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Summary

Alexander Chow discusses the evolution of Christianity in China, emphasizing its growth in urban centers and the emergence of public theology.

Highlights

-  **Global Influence:** The growth of Chinese Christianity reflects the global church's diversity and interconnectedness.
-  **Public Theology:** Emerging public theologians in China are engaging with societal issues rooted in Calvinist thought.
-  **Urban Shift:** Christianity is moving from rural areas to urban centers, attracting intellectuals and entrepreneurs.
-  **Human Rights:** Public theologians advocate for human rights and constitutionalism, challenging state authority.
-  **Cultural Exchange:** There's a cross-pollination of ideas between various Christian groups in China.
-  **Indigenous Theology:** Indigenous forms of theology are emerging, integrating traditional Chinese philosophies with Christian thought.
-  **Complexity:** Chinese Christianity is diverse, with many expressions that defy simplistic categorizations.

Key Insights

-  **Urbanization Effects:** The church's growth in urban areas signifies a shift in demographics, attracting diverse social classes, which enhances its cultural relevance.
-  **Persecution and Growth:** While persecution is a challenge, it has historically spurred growth and resilience in the church, fostering deeper faith among believers.
-  **East Meets West:** The intersection of Eastern and Western

00:00:12 hello and welcome to the global church project I'm Graham Hill Alexander Charles an american-born Chinese who was raised in Southern California he completed his PhD in theology at the University of Birmingham following a postdoctoral fellowship at Renmin University of China where he was doing research into Chinese Christianity Alexander Chow joined the University of Edinburgh Center for the Study of well Christianity in September 2013 hiren extensively on Christianity and China and more broadly in East Asia his

00:00:41 books explore historical types of indigenous theology in China and he posed Eastern Christian thought into a dynamic conversation with Chinese views of the world Alex Joe welcome to the global church projects thank you you've written quite a lot on the growth of the church in China and until recently the Chinese Church was considered a rural maybe marginal religion in the Chinese context but there's been movement to urban centers and urban intellectuals that become more more involved can you describe some of that shift sure in the

00:01:16 1980s there was what people would describe as a Christianity fever happening in China and many internal government documents would talk about what they call the for many's the many old the many women many illiterate and the many ill so it was very much a marginalize the people from the villages that that needed something some kind of a rice Christianity that were drawn to Christianity but as as we move into the 1990s with the with the growth of on the one hand economic success and on the other hand intellectual growth within

00:01:57 the universities Christianity was growing in urban centers in both those areas so you have academics who are studying Christianity who would not consider themselves Christians but instill were drawn to Christianity and others in in the urban centers who who whether they they are involved in entrepreneurial it excuse me whether they are entrepreneurs working in businesses or also in teaching in universities or well-educated individuals that were drawn to Christianity and so that Mervin centers became it is becoming where Christianity

00:02:32 is growing the most today can you give us examples of public theologians in China today who are making use of Calvin's for sure there's probably two major groups of public theologians in China today one of them is is a group that's often associated with human rights activism and so for many of them they'll come from sort of a legal background and often argue from the basis from from John Calvin's writings and sort of reformed theology the the sense that constitutionalism is something that comes out of a covenantal

00:03:11 relationship with God and so because of the covenant to relationship we we can have a better constitutionalism built around a covenant with God and so there's many of them who build from a legal perspective and arguing about constitutionalism and the rule of law as ways to engage the society and state as well but then there's a second group and the second group often borrowing from neo Calvinist thinkers from like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Babbitt who look at the church and how it engages the the

00:03:52 society in in the cultural mandate so it's looking at the church as a type of NGO not a non-governmental organization and engaging the civil society and working for the those who are hurt in society mm-hmm so there's a lot of crossover in thought between those two groups although they remain quite separate there tend to have very independent thinking but there is a lot of cross-pollination so some of the groups will some individuals from each of the groups will would publish in articles in magazines

00:04:27 written by published by other churches from another group and vice versa there's there's blogs and and wave wall which is like a Twitter Chinese Twitter that that is used by both both groups very very frequently and Pentecostalism has been burning in China too I had the Pentecostals tended to engage some of the public theology issues or not so far so far Pentecostalism work well in Pentecostalism itself in China's is somewhat complex and a lot of people would actually resist a term Pentecost in China but Pentecostalism has been

