

Article

The Gospel According to Marxism: Zhu Weizhi and the Making of *Jesus the Proletarian* (1950)

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Received: 31 May 2019; Accepted: 13 September 2019; Published: 19 September 2019



Abstract: This article explores the integration of Marxism into the Gospel narratives of the Christian Bible in Zhu Weizhi's *Jesus the Proletarian* (1950). It argues that Zhu in this Chinese Life of Jesus refashioned a Gospel according to Marxism, with a proletarian Jesus at its center, by creatively appropriating a wealth of global sources regarding historical Jesus and primitive Christianity. Zhu's rewriting of Jesus can be appreciated as a precursor to the later Latin American liberation Christology.

Keywords: The Gospel; Marxism; Zhu Weizhi; *Jesus the Proletarian*; Life of Jesus

1. Introduction

In recent decades, scholarly attention has been increasingly paid to Chinese intellectuals' rewriting in the early twentieth century of the Gospel narratives of the Christian Bible (Ni 2011; Wang 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2019; Starr 2016; Chin 2018). Among these intellectuals—Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao, 1888–1979), Wu Leichuan (L. C. Wu, 1870–1944), Zhang Shizhang (Hottinger S. C. Chang, b. 1896), etc.—stands out Zhu Weizhi (W. T. Chu, 1905–1999), who in addition to being first and foremost a preeminent literary scholar, also devoted himself within no more than two years to the recasting of two very different Lives of Jesus, one in 1948 and another 1950. Entitled *Yesu jidu* (Jesus Christ) and *Wuchan zhe yesu zhuan* (Jesus the Proletarian) respectively, these two biographies of Jesus (particularly the latter one) have drawn attention from scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds (Gálik 2007; Chin 2015; Liu 2016).

Having recognized some foreign influences on Zhu's composing of *Jesus the Proletarian*, however, scholars did not probe sufficiently into the extent to which he borrowed from global sources as follows regarding historical Jesus and primitive Christianity: Friedrich Engels' "On the History of Early Christianity," Karl Kautsky's *Foundations of Christianity*, Bouck White's *The Call of the Carpenter*,¹ Naozo Yonezawa's *Musansha Iesu* (Jesus the Proletarian), F. Herbert Stead's *The Proletarian Gospel of Galilee*, and David Smith's *The Days of His Flesh*. By "global" here we respectively mean American, British, Japanese, German and Czech-Austrian in terms of the aforementioned writers' nationalities. Equally under-explored are the ways these global sources have been creatively localized (*bentu hua*), or indigenized (*bense hua*), by Zhu through the lens of Sinicized Marxism. To capture the nature of this phenomenon, in this article I apply the discourse of globalization and its extended version, glocalization (Robertson 1995)—a discourse that has been adopted in analyzing the history of Christianity in China (Harrison 2013; Kilcourse 2016; Sachsenmaier 2018; Inouye 2019). The elucidation of the glocal entanglements in *Jesus the Proletarian*, the very first Life of Jesus (*yesu zhuan*) after the establishment by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of the People's Republic of China, will shed new light upon not

¹ Zhu Weizhi in his preface to *Jesus the Proletarian* misspelled "Bouck White" as "Buck White" (Zhu 1950a, p. 2), which has been followed by scholars including Marián Gálik and Liu Yan (Gálik 2007, p. 1343; Liu 2016, p. 182). There is a high possibility that they did not consult Bouck White's *The Call of the Carpenter*—one of the most significant sources, as I argue in the following, for us to understand the origin of Zhu's conception of the Gospel according to Marxism.

only the ways social Christianity and Marxism were interlocked with each other in quest of a historical Jesus by a progressive Christian intellectual, but also the ways Christian intellectuals like Zhu strove to remold themselves intellectually (*sixiang gaizao*) to the adaptation of the exclusively Marxist ideology under an avowedly atheist regime.

In what follows, I firstly offer a synopsis of Zhu Weizhi's life and literary career up until the year 1950 when he published *Jesus the Proletarian*, before moving to discuss in detail Zhu's borrowing from contemporary global sources for its composition. In this regard, *Jesus the Proletarian*, a Chinese historical novel falling under the genres of both Life of Jesus and leftist/proletarian literature (*zuoyi wenxue* or *wuchan jieji wenxue*), can be read as part of world literature. The last section examines the ways Zhu adopted Marxist viewpoints and the CCP's political terms to re-imagine a Gospel according to Marxism for New China (*xin zhongguo*). A Christian socialist theology underpinned Zhu's literary enterprise. Along with other Chinese intellectuals, the Christian intellectual Zhu Weizhi was grappling with the problem that modernity (in the forms of revolution, rationalism, secularization, and Marxism in this context) had posed for traditional (i.e., "feudalistic" and "capitalistic") conceptions of Jesus. In an epoch when all religions including Christianity were plunged into a precarious situation, Zhu's literary *apologia* might be doomed to fail, but what might be worth rethinking even until now is his very endeavor in quest of the relationship between Jesus and proletarity, religion and politics, literature and ideology, and spirituality and secularity.

