

## Book Review of

**Wu Kin Pan, *Thy Kingdom Come: Rev. Dr. Ernst Faber's (Hua Zhi'an, 1839–1899) Intercultural-Missionary Vision of Chinese Spirituality*, Edition Cathay, vol. 79, Bochum: Projektverlag 2022, 349 pp., preface, bibliography, appendix. ISSN 0946-2325 · ISBN 978-3-89733-567-7 (PB).**

*Dirk Kuhlmann*

The book under review is the published version of Wu Kin Pan's dissertation at Bonn University, a study on the Protestant China missionary Ernst Faber (Hua Zhi'an 花之安). Faber initially came to China in 1864 as a representative of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG, Rhenish Missionary Society), but left the RMG in 1880 as the Society wanted to enforce adherence to a restrictive form of Lutheran Protestantism among its missionaries, a move which ran counter to Faber's revivalist theological position (pp. 33-34). After staying in Hong Kong as a freelance missionary for a few years, Faber joined the Allgemeiner evangelisch-protestantischer Missionsverein (AEPM, General Evangelical Protestant Missionary Association, AEPM) in 1885. He worked as an AEPM missionary in China until his death in 1899. Faber's missionary approach comprised genuinely engaging with Chinese elite culture, as well as promoting social reform and implementing social justice as a testimony of the Kingdom of God. In this, Faber perfectly matched with the theologically liberal objectives of the AEPM which focused on converting the influential educated classes, as well as offering education and medical aid through missionary institutions.

Following the introduction to this study (ch. 1) is a short biography of Ernst Faber (ch. 2), which also analyses his role as a missionary Sinologist. In addition to his vocation as a missionary, Faber was a scholar with a wide range of interests – apart from Chinese culture, Faber also studied the flora of China in great detail and published botanical treatises. As Wu Kin Pan attests, Faber was also acknowledged and appreciated as a Sinologist by his contemporaries, including Yoshiro Saeki (1871–1965), the pioneer researcher of Nestorianism in China, and even the dyed-in-the-wool missionary critic and cultural-conservative scholar Ku Hung-ming (1856–1928), who explicitly praised Faber for his deep understanding of Chinese intellectual history (pp. 49-52).

Chapters 3 to 6 make up the core of this study, i.e., Faber's aim to contribute to constructing a "Chinese spirituality" which combined traditional philosophical approaches

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with the faith in the Christian God. Wu characterizes this way of contextualizing Christianity as being guided by science and rational thinking (“*Religio cum scientia*,” p. 15). To this end, Faber reinterpreted central concepts of Chinese moral philosophy based on various commentaries on Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, but also Mozi. Faber’s reflections were published, e.g., as a series of articles in the *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (*A Review of Times*, also: *Globe Magazine*, pp. 346-348). They were also integrated in his posthumously published work *Jingxue buyan jingyi bian* 經學不厭精遺編 (An Evaluation of the [Chinese] Classics) (p. 333). As Wu demonstrates, Faber had extensively perused the authoritative, commentary literature of his time, including the *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 (The Correct Meaning of the *Mencius*) of Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820). In particular, Wu introduces Faber’s lines of reasoning on the following concepts: *xing* 性 ([human] essence, nature) and *xin* 心 (heart) (ch. 3); *tian* 天 (heaven) and the *sanlun* 三倫 (the three relationships between heaven, earth, and man) (ch. 4); *ren* 仁 (humanity) and *li* 禮 (acting in a ritually appropriate way) (ch. 5); and *li* and *yi* 義 (justice/righteousness) as the foundations of a society truly devoted to social justice (ch. 6).

By way of illustration, some of Faber’s positions shall be presented here: According to Faber, *xing* was God’s individual gift to each person, in order to make him/her capable of salvation. He thus strongly opposed Zhu Xi’s interpretation of *xing* as a non- or supra-personal concept like the ordering principle *li* 理. Similarly, based on the theological concept of original sin, Faber rejected Mencius’ definition of *xing* as being intrinsically good. In this, Faber partially adopts Xunzi’s argument, who viewed *xing* as fundamentally “evil,” i.e., selfish, without fully agreeing with it, though (pp. 98-99, 102-104). Faber interpreted *xin* among others as the seat of feelings or sensations from which concrete human action springs (p. 109). As such, *xin* was also not intrinsically good for Faber, but rather, following the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20), formed a field in which the capacity for redemption (*xing*) could unfold (pp. 115-120).

