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Essays

On the Double Perspective of Sino-Christian Theology

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In the 1990s, the ISCS launched a massive Chinese translation project of classic academic works of Christianity, echoing the youthful inquisitiveness of Chinese academia at that time to explore and embrace Western academics. As a result, Christian studies became very popular among humanities scholars in Mainland China.



Against the historical background of cultural openness and the critique of tradition, from the very beginning the ISCS emphasized the “interaction of culture and religion”—understanding religion through culture and renewing culture through religion. At stake was the underlying issue of the “unprecedented major change since the past three thousand years” (LI Hongzhang) or, in other words, the “problem of modernity.” This basic concern not only united all of the Chinese humanities scholars who were willing to study Christianity seriously, but also enabled Christian studies to develop gradually over the past two decades into one of the main branches of Western studies in Mainland China. All of the translation work and research studies conducted by Chinese humanities scholars over the past two decades belong to what can be characterized as “Sino-Christian Theology in a narrow sense,” which the present essay will address, in contrast with “Sino-Christian Theology in a broad sense,” which encompasses all Chinese discourses and writings on Christianity over the past centuries. In the following, I intend to present some of my

observations and understanding concerning the future developments of Sino-Christian Theology in its narrow sense.

Sino-Christian Theology in its narrow sense depended at first on the initiation of and the collaboration among humanities scholars from higher education institutions and research centers in Mainland China, as they began to study Christianity intensively from a neutral stance and in a non-confessional manner. This will most likely still be the case in the future. Nevertheless, in recent years, the discipline of Christianity studies in Mainland China no longer enjoys the popularity it once enjoyed and now faces pressures. Instead, translation work and research in ancient Greco-Roman classics have gradually become very popular over the past decade. Its basic concern also happens to be the “unprecedented major change since the past three thousand years.” While sharing a common basic concern, Christianity studies and Western classical studies in Mainland China approach the issue from totally different, even opposite, angles. In its critique of the tradition, the former approach shares the same stress as modern Protestantism on the value and dignity of an individual’s faith. LIU Xiaofeng’s *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao* (“*Salvation and Untroubled Wandering*,” published in 1988), is a fine example of this spirit. In contrast, the latter approach attempts to embrace the tradition through returning to the classics and, in doing so, no longer regards Christianity as the solution to the aporia of modernity, but rather as its cause. It echoes WANG Hui’s *Xiandai Zhongguo Sixiang De Xingqi* (*The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, 4 vols., 2004-2009) in its emphasis on the “empire-building” narrative of China. Consequently, the discipline of Western classical studies is closely associated with many different schools of conservatism in Mainland China. Against this background, not only has the previous emphasis on the “interaction of culture and religion” become questionable, but the neutral stance from which Chinese humanities scholars have been studying Christianity over the past two decades also needs to justify itself once again in face of a new round of challenges.

In other words, terms like “unprecedented major change since the past three thousand years” or “problem of modernity” manifests a peculiar ambiguity. Whether they respond to the spirit of cultural openness or serve certain conservative agenda depends on who can actually have the cultural power to dominate the interpretation. But more important than merely the question of cultural power, in my opinion, is who can make a substantial contribution to the future development of Chinese culture—and this should be the primary and uncompromising goal of Sino-Christian Theology. To realize this primary goal, it is necessary to go beyond the rather general “cultural studies approach” and enter into engagements with highly concrete investigations in particular professional fields. Only by doing so can Sino-Christian Theology advance any further.

But first of all, we need to examine the relationship of the two perspectives that have been developed along with Sino-Christian Theology over the past years. The first is the outer perspective from which all kinds of humanistic studies investigate Christianity and its broad cultural influences, while the second is the inner perspective from within which Christianity understands itself and unfolds its worldview through its canonical texts and normative doctrines. Although such a distinction may not be exhaustive, it is nevertheless relevant and necessary to maintain this idea of a double perspective in our consideration of Sino-Christian Theology. As a matter of fact, a number of important disputes that occurred during the development of Sino-Christian Theology over the past two decades, such as whether religious identity can affect the objectivity of investigations, concerned the question of the proper relationship between these two perspectives. Especially for Sino-Christian Theology, which depends on the ongoing efforts of humanistic scholars, the outer and the inner perspectives are both necessary and interdependent—but the necessity of such an interdependence will only become truly manifest when we enter into engagements with concrete investigations in particular professional fields.

