ASIAN STUDIES

Editor in Chief
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EACP SPECIAL ISSUE: INTERPRETATION AND REINVENTION OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Guest editor of the special issue
Selusi Ambrogio

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Selusi AMBROGIO
Guest editor

This special issue of *Asian Studies* (Volume 13, Issue 2) is dedicated to a relocation of Chinese thought outside of closed definitions and disciplines so as to return to this rich and varied tradition to its authentic, inclusive power. The introduction of Western systems of knowledge classifications, based on Melvil Dewey's (1851–1931) library system introduced in China in 1909 (Makeham 2012, 5), imposed entirely different models from the earlier imperial classifications. Moreover, the Dewey decimal model presents philosophy under nine categories (metaphysics; epistemology; parapsychology and occultism; psychology; logic; ethics; ancient, medieval, and eastern philosophy; modern Western philosophy), each with nine subcategories. Therefore the history of philosophy is split into two groups: thinking produced before the 19th century and that which followed. Eastern philosophy is actually the first subcategory of the first historical period (decimal no. 181). This view is highly conservative, and implies that Chinese and Indian philosophies are ancient but unprogressive and not rationally advanced compared to Western philosophy. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that this difference becomes irreconcilable when these Asian philosophies are compared with modern Western philosophy, as the supposedly pre-philosophical nature of non-Western philosophies is implied in the classification.

Comparative and transcultural philosophy, as well as philosophical studies in their respective cultural contexts of reference (i.e., Area studies), have expended much effort in rejecting this classification and discrimination, highlighting the epistemological injustice implicit in the study and classification of other cultures based on criteria embedded in a specific tradition. However, this is still a much neglected awareness in the philosophical arena. In this issue, the selected authors have further attempted to question any classification of Chinese philosophy. In the following contributions, the argumentation transcends the borders dictated by various different perspectives, such as geography, doctrine, conceptual field, and literary genre. This is why the authors position themselves on a lexicon that expresses a "trans-" argumentation (i.e., trans-cultural, trans-disciplinary, trans-genre, trans-linguistic, trans-human). This liminality, which does not merely stand on the edge—i.e., inhabiting the edge of instability—but considers the limit a door from which to go back and forth, is undoubtedly the hallmark of this special issue.

Studying conceptual limits to cross them, overturning the "road signs" of categories, and mocking the prohibitions between genres and disciplines is the nature of doing philosophy, or at least it should be.

This issue is divided into three sections: "Translating and Transreading between China and the West", "The Aesthetics of Life in the Chinese Tradition", and "Comparativity and Compatibility of Systems in Contemporary China". In the first article, Huiwen Helen Zhang and Peter C. Perdue investigate and compare the writings on China by two German authors, Richard Wilhelm and Alfred Döblin, in which an effective process of trans-reading and rethinking identity through contact between traditions is present. Wilhelm was an important sinologist and translator of philosophical texts into German, while Döblin was a modernist writer of fiction, particularly dedicated to disseminating Chinese thought in Germany. Both shared the idea of the necessity of knowledge and questioning, and saw China as a civilisation capable of producing a renewal of German thought. Particular attention is paid to pivotal figures such as Confucius and Liezi, whose thoughts richly permeate the two authors' production and influence their perspectives.

In the second article of the first section, Piotr Machajek and Martyna Świątczak-Borowy tries to make use of Li Zehou's disruptive dictum of "Western learning for substance, Chinese learning for function" (*xiti zhongyong* 西體中用) as an interpretative framework that might be applied on different intellectual contexts and topics. They engage Sungmoon Kim's political theory and Yan Lianke's fiction writing through this concept. The authors thus demonstrate what we have anticipated—the transversal and trans-genre nature of the Chinese tradition. Li Zehou's perspective is illustrated in its critical and iconoclastic nature while suggesting its deeply hermeneutic value and philosophical productivity. The article proceeds by providing a detailed analysis of Sungmoon Kim's attempt to make democratic liberal institutions and Confucian identity converge. In the last section, Yan Lianke's mythorealism is illustrated in relation to Li Zehou's perspective.

On the other hand, Xu Zhemeng gives us an intellectual history of the introduction of the concept of logic in China and its terminological renderings, highlighting how the translation process is always thinking with and across cultures. The first translation of the term was *mingli* (名理), in Li Zhizao's 李之藻 *Mingli tan* (名理探) (Investigation of Name-Patterns) and dates back to 1630s. Although this translation has been somewhat ignored due to the lack of success in the late Ming period, the author argues that this terminological choice is rich in philosophical and intercultural characteristics that the more common phonetic translation with *luoji* (邏輯) certainly cannot express. The term emerges in the context of introducing European philosophical culture into China, notably Aristotle,

intending to support and spread Christianity as a culturally advanced doctrine. The analysis of the term *mingli* provides a vivid insight into the contact between Ming-era Chinese philosophy and Greek-European philosophy.

The second section of this issue presents four articles related to the question of the aesthetics of life and the resulting artistic practices, from painting to cricket-fighting. Timo Hendrik Ennen offers us a reflection on the concept of conflict between cultures and philosophical ideas and how this conflict is the very essence of a living and effective philosophy. In the second part of his article, he offers an investigation into the *Xinxue* (心學) School's view of the subject, agentivity and thus life. This investigation is developed in a constant and close comparison with Western philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Husserl, bringing out the productivity of the conflict between these perspectives on the definitions of subject and life.

In his article, Fabian Heubel engages with modern Western culture and Laozi on the concept of hardness, strength and masculinity. Through the figure of the ravine from *Laozi* (6), the author challenges Western education and politics, together with the concept of modernity that the West has imposed over the globe. A pivotal question guides the whole argument: "Is it possible to imagine a way of modernisation that is compatible with the Daoist praise of softness?" Softness implies continuous change and vitality, adaptability and flexibility. The best example of this softness provided by Daoism is breathing.

Téa Sernelj focuses on the Qing painter and thinker Shitao's 石濤 theory of painting as expressed in his masterpiece *The Remarks on Painting* (*Huayulu* 畫語錄). Shitao contested the traditionalist school of painting that advocated imitation of past models rather than creative innovation. Instead, Shitao advocates a subjective and inner dimension in creation that can revive painting and make it regain an authentic and vital vein. A "method of no method" (*wufa zhi fa* 無法之法) is the outflow of imitation towards creative flow and deep vitality.

Yang Xiaobo, on the other hand, takes us into the world of cricket-fighting and the writing of "cricket books" (*xishuai pu* 蟋蟀譜) that rose to the level of Classics. The author demonstrates how this social practice's hermeneutic and philosophical value goes far beyond the dimension of mere leisure. It is one of the Chinese philosophical practices that aims to seek an overall meaning of the cosmos through daily experiences, taking us from the "humble thing" to the "great *Dao*" through a philosophy of emotions that the author argues through Li Zehou's vision.

The third and final section, centred on comparativity and compatibility, is opened by a contribution by Thomas Moore that addresses an ambitious and topical

comparative project: reading Confucianism in comparison with the Laclauian Conception of Democracy. The author considers the Confucian theory of the virtuous king as similar to the modern concept of the virtuous leader by Ernesto Laclau, whereby the sovereign-subjugate relationship could be reread as the people making a radical investment in a virtuous leader who can guarantee stable and effective social harmony.

Dawid Rogacz, engaging in political analysis, proposes a novel reading of Maoist Marxism from a transhuman perspective. If we usually link the vision of an alternative life or future beyond man to science-fiction, then in Maoist theory this same trend was present and well-articulated within an overall vision of the relationship between man and the cosmos. According to the author, Mao's thoughts reflected both European and Chinese influences in an original system often positioned far from canonical Marxism. Mao's youthful thinking, driven by ideas about immortality, alternative spaces, the destruction of Earth, and the power of humans, would guide the entire development of his later thought.

Jana S. Rošker authors the last article in this issue and sets the ambitious (though always necessary) goal of re-inventing Chinese Philosophy. The author examines and questions the open problems of comparative and transcultural philosophy, which she proposes to remedy through her sublation method, an innovative theory of intercultural philosophical creation constructed from (and beyond) the Hegelian concept of sublation.

Some of the papers in this volume were presented at the Fourth Biennial Conference of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (June 16-18, 2023), organized by me at the University of Macerata, which gathered nearly 120 speakers from 95 universities on four continents. On that occasion, the papers collected here by Timo Hendrik Ennen (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) and Thomas Moore (Sheffield University) were awarded the EACP Young Scholars Award in first and third place, respectively.

Reference

Makeham, John, ed. 2012. *Learning to Emulate the Wise: The Genesis of Chinese Philosophy as an Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

SPECIAL ISSUE
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Translating and Transreading between China and the West

Richard Wilhelm and Alfred Döblin Transread the Chinese Tradition

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Abstract

This article compares the transreading of Chinese texts in German by Sinologist Richard Wilhelm and novelist Alfred Döblin. Wilhelm, a spiritual intermediary between China and Europe, worked with eminent Chinese scholars to write accessible translations for German readers of Confucian and Daoist classics. Döblin relied on Wilhelm's translation of the *Liezi* for his artistic breakthrough, *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun: Chinese Novel*. Over two decades later, while exiled in France, he crafted an idiosyncratic presentation of Confucius. Although he used excerpts from James Legge's English translation, Döblin's perspective on Confucius is grounded in his exposure to Chinese texts in Wilhelm's German translation. Both Wilhelm and Döblin reinterpreted Chinese philosophy to provide lessons for 20th-century Western readers.

Our analysis recognizes the social environment that shaped both writers' interest in Chinese philosophy. We examine selected passages from these two representatives of the German literary tradition in order to indicate their convergent positions on Sino-Western cultural contact. Their shared stances toward the Chinese tradition, their own marginal positioning, physical migration, and intellectual alienation culminated in a unifying, outsider's view. Both Wilhelm and Döblin initiated and promoted significant interactions on a basis of equality between Chinese and Western cultures.

Keywords: translation, philosophy, Daoism, Confucius, German

Richard Wilhelm in Alfred Döblin prečno bereta kitajsko tradicijo

Izvleček

Članek primerja prečno branje kitajskih besedil v nemškem jeziku sinologa Richarda Wilhelma in pisatelja Alfreda Döblina. Wilhelm, duhovni posrednik med Kitajsko in Evropo, je sodeloval z uglednimi kitajskimi učenjaki, da bi napisal nemškim bralcem dostopne prevode konfucijanskih in daoističnih klasikov. Döblin se je pri svojem prelomnem

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umetniškem delu *Trije skoki Wang-luna: kitajski roman* oprl na Wilhelmov prevod *Liezija*. Več kot dve desetletji pozneje je v izgnanstvu v Franciji ustvaril svojevrstno predstavitev Konfucija. Četudi je uporabil izpiske iz angleškega prevoda Jamesa Leggeja, Döblinov pogled na Konfucija temelji na njegovem vplivu kitajskih tekstov v Wilhelmovem nemškem prevodu. Tako Wilhelm kot Döblin sta reinterpretirala kitajsko filozofijo, da bi zahodnemu bralstvu dvajsetega stoletja ponudila nova znanja.

Najina analiza prepoznava družbeno okolje, ki je oblikovalo zanimanje obeh avtorjev za kitajsko filozofijo. Obravnavana izbrane odlomke teh dveh predstavnikov nemške literarne tradicije, da bi pokazali njuna konvergentna stališča glede sino-zahodnih kulturnih stikov. Njuna skupna stališča do kitajske tradicije, njun lastni obrobni položaj, fizična migracija in intelektualna odtujenost so dosegli vrhunec v združujočem pogledu tujca. Tako Wilhelm kot Döblin sta sprožila in spodbujala pomembne interakcije na podlagi enakosti med kitajskimi in zahodnimi kulturami.

Ključne besede: prevajanje, filozofija, daoizem, Konfucij, nemščina

Introduction: Wilhelm and Döblin as Transreaders[1]

Chinese classical texts have inspired many modern Western writers, including Franz Kafka, Ezra Pound, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, and Olav H. Hauge. As literary artists, they found in the Chinese tradition elements which they used to supplement, sabotage, refine, or revolutionize inherited aesthetic practices. While they began by reading Sinologist translators, who knew the original Chinese texts, they produced original literary works that transcended their sources.[2]

The goals of the Sinologist translator and the literary artist differ, but also overlap. The translator negotiates between fidelity to the text in its original language and the need to make it comprehensible to the foreign reader. The artist takes up the translator's product and carries it further, guided by his own unique sensibility. Some present their works as "translations", while others define the source as one of many "inspirations". Both translations and inspirations are forms of transreading, which takes a text's meanings in new directions determined by the language and its audience.[3]

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1   Translations in the introduction and sections 1.1.2, 1.2, 2.2 are by Huiwen Helen Zhang. Translations in section 1.1.1 are by Peter C. Perdue.

2   For a glimpse into how the Chinese tradition inspired Kafka, Pound, and Hauge in their own creative writing, please see: Zhang "A Perfect Bliss-Potential Realized: Transreading 'Wish, to Become Indian' in Light of Kafka's Dao" (2021), "Upon the Eagle-Mound: Hauge's Cathay" (2022), and "Transreading in the Nordic Mode: Olav H. Hauge in Dialogue with Laozi and Eckhart" (2023).

3   For a full discussion of how the concept of transreading was developed and relates to other critical-analytical methods, please see: Zhang "'Translated, it is: . . .'—An Ethics of Transreading" (2014).

In this article, we discuss a particular case of transreading, in the relationship between Sinologist Richard Wilhelm and novelist Alfred Döblin. Just as Ezra Pound relied on the notes of the Sinologist Ernest Fenollosa to inform his presentation of Chinese poetry in *Cathay*, Döblin relied on Wilhelm's translation of the Daoist philosopher Liezi for his first novel, *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun* (*Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun: Chinesischer Roman*), published in 1915, the same year as Pound's collection.

Common elements in their aesthetic and social positions made it possible for Döblin and Wilhelm to converge; although they never met each other, shared stances toward Chinese culture, their own marginal cultural positioning, and physical migration out of Germany drew them together. From their stance as outsiders in relation to both China and the West, they viewed their inherited cultures as integrated wholes, of equal validity, as they proposed that each could learn from the other.

Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930) trained as a Protestant theologian and went to China as a missionary in 1899 just as Germany established its colony in Qingdao, and he remained there for 25 years. He lived through the early days of the creation of a planned colonial city out of a small fishing village, enduring biting flies, rats, crowing roosters, muddy streets, floods, warfare, and famines. He soon grew alienated from his missionary colleagues' narrow prejudices against Chinese beliefs. He felt that it was useless to stress those matters of Christian doctrine which had nothing to do with daily life. In Wilhelm's view, the example of Jesus was sufficient to transmit the Christian faith, and Jesus himself stood on the same level as Confucius. He said that he found "more truth in Daoism than in all confessions" (Wilhelm 1956, 103), and later boasted that he had never converted a single Chinese person.

Working closely with the eminent scholar Lao Naixuan (1843–1921), Wilhelm produced remarkably thorough, sensitive, and readable versions of the following major Chinese classical texts, as listed with the year he published them (note that he also produced a revised edition of the *Liezi*):

> 1910. *Lunyu. Conversations.*
> 1911. *Daodejing. The Book of Old on Sense and Life.*
> 1912/1921. *Liezi. The True Book on the Earth's Gushing Springs.*
> 1912. *Zhuangzi. The True Book on the Southern Land of Blossoms.*
> 1916. *Mengzi. The Instructive Conversations by the Master Meng.*
> 1924. *Yijing. Book of Changes.*
> 1928. *Chunqiu. Lü Bu Wei's Spring and Autumn Annals.*
> 1930. *Liji. The Book of Rites, Morals, and Customs.*

Living in China, Wilhelm found himself doubly marginalized: both in relation to the dogmatic missionaries, who disdained all Chinese tradition, and, along with his conservative Chinese scholar colleagues, by reformers who also attacked the classical tradition as an obstacle to China's development. After the First World War, he saw Germany and China as countries sharing a common fate. Both had lost their empires, and both suffered from severe impositions from the victorious Western powers and, in China's case, Japan.

When he returned to Germany, in 1924, Wilhelm established the nation's first major centre for Sinology, in Frankfurt, and actively promoted scholarship and public knowledge of China's cultural heritage. While celebrated by the German public, he also came under attack for his interpretations of classical texts, aimed at general readers, in contrast to the meticulously annotated philological studies of German and French Orientalists. His Chinese colleagues, however, regarded him as much more than a scholar of China. In the words of the philosopher Carsun Chang, he was "one of the few who truly experienced Chinese culture and understood it as part of his personal being" (Chang 1930). Soon after he died, Wilhelm's Institute was shut down, but in the last few decades his reputation has risen. His writings and translations still stand as major contributions to cross-cultural understanding of China and the West (Wilhelm 1928; 1956; Wipperman 2007; 2020; Goulding 2014).

Alfred Döblin (1878–1957), who shared with Wilhelm the impulse to transmit Chinese philosophy to Western readers, found himself in an equally marginal position. He became most famous for his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), which used modernist techniques to describe the fluctuating, chaotic experiences of modern urban life. His first published novel, *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun* (2007 [1915]), however, used the story of a Chinese rebellion in the eighteenth century to reflect on instability, spiritual searching, and violence experienced through Daoist-Buddhist cultural frameworks. Like many Jewish writers he left Germany in 1933, living in France and then the United States. In 1940, he wrote an introduction to Confucius' thought for English readers, placing Confucius among the greatest philosophers of world traditions, including Plato, Machiavelli, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Like Wilhelm, Döblin transformed Chinese philosophical elements to suit his aesthetic ideals, but he went much further.

Part One: Wilhelm and Döblin in Dialogue with Liezi

1.1 Wilhelm's Liezi

1.1.1 Transreading Liezi through Christianity

Most discussions of Wilhelm concentrate on his public achievements and say little about his translation practices. By looking at specific examples of his scholarly work, however, we can find strong connections between his worldly activities and academic research.

Wilhelm practiced what we might call "open-access" Sinology. He provided translations which could be comprehended by German readers in the terms of their own literary tradition. He aimed to convince readers that Chinese texts contained just as much literary and philosophical value as the classics of Western philosophy, and they should be included in the cultural horizon of any literate person. Although Wilhelm did not elaborate a theory of translation, several times he did remark on his goals, and in his translations he used structural and linguistic techniques to make the ancient texts accessible to modern readers. More than many other Western scholars, he aimed to place Chinese in the frame of world literature.

Wilhelm presents his intercultural objectives of translation most explicitly in his justification of the use of the term *Sinn* (sense, meaning) to translate the Chinese term *Dao*:

> The entire metaphysic of the *Daodejing* is built upon a fundamental insight, which cannot be reached through strict conceptual definition, which Laozi, in order to give it a name, as a "makeshift", calls Dao. From the beginning, there have been many contenders for the correct translation of this word. "God", "Way", "Reason", "Word", are only a few of the suggested translations, while some translators simply use the untranslated term *Dao* in European languages. Basically, the actual word used does not matter much, since the term even for Laozi is only as it were an algebraic sign for something inexpressible. It is basically *aesthetic* considerations that make it desirable to use a German word in a German translation. We have chosen to use the term *Sinn* throughout. (*Daodejing*, 1911, Introduction; Peter C. Perdue italics)

All translators face constant choices between fidelity to the original text and writing in a way readily understandable by their readers. The Chinese version of the translator's dilemma is the tension between *xin* (信) "fidelity" and *ya* (雅) "literary elegance". Here Wilhelm strongly favours the aesthetic pole, but he does not reject the value or possibility of scholarly faithfulness, either.

He defended his method in a response to a sharp critique by the German Sinologist Erich Hauer of his translation of the *Yijing*, or *Book of Changes*, which he and his collaborator Lao Naixuan believed to be the supreme work of Chinese philosophy. Hauer had accused him of incompetence and blunders, and Wilhelm objected to Hauer's insulting tone, which he found unworthy of serious scholarly debate. While admitting that inevitably there were mistakes, he defended the thoroughness of his efforts, and argued that his philosophical objectives were fundamentally correct:

> With my translation of the *Yijing* I have tried to explore without preconceptions the world of thought of this work of world literature and make it accessible in German. This was a difficult task, which I have carried out with the greatest possible thoroughness … And although I am convinced that my work is by no means free from error, my essential intentions, especially in their *philosophical aspects*, have been fulfilled. (Wilhelm 1956, 313; Peter C. Perdue italics)

In short, Wilhelm defended his translation choices for aesthetic purposes, but he also felt that he had attained philosophical accuracy. He did not see the two goals as contradictory. Modern readers may find some of Wilhelm's solutions to translation issues stylistically jarring and philosophically inadequate. Using the word *Sinn* for *Dao*, or *Leben* for *De*, now sounds too awkward to be convincing. Since Daoism is now much more familiar to Western readers than it was in Wilhelm's day, using the term *Dao* alone seems more appropriate, and he could be critiqued for distorting the original meaning of the Chinese text in order to serve a specific cultural agenda. Nevertheless, he clearly recognized the translator's dilemma, and he explained his own distinct approach in both aesthetic and philosophical terms. Throughout his many translations, he demonstrated sensitivity to the nuances of Chinese texts while he aimed to draw out the concerns that they shared with German literary traditions. We may disagree with his particular choices in certain instances, but we must respect his dedication to accuracy and intelligibility.

For examples of Wilhelm's practice, we may look at excerpts from his translation from the *Liezi*. Wilhelm translated it first in 1912 and published a revised edition in Jena in 1921. The cover and opening pages indicate that this is a Chinese work

intended to be read as a German philosophical text. Wilhelm uses a title taken from a Tang edition, *Chongxu Zhen Jing*, which he translates as "*Das wahre Buch vom quellenden Urgrund*". The date is given at the top and the place and author on the right: "Qingdao, translated by Wei Lixian (Wilhelm)". The German publisher's name is given on the left in Chinese characters. This page is not a version of the text for Chinese readers; it is a mimicry of Chinese book format for German readers:

宣統辛亥五月

列子冲虛真經

青島尉禮賢譯解

德國德得利藏版

Figure 1. Liezi 1921. (Source: Chinese title page)

Section 1.8 in Wilhelm's translation, entitled *Von der irdische Pilgerschaft* (Of the Earthly Pilgrimage), describes the fate of mortal man as a wanderer in the world. Unlike the Chinese text, this added title evokes for English readers John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, allegorically describing the course of a Christian life battling against temptation and sin:

> Master Yen said, "How well the men of old thought about death! It brings rest to the good, it subdues the bad. Death is the return of Essence. [*de* 德] The men of old called the dead "those who have returned home". When we speak of the dead as those who have returned home, then the living are wanderers. He who wanders and knows not where he goes, is homeless. When an individual man has lost his homeland [*jia* 家], everyone around him considers it to be wrong. Now, however, that the entire world has lost its homeland, no one finds it to be wrong. When a man leaves his homeland, abandons his kinsmen, squanders his wealth, wanders in all directions and does not return home, truly, what kind of man is he! Others will certainly consider him to be lost [*kuangtang* 狂蕩]. And there is another man, who obsesses over external appearances, and is very adept at making a name for himself; he strides grandly through the world with no restraint; what kind of man is he! But both men are lost. Yet ordinary people praise the second and condemn the first; only the chosen [*shengren* 聖人] know what deserves praise and what deserves blame." (Liezi 1921, 7)

Wilhelm uses several unusual words in his translation which deviate from the literal meaning of the Chinese text, but make it more compatible with Western philosophical frameworks. For the Chinese word *de* (德), usually translated as "virtue", he uses *Wesen*, meaning "nature", or "essence". Just like his use of the term *Sinn* for *Dao*, Wilhelm chooses a heavily laden philosophical term instead of a literal translation, in order to convey that the Chinese term itself also carries philosophical weight. For the Chinese word *jia* (家), meaning "household", he uses *Heimat*, the very resonant German romantic concept of "homeland", often considered untranslatable in other languages. He translates the Chinese term *kuangtang* (狂蕩), "crazed", as "lost", supporting his picture of the isolated man who has abandoned the human world. For the Chinese *shengren* (聖人), or "sage", he writes *Der Berufene*, "one who is called", a clear reference to the Christian concept of a calling (*Beruf*) to follow a spiritual path.[4]

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4   Matthew 22.14: "For many are called, but few are chosen." Luther's Bible: "*Denn viele sind berufen, aber wenige sind auserwählet.*"

"The living are wanderers" (*Shengren wei xingren* 生人為行人), in Wilhelm's translation, evokes much greater resonance than the flat translation "the living are travellers" (Liezi 1990, 26). The theme of a spiritual seeker, who is a wanderer without a clear goal, a lost person in an indifferent world, reverberates in Wilhelm's translation much more strongly than in the original Chinese text, or in other translations. For Wilhelm homelessness, wandering, and a sense of loss pervade our life in this world, and only death brings relief. Wilhelm has overlaid on the Daoist text a heavy layer of Christian implications that go well beyond the text itself.

Wilhelm develops this theme further in his translation of Section 4.7, which he entitles "Wandering":

> Liezi always liked to wander. Hu Qiuzi asked him: "You love to wander. What do you like about wandering so much?" Liezi answered: "The joy of wandering is that it has no purpose. Others wander to look at the sights; I wander just to see them change. There is wandering and wandering! No one can tell the difference." Hu Qiuzi said: "Your wandering is just like the others, yet you say it is different. For everything we see, we see it changing. You enjoy the purposelessness of the outside world, but you have not recognized the purposelessness of your own self. Whoever pays attention to external things while wandering does not know how to look within. The wanderer who looks outward seeks completeness in material things. Whoever looks inward, finds satisfaction in his own self. To find satisfaction in your own self is the highest stage of wandering. Whoever finds satisfaction in the material world, has not yet reached the highest stage. … Therefore I say: wander to the highest goal! Wander to the highest goal!" (Liezi 1921, 42)

Wilhelm translated the Chinese term *wugu* (無故), which can mean "without cause or reason", as *Zwecklosigkeit*, "without purpose". His version of aimless wandering emphasizes the lack of any evident purpose for a human life. Liezi's interlocutor Hu Qiuzi stressed the futility of finding completion in the outside world, instead urging Liezi to look within himself. He concludes with an injunction to wander inwardly in a state of transcendent contemplation, a consciousness completely detached from the outside world: "Wander to the highest goal!" The Chinese term *you* (游), meaning "to roam, wander", however, has more positive implications than Wilhelm's aimlessness. It implies freedom from the constraints of all social obligations, leading ultimately to a merger with the cosmic processes of the natural world. The playfulness of *you* (here, 遊) is expressed in the title of

BUCH I
OFFENBARUNGEN DER UNSICHT-
BAREN WELT

„Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis / Das Unzulängliche /
Hier wird's Ereignis.“

1. VOM DING AN SICH

Meister Liä Dsï wohnte in einem Garten zu Dscheng vierzig Jahre lang,
und niemand kannte ihn. Vor den Augen des Landesfürsten und der
hohen Würdenträger war er wie einer aus der Menge des Volkes. Es entstand
aber Mangel im Lande, und er machte sich auf, aus seiner Heimat nach We
zu ziehen. Da sprachen seine Schüler: „Meister, du gehst, und deine Rück-
kehr ist unbestimmt, darum wagen wir Schüler um etwas zu bitten, worüber
uns du, Meister, belehren mögest: Hast du, Meister, nicht die Reden des Hu
Kiu Dsï Lin gehört?“
Meister Liä Dsï lächelte und sprach: „Ja, was hat denn Meister Hu gesagt?
Immerhin; der Meister unterhielt sich oft mit Be Hun Wu Jen, und was ich
gehört, wenn ich daneben stand, will ich versuchen, euch zu sagen. Seine
Reden lauteten also: Es ist ein Zeugendes, das nicht erzeugt ist; es ist ein
Wandelndes, das sich nicht wandelt. Das Unerzeugte hat Freiheit, Zeugen-
des zu zeugen, das Unwandelbare hat Freiheit, Wandelndes zu wandeln.
Das Erzeugte muß aber notwendig weiter zeugen, das Wandelbare muß
notwendig sich weiter wandeln. Darum ist es immer im Zeugen und Wan-
deln begriffen. Das immer im Zeugen und Wandeln Begriffene hört niemals
auf, zu zeugen und sich zu wandeln; so verhält es sich mit Licht und Finster-
nis, so verhält es sich mit den vier Jahreszeiten.
Das Unerzeugte ist vermutlich einzig. Das Unwandelbare wallt im unend-
lichen Raum hin und her, ohne daß es in seinem Pfade an eine Grenze käme.
Im Buch des Herrn der gelben Erde steht:

> Der Geist der Tiefe stirbt nicht.
> Er ist das Ewig Weibliche.
> Beim Ausgang des Ewig Weiblichen
> Liegt die Wurzel von Himmel und Erde.
> Endlos drängt sich's und ist doch wie beharrend.
> Der es wirkt, bleibt ohne Mühe.

1 Liä Dsï, Urgrund   1 ·

Figure 2. Liezi 1921. (Source: page 1)

the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 "spontaneous free play" or "free and easy wandering". The Chinese Daoist has "lost" his human connections, but he has regained unity with the eternal Way.

This mystical state appears to be quite contrary to the ordinary Christian missionary's engagement in the world, but it reflects Wilhelm's preoccupation with his own inner life, and his view of Christianity as a personal quest rather than the performance of empty rituals.

1.1.2 Transreading Liezi through Goethe

In the structure and presentation of the chapters, Wilhelm's translation of the *Liezi* also reveals an audacious paradigm of reframing. In the classical Chinese original, the *Liezi* consists of eight titled books with varied numbers of untitled chapters. In Wilhelm's German edition, however, not only does he create a title for each chapter to direct the reader's attention to that which he considers to be the chapter's pivotal point, but he also consistently chooses a Goethe citation as the epigraph for each chapter. Rather than providing bibliographical references for these citations, Wilhelm lets the reader seek the sources himself—or even take these quotes as integral parts of the original. Take Book I, for instance: (Liezi 1921, 1)

> *Buch I*
> *Offenbarungen der unsichtbaren Welt* [Wilhelm's translation of the original book title]
> "*Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis / Das Unzulängliche / Hier wird's Ereignis.*"
> [Goethe quote without a reference]
> *1. Vom Ding an sich* [Wilhelm's chapter title]

> Book I
> Manifestation of the Invisible World
> "All the ephemeral / Is only a parable / The unfathomable / Comes to pass here."
> 1. On the Thing Itself

Moreover, in Books II, III, IV, and V Wilhelm crafts a pithy phrase to pinpoint the book's core idea, which, in his view, unites Liezi the ancient Daoist master and Goethe the modern German icon. Take Book IV for instance. To reframe it, Wilhelm draws a stanza from Goethe's canonical poem "Blissful Yearning" and crafts the phrase "Devotion to the Cosmos" to capture the book's message in his perception, i.e., an individual's dedication to the universe:

Buch IV
Konfuzius [Wilhelm's translation of the original book title]
Hingabe ans All [Wilhelm's phrase]
"*Und solang du das nicht hast / Dieses: Stirb und Werde / Bist du nur ein trüber Gast / Auf der dunklen Erde.*"
[Goethe quote without a reference]

Book IV
Confucius
Devotion to the Cosmos
"And so long as you have it not, / This: Die and become! / You are but a mournful guest / Upon the dark planet."

The second example of "wandering" is embedded precisely in Book IV, Chapter 7, discussed above. When viewed in juxtaposition, the Daoist command "Wander to the highest!" and Goethe's imperative "Die and become!" illuminate one another beautifully: both argue for the indispensability of introspection to an individual's spiritual bliss. That "Blissful Yearning" is a quintessential poem in Goethe's *West–östlicher Divan* may be another motivation for Wilhelm's choice: the *Liezi* in his reframing is a *West-Eastern Divan* in philosophy.

Another example of Wilhelm's framing lies in "Book II: The Lord of the Yellow Earth", where Wilhelm distils three lines from the opening of Goethe's poem "One and All" and crafts the phrase "The Potency of the Spirit" to convey his insight into the book, i.e., the concentration and force of the spirit:

Buch II
Der Herr der gelben Erde [Wilhelm's translation of the original book title]
Die Macht des Geistes [Wilhelm's phrase]
"*Statt heißem Wünschen, wildem Wollen / Statt läst'gem Fordern, strengem Sollen / Sich aufzugeben, ist Genuß.*"
[Goethe quote without a reference]

Book II
The Lord of the Yellow Earth
The Potency of the Spirit
"Rather than feverish 'wish' or wild 'want' / Rather than onerous 'demand' or strict 'must' / To surrender oneself, is bliss."

This combination effectively primes the reader to digest the core passage from Book II, Chapter 3, which Wilhelm—in accordance with Goethe's "One and All"—titles "Self-Surrendering":

> 3. Self-Surrendering
>
> The distinction between I and Not-I was no more. After that the distinctions between the five senses also ceased to be, they all became similar to one another. Then the thoughts condensed, the body became free, flesh and bone dissolved, I no longer felt that against which the body leaned, upon which the foot trod: *I followed the wind east and west like a leaf or dry chaff, and I truly know not if the wind drove me or I the wind*. (Liezi 1921, 50–51; Huiwen Zhang italics)

This passage is embedded in Liezi's revelation of his own becoming. As the passage recurs in "Book IV: Confucius, Chapter 6," Wilhelm retitles it "The Evolution of Liezi". In both occurrences, Liezi's dissolution of "the distinction between I and Not-I"—which culminates in his fusion with the wind, "I truly know not if the wind drove me or I the wind"—anticipates Book II in the *Zhuangzi*, the title of which Wilhelm translates as "The Adjustment of World Views". In that book's final chapter—originally unnamed yet titled by Wilhelm "Butterfly Dream"—Zhuangzi draws a playful and perplexing inference, "I know not if Zhuangzi has dreamed himself becoming a butterfly or the butterfly has dreamed itself becoming Zhuangzi" (Zhuangzi 1912, Book II, Chapter 12).