00:05:12 growing but it has tended to avoid engagement with society and with the state so as a consequence it has not really been very strong in the public theological engagement there are a growing number of Christian intellectuals that are Pentecostals and are therefore also wanting to engage Society but but it has not really developed too much in terms of the public theology can you give us examples of the way in which public theology is engaging Laurel Constitution or other social justice issues today in China

00:05:49 sure there's a large number of public theologians who are looking at how human rights issues are violated in China and trying to ask the question well what is the ultimate rule is it the law that's that's in charge or the government that's in charge of it wielding the law as a tool to persecute and so there's many of these policy allusions or lawyers and they're trying to use the law to engage the state on its own effectively so you've given us these laws we we use these laws and we try to argue the human rights cases based on

00:06:33 the laws you have given us that you have been violating and the government of course doesn't quite like that hmm so you tend to use Chinese public theologians rather than public intellectuals or Chinese new Calvinists why do you use that term why do you prefer that term I think the term public intellectuals Chinese public intellectuals is still valid but as Mariah does not capture the essence of of what these individuals are trying to do they want to see how their Christian faith and their Christian thoughts can

00:07:11 have an influence in the public sphere so it's very much a theological reflective reflection on the Christian on their Christian identity engaging the public sphere and so that's why I prefer public theology Chinese public village and instead of Chinese public intellectual in terms of Chinese new Calvinism that's a term that some have begun to use simply in parallel with what's happening in North America the new Calvinism from people like John John Piper Mark Driscoll al al mohler and so forth the trouble with that term

00:07:51 is new Calvinism enchantment excuse me new Calvinism in the States is very much wrapped around this question of a tulip hmm questions of salvation questions of the election and all these types of things but that is not really Calvinism in a broader sense right if you think about the historic Calvinist church's Presbyterian or Reformed churches they would say well yes that that's a part of Calvinism but that's not the whole thing Calvinism embodies a lot more and it particular in embodies and ecclesiology

00:08:31 of the ology of the church and so for these public theologians in China their use of Calvin is less about the question of salvation it's more about the question of the church how does a church engage the society how does it search engage the state it's less about you know whether or not we adhere to four point or five point Calvinism but it's about how the church and the magistrate is engaged which is a topic of course of John Calvin himself it was the fourth book of his Institute's toss by the

00:09:11 church and how they examined that question alongside public theology nikuman ISM since Edinburgh 1910 yes I don't know 1910 of course was was a landmark event and within China it was one of many stimuli to push the church towards independence independence from foreign denominations and and foreign powers and in that way and so the trajectory of the church in China has very much then how do we engage the broader church the global church but how do we have our own church how are we on our how can we stand on our own two feet

00:09:59 as the Chinese Church not as the younger Church the little brother of the American Church or British church or what have you but its own and in that process the public theology that's been coming out of China has been one that asks the question or how how do we exist in distinction from the the world in a distinction from from the issues that that are being raised up by the secularists or the Buddhists or the Confucian is within our society and it's it's both a a resistance against but also an engagement with so it's a

00:10:42 both/and type of emotion in which public theology is trying to has been growing a sense of an identity in which Chinese Christianity is something that is unique by itself and do you say then an indigent or indigenous forms of theology emerging as a consequence of that wrestle in China the are unique to the Chinese context yes and no a lot of Chinese theology has of course borrowed from the legacy of the missionaries but not only the missionaries but also as many Western or foreign texts have been translated into

00:11:28 Chinese or have been accessed by Chinese it's been adopted so you have a lot of everybody from Schleiermacher to Calvin to you know Piper being embraced by Chinese thinkers so available on one hand it doesn't seem unique but on the other hand it's it's a question of how it's being applied I think and oftentimes the ways is being applied engages questions of the Chinese society that are very different from an outsider there part of that is the multi multiple religious environment and China has has

00:12:06 always been in and it's engaging the question of theology of religion so how do how does Christianity engage other religions and asking questions around that but it's also bringing in characteristics from Confucianism for example the priority in the family which translates to a priority in the church right so it's it's very distinct from a more individualistic orientation that we may often characterize as Western Christianity yeah I'd ask you about that because I've talked to some who suggested the church was well-equipped

