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### CONTENTS

Karl-Heinz POHL

INTRODUCTION.....ix

#### PART I: INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF EAST-WEST UNDERSTANDING

Ram Adhar MALL

TOWARDS A THEORY AND PRACTICE OF AN "ANALOGOUS" INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS..... 1

Günter WOHLFAHRT

MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNISM  
— SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS ON THE  
NECESSITY OF AN EAST-WEST-DIALOGUE ..... 14

ZHANG Longxi

TRANSLATING CULTURES: CHINA AND THE WEST.....29

Wolfgang KUBIN

"ONLY THE CHINESE UNDERSTAND CHINA"—  
THE PROBLEM OF EAST-WEST UNDERSTANDING .....47

ZHANG Kuan

THE PREDICAMENT OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM IN  
CONTEMPORARY CHINA .....58



*PART II: CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION AND NEW INTERPRETATIONS  
OF THE CHINESE TRADITION*

LIN Yü-sheng REFLECTIONS ON THE "CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION OF CHINESE TRADITION" .....	73
--	----

LI Shenzhi REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN ("TIAN REN HE YI") .....	115
---	-----

LI Zehou HUMAN NATURE AND HUMAN FUTURE: A COMBINATION OF MARX AND CONFUCIUS .....	129
---	-----

YIP Wai-lim THE DAOIST PROJECT AS A "POSSIBLE" METANARRATIVE .....	145
--	-----

*PART III: CHINESE THOUGHT IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT*

LIU Shu-hsien ON THE ORIGIN OF EVILS – A CONFUCIAN AND INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE .....	173
--	-----

CHENG Chung-ying CHINESE-WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY AND GOOD AND THEIR CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS .....	190
---	-----

Heiner ROETZ THE "DIGNITY WITHIN ONESELF": CHINESE TRADITION AND HUMAN RIGHTS .....	236
---	-----

Karl-Heinz POHL COMMUNITARIANISM AND CONFUCIANISM – IN SEARCH OF COMMON MORAL GROUND .....	262
--	-----

Lutz GELDSETZER EUROCENTRISM, SINOCENTRISM, AND CATEGORIES OF A COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY .....	287
--	-----

*PART IV: CULTURAL FLOW BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST*

Martin BAUMANN TRANSPLANTING RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS OF MEANING - MODES OF TRANSFERENCE AND STRATEGIES OF ADAPTATION, EXEMPLIFIED BY THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN THE WEST .....	307
--	-----

Klaus-Georg RIEGEL TRANSPLANTING THE POLITICAL RELIGION OF MARXISM- LENINISM TO CHINA: THE CASE OF THE SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY IN MOSCOW (1925-1930) .....	327
--	-----

Werner MEISSNER WESTERN POLITICAL SCIENCE IN CHINA .....	359
---	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED WORKS IN WESTERN LANGUAGES ..	373
--	-----

INDEX/GLOSSARY .....	387
----------------------	-----

LIST OF AUTHORS .....	405
-----------------------	-----



KARL-HEINZ POHL

## INTRODUCTION

How effectively Western style modernity has left its imprint on the world can be observed in the remotest corners of the globe. Whether these developments will be a blessing or a curse for the human enterprise on this planet will be left for later generations to decide. Whatever the ultimate judgement turns out to be, for now there seems to be a globally accepted assumption among intellectuals that the theoretical approach and level of complexity in the Humanities, as they are studied in the West, are to be applied as universal norms. This would appear to be inspired by perceptions of Western superiority in so many other areas, particularly in technology, natural sciences and even military capability.

In the wake left by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, these assumptions have been subjected to criticism. However, the effects of this postcolonial critique have been only marginal in the West in terms of questioning and challenging US- and Euro-centric views or developing a deeper consciousness of other cultures. We are still cooking in the juice of our Western style scientific theories, and take it for granted that people from other cultures will simply have to become well versed in Western modes of thought - even in the Humanities, if they are to explore the very essentials of human existence. The so-called cross-cultural exchange in the Humanities has, then, in fact been taking place on a one-way-street: Euro-American theories, categories and models were adopted everywhere and have become the universal standard of discourse for intellectuals all over the world. Meanwhile, in the West, the preoccupation with other cultures was limited to a kind of cultural anthropological positivism: The peculiarities of other cultures were researched, mapped out, and filed in the edifices of Western academia.

