

**Is Ecumenism a Feature of
Taiwanese Christianity?
Methodology in view of a Preliminary
Assessment**

**基督徒合一是否台灣基督教的特徵嗎？
初步評估方法論**

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[ABSTRACT] Ecumenism – as an epistemic and practical tradition in the West - refers to the process of bringing together Christians of different denominations, confessional and theological backgrounds in view of a more intense, vivid, rationalized and visible unity of the Church or Body of Christ.

Looking through the ecumenical lens, Christians constitute a complex minority within the Taiwanese people. Because of historical links, groups or ecclesial communities stemming from mainline churches of the West naturally encounter ecumenical challenges similar to those faced in traditional churches. Taiwanese ecumenical awareness however needs also to account for the yearning and search for ecumenical unity among evangelical and charismatic groups, Pentecostal movements, as well as the autochthonous free churches whose growth is rather steady compared to the offshoots of mainline

churches. Now, can ecumenism be said a feature of Taiwanese Christianity?

Since the task evoked here requires ample time and energy, my intention in this initial stage will consist in defining the method for a preliminary assessment of the question.

【摘要】 合一——作為西方認識論和實踐的傳統——是指匯集不同宗派、教派和神學背景的基督徒，探討一個更強烈、具體、合理化和可見的教會或耶穌基督的統一。

從合一的角度看，基督徒在台灣人民中屬於一個複雜的少數民族。由於歷史的關係，源於西方主流教會的台灣教會團體自然會面對西方傳統教會在面對合一上的挑戰。台灣人對合一的意識，還需考慮福音派、靈恩派、五旬節運動和本土自由教會之間對合一的盼望和追求，相對於主流教會的分支，他們在穩步成長。那麼，我們可以說，合一是台灣基督宗教的一個特徵嗎？

Introduction

While Christianity is a relatively modern phenomenon in the Taiwanese culture, still it appears as a multifaceted reality, whose impact affects society in incommensurable ways. Although it is a minority religion, still in its expressions and sensitivities, Taiwanese Christianity is highly denominational, with each denomination defining and being defined by its history and the strategies it chooses to secure its continuity. Instances of cooperation and collaboration between and across denominations and churches, as well as among people belonging to several churches and denominations, can also be found. Yet, despite all those manifestations, there is still a long way to ascertain the extent to which ecumenism is part of Taiwanese

Christianity. Vested with the recesses of my immersion in both the academic and ecumenical environment of Taiwan,¹ I consider my contribution not so much in providing final answers, but mostly in pondering on the question and the methodological considerations to address it.

Signs of an Ecumenical Christianity

In this complex and compelling context, the paths of ecumenism have been running for some time and are already rich in experiences and choices for the future, obviously in the midst of problems and impasses that stimulate further commitment and creativity.

Historically, the adhesion of Presbyterians of Taiwan to the WCC dates back to 1956. In 1991 the National Council of Churches of Taiwan (NCCT) was established, to which also the Regional Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church of the island took part, the only case in the world together with Australia. NCCT strives to foster ecumenism through the activities of its desks catering to common concerns (ecumenical unity, women, aborigines, environment). For the last years, beside the periodical meetings of representatives of church members and accredited organizations, a

¹The perceptions and comments on Taiwanese Christians come from my involvement with the National Council of Churches of Taiwan. I have been joining activities of the organization since 2006. Since 2011, I have been participating in the core-group of the organization in virtue of my position as executive secretary of the Commission for Ecumenism and Christian unity within the Regional Bishops' Conference of Taiwan. Beside involvement in NCCT, I have been also teaching courses related to interactions between churches and denominations and dialogue among and across denominations. These courses ponder on questions on the proliferation and diversity of denominations, the nature and goals of ecumenical movement, the meaning and challenge of Christian unity, etc. Moreover, besides theoretical thinking, students are required to visit churches, and local congregations. All these have provided insights for the sharing in this article.

yearly ecumenical sports fest and the prayer for the week of Christian unity are the main activities of the organization.

Another sign of ecumenism is the choice for Taiwanese Christian universities and colleges (3 Catholic and 8 of other denominations) to join the ACUCA (Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia). Moreover, in the field of pastoral and academic formation, there are exchanges among theological schools. They welcome and form members of other denominations and strive to create opportunities for exchange and interaction. For instance, though meant for Catholics, the Faculty of Theology of Fu Jen also forms orthodox, Episcopalian, Lutheran and Presbyterian students. Moreover, thanks to an initiative of Fr Luis Gutheinz, for over thirty years, the institution has maintained a close and friendly relation with its counterpart, the Theological College of the Presbyterians founded over a hundred years. The two institutions alternatively visit each other. The visits include moments of prayer, study, play and sharing, all geared to deepen mutual knowledge and appreciations.

The Taizé Prayer is another engine fostering ecumenism in Taiwan. It gathers Christians of different denominations who come to pray following the style of the Taizé community. Compared to other initiatives of the National Council of Churches, this movement is being referred to as an ecumenism from bellow, or a grassroots ecumenism.

