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Christian Jochim

San Jose State University, christian.jochim@sjsu.edu

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THE CONTEMPORARY CONFUCIAN-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER: INTERRELIGIOUS OR INTRARELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?*

Christian Jochim

PRECIS

The discipline of comparative religions has paid little attention to perhaps the most important religious phenomenon of the late twentieth century: interreligious dialogue. Available scholarship on this topic is largely written by and for participants in various dialogues. This scholarship is mainly on the normative issues that concern participants, thus leaving the need for descriptive, analytical scholarship largely unfilled.

This essay engages in descriptive analysis of a relatively new twentieth-century dialogue—the Confucian-Christian dialogue—which, nevertheless, has deep historical roots. The essay turns, first, to history, summarizing two different periods of past Confucian-Christian encounter: the period from Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to the World's Parliament of Religions (1893), and the twentieth-century period leading up to the recent international Confucian-Christian conferences. It turns, second, to the specific nature of the first, second, and third international Confucian-Christian international conferences (1988, 1991, and 1994).

In its analytical efforts, the essay employs two key conceptual tools: the *intrareligious/in-*terreligious distinction (which differentiates the interior dialogue of a person interested in two

*In its first form, this essay was a paper for the Pacific Coast Theological Society meeting in Berkeley, California, April 2-3, 1993, held in commemoration of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, on the theme of interreligious dialogue. I wish to thank those who commented on the essay at that meeting, especially Huston Smith, my respondent. I also wish to thank those participants in the international Confucian-Christian dialogue conferences who have commented on the essay or otherwise shared their insights with me. Too numerous to list here, their names appear in the body of this essay.

Christian Jochim (humanist) has been an associate professor in the Comparative Religious Studies Program at San Jose (CA) State University since 1988, where he was an assistant professor, 1985-88. He previously taught at California State University, Northridge, and at the University of California, Los Angeles (1984-85); at Occidental College, Los Angeles (1983-84); at California State University and the international program in Taipei, Taiwan (1981-83); at the University of Southern California (1978-80); and at Los Angeles Harbor Community College (1976-79). He holds a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Barbara; an M.A. from the University of British Columbia; and a Ph.D. (1980) in religion, with a certificate in East Asian Studies, from the University of Southern California. He did field study in Taiwan during the summers of 1978, 1989, and 1994, and during 1980-83 and 1991-92. Director of the Center for Asian Studies at San Jose University since 1992, he was director (1988-89) and assistant director (1987-88) of the university's Internationalizing Education Project. His book *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Prentice-Hall, 1986) was published in Beijing in Chinese as "China's Religious Ethos" (Chinese Overseas Publishing Co., 1991). He has published articles, reviews, and reports in several scholarly journals, including the *Journal of Chinese Religions*, the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Philosophy East and West*, *The Pacific World*, and the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. In 1992, he contributed five 10-page texts and slide sets to the Image Bank for Teaching Religious Studies at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. His paper for the International Academic Conference on Religion (Beijing, April, 1992) was published in Chinese and will be included in the conference proceedings in English. He is currently engaged in long-term research on contemporary Confucian traditions, especially in Taiwan.

traditions from exterior dialogue between two traditions), and “dual religious citizenship” (which designates the simultaneous participation in two distinct traditions). These particular tools are used to show that the contemporary Confucian-Christian dialogue has an unusually strong *intrareligious* dimension, relative to other existing dialogues, and, moreover, has great promise for teaching those in other dialogues and in comparative religions important lessons on the issue of “dual religious citizenship.”

Introduction

In 1959, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, with characteristic precociousness, made several insightful comments on interfaith encounters in his celebrated essay “Comparative Religion: Whither — and Why?”¹ His essay is best remembered for expressing an ideal in “the study of other men’s religions.” Smith said this kind of study began treating its object as an “it,” moved on to speaking of a “they,” and was becoming aware of the situation as one of “we” talking about a “they.” For the future ideal to be reached, he added, the next step would be a dialogue where “we” talk to “you,” followed by “we” talking *with* “you,” and culminating in the ideal situation when “we all” are talking *with* each other about “us.”² Smith’s essay is less remembered for another kind of advice he gave to comparative religionists at a time when interreligious dialogues were just entering a new stage of growth in kind, number, and scale. Specifically, he described three ways in which they could respond to the phenomenon of dialogues: (1) participate in a dialogue as a member of one group or another, (2) act as a “chairman” (mediator and interpreter) for a dialogue, and (3) play the role of observer.³ It is this advice that is most relevant to my aims in this essay.

This essay is an experiment in which I play the role of observer of the Confucian-Christian dialogue. Thus, let me quote Smith’s advice on that role in full:

The third role is that of observer. If the comparative religionist chooses not to participate in or to moderate the dialogues that are in fact increasingly taking place, at least he can hardly fail to take a (professional) interest in what is going on. It is part of the contemporary history of the religions (and conceivably one of the most profound matters in the whole history of religion) that they are encountering each other, both on systematized occasion and informally in the coffee houses of the world. And even on the sidelines he may find himself being asked at least to provide the theory for those that are practically involved. People wishing to talk together across religious frontiers have been finding that their conceptions of one another’s faiths, their capacity to explicate their own faiths in terms that can be

¹Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Comparative Religion: Whither — and Why?” in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 31-58.

²Ibid., p. 34.

³Ibid., pp. 49-52.

understood by outsiders, and the concepts of mutual discourse available to them jointly, are inadequate.⁴

If we turn to comparative religion today for history or theory on religious dialogues, several decades after Smith wrote and more than a century after the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, we will be disappointed. Since the role of comparative religionist as outside observer of dialogues remains to be defined, description of the nature and content of particular dialogues comes mostly from participants.

Moreover, as for providing the kind of "theory" to which Smith refers, this burden has also fallen on the shoulders of participants themselves. For example, two fine review essays in *Religious Studies Review* by Francis X. Clooney and Paul Knitter together cover fifteen books related to religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue published between 1985 and 1989.⁵ Only one of the fifteen books is a work in comparative religions: Harold Coward's *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*.⁶ The next closest is a volume edited by Leonard Swidler representing the results of a 1984 conference at Temple University on interreligious dialogue.⁷ An overview of other similar resources also leads one to the conclusion that there is much normative work but little descriptive-comparative analysis.⁸

Without insisting that comparative religionists as "observers" will do the best job of covering interreligious dialogues, I do lament the fact that they have not adequately covered "one of the most profound matters in the whole history of religion," let alone developed it as a sub-field of the study of religion. In my view, comparative religionists' relative lack of interest in the phenomenon of interreligious dialogues is lamentable to the extent that their contribution is (or could have been) *comparative*. In this instance, as in others, I fully support

⁴Ibid., pp. 51-52.

⁵Francis X. Clooney, "Christianity and World Religions: Religion, Reason, and Pluralism," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (July, 1989): 197-204; and Paul F. Knitter, "Making Sense of the Many," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (July, 1989): 204-207.

⁶Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

⁷Leonard Swidler, ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁸Of course, *J.E.S.* constitutes a regular forum for commentary on interreligious dialogue, and its editor, Leonard Swidler, is also editor of a series published by Edwin Mellen Press called "Religions in Dialogue," with five volumes appearing through 1991, volume five being the proceedings of the First International Confucian-Christian Conference: Peter K. H. Lee, ed., *Confucian-Christian Encounters in Historical and Contemporary Perspective*, *Religions in Dialogue* 5 (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, ON; Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991). These volumes contain much by and for participants in dialogue, as do other key resources in the study of interreligious dialogue that include descriptive analysis, notably Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler, eds., *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues: An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments since 1945* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Jerald Gort, et al., eds., *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989); Moses Jung, et al., eds., *Relations among Religions Today: A Handbook of Policies and Principles* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963); and Maura O'Neill, *Women Speaking, Women Listening: Women in Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

Max Muller's conclusion: "Goethe's paradox, 'he who knows one language knows none' . . . applies to religion. He who knows one, knows none."⁹ Thus, the contribution of comparative religionists comes not only from their commitment to objectivity but also from their commitment to comparison. In other words, as this essay aims to show, each type of dialogue (Buddhist-Christian, Confucian-Christian, Hindu-Islamic, Jewish-Christian, Jewish-Islamic, etc.) has its own character and should be distinguished from other dialogues. For example, we can imagine a whole range of motivations behind each dialogue, perhaps even a typology of motivations.¹⁰ These will condition the origin, character, and future prospects of a given dialogue. Some dialogues are motivated by concrete social, political, or military conflicts, such as the current Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the Middle East or the Hindu-Muslim dialogue in India. Others are the result of a need for enhanced mutual understanding between people who share common goals or organizational alliances, such as the American Catholics and Protestants who shared missionary aims in the nineteenth century or social-welfare activities in the twentieth. A third category, which seems to include the Buddhist-Christian as well as Confucian-Christian ones, is dialogues that come from needs to understand foreign ways of thought and to solve problems of religious identity created by the clash of cultures.