00:12:41 for ministry under communism but now that some of that ideology is is waning a listing in amongst the middle classes and people are becoming wealthier more globalized there's a sense amongst some that the church isn't all that well equipped to deal with this new environment what's your sense about how the church is engaging with a new wealth new modernity and new globalization in China is it able to come to terms with all of those challenges and how's it doing that that's a great question I think one way

00:13:22 to look at it is this push of globalization the global market and all these different things is causing a lot of societal problems right in society and a lot of mental and emotional strain on society and yet at the same time there's there's all this internally there's a rapid urbanization and so people are leaving their their families in the villages and going to the urban centers to work and then coming back on on you know once or twice a year for holidays so you have all this social angst at the same time the church is

00:14:02 thriving and the church seems to be responding to this that it is almost in the the social ills of society that the gospel is really seen that it is through these struggles that draws many people to the church and so the church perhaps you know very few church leaders will have PhDs or you know even seminary education but they are doing a fantastic job considering the circumstances hmm I wonder about the kind of other if is the right word to use but whether there was something of a vacuum that was left a

00:14:46 religious or spiritual vacuum that was left as again correct me if I'm wrong as communist ideology became less popular amongst the middle classes these are something of a vacuum that is there that is being filled by a range of religious and spiritual and AH and ideological beliefs that Christianity is fitting into or what's what's going on there the Chinese context yeah I mean I think the word vacuum is is probably good good one to use my views it myself particularly during the 1960's assemblies at the Cultural Revolution

00:15:24 the the MAOIs dogmatism during that time really suppressed anything that was opposing it which meant every day all religious ideologies all or even Confucianism was was trampled upon and and so it was not just Christianity but all sorts of religious and ideological alternatives were trampled upon but after the 80s and 90s we have this this surge in in ideas and the surge of interests in religions and in different ideologies very broadly Christianity of course being one of the major components to that Christianity of courses is is a

00:16:09 growing voice as we've already discussed in terms of the public theology it has a very strong public force so yes there there is this almost a competition of ideas but it is also one in which Christianity and you know in if you think about it Christianity 1949 has you know what around 500,000 Christian Protestants and you know the latest estimates around 70 70 million that's that's quite a turn of events it's still minority religion in in China but it is definitely growing in its string and they mainly by space still in rural

00:16:55 areas or has it been a significant growth of the Chinese Church in the major urban centres it's a it's a mixture of both and part of that is is because of this growth as we've discussed in in entrepreneurs in major urban centers intellectuals in the urban but also from those who migrated from the rules rural areas to the urban centers so you have no migrated my migration that ships not as well we'll ask you about theology have seen say you've discussed the ways in which Asian societies Korean Japanese Chinese

00:17:34 exploring afresh a theology of sin as it relates to their experience and their traditions can you unpack some of that for us sure the the doctrine of sin when when it was first introduced by by missionaries to China Japan and Korea so East Asia was one that was introduced almost as a very very foreign idea the terminology that was used what really convey this idea of crime a crime that a person is convicted of and recognized as guilty because those very legal terminology but within East Asian religiosity and and and ideas there

00:18:20 there is no such thing as that that that people are inherently good and that there there may be some disposition to to do evil but overall people are fundamentally good so the the doctrine of sin became a major stumbling block more many people in the engagement between Christianity and East Asia but really it wasn't until the end of world war two roughly that they see in in Japan Korea and South Korea and and China this growing thirst for something else in Japan you have theologies in which people are speaking about the pain

00:19:07 of God and and this is of course coming out of this idea in which we've suffered through the wolf World War two we've experienced Hiroshima and you know we recognize the problems that are in society and

really we need to speak about the pain of God in South Korea you have in the 1970s in particular this growing military force a military Junta military dictatorship ruling over South Korea and during this time the Korean Christians were thinking about sin in terms of the structural sin so people who have been sinned against that we

00:19:51 mall have been sinned against by society and different aspects of society and we oppressed must rise up against those forces that have sinned against us and and then in the case of China you have a growing number of individuals both within the churches as well as within intellectual circles many of whom are not Christians who have been drawn to the doctrine of original sin and saying actually this original sin this is what we face in society this is the ills that we see in society and how they exploring