The cross-cultural encounter in the Humanities also concerns values. This inevitably brings up questions about different systems of values, and these questions have lately been the subject of hot



debate. More and more often the question is being asked if, in a pluralistic and multicultural world, it is necessary for the people outside the US-Euro-cultural orbit to ultimately adopt and conform to established Western values. This question begs another controversial one, which is whether these priorities are universal or particular in nature. Leaving this open for now (some of the authors included in this volume will address this and offer possible solutions), the most recent global developments, driven not only by global market forces and the globalizing effects of computer based media (information revolution, Internet, etc.) but also by an increased emphasis on regional and cultural identity, have made it necessary to come to a sharing of values. Any community - even those striving to preserve their most pluralistic aspects - is only able to function when it shares basic values. This is true in the minimalists version, where the one and only shared value is tolerance. Likewise, the world to come, as a global community or "village," will probably only be able to function on shared values. After all, "we are one world, space-ship earth, one ecology, one polity, one commonwealth."<sup>1</sup>

But how to arrive at sharing values? An answer that has been suggested in the course of new developments in the field of intercultural hermeneutics is by dialogue between cultures. An intercultural dialogue, however, can be a precarious endeavor because it calls for the unity of two apparently contradictory prerequisites. Firstly, a heightened awareness of one's own cultural identity, implying a sound understanding of the historical forces that have formed one's own cultural tradition and point of view, i.e. its genesis and historicity; and secondly, a willingness to question the usually unquestioned validity of one's own cultural background and world-view. An intercultural dialogue can be conducted only once this twofold requirement has been satisfied.

If successful, inter-cultural dialogue can lead to a new openness and sensitivity, that is, a willingness to be informed by another culture. This is also the goal of intercultural education as once defined by the US-Senator J. William Fulbright:

The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy - the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see, or may see it more accurately.<sup>2</sup>

Such a dialogue may not only lead to a better understanding of and respect for people from another culture, thus helping to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings, but it could also lead to a new way of seeing and understanding ourselves and our culture, because we need the "other" (here the other culture) in order to better understand our "own" and our culturally conditioned - *not* determined - point of view.

Intercultural dialogue involves translation and interpretation. But in order to translate, one needs, first of all, to understand the semiotic system of the other culture. That is, translators have to immerse themselves in more than just texts. They have, rather, to enter into the "horizon of significance" (Charles Taylor) of the other culture, i.e. the cultural background through which things become meaningful. Cultures should not, of course, be regarded as a-historical entities; they change with the times through both *intracultural* processes and *intercultural* contacts, forming palimpsests, as it were, of different inheritances. In spite of all the flux and mix, due to the accumulated "collective memory" they form dynamic patterns and systems of meaning that can be read and understood - to some degree - like the grammar of a language. Thus, for the sake of engaging in intercultural communication, the acquisition of a competence is needed which is more than just linguistic in nature. This intercultural competence is the ability to switch over to another angle of view, acquiring an ability to see the world from more than one culturally conditioned perspective. And just as it takes time to develop translation skills in language, the skill of translating culture likewise cannot be built up in a short time. We are actually only at the beginning of finding basic premises and a frame of reference for this kind of cultural translation. Although difficult, imperfect, and still largely unexplored, such translation is possible. We have to start by trying to understand the philosophical concepts and socio-political values of the "other."

<sup>1</sup> Robert Young, *Intercultural Communication: Pragmatics, Genealogy, Deconstruction*, Clevedon 1996, p. 154

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Fulbright, *The Price of Empire*, New York 1989, p. 217



This was the task that brought together scholars from China and the West at a symposium entitled "China and the West in Dialogue," held between April 9 - 12, 1997 in Trier, Germany. Trier happens to be the birthplace of the person who, unlike any other, shaped the China of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Karl Marx. With this *genius loci*, Trier was virtually predestined as a place to engage in such an intercultural dialogue. The papers given at this symposium ranged from general questions concerning intercultural hermeneutics to philosophy, values, politics and aesthetics of China and the West. Because of the interdisciplinary scope of the symposium, most of them defy clear categorization. For this reason, they are divided here in four broader and more inclusive groups. I. "Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Problem of East-West Understanding," II. "Creative Transformation and New Interpretations of the Chinese Cultural Tradition," III. "Chinese Thought in a Global Context," and IV. "Cultural Flow Between China and the West." (Not all the papers given are collected in this volume; also two are included which were submitted after the symposium: those of Li Zehou and Klaus-Georg Riegel.)

The first section, "Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Problem of East-West Understanding" contains five essays that are concerned with the question of understanding between cultures. It begins with an introductory essay by Ram Adhar MALL which probes into the philosophical foundations of intercultural hermeneutics. Departing from the basic notion that we need both a center to start philosophizing from and, at the same time, a need to overcome any kind of centrism, he proposes the concept of analogy as a conceptual framework. That is, to enable us to see similarities between cultures by means of a process which stresses neither consciousness of total identity, nor of total difference but of analogous equivalence. Günter WOHLFAHRT sees the necessity for an East-West dialogue from the perspective of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. The basic consequence of the latter, which he understands to be a meta-critique to the modernist critique of pre-modern metaphysics (as well as a development from the modernist subject-centeredness to its postmodern disillusionment), is the realization of difference: There is not only one way but many ways. Particularly the Daoist idea of no-self (equivalent to the postmodern death of the subject) might have, in his view, a refreshing impact on Western style rationalistic

philosophy, leading towards an understanding of philosophy in its original sense - as wisdom and a learning to live.