Showing that each dialogue has its own particular nature involves both the objective study of each dialogue and the comparison of their different characters. This kind of work will have value for participants in dialogues as well as for those with narrower historical interests in the study of religions, for it puts us a step closer to providing theory of the kind for which Smith called. At the very least, an understanding of the characters of different dialogues may help participants in each dialogue know what strategies of encounter used in other dialogues they should and should not imitate. It seems logical, for example, that the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, perhaps best conceptualized as a recent "meeting of strangers," cannot proceed in the same way as the Jewish-Christian dialogue — an effort to resolve a long-standing "family quarrel."

This essay plans to move toward an understanding of the specific character of the Confucian-Christian dialogue. In addition to considering the motivations of participants in this particular dialogue, it will also focus on the issue of participants' religious identity and that of the dialogues' specific character ("interreligious" or "intrareligious"). It will employ, as analytical tools, concepts developed by certain participants in this and other dialogues. The first such concept is that of "dual religious citizenship" (Hans Küng's term), or "multiple religious participation" (John Berthrong's term).¹¹ This concept is

⁹Max Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (New York: Arno Press, 1978; orig. — 1873), pp. 15-16.

¹⁰Huston Smith suggested the use of such a typology in his response to this essay. His comments are incorporated in what follows.

¹¹See, respectively, Julia Ching and Hans Küng, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New

helpful in dealing with someone's involvement in two (or more) traditions at once: the issue of religious identity. The second key concept is that designated by the terms "interreligious dialogue" and "intrareligious dialogue." These terms can be used in prescriptive as well as descriptive ways and may mean different things to different people. I will use "interreligious" to refer to dialogues in which there are formal exchanges regarding religious thought and practice between members of two traditions. I will use "intrareligious" to refer to "dialogues" within the minds and hearts of people who have interests in two different traditions. I will not use it to describe dialogues among members of only one tradition, although I acknowledge that this would be another valid use.

Use of the latter term is more problematic because its meaning is relatively less established and because its best known use is in the work of Raimundo Panikkar, for whom the concept "intrareligious" is both more complex and more prescriptive than it is for me. Panikkar's work and the work of Kenneth Kramer indicate that the inner counterpart to interreligious dialogue cannot be treated in its full complexity simply by pointing out that there are dialogues *within* religious people as well as *between* religious people. Panikkar and, in a more systematic way, Kramer are interested in bringing attention to "voices" (Kramer's term) within people that come not only from traditions other than their own but also from levels of awareness deeper than those at which they engage in explicit inner thought about two traditions.¹² However, I am interested simply in having a term to distinguish what happens inside one individual who is concerned about what two traditions mean to him/her, which I call "intrareligious," from what happens when two individuals or groups meet to discuss the "traditions" of which they are "members," which I call "interreligious." Although I distinguish these two forms of dialogue, I realize that they always exist together. As Paul Tillich long ago indicated: "Under the method of dynamic typology every dialogue between religions is accompanied by a silent dialogue *within* the representatives of each of the participating religions."¹³

I will treat the Confucian-Christian encounter initially as an "interreligious" dialogue, emphasizing the actual developments that have occurred in recent decades. However, I will begin with some historical background and end with some *obiter dicta* (in my role as mere outside observer) regarding the future aims that participants in the dialogue might pursue. In describing the dialogue I will focus almost exclusively on Chinese Christians and Confucians,

York: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 273-283; and John Berthrong, "Syncretism Revisited: Multiple Religious Participation," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 57-59.

¹²See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); and Kenneth Paul Kramer, "Extra-, Inner-, Intra-, Inter-Religious Voices," *J.E.S.* 30 (Spring, 1993): 183-212.

¹³Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, No. 14, Hampton Lectures Delivered in America at Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 57 (his emphasis).

and their Anglo-American counterparts, rather ignoring other East Asians.¹⁴ The essay will have four sections. The first will comment on the Confucian-Christian encounter from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century. The second will cover twentieth-century developments in general terms. The third will describe the context and content of three recent international Confucian-Christian conferences. The fourth will humbly offer my *obiter dicta*.

From Matteo Ricci to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions

The Honorable Yu Pung Kwang (Yu Pengguang),¹⁵ Secretary of the Chinese Legation in Washington, DC, was appointed by the Chinese Emperor to participate in the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions as a representative of the Confucian tradition. His remarks on Christianity typified nineteenth-century Confucian intellectuals, for his primary concern was with the behavior and status of Christian missionaries on Chinese soil. Most instructive for our purposes is a comparison of his praise for the Jesuit missionaries who entered China near the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and his disdain for nineteenth-century missionaries. After praising "Matteo Ricci [1552-1610] and other Jesuits" for their serious study of Chinese culture, knowledge of science, and entry into official circles, he made the following remarks about his Christian contemporaries in China:

On the other hand, the foreign missionaries that have for the past thirty years labored in China have come into contact only with the lowest element of Chinese society. Having introduced into the country a strange tongue, a strange doctrine, and a strange writing, they make no attempt to study the political institutions and educational principles of the Chinese people, and aim only to carry out their own notions of what is right. Moreover, the diplomatic agents of the foreign powers in China have supported the pretensions of the missionaries by arguments that reveal more knowledge

¹⁴Korean participants have been quite active, but, as far as I know, Japanese have not. Chai Sik Chung and Sung Hae Kim contributed to the proceedings of the First International Confucian-Christian Conference (Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounters*); they contributed again, along with Heup Young Kim and Young Ae Kim, to the proceedings of the second conference. See "Papers from the Second International Confucian-Christian Conference, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, July 7-11, 1991," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-1993), pp. 18-94. Interpreters of the significance of Confucian-Christian dialogue in Korea argue that it is even more important for Koreans than for Chinese. See Kang-nam Oh, "Sagehood and Metanoia: The Confucian-Christian Encounter in Korea," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (Summer, 1993): 303-320; and Young-chan Ro, "Text and Context of Confucian-Christian Dialogue in Korea" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Kansas City, Missouri, November 23-26, 1991). For them, Korea is in certain ways the most Confucianized as well as the most Christianized nation in Asia. Under strictly Confucian rule for hundreds of years until the fall of the Yi Dynasty in 1910, it then became the nation with the largest percentage of Christians among all East Asian nations.

¹⁵When a Chinese name, as it appears in other English sources, is not in Pinyin Romanization, I give that Romanization in parentheses. Also, I adopt the practice of giving Chinese names in their native order, with the surname first.

of the political and social customs of their own country than of the customary courtesies of diplomatic intercourse.¹⁶

Yu was not alone among those of his day, or even our own, in holding contrasting images of the earliest Confucian-Christian encounter and later encounters. While some today feel that the positive image we have of the first encounter is too idealistic, none would doubt that it constituted a relative high point in Confucian-Christian relations when compared to the events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that led necessarily to the mending efforts of the twentieth century.

The first encounter began with Matteo Ricci's arrival in China in 1583, and it started to dissolve with the 1707 Nanjing Decree of Papal Legate Maillard de Tournon that prohibited Chinese Christians from performing rites for ancestors or for Master Kong (Confucius). This encounter is important to us for two reasons. First, many of the issues that continue to play a central role the Confucian-Christian dialogue surfaced during the first encounter; second, debate over the nature and significance of the first encounter also plays a major role for dialogue participants today.

The first set of issues has primarily sociocultural significance and is seen in precisely those events that led up to the so-called "Chinese Rites and Terms Controversy" that came to a head with the Papal Decree unveiled by de Tournon in 1707. These are issues that today are covered by reference to such concepts as "accommodation," "syncretism," and "dual religious citizenship." They cohere around this question: Can the Christian message really be understood and embraced by Chinese who remain socially and culturally Chinese? From the Christian side, answering this question meant confronting the danger that the practice of Chinese Christians might be idolatrous or at least too syncretistic by Christian standards. From the Confucian side, it meant determining whether or not the Christian message was too heterodox to be openly promulgated among subjects of the empire.