00:20:25 the doctrine of original sin in a context where sin wasn't a natural idea yeah the because the term and the idea was not very natural there's actually something attractive about it okay which is sort of odd but it's it's something that well it's it doesn't make sense but there's something out there that we know we need hmm and there is something here that just does not make sense and with the vacuum in China does that make the Chinese mind more open to these new ideas so the reason I that question is

00:21:06 in some contexts that are much more traditional than an emerging China where there might be something of an ideological spiritual vacuum you've got to work very hard at connecting with traditional ideas and spiritualities I'm just wondering whether the vacuum in China does actually open up opportunities for ideas like original sin and others to be explored in a fresh way yeah I think the the fact that they're there is a spiritual vacuum in China does open the opportunities for the doctrine of original sin and other ideas to come in

00:21:46 and and and have a fresh new look on society on the flip side Christianity is not the only thing that's filling that spiritual vacuum and so there's people will also speak about a Buddhism fever or in a Confucianism fever yeah so there's this growing of more traditional ideologies as well as the Christianity and so with with the multiplicity of ideas it's it's a it's a new battle of ideas in a sense and and therefore Christianity in this this new context has a great opportunity to to grow but it also has a great need to engage with

00:22:34 the multiplicity of ideas that is being introduced at the time what about other doctrines like a doctrine of spirit so other ways in which pneumatology connects at all with Chinese mind or Chinese thought I think the doctrine of the holy spirit has had a very strong presence in China on the one hand you know through of course the the so-called Pentecostal or more charismatic tendencies of of Christianity but also in terms of spiritual theology and just a sense in which and many more if I can say it more

00:23:17 more conservative Christians there there's a stronger leaning towards a more mystical theology a connection with God that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is in a sense burgeoning with it hmm can you think about the indigenous forms of Chinese theology that are worth mentioning today yeah I mean I think the the general direction of the church since in particular since the 1980s has been one that on the one hand is searching for a new identity you don't have missionaries you don't have foreign denominations you

00:24:01 have more or less two maybe three different major groupings categories of Christians in China and so during this time you know they're one of the major things that people are thinking about is the question of suffering some people talk about the gospel as a gospel of suffering and and that the church in China is a church

that suffers and it has gone through a death and a resurrection of sorts paralleling that the life of Christ but there is also because of this this competition of ideas there is also this

00:24:42 return to the more traditional religions and philosophies and and theologies that reflect on that and in some ways integrate that into its Christian theology along with that there's probably a third major group which are intellectuals there's this huge growth in intellectuals academics scholars who are drawn to Christianity or drawn to Christian theology but are not Christians and so they engage Christian theology as a way to engage society but not as a confessional person who says that you know I I follow Jesus Christ as

00:25:28 my Lord and Savior there there's no profession of the faith but there's a way in which these individuals in some senses are scholars of Christianity and are learned followers followers of a learner Christianity what some people have termed a cultural Christian not in the sense of how we have in Western societies you know in which you were born into church and you left it but that you are a Christian in the terms of its culture that the cultural idea for Sharon and so that I think that the cultural ideas

00:26:07 which have served the West world from time to time have some value in terms of exploring them for Chinese public theology yes and as contextual theologies have been explored I have Chinese ideological resources past and present been engaged with mainly they have been engaged in Chinese ideological sources have been both a a blessing and a burden on Chinese Christianity on the one hand your many of the more conservative Christians in China have have tried to reject it on the other hand some some Chinese

00:27:02 Christians who would perhaps be more more liberal in their theology have tended to embrace Chinese religious background and integrate it within Christianity and I think to be honest I think the the space that we need to be in is sort of in between both of those that there is a recognition of the ideological resources from the past from China's past and an engagement with it because that shapes the way that the Chinese society Chinese people think today whether or not they they realize it but at the same time it's not just a

00:27:46 wholesale Confucian ization of Christianity or Buddha size ation of Christianity but it needs to be one that in which Christianity needs to constantly question and and perhaps there are certain modes of thinking within that that need to be embraced as well hmm do you say as China becomes more confident on the world stage in a variety of different arenas do you say that that lending more impetus to Chinese theologians doing more not completely independent but more Chinese contextual theology in their own

