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“The 心 of the Foreign: Ancient Daoist and Confucian Influence on German Romantic Translational Hermeneutics”

by

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10 August from 2:00-3:00 in the Pat Hannan Room (Arts 2 room 501)

Scholars have traced the influence of French Enlightenment thinkers like d’Alembert and Condillac, through Herder, on German Romantic thinking about hermeneutics; there has been considerably less talk about the influence of ancient Chinese thought—Daoism and Confucianism—on the German Romantics as channels of powerful “dissident” Western thought. And yet, over the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century all the major German Romantics (including Herder and the Schlegel brothers) and Idealists (including Hegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt) seem to have undergone a gradual “conversion” vis-à-vis the value of Chinese writing, involving an emerging realization that Chinese philosophy and literature were not after all “mummified, reactionary, and unimaginative” (Linder) but a sinuous and tenacious ally against the forces of conservatism that surrounded them.

In this paper I trace some of this “cognitive” history (to use Sakai Naoki’s term), showing especially how Herder’s hermeneutical doctrine of “sich hinein fühlen,” which so powerfully influenced Schleiermacher’s “Gefühl des Fremden” hermeneutics of foreignizing translation, was shaped by ancient Chinese ecologies of 心 xin, the heart-becoming-mind through which all the forces of the universe flow.



A native of the United States, Douglas Robinson lived in Finland for a total of fourteen years, taking three university degrees there and serving as a lecturer in English at the University of Jyväskylä (1975-1981) and a professor of American language and literature (1983-1987) and of Finnish-English Translation Theory and Practice (1987-1989) at the University of Tampere. During his 21 years (1989-2010) as professor of English at the University of Mississippi, he also spent two years in Voronezh, Russia, and five months in Spain; the last three years at Ole Miss he was Director of First-Year Writing. From 2010 to 2012 he served as Tong Tin Sun Chair Professor of English and Head of the English Department at Lingnan University. His 1983 Ph.D. is from the University of Washington, Seattle.

