

“Chasing after the Beginning of a New Era”
On Yeo’s Chapter 1 Theological Methods and Chinese Contexts

In the beginning of Yeo’s opening chapter to his book, he expressed a near prophetic observation of the explosion of information brought in by the instantaneous communication. Technology development has pushed forward at an unprecedented pace various developments in the twenty-first century scholarly approaches to the reading of the NT. Over the past decades, quite a few significant new approaches developed in the field of NT study. Indeed over the last few years, IT helps to bring about explosion of new knowledge concerning the ancient society of the Palestine. More information about the world of NT is available to more scholars than at any previous time. Out of this, the cross-cultural reading, social scientific reading of the NT gain popularity. The development in the literary world ushered in rhetorical reading, narrative reading, and reader-response reading of the NT. At the same time, other forms of combined approach to the reading of the NT also emerged. Socio-rhetorical criticism, ideological criticism, feminist reading, post-colonial reading, and simply postmodern reading are enriching the world of NT reading. Despite the controversial appearance of the many new approaches to the study of Bible, the dust has settled and the foundation is revealed.

Luke Timothy Johnson observes that it is “no longer absolutely necessary to include Levy-Straus, Greimas, Ricoeur, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida or Girard in the first paragraph of a dissertation.”¹ Johnson’s observation resonates with Yeo’s stand in his approach to reading NT. Yeo has chosen to stay with historical-critical method as the foundation of reading the NT. On top of this, he employs cross-cultural and rhetoric reading. His aim is to construct a theology that creates “dialogue, tolerance and appreciation of one another’s theology.”² In the NT studies some of the readings are mere abstract discussions which do not create any time or space for the lay people in the church or for another culture, Yeo’s approach provides a venue to relate scholarly work with the church and even those outside the church. This is useful in the face of another challenge where there are others who freely read into the text from their own peculiar time and space, creating absurd application of the text.

Yeo uses cross-cultural readings in chapters 3-6 to fuse with the Chinese in their tenet of life in the philosophy of *yin* and *yang*, live under the auspicious regulation of heaven, *Tian*. In chapter 7-10, rhetorical criticism is his broadband to communicate the biblical insight into the harsh realities of life among Chinese both in main land China and overseas. This is part of what he proposes in the conclusion in his Ph D dissertation; a necessity for ongoing dialogue with the masses, especially with close to one quarter of world population living in China.

As we witness the phenomenon rise of China in the world market in the last decade, we must ask: what would be in the next decade? How would the Scripture address their next challenge? When Tienanmen tragedy is conveniently and comfortably put behind their memory, the Square is turned into the cash cow of the tourism industry; when Beijing is preparing the prestigious Olympic 2008; in the height of their glory (or not even yet) how would the Scripture speak to a nation that is virtually rising to be the next superpower? Would there be a time for post-English, post-CUV (Chinese Union Version) reading of the Bible? We need more biblical scholars who will join Yeo in the continuing dialogue with the Chinese and bring about harvest that will elicit doxology to God in greater sphere of place and time across China.

¹ In Appendix 1 ‘New Approaches to the New Testament’ Johnson also mentions the passing of the structuralism, chiasmic analyses as part of the passing of some of the post-modernist approaches. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of The New Testament: An Interpretation*. Revised ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 621.

² Yeo Khiok-Khng, *What has Jerusalem to do with Beijing?* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998), 11.