This analogy is well-known to Wilhelm, who in his "Introduction" to the *Liezi* calls it "the mediating link between the fundamental conception of the *Taoteking* on the one hand and the summary of the Daoist teachings in the work attributed to Zhuangzi on the other" (Liezi 1921, xxix), In his chapter-by-chapter "Explanations" of the *Liezi*, Wilhelm frequently uses the *Zhuangzi* as a reference point. For instance, he cites the *Zhuangzi* to declare how Liezi is revered as "the true man who rides the wind": "with sublime superiority, Liezi let the wind drive him, totally free from the striving after bliss" (Zhuangzi 1912, Book I),

This ancient Chinese philosophical genealogy, however, was generally inaccessible to Wilhelm's German readers. By inviting Goethe onto the stage reciting "To surrender oneself, is bliss" and naming the *Liezi*-chapter after Goethe's message "Self-Surrendering", Wilhelm initiates a trans-cultural, trans-era conversation that renders Liezi's idea and articulation accessible.

Yet another excerpt that exemplifies Wilhelm's provocative reframing of the Liezi harkens back to "Book I: Manifestation of the Invisible World", for which

Wilhelm chooses one of the most memorable moments in German literature as a motto: the ending of Goethe's *Faust*. This motto primes his reader to explore Chapter 12, which Wilhelm titles "Property":

> "All the ephemeral / Is only a parable / The unfathomable / Comes to pass here."

> 12. Property

> Shun (the grand ruler) asked Cheng: "*Can one appropriate the Dao of cosmic phenomena*?" Cheng spoke: "*Not even your body is your property, how do you want to appropriate the Dao*?" Shun spoke: "If my body is not my property, whose property is it then?" The other spoke: "It is the form assigned to you by Heaven and Earth. Your life is not your own, it is the balance of forces assigned to you by Heaven and Earth. Your nature and your fate are not your own, they are the course assigned to you by Heaven and Earth. Your sons and grandsons are not your own, they are the vestiges assigned to you by Heaven and Earth. Therefore: *we go and know not whither, we stay and know not where, we eat and know not why: all this is the potent life force of Heaven and Earth: who can appropriate it*?" (Liezi 1921, 44–45; Huiwen Zhang italics)

Wilhelm's juxtaposition of Goethe's *Faust* and the *Liezi* rejuvenates both. In one direction, Goethe's discernment between "the unfathomable" and "the ephemeral" enables German readers to approximate Liezi's distinction between "Heaven and Earth" and the individual's body, life, nature, fate, sons, and grandsons. In the opposite direction, Liezi's denial of "property" and his argument against "appropriation" reveals a Daoist premise that is at once archaic, alien, and stimulating to German readers, thus offering them a novel perspective from which they can revisit and penetrate Goethe's "parable".

Also worth noting is Wilhelm's translingual aptitude. In classical Chinese, the central question of Book I, Chapter 12 is encapsulated in *de er you* (得而有), a phrase consisting of two verbs, *de* (得) "to receive or acquire" and *you* (有) "to have or possess", joined by the conjunctive *er* (而) that implies consequence. By turning *de er you* into the German phrases *sich zu eigen machen* "to take for one's own" and *sich zum Eigentum machen* "to make something one's property", Wilhelm bypasses the character-by-character approach and grasps the target—an individual's "appropriation" of the Dao, a motive and act of which the *Liezi* disapproves.

As demonstrated in his renditions of "Wandering", "The Earthly Pilgrimage", "Self-Surrendering" and "Property", Wilhelm's transplantation of the *Liezi* into

the Goethe-fermented soil is methodologically daring, philologically intuitive, aesthetically delightful, and spiritually thought-provoking. Clearly, this missionary-turned-sinologist reframed the *Liezi* not only to probe and transcend the limits of translation, but also to seek and declare the unfathomed intersections between the ancient Chinese and modern German languages and philosophies.

1.2 Döblin's Liezi

Wilhelm's approach to the Daoist canon may be deemed radical until one meets Döblin, whose audacity and creativity even surpasses Wilhelm's. While Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has become known as one of the most significant German novels of the 20th century, his transreading of ancient Chinese philosophy remains relatively unknown. Yet his two encounters with Chinese antiquity form an unparalleled *bildungsroman*.

First, in the 1910s, Döblin met Laozi and Liezi through Wilhelm's German translation. Then, in the 1930s, Döblin, exiled in France, met Confucius through James Legge's English translation. The younger Döblin's poetic and philosophical resonances with Daoism led to his two idiosyncratic works, *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun: Chinese Novel* (2007 [1915]) and *Mountains Oceans and Giants* (1924).[5] The older Döblin's political and pragmatic recognition of Confucianism led to his 1940 publication of *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, which incorporates a distinct presentation of Confucius and an eclectic selection and argumentative arrangement of what he called "the essence of Confucius's thought".

An optimal angle from which to cut into Döblin's encounter with Daoism (1911–1913) lies in *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun*, an epic novel that earned him the Fontane Prize for Culture and Literature in 1916. It reconstructs a turbulent 18th-century China through the titular figure—the historical rebel Wang-lun—who led an uprising against the Qianlong Emperor and was defeated in 1774. What Döblin named *Chinese Novel*—as the peculiar absence of the article in the subtitle *Chinesischer Roman* implies—creates a genre of its own which resists labelling by conventional criteria.

In his autobiographical sketch, "The Epic Poet, his Material, and the Critique (Der Epiker, sein Stoff und die Kritik)" (1986a [1921]), Döblin dismissed the favourable reviews on the "historical, ethnological, geographical" realities of this *Chinese Novel* and called the praise of its authenticity "burlesque":

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5   For English translations of these two novels, see Döblin 1991 and 2021.

While writing a "Chinese" novel, I went to the Ethnological Museum of Berlin several times and read quite a few portrayals of trips to China and Chinese customs: but how inaccurate already are the phrases I use here: "read": *I have never thought of engaging myself with China*; the thought of going to China, for instance, has not occurred to me even in a dream: *I had an underlying inner sensation or an underlying vision to whom I, with the utmost sensitivity, granted complete freedom and to whom I presented—submitted—what she needed to radiate.* It seemed burlesque to me that one of the first detailed references to the book stemmed from an expert Sinologist who found my protagonist, even, authentic. *So little have I engaged myself—absorbent, observant—with the real China*, that after the composition of the book one would have searched in my "memory" for the most important data on China, yes, the realities of my novel, to no avail: these realities—historical, ethnological, geographical—had not been assumed, not even seen by me, as facts, but rather assumed, within the scope of an entire surging psychic process, as its vehicles, its means of transport and of provocation—so that after the cessation of the whole storm only a dim recollection of the individual cobblestones remained, past which passion flowed. [...] If I were finished with my book—now and then I figured—I would love to occupy myself with this or that matter which appeared interesting to me; haven't done it since, *what relevance to me—who does not know even Europe—did China have, apart from Laotse.* (Döblin 1986a, 29; Huiwen Zhang italics)

Here, Döblin drew a conspicuous line between China and Daoism. While mocking and refuting his perceived engagement with "the real China", Döblin confessed and appreciated Laozi's relevance to himself. In contrast to his frank and abrupt confession at the end, Döblin's subtle yet profound appreciation of Daoism lies in this syntactically and thematically complex line: "I had an underlying inner sensation or an underlying vision to whom I, with the utmost sensitivity, granted complete freedom and to whom I presented—submitted—what she needed to radiate." Playing with the German feminine pronoun of *Grundeinstellung*, "underlying vision", Döblin emphasizes *her* grace, potency, or pregnancy, suggesting that his reception of the Dao—likewise feminine in the *Laozi*—was in fact a predestined encounter, a cross-cultural kindship, and a trans-era resonance. According to his self-reflection, it was the Dao that awakened him, kindled his own underlying sensation, and let his own vision "radiate" in *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun*, which created a genre of its own.

To frame this *Chinese Novel*, Döblin composed a preface named "*Zueignung*". A play on words in German, this naming simultaneously signals "Dedication" (*Widmung*) and "Appropriation" (*das Sich-zu-eignen*):

The Three Leaps of Wang-lun
Chinese Novel

DEDICATION/APPROPRIATION

SO I don't forget —.
A gentle whistle up from the street. Metallic starting, purring, sputtering.
A slap to my bony quillholder.
So I don't forget —.
What now?
I want to shut the window.
The streets have acquired strange voices in recent years. […]
I don't blame the baffling vibration. *Only I can't orient myself*.
I don't know whose voices these are, whose soul needs such a thousand-barrelled vault of resonance.
This heavenly doveflight of airplanes.
These hatching chimneys beneath the ground.
This flashing of words across a hundred miles:
Whom does it serve?
The human beings on the pavement I know, after all. Their Telesparks are new. The grimaces of avarice, the hostile smugness of the blue-shaven chin, the pinched snuffling nose of lasciviousness, the barbarity, upon whose jelly blood the heart beats itself down, the watery puppy-dog eyes of obsessive ambition, their throats have yelped through the centuries and filled them with – progress.
O, I know that. I, currycombed by the wind.
So I don't forget —.
In the life of this Earth two thousand years are one year.
Winning, conquering; an old man spoke: "*We go and know not whither. We stay and know not where. We eat and know not why. All this is the potent life force of Heaven and Earth: who can then speak of winning, possessing?*"
I want to sacrifice to him behind my window, to the wise old man,
                         L i ä D s i
with this *impotent* book. (Döblin 2007, 7–8; Huiwen Zhang italics)

Comparing this preface to the novel, Döblin's strategy reminds one of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both of whom are astute and deliberate in using prefaces as a kind of "tuning". Here, drawing from Wilhelm's translation of the Daoist refutation of "property", Döblin builds a bridge for his readers to traverse beyond the normal expectations of a historical novel. Rather than laying a panoramic foundation for his reimagination of 18th-century China, Döblin narrows his focus to the contrarian contemplation of a first-person narrator—a nostalgic yet vehement, bewildered yet discriminating poet—who seeks shelter behind his window, in vain. The phrase "a slap to my bony quillholder", underlines the poet's delicacy, fragility, and vulnerability when being exposed to the sinister, intrusive, and devouring modern metropolis. While his suffering from and scepticism of industrialization and urbanization urge him to write, the poet's attempt to write is incessantly interrupted by the multidimensional distractions and assaults that the contemporary world continues to generate.

Seemingly detached from the novel, this preface nevertheless ties the first-person narrator's inner monologue to the third-person narration of the Chinese rebel Wang-lun. The dual connotation of *Zueignung* implies both Döblin's philosophical, self-referential, and paradoxical *appropriation* of Wilhelm's Liezi and Döblin's personal, ceremonial, and sacrificial *dedication* of "this impotent book"—his "Chinese Novel"—to "the wise old man // L i ä D s i". Strikingly, the Daoist sage's name is visually enshrined. The curious formatting turns "Liezi" (after Wilhem's spelling "Liä Dsi") into a one-word, stand-alone, and centralized paragraph, and inserts empty spaces between letters to force the reader to slow down, ponder, and even worship.

The choice of "impotent" here is also curious, in that it can be interpreted in two ways. On the surface, "impotent" addresses the non-conformist poet's self-perceived inferiority to "the potent life force of Heaven and Earth". But in an ironic sense, "impotent" also suggests his self-perceived superiority to his conformist contemporaries. The latter is manifested in the poet's mercilessly scornful critique of the self-deceiving people who, in his view, fail to recognize the futility of winning, conquering, and possessing. This might indeed be the rationale behind Döblin's literary appropriation of Wilhelm's Liezi for his preface, i.e., the citation from "Property" (Liezi 1921, Book I, Chapter 12) in quotation marks. Instead of "all this is the potent life force of Heaven and Earth: who can appropriate it?", the quote now ends in "who can then speak of winning, possessing?"

In fact, even before this unmistakable citation, the line that instantly shifts the preface's tone from offensive to serene—"O, I know that. I, currycombed by the wind"—already bears a parallel to "Self-Surrendering" and "The Evolution of

Liezi", Book II, Chapter 3 and Book IV, Chapter 6 in Wilhelm's Liezi: "I followed the wind east and west like a leaf or dry chaff, and I truly know not if the wind drove me or I the wind". This parallel reinforces the dual implication of Döblin's wordplay with "impotent": the first-person narrator, while admitting his *impotence* to appropriate "the potent life force of Heaven and Earth", regards himself as a modern European Daoist who rides the wind beyond "the human beings on the pavement", spreading a *potent* message with his "Chinese Novel"—a powerful antidote to the current worship of that taken-for-granted "progress".

From this point of view, the enigmatic fragment that recurs three times in the preface and ends each time with an em-dash and a period, "So I don't forget —.", finds a promising solution. The first-person narrator—the idiosyncratic and non-conformist poet—writes his "Dedication/Appropriation" in order not to forget his spiritual temple and philosophical ideal, his trans-era origin and cross-cultural kinship, his inner sensation that resonates with "the Earth's gushing springs", and his underlying vision awakened to the ancient Chinese Dao, by which he, a 20th-century German who "can't orient" himself, may ultimately re-orient himself.

In a later "Autobiographical Sketch (Autobiographische Skizze)" (1986b [1922]), Döblin revisited his predestined encounter with Daoism, expanding his self-observation from *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun: Chinese Novel* (2007 [1915]) to *Mountains Oceans and Giants* (1924):

> I—in a pent-up rage, nevertheless unable to break through, not even in my environment, and beyond this also in arrogance and certainty: "I already know, what I can do, I have time,"—have executed nothing right for an entire decade. Instead, I hung around in psychiatric clinics, all the way into the night at laboratory work of a biological sort […] *From 1911 on, a breakthrough or breakout of literary productivity. It was almost a dam break*; the originally almost two-volume *Wang-lun* was written, including preparatory work, in eight months, written everywhere—*gushing out*—on the train, in the emergency room during night-watch, between two consultations, on the stairs while visiting patients; finished May 1913. […] Since two or three months ago, on a new grand epic work [*Mountains Oceans and Giants*]: non-history, but futuristic, from the epoch around 2500—*the peak violence of technology and its detainment by nature*. (Döblin 1986b, 36–37; Huiwen Zhang italics)

This excerpt illuminates what one may call the artistic, psychological, and philosophical "evolution" of Döblin, marked by his two experimental novels, both of which resist labelling by conventional criteria. Regarding the first turning point,

The Three Leaps of Wang-lun, Döblin's layering of three breaks—"breakthrough" (*Durchbruch*), "breakout" (*Ausbruch*), and "dam break" (*Dammbruch*)—highlights the explosive impact of his newly gained Daoist insight on the conception and composition of his *Chinese Novel*.[6]

Regarding the second turning point, *Mountains Oceans and Giants*—titled without a comma and seen by Döblin as "a new grand epic work"—his terse yet pungent summary, "the peak violence of technology and its detainment by nature", evokes two excerpts from Wilhelm's renditions of the *Laozi* and the *Yinfujing*, both of which illustrate the Daoist genesis, though in opposite directions:

> *Tao Te King (Daodejing)—The Book of Old on Sense and Life*
> 25. The Unfathomable Parable[7]
> […]
> Man is modelled on Earth.
> Earth is modelled on Heaven.
> Heaven is modelled on the Dao.
> And the Dao is modelled on itself.
> (Laozi 1911, 27)
>
> *Yin Fu Ging—The Book of Esoteric Addenda*
> 19.
> The Dao of that which is rooted in itself is peace:
> So Heaven, Earth and nature come into being.
> The Dao of Heaven and Earth
> Saturates the cosmos:
> So darkness and light win over one another.
> While darkness and light come off,
> Change and transformation go their way.
> (Liezi 1921, XXI, no. 19)

Chapter 25 in Wilhelm's *Tao Te King* (1911)—originally attributed to Laozi (5th century BCE)—presents the Daoist genesis from the lowest to the highest, i.e.,

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6   Beyond the idiosyncratic preface "*ZUEIGNUNG*"—a dedication to and appropriation of Wilhelm's Liezi—Döblin titles Book III of *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun* "Der Herr der gelben Erde (The Lord of the Yellow Earth)". The title is identical with Wilhelm's translation of the original title of Book II of the *Liezi*. Moreover, the title hints at the Yellow Emperor, Huangdi 黄帝, to whom the Daoist classic *Yinfujing* 阴符经 is attributed.

7   Wilhelm titles the originally untitled Chapter 25 of the *Laozi* "The Unfathomable Parable", which resonates with his invented motto for Book I of the *Liezi*, drawn from Goethe's *Faust*: "All the ephemeral / Is only a parable / The unfathomable / Comes to pass here."

from man to the Dao. Chapter 19 in Wilhelm's *Yin Fu Ging*—originally attributed to "The Lord of the Yellow Earth" Huangdi (ca. 2700 BCE) and selected by Wilhelm for his "Introduction" to *The True Book on the Earth's Gushing Springs* (1912), originally attributed to Liezi (4th century BCE)—portrays the Daoist genesis from the highest to the lowest, i.e., from the Dao to "change and transformation".

Together, these two depictions converge into the true way—a journey home—on three grand scales of space and time. Döblin begins with the first-person narrator in his preface to *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun*, then expands his view to historical actors, and finally embraces the future of the human race, as indicated in his vision for "the epoch around 2500". The Dao encompasses them all.

Part Two: Wilhelm and Döblin in Dialogue with Confucius

2.1 Wilhelm's Confucius

Although both Wilhelm and Döblin discussed Confucius, Döblin's encounter with Confucius occurred twenty years after he discovered Daoist texts. The *Analects* of Confucius, on the other hand, was the first translation published by Wilhelm. The first edition appeared in 1910, with revised editions in 1914 and 1923 (Wilhelm 1923 [1910; 1914]). His introduction provided social and historical information about Confucius' times and evaluated the sage's fundamental character, his philosophical message, and his achievements. For Wilhelm, Confucius was a "great man" of immense historical significance, whose life and teachings expressed a unified vision that lifted him above other human beings. Confucius dedicated himself to studying the culture of antiquity, especially the period of the early Zhou dynasty, the time of the great sage-kings Wen and Wu and the advisor Duke of Zhou. He aimed to make himself a complete *Kulturträger*, or "culture bearer", an integrated person who could contain in himself the scattered fragments of antique culture.

For Wilhelm, Confucius's obsession with antiquity exemplified Goethe's observation that destiny provides the striving man with what corresponds to his nature and what he requires for his own perfection (Wilhelm 1923, XIII). He compared Confucius' encounter with ancient texts to the experiences of Luther and Goethe on their travels to Rome.

Confucius, however, aimed to be more than a textual scholar, as he constantly sought a ruler who would carry out his moral and political prescriptions, and thereby restore the harmony of the Golden Age of the early Zhou. Although for

a short time he advised the ruler of his state of Lu, he spent most of his life in a fruitless search for anyone who would listen to him. His influence after his death was transmitted through the texts he edited and through the students who developed his thoughts. Thus Confucius built the foundations of Chinese culture in a time of "social collapse" (Wilhelm 1923, XIX).

Wilhelm's version of Confucius explicitly compares him to major German figures, and he highlights modern aspects of Confucius' thought. As Minister of Justice in Lu, Confucius showed the "generosity" of a modern judge. Wilhelm singles out Confucius' love of music to show that he genuinely valued *Ausdruckskultur*—"expressive culture"—and was not the pedantic moralist rejected by modern Chinese. Wilhelm believes that the Western moral philosopher whom Confucius most strongly resembles is Immanuel Kant, and translates the virtue of *zhong* (忠), or "loyalty", as *Gewissenhaftigkeit*—"conscientiousness"—to make it comparable to Kant's dedication to moral autonomy. Confucius' dedication to re-enacting the rituals of the past did not stress their exterior form, as what mattered most was their effect on one's inner life. Just as Wilhelm rejected rigid adherence to the sterile practice of Christian rituals such as baptism if they had no relationship to genuine spiritual insight, he recognized in Confucius a fellow searcher, a man dedicated to *Innerlichkeit*, or "inwardness". Kant's concept of *autonome Sittlichkeit* ("moral autonomy") echoed Confucius' determination to follow the path of virtue regardless of external constraints and personal suffering. Wilhelm's Confucius, like Socrates and Kant, recognized that virtue does not necessarily lead to happiness. Wilhelm thereby turned Kant's abstract "autonomous morality" into a spiritual quest. Wilhelm in part echoed the arguments of the Jesuits of the 18th century, who espoused a secular, this worldly version of Confucian teaching, but he also recognized Confucianism as a genuinely religious culture, and insisted that China's religious beliefs could be placed on an equal level with the major world religions.

In Wilhelm's account, Chinese society moved in a direction radically opposed to Confucian ideals after his death. The Warring States period culminated in the victory of the Qin, whose leader completely rejected humanist values. Confucian ideas survived in the following Han dynasty, and the "educated middle class", or literati, became the culture-bearing class. But the rituals which Confucius valued froze into sterile orthodoxy and intolerance, and the inwardness at their core was lost. By the 20th century the collapse of the Qing dynasty, and along with it the collective family system, seemed to imply the collapse of Confucianism as well. Modern efforts to recreate Confucian doctrines in a form modelled on the Christian church, Wilhelm felt, completely missed its essence. What would last in Confucianism would be *die Souveränität der sittlichen Persönlichkeit*— "the sovereignty of the moral personality". Like Kant, what endured was not the institutionalized

form of religious doctrine, but the force of an integrated personality (Wilhelm 1923, XXVIII).

Wilhelm, in all of his studies, overwhelmingly concentrated on the native Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Daoism. Although he respected Buddhism, he often described popular Chinese religion as "superstition", nor did he explore the frontier regions of China, or non-Chinese texts. Wilhelm maintained that Chinese culture consisted of a fundamental unity and harmony, which he contrasted with the multiple warring orientations of the West. In his view, Confucian tolerance of multiple sources of truth contrasted with the dogmatism of Western religions, Islam, and Buddhism, while the Confucian stress on daily life contrasted with Western and Indian concern with death, the future, heaven and hell. He tried to persuade readers of the need to combine this harmonious vision with the Western assertion of the individual self, but he seldom addressed the contradictions between individualism and Confucian-Daoist orthodoxy.

2.2 Döblin's Confucius

In 1940, Döblin published a short book entitled *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, included in a series of writings edited for North American audiences by Alfred O. Mendel. This series, "The Living Thoughts Library", explained to American readers the basic doctrines of leading thinkers accompanied by short excerpts from their works. The motto of the series was: "Life travels upward in spirals. He who takes pains to search the shadows of the past below us, then, can better judge the tiny arc up which he climbs, more surely guess the dim curves of the future above him" (Döblin 1940, front). The series included studies of Jefferson, Darwin, Freud, Kant, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, with Confucius, Muhammad, and the Buddha as the only non-Western thinkers. Many well-known literary figures wrote for it: W. H. Auden, for example, wrote on Kierkegaard, John dos Passos wrote on Thomas Paine, Thomas Mann wrote on Schopenhauer, and Heinrich Mann wrote on Nietzsche.

In his introductory essay Döblin, like Wilhelm, outlines Confucius' life, his personality, and his major teachings, and explains his relevance to readers of modern times. The excerpts from Confucius and other classic texts are taken from James Legge's English translations, presented without commentary. Döblin addresses the general English-language reader, with the explicit goal of connecting the ancient sage's thoughts to concerns of the present day.

Döblin's Confucius is a powerful and moral person, focused on his goal and influential by virtue of his determination. He exemplifies sincerity, "the supreme

importance of keeping one's actions in tune with one's surroundings". He follows his own moral duty, which is "morality with a cosmic perspective", derived from the "natural reason" that unites the Heavenly cosmos with the individual human character. He provides the basis for a critique of modern social and psychological assumptions: "what a contrast to the empty wisdom and hellish indifference of our day! … in contrast to our materialist line of thought … our actions are capable of influencing and do influence world happenings … for we have here spiritual power" (Döblin 1940, 15, 17, 18).

Döblin's Confucius, however, has a more political orientation than Wilhelm's, as Confucius always aimed to influence the ruler, backed by his claim to represent Heavenly force. Confucius supported centralized rule against the arbitrary power of lords and rebels, but insisted on reciprocity as its central principle. The performance of rituals, as prescribed by the scholars, constrained emperors and princes, ensuring that they ruled on behalf of the people: "Emperors and rulers, by making mistakes, lose their right to rule." In Döblin's interpretation, Confucius' espousal of the "golden mean" and his avoidance of praise for heroic deeds and unusual phenomena made him a spokesman for the "average man". He was a practical, secular thinker, focused on the essential components of social order: human behaviour, the family, and the state. Unlike the Buddha or Jesus, who had much more transcendent spiritual goals, Confucius simply aimed to improve the society of his own time. While Wilhelm compared Confucius to Kant, because of his strong inner morality, Döblin remarked that "even Kant, marveling at the starry heavens above and the moral law within him, was far from connecting these two things". Confucius, by contrast, links Heaven's order and human moral order: "Only together do humanity and Heaven build the universe". Just as Wilhelm placed Confucius on a level with Kant, Döblin ranked Confucius above Marx, who only "stressed the importance of external, material things", or Nietzsche, whose "hopeless nihilism" led only to "tyranny and brutality" (Döblin 1940, 21–23).

Döblin's attraction to Daoism as both a moral and political force is also apparent in his characterization of Confucius. Although his Confucius avoided metaphysical speculation, his ability to persuade rulers and students of the power of moral behaviour depended on the assumption that the Dao, as the order of Heaven, enforced humanity's obedience to the rituals seen in ancient texts, which described an ideal social order. Rulers who violated these prescriptions would lose the support of both Heaven and the people. Döblin thus portrays a radically democratic Confucius, a "teacher of democracy" who "brought into esteem the will of the people", even though he never knew of representative institutions, the rule of law, or modern individual rights (Döblin 1940, 26).

Döblin's nonconventional presentation of Confucius led to polarized receptions. In December 1940, the American novelist Albert Guerard published a critical review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, in which he did not appreciate Döblin's recontextualization of Confucius. Instead, he ridiculed Döblin's unscholarly approach of drawing light from the ancient East to inspire the present-day West as "not Confucianism but Confusionism", Guerard's review concluded that "Döblin has achieved the miracle of creating opacity out of translucent materials", and that "the interpreter is much harder than the original" (Guerard 1940, 30).

By contrast, Döblin's Confucius was warmly received in 1940s Norway.[8] Starting in 1939, the influential public intellectual Nic Stang selected eleven titles from the expansive spectrum of the "Living Thoughts Library" for Norwegian readers. For his re-envisioned book series *De store filosofer* (The Great Philosophers), Stang chose Döblin's Confucius—over Ali's Muhammad and Coomaraswamy's Buddha—as the sole Eastern representative.[9] Upon its release in September 1949, the publisher Gyldendal Norsk Forlag used Döblin's established appeal to promote the Norwegian edition of his transreading of Confucius: "It is the renowned author Alfred Döblin, one of Germany's leading intellectuals in the period between the First World War and Adolf Hitler, who has edited the Confucius volume in our series" (Gyldendal Norsk Forlag 1949).

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8   Two Norwegian pioneers in cross-cultural dialogue contributed to cultivating the soil for transplanting Döblin's Confucius. In 1926, Kristian Schjelderup recognized in his book *Religion og religioner* (*Religion and Religions*) not only the phenomenon that Karl Jaspers later termed the *Achsenzeit* (Axial Age)—the resonances between Moses, Zarathustra, Laozi, Budda, Jesus, and Muhammad—but also the influential personality of each master: "The followers of each religion have been shaped by the fundamental, innovating experience of the master and received the religion as a gift from him" (Schjelderup 1926, 50). Between 1942 and 1950, Harris Birkeland developed the book series *Religionens stormenn* (*The Grandmasters of Religion*), featuring seven figures: Muhammad and Confucius (1942), Zarathustra (1943), Laozi (1948), Eckhart and Isaiah (1949), and Jeremiah (1950). Birkeland emphasized both the "infinite enrichment for the Christians to gain an insight into the eternal values by which the followers of foreign religions live" and the "creative religious personalities" as "starting points and milestones in a rich and dramatic development", who "have set in motion powerful impulses that work through centuries and millennia, reshaping the course of history" (Birkeland 1942, 1–4).

9   The eleven titles chosen by Stang for Norwegian translations were: Andre Maurois' *Voltaire*, Thomas Mann's *Schopenhauer*, and Heinrich Mann's *Nietzsche*, published in 1939; Romain Rolland's *Rousseau* and Stefan Zweig's *Tolstoy* in 1940; Julian Huxley's *Darwin* in 1941; Alfred Döblin's *Confucius* and Carlo Sforza's *Machiavelli* in 1949; Robert Waelder's *Freud* in 1950; Andre Gide's *Montaigne* in 1952; and François Mauriac's *Pascal* in 1954. Stang himself translated two volumes into Norwegian, those on Nietzsche and Pascal. Moreover, Stang replaced W. H. Auden's *Kierkegaard* with Harald Beyer's original Norwegian version (1942) and added a new title, Henning Mørland's *Plato* (1951). Thus, the Norwegian book series "De store filosofer (The Great Philosophers)" features a total of 13 titles, 11 translated from the "Living Thoughts Library" and two specially written in Norwegian.

In his preface to this volume, Stang walked the opposite path from Guerard, ranking the relevance of the interpreter even above the original, for two reasons. First, parts of the original were "so tied to the time in which it was written that today they only interest the professional philosopher and historian", and thus the task of the interpreter is "to identify those writings of the great minds which carry messages to us in today's cultural clash". Second, the unique richness of Döblin's Confucius lies in its dual insight into both the original thinker and the interpreter. According to Stang, Döblin is one of those "creative writers and thinkers in the middle of today's battle" who "are intimately related to the philosophers they treat. Therefore, the series also provides a glimpse into the vibrant intellectual life of our own turbulent century" (Stang 1949, 5–6).[10]

In November 1949, the Norwegian transreader Paal Brekke—reader, writer, translator, and critic in one[11]—penned an article for the widely read newspaper *Dagbladet*, in which he contextualized Döblin's Confucius in a multifaceted network of eclectic Confucius commentaries.[12] Against this background, Brekke deemed Döblin's idiosyncratic selection of Confucian classics "wise and insightful", fulfilling Stang's anticipation of the interpreter to "make the selection as accessible as possible to the ordinary, interested reader" (Brekke 1949).

Moreover, Brekke appreciated Döblin's strategy of using Confucius to overcome the fragmentation of modern Western culture. In contrast to Daoism, which "encouraged people to turn away from this evil world," Brekke considered Confucianism to be the only solution to the Warring States Period's "sad state of disintegration". Brekke echoed Döblin's characterization of Confucianism as "the law purified of all mysticism". In contrast with Christianity, which "had eternal bliss to tempt us", the whole Confucian package promises to be a healing force for trauma on a universal scale: historical knowledge, practical idealism, moral appeal, harmony in *this* world, and accessible laws for both the spiritual and mundane (ibid.).

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10   Yet another motivation for Stang's choice of Confucius in 1949 was his empathy with the suffering Chinese people: "Today, China is going through the most brutal metamorphosis in her history, and there may be reason to pause and gaze upon her ancient wisdom." (Stang 1949, 5)

11   A representative of what I term "Nordic modes of transreading", Brekke incorporated both American-British modernism (T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound) and Asian poetry (Chinese, Japanese, and Indian) into Scandinavia, the European periphery, and cultivated a Norwegian modernism.

12   This multifaceted network of eclectic Confucius commentaries spans Sima Qian's *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian of China), Lin Yutang's *Wisdom of China*, P. A. Munch's work on the medieval history of Norway, Sten Bugg's *Konfusius* in Birkeland's series *Religionens stormenn* (The Grandmasters of Religion), and Karl Reichelt's Confucius in *Fromhetstyper og helligdommer i Øst-Asia* (*Piety Types and Shrines in East Asia*).

Conclusion: Transreading Chinese Antiquity through German Modernity

Wilhelm, who saw himself as the "spiritual intermediary between East and West", practiced a Sinology accessible to the general public. He aimed to encourage the two cultures to understand each other by producing translations that were best adapted to intercultural transmission. He worked closely with Chinese scholars, but his translations constantly sought German equivalents for Chinese terms, allowing the reader to place Chinese literary and philosophical texts into the German cultural heritage. His work did in fact influence major writers like Kafka, Heidegger, Brecht, Döblin, and others. His German translation of the *Yijing*, which was in turn translated into English in 1950, has been reprinted over thirty times since then, and readers today still regard it as a key text of Oriental wisdom (Wilhelm 1967). An ordained minister who felt alienated from his fellow missionaries, he simultaneously rejected the narrow provincialism of Christian orthodoxy and the Orientalist condescension of German imperialism. Wilhelm dehistoricized his sources, and by removing particular details of time and place created the impression of a timeless, universal human culture (Lackner 1999). Living in China turned him into a genuine believer in the high moral value of Chinese classical civilization, an advocate of generosity and tolerance.

Döblin, a pioneering modernist writer, found in Daoism the inspiration for large-scale epic accounts that grasped the existential condition of humankind in a world of demonic technology and materialist philosophy. Later, writing in exile, he promoted Confucius as the archetypal personality who could lead ordinary people out of war and exile in both past and present. China, a place Döblin visited only in his imagination, still inspired, as it did with Wilhelm, a dedication to the respect for cultural difference and interchange of values guided by the principle of cultural equality.

Wilhelm and Döblin both created a Liezi and a Confucius who could engage with the central issues of the 20th century. Both men rejected the revolutionary materialism and the soulless liberalism of their times, idealizing Chinese antiquity as a special source of values. Döblin the modernist visionary appropriated Liezi to construct his own idiosyncratic novels; later, as a creative artist in exile, he argued for a Confucius with immense potential for spiritual and political influence, an answer to modern despair. Wilhelm found himself estranged from both his missionary colleagues and academic philologists, as he sought to make Chinese writings helpful for informing contemporary moral discussions.

