



China Centre Tübingen Opening Ceremony, 21.04.2016

Welcoming Speech: Prof. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer

Honourable Rector, honourable Mr. Schlecht, honourable Embassy Counsellor Professor Dong, ladies and gentlemen!

Why do we need a China Centre? Many things have already been said on this question. If I were to say, “Perhaps even everything – just not by me,” then you would surely laugh.

But let me add a few more thoughts all the same, particularly because I am charged with representing the China Centre to the outside world and promoting its goals. So, why *do* we need a China Centre at Tübingen University?

A glance back in time can perhaps give us an answer. Almost a hundred years ago, Max Weber, in his famous “Preliminary Note” to *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion*, published in Tübingen in 1920, asked “To what combination of circumstances [should] the fact be attributed that in Western civilisation, and in Western civilisation only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a long line of development having *universal* significance and validity?”¹

Max Weber was searching for a better understanding of his own culture – the modern age - through comparing it to other cultures and their religions, including Confucianism and Daoism. Today, a hundred years later, we know better than Max Weber that we are not the only ones who define ourselves against other eras and peoples and may thereby achieve better understanding of ourselves; other peoples and cultures are also changing in reference to the Western model. They are following its developmental direction and at the same time want to participate – how could it be otherwise? - in shaping its further progress and/or occasionally to take a different path altogether. In this way, everything has become reciprocal, a form of “give-and-take,” and sometimes also a competition.

In any case, this reciprocity, from which some common goals and values might arise, links us together. Despite manifold divisions (divisions which we need to overcome in our own best interests), we are mutually entangled [As Willy Brandt stated,] “Peace may not be

¹ English translation from M. Weber (1992 [1930, trans. Talcott Parsons]), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London & New York: Routledge.

everything, but without peace, everything is nothing.”

Mr. Schlecht has referred to the Golden Rule. This is linked to the fact that all humans – despite often travelling in separate boats and countless among them never reaching their destination – *qua humanity* are in the same boat. . In light of this insight, the study of other cultures needs to establish itself anew. Such study has long been a core task of Sinology, in particular in the field of political science, but other disciplines and fields which refer to China in some way or another are growing. So, over time, plenty of knowledge about and experience of China has been accumulated, and a variety of images and perceptions of China abound.

Today, we are asking ourselves in Germany and elsewhere in Europe how we are supposed to define ourselves as *Europe*. From time to time, this question monopolises our attention. Likewise, the question of what China is and what it wants to be or should be is a pressing issue in China. That is, self-doubt and the search for identity prevail on all sides.

What we need in this situation is a pooling of knowledge, the fostering of skills, information and competences, and the development of a platform for enhanced mutual understanding that evolves in accordance with our insights – yes, both evolves and *has to* be created again and again.

Given the current dynamic of competition alongside cooperation (working both “*against* each other” and “*with* each other”) and the necessity of negotiating viable agreements, we are in need of comprehensive knowledge of one another. It is only on this pre-condition that trust can develop.

We need information and insights from China experts, but we also need to interest ourselves in China’s self-interpretation; we need to know about the intentions and hopes of the people in China and of the many diverse communities and social groupings there, including government representatives.

The China Centre at Tübingen University offers a place and a platform for dialogue and a research framework in which we will do our utmost to pursue and deepen our insights. All disciplines, all teachers and all students are invited to participate.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was of the opinion that Europe can and must learn from China. He said that over 300 years ago, around the year 1700. 200 years ago, Friedrich Schiller – who is well known here on the banks of the Neckar – stated that mankind had already developed a concept of humanity [as a cultural melting pot]. “Man has intermingled the regions and the seasons” and has “let Asia arise in Europe.” As Schiller put it, “In the waves of Rhine Asia’s grapevines are reflected”² – we will taste [the literal fruits of] that shortly!

² F. Schiller, “What is, and to what end do we study, universal history?”

http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/Schiller_essays/universal_history.html, accessed 10.06.2016.

A hundred years later, China's elite realised their need to learn from the West. This wasn't entirely a free choice; rather, it was a consequence of the insight that China's treasures might otherwise fall into the wrong hands. After Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, the great Prussian geographer, disembarked from the steamer *Costarica* in Shanghai on September 5, 1868, he spent four years exploring China in seven separate expeditions, the result of which was not solely the term "Silk Route", coined by Richthofen himself, which everyone is talking about today with a new connotation.