At first, things seemed to go well. With Ricci taking the lead, the Jesuit missionaries took an "accommodationist" position, believing that the Christian message transcended cultural particulars and could be embraced by Chinese without much change in their customs, including the custom of ritual offerings for ancestors and Master Kong. In addition, Confucian officials treated the Jesuits favorably because they carefully followed Chinese laws, impressed the Chinese with their personal moral integrity, and possessed a remarkable knowledge of science. However, anti-Christian sentiments were on the horizon, and, in 1616, the first anti-Christian incident occurred (the Nanjing Incident). The instigator was an official named Shen Que, who in a series of memorials to the throne and other writings portrayed Christianity as a form of heterodoxy (*yi-duan*). Christianity, he said, places Tianzhu (Master

¹⁶John Henry Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), p. 434.

of Heaven) above Tian (Heaven) and claims that this being created all things; it claims that over 1,600 years ago Tianzhu came to earth as a man who was crucified as a criminal; it advocates that its believers can avoid the pains of hell (that, even if illusory, will encourage people to behave well, as even the Buddhists and Taoists know); and it despises the human world in favor of the divine. Therefore, it is not only heterodox but even more so than Buddhism and Taoism.¹⁷ These views were able to gain a hearing despite Ricci's efforts to align the Christian message with enlightened Confucian views and to join Confucians in their criticism of Buddhism and Taoism. For a time most Chinese officials, including a few who converted to Christianity, accepted the Jesuit position that one could be culturally Chinese and religiously Christian.

However, as Shen Que's criticisms indicate, the gap between Confucian and Christian was philosophical-theological as well as sociocultural. What seemed to Ricci to be primarily a problem of terminology was perhaps a problem of fundamentally opposed concepts: "God" on one side and "Tian" on the other. Ricci's position was that the Chinese, at least in ancient times, had worshipped the true God under other names, such as "Shang Di" and later "Tian," and that they could do so again. Shen Que saw the call to worship Tianzhu (God) as a thinly disguised attempt to usurp the position of Tian, not to mention the Emperor's exclusive prerogative to worship Tian.

Not only was the issue of terms and concepts for ultimate reality, which is still a key issue today, taken up by Confucians and Christians of the seventeenth century, but they also began to contemplate whether or not the two traditions had comparable ethical ideals beyond the level of conventional morality. Then, as today, the concepts contemplated were those of Christian love and Confucian *ren*.

As previously indicated, the significance of the first encounter lies not only in its various details but also in its interpretation by contemporary scholars, including those who participate in Confucian-Christian dialogues. Those who have an idealized view of the early Jesuit enterprise in China, believing it would have succeeded were it not for the unfortunate political machinations of the Jesuits' enemies in Rome, are more likely than others to see *Confucian culture (or ethics) plus Christian religion* as a success formula still valid today. Thus, in an introduction to the Chinese Rites and Terms Controversy in the program for a recent international conference on the controversy at the Ricci Institute, University of San Francisco, we read: "On its most general level, the Rites Controversy posed the question of whether the adoption of a foreign religion required that a culture be changed. Specifically, it asked whether the adoption of Christianity by the Chinese required that they also adopt Western culture."¹⁸ This formulation of the question of the significance of the Controversy

¹⁷John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), pp. 62-64.

¹⁸Ricci Institute, *The Significance of the Chinese Rites Controversy in Sino-Western History: An International Symposium* (San Francisco, CA: University of San Francisco, 1992), p. 4.

assumes that what existed on the Western side of the encounter was “religion” and what existed on the Chinese side was “culture.”

For some contemporary scholars, the next step is a kind of fulfillment theory in which Christianity perfectly complements Confucian culture or ethics by providing the spiritual dimension that it allegedly lacks. We find hints of this in the presentation of the earliest Confucian-Christian encounter in John Tong’s essay for the volume on the First International Confucian-Christian Conference in 1988. He stated:

As Confucianism emphasizes moral ethics, with personal relationships as a basis, it stresses life in this world and shows a quantity of strong overtones toward agnostic thought on existential problems such as suffering and death. Ricci thus introduced the Catholic faith into the Confucianist religious vacuum. . . .

If Ricci entered into dialogue with Confucianism, his approach was accommodating and apologetic. Accommodating, in that he went to considerable length to adapt himself, a Catholic missionary, to Confucianism. Apologetic, in that he in the end defended the Catholic faith, not so much against the attacks from the Confucianists but as a means to fulfill Confucian ideas.¹⁹

As we might expect, this view of the nature of the first encounter, being optimistic about the possibilities of intercultural communication, leads to an optimistic assessment of the situation today in which the “Chineseness” of a person or a society does not stand in the way of efforts to embrace the Christian message.

This view of the first encounter has been challenged by other scholars, such as John Young and Jacques Gernet, both of whom feel that the early Jesuit enterprise was doomed to failure, regardless of whether or not political difficulties emerged, because of the immense gap in worldview between seventeenth-century Europeans and Chinese. Focusing on ideas of ultimate reality, Young has argued that the problem of communicating the idea of God in China was inherently problematic, not simply a matter of using the right or wrong Chinese terminology. Moreover, according to Young, the Confucians had their own absolutized moral and metaphysical system that could not make room for Christianity. In his words: “In the final analysis, in the Confucian context, Christianity was disappointing because its moral persuasions were utterly ineffective. . . . It was the moral absoluteness of the Confucian tradition, supported by a Neo-Confucian metaphysical base, that was responsible for the failure of the first encounter between China and the West.”²⁰

Gernet, for his part, has stressed the encultured nature of Christianity, especially in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Seeing the failure of the

¹⁹John Tong, “Catholic-Confucian Dialogue in Historical Perspective,” in Lee, *Confucian Christian Encounters*, pp. 2-3.

²⁰Young, *Confucianism and Christianity*, p. 128.

first encounter simply as proof of a huge gulf between two systems of thought and action, one European and the other Chinese, he has explained why it was a mistake for Europeans then (as now) to see the problem in the so-called Chinese Rites and Terms Controversy:

Around 1700, at the time of the quarrel over rituals, Europe was passionately debating the question of whether the Chinese ceremonies were superstitious and therefore incompatible with the Christian faith or whether they were purely civil and political and therefore compatible. This was to make the mistake of limiting to one detail, which had meaning only within the mental categories of the West, a question of much wider significance: namely, whether it was possible to reconcile Christianity with a mental and socio-political system which was fundamentally different from the one within which Christianity had developed and from which it was, like it or not, inseparable.²¹

What, according to Gernet, made the two systems so different? Elsewhere in his book he put in one poignant, yet perhaps hyperbolic, sentence what made the two worldviews so different: "It is particularly noticeable in the Chinese refusal both to envisage a sphere of constant truths quite separate from the phenomenal world and to draw a distinction between the rational and the sensible."²²

Accepting Gernet's view, one would be less inclined to believe that there was, or even could have been, meaningful dialogue during the first encounter. One would also be less inclined to put blame for the failure of the encounter on either xenophobic Chinese officials or a fallible pope. However, one would still be justified in feeling remorse at the failure of an intercultural encounter that promised the introduction of Western science as well as religion to China and the absorption by the West of ideas and practices from a civilization that had for thousands of years developed independently of European civilization.

From 1707, the year of de Tournon's Nanjing Decree, until the Opium Wars "opened" China to Christian missionaries in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was quite literally no dialogue between Confucians and Christian missionaries in China. Papal decrees became ever more strict, and the Chinese emperor responded in kind. The social, political, and military situation in the nineteenth century did little to improve matters, apart from bringing the two parties, once more, into contact with each other.

On the Christian side, as Peter Lee informs us, nineteenth-century Christians who studied the Confucian tradition, with the possible exception of sinologists such as James Legge, did so for narrow apologetic purposes. This meant that they were interested in exploiting the Confucian teaching either to show its weaknesses or to find in it convenient points of contact that could be

²¹Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 247.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 238.

used to spread the Christian gospel.²³ On the Confucian side, as we saw in considering the case of Yu Pung Kwang, Christianity was inseparably linked to what they saw as the morally questionable behavior of both Chinese Christians and Western nations. His case also allows us to see other aspects of the situation of Confucian intellectuals *circa* 1893. First, he followed some of his seventeenth-century counterparts in criticizing Christianity by making unfavorable comparisons with the Buddhist and Taoist religions, now armed with the concept of “religion.” This marked the start of a modern Confucian strategy to consider the Confucian tradition nonreligious and therefore superior to all “religious” traditions. Interestingly, this is compatible with the strategy of certain modern Chinese Christians to legitimate the merger of Christianity and Confucianism by arguing that the former is religious while the latter is not.

