“A conclusion we may draw is that throughout human history there are men and women who have gone about doing the king’s business without being aware that they are in the king’s service.” (C S Song, Third-Eye Theology, cited in Placher, Readings, 2:200).

THE THIRD EYE OF CHOAN-SENG SONG
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I. From Where Christianity’s Exclusive Claim of Exclusivity?

Perhaps, the most quoted authority for the theology of Christian exclusivity is Jesus’ answer to Thomas, the one with doubts: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”1 The question asked by Thomas was “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”2 Quite interestingly, Jesus, moments before, had reassured all the disciples at the last supper to “[l]et not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”3

Jesus’ reference to “many mansions” or many abodes in God’s house and the assertion that He goes to prepare “a place,” that is one from among the many suggests surplus latitude for the diverse many in Heaven. The student is left with the question as to for

1 John 14:6.
2 John 14:5.
3 John 14:1-4.
whom are the remaining dwelling places prepared. Paradoxically, Jesus appears to first point to generous abundance, and then immediately when answering Thomas spoke with great parsimony respecting the availability of space in the heavenly place. Who, then, possesses a reserved eternal home with God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, the alpha and omega?

This is the paradox grappled by both John Mbiti of Kenya and C. S. Song of Taiwan. Christianity qua religion is a latecomer to the continents of Africa and Asia, both vast places which are filled with humanity and which teem with native religions. Mbiti boldly asks:

Did he [God] then reveal himself only in the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and other personalities of the Bible? Didn’t our Lord let it be clearly known that “before Abraham was I am.” [John 8:58]? Then was he not there in other times and in such places as Mount Fuji and Mount Kenya, as well as Mount Sinai?

Canon Mbiti of the Anglican Church answers his own question in the negative: instead of “only,” he sees the word “also,” for “we must also take it that God has had a historical relationship with African peoples.” Mbiti next adamantly argues that “God is not insensitive to the history of peoples other than Israel” and that the “history [of the African peoples] has a theological meaning.” Mbiti has labored to develop a greater awareness of the influence of African traditions on Christianity. His efforts extend on more esoteric

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4 Professor John Mbiti originally from Kenya has taught the Science of Mission and Extra-European Theology at the University of Bern and retired recently from parish ministry in Burgdorf, Switzerland.
5 C. S. Song is western trained and holds a Professorship of Theology and Asian Cultures at the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley as well as a Regional Professorship of Theology at the Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology.
7 Id, at p198.
subjects that such as role of women in traditional African religion which includes well entrenched prejudices against women in Africa. For example, he has observed that:

Men complain that they cannot understand women. So the Ghanaians say: "When women increase in wealth, they are silent. But when they fall into trouble, the whole world gets to know." In another saying we hear that: "In a town where there are no men, even women praise a hunch back for being the fastest runner" There are men (and women) who fear women, considering them to be dangerous. So we hear proverbs like: "To marry is to put a snake in one's handbag", and even to take up contact with women is an evasive undertaking: "One does not follow the footprints in the water, which means that "following a woman is like footprints in water", because "the way soon vanishes". It is even claimed that words of women have no legal value, they are not reliable: "Women have no court". They even ruin men: "Marriage roasts (hardens)", is said to mean that a man's heart hardens after marriage, because of his wife. Even beautiful women get a share of prejudice: "Beautiful from behind, ugly in front", a proverb which warns that a person may look attractive or say nice words at first, but after marriage turns out to be really ugly. [citations omitted]

Mbiti overcomes these traditional opinions and affirmatively concludes:

It is clear, that women both participate in the religious activities of society and make their own contributions for the spiritual welfare of their lives, their families and of society at large. The prayers are small window that opens into their spirituality which indeed is the spirituality of all human beings. As they share with God in the great mysteries of passing on life, so they share also in giving human life a spiritual orientation. They are truly flowers in the garden. They give life beauty, scent and seed.

On the basis of his examination of Israel’s history and his inherent the knowledge of folk culture and religions in Africa, Mbiti is able to “demand a new look at the history of the African peoples, among whom this same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has indeed been at work.”

