Spiritual Exercise and Chinese Women:
A Contemporary Encounter
(An Abstract)

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Christian spirituality is a relatively new academic discipline in many Chinese Protestant theological seminaries. This essay is an attempt to draw on the insights from the historical tradition of Christian spirituality and to reflect on the contemporary Chinese evangelical context. In the past decade, a lot of Protestant Christians in Hong Kong are attracted by Ignatian spirituality. Many evangelical female leaders integrate their reflections on Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* into their ministry. The reasons for such phenomena are rarely explored. Especially, their reflections and application of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* have not yet been investigated in a systematic way. This essay addresses this deficiency with a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, we examine why a Christian spiritual classic like Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* is suitable for Chinese women’s spiritual formation; on the other hand, we explore a
new methodology to investigate contemporary Chinese women’s spiritual formation.

Based on recent sociological analyses and theological reflections on women’s participation in the Chinese Protestant churches, we conclude that Christian women’s spiritual formation should address a wide spectrum of issues including their quality of ministry, personal space, holistic growth and spiritual experiences in daily life. In order to explore why Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* can fulfil these expectations for many Chinese church female leaders, we briefly introduce Ignatius of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius’ approach of spiritual formation can be understood through his concept of Christ-centered formation in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The theme of “the imitation of Christ” in Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* can become a powerful theme to engage the contemporary evangelical spiritual formation.

Then, we introduce our empirical qualitative research to explore how Chinese female leaders understand and apply the *Spiritual Exercises* in evangelical context. We identify seven main elements in this contextualization process. In the conclusion, we elaborate further our interpretation of the empirical results. Lastly, we indicate some implications and future applications of the contextualization of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the Chinese evangelical context.