Let us consider the case of “Law and Religion.” This academic field emerged in the mid-1970s and is relatively new. One of its main focuses is the question of how the two sociocultural entities of law and religion interact with each other within the context of Christianity. This may well be regarded as a paradigmatic case of the outer perspective of Sino-Christian Theology. The development of this area of research over the past forty years may be summarized by the research works of two scholars. Harold J. Berman, a Harvard specialist in Soviet law, is the main representative of the first twenty years of development. He wrote a number of essays expounding the relationship between law and religion from the macroscopic point of view of the cultural history of law, which was indeed quite typical of that period. The majority of scholars of this period understood law as the structural process through which rights and responsibilities become realized inside a society. Here, religion—Christianity in particular—was regarded as the intuition expressing the dedication of a society towards the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. Law without religion degenerates into a mechanical legalism, while religion without law loses its social effectiveness. John Witte, Jr., a student of Berman and an Emory University specialist in marriage law is the main representative of the second twenty years of development. He brought changes to this area of research by

introducing the inner perspective, based on the canonical texts and normative doctrines (and also the liturgical practice) of the Christian tradition, thus raising the understanding of Berman’s time to a higher level. According to Witte, law and religion share such ideas as fault, obligation, and covenant and such methods as ethics, rhetoric, and textual interpretation. But more importantly, they also balance each other by counterpoising justice and mercy, rule and equity, discipline and love. Religion gives law its spirit and inspires its adherence to ritual and justice, while law gives religion its structure and encourages its devotion to order and organization. Every matured religious system needs to come into terms with law by striking a balance between the rational and the mystical, the prophetic and the priestly, the structural and the spiritual, while every matured legal system needs to link its formal structures and processes with the beliefs and ideals of its people.¹ Indeed, one may rightfully say that this new understanding of the dialectical interaction of law and religion is directly related to the emergence of the inner perspective in the scholarship.

On the other hand, the outer perspective is not something additional or supplementary to the inner perspective, but something necessarily called for during the latter’s pursuit of truth. Let us consider the case of systematic theology, one of the main representatives of the inner perspective. Its classical formulation took place in the 17th century, as the concept of system and the method of analysis were introduced into the orthodox Protestant theology. This inner perspective adopted the language of argumentation and the method of analysis in the systematic exposition of its main doctrines. In order to demonstrate the validity of its truth, it needs to be verified not only in terms of the internal coherence of its main doctrines, but also in terms of its interaction and competition with the outer perspective—in other words, with the understandings of other disciplines that are also concerned with man and the world. This twofold verification, in fact, constitutes the process of pursuing truth by the inner perspective and the basis of the validity of its truth. Once isolated from the outer perspective, the inner perspective may easily fall into the trap of talking to nobody but itself.

From the 1970s onward, the research methods of interdisciplinary studies have been developing steadily, and the employment of them in systematic theology further demonstrates the necessity of subjecting the validity of the truth of the inner perspective to a twofold verification. When systematic theology employs the language of law or social sciences to discuss issues such as the human body, what it presupposes is not the sum of the cognitive presuppositions of the dominant sciences, but rather the validity of the truth of the inner perspective (in particular, of a systematic theology that incorporates the results of historical investigations of the Bible) in understanding the phenomenon of the body, in contradistinction with the horizons of the dominant sciences. When we conduct an interdisciplinary study of the phenomenon of the body from the inner perspective, it is very important to pay attention to the notion of “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν) in 1 Corinthians 15:44. While paying due respect to the specific meanings of this notion in Pauline theology, the inner perspective submits it to an analysis from the horizons of doctrine of creation or eschatology. On this basis, it is also necessary to incorporate the

specific results from biological sciences and social sciences (such as the bodily memories of trauma), in such a way that the concept of “spiritual body” can become an axis of meaning that competes with and incorporates the understandings of those sciences. When the inner perspective disregards the outer perspective and thus the need of a twofold verification, the validity of its truth claims may become very questionable. Religious identity may guarantee authenticity that is involved in the actual process of conducting researches, but it cannot guarantee that these researches will assuredly stand the test of a twofold verification.