2. Zhu Weizhi's Life and Literary Career

Zhu Weizhi was an offspring both of the modern Protestant missionary movement and the secular New Culture/Literature Movement. Born on 26 May 1905 into a "middle-peasant family" (*zhongnong jiating*, a Marxist-laden term used by Zhu in his later years) in a southern village of Wenzhou, China, a city that would later be called "China's Jerusalem" (Cao 2011), the boy Zhu enjoyed himself very much in Nature—"beautiful mountains and clear waters" and "the blue sky and white clouds" (Cui 1999, p. 46). There is little wonder that he would later identify affectively with a boy Jesus who "lies freely under a fig tree and watches clouds coming and going slowly" (Zhu 1941, p. 5).

There seems to be of no record as to when and why Zhu's peasant parents converted to Christianity, but their acquired faith (Liang 2000, p. 490; Zhu 2009, p. A22; Qu 2011, p. 92) played a decisive role not only in Zhu's primary and higher education, but also in his growing interest in the Bible—a religious and literary text Zhu would devote himself to studying for the rest of his life. For primary education, Zhu likely spent about four years in a China Inland Mission boarding school in Wenzhou city, where he started to learn English—a language to be essential in his later years for his academic pursuits, such as translating the works of John Milton. For higher education, after five years in a Wenzhou teachers' training school (secondary level), Zhu chose Nanking (Nanjing) Theological Seminary, partly because of its complete tuition waiver (Qu 2011, pp. 92–93, 95).

As important for his future literary career as education was Zhu's enduring interest in the Bible since his childhood in a Christian family. As he recalled, "At that time [when he was still a middle school student in the early 1920s], there was nowhere to make inquiries about Christian literature, and nobody studied the Bible from a literary point of view. In my childhood, however, I loved myths, legends, and folktales in [the Bible]; during my middle school, I loved poetry in it." By "poetry" he meant at least Psalms and the Song of Songs in the Mandarin Union Version of the Bible (UVB, 1919), arguably the most influential Chinese Bible in the twentieth century. Two other beautiful books in the UVB singled out by Zhu were the Book of Job and the Gospel of Matthew (Liang 2000, p. 490). His then love for the Bible as a literary text was assured by a well-known and beloved lyrical prose writer of the May Fourth era, Zhu Ziqing (1898–1948), who happened to be Zhu Weizhi's middle school teacher for only about one year (1923–1924) (Liang 2000, p. 490; Zhu 1992).

Even before Zhu Ziqing's arrival in Wenzhou, the middle school student Zhu Weizhi had enthusiastically embraced the New Culture/Literature Movement, and his literary favorites included some renowned literati emerging from this movement: Guo Moruo (1892–1978) and the books and

journals produced by the Creation Society (*chuangzao she*, one of whose founders was Guo), Bing Xin (1900–1999, the pen name of Xia Wanying), Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) and, of course, Zhu Ziqing. Now, since Zhu Ziqing was right before Zhu Weizhi, Zhu Weizhi's literary spirit was set aflame by Zhu Ziqing's intellectual spark. "Under Mr. Zhu Ziqing's teaching and influence," as Zhu Weizhi later put it, "my road to literature" was determined once and for all (Zhu 1989, p. 189; Zhu 1992). Therefore, during his three years of studies in the Nanking Theological Seminary (1924–1927), Zhu Weizhi immersed himself in the world of literature and came to publish academic articles on various topics such as Mozi, Qu Yuan, Li Bai, *Chu Ci* (Lyrics of Chu), the Bible as literature, nature poetry in Psalms, and the patriotic poetry in the Old Testament.

No less patriotic than the Old Testament poets was Zhu himself, whose nationalistic fervor could date back to as early as his very first year in middle school, 1919, when the May Fourth Movement concurrently broke out. The fourteen-year-old student Zhu participated in this movement by "propagandizing and lecturing," by "checking and banning and burning Japanese goods," and by "boycotting classes and opposing the schoolmaster." In the spring of 1927, Zhu exhibited his patriotism again, this time by "*toubi conrong*" (tossing aside the brush to join the military ranks), that is, by leaving his seminarian life and joining the General Political Department of the North Expedition army (with Guo Moruo as one of Zhu's superiors). Having then read the "Communist Manifesto" for the first time as an officer in the army, Zhu appreciated its "poetic language" without "a thorough understanding [of it]" (Zhu 1989, pp. 189–90; Qu 2011, p. 98).

After being in the army for less than one year, Zhu became an editor and translator for the Association Press of China (the national publishing arm of the Young Men's Christian Association in China), before moving south to join Fukien (Fujian) Christian University (FCU) for teaching a course about Chinese New Literature in its first decade, a topic on which he had published a research article. One year later, he was sent for in-service training by the FCU to Waseda University and Chuo University (both in Tokyo, Japan). Under the instruction of Professor Takeshi Yamaguchi (1884–1932) in Waseda University, Zhu conducted his research on the history of Chinese literary trends of thought (Zhu 1989, p. 190) in applying the Western dialectics of realism and romanticism.

