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CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY – INVESTIGATIONS INTO INTERCULTURAL ADVENTURES

Ulrich Dehn

The Chinese world of thought has fascinated Western travellers and missionaries for many centuries. Untouched by hermeneutic reflections or intercultural sensitivities everything unfamiliar was compared with the well-known and perceived as being strange and peculiar. At the same time, accounts of journeys and reports of missionaries were a first-rate source of information about far-away countries and provided material for the first maps of the non-European parts of the world. One of the most detailed travel reports was written by Marco Polo who together with his father and uncle travelled around Asia from 1271 to 1295 and who – supposedly – served as a prefect at the court of the then ruling Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan who at that time also was the ruler of China.¹ The authenticity of Marco Polo's travel reports is widely doubted – although mainly based on arguments which I regard as modern projections. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Marco Polo was deeply fascinated by the Chinese world despite all of its strangeness; however, his reports are less interested in actual objects of art or aspects of the Chinese history of ideas. Occasionally describing in great detail and filled with enthusiasm for the exotic, Polo is first of all paying attention to architecture, landscapes, eating habits and numerous folkloristic aspects of Chinese life. The Polo family were businessmen, especially dealing in jewels. In Marco Polo's travel reports Jews, Christians, Saracens/Muslims and idolaters (Buddhists) appear, and the Khan is reported to have high regard for Christianity.²

The important Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (born 1552) started his missionary work in the South of China in 1583, and, in line with the

1 By request of the Khan the journey should take place on the order of the Pope. The travellers, however, did not want to wait for the election of a new Pope (Gregory X, from September 1271) after a three-year vacancy (death of Clement VI, 1268) and departed without a papal mandate.

2 Cf. *Die Reisen des Venezianers Marco Polo im 13. Jahrhundert*. Revised and edited by Dr. Hans Lemke, Wiesbaden 2004, vol. 2, chap. 2, 160–162.

method of accommodation, he set out to turn the Chinese cosmology into the basis of a Christian conception of God.

Until today the West and sometimes also the East Asian sphere have succumbed to the fascinating power of the philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism. It is felt that there the problems are solved that Western history of philosophy and theology have presented us with, using the East Asian philosophy of religion as something of a quarry, depending on the closeness to the subject and on the field of interest respectively. I would now like to take a look at some of the attempts at understanding China and to try to critically assess these projects.

China – Dialogue Project Hans Küng/Julia Ching in the summer term of 1987

One of the first big projects on the reception of the Chinese world of thought in the Western theological sphere was realized by Hans Küng in cooperation with Julia Ching in the summer term of 1987. This endeavour was the continuation of his “dialogue project” directed at Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and served to prove his thesis regarding the classification of the whole of the world of religions as either prophetic (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), mystical (Indian religions) or wisdom religions (China).³ In accordance with this classification that runs through the whole of his following work, including his project “Spurensuche” in 1999, Küng has to acknowledge Buddhism – compared with Daoism and Confucianism – as the “first big foreign religion” in China.⁴ The history of the Christian reception of the Chinese world of thought is divided by Küng into seven categories or historical phases respectively.

1. The increasing outward similarity, i. e. Nestorians using crosses which grow out of a lotus. This was brought to an end with the arrival

3 Cf. Hans Küng, *China – ein drittes religiöses Stromsystem*, in: Hans Küng/Julia Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, München 1988, 11–19, esp. 15.

4 So among others in: Küng/Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, 252ff.

of the first Catholic missionary, Johannes von Montecorvino, in 1294 who tried to “convert” the Nestorians.⁵

2. Küng identifies a high extent of syncretistic blending in Manichaeism, which came to China via the Silk Road from Middle Asia. Even though there may be numerous more fitting examples of “syncretistic” dynamics in the Chinese history of religion and even though – from a Chinese point of view – Manichaeism, much more than Buddhism, appears to be a migrating religion, Küng can refer to Manichaeism as a cult used also by the Chinese emperor in the 8th century that strongly drew on Buddhist and Confucian elements.⁶

3. The activities of Matteo Ricci are categorized by Küng as a method making use of “complementary levels”: reinterpretation of Confucian texts, marginalization of the name of Jesus, adoption of Confucian terms for Christian conceptions of God.

