

CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY: EXPLORING CHINESE CHRISTIANS' TESTIMONIES 2003-2009

By:
Yu-Ling Chung*

Abstract

For Chinese, Christianity used to be viewed as a foreign religion forced into China by the hegemony of the West. Christianity also tends to remind them of a period of humiliating history since the late nineteenth century. However, Christianity for contemporary Chinese Christians in the twenty-first century, especially those from Taiwan, has become a channel to approach Western cultures and histories. Some Chinese Christians first have access to Christianity out of the motive of learning English. In other words, their perceptions of Christianity may have been changed. Writing testimonies has become a ritual for about-to-be-baptized Chinese Christians as a verification of their belief. The big transformations happened in their lives before and after they accepted Christianity are often emphasized in their testimonies. Setbacks such as illness, failures or accidents diverging them from original life tracks, are usually the turning point for their attitude change toward Christianity, from objection and resistance to acceptance and endorsement. The truth they claim is based on the Bible and can obtain by praying to and submitting themselves to Jesus Christ. Some of them also mention the differences between Chinese traditional religions and Christianity and difficulties for Chinese people to accept Christianity. This paper uses a Chinese Christian monthly magazine as corpus to analyze the testimonies within since 2003, offered by Christians from contemporary Chinese communities. Typical testimonies are chosen to probe the adaptive strategies Chinese Christians use while confronting with Christianity, what Christianity and Christians mean to them before and after their conversions, and the narrative devices they use in writing testimonies. Some of the testimonies are in written form, but some are first delivered orally then rewritten and edited by specific writers. The subtitles in these testimonies are added by editors who seemingly follow the norm of introduction (personal background), encountering with Christianity, life transforming and renewing, and concluding with the importance of biblical teachings. The circumstances of moving between spoken and written testimonies are investigated by interviewing an editor of the magazine.

Keywords: Christianity, Chinese Christian, testimonial, genre, norm, stereotype.
Introduction

* Yu-Ling Chung, PhD, is an Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Foreign Languages, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taiwan. She can be contacted via email: yuling@mail.ntust.edu.tw.

Introduction

What does it mean to give a testimony? Generally speaking, it means a person, as a witness, to say or to write something that can prove what he or she has seen. Testimonies are different from ordinary talking or writings because to some extents testimonies carry a ‘guarantee’ from the witness to be legitimate or justifiable. On the other hand, for spectators of testimonies, they would also take more seriously or become more convinced about what the witness write or say. Although testimonies are usually subjective accounts, yet they become more reliable because of the support of the witness’s personal pledge and assurance. The witness becomes the basis of his or her testimony: if the witness has any positive characteristics, it gives a lift to what he or she pledges. Moreover, it is noted that religion can be a sensitive issue in people’s casual conversations. People tend not to air their opinions about religions so as not to offend others. However, testimonies act as people’s claims to what they believe to be true. This usually reflects their actual thoughts about religions. In this light, testimonies are supposed to be more ‘real’ in reflecting people’s viewpoints toward given religions. This is why contemporary Chinese Christians’ testimonies are taken as the corpus of this paper, to reveal how they perceive Christianity.

This paper starts with the premise that viewing contemporary Chinese Christians’ testimonies (especially those from Taiwan) as a genre which dramatizes the richest details of an individual life in such a way that it might claim to represent an entire group’s experiences with a particular set of value judgment. By means of close reading and examining the published Chinese Christians’ testimonies from 2003 to 2009 in the media of 《中信月刊》 (The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission), their perceptions of Christianity are supposed to be disclosed. It is assumed that a survey of the published accounts of testimonies will allow some patterns to unfold and reveal generalities that might remain hidden. Based on these assumptions, a comparison is also made about the different perceptions of Christianity between contemporary Chinese Christians and those in the mid-19th century, to see if there is any change of the perceptions about Christianity in different times.

To use The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission as the corpus of this study is considering its representative status in Chinese Christian circle. This magazine was first issued by an organization founded in Detroit, America in 1961 and a branch was established in Taipei in the same year. It is a publication published every month since 1961 by the organization called “Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission”. With the feature of cross-denomination, “Chinese Christian Mission” publishes testimonies from different Chinese communities in The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission. Their target readers are Chinese all over the world. The circulation of this magazine used to be around 130,000 titles a month, but it increases to 150,000 per month since 2009. Now this magazine distribute to overseas Chinese in scores of countries. So its published testimonies are supposed to reflect most contemporary Chinese Christians’ perceptions of Christianity.