Coming back from overseas, Zhu spent another four years in the FCU (1932–1936) before transferring himself to the Baptist-affiliated University of Shanghai, another well-known Protestant Christian college in Republican China. He stayed in Shanghai for 16 years until 1952, when he was redeployed north to Nankai University, Tianjin, for the rest of his life (Zhu 1989, p. 191). It was during the Shanghai period that Zhu had published most of his scholarly outputs in the first half of his life. Among them were the aforementioned two Lives of Jesus, *Jesus Christ* (1948) and *Jesus the Proletarian* (1950).

3. Global Sources for Zhu Weizhi's Composition of *Jesus the Proletarian*

Why did Zhu produce two Lives of Jesus within such a short two-year time span? There must be significant reasons in Zhu Weizhi's judgment that rendered the first one unsatisfactory and the second necessary; fortunately, he provided a brief explanation. In the preface to *Jesus the Proletarian*, Zhu described his most crucial task in this work as presenting Jesus "as he truly was" by "taking off the exotic costumes put on him for two thousand years by feudalism and capitalism." This task should be undertaken, Zhu continued, from a bluntly "proletarian viewpoint" (*wuchan jieji de guandian*), a viewpoint Zhu did not take two years ago when writing *Jesus Christ*, in which Jesus was represented as a "pure religionist" (*chun zongjiao jia*). Such a religionist Jesus, though not without a "revolutionary consciousness" (*geming de yishi*), was still colored by something "idealistic" (*weixin*). Since 1948, however, two things had taken place for Zhu personally and politically. For one thing, after reading, among other ancient histories and social histories, "On the History of Early Christianity" written by Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and *Foundations of Christianity* by Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), Zhu

“gradually came to understand Jesus’ correct position and viewpoint.”² For another, the post-1949 political reality in which Zhu lived had been “turned upside down,” implying the defeat of the Guomindang (Nationalist) regime and the establishment of the CCP’s. This historical turn was likened by Zhu as “a larger reference book” to help him “see more clearly [whom Jesus truly was]”: a proletarian, as shown by the provocative title of his 1950 *Life of Jesus* (Zhu 1950a, p. 2). The 1948 image of Jesus had not taken into full account this proletarian aspect and hence was no longer sufficient; it needed to be refashioned in light of Marxism.

Zhu’s explanation evinced both global (Engels and Kautsky) and local (the regime transition) influences on his worldview, and accordingly on the re-interpretation of Jesus and the Gospel accounts. To begin with, in chapter 1 of *Jesus the Proletarian* Zhu quoted from Engels’ “On the History of Early Christianity” in its very first sentence: “The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement” (Engels 1990, p. 447). This quotation was intended to draw young Chinese readers’ attention to “come and see” the ways Jesus would be endowed with proletarianity in the following chapters (Zhu 1950b, p. 3). Whereas the observation made by Engels did generally embolden Zhu to investigate a proletarian image of Jesus, “On the History of Early Christianity” itself cared nothing about the issues of the historical Jesus and the four Gospels, which would have been essential for the reconstruction of any *Life of Jesus*. As a matter of fact, Engels’ piece unfolded the history of early Christianity in analyzing, instead of the historical Jesus, the Revelation of John, a book Engels dated as the earliest one in the New Testament (Engels 1990, p. 454). Therefore, Engels did not specifically exemplify for Zhu the ways the “marriage” of Jesus and proletarianity could be consummated.

In this regard, another figure mentioned above, Karl Kautsky, was not helpful either. One of the authorities on Marxism, in *Foundations of Christianity* Kautsky applied the materialistic conception of history to the rigorous study of the beginnings of primitive Christianity. Kautsky admitted that “Christianity in its beginnings was without doubt a movement of impoverished classes of the most varied kinds” (Kautsky 1925, p. 9). Yet in following the German biblical higher criticism of his time, Kautsky treated the Gospel accounts not as sources for a *Life of Jesus* but as testimonies of faith in Jesus, holding that “it is impossible to say anything definite of the alleged founder of the Christian congregation” (Kautsky 1925, p. 326). It was thus by no means possible for Kautsky to project the proletarianity of primitive Christianity onto the historical Jesus.

Having said that, *Foundations of Christianity* did have influences in some respects on Zhu’s composition of *Jesus the Proletarian*, chapter 4 of which was a most conspicuous case in point. In this chapter, entitled “Jewish Society Under the Roman Rule,” Zhu gave a Marxist analysis of both the class distinctions constituting Jewish society during the time of Jesus and the class antagonism therein. Three classes—the proletarian, the bourgeois, and the patrician—were said to be represented by Zealots and Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, respectively (Zhu 1950b, p. 8). I would suggest that Zhu borrowed this framework of classification directly from *Foundations of Christianity*, in which Kautsky’s longer version of a counterpart analysis of Judaism was clearly grounded upon these class distinctions. Where Kautsky noted that “the contrast between the Sadducees and the Pharisees was not at bottom a religious one, but a class opposition, a hostility that can be compared with that between the nobility and the Third Estate before the French Revolution” (Kautsky 1925, p. 273), Zhu translated the same point, with several minor deletions and additions, into *Jesus the Proletarian* (Zhu 1950b, p. 11). More borrowings from Kautsky, and even a host of verbatim extracts, could also be evidenced by a parallel reading of chapter 4 from *Jesus the Proletarian* with chapter 2 on “The Jews After the Exile” from part 3 of *Foundations of Christianity* (Zhu 1950b, pp. 8–14; Kautsky 1925, pp. 272–320).