4. Then there was the phase of mission, in which it was again tried to translate terms directly from Latin (Niccolo Longobardi). This was followed by the rites controversy in the 17th century which had its origin in the question whether the Chinese were allowed to continue their ancestor-worship, the cult of Confucius and to use Chinese names for God.

5. The Protestant mission in the 19th century, mostly of Pietistic-Fundamentalist character, was accompanied by “cultural foreign infiltration” and the cooperation of commerce, political power and mission.

6. From this ensued the political “anti-missionary reaction” in the 20th century as well as

7. The “contextual inculturation”, which in the past few decades has been following new paths of encounters between Christianity and the Chinese world of thought.

For Küng the criteria required for the development of a “Chinese theology for the post-modern era” include the orientation towards “original biblical belief”, the reference to the socio-political situation

5 Cf. Küng/Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, 254–256.

6 Cf. *ibid.* 256f. Further: Gero Widengren (ed.), *Der Manichäismus*, Darmstadt 1977; Manfred Hutter, *Manichäische Religion*, in: *Handbuch Religionswissenschaft*, ed. by Johann Figl, Innsbruck et al. 2003, 235–244.

as well as an orientation towards “practical discipleship”, but also the “restoration of culture through religion”, in the sense of a dialogue in partnership with people from different religions and ideologies.⁷

Only after having explained these guidelines, Küng mentions some concrete elements for a theological encounter with Chinese thought; then again, he cannot understand the fascination the theme of heaven holds for the Chinese world of thought or for Christianity in the era of de-mystification of the universe. Rather, it would be T'ai chi (“The Supreme Ultimate”) or T'ai-i (“The Supreme One”) with their transcendental dimension that may possibly also refer to God. He likes the suggestion of the Japanese theologian TAKENAKA Masao to use rice as a theological symbol as well as the thought of the Taiwanese Hu Tsan-yün who wants Jesus to be seen as the fulfilment of the hope of heaven/God and human being becoming one.⁸

The East Asian *chi* which as “air and breath”, “inner energy”, “vital, dynamic primal force” pervades the whole cosmos, thus “bringing about ultimate unity”: here Küng sees the possibility to convey the Christian understanding of the spirit that in a similar non-personal manner means “God being in this world and the world being in God” and which could as well be expressed by the term *chi*.⁹ Then there also is Küng’s positive assessment of the five values which are stressed in a manifesto published by Chinese scholars in 1962: 1) the self-sufficient concentration on the one moment, 2) a form of wisdom that is directed at an intuitive, elastic, dialectic, truly spiritual grasp of reality, 3) a “feeling for mildness and compassion” that is superior to “love”, 4) a sense of responsibility to spiritually develop this highly mechanized world, 5) the basic attitude to regard the whole world as one family where there is no room for original sin and hell.¹⁰

Finally, Küng takes up the New Age holistic philosophy of Fritjof Capra¹¹ and pleads for a change from a self-centred form of behaviour (yang) to a “new behaviour (yin) in accord with nature”.¹² Together

7 Cf. Küng/Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, 280–282.

8 Cf. *ibid.* 288f.

9 *Ibid.* 290.

10 *Ibid.* 292.

11 Cf. *The Tao of Physics*, 1982; *The Turning Point*, 1982.

12 Cf. Küng/Ching, *Christentum und Chinesische Religion*, 294.

with Moltmann's ecological Theology of Creation (296) who examined the Chinese history of ideas in various publications, Küng demands: "instead of a further integration of nature into the history of human progress now conversely the integration of the human history of progress into the rhythms and cycles of the ecosystem of nature" – a notion that for him (and Moltmann) seems to stand for "Taoist harmony with nature".¹³

Küng's approach transports the gesture of reorganizing the theological world and taking responsibility of discourse partners who should speak for themselves. Beyond fulfilling the purpose of informing readers about Chinese philosophy and unfold opportunities of conceptual encounter, his theological advices directed to Chinese partners may be either too simple to be worth mentioning, or may dig into neighbouring fields not to be cultivated by Küng's spade but by the spades of vernacular theological thinkers.

Before I turn to further examples of a theological reception of Daoist philosophy I would like to take a look at the reception history in China in order to gain additional information about the philosophy of religion's fascination with this theme.