00:28:24 right yes I think that's definitely a trend in which many Chinese Christians are trying to articulate their own theologies and I mean obviously you know you you cannot do away with Christianity's paths under Shanti's hip history and you know you need to think about the Calvin's the kuipers August's and and so forth but there are both explicit and implicit reflections of a theology that are happening today in China and have you saying Eastern Orthodoxy engaging with questions around Chinese contextual theology yeah Eastern

00:29:12 Orthodoxy I think is is a valuable resource in terms of the ideas that it has to present in particular many of the Chinese Christians today more very much shaped by a Western or a prosthetic type of a theological background Eastern Orthodoxy of course coming from the eastern or Greek branch of Christianity has preserved certain things that that go back to the early patristic s-- in which the Western Church has tended to move away from and so I think Eastern Orthodox theology together with with Western theology particularly ideas like

00:29:59 theosis or deification and questions of the relationship between humanity and divinity these are ideas which can have a place in the Chinese context as well and in some ways actually are reflected within aspects of Chinese Christianity today that some parts of Chinese Christianity have some aspects of Chinese Christian theology have theologies in which speak about humanity's union with God and that is not coming from the Western missionaries that they heard at the gospel from and it's not coming from Eastern

00:30:44 Orthodoxy because Eastern Orthodoxy was not brought in was not a missioning force in China so where does this come from and I believe that that some of this actually comes from the Chinese traditional ideas that there is within Chinese traditional philosophies and religions there's this idea in which humanity can be united with heaven a type of deity if you will and that sensibility of a union with heaven becomes translated into a unity with God within Christianity and there's this this this sense of this unity which is

00:31:30 articulated most clearly I think within the Eastern Orthodox tradition so Eastern Orthodox theology as well as the process and Catholic theologies brought together in the Chinese context I think are useful in engaging with the situation today in China this with this plethora of ideologies that are intersecting in this one place that helps to clarify or helps to bring a different face of Christianity into China that's very interesting I was talking to a friend who had lunch with Mother Teresa and he

00:32:13 young man and he said to mother Teresa I'm trying to discern what God's will is for my life can you help me and she said to him you need to stop thinking like a westerner and you don't discern God's will you are God's will or unite with God's will and it made me wonder about the difference between eastern and western thought in terms of union with God embodiment of God's will and so on do you see some of those ideas reflected here in Eastern Orthodoxy and in Chinese thought yes I think that's

00:32:49 definitely a sense that is within both Eastern Orthodoxy and the Chinese Christianity there is many within Chinese Christianity that despite the growth in Calvinism there's been many within Chinese Christianity that have had theologies that are very much against a very deterministic tenancy that we see in Calvinism and are more drawn to a synergistic relationship between God and humanity in which we are working as co-workers alongside of God and this is this is an idea that that I think is very much captured within

00:33:35 Chinese historical traditions and religious and philosophical traditions but also within Eastern Orthodoxy and Chinese Christianity today what excites you the most as you look at what's happening in the church in China today well there's a lot of things that it was a list of you probably the thing that's exciting me the most about Christianity in China today is the changes that it's having on society and the the growth and articulation of an indigenous Christianity one that can can very much be appreciated as

00:34:25 being Chinese and one that is able to have a very strong voice within China to the fear of the government in many senses but also that as China's becoming a very strong force globally economically and in different intellectually and so forth it is also a growing force in terms of the Christian role as well I think that's exciting and that that brings it brings a lot of challenges to the global church but it also brings a lot of beauty that that I think all the global church can grow from what concerns you the most about

00:35:17 the church in China today what concerns me the most about the church in China today is the challenges that our offer from the more global world as well as from the the Chinese society what I mean by that is oftentimes Christianity in China wants to be just Western many Chinese want to just be Western and in the the path of following that oftentimes take up the worst of what is Western if you will yeah and not really reflecting and thinking deeply about what it really means and likewise within China there's

00:36:20 been many new growth of persecution within the church in China and a few years there's what we call the The Jerusalem of China Wenzhou which has the most Christians of any one part of of China today in the last two years have had a lot of persecution the government has been taking off crosses from hundreds of churches and this is forcing that those churches to rethink well what is it that we stand for what is the gospel is it building these magnificent churches with the the steeples and the crosses or is there something much