Background

According to Chinese scholars, the foreign religion of Christianity had its first encounter with Chinese culture in 635 A.D. and the whole process over one thousand years can be divided into three stages: the Nestorian church derived from the Churches of the East in the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century, the arrival of the Roman Catholic Jesuit during the late Ming Dynasty in the 16th century, and the Protestant Church in the late Qing Dynasty in the 19th century. The term of 'Christianity' in China also changes along with these three stages, at first it was called Jingjiao, then it was termed Tianxue, and finally it was known as Jidujiao, which is the most popular one. (Ji, 2007: 3-4) Consequently, Christianity has a history of more than 1,300 years since it has been introduced to China. Generally speaking, during those times when the feudal China had strong power and thriving cultural activities, Christianity had less impact on Chinese people. However, after the feudal China stepped towards declining and sealing in the 19th century, Christianity re-entered China along with western powers, and brought superior scientific and technological knowledge into China. At this time, Christianity became more influential to Chinese people and many studies appeared discussing this period. Christianity drew more attentions from Chinese people along with its connection with Western powers and the negative image of invaders. Since the 19th century on, it is wondered whether the image of Christianity has ever changed in Chinese communities because of the change of circumstances. According to Tiedemann's recent research, regarding the motives of Chinese Christians' conversions, there are three broad categories: (1) spiritual incentives (2) material incentives; and (3) socio-political incentives. (Tiedemann, 2001: 114). This observation is current, but it is a quite general categorization. A more detailed investigation is needed to make more delicate discernment about the possible patterns which may exist in Chinese perceptions of Christianity. Considering the shortage of relevant discourse about Christianity in Chinese communities, a Christian magazine is chosen where the published testimonies as the corpus of this study.

In this paper, testimonial is viewed as a genre and its features and norms will also be explored. The premise of this paper is that contemporary Chinese Christians are still under traditional influences but some shifts have appeared in their conversions. Their attitudes and perceptions towards Christianity may have changed. Chinese Christians' interpretations of Christianity might appear as early as the mid-19th century (Lutz, 2001:67), yet contemporary Chinese Christians shall have their own and new interpretations and perceptions of Christianity due to the space-time difference. This paper hence uses a Christian monthly magazine to analyze its published testimonies, so as to observe contemporary Chinese Christians' conversion patterns and to decode their perceptions about Christianity.

Methodology

At first, this paper tries to define the genre of testimonial and analyzes its features, so as to justify its suitability for disclosing the hidden value system and the

possible patterns or norms in the text. The concept of 'norm' is defined as the habitual way of doing given things. In this study, the norms of the testimonies published in *The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission* are divided into two types, one is 'the format norm' and the other is 'the content norm'.

Secondly, these testimonies were published from 2003 to 2009, offered by Christians from Taiwan, China and overseas Chinese, namely contemporary Chinese communities. In order to find the format norm, these testimonies are closely examined to find the adaptive strategies Chinese Christians use while encountering and confronting with Christianity, what Christianity and Christians mean to them before and after their conversions, and the narrative devices they use in writing testimonies. This part will be elaborated by interviewing an editor of this magazine.

In order to find the content norm, this study views a highly relevant notion of 'stereotype' as a kind of 'perception'. It is assumed that to discover the content norm of these testimonies is to find the stereotypes spreading along with the testimonies. In other words, by discovering the stereotypes reflected on these Chinese Christians' testimonies, their perceptions of Christianity could be revealed. The assumption is that stereotypes towards Christianity are often spread and strengthened through people's word of mouth. These stereotype-based 'perceptions' will be reflected on their written materials such as testimonies. Although the term of 'stereotype' is generally viewed as negative due to its ignorance and resistance of idiosyncrasy in a group, but stereotypes in this study are not taken this way but as 'attributions to an entire group of people'.¹

Findings

To address the above issues, both interview and textual analysis are used in this study. By interviewing an editor of *The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission*, the producing process of the testimonies is disclosed.² As for the source of the testimonies, there are three types according to the editor. The first one is writings submitted or invited. This kind of writings includes different forms such as the witness wrote their own testimonies or used journals and diaries as supplementary data. The second one is the magazine assign people to interview the witness or to cite others' interviews, and the editor is responsible for editing and writing testimonies. The third one is that the testimonies are first transcribed and then rewritten by others. This is usually because the witness are old age and need others' help to sort out and write testimonies for them.