Rites controversy and figurism

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), together with Michele Ruggieri, was the first Jesuit allowed to enter China. He became famous as cartographer, astronomer and mathematician and also because of his brilliant mnemonic skills which enabled him to not only read the classical Confucian texts but to memorize large parts of them. Little by little, Ricci was accepted by Chinese scholars as one of their own. His most important argument for the compatibility of Christian faith and Confucianism stated that the latter, in its original form, had known a divine being. He was further eager to prove that the ancestor-worship with its numerous rites – supposedly incompatible with Christianity – was, in fact, no

¹³ Ibid. 296, used are: Moltmann, *China zwischen Tao und Mao*, Evangelische Kommentare 1987, 154; and *Gott in der Schöpfung. Ökologische Schöpfungstheologie*, 1985.

religious praxis nor the worshipping of divine beings but that it only expressed respect and love trying to maintain relationships and that ancestor-worship within the framework of Confucian ethics was an expression of “child’s love” – so that therefore a prohibition for Christians to take part in such rites – barring certain exceptions – was not necessary.¹⁴ This method, which was called accommodation, was later on developed further by Jesuits in China, particularly by Joachim Bouvet and Jean-François Foucquet, and in its radicalized form it turned into figurism.

The French Jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656–1739) is regarded as the founder of Chinese figurism and the pioneer of a Christian-theological interpretation of the Dao. Figurism assumed that the classical Chinese texts already contained the basic teachings of Christianity, based on early Christian documents explaining how to deal with the Old Testament that seemed to suggest this interpretation. Figurism could refer to European forerunners: so, among others, Paul Berrier who was close to Bouvet had tried to prove the existence of signs of original Christianity in different religions of this world, and in his work “*Speculum christianae religionis*” he claims to have found connections between Daoism and the Kabbalah.¹⁵ The figurists were interested in Daoist, Buddhist and Neo-Confucian texts, trying to find there indications of Christian teachings and occurrences from the Christian history of salvation.¹⁶ They went as far as proposing to incorporate classical Chinese texts into the Christian canon of Holy Scriptures.

14 Cf. Rita Haub, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610): Gelehrter – Heiliger – Weltenlehrer, in: *China heute*, Vol. XXIX, 2/2010, 115–121; Rita Haub/Paul Oberholzer, Matteo Ricci und der Kaiser von China, Würzburg 2010; Nicholas Standaert, Matteo Ricci shaped by the Chinese, in: *Shenzi* 2010, No. 84, 1–15.

15 Cf. Oliver Grasmück, *Geschichte und Aktualität der Daoismusrezeption im deutschsprachigen Raum*, Münster 2004, 37f.; Claudia von Collani, *Die Figuristen in der Chinamission*, Frankfurt a.M./Bern 1981; Claudia von Collani, *Figurismus – Anfang und Ende einer kontextuellen Theologie in China*, in: Roman Malek (ed.), “Fallbeispiel” China. *Ökumenische Beiträge zu Religion, Theologie und Kirche im chinesischen Kontext*, St. Augustin/Nettetal 1996, 89–127.

16 Cf. Friedrich Huber, *Das Christentum in Ost-, Süd-, und Südostasien sowie Australien (Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen, vol. IV/8)*, Leipzig 2005, 206–208.

However, these endeavours, which could be characterized by using the key words (ritual) accommodation and figurism, had only marginally to do with fascination or openness to interreligious dialogue but – at least with regard to their objective function – were meant to serve intelligent apologetics meant to signal the Chinese that Christianity was not the foreign religiousness incompatible with the Chinese context and philosophy of life as which it had to appear when only looked at superficially. The Jesuit mission, in particular, has again and again been concerned with such forms of contextualisation. More than 1000 years before, Buddhism, as a newly arriving religious milieu, by employing similar mechanisms, was successful in winning over the Chinese world of thought.

