

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that a dialogically contextualized Chinese soteriology, which draws heavily upon honor-shame concepts prevalent in Chinese culture, issues forth in a biblical understanding of atonement and justification. It uses an interdisciplinary method of theological contextualization that intentionally utilizes a cultural worldview for the sake of exegesis. The honor-shame (HS) concept helpfully connects Chinese context, ancient biblical cultures, and the biblical text. The study culminates by developing a doctrine of salvation from an HS perspective. By reading the Bible from a Chinese worldview, one sees a variety of themes emerge that are underemphasized in traditional, Western theologies.

Chapter 2 argues that contextualization first of all means interpreting the Bible through a particular cultural lens. Missionaries and theologians often assume a narrow formulation of the gospel. Contextualization then is typically conceived as a kind of communication or application. However, these people essentially “beg the question” and thus predetermine the result of their contextualized theology. There is a danger for well-intended missionaries to communicate a gospel message that requires listeners, before becoming Christians, to first conform their primary way of thinking to Western, law-oriented categories. A “dialogical” approach to contextualization helps people compensate for their subjective limitations by broadening their cultural lenses and so enabling them to see more of what the Bible says to those among all nations.

Chapter 3 identifies a number of prominent themes and concerns within Chinese culture that can shape a contextualized theology in China. In general, Chinese people typically lay stress on their collective identity, hierarchy, tradition, and “face.” They are more group-oriented (versus individualistic) and focus on the practical aspects of life and religion. People think most basically in terms of relationships (or *guanxi*) not law. In history, the Chinese worldview divides the world into those who are insiders and those who are outside the “Middle Kingdom.” The increased presence and power of foreigners has fostered differing degrees of ethnocentrism and nationalism. The chapter looks at how scholars and practitioners have attempted to contextualize theology in China. Even though many people can agree in principle on a variety of issues, there remains a lack of consensus on how practically to do contextualization. Few theologians have attempted to develop extensively a “Chinese” theology. If one considers many of the tools and strategies used by missionaries, it appears that few practitioners are applying the theoretical and cultural insights highlighted in the chapter.

Chapter 4 compares HS in Chinese culture, the Ancient Near East (ANE), and Scripture in order to understand its relevance for Chinese theology. Humans universally have a concern for HS because it determines one’s public identity. Theologians often speak about achieved honor (via doing good works). In addition, HS can also be ascribed, perhaps based on one’s group identity or relational network. Many theologians have written on the theme of “glory” in the Bible. Fewer people have explored how HS concepts pervade Scripture and shape a robust biblical theology. Although missiologists recognize the importance of HS, their theological proposals, in general, remain law-oriented and do not apply an HS perspective to biblical exegesis.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how HS frames and gives color to the biblical doctrine of salvation. The gospel announces how Jesus saves the “face” of God, who establishes his kingdom by fulfilling his promise to bless all nations through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection (cf. Rom 1:1–4; Gal 3:8). The glory that the Father gives the Son, Jesus gives to his people (cf. John 17:22). Collectively, all who boast in Christ are enabled by the Spirit to obediently honor God. Any who refuse to give allegiance to (i.e. have faith in) Christ will be put to shame. A theology of HS is pervasive and practical in Romans, where Paul develops a doctrine of justification that integrates soteriology and ecclesiology. Whether Greeks or Jews, people should not boast in their cultural or ethnic identity. Paul undermines the notion that salvation is tied to ethnic identity. The gospel challenges the sense of cultural superiority. Because God upholds his own honor, all who trust in Christ are reckoned as Abraham’s offspring. True faith entails a conversion of one’s HS standards. Like Paul, missionaries can use HS to overcome cultural pride, build church unity, and mobilize missionaries to be a blessing to all nations, including China.

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate a theological missiology and a missiological theology. Those who develop contextual theologies can draw from diverse human cultures as a way of guarding against provincial interpretations of Scripture. Missiologists have integral contributions to make to theological studies. Additionally, one minimizes theological reductionism by taking seriously the range of metaphors presented throughout the entire biblical narrative. However, all people interpret Scripture from a limited perspective. Therefore, in order for Christians to grasp more fully God’s revelation, they must constantly seek to broaden their worldview