Second, he revealed great pride and self-confidence in describing Confucianism as well as in presenting advice to Christian missionaries, which was the purpose of the final section of his address at the Parliament. In concluding this section, he stressed that China was no barbarian nation that would easily succumb to foreign religious propaganda. In his words:

The propagation of religious doctrines, as a rule, meets with fewer obstacles in a country that has no civilization. A people that is without knowledge and without experience can readily accept every word without questioning. A people that is already grown up in knowledge and in experience can only, with difficulty, be shaken in its deep-rooted belief. . . . [Unlike Christian missionaries] Confucius attempted to benefit the people in the direction in which they desired to be benefitted. For this reason I beg to commend to the careful consideration of missionaries to China two important points. The first is, that they should study the political institutions and social customs of the Empire. The second is, that they should inquire carefully into the moral character of their converts.²⁴

These words, spoken in 1893, perhaps mark the end of an era for Confucian intellectuals. They bespeak a pride, if not an arrogance, that would be hard to match as one event after another further eroded the diplomatic position of China and further undermined the self-confidence of intellectuals calling themselves “Confucian,” who became fewer and fewer as the years passed.

In 1895, China suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Japan’s newly industrialized and militarized state. In 1898, the Hundred Days Reform of Confucian progressives failed. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion resulted in further embarrassment, not to mention the payment of large indemnities to Western powers. In 1906, the Qing Dynasty government began to dismantle the Confucian educational and ritual system. In 1911, that government was overthrown. In 1915, Japan presented a helpless China with the infamous

²³Peter K. H. Lee, “Preparation for Christian-Confucian Encounter: The Protestant Story,” in Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounters*, pp. 11-12.

²⁴Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, p. 438.

Twenty-One Demands. In 1919, the May Fourth movement blamed Confucianism for China's failure to modernize and gave birth to intellectual trends that, according to proponents, made Confucianism irrelevant to China's future.

Confucians and Christians in the Twentieth Century

In the post-May Fourth era, since most Chinese intellectuals have been as anti-religious as they have been anti-traditional, Christians have fared no better than self-professed Confucians during most of the twentieth century in China. Members of these two groups have suffered even more than others from the "identity crisis" of modern Chinese intellectuals, a phenomenon that is itself perhaps the center of controversy in the intellectual history of modern China and for which several divergent explanations have been offered.²⁵ Christians, in an often hostile environment, have had to deal with a series of tough questions: What does it mean to be a *Chinese* Christian? Are Chinese Christians by definition guilty of collaboration in Western imperialism? Is the *Chinese* indigenization of Christian theology possible? What contribution can Chinese Christians make to China's modernization, especially within a socialist society? These were questions that no thinking Christian could ignore after May 4, 1919, and recent studies of Christianity in both the People's Republic and the Republic of China (Taiwan) show that these questions have continued to haunt Chinese Christians.²⁶

Chinese Confucians have had to face an equally dizzying array of questions: Was Confucianism to blame for China's "failure to modernize"? What possible relevance to modernity and to modernization could the Confucian tradition have? What is the essence of Confucianism and, thus, the essential contribution of China to world culture? How should the Confucian tradition respond to the challenge of Western religious and philosophical ideas? Questions of this kind were of supreme significance, for example, to the modern Confucians who wrote the famous 1958 Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture.²⁷

In view of the fact that these two groups of Chinese intellectuals had much

²⁵See, e.g., Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890-1911* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); and Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 3 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958, 1964, 1965).

²⁶See Murray A. Rubinstein, *The Protestant Community on Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary, and Church* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); and Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

²⁷This Manifesto is actually not very famous beyond the study of modern Confucianism, which in itself is an indication of the fact that Confucians have been considered of relatively little consequence in twentieth-century China. The two publications of its English translation are rather

in common and, at the very least, much about which to commiserate with each other, why did they communicate so little for most of the twentieth century? It was partly because twentieth-century Confucians were more concerned about dialogue with Western philosophy, from Plato to Dewey, than with Western religion. However, the key representatives of the Confucian tradition in recent decades, the “contemporary Neo-Confucians” (*dangdai xinrujia*), have seen their tradition as a spiritual one that has had a religious function throughout its history.²⁸ Why would they be reluctant to engage Chinese Christians in a process of mutual communication? The first reason is, in fact, embedded in their views on Confucianism as having a religious function. Fu Pei-jung (Fu Peirong), for example, has indicated, “as regards the communication issue, the religious function of Confucianism turns out to be a double-edged sword.”²⁹ He means that, while acknowledgment of Confucian religiousness opens the door to its comparison with other religions, for some contemporary Neo-Confucians it means that the Confucian tradition can itself satisfy all the religious needs of the Chinese people. Some who hold this view, among them such influential modern Confucians as Mou Tsung-san (Mou Zong-san), have indeed had little interaction with Chinese Christians.³⁰

Until recently, Confucians and Christians not only have avoided dialogue but also have been mutually suspicious of each other. John Tong and Peter Lee, writing background pieces on the Catholic and Protestant traditions, respectively, for the volume of proceedings on the First International Confucian-Christian Conference, both tried to explain why this has been so. Tong described Chinese Catholic writers of the mid-twentieth century as engaged in an “inner dialogue with Confucianism” but unable to enter into dialogue with living Confucians, for “they tended to view the Neo-Confucian scholars of the 20th century as close-minded humanists.”³¹

Lee pointed to a similar phenomenon among Chinese Protestants, saying that “most scholarly-minded Chinese Christians acknowledge their indebted-

obscure in that it appears as an appendix in two works little known beyond Confucian studies: Carson Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 2 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962); and Tang Chün-i, *Essays on Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (Taipei: Student Book Company, 1988). In the latter version, the authors are listed as Carson Chang (Zhang Junmai), Hsieh Yu-wei (Xie Youwei), Hsü Fu-kuan (Xu Fuguan), Mou Tsung-san (Mou Zongsan), and Tang Chün-i (Tang Junyi).

²⁸*Dangdai xinrujia* has only recently been used as the standard term by which these Confucians refer to themselves. They now use this term because they are aware of developments in Western Confucian studies, in which “Neo-Confucian” (a likely meaning of the Chinese “*xinrujia*”) refers to developments about a millennia old. By adding the adjective “*dangdai*” (“contemporary”) to “*xinrujia*,” they are able to acknowledge their place in this thousand-year-old Confucian renaissance as well as to distinguish themselves as modern thinkers. In English works, these same thinkers are sometimes referred to as “the new Confucians.”

²⁹Fu Pei-jung, *Communication between Confucianism and Christianity* (Taipei: Yeh Chyang Publishing Co., 1988), p. 2.

³⁰See *ibid.*, p. 6, n. 3; cf. Mou Tsung-san, “Confucianism as Religion,” in Douglas Lancashire, tr. and intro., *Chinese Essays on Religion and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Chinese Materials Center, 1981), pp. 21-43.

³¹Tong, “Catholic-Confucian Dialogue,” p. 7.

ness to Confucianism” but do not often engage in significant dialogue with Confucians today. He added: “More common is the case that scholarly-minded Chinese Christians carry on a dialogue in their minds with Confucianism. The reverse is less common. Few Confucians are known to have been interested in reading Christian theology. Open and public Christian-Confucian dialogue has not been common.”³² Moreover, when Protestant thinkers well versed in Confucian thought, such as Chao Tzu-ch’en (Zhao Zichen), have incorporated Confucian ideas in their writings, the writings have appeared in Christian publications, and there is no evidence that Confucians have responded to them. Moreover, noted Lee regarding his Hong Kong compatriots:

These scholarly-minded Christians no doubt took Confucianism seriously and would have loved to talk with Confucianists. But serious Confucianists are usually put off by Christian preaching, even a pre-emptive kind of “fulfillment theory.” . . .

As to the Neo-Confucians who have their base in Hong Kong, they on the whole have ignored the Christians.³³

Lee also gave us the best possible example of failure at dialogue between Neo-Confucians and Chinese Christians — one that serves to symbolize all the ironies in their relationship — when he described the situation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong during the last several decades. New Asia College, the most important academic institution in the contemporary Neo-Confucian movement, and the Chung Chi College, an equally central institution for Christians in Hong Kong, have existed in close proximity ever since they became foundation colleges of the University in 1963. “But,” Lee explained, “until the present conference [1988], the Confucians and Christians of the two institutions are not known to have engaged in serious and open dialogue, even if all have been cordial colleagues.”³⁴ Perhaps T’ang Chün-i (Tang Junyi) was an exception to this, although it was not at Chinese University of Hong Kong but elsewhere that he sought to engage Christians in dialogue.³⁵ Lee himself has done more than anyone else to further interreligious dialogues of various kinds in Hong Kong. He is director of the Christian Study Centre for Chinese Religion and Culture, from which come two key publications for interreligious dialogue: the newsletter *Inter-Religio*, and the quarterly journal *Ching Feng: A Journal on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture*.