Consequently, some of the testimonies are in written form, but some are first orally delivered then rewritten and edited by others. The circumstances of moving between spoken and written testimonies are elaborated as below. Most of the

¹ Hall, B. J. *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005, p. 192.

² Interview with Chang Yin.

testimonies published in this magazine are written in the third person narrative, only a few are written in the first person narrative to increase the readability. According to the editor of the magazine, the testimonies published in the magazine used to be more ‘normalized’ and the use of the third person narrative aims to sound objective. Recently this magazine has tried to change the style of the testimony and to publish testimonies written in the first person narrative to increase the reader’s identity. In addition, most of the witnesses of this magazine are from Taiwan, yet there are also some witnesses are from China or overseas. For overseas Chinese, most of them are students. As for the selection mechanism of the witness, according to the editor, they avoid controversial figures and pay special attention to whether the witness’s deeds match with their words or not.

As for the editing process, the use of the subtitle is to help organize the article to be more logical and readable. The editors of this magazine often do this based on their experiences or follow their instincts. As for the layout, it is noted that the subtitles in these testimonies are added by editors who seemingly follow a norm of introduction (personal background), encountering with Christianity, life transforming and renewing, and concluding with the importance of biblical teachings. In order to meet the layout requirement of the magazine, the editor may have to add, delete, reorganize, add subtitles or even rewrite the materials. The features and the format norm of testimonies published in magazines can seemingly be sorted out as following:

- i. The frequent use of quoted scriptures: Scriptures quoted from the Bible act as the evidence to prove the legitimacy of their testimonies. It often appears in the beginning or in the end of a paragraph, as the starter or the conclusion of the testimony.
- ii. The use of subtitle: The function of subtitles in the testimonies is to help separate the whole article into different paragraphs, usually three to four. The common pattern of the subtitle goes like “introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint, and summing up”, namely the four steps in the composition of an essay. In other words, the subtitles in these testimonies are added by editors who seemingly follow the norm of introduction (personal background), encountering with Christianity, life transforming and renewing, and concluding with the importance of biblical teachings.
- iii. The ending is usually a simple prayer: After describing the life changing experience or the conversion and new life, the testimony usually ends with a positive and thankful prayer for God’s help and guidance. Or, the prayer may be an invitation to other people to accept Christianity.
- iv. The third person narrative: The testimonies no matter are written by the witnesses or rewritten and edited by editors tend to use the third person narrative. The possible reason for doing so is to sound objective and convince.

- v. The word limit: The word limit for a testimony published in the magazine is about 1500 to 2000. Such a testimony may include both words and pictures, so as to increase the convincing and realistic effects.
- vi. The target readers are the public. The testimonies published in magazines are different from those published in churches' internal publications. The testimonies published in magazines aim at the public and hope to reach as many people as possible. The testimonies published in churches' internal publications are usually from new converts who are asked to submit written testimonies to verify their belief, which are usually a part of the procedure of being baptized in churches. Their target readers are primarily their church congregation. These testimonies may include more terminologies and can be more private. The narrative style of the testimonies published in magazines tends to be easier to understand, more colloquial, and less use of terminologies.

After investigating the producing procedure and sorting out the format norm of the testimonies published in The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission, the content norm of these testimonies is also examined. At first we will see a statistic about the amount of these testimonies and where the witnesses are from.

Table 1: Statistics about The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission

Figures Years	Total number of articles	Number of testimony articles	Origin of testimony articles (T=Taiwan, C=China, O=Overseas)
2009	170	33	T: 28 C: 0 O:5
2008	166	46	T: 32 C: 0 O:14
2007	146	40	T: 20 C: 3 O:17
2006	145	27	T: 21 C: 2 O: 4
2005	145	21	T: 15 C: 1 O: 5
2004	135	20	T: 20 C: 0 O: 0
2003 (since Dec.)	7	3	T: 3 C: 0 O: 0
Total	914	190	T: 139 C: 6 O: 45

Observing from Table 1, 190 testimonies extracted from The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission from 2003 to 2009 are examined in this paper and most of the witnesses are from Taiwan. Therefore the issues discussed below reflect mostly the viewpoints of Christians from Taiwan.

