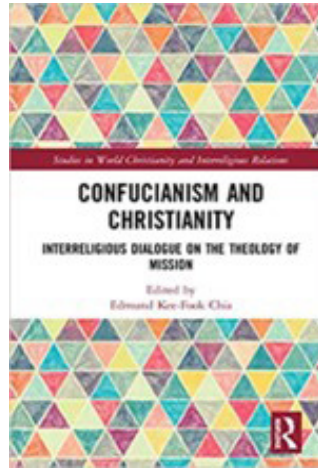


Book Review
by Edmund KWOK

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia. ed.
*Confucianism and Christianity:
Interreligious Dialogue on the
Theology of Mission.*
New York. Routledge, 2021. xii
+ 209 pp (hardback).
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Reading this book edited by Edmund Kee-Fook Chia is a joy: it is well-structured and the articles are solidly researched and presented. Of course, there are also challenges to try to integrate all the different approaches and develop a more holistic understanding of the major theme of the anthology. Nevertheless, even though there are gaps and inconsistencies on the surface among the different articles which the reader needs to straighten out, that is precisely the reward of this type of publication: readers need to be proactive in bringing out the full meaning of these various articles bound together as a single book. It is therefore greatly relevant that I adopt an integrated autoethnographic and intellectual historical approach to reading this book.

As a Hong Kong Chinese born into a traditional family with a Daoist father and Buddhist mother, I was educated by the Baptists in primary school, the Jesuits in secondary

school, and prominent Confucian scholars of philosophy and history in college. At Berkeley, California, I entered the free speech and anti-Vietnamese war environment. I took with me three questions for my graduate studies during the peak of the Cultural Revolution in China: firstly, why did China adopt communism? Secondly, what is the fate of Chinese traditional culture under communism in China? Thirdly, what is the fate of Christianity in China under communism? Approaching these questions from a comparative intellectual historical perspective, my personal upbringing and education continued to bring me into the dialogue between the wisdom traditions of the West and China. That is why reading Chia's book is like returning to my personal journey as a Chinese Christian, deeply influenced by knowledge of East and West in Hong Kong, with its intercultural and interreligious background that is unique in modern China.

Without going too far back into the history of dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity, given the limitations of a review article, I focus on the 1950s and 1960s, together with some personal reminiscences, as the starting point for the journey of reading this book.

In 1958, Tang Chunyi and Mou Zongsan, my teachers at New Asia College, together with Zhang Junli and Xu Fuguan, made their famous manifesto to the world on behalf of Chinese culture, which sparked a series of heated debates, including the first major dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity since 1949. Most noticeable was the dialogue

initiated by R.P. Kramers, a Dutch sinologist at the Tao Fong Shan Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion of Hong Kong. This dialogue is significant for revealing the unique historical context in which the diaspora intellectuals, Confucians, Christians, and Confucian Christians, compare the two wisdom traditions. The context can be more broadly expanded to include the milieu of important Chinese Christian thinkers and theologians, such as John Wu Ching-hsiung (1899-1986) and Xie Fuya (1892-1991). Then there was Peter Lee King Hung, who was involved in the series of international forums organized in Hong Kong, Berkeley and Boston, and also the development of *Hanyu Shenxue* (Chinese-Christian theology) in the 1990s in Hong Kong associated with Tao Fong Shan which was also discussed in Chia's book.

The brief mention of this debate from the 1950s and 1960s brings out two fundamental themes for reflecting on dialogue, namely, **contextualization and methodology**. Keeping in mind these two themes, Chia's book may be better appreciated. The authors of the articles are also aware of the significance of contextualization and methodology. Chia takes note of the relationship between the Protestant and the Confucian revivals in the 1980s, reflecting on some immediate cultural changes accompanying Confucian rehabilitation (pp. 24-26). Besides describing the context for the emergence of Sino-Christian theology, Lam highlights the concept of the "spatialization" of religion to describe how Chinese Christians practice their faith (pp. 50-52). Sung-Hae

Kim adopts Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach when comparing Confucian rites (*li*) with Christian liturgical life, and highlights the challenges to the Catholic Church from its different kinds of scandal. Jude Soo-Meng Chua expands the understanding of the concept of *junzi* (gentleman, noble person), advising Christians to transcend the shortcomings of neoliberalism. Anh Q. Tran uses a standard approach of the history of ideas when comparing Confucian sagehood with Christian sainthood and placing it in the context of East Asia today. K. K. Yeo offers an intertextual and hermeneutical analysis of Confucian-Christian vision of mission, while Stephanie M. Wong searches for Confucian ethical insights for the Catholic Church in crisis in a time of scandal and conflict. Mary Mee-Yin Yuen focuses on Confucian virtue ethics, as represented in the *Four Books*, as a means of enhancing Catholic social teaching. Anselm K. Min approaches the theme of ecology with an intertextual comparison between Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* and Confucian and Neo-Confucian texts. What all these articles share is the affirmation that both Confucianism and Christianity are living traditions, and in the case of Confucianism "not only in its classical expressions and historical developments, but also in its contemporary *aggiornamento* or updating....A dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism must take into account precisely these revolutionary changes" (p.203).

Wong's study of "Mission as witness: Confucian insights for a church in crisis" makes the point of contextualization and methodology particularly clear. She

writes, “My project here is not to Confucianize Catholicism as though Confucian thought introduces a wholly foreign corrective into the tradition. In fact, I am of the conviction that Christianity, as seen in the biblical tradition and in various strains of interpretation through history, is itself deeply concerned with lived morality. Acknowledging that all forms of Christianity are contextualized, with their varying strong and weak points, I hope to suggest how one form of inculturated Catholicism might complement another.” (p.156) This statement brings out clearly the significance of methodology in the study of the meeting of Confucianism and Christianity.