To conclude, the double perspective involved in Sino-Christian Theology is not only the source of its vitality, but also of its controversiality. The tension existing between the two mutually complementing perspectives is not only what characterizes us and constitutes our identity, but, more importantly, also what motivates us in our pursuit of truth. How far Sino-Christian Theology can advance actually depends on how well we can continue to implement and unfold this double perspective, in terms of depth and precision.

* Translation by LO Kwun Lam and proofread by George Dunn. The present essay is based on Dr. Hong's speech in the 14th Academic Committee meeting of the ISCS on 10 December 2018.

1. John Witte, Jr., and Frank S. Alexander (eds.): *Christianity and Law: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

Theological Abstraction and Concrete Textual Evidence: Taking *kairos* as an Example

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It is often mentioned in theological discourse that there exist two different Greek words in the text of the New Testament for two different conceptions of time: *chronos* and *kairos*. The former refers to time viewed in terms of quantity or, in other words, duration. The latter refers to time viewed in terms of quality or, in other words, significance. In Mark 1:15, Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near [...]” Being one of the earliest recorded sayings of Jesus, this is often cited as a striking evidence of the *kairos* view of time in the New Testament. Here, the Greek original of “The time is fulfilled” is “πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρός.”

Theologian Paul Tillich was a powerful advocate of such a view. The core concept of his theology is “*kairos*.” When he was still in Germany in the 1920s, he founded the “*Kairos Circle*” and edited two essay volumes. In his debate with Emanuel Hirsch, Tillich put forward his *kairos* theology (*Theologie des Kairos*). In his last academic lecture, he still spoke of *kairos* in singular or *kairoi* in plural. Tillich's theology is arguably a *kairos* theology, which



may in turn be regarded as based on the *kairos* view of time in the New Testament. Often cited as a textual support are Jesus's words in John 7:6, “My time has not yet come” (ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ἐμὸς οὐπω πάρεστιν).

For Tillich, the objectivistic mode of thinking can be characterized by its conception of time as purely formal, external to the thinking man—in other words, homogeneous time of uniform duration. But there exists an alternative mode of thinking that does not regard time as homogeneous, but rather as comprising specific significant time moments. The reason specific time moments can produce meaning and give meaning to other time moments is that certain “creative events” have occurred in those specific time moments. Accordingly, time is far from being purely formal, for it possesses contents. Especially for Tillich, the *kairos* in the New Testament text is nothing but a contentful time.¹

It is undeniable that this mode of thinking, based on a qualitative conception of time, can be theologically profound and very stimulating. In fact, Tillich was not the only one who had that idea in mind. Others, such as biblical scholar John Marsh, also held such a view. The title of his work, *The Fulness of Time*, already conveys a *kairos* view of time. But it needs to be pointed out that in academia there have long been some careful studies that point out the non-existence of the *kairos* view of time as well as the dubiousness of the distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* (or *aion*) in the New Testament text. Such a distinction can only be the result of theological abstraction away from the New Testament text.

Biblical scholar James Barr criticizes such a view directly and offers a systematic argument. According to him, in many passages of the New Testament text, the word *kairos* means just the same as *chronos*. In passages such as Ephesians 2:12, “remember that you were at that time without Christ” (ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ), or Luke 18:30, “will not get back very much more in this age” (... πολλαπλασίονα ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ), it is clear that the word *kairos* not only does not refer to time as quality, but also makes no contrast with time as quantity.²

Barr also points out that Augustine was arguably the first one who contrasted the *kairos* view of time with the *chronos* view of time. But in making such a distinction and contrast, Augustine, Barr stresses, was just talking generally about the ancient Greek tradition and not discussing the New Testament Text.³ Accordingly, one will commit the mistake of seeking something in places where it does not exist when, inspired by Augustine, one finds the distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* very meaningful but want to seek textual support for it in the New Testament text. As a matter of fact, in the discourse of Western theology of the 20th century, there have frequently been theologians who sought to explore the implications of the *kairos* view of time in the New Testament. While theological abstraction can indeed be fascinating, concrete textual studies should be receiving more attention. More significant results may be expected when both are combined. ■

* Translation by LO Kwun Lam and proofread by George Dunn.

1. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Der Widerstreit von Raum und Zeit, Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VI (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1963), p. 10.