Contemporary Chinese Christians' Motives behind Conversion

Table 2 sorts out the motivation of conversion in the testimonies, which are published in The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission from 2003 to 2009. The frequency of mentioning of certain entries in these testimonies is counted to find the visibility and influence of each entry.

Different entries of 'motives behind conversion' are categorized by making reference to Tiedemann's categories. (Tiedemann, 2001: 114). These entries are divided for analytical purposes.

Table 2: Motives behind conversion sorted out from The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission

Frequencies of mention Motives Behind conversion	2003 (since Dec.)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Important others' impact	1	6	6	5	8	12	14
Career change	1						
Spiritual pursuit (peace, joy, cast out demons etc.)	1			2	2	9	2
Encounter setbacks	1	3	2	1	2	6	6
Unable to rid addiction	1			1	1	1	2
Marriage problem	2	2		2	1	5	4
Look for life's meaning	1		2	2	2	3	2
Accidents	1		3	1	2	4	5
Other Christians' help and love		7	5	8	11	16	13
Illness		5	1	5	5	16	6
Converted from other religions		2	1	2	1	1	
Attend gospel camps, bible study, church services		1	1		8	15	3
Worship folk deities but find useless					3	7	2

Observing from Table 2, it is noted that the reasons for contemporary Chinese to convert are mostly focused on ‘important others’ impact’, ‘other Christians’ help and love’, ‘illness’, ‘attend gospel camps, bible study, church services’. These factors are usually connected to interrelationship. It may be assumed that contemporary Chinese Christians are under stronger impact of networking than other societies or cultures. Their perception and understanding about Christianity may also largely come from their networks.

As for the impression about Christianity, some items are sorted out in the testimonies published in The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission. The appearing frequency of each item is displayed in Table 3. In Chinese Christians’ testimonies, they usually describe how they perceive Christianity before and after their conversions. The table below is sorted out from their accounts about Christianity before they converted.

Table 3: Impressions about Christianity sorted out from The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission

Frequencies of mention Impressions about Christianity	2003 (since Dec.)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
A foreign religion		1		1	1	3	
For weak and helpless people		1	1		1		
Church is a boring place or a club of good people	1	2	1				
Goes against traditional religions		3	3		4	4	3
Refuse to worship/remember ascendants (Christians are family traitor, not filial)		2	2	1	2	2	
Relate to Christmas and Jesus	1	1	2	1		1	
Honor only one god, too exclusive		1	1	1	1	1	
No longer under folk deities’ control		1			1		1
Christians’ love (intercession, company, concern,		3	2	3	4	9	6

stay optimistic...)							
Sunday school in churches (for free food and gifts)		2	2	1		1	
A cure (miracle) to fear, restlessness, insecurity, burden, illness...		3	4	3	2	4	6
Other Christians' testimonies		1	1		4	1	4
A religion for sinner (feel disgraceful)			1				3
Contradictory to Evolution, not scientific			4		1		
Insist on righteousness			1				
Opportunity to learn English				1			
Different funeral style (joyful, quiet...)							2
Poor clergymen							2

Observing from Table 3, it is noted that the impression that contemporary Chinese Christians hold for Christianity are mostly focused on ‘Goes against traditional religions’, ‘Refuse to worship/remember ascendants (Christians are family traitor, not filial)’, ‘Christians’ love (intercession, company, concern...)', ‘A cure (miracle) to fear, restlessness, insecurity, burden, illness’. Likewise, these factors are usually connected to interrelationship and tradition. This discovery seems to highlight the contemporary Chinese perception of Christianity: a religion different from the traditional ones which features in Christians’ love and its miraculous healing power.

Discussions

For better understanding what these entries mean, some quotations extracted from the testimonies published in The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission are elaborated as below.

