

Report on “the First Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies”

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The First Sino – Western Forum, which was held on October 4th 2011 in Helsinki, was co – organized and co – hosted by the Department of Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology, and the Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Humanities, of the University of Helsinki. It was chaired by Prof. Dr. Miikka Ruokanen and Prof. Dr. Paulos Huang, who also functioned as a translator. The forum attracted a number of participants, most of them from different faculties of the university, others from the Finish Lutheran church.

The Forum concentrated on the dialogue between Chinese culture and Christianity and on the development of Christianity in contemporary China. Special attention was paid to what kind of a role religion (especially Christianity) had in the fast development of modern Chinese society, and to the question about what kind of contribution religion can bring to the moral reconstruction of China and to the building – up of a welfare state.

Six Chinese scholars from Mainland China were invited as key speakers to attend the forum. They are: Professor Li Xiangping from East China Normal University, Shanghai; Professor Sun Shangyang from Beijing University, Beijing; Professor Zhao Lin, Su Dechao, and Zhou Xuanyi from Wuhan University, Wuhan; and Professor Wang Aiming from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Nanjing. All of them are among the best Chinese scholars in their own field of research.

Before the forum began, the Chinese scholars visited the Faculty of Theology, and had meetings with the dean and the administration. The conversation focused particularly on the continued cooperation on academic affairs between the faculty and the Chinese universities.

The forum was opened with words of welcome by Prof. Miikka Ruokanen, director of the Department of Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology. Each speaker was then given 40 minutes each for their presentation.

The first speaker, Prof. Wang Aiming (Ph. D. from Basel University, Switzerland) gave his presentation on “The Continuing Growth of Christianity in China”. Prof. Wang looked at the Reformation and Enlightenment as the background for understanding Christianity in China from the missiological perspective, and pointed to both strengths and weaknesses in the fast – growing Chinese Protestant Church. He also offered his suggestions for solutions to tackle these problems or challenges which the church is facing. According to his understanding, Christianity in China “should be interpreted as the principles of the faith in Jesus Christ in the Chinese society.” The theological meaning of the term “the church in China” is the universal church in China. It is different from the visible church and the denominational churches. On the one hand, Prof. Wang observed that “Until today, Protestantism has grown up by huge quantities in Chinese society.” On the other hand,

he acknowledged that "the quality of the Christian groups, churches, and organizations remains an urgent, serious problem. We must pay serious attention to the low level of the Faith in the Chinese church." Prof. Wang recommended to create a theological foundation for the faith of the church as the starting point of the solution, and then return to Reformation tradition for "transplanting well the teachings of the Reformers, especially Martin Luther and Jean Calvin" in order to "motivate the consciousness of the theological sense in the church".

The second speaker was Prof. Li Xiangping, whose special field is religious sociology. His topic was "Christianity and Chinese Civil Society". In his research, Prof. Li has combined a case study with literature studies. Based on the discussion of the concept civil society, the direct and indirect relationship between Christianity and civil society in the contemporary China was explored. Through a study on the working mode of the Christian church and its relationship with social public affairs and official powers, the speaker discussed how Christianity, as a faith community, can become an element of civil society in the construction of contemporary China. Prof. Li argued that Christianity could give its contribution in the building-up of a Chinese civil society. In the context of Chinese language, it seems that relations among "the religious basis of citizenship", "the common community of religious faith", and "the membership qualification of the common community" could constitute "the essential facts of the civil society" in the process of religious movement. The Christian church is a leaven in society, and the church has close relations to society. By allowing people to gather and form a "common community of faith", religious organizations can be social resources to make Chinese society turn to a civil society. Therefore, the contemporary Chinese Christianity can contribute something to build up the Chinese society.