Our study of Wilhelm and Döblin reveals the paths they forged to make East and West not only mutually comprehensible, but even integrable into something

richer and more meaningful than the sum of their parts. Such paths remain open for us today so that we might explore one culture and elevate another, finding new lessons and inspirations in both.

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Li Zehou's Ideas on Chinese Modernity Revisited: Possible Applications of *Xi ti Zhong yong*

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Abstract

We propose Li Zehou's idea of "Western Learning for Substance, Chinese Learning for Function" (*Xi ti Zhong yong* 西體中用) as an interpretative framework for two distinct theories: Sungmoon Kim's political theory of public reason Confucianism and Yan Lianke's literary theory of mythorealism. This paper aims to show that *Xi ti Zhong yong* can provide a unified explanatory framework for these two apparently distinct theories. Second, we show that *Xi ti Zhong yong* can be applied even more broadly to other phenomena occurring in contemporary discourses on China. In particular, we show that it provides new interpretative perspectives in political philosophy and literary theory.

Keywords: Li Zehou, history of ideas, Chinese philosophy, Yan Lianke, mythorealism, Sungmoon Kim, Public Reason Confucianism

Ponovni pregled Li Zehouovih idej o kitajski modernosti: možne aplikacije *Xi ti Zhong yong*

Izvleček

Avtorja članka predlagata Li Zehouovo idejo o »zahodnem učenju kot substanci in kitajskem učenju kot funkciji« (*Xi ti Zhong yong* 西體中用) kot interpretativni okvir za dve različni teoriji: Sungmoon Kimovo politično teorijo konfucijanskega javnega razuma in Yan Liankejevo literarno teorijo mitorealizma. Namen članka je pokazati, da lahko *Xi ti Zhong yong* ponudi enoten razlagalni okvir za ti dve na videz različni teoriji. Avtor in avtorica pokažeta, da je *Xi ti Zhong yong* mogoče uporabiti v širšem smislu za druge pojave, ki se pojavljajo v sodobnih diskurzih o Kitajski. Predvsem pa izpostavljata, da ta ponuja nove perspektive za interpretacije politične filozofije ter literarne teorije.

Ključne besede: Li Zehou, zgodovina idej, kitajska filozofija, Yan Lianke, mitorealizem, Sungmoon Kim, konfucijanstvo javnega razuma

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Introduction

This article aims to revisit Li Zehou's idea of "Western Learning for Substance, Chinese Learning for Application" (*Xi ti Zhong yong* 西體中用), further referred to as *Xi ti Zhong yong*. Our research is an attempt to operationalize it in the areas of political philosophy and literary studies. In particular, we draw on Li's idea to provide a new interpretative framework for Sungmoon Kim's public reason Confucianism and Yan Lianke's mythorealism (*shenshizhuyi* 神實主義). We believe that some crucial features of this framework are indicative of its explanatory force not only for the two presented theories, but also for a more comprehensive array of theories that explore modern Chinese phenomena. Such features include the search for continuity as well as the evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) character of how modernization pathways for China have been shaped.

This article has the following structure: first, we briefly present the historical context of Li Zehou's idea and his approach to the interplay between the two well-established concepts of "substance" (*ti* 體) and "application/function" (*yong* 用). In particular, we outline the significance and implications of *Xi ti Zhong yong*. In the main part, we first present Sungmoon Kim's political theory of public reason Confucianism and then Yan Lianke's literary theory of mythorealism through the interpretative lens of *Xi ti Zhong yong*. Finally, we conclude with final remarks and provide a perspective for further research on *Xi ti Zhong yong*.

Li Zehou was an active thinker from the 1950s until his death in 2021, and well-read in both Eastern and Western traditions. He created some of his most insightful works in the 1970s and 80s, including a panoramic overview of the history of Chinese thought, a critical examination of Kant's philosophy, and a re-evaluation of Confucius' heritage (Lambert 2021). Li solidified his academic standing with the publication of *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics* in 1981. Although his work on Chinese aesthetics earned him the status of an academic celebrity, he decided to venture into a new philosophical area after adopting a stance critical of the government's response to the Tiananmen Protests in 1989, and after three years of house arrest he moved to the US in 1992. Li proposed some distinctive ethical theories, such as the theory of sedimentation and "emotion as substance". The last few years have brought a renewed interest in Li Zehou's thought; among them, a book edited by Ames and Jia (2018) and the special issue of *Asian Studies* dedicated to his work (2020). In the former, Karl-Heinz Pohl presented probably the most recent and most explanatory take on the idea of *Xi ti Zhong yong*.

The reception of an essay published in 1987, "Random Thoughts on 'Western Learning as Substance, Chinese Learning as Application'" (*Man shuo Xi ti Zhong*

yong 漫說西體中用), was indicative of Li's future. Published at the height of his popularity in the People's Republic of China, "Random Thoughts" was fiercely criticized both by radical liberals for an overly conservative approach and by orthodox Marxists for inviting total Westernization (*quanpan xihua* 全盘西化) (Liu 1994; Pohl 2018). Whether or not his critics were right, such divergent receptions of Li's proposal indicate its interpretative potency and richness.

However, its immediate reception in the late 1980s is not what matters most today for developing the ideas shared in Li's essay from 1987. His proposal of *Xi ti Zhong yong* is a subversive voice in a much longer debate. China's position towards the West has been a leitmotif of Chinese intellectual life and social debates since the Opium Wars. This historical frame needs to be accounted for in discussions of Li's views on Chinese modernity.

Moreover, the distinct starting points of Li Zehou's conception present it as particularly well-suited for engaging in a meaningful dialogue with a diverse array of contemporary voices. His ideas, rooted in a deep understanding of Chinese intellectual traditions while simultaneously engaging with Western philosophies, create a fertile ground for dialogue with thinkers such as Sungmoon Kim, whose works delve into East Asian political philosophy, or literary figures like Yan Lianke, who is keenly interested in the pace and influence of modernization in China and its toll on society.

Sungmoon Kim's reflections are inspired by the actual social existence of people in East Asia. According to Kim, the enduring East-Asian social conditions are irrevocably marked by value pluralism and structured by political institutions originating from external traditions. Nonetheless, the lives of East Asians are deeply permeated by Confucian mores and habits. The question then is how one can accommodate the fact that Confucianism greatly influences East Asians even if they identify themselves as followers of other doctrines in their public and private lives.

Likewise, there are noticeable similarities between Li Zehou and Yan Lianke. In both cases their theoretical work stems from genuine concern for society, and both Li and Yan take an interest in China's development and path toward modernity, even though they use different tools in approaching these topics. Even though it is not crucial to this analysis, it is worth mentioning that Yan, just like Li, examines the relationship between humans and productive forces. He does so by presenting in his fiction recurring motifs to comment on painful societal matters such as the exploitation of the human body (*Hard Like Water* (2021), *Lenin's Kisses* (2012), and *Dream of Ding Village* (2009)), absurdities resulting from hyper-fast development (*The Explosion Chronicles* (2018b)), or engagement in utopias (*The Four Books* (2016) and *The Day the Sun Died* (2018a)).

Both theories presented in the article are holistic. They both reassess the role of Chinese tradition, grapple with the question of Western influences in contemporary China, and reach similar conclusions.

In the article, we will first shed new light on Sungmoon Kim's attempt to establish congruence between democratic liberal institutions and Confucian self-identification. We will then reinterpret Yan Lianke's mythorealism by arguing that it is conceptually close to *Xi ti Zhong yong*.

Xi ti Zhong yong was not proposed to establish a framework for any particular area of study. It was Li's system of philosophical aesthetics and his concepts of the "humanization of nature" (*zirande renhua* 自然的人化), the "naturalization of humans" (*rende ziranhua* 人的自然化), "subjectality" (*zhutixing* 主體性) and "sedimentation" (*jidian* 積澱) that were previously applied in literary studies. In particular, his idea of human subjectality directly influenced the theory of literary subjectivity put forward by Liu Zaifu (Lin 1992). Similarly, it was Li's simultaneous apprehension of Kant's aesthetics and Marx's politics that invited reflections on concepts such as political freedom (Bruya 2003).

Why then, do we intend to argue that *Xi ti Zhong yong* is applicable to the fields of literary study and political philosophy? First, Li's formulation stems from his awareness that Western influences on Chinese reality cannot be ignored. This awareness is a substantial background behind Chinese intellectual debates. Second, we believe that the two theories share a common ground with Li's idea and can be thought of as concrete instances of *Xi ti Zhong yong*. Finally, exploring links between *Xi ti Zhong yong* and its potential practical applications provides an opportunity to reinterpret the latter. We are not looking for the direct conceptual genealogy linking *Xi ti Zhong yong* with the ideas analysed here. Instead, we aim to show that Li's proposal serves as a useful interpretative framework for different research areas.

Xi ti Zhong yong: The Context and the Contents

The Chinese intellectual landscape in the 19th and 20th centuries went through waves of change and deconstruction. Contact with the West, although initially conducted on Chinese terms, deteriorated into "the century of humiliation". The disintegration of the idea that Chinese culture offers sufficient resources to respond to any challenge forced Chinese intellectuals to actively seek ways of addressing the pressures of modernization. This impulse for modernization had a very particular face—one of deeply Western provenance. The inrush of "Western

learning" propelled by the use of military power was not yet another ideological novelty to be absorbed and Sinicized by the capacious means of Chinese culture. Instead, it created a vital challenge to the very paradigm of the Chinese political model. As a result, Chinese thinkers were determined to reexamine their traditions and come up with ingenious ways of confronting this challenge. The spectre of "Western learning" became a presence—to some menacing, to others providential—that was ubiquitous and unavoidable. The responses took multifarious shapes, spanning between two organizing principles of "Westernization" (*xihua* 西化) and "Sinicization" (*zhonghua* 中化) (Yu 2010, 153). The former is probably best represented by Hu Shi's appeals for "total Westernization", whereas the latter took the most prevalent form in Zhang Zhidong's formulation of "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning as application" (*Zhongxue wei ti Xixue wei yong* 中學為體西學為用) put forward in "Exhortation to Study" (*Quanxue Pian* 勸學篇) in 1898.

A binary notion of substance and function has been present in Chinese tradition from the times of neo-Confucianism. Thus, the idea of "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application" had already taken deep roots in the Chinese intellectual landscape when Li Zehou conducted his "ingenious turnaround" (Pohl 2018, 64). At the end of the 19th century, Zhang Zhidong repurposed the neo-Confucian notions of *ti* and *yong* to present his vision of incorporating Western ideas and changing the country. In Zhang's understanding, *Zhong ti* represented the orthodox basis of society (ibid., 63). In his influential work, Zhang voiced the belief of his time that Western learning could be limited to scientific, technological, and economic know-how, effectively serving what the Chinese could call "worldly affairs" (*shishi* 世事).

Zhang's use of *ti-yong* was "by no means orthodox in a Confucian philosophical way but […] rather creatively clever" (Pohl 2018). Li Zehou, on the other hand, despite returning to the traditional view of *ti-yong* as inseparable (*tiyong bu er* 體用不二), proposed a treatment of the formula that was far from conventional. First, Li adapted this idea by reversing it. Second, he proposed a different understanding of *ti*:

> I repeatedly emphasize that social existence is the substance of society [*benti* 本体]. Turning '*ti*' into social existence does not involve only the ideological state, and it is not just 'science'. Social existence is a mode of production and ways of everyday life. This is social existence in itself from the materialistic viewpoint and the root of human existence. Modernization primarily means changing this '*ti*'. (Li 1987; authors' own translation)

Here Li believes *ti* and *yong* to be two sides of the same coin. The "function" (*yong*) is an "upgrade" and "variation" of the Chinese tradition and the starting point to realize the Western *ti*.

> This 'Chinese function' involves 'Western substance' applied in China and includes Chinese traditional culture and 'Chinese learning' since those should serve as the way and method to achieve '*Xi ti*' (modernization). In this sense of '*yong*', what used to be the original 'Chinese learning' is upgraded, altered, and varied. Only with this kind of '*Zhong yong*' 'Western substance' can be genuinely and adequately Sinicized, instead of—yet again—turning it under the banner of Sinicization into 'adopting Western knowledge for its practical while keeping Chinese values as the core'. (Li 1987; authors' own translation

In a comprehensive and highly elucidative chapter, Karl-Heinz Pohl describes "Western learning as substance" as a modernized social existence that not only comprises natural sciences and technology, but also involves "the political, social, and economic thought that enabled the development of technological know-how, as well as the thought tradition of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (of which Marx was an integral part)" (Pohl 2018, 64). The corresponding "Chinese learning as function" refers to a specific Chinese form that both shapes and is shaped by the modernized social existence (Li 2018, 64).

Although Li's understanding of the terms *ti* and *yong* contradicts that of Zhang Zhidong, there is a historical parallelism that provides them with a shared context. The year 1898 was a tumultuous and fervent one that culminated in the bold yet failed Hundred Days Reform (*wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法). Similarly, 1986 was marked by the so-called "Cultural Fever" (*wenhua re* 文化熱) (that also includes the "Aesthetic Craze"—*meixue re* 美學熱), a period abounding in daring movements, such as the '85 New Wave that openly followed ideas of Western art. Li's primary concern in this context is how to establish the most favourable way of incorporating both tradition and modernity in China. In both 1898 and 1986, China was at a crossroads. In both cases, there were widespread doubts about the efficacy and relevance of China's heritage under the growing influx of foreign ideas. Questions of identity and the degree of opening up to the outside world prevailed. In both cases, the intellectual ferment was possible thanks to the period of short-lived political liberalization. Zhang Zhidong's proposal of prioritizing "Chinese substance" and disjoining it from "Western application" became inscribed in the Chinese intellectual imagination. In contrast, Li advocated treating both as equal and, more importantly, inseparable. On the other hand, following

Lin's (1992) and Lambert's (2021) observations, it could be argued that it was Li Zehou's innovative reworking of *Zhong ti Xi yong* that underpinned Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic appeal to "cross the river by feeling the stones" (*mozhe shitou guo he* 摸著石頭過河).

Sungmoon Kim's Public Reason Confucianism

As Yutang Jin (2021) aptly observes, the diversity of contemporary Confucian political theories is due to different ways of understanding social change and assessing whether and how Confucianism can respond to social change. Jin further points out that this is but another iteration of "the age-long debate about 'substance' (*ti*) and 'function' (*yong*) in Chinese intellectual history" (Jin 2021, 18). Finally, he distinguishes between two main approaches among Confucian political theorists: the cultural and the intellectual. The cultural approach is represented by Confucian perfectionists such as Sungmoon Kim or Franz Mang. It takes Confucianism as a set of interconnected values, customs, and behaviours deeply ingrained in the cultural practices of contemporary East Asians. As such, Confucian perfectionist values need to be given serious consideration. The primary challenge is thus to find legitimate means of promoting them within the context of the modern state (ibid., 4). The intellectual approach regards Confucianism predominantly as a system of thought upheld by an extensive intellectual tradition. The normative implications retrieved from this philosophical framework can potentially question the dominance of liberal democratic universalism in contemporary society (ibid., 8). Jin divides the intellectual approach into revivalists and reconstructivists. The former, represented by Jiang Qing, strives to devise methods of reviving traditional Confucianism to tailor a concept of modernity suitable for East Asia. The latter, represented by Stephen Angle, Tongdong Bai, Daniel Bell, and Joseph Chan, while recognizing that traditional Confucian thought is no longer applicable to complex modern societies, remains optimistic about retrieving and adapting philosophical insights from Confucianism and their relevance for understanding contemporary issues. Nevertheless, both subgroups regard Confucianism as a system of thought upheld by an extensive intellectual tradition that can serve as a reservoir of normative challenge to the dominance of liberal democratic universalism. Concerning the "substance" (*ti*) and "function" (*yong*) framework, Li Zehou's idea of "Western substance and Chinese function" is represented by the cultural approach (ibid., 18). Kim's conception of public reason Confucianism is a good example of how Li's principle can be applied in practice.

As Kim describes it, public reason Confucianism is a particular mode of Confucian democratic perfectionism that "best articulates the complex relationship between Confucian cultural values and Confucian democratic citizenship under the institutional constraints of democratic constitutionalism and within the normative parameters of democratic principles" (Kim 2016, 19). It aims to reconcile the existing diversity and value pluralism of East Asian societies with their assumed pervasive Confucian character. To achieve this goal, Kim creatively revises the Rawlsian concept of public reason to open it to the possibility of public reason perfectionism and, subsequently, to public reason Confucianism (ibid., 80).

While Jin does not elaborate on his idea further, his observation points to Kim's public reason Confucianism as an example of the *Xi ti Zhong yong* principle. At the same time, he acknowledges the complex intellectual and historical background of contemporary Confucian investigations. At the very source of contemporary Confucian political thought lies the impetuous and often violent encounters with the West. According to David Stasavage (2020), China and Western Europe represent not just two different models of political development, but are "the starkest alternative" (Stasavage 2020, 138) in terms of how their political experiences unfolded. This modal polarity is the predominant reason why the encounter with the West resulted in a challenge unprecedented in Chinese history. At the beginning of the 20th century the generally undisputed role of Confucianism and Confucian political thought was questioned and criticized for its perceived role in China's inability to modernize and resist Western and Japanese imperialism. Both liberals and communists deemed Confucianism "hopelessly outdated" (Elstein 2021, 490). Consequently, contemporary Confucian political philosophy took shape in a context of vulnerability and self-contestation. Confucianism was no longer the unwavering political ideology within a stable institutional framework, but instead needed to be re-established and re-imagined to respond to the influx of cultural, political, and philosophical challenges of Western modernity.

In recent years, the explicit discourse centred around the categories of "Westernization" and "Sinicization" has waned (Yu 2010, 183). Some researchers believe that, in times of globalization, we should discard old distinctions and replace them with "Complementary Substance and Complementary Function", *hu ti hu yong* 互體互用 (Yu 2015). In other cases, the debate between *Zhong ti Xi yong* and *Xi ti Zhong yong* is considered to be no longer relevant (Yao 2019; Gao et al. 2016), or even responsible for stagnation in academia (Gao et al. 2016). However, the need to reconcile local and non-local institutional, cultural, or political elements is still a challenge in China and East Asia. The engagement with Western philosophical tradition is a defining feature of contemporary Confucian philosophy (Elstein 2021, 7), and the question of how to operationalize the relation between Western

and Chinese learning undergirds most of the contemporary political Confucian scholarship regardless of its stance. Even Jiang Qing (2013), an ardent proponent of reviving traditionalist Confucian political philosophy who emphasizes the importance of holding onto the original Confucian principles (Rošker 2015, 513), cannot but engage with ideas of Western provenance, even though he himself accuses such Confucian political reformers as Kang Youwei and Zhang Junmai of excessively internalizing Western constitutional principles (Jiang 2013, 46). While Jiang's goal is to present a modern form of a Confucian political order divorced from the influences of Western-style liberal democracy, he nevertheless has to engage with such concepts as constitutionalism or legitimacy.

The heterogeneity of Confucianism has led to the development of diverse ways of capturing the ever-changing aspects of the Confucian tradition. Apart from basic geography- or history-based classifications, a wide array of scholars have proposed taxonomies centred around the chosen method (Chan 2014), set goals (Angle 2012), the way the authors draw on Confucianism (Jin 2021), or the doctrine that serves as a reference point for Confucianism's self-transformation (Kim 2016).

According to Sungmoon Kim, Confucianism has been in the process of self-transformation throughout its whole history. What stimulates this constant evolution is the need and willingness to negotiate with doctrines that pose cultural, philosophical, or political challenges to Confucianism. Kim singles out the encounters with Legalism and Buddhism as the defining forces that first reshaped classical Confucianism into political Confucianism of the imperial period, and then redirected its interest toward metaphysics and moral psychology (Kim 2016, 242–43). Kim's proposal, public reason Confucianism, is also a result of such an encounter between Confucianism and liberal democracy.

Let us put aside the question of whether public reason Confucianism passes the test of feasibility and intelligibility (Angle 2019; Chan 2019; Wong 2019; Jin 2021), to be both philosophically significant and recognizable as belonging to the Confucian tradition. Regardless of the answer, Kim's theory remains a substantial voice in discussing how Confucian political theory can engage with liberal democracy. The hermeneutical lenses of *ti* and *yong* afford a more comprehensive understanding of how his proposal differs from other recent Confucian political theories that result from such an encounter (Angle 2012; Bai 2019; Chan 2014). In particular, it affords a way of understanding these differences regarding the internal structure of their engagement with the Western philosophical tradition.

At the very beginning, Kim acknowledges that external factors are responsible for the fact that the patterns of constitutional structure, political system, or public

identity in the political societies of East Asia have not emerged from within their own cultures (Kim 2021, 126). Moreover, traditional political institutions and patterns of public engagement are defunct, creating a vast political vacuum. Since Kim sees the traditional East Asian political culture as overlapping with Confucianism to a great extent, he claims that traditional Confucian institutions (such as one-man monarchy or political ritualism), as well as the resulting social divisions, are all but obsolete (Kim 2016, 24). In contrast to Confucian revivalists (e.g., Jiang 2013), Kim claims that the attempt to resuscitate these institutions would not only be undesirable but also impossible. The *circumstances of modern politics* characterized by value pluralism and moral disagreement (Kim 2016, 13) render the Confucian sage-king paradigm groundless.

Kim's observation coincides with Li Zehou's statement that "although the substance *ti* on which traditional politics and culture are based has gradually collapsed, many of its superstructural systems, values, and relationships still exist and became a huge habitual force". The traditional Confucian political institutions might be gone alongside the traditional ways of life, but such "deep structures of Confucianism" as the outlook on life or habits of thought (Li 2018, 216) are still in place. Li describes them as complex composites in which "desire, emotion, and reason (rational knowledge) reside in complex interrelation within a type of structure" (ibid.). Despite transformations and changes on the "surface level", the deep structures remain relatively stable since they are formed through a long process of "sedimentation"[1] (Rošker 2020a, 14–15). According to Kim, although traditional Confucian political institutions (such as one-man monarchy) have been at least partially superseded by the modern institution of citizenship (Kim 2016, 95), East Asian citizens are nonetheless *Confucian citizens* who are still under a penetrating and lasting influence of "Confucian mores and habits" (ibid., 67). Confucian citizens are thus put in a peculiar position. While they are deeply, although often unconsciously, entrenched in Confucian "habits of the heart" (Ivanhoe and Kim 2016), the circumstances of political, economic, and social life that conditioned these habits have almost entirely changed.

Instead, exogenous institutional elements (be they liberal democratic, or other) have been applied in a somewhat piecemeal and unintegrated way. The juxtaposition of the tentative institutional make-up and the shared Confucian way of how "ordinary men and women interact with themselves, think about moral questions, and make important political and legal decisions" (Kim 2021,126) results in a cacophony that renders East Asian societies unintelligible to their citizens. In

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1   Rošker (2020a) shows how the historical development of people's social and cultural life is akin to "the gradual layering of silt" that accumulates along riverbanks.

response to the needs and expectations of Confucian citizens, Kim proposes that the state should be allowed to "publicly promote a (characteristically) Confucian way of life" understood as "a constellation of values such as, but not limited to, filial piety, ritual propriety, respect for elders, ancestor worship, harmony within the (extended) family, and social harmony" (Kim 2016, 14). At the same time, core democratic values must be embraced non-instrumentally (ibid., 27). His scheme can be reframed according to the *ti-yong* framework, where the core values of democracy, such as popular sovereignty, political equality, and the right to political participation (ibid., 245), constitute the substance *ti*, while the constellation of underlying Confucian values constitutes its application *yong*.

According to Kim, the impact of modernity on the circumstances of politics in East Asia is indisputable. What, within the *ti-yong* framework, could be presented as *Zhong ti* is no longer plausible. Kim states that the "political theology of Heaven, the political ideal of sage-king, the moral metaphysics of virtue, and traditional Confucian political perfectionism" (Kim 2018, 10) have all become obsolete and no longer viable. The existing sociopolitical arrangements position East Asian citizens as equal and normatively diverse, even though their "lives are still significantly shaped by Confucian values, rituals, and social practice" (ibid., 9).

This argument can be illustrated by building upon the analogy used by Chengyang Li (2023) to describe different approaches to reconstructing Confucian philosophy. An ancient house needing renovation could be demolished and replaced with a new building. However, this would be detrimental to maintaining the inhabitants' unique way of living, outlook on life, and habits of thought. Conversely, such an ancient house could be meticulously restored to its original form, including the no longer functional parts and possible faulty designs (Li 2023, 9). However, paraphrasing Kim, the circumstances of modern living require such basic amenities as running water or electricity. Only after introducing these substantial amenities does an ancient house become practically habitable, allowing its dwellers to pursue their Confucian-valenced lives.

The experience of "cacophony" is indeed a reformulation of the modernization challenges that East Asian societies, and China in particular, have faced since before the beginning of the 20th century. Kim's solution for resolving this disharmony is consistent with Li Zehou's recommendation to infuse "sedimented tradition" (*chuantong jidian* 傳統積澱) and "cultural-psychological formation" (*wenhua xinli jiegou* 文化心理結構) with the new consciousness, thus changing the "hereditary factors" (*yichuan jiyin de gaihuan* 遺傳基因的改換) and resulting in a change in "habits, functions, and appearances" (Li 1987, 27). Kim intends to give the regulative idea of public reason a distinctly Confucian form. By changing and rejecting

some of the Confucian "hereditary factors", such as the monistic approach to ethics and politics or "the elitist aspect of Confucian meritocratic perfectionism" (Kim 2016, 14), Kim wants to offer a political proposal that satisfies three conditions. First, it should maintain a meaningful historical connection with traditional Confucianism (ibid., 15). Second, it could be recognized as distinctively Confucian by Confucian citizens. Third, it should nevertheless embrace the core democratic values non-instrumentally (ibid., 27). While Li postulates the transformation of everyday life in its political, economic, and social aspects according to Western patterns, Kim assumes that this change has already happened. What Kim calls the circumstances of modern politics are nothing else but the already modernized modes of living. From this perspective, it is only reasonable to subsequently subject the Confucian tradition to selection and transformation "on the basis of a new consciousness, shaped by a modernized social existence" (Pohl 2018, 65).

Yan Lianke's Conception of Mythorealism Reinterpreted as "Western Substance and Chinese Application"

As likely happened to all regional and local literatures worldwide, Chinese literature in the past century dramatically transformed itself through the reception and appropriation of outside influences. This was also the case with literary theory, and turbulent episodes of Chinese history led to a few momentous years of Cultural Fever, during which "in a short span of five or six years, roughly fifty- or sixty-years' worth of Western theories were introduced to Chinese readers" (Zhang 1992). The influx of new and foreign ideas coincided with the peak interest in Li Zehou's work. Eventually, the overzealous application of Western methods to the analysis of Chinese humanities inspired a self-reflection on the specific Chinese subjectivity of literary works and theory. As a side-effect, this sudden backlash against Western theory may have influenced the critical reception and misconstruction of Li's idea of *Xi ti Zhong yong*. The same phenomena could serve as an explanation for why the notion of the "Chinese School" of literary theory first put forward in Hong Kong and Taiwan was so warmly received in Mainland China in the mid-1990s (Dan and Zhou 2006).

One of the most acclaimed contemporary Chinese novelists, whose works include literary critique and theory, is Yan Lianke, and while he does not claim to represent the comparatist school mentioned above, his theory of mythorealism also takes Chinese particularity as a starting point. Yan himself coined the term mythorealism, and for this reason it is sometimes mistakenly described as a writing strategy that only he applies. However, Yan refutes this misconception by stating:

> […] Chinese literature already contains a body of writing that diverges from both nineteenth-century realism and twentieth-century modernism. This overlooked literature is precisely what I am calling mythorealism. (Yan 2022)

Mythorealism is a new literary mode that strives to touch upon the so-called "reality of the inner soul" (*linghun shendu zhenshi* 靈魂深度真實) to create and transform the objective and social. Yan distinguishes four types of reality. Apart from the reality of the inner soul, he also names the "reality of social construction" (*shehui konggou zhenshi* 社會控構真實), the "reality of worldly experiences" (*shixiang jingyan zhenshi* 世相經驗真實), and the "reality of life experiences" (*shengming jingyan zhenshi* 生命經驗真實). In this sense, the relation between "nonrealist"/"suprarealist"/"non-realist" and "realist" in mythorealistic writing may reproduce the dynamics of *ti* and *yong* intended by Li Zehou. The "inner soul", both on an individual and collective scale, may involve myths, legends, fantasy, and spirituality. Those are the things that partly shape the "Chinese function" as a part of traditional culture and "Chinese learning" (*zhongxue* 中學).

Social construction, worldly experiences, and life experiences are the realities that Yan Lianke believes to be "the biggest cemetery of literature" (Yan 2004). Yet the reality of the inner soul that mythorealism pursues grows out of social reality (Yan 2022, 99). In this sense, modernization (*ti*) and widely-defined "Chinese experiences" (*yong*) (ibid., 104) are mutually redefining themselves, creating a kind of synergy that could be interpreted in a similar manner in which Li considers *ti* and *yong* inseparable, *ti yong bu er* 體用不二.

Interestingly enough, since Yan does not name any foreign works that could fit the definition of mythorealism, the new optics is, in fact, a "Chinese application" of external literary paradigms. The "Chinese application" of mythorealism, however, is no longer for a China at the crossroads. It sets off to explore the already transformed Chinese reality, which "possesses unprecedented complexity, absurdity, and richness" (ibid., 100). This new reality is partly a side effect of the unprecedented pace and scope of Chinese development after 1978. Interest in the often disconcerting results of this drastic socio-economic transformation is common for many works that Yan considers to be examples of mythorealism. In his own writing, the entrapment of individuals and communities by the unrelenting logic of the new system is a recurring theme. The author often resorts to mythorealism to illustrate specific social conditions observed in China. For example, in *The Explosion Chronicles* (2018b) Yan problematizes China's economic development by condensing temporality (Cao 2016)—a fantastical curve of time represents the almost unlikely pace of many infrastructure projects developed in China in the first decade of this century.

According to Lambert (2021), the theorization of the relationship between humans and productive forces is one of Li Zehou's requirements for aesthetics. This premise of Li's thought on aesthetics may not be just a coincidental similarity to Yan's social engagement, but also another thread linking *Xi ti Zhong Yong* and mythorealism.

After receiving strong criticism of his idea, Li Zehou underlined the short-sightedness of the uncritical acceptance of Western solutions. In his view, "gradual transformation (improvement rather than revolution) is exactly what the position 'Western substance, Chinese application' stands for" (Li 2004). Similarly, Yan Lianke also does not consider Western theory a ready-made paradigm:

> For the past three decades, contemporary Chinese literature's repeated attempts to borrow techniques and characteristics from various branches of Western literary modernism demonstrate that sometimes Western literary trends and local Chinese experiences don't necessarily accord with one another. (Yan 2022, 104)

While some authors position China and the West in a dichotomic manner and consequently define *ti* and *yong* as two different realms, Li considers them binary, and thus inseparable (*ti yong bu er* 體用不二). *Ti yong bu er* may be seen as the principle of mythorealism not only regarding its position on the relation between reality and fiction, but also on balancing local and foreign influences. If we agree to interpret mythorealism as a form of "Chinese application", then we can set Yan Lianke in line with Li Zehou in this context, as can be seen in the following paragraph:

> Contemporary mythoreal writing cannot separate itself from the influence of twentieth-century world literature. […] This principle also applies to literature, and just as mythorealism cannot separate itself from Chinese tradition and create a world out of nothing, it similarly cannot separate itself from world literature's modernist writing and attain a completely autonomous existence. (ibid., 113)

There is also no priority given to foreign influences, namely Western modernism, "not at all inferior to nourishment from the Chinese tradition" (ibid., 114). The dynamics of West-China relations within the framework of mythorealism position both sides in a manner similar to that of Li Zehou: outside influences are inspirations that lead to different objectives and directions, since the initial forces were significantly different. The dynamics of modernization, according to "Western learning as substance", is such that it draws from its own sources. At the same time, it absorbs useful inspirations from Chinese culture.

Even if the parallels between Chinese literary tradition and *Zhong xue* seem too far-fetched, Yan does not provide any contemporary factor shaping local literature that could be specifically indigenous.[2] Yan believes mythorealism is the best way to reach the "new truth" and "new reality". Mythorealism is thus both a conceptual framework and an epistemological tool. In any case, Western forms of literary expression are realized with reference to Chinese tradition in order to fully realize the potential of China's particularity. This is where Yan Lianke's mythorealism and Li Zehou's *Xi ti Zhong yong* meet.

Conclusion

We claim that the attempt to enhance the interpretational potential of *Xi ti Zhong yong* represents a form of engagement in cross-disciplinary perspectives in research on contemporary China and the complexities of Li Zehou's thought. Even some of Li's less elaborated ideas provide an interesting theoretical tool that applies to areas with which he was always concerned, such as politics, art, and Chineseness. Li's ability to move smoothly within and beyond the paradigm makes his proposal relevant even though after publishing "Random Thoughts on 'Western Learning as Substance, Chinese Learning as Application" he gradually moved away from discussions about the balance between Westernization and Sin-icization. Although Li did not intend *Xi ti Zhong yong* as a methodological tool but rather as a manifesto for the future direction of China, there is no reason not to extend his idea to other potential applications. We have shown that *Xi ti Zhong yong* is a fruitful interpretative framework highlighting the internal structure of the two analysed theories. Moreover, it provides a unifying perspective for them even though they may appear quite distinct. Our findings serve as the basis for further examination of how *Xi ti Zhong yong* can be reinterpreted in light of the presented applications in literary and political theory.