First of all, many Chinese people’s first perception of Christianity is that it is a foreign religion. Taking the below testimonies for example, Christianity to many contemporary Chinese people is still a western religion which is very different from their traditional religions. A testimony published in January 2007 elaborated this viewpoint, “Our fellow people have a deep rooted conception that ‘Christianity is a western religion’ or ‘Jesus is a western god’. No matter in textbooks, television programs, newspapers, cultural circle, or for people of other

religions, they all share the similar viewpoints. Most Chinese people think Christianity this way. That is why Chinese people tend to reject Christianity even before they actually contact with it.” (2007/1)

Another testimony published in December 2007 further this viewpoint, “In the beginning, I thought this was the so-called cultural invasion! I was supposed to defend our Chinese culture and shall not believe such a foreign religion.” (2007/12)

From Chinese perspective, convert to Christianity means you are not filial and become family traitors. This viewpoint can be reflected from quite a few testimonies extracted below. A citation drew from a testimony published in April 2004 described the process of the Lin family converted to Christianity. After the Lin converted to Christianity, his neighborhood in a simple, mutual help rural area immediately formed an anti-Christ force and fiercely expressed their opposition. Other village people treated the Lin with hostile and rejecting attitudes, and some villagers even asked them to move. They believed that converting to Jesus equals to betraying ascendants and would lead to the wrath of heaven and may bring troubles to them. (2004/4)

A testimony published in March 2005 described the witness’s resistance to Christianity. He said that it is so difficult for him to believe in Christianity, although so many people around him asked him to do so. He explained that he grew up in a traditional family and it was impossible for him to be a family traitor. (2005/3)

Another witness depicted in a testimony published in August 2008 her concern of being baptized, “From then on I began to go to church on Sundays and gradually got used to it. But I did not want to be baptized because my mother is a devoted Buddhist. I did not want to arouse any family quarrel because of my conversion.” (2008/8)

Another testimony published in June 2007 further this point. The witness said, “I teased those who believe in Jesus are people who betray their ascendants. Chinese people shall believe our traditional religions which have lasted for more than five thousand years. People convert to Christianity such a foreign religion will be under the wrath of heaven.” (2007/6)

The key point for Chinese people who reject Christianity seems to focus on the issue of worshipping ascendants. A testimony published in March 2005 gave the similar reason for not accepting Christianity. He said that he used to hear people saying, “Nobody will cry for you after you die if you convert to Christianity.” (2005/3)

Another testimony published in March 2008 echoes this viewpoint, “Quite a few Taiwanese mocked at Christians, saying that ‘Nobody will cry for you after you die if you convert to Christianity.’” (2008/3)

Moreover, the supernatural aspect of Christianity is sometimes emphasized in these testimonies. For instance, the entry of ‘no longer under folk deities’ control’ is one example. This viewpoint can be summed up by the following two testimonies. A testimony published in March 2004 described the witness’s mother’s life story and her conversion. After her mother passed away for a hundred days, a family member resorted to the measure of spiritual possession to ‘see’ her mother in the underworld but could not find her. Then the Taoist priest said that if she told him earlier that her mother had already converted to Christianity, he would not bother to find her. This is because Christians cannot be found in the underworld. (2004/3)

Another example is cited from a testimony published in April 2004. The witness described that he incidentally found a Taoist secret talismanic writing at home, a poem including all the names of the witness’s siblings except for his. The witness’s mother told him that the Taoist secret talismanic writing was written by the witness’s uncle. The witness’s uncle was possessed by the witness’s grandfather in the underworld while writing it. The witness’s uncle asked the witness’s grandfather why the witness’s name was not included in the poem, and the witness’s grandfather said that the witness was already Jesus’s son and he could not find information about him in the underworld. (2004/4)

About the exclusiveness of Christianity, a testimony published in September 2005 said, “I disagreed on what she called the good news, and felt that Christianity is too exclusive.” (2005/9)

Another testimony published in June 2007 polished this viewpoint, “Every religion has its congregation and they are also good people. It is the problem of people. Why do you say that there are no other gods except for Jesus? Why do you even boast that ‘God so loves the world’? This statement is distasteful. On the contrary, considering the doctrine of Buddhism, religions that pursuing good and doing good things are all counted as good religions, no matter what you believe. Such kind of open-minded love is what Christianity cannot compete with.” (2007/6)

As for Chinese people’s impression on Christians, there are two kinds of typical opinions. One is that Christians are mostly weak and helpless people. This viewpoint is reflected from the two testimonies below. A testimony published in June 2005 said that, “Although there have been Christian friends, colleagues and clients preached to me and invited me to attend gospel meetings, yet I was indifferent. Not only I did not accept their good will, but also I criticized them for not being able to be the master of their destinies and trying to avoid reality.” (2005/6) Another testimony published in September 2007 held similar viewpoint, “Later I attended the bible study held by church pastors and found many attendants were well educated graduate students. This hugely changed my previous thought that those who learn the Bible are all elder ladies.” (2007/9)

