CHAPTER 2

Scientism and the “Spirit” of Christianity

Modern Chinese intellectuals planned to clarify Hegel’s “spirit,” but this plan was interrupted by some other European “spirit” (by scientism). How, then, was it interrupted? How is this other European spirit related to Christianity?

Truly, just as the academic world has already observed, “the Western learning, which the missionaries brought into late Ming China, was not the new science (xinxue 新学) of Europe at that time, but it was the old learning (jiuxue 旧学) of that period, that is to say, it was not the thought and culture of the period of the rising bourgeoisie since the Renaissance; it was, rather, the theology and scholasticism of the feudalist Church of the Middle Ages, which was opposed to the former.”67 But when, in the late Qing dynasty, Christianity introduced the so-called new learning, the old learning of Europe had by no means disappeared. Articles in A Review of the Times68 (Wanguo gongbao) titled “Letters of Protestant Missionaries to China,” “Jesus’ Dao Transcends All Religions and Must Therefore Be Propagated in All Lands,” “Chinese and Western Religious Teachings,” “On the Relation Between Christianity and Reforms in China’s Academic World,” “On the Differences Between Confucianism and Christian Religion,” and so on—are they examples of the same scholasticism that was propagated when Western learning came first to the East in the late Ming period?69 The second introduction of Western learning to China was led by scientific rationality, and Chinese scholars in the Republican era [1912–1949] often enough relied on this scientific rationality in their attacks against Christianity. But the Jesuits in late Ming China had already introduced science,


68 Translator note: A Review of the Times was an influential Chinese journal in Shanghai from 1868 to 1907 founded and edited by the American Methodist missionary the Reverend Young John Allen. In the early days it was called “Chinese Globe Magazine”.

69 See Li Tiangang, ed., Wanguo gongbao wenxuan (Beijing: Sanlian, 1998), pp. 3–173; see also Zhu Weizheng, The Popularization of Western Learning, “Xixue de chuanbo” in his Asking for True Civilization: On the Academic History of Late Qing (Qiusuo zhen wenming: Xixue de chuanbo), (Shanghai: Guji, 1986), pp. 63ff; Gu Changsheng, Missionaries and Modern China (Chuanjiaoshi yu jindai Zhongguo), (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1981).
how was it that the attacks against Christianity in the *Poxieji*\(^70\) did not rely on this scientific rationality? The old learning and the new learning of the West both relied on scientific rationality, but where is the difference? And was there no Christian theology in the “thought and culture of the period of the rising bourgeoisie” at all?

The Chinese scholars thought they had found out that the old European learning was in conflict with the new learning, but not even one of them started to do detailed research about the inner connections between those two kinds of “Western learning” and its relation to China’s modernity, and no one paid any attention to questions such as: Why did this same scientific rationality lead to such different results?

Christianity as it was propagated in the East brought some kind of European civilization. What kind of “European civilization”? What is “Europe”? Is there a united Europe? It is beyond the scope of this book to clarify the geographic borders of Europe, but we need to be clear about what is called Europe with one culture—the so-called European spirit. The Confucians like to say that Chinese culture is not a concept of one people or one racial lineage. Likewise, European culture is not a concept of one people or racial consanguinity but a politico-cultural concept.\(^71\) In the form of a politico-cultural concept, “Europe” does not at all have the coherence of the concept of “Chinese culture”—a coherence that “appears divided but is united at heart” (*maoli shenhe* 面离神合).\(^72\) The Chinese scholars know from their textbooks that the so-called European spirit is precisely the general name for the Greek spirit, the Roman-Christian spirit and its corresponding political forms—the democratic system and the theocratic political system. The Chinese scholars again know from Marxism that within the European spirit there is a conflict between the feudal culture of the Middle Ages and the capitalism of modern times, but they have not paid attention to an even more basic conflict of spirits within the European spirit, a conflict that transcends the history of class struggle: namely, the conflict between the Greek and the Jewish spirits, and the conflict within Greek culture itself, the conflict between myth and reason.

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\(^70\) Translator note: *Collected Writings as to Destroy Superstition (Poxieji)* were compiled after the attacks of Yang Guangxian [1597–1669] against Western learning and Christian faith in the 1660s.

\(^71\) See Werner Sombart, *Vom Menschen. Versuch einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Anthropologie (On Man. Draft of an Anthropology of Humanities)*, the German original was published in 1938, Chinese translation by Zhang Pijie (Taipei: Tianhua, 1979), p. 139.

\(^72\) Translator note: Liu paraphrases the Chinese idiom *maohe shenli* 貌合神离 (united in appearance but divided at heart).