Acknowledgements

2　Yan remains mysteriously silent on Chinese socialist realism, and some possible explanations for this are provided by Ma (2022).

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When *Dialectica* and *Logica* Travelled East: An Early Modern Chinese Translation of 'Logic' in *Mingli tan*

*XU Zhemeng**

Abstract

Mingli tan 名理探 (*Investigation of Name-Patterns*) is the first Chinese work dedicated to introducing Aristotelian logic. It was largely forgotten after being published in the 1630s, only rediscovered more than two centuries later, and then considered by modern academia more or less a failed project. However, through the lens of *mingli*, the key term to translate 'logic' in the book, this paper argues that despite the scarce readership and influence of *Mingli tan*, its translation practice should not be deemed as a failure. Instead, it is a work that reveals how translators can intervene with conceptual paradigms creatively and meaningfully. This paper provides a thorough examination of mingli, a culturally loaded term, by contextualizing it in the late Ming (1582–1644), a time of significant Sino-European cultural contacts. In doing so, it sheds light on the neglected philosophical value carried by the term through translation, and highlights the translator—Li Zhizao李之藻 (1565–1630)—and his pioneering effort in infusing it with a novel Aristotelian and Christian sense. *Mingli* is also examined in the broader intellectual history. Through an investigation into its traces in later Chinese translations of 'logic' starting from the 19th century until the 1980s, this study reveals a line of changes in the Chinese reception of logic suggested by the shift from the use of *mingli* to the phonetic translation *luoji* 逻辑 to denote logic, indicating that *mingli* can serve as a meaningful clue to track the transition of Chinese thought from traditional to modern paradigms.

Keywords: *mingli*, Aristotelian logic, Chinese philosophy, intercultural, translation history, history of concepts

Ko sta *Dialectica* in *Logica* odpotovali na vzhod: zgodnjemoderni prevod 'logike' v delu *Mingli tan*

Izvleček

Mingli tan 名理探 (*Raziskava o vzorcih imen*) je prvo kitajsko delo, ki se posveča uvodu v aristotelsko logiko. Kmalu po objavi v tridesetih letih 17. stoletja je potonilo v pozabo, ponovno pa je bilo odkrito šele več kot dve stoletji pozneje, vendar je moderni akademski

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svet v njem prepoznal bolj ali manj spodletel podvig. Z obravnavo *minglija*, ki je ključni izraz za prevod »logike« v knjigi, ta članek trdi, da njegove prevajalske prakse kljub redkemu bralstvu in šibkemu vplivu *Mingli tana* ne bi smeli obravnavati kot neuspešne. Gre namreč za delo, ki odkriva, kako lahko prevajalci kreativno in smiselno sodelujejo v snovanju konceptualnih paradigem. Članek podaja poglobljeno analizo tega kulturno globoko zaznamovanega pojma, tako, da ga poskuša kontekstualizirati v obdobju pozne dinastije Ming (1582–1644), namreč v času pomembnih sino-evropskih kulturnih stikov. Tako pa osvetljuje pogosto zanemarjeno filozofsko vrednost, ki jo ima neki pojem v procesu prevajanja, ter v ospredje postavlja njegovega prevajalca – Li Zhizaota 李之藻 (1565–1630) – in njegovo pionirsko delo, navdajajoč le-tega z novim aristotelskim in krščanskim pomenom. Prav tako je *mingli* obravnavan tudi znotraj širše idejne zgodovine. S pomočjo preiskave njegovih sledi znotraj poznejših kitajskih prevodov »logike«, začenši z 19. stoletjem, pa vse do osemdesetih let 20. stoletja, pričujoča študija odkriva vrsto sprememb v kitajskem dojemanju logike, ki jih nakazuje spreminjajoča se raba pojma »logike«, od besede *mingli* do njegovega fonetičnega prevoda, ki ga predstavlja beseda *luoji* 邏輯. Na ta način želi pričujoča študija nakazati, da je pojem *mingli* mogoče uporabiti kot zelo poveden sled, s pomočjo katere lahko sledimo prehodu kitajske miselnosti od tradicionalnih do modernih paradigem.

Ključne besede: *mingli*, aristotelska logika, kitajska filozofija, medkulturno, prevodna zgodovina, zgodovina konceptov

Introduction

Mingli tan 名理探 (*Investigation of Name-Patterns*[1]) is a translation that marks the first detailed introduction of Aristotelian logic into China. It is based on a commentary on Aristotle's *Organon*, titled *Comentarii Collegii Conimbricensis e Societate Iesu: In universam dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritae* (Commentaries of the Coimbra College of the Society of Jesus: on the Whole Logic of Aristotle from Stagira) published in Cologne in 1611,[2] a textbook used by Jesuits when they studied at the College of Liberal Arts in Coimbra. *Mingli tan* was collaboratively written by Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630), a Chinese scholar-official and prominent convert to Christianity, and by the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Furtado (Fu Fanji 傅泛际) (1587–1653). It was published around 1636–1639 and contains two

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1   Regarding the translation of *mingli* in *Mingli tan*, the previous scholarship has adopted the phrase "the pattern(s) of names", where the choice of "pattern" to render *li* dates back to Needham who understood it in terms of its literal meaning "the order and pattern in nature". Similarly, "the principles of names" has also been used, where "principle" is a commonly used yet extended meaning of *li*. Another translation is "names and principles/patterns" where *ming* and *li* are in parallel. In this paper, I would like to use "name-pattern(s)" to translate *mingli*, an imitation of "heart-mind" used to translate *xin* 心. This approach keeps the relationship between the two words open to interpretation and draws on the literal meanings of both words.

2   This edition is a reprint found in the library of the Beitang (North Church) in Beijing. The initial edition is Coimbra: D. G. Loureyro (1606).

volumes (*ce* 册): "Five Universals" (*wugong* 五公) and "Ten Categories" (*shilun* 十伦). Each volume is comprised of five chapters (*juan* 卷). Compared to the scope of *In universam dialecticam*, *Mingli tan* is not a full translation. The Latin commentary includes eight chapters: *In Præmio* (Introduction), *In Isagogem Porphyrii* (Porphyry's Introduction to *Categories*), *In Libros Categoriarum* (Categories), *In Libros de Interpretatione* (On Interpretation), *In Libros de Priori Resolutione* (Prior Analytics), *In Libros de Posteriori. Resolutione.* (Posterior Analytics), *In Librum Primum Topicorum* (Topics), and *In Duos Libros Elenchorum* (on Sophistical Refutations). However, *Mingli tan* only covers the first three of them.

As for its reception, in contrast to the tangible influence of other translations on subjects such as mathematics, astronomy and mechanics in the late Ming and early Qing periods (c. 1582[3]–c. 1724), the first introduction of European logic seems to be "a more or less complete failure. It did little, if anything, to enlarge or transform the conceptual repertoire of late Ming and early Qing discourses" (Kurtz 2011, 21–22). Modern scholars have proposed different reasons for this. Kurtz emphasizes that the text is rather abstruse due to the abundance of neologisms, indicating that comprehending the finer ideas without the guidance of an instructor is nearly impossible (ibid., 58). Similarly, Fukazawa Sukeo believes that the intricate style and structure of the Latin source text is partly responsible for the difficulty in reading the Chinese target text. He stresses that in the beginning of the book, *In universam dialecticam* delivers a lengthy discussion on the intractable issue of universals (*universalis*) in its commentary on the Noe-Platonic philosopher Porphyry's (c. 234–c. 305) *Isagoge* (*In Isagogem Porphyrii*). At first, Porphyry largely set aside this issue in his *Isagoge* due to its challenging nature. Later, however, it stood out as one of the prominent controversies in the Scholastic philosophical debates. The rigorous approach in the Latin original with regard to treating this problem is faithfully maintained in *Mingli tan*, thereby complicating the task of comprehending the text (Fukazawa 2006, 174). Zhang Yijing also attributes the difficulties in understanding it to textual, linguistic challenges. By discussing the Chinese translation of *categoria* (category) in *Mingli tan*, she underscores the difficulty of associating new meanings with existing Chinese words. This challenge complicates readers' comprehension of the Chinese translation in its specific Aristotelian sense, which grows out of a distinct linguistic and cultural milieu compared to the Chinese context (Zhang 2020, 109–11). Zhang's point implies the idea of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that is, grammatical categories and concepts in a language shape how we perceive the world by directing our attention to certain ideas rather than others. This is challenged by Robert Wardy, who conducted a case study on *Mingli tan* to examine the relationship between language and thought. He argues that even in two instances concerning

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3   1582 marks the year when Jesuit missionaries first entered the Chinese mainland.

relativa (relative) and *denominativa* (denominative) where linguistic relativity might be more at play, the relevant features of the Chinese language were not distorting or lacking Aristotle's intent, but were instead found to be better suited for reproducing certain logical properties of the concepts in question. The two terms were successfully explicated through what the Chinese philosophical tradition refers to as *geyi* 格义 (analogical interpretation/dynamic equivalence) (Wardy 2004, 151). Meynard does not regard *Mingli tan*'s inherent linguistic difficulty as the essential factor that hinders its reception. He emphasizes that the Coimbra commentary and *Mingli tan* are both textbooks of logical exercises in their nature and require a pedagogical method of reading. Thus, the main reason for the limited influence of *Mingli tan* lies in the lack of institutional support to use it. He also puts forward two addtional factors to explain the book's failure: its claim to be the foundation for any human knowledge, and its complex relationship with theology (Meynard 2019, 248–63).

Mingli tan is not the first work in Chinese that touches upon Aristotle's logic. The earliest trace can be found in *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主实义 (*The True Meaning of Lord of Heaven* 1603), where Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利玛窦) (1552–1610) employed common words found in Chinese classical texts to translate major terms in Aristotle's *Categories*. For example, he translated "substance" as *zili zhe* 自立者 (who/what supports oneself/itself) and "quantity" as *jihe* 几何 (how much) (Hsu 2005, 249, 255–57). Subsequently, *Jihe yuanben* 几何原本 (*Elements of Mathematics* (1607)) includes a translation of "category". Giulio Aleni's (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略) (1582–1649) *Wanwu zhenyuan* 万物真原 (*The True Origin of Everything* (1628)) contains several terms from *Categories*, adhering to Ricci's translations (Hsu 2005, 263). *Xixue fan* 西学凡 (*An Outline of Western Learning* (1623)) includes both translations of important terms in *Categories* and a brief introduction to logic as a discipline, where four translations of "logic" are given. Alfonso Vagnone's (Gao Yizhi 高一志) (1568–1640) *Qijia xixue* 齐家西学 (*Western Learning on Family Regulation* (1625–1630)) and *Tongyou jiaoyu* 童幼教育 (*Education of Children* (c. 1628)) also contain two translations of "logic" each. Compared to them, *Mingli tan* stands out for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as a dedicated, in-depth introduction to Aristotle's logic. Moreover, it holds significance as the first Chinese book to present a significant number of Chinese translations of the concept itself—more than twenty, as per my count.

This paper first lists all the translations of "logic" in *Mingli tan* and explain why *mingli* deserves special attention. Following this, the second section is dedicated to analysing this term. It serves as the main body of the paper because there is a lack of in-depth investigations into this term in the current scholarship when discussing *Mingli tan*, hence an insufficient awareness of its significance concerning the introduction of logic into China and the broader picture of cultural contacts between

China and the West. This section is comprised of three sub-sections corresponding to three cultural implications carried by the term. It examines the use of *mingli* not only by Li Zhizao, but also by other Chinese literati and by European missionaries in their intercultural texts. This is because the term is mostly considered in isolation, rather than in a cluster of neighbouring texts, when researchers discuss the early introduction of Aristotelian logic into China represented by *Mingli tan*. After each sub-section, a comparison is drawn between Li and others in their use of this term, highlighting the novelty of the former's work. The last section discusses the enduring influence and traces of *mingli* in later Chinese translations of "logic" from the late Qing period onward. It reveals that the Chinese understanding of logic was limited to the scope delineated by *mingli* for a long time. However, this transformed as the phonetic translation *luoji* (逻辑) eventually became the official and most commonly used equivalent to "logic". In general, this paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the introduction and influence of Aristotelian logic in China through the lens of the term *mingli*. It reveals a significant dialogue between China and European intellectual traditions, as initiated by Li Zhizao. More broadly, it underscores the complexities in cross-cultural translation and the evolution of conceptual paradigms, contributing insights to the historical exchanges of ideas between China and the West.

A Summary of Chinese Translations of "Logic" in *Mingli tan*

This section presents a list of 21 Chinese translations of "logic" which I identified in *Mingli tan*, and explains why *mingli* stands out among them.

Table 1: Chinese translations of logic in *Mingli tan*

	Chinese translations	Retranslations
1	*Mingli* 名理	name-patterns
2	*mingli tan* 名理探	the investigation into name-patterns
3	*mingli tui* 名理推	the search for[4] name-patterns

4   *Tui* 推 literally means "to push". In the context of Mencius, it can mean "to extend", such as in his important idea of "extending affection" (*tui en* 推恩). *Le Grand Ricci* dictionary defines it as *inférer* (to infer). It can also mean "to search for" or "to investigate" in some instances. For example, "The Biography of Prince Yuan of Chu 楚元王" (?–178 BC) (*Chu yuan wang zhuan* 楚元王传) in Ban Gu's 班固 (32 AD–92 AD) *The Book of Han* (Hanshu 汉书) wrote that: "He was inclined to search for their roots" (*you yi qi tui ben zhi ye* 有意其推本之也). According to the commentary of Yan Shigu 颜师古 (581–645), *tui* means "a thorough search for/investigation into the roots" (*jiuji genben* 究极根本). See the entry for *tui* in https://www.zdic.net/hans/. I opt for "to search for" here because it does not look as modern as "to infer", and it also corresponds to the notion of *zêtêsis* (search) central to Aristotle. See Corcilius (2008, 166 n.11).

	Chinese translations	Retranslations
4	*mingli (zhi) xue* 名理（之）学	the science (*scientia*) of name-patterns
5	*mingli zhi lun* 名理之论	the discussion of name-patterns
6	*xi tui mingli* 习推名理	to practice and search for name-patterns
7	*tui lun mingli* 推论名理	to search for and discuss name-patterns
8	*tui yong mingli* 推用名理	to search for and utilize name-patterns
9	*bian lun lixue* 辨论理学	to debate and discuss the science of patterns/principles
10	*tui jiu yili* 推究义理	to search and examine patterns/principles
11	*tui lun zhi zong yi* 推论之总艺	the general art of searching and discussing
12	*ming bian zhi xue* 明辨之学	the science of clear debate
13	*ming bian zhi dao* 明辨之道	the way of clear debate
14	*tui li zhi xue* 推理之学	the science of searching for patterns (inference)
15	*bian shifei zhi dao* 辨是非之道	the way of debating truth from falsehood
16	*bian xue* 辨学	the science of debate
17	*bian yi* 辨艺	the art of debate (*ars disserendi*)[5]
18	*tan* 探	the investigation
19	*you wei di wei cheng zhi rongde* 有为底为称之容德	what possesses the property of having subjects and predicates
20	*luorijia* 络日伽	logic (*logica*)
21	*diyaledijia* 第亚勒第加	dialectic (*dialectica*)

A total of 21 Chinese translations of "logic" are found in *Mingli tan* (see Table 1). The sheer number of them reveals the difficulty of translating a foreign concept, and also reflects the translators' persistence in attempting to reconstruct the nuances of a term embedded in a distinct linguistic, cultural context in new linguistic and extralinguistic circumstances. A major challenge inherent in translation is that there are "no fixed 'source texts' capable of objective reinstatement in another language" (Sturge 2007, 2). This challenge is evident when translating "logic", as the Latin

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5   *In universam dislecticam* describes the notion of logic as "*tota ars disserendi*" (the entire art of debating/discussing), which largely corresponds to this Chinese translation. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Glare 1968, 556), "*dissero* means "to set in order; to discuss". Its definition can be found in more detail in *A Latin Dictionary* (Lewis, Short, and Freund 1958, 594), where it is described as "to set forth in order, arrange distinctly; hence to examine, argue, discuss; or to speak, discourse". Therefore, it explicitly means to discuss, argue/debate, yet it also implicitly involves the act of distinguishing one thing from another before going on to discuss things. Similarly, the character *bian* 辨 has both the meanings of "to debate" and "to distinguish". It was used interchangeably with another *bian* 辩 (to debate) in the Ming dynasty.

words used to denote this concept in the original Latin commentary, *dialectica* and *logica*, do not bear any single stable meaning ready for transmission. Rather, their meanings changed over time and were perceived differently by various philosophers. For example, and as stated in the *In universam dialecticam*, Aristotle, Plato, and other earlier ancient Greek philosophers never used *logica* to denote the demonstrative art (*ars demonstrativa*).[6] For Aristotle, the entire discipline of syllogisms belongs to the whole or part of *dialectica*, and he never used the term *logica* in this sense.[7] Nevertheless, later Peripatetics attributed the term to the art. As for Cicero, he stated that "logic" can be signified by both *dialectica* and *logica*. He also mentioned that Epicurus referred to the same concept as *dialectica*.[8]

In the table it is notable that—the two phonetic loans at the end excluded—half of the other examples contain *mingli* or at least one character of the compound term, such as *tuijiu yili* and *bianlun lixue,* suggesting the importance attached to it in the initial reception of logic in China. Additionally, given the heavy philosophical implications suggested by the term in various Chinese schools of thought, *mingli* serves a counterexample to Kurtz's claim that the technical terminology worked out by both Li and Furtado displays "no attempt on Li's part to link logical terms with established Chinese notions" (Kurtz 2011, 51). The central importance of the term is further evident due to its remarkably high frequency in the book, particularly noticeable in the first chapter of the initial volume (see Table 2). This chapter corresponds to the introductory chapter of *In universam dialecticam*, delving into the definition and the place of logic among all disciplines, hence the frequent occurrence of the term "logic". As a culturally loaded term and the core to all translations of "logic" at the same time, *mingli* warrants a closer examination, which will be conducted in the following section.

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6   Couto (1611, 25): "*Quod spectat ad vocabulum (Logica) non tam facile probant eo significari artem demonstratiuam; quia hoc nomen apud Aristotelem, Platonem, & antiquiores non reperitur in substantiuo, quo tantummodo artem significare poterat; posteriores autem Peripatetici, qui auctore Boetio in Top. Cicer. Ad initium, illud inuenerunt, toti arti attribuunt.*" ("As for the term 'logic', it is not so easily to prove that it specifically signifies the demonstrative art, since this term is not found as a substantive which could exclusively denote the art in Aristotle, Plato, and the earlier philosophers. However, the later Peripatetics, who, according to Boethius, discovered it at the beginning of Cicero's Topics, attribute it to the entire art.")

7   Couto (1611, 26): "*Aristoteles etiam primo libro Rhetoricae Dialecticam accipit pro tota arte, cum ait, omnem Syllogismorum doctrinam ad totam Dialecticam, aut ad aliquam eius partem spectare. Logicam vero nunquam eo sensu usurpauit; sed nec pro ulla huius artis portione accipit; ut post alios obseruauit Bernardus Mirandulanus lib. 8. suae apologie sect. 10.*" ("Aristotle, in the first book of *Rhetoric*, also takes dialectics for the whole art when he says that the entire doctrine of syllogisms belongs to the whole of dialectics or to some part of it. However, Aristotle never used the term logic in that sense, nor did he take it for any portion of this art, as Bernardus of Mirandola observed later in his Book 8, Section 10 of his *Apology*.")

8   Couto (1611, 26): "(*Tota ars disserendi utroque vocabulo, Logica scilicet, vel Dialectica significatur. Cicer.) … Epicurus plane inermis, ac nudus est paulo post eandem artem vocat Dialecticam.*" ("(The entire art of debating/discussing is signified by two terms, namely dialectics and logic. Cicero.) … Epicurus, indeed defenceless and exposed, refers to the same art as dialectics shortly afterwards.")

Table 2: Frequency of *mingli* in the whole *Mingli tan*

Volume	Chapter	Frequency
The first *ce*: "The Five Universals"	The first *juan*	159
	The second *juan*	1
	The third *juan*	0
	The fourth *juan*	3
	The fifth *juan*	1
In total	The first five *juan*	164
The second *ce*: "The Ten Categories"	The first *juan*	7
	The second *juan*	1
	The third *juan*	1
	The fourth *juan*	0
	The fifth *juan*	1
In total	The second five *juan*	10

An Investigation of *Mingli* as the Chinese Equivalent of "Logic"

This section explores the most important translation of "logic" that appeared in *Mingli tan*, the culturally loaded word *mingli*. My interest is not to evaluate whether Li Zhizao, as a translator, made the right or wrong choice when rendering a foreign concept. Rather, by putting this term back in the historical context, my focus is twofold: firstly, I investigate what attributes implied by *mingli* might have driven him to create correspondence between "logic" and his own intellectual world when he selected and reshaped *mingli* to accommodate the new idea. Secondly, I explore how this new association contributes to enriching the meaning of the existing Chinese term and to interacting with intellectual trends at the time. I approach these two questions by situating this translation within configurations of varying scopes which range from narrow to broad, including Li's own intellectual dispositions, the context of intercultural contacts represented by Chinese Christian Texts (CCT),[9] and the overall intellectual picture during the late Ming period.[10]

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9   Chinese Christian Texts is a term referring to the intercultural texts relevant to "Western Learning" (*xixue* 西学) introduced by European missionaries from the late Ming period on, written either independently by missionaries or Chinese scholars, or out of their collaborative efforts. For more information about CCT in the late Ming and early Qing periods, see the CCT Database created by Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink: https://libis.be/pa_cct/index.php/Search/advanced/ccts.

10   The theoretical guidance of this section is drawn from Theo Hermans' book *Translation and History: A Textbook* (2022, see especially 85–90).

In order to gain an idea about Li's understanding and use of *mingli*, I went through all 54 of Li's texts (not including books) that have been collected so far. They are categorized into essays in response to practical questions in imperial exams (*ce* 策), reports to the throne (*shu* 疏), discussions (*yi* 议), prefaces and postscripts (*xu ba* 序跋), letters (*qi* 启), and miscellaneous compositions (*zazhu* 杂著) (Zheng 2018). It turns out that *mingli* occurs three times in these texts, as shown in the table below. Moreover, what seems to be an interesting finding is that all the three texts fall into the domain of CCT.

Table 3: Instances of Li Zhizao's writings (CCT) that contain *mingli*

Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
Daiyi pian xu 《代疑篇》序 (Preface to *Essay in Place of Doubt*)	1621	唯拘守旧闻，自矜极致，妄谓世无域外之境界，人无超性之名理。	Only those who cling to old knowledge and are excessively conceited would presumptuously assert there are no places beyond the boundaries [of Ming Dynasty] and deny the existence of name-patterns transcending human nature.
Ke Tianxue chuhan tici 刻《天学初函》题辞 (*Foreword to the Printed First Collection of Writings on Heavenly Learning*)	1628	时则有利玛窦者，九万里抱道来宾，重演斯义，迄今又五十年，多贤似续，翻译渐广，显自法象名理，微及性命根宗。	At the time, someone called Li Madou [Matteo Ricci], who travelled ninety thousand *li* carrying the righteous way to pay his tribute, presented the teaching once again. It was fifty years ago. Since then, many noblemen seemed to have followed suit, resulting in an increasing number of translations [on Western Learning] in a wider scope. They reveal the apparent name-patterns of natural phenomena and reach as deep and subtle as the root of nature and life.

Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
Huanyou quan xu 《寰有诠》序 (Preface to *Explanation on the Great Being*)	1628	是编竣，而修士于中土文言理会者，多从此亦能渐畅其所欲言矣。于是乃取推论名理之书而嗣译之。	When this work [*Huanyou quan*] was completed, the Father [Furtado] was better at understanding and expressing himself in Chinese. Therefore, we took the book which quests for and discusses name-patterns for subsequent translation.

Of these three occurrences of *mingli*, only the preface to *Huanyou quan*, the first Chinese translation of the Coimbra commentary on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*, uses the term as an equivalent to "logic". This is also the earliest occurrence in Li's writings of the word used in that sense. According to Li Cibin's preface to and the start of the first section "The Beginning of Philosophy" (*ai zhi xue yuanshi* 爱知学原始) in *Mingli tan*, Li Zhizao and Furtado started the project of Mingli tan in 1627. His preface to *Huanyou quan* was written in 1628, when Li was still committed to working on *Mingli tan* before being summoned to reform the calendar in Beijing in 1629. Therefore, his use of *mingli* in this preface aligns consistently with his prior association of the term with logic dating back to 1627. As for the other two texts that include the term, it should be noted that although the foreword to *Tianxue chuhan* was also written in 1628, the use of *mingli* seems to have nothing to do with logic. That text draws a distinction between the apparent (*xian* 显) and the subtle (*wei* 微) through the phrase "name-patterns of natural phenomena" (*faxiang mingli* 法象名理). In this sense, *mingli* can be related to what is apparent, such as natural phenomena (*faxiang* 法象), as opposed to what is subtle, such as nature and life (*xingming* 性命). *Faxiang* and *mingli* are not a common collocation in ancient Chinese writings, since after searching in the Scripta Sinica and Diaolong databases the only example I could find is in this foreword. Regarding his preface to *Daiyi pian* completed in 1621, here too the use of *mingli* bears little relation to logic. In this case, the term connects to the abstract concept of human nature, which contrasts with its earlier association in the 1628 foreword mentioned above. From those instances, we derive an impression that for Li Zhizao *mingli*, which only appeared in his CCT writings, was mostly used in reference to Western Learning and did not have a single, strict meaning. It may specifically denote the Aristotelian logic, yet it also has the capacity to encompass a wide array of elements, whether they are tangible or abstract, superficial or foundational.

Nevertheless, Li Zhizao is neither the first nor the only author to have employed the term in CCT in the late Ming and early Qing. It also appears in writings by both Chinese scholars and European missionaries of the time, including other pillars of Chinese Christianity in the late Ming such as Yang Tingyun 杨廷筠 (1562 [1557]–1627; *jinshi* degree 1592), Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633; *jinshi* degree 1604), and Wang Zheng 王徵 (1571–1644; *jinshi* degree 1622). Other Chinese authors who make use of the term include a scholar known for his study of European knowledge, Xiong Mingyu 熊明遇 (1579–1649), and Christian converts such as Qu Rukui 瞿汝夔 (1549–1611), Li Tianjing 李天经 (1579–1660, *jinshi* degree 1613) and Wang Shiqi 王世其 (?–?).[11] European missionaries who use the term include Matteo Ricci and Alfonso Vagnone, two prominent figures during the early Sino-European contacts. I will first make a table showing how *mingli* was utilized by other individuals, something which has not been explored or summarized in previous scholarship. After that, I will analyse the instances and compare them with Li's usage, further shedding light on how the term was understood within the context of Sino-European interaction in three regards, and on Li's ingenious contribution in adding a new layer to its meaning.

Table 4: Instances of other authors' writings (CCT) that contain *mingli*[12]

Author	Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
Yang Tingyun	*Qike* xu 《七克》序 (Preface to *Seven Victories*)	1610–1615	名理妙趣	exquisite wittiness in name-patterns [points]
	Xixue fan xu 《西學凡》序 (Preface to *An Outline of Western Learning*)	1623	而貌取者第敬其操詣之纯笃，与其名理之该洽。	Those who are superficial respect them only for their honesty in conduct and their extensiveness in name-patterns.

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11   Wang Shiqi probably knew the Chinese Christian convert Zhang Xingyao 张星曜 (1633–c. 1715) in person. Therefore we have a basic idea of Wang's appropriate period of existence. Please see Xiao (2013, 52).

12   The data presented in this table is based on the search results of the keyword "*mingli*" obtained from the Diaolong and Scripta Sinica databases.

Author	Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
	Tongwen suanzhi tongbian xu 《同文算指通编》序 (Preface to *Instructions for Calculation in Common Script*)	1614 [draft 1608]	往予晤西泰利公京邸，与谭名理累日。	Previously I visited Mr Ricci from the West at his household in Peking. We discussed name-patterns [philosophical and religious theories] for days.
	Tianshi mingbian 《天释明辨》 (Light Emitted by Heaven)	1645 [posthumously]	其稍能修饬，善谈名理者…	Those Buddhist monks who have a relatively decent look and are good at talking about name-patterns [philosophy]…
Xu Guangqi, Li Tianjing, etc.	*Xinfa Suanshu* 《新法算书》 (Treatises on Calendrical) Astronomy according to New Methods from the West)	c. 1770 [originally 1635]	能依名理；专求法数，罕言名理.	able to follow name-patterns [close to logic]; dedicated to pursuing numbers and techniques while hardly discussed name-patterns [general principles]
	Ke *Tongwen suanzhi* xu 刻《同文算指》序 (Preface to the printed *Instructions for Calculation in Common Script*)	1614 [draft 1608]	其一为名理之儒土苴天下之实事	One of the reasons is that Confucian scholars of name-patterns disregard practical matter in the world.

Author	Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
Xiong Mingyu	*Qike* yin 《七克》引 (Prologue to *Seven Victories*)	1610–1615	精天官日历、算数之学，而犹喜言名理，以事天帝为宗。	They are excellent in the studies of calendrical astronomy and mathematics. In particular, they enjoy talking about name-patterns [Christian teachings], taking the service of Emperor of Heaven as their primary mission.
Qu Rukui	*Jiaoyou lun* xu 《交友论》序 (Preface to *On Friendship*)	1595/1601	予思楛矢白雉，非关名理…今利公…以我华文，译彼师授…此心此理，若合契符。	To me, wooden arrows and white pheasants have nothing to do with name-patterns [being civilized in a Confucian way] … Mr Ricci now has put into Chinese what he was taught…which is common to us regarding mind and principles.

Author	Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
Wang Zheng	*Xiru ermu zi shiyi* 《西儒耳目资》释疑 (Explanations of Doubt on *An Aid to the Ear and the Eye of Western Scholars*)	1626	西儒他所著書，種種名理，悉皆发此中从来所未发；名理如渊，正汇字学之海。学海不澄，名理奚自而流？其中种种名理相逼而出..鲜新可味；但名理所迫，不得不尔。	Various name-patterns [points] in Western scholars' books have never been put forward in our land. Name-patterns are like a deep pool, filled by the sea of words. If words are not clarified, how are name-patterns able to flow? A myriad of name-patterns [points] burst forth from the books … which are fresh and worth ruminating on. He had to do this due to what is requested of name-patterns.
Wang Shiqi	*Piwang tiaobo heke* xu 《<辟妄><条驳>合刻》序 (Preface to the combined printed *Refutation of Buddhist Errors* and *Confutation of Buddhist Arguments*)	1689	盖深恶其剽窃名理…以惑世也。	This is out of a strong aversion to those Buddhist monks stealing name-patterns [Confucian traditions] … to delude the world.
Matteo Ricci	*Bianxue yidu* 《辩学遗牍》 (The Remaining Letters on the Study of Debate)	c. 1624	凡诸异教行久行远者，无不依附名理。	Any foreign teaching that seeks a lasting and prosperous presence in China is bound to attach itself to name-patterns [Confucian teachings].

Author	Title	Time of printing	Original Chinese	Retranslation
	Tianzhu shi-yi 《天主实义》 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven)	1603	昔老庄亦有勿为、勿意、勿辩之语，然…辩天下名理独非辩乎？	In ancient times, Laozi and Zhuangzi also had teachings about "do not act", "do not desire", "do not argue"… But isn't arguing about name-patterns of the world also arguing?
Alfonso Vag-none	*Huanyu shimo* 《寰宇始末》 (The Beginning and End of the Universe)	c. 1637	高文大作，章法句法之不苟，神采名理之流注	Grand compositions are meticulous in structure and syntax, with an infusion of spirit and a flow of name-patterns [points].

The instances mentioned above provide a wealth of information regarding the meanings and implications carried by *mingli*. I will focus on three of them it bears in the following sub-sections. Firstly, it is closely associated with the use of language. Secondly, it implies a hierarchical structure within Western knowledge, where *mingli* not only can be used to refer to a higher abstract level of knowledge than that on the concrete level, but also to the highest level of Western knowledge. Moreover, it indicates hierarchy within the Three Chinese Teachings, with a particular emphasis on a Confucian perspective. Lastly, the term suggests a potential tension with the intellectual trend of critique against "idle talk" (*kongtan* 空谈) at the time.

Association with the Use of Language

Primarily, the term is closely connected with spoken language, although it also pertains to written expression. This can be observed directly from the verbs that usually go with *mingli* in many instances, such as Yang (1614), Xu (1635), Xiong (1610–1615), and Ricci (1603). These verbs include "to say" (*yan* 言), "to talk about" (*tan* 谈/谭), and "to debate/distinguish" (*bian* 辩). Such a feature can also be derived indirectly from three other quotations. In Yang Tingyun's 1623 preface, he mentions Jesuits' honesty in conduct (*caoyi zhi chundu* 操诣之纯笃) and their extensiveness in name-patterns (*mingli zhi gaiqia* 名理之该洽). Here *mingli* is situated in conjunction with action. Given that Jesuits were known for the

new objects and ideas they introduced to China, the term appears to refer to the all-encompassing European learning. Since Chinese scholars learned about the new knowledge mainly by talking with European missionaries or by reading their works in Chinese, *mingli* in this case is relevant to both spoken and written words. Wang Zheng's writing put forward an original metaphor. He compared *mingli* to a deep pool (*mingli zhi yuan* 名理如渊) filled by a sea of the study on words (*zi xue zhi hai* 字学之海), emphasizing that words lay the building blocks for *mingli*. As for Vagnone, he used *mingli* when he mentioned the components of writing a composition where the term was put alongside with the organization of paragraphs [structure] (*zhangfa* 章法), the arrangement of sentences [syntax] (*jufa* 句法), and the lively spirit of a composition (*shencai* 神采). It was still utilized within the framework of linguistic application.