The reception of Daoism since the Weimar Republic and Moltmann's and KIM Heup-Young's fascination with China

Jürgen Moltmann's investigation concerning the reception of the Chinese world of thought is focused on the *Dao de-jing* which he, for the sake of simplicity, attributes to Lao-tse¹⁷. In doing so he stays true to a tendency that could be noted in the interpretation of the *Dao* since the time of the Weimar Republic. With his translation and interpretation of 1911, Richard Wilhelm had introduced the *Dao de-jing* to the Christian world by consciously creating allusions to the concept of God. By translating *dao* with the word SENSE (SINN) he explicitly refers to a passage in Goethe's *Faust I*, in which Faust on his return from his walk at Easter quotes the first words of the Gospel of John as follows: "In the beginning there was the sense".¹⁸ The use of capital letters might be an adaption of Luther's rendering of the Hebrew Bible's tetragram as LORD (in small caps). Accordingly and again using small capitals, he translates *Te (De)* with the word LIFE. At the end of chapter 4 the word

17 Jürgen Moltmann, *Laotse's Tao-tē-king mit westlichen Augen gelesen*, in: Dieter Becker (ed.), *Mit dem Fremden leben*, part 2, in: *Missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen Neue Folge*, vol. 12, Erlangen 2000, 123–138.

18 Cf. *Laotse, Tao-tē-king – Das Buch vom Sinn und Leben*. Translated and annotated edition by Richard Wilhelm, München 1978, 24f.

“God” is introduced explicitly against other possible options.¹⁹ And also with his translation of the first verses of chapter 14, which according to some scholars touches upon Trinitarian thinking, Wilhelm is said to suggest a closeness to Christian theology, similar to his later translation of the Zhuangzi in 1912, but also, concerning a Jewish body of thought, similar to the selected translations of parts of the Zhuangzi by Martin Buber.²⁰

It is debatable whether Wilhelm’s reception and translation really were in line with the Christian theological way of thinking against the background of himself having been a Protestant missionary to China. But he certainly constructed a form of Daoism that was meant to be a contrast to the Western rational personal concept of God. The source of knowledge of Laotse is “the mystical entering into a state which goes beyond rational cognition”. Here “experiences of super-consciousness” take place. What is experienced here could “only be called non-being. But this non-being is not just the absence of something but is the source of being, from which start out heaven and earth, time and space”. Wilhelm, first of all, determines this transcendental Tao which has its origin in the yoga experience but, on the other hand, also the “cosmic Tao” that is directed at life.²¹ Wilhelm’s interpretation of Daoism calls to mind the interpretation of Zen by the Japanese scholar Suzuki Daisetz that, also in the first few decades of the 20th century, inspired the West by drawing lines between the analytic and destructive West and the soft, unaggressive and unpretentious Zen-inspired East. In general, the exotising and contrasting elements of Wilhelm’s interpretation of Chinese philosophy may have the larger part in his work than the ones allegedly insinuating a closeness of Daoism to Christian thought.

Wilhelm’s translations, in particular, have shaped the reception history of Daoism decisively and helped blending the so-called Daoist

19 Observations by Grasmück, *ibid.* 44f.

20 Cf. Karl-Heinz Pohl, *Spielzeug des Zeitgeistes. Zwischen Anverwandlung und Verwurstung – Kritische Bestandsaufnahme der Daoismus-Rezeption im Westen*, in: Josef Thesing/Thomas Awe (ed.), *Dao in China und im Westen. Impulse für die moderne Gesellschaft aus der chinesischen Philosophie*, Bonn 1999, 29.

21 Richard Wilhelm, *Chinesische Philosophie – Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2007 (1929), 29.

body of thought with Western-esoteric lines of conceptual ideas, even if Wilhelm in many ways distanced himself from the course set by figurism.