The joint action for the translation of the Bible into Chinese is another example of that collaboration. The initiative officially brought Catholic and Protestant experts to work together for what was to be the first Chinese ecumenical bible, the equivalent of the

French TOB.² It aimed at overcoming obstacles posed by the various Chinese translations of Scripture. Starting from the gospels, the new translation set a prior agreement on two points. It was accepted by the Catholic side to translate the name of God with Shang Di (Protestant translation) leaving aside the Catholic translation Tian Zhu. It was accepted by the Protestant side to translate the Holy Spirit with Sheng Shen (Catholic translation) leaving aside the Protestant translation Sheng Ling. Obviously, the reception of the work was met with resistance on both sides, certainly not only on a literary and theological basis, but also, perhaps, for the fear of losing, with the specificity of the names, the signs of their particular identity. Beyond the objective difficulties, it is up to the hierarchies to approve the translations for official use, and an ecumenical translation of the biblical texts should have been seen as very promising step ahead. Though the efforts have not achieved the expected results, it still gave possibility to foster ecumenical friendships among the experts who were involved in the project.

There are many other attempts of ecumenical collaboration which could be seen as ambiguous, leading to wonder whether they can offer a solid ground to qualify Taiwanese Christianity as ecumenical. While exposed to challenges emanating from the same context, because of denominationalism, Christians fail to have a common stand on many burning issues - social, ethical, ministerial, etc. The failure weakens the ability to speak to society with one voice and to offer in it a strong testimony to the message of Christ. But above all, one of the deepest challenges facing ecumenism is the vagueness of the expectations denominations hold regarding the ecumenical movement. This factor affects the type and intensity of

² For further information regarding the efforts and results of the joint action for the translation of the Bible into Chinese, see Archie C.C. Lee, "Ecumenical Venture and Chinese Bible" *Lumen* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan., 2016), 66-68.

their commitment and reminds the necessity for an adequate methodology capable of fostering a contextual ecumenism which does not only facilitate a systematic analysis and assessment of the field, but can also unveil themes and areas that need more attention. Because of history and faith traditions and convictions, the challenges of Taiwanese Christians are in many ways analogical and the ecumenical path could eventually enrich the approaches of churches and denominations.

A Relatively Young and Denominational Christianity

The earliest contact of Christianity with Taiwan goes back to the end of the 16th Century when a ship carrying a group of Jesuits missionaries wrecked on the Island in 1582. As Taiwan or Formosa was not their original plan, they left as soon as it was possible. However in 1626, a group of Spanish Dominicans landed on the Island with the intention of gaining it to Christ. Protestant missionaries who entered Taiwan during the Dutch colonial rule (1624-1662), had similar intention. This first wave of evangelization, by Catholic and Protestant missionaries dwindled, leaving no traces, after General Koxinga, a Chinese Ming Loyalist, regained the Island from the Dutch. The second wave of evangelization started in the midst of the 19th Century. For the Catholic side, the protagonists were Spanish Dominicans accompanied by five of their Chinese lay assistants who arrived in Gaoxiong in 1859. Finding no trace of the previous work, they had to establish first contacts and find a *modus vivendi* in an environment which did not show any sympathy to Christianity. The Protestant second adventure followed six years later. The protagonists were two Presbyterian missionaries. In 1865, Dr James Laidlaw Maxwell of the Presbyterian Church of England initiated the mission in Tainan, in the Southern part of the Island,

while Georges Leslie Mackay of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada started the Tamshui mission in the Northern part of the Island in 1871. The seed of Christianity that expanded on the Island was borne from the diversity found in the two denominations. More faces of Christianity were to be added with time. The True Jesus Church, one of the first Pentecostal denominations founded in China, records to have expanded its mission to Taiwan in 1926.³ The same year a group of Taiwanese youth converted to the Holiness Church (聖教會) in Japan and returned to establish a Taiwanese branch, marking hence the beginning of the Taiwan Holiness Church (台灣聖教會).

As for the other denominations and churches present on the Island, their arrival is in between the wake of the retreat of the Nationalist troops of the KMT and the expulsion of foreign missionaries from China. In a span of less than a decade, Taiwanese came to know and hear about other different churches and denominations: Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, and so forth. These were coming from vast territories of China that had accommodated larger and more diversified groups of missionaries who, though belonging to the same denomination, manifested particularities because of allegiances to founding and sending mission countries, theological formation, efforts of adaptation, language, etc. While in China, those particularities might not have been apparent because of distances; that could no longer hold in the cities and villages of Taiwan. The influx of particularities gave the impression of a multiplication of denominations and churches. In the case of the Catholic Church for instance, the Catholicism Dominican missionaries had propagated thus far was expanded and diversified with the arrival of other congregations which strove to express their

³ "The History of the True Jesus Church", accessed Feb 17, 2018. <http://www.tjc.org/church/history.shtml>.

respective charisms and missionary approaches. Among Protestants, the situation was similar even though in some cases, liturgical language, which could have led to a segregation within a denomination, became instead a sign of common identity.

The influx of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Taiwan, not only intensified the denominational character of Taiwanese Christianity, it also exposed all denominations to face similar problems in terms of insertion and adaptation to the new environment. Moreover, the similarities in the strategies of churches and denominations are obvious. They have concentrated in the fields of education, health care and social relief programs. Christian churches in Taiwan formulated their responses to the need of the gospel and the people by creating universities, colleges, formation centers, technical institutes, formation outlets, middle and high schools, vocational schools, kindergartens. They also built hospitals and provided health centers in remote areas. Moreover, they organized relief programs, managed social structures such as orphanages, home for elderly, centers for recuperation. All these institutions are denominational and they are considered as a concrete incarnation of the Christian message; they are institutions standing as witness for the Christian spirit and as tools for an implicit and indirect preaching of the Gospel message.