That *mingli* has much to do with the use of language is evocative of how the Coimbra commentary describes the concept of logic. It stated that logic is the entire art of debating/discussing (*tota ars disserendi*) which is encapsulated by two terms: *dialectica* and *logica*. Contemporary philosophers often used them interchangeably when referring to this complete art of discourse, although Aristotle only used *dialectica* for this sense, never *logica*.[13] Regarding *dialectica*, four meanings of this term were given, among which the first one is fundamental. The first meaning is to use language (*sermone uti*), serving as the origin of the designation of logic as "the entire art of debating/discussing". The other three specify the desirable ways to use language and their aims, such as developing well-reasoned arguments in a discussion.[14] In this sense, important common

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13   Couto (1611, 26): "(*Tota ars disserendi utroque vocabulo, Logica scilicet, vel Dialectica significatur. Cicer.*) *Quamuis hic vocabulorum usus priscis temporibus magna ex parte obseruatus fuerit, hodie tamen Philosophorum consuetudo obtinuit, ut utrumque vocabulorum pro tota arte disserendi permixtim usurpetur… Aristoteles etiam primo libro Rhetoricae Dialecticam accipit pro tota arte, cum ait, omnem Syllogismorum doctrinam ad totam Dialecticam, aut ad aliquam eius partem spectare. Logicam vero nunquam eo sensu usurpauit; sed nec pro ulla huius artis portione accipit; ut post alios obseruauit Bernardus Mirandulanus lib. 8. Suae apologiae sect. 10.*" ("(The entire art of debating/discussing is signified by two terms, namely dialectics and logic. Cicero.) Although in ancient times there was largely a usage of these terms as observed, today the custom among philosophers has prevailed to use both terms interchangeably for the entire art of debating/discussing… Aristotle, in the first book of *Rhetoric*, also takes Dialectics for the whole art when he says that the entire doctrine of syllogisms belongs to the whole of Dialectics or to some part of it. However, Aristotle never used the term 'Logic' in that sense, nor did he take it for any portion of this art, as Bernardus of Mirandola observed later in his Book 8, Section 10 of his *Apology*.")

14   Couto (1611, 27): "*Verum cum Dialectica a disserendo deducatur, necesse est ostendamus verbi (*disserere*) non esse illa tantum significationem…sed hanc etiam, ex qua nomen totius artis deriuatur. Igitur disserere aliquando idem est, ac sermone uti… Aliquando idem est ac probabiliter disputare…Tertio idem valet atque argumentari…argumentandum, & accurate disserendum… Quarto denique sumitur disserere pro eo, quod est aliquid ignotum ex iis, quae nota sunt, oratione patefacere.*" ("However, since Dialectics

ground is visible between *mingli* and *logica/dialectica*. On the other hand, given the emphasis on using language and the definition as the art of discussing in logic, it is understandable that *bian* 辩/辨 (to debate/distinguish) was a favoured word choice to render the new concept of logic among the CCT published before *Mingli tan*. This translation appeared in three texts before the completion of *Mingli tan* in 1629. A list of Chinese translations of logic in the texts is presented in the table as below.

Table 5: Chinese translations of logic in CCT published before *Mingli tan*

Title	Time of printing	Chinese translation of logic	Retranslation
Xixue fan 西学凡	1623	*luorijia* 落日加	*logica*
		mingbian zhi dao 明辩之道	the way of clear debate
		luorijia 洛日伽	*logica*
		bian shifei zhi fa 辩是非之法	the method of debating truth from falsehood
Qijia xixue 齐家西學	1625–1630	*luorejia* 落热加	*logica*
		mingbian zhi dao 明辨之道	the way of clear debate
Tongyou jiaoyu 童幼教育	c. 1628	*luorejia* 落热加	*logica*

Bian also accounts for a noticeable frequency in all of Li's translations of logic, appearing in six out of the 21 translations, as indicated in Table 1. This demonstrates Li's continuation of the legacy established by his predecessors in translating this concept. Meanwhile, however, Li made his own intervention by being the first to identify and claim commensurability between *mingli* and logic.

is derived from 'debating/discussing', let us show that the word 'debate/discuss' not only has the meaning that…but also the meaning from which the name of the entire art is derived. Therefore, 'to discuss' sometimes means the same as 'to use language'… Sometimes it means to argue probably…Thirdly, it is taken to mean the same as to argue, as Cicero thinks that…one should argue and discuss accurately… Finally, in the fourth sense, it is used to discuss the act of revealing something unknown from what is known by means of discourse.")

Hierarchy Within Western Knowledge and the Three Chinese Teachings[15]

Other than its association with the use of language, *mingli*'s utilization suggests a possible hierarchy of knowledge in Western Learning, favouring what is profound and overriding over what is superficial and elemental. For example, in *Xinfa suanshu*, which was adapted from the earlier *Chongzhen lishu* 崇祯历书 (Treatises on Calendrical Astronomy of the Chongzhen Reign), Xu Guangqi complained that most of the previous calendars were dedicated to pursuing numbers and techniques [divination] (*fashu* 法数) while seldom discussed *mingli*. By contrasting the two words *fashu* and *mingli*, Xu implied that the latter was more critical in producing satisfactory calendars. *Fashu* may only concern surface-level aspects, while *mingli* may go deeper, providing guidance for it. Here we can turn to the prevalent neo-Confucian idea *gewu qiongli* 格物穷理 (investigating things to fathom principles) at the time, which was reshaped by European missionaries starting from Ricci and acquired a touch of Western Learning.[16] Xu's writings show traces of his reception of the new learning through this adapted idea. In his preface to *Jihe yuanben* 几何原本 (Elements of Mathematics), he divided the knowledge introduced by Ricci into three kinds, at the highest level being moral self-cultivation and service to Heaven, and at the foundational level being the investigation of things to fathom their principles (*gewu qiongli*). The third kind is the study of images and numbers (*xiangshu* 象数) as a part of the foundational level of knowledge (Xu Guangqi 1607, quoted in Xu Zongze 2010, 193). Since *fashu* and *xiangshu* overlap in meaning, *fashu* can be considered as belonging to the knowledge of *gewu qiongli* as well. In this way, the *mingli* in *Xinfa suanshu* refers to a higher level of knowledge than that dealing with concrete things. By the same token, such a hierarchy of knowledge within the structure of Western Learning is observable in Xiong's prologue to *Qike*, where he wrote that the Jesuits whom he met were excellent in the study of calendrical astronomy (*tianguan rili* 天官日历) and mathematics (*suanshu* 算数). More importantly, they took pleasure in talking about *mingli* (*xi yan mingli* 喜言名理) and regarded the service of Emperor of Heaven [God] (*shi tiandi* 事天帝) as their primary mission. In this context, *mingli* was distinguished from astronomy and mathematics. Moreover, the subsequent mention of serving God implies that their discussions

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15   Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

16   For a detailed analysis of how missionaries reinterpreted the concept of *gewu qiongli* and brought European learning under the line of *lixue*, please see two papers: 1) Nicolas Standaert "The Investigation of Things and the Fathoming of Principles (*gewu qiongli*) in the Seventeenth-century Contact between Jesuits and Chinese Scholars" (Standaert 1994, 395–420), and 2) Kuang-tai Hsu "Jie gewu qiongli zhi ming 借'格物穷理'之名：明末清初西学的传入 (In the Name of 'Gewu Qiongli': The Transmission of Western Learning in Late Ming and Early Qing)" (Hsu 2003, 165–209).

were oriented towards religion, and specifically Christianity. This is supported by Ricci's preface to *Jihe yuanben*, where he notes that his conversations with Xu Guangqi primarily revolved around the Great Way of the Lord of Heaven [God] (*tianzhu da dao* 天主大道) (Ricci 1607, quoted in Xu 2010, 196). Therefore, according to the categorization quoted previously, here *mingli* refers to the highest level of Western knowledge.

Besides the hierarchy within Western knowledge, a hierarchical structure among other elements can be found in *mingli*. For instance, in his preface to *Jiaoyou lun*, Qu remarks that although "wooden arrows and white pheasants" [tribute] (*hushi baizhi* 楛矢白雉) have nothing to do with *mingli*, they were still received with respect by the emperor. Following this, he stressed that what Ricci offered to China through translation was in line with Chinese in terms of heart-mind and principles (*ci xin ci li, ruo he qi fu* 此心此理，若合契符[17]). It was thus much more worthwhile than tributes from peripheral states. Given his complimentary words about Ricci, it can be inferred that what Ricci presented was relevant to *mingli*. In this context, *mingli* points to something better than plain material goods, since it was intangible, sophisticated culture or philosophy. A similar scheme of order can be found in Ricci's words in *Bianxue yidu*. He asserted that any foreign teaching (*yijiao* 异教) seeking to establish a lasting and flourishing presence in China inevitably attached itself to *mingli* (*yifu mingli* 依附名理), without exception. Considering the dominant status of Confucian teachings in the Chinese intellectual landscape, it is highly probable that here *mingli* refers to such teachings. This connection can be supported by the afore-mentioned preface to *Tongwen suanzhi*, where he mentions "Confucian scholars of *mingli*" (*mingli zhi ru* 名理之儒), implying a possible strong link between the Confucian tradition and *mingli*. Ricci's manner of expression hints at an asymmetry in power relations between foreign teachings and those represented by *mingli*, suggesting the former are on the periphery while the latter hold a position of orthodoxy or centrality.

Such an underlying structured hierarchy, however, is little visible in Li Zhizao's use of *mingli* as discussed in the previous segment. For one thing, distinct from other authors quoted above, Li did not display his favour of *mingli* over something

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17   This phrase alludes to a quote by the Chinese philosopher Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 (1139–1193): "东海有圣人出焉，此心同也，此理同也。西海有圣人出焉，此心同也，此理同也。千百世之上至千百世之下，有圣人出焉，此心此理，亦莫不同也。" ("There are sages who appear in the Eastern Sea; their heart-mind is the same, and their principles are the same. There are sages who appear in the Western Sea; their heart-mind is the same, and their principles are the same. There are sages who appear from the earliest to the latest, across thousands of generations; their heart-mind and principles are the same as well.") This quote was often referred to by Chinese literati who converted to or sympathized with Christianity in their texts in the late Ming.

else by making a comparison. For another, unlike others who predominantly associated *mingli* with a sense of depth and excellence, Li associated the term with both surface-level and profound elements by aligning it in parallel with "natural phenomena" (*faxiang*) and "beyond human nature" (*chaoxing*). Therefore, compared to others, Li displays a more expansive interpretation of *mingli*, enabling the incorporation of contrasting elements into this term. This broader perspective allows for a unique selection of terminology during translation. Such an approach is particularly important in translating "logic", because as noted in the Coimbra commentary, "logic" bears a dual nature of instruction (*doctrina*) and practice (*usus*), also exhibiting a coexistence of contradictory aspects. It is instructive as an independent discipline, deciding rules of constructing a mode of discussing. However, it is at the same time practical, constructing the mode itself applicable to all disciplines.[18]

Tension with Contemporary Intellectual Trends

Beyond its link to language and to a graded structure, *mingli* hints at an underlying tension between its use as a rendition of "logic" and its compatibility with the intellectual atmosphere in the late Ming period. The intellectual dynamics at the time can be perceived in Xu's preface to *Tongwen suanzhi*, where he criticizes Confucian scholars for disregarding solid (*shi* 实) matters, one cause of the decline of mathematical studies in China in recent centuries. In particular, he uses *mingli* to designate the attribute of those Confucian scholars, namely *mingli zhi ru* (Confucian scholars of *mingli*). A following question would be: Instead of focusing on what is solid, what did those scholars of *mingli* divert their intellectual pursuits to? An answer to this question would enlighten us about what *mingli* stands for in this context. A potential clue can be identified in the preface that Li Zhizao's son, Li Cibin 李次霦, wrote for *Mingli tan* (1639). This starts with harsh criticism of Confucian intellectuals who were lost in ornamental language (*diaochong xiuhuang* 雕虫绣幌) while their ideas became increasingly obscure (*zhiqu yi hui* 旨趣益晦). This was followed by a depiction of the intellectual chaos and disorder observed at the time. Li Cibin laments that pure Confucian teachings were stained

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18   Couto (1611, 28): "*Ac prior quidem actus est doctrina actualis, & habitus qui illius causa est, appellatur Dialectica docens; posterior vero est usus, & habitus qui ad illum concurrit, utens dialectica nuncupatur.*" ("The prior act is the actual instruction and the condition which causes it called instructive Dialectics. The posterior act is practice and the condition that contributes to it is called applied Dialectics."); Couto (1611, 31–32): "*nam actus docentis est praeceptum, & regula extruendi aliquem disserendi modum: actus vero utentis est ipsa modi extructio.*" ("For the act of teaching is to give precepts and rules for constructing a mode of debating/discussing, while the act of employing is the actual construction of the mode itself.")

by "saliva of *Shendu* (*Sindhuka*, India)" [Buddhism] (*shendu zhi tuo* 身毒之唾) and "ink under the column (Laozi)[19]" [Daoism] (*zhu xia zhi shen* 柱下之沈), resulting in literati's belittlement of the typical political obligations expected of them as empty (*xuwu* 虚无) and temporary (*jiahe* 假合).[20] Therefore, scholars of *mingli* have instead turned their minds to enhancing the beauty of their expressions and to learning about Buddhism and Daoism. Considering the two prefaces together, *mingli* conveys dual connotations of an excessive dedication to flowery language and an undesirable blend of Confucian together with the more inferior Buddhist and Daoist teachings among literati. In contrast, the notion of being solid in the context of late Ming comprises two levels of meaning. On the academic level, it emphasizes studying concrete content rather than refining words. On the political level, it stresses compliance solely with Confucian political ideals in thinking and practice. Overall, it can be perceived that *mingli* conveys a stress on the Confucian framework.

The problems with literati pointed out by Xu and Li are relevant to a particular phenomenon among intellectuals in the late Ming period, which is "idle talk" (*kongtan* 空谈). The subject is usually related to heart-mind (*xin* 心), the result of popularity of Wang Yangming School's development of Neo-Confucianism. The prevalence of such speculative, unproductive talk and its harmful effect invited significant criticism at the time. For example, one of the elite intellectuals Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613–1682) compared the idle talk on *lixue* 理学 (the study of the neo-Confucian *li*) in the late Ming to that on Daoist classics in the Wei and Jin Dynasties (224–420), warning about its danger of aggravating the social, moral, political crises (Wang 2011, 220). As stated by Zhang Xiao, intellectuals in the late Ming period were critical about the *lixue* characterized by "abstract talk on the nature of heart-mind" (*kongtan xinxing* 空谈心性), and started to divert their attention to knowledge of practical value (Zhang Xiao 1998, 774). It was under

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19   "Ink under the column" (*zhu xia* 柱下) refers to the official title of *zhu xia shi* 柱下史 (official standing under the pillar) in the Zhou and Qin dynasties, indicating an official who typically serves by standing under the pillar. This later evolved into the more widely known title of called *yushi* 御史 (Censor). Laozi served as *zhu xia shi* historically.

20   See Li Cibin's preface in Li and Furtado (1975 [1636/1639], 7): "其或负敏喆、侈赡博者，搜奇袭艳，祇事雕虫绣幌，而旨趣益晦。寖假而承身毒之唾，拾柱下之沈汁，以奸吾儒之正。举凡一切修齐克治，咸芥眂轻视为虚无假合，而理道且愈迷厥向矣." ("Some literati captivated on their cleverness and extensive knowledge to seek for and follow the novel and flowery [styles], focused their mind solely on literary writings, leading to increasing opacity of their ideas. Gradually accepting the saliva of Buddhism, and using the ink from Daoism, [those literati] have jeopardized the purity of our Confucian teachings. All [political obligations] concerning cultivating one's moral character, regulating your family, and restraining selfish and wicked thoughts is disregarded as void and ephemeral. Therefore, the [true] path towards principles becomes increasingly hard to navigate.")

these circumstances that scholars like Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao were keen on advocating for solid learning (*shixue* 实学) to remedy the pernicious consequences of these impractical discussions. Thanks to this favourable condition, Jesuit missionaries were able to accommodate the prevailing utilitarian mindset and distaste for non-utilitarian pursuits by presenting evidence of their solid studies, such as those which indicate their scientific and technical superiority (Übelhör 1972, 181). Therefore, Li's introduction of the Aristotelian logic was not only for the sake of importing a new discipline and method, but more importantly, he intended to use it as means to counter the negative effect of Chinese scholars' idle talk on the nature of heart-mind (Zhang Xiping 2001, 24).

The allusion made by Gu Yanwu to impractical discussions on the Wei and Jin Dynasties directs us back to *mingli* again, since it is a useful concept to understand the intellectual trends of these dynasties. The term is normally understood as a compound comprised of *ming* (names) and *li* (patterns/principles). This compound was at least known during the early Han times, around the third century BC, and became widely used during the third century AD (Harbsmeier and Needham 1998, 354). It became the subject of pure talk (*qingtan* 清谈) in the Wei-Jin period, a popular practice among literati. As Tang Yongtong noted, at the start of the Wei Dynasty pure talk was mainly about political matters and political figures, emphasizing an examination of the relationship between names and reality (*ming shi* 名实) or names and shapes/performances (*ming xing* 名形). Such examination concerns Confucianism, the School of Names (*mingjia* 名家), and Legalism (*fajia* 法家), though it was frequently categorized as belonging to the School of Shapes/Performances and Names (*xing ming jia* 形名家). However, as methods of discussion evolved and the political climate became increasingly constrained, the literati grew reluctant to discuss real-life occurrences and focused instead on abstract, speculative theories (Tang 1962, 13–25). As Zhang Yijing nicely puts it, *mingli* "has been retained as a way of describing a mind inclined towards questions that are theoretical, abstract, speculative; in short, contrary to the political ideal of Confucianism" (Zhang Yijing 2019, 29). Since *Mingli tan* discusses "the names and principles of language and thought", rather than "the names and principles of things" (ibid.), it complies more or less with the tradition of *qingtan*. As such, *mingli* is a term that "carries in itself the idea of a discourse that is vague and general" (ibid.). The latter stage of *mingli* in Wei and Jin acquired a negative connotation that has persisted ever since, as captured in the frequently used expression *kongtan mingli* 空谈名理 (idle talk about name-patterns), serving as a critique for such impractical discussions. For example, the well-known historian and philologist of the Qing Dynasty Qian Daxin 钱大昕 (1728–1804) lamented in his preface to the collection of Sun Mingfu's 孙明复 (992–1057)

texts that since the Yuan and Ming Dynasties scholars had been so absorbed in idle talk about name-patterns (*kongtan mingli*) that they no longer conducted philological and exegetical studies on ancients books (*xungu* 训诂). [21] Gu's attack on idle talk in the late Ming drew exactly upon this unfavourable association of the term. From the preceding elaboration, a potential tension emerges regarding *mingli*. It was critiqued by a relatively general intellectual circle for its impractical and abstract nature, yet simultaneously promoted by a person who created its association with logic, an integral component of practicality-oriented solid learning. In this sense, it appears especially intriguing that Li Zhizao, though living in an age that featured an awareness of resisting idle discourse on *mingli*, still chose this word to render a concept that seems to be its opposite. A response to this contradiction is made by Jia Qingjun. He contends that this is interlinked with Li's reception of Western Learning and the scope of solid learning at the time. Regarding the former, Li was not only interested in the utilitarian aspect of Western Learning, such as natural sciences and Catholic ethics, but also developed a keen interest in the conceptual aspect, namely the method of logic. This inclination led to his preference for talking in a speculative manner. Furthermore, he noticed that the power of Western Learning was grounded on its impractical theological elements, and Western natural sciences were also built upon the method of abstract logic. Therefore, to him, both practical and impractical parts form an inseparable whole of Western Learning. As for the latter, according to Jia's examination, solid learning in the late Ming period can be either physical or metaphysical, incorporating studies of utility (*gongli zhi xue* 功利之学) as well of moral philosophy and human nature (*daode xingming zhi xue* 道德性命之学) (Jia 2009, 136–39). Jia's explanation not only dissolves the seeming tension between the two, but once again confirms Li's ability to encompass apparently opposing components, an attribute we have already observed in the earlier comparison between his and others' utilization of *mingli*.

To conclude, and as elaborated in this section, *mingli* embodies rich layers of meanings, allowing for an extensive space of interpretation. Moreover, it takes on similar features compared to "logic", such as the focus on the use of language and the possibility to include contrasting elements within itself. Such similarities provide the potential common ground for their association. Thanks to Li Zhizao's all-embracing attitude and creativity, he was the pioneer in unlocking the potential embedded in *mingli* by bridging it with logic through translation, further

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21 "元明以来，学者空谈名理，不复从事训诂。" ("Since the Yuan and Ming dynasties, scholars have indulged themselves in idle talk on name-patterns, neglecting philological and exegetical studies on ancients books.") As for instances of modern scholarship that uses this phrase, see for example Yang (1996, 162); Wang (2002, 305); Peng and Ma (2004, 45) and Sun (2001, 114).

enriching its meaning. Although his creation largely fell into obscurity almost as soon as it was made public, later it proved influential in the Chinese reception of logic from the late Qing period on, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Enduring Influence and Traces of *Mingli* from the 19th Century Onward

Mingli tan was largely neglected from its first publication till the 1724 imperial edict that prohibited Christianity in China, which also marks the oblivion of Western logic in China during this period. It was in the late Qing period (19th century) that Western logic was again introduced into China. Since then, there has been a surge in translated books on logic, hence a myriad of new translations of this concept. Around 1920, "Chinese Logic Studies" was established as an independent field of study that aimed to explain and supplement Western logic (Gao 2008, 64). Gao Shengbing, who did a thorough study of Chinese translations of "logic" throughout the Chinese history, made a table in that gathered all the major examples before 1919 (ibid., 65–67). According to this, more than half of them contain either *ming* or *li* from the compound *mingli*. Gao listed 43 translations in total, of which eight contain *ming*, 17 include *li*, and one is *mingli*. It is notable that more importance was attached to *li* in interpreting logic at the time. Yan Fu 严复 (1854–1921) and Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) were two prominent Chinese intellectuals who significantly influenced the transition of Chinese culture from traditional to modern. Their translations of "logic" provide typical examples of the reception of this concept in the early 20th century, and these will be discussed in more detail below.

In 1895, after China had been defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War, Yan published an article in support of Western Learning in a newspaper in Tianjin, in which he translated "logic" as *mingxue* 名学 (the study of names), marking his first translation of the concept. In 1902, Yan's translation of John Mill's (1806–1873) *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* was published, under the title *Mule mingxue* 穆勒名学 (*Mill's Logic*). In this work, Yan proposed another two alternative renditions, *luoji* 逻辑, and *luoji xue* 逻辑学 (the study of logic), the most commonly used equivalent to "logic" today. In fact, he was the first to propose this translation. In the first footnote to this work he explained why he uses *luoji* and *ming* to render logic. *Luoji*, he wrote, was a phonetic translation of "-logy", as in "philology", "sociology", and "psychology", implying the importance of logic as the study of all the studies (*yiqie xue zhi xue* 一切学之学). As for *mingxue*, he asserted that in the Chinese linguistic repertoire only *ming* carried the same extent

of profundity and extensiveness as *logos* (Yan 1902, quoted in Gao 2008, 71). Similar to *mingli*, *ming* is also a heavy culturally loaded word. It is immediately evocative of the theories of *zhengming* 正名 (rectification of names)[22] and *mingjiao* 名教 (the teaching of names). It should be noted that names in the Confucian sense do not refer to individuals' own names, but their social positions (*mingfen* 名分), official titles (*mingwei* 名位), or reputations (*mingmu* 名目). Another concept closely associated with *ming* is *shi* 实 (realities). The relationship between names and realities is an important theme of philosophical discussions found in various schools of thought in ancient China, with various nuanced meanings of *ming* and *shi* in different schools. Regarding Liang Qichao, he translated "logic" as *lunli xue* 论理学 (science of reasoning) in an article on Mozi that was published in 1904, which attempted to depict Mohist logic from the perspective of Western logic. In this he wrote that Western logic was what Mohism called *bian* 辩, and what Mozi called *bian* is *lunli xue*. This translation was derived from the Japanese translation of "science of reasoning". Liang stated that he regarded Li Zhizao's translation of "logic" as *mingli* and Yan Fu's translation as *mingxue* as originating from the term "School of Names". They did not seem to have fully conveyed the original meaning of "logic". He opted instead for the Japanese translation to maintain a strong link and facilitate seamless communication with the Japanese academic community (Liang 1904, quoted in Gao 2008, 72). Like *mingli* and *ming*, *li* is another word with complicated cultural implications. Liang's translation shows a clear correspondence between "reason" (or *ratio*) and the term, one which has significantly diverged from its original meaning as "pattern", or in the context of Neo-Confucian philosophy specifically *gewu qiongli*, which signifies comprehending "principles". Such an association may begin with *Mingli tan* because the text mentions in different places that the object of logic lies in the actions of the intellect, such as "logic is a tool through which intellect extends across all fields of study".[23] However, the connection between *li* and the scholastic *ratio* requires further careful examination, which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

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22 As Defoort (2021) has insightfully clarified, *zhengming* is a successful modern discourse in the current academic scholarship on Confucius, Confucianism, and even Chinese philosophy, which is often taken as a fact instead of a specific interpretation. The consensus nowadays is that the debate on *zhengming*, initially started by Confucius, had a tremendous influence on the stream of thought that bears his name, and even Chinese thought in general. Nevertheless, this discourse is in fact the invention of Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), one of China's most influential modern scholars. He was the first who constructed a philosophical interpretation of *zhengming*, offered textual evidence from ancient Chinese classics for his proposal, and attached unprecedented importance to the term. His interpretation had a profound influence on later scholars in China and beyond, despite a striking lack of acknowledgment of his contribution nowadays.

23 Li and Furtado (1975 [1636/1639], 14): "名理探者，乃明悟所以贯彻诸学之具也"; ("Logic is the means through which intellect extends across all fiends of study".)

Based on our earlier discussions regarding the use of *ming* or *li* in translating "logic" during the late 19th and early 20th– centuries, it is evident that those translations have not surpassed the scope of *mingli*. The nuanced layers of meaning encompassed by the former terms are also embedded within *mingli*. This compound term can be regarded as a unified concept, yet it also allows for separate consideration of its two constituent words. Moreover, it is notable that *mingli* was still used as the translation of "logic" as late as in the 1980s. For example, from 1980 to 1986 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) retranslated the analytic philosopher Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Treatise on Philosophical Logic*) and named it *Mingli lun* 名理论 (*On Name-Patterns*), maintaining the same title for the translation of the same work that had been produced by his teacher, Zhang Shenfu 张申府 (1893–1986), in 1927. This aligns with Christoph Harbsmeier's view that *mingli* can be anachronistically translated as analytic philosophy (Harbsmeier and Needham1998, 354). Speaking of today, however, as the phonetic translation *luoji* becomes ever more widely adopted as the official equivalent of Western logic, devoid of cultural connotations, it appears that the reception of logic is focused on accepting Western logic as it is. This marks a transition away from the stage exemplified by *mingli*, which has significant cultural baggage encompassing various schools of thought such as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, the School of Names, and the School of Mystery (*xuanxue* 玄学) .

Conclusion

Mingli (名理) is a long-standing term in the Chinese philosophical tradition, and has been utilized in texts relevant to various Chinese schools of thought. However, its utilization exhibits characteristics shared by the Western "logic", establishing a basis for commensurability. First and foremost, the verbs that normally pair with *mingli* show its fundamental relevance to the use of language. This can also be seen in Aristotelian logic, since *dialectica* and *logica* were together defined as *tota ars disserendi* (the entire art of debating/discussing). Moreover, according to Li's interpretation, *mingli* incorporates contradictory elements. It can refer to the superficial as well as the profound. "Logic" also features contradictory aspects in itself due to its dual nature of making rules (*doctrina*) and applying the rules it makes (*usus*). Li Zhizao was the pioneer who materialized this commensurability through his translations, contributing a novel dimension to the term. Meanwhile, given *mingli*'s emphasis on the Confucian perspective in the instances shown in Table 4, it is likely that Li Zhizao essentially embraced logic within the framework of Confucian thinking. The same can be seen in the later Chinese reception of the concept since the 19th century, such as in Yan Fu's translation of "logic"

as *mingxue* (名学). Given the highly frequent use of *ming* (名), *li* (理), and *min-gli* in translating "logic", those translations are still bound by the connotations embedded in *mingli*. By the same token, the extent of Chinese understanding of logic deriving from these translations does not transcend the limit set by this term. Such cultural baggage appears to have been finally shed when the phonetic translation *luoji* (逻辑) became predominant in the last few decades. In this sense, *mingli* can be taken as a guiding thread to trace the evolution of Chinese thought from traditional to modern perspectives. Placing the term within the broader context of intellectual history reveals its significance.

Moreover, the term itself suggests an attempt to organically encompass elements that seem contradictory—the practical and the impractical, "names" (*ming* 名) and "reality" (*shi* 实). This effort indicates Li's recognition of Western Learning as an integral unity comprising practical and impractical facets, a perspective that is still inspiring and relevant today. The combination of the seemingly conflicting elements in the term through translation creates an appealing tension with the contemporary critique of "idle talk" (*kongtan* 空谈), characterized by theoretical and speculative discussions. In this way, *mingli* also appears as both an echo and a challenge to Chinese philosophy exemplified by "pure talk" (*qingtan* 清谈) and "the examination of the relationship between names and reality" (*ming shi zhi bian* 名实之辩) in the Wei-Jin period. Li's effort in reconciling the practical and the impractical, as seen in this translation, might have been overlooked historically, but as this paper has revealed, it holds non-negligible value philosophically.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
EACP SPECIAL ISSUE:
INTERPRETATION AND
REINVENTION OF CHINESE
PHILOSOPHY

The Aesthetic of Life in Chinese Tradition

On Philosophy as Living: *Xinxue* and the Infinity of the Individual

Timo ENNEN*

Abstract

This paper considers what it would mean to conceive of philosophy as living. In the first part, by way of a discussion on intercultural encounter recently taken up by Cora Diamond, I first illustrate why philosophical conflict cannot be resolved within already given modes of thought or self-contained finite philosophical traditions, but instead transcends those. In the second part, I show why this dynamic plays out not only between cultures but also between the individual and that individual's own tradition. I do this by drawing from insights of the two major proponents of *xinxue* 心學 (Learning of the Heart-Mind), Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 and Wang Yangming 王陽明. The way *xinxue* deals with both orthodox and heterodox traditions illuminates how we can understand philosophy as something living. It is neither self-contained and indifferent to its own heritage or to the culturally alien, nor does it consist of the mere accumulation of diverse philosophical contents. The deepening of individuality that *xinxue* introduces into Chinese philosophy consists in the relation of the individual to what has already been conceived. Ultimately, by grasping this dynamic that happens through the individual, we may better grasp why philosophy is not reducible to given modes of thought nor to self-contained finite philosophical traditions, but instead is infinite.

Keywords: intercultural philosophy, comparative philosophy, infinity, individuality, *xinxue*, Lu Jiuyuan, Wang Yangming

O živi filozofiji: *Xinxue* in neskončnost posameznika

Izvleček

Članek pretehtava pomen obravnave filozofije kot žive vede. Prek diskusije o medkulturnem srečevanju, ki jo je pred kratkim odprla Cora Diamond, v prvem delu najprej opisujem, zakaj filozofskih konfliktov ne moremo reševati znotraj že danih načinov mišljenja ali samovsebujočih končnih filozofskih tradicij, saj te presegajo omenjene domene. V drugem delu ponazarjam, zakaj se tovrstna dinamika ne odvija samo med kulturami, ampak tudi med posameznikom in posameznikovo lastno kulturo. Pri tem izhajam iz dognanj dveh najvidnejših zagovornikov nauka *xinxue* 心學 (nauk o srcu-umu), Lu Jiuyuana 陸九淵 in

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Wang Yangminga 王陽明. Način, na katerega se *xinxue* spoprijema tako z ortodoksnimi kot heterodoksnimi tradicijami, ponazarja, kako je mogoče filozofijo dojemati kot nekaj živega. Tako ni niti vsebujoč zgolj sebe in ravnodušen do svoje dediščine niti ne sestoji zgolj iz kopičenja različnih filozofskih vsebin. Poglobitev individualnosti, ki jo *xinxue* uvaja v kitajsko filozofijo, sestavlja v bistvu odnos posameznika do že ustvarjenega. Prek dojemanja te dinamike, ki se udejanja prek posameznika, lahko na koncu bolje dojamemo, zakaj filozofije ni mogoče zreducirati na že dane oblike mišljenja ali sebevsebujoče končne filozofske tradicije, ampak je filozofija po sebi pravzaprav neskončna.

Ključne besede: medkulturna filozofija, primerjalna filozofija, neskončnost, individual-nost, *xinxue*, Lu Jiuyuan, Wang Yangming

Introduction

The original proponents of *xinxue* (Learning of the Heart-Mind) did not have a concept of philosophy, let alone of comparative or intercultural philosophy. Yet the way they engaged with both orthodox and heterodox traditions sheds light on their self-understanding as thinkers who confronted both an authoritative textual transmission and the popularization of practices and outlooks on life that conflicted with parts of this transmission. Ultimately, the deepening of individuality they introduced into Chinese philosophy supplies us with a notion of philosophy as living. It accomplishes this by emphasizing the role of the individual in the dynamic transmission of a philosophical tradition.

