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Editorial

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This issue introduces a new feature to the *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*: the regional issue. In those issues, which will appear from time to time, we aim to present to our readers current developments in theology and philosophy of religion in one particular part of the world. Our disciplines today exist as global conversations to which participants from many countries contribute. This is reflected in the diversity of authors who submit their research articles for publication in this journal.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that scholarly conversations are shaped by local and regional conditions – be it their academic traditions, be it their specific social, cultural or economic circumstances. Bringing together articles from one region in a single issue can make visible features of theological discourse in that area and thus shine a spotlight on topics, individuals, and developments that could otherwise be hard to recognise in their specific character.

In the current issue, the focus is on Christian theology in China. Developments there are dynamic and diverse – too much so to be covered in a single journal issue. For this reason, the editors decided to narrow the scope of the regional issue to the reception of modern German Protestant theology in China. Other topics could have been chosen, but in view of the history and tradition of this journal, this thematic choice seemed pertinent. As will become evident, there is a fascinating story to be told about the use Chinese theologians from the twentieth century down to our own day made of modern German Protestant thought in their diverse attempts to address the various challenges that arose and continue to arise in the ongoing process of modernization in China as a *Kulturnation*, *Staatsnation*, and *Nationalstaat*.

The profound and multifarious influences of German thought and culture on modern China have been well documented in the secondary literature. Modern Chinese nationalism, for instance, is rooted in the nineteenth-century German tradition of *Mystik als Nationalismus par excellence*. Patriotic songs and so-called Chinese *Kunstlieder* (中國藝術歌曲), most of which were written in the twentieth century and remain popular today, were inspired by both the more intimate styles

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of Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann and the tragic-heroic aesthetic of the sublime (*das Erhabene*) featured in the New German School (*neudeutsche Schule*) led by Richard Wagner.

Legislative and judicial reforms in the People's Republic of China over the last three decades, too, have drawn significantly on the German tradition of the civil law system. Of course, the extent to which communist China can/should adopt or has adopted Germany's largely Kantian paradigm of human dignity, stated at the very beginning of the *Grundgesetz*, remains a subject of intense debate in comparative law.

Education is another area in which China has been profoundly indebted to Germany for over a century. The schooling system in contemporary China has its roots in the one established by the Weimar Republic in 1919, while modern research universities in China are for the most part modelled after the Humbolt University of Berlin. Schiller's notion of aesthetic education set forth in the 1795 *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* was officially incorporated into the educational program of the Republic of China by her inaugural Minister of Education, the Leipzig-trained scholar Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940). Cai was particularly impressed by Schiller's reflections on the then-ongoing French Revolution, and proposed in 1916–1917 during the height of the First World War the vision of "aesthetic education as substitute for religion" (以美育代宗教) in opposition to the overwhelming sacralization of politics in China and around the globe. In the Reform and Opening Up (改革開放) program that began in late 1978, Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平, 1904–1997) reintroduced to the People's Republic a revisionary model of the aesthetic education espoused by Cai.

Many other examples can be given, but the foregoing discussions would suffice to give the reader a sense of the significance of German thought and culture in the modernization of China. And needless to say, the core political values of the People's Republic of China as an officially communist state have their roots in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Young Hegelians like Ludwig Feuerbach. Incidentally, Marx was significantly influenced by the writings of Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851), the first ever Lutheran missionary to China, and even travelled to London to listen to a speech by Gützlaff who happened to be on a fundraising trip just a year before his death.

Curiously, though, the influence of German Protestant theology remained for the most part thin and indirect until the 1990s. One reason is that widespread introduction of German thought and culture among scholars and students in China around the turn of the twentieth century by proponents of the Reform Movement (維新運動), notably through the publications by Quong Jee Sue Kouk Limited (廣智書局) from 1901 to 1915, relied heavily on the Japanese scholarship that was already quite advanced. Theologians like Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsch were for

the most part mentioned only in passing in the Japanese literature. In addition to canonical figures like Kant and Hegel, the major German thinkers introduced to China via Japan in those years would often include names like Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) that are less known today, reflecting the knowledge of Japanese scholars on the most up-to-date trends in Germany at the time. Schopenhauer was often listed as a representative of German philosophy alongside Kant and Hegel, possibly because of both Schopenhauer's influence on music and the arts as well as his affinity to East Asian culture. The coverage that Fichte received from Japanese scholars at the time also showcased their knowledge of the "Fichte revival" in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was usually under the shadows of these supposedly major historic figures of German thought and culture that theologians like Schleiermacher would be mentioned.

Early twentieth-century Christian theologians in Japan, though few, were exceptionally adept in modern historical scholarship and well-informed about ongoing developments of academic theology in Germany. Unlike their contemporary Japanese historians and philosophers, however, they remained largely unknown to Chinese scholars. Christian communities in China, too, were for the most part unaware of their works.

