

The Hermeneutical Significance of Sino-Christian Studies

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When I first heard the term "Sino-Christian studies" in the 1980s, it looks to me very meaningful. Since Ming and Qing dynasties the Chinese have tried hard to understand Christian culture with the help of missionaries, but few have focused on the relationship between the Chinese language and Christianity. In the last two decades there has been a significant increase in the publication of the translation of Christian literature. Young people have interest in the doctrines and academic discussion of Christianity, which look new to them, and compare them with traditional Chinese culture and intense intellectual bombardments are created. In the meantime, however, some people have this doubt in mind: is this wave of heat of western religion and culture merely another form of solipsism of our own culture? We understand another cultural phenomenon through our translated works since most of us are not familiar with the western languages and traditions. And most of us do not believe in their god. Can we truly understand the subtle points of this culture? On the other hand, if we are just trying to accept or study a western cultural concept, then why don't we strengthen our ability of foreign languages, so that we may read the western religious writings directly? Why are we learning through translated works, some of which may be unreliable? Are those things we try to introduce through the Chinese language genuine Christian thought? If modern hermeneutics emphasizes the untranslatability between different languages, does Sino-Christian studies need to emphasize its "Sino" prefix?

I do not think that these doubts are necessary. In fact, any dialogue and communication between two cultures can unavoidably go through one's own "fore-seeing" (Vorsehen) or "horizon of expectation" (Erwartungshorizont). This first manifests in translation. Christian documents are originally written in Hebrew and Greek, and later also in Latin. When Luther translated the Bible into German, he did not think that his meaning deviated from the original. Instead, he thought that his

translation was immersed in the true spirit of the Bible. It is because the Bible as the word of God is not confined to a particular language. It is neither Hebrew nor Greek nor Latin but the Logos. Jesus spoke in Aramic because he is the Word incarnate, thus we cannot only understand his words in this language. Some versions of the Chinese Bible have made reference to English editions. But they may not be rated inferior unless the version relies only on another without any reference to the original. It is even not proper to see the Bible as a book in which not one word can be altered. Throughout the two millennia the cannon is revised continuously. What is the scholars' ground? Besides historical records, it is also important to appreciate the spirit communicated through the written words - the true "word" of God.

The word of God is to be perceived through our heart. It is fair to every national language. No one particular language may claim to be special. For the Chinese, Christianity comes from the west. But as it is a global religion, it is not confined to national or geographical boundaries. However, when anyone wants to justify one's perception or express it, he or she must use its own mother tongue. Gadamer once said, whenever the question asked is related to worldview, one can only inquire with its own language. It is because foreign language is an imitation, but the voice from the bottom of one's heart can never be imitated. Therefore, in spite of the language employed, each nation must use its own language to grasp the truth of Christianity. On the other hand, however, when every nation uses its language to do so, it must also notice the universal meaning of Christianity and not being limited by the particular features of its culture. These features only lead them to a broader and more profound way of thinking. But Christianity has done a great job when it takes the tracing and the retaining of universal meaning as its main goal.

At Tao Fong Shan, I have seen some Christian art works of biblical stories using Chinese traditional ways of expression, e.g. Chinese painting, ancient poems, etc. If there were no explication, I would have regarded a porcelain dish of Jesus and his twelve disciples as being that of Confucius and his students. I am impressed by the creative mind of the artists but with some reservation, since the story did not take place in the Chinese historical context. Nevertheless, it could be seen as a guide or symbol for inspiring the Chinese religious mind. In the history of Christianity, religious symbol is not confined within European image. In this global age, Christianity should cultivate a sense of inclusivism, and thus prevent the attempt of any idea or thought to be developed into a kind of narrow nationalism. It should aim at

raising the national interest to a universal level. may learn from the lesson in worship, although God is not limited to those material images, even though his followers may means. In light of this, should not stay on the surface but seek to perceive the genuine spirit behind.

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