00:37:06 deeper much much more within our community and our people that we need to think about and so for for Chinese Christianity like any other Christianity the the the biggest challenge is perhaps the challenge of arrogance in a sense that well we just got this and we know it all and we've achieved it all but it's much more than that my gospel is much more than that what do you think's most misunderstood about Chinese Christianity the thing that's most misunderstood about Chinese Christianity is it cannot be understood China is a

00:37:50 very very vast country there are many many different expressions of Christianity throughout hmm and oftentimes people will say well you know the church in China it's all Pentecostal no it's not you know or there's a there's a three-self Church that's sold itself to the state and there is house searches and that's where the true Christians are maybe maybe not there's it's a lot more complicated than that and I think the more and more I study and travel to and speak to people in China the more and more I realize I

00:38:27 don't know as much as I thought hmm what do you think of some of the things that the Chinese Church and you just told us it's a very complex tapestry but what do you think is some of the things that the Chinese church can teach Western Christianity today I think the Chinese Church can on the one hand teach Western churches how to pray oftentimes when I hear about how Western churches pray for the churches in China it's often a question of what we need to pray for against the persecutions but for many in China the persecutions is

00:39:15 where the gospel has grown through and it's more than just the persecutions is more about how they follow God that they that the need to fall got into to run after him rather than to run away from the persecution another thing that I think that the Chinese church has to offer to the West is a different appreciation of of culture of the cultural background of China religiously philosophically is very much intertwined with everyday life from you know what do you eat at the dinner table is very religiously philosophically intertwined

00:40:04 - how do you treat your mother and your father is very much part of the life of an average Chinese and that gets embedded into the Chinese Christianity in which for Westerners I think Westerners also need to learn how embedded Western traditional thoughts are how embedded pagan holiday like Christmas and Easter Horan and how embedded is enlightenment thought into our individualistic tendencies and and what what have you that there is a need for a deep reflection about who we are and what our Christianity is is there

00:41:01 anything else that you will decide us today I think probably the one thing I I want to say is learn more about the church learn more about the church globally learn more about the church that you are part of and learn more about who you are and where you come from is for a person like myself I I was born in the u.s. to Chinese ethnic background I've lived in quite a number of countries in North America Europe and in China and everywhere I go I find I am a foreigner in these lands mm-hmm but it is when I recognize that I'm a foreigner

00:41:57 in these lands that I realize that I need to know who I am and where I come from and where my background is and how that influences and shapes both good and bad I'm the Christianity that I know I've noticed when I've been talking too often North Americans on one hand a concern for the persecuted Church in China or their idea of the persecuted Church not necessarily an understanding of the complex tapestry we're talking about but an idea of a persecuted Church on the one hand but on the other hand a a fear

00:42:35 or suspicion or or you you had some other words there about China itself and about Chinese people about Chinese immigration so it feels to me that in the West including amongst Christians there's a a there's multiple feelings or going on so what's your sense about how Western Christians can become better engaged with China better informed about Chinese culture and Chinese people know more sympathetic to Chinese who are coming into the west know the sorts of issues that I'm dealing with here yeah that's a

00:43:19 very complex issue I think having myself lived in North America for many years and then living in the UK and as well as in China I've seen different phases of this this this fear or this uncertainty about China or Chinese people or Chinese what-have-you and I think the simple answer the simple answer is get to know some and and there's probably some of those figures that are valid so there's probably a lot of those fears that aren't or really need a in thinking I'll tell you a real quick story you know I've traveled prior to to

00:44:16 living in China I've traveled there many times for research trips and what have you and you know what one of the things that always gets me about China's is when you have to cross the street you know what the car is you know that you you basically have to close your eyes and walk or you never get to the other side and when I was living in China before I came here I I had that idea in my head that you know you just cannot cross the street and you know how do people drive in here until I realized

00:44:52 that there weren't that many car accidents that very few Chinese would actually run into each other yeah they're going into the opposite lane of traffic and holding their hand on the horn and waving their hand at the next driver and have you but there's very few accidents and I realize there's a logic there that is very illogical in my mind but there is a logic there that is very different and it wasn't until I really live there with the people and really experience the driving day-in and day-out I