More significantly, Ferdinand von Richthofen expanded knowledge of China's natural resources and coal deposits in particular. Without these explorations and others which followed, coal extraction, the construction of a vast railway system across China, the process of modernisation, which has continued up to the present day, and the industrialisation of every region of China are unthinkable.

Max Weber speaks of an order "now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production, which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism." In Weber's words, "Perhaps [this order] will so determine them until the last ton of fossilised coal is burnt."³

Without the use of fossil fuel and without it burning out – though not up to the last ton as suggested by Max Weber! - heavy industry, machine-operated spinning factories and other types of manufacturing wouldn't have been possible on a modern scale in China.

Today, we know, just like the people in China, that we can only survive if we seek new ways of living or are at least open to new ways of living – *nolens volens* perhaps. We therefore have good reason to bear in mind the experience of European modernisation and the Westernisation of the world when communicating with other peoples and cultures.

Developing open-mindedness, keeping an open ear for China and the Chinese, isn't too hard a struggle and can even open up great treasures to us. That is because China is not a masked world made of porcelain; China is a big part of human history that has always been in motion, lively and innovative in multiple spheres: cultural, literary, musical, theatrical, culinary and lately even in fashion and many other arenas. Therefore, I agree with Hubert Lienhard, Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business, who recently said, "It can't be damaging to Germany when it is more strongly interlinked with China as far as we can see, not even from the longer term perspective" And if our markets remain open, we can also request more as regards access to China's markets."⁴

Maybe Max Weber was right – I believe he was right! – when he said that one's political and economic fate does not depend exclusively on favourable circumstances and

³ M. Weber (1992 [1930, trans. Talcott Parsons]), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London & New York: Routledge.

⁴ Interview by Nicole Bastian with Hubert Lienhard, printed in: *Handelsblatt*, Weekend 1./2./3. April 2016, Nr. 63, p. 51.

opportunities but to a substantial extent upon “the basic characteristics of the ‘mentality’” and “the practical attitudes toward the world.”⁵ It is the wish of founder Karl Schlecht to reflect on that. Bearing this in mind, the Tübingen China Centre strives to meet high standards of information and reflexivity– one might call it mindfulness – in all areas of our scholarly research on China.

To this end, we not only pursue all possible means of knowledge acquisition and verification, but also want to promote general interest in China, the development of Chinese language education and mutual learning between students from Germany and China. Therefore, CCT is incorporating the Erich Paulun Institute (EPI), founded by Professor Paul Gerhardt of the Technical University of Munich in cooperation with the German-Chinese Business Association (DCW).

We are keenly aware of the fact that internationalisation continues to be a weak spot at German Universities; as emphasised by the Imboden report evaluating the Excellence Initiative, “Internationalisation manifests itself in a high percentage of international students and researchers. Successful internationalisation closely correlates with the international visibility and reputation of the respective University.” CCT aims to contribute, therefore, to such internationalisation of Tübingen University.

When we describe CCT as a “Centre of Competence for Germany”, it is not of course supposed to mean that there are no other centres of competence for China in Germany; we regard these institutions as our partners.

The unique feature of CCT, however, will be its integration of scientific distance and [intellectual] independence with human closeness and mutual intercultural respect. The [critical] distance that we as scholars naturally maintain towards the foreign is a position we want to assume towards our own culture as well.

In this way, something entirely new can emerge.

This will not only be a task of the Universities and not exclusively a task of the Länder either for it is in the well understood interests of Germany as a nation of knowledge and business that we maintain a climate of cosmopolitanism and openness, not only in seminars but also on the streets, between people and of course in our business enterprises. Therefore, I am grateful for CCT’s neighbourhood to the World Ethos Institute.

Such openness to life in a globalised world is not simply a code of behaviour; it needs to be learnt. CCT will be a place of such learning for Germany.

I thank you all for the trust I have been given. My thanks go to Tübingen University and especially to you, Honoured Rector Engler. I thank my colleagues, especially Junior-Professor Matthias Niedenführ for his untiring efforts. My thanks go also to Professor Paul

⁵ M. Weber (1951). *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. New York: Free Press/Macmillan Co.

Gerhardt, founding president of the Erich Paulun Institute, and to the German-Chinese Business Association and its Chairman Harald Lux. But my special thanks go to you, honoured Mr. Schlecht, for your initiative and friendly perseverance. I am confident that your initiatives, dear Mr. Schlecht, will continue to bear fruit.