Lam’s valuable review of the search for the faith identity of contemporary Sino-Christian theology brings out the context of “diaspora,” a term prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, when theologians such as Wu and Xie looked at how the two wisdoms may meet, creating a set of new discourses that can enhance not only religion but also culture in general. The contribution of these Chinese Christians of the 1950s to 1970s to the search for faith identity is an important backdrop to the contemporary dialogue.

From the 1950s to 1970s, Tang and Mou took up Hegelian and Kantian philosophy to compare Confucianism with Christianity while they worked hard to prove that whether China has “philosophy” as a discipline as prescribed by the European wisdom tradition. Their understanding of Christianity derived mainly from Protestant teaching

especially influenced by Kant. Because of the immense influence of both philosophers on contemporary development of the Third Stage of Confucianism successfully promoted by Tu, this is one of the key methodological issues to be tackled for any study of dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity. Mou's theory of self-denying of conscience as the core of Confucianism is closely linked up with Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, and the relationship between human understanding and God. This brings out also the need for Catholic scholars to look at the works of transcendental Thomism especially Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan in considering the methodological approach to this intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Taking a different methodological approach, Tu focused on the establishment of Third Stage of Confucianism from which he highlights the value of Confucian spiritual humanism. Tu worked together with Hans Küng and Leonard Swindler to advocate the Golden Rule and interreligious dialogue, culminating later in the organization of the last World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing in 2019 with the conference theme grounded in Confucianism, especially Confucian spiritual humanism. With ethics and morality as the core to Confucianism, Confucian spiritual humanism is particularly relevant to the discussion of Part II and III of Chia's book dealing with exemplars and excellence, *Missio ad extra* respectively.

The work of Tu, which is closely related the revival of

Confucianism in the last twenty years, runs parallel to the movement of Sino-Christian theology that links directly with the dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity. As Lam rightly points out, the movement promoting Sino-Christian theology was initiated and supported by scholars not as part of institutional religion but as diffused beyond the institutional church. Put in this broader context, the Sino-Christian theologians may be seen as part of a long line of intellectuals (mostly Chinese, atheists, Christian, Confucian, Daoist, Buddhists and Moist alike), who try to name their own cultural and intercultural, religious and interreligious paradigms, creating their own respective narratives. Distinguished claimants include Chinese and international Daoist practitioners and scholars offer a new system for understanding and interpreting of Daoism. Buddhist practitioners and scholars have made similar efforts. After all, Daoism, Confucianism (as a religion or a wisdom tradition) and Buddhism, have a long history of close interaction and interrelationship. Viewing the reconstruction of their identity, be it cultural or religious, from this broader context and perspective, one can appreciate the importance of rethinking the methodology of inter-civilizational, intercultural, and interreligious dialogues. The search for a new identity for Chinese or Chinese Christian culture needs to go back to basics. This is the context which the authors of Chia's book need to look closely at.

From a macro-historical perspective, one can see how the intellectual community of both China and Cultural

China has been reshaping and designing a new paradigm for dialogue with the West. On this note, one may further extend the application of the themes of contextualization and methodology to the intellectual movement that has reshaped world history in the last two centuries, which in turn, may reveal the deeper significance of these two themes. This is the historical context in which the present book should be placed to be read because contextualization and methodology, in fact, are two sides of the same coin. In carrying out intercultural and interreligious study, these two sides need to be carried reflected to provide a solid foundation or a framework for dialogue.

Going back to 1949, Karl Jasper put forward his concept of the Axial Age. This term reflects the explosive trends of intellectual and theoretical creativity from the European-American world since the beginning of the First World War. Along with the appearance of quantum physics and general theory of relativity in physics, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, analytical philosophy and process philosophy, and the emergence of postmodernism in philosophy, the post-Second World War era saw the global wave of decolonization. Parallel to the torrent of decolonization, a wide range of development in the studies of humanities, especially philosophy (including philosophy of science, political philosophy), and historiography provided the intellectual foundation of the movement. In the realm of Christianity, liberation, political and public theologies found champions in different parts of the world. Intellectuals

were searching for new structures of thinking in philosophy and history to interpret the unprecedented impact of the two world wars and the new phase of human history in a globalizing context.

It is by no means a coincidence that the Catholic Church organized its historic Vatican Council II in the 1960s. When the Church was proactively moving into the modern world, which at that point was already sucked into the Cold War, China underwent a painful struggle through the extremism of Maoism. Meanwhile, Thomas Kuhn presented his concept of paradigm shifts in the form of scientific revolutions. His idea resonates with Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, which breaks the bondage of the Eurocentric legacy of Max Weber. The important works of Rahner and Lonergan developing the spirit of Vatican II were particularly relevant to methodological approaches useful for intercultural and interreligious dialogues.

Chia's book has basically manifested the concern for contextualization. As for methodology, the challenge is much greater. Both contemporary Confucianism and Post-Vatican II Christianity are living traditions searching for their modern fate. More thoughts need to be given to methodology to enhance mutual understanding and stamina in their search. After all, mission is praxis. Union of knowledge and praxis is essential to both living traditions. Methodology addresses the question of how to fruitfully achieve this union in the complex and rapidly globalizing context of today.