Looking at the nature of Taiwanese Christianity from a historical perspective, denominationalism emerges as a factor linked to the history of evangelization of the Island. From the middle of the 17 Century on, Taiwanese have been encountering and identifying Jesus as Christ. The encounters have been mediated by foreign and local missionaries looking forward to recruit new members for their respective denominations. Consequently, it naturally goes that the Christianity introduced to Taiwan has been highly denominational. Knowledge and immersion in one's denomination prime over the

interest for knowing the Christians as a whole body. In this situation, Christian identity might primarily be associated with the sense of belonging to a denomination and denominational identity might conceal and even compromise the Christian identity. Risks of enclosure and sectarianism are present from the moment a denomination fails to identify the Christic experience taking place in other communities and shaping the followers in the likeness of Christ. In fact, Christian identity derives not primarily from the belonging to a given denomination but by the identification with the spirit of Jesus who shapes the follower in his image and likeness.

In the light of the above considerations, Christians constitute a tiny, small, diversified and yet important religious minority. They are known for their respected and highly qualified service in social, educational and health sectors, which in many ways are expressions of the witness they want to bear to their faith.

A recent study by the Christian Research Center in 2014 evaluates the Christian population of Taiwan at 5.86%. All denominations included, Taiwanese Christians amount to 1307842 believers. They worship in 4101 identifiable churches or congregations. The majority of these congregations clusters around 57 well-established denominations. Some are independent communities and others operate as freelance charismatic groups.⁴ Overall, there are notable nuances in the expression of faith resulting from the perspectives of the denominations and personal

⁴ For details, see the "2013 Report of the Chinese Christian Evangelical Association" prepared by the Christian Research Center of Taichung in 2014. The work is recommendable for its complete coverage and meticulous approach. It provides information for 4065 out of 4101 Christian places of prayer; that is 99.15% of coverage. It is not a mere compilation of data obtained from denominations for it provides a confrontation and analysis of these data in light of other existing sources of information. For instance, it made use of available governmental information and sought to reach out individually to each of the denominations and their places of prayer. "台灣基督徒達 130 萬相當於一個彰化縣人口!" Accessed Oct 13, 2014. <http://taiwanbible.com/web/news/news.jsp?ID=103129>.

appropriation of faith. The Christic experience of Taiwanese does not merely make of them 'Christians' in general; they are Christians in the steps of an X or Y denominational tradition. They are Christians in the tradition of the Roman Catholics, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Lutherans, the Anglicans, Born Again, True Jesus Church, Jesus the Light, the Church (召會), etc.

Taiwanese Christian denominations answer their call to identify Jesus as the Christ in freedom and creativity, striving to maintain their identity and autonomy vis-à-vis the others. However, they are all also faced with a common basic challenge; the one emanating from the generalized assessment of Christianity as still a foreign religion, implying that there might be a dichotomy between being a Taiwanese and being a Christian. How do Taiwanese Christians solve the apparent dichotomy? How do they address the riddles of professing Christianity and being Taiwanese in the fast-changing society of Taiwan? What are the particularities of the experience of Jesus as Christ in Taiwan? Which are the challenges the Taiwanese context pose to the reception and identification with the Christian ideals? Which added meanings the Christian experience brings to the self-hood of Taiwanese Christians? Finally, how do those challenges constitute an ingredient for a potential quest for Christian unity among Taiwanese Christians?

Speaking of the history of evangelization of Taiwan, Allen J. Swanson offers a framework capable of mirroring a process familiar to each church or denomination. He speaks of stages in the evangelical work. The first is the breaking up of the ground (16th Century to the 1945); the second, planting of the Word (1945-1955); the third, harvest time (1955-1960); the fourth, conservation and storage (1960-1965); and the last and perennial one is the "back doors' church phenomenon (starting from the 70s on)" and alluding to baptized Christians who by lack of interest and motivation are no

longer in touch with the congregation.⁵ It is not an exaggeration to state that each congregation and church denomination in Taiwan can see itself reflected in this pattern.

Initial Denominational Gathering

Admitting that Taiwanese Christianity is highly denominational, what can be said regarding the relations existing between the denominations? The history of Christianity in Taiwan unveils that there has always been here and there signs and occasions of cooperation and collaboration among and across denominations and churches.