The third and last speaker in the morning session was Prof. Sun Shungyang. Prof. Sun has earned his fame not only because of his academic achievement on religious sociology but also because of his contribution in the field of Chinese church history, especially the Chinese church history before 1840. The topic of Prof. Sun's presentation was "Chinese Traditional Culture Study Fever, Scarcity of Meaning and the Trend of University Students' Attitude toward Religions: A Survey in Beijing". This presentation was based on a survey on university students in Beijing done by the author. Based on the analysis of the data, Prof. Sun presented several conclusions. First, attention should be paid to the fact that there is indeed a scarcity of meaning among university students. They keep thinking of the problem of meaning, but it is not easy for them to find satisfactory answers. Second, although believers of religions constitute less than 20 percent, only 21.9 percent report that they are not interested in any religion. Third, among non-believers, the number that reports that they are interested in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (49.6 percent of the total) is higher than those who report that they are interested in Christianity (17.6 percent of the total). This shows the influence of Chinese traditional culture study fever. Fourth, the more the students think of the problem of meaning, the more likely is it for them to resort to core functions of religion. Fifth, when they are in need of a spiritual source to help them to pass through the crisis of meaning, most of them (62.1 percent) turn to a scientific view of life and world and non-Marxist philosophy, but not religion. They are indeed as secular as their counterparts in Western society. Sixth, those who report that they turn to religion (10.6 percent) are more than those who turn to Marxism. This indicates that the dominant ideology is losing its hegemony.

Prof. Zhao Lin's speech opened the afternoon session. Prof. Zhao is a well known in the field of philosophical and religious studies in China. The topic of his presentation was "Global Development Trend of Christianity in the Post-Colonial Era". Beginning with Philip Jenkins' widespread idea that God is going southward, Prof. Zhao confirmed that "Christianity has been changing from a religion of the rich, the white and the capitalist to one of the under-privileged, colored and people

in the developing countries". However, the situation of Christianity in Asia is quite different from that of Latin America and Africa. A revival of traditional religions in most parts of Asia presents a serious challenge to Christian development in the region while it upholds the Hindu and Islamic positions and advantages. Religions, cultures, and the social - political status are stepping stones for Christianity in the region. As for China, Christianity is expecting a time of disentanglement. As is the case with Islam and Hinduism, China is desperately trying to find a way to modernization without westernization. Although Christianity has been growing fast recently, it is challenged by both Chinese politics and the traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, secularization is another big challenge to the development of Christianity in China. On the other hand, Christianity meets also in China a favourable attitude among the poor as well as the conscious (what does he mean?). We should look for answers to the question "when will God, if he does, go eastward where he was made known to the world?"

The following speaker Su Dochao, a young professor from Wuhan University, delivered his presentation on the topic "The Golden Rule: A Comparison between Confucianism and Christianity". His presentation identified and critiqued a widely accepted view defended by some Chinese scholars nowadays that there are many important differences between the Christian version of the Golden Rule and its Confucian counterpart. He calls this view "differentism". While details of differentism vary from scholar to scholar, some central arguments could be seen in the writings of most differentists. On the one hand, his presentation aimed to examine relevant formulations applied by some leading differentists, such as Deng Xiaomang, Wang Xiaochao, Zhao Dunhua and Zhou Xuanyi, and showed that the differentist strategy does not provide a credible argument to support their differentism. On the other hand, his presentation argued strongly that the two versions of the Golden Rule are equal to each other in some core respects. The conclusion which was finally reached by Prof. Su is that "generally speaking, Confucianism and Christianity are equal regarding the Golden Rule."

The last key speaker, Zhou Xuanyi, another young professor from Wuhan University, gave a speech on the topic of "Cultural Adaptability of Confucianism and Christianity". In his view, culture adaptability should be considered as the main topic of cross - cultural studies between Confucianism and Christianity. He used two approaches for the corresponding research. First was the method of paratactic analysis, which means to treat them as two independent entities and to compare their replies to similar great challenges and transformations in their own histories. Second is the method of interactive analysis, which means to treat them as a counterpart and to compare their reaction to each other's impact. Through both historical and contemporary analysis, the author came to a conclusion that Confucian strategy of cultural adaptation is more diffusible and realistic, focusing on social - life and self - fulfillment; whereas Christianity is more abstract and shows much more attention in the religious identity with the consciousness of Other's (God) presence. With regard to these different strategies of cultural adaptability, there should still be strong tension between Confucianism and Christianity in the reconstruction of Chinese culture in the 21st Century.

The forum was closed by Prof. Sakaranaho Tuula, director of the Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Humanities.

中文题目：

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