What changes occurred in the years leading up to the 1988 conference that made it possible to revive the 400-year-old dialogue between the Confucian and Christian traditions? Philip Shen, head of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, opened the conference by referring to three

³²Lee, “Preparation,” p. 16.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁵T’ang engaged Christians in dialogue, e.g., at Daofeng Shan Christian Centre (a Norwegian Christian-Buddhist retreat center in Hong Kong). I am grateful to Lauren Pfister, Hong Kong Baptist College, for this information on T’ang’s situation.

factors that made dialogue possible in 1988: (1) the achievements in critical scholarship in the study of religious and philosophical traditions, (2) the increasing self-critical awareness that scholars have of their own traditions in a pluralistic context, and (3) the momentum gained in various parts of the world in interfaith dialogue. Indeed, regarding the last factor, it is also important that he said it was at an international Buddhist-Christian conference in Hawaii in 1984 that the idea of holding a similar one for Confucians and Christians was born.³⁶

There are, of course, other factors in addition to these three that made Confucian-Christian dialogue more likely to happen in the 1980's than before. First, there was not only a more pluralistic situation worldwide, but there was also an increasingly open intellectual atmosphere in East Asian countries, with the post-Mao reforms in China as an especially important aspect of this. Christianity and Confucianism were far less on the defensive in this new climate. Indeed, outside the People's Republic, many were praising Confucianism for its alleged role in East Asian economic development, rather than blaming it for its backwardness. This in itself is a noteworthy development in the history of twentieth-century Confucianism.³⁷ Second, the new generation of Christian and contemporary Neo-Confucian scholars were aware of the achievements of critical scholarship to which Shen refers. Many of them were steeped in the Western scholarly tradition and thus shared common intellectual habits. This was especially true of those who participated in the First International Confucian-Christian Conference. Indeed, one may assume this was what made their participation possible, just as a knowledge of Chinese traditions allowed the participation of attendees from Europe and North America. Third, we must mention the appearance in the late 1970's of *Confucianism and Christianity*, a path-breaking work by Julia Ching, who therein described herself as a person, "both Christian and non-Christian," attempting "a dialectical integration of [her] double heritage."³⁸ Her individual efforts in this work presaged, in key ways, the collective struggles of the first conference.

³⁶Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounter*, pp. viii-ix.

³⁷See Christian Jochim, "Confucius and Capitalism: Views of Confucianism in Works on Confucianism and Economic Development," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 20 (Fall, 1992): 135-171.

³⁸Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco, CA: Kodansha International, 1977), p. xix. According to Ching, this was probably "the first study of Confucianism done in the light of a clearly contemporary understanding of Christianity, with a manifest intention of promoting more intellectual dialogue between the two traditions" (pp. xviii-xix). Readers can consult ch. 1 (pp. 3-33) of this book for her treatment of the historical background to the contemporary encounter.

Recent International Confucian-Christian Conferences

Few participants in these conferences represented the contemporary Neo-Confucian movement, perhaps for some of the reasons just mentioned. The key exception was Liu Shu-hsien (Liu Shuxian), and even he has shunned narrow identification with the tradition of his elders, Mou Tsung-san and T'ang Chün-i, and he has had extensive experience studying and teaching in North America. People's Republic of China scholars who were invited to represent the Confucian tradition at the first conference, such as Tang Yijie, are even less narrowly "Confucian" by self-identification. In fact, many key representatives of the tradition, such as Alan Chan, Cheng Chung-ying (Cheng Zhongying), and Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming), teach at Western universities and vary in their willingness to use the label "Confucian" in describing themselves. The final group of participants with strong links to the Confucian tradition were European Americans in the field of Confucian studies who were raised within the Christian tradition (for example, Wm. Theodore deBary, Judith Berling, John Berthrong, Rodney Taylor).

As for participants representing the Christian tradition, with a few exceptions (Langdon Gilkey, Paul Martinson, Robert Neville, Frank Whaling), they were East Asian Christians located throughout the world, with a predominance of representatives from Taiwan and Hong Kong. In addition to scholars already referred to in this essay for various reasons (Fu, Lee, Shen, and Tong), these included Archbishop Lo Kuang, president of Fujen Catholic University, Taipei; Bishop Jin Luxian, rector of Shesan Theological Seminary, People's Republic of China; Choong Chee-pang (Zhong Zhibang), principal, Trinity Theological College, Singapore; and other leaders in the East Asian Christian world.

What motivated these participants to join in dialogue? It is not naive to say that sheer desire for knowledge of others' philosophical or theological views is a key motivation. This is often articulated in terms of renewing the exchange of ideas between European Jesuits and Chinese Literati centuries ago. It is also articulated in terms of following the model of contemporary Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which indicates that the desire to bring two more of the world's "great traditions" into dialogue is also a factor. Beyond this, many key participants have been motivated by a desire to understand a tradition other than their own, which, due to their cultural setting or to personal destiny, has come to have special meaning for them. For some, the second tradition has so much meaning that their religious identity would be incomplete without it. In light of these motivations, we can understand why it was important enough for some to devote the time and energy needed to organize several international conferences.³⁹

³⁹In Philip Shen's foreword to the proceedings of the First International Confucian-Christian Conference (June 8-15, 1988), we are told that the idea first came up at a Buddhist-Christian

The First International Confucian-Christian Conference

A variety of documents reveal the expectations held by participants before and during the first conference, such as the background pieces by Peter Lee and John Tong, Philip Shen's welcoming remarks, other conference presentations, and pieces that appeared in *China Notes* (a publication of the Division of Overseas Ministries, National Council of Churches) before and after the conference. The pieces by Lee and Tong both expressed the hope that the conference would mark a turn from "interior dialogue" or "dialogue in their minds" to genuine public dialogue. Philip Shen clearly expected that a dialogue on the model of Buddhist-Christian dialogue would begin. He stated: "It is thus time to bring together scholars and thinkers from the Confucian and the Christian traditions to express their concerns, to define the issues, and to explore lines of thought and action that might be fruitful not only for themselves but also for others."⁴⁰ Frank Whaling, in his paper, "The Present World Stage for Confucian-Christian Interchange," expressed the view that the 1980's presented a new situation in which, "On both sides there is an increasing sense that the whole process of dialogue is important in its own right and it is important also for the insights that can be imparted in either direction."⁴¹ Even the participant representing contemporary Neo-Confucians, Liu Shu-hsien, was extremely optimistic about actual exchanges of experiences and insights, and he presented a paper entitled "Some Reflections on What Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy May Learn from Christianity." Franklin Woo, then editor of *China Notes* and the North American Coordinator for the conference, expressed hopeful feelings in editorial comments on the conference published both before and after the event.

However, others who contributed comments to *China Notes* presented an assessment of the conference that helps us to see its limitations as a conference modeled on the Buddhist-Christian dialogue: an *interreligious* dialogue between two traditions. Interestingly, the authors of these comments are all North Americans deeply exposed to the comparative study of religions: Judith Berling, John Berthrong, and Robert Neville. All three express an awareness that the conference was designed to bring about a historic encounter of "Confucians" and "Christians," as expressed by Berthrong in these words: "The aim of the consultation was to explore the possibilities for beginning anew the long suspended dialogue between Confucians and Christians in light of the modern interfaith movement."⁴² Yet, each indicates in his or her own way how the dialogue was unlike other interfaith dialogues. We see this,

conference in Hawaii in 1984, and that John Berthrong, Cheng Chung-ying, Peter K. H. Lee, Julia Ching, and others pursued the matter further (Lee, *Confucian Christian Encounters*, p. viii).

⁴⁰Ibid., p. ix.

⁴¹Frank Whaling, "The Present World Stage for Confucian-Christian Interchange," in Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounters*, p. 33.

⁴²John Berthrong, "Confucian-Christian Dialogue Continues Formally after Several Silent Centuries," *China Notes* 26 (Summer, 1988): 487.

overall, in the nature of the three issues that seem to have most captured participants' interest: the indigenization of Christianity in China, the nature of dual religious citizenship, and Confucian-Christian divergence on views of human nature and ultimate reality.