The creation of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan stands as the first visible sign to gather under a Christian organization. The merit goes to the Presbyterians who, already in 1949, had started considering joining their missions in the Southern and Northern synods under one headquarter; this would have not only overcome parochialism, but also bridged and conserved the legacies of James Laidlaw Maxwell, the Presbyterian missionary from England who evangelized the south (Tainan) with that of George Leslie Mackay whose evangelizing work was located in the northern part of the Island. This choice helped them move and speak with one voice. In fact, they were the first Christian organization from Taiwan to apply for membership of the World Council of Churches in 1957. In 1963, other denominations followed in their steps to create the Ecumenical Cooperative Committee of Taiwan, and which in 1966 became the Consultative Committee of Taiwan. The atmosphere was conducive to the discussions towards the

⁵ Allen J. Swanson, *The Church in Taiwan: Profile 1980* (South Pasadena - California: William Carey Library, 1981), 26-27.

creation of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan (NCCT), which eventually became the first ecumenical organization on the Island. Beside the Presbyterians, other churches and denominations involved in those sharings included Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, True Jesus Church (真耶穌教會).⁶ Those days seemed to reflect a certain ecumenical openness and receptivity to all. For instance, one could note the presence of all major denominations, Catholics included, at the conference the True Jesus Church organized in Taizhong in 1963 (台中真耶穌教會會議).⁷ The celebration of the centennial of evangelization of Taiwan in 1965 reflected also that openness. Though the event was closely connected to the history of the Presbyterians, they wanted it to be an important moment for all Christians regardless of the denominations. The theme was inclusive; it emphasized that "all was God's grace" and "that all glory belonged to God." With this in mind, the centennial was to recognize the contribution of all missionaries - regardless of their denominations - to the evangelization of the Island. It was also a moment to reflect together on some prospects for Christianity in Taiwan. In fact, this was also the context leading to the promotion of the Ecumenical Cooperation Committee into a consultation committee of the World Council of Churches. Accordingly, twenty-two different denominations and church organizations submitted to the idea.⁸ The organization was to work as a platform

⁶ See Chin Ke Pa (曾慶豹), "Yue se he ta de xiong di men: hu jiao fan gong, dang guo ji du tu yu tai wan ji yao pai de xing cheng" (約瑟和他的兄弟們: 護教反共, 黨國基督徒與台灣基要派的形成), 171.

⁷ Chin Ke Pa, 172.

⁸ These included the Episcopal Church of Taiwan (台灣聖公會), The Methodist Church in the Republic of China (中華基督教衛理公會), Taiwan Lutheran Church (基督教台灣信義會), Chinese Baptist Convention (基督教浸信會台灣省聯會), Taiwan Holiness Church (台灣聖教會), Mennonite Church (門諾會), Xing Dao Church (行道會), Seventh-Day Adventist Church Taiwan Conference (安息日會), Christian and Missionary Alliance (宣道會), Chinese Mandarin Church (國語禮拜堂), Victory Church (凱歌堂), Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (台灣基督長老教會), Taiwan Christian Net Work (台灣福音聯誼會), Bible Society (聖經公會), Far

fostering cooperation among and across denominations in addressing questions of common interest.⁹ How long and determined were the members to foster those ideals? Right in the sixties, the resolve to work out of a consensus was tested twice. It was the case with the common position regarding the World Council of Churches and its mission. Presbyterians were already members and their drive to foster ecumenism was very much in line with the purpose of that ecumenical body. But when, because of insidious political calculations, the KMT ordered them to quit the organization, none of the denominations took side. Instead, there were some even opposing the organization and stipulating that cooperating with the WCC was heretic.¹⁰ The leaving of WCC, according to Liu YuHong (劉裕宏), "was caused by the ideology of the KMT government and the political intervention of ICC. It resulted in the failure of the unity movement of Taiwanese local churches and the only General Assembly Meeting to fail to convene as a protest to the government in the history of PCT. It also resulted in the decisive turn in PCT's attitude toward political-religious relationship."¹¹

The second testing moment was related to the Common Prayer organized in 1966 and to which the Presbyterians invited the Catholic Church. Most denominations disapproved that invitation. What originally was meant to be an occasion to foster ecumenism

Eastern Council of Christian Churches (CHURCHES 遠東歸主協會) China Sunday School Association (中國主日協會), Young Men's Christian Association (中華基督教青年會), China Young Women's Christian Association (中華基督教女青年會), China Pacific Mission Society (中國平信徒傳道會), Taiwan Christian Audio Visual Association (台灣基督教視聽聯合會), Tunghai University (東海大學), Overseas Radio & Television Inc. (救世傳播協會)。see Chin Ke Pa, 172-173.

⁹ see "Jiao hui he yi xing: zheng gao zhu nei xiong di jie mei men" (《教會合一性：正告主內兄弟姐妹們》), 1965, see Chin Ken Pa, 176.

¹⁰ For further details on the outcome of the Presbyterians' intention to join the WCC, See Chin Ke Pa, 171-213.

¹¹ Liu Yuhong 劉裕宏 "Historical Investigation into the Process of The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's Joining, Leaving, and Rejoining of The World Council of Churches", M.A.Thesis, Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, 2016.

escalated into a diatribe against the Catholic Church. An accusing finger was pointed at the Presbyterians, for having tendered the invitation, and the other mainline denominations who had agreed sit together with heretics, the Catholic Church. The most virulent voices affirmed that “collaborating with the ‘heretic’ Catholic Church equaled to ‘betraying Jesus’”¹² and set their periodicals into a diatribe aimed at exposing the heresies they thought exist in the Catholic Church.¹³ Moreover, the resolve to defend “orthodoxy” against a pernicious spread of Catholic heresy occasioned the greatest interdenominational meeting among Taiwanese Christians. The meeting gathered thirty tree denominations and aimed at defining a common stand regarding an ecumenical common prayer involving Catholics. To be effective, they designed a drafting committee of four people,¹⁴ who produced a document enlisting ten capital errors of the Catholic Church.¹⁵ The errors alluded to doctrinal pronouncements and teachings such as the papal infallibility, immaculate conceptions, papal primacy, clerical celibacy, good work. In a nutshell, they were pending questions emanating from Vatican I and Church tradition that eventually would be valuable topics for an ecumenical explanation between Catholics and other denominations.