² Zhu, though generally apolitical since 1928, stood as a sympathizer of the communist movement towards the late 1940s, as evidenced by his covering in 1948 of an ex-student of the University of Shanghai and underground communist party member (Ding 2014, pp. 10–14).

However, in many significant respects, the dominant influences on Zhu's literary production of the first post-1949 Chinese Life of Jesus came not from Engels and Kautsky, but from Zhu's reading of some other global sources. Here we identify three such sources. One was *The Days of His Flesh* written by David Smith (1866–1932), Professor of Theology in Magee College, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland. It contributed to Zhu's composition, particularly regarding the arrangement of the sequences of what Jesus said and did. For example, in line with Smith for harmonizing the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel, Zhu had Jesus cleanse the temple twice (Zhu 1950b, pp. 4, 35–37, 95), which is almost unparalleled in contrast to "Jesus novels" produced in the English world (Crook 2011, p. 505).

Another two closely related sources that left a more indelible imprint on Zhu's composition of *Jesus the Proletarian* were Bouck White's *The Call of the Carpenter* and Naozo Yonezawa's *Musansha Iesu*.³ *The Call of the Carpenter*, written by the American socialist and Congregationalist minister Rev. Bouck White (1874–1951) (Kenton 1998), was regarded by Zhu Weizhi as the earliest Life of Jesus that was written from a proletarian point of view. White's work was also the one upon which the Japanese socialist and Congregationalist minister Rev. Naozo Yonezawa (1876–1936) (Kasahara 1978) substantially based his Life of Jesus.⁴ Zhu Weizhi recalled in 1950 that, among several Lives of Jesus written from a proletarian perspective, Yonezawa's work, *Musansha Iesu*, stood out as both the first one Zhu read eighteen years ago (quite possibly during his stay in Japan) and "the one impressing him most" (Zhu 1950b, p. 2). Zhu did admit in general that he "drew significant inspiration" from works like White's and Yonezawa's (Zhu 1950a, p. 3), but in *Jesus the Proletarian* there was no citation of such contemporary works whatsoever, which increases the difficulty in differentiating between Zhu's original ideas and his borrowings.

That said, it is still evident that not a few of the contents and ideas in Zhu's *Jesus the Proletarian* should be attributed to the influences from White's *The Call of the Carpenter*, either directly or indirectly through the detouring of Zhu's reading of Yonezawa's *Musansha Iesu*. Take for instance chapter 3 on "A Ruthless but Crafty Exploitation" from Zhu's *Jesus the Proletarian*. In this chapter, Zhu depicted the rule of the Roman Empire from an economic standpoint. According to Zhu, Rome governed the colonies, not by the policy of utter political conquest, but by tax collection through its local allies—for instance, the aristocracies in the conquered Carthage or Palestine. The exorbitant tax collection of Rome, Zhu wrote, "oppressed the [colonized] people out of breath" (Zhu 1950b, p. 5). This depiction should be seen, however, as a borrowing—a conspicuous paraphrase that stemmed initially from *The Call of the Carpenter* and *Musansha Iesu*. On the one hand, it was precisely from the tax-collecting viewpoint that White and Yonezawa described the Roman ruling. On the other, even Zhu's examples concerning the Roman collaboration with the upper class in Carthage or with the native princes in Palestine were identical to what White and Yonezawa had written (White 1911, p. 9; Yonezawa 1928b, p. 4). Another of Zhu's obvious borrowings from *The Call of the Carpenter* appeared when in illustrating the Roman slavery system he cited a statement made by Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), which was also cited by White and Yonezawa, that across the Roman Empire there were sixty million slaves, accounting for almost half of the Empire's entire population (Zhu 1950b, p. 6; White 1911, p. 13; Yonezawa 1928b, p. 5).

Zhu's Jesus was not always in line with White's (and Yonezawa's), however. For example, White straightforwardly broke up with both the "Christian socialism" camp and the "liberal theology" camp as far as the view of God is concerned. Whereas the Christian socialism movement "had for its

³ I herein thank Dr. Yosuke Matsutani, church historian and pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan, who made a copy of Naozo Yonezawa's work for me.