To understand what is at stake in such a dynamic conception of philosophy, it is helpful to contrast it with the realist position of Theodore Sider. In a subchapter titled "Against Subjectivity" in his much-discussed monograph *Writing the Book of the World*, he states:

> The world is "out there", and our job is to wrap our minds around it. This picture is perhaps my deepest philosophical conviction. I've never questioned it; giving it up would require a reboot too extreme to contemplate; and I have no idea how I'd try to convince somebody who didn't share it. (Sider 2011, 21)

This quotation expresses a widespread (perhaps commonsensical) view of both past and living philosophers on the relationship between a subject and the reality the subject tries to grasp. In terms of comparative and intercultural philosophy, it would mean that there are given philosophical traditions "out there" and that we comparative and intercultural philosophers somehow have "to wrap our minds" around them. There is something waiting for us, so to speak, which exists and is

comprehensible quite independently from our attempts at making sense of it and of ourselves. In this article, I shall challenge this view by contemplating intercultural encounters, on the one hand, and the relation of the individual to a philosophical tradition as conceived by proponents of *xinxue*, on the other.

In what follows, I will first draw from a recent discussion of philosophical collision in intercultural encounters by Cora Diamond. Following Diamond, I will show how collision in such encounters cannot be resolved within given modes of thought but necessarily transcends those modes. Philosophical collision thus already hints at a notion of infinity since it cannot be resolved within particular finite philosophical traditions. I will then show how *xinxue* philosophers help us comprehend how this infinite dynamic plays out not only between cultures or philosophical traditions, but also through the individual and that individual's relation to an authoritative textual transmission. Precisely through the emphasis on the individual, *xinxue* does not narrow down the scope of philosophy to the local and particular, but opens it up to infinity.

Infinity through Philosophical Collision

In a recent article, Ralph Weber (2014) rejected the incommensurability of philosophical traditions and defended the project of comparative philosophy. According to Weber, currently popular notions such as "similarity, family resemblance, and analogy are ways of comparison that in some way or other rely on assertions of commonality" (Weber 2014, 156).[1] For Weber, any comparison presupposes a *tertium comparationis* (the point of comparison). This "pre-comparative" (ibid., 162) *tertium* determines what the *comparata* are. However, the establishment of something "pre-comparative" is problematic in that the very space of reasons within which an intercultural encounter takes place is shaped by that encounter itself. In other words, what the encounter is about is not fully determinable in advance but is precisely at stake in the collision of different philosophical traditions.

To clarify, let us look at a specific example of intercultural encounter and philosophical collision. Investigating magical thought among the Zande, an African ethnic group, the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard highlights that what to proponents of modern Western scientific culture (like himself) looks like invalidating Zande beliefs is taken by the Zande themselves as actual support for the coherence of their beliefs. Evans-Pritchard writes:

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1   For the notion of analogy, see Wong (2002); for the notion of family resemblance in the context of comparative and intercultural philosophy, see Ma and van Brakel (2016).

> Let the reader consider any argument that would utterly demolish all
> Zande claims for the power of the oracle. If it were translated into Zande
> modes of thought it would serve to support their entire structure of be-
> lief. For their mystical notions are eminently coherent, being interrelat-
> ed by a network of logical ties, and are so ordered that they never too
> crudely contradict sensory experience but, instead, experience seems to
> justify them. The Zande is immersed in a sea of mystical notions, and
> if he speaks about his poison oracle he must speak in a mystical idiom.
> (Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937], 150)

Responding to Evans-Pritchard and agreeing with him on this point, Peter
Winch intriguingly suggests that this thought experiment also works the oth-
er way round. In an inverted world, and exploring modern Western culture, the
Zande visitor would speak of the "European [who] is immersed in a sea of scien-
tific notions, and if he speaks about the Zande poison oracle he must speak in a
scientific idiom" (Winch 1964, 313). Drawing from his reading of Wittgenstein,
Winch makes the point that the scientific standards used in modern Western
culture cannot be extended to unscientific discourse. There is no ground from
which we could pass judgment on the Zande's conception of reality as wrong.
Winch does not argue that we could just as well abandon our scientific standards
and adopt the magical thought and practices of the Zande. Rather, no standpoint
exists from which we could settle this collision of conceptions of reality. To put it
another way, to a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail, and both the
Zande and Western anthropologist exemplify this saying. They are left with an
irreconcilable clash without any possibility of a universal discourse to settle it.

Cora Diamond (2013) has recently revived this discussion. She makes the in-
sightful point that the very collision between the two conceptions of reality adds
something that was not yet conceived in either the Zande mode of thought or the
Western one. Drawing from a passage of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* regarding
the encounter with people who consult oracles, Diamond writes:

> Wittgenstein speaks here of cases where two principles really meet, prin-
> ciples that cannot be reconciled with each other. The verb translated as
> "meet" is *treffen*, so the image is of principles that hit each other; they do
> not miss each other; they do not pass each other by. One might elaborate
> this in something like the following way: each of the conflicting princi-
> ples is connected with a system of thought within which we have ways
> of establishing what is and is not so. But in taking the two principles to
> *meet*, in taking them to be *irreconcilable*, we are giving a logical shape to

the conflict; we are making a conception of reality, of what is real, that is not internal to either of the two forms of thought that provide the initial understanding of the conflict-situation. That is, we can take the situation here to be one in which what is real is contested; and this idea of *reality as contested* is a different notion of reality from that which is involved in either of the two forms of thought themselves. (Diamond 2013, 119)

The collision between the Zande and the Western visitor gives rise to a tension that was not there before and that has to be taken into account if we are to discuss the very notion of what is real. Diamond thus states that "[t]he real is (among other things) that which we take to be at stake in conflicts, and this means that the concept of *what is real* has a complexity beyond what can be elucidated by examining its role 'within' language-games or modes of thought" (ibid., 129). What might resolve this collision, if such a resolution is possible, cannot be something given beforehand. It must develop through the collision itself. Ultimately, the accounts of both Evans-Pritchard and Winch end up in a stalemate since they conceive of the only possible standard as internal to the colliding modes of thought and as already formed prior to the collision. Diamond's important contribution breaks through this stalemate by bringing out the dynamic and contested nature of the very notion of what is real.

Diamond helpfully remarks that one symptom of this stalemate is Winch's usage of the term "established" when he mentions the "established universe of discourse" (Winch 1964, 309) that Evans-Pritchard's position (the judgment that the Zande are wrong) would require and that Winch wants to deny. Here, Diamond raises the question of why there has "to be 'an established universe of discourse?' Why can one not be making, giving articulation to, a kind of thought about reality *in thinking about the conflict*?" (Diamond 2013, 119). In other words, why would a conception of what is real and unreal have to be a dead one, a conception that is always already decided through reference to language-games, a worldview or a culture? Why can the conception of what is real not be something that lives precisely through such conflicts and our comprehension of them?

Diamond then offers an example of how such comprehension "along the way" would look:

[I]t is helpful to consider the difference between proving a theorem when you have methods of proving exactly such theorems (and you can evaluate against prior standards the validity of the proof) and resolving a mathematical problem by a totally new sort of proof, a new method of proof. The new method of proof is not there to be a standard in advance

of the proof. But this does not mean that the proof does not give us good
reasons for accepting the conclusion; it means that what counts here as
a reason, what counts as establishing something in this sort of case, is
articulated along with the particular reasoning itself. (ibid., 120)

Diamond then goes on to discuss witches and the search for them, and what
a possible refutation of such practices might look like. In contrast to Ev-
ans-Pritchard's and Winch's accounts, Diamond's point here is that one need not
oppose witch-hunting in another culture *a priori* on the basis of its alien mode
of thought, that is, its unscientific character. Rather, confronted with a particular
case of witch-finding, one may tell a story of one's own culture that itself once em-
braced a notion of human agency that allowed for witch-hunts and thus highlight
how overcoming that notion and ending such practices helped one's community
to flourish. As seen from the perspective of a contemporary European, we then
might say:

> If we find ourselves in the situation of conflict, the picture of human
> agency that has been an unquestioned part of our world-picture, held in
> place by everything around it, can be taken to be something for which
> we have grounds, in its having stood up as it has, in the 300 or so years
> during which it became and has remained an unquestioned part of our
> thinking. It has proved itself, we may think, in its having worked well
> over these centuries. That this would not be taken to be persuasive by the
> witch-fearing and witch-finding cultures does not mean that it is not
> reasonable (within the context of our reflection on the conflict) to take it
> to support the idea that, in this conflict about human agency, we are right
> and they are wrong. (ibid., 126)

Although Diamond's main question is whether there are "'rational grounds' for
the criticism of practices and beliefs as different from our own" (ibid., 127), we
can apply her considerations of those situations of conflict to the question of
how to conceive of philosophy as such. Like Diamond, we "do not depend upon
appeal to standards of what counts as rational available independently of and
prior to the articulation of thought about conflicting worldviews" (ibid., 129); in
fact, comparative and intercultural philosophy does not rely on anything given
prior to particular comparisons or encounters. As mentioned above, in defend-
ing the *tertium comparationis* as the pre-comparative setting up of the *comparata*,
Weber argues that "the determination of the *comparata* at least upon reflection
involves the positing or asserting of a point of commonality" (Weber 2014,
162). Unlike Evans-Pritchard and Winch, both Weber and Diamond agree on

the standard not being internal to one of the *comparata* involved. However, Diamond elucidates how the notion of reality is precisely a contested one and how the standard that is supposed to measure it is therefore never pre-comparative. What Diamond's reference both to a new mathematical proof and to a self-assurance by way of looking back to particular cases in history demonstrates is that we cannot give a universal form prior to engaging with particular contents. Such a form would be dead and would prevent comprehension of philosophy as living.

We now may draw some provisional conclusions: Philosophical traditions exceed themselves since what happens in their collision is not merely a clash of two different self-contained worldviews, but the generation of something new. Philosophical collision changes the way we conceive of the entities involved.[2] What is at stake in philosophical collision cannot be set out in advance. There is more to it than merely the criteria of truth inherent to each mode of thought or philosophical tradition. Yet this must not lead us to the assumption that there is something the philosopher establishes pre-comparatively from the outside, as Weber claims. What in comparative philosophy is called the *tertium comparationis* is likewise determined and challenged by the tension between the *comparata*. It is not an *a priori* form that is there independently of any content. In a sense, such a form would be dead. However, as Diamond shows, the contested notion of reality lives precisely through the collision. This is a way to conceive of philosophy as living.

While Diamond does not use the terminology of the finite and the infinite, infinity is already inherent to Diamond's reflections on an unstable and contested notion of reality. Instead of a mere unresolvable opposition of given particular modes of thought, that is, self-contained finite philosophical traditions, the contested notion of reality living through philosophical collision hints at an infinite self-development. Yet what Diamond leaves out is that the bearers of this infinity are not just colliding philosophical traditions, but the individual human being itself. It is this infinity that plays out between the individual and that individual's relation to orthodox or heterodox traditions that proponents of *xinxue* spotlight.

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2   We can neglect, at least theoretically, imaginable cases of comparison where the result is pure identity or where there are only differences. For one, those cases would probably not be a meaningful philosophical encounter to us. Secondly, following Weber, the sheer fact that we pursue such a comparison might at least tell us something about us, if not about the *comparata* involved (Weber 2014, 165–66).

Xinxue and the Infinity of the Individual

Universality, Infinity and Eurocentrism

For Edmund Husserl, any universalization must necessarily amount to a Europeanization. Along these lines, any cultural tradition that aspires to overcome its finite and particular character must at some point adopt the philosophical spirit as it was born and shaped in European civilizations. He writes:

> There is something unique that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example. (Husserl 1970, 275)

Regardless of to what extent with such a judgment Husserl is a child of an epoch still heavily informed by imperial domination, or to what extent he offers a genuine expression of his philosophical project, he figures as one further voice that denies non-European civilizations any genuine philosophical self-development, in so far as we understand philosophy as the pursuit of a comprehension of what transcends the finite and particular. For him, Europe or European philosophy stand alone in their significance as an envisioned "ideal shape of life and […] eternal pole" (ibid., 275). Commenting on Husserl's idea of Europe's singularity, Eric S. Nelson writes:

> Europe names an infinite and universal horizon that is the proper sense of world history, and its idea is higher than any particular anthropological culture, including the corroded particularities of existing European nations that have lost touch with the scientific spirit and are in desperate need of renewal through reconnecting with the genuine cosmopolitan *telos* and idea of Europe in the West's internal dialogue with itself. (Nelson 2019, 183)

For Husserl, then, universality and infinity are inextricably entangled with science, that is, theoretical knowledge, in contrast to mere practical considerations. Therewith, he does not just exclude most of Eastern philosophy but much of the philosophical tradition he himself inherited, since the emancipation and prioritization of theoretical knowledge can be seen as a reaction or complement to the scientific revolution and the formation of the modern sciences. Needless to say,

this prioritization has been contested within Western philosophy itself. As Kwok-Ying Lau points out, "if we accept Husserl's Idea of philosophy as 'pure thêoria', not only the existence of Indian and Chinese philosophies is denied, [there] would also be ruled out as philosophical works a significant number of important original and influential works of contemporary Western thinkers" (Lau 2016, 6).

In *Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding: Toward a New Cultural Flesh*, Lau engages critically with Eurocentric motives in Husserl's late philosophy (ibid., 3–9, 54–56, 64–66). He emphasizes the "epistemological dimension of interculturality: due to the factually historical character of every life-world upon which a philosophy is born, no philosophical theory born in a single cultural soil can be assured *a priori* of its truth value until it could be testified in and by other cultures" (ibid., 224). However, this statement is problematic in at least two ways. First, it presupposes that the bearers of philosophical truth are cultures, not individuals. Secondly, it presupposes that any philosophy, at least at its beginning, represents a particular, that is, finite, "life-world". This would mean to deny infinity and universality from the outset, just as Husserl did with respect to non-European traditions, since neither infinity nor universality could be recovered through mere mutual validation between particular finite philosophical traditions. Fortunately, we do not have to give up on infinity, universality and philosophical self-development since they are internal to human self-understanding, as conceived by proponents of *xinxue* or the Learning of the Heart-Mind.

Xinxue, Infinity and the Individual

Many of the major philosophical works of Western modernity deal with the peculiar character of first-person thought and action. Of course, in most cases this is not a move towards the autobiographical, but is rather meant as an expression of universality and an invitation to carry out for oneself what is performed in the text in front of everybody. As long as we read modern philosophy's most famous proposition as saying that Descartes thinks and therefore *he* is, we are not reading the phrase as it was intended to be read (cf. Haddock 2019, 262–63).[3] To understand Descartes' statement from the inside, rather than observing it from the outside, we need not consider the fact that it was written by a French male early modern philosopher. In other words, Descartes' *cogito*, Kant's apperceptive unity of the "I", Hegel's "consciousness [which] is for its own self its *concept*" (Hegel 2018, §80) are not memes; that is, they are not units of cultural information, not even very

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3   Elisabeth Anscombe thus writes that the "first-person character of Descartes' argument means that each person must administer it to himself in the first person" (1981 [1975], 21).

general ones. They are self-understanding. While it takes a language and a culture to express this self-understanding, this self-understanding does not denote a mental episode of a particular human being, and it does not denote a particular chapter in someone's autobiography. Such self-understanding is inherent not to a culture, nor to a language game, but to thought as such. It is self-knowledge, that is, knowledge not of a certain human being but knowledge that anyone has by virtue of the first person. To these authors, the conviction that everything can be explained and needs explanation in terms of its cultural grammar would have meant that there is no philosophy.

Emphasis on the first-person perspective is not absent from Chinese philosophical writing, nor is the occurrence of first-person pronouns. Commenting on the centrepiece of the Learning of the Heart-Mind that Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 calls the original mind (*benxin* 本心) and that Wang Yangming 王陽明 later elaborates as moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知), Zhang Junmai 張君勱 claims it is self-knowledge in which "the knower and the known coincide" (Chang 1962, 88). It is knowledge in virtue of what or how we are. But the original mind is not the *cogito*. Nor is it a form that we apply to certain contents outside of us. Likewise, it does not describe a diversity of given contents out there in the world that we have to find out about. It rather denotes the possibility to authentically express ourselves in a cosmos whose infinite change and meaning are at the same time our own. In this spirit, *xinxue* takes up Mengzi's 孟子 notion of the myriad things within oneself (*wanwu jie bei yu wo* 萬物皆備于我) (Lau 2003, 7A), and Lu Jiuyuan asserts that the Six Classics interpret him just as he interprets them (*liujing zhu wo, wo zhu liujing* 六經注我, 我注六經) (Lu 1980, 399).[4]

We may notice the first-person pronoun in these expressions of Mengzi and Lu, but note that these pronouns do not represent an autobiographical character or the finitude and particularity of these sentences. On the contrary, they open up the possibility of understanding these propositions as not belonging to a particular human being, but as something we can administer to ourselves. Certainly, we may first need to gather particular cultural information in order to be able to actually understand these expressions at all. We have to learn what Mengzi meant by the myriad things and what Lu refers to when he speaks of the Six Classics. But having acquired the necessary background information, no further particular

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4   In a recent article, borrowing a term from Amélie O. Rorty, Zheng Zemian speaks of the "epistemological egalitarianism" (Zheng 2021, 337) in the philosophies of Wang Yangming and Descartes. What Zheng labels the "Sino-European juncture of Enlightenment" signifies the emphasis on the "individual's power of judgment" (ibid., 342) in both thinkers. Zheng's observations correspond with the focus on self-knowledge and the first person in modern Western philosophy and *xinxue*, as sketched here.

cultural information will actually enable us to go inside and live through these expressions. Instead, we must administer them to ourselves, and thus comprehend them through the first person.

Needless to say, the mere presence of a first-person pronoun or the mere claim of being philosophically significant is not proof of actual philosophical purport. We could be reading an autobiography or a dictionary, or we could be falling prey to a hoax. Therefore, we usually read both primary and secondary literature thoroughly in order to ascertain if there is something *for us* in a particular text. Yet this does not change one bit the fact that as soon as we come across the philosophical purport of one of these notions, we will ultimately have done so by comprehending them in the first person, not by considering their popularity or the way they were quoted by other philosophers.

Descartes' *cogito*, Kant's apperceptive unity of the "I", Hegel's "consciousness [which] is for its own self its *concept*", Lu's original mind and Wang's *liangzhi* all require the relevant cultural—that is, first and foremost, linguistic—knowledge in order to be so much as recognized as potentially bearing any philosophical purport at all. Nonetheless, no amount of information about a culture or a language will ever bring us to the full comprehension of these notions. In order to reach such comprehension, we have to think these notions not through a cultural context but in the first person. No accumulation of cultural particulars will ever help us in making this final step. It can only be taken by actually comprehending what is conceived in these notions. No biography of Descartes or Wang, no study of their thought, will ever be able to do this for us. First-person thought is not a naïve stance but the medium in which these notions gain their philosophical significance in the first place.

In the introduction to this text, we quoted Theodor Sider's idea of a world "out there". Certainly, his picture fits with empirical knowledge. But the aforementioned philosophical notions are not "out there" like the objects of ordinary experiential knowledge, and "our job" is not "to wrap our minds around" them (Sider 2011, 21). These notions do not represent a bundle of contents that we could explain without at the same time entering ourselves into their efficacy, that is, administering them to ourselves.

Lu's expression about mutual interpretation (*liujing zhu wo, wo zhu liujing* 六經注我, 我注六經) adds an intriguing hermeneutical component to philosophical infinity that remains unmentioned in Diamond's account of philosophical collision. Firstly, it reveals how philosophy is not reducible to certain contents coming from outside that an individual recipient just has to absorb. Otherwise, philosophy would deal with mere aggregates of given information and not be categorically

different from philology. Secondly, it reveals how philosophy is not reducible to the self-contained activity of an individual thinker independently of what has already been conceived, which is why introducing someone to philosophy necessarily includes introducing that person to what has been philosophically thought.

In short, philosophy can neither be introduced by abstracting from concrete philosophical contents nor by abstracting from how the individual shapes these contents through that individual's first-person comprehension of them. Philosophy is living in the sense that form and content do not exist independently from each other. Strictly speaking, isolating a philosophical form or a philosophical content would mean to conceive of philosophy as dead, as an object of mere historical or philological interest. In other words, there are no self-standing given finite contents out there. Otherwise, we would think of philosophy only through the idea of dead philosophical traditions and neglect the individual who administers philosophical thought to itself, that is, interprets it, shapes it, determines it, just as, following Lu, the individual is interpreted, shaped and determined by that tradition. Conceiving of philosophy as living means to conceive of philosophy through this interplay of the individual and its own or alien traditions. This dynamic, however, cannot be put into terms of a particular, finite content. Philosophy is neither a given objective content out there nor a mere subjective form we give to the world. This is the way in which philosophy is infinite.

One objection might be that while Descartes, Kant and Hegel had the universal "I" in mind, *xinxue* thinks of the original mind and *liangzhi* in terms of certain psychological reactions, that is, a finite content. To narrow the scope of *xinxue* down to claims about certain psychological reactions is, however, misleading. *Liangzhi* is not a set of psychological or anthropological facts up for investigation by cognitive science. Mencius' idea of innate moral impulses has been a crucial point of departure for the proponents of *xinxue*. Yet the universality of such impulses has not only been thematized by *xinxue*. More importantly, this idea of innate moral impulses does not exhaust the meaning of Lu's original mind or Wang's *liangzhi*.

Wittgenstein mentions "a primitive reaction to take care of, to treat, the place that hurts when someone else is in pain and not merely when one is so oneself—[…] a primitive reaction to attend to the pain-behaviour of another" (Wittgenstein 1980, §915). By using the idea of the primitive, Wittgenstein did not speak condescendingly but meant "that the mode of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language game is based *on it*: that it is the prototype of a mode of thought and not the result of thought" (ibid., §916). The universality of such impulses lies therefore in their pre-linguistic character. However, if *liangzhi* only denoted the universality

of certain psychological reactions, we could indeed delegate its verification to psychological experiment. There would be no need to consult *xinxue* texts at all. There would not even be the need for the term *liangzhi*, since we could just speak of this and that impulse in its stead.

Wang introduces the idea of *liangzhi* as not being determined by anything other than itself. Thus, seeking "the highest good (the abiding point) in individual events and things is to regard righteousness as external" (Wang 1963, 6), a view which Mencius had already rejected in his dialogue with Gaozi (*Mencius* 6A). Yet, at the same time, the good "is not separated from events and things" (Wang 1963, 7). Wang follows Lu in conjoining the heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理) of the entire cosmos with (the original state of) the heart-mind (*xinzhibenti* 心之本體). *Liangzhi* signifies our irreducible moral existence and entails that morality is infinite by existing "in no fixed place" and not being "exhaustible" (ibid., 28). It denotes an infinity of situations within a cosmos that is characterized by infinite creation (*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息) and that in each moment requires an individual authentic response by us. Along these lines, Chang Tzu-li speaks of *liangzhi* as our moral agency, as our moral creativity, which cannot be reduced to adherence to a finite set of moral principles, facts or sentiments (Chang 2015). Zhang Xuezhi renders *liangzhi* even in terms of the transcendental, namely, as a "transcendental moral consciousness" (Zhang 2021, 145). Famously, Wang remarked how he would even overrule the words of Confucius himself if he found that they contradicted his own moral sense.[5] Hence, for Wang, ultimately, philosophical truth cannot be codified in a set of classics, even if written or authorized by the sages themselves.

When speaking of the original mind or *liangzhi*, neither Lu nor Wang were recounting mere autobiographical episodes or describing a finite lifeform within a particular anthropological culture or a past philosophical tradition. As such, Lu emphasizes that the "substance of the mind is infinite" and that "[t]here is only one mind. My mind, my friends' mind, the mind of the sages thousands of years ago, and the mind of the sages thousands of years to come are all the same" (Chan 2008, 585). What is more, "[o]ver the four seas sages appear. They share this mind" (ibid., 580). Lu and Wang could know this without empirically investigating all extinct, existing, and future human societies since they express self-knowledge of the good

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5   The passage reads: "The important thing in learning is to acquire learning through the exercise of the mind. If words are examined in the mind and found to be wrong, although they have come from the mouth of Confucius, I dare not to accept them as correct. How much less those from people inferior to Confucius! If words are examined in the mind and found to be correct, although they have come from the mouth of ordinary people, I dare not regard them as wrong. How much less those of Confucius!" (Wang 1963, 159)

that has infinity and universality not by accident, but built into it from the outset. In short, there are no temporal nor local nor cultural restrictions on the efficacy of these philosophical notions. Moreover, there is infinite self-development, in that with each individual and that individual's comprehension of the philosophical tradition, that tradition will be determined anew, just as the already conceived conversely determines that individual and that individual's comprehension.[6]

Given the infinity and universality of these notions, then, why have different philosophical traditions come up with different notions and outlooks on life at all? Here, it will be illuminating to look at how Wang Yangming apprehended these notions in relation to the traditions of Daoism and Buddhism that were of great influence and appeal during his lifetime.

Wang Yangming and the Three Teachings

In the words of Wing-Tsit Chan, while Wang's "attitude toward Buddhism was not as hostile as that of other Neo-Confucians, his criticism of it is nonetheless severe" (Wang 1963, xxxvii). Yet it is noteworthy how Wang's criticism is structured. In brief, Wang thinks of the Buddhists and the Daoists as misunderstanding themselves. He does not conceive of them as different cultural or philosophical traditions which have their own content and their own notions to grasp that content. Instead, he thinks of these "heterodox" traditions as speaking to the very same fundamental reality to which he is speaking.

As he remarks:

> The Taoist talk about vacuity is motivated by a desire for nourishing everlasting life, and the Buddhist talk about non-being is motivated by the desire to escape from the sorrowful sea of life and death. In both cases certain selfish ideas have been added to the original substance [of the mind], which thereby loses the true character of vacuity and is obstructed. (ibid., sec. 269)

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6   In an insightful paper, Zhao Dongming (2015) has addressed infinity as a paradigmatic motive of and interpretive key to *xinxue*. Contrasting with the notion of infinity I propose here, Zhao understands infinity in *xinxue* through a sort of decisionism by virtue of which some eminent individual "*chooses to be determined* by a certain aspect of her being" in her striving for the infinite (Zhao 2015, 78). For Zhao, the infinite moral mind is ultimately a projection of *xinxue* philosophers and of performative significance: "Yet the real subject of *xinxue* is not what the Neo-Confucians of the Lu-Wang school believed it to be, i.e. the infinite mind, but rather is revealed in their inauguration of the discourse of *xinxue* and its various discursive activities, and in the subsequent moral practice brought about by this discourse" (ibid., 93).

Wang stresses that "[t]here is but one innate knowledge (*liangzhi*)". The "two methods", his "extension of knowledge (*zhizhi*)" and "what the Buddhists called 'Be always alert,' that is, always preserve one's original state" are "[i]n broad outline […] about the same". Yet "[i]f we already understand clearly what innate knowledge is, there is no longer any need of recognizing one's original state as the Buddhists have advocated" (ibid., sec. 162).

At the end of the day, Wang is a Confucian, and there will thus necessarily be disagreement or collision with the Buddhist and Daoist perspectives. This is not the interesting point, which is that he does not think of these perspectives as particular finite philosophical traditions that stand incommensurably next to each other. On the contrary, they are colliding precisely in that they speak to the same fundamental reality, and this we can acknowledge even from within the Confucian perspective. Hence, even without agreeing with Wang on the superiority of his teaching, we can still take up the insight that the object and standard of philosophical truth is one, since it will irreducibly be the one attained and expressed by an individual. Yet this individual perspective must deal with perspectives other than its own. It does this not by giving them the status of self-contained finite particular philosophical traditions that can be put to the side and not bothered with, as this would be to deal with them as something dead. Rather, the individual will understand these perspectives as perspectives on one and the same reality. As such, it is unsurprising that one will necessarily find moments of one's own thought in the other and moments of the other's thought in one's own. For Wang, Daoist "vacuity [of the mind]" and Buddhist "non-being [of the mind]" (ibid., sec. 269) are not given contents existing out there, separate from his teaching of *liangzhi*. That is to say, *liangzhi* lives through them. It is just that, for Wang, Daoists and Buddhists have not reached full comprehension of what they themselves are already proposing.

The idea that Wang's teaching lives through Daoist and Buddhist notions and is not separate from them comes out in his rejection of the metaphor of the tripartite hall and his embrace of the shared all-encompassing hall that appear in his *nianpu* 年譜 (chronological biography). This illustrative imagery implies that these traditions are not self-contained finite contents that could be placed independently next to each other. Wang replies to a disciple that the practices of the Daoists and the Buddhists are entailed by his own practice (*er shi zhi yong, jie wo zhi yong* 二氏之用，皆我之用), and that it was only later Confucians who did not comprehend the learning of the sage to its full extent and thus regard Daoism and Buddhism to be opposing views (*dan houshi ruzhe bujian sheng xue zhi quan, gu yu er shi cheng er jian er* 但後世儒者不見聖學之全，故與二氏成二見耳). Thus, contrasting with later scholarship on Neo-Confucianism, Wang

himself did not think of the impact of Buddhism on his own tradition as a crucial turning point. Rather, to think of Buddhism as an entirely alien and separate philosophical content from what was already conceived in the Confucian tradition is a misunderstanding put forward by later proponents of that tradition.

Wang's criticism goes precisely against those who think of these philosophical traditions as entirely separable. They do not see that "these three parts form one single hall together" (*san jian gong wei yi ting* 三間共為一廳). Those "Confucians do not know that he is using all of them" (*ruzhe buzhi jie wo suoyong* 儒者不知皆我所用). They only conceive of "the Buddha's teaching [for itself] and then cut out the part on the left and give it to it" (*jian fo shi ze ge zuobian yi jian yu zhi* 見佛氏則割左邊一間與之). Likewise, they conceive of "Laozi's teaching [for itself] and then cut out the part on the right and give it to it" (*jian lao shi ze ge youbian yi jian yu zhi* 見老氏則割右邊一間與之). Moreover, "they themselves reside in the middle" (*er ji ze zi chu zhongjian* 而己則自處中間). Thereby, "they elevate one thing and discard a hundred others" (*jie ju yi er fei bai ye* 皆舉一而廢百也). It is this fragmentation that a notion of philosophy as living cannot accept.

Above, we saw Wang criticizing the Daoist and Buddhist lack of comprehension. Yet this does not prevent him from conceiving of "sages, heaven and earth, people and things as one body" (*shengren yu tiandi min wu tong ti* 聖人與天地民物同體) and from using Confucian teachings along with those by the Buddhists, Laozi and Zhuangzi (*ru, fo, lao, zhuang jie wu zhi yong* 儒、佛、老、莊皆吾之用). For Wang, "this is called the Great Way" (*shi zhi wei dadao* 是之謂大道). To narrowly look only at one's own tradition would precisely repeat the mistake that Wang sees these "heterodox" traditions as making. Even though Buddhism came to China from outside and arrived after Confucianism and Daoism had emerged, none of these teachings are self-contained contents alien to each other. Instead, each brings something out that has in one way or the other to some extent already been conceived in the other teachings. Strictly speaking, there is no heterodoxy. For him, "the Buddhist and the Daoist selfishly occupy themselves [only] with themselves" (*er shi zi si qi shen* 二氏自私其身). This attitude with regard to thinking of one's own teaching as self-contained and opposed to others he calls "the petty way" (*xiaodao* 小道) (Wang 1992, vol. 35, 1289). Hence, for Wang it is not so much that Buddhists, Daoists and some of his Confucian predecessors look at the wrong parts of the cosmos or have come up with the wrong notions. It is rather that they lack self-comprehension. In other words, they lack comprehension of what is implied in what they propose.

How do we enter this hall Wang describes? To stick to the metaphor, the key to a house is actually a key to the door, not to the house. We certainly cannot begin

with grasping the whole, but will necessarily first always occupy ourselves with a particular teaching, with something that is near to us. Yet the key is outside the house, otherwise it would not be the key. It cannot be some particular content of the transmission within the house that lets us enter it. For both Lu and Wang, the key is the individual, that is, we ourselves are the key. It is only through ourselves that we can enter the house. This focus on the individual does not describe the parochial character of living philosophy, but its opening up to infinity. Individuality and infinity are not opposites, but each is precisely only comprehensible through the other.

To sum up, for Lu in his remark on interpretation—and for Wang, in dealing with different philosophical traditions, be they our own or alien to us—we do not just accumulate knowledge about self-contained finite contents. We are not containers of philosophical knowledge. Rather, as individuals, we take part in an infinite process of the self-development and comprehension of philosophical truth happening within the collision and convergence of those traditions.

Conclusion

These reflections have aimed to give shape to a comprehension of philosophy as living. Firstly, they expound on the dynamic taking place with the collision among philosophical traditions, as recently illuminated by Diamond's contribution to a discussion on intercultural encounters. Diamond helpfully explains why the very notion of what is real is a contested one, and that there is no standard of philosophical truth outside of particular philosophical collisions in which that notion of what is real is at stake. The notion of what is real and the standard of philosophical truth live or move through such collisions of philosophical traditions. Hence, this dynamic is infinite in the sense of not being reducible to particular modes of thought or self-contained finite philosophical traditions. This infinite movement of living philosophy, this "process of creating something new", is perhaps best described by a notion of "sublation" which entails the moments of "arising, eliminating, and preserving" (Rošker 2021, 123–24). Secondly, by drawing from *xinxue*, it was shown how this dynamic extends even to the individual and its relation to philosophical transmission. The emphasis on the individual in *xinxue* is precisely not a turn towards the parochial, but an opening up to infinity.

Let me close with just one implication of the considerations propounded here. What comparative and intercultural philosophy can do is precisely not to judge the degree of universality by demonstrating mutual validation or exclusion among particular, finite philosophical traditions, but rather to show where and how philosophy originating in various cultures is already infinite, universal and

self-developing. To some, this might be tantamount to neglecting the very idea of the intercultural. In my view, however, the notion of philosophy as living proposed here is still intercultural in that it lives precisely through the collision and convergence of different philosophical traditions. Yet it is already transcultural in that the standard of philosophical truth in this dynamic goes precisely beyond particular modes of thought and self-contained finite philosophical traditions.