Fifty years later, it is still difficult to assess the impact of these two incidents on the ecumenical journey of Taiwan. On the one hand,

¹² Chin Ke Pa, 184.

¹³ Newspapers and periodicals engaged in that diatribe included: *Tianqiao xinwen* 《天橋新聞》, *Fuyinbao* 《福音報》 and *China Christian Mission Monthly* 《中國信徒月刊》 See Chin Ke Pa, 184.

¹⁴ According to Chin Ken Pa's research, the drafting committee was made of four people, namely Kou Shiyuan 寇世遠, Lu Qiwo 盧祺沃, Wu Yong 吳勇 and Yu Ruliang 俞汝良. See Chin Ken Pa, 183.

¹⁵ The document was called *Gao Tong Dao Shu* 告同道書. To ensure its circulation, they printed fifty thousand copies distributed to the various denominations. Moreover, it was posted in all major Christian newspapers and periodicals, including *Fuyinbao* 《福音報》 and *China Christian Mission Monthly* 《中國信徒月刊》. See Chin Ke Pa, 184.

it proved that when determined, denominations could gather together for a cause and that they had the potential to create a platform prompting Christian interactions. On the other hand, it shed doubt on the motivations of that platform. If ecumenism had been a clear goal, the attitude of members towards the World Council of Churches and the manner of addressing the so-called errors of the Catholic Church would have been different. In fact, to the present, exception made of the annual prayer for leaders, I have no record of other cross denominational gatherings bringing as many Christian denominations together as it was in the 60s. Moreover, some of the protagonists for orthodoxy in the 60s parted ways with the group.¹⁶ Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, they did not appear on the list of the members of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan, the ecumenical body founded in 1991¹⁷ in replacement of the Ecumenical Cooperative Committee of Taiwan formed in 1966. Nonetheless the shadows and scars of the occurrences of the 60s can still be perceived within the organization. As Liu YuHong mentioned,

¹⁶ A major reason could be that they realized, in the process, that the ecumenical agenda stood against their theology. Ni Tuosheng 倪柝聲 never wanted to provide a denominational appellation to his communities. He referred to them as the 'ecclesia' - an implicit claim that it was the Church towards which those in search of salvation, Jesus, were to turn to. In that logic, followed also by his successor, Li Chang Shou 李常受, joining the ecumenical movement was an absurdity because it was to give credit to realities which were not supposed to exist. For more explanation on the theology of the Difang Jiaohui 地方教會 and its implications for ecumenism, see Shao Zunlan(邵遵瀾), "Ni shi fei zong pai jiao de zai si" (倪氏非宗派教的再思) in "Ling shi ji de zhui xun: Cong sheng jing, li shi, shen xue kan ni tuo sheng de si xiang" (靈實際的追尋: 從聖經、歷史、神學看倪柝聲的思想) edited by liao yuan wei, lu pei yuan, xu hong du (廖元威、呂沛淵、許宏度), Zhong hua fu yin shen xue yuan chu ban she (中華福音神學院出版社) 2003), 220-221.

¹⁷ The actual church members and organizations of NCCT include the *Presbyterian Church in Taiwan*, Taiwan Episcopal Church, Methodist Church in the Republic of China, Taiwan Lutheran Church, Chinese Regional Bishops Conference (Roman Catholic Church), Greek Orthodox Church, Bible Society in Taiwan, Christian Audio Visual Association Republic of China, Mackay Memorial Hospital, Taiwan Christian Service, The Garden of Hope Foundation, World Vision, Young Women's Christian Association of Taiwan, and Young Men's Christian Association of Taiwan. Unlike many other places, the Roman Catholic Church is a member of the National Council of Churches.

they helped PCT determine its attitude toward political-religious relationship.¹⁸ They could also account to the reserved attitude among NCCT's members especially regarding keeping the doors open up for other denominations, and discussing theological questions involving other members. In all these cases, in the name of mutual respect, the attitude observed is rather minimalistic and cold attitude towards theological discussions involving other members. To the present, there is no organization capable of offering a full coverage of the ecumenical activities and initiatives taking place on the Island. Church related media and publications are predominantly concerned with matters circumscribed to their own organizations. Perhaps it is a matter of choice, or a lack of interest in the other or a fear of misunderstanding. Nonetheless, examples of cooperation among and across denominations exist. Yet, their relation to the ecumenical movement remains hard to determine. For instance, in the area of theological formation, there are denominations sending their future pastors in theologies run by other denominations. While organizational and financial constraints might justify the choice, still it reflects a sense of trust with regard to the forming institution. And in accepting forming future leaders of other denominations and churches, the host institutions take on themselves the responsibility involving a commitment to one's denominational identity and respect of alterity of the others. An Anglican minister or a Presbyterian pastor enrolled in the theological program run by Catholics, or vice-versa, does something more than just gather or collect academic credits. David Lai, Bishop of the Anglican Church of Taiwan, referring the unvoiced sign of ecumenism occurring in these formative institutions, jokingly said that he sends introvert candidates to Protestant theological schools, whereas the lively ones are sent to

¹⁸ Liu Yuhong, "Historical Investigation into the Process of The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's Joining, Leaving, and Rejoining of The World Council of Churches" M.A. Thesis, Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, 2016.

the Catholics. In this way, he says, the formative character of the institution helps the candidate gain balance.