00:45:30 realized that it's not as illogical as I thought it may be illogical if you bring a whole bunch of those drivers and brought them to LA or you know San Francisco or you know Sydney Australia or wherever and there's a clash of logics but over time there's a negotiation that happens and you learn from one another and I think that's that's a great analogy for West the Western Church to think about China and Chinese Christianity that oftentimes we think we know what it is that's there it's a lot more complicated than we realize and it

00:46:16 requires a paradigm shift to really understand what's there but what we do then we realize that we need to really negotiate and and and have a sort of symbiotic relationship with these different ways of

thinking in these different ways of living how does Chinese language shape the Chinese imagination or shape Chinese theology I think Chinese language affects or Chinese language or any language affects so much in theology much more than we've we've really engaged with a scholarship or what-have-you to take a simple example

00:47:04 you know you you you cannot address somebody as your brother without speaking about whether they're older or younger than you and so if you think about the Gospels when Peter and Andrew are introduced which ones older or perhaps a better one is Mary and Martha when they when one serves Jesus and the other is sitting at his feet which ones older has very profound implications to how to interpret that passage and therefore the language how the Chinese language communicates relationships influences

00:47:54 how the church relationships mm-hmm exist and that there's embedded in the language is a sense of order and hierarchy that gets imported into the sense of a church that's just a very simple example but but language really has these different nuances that really shape the way that Christians think about themselves I think about God I think it was Lana asana that you know he makes the big argument that you know Christianity has always been one that's been translated from you know Jesus speaking to his disciples in Aramaic

00:48:41 written in the Gospels in Greek translated into Latin and then this this awful language called English and you know you know it's always one of translation and it's not that there there's often this emphasis on ethereal intent right on trying to understand what the original author meant so ask God because only he knows I suppose and but but through the layers of translation culture and and Society and people's experiences really shape a very different understanding of who God is and very subtle but important

00:49:37 ways hmm it's it's someone's being said that other agent societies like Korean society has become more confusion than China itself it's cha RS hierarchical looks at once was or has become flatter in the life of the church for instance that's a that's a great question about two years ago there was a an event that happened that I really caught me off guard in which the Chinese government passed a new law that required adult children to visit their parents or suffer fines and possible of prison time and this was

00:50:21 remarkable in the historic home of Confucius right in which the communist government must mandate adult children to visit and care for their parents no matter how far they live from them and that really highlights how with the the move of the market society the move of urbanization how many people migrate around China to get a better job at better education that this has and also the the one-child policy but all these things together have really pushed down upon this hierarchical Society that was

00:51:09 taught from a very long time for a very long time what we have though I believe is not a ridding of all this but a reshaping of it that the hierarchy is no longer within the family but as in is in the office place is in the church is within the the government in which you have these different replacement communities for the family and that the hierarchy is still very prevalent there and there's a very so within the church there's a very high respect for the pastor and the pastor's wife who has a

00:52:01 special title by it by herself there's no title for pastor's husband oddly enough but there's a you know there is a special titles for the passenger and the pastor's wife and there is there's terms that we use for Christians that are brothers and sisters of the church and theirs is very familial language and very much a strong

community that is reinforced with in the midst of this hierarchy as well and so I think the church in China is one of the places in which you have a new family a surrogate

00:52:45 family coming about in which the hierarchies are remapped within the church of course there's horses that were pushing against that but I think that that way of thinking is still very much embedded within society Mirjana also society that values education and his knowledge how does the value for what only for family but for education and knowledge affect the way that churches see themselves see how they relate to Scripture what does that do for the imagination of the Christian congregation yeah that's the the

00:53:26 importance of education and the importance of studying does and for say a more it pushes towards a more intellectualized Christianity in which for for many people you know to study the Bible and to memorize Scripture but also to study theology and there's lots of theology being translated from from Western contexts being translated into Chinese and you know for for theology to be read and and to know Christian theology well is a very strong and and good influence on the growth of the church but it also

00:54:16 causes problems it causes a very strong sense of well I'm right because I know all this and so there's a risk that comes with that but that that's also something that is perhaps not a universal thing that there are different sectors of society which are not able to access the theology and access ideas the same way but scripture the Bible is still a very high priority within many Chinese churches in Lex Chell thank you for joining a circle of a church project thank you very much the clover church

00:54:58 project is located at WWDC local church project calm on our website you'll find a wide range of interviews and resources for colleges universities and churches our for to your company next time from me goodbye