⁴ In his preface to *Musansha Iesu*, Yonezawa notes that his work is not a total translation of White's *The Call of the Carpenter*, and he has done his own research by also consulting other books, including (1) the American leading social theologian and Baptist pastor Walter Rauschenbusch's three books about "social Christianity" (implying *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, *Christianizing the Social Order*, and *A Theology for the Social Gospel*), (2) the American sociologist Charles A. Ellwood's *The Reconstruction of Religion*, and (3) the British Baptist pastor and educator Theodore Gerald Soares' *The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible* (Yonezawa 1928a, p. 5). However, the stark commonalities between *Musansha Iesu* and *The Call of the Carpenter* can be identified by simply comparing the tables of contents. A majority of the keywords shown in chapter titles are exactly the same in meaning; this is particularly the case in the first eleven chapters, where Jesus' whole life is retold.

intellectual foundation the orthodox doctrine of a heavenly despot” and the liberal theology proponents “[had] been taught to believe that ‘the father almighty’ [sic] is the *sine qua non* of Christianity,” White could not endure a “God the father [sic] almighty” (White 1911, pp. 292, 297–98). He firmly believed that fatherhood equaled despotism and brotherhood equaled democracy, and he would be all for brotherhood. In contrast, Zhu’s Jesus did not bother with a father-like God and did not see a dichotomy between fatherhood and brotherhood. For Zhu’s Jesus, the conception of the fatherhood of God for all human beings signaled a spirit of equality. The conception that “everyone is a child of God after all,” Zhu opined, would “break the distinctions either between the propertied class and the unpropertied class or between those who toil with their minds and those their hands” (Zhu 1950b, p. 31). In this regard, Zhu’s Jesus bore more resemblance to the Jesus in F. Herbert Stead’s *The Proletarian Gospel of Galilee* (another biography Zhu had also consulted) than to White’s and Yonezawa’s Jesus. In his *Life of Jesus*, the British social reformer and Congregationalist minister Rev. F. Herbert Stead (1857–1928) prioritized “the Divine Fatherhood” as below: “Fatherhood is fundamental to Jesus. It is also fontal. Because God is Father to all men, therefore all men are brothers. The Brotherhood is based upon the Fatherhood. And there is no other foundation that can compare with this that is laid by Christ Jesus” (Stead 1922, pp. 31–32). Although the theme of “the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man” was commonplace among the liberal Protestant circles (Richardson 1963, p. 311) and there was no need for Zhu to read Stead in order to come to this conclusion, Zhu’s view at least resonated well with Stead’s or was even reinforced by the latter.

In all, then, Zhu Weizhi had consulted the above contemporary sources to various degrees when portraying a Jesus in response to, and in harmony with, the CCP’s ideology. These sources were read enthusiastically by such a progressive Christian in light of a brand new political reality. The global literary antecedents provided a model for Zhu’s Marxist presentation of Jesus. As mentioned before, *Jesus the Proletarian* can be read in this regard as part of world literature (Duran 2018). Indeed, *Jesus the Proletarian* should not be considered a completely original biography; it bears the stamps of global socialist movements (as one aspect of modernity) and their literary reflections in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the contributions that Zhu made through his creative localization of the globally produced Lives of Jesus cannot be ignored. Zhu executed his intellectual and literary creativity when rewriting the Gospel narratives. From these global entanglements emerged a Gospel according to Marxism. I now turn to this Gospel itself.

4. The Gospel According to Marxism

Zhu Weizhi’s *Life of Jesus* did not emerge from a socio-political vacuum. As mentioned previously, Zhu in post-1949 China sought to reconstruct a Gospel story in harmony with the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time. What is immediately striking about Zhu’s *Jesus the Proletarian* is that the events and characters in the Gospel accounts were now placed in a Marxist frame of interpretation. Simply by a random reading of *Jesus the Proletarian*, one can identify the following widely-used terms that either were adopted from Marxist literature or were fashionable in the CCP’s propaganda of the time: exploitation (*boxue*, used 23 times in the whole text); inequality (*bu pingdeng*, 1 time); the people (*renmin*, 5 times) or the masses (*dazhong*, 24 times); socialism (*shehui zhuyi*, 2 times) or communism (*gongchan zhuyi*, 2 times); revolution (*geming*, 22 times); “overturning the body” (*fanshen*, 3 times), liberation (*jiefang*, 17 times), or liberation movement (*jiefang yundong*, 7 times); political program (*gangling*, 10 times); class interest (*jieji liyi*, 1 time), class consciousness (*jieji de yishi*, 1 time), class struggle (*jieji de douzheng*, 1 time), or class antagonism (*jieji duili*, 1 time); the privileged class (*tequan zhe* or *tequan jieji*, 20 times), the propertied class (*youchan zhe* or *youchan jieji*, 4 times), or the bourgeoisie (*zhongchan jieji*, 6 times); the proletariat (*wuchan zhe*, *wuchan jieji*, *wuchan dazhong* or *puluo lieta liya*, 55 times), the working class (*laodong zhe*, *laodong jieji* or *laodong dazhong*, 6 times), or the oppressed class (*bei yapo zhe*, *bei yapo jieji*, or the like, 13 times); proletarian solidarity (*wuchan jieji tuanjie*, 1 time) or unifying the masses (*tuanjie qunzhong*, 1 time); comrade (*tongzhi*, 12 times) and cadre (*ganbu*, 2 times); social sin (*shehui de zui’e*, 3 times); public servant (*gongpu*, 2 times); democracy (*minzhu*, 11 times); human right (*renquan*, 16 times);

internationalism (*guoji zhuyi*, 1 time); social existence (*shehui cunzai*, 1 time); and dialectic (*bianzheng*, 5 times). Zhu's Life of Jesus therefore arguably operated within a Marxism-oriented context. As far as I know, there is no single Chinese Life of Jesus—not even *Jidu jiao yu zhongguo wenhua* (Christianity and Chinese Culture) by Wu Leichuan (Wu 1936) or *Geming de mujiang* (The Revolutionary Carpenter) by Zhang Shizhang (Zhang 1939)—that has made such extensive use of Marxist terminologies as Zhu's.