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9 Id.
Similarly, C. S. Song also critically argues that

It is a cause for Christians to rejoice if they are able to set aside their preconceived ideas and prejudices. They should see the mission of church as consisting not of conquering members of other faiths but growing with them in the knowledge and experience of God’s saving work in the world. For one thing, we Christians must humbly admit that institutional Christianity alone cannot save the world. This is a historical fact as well as a theological truth that can hardly be refuted. The institutional church in Asia, with few exceptions, is a minority entity and will remain so.[Emphasis added]\(^\text{11}\)

Indeed, this paradox may have been also solved by Jesus \textit{ab initio} when he taught:

And they shall come from the east, and \emph{from} the west, and from the north, and \emph{from} the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.\(^\text{12}\)

Saint Paul also labors to provide an exegesis on this remarkable paradox:

Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; \(^\text{10}\)But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: \(^\text{11}\)\textbf{For there is no respect of persons with God.} \(^\text{12}\)For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; \(^\text{13}\)(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. \(^\text{14}\)For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: \(^\text{15}\)Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and \textit{their} thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) \(^\text{16}\)In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.[Emphasis added]\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Luke 13:29-30. A similar statement is reported in Matthew: \textit{Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 8:10-11.
\(^{13}\) Romans 2:9-16.
II. Third Eye Theology

C. S. Song borrows the term “third eye” from Buddhism, and in particular, the Taiwan-born theologian quotes the Japanese Zen master Daisetz Suzuki who sought to open and focus a third eye “to the hitherto unheard-of region shut away from us through our own ignorance” and if ultimately successful, the “cloud of ignorance disappears, the infinity of heavens is manifested where we see for the first time into the nature of our own being.”

Song’s Third Eye Theology seeks to enlighten the “double darkness,” that is, the darkness that surrounds the heart of Being and that which separates Christian spirituality from other Asian spiritualities. According to Song, “[o]nly when the darkness that surrounds different spiritualities is lifted can we begin to see the love and compassion of God for the world in a fuller and richer light.”

For Song, this enlightenment of Christianity which he also calls “contextualization of theology” is to be sought through an overlay of liberation theology with Asian deference to authority, and a blending of traditional Scripture with Asian folklore and culture. His mission is to make Christianity relevant to Asian reality. He is much disturbed by the colonial legacy which is inevitably associated by Asians with western Christianity. In his short article, The Tortoise and the Hare, Song points out, not without righteous wrath, that

After Christianity was elevated to the status of imperial religion under the Roman emperor Constantine, it gained more and more speed. … Christianity gained even

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15 Id. at 38.
16 Song also calls it submissive acquiescence. Id. at 228.
more momentum as it expanded beyond the West on the heels of the Western colonial powers. And the rest is history. Under the cross, countless people on many continents were decimated or subjugated, their land and rights taken away, Religions and cultures that had shaped the lives and histories of nations and peoples alien to the West were treated as godless and pagan. Profound religious cultures, as well as eminent traditions of learning and scholarship, fell victim to missionary wrath, condemnation, and eradication.

The delicate contradiction that Song must face and overcome is the paradox of how to shed the legacy of colonialism and overcome the suffering and humiliation which colonialism has engendered without extinguishing the embers of Christianity in the soul of Asia. A worn analogy would be the challenge to the mother of how to throw out the bathwater without losing the baby as well. Song, as a Christian theologian and writer, while hurt by the excesses of western imperialism which includes that of the western missionary church, dearly wishes at the same time, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout his home continent. He struggles mightily with the problem and resolutely confesses:

I believe we must stay in the race. Not only that: we must catch up. This is our mandate. To leave the race – abandon the good news of Jesus – is to leave the world behind, to leave Jesus behind, to leave the God of Jesus behind. How can we excuse ourselves from sharing the gospel of life – from sharing a God who created life and the abundance of it?

This is the struggle to be fought and won by the Third-Eye Theology and by the Christians of Asia. Song believes he has found a way.