Perhaps the most telling remark came from Neville, when he said that "the issue of Chinese indigenization of Christianity was never far below the surface of discussion; many Chinese Christians were more interested in that than in dialogue with Confucians or with Western Christians."⁴³ Berling supported this view of the conference in explaining that it was a historic conference for East Asians because it brought many East Asian church leaders together "to ask: what does it mean to be East Asian and a Christian?"⁴⁴ This issue is, of course, directly related to the second of dual religious citizenship, but they are not identical. For, under the second issue, we must consider Western Christians who are, like their Chinese counterparts, "Confucian Christians," although for different reasons. In this regard, it is instructive that, for Neville, the key question raised by the conference was whether "American and European Christians [could] also be Confucians in the practice of the life of holiness."⁴⁵

Berling and Berthrong also became aware that the issue of dual religious citizenship applied to themselves as well as to East Asian Christians; and they came to see that the issue is greatly complicated by a huge difference between Chinese and Western religiosity when it comes to the problem of "citizenship" in a tradition. In different ways, both indicated that exclusive membership ("citizenship") has rarely been part of Chinese religious life, and especially not of Confucian life; for the Confucian tradition has never had churches to join and, today, even lacks the surrogate "church" of Chinese officialdom. Determining who speaks for Confucianism is also a very problematic issue. Berthrong stated: "The question of Confucian representation will remain crucial for the maturing dialogue."⁴⁶

As for the problem of dual religious citizenship for Confucian Christians in the West, many Western scholars have joined the dialogue because they are scholars in Confucian studies. However, unlike earlier scholars, also Christians and usually missionaries, they are not interested in converting Chinese to Christianity; they generally know more about Confucianism than about Christianity; and, if anything, they are perhaps "converts" to the Confucian tradition. Are they representatives of the Christian tradition, the Confucian tradition, both traditions, or none at all? Questions of this kind, Berling,

⁴³Robert Neville, "Confucian-Christian Dialogue," *China Notes* 27 (Spring, 1989): 524-528.

⁴⁴Judith Berling, "Theological Education in a Global Context: Reflections on Confucian-Christian Dialogue," *China Notes* 26 (Summer, 1988): 485; reprinted as the epilogue to the conference proceedings, as "Reflections on Confucian-Christian Dialogue in a Global Context," in Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounters*, p. 475.

⁴⁵Neville, "Confucian-Christian Dialogue."

⁴⁶Berthrong, "Confucian-Christian Dialogue Continues," p. 488.

Berthrong, and Neville agree, reveal a need to rethink the whole issue of “dual religious citizenship.”

Finally, although the first conference generally lived up to the harmony ideal of its Chinese hosts, there were apparently some heated debates, perhaps even misunderstandings, on two themes regarding which the two traditions markedly diverge. Berthrong and Neville agreed that one such area concerned the problem of human nature (“good” or “bad”); and Neville added that a second “major theme of contention” involved the claim that “Christianity believes in a transcendent divinity whereas Confucianism deals only with immanent principles.”⁴⁷ Aside from the fact that these are related to perennially interesting questions for all thinkers, in this conference they probably surfaced as contested themes because of their importance for East Asian Christians. Christians who are also “Confucians” perhaps find it as difficult to reject ideas of the goodness of human nature and the immanent nature of divinity as to give up reverence for their ancestors. Yet, for non-Christian Confucians, the essential distinctions between Confucianism and Christianity depend precisely on where each tradition stands on the issues of “human nature” and “transcendence-immanence,” as Liu Shu-hsien argued in his conference paper.⁴⁸

Thus, most of the key concerns of the first conference cohered around the issue of dual religious citizenship, defined mostly in terms of what it means to be a “Confucian Christian,” whether one is an East Asian seeking to indigenize Christianity or a Confucian studies scholar in the West seeking meaning in two traditions. Moreover, explicitly and implicitly, the Second International Confucian-Christian Conference was built on this issue more than on any other.

The Second International Confucian-Christian Conference

The second conference was self-consciously designed to have a different style from that of the first. While the first conference featured formal papers that had been solicited on a wide range of historical and theological topics, the second had only “working papers” in which people shared their reflections.⁴⁹ In the informal environment of American hospitality at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, the conference featured a “let’s just get to know each other” atmosphere. This allowed participants to deal with the main matters in their minds.⁵⁰

As I have already indicated, these main matters cohered around the issue

⁴⁷Neville, “Confucian-Christian Dialogue.”

⁴⁸Liu Shu-hsien, “Some Reflections on What Contemporary Neo-Confucianist Philosophy May Learn from Christianity,” in Lee, *Confucian-Christian Encounters*, pp. 68-81.

⁴⁹Despite their less formal nature, the papers from the second conference have been published; see note 14, above.

⁵⁰I attended this conference as an “eminent guest,” which perhaps qualifies me to discuss it as an objective observer. In Chinese, the literal meaning of the term for “objective” (*keguan*) is “guest’s perspective,” while that of the term for “subjective” (*zhuguan*) is “host’s perspective.”

of dual religious citizenship. A look at the participants helps us to understand why this was so. On the first day of the conference, participants introduced themselves as both scholars and persons, so they could begin to know each other better. All participants but one, the contemporary Neo-Confucian Liu Shu-hsien, were "Confucian Christians" in the sense that they were Christians with strong interests in Confucianism (which varied from primarily academic interests to deeper commitments).⁵¹ This meant that the conference was "intrareligious" not only in the sense stipulated for this essay (involving an interior dialogue between traditions) but also in the sense that it was mainly a dialogue among people sharing the same primary tradition: Christianity.

Of seven conference sessions, three were focused on themes related to dual religious citizenship. One focused on the extent to which having "a tradition" defines and limits religious/cultural identity; one focused on the issue of dual identity as such; and one focused on matters of enculturation and contextualization with reference to Christians and Confucians. Of the remaining sessions, three were on modernization and related topics ("Puritan ethic," secularization, and modernization as such). The other session focused on defining issues where Confucianism and Christianity diverge/converge.

In confronting the issue of dual identity, East Asian Christians struggled with questions of Christianity and culture related to their practice of Christianity as East Asians. North American Confucian studies scholars raised more theoretical issues related to "tradition," "dual religious citizenship," and so forth. Liu Xiaofeng, a Christian thinker from the People's Republic of China, presented a paper in which he distinguished "Christness" from "Christianity," using the former term to represent something that transcends culture; the latter, for a religious institution formed within Western culture. On the basis of this distinction it was possible for him to imagine how he could be Christian (manifest "Christness") without becoming Western.⁵²

Others spoke more directly to the issue of being a *Confucian* Christian. For example, Mark Fang, S.J. (Taiwan), seemed to revive the early Jesuit strategy of reducing Confucianism to a *praeparatio evangelii* waiting to be filled with religious content. In his words:

Confucianism is . . . very much this-world oriented. This is why it provides a basis for business and temporal prosperity. Lacking a wholesome vision of the human person it leaves the human heart unsatisfied and looking for something more durable and more consistent. It seems that Christianity might be a good supplement to Confucianism in this aspect.⁵³

⁵¹A survey of participants at the first conference would have produced slightly different results, because a number of non-Christian scholars from the People's Republic of China attended, who probably would have come to the second conference if it were not for the Tiananmen incident. Also, key Confucian scholars overseas, such as Cheng Chung-ying and Tu Wei-ming, could not attend for personal reasons.

⁵²Liu Xiaofeng, "On the Theological Commentary of 'Tao' and 'Word,'" *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 18-23.

⁵³Mark Fang, "Between Tradition and the Future," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26

Peter Lee was in apparent disagreement with Fang in presenting an answer to the question: How is it possible to present the Christian Gospel in a non-Christian cultural context with particular reference to Confucianism? He had this to say: "I am sensitive to the patronizing attitude which is betrayed by singling out Christian revelation as special or unique and in believing the Christian religion to be the fulfillment of what another religion lacks. A Confucian would resent his or her heritage being treated in such a condescending way."⁵⁴

Young Ae Kim, in "The Religious Identity of Korean Christian Women," referred to the significance of fundamental patterns of Korean religious life—found in Korea's shamanistic traditions—for sorting out the role in people's lives of the Christian and Confucian traditions. She concluded that, because both Confucianism and Christianity are patriarchal religions, they not only need each other but, more importantly, they need the balancing influence of shamanistic traditions. For, these traditions allegedly do not discriminate according to gender or separate humans from nature.⁵⁵

The North American scholars I will discuss (Judith Berling, John Berthrong, and Paul Martinson) also saw the need to consider fundamental patterns of East Asian religious life, although they all referred to Chinese traditions. The comments of Berling and Berthrong built directly on their reflections on the first conference, as discussed above. Berling felt that reflection on the Chinese situation had led her to conceive of "traditions" in a new way. To begin, she summarized several implicit "models" of tradition that scholars have used, listing them as follows: (1) tradition as the unchanging authority of the past, and thus the enemy of modernization; (2) tradition as sealed, closed off from other traditions; (3) tradition as a set of books, writings as a canon; (4) tradition as a lineage, a genealogy of thought, practice, and wisdom; (5) tradition as neatly bounded within geographical or cultural enclaves; (6) traditions as embedded in social institutions and practices and enforced by them.⁵⁶

Berling discussed the weaknesses of each "model," especially for the purpose of studying traditions in the modern world, then offered a more adequate model. She briefly contrasted her model with previous ones, as follows:

When we speak of tradition in the modern world, then, we must talk not so much of texts, lineages, and institutions, but rather of communities of persons who keep tradition alive. Moreover, these communities function on at least two levels: communities of interpretation and communities of

(1992-93), pp. 39-44.