ZHANG Longxi, in his article "Translating Cultures: China and the West," addresses the question of cultural relativism and universalism. Taking the rites controversy of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as an example, he points out that the Jesuit missionaries around Matteo Ricci were both relativists (playing the "language game" with the Chinese) and universalists (insisting on the universal truth of the Christian faith). He concludes, therefore, that cultural supremacists can take and often have taken a relativist position in order to emphasize cultural difference and to insist on the superiority and correctness of their own values. Hence he declares the categories of universalism and relativism as unhelpful in terms of cross-cultural understanding. Wolfgang KUBIN, questioning the often heard saying that "only Chinese can understand the Chinese", looks into common manifestations of ethnocentrism of Chinese and others. Pointing out that understanding needs distance, he argues that also for self-understanding, distance is needed, because understanding of oneself is only possible in reference to the other. In the end it is language that founds understanding and solidarity, as it is through language that two people meet. ZHANG Kuan discusses the problems and challenges of the postcolonial critique in China and explains why this topic that he himself helped initiate has become such a heated debate among Chinese intellectuals. He points out that Western colonial discourse has become deeply internalized in the Chinese modernity discourse since Chinese occidentalism has romanticized and idealized the "West." Thus, orientalism and occidentalism are mutual distortions of the other. One of the problems of postcolonial critique he addresses in this context is that while minority ethnic scholars based in the West are accepted as representatives of the Third World, the authentic voice of the Third World is growing ever quieter.

The second part "Creative Transformation and New Interpretations of the Chinese Tradition" collects papers offering new perspectives on the forward development of the Chinese tradition. In the first of the four essays LIN Yü-sheng proposes the concept of "creative transformation" for China in order to remedy the effects brought about by the ideology of "totalistic anti-traditionalism" during the May Fourth Era. He defines the task for



modern Chinese intellectuals to continue the "this-worldly sense of mission embodied in the May Fourth spirit" but at the same time to overcome the shortfalls of its "passionate but closed and inflexible ideology." He suggests to apply "creative transformation" to the following three areas: transforming Confucian family ethics, developing the idea of human rights from the primacy of *ren* (humanness), and building up a civil society from specific Chinese resources (such as Mahayana Buddhism). LI Shenzhi inquires into the concept of "Unity of Heaven and Man" which has been an important topic in Chinese thought from its very beginning. Tracing the different interpretations of this idea through the ages, he offers a new interpretation of the unity of the mystical with the rational and shows how this concept can even be of use during China's search for a moral basis in the modern age.

LI Zehou probes into the concepts of human nature that are found both in ancient Confucianism and in the early Marx of the *Economical Philosophical Manuscripts*. Stressing the idea of social nature, common to both, and the Confucian strength in education, Li Zehou sees that a combination of the two might still contribute meaningfully to the Chinese way towards shaping a modernized society. In common with Günter Wohlfahrt's paper, YIP Wai-lim's highlights the Daoist tradition which he discusses as a counter-discourse (challenging power hierarchies in terms of language and systems of norms) in the context of both Chinese aesthetics (poetry) and postmodern thought. Questioning the validity of the common type of modernization theory which claims to deliver human happiness and fulfillment (thereby eschewing its ambiguous and repressive aspects), he proposes a cultural ecology for China with Daoist elements as a means to survive the alienating Western impact.

Most of the papers in the third part "Chinese Thought in a Global Context" are concerned with issues in the Chinese philosophical tradition that pertain to discussions going on either in the global intellectual community, or in comparative philosophy. In the first of the five essays in this section, LIU Shu-hsien pursues the question of evil in Chinese thought from its very beginning until the modern period. In contrast to Western concepts such as original sin or theodicy, Chinese thought seems not to have been concerned with the question of evil as a theoretical problem but more with the existential and practical problem of how to overcome evil (from Qin Shi