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17 C. S. Song, Tortoise and the Hare: Creating a Reforming Church for a Global World, Articles and Sermons of the Faculty of the Pacific School of Religion, http://www.psr.edu/page.cfm?1=62&id=80 p2.
III. How the Third Eye Sees the Holy Trinity

In his theology, C. S. Song appears to disassociate the first personage, the Father from the Holy Trinity. In the entire book of Third Eye Theology, he hardly mentions God the Father and there is no discussion of the attributes of God as Father. Song is certainly unwilling or perhaps unable to see God in his own mind’s eye as the Almighty Father who protects, nurtures, and above all, acts as a God of fatherly love. To Song, love appears as a mere possibility of theology.\(^{18}\) The closest Song comes is an appreciation of the “pain-love” of God, which he illustrates by a reference to two Chinese words:

In Chinese one is required to say the two words love and pain in almost the same breath. I am referring to the expression pain-love (thun-ai). The force of this expression is most vividly felt when we visualize a mother holding her child in a tight embrace, plunging her lips to its cheek and almost devouring it. The mother’s love for the child is so great and intense that she feels pain. Love seems to generate a kind of force very close to pain. This should not be dismissed simply as an indication of sadistic tendency in human beings. Our experience tells us that genuine love is indeed accompanied by pain. [Emphasis added]\(^ {19}\)

Thus, by way of this analysis Song can see God mostly, if not exclusively as the suffering Christ. Perhaps to Song, the image of a fatherly god is discolored by the wrath and oppressiveness of one more powerful on those who are weaker or from a perception that some fathers have mistreated or even abandoned their children. Song’s preference for and focus on the Son, Jesus Christ gives rise to the main beam of Song’s theology: the incarnation should constitute the center of Christian theology. To Song, through the

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\(^{18}\) See, the title to Chapter Three of Third Eye Theology, Revised Edition, which is “Love as the Possibility of Theology.”

\(^{19}\) C. S. Song, Third Eye Theology, Revised Edition, p83-84.
incarnation, God has revealed himself to be the God of pain-love and also the God of change.\textsuperscript{20} Song expounds on the pain-love theme further when he wrote:

The God in Christ … is not the God of wrath, that is, not the God who becomes hardened and unchangeable on account of wrath, but the God who changes and makes God’s own self available to human beings because of God’s pain-love. All words and acts related to salvation start from this change of God in Christ into a human form. This is the heart of the gospel – God’s pain-love\textsuperscript{21}

So convinced is Song of this hybrid pain-love that he proclaims: “Hence all theological acts, that is acts of God in the world, are God’s own self-rooted in God’s pain love.”\textsuperscript{22} He goes on to reiterate that “Theology without the pain and agony of love is not theology.”\textsuperscript{23} Perhaps, Song is able to declare this doctrine of pain-love because he is speaking to Asians, a people who in their collective history have suffered pain more than tasted joy. Song sees God not only being subject to pain-love; he sees God as actually suffering physical pain just as human creatures do.\textsuperscript{24} Song explains:

\begin{quote}
  \textsuperscript{20} Id. at 86.
  \textsuperscript{21} Id. at 88.
  \textsuperscript{22} Id.
  \textsuperscript{23} Id. at 108.
  \textsuperscript{24} Compare this emphasis on suffering with Buddhism’s Second Truth of the Four Noble Truths: The Cause of Suffering: Heaping Up Of Present Suffering. Verily, due to sensuous craving, conditioned through sensuous craving, impelled by sensuous craving, entirely moved by sensuous craving, kings fight with kings, princes with princes, priests with priests, citizens with citizens; the mother quarrels with the son, the son with the mother, the father with the son, the son with the father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. Thus, given to dissension, quarreling and fighting, they fall upon one another with fists, sticks, or weapons. And thereby they suffer death or deadly pain. And further, due to sensuous craving, conditioned through sensuous craving, impelled by sensuous craving, entirely moved by sensuous craving, people break into houses, rob, plunder, pillage whole houses, commit highway robbery, seduce the wives of others. Then, the rulers have such people caught, and inflict on them various forms of punishment. And thereby they incur death or deadly pain. Now, this is the misery of sensuous craving, the heaping up of suffering in this present life, due to sensuous craving, conditioned through sensuous craving, caused by sensuous craving, entirely dependent on sensuous craving. Heaping Up Of Future Suffering. And further, people take the evil way in deeds, the evil way in words, the evil way in thoughts; and by taking the evil way in deeds, words, and thoughts, at the dissolution of the body, after death, they fall into a downward state of existence, a state of suffering, into perdition, and the abyss of hell. But, this is the misery of sensuous craving, the heaping up of suffering in the future life, due to sensuous craving, conditioned through sensuous craving, caused by sensuous craving, entirely dependent on sensuous craving. THE BUDDHIST ABHIDHAMMA.
\end{quote}
Suffering touches the heart of God as well as the hearts of human beings. In the suffering of humanity we see and experience the suffering of God. God and human beings are bound together in suffering. … In the suffering everyone of us has to go through at various stages of life, God also suffers. And in Jesus Christ we witness how God is part of human suffering. … The cross, from the standpoint of the human faith is the supreme symbol of God’s suffering love. … Suffering is the cross God has to bear with all creation.25