All these terminologies aside, we may also adopt a thematic approach to examine the extent to which Marxism was integrated into Zhu's narrative. *Jesus the Proletarian* tells its story in 26 short chapters, drawing from all four Gospels as narrative materials in a typically harmonizing way. It opens its very first chapter with describing the contemporary Chinese dichotomy thinking of Christianity, seeing it either as downright superstition or as pure religion ("religion for religion's sake"). In a polemical manner, in *Jesus the Proletarian* Zhu tried to transcend the conflict by arguing (against the Chinese young atheists) that the founder of Christianity was no less revolutionary and socialistic, while holding (against the pure religionists) in the meantime that the core of Jesus' mission was not religious but socio-political ("religion for life/society's sake") (Zhu 1950b, pp. 1–3, 31–32). In the following, I would like to draw attention to six facets of the unfolding story of Zhu's Jesus to illustrate the ways Zhu attempted to justify this two-fold argument by adopting Marxist viewpoints and CCP's propaganda terms.

The class opponents of Jesus. From a literary perspective, not unlike Mark's Gospel (Telford 2011, p. 21), one of the major strands of Zhu's storyline or plotting is the conflict between Jesus and his opponents. Jesus had as his class opponents not only the Roman Empire who exploited Palestine and the aristocratic classes like the Sadducees as Rome's local collaborators, but also the bourgeois Pharisees. As regards Pharisees, on the one hand they opposed the aristocrats' loyalty to Caesar and committed themselves to "preserving the national essence" (*baocun guocui*), as Zhu puts it, while on the other hand, it is their class status as the bourgeois intelligentsia that brought "two-sidedness" (*liangmian xing*) and "wavering in determination" (*youyi xing*), thus "alienating themselves from the masses." As Zhu remarks in the middle of the work, given their class nature, Pharisees "despise the proletarian masses and support the distinction between classes because they want to maintain their class privilege." There is little wonder then that through a loose quotation from Matthew 23: 13–27, Zhu characterizes Pharisees as severely accursed by Jesus due to their collaboration in secret with the ruling class (Zhu 1950b, pp. 10–12, 46–48; cf. White 1911, pp. 96–99).

The dependence of social consciousness upon social existence. The class distinction between Jesus and his opponents further exemplifies Zhu's understanding of this classical Marxist thesis. Two stories illustrate this point. One story concerns a narrative originally from John 3: 1–21—namely, the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, the latter being one of few (in Zhu's terms) "progressive" and "open-minded" patricians. However progressive and open-minded, it is nonetheless because of "being blinded by class prejudice" that the patrician Nicodemus still could not grasp what Jesus meant by "regeneration" in the sense of remolding oneself. In a similar vein, Zhu tells another story about a well-known conversation between Jesus and the young rich man. This story ends with Jesus' parabolic statement that "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19: 24). Zhu then makes a Marxist implication out of this narrative: "The living condition, social relations and social existence of an individual determine his consciousness, and class interest influences his standpoint. It is almost a mission impossible for a rich man to join a revolutionary community" (Zhu 1950b, pp. 38–39, 89–90).

Women as the liberator and the liberated. Much ink has been spilled by Zhu depicting the roles that women play in Jesus' life and public ministry. Jesus' mother Mary typifies one type of women as the liberator. The portrayal of Mary as a "revolutionary, laboring woman" makes up the whole fifth chapter of *Jesus the Proletarian*. In stark contrast to a Mary "born into a distinguished family" (*xichu mingmen*) in Zhu's 1948 Life of Jesus (Zhu 1948, p. 17), two years later Mary in *Jesus the Proletarian* is reconstructed as someone "born into a humbly laboring family" (*shengyu beiwei de laodong zhe zhi jia*) (Zhu 1950b, p. 14) so that her proletarian-class background is well established. Along the same

line with Luke's Gospel (1: 46–55), Zhu refashions a progressive Mary partly through the message in her Magnificat—"an unparalleled, proletarian-revolting song" that "exudes class consciousness, revolutionary mood, and democratic thinking" (Zhu 1950b, p. 15). In this song, Mary is expecting that her future child would liberate the oppressed and the weak not from sin, but from their oppressor—the Roman Empire—even though the Magnificat itself does not mention the Romans by name. It is very likely that Zhu here borrows some critical insights from Bouck White, such as: "Heaven is not on the side of privilege and oppression, she [Mary] affirms, but is rather on the side of the trodden" (Zhu 1950b, p. 16; White 1911, p. 22). One more affirmation of Mary's revolutionary character emerges when Zhu re-interprets what Jesus intends before his death in connecting his mother and the Apostle John (identified by Zhu as the disciple whom Jesus loved in John 19: 26–27). As opposed to what has been commonly assumed, in Zhu's judgment, Jesus' purpose is not that John should take care of the pitiful Mary, but that such a staunchly revolutionary woman as Mary would maintain the immature John's faith (Zhu 1950b, p. 18; cf. White 1911, pp. 197–98). We may term Zhu's characterization of Mary as a proletarian/revolutionary Mariology, which, not surprisingly, fits quite well into the CCP's representation of "progressive women" that dedicate themselves to the revolutionary cause.