Huangdi until the Cultural Revolution). LIU Shu-hsien follows a well-established line of Neo-Confucian interpretation to assert that evil results from the deviation from the Mean, and that the way to restore the good is through self-cultivation. CHENG Chung-ying explores some fundamental differences between Chinese and Western conceptions of beauty and good. Whereas in the Chinese tradition aesthetics and ethics - just like Daoism and Confucianism - interact and form a complementarity, Cheng tries to show that in the modern context there is a radical difference between Chinese notions of moral goodness and Western notions about ethics of rights. This he considers to be a difference between the holistic, cosmological and sentimentalist on the one hand, and the atomistic, political and rationalistic on the other. Still, Cheng concludes that these different notions are not mutually exclusive but complement each other. Heiner ROETZ addresses the hotly debated issue of human rights in the context of cultural difference. According to his perspective, a culturalist view on human rights is untenable because concepts which are central to the human rights idea, such as human dignity or the morally autonomous person, can all be found in basic Confucian texts, mainly in *Mencius*. In contrast to other scholars, he interprets the proverbial Confucian communal commitment not as a form of communitarianism but, due to a notion of "strong self" which he finds in Confucianism, as "social individualism." His conclusion is that, while human rights cannot be found explicitly in the Confucian tradition, Confucian ethics, with their emphasis on mutuality or reciprocal recognition, can be developed in this direction. Karl-Heinz POHL shows how certain issues that are central to some communitarianist authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor can be applied to the Confucian tradition. These include the gaining of an ethical identity (the process of individuation), the concept of authenticity as well as tradition understood as a meaningful context of a narrative continuity (in Charles Taylor's words, an "horizon of significance"). Against this background Pohl compares, as did Cheng Chung-ying earlier in this collection, Western and Chinese universalist concepts, with Western universalism being more rational and principled, in contrast to a moral universalism of practice and responsibility in the Chinese tradition. He concludes that a common moral ground between the two cultures might not be found in a universalist moral philosophy



but in moral practice. Lutz GELDSETZER discusses Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism from the perspective of comparative philosophy. He begins, like Mall in the first essay, with the assertion that "centrisms" are necessary preconditions for intercultural encounters since all understanding starts from certain prejudices. He attempts to systematize identities - according to categories such as negative and positive, formal and material - as well as differences between Western and Chinese philosophical approaches. He concludes that although there are many identities, there remains the basic difference in terms of practical vs. theoretical philosophy between the Chinese and European traditions.

The fourth part contains three essays that concern the "Cultural Flow Between China and the West". The first essay in this section by Martin BAUMANN discusses the transplanting of a religious system of meaning - not from the West to the East as in the form of Christianity but in reverse order - that is, of Buddhism travelling from the "Orient" to the "Occident." After giving an overview of the development of Buddhism in Europe and North-America, the essay outlines different modes of transference (from contact, confrontation, ambiguity and recoupment to innovative self-development) and strategies of adaptation (from translation, reduction, assimilation and absorption to acculturation) for Buddhism to take hold in the West. Klaus-Georg RIEGEL discusses the transplantation of another - secular - system of meaning, this time in a direction more familiar to the West: from the "Occident" to the "Orient," that is, the transplanting of the political religion of Marxism-Leninism to China. Focusing on the Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow (1925-1930), he shows that the modes of transference of this "secular faith in inner-worldly salvation" happened very much according to the established ways of religious mission. There were dominant missionary powers, dependent converts, pilgrimages (to Moscow), codes of virtuous conduct, initiation rites, and tight modes of thought control (*zhengfeng* campaigns). Chinese converts were thus trained as missionaries of the Comintern (as a "missionary world church") to preach the new gospel in their homeland. The last essay by Werner MEISSNER deals with the transfer of a system of knowledge from the West to China, that is, the adoption of Western Political Science in China. Meissner first gives a brief sketch of the historical development of this process from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

and then focuses on the 1980s with the reception of political theory and debates surrounding Max Weber, Neo-Authoritarianism, and Social Democracy. While showing that a phenomenal number of Western works have been translated in this process, which helped to form syntheses of Western and Chinese thought, he concludes, though, that the general problem of cultural "exchange" on a one-way-street exits also here: "An attempt by Western scholars to adopt Chinese thought and to reassess their own sources of thinking in a similar way as the Chinese intellectuals have done in the last ten or twenty years is still an event to be looked forward to."

The Trier symposium was meant to initiate a dialogue between East and West. The question remains, though, as to how such isolated events can help preparing the ground for a cultural exchange in the wider sense of the word, as well as checking the persistent manifestations of cultural arrogance and cross-cultural ignorance in both East and West. Therefore, dialogue has to continue, furthermore it has to be understood as a process, not of one side lecturing the other but of *mutual* learning and understanding through which *both sides* may modify their views. Although fully aware of the limitations of their efforts, the scholars gathered at the symposium could say at the end of their lively sharing of ideas that, regarding China and the West, an exchange on a two-way-street did take place, at least for four days in April 1997 in Trier.

\*

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