One other reason why modern theology from Germany did not receive adequate attention in Chinese scholarship until about three decades ago is that the vast majority of nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries actively involved in evangelism and church planting in China were conservative. It was basically a consensus among them that theological modernism from Germany is altogether an apostate enterprise. As a result, for a long time Chinese believers and seminary students had been prevented from first-hand knowledge of modern academic theology from Germany.

This is not to say that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese Christianities (there is a growing consensus among scholars in the field to use the plural) were all conservative. There was in fact a strong presence of theological liberalism among China's intellectual elites, most of whom were vocal proponents of the political left, in the first half of the twentieth century. The form of liberalism that took root in China, however, had its origins in the social gospel from the United States rather than in German neo-Protestantism. Tzu-ch'en Chao's (趙紫宸, 1888–1979) 1939 *Karl Barth's Religious Thoughts* (巴德的宗教思想) was possibly the only major academic volume on a German-speaking theologian published in mainland China before the 1990s. Even in this volume, however, the Vanderbilt-trained author writes from a recognizably American perspective and shows little first-hand knowledge of the history and ongoing developments of modern academic theology in Germany.

The 1990s saw a rapid growth of interest in Christian studies across the various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The complex and multifarious

reasons behind this phenomenon – some of which are discussed in the articles published in the present issue – have been a subject of in-depth discussions in the field of Chinese Christianities, and we will refrain from offering any explanation here.

Suffice it to say that the Sino-Christian Theology movement (漢語神學運動), which began in the late 1980s, proved to be one of the most – if not the most – decisive factors for the vast secondary literature that has been written on modern German theology over the last three decades, especially since the founding of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (漢語基督教文化研究所) in Hong Kong in 1992–1995, which has since become a hub (if not the hub) for mainland-Chinese scholars specializing or interested in Christian theology and related subjects.

Sino-Christian Theology, defined in the stricter sense of the term, refers to an interdisciplinary brand of Christian studies centering on but not confined to the more traditional areas of modern academic theology such as dogmatics, historical theology, biblical studies, and church history or the history of world Christianities. From the very inception, Sino-Christian Theology has been profoundly informed by German models of theological and religious studies. The modern theology-as-science tradition, *inter alia*, features prominently in Sino-Christian Theology as a non-ecclesiastical yet ecumenical and deeply ecclesial enterprise.

At the beginning, the movement took on a largely Barthian shape in the hands of its former proponent and forerunner Liu Xiaofeng (劉小楓), who received his doctoral training in Basel. The thrust of the Sino-Christian Theology movement in its early years can be expressed by a famous statement by Barth: “the speech of God is and remains the mystery of God supremely in its secularity [*Welthaftigkeit*].”¹ This is precisely what makes Sino-Christian theology possible as Sino-Christian theology. This, too, is precisely why proponents of Sino-Christian studies, regardless of whether they are members of the Church, and regardless of their areas of expertise, can come together as a secular Sinophone community to reflect and debate on, and seek to understand, the intellectual and cultural expressions of the millennia-old faith of the Christian Church proclaimed to diverse nations through the ages – including China.

Today there is no longer any single working paradigm for Sino-Christian Theology. Troeltschian, Dutch neo-Calvinistic, historicist, historical-objectivist, phenomenalist, phenomenological, and even post-modern models, to name but a few, have all been invoked by various proponents of the movement in support its non-ecclesiastical yet ecclesial nature. Regardless, ongoing researches on modern German

1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. in 12 parts (I/1–IV/4), eds. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936–1975), 165. German: Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 12 part-volumes (Zürich: TVZ, 1980), I/1,171.

Protestant thought remain central to Sino-Christian Theology and academic theology in China.

The present issue presents six modern German theologians who have been of the most perseveringly studied in the recent Chinese scholarship, namely, Kant, Schleiermacher, Barth, Tillich, Moltmann, and Pannenberg. Each of these thinkers, as we shall see, has a unique *Rezeptionsgeschichte* in China.

There is little question today that the theology-as-science model developed in nineteenth-century Germany is a basically post-Kantian enterprise. Yet, the way Kant is presented in this issue as a theologian might raise some eyebrows. The article on Kant is by Xiaolong Zhou (周小龍), associate professor of philosophy at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. With a Dr. theol. from Tübingen, Zhou is well versed in German idealism and neo-Protestantism. His own theological interpretation of Kant as a thinker in the Christian tradition of analogical metaphysics reflects the influences of both older German scholars like Ernst Specht as well as more recent Anglophone readers like Stephen Palmquist. The article included in the present issue documents the historic receptions and emerging interpretations of Kant in China.

At the outset of this editorial, we observed that Christian theology in China was too complex and diverse to be fully covered in a single journal issue. It should now be clear that the story of the Chinese reception of German theology, too, is multifarious and variegated despite its recent origins. It is a story of fascinating vitality that continues to unfold and evolve. The articles contained in the present issue can only begin to take cognizance of this development. It is hoped that this impulse will be continued.

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