Here, once again, we see Song addressing an Asian audience. Perhaps, Song is also seeking to explain the existence of suffering (and evil) in the world. Song has a purpose to his theology of suffering, a purpose which is revealed when he wrote:

This is the God who makes our suffering a suffering to the point of hope. In this God suffering and hope are linked and form a close ally. God is the power which transforms suffering into hope. … This still does not explain why there is suffering in the world. God as the power of love and hope cannot be invoked to justify the continuing presence of suffering in our lives. But God does tell us that God is determined to redeem us from hopeless suffering by suffering with us in Jesus Christ.26

Song’s purpose then is to link redemption to God’s pain-love and indeed to the creation itself. By minimizing any reference on the personages of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and by focusing almost exclusively on Jesus Christ and His suffering on the cross, Song in effect, simplifies Christian theology for application acceptance in the Asian context. Song knows that suffering, actual and theological, is well understood in Asia. Because of his suffering on the cross, Jesus Christ is presented as the diamond of Song’s theology. It is Song’s invaluable gift to Asia.

25Id. at 119. In some respects, Song, in his strident insistence that God suffered on the cross with Christ appears to me theologically as being a present-day patripassianist. Cf. Sabellianism (also known as modalism), the second century belief that the three personages of the Holy Trinity are merely different modes or aspects of God, rather than three distinct persons.
26Id. at 185.
IV. Conclusion: Song’s Call For Victory

In the twelfth and final chapter of Third Eye Theology, Song issues his clarion call for victory, which in the accompaniment of his previous theological assertions is rather standard Christian fanfare:

The resurrection enables us to hear the echo of victory in the pain and suffering of the cross. ... The victory of Jesus on the cross connects the work of creation done through the Word and the redemption of all creation through the Lamb. Resurrection as the victory of life over death is the decisive meaning of the cross on Golgotha. The resurrection vindicates all the pain and agony of history.27

Even so, and especially for Song, the challenge is to translate his theological Christian victory into Asian reality. Song invokes a discussion of Christianity in communist China, including a retelling of the Christmas Mass of Father Hsi in the Ching Ho reform-through-labor camp, a powerful story indeed.28 For Song, it is inevitable that he returns to political realism and the liberation theologian in him surfaces once more:

The politics of the resurrection, like the politics manifesting itself in the freedom of Christ, is the politics of openness in the future. ... What it means essentially is as follows: the politics of God that moves from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life, and from the cross to the resurrection, is a politics that creates the future in the present, that makes an opening at a dead end.29

The liberation theologian is not finished – Song goes on with his call for action:

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27 Id. at 264.
28 See, id. at 265-266. The Christmas Mass was hastily and secretly improvised with some fruit juice and wo ’tou, a type of Chinese bread-roll. For this reason, the camp guard who passed by and observed the activity failed to recognize it as a worship service and hence allowed the holy sacrament to be completed.
29 Id. at 274.
Let us face it, the dream of “christendom” [sic] has [with] the demise of Western colonial domination of the Third World, vanished. The Christian Church alone cannot deal with the mounting problems that threaten to tear apart the moral fabric of human community. As Christians we have to learn to work together with people of other faiths to be a spiritual force that creates a new vision for humanity. This is a theological experiment with both promises and challenges. … I hope our theological experiment in Asia in the coming century will be a modest contribution to the human search for the meaning of life and eternity in the world of transition and temporality.  

In conclusion, Song’s third eye theology is the theology of a new Christian political action albeit fully reconstructed for the Asian context. Song is ready to go forth with Jesus’ own call: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;  And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” In the final analysis, and notwithstanding any appearance of patripassianism or over-reliance on Buddhism, there is nothing unconventional in the Soteriology of C. S. Song.

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31 John 8:31-32.
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