2. James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 41.

3. Ibid. pp. 47-48.

The Third International Meeting of the Global Network of Research Centers for Theology, Religious and Christian Studies



The Global Network of Research Centers for Theology, Religious and Christian Studies was established in 2009, with the aim to establish an international platform of dialogue and to network and foster cross-regional intellectual exchange and academic cooperation. It now consists of 45 research universities and institutions across the globe.

The third international meeting of the Global Network of Research Centers in 2019 was scheduled to be held in Hong Kong, with the theme “The Family in Cultural Transitions.” ISCS was honoured to be invited to co-organize the meeting with the Divinity School of Chung Chi College and the Centre for Christian Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The meeting took place at Tao Fong Shan and The Chinese University of Hong Kong from 17 to 20 January 2019.

Prof. Milton WAN, Dr. Mok Hing Yiu Distinguished Professor of ISCS, delivered the opening lecture “Globalization on Fire: Pondering on Global Network, Religion and Family” in the evening of the first day. In the following three days, a total of 14 lectures and speeches, together with the respective responses, were then given by over 20 leading researchers in Christian studies from established, promising universities from all over the world during six special topic sessions. The speakers include: Prof. Michael Welker, University of Heidelberg, Germany; Prof. Konrad Schmid and Prof. Jörg Frey, University of Zurich, Switzerland; Prof. Jeffrey Stackert, University of Chicago, USA; Prof. Niels Henrik Gregersen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; Prof. Jörg Lauster, University of Munich, Germany; Prof. Risto Saarinen, University of Helsinki, Finland; Prof. Louis C. Jonker, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; Prof. Shimon Gesundheit, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel; Prof. Mark W. Elliott, University of St Andrews, UK; Prof. Sándor Fazakas, Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Hungary; Prof. Karl Olav Sandnes and Prof. Vidar L. Haanes, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Norway; Prof. WU Fei, Peking University, Mainland China; Prof. Gordon S. Mikoski, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA; Prof. Chung-Hyun Baik, Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, South Korea; Prof. Kai-man KWAN, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong; Prof. Tobias Brandner and Prof. Simon KWAN, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; Prof. Kim Sung-Hyun, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong.

The conference was followed by a visit to four universities in Shanghai from 21 to 24 January, under the arrangement of ISCS. Ten of the international participants there visited Fudan University, Tongji University, East China Normal University, and Shanghai Normal University, delivering lectures and engaging in dialogue

and exchange with the faculty staff at the respective universities.

ISCS also arranged a number of cultural visits in Hong Kong and Shanghai for the international participants. In Hong Kong, they visited St. John's Cathedral and Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church. In Shanghai, they visited Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, Shanghai Community Church, St. Ignatius Cathedral at Xujiahui, and City God Temple of Shanghai. Through these visits, they have developed a better understanding of Chinese culture and the situations of Christianity and Chinese religions in Mainland China.



Prof. Markus Bockmuehl Visited Hong Kong and Mainland China



With the generous support of Mok Hing Yiu Charitable Foundation, Prof. Markus Bockmuehl, Professorial Fellow of Keble College and Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford, a world-renowned scholar of New Testament and early history of Christianity, visited Hong Kong and Mainland China from 21 March to 5 April 2019. Within two weeks, he delivered a total number of nine lectures at seven institutions of higher education—The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Zhejiang University, Minzu University of China, Nankai University, and Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong. The titles of his lectures are as follows: “The Problem of the Absence of Jesus in the New Testament,” “Creation ‘Out of Nothing’ in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,” and “How to Read the Apocryphal Gospels.” Prof. Bockmuehl had a very good discussion and exchange of ideas with the audience after each lecture.

ISCS would like to express its sincere thanks to Mok Hing Yiu Charitable Foundation for their support to this event.



The Barth Forum “Mit dem Anfang anfangen” (2019, Beijing)



From 8 to 14 May 2019, the Barth Forum “Mit dem Anfang anfangen” was held at Beijing Normal University, in commemoration of the 133rd birthday anniversary of theologian Karl Barth as well as in honour of the 100th anniversary of the first edition of his commentary on

The Epistle to the Romans and his Tambach Lecture. This was, in fact, the first academic conference on Karl Barth ever held in Mainland China, and ISCS was one of the co-organizers.