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Touch and Breath: The Ravine in the *Lǎozǐ* as a Paradoxical Image for a Way of Being Human

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Abstract

"Become hard!" is the supposedly "new tablet" that Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* has placed above us. It can hardly be denied that modernization in particular has relentlessly imposed a need to develop one's hardness and strength. Is it even possible to imagine a form of modernization based on the commandment to "Become soft!"? While this is the old and always new instruction to which Lǎozǐ pointed in his advice to become like water, Nietzsche finds it unbearable. He asks, "Why so soft?", and "Why so soft, so retiring, and yielding?" And Lǎozǐ answers that hardness is deadly: "The hard and strong are the followers of death." Then Nietzsche responds, "Don't you want to conquer and win?" And Lǎozǐ replies, "The soft and weak win over the hard and strong". Where are the modernizers who believe in the old "tablet" Lǎozǐ has given us in the praise of softness and weakness? Where are the modernizers who know about the hard but are able to preserve the soft? Where are the modernizers who are able to philosophize not with the hammer but with the brush?

The "good old authoritarian character" (Theodor W. Adorno) has been educated to (masculine) hardness. For this mode of being human (feminine) softness is nothing but a form of weakness on which the creator wants to put his stamp. As a philosophical source of criticism of the authoritarian character, the Daoist classic *Lǎozǐ* has a value that can hardly be overestimated. It moves toward a paradigm of self-relation or subjectivity in which the eye and light cannot claim primacy as the means by which humans can access the true and the good, but touch and breath form a pivot by which they can learn to walk a Way that wanders between hardness and softness. Therefore, at the centre of character formation and cultivation is a self-relation described in the sixth chapter of the *Lǎozǐ* by the paradoxical image of the "ravine" (*gǔ* 谷).

The ravine is a natural image in which the hard stone of the mountain cliffs and the soft water flowing through them belong together. At the same time, this chapter of the *Lǎozǐ* has been associated with the motif of the female in commentaries since antiquity. Moreover, the analogy between the ravine and the female sex organ opens up a thought-provoking approach to the relation between the female and the soft in the *Lǎozǐ*. However, the ravine as a paradoxical image does not stop there. Rather, the Way it suggests leads in a direction that can be summed up in the phrase "knowing hardness

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and preserving softness". In the following paper, the discussion of the female and the male in relation to the soft and the hard aims at a broader reflection on a theory and practice of *breath* (*qì* 氣) that constitutes a transcultural *philosophy of the Way* (*dàozhéxué* 道哲學).

Keywords: Laozi, philosophy of breath, ravine (*gǔ* 谷) softness, hardness, touch

Dotik in dih: globel kot paradoksalna podoba načina človeškega bivanja v delu *Lǎozǐ*

Izvleček

»Postanite trdni!« je domnevno »novi« napotek, ki nam ga je dal Nietzschejev *Zaratustra*, in težko je zanikati, da je predvsem modernizacija neusmiljeno vsiljevala potrebo po razvijanju neomajnosti in moči. Ali si je sploh mogoče predstavljati obliko modernizacije, ki bi temeljila na napotku »Postani mehak!«? Čeprav je ta stari, a vselej nov napotek, naj postanemo kot voda, podal Lǎozǐ, se ta Nietzscheju zdi neznosen. Tako sprašuje: »Zakaj tako mehak?«, »Zakaj tako mehak, tako umaknjen in popustljiv?« Lǎozǐ odgovarja, da je trdota smrtonosna: »Trdi in močni so privrženci smrti.« In Nietzsche odgovori: »Ali ne želite osvojiti in zmagati?« Lǎozǐ odgovarja: »Mehki in šibki zmagajo nad trdimi in močnimi.« Kje so modernizatorji, ki poznajo trdo, a znajo ohraniti mehko? Kje so modernizatorji, ki znajo filozofirati, ne s kladivom, ampak s čopičem?

»Dobri stari avtoritarni značaj« (Adorno) je bil vzgojen v (moško) trdnost. Za tak način človeškega bivanja (ženska) mehkoba ni nič drugega kot oblika šibkosti, na kateri želi ustvarjalec pustiti svoj pečat. Kot filozofski vir kritike avtoritarnega značaja ima klasično delo *Lǎozǐ* vrednost, ki je skorajda ne moremo preceniti. Pomika se proti paradigmi samoodnosa ali subjektivnosti, v kateri oko in svetloba ne zahtevata prvenstvenosti kot sredstva, s katerim lahko ljudje dostopajo do resničnega in dobrega, ampak kot dotik in dih tvorita središče, s katerim se lahko naučijo hoditi po poti, ki vodi med trdoto in mehkobo. Zato je v središču oblikovanja značaja odnos do samega sebe, ki je v šestem poglavju daoistične klasike *Lǎozǐ* opisan s paradoksalno podobo »globeli« (*gǔ* 谷). Globel je naravna podoba, v kateri sta združeni trdota kamna gorskih pečin in mehkoba vode, ki teče skoznje. To poglavje dela *Lǎozǐ* je v komentarjih že od antike povezano z motivom ženske. Še več, analogija med globeljo in ženskim spolnim organom odpira razmišljanje o odnosu med ženskim in mehkim v delu *Lǎozǐ*. Vendar se globel kot paradoksalna podoba ne ustavi pri tem. Nasprotno, Pot, ki jo predlaga, vodi v smer, ki jo lahko povzamemo s frazo »poznavanje trdote in ohranjanje mehkobe«. V članku je razprava o ženskem in moškem v povezavi z mehkim in trdim namenjena širšemu razmišljanju o *filozofiji dihanja*.

Ključne besede: Lǎozǐ, filozofija dihanja, globel (*gǔ* 谷), mehkoba, trdota, dotik

Aesthetic Cultivation

Chinese modernization since the 19th century has been obsessed with the need for self-strengthening in order to better meet the challenges of the violently imposing and invading West, and a phrase from the *Book of Changes* has served as a motto for this: "unceasing self-strengthening" (*zì qiáng bù xī* 自強不息). In this situation, the age-old aesthetic practices cultivated in the realm of Chinese literati culture—and especially the arts of brush writing, mountain water painting, and playing the zither (*qín* 琴)—entered very difficult times. The aesthetic cultivation associated with these arts has in common with them the fact that in such arts seeing and hearing are related to the "touch" of certain utensils and materials (brush, paper, ink, musical instrument). The first thing one notices when handling these utensils and materials is their softness and fluidity: the brush is soft, the paper is soft, the ink is fluid, and the silk strings of the zither respond to the most delicate touch. The cultivation of touch begins with the cultivation of softness and tenderness. The rejection and condemnation of literati culture by cultural revolutionaries in 20th-century China is related to the undeniable impression that the way of life practiced in literati culture cannot withstand modern hardness. Education for softness was thus widely suspected of being an obstacle to modernization, and was replaced by a new education for hardness.

However, it was never completely forgotten that hardness alone does not lead to success, but that softness and plasticity are indispensable, at least as flexible and strategic behaviours applied at the right time and in the right place. In this context, openness and receptivity to modern Western ideas and achievements have been recognized as indispensable qualities for Chinese modernization. Meanwhile, since the 1980s, Chinese literati culture and classical aesthetic practices have resurfaced from the abyss of rejection and denigration into which they were thrown by the narrowing of modernization to Westernization.

In this context, the question arises: Is it possible to imagine a *Way* of modernization that is compatible with the Daoist praise of softness? Softness is closely related to the experience of breath and water. But what are breath and water? Life on Earth is impossible without them. Breath and water go through (*tōng* 通) all living things. There is nothing in the world through which both do not enter and exit (*chū rù* 出入). The "transmissibility" of "emptiness, being-without, softness, and weakness" is not hindered by anything (see Wáng Bì's commentary to *Lǎozǐ* 43). The softness of breath and water "goes through" all things. It "communicates" in and through the solidity and resistant hardness of things. Such softness is omnipresent in the most inconspicuous way. In the *Lǎozǐ*, softness is associated with this utmost inconspicuousness from which all vitality emanates. Breath and

water can be distinguished by understanding breath as the softest thing "without physical form" (*wúxíng* 無形) and water as the softest thing "with physical form" (*yǒuxíng* 有形) (Xiāo 1979, 300). More abstractly, awareness of the soft and the softest is a way into the realm of "being-without" (*wú* 無), and thus into the world of inconspicuously concealed being that escapes every hard grip of human domination.

It is Lǎozǐ's conviction that any will and effort to master the forces of breath and water through hardness and strength are doomed to failure. Nevertheless, the whole world believes in the superiority of hardness and strength, thinking that they are useful ("with use"; *yǒuyòng* 有用), while softness and weakness are useless ("without use"; *wúyòng* 無用). This is because the people who dwell "under heaven" know little about the "un-use" or "use of the without" (*yòng wú* 用無) (Xiāo 1979, 300). Moreover, this is also because they want to control and channel breath and water through hardness rather than being educated and formed by the softness of breath and water. But access to "un-doing" or "without-doing" (*wúwéi* 無為) is granted by the soft, not by the hard. The hard is incapable of un-doing. Access to un-doing, and thus to the Way, is blocked by the violence of hardness. The hard is not able to allow for the vital "self-change" (*zìhuà* 自化) of things or people (see the commentary by Lù Xīxīng 陸西星 (1520–1606) in Lù 2011, 596). Therefore, in relation to the world, hardness and strength may be successful in the short term, but in the long term they are destructive or even deadly.

Lǎozǐ says that he knows about the benefits of "un-doing" from the "softest" (*zhìróu* 至柔) (*Lǎozǐ* 43). Indeed, constant dripping wears away stone or grinds it to sand, and the soft tongue outlasts the hard teeth. But how can a Lǎozǐ-inspired cultivation of softness be described more concretely? We may approach this question through the example of the Chinese art of writing. It is a field of aesthetic cultivation in which Chinese is revealed as a language that must be touched and be touching in order to be learned. The brush used in the art of writing and ink painting is very soft. The very materiality of this brush contains the demand to deal with the philosophical significance of the relation between the soft and the hard. This context foreshadows the extent to which Lǎozǐ's critique of the *authoritarian character* or *authoritarian personality* is connected to a philosophy of nature that is highly aware of the "permeating" softness of "breath" (*qì* 氣) and "water" (*shuǐ* 水). Cultivating the use of breath and water opens up the material and spiritual dimensions of the art of the brush. Related to this are the aesthetic experiences of "un-taste" (*wúwèi* 無味) and "blandness" (*dàn* 淡), from which it becomes clear what it means to say that hard and soft, Without (*wú* 無) and With (*yǒu* 有) or being-without and being-with, belong together in "counterturning" (in German, *Gegenwendigkeit*).

Through the brush dipped in water or ink, the breath touches the world. The movement of the soft brush creates the possibility of a form of communication in which the human relationship to the world can breathe. In this breath, the world touches us. In breathing, the world enters and exits through us. Art that is centered around the breath and not the eye is imbued with a peculiar experience of touch. The "sense of touch" (*chùjué* 觸覺) can therefore be understood as the beginning of writing as an aesthetic cultivation. Chinese characters must be repeatedly exercised in movement, in writing, in order to be remembered and understood. The need for continuous exercise persists through the very nature of the Chinese written language, although in modern China the brush has largely been displaced from the practice of writing. Modern technology tends to obscure that writing and language have long been associated with a fleeting touch, in which a soft brush tip soaked in ink moves in lines and circles on and across a thin, absorbent paper, leaving traces of ink. It is in this movement of breathing touch that the transition from an instrumental technique of writing to an artistic Way of writing takes place.

When we speak of wanting to grasp or conceive (in German, *begreifen*) a text, a violent way of touching language easily creeps in. Whoever wants to grasp a text, does he not at the same time strive to master it, to appropriate it, and to absorb it as spiritual nourishment? Whoever grasps a text, does he not violate it? Such a critique of the violent character of language seems to sound a warning that the names and concepts with which we name things and with which we deal in writing and reading texts touch things primarily in order to make them controllable, to be able to handle or manipulate them. In chapter 29 of the *Lǎozǐ* we find a phrase about the seizer who loses (*zhízhě shī zhī* 執者失之) "all under heaven" or the world (heaven-under; *tiānxià* 天下) precisely because he wants to "take" (*qǔ* 取) it more or less by force and bring it under his control by "doing" (*wéi* 為). However, the "taking of all under heaven" (*qǔ tiānxià* 取天下), a phrase that occurs several times (*Lǎozǐ* 29, 48, 57), is linked to the criticism of "doing" and "busyness". Touching the world all too easily becomes a violent appropriation through which people risk losing their relation to the world. They lose their world precisely because they want to take possession of it. But is it possible to touch the world without appropriating it, or at least without trying to appropriate it? No, it is not.

In the softness of breath and water constant change is implied: just as water evaporates when it is warm and freezes when it is cold, breath is in a state of change that links it equally to spirituality and materiality, as even spiritual creations can harden into buildings that imprison us and in which we cannot breathe. More than that, hardening is inevitable, for without becoming harder and firmer, living things could not grow and thrive. At the same time, with each moment of growth,

the soft, weak, and at the same time very much alive infant approaches the final hardening toward which its corporeal being is heading: the rigidity of the corpse that has stopped breathing and that it will one day become. To think of softness and weakness, then, is to remember, in the necessary hardening of life, the possibility of a breath that "communicates" (*tōng* 通) the corporeal and the spiritual, reaching the "soft" by gathering itself (*zhuān qì zhì róu* 專氣致柔; *Lăozĭ* 10).

Lăozĭ opens up the possibility of a philosophizing that focuses on the breath, not the eye, and comparatively and stereotypically speaking, the philosophizing of the *Chinese breath-man* now emerges alongside the philosophizing of the "Greek 'eye-man'" (Heidegger 2018, 215). Derrida's reflections on perception move along the way from one to the other when he attempts to make the sense of sight understandable as a sense of touch, and thus to perceive seeing as a way of touching. In doing so, he already touches upon a history of the forgetfulness of air and breath (Irigaray 1983). In his book on touch, Derrida poses the following question, "*Quand nos yeux se touchent, fait-il jour ou fait-il nuit?*" (When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?) (Derrida 2000, 11) The absurdity of this question opens a critical perspective on the "excessive primacy" accorded to the sense of seeing in "our culture" (Derrida 2000, 227; Irigaray 1997, 163).[1] Derrida goes beyond Aristotle by following the seemingly absurd question he encountered on a wall in Paris, one that addresses what he calls the difficulty of touching with the eyes. Can the eyes and gaze touch like lips? The question "*Quand nos yeux se touchent, fait-il jour ou fait-il nuit?*" ("When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?") does not stop with Aristotle, who assumes that touch or "feeling" (*Gefühl*) in the sense of tactile perception is always direct and unmediated perception. Close perception can be associated with an existential danger to life—if we are touched and grasped by other living beings then this can sometimes entail being attacked by them, and possibly even being killed and eaten. The eye, on the other hand, is capable of distant perception. Derrida tries to reverse this relation by reintegrating, following Jean-Luc Nancy, seeing into touching. What happens when we ask further, when we replace the eye with the breath and ask: "If our breath(s) touch, is it day or is

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[1]   The motif that we are touched by something before we see it—as Derrida says of this question that it touched him before it let itself be seen—is already found in a book by Aristotle, which has come down under the title *Of the Soul* (Περὶ ψυχῆς). There we read: αἰσθήσεως δὲ πρῶτον ὑπάρχει πᾶσιν ἁφή, which Klaus Corcilius translates into German as "*Und als erste Wahrnehmung kommt allen [Lebewesen] der Tastsinn zu*" (Corcilius 2017, 74–75) (And all [living beings] have the sense of touch as their first perception). Or in Hett's English translation: "The first essential factor of sensation that we all share is the sense of touch" (Hett 1935, 74–75). It is noteworthy that in a 1794 German translation "touch" is rendered simply as "feeling" (*Gefühl*) and is attributed exclusively to animals and not to all living things: "*Vor allen anderen Sinnen haben die Tiere vorzüglich das Gefühl*" (Above all other senses, animals have especially feeling) (Voigt 1794, 88–89).

it night?" The idea that breath can touch seems even more absurd than Derrida's question: Is it possible to touch one another not with the eyes, the lips, or the hands, but with the breath? Or: Is it possible to touch one another with the eyes, lips or hands through the breath, so that the eyes, lips or hands breathe and become perceptible as belonging to the world of breath?

Accordingly, a way of thinking and writing may be misguided in which we want to grasp a text only in a hard way, instead of letting it touch us or touching it in breathing way. Lǎozǐ seems to point in this direction. He can be read as questioning the human perception of the world in such a way that in the word *Wahrnehmung* (truth-taking, perception) the *-nehmung*, the taking of the world, stands out as questionable. This German play on words corresponds to a motif of the *Lǎozǐ*, which is to reverse the hard taking of the world into a "soft" (in German, *weich*) or "yielding" (in German, *weichend*) touch.[2] The soft and weak indicate a relation to the world that seems to be low, but actually is higher than seeing with the eyes, hearing with the ears, tasting with the mouth, all of which are associated with running and chasing after sensations, expression, intensity, and appropriation (see *Lǎozǐ* 12). If, with reference to Lǎozǐ, it is possible to speak of aesthetics in the sense of a theory of perception, then, in my view, aesthetics does not revolve around a sensual perception that is opposed to spiritual cognition, but around an awareness (*Besinnung*, *Gewahren*) that is equally sensual *and* spiritual and is aesthetic in this sense, or *aestethic* (*sic*): both aesthetic and ethic. The education toward the soft and yielding (Erziehung zum Weichen) tends toward an *aesthetic education* in which awareness and touch can be cultivated.

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2   In his discussion of *Lǎozǐ* 43, Heidegger plays with the relation of "*das Weiche*" (the soft) to "*das Weichende*" which means the yielding, receding and softening. First, he quotes from the chapter as follows: "*Der Erde Sanftestes verwindet der Erde Starrstes*" (What is most gentle on earth overcomes what is most rigid on earth) (Heidegger 2020, 5). After this quotation, which he introduced at the beginning of volume 101 of his collected writings, he says: "*Das Sanfte: Was in der eigenen Ruhe das Heile birgt und darum das Nachgebende zu seyn vermag gegen alles im Ruhelosen Erstarrte*" (The gentle: That which holds salvation in its own tranquillity and is therefore able to give way against everything that is hardened in the restless.). Then follows the key phrase "high giving way" (*das hohe Nachgeben*)—a faculty that human beings lack or have lost in their restless relation to the earth. Later, in apparent reference to *Lǎozǐ* 43, he varies this idea as follows: "*Das Weiche kann das Schwache sein; aber das in die Ruhe des Sanftmütigen Weichende ist vermögender als jede Gewalt und Härte*" (The soft can be the weak; but that which gives way into the tranquillity of the gentle is more capable than any violence and hardness) (Heidegger 2020, 88). This connection between "Weichem" and "*Weichendem*", softness and yielding, can already be found in Nietzsche, whose idealization of hardness, however, leads him to express contempt for this connection: "Why so soft? Oh, my brothers, this I ask you: for are you not—my brothers? Why so soft, so retiring and yielding?" (Nietzsche 1988, 268/172).

The Soft and the Hard Belong Together

The question arises as to whether in Lǎozǐ's education to softness and yielding (*Erziehung zum Weichen*) "remnants of a more archaic civilization" survive, one less marked by the "logic" (of hardness) "that has dominated the West since the Greeks" (Irigaray 1977, 25/24). Moreover, if the image of the ravine that appears in *Lǎozǐ* 6 and other chapters is a paradoxical image in which remnants of an older image of the world and of humanity survive, the question arises whether this image is not already dominated by a human character that is characterized or even produced by a male gaze. Does the image of the ravine, in which an older cult of the female sex organ survives in a sublimated manner, already testify to a male sexual fantasy? Or does it not at least indicate a male conception of female fertility? Does the image of the ravine not already testify to a world in which men regard women as property and use or even abuse them accordingly? The praise of the "mysterious bearer" (*das geheim Gebärende*; *xuán pìn* 玄牝) and the "inexhaustible" use of the "ravine" would thus be hard to distinguish from a patriarchal and paternalistic praise of motherhood, in which women are simultaneously naturalistically idealized and socially restricted by men because of their ability to conceive and give birth.

The relation between "the creative and the receptive" (*qiánkūn* 乾坤), "hard and soft" (*gāngróu* 剛柔), or "the shadowed and the bright" (*yīnyáng* 陰陽), which is central to the *Book of Changes*, was obviously invoked in ancient China to provide a naturalistic justification for a normative order that was unmistakably androcentric and paternalistic. Lǎozǐ's thought, however, already problematizes the dominance of men and fathers over women and mothers. The *Lǎozǐ* overturns this order. It testifies to a gynocentric and maternalist worldview, in which the female and maternal are apparently not normatively subordinate to the male and paternal, but superior. But overturning does not mean reversal. Lǎozǐ aims not at replacing hard men and fathers with hard women and mothers, because that would not structurally change the problem of education to hardness and domination by hardness. Rather, it is about ordering the relation between the hard and the soft in a normatively different way. It is about *another way of being human*, not just about being male or female differently. Lǎozǐ avoids attributing hardness to men and softness to women. The distinction between feminine women and masculine men is foreign to him. He does not speak of men and women, but at best of males and females. The relationship between the soft and the female or the hard and the male is expressed in language borrowed from the animal or bird world (*cí xióng* 雌雄). In the relation of hard and soft, death (killing) and life (giving birth), male and female, natural history reaches into human history. The social history of

the relationship between men and women, seen in this way, is inevitably part of a broader history of natural transformation.

The other way of being human, as indicated in the *Lǎozǐ*, derives from a paradigm of self-relation or subjectivity in which hard and soft, strong and weak qualities paradoxically belong together. Lǎozǐ repeatedly criticizes the widespread preference for hardness and strength. He contrasts this with the praise of softness and weakness, with the claim that the soft can "defeat" the hard, like water, which can hollow out stone and corrode metal. This is what Lǎozǐ "found out" during his years of teaching and research, as expressed by a boy in one of Bertolt Brecht's best-known poems: "That the soft water in motion / In time defeats the mighty stone. / You understand, the hard succumbs" (Brecht 1967, 660–63). Yes, the softest "overruns" the hardest, but in the world—"under heaven"—this is something that can rarely be accomplished (*Lǎozǐ* 43). That the weak overcomes the strong and the soft overcomes the hard is something that "no one does not know", but at the same time "no one is able to walk", and thus realize in practice (*Lǎozǐ* 78). Strength that can "preserve the soft" (*Lǎozǐ* 52) is rare. Therefore, the knowledge is also rare that "un-doing increases" and can be beneficial (*Lǎozǐ* 43). Without the knowledge of increasing by "un-doing", it is difficult to "do the Way" (*wéi dào* 為 道), because doing and walking the Way again is to "decrease daily", while learning wants to "increase daily" (*Lǎozǐ* 48). It is apparent from the above references that the motif of the soft and the weak is closely related to the Way and un-doing. *Lǎozǐ* approaches another way of being human through the cultivation of softness. He advocates an education to softness that is opposed to that one-sided education to hardness in which the *authoritarian character* is rooted.

Lǎozǐ's critique of learning and the juxtaposition of two kinds of doing—"doing of learning" (*wéixué* 為學) and "doing of the Way" (*wéidào* 為道)—grows out of the tendency to overcome modes of learning, which are primarily disciplining and civilizing and thus lead to a hardened and ossified self-relation. Several times Lǎozǐ mentions the image of the newborn child (*Lǎozǐ* 10, 20, 28), soft and weak, but at the same time almost open without limit and receptive to all that is new and unknown. The image of the infant is contrasted with that of the hard and rigid corpse, or the withered and dried plant, in which the cycle of life and death, of giving birth and dying, comes to a temporary end. Therefore, Lǎozǐ does not stop at praising the soft and weak, but also points out that the hard and strong are indispensable. For the relation of softness and hardness permeates the relation of life and death, of generating and dying. The individual existence of a tree is not possible without its hardening from a soft and weak seedling to a hard and strong trunk. But it is precisely because of this hardening, which is inseparable from living and growing, that the tree that has become a strong trunk is in danger of dying: namely, being cut down and made into weapons (*Lǎozǐ* 76).

When Lǎozǐ says "whoever strengthens the military therefore does not win", he does not mean that strengthening the military cannot lead to victory, but that this victory is at the same time a defeat: the loss of another possibility of being human. Every military victory is the victory of a hard logic of (self-)domination and struggle, which tends to fatally overemphasize hardness, strength, and greatness. Insofar as Lǎozǐ justifies struggle and war, he does so in a surprisingly restrained way: for example, he recommends holding a mourning ritual on the occasion of a military victory (*Lǎozǐ* 31). In this sense, what is soft and weak is normatively above, but what is firm and strong is below (*Lǎozǐ* 76). Although it is inevitable to harden and strengthen oneself, Lǎozǐ nevertheless attempts to distinguish the hardness necessary for survival from an attitude of struggle and belligerence that fatally accelerates hardening, withering, and (self-)destruction: Those who fight (*wéi zhēng* 為爭) must strengthen and harden themselves to be able to attempt to defeat others; but those who wish to defeat others are in turn those whom others wish to defeat: both sides become entangled in a logic of struggle from which they can hardly escape.

Lǎozǐ invites us to perceive the creative from the receptive, doing from letting, the high from the low, the full from the empty, or the limited world of "being-with" (*yǒu* 有) from the unlimited world of "being-without" (*wú* 無). To explain this motif, he not only uses the image of the ravine (*Lǎozǐ* 6) but also that of making a clay bowl (*Lǎozǐ* 11). Only an empty bowl is usable, and the potter who makes the bowl grow from a lump of clay on his wheel is, strictly speaking, not creating the visible and tangible bowl in its limitedness, but the being-without or emptiness in the bowl, that is open for unlimited use.

The potter's creative activity revolves around the receptive, around the possibility and significance of receptivity and generation. Thus, insofar as the connection between the soft and the *female* (not the *feminine* in the sense of socially constructed roles of femininity) is implied in the *Lǎozǐ*, it is not a matter of attributing softness and weakness to women, or of confining them to the social role of mothers. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing the empty, open and generative side of the human character. It is a matter of recognizing that all human beings can and should preserve and nurture within themselves character traits that have historically been associated with the female. Why? Because a human being who is not able to recognize and preserve softness and weakness tends to develop an authoritarian, destructive, and therefore pathological character structure. People with an authoritarian character, dominated by a one-sided fixation on hardness and strength, tend to be violent and (self-)destructive: they become "followers of death" (*sǐ zhī tú* 死之徒; *Lǎozǐ* 76)—regardless of their sex or gender.

Primacy of Gaze or Primacy of Touch?

In the *Lǎozǐ*, more abstract terms such as the "Without" (*wú* 無; being-without) and the (empty) "middle" (*zhōng* [*kōng*] 中[空]) correspond to more concrete terms such as the "ravine" and the "belly". The "holy human" is said to "do for [the] belly, not for [the] eye" (*Lǎozǐ* 12). "Belly" is not addressed here in the feminist sense of the provocative slogan "*Mein Bauch gehört mir*" ("My Belly/Womb is Mine"), which German women used in the 1970s to resist their degradation to child-bearing machines and to demand bodily self-determination. When Lǎozǐ speaks of "holy humans", the juxtaposition of "belly" and "eye" testifies to a critical turn against an outward-looking perception and the intensification of sensual stimuli, in contrast to which attention is turned inward, toward the "belly". In the Daoist context, this is associated not only with self-preservation through drinking and eating, but also with life-nourishing exercises of breathing, in which the "belly" or, more precisely, the "vermilion field" (*dāntián* 丹田) is given the significance of a bodily "bellows" (see *Lǎozǐ* 5) through which human beings can ignite the hearth of their own life forces. A self-determined relationship to oneself, to others, and to the world thus begins with an awareness of breathing, through which we touch the world and through which what is inner and what is outer, what is concealed and what is obvious, communicate with one another—it is not by chance that awareness of breathing, for example, is associated with closing one's eyes during meditative sitting.

In China, the breath has been politicized since ancient times, understood as a life force to be nurtured or governed, or as a mediator of individual and collective energies, forming a hinge between human and cosmic order. In both Daoist and Confucian texts, there are clear references to a politics of *breath-change*, in which breathing techniques and regimes of nourishing life come together. Today, with the modern respiratory crisis in the form of air pollution, climate change, and global respiratory diseases, new forms of politicizing the breath, or *pneumopolitics*, emerge.

It is remarkable how consistently Irigaray's theoretical development starting from the problem of female sexuality has paid attention to the philosophy of breath (Irigaray 2000; 2019; 2021). Stepping out of the primacy of the gaze is a crucial condition for being able to reflect on the meaning of breath. Irigaray's thinking has gradually developed from the feminist critique of the primacy of the gaze and the associated "authoritarian discourse" of men and fathers (Irigaray 1977, 27/27) into the direction of philosophizing the breath. The step from the eye to the breath, from seeing to breathing, has thus been connected to reflections on breathing practice, but also to theoretical elaborations. Through her approach it

becomes clear that the difficulty of thinking about the "female sex" and about approaching the "cultivation of the breath" are intertwined, and that the cultural and philosophical resistance to both is ontologically rooted. Irigaray insists that in Europe, historically, the female sex has not been recognized as a sex, because it *is* not, because it has no *being*, or more precisely, because it is not determinable in the mode of being visible. The female sex, in its concealment, is "not one" like the male sex, because it is not recognizable as one. Irigaray thus describes the female sex as one that is not one and has "no form of its own".

Such an approach is reminiscent of *Lǎozǐ* 41, which says that the "great image is without form" (*dàxiàng wúxíng* 大象無形) and the "Way is concealed [and] without name" (*dào yǐn wú míng* 道隱無名). Irigaray reactualizes these old motifs, which do not sound very contemporary, in the context of a critique of civilization that surprisingly coincides with that of the *Lǎozǐ*: "This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure precisely from the incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallomorphism" (Irigaray 1977, 26/26). From the definable form of the *one* (phallus), Irigaray distinguishes "the touch of at least two (lips), which keeps the woman in contact with herself, but without any possible separation of what is touched". And Irigaray goes on to speak about "the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. *She is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no 'proper' name. And her sex [sexe], which is not *one* sex, is counted as *no* sex" (ibid.). From the perspective of paradoxical thinking in the *Lǎozǐ*, it is not difficult to relate to such a language.

For Irigaray, one task of "female writing" is to distinguish a female sex from a male sex in order to open up to the former a language that belongs to it, that is, a language that is not "phallogocentric". The condition of the possibility of such a language is linked to the philosophical reevaluation of the relationship between what is considered high and low, above and below, bright and shadowed. Irigaray is concerned with the task of allowing not only the upper but also the lower lips to speak. For her, phallogocentrism means silencing the lower lips of the female sex, those labia that the male sex lacks. The lower lips are thus a material and embodied reality that permanently challenge the *metaphysics of the One*, which rules by dividing and splitting the world: into high and low, light and shadow, truth and un-truth, essence and un-essence, good and evil, freedom and un-freedom, being and non-being. The monistic One possesses the power of imposing dualistic divisions. Such metaphysical thinking gives this divisiveness the character of

the absolute, which prevents the two sides from being experienced as *belonging together in difference*, as *being* that is in itself *counterturning* (in German, *gegenwendig*). Feminist theories have long struggled with the old tendency of patriarchal civilizations to place the female sex on the side of the secondary, the low, the shadowed, or even the nothing: it *is* not, it is a nothing in relation to being, it is a "being nothing": "*rien d'être*", "nothingness" (Malabou 2009, 115/98). In this critical feminist language, however, *nothingness* is already turning into *being*. Nothing stops being a nothing that is dualistically opposed to being. With the help of Lǎozǐ we might say that *nothingness* is turned into *being-without*. But it is difficult not only for logocentric ontology to think of being-without, that is, to think the *Without* not as nothing that is opposed to being.[3]

Irigaray's texts approach the language of the lower lips that are characteristic of female bodies. Why does she insist on this very physical understanding of sexual difference? For her, the necessity of this understanding is imposed by the critique of metaphysics. She associates the concept of the "female sex" with a way out of the cave, out of an "occidental metaphysics" that has been paradigmatically expressed in Plato's cave: the "female sex" is for her a passageway into another way of philosophizing, whose centre is touch and breath, not vision and light. As mentioned before, such an approach is similar to the emphasis on the "belly" and the critique of the "eye" in *Lǎozǐ* 12. Irigaray insists on sexual difference because she is afraid that its deconstruction actually means a relapse into "phallocentrism" and the "logocentrism" associated with it, and thus a renewed silencing of the language of the lower lips. The possibility of a different way of philosophizing concerns the whole of modern humanity, insofar as the idealistic primacy of seeing is, of course, not only a problem of men. The structural change of thinking that Irigaray has tried to foster throughout various phases of her work is about overcoming the (post-)metaphysical paradigm of the ascent from the cave to the light. This kind of thinking wants to liberate being human from the image of the cave as a paradigm of liberation.