The other impression on Christians held by Chinese people is that Christians are all 'good people' from higher social class. This opinion can be reflected from the following two testimonies. A testimony published in November 2004 described the witness's impression about Christians. He said that many people have misconception about churches and think they are 'a club of good people'. They thought that church goers all have good taste, and they are well behaved and decent people. (2004/11)

A testimony published in January 2005 gave accounts to describe her impression on Christians. The witness said, "I still remember there was a church near grandmother's house. Every Sunday I passed by that church, and I saw some children from rich family. They all dressed up and played outside the church. Their happy faces and joyful laughter attracted my attention. I could not help but keep looking at them. However, I grew up in a devoted Taoist family (my mother is a religious vegetarian) and was given to folk deities as adapted daughter. So I despised their 'Jesus' at that time." (2005/1)

Another feature about Christianity is its assertion of Creation. This is especially hard for Chinese intellectuals from China. A testimony published in March 2005 explained why it was hard for him to convert to Christianity. He said that from the Bible he learnt God created all creatures in the world. This is very different from the teachings of Earth Science he received in universities and graduate school. So he was hesitant about whether to convert to Christianity or not. (2005/3)

Another testimony published in March 2006 echoes this point and says, "I am a scientist and believe everything in the world shall have a scientific reasoning. The biblical stories you read are completely contradictory to scientific rules and can only be viewed as fantasies or fictions." (2006/3)

On the other hand, there could be misconception in testimonies caused by cultural differences. Taking the word 'An Xi' for example, it means differently to Chinese Christians and Chinese non-believers. A testimony published in August 2004 mentioned the concept of 'peace' (An Xi, 安息) and explained that this term has a different connotation in Chinese. In Chinese, 'An Xi' also means passing away in peace. It is thus hard for Chinese to understand why approach to Jesus can have 'peace'. The cultural difference existing in the term 'An Xi' in Chinese and 'peace' in English is a typical one of mistranslation or misconception. (2004/8)

Some reflections about the traditional religions also appear in these testimonies. For instance, a testimony published in February 2007 questioned the value and effect of folk deities. The witness said, "My grandmother and my mother's unfortunate experiences trouble me a lot. I often wonder have they ever received any response through their requests to folk deities. Why those folk deities are not willing to help them? For me, I also did not get what I request for peace and good health from folk deities. So I think the problem is not we are not devotional enough but because those folk deities are just useless mud-shaped idols. What we request of folk deities is only to comfort ourselves." (2007/2)

Nevertheless, there are still some positive comments on Christianity. For instance, a testimony published in September 2005 stated, “Christianity to me is easy to understand and to accept, a very positive religion. Simply put it, Christianity is unitary and in the world. Everything mentioned in the Bible is very useful, only that I did not know at that time. In addition, my husband also recognized the contribution of churches to Taiwan and approved churches’ insistence on righteousness and paying attention to look after the aboriginal and the minority groups in Taiwan. So my husband and I decided to be baptized three years ago.” (2005/9)

A testimony published in November 2005 said, “My first good impression on Christianity came from those foreign missionaries who came to Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s. They built orphanages and hospitals in rural areas and taught the aboriginals in the mountains. Their sacrificial spirit always made me wonder where their love is from.” (2005/11)

As for the entry of ‘opportunity to learn English’, a testimony published in April 2006 states, “After entering the junior high school, I found there was a church near my school and a friendly American missionary held an English course there. She invited me to attend her course. When I first stepped into the church, I found the missionary was kind. She not only taught us English but also the rule of returning staff back after we finished playing table tennis.” (2006/4)

Two witnesses mentioned their impressions on Christianity that relate to Jesus and attend mass. Some witnesses’ impressions about Christianity actually come from churches. In the two testimonies published in November 2006, one witness said, “I heard the name of Jesus when I was an elementary school student. Once I went to a church near my home to get candies and heard about Jesus from the pastor there.” (2006/11)

The other witness’s testimony also published in November 2006. She said, “I came from a poor family and the whole village where I lived all received aid from a nearby Catholic church. So going to mass is not strange to me.” (2006/11)

From the accounts given above in the form of testimonies, a sketch might be drawn from the interplay of all the different voices. After analyzing their motives of conversion and their impressions on Christianity, a profile of Christianity can probably be pieced together, and the perception of Christianity for contemporary Chinese Christians be revealed.

