

Editor's Preface

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This is a special issue of *Oriens Extremus* in several respects. The volume is wholly devoted to the proceedings of the conference entitled “Confucianism for the 21st Century?” held at the Asia-Africa Institute, University Hamburg, September 21–23, 2009, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Sinology in Hamburg. It seemed appropriate to choose “Confucianism” as a topic for the conference, a subject that has concerned Sinology in Hamburg since the days of its founding father, Otto Franke (1863–1946). It seemed equally appropriate to add a question mark to the conference title, since “Confucianism,” especially in the last century, has always been a highly controversial topic. Nor has this changed with the remarkable renaissance Confucianism is enjoying in the 21st century. True, Confucianism which seemed dead as the druids in the last century is coming back with a vengeance: “redemptive societies” have cropped up in many places, the “classics reading movement” is all the rage, an International Confucian Association has been founded, veritable Confucian Masses draw crowds that fill entire stadiums, hundreds of Confucius Institutes have been established all over the world, thousands of Confucius statues have been set up all over China (while this volume was being edited, a great statue was even placed on Tian’anmen square – and removed again). However, it seems that this revival has not silenced but rather amplified the questions surrounding Confucianism. Sébastien Billioud, who vividly describes the rise of popular Confucianism, calls it “a patchwork of scattered and fragmented activities” and warns against “the impression of a community of worldviews among Confucian activists and sympathizers.” Indeed, a great diversity of worldviews among scholars of Confucianism became evident throughout the conference.

“Confucianism [...] possesses multiple layers of meanings and plentiful connotations,” as Tu Wei-ming writes in the present volume. This is true for its very sources which are mostly multi-layered patchworks of textual fragments disconnected from their original context. Hans Stumpfheldt demonstrates how Confucius’ sayings, which are scattered throughout diverse texts, may plausibly be traced to travel accounts, didactic poems, or other now-lost texts. He warns against blithely taking the *Lunyu* as the sole source of truth about Confucius. Whereas Stumpfheldt’s case is presumptive, my own may be considered downright presumptuous: not only because I slipped a paper into this volume that was not presented at the conference, but also because this paper challenges “the timelessness and broad application of the teachings of Confucius” (Roger Ames), attempting to explain them as a reaction to specific historical circumstances, namely in-

creasing social complexity and the emergence of a public sphere in Chunqiu times. Hans van Ess' and Lionel Jensen's papers likewise illustrate how intimately Confucian thought has been bound to its specific times. Taking Cheng Yi's commentary to the *Yijing* as an example, van Ess points out misogynous aspects of Confucianism which seem glaringly incompatible with global values in the 21st century. Jensen, in turn, demonstrates that Zhu Xi's *Daotong* "was a reaction-formation, in Freud's sense, against the expanding presence of devotional cults and worship of tutelary deities that were immensely popular and sometimes illicit. As well, it was a defiant gesture against an increasingly authoritarian, encroaching state." Again, Confucianism appears as a reaction to historical conditions that seem far removed from the 21st century. Thomas Fröhlich's penetrating analysis of Mou Zongsan's and Tang Junyi's political philosophy adds to this impression. Fröhlich points out that not only "no 'Confucian democracy' has existed in any country," but that Mou's and Tang's „modern Confucian justification paradoxically points towards the complete dissolution of democracy." More urgently, Peng Guoxiang warns against a hollow Confucianism that "may be deliberately used by proponents of narrow-minded nationalism" or even "shaped so as to oppose freedom, democracy and human rights." Lee Ming-huei consequently concludes that "attempting to restore Confucianism to the status of national ideology in modern China" would be "impractical and dislocated in time."

No Confucianism for the 21st century, then? Quite to the contrary, Margaret and Hoyt Tillman present a very graphic account of how Zhu Xi's descendants hope "to foster social civility (and strengthen civil society) based on modernization of Zhu Xi's wedding ritual." The authors conclude that "what enabled Confucianism to survive was [...] primarily its close association with Chinese family rituals because family values provided a basis for society's cohesion and order." In tune with this, Roger Ames finds the essential value of Confucianism for humans "within the context of their own particular family." Confucianism, he claims, "is nothing more than a sustained attempt to 'family' the lived human experience." Tu Wei-ming finally sums up "the challenges and crises Confucianism encountered in modern times" and stresses the broad applicability of its tenets. Transcending time and culture, or so Tu argues, Confucianism may still provide helpful answers for central questions of the 21st century.

So many scholars, so many "Confucianisms"! The present volume documents these variant views without any attempt to bring them into line, indeed, with a minimum of editorial interference. In this way, the papers of the Hamburg conference may be read not only as scholarly contributions to Confucian studies, but also as sources for the situation of Confucianism at the beginning of the 21st century. With these sources at hand, it is left to the reader to find his or her own answer the question of the conference: "Confucianism for the 21st Century?"