural powers by spiritual adepts (Chu 1950: 26–27). This was the basis from which Jesus set out on the arduous path of revolution.

> Once the workers of the world were united and of one heart and mind, they would struggle together to establish the Kingdom of Heaven. Whereas the Romans used military force to unite the world, Jesus used the power of the people. In addition to reviving the people's faith in God, he also introduced them to the ideas of justice, human rights, freedom, and universal love. In this way, Jesus strove to liberate all humanity and establish the Kingdom of Heaven (Chu 1950: 27).

Conclusion

Arriving on the coattails of Western imperialism, most Chinese still regard Christianity as an instrument of foreign aggression (Hevia 2003). In the Marxist approach to literary criticism, an interpretation of a given text requires an inquiry into the social context in which it was produced, especially the economic system and means of production. In *Jesus, the Proletarian*, Chu asserts that "the individual's views and opinions are determined by such factors as the social system, the class structure and one's living conditions" (Chu 1950: 89). At a time when China was still smarting from the "century of humiliation" at the hands of Western imperialists, Chu used the Marxist perspective to demonstrate how Jesus and Christianity were misappropriated into being used as tools of capitalist and imperialist aggression. Chu's chief concern in writing *Jesus, the Proletarian* was to set the record straight. His understanding of Jesus can be summed up by Pier Paolo Pasolini who stated, "What Jesus started was a revolution" (2008: 112–13).

This is the issue Chu wanted to address in *Jesus, the Proletarian*. He was able to understand why many Chinese intellectuals saw Christianity as an instrument of Western imperialism, but felt that its character had gradually changed so that by the time Western powers and their collaborators had been expelled from China, it was well suited for the Chinese nation. In the West, a theologian establishes his reputation by completing

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a work on Christology; in China one does so by completing a biography of Jesus. In Chu's view, that Christianity came in for such severe criticism in China was a positive, for this made it possible to clearly differentiate genuine Christianity from its counterfeit version. No doubt, Chinese people of the time found it easier to understand Jesus when presented in the guise of a proletarian—for this was the middle of the twentieth century—when China had finally succeeded in throwing off the last remaining vestiges of Western imperialism. Thus, what Chu wanted to present was what he saw as the real Christianity, in its original purity, unmatched in its ability to bring truth, freedom, justice, and prosperity to the people of China.

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