Perception comparison between Chinese Christians in the mid-nineteenth century and contemporary Chinese Christians

Lutz’s study is based on 67 Chinese Protestant evangelists who worked between 1830 and 1870. (Lutz, 2001:68). For these early evangelists, their motivations of accepting Christianity related to their seeking of solace, aid, and guidance amidst personal troubles and family tragedies. Some of them desired a cure for their

opium addiction and hoped that a combination of Western medicine and Christian rebirth would work for them. Some were attracted by the high moral ideals and the promise of salvation Christianity offered. Others accepted Christianity because of working with foreign missionaries and observing their lives of devotion and being subject to their teachings. (Lutz, 2001:74-77) As for these early Chinese Protestants' perceptions of Christianity, some were convinced that Christian God was more powerful than their folk deities. Others were attracted by the concept of a loving and forgiving Jesus, especially in the light of personal troubles and social disorder. Still others were drawn by the Christian community and viewed it to be their larger family. Moreover, some of them condemned Buddhist, Taoist and folk deities and exalted one true God. (Lutz, 2001:78-81)

Considering contemporary Chinese Christians, particularly those from Taiwan, the motives behind their conversions are actually not very different from Chinese Christians in the mid-19th century, except for more attentions are paid to new aspects such as 'opportunity to learn English' and 'contradictory to Evolution, not scientific'. These new perceptions of Christianity emerge because of the evolution of history. English and science are viewed as symbols of the West powers and Christianity as a channel to the West for contemporary Chinese. In addition, along with the increase of the ratio of Christians in Taiwan,³ the networking between Christians become stronger and social work such as hospital visit and charity work have been put more attentions in church's preaching strategies. Apart from these new aspects, Christianity is still exclusive with its one god doctrine, which goes against traditional religions in Taiwan.

Meanwhile, networking still plays an important role in spreading Christianity in Chinese communities, no matter in the mid-19th century or in the current 21st century. From the high frequencies of mentioning of entries such as 'important others' impact', 'other Christians' help and love', 'Christians' love (intercession, company, concern...)', and 'attend gospel camps, bible study, church services' in the testimonies published in *The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission*, it can be assumed that word of mouth is an essential force in shaping Chinese people's perception of Christianity. This is where the content norm of testimonies can exert its impact. Stereotypes towards certain concepts such as Christianity are often spread and strengthened by people's word of mouth. With the spread of word of mouth, stereotypes are also easily circulated.

Stereotypes contribute to the shaping of the content norm of testimonies. In this light, by discovering the content norm reflected in Chinese Christians' testimonies, their perceptions of Christianity are revealed as well.

³ The percentage of Christians of the whole population in Taiwan is 10.4% in 2010, a big increase from 5.06% in 2001.

Conclusion and implications

This paper is carried out under the assumption that contemporary Chinese's perception of Christianity would be different from that in the mid-19th century. Therefore, this paper focuses on a study of 190 testimonies published in *The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission* from 2003 to 2009, to investigate how contemporary Chinese perceive Christianity, and compare it with a profile of Chinese Christian in the mid-19th century. In terms of the perception of Christianity, although it is noted there are not many differences for Chinese in the mid-19th century and Chinese in the current 21st century, it seems that contemporary Chinese people have contradictory impressions on Christianity and Christians. For them, Christianity is a foreign religion forced into China by western powers and it worships only one god. This exclusiveness goes against Chinese traditional religions of pantheism and it causes troubles in the issue of worshipping ancestors, the biggest hindrance for Chinese people to accept Christianity. As for Chinese people's impression on Christians, there are two typical opinions: one is that Christians are mostly weak and helpless people; the other is that Christians are all 'good people' from higher social class. It is also noted that Chinese people's perceptions about Christianity are mostly from their networks. Apart from the philosophic dialectics about testimonies such as the epistemology of testimony (Coady 1994; Lackey 2008), testimonial as a genre is actually similar to texts such as advertisements, with the feature of highly condensation and assertion of given viewpoints.