Another type of women concerns those seen as the liberated ones due to Jesus' public ministry. One such woman, Mary Magdalene, is identified by Zhu as the woman in Luke who lived a sinful life (7: 36–38). According to Zhu's account, whereas Simon the Pharisee, on account of his class prejudice, withheld from Jesus the customs for inviting distinguished guests, the "promiscuous" Mary Magdalene anoints Jesus' feet with the ointment. Seeing through the hearts of fellow guest Pharisees who despise Mary Magdalene for her moral sins, Zhu's Jesus absolves her from responsibility because he deems Mary Magdalene's sinning out of not merely her own fault but also the society's (Zhu 1950b, pp. 62–63; cf. White 1911, p. 124). This discursive strategy of defending the female sinner and blaming the society is adopted again in Zhu's recasting of the narrative of a woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1–11). Zhu asserts that this woman works as a harlot simply because she "could not stand the economic oppression" and that Jesus sees these "social sins" as "far more severe and obstinate than the personal ones" (Zhu 1950b, pp. 97–98). Zhu thus constructs these biblical women as the liberated ones, for whose iniquities society at large is to blame. This theme of women's liberation in Jesus' time also resonates well with the CCP's propaganda discourse of the time.

The class nature of Jesus. As has been stated previously, Zhu's *Jesus the Proletarian* is a work revolving around the class nature of Jesus. To achieve his aim, Zhu primarily presents a fully human Jesus. It can be said without reservation that Zhu's Jesus is positioned in exclusively human terms. Jesus' birth from a virgin, divine nature, working of miracles, resurrection from the dead, and *Parousia* (second coming)—all these elements are missing from *Jesus the Proletarian*. In this non-miraculous framework, Zhu makes his attempt to justify a Jesus who belongs to the proletariat in at least three ways. First, in chapter 2 of *Jesus the Proletarian* Zhu contrasts ancient official history (*zhengshi*) in antiquity to the four Gospels. The near absence of Jesus in ancient official history, which tells of stories only concerning "princes and marquises" or "emperors and aristocrats," is highlighted by Zhu to manifest Jesus' proletarianity. Only in the four Gospels, which Zhu attributes as "the people's history recorded by the people," can we find the trace of Jesus as a proletarian (Zhu 1950b, pp. 3–4).

Another way Zhu used to refashion a proletarian image of Jesus was to reconstruct the world into which Jesus was born. The Nativity narrative in Luke is appropriated by Zhu in chapter 6 to illustrate the contrast between a baby Jesus who "did not even own a cradle" on the one hand, and "the patricians and the propertied classes who lived a leisurely life" on the other. In contrast to imagining the Nativity story in *Jesus Christ* as "the most beautiful poem" (Zhu 1948, p. 18), two years later Zhu reconsiders the Nativity night, not as "a silent night," but as "a miserable and depressing night." This is the case because, according to Zhu, the poll tax that the Roman government collects from the proletariat such as Jesus' parents is abusive and the homeless shepherds in the field of Bethlehem suffer even more from the exploitative tax collecting. In a word, Zhu's Jesus was born "not so much on earth as on a living hell" (Zhu 1950b, pp. 18–19).

A third way of shaping the class nature of Jesus concerns an emphasis upon the labor work of Jesus as a carpenter. The labor work makes our young protagonist so conscious of the value of laboring (*laodong*) that he later would come to some truth claims such as “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10: 7) or “my father [read here Joseph, Jesus’s earthly father, rather than God, Jesus’ heavenly father] worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5: 17). Zhu then lauds Jesus for his thoroughgoing viewpoint about labor. “Labor creates the world and the universe,” as Zhu puts it, “and since the universe is still unfinished yet and in the creating process, we need to labor to create a just world without oppression” (Zhu 1950b, pp. 22–23). Zhu’s underlining of labor resonates again with both Marxism and the CCP’s political discourse, and all these serve to render Jesus more attractive to the Chinese proletariat. In terms of theology, we may title Zhu’s presentation of Jesus as a proletarian Christology.