Besides the above examples, there are many other instances leading to question the clarity of intentions and expectations of denominations participating in ecumenical movement and ask whether Taiwan might not be living the vagueness of current ecumenical situation that Cardinal Kurt Koch has been denouncing.¹⁹ Because of its closeness and long dated interaction, the Presbyterians' view on ecumenism has followed and developed along the line of the World Council of Churches. Catholics, following the steps of Vatican II and its sequent development emphasize visible unity, while the emphasis of other denominations is not easily discernible. One might wonder whether Thomas Rausch's assessment of modern ecumenical movement was also referring to them when he stated that "the goal of reconciliation and full communion continues to elude us."²⁰

Another shadowy corner is the extent to which international ecumenical movements are inspirational to the local churches and denominations. What is at stake here is not only the level of collaboration but also the receptivity of choices and orientation of corporate ecumenical bodies. To what extent for instance decisions of the WCC are received and implemented within the Presbyterian

¹⁹ "The basic problem in the current ecumenical situation" according to Card. Kurt Koch is the fact that the objective of the ecumenical movement over time has become vaguer. "Accordingly, the vagueness comes from the fact that "several churches and ecclesial communities emerging from reformation more and more dissociate themselves from the original objective of the visible unity in faith, in sacraments and ministries in favor of a call for a mutual recognition of the different realities as churches and thus as part of the one Church of Jesus Christ." See Kurt Koch, "The Pentecostal Churches as Partners of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity?" in *Evangelicals and Pentecostals Churches, Charismatics: New Religious Movements as a Challenge for the Catholic Church*, edited by Johannes Muller, and Karl Gabriel (Quezon City: Claretians Communication Foundation, 2015), 350.

²⁰ Thomas P. Rausch, "The Present State of Ecumenism" *Perspectiva Teologia*, vol. 49 (Jan, 2017) , 89.

Churches of Taiwan for instance? Likewise, how are directives of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity mirrored in the local Catholic communities of Taiwan, those of Lutheran World Federation received and implemented in the Lutheran communities? Does the commitment of the local church mirror the enthusiasm of the Council? Perhaps the notion of collegiality needs to be fostered further to be able to make such an assessment. Not always the dynamism and enthusiasm of international bodies matches the priority of the local community. And if the problem exists within the same denomination, ideas and documents from cross denominational bodies are even more difficult to be received. The reception of the Chinese ecumenical bible is one example. The translators worked hard to produce a common version of the four gospels, just to realize that their efforts could not but have a consultative value, dissipating the hope for a common ecumenical Chinese Bible. Other recent examples are related to documents emanating from the World Council of Churches. *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Signed in 1999, the document was the fruit of an extensive ecumenical dialogue involving Catholics and the Lutheran World Federation. It clarified long dated theological and exegetical misunderstanding especially between the Catholic Church and churches emerging from the reformed traditions. One would expect a document of this kind to attract vivid attention, ignite studies and discussion among concerned denominations and churches. The attendance to the two conferences our respective offices (the Commission for Promoting Christian unity of the Bishops' Conference of Taiwan in 2014 and the other one organized with the help of the Department of Religious Studies of Fu Jen Catholic University) did not reflect that importance. With some degree the same can be said of the work of the commission for the commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reform. *From Conflict to Communion*, was primarily a resource manual

fostering an ecumenical celebration and commemoration of the event. Again, one would have expected more gatherings and ecumenical initiatives related to this event. This is not denying the value of individual churches, and theological institutions which chose to celebrate and commemorate in their own way. My remark is regarding the missed opportunity for ecumenism. Perhaps this is confirming the gap of interest and concerns between local and global ecumenical movements. In the end, I would be interested in the practical interpretations the local ecumenical movement is making of the Lund Principle, which urges particular churches at every level to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."²¹

The introductory message of Bp Thomas, President of the Commission for Promoting Christian Unity of Chinese Regional Conference of Bishops, to Pope Francis, during the visit of the Delegation of the NCCT to Rome on December 2017, summarizes the complex situation of Taiwan. He states as follows: "Holy Father, we have started harvesting the work of ecumenism initiated in our local church. The brothers and sisters present here are from different denominations. Having shared fifty years of journey together, we are aware of the achievements, the difficulties encountered and questions still pending and which are still preventing us from achieving full communion. Holy Father, there are other denominations in Taiwan not represented here, because they are not yet awakened to the spirit of ecumenism. It is our hope that the blessings and inspiration from this visit will ignite our dynamism for a more creative commitment and common search for a more visible Christian unity in our locality."²²

²¹ <http://www.cam.org.au/eic/images/stories/pdf/cr-Victoria.pdf>.