The Barth Forum consisted in two parts. The first part comprised a full-day series of two commemorative keynote speeches in English, delivered on 10 May by Prof. Günter Thomas, a leading Barth scholar in Germany and Chair Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Fundamental Theology at Ruhr-University Bochum. Prof. Thomas engaged in a very profound and extensive discussion with many of the leading Barth scholars from Chinese academia after each lecture. The topics of his lectures were as follows:

Date	Lecture Topic
10 May 2019	The Year 1919: The Tambach Lecture and the First Edition of <i>The Epistle to the Romans</i>
10 May 2019	Karl Barth's Thought of Culture



The second part comprised a two-day Chinese Forum on Barth, held on 11 and 12 May. Many of the leading Barth scholars from Chinese academia participated in it and gave presentations on different aspects of Barthian studies in Chinese academia. The topics of their presentations are as follows:

Name	Institution	Presentation Topic
TSENG Shao Kai	Zhejiang University	Barth's Actualistic Ontology: The Dialectic between Process and Substance Grammars
CHEN Yaqian	Editorial Board of <i>Fudan Journal</i>	A Preliminary Discussion of Karl Barth's Concept of Gegenständigkeit
SONG Xuhong	Minzu University of China	On Balthasar's "Seeing" and Barth's "Hearing"
QU Li	Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College	Karl Barth on the Temporality and Trinity of Eternity
HAN Yuexiang	Zhaoqing University	The Free Spirits Are Interlinked: A Comparative Study of Barth and Hayek
YANG Junjie	Beijing Normal University	A Reflection on Karl Barth's Influence on T. C. Chao
QU Xutong	Beijing Normal University	A Post-Kantian Interpretation of Barth's Critique of Religion
XIONG Jingzhi	Chengdu University of Information Technology	A Comparison of Theological Dialectics in Hegel and Barth
LI Yi	Wuhan University	On the Different Fields of Vision of Barth and Eckhart on Natural Theology
ZHAO Weirong	Fudan University	Barth and Mozart: An Investigation of the Religious Roots of Mozart and His Music

During his visit, Prof. Thomas also visited Tao Fong affiliated universities in Beijing and delivered lectures there on behalf of us as ISCS Guest Professor.

In Memoriam of Dr. Knud Jørgensen (1942-2018)



On 6 March 2019, a memorial service for Dr. Knud Jørgensen was held at Tao Fong Shan. During the memorial service, Director Daniel YEUNG gave a eulogy

in memory of him. Dr. Jørgensen was the former Director of Areopagos and Dean of Tao Fong Shan (1998-2010); he was also a Board Member of ISCS. During that period, he led Tao Fong Shan through a number of difficulties and challenges, including three fire incidents (1988-1999), post-fire reparation (1999-2000), the founding of the TFS Service Unit (2001) and the strengthening of the work division and mission specialization between the three organizations on Tao Fong Shan (TFS Service Unit focusing on campus management and development, TFS Christian Centre focusing on church-oriented ministries such as spirituality, Chinese Christian art, and dialogue, and ISCS focusing on academia-oriented works such as academic research, exchange, and publication), and finally, before his retirement, the full localization and autonomization of Tao Fong Shan (2006-2010), establishing the Hong Kong-based TFS Foundation to direct the multifaceted missions of Tao Fong Shan. His creative talents and exceptional leadership qualities were well demonstrated not only in his vision, confidence, and determination, but also in a great number of his writings on missiology. He was, in particular, concerned with the issue of "theology with inculturation."

Geared Towards the Digital Age

Recently, ISCS has made a number of changes in order to move towards the digital age.

1. The New Website of ISCS Launched in April 2019

The new website of ISCS was officially launched on 1 April 2019. The project started in early 2017 and lasted for two years. The original website of ISCS contained all information of our academic programs, our academic network in China and overseas, and our publication works over the past two decades since our establishment in 1995. Owing to the huge size and complexity of the information, it was therefore necessary to reorganize and redesign the website structure so as to render our information more accessible to our visitors. The Director's Office would like to thank all our staff for their involvements and dedicated efforts for the project. Their contributions are deeply appreciated. Please visit our new website at <http://www.iscs.org.hk/>.