Jürgen Moltmann

Belonging to the tradition of an open-minded or even enthusiastic Christian reception of Daoism, Jürgen Moltmann can look back at a long-standing preoccupation with Daoism studies since a journey to China in 1986. Moltmann does not draw on Wilhelm's translation but starts out – seemingly meta-critical – referring to “Western thinking” which “had pounced with all of its traditional concepts on the mysterious Tao”, however, without understanding it.²² By employing a number of contrasting terms Moltmann tries to come closer to the Tao: claiming to understand = not understanding; not comprehending = the way of understanding; saying what it is, saying what it is not. Eternity; inability to give it a name; no demonstrable way; sovereignty: it determines everything but is not determined itself. The Tao is eternal and without name, but it has a name when it is at work. It comes into being when at work, and it is effective through Wu Wei, non-action. The Tao cannot be queried with regard to being of personal or impersonal character – what would normally be the interest of Western theology when trying to link up the Tao and the concept of God. However, to ask “either – or” would be the wrong question (125f.). Moltmann refers to medieval thoughts like those of Johannes Scotus Eriugena which lead to the mystic of Master Eckhart – in the sense of going beyond a statement concerning the existence of God: as the existence of being stems from the deity, it itself is nothingness. Following this statement, Eckhart called the deity the existence of being but also the nothingness of being. For Moltmann the Tao is “the non-being existence, the nameless name and the unspeakable speaking” and is, therefore, also beyond the category of the analogy that mediates between equality and inequality (127). He restrains from the temptation to move the first verses of chap-

22 Moltmann 2000, 123. These are the terms “meaning, God, way, principle, logos, reason, the One” etc., *ibid.*

ter 42 close to a Trinitarian interpretation; instead, he establishes a connection between chapter 78 and an ethic of humility. There it is said:

“Nothing on earth is as soft and as weak as water.

Yet, in its attack on the firm and strong it will not be defeated by anything.

Non-being makes it easy for it.”

This means that “only he wins who humbles himself, and he who takes the dirt of the land upon himself, will become the king of the land” (130), with reference to Is. 53 and Phil. 2,5–11.

After this trip to a kenotic theology of Daoism, Moltmann links up the biblical Theology of Creation and Taoist cosmogony. The differences are quite obvious – there the coming into being of the world, here the Creation; there an impersonal or supra-personal Tao, here transcendental, personal Creator God; there the path, here the Word; there the mention of the ten thousands of beings, eventually also the human being, here the Creation for the sake of humankind; there the human being in awe of the law of nature, here the human being who, as “created in the image of God”, shall “subdue” the Earth (131). For Moltmann, the only possible bringing together of the two diverging ideas can be seen in the tradition of the Kabbalah to which Johannes Scotus Eriugena seems to be close: the nothingness from which God creates his Creation is God himself and, therefore, he is close to a supposed Daoist position which, according to Moltmann, would maintain that “the existence of God the Creator and the existence of his Creation stem from his conceded non-being” (131f.).

On the basis of chapter 16, the beginning of chapter 40 and a verse from chapter 14 of the *Dao de-jing* Moltmann starts to compare the – in his opinion – circular, closed form of thinking of the Daoist text and the open system of the Christian understanding of world history. In the circular system beginning and end would be the same: that is, starting from the Tao and returning to the Tao, whereas the Christian system would have a starting point in time, the Creation, and move then to the eternal Kingdom of God. All of this is based on the condition that the Daoist text is really meant to convey the idea of a *return* in a historical-philosophical sense. But Moltmann himself also takes into considera-

tion that “perhaps it might only be the process of the returning of the Tao in the Western mind” (135).

A parallel that suggests itself seems to be the one between *ch'i* and the Old Testament *ruah*. In both cases there is life-creating force and energy; *ch'i*, associated with *yin* or *yang* respectively, is either the resting or the moving *ch'i* which sustains and shapes the life of the whole of nature, including humanity. *Ch'i*, as stated by Moltmann, is “a sort of world spirit which brings to life, moves, transforms and consolidates everything” (136). The difference between the biblical talking about *ruah* and *pneuma* and *ch'i* as the life spirit of the world is to be found in the divine quality of the biblical spirit and in the character of the impersonal medium as life spirit of the world for the *ch'i* (137f.). However, *ch'i* is “not only divine but more than divine because the gods are powerful only ‘thanks to unity’” (138).

This concluding sentence of Moltmann’s text keeps the reader from the fact that the idea of the divine in the Dao de-jing – should it be applied to the *dao* or the *ch'i* at all – has, of course, quite a different meaning than the common Western idea of God. Besides that, Moltmann does suggest an encounter of the Dao de-jing and Christian theology but stages a dialogue of a constructed ‘Daoism’ in the exoticistic tradition of Wilhelm, on the one hand, and a rather simplifying Christian theological concept, on the other, making use of a ‘hermeneutics of embrace’ and Christianizing Daoist ideas, while at same time contrasting them just as Arnold Toynbee used to do fifty years ago, who suggested that there was a Buddhist circular idea of existence, time and history which contrasts to the linear Judaeo-Christian process-thinking, the one being an impersonal dynamics dominated by laws of nature and cosmos, the other a finding for meaning being steered by will and intellect.²³

23 Cf. Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*, London 1956. Moltmann does not give any reference in his paper so that it cannot even be known which translation of the Dao de-jing he has used.