²² Bp Thomas Chung An Zhu, "Message to His Holiness Pope Francis" at the Occasion of the Visit of the Delegation of the National Council of Churches to

Fostering a Contextual Ecumenical Christianity

Despite the many examples and reflections made regarding the engagement of denominations and churches of Taiwan, it remains difficult to provide a definite, systematic and comprehensive assessment of the ecumenical movement in Taiwan. To counter the lacunae of the evaluation above, a future assessment will need to define a fitting theological method. As the question is dealing with a concrete situation, that method will need to be contextualized, taking into account the specificities of the Taiwanese situation. It will need to name the common trends, expectations within the ecumenical movement of Taiwan and the efforts each denomination and church makes to concretize them. It will equally identify the challenges, highlighting the way they are being addressed as a common concern. This is important because not all challenges are felt with the same intensity among denominations and churches. It is hence important to foster an analysis of layers of perceptions and sensitivities within the movement as an obligatory step to the "unity in reconciled diversity"²³ which ecumenical documents have been fostering now.

A contextualized method is fit for an ecumenical thinking for it can identify the commonalities found across all the denominations and churches. These are common denominators - identified in terms of option, aspiration, challenges - rooted and related to the double fact of being Taiwanese and Christians. Ecumenism from this perspective can't be reduced to its traditional definition, as a reality pertaining indiscriminately to the entire inhabited world,²⁴ but as

Rome on December 7, 2017.

²³ *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Ap C) 44, *From Conflict to Communion* # 210.

²⁴ Ecumenism is presently known as the movement and activities aimed at promoting unity among the followers of Jesus Christ. Oikoumene, the Greek root of the word,

local efforts of different Christian denominations and churches to witness together to the fact that they are Christians.

In defining ecumenism in the area of contextual theology, I would apply to it the insights of David Tracy. Tracy defined theology as a public discourse carried with historical consciousness;²⁵ a discourse addressing and involving three different kinds of audiences (publics), namely, the church, the academia, and the wide range of society.

In the ecumenical context of Taiwan, the notion of church needs to be considered in a dynamic way since denominations naturally believe that they incarnate the church component. As in the model of the 60s, the meeting will offer venues where denominations share their respective views of the Church, clarify claims whose interpretation angers others and might offend the goal of ecumenism, namely the notion of a visible unity in reconciled diversity.²⁶

A discourse involving the academia, theological research and reflection must be extended to themes related to ecumenism. In that way, a further assessment will be able to delineate the academic attention given to the field by evaluating the formative programs - courses, researchers, publications, and symposia. The discourse will build on the existing work carried on within particular institutions, churches or denominations and expand to an inter-churches, inter-denominational, inter-institutional level. For instance, thus far, an answer to the felt need for a localized Christianity has borne different types of inculturated theologies, each easily identified with

however, referred to the inhabited world and to the universe. No allusion was made to unity. The gap between the original connotation and the Christian appropriation of the term should trigger a reflection." See Batairwa Kubuya Paulin, "Catholic Ecumenical Engagement and Scripture" *Lumen* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan 2016), 78.

²⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 3-46.

²⁶ *From Conflict to Communion* # 210.

a specific school. “Shen xue ben wei hua”(神學本位化), “Ben tu shen xue”(本土神學), “Ben se hua”(本色化), “Chu jing hua”(處境化) are theological venues discussing issues of Christian identity. An ecumenical discourse with the academia will need to bridge the different schools of thoughts that have produced those works and reflect together on how these are analogical Christian responses to a felt problem.

Identity is another question of concern for many people living in Taiwan, Christians included. Identity is a foundational issue for any society and a predicament for healthy interactions at individual as well as societal levels. Clear identity bears self-confidence and predisposes for respectful and mutually enriching relationships. In the context of Taiwan, a reflection on the issue of identity, which built on the Christian experience can be very enriching, for it widens the epistemic horizons beyond the boundaries of theological framework,²⁷ provides a transformed epistemic arena beyond the political and ethic framework used to address the question. For Taiwanese Christians, the need for self-identification has other parameters. The effect of being Christians endows them with the Christic experience; an experience occurring in time and space but also transcending them. It is both a universal and particularized experience; it identifies and integrates at the same time as it particularizes. The Christic experience is naturally complex, for it holds together in a harmonious way diverse kind of opposites without creating dichotomies. Taiwanese Christians are a minority connected to the entire universe. Theirs is a dichotomous identity which binds them to remain always receptive at home and open to the global. Were they to choose enclosure to the local, they will

²⁷ The theological framework treated questions pertaining to identity in terms of inculturation, contextualization; a jargon only familiar to a Christian audience.

suffer from self-segregation, cutting ties with their outer and global connections, they will suffer from sectarianism.

As for the last audience entailed in Tracy's framework, society in general is the last interlocutor ecumenical discourse needs to address. In other words, the ecumenical discourse of the Taiwanese Christians in general must address society in its concreteness. Issues at stake are about the identity concern of Taiwanese Christians and their role and place in the Taiwanese society. The discourse must rethink and re-conceptualize the problem of self-identification, illustrating that being a Christian does not imply cultural alienation rather a rooting in society with a different dynamism. Culturally speaking, there is no contradiction between being Taiwanese and being Christian. Moreover, for this to occur, a discourse involving the general public will require a closer awareness and analysis of the actual context wherein Taiwanese Christians are to live their calling. From the perspective of ecumenical cartography, it is only part of the other side of the hemisphere, where the center of gravity of Christianity is shifting.²⁸ From the perspective of faith, it is, to use the description of *Asia News*, "a secularized society in which the faith appears to be poorly rooted."²⁹ And for the overall, socio-economic perspective, there are voices denouncing the ambiguous outcome of the economic prosperity and fast modernization of the Island and the new challenges they raise to Christianity.