The *basileia* (kingdom) mission of Jesus. In chapter 9 of *Jesus the Proletarian*, “The Program of the Liberation Movement,” the mission of Zhu’s Jesus is to advocate for “a movement of the kingdom of the heavens” (*tianguo yundong*)—that is, “a movement of new social construction” not only for liberating the slavery class but also for fundamentally remolding the lives of human beings. This movement of the *basileia* of the heavens, then, has little remaining religious connotation. In truth, the “maximum program” (*zuigao gangling*)—a conspicuously communist-style terminology—of Zhu’s Jesus corresponds to that of communism and the CCP: “a new society where all human beings live, without class distinction and exploitation.” In a nutshell, the *basileia* of the heavens equals a communist society.

Yet Jesus’ maximum program cannot be achieved hastily. It needs to be accomplished step by step, and the very first step to take shall be the act of inculcating the masses with the “awareness of human rights”: the proletarian class should have been equal to the propertied class because the former are as much the children of God as the latter. Rather than a revolutionary proper (as Bouck White has depicted) given the means he employs, Zhu’s Jesus is more like a teacher or a prophet. The motif of awakening the masses on the part of this teacher-prophet figure, in line with White’s narrative (see, for example, White 1911, p. 93), runs through *Jesus the Proletarian*. For example, although used to be despised abusively as “Galilean pigs” by Jerusalem’s patricians, Zhu claims, the proletariat from Galilee where Jesus grows up are told by Jesus that “God is on our side” and that “God’s wisdom is hidden from the wise and prudent and is revealed unto the lowly brothers” (adapted respectively from Matthew 1: 23 and 11: 25). The use of the term “Immanuel,” meaning either “God with us” or “God on the side of us,” “becomes a voice of liberation that makes a great impact on the lowest class” (Zhu 1950b, pp. 31–33). Theologically, the *basileia* mission of Jesus can be understood as an awakening soteriology.

The passion of Jesus as the working out of dialectics. Finally, every Life of Jesus in history must find a way to come to terms with Jesus’ death. Against basing the passion narrative upon the religious atonement theory, Zhu refashioned his Jesus as a firm adherent of Marxist dialectics. When his second year’s public ministry begins, and another Passover approaches, Zhu’s Jesus recalls the meaning of the festival and the agency of salvation: when Moses led Israel out of the hands of the cruel Egyptian despot (cf. White 1911, pp. 153–54), the Passover lambs as sacrifices were vital to the Israelite nation’s very survival. Zhu’s Jesus derives from this national story the dialectics of death and life and the significance of martyrdom (*xisheng*). It then makes sense for Zhu’s Jesus in this context to state the following claim: “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12: 24). Jesus’ resolution to become such a grain of wheat reflects, Zhu avers, his “dialectical views of the world, life, and society.” Later on, in the district of Caesarea Philippi, Zhu’s Jesus announces to his disciples “the most important manifesto”: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?” (Matthew 16: 24–26) This manifesto indicates, again, Jesus’ “dialectical view of revolution” (Zhu 1950b, pp. 70–71, 76). The high praise of martyrdom, of course, was not alien to those Chinese who had just gone through the Anti-Japanese War and the civil war. Through Zhu’s re-imagination,

the Chinese readers, just as Wainwright claims for today's readers, "can read the passion narrative as providing a model for a life lived for the sake of justice and in fidelity to God, lived in a way that could lead to a martyr's death, especially in unjust imperial situations like that of first-century Palestine" (Wainwright 2011, p. 41).

5. Conclusions

To conclude, Zhu Weizhi's aim in composing *Jesus the Proletarian* is to provide a Marxist Jesus as equaling *the* historical Jesus, without the garbs of feudal and capitalist appropriations. Nonetheless, it is because of his Marxist framework that Zhu's Jesus—just as the Jesus in Mark's Gospel or any other Gospels—becomes another "Jesus of culture," "constructed by the literary or religious imagination and propagated in the interests of the believing community or society" (Telford 2011, p. 17). In keeping with Albert Schweitzer (Schweitzer 2001), New Testament professor Delbert Burkett remarks that "Ultimately humans have created Jesus in their images ... These images may not tell us a great deal about Jesus of Nazareth, but they do tell us about the people who conceived or imagined them" (Burkett 2011, p. 9). In a similar vein, the quest of the historical Jesus in Communist China may tell us more about Zhu the progressive biographer than Jesus the protagonist.

Moreover, our understanding of the Sinicization of theology should not be limited only to its "cultural" aspect, that is, something like the use of "the Chinese concept of yin and yang to understand the divine and human in Jesus" (Burkett 2011, pp. 6–7). Traditional scholarship in theological studies has attributed the development of what we now call "liberation Christology" overwhelmingly to the Latin American theological works under the influence of Marxism, without giving due attention to their Chinese counterparts such as *Jesus the Proletarian*, a work published more than two decades earlier than Leonardo Boff's *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1972) and Jon Sobrino's *Christology at the Crossroads* (1976) (La Due 2001, pp. 160–80). Globally speaking, Zhu Weizhi's Jesus stands as a precursor to his later Latin American counterpart. *Jesus the Proletarian* deserves to be appreciated as the Gospel according to Marxism in China that has long been forgotten and to which it is now time to pay heed.

Funding: This work has been supported by the STU Scientific Research Initiation Grant (Project No. STF19002).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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