KIM Heup-Young: dialogue with philosophical Confucianism

The Presbyterian theologian KIM Heup-Young is from South Korea and, as a member of a Confucian family, he has intensively studied the body of thought of Chinese culture. Today he is professor for Systematic Theology at Kangnam University but as he received the academic degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union, he is part of the international academic discourse. Also his articles which he has published in his book “Christ and the Tao”²⁴ are mostly lectures held at international conferences. That is why I think it to be justified to place him – in a broader sense – in the vicinity of a Western Christian reception. Kim is member of the International Confucian-Christian Dialogue, and his contributions are theological examinations of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. *Tao* is regarded as a general term within Chinese thought. Kim maintains a syncretistic convergence of Confucian and Daoist ways of thinking that turns into a “cultural linguistic matrix” which Kim brings into contact with Christian theology.

Both theology and Confucianism have the task to humanize. The most important concern of Confucianism is the embodiment of the Tao through the human being into a certain ethical-religious context. Kim initiates an exchange between the Confucian concept of *ch'eng* and Christian *agape* and, subsequently, suggests the Asian concept of Christ as a Confucian wise man.

Basically, he refers to the two – in his opinion paradigmatic – thinkers Wang Yang-ming and Karl Barth.²⁵

In the opinion of Kim, the *tao* is inherent to the human being qua nature. It is the spirituality of human actions, a “head in movement” (8f.). *Tao* means to follow human nature. *Ch'eng* (truthfulness) enables the human being to reach the path to the Tao. Confucian anthropology assumes that humanity (*jen*) is always consideration for our fellow

24 Heup Young Kim, *Christ and the Tao*, Hong Kong (CCA) 2003. The following page numbers refer to this book.

25 Refer for more detail to his book: Heup Young Kim, *Wang Yang-min and Karl Barth: a Confucian-Christian Dialogue*, Lanham 1996.

human beings (*jen*). According to Wang, the core of Confucian teachings is the inner knowledge about the good (*liang-chih*), an optimistic conception which calls to mind Menzius. *Liang-chih* helps to put the rule of mutuality into action (*shu*), to which Wang refers, too. Consequently, the human being lives in a cosmic process of mutuality and not just in a relationship of two (16).

As to Kim's Christian partner in dialogue, Karl Barth, there the assumed dualism of Law and Gospel is shaped into a thorough unity of Gospel and Law, with Barth referring to Calvin as a theologian of sanctification. Love, as described in 1. Cor. 13, contains faith and hope. Barth, in his going beyond the "Epistle to the Romans", postulates that in the divinity of God there humanity is to be found: in Jesus, in the paradigm of Jesus humanity always means willing consideration for the fellow human beings, being in relationship, living in community (20). The ontological reality of our being in Jesus is met by a relationship of sanctification and instruction: the instructions from the Holy Spirit are, in turn, similar to the Tao. The people who resist this ontological relationship are directed to discipleship, to a real comprehension of sanctification. Barth distinguishes between *agape* (self-giving love) and *eros* (self love). Only through the first we are able to free ourselves from the latter. The commandment to love one another in its twofold orientation towards God and the fellow human being is no succinct order to universal love but a "differentiated love in shared praxis" (23). This love always includes mutuality; it refers to a "fellow human being" who – as a reciprocal witness and my contemporary – is living in a concrete relationship to me.

Barth and Confucianism meet in the question of humanism: for Confucianism it is the ontological possibility of human self-transcendence which is considered to be a divine installation (from below); for Barth it is the human being as God's elected creation (from above). Both, Barth as well as Wang, are concerned with a united basis of faith, protecting faith from dualism, and also with the inclusion of the human being into the process of realization. With that, Wang refers to Menzius and his identification of mind/heart and principle (24). In the view of Kim, both have a vision of an ultimate transcendental reality (immanent-transcendental in Confucianism, as the grace (of God) in Christian terminology), and they confirm the ontological unity of humanity.