Considering the testimonies mentioned above, most of them are retrieved from the witness's life stories. Therefore they are usually highly selective, value judgmental and subjective, thus a 'breeding ground' for spreading and coping stereotypes. Plus the editing procedure of the monthly magazine, a testimony from a witness's life experience or even a whole life is finally condensed to be a text of no more than 2000 words and has to fit the format norm of being 'logical' and easy to read and understand.⁴ Vital events happened in the witness's lives are selected and viewed as the turning point of their faith journeys. Through multiple mechanisms of selection and value judgment, the testimonies published in the monthly magazine become a tool to preach the gospel. The content norm of these testimonies acts as one of the selecting mechanisms and it takes effect on assimilating the various voices and regulating the interplay of different or even opposing voices. Stereotypes can easily be found in these testimonies, which attribute to maintain and strengthen the content norm of testimonies. Further researches can be done to explore this thesis in semiotic approaches such as the relationship and relevance between the signifier (stereotype) and the signified (reality). Some entries listed in Table 3 can be viewed as Chinese stereotypes towards Christianity. There is manipulative room for people to shape word-of-mouth to be stereotypes and even norms. By means of discovering the possible patterns or the norms (format and content) used to be implicit in testimonies, the perception of Christianity for Chinese people is revealed.

⁴ Interview with Chang Yin.

This paper also includes an inquiry into the circumstances of moving between media, including the spoken and written forms of testimonies, an analysis of the ways these testimonies are packaged, and how they are circulated materially, by interviewing an editor of The Monthly Magazine of Taiwan Chinese Christian Mission to understand the producing process of their published testimonies. It is found that the moving between the spoken and the written forms of testimonies allows even more manipulative room for shaping given norms regarding testimonies. This is because the agent or the mediator such as the editor has power to intervene and to mould the testimonies to meet certain requirements, which gradually become norms.

Last but not least, using testimonies in a monthly magazine as the corpus of this study may be limited and selective, but it is still a tentative exploration and researches of this kind can be kept on in the future to examine corpora of larger scope and scale and to attain more convincing results.

References

- Clammer, J. (1991), *The Sociology of Singapore Religion: Studies in Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Singapore: Chopmen Publishers.
- Coady, C. A. J. (1994), *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, P. A. (1963), *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism 1860-1870*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Granade, R. and T. Greer. (2005), Translating China to the American South: Baptist missionaries and Imperial China, 1845-1911. *Translation and Cultural Change: Studies in history, norms and image-projection*. E. Hung. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 67-89.
- Hall, B. J. (2005), *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Jingyi, J. (2007), *Encounters between Chinese Culture and Christianity: A Hermeneutical Perspective*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- Lackey, J. (2008), *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lefevere, A. (1998), Chinese and Western Thinking on Translation. *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1-24.

- Lutz, J. G. (2001), A profile of Chinese protestant evangelists in the mid-nineteenth century. *Authentic Chinese Christianity: Preludes to its development (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)*. K. Wei-ying and K. D. Ridder. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 67-86.
- Madsen, R. (2003), Chinese Christianity: indigenization and conflict. *Chinese Society: Change, conflict and resistance*. E. J. Perry and M. Selden. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 271-288.
- Perry, E. J. and M. Selden (Eds) (2003), *Chinese Society: Change, conflict and resistance*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Samuelsson-Brown (1998), G. *A Practical Guide for Translators*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Sela-Sheffy, R. (2005), "How to Be a (Recognized) Translator: Rethinking Habitus, Norms, and the Field of Translation." *Target* 17.1, 1-26.
- Tiedemann, R. G. (2001), Conversion Patterns in North China: Sociological Profiles of Chinese Christians, 1860-1912. *Authentic Chinese Christianity: Preludes to its development (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)*. K. Wei-ying and K. D. Ridder. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 107-133.
- Toury, G. (1995), *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- 〈2007年教勢報告〉。台北: 中華基督教福音協進會。
- Extracted April 16, 2010 <http://www.ccea.org.tw/church/adlink/statics/one.htm>
- 《中信月刊》。台北: 台灣中國信徒佈道會, 2003-2009。
- 尹常 (Yin, Chang). Interview in Taipei, 2009。
- 馬祖毅。《中國翻譯史上卷》。武漢: 湖北教育出版社, 1999。