⁵⁴Peter K. H. Lee, "What Are the Issues in regard to Contextualization/Inculturation/Enculturation of Christianity and Confucianism in the Contemporary World?" *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁵Young Ae Kim, "The Religious Identity of Korean Christian Women," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 53-57.

⁵⁶Judith Berling, "The Role of Tradition," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 23-24.

faith and identification. The latter deals with the commitment to or identification of persons within a specific community and tradition and its texts, way of life, values, and practices; it provides the community locus and the links to the past. The former deals with reappropriation of the tradition for understanding and application to life, adapting the way of being in the world and spiritual realization to the contemporary setting.⁵⁷

Berling has used the term “level” to describe the two kinds of tradition because one is deeper or more difficult to access than the other. It is a simpler matter to interpret the Confucian tradition, for example, than it is to identify oneself as “Confucian” and to live the kind of life required by that self-identification.

Although not necessarily designed for the purpose, this model can help to solve the crucial problem of “Confucian representation” to which Berthrong had referred after the first dialogue. On the one hand, it makes sense of the decision (that no one ever doubted was right) to include many participants in dialogue who belong only to a Confucian “community of interpretation” (whether they are Christian or non-Christian). On the other hand, it also makes sense of another implicit decision, that was to consider certain participants to be especially clear representatives of the Confucian tradition because of their actual commitment to a Confucian movement (community of faith and identification), such as contemporary Neo-Confucianism.

As for Berthrong’s paper at the second conference, it showed how our way of thinking about dual identity—dominated by the concept “dual religious citizenship” and undermined by fear of “syncretism”—does not fit the context of the Confucian-Christian dialogue. First of all, because the term “dual religious citizenship” raises the specter of conflicting loyalties, Berthrong does not use it. Instead, he has used “multiple religious participation” or “MRP,” which is what occurs when people reach out from their “primary tradition” for contributions from a “secondary tradition.” In his view, MRP is a more natural religious stance than we are willing to realize; one reason we are unwilling to realize this is because of the bogeyman of “syncretism.” We fear “syncretism,” he said, because we assume people will create some strange new (third) religion out of their primary and secondary traditions. “In actuality,” he added, “they are transforming their primary tradition, enriching it with what they have learned in their journey into other faiths.”⁵⁸ To see how this is so and to reduce our fear of “syncretism” we should learn more about and from Chinese traditions: “Reflection on Chinese religious history and praxis may make MRP less problematic.”⁵⁹

Paul Martinson’s paper also took an established concept—enculturation—and sought to rethink it. In his words: “This brief paper begins from the assumption that enculturation in a many-cultured world that is yet a single whole must be a genuinely mutual process. The world needs to incorporate

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁵⁸Berthrong, “Syncretism Revisited,” p. 58.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 59.

both Jesus Christ and Confucius into its corporate memory.”⁶⁰ Accordingly, his paper was concerned with thought that would normally be treated as “indigenized Chinese theology,” but he treated it as a contribution to Christian theology as such, worthy of everyone’s attention. His point of departure is a challenge issued to Chinese Christian thinkers by Tsai Jen-hou (Cai Ren-hou), a leading contemporary Neo-Confucian in Taiwan. Tsai, without attending the Confucian-Christian conferences, has thus joined the dialogue through his writings, to that several Christian thinkers have responded.⁶¹ Martinson stressed the theological developments, especially in the thought of Leung In-sing (Liang Yancheng), that have emerged partly as a result of Tsai’s challenge. Leung, picking up on Tsai’s idea that *tiandao* (the Tao of Heaven) is the most comprehensive category for conversation between Confucianism and Christianity, develops a theology built around a “Taological God.” I do not intend to summarize this theology here. What is important to note is that Martinson is interested in Leung’s thought, not as indigenized theology, but as theology that is profoundly valuable to him, because it incorporates the insights of two traditions to which he feels equally connected.

It is instructive that Martinson’s paper was largely a report on an inter-religious dialogue (between Tsai and Leung) rather than an instance of it. His main concern was with his dual identity as a Confucian Christian. As with most others who gathered in Berkeley for the second conference, he was concerned with the *intra*religious dimension of dialogue. Whether thinking to themselves or thinking out loud, it was the dialogue between the “Confucian” and “Christian” parts of themselves that dominated the conversation.

The Third International Confucian-Christian Conference

The third conference was held at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, August 24-28, 1994, on about the same scale as the second conference and with the same core of major participants. The same informal atmosphere

⁶⁰Paul Varo Martinson, “Confucian and Christian Thinking across Cultures,” *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), p. 89.

⁶¹Tsai’s challenge consists of six questions originally issued in 1982 and later published in a volume with responses from Chow Lien-hwa (Zhou Lianhua) and Leung In-sing (Liang Yancheng), with further commentary by Tsai himself; see Lin Zhiping, *Huitong yu zhuanhua* (Communion and Transformation) (Taipei: Yuzhoukuang Publishing Co., 1985). Lee also discussed Tsai, Chow, and Leung in his essay for the volume on the first conference (Lee, “Preparation,” pp. 23-26). The six questions are: (1) Can all people become Christ (a question in precisely the form of a famous quote from Master Meng [Mencius] to the effect that all can become [great sages like] Yao and Shun)? (2) Is Jesus human or divine – God become man, or man become God? (3) Apart from accepting Jesus as savior, do people have any possibility of saving themselves? (4) From the standpoint of communion of religions, is Jesus alone revered, or are Master Kong and Shakyamuni [Buddha] also revered? (5) Is it that non-Christian religions have as their only “legitimate” status that of preparation for receiving the Christian Gospel . . . or do non-Christian religions in the same way [as Christianity] have their permanently independent status? (6) From the standpoint of communion of religions, is the issue one of Christianity’s Sinification or of China’s Christianization? (in Lin, *Huitong yu zhuanhua*, pp. 15-25; cf. Martinson, “Confucian and Christian Thinking,” p. 90, n. 2; and Lee, “Preparation,” pp. 23-24).

prevailed, except that several sessions did have featured speakers making formal presentations. The main change in participation and content was perhaps in response to the relative lack of non-Christian Confucians at the second conference. Thus, Cheng Chung-ying, Liu Shu-hsien, and Tu Wei-ming were all invited as featured speakers, and the final session was a "dialogue" between Tu and Peter Berger on "Confucianism and Christianity in the Third Millennium." The issue of people's dual identity as Confucian-Christians was present, but it was more an undercurrent or "subtext" than a part of the formal "text" of the conference.

The theme/title for the conference, "Confucian and Christian Contributions to the Coming Civilization," determined the nature of most of the formal presentations. It began with a session that featured Liu Shu-hsien's paper, "World Peace from a Confucian Perspective," with a Christian response by Paul Martinson. It ended with a kind of epilogue featuring a proposal by Mary Evelyn Tucker for a conference in 1996 on Confucianism and ecology. This shows that, despite the unique character of the evolving Confucian-Christian dialogue, it has fortuitously gone the same direction as many other dialogues (including the large-scale 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions), stressing the search for solutions to shared human problems over the analysis of different theological positions. This is a welcome trend and one that will certainly have its impact on planning for the Fourth International Confucian-Christian Conference, which is scheduled to be held in Canada in 1997, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Obiter Dicta from an Outside Observer

Having attended the 1987 international Buddhist-Christian conference, also at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, I had my own expectations about what a "Confucian-Christian dialogue" would be like. In 1987, I had seen and heard representatives of two distinct faiths, some with white clerical collars or black cassocks, others in ochre or gray robes with shaved heads. It was easy to tell who was who. I headed for the second Confucian-Christian conference (at the time I had only a vague awareness of the nature of the first conference) expecting to find out who would represent the two "sides." Subsequent experience and study showed how foolish my expectations were. I expected a purely *interreligious* dialogue but found myself among participants more interested in what I now call the *intra*religious dimension of dialogue.

However, my aim here is not to discuss how the contemporary Confucian-Christian encounter has "failed" as an interreligious dialogue. It is simply to say something about its character and future prospects, especially in comparison with the Buddhist-Christian dialogue as another major case of dialogue between Christianity and an Asian tradition. The Buddhist-Christian

dialogue is not more successful because it has a more clearly developed interreligious dimension; it is simply different. Buddhism and Christianity both have a long history as institutionally complex, universal religions; and, in important ways, they have defined the nature of “specifically religious groups” (Joachim Wach’s term) for world religious history in general. Both are more clearly “religious” than the Confucian tradition, at least according to traditional common sense notions of what constitutes “religion.” Both preach a universal message: the Dharma or the gospel. It makes sense for them to have actual interreligious dialogue.