Wang has created a dynamic confuciology of self-cultivation by developing the teachings of the “golden mean” into a teaching of the divine residing in human nature. As to Barth, it is the doctrine of sanctification that summarizes the Christian vision of God’s election of the human being.

Consequently, the (inner) knowledge of the good, *liang-chi*, (Wang) and the humanity of Christ (Barth) are their respective theological centres that stand opposite each other. Both emphasize the unity of knowledge and action. Christ can also be understood as the “knowledge about the good”. Some of the most important aspects of divergence between the two systems Kim mentions are the immanent-transcendental orientation (Wang) in contrast to the historical-transcendental orientation (Barth), the ontological identification (Wang) compared with the existential differentiation (problem of evil) (Barth). He outlines this in the problem that Confucian philosophy would be very strong in its “all-embracing, anthropo-cosmic-sagacious articulation” but relatively weak concerning the treatment of historical-existential problems, like i.e. suffering and death; this would be the strength of theology, but, on the other hand, theology could easily resort to “exclusivism, fundamentalism or historical anthropocentrism” (27). The ontologically anchored knowledge about the good tensely corresponds to the sinful structure of the human being, and the seriousness of the human will to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the instructions from the Holy Spirit have to be seen as being in correspondence to the Tao, since the instructions set the human being onto a course. *Ch’eng* (sincerity, truthfulness) as self-realization aiming at cosmic harmony with its rather ontological character contrasts with *agape* as existential dimension of humanity. Nevertheless, both meet in the fact that they claim the inseparability of “ontological knowledge and ethical action” (30) as well as in their effort to transfer ontological reality to existential totality.

As coordinates for a Confucian-Christian understanding of Christ Kim proposes the following:

1. Christ as the Tao

Christ as the path is related to the Christology of Jürgen Moltmann which emphasizes the element of the path of life, of the ideal path of human existence, of the path of the cosmos.²⁶

2. Christ as paradigm of the sage

In the majestic humanity of Jesus Christ there are realized reverence and truthfulness in ultimate human existence and in perfect unity with heaven.

3. Christ as *ch'eng* (truthfulness) par excellence

4. Christ as the unity of *jen* and *agape*

This coordinate reminds us that the self-giving *agape* meets its limit and challenge in Confucian self-critical reciprocity.

5. Christ as the knowledge about the good (*liang-chih*)

Christ is the ultimate embodiment of the knowledge about the good, in him there lies the ultimate tie of the true God and the true human being, the ontological connection of heaven, humanity and all things; the human subjectivity is identified with the ontological reality, the “heavenly principle” (31–36).

Kim thinks that Asian Christians and churches have answered the question “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt. 16,15) much too quickly with a traditional answer that is orientated to the logos philosophy of Old Church theology and the Nicene Creed and Chalcedon. The metaphor of the path is much more biblical in its explanation of what “Christopraxis” means. Jesus Christ as paradigm of humanity reveals “consideration for our fellow human beings, being in relationship, being in encounter, life and history in partnership” (80). A Christology of the wise man adds the aspects of environment and cosmic dimension, and the idea of mutuality and reciprocity liberates from the model of dominance and exploitation.²⁷

In Christ as *liang-chih* (knowledge about the good) there meet the two concrete, universal stories about God’s incarnation and of human-

26 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, München 1989.

27 Similar to his comparison of Barth and Wang, Kim also compares Calvin and the founder of Korean Neo-Confucianism, Yi-Toegye, both from the 16th century; a comparison that results in finding astonishing closeness between the two (Imago Dei and T’ien-ming – John Calvin meets Yi’Toegye, in: *Christ and the Tao*, 89–120).

ity in the one story of the inclusive human existence, of “the new human subjectivity, the new paradigm of radical humanity in the cosmic anthropo-theistic theatre and in the new age” (81).