Faber also actively participated in the 19th century inner-Protestant debate known as the “term question” and shared his views about the most appropriate translations for the Christian concept of God. He made his case for the use of *shangdi* 上帝 (Supreme Lord), a term also found in the Classics which, according to Faber, came closest to expressing a monotheistic understanding of God. He rejected alternatives such as *tian* 天 (heaven) or *shen* 神 (God/Spirit[s]) because they were either too impersonal (*tian*) or too generic (*shen*). In the spirit of an ecumenical Christian missionary effort in China, Faber was even willing to adopt the established Catholic term *tianzhu* 天主 (Lord of Heaven) in Bible translations. However, his proposal did not prevail in the Protestant translation committee to produce a Chinese “Union Version” of the Bible (pp. 127-129, 133-135). In discussing the term *sanlun* Faber addressed the broken relationships of an individual with heaven/God (through the Fall), with one’s country (through an unsustainable use of land resources), and with one’s fellow human beings (through discord and conflict, as well as neglect of those beyond the networks of the Confucian “five relationships” [*wulun* 五倫]). For Faber, these various stages of brokenness resulted from the still unredeemed nature of man; healing these relationships, therefore, entailed returning to the traditional monotheistic faith of China through Christianity (pp. 160-162, 166-168, 169-171).

Faber understood recognizing the virtues of *ren* and *li* primarily as a personal moral maturation process that would gradually lead to a transformation of society (p. 176). According to Faber, an essential part of this much needed social change lay in the support of marginalized groups within Chinese society, including the poor as well as women (pp. 185-189).

Wu's study excels in illustrating Faber's understanding of Chinese philosophy through numerous quotations from this missionary's works. Thus, readers are made aware that Faber moved confidently within a Confucian interpretive framework and was able to re-interpret it in a Christian sense using Confucian terminology. Faber's reference to the Chinese Classics can be seen as part of a strategy of contextualization by building theological bridges via a Christianizing interpretation of Chinese works. According to Wu, like the Jesuit missionaries of the 16th to 18th centuries before him, Faber was convinced that China had a genuine monotheistic tradition. Therefore, he considered his interpretation to be a reconstruction of this original faith, or as referring back to the fundamental values of Confucian philosophy respectively. Faber regarded the pre-Qin tradition (5th to 3rd century B.C.) as orthodox Confucianism and consequently rejected the philosophical approaches of the neo-Confucian turn by Zhu Xi (1130–1200) as being too strongly influenced by Buddhism (p. 102). In this, Faber's approach is also very similar to that of the Jesuits. His reasoning regarding Confucian concepts is noticeably guided by the premise that true moral education is only possible with reference to God. A striking difference with the Jesuits concerns the attitude toward ancestor worship, which Faber, like most Protestant missionaries of his time, rejected as idolatry (pp. 195-196).

In reading Wu's book, this historical parallelism becomes increasingly evident: like the works of the Jesuits, Faber's writings were characterized by an interplay between personal faith, missionary mandate, and cultural interpretation or mediation. As Wu pointed out in his earlier article, "A Discussion of Ernst Faber's Criticism of the Jesuit Missionaries in China," in: *minima sinica* 29 (2017) 1, pp. 27-76, Faber was well aware of this parallelism and sought to distinguish his approach from that of the Jesuits. Occasional references to the article can be found in the footnotes of the present book. An addition of a condensed version of this article to the original dissertation text would have been a great benefit for the readers: It could have given further depth to Wu's argument by reflecting on the specific challenges of Missionary Sinology and would have located Faber's approach even more clearly in the larger context of the Christian China mission. Likewise, a concise discussion and definition of Faber's "*Religio cum scientia*" approach in the "Introduction" would have been helpful to introduce general patterns in Faber's line of reasoning. As it is, there are only cursory references to this concept in the main text, so that its actual meaning and function are only revealed very indirectly during reading.

Wu Kin Pan's work is both inspired and inspiring, a fascinating volume that offers profound insights into the activities and thoughts of Ernst Faber. It is the most comprehensive monographic study of Ernst Faber in a Western language up to now, and Wu's bibliography is the first to list all of Faber's writings in both Western languages as well as Chinese. With this alone, it has already established itself as a reference work for future research. Wu's arguments are well supported with numerous references to primary and second-

ary sources. The above comments are not meant to diminish the very positive reading impression of this publication, but should rather be taken as indicators for the ongoing questions that Wu's work sparks. The book under review is therefore highly recommended for Sinologists focusing on the history of Christianity in China, as well as for theologians and religious studies scholars with similar research interests.