²⁸ See Konrad Raiser, "The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century - Challenges and Opportunities" in *The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century - Challenges and Opportunities*, (Hong Kong: 2004), 10.

²⁹ "At 150th anniversary of evangelization, the Church of Taiwan starts over from mission of the laity," accessed Feb 17, 2009.
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/At-150th-anniversary-of-evangelization,-the-Church-of-Taiwan-starts-over-from-mission-of-the-laity-14507.html>.

In Georges P. Hunt's assessment, "Taiwan has become a very prosperous country in recent years, one of the world leaders in export. All of this prosperity does not help the Taiwanese to be more receptive to the gospel. The people have become more interested in taking care of their physical needs and striving for worldly comfort instead of dealing with spiritual aspects of their lives"³⁰ Likewise, Wright Doyle has a similar observation in his pathetic description of modern Taiwanese society and the impact of modernity to the work of the Church. He sees Taiwan as a society that "crumbles under the weight of urbanization, modernization, and the corrosive effects of media-generated hedonism and moral relativism. Old values have been shredded in a post-modern, fast-paced world of dizzying change, and millions are paying the price in poor health, depression, and broken families. Most are gripped with anxiety and fear about the future, as China's clout in every domain advances with ominous and apparently inexorable progress.

Not a few Christians in Taiwan believe that believers there will soon face challenges from which they have hitherto been spared. Freedom and prosperity have robbed the church of that toughness and concentration upon God and eternal life which their counterparts of an earlier generation in China evinced in the long years of persecution before the present period of relative religious freedom. No one knows what the future holds for Protestant Christianity in Taiwan."³¹

³⁰ Georges H. Hunt, "A Study of the Effectiveness of Evangelistic Techniques with Chinese Christians: with Applications to the Field Mission of Taiwan" M.A Thesis in Church Growth and Cross-Cultural Studies - Graduate School of Religion of Liberty University, (1987), 12-14.

³¹ Dr. G. Wright Doyle "Christianity in Taiwan."
<http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/christianity-in-taiwan.php>.

The outcome of the crisis is reflected in the figures and problems Fr. King enlisted as social issues in need of immediate pastoral attention in Taiwan. Accordingly: "Taiwanese society is afflicted by the same problems that are found in many other parts of the world: abortion, the rise in divorce, the spread of gambling." The birth rate in the country is now at the same level as that of Japan, considered the laggard of Asia: from 25.65% in 1971, it has now fallen to below 9%. To these figures are added the global economic crisis, corruption, fighting among the political class, all elements that produce widespread distress among the population. The family is experiencing a profound crisis. Religion, including traditional religion, is the object of less and less interest, especially among the young people."³²

Conclusion

What it takes to affirm whether Taiwanese Christians are ecumenical goes beyond a list of activities and of organizations bringing churches and denominations together. What is needed is a well thought methodology that ponders on the united commitment of those touched by the Christic experience to stand together and corroborate the ecumenical dimension of the faith and grace they have received. Future assessment of the ecumenical movement in Taiwan requires inscribing ecumenism on the agenda of the local contextualized theology. The insertion enables a communal pondering on the Christian phenomenon as lived in different churches and denomination and its implication for the common witness that Christians are to carry on in the general society.

³² "At 150th anniversary of evangelization, the Church of Taiwan starts over from mission of the laity," accessed Feb 17, 2009.
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/At-150th-anniversary-of-evangelization,-the-Church-of-Taiwan-starts-over-from-mission-of-the-laity-14507.html>.

Ecumenical thinking can facilitate a broader understanding of the founding faith experience inherent to being a Christian and which is also the basis for Christian ecumenism. The belief in Jesus as Christ has been working as an undertow unceasingly stirring waves crossing through the confines of time and space. Being a Christian amounts to an encounter with Jesus as a Christ. In that experience, believers acquire a new perspective, which enables them to see and engage reality from an angle wider than that of their respective cultures and traditions. Once immersed in that perspective, time and space as well as other referential concepts for self-identification are endowed with extended meanings. The experience of Jesus as Christ provides a form of identity and extends in the meantime the confines by which believers know the world and interact with its dwellers.

However, as waves and undertow are related, so it is with the experience of Jesus as Christ. As the undertow, the experience of Jesus as Christ is the common and foundational denominator among Christian believers. As waves, encounters with Jesus occur in specific contexts which shape the perception and articulation of the Christian faith. Each experience of Jesus as Christ is hence unique, for it carries within itself (cultural, epochal, geographical) marks of the context wherein it evolved. Christian identity is the byproduct of the specific reception and appropriation of the common experience of Jesus as Christ. The process integrates at the same time as it reshapes. According to Matt Steffon, the foundation for Christian identity, which is also the foundation for Christian ecumenism, is “inner sameness and continuity” through the focus on Jesus Christ as the way of salvation.” For not matter what is said about Christianity, it “remains safe to say that Christian identity begins and ends with a

reference to Jesus in relation to God's truth and a way of salvation."³³

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³³ Matt Stefon, *Christianity: History, Belief, Practice*, (London: Britannica Educational Pub, 2011), 14.

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