Kim pleads for abandoning the old theological dichotomy of *logos* and *praxis* and favours a Tao-oriented understanding of God, a *Theotao*. The character for Tao contains the terms “head” and “movement”, meaning, according to Kim, the source of being (*logos*) and the path of cosmic Becoming (*praxis*). Tao informs the spiritual power of *sin-ki*, the divine life energy, which can also make the human being swim against the tide, as Kim demonstrates with the help of a story by the Korean poet Kim Chi-Ha (138–142). “Theotao regards Jesus as the overlapping of the heavenly Tao and the human Tao. It understands Jesus as the crucified Tao that reveals the path of salvation with his own socio-cosmic biography of an exploited life. It welcomes Christ as the Tao of resurrection, as the path of socio-cosmic reconciliation and sanctification.” (133) Insofar as the Tao is always moving to the rhythm of the complementary forces of Yin and Yang that do not stand for exclusion, but for holistic mutuality, the Western form of thinking in alternatives is overcome. Kim can also describe Christ as *Ki*, as the life-giving energy spirit (“cosmogonic breathing of the Primordial *Ki*”, 175).

Kim’s theology which focuses exclusively on the philosophical-theological dialogue with Neo-Confucian philosophy à la Menzius takes up certain elements of the existing dialogue theology, so i. e. he quotes with appreciation the suggestion of the Sri Lankan theologian Aloisius Pieris, to link dogma-related theology (word theology), liberation theology and integral way theology (158).²⁸

At the same time elements of the New Age philosophy of the late 1970s and early 1980s are discernible. As a whole, it is of the type of a harmonistic model aimed at overcoming aporia of Western theology in a dialogue with East Asian thought.

In contrast to Moltmann’s associations concerning Daoist texts, Kim maintains a dialogue with a series of theological theories and milieus which he wants to harmonize, bringing into dialogue and con-

28 Aloisius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*, Maryknoll 1996.

structuring theological tools using a new language which is strange to Western ears – and, for that matter, for Western-trained Eastern ears.

Conclusions

Let me summarize my observations in some concluding remarks.

1. The discernment of Chinese thought in the 20th century after Daoist texts became known in Western languages mostly happens by selection of a construct of religio-philosophical ideas from Daoist-Confucian background. Dao, yin-yang duality, *ch'i*, and other concepts from the philosophical cosmology of the ancient China fascinate the West and Western-trained Asian thinkers as far as to present-day esoteric trends. The reception usually leaves out socio-religious elements being named and criticised in feminist literature, such as by the Korean theologians Kang Nam-Soon and Sung-Hee Lee-Linke.²⁹

2. These 'encounters' adopt a 'hermeneutics of embracement': The Christian interpretation of Daoist resp. Confucian concepts is a major intention of Moltmann, Kim and implicitly of Küng: Kenotic theology in the Dao de-jing, the crucified Tao, the Tao of resurrection, the way of socio-cosmic reconciliation and healing. The other way round it is the mystic or cosmic dimensions of traditional Christian thinking which are brought to the fore and close to a construction of Chinese thinking as advocated by Wilhelm.

3. Anyway, it is not my approach to compare constructions of Chinese concepts against an allegedly 'correct' understanding of Chinese philosophy which would assert to correspond directly to the objective reality of the Chinese texts and other documents of the tradition. In any case we will have to select between various kinds of constructions – there is no such thing as an objective understanding beyond the world of our mental staging. At the same time, this is not to keep e. g. Moltmann, Küng and Kim free from criticism as to the hermeneutics of embracement resp. identification.

29 Cf. Ulrich Dehn, *Religionen in Ostasien und christliche Begegnungen*, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, 120–122, 136–140.

4. As I took Moltmann and Kim as examples, it could be shown that there is no one-way reception of Eastern thinking by Western thinkers but an internationalized process which makes authors create an idealized construction of the alternate religious milieu and select its elements for one's purposes. This is what in the 1990s as well the Korean theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung did when she constructed her own 'Korean shamanism' to enter into dialogue with it and celebrate the empowerment by a new theological language being informed by vernacular ideas.³⁰

5. I rather plead for hermeneutical authenticity confessing that in the process of theological reconstruction elements are selected and being used according to the mental capacities, subjective frameworks, interactions and social conditions of the individual author. This results in the way of intercultural theology which may turn out to be a productive syncretism enriching theological language without asserting to 'understand' the other but confess to create and construct it to one's own image.

30 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, Maryknoll 1990.