Thus, this type of dialogue is in certain circumstances expectable. But, is it good? Not necessarily. At least one participant in the Confucian-Christian conferences, Judith Berling, argues that the kind of dialogue typified by recent Buddhist-Christian encounters has serious drawbacks, such as that it can cause the two “sides” to reify and even rigidify their positions.⁶² In addition, the Buddhist-Christian dialogue is giving increasing attention to the intrareligious dimension of dialogue as it matures. In other words, its participants have become more and more interested in what it means to follow two traditions. In its sessions at the 1991 and 1992 national American Academy of Religion meetings, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies has featured a closely related theme: joint Buddhist-Christian practice and internal dialogue.⁶³

Should participants in the Confucian-Christian conferences congratulate themselves for reaching the intrareligious dimension of dialogue relatively faster? I think not. Considering the circumstances in which this dialogue began, it was their only real option. There were an abundance of factors leading them in that direction. First, we have the background of the traditional Chinese religious situation, within which “belonging” to a distinct tradition was not emphasized and harmonization of different traditions was positively valued. Second, we have the specific case of the Confucian tradition as one always represented by intellectual movements, ritual activities, and methods of cultivation that were more like streams running through the Chinese state and society than like religious organizations. Third, we have the modern history of this tradition, by which it became a truncated version of its former self, with few spokespersons equipped to enter into dialogue with Western theologians.

Finally, while Chinese Christians could conceivably have begun a dialogue with modern Confucians, there were strong forces working against such a development, as we saw earlier in this essay; so, instead, they had a “dialogue in their minds” between the two traditions. This final factor, more than any other, has led the current Confucian-Christian encounter in the direction of

⁶²This comment was made in a presentation at the Pacific Coast Theological Society Meeting in April, 1993, referred to in the asterisked comment from this essay’s title, above.

⁶³On the 1991 meeting, see Ruben L. F. Habito, “Practice and Internal Dialogue: A Report on the Fourth Annual Conference of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 12 (1992), pp. 27-30.

intrareligious dialogue. Moreover, this has been reinforced by the participation of Western Confucian studies scholars who, being culturally if not confessionally Christian, were also preoccupied with the *intrareligious* issue of dual identity.

While it therefore seems unlikely that the contemporary Confucian-Christian encounter could have moved in a different direction than it did, there are now reasons for enhancing its *interreligious* dimension. This dimension of the encounter should be enhanced by involving more non-Christian Confucians, whether they are in a Confucian community of faith and identification, as with contemporary Neo-Confucians, or only in a community of interpretation, as with most Confucian scholars in the People's Republic of China and in North America.

The issue of Confucian representation also draws attention to the dangers inherent in one person's intrareligious dialogue. It takes an extremely honest individual to have a fair chess game with an imaginary opponent. There are obvious dangers in representing the other side yourself. In intrareligious dialogue, the other side may indeed be an imaginary one, rather than one connected with an actual historical tradition. In this regard, I see a major flaw in works by Chinese Christians who have the Confucian and Christian traditions meet in their minds. In such "meetings," the Confucian tradition is often represented by such ancient thinkers as Masters Kong and Meng, rarely by more recent thinkers. For example, in an otherwise good work, Fu Pei-jung has chapters contrasting the Confucian and Christian views of human nature. Therein, after introducing the views of Master Kong, Master Meng, and other ancient Confucians, he presents the Christian viewpoint through an extended discussion of the ideas of F. R. Tennant, Karl Rahner, and Paul Ricoeur.⁶⁴ Would it not be more appropriate to present, on the Confucian side, the ideas of Mou Tsung-san, Tang Chun-i, and Tu Wei-ming? In a public, interreligious dialogue, this problem does not arise. Living Confucians are present and cannot be ignored.

The case of Liu Shu-hsien is interesting in this regard. He has raised the issue of comparing the contemporary Confucian and contemporary Christian traditions by exploring the compatibility between Confucian thought and recent developments in Christian thought: process theology, death of God theology, demythologization, and so forth.⁶⁵ I feel there are some extremely valuable topics to pursue in this regard, one of which was suggested by Mary Evelyn Tucker in her paper for the second Confucian-Christian conference. She suggested that the Neo-Confucian cosmology of organism has resources in common with Christian process theology on the basis of which we can build a better ecological spirituality and environmental ethics.⁶⁶ In my view, this is

⁶⁴Fu, *Communication between Confucianism and Christianity*, pp. 7-46.

⁶⁵Liu Shu-hsien, "Modernization of Confucianism and Christianity," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 67-70.

⁶⁶Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Confucianism and Christianity: Resources for an Ecological Spiritu-

one of the most promising areas to explore, not only for Western scholars but also for contemporary Neo-Confucians. The overemphasis on Kantian trends in their comparative studies, due largely to the singular influence of Mou Tsung-san (a Kant scholar and translator of Kant's works) has unfortunately prevented them from developing a stronger interest in Whitehead and related developments. I hope Tucker and others will encourage them to show more interest in Western process thought. I also hope Western process thinkers will find resources in Neo-Confucianism that will stimulate them in the way that Mahayana Buddhism has. John Berthrong's work since the second conference has taken major strides in this direction.⁶⁷

Finally, I wish to offer a few comments on what comparative religion and other religious dialogues can learn from the Confucian-Christian encounter as one that, in a sense, specializes in *intrareligious* dialogue and multiple religious participation. My comments will focus on a previously mentioned issue: fear of "syncretism." Many will agree that a positive process occurs when someone finds stimulating ideas and practices outside his/her own tradition and tries to integrate them with more familiar things. If this is a positive process, then let us find a more positive term for it. Moreover, let us look to Chinese language and religious values for suggestions, knowing that a process sometimes referred to as "syncretism" tends to be valued positively in that context.

Chinese terms for syncretism and related phenomena all share a fundamental syllable: *he* (integrate, harmonize, combine). The connotations of this term are quite positive, and it often turns up in phrases expressing high ideals. The famous Chinese phrase for religious tolerance among the Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist traditions is "*san jiao he yi*" (the three teachings form a unity). The goal of Confucian self-cultivation is called "*Tian ren he yi*" (Tian and person integrated). The fundamental Confucian teaching about the unity of knowledge and action is expressed in the phrase "*zhi xing he yi*" (knowing and acting integrated as one). Thus, from the Chinese point of view, what occurs when people combine religious ideas and practices is a positive process captured best in the English term "integration." Therefore, I recommend that we use "integration" instead of "syncretism" to refer to the practice of self-conscious combining of elements from different traditions.

With specific regard to the integration of Confucian and Christian elements, one should begin with the idea of each tradition as a cultural, ethical, and spiritual *whole*. Although the completeness of Christianity is not usually questioned, a truncated version of Confucianism is often adopted for the purpose of integrating the two traditions. We previously saw a case of this in discussing traditional fulfillment theory, which joined Christian "religion" and Confucian "culture." We also see it in Hans Kung's recent expression of

ality," *Pacific Theological Review*, vols. 25-26 (1992-93), pp. 71-75.

⁶⁷See John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

approval for being Christian religiously, “*in rebus fidei*,” and Confucian ethically, “*in rebus morum*,”⁶⁸ in contrast to his strong disapproval of “dual religious citizenship” in Christian-Confucian or other guises. In his words: “*Christian inculturation, not dual religious citizenship, must be the watchword!*”⁶⁹

Both historical and contemporary manifestations of Confucianism make it amply clear that it can serve spiritual as well as ethical and cultural needs. Participants in Confucian-Christian dialogue certainly are welcome to debate the meaning of the term “religion” and the appropriateness of applying it to Confucianism. However, they should adopt the principle of mutual respect for each others’ traditions that has become customary in other interreligious dialogues. Those on the Christian side, in particular, should respect the Confucian tradition as a well-formed whole capable of serving cultural, ethical, and spiritual needs of adherents.

Moreover, participants on both sides should be open to the possibility of a balanced integration of Confucian and Christian spirituality for anyone who desires it sincerely. Dialogue is not furthered by the a priori exclusion of such a balanced integration (as in Kūng’s watchword against “dual religious citizenship”). It deserves a place alongside other kinds of Christian, Confucian, and Confucian-Christian identity that participants bring into or take away from the dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity. This applies both to the exterior *interreligious* dialogue among representatives of the two traditions and to the interior *intra*religious dialogue within a given person.

⁶⁸Ching and Kūng, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, p. 277.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 282.



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