The feminist critique of Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic interpretation of "female sexuality," expressed by Irigaray in the 1970s, develops a highly idiosyncratic discourse of the female genitals that is experience-oriented and begins with "touch", but at the same time includes a model of unblocked communication. Irigaray assumes that the labia touch and communicate with each other as long as they are not separated. In her early writings, she sees the male intruder as the cause of a breakdown in communication that leads women to

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3   Here we touch on the conventional translation of *wú* (無) as "nothing", "nothingness", or "non-being" in Daoist and Buddhist studies. My translation as "without", "without-being" or the prefix "un-" is based on ontological considerations that cannot be elaborated in this paper.

become insensitive to the elemental character of (self-)touch associated with the structure of their sex organ:

> [...] the auto-eroticism of women is very different from that of men. In order to touch himself, the man needs an instrument: his hand, the woman's sex, language.... And this self-touching [auto-affection] requires a minimum of activity. As for the woman, she touches herself in and out of herself, without the need for mediation and before there is any possibility of distinguishing activity from passivity. Woman 'touches herself' all the time, without any possibility of forbidding it, since her sex consists of two lips that are in constant contact with each other. She is, therefore, always two touching each other. (Irigaray 1977, 27/28; see also Malabou 2020, 71/67)

Female sexuality is, therefore, at once double and one, double and "plural" (*plurielle*). However, this auto-eroticism

> is disrupted by a violent break-in [*l'effraction violente*]: the brutal separation [*l'écartement brutal*] of the two lips by a violating penis, an intrusion that distracts and deflects the woman from this 'self-touch' [auto-affection; Porter translates 'self-caressin'] she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure in sexual relations. (Irigaray 1977, 24/24)

Seen in this light, it is the violent interruption of female "self-touch" that degrades the "female sex" to a shadowed "hole" or dark "cave". This interruption is realized by the penetrating and splitting penis and is reinforced by phallocentric discourse.

For philosophy such language is provocative, if not revolutionary. Since the publication of *This Sex Which Is Not One*, the task has been to search for another language and another logic, namely one capable of thinking a sex that is "not one". This task is paradoxical in that Irigaray fights for the recognition of the female sex as a sex—as the other sex, to speak with Simone de Beauvoir—that is to be distinguished from the male sex. Related to this is the suggestion that female sexuality is not "one" but "at least double", if not "plural" (Irigaray 1977, 27/28). Drawing on the experience of the female body, Irigaray touches upon a way of philosophizing that is equally capable of doing justice to oneness, twoness/doubleness and plurality, or to monism, dualism, and pluralism. This way of thinking that does not perceive these three moments as mutually exclusive alternatives, but rather engages in their paradoxical communication. Irigaray thus deals with the task of thinking the female sex as one that is not fixed in oneness, but one that is simultaneously open to duality/doubleness and plurality. Understood in this way, Irigaray's concrete and provocative discussion of the female sex organ and the motif of the

breath-change meet in the recognition of a paradoxical structure in which oneness and doubleness can belong together by way of counterturning. Although, as far as I know, the Chinese philosophy of breath has never discussed the problem of the "female sex" or "shadowed character" (*yīnxìng* 陰性) as it appears in Irigaray, her problematization of the metaphysics of light, the eye, and vision is particularly helpful in understanding the difficulties of reactualizing a philosophical paradigm of breath that has been handed down and elaborated in the East since antiquity. Moreover, recalling this historical context helps to better understand the extent to which even Irigaray's reflections still bear witness to the ontological difficulty of thinking oneness, doubleness, and plurality paradoxically together.

The struggle for liberation has empowered women to overcome feminine role patterns. At the same time, however, it has entangled humanity even more deeply in the chains of masculine role patterns, according to which freedom is possible only through hardness *against* nature but not also through softness *with* nature. The attempt to realize liberation more or less exclusively through domination and manipulation of nature is an aberration that makes human domination of nature possible in the short term, but leads to human self-destruction in the long run. Seen in this light, it is a tragic fate for the whole of humanity, caught up in the spell of European modernization, not to be able to free itself from an idea of liberation that is based on the continued misperception and domination not only of external nature, but also of the nature that we ourselves are as human beings. "Being-nature" (*Natursein*) and the cultivation of being-nature points to another way of understanding the relation between nature and freedom (Gahlings 2016, 685). *Being-nature* (in German, *Natursein*) and freedom can belong together once we realize that the philosophy of nature and the theory of subjectivity are "internally clamped together" (in German, *intern miteinander verklammert*). This means that "nature is a presupposition of the very subjectivity that wrests itself from it: nature precedes freedom as much as it follows it. And that would mean that just as nature liberates subjectivity, so subjectivity liberates nature" (Menke 2023, 268). However, such a "liberation from liberation" seems only possible if both women and men succeed in liberating themselves from feminine and masculine role ethics. Ascribing to women the role of soft proximity to nature and to men the role of hard domination is of little help in developing the awareness that *being-nature* can liberate subjectivity.

The With and the Without of Being

The discursive deconstruction of the biological difference between the sexes risks further disconnecting all human beings from the awareness of being-nature. It thus risks prolonging an old, deeply entrenched regime of violent domination over nature and the self. In the name of critiquing "essentialism", it perpetuates an attitude familiar from the history of metaphysics and religion: the devaluation and denial of being-nature, which in turn enabled and enables the manipulation and instrumentalization not only of bodies but also of souls. The denial of being-nature juxtaposes freedom and nature: Freedom is reduced to the liberation from being-nature. Such freedom remains tied to the image of Plato's cave. The image of the ravine, on the other hand, points to a paradoxical togetherness of freedom and nature, to the fact that freedom is only possible by way of recognizing the nature that we ourselves are.

The air in the ravine is the being-without that fills and blows through it. The world breathes in being-without: "No being without the Without of being; no letting be without the Without of letting be. Only being-without allows being [...]" (Hamacher 2021, 107).[4] The image of the ravine signifies the possibility of letting being-without be. Thus, we touch on the assumption that *being-without is not nothingness*. Being (*Sein*) should not, in the traditional way, be opposed to nothingness (*Nichts*); rather, the "without of being" and the "with of being" belong together *in* being. Thus understood, the forgetfulness of being can be understood as the forgetfulness of the "Without of being" or being-without. The forgetfulness of the Without corresponds to the forgetfulness of the air that we must breathe in order to stay alive and nourish life. Conversely, awareness of breath and breathing air is the closest possible recollection of nature *in* the subject (in German, *Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt*). Nature and freedom can meet in the cultivation of breath when the without is recognized as the being-without of being. With the forgetfulness of the breath that moves in and through the ravine, humanity breathes without breathing, so to speak. She breathes without awareness, and in her relationship with nature she falls under the spell of a domination of nature that is breathless and hard.

Against the background of an *ontology* in which being differentiates itself in *being-without* and *being-without*, it is now possible to say more about the analogy of the "ravine" (mentioned in *Lǎozǐ* 6) and the female sex organ. This analogy raises the question of the position of women in a world in which *being-without* is denied recognition. In feminist discussions, the difficulty associated with the inability to

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4   "Kein Sein ohne das Ohne des Seins; kein Seinlassen ohne das Ohne des Lassens. Erst das Ohne lässt sein [...]."

think *being-without* is clearly evident. This difficulty is significant not only for the philosophical discussion of sexual difference, but also for thinking about a way of being human for which being-without is no longer a deficiency to be covered up or a hole to be filled: "We are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfilment from the other. By our lips we are women: this does not mean that we are focused on consuming, consummation, fulfilment" (Irigaray 1977, 209/209–10).

The uneasiness about the being-without of the female sex lives on. Catherine Malabou's critical discussion of "post-feminist" anti-essentialism touches upon the violence done to "woman" by the abolition of her "essence". In the accompanying "ontological negation of the female" feminism repeats, she says, a violence traditionally done to "woman" by men: she is once again assimilated to a "being nothing" (*rien d'être*). This is possible to the extent that the female sex is again "counted as no sex". *She* remains the "negative, the underside, the reverse" of the penis, which is considered the "only visible and morphologically designatable sex" (Irigaray 1977, 26/26). Thus, the female sex organ is, still or once more, seen as *nothing* in relation to male *being*, as deficient emptiness: because *she* is empty, open and indeterminate, no being is conferred to *her*. How does *she* connect to being? The shocking answer Malabou gives is very similar to the one Irigaray gave in the 1970s:

> 'woman' has never been able to define herself other than through the violence done to her. Violence alone confers her being—whether it is domestic and social violence or theoretical violence. The critique of 'essentialism' (i.e. there is no specifically feminine essence) by gender theory and deconstruction is but one more twist in the ontological negation of the feminine. (Malabou 2009, additional sheet/V)

Understood as an "absence of being. Woman is nothing any more, except this violence through which her 'being nothing' continues to exist. She's nothing but an ontological amputation [*moignon ontologique*], formed by that which negates her" (ibid., 115/99). At this point, however, Malabou sees the possibility of a turn, and suggests that the

> assimilation of 'woman' to 'being nothing' perhaps opens a new path that goes beyond both essentialism and anti-essentialism. Let us envisage the possibility that, in the name woman, there is an empty but resistant essence, an essence that is resistant precisely because it is emptied, a stamp of impossibility. This could augur a new era in the 'feminist' fight, a new stage in the battle against the violence that claims woman is impossible because of her lack of essence. (Malabou 2009, 115/98)

The new era that is emerging seems not to be just one of "feminist struggle", but one in which we search for an ontology that, at the very moment it becomes capable of thinking the *Without of being*, must also rethink the *With of being*. The possibility of a turn arises precisely from the awareness of "woman's" lack of essence—of her *being* without essence—Malabou speaks about. It arises from the misrecognition of her being in the context of traditional metaphysics, in which the *Without of being* can only appear as an inferior and unfree shadow world that, consequently, relegates woman to the shadow of man. Thus, the discussion of Plato's cave and Lǎozǐ's ravine enters the sphere of an ontological discussion that leads to contemplating *the doubling of being into Without and With*.

Malabou says that to speak of "the woman as 'philosopher'" requires a rethinking of "ontology and biology" (Malabou 2009, 11–12/4). This is, of course, a difficult undertaking. Nevertheless, I try to think further at this point, especially with reference to Irigaray, Malabou, Derrida, Nancy, Hamacher, and Heidegger's interpretation of being as in itself counterturning. In this context a *double ontology* of being-without and being-with emerges, that is structurally related to Lǎozǐ's philosophy of the Way.

If being-without thereby gains ontological independence, a turn in the perception of the claim that "woman is impossible because she has no being" opens up. The ontological relation of Without and With (*wú yǒu* 無有) opened up in *Lǎozǐ* 1 develops, in *Lǎozǐ* 6, towards the motif of *using* the *Without* (*yòngwú* 用無) of the ravine in a "spiritual" (*shén* 神) way. This Way of "un-use" (*wúyòng* 無用) becomes possible not through the violent hardness of doing but through the non-violent softness of "un-doing" (*wúwéi* 無為). By conceptually bringing together the Without, softness, and un-doing, Lǎozǐ touches upon an understanding of the "female", which is by no means tied to the human category of "woman". In this context, it is perhaps not insignificant that the Chinese characters for man and woman (*nán nǚ* 男女) do not appear in the *Lǎozǐ*.

Following the analogy of the ravine and the female sex organ, I will now attempt to further explore the ontological significance of Lǎozǐ's image of the ravine. Irigaray's philosophical discussion of the "forgotten vagina" and the (pubic) lips, constantly touching and communicating, has strongly influenced the discussions about the female sexuality in contemporary philosophy. "Being is communication" (*l'être est communication*), says Jean-Luc Nancy in the context of his reflections on "being-with" (*être-avec*) (Nancy 1996, 47). Seen in this light, Irigaray's response to the ontologically rooted misrecognition of *being-without* also emphasizes the constitutive importance of *being-with*. The significance of the image of the ravine in *Lǎozǐ* 6 corresponds to this ontological topic in an almost uncanny way, namely

in a way that repeatedly makes clear that Heidegger's intuitive opening to philosophical Daoism was only the beginning of a conversation whose potential for thought is far from exhausted. Understood in terms of the image of the ravine, the female sex organ is not so much a cave or an empty and dark void, but rather a "communicative way" or "passage" (*tōng dào* 通道) that connects the "multiplicity of things" (*wànwù* 萬物) by generating and nourishing them (*Lǎozǐ* 8): The ravine is a passageway through which water flows down from the high mountains in order to nourish all that lives and thrives in the valley and on the plains, not least human civilization, which in many cases has developed in cities along large rivers. In this sense, the ravine is life-generating and life-nourishing.

The ravine is formed by two mountain sides whose *double being-with* (in German, *doppeltes Mit-sein*) makes possible the empty middle, the being-without between the two sides. Understood in this way, it again becomes clear that being-without cannot claim ontological independence from being-with: *being-without* (of the empty and more or less open ravine) is only possible in the midst of *being-with* (of the mountain slopes) (*wú zài yǒu zhōng* 無在有中). Being-without and being-with paradoxically belong together. They form a relationship of "mysterious sameness" (*xuán tóng* 玄同; see *Lǎozǐ* 56). To elucidate such a *double ontology of being-without and being-with*, Malabou's critical engagement with the lips, in which she connects the labia and the lips of the mouth, proves helpful. She wants to detach the motif of the lips from its connection to the bodily characteristics of women. This also seems necessary in order to further explore the ontological content of the ravine, for in the *Lǎozǐ* it is by no means tied to the female body. Instead, it is concerned with a Way of being human that is open to all human beings.

If it is, according to Malabou, impossible for women to gain access to philosophy without immediately being forced to "disappear as a [female] subject" (Malabou 2009, 11), then the question arises whether, conversely, it is still possible, or at least desirable, to gain access to philosophy as a (male) subject. If this means above all becoming a subject of self-control, capable of hardening against the experience of one's own "fragility" (*fragilité*), then the question emerges as to whether such a paradigm that connects the philosophical subject to the authoritarian character should be defended and sustained. Should we not all turn away from a way of philosophizing in which it is impossible to be "female"? If it becomes a problem that the mainstream of philosophy in Europe since antiquity—from Plato to Nietzsche—has been connected with the education to hardness and strength, then it becomes philosophically significant that in Chinese antiquity there was a male philosopher to whom slogans of the authoritarian character such as "praised be whatever makes hard" (*gelobt sei, was hart macht*) and "what does not kill me makes me stronger" (*was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich stärker*) were suspect

long before Nietzsche proclaimed them to the world. Lǎozǐ thought and taught self-cultivation as an aesthetic education that emphasizes softness and weakness, he did not try to "hide his fragility" (Malabou 2009, 12). On the contrary, he says that being "soft and fragile" (*róucuì* 柔脆) is a sign of life, while being "firm and strong" is a sign of death (*Lǎozǐ* 76).

The name Lǎozǐ thus refers to a philosopher, or a plurality of philosophers, who can explain why it is necessary to critically rethink models of "ontology and biology" (Malabou) that tend to misrecognize being-without and to downgrade the softness of all living things as effeminate weakness. It is certainly desirable that female (and male) philosophers be given the opportunity to speak about the female in philosophy. As long as this is and remains "impossible", philosophy is also "impossible". When will a way of philosophizing become possible that knows about being-with and hardness, but is also able to preserve being-without and softness? Lǎozǐ does not emphasize the female for the sake of the female, but because the female character is, historically speaking, more capable than the male character of becoming aware of the meaning of being-without and softness. For him, however, such awareness is a way of life to which all humans, not only women, should aspire.

In feminist discourse, the strategic primacy of the female corresponds to the emphasis on those "two fleshy lips and two delicate folds of skin that surround the entrance of the vagina" (Malabou 2009, 13/5). Irigaray, notably, has drawn the attention of concrete philosophizing to the lips of the vulva, thus stimulating a far-reaching discussion. Malabou, in her book on the clitoris, recapitulates how the male philosophers Derrida, Levinas, and Nancy have taken up this suggestion and developed it further (Malbou 2020).

Women's lips are as much those of her mouth as those of her vulva. But the vulva is better than the mouth at incarnating the existence of lips that cannot open by themselves (Malabou 2009, 25/16). For Irigaray, the lips of the vulva testify that "the woman is constantly touching herself" (*se re-touche tous le temps*) (Irigaray 1977, 28/29). They do not require the opening and closing of the mouth to communicate. The opening of the lower lips, as already mentioned, is associated for her with a "brutal separation of the two lips by a raping penis" (Irigaray 1977, 24/24). Malabou does not want to limit her discourse within the framework of this polemical polarization of female self-conversation and male violence. She wants to emphasize that "the female cannot be reduced to women", but neither can violence be reduced to men:

> Perhaps more than any other schema the silent, withdrawn and folded lips, offered and defenseless, of the woman's anatomical sex organ allow us to figure absolute, defenseless fragility. But this schema does not also play the role of model or paradigm. Nothing prevents us from seeing the two lips in other beings than woman, seeing them in any exposed, suffering subject. Nor must we forget that defilement, rape, and evil can also be the acts of women. The violence done to lips can come from everywhere; it can be the fact of anyone, the work of all, including women. […] Obviously woman can desecrate the feminine, perpetrate evil, abuse children, other women, men, animals, or offend justice and thought […] The feminine is detachable from 'woman'. (Malabou 2009, 32–33/23–24)

It seems obvious to me that Lǎozǐ, on the contrary, did not attach the "female" to "woman" in the first place. For his paradoxical thinking, it is also not surprising if "women" in particular do not want to be (perceived as) soft and weak, but want to be hard and strong, as it is inherent in the human understanding of the *counterturning belonging together* (in German, *gegenwendige Zusammengehörigkeit*) of the female and the male that the former cannot be reduced to femininity and the latter cannot be reduced to masculinity.

The detachment of the female from women begins with the tenderness and unclosability of the lower lips, and then turns to their fragility and weakness. All human beings are *open* to violence. There is no human being who is completely protected from violent influences and intrusions. In her discourse, Malabou not only removes the female from the category of woman, but also removes the experience of "fragility" from the female. By making the female recognizable as fragility and vulnerability in the bodily concreteness of women's lower lips, she also detaches herself from the female and moves into the ontological recognition of an openness and fragility inherent in human life as such, indeed in all living things. Irigaray and Malabou discuss this extension of the meaning inherent in the awareness of the lower lips by addressing the relationship that exists between the soft lips of the vulva and the soft lips of the mouth. The fragility of the lower lips is thus connected to the fragility of language.

The search for a female language, which gives Irigaray's early texts an unmistakably experimental character, revolves around the motif of *touch*. How is it possible to speak a philosophical language that is able to accommodate and preserve the whispering self-touch of the lower lips? A philosophical language oriented toward the alleged hardness and constancy of definitions and identifications has great difficulty in accommodating the mutability, fluidity, and softness of language formation. On the other hand, it is poetic language in which language does not have

to and cannot "hide its fragility". The male philosophers to whom Malabou refers have all sought to open their language to a way of philosophizing that does not need to hide its fragility. Philosophy thus becomes soft enough to pass through and transform the hardness of the "identical, purposeful, masculine character of man". This authoritarian character has also worked its way into the language of philosophy, into the ramifications of its conceptual world, inscribing in it "the hypostasis of hardness and exclusivity" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2003, 39). "Terrible things humanity has had to do to itself", say Horkheimer and Adorno, in order to ossify the authoritarian character into a *paradigm of subjectivity* that must be repeatedly exercised in every childhood (ibid., 50). Against this historical trend Irigaray has moved into the direction of a philosophical language that touches because it is capable of preserving being-without and softness.

The Horror of Nothing to See

The "ravine" (*gǔ* 谷) at the beginning of *Lǎozǐ* 6 has been widely read as an image of the *Way* (*dào* 道) that is itself an image. The chapter was also already linked to the female sex organ and the cultivation of sexual practices in one of the earliest extant commentaries of the Daoist classic (Gù and Zhāng 2015, 21). In this context, there is reference to a "dark" or "shadowed hole" (*yīnkǒng* 陰孔). The concealment of the "female sex" or "shadowed character" (*yīnxìng* 陰性) is thus associated with a place of lightless obscurity. But in the *Lǎozǐ* what is shadowed and dark is not subordinated to what is luminous and bright. Indeed, tendencies toward such a hierarchization are unequivocally rejected (see *Lǎozǐ* 27). This *counterturning belonging together* of the shadowed and the enlightened stands in contrast to the dualistic opposition of shadow and light as expressed in many ancient cultures. This hierarchic order continues to have a largely unbroken effect up to the present.

Plato's cave is a "shadowed hole" in a derogatory sense, because this cave is a "dwelling" (Heidegger 1976, 111) in which human beings in chains live in unfreedom and take as true an untrue world of shadows. But as soon as the phenomenological description of the female sex organ as "concealed" and that of the male as "unconcealed" is transformed into a normatively charged relationship between the sexes, philosophical questions arise that have long gone unnoticed in the interpretation of the cave. Luce Irigaray's psychoanalytic and feminist interpretation reveals a highly problematic side of the normative order between shadow and light described by Plato. Her analysis of the cave as an image of the female sex organ is provocative not only because the directness of her interpretation critically undermines Plato's metaphysics of light, but also because

it makes clear the extent to which his exaltation of light and seeing continues to affect modes of thinking that no longer feel indebted to, or even reject, the Platonic legacy.

For Irigaray, "the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks" is characterized by the primacy of the gaze. She contrasts the *primacy of the gaze* with the *primacy of touch*:

> Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation. (Irigaray 1977, 25/25–26).

In speaking of a "scopic economy", the critique of the one-sided preference for looking/seeing and visibility is radicalized into a critique of the purposeful, "scopic" gaze by which she characterizes the male gaze—"scopic" comes from the ancient Greek σκοπεῖν (*skopein*): to look at, to consider, to examine, and σκοπεῖα (*skopeia*), which is an instrument of contemplation and investigation. The title of the book *Speculum* (Irigaray 1974), in which Irigaray discusses Plato's allegory of the cave in detail, already indicates the context she wants to address, as speculum is also the name of the instrument used in gynaecology by the examining gaze to explore the interior of the female sex organ, which is inaccessible to the naked eye and, in this sense, invisible and concealed.

Irigaray enters Plato's image of the cave through this connection between the eye and the female sex. To contrast in this way the "male" primacy of the gaze and the "female" primacy of touch is obviously a polemical move whose intention is not to reduce men to seeing and women to touching. She is, however, concerned with the question of how (male) seeing could historically assert its primacy over (female) touch and establish a civilizational model based on the "taboo against touching" (*le tabou du toucher*; Irigaray 1977, 27/27). In Plato's cave, this taboo corresponds to the prisoners' fixation on seeing the shadows on the wall in front of them, while they are not allowed to turn around or touch each other because they are tied to their places. In a male economy of seeing understood in this way, the female sex organ represents

> *the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A 'hole' in its scoptophilic lens. It is already evident in Greek statuary that this nothing-to-see has to be excluded, rejected, from such

> a scene of representation. Woman's genitals are simply absent, masked, sewn back up inside their 'crack'. (Irigaray 1977: 25–26/26)

In ancient Greek art, women are often depicted naked or semi-naked, but their genitals are closed and formless, and Irigaray criticizes the fact that they look "sewn back" because the labia are shamefully omitted. She links this phenomenon to the claim that because there is nothing to see, the female sex has no "form of its own" and is therefore "nothing". *She* not only is it not an eye-catcher, but causes the (male) gaze to fall into a hole of seeing, so to speak, which is frightening and repelling. Because this "shadowed hole" eludes the order of light and seeing, it is also difficult to grasp linguistically. It conceals itself not only from the gaze, but also from linguistically illuminating access. The *logos* of the male subject, which considers itself universal, is thus confronted with a void or nothingness of which, consequently, nothing or almost nothing can be said, and concealment and speechlessness reinforce each other. Consequently, Irigaray emphasizes that "her sex organ, which is not one organ, is counted as none. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable sex […]: the penis" (Irigaray 1977, 26/26).

The physical concealment of the female sex organ has therefore been perceived in Europe, from antiquity to modernity, as a negative shadow of the true thing. European philosophy, based on the "primacy of the gaze", has thus failed to think through the *Without* (*wú* 無) of the female sex, because it has remained attached to a metaphysics of the One—the one light, the one truth, the one thing: "This model, a phallic one, shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, unity, visibility ... and erection" (Irigaray 1977, 85/86). The "forgotten vagina" (*vagin oublié*; Irigaray 1974, 306/247), on the other hand, refers to the oblivion of the normative meaning of the female or the "shadowed way" (*yīndào* 陰道)—"shadowed way" is a common term for the vagina in Chinese. This *way* is a passage that necessarily moves between the inside and the outside, between the concealed and the revealed, between shadow and light. In French, Irigaray is able to play with the relationship between the words "*antre*" (cavity), "*ventre*" (belly/womb), and "*entre*" (between) in order to criticize the tendency to imagine "this primitive cavern or womb […] as a dangerous fault-line, as chaos, as 'empty vase'" (Irigaray 1985, 300/242–43). Irigaray claims that this perception and the related discourse have caused women to lose and forget contact with their bodies, and thus with themselves.

Philosophy of Breath

For Irigaray, "woman" is condemned to remain a sexless "body without organ(s)" (*corps sans organe*[*s*]) in the world of identifying language marked by masculine hardness and within the phallocentric order of discourse, because this hardened order can neither think nor express the structure of female sexuality (Irigaray 1977, 88/93). Why does the "logic of reason" fail to think and recognize this sex which is "not one"? Irigaray does not discuss this question abstractly from a distance, but by following a way of concrete philosophizing that is not afraid to address perceptions and bodily experiences that have long been excluded from philosophy as low and unworthy: Against the male view that "woman [...] has no sex," Irigaray insists that she has "at least two" of them:

> So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as one. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality is always at least double, even further: it is *plural*. […] Indeed, woman's pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity, for example. The pleasure of the vaginal caress does not have to be substituted for that of the clitoral caress. They each contribute, irreplaceably, to woman's pleasure. Among other caresses… Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on. To evoke only a few of the most specifically female pleasures which are somewhat misunderstood in sexual difference as it is imagined—or not imagined, the other sex being only the indispensable complement to the only sex. (Irigaray 1977, 27–28/28)

This description is directed against an understanding of the female sex for which the "pleasure experienced by touching, caressing, opening the labia, the vulva" does not exist (Irigaray 1974, 30/33). The persistence of this problem is pointed out by Malabou in a discussion that does not focus on the sexual difference between women and men, but on the difference within female sexuality, which Irigaray already addressed in the above quotation, namely between vagina and clitoris. For Malabou, "the clitoris, anarchy, and the feminine" are inextricably linked: "The clitoris interrupts the logic of command and obedience" (Malabou 2020, 121/122). While the vagina and the uterus can hardly escape the image of a void waiting to be used and filled, the clitoris is only useful for touch and pleasure. Its resistant uselessness is thus also a challenge to Lǎozǐ's image of the ravine that deserves to be considered. However, since the "use of being-without" (*yòng wú* 用無) and uselessness are closely related, it seems obvious that a "spiritual" use of

the ravine is related to preserving and acknowledging the moment of anarchic uselessness that Malabou evokes.

While Lǎozǐ gives an indirect and poetic expression to thinking about the female sex through the image of the ravine, Malabou speaks a more direct language as a "French 'woman philosopher'" (*femme-philosophe française*; Malabou 2019, 10/3). Irigaray and Malabou are experimenting with a language that has no place in the European tradition of philosophy. They obviously do not proceed in a very poetic way. Why does their way of philosophizing go so "low"? Why is sexual difference, for Irigaray, the focus of her critique of a male philosophical discourse that she traces from the present to antiquity and from Freud to Plato's cave? Is this not a betrayal of a philosophical way that seeks the ascent to the light and at best descends (again) into the world of shadows in order to enlighten those imprisoned there and to guide them upwards, to the exit of the cave?

Initially, mainly the "dark writers of the bourgeoisie" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2003, 130–40) departed so drastically from the traditional contempt for the body that they became "crushers and criminals" (*Brecher und Verbrecher*) and aroused the hatred of the "good and just" (Nietzsche 1988, 26, 87). In *Zarathustra*, there are repeated references to "descent", whose layers of meaning Nietzsche plays with: from the setting of the sun, the descent into the valley and into the body, to the disintegration of the prevailing order of values. In the 18th century the long imprisoned and tabooed Marquis de Sade exposed through violent exaggeration how men find pleasure in tormenting and exploiting female bodies. Irigaray extends the critique of the despisers of the body to a critique of the despisers of the female body, countering de Sade's philosophically charged depiction of the "phallic empire" (Irigaray 1977, 201/203) with a perspective that is precisely non-pornographic in its experiential directness of language.

Irigaray approaches female sexuality along a philosophical way that begins with a descent to the lowness of the "lower lips" in order to bring about a reversal of perception: she moves from the problematization of the discourse of sexual difference toward a profound transformation of thought and life. In doing so, she contrasts the masculine idea of active penetration into a passive cave with an understanding of female sexuality as both active and passive in itself. She thus attempts to depart from the traditional paradigm of subjectivity as self-mastery by opening subjectivity to the "anarchy" (Malabou 2020, 119–22/120–23) of the one female sex, which she perceives as *one, double, and plural* at once. The one male sex, on the other hand, stands for a "oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism: like the sun's" (Irigaray 1977, 207/207)—not to forget that in Plato's allegory of the cave, the one sun is contrasted with the plurality of shadows.

Irigaray rethinks subjectivity not only by way of *touch*—distinguished from the distance of the *gaze*—but also by way of the female sex organ, which is commonly perceived as low or even as disgusting. This is a turn of thought that has many correspondences in the *Lǎozǐ*, where the cultivation of the Way often begins not above and on high, but below, in the uncanny ravines, lowlands and abysses of being human. For Lǎozǐ the cultivation of the *Way* not only entails ascending, but always descending as well. The ravine is a paradoxical image of a way that is *one* but always also *double*.

Irigaray contrasts visual and bodily intrusion with an awareness of touch that focuses on the self-touch of the two lips of the female sex, not solipsistic but communicative in themselves (Irigaray 1977, 205–17/205–18). Starting from touch in her early work, the attention of her reflections later shifted towards air and the "cultivation of breath" (Irigaray 2021, 15, 121). She approaches this topic through a critique of Heidegger's "forgetfulness of air" (Irigaray 1983), as breathing along with yoga helped her alleviate the painful after-effects of an accident (Irigaray 2021). Although the transition from the philosophical revaluation of touch to the cultivation of breath appears rather preliminary from the perspective of Chinese "breath theory" (*qìlùn* 氣論), her search for a language based not on gaze and representation, but on touch and breath, contains important clues for a philosophy of breath and the profound difficulties involved in developing it in the context of contemporary European philosophy.

In her research into the reasons for the "hegemony of the gaze and the eye" (Irigaray 1983, 143) over other perceptual faculties, Irigaray came across Plato's allegory of the cave, in which those imprisoned in the cave are limited to their sense of sight. They can see, speak, and hear but their hands are bound. Twentieth-century European philosophy has explored this theme extensively, even going so far as to counter the metaphysical primacy of eye, light, and sight with a *philosophy of touch* (*le toucher*; touch, touching). This tendency is expressed, for example, in the attempt to understand the eye as an organ of touch, and thus to draw it into the realm of touch. Jacques Derrida has done this in an extraordinary text, mentioned earlier, that revolves around a seemingly absurd question: "*Quand nos yeux se touchent, fait-il jour ou fait-il nuit?*" (When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?) (Derrida 2000, 11). He thus opens up a perspective that allows us to discuss a juxtaposition of European and Chinese aesthetics whose significance is not diminished by the fact that it has become a cliché: the European primacy of vision is juxtaposed with the Chinese primacy of "breath" or "breath energy" (*qì* 氣)—in France, François Jullien in particular has elaborated on this understanding (see Heubel 2021, 175). Related to this is the idea that breathing is a perception of the world that precedes or at least accompanies bodily *and*

spiritual perception: through breathing we touch the world and are touched by it. Only as long as we breathe can seeing and other sensory perceptions have meaning for us. And before a dying person takes his or her last breath, all other perceptions fade behind breathing, the final struggle for air. In phrases such as "I breathe, therefore I am" (Irigaray 1983, 145) or "philosophy dies—without air" (ibid., 13), Irigaray articulated such a view. According to her, the identification of being with thinking as well as of thinking with seeing already led philosophers in ancient Greece to a *breathlessness* (*Atemlosigkeit*) that became a topic of critical self-reflection in Europe during the 20th century.

Heidegger is one of the modern philosophers who prepared a way of philosophizing that takes breath seriously. Irigaray criticized Heidegger's "forgetfulness of air", but in the openness of the "clearing" (*Lichtung*) she also perceived a "free space" in which there is again air for philosophy to breathe (Irigaray 1983, 13, 59). In her critique of Heidegger, however, she underestimated the extent to which his concept of being—inspired by pre-Socratic thought—as counterturning in itself, moving between revealing and concealing, rising and falling, ascending and descending already comes close to philosophize *breath-change* (*qìhuà* 氣化). At this point, being and breath meet in a promising way. For both Heidegger and Irigaray, however, it is equally true that they lack the linguistic and cultural sources for a philosophical *breath-turn* (*Atemwende*). Both have turned to Asia in different ways and explored the possibilities of an Easternization of European philosophy. Where these ways might lead is difficult to predict, but the philosophy of breath will help to find an answer.

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In Defence of Subjectivity and Autonomy: Shitao's Aesthetic Theory and His Critique of the Mainstream School of Painting in the Early Qing Dynasty

*Téa SERNELJ**

Abstract

The article explores the aesthetic theory of Shitao, an early Qing dynasty painter who belonged to the Individualist school of painting which advocated painting from subjective experience of life and learning from the Dao, thus following the aesthetic tradition of literati landscape painters. Shitao composed his own theory of painting and aesthetics in the work *The Remarks on Painting* (*Huayulu* 畫語錄), which was the result of his artistic practice and philosophical reflections collected throughout his life. The article delves into Shitao's critique of the Traditionalist school of painting which prevailed in his time as the mainstream painting style, advocating imitation and repetition of the old masters. For Shitao and other Individualist painters, such an approach and attitude towards art led to creative stagnation and a departure from the aesthetic ideals of classical landscape painting. With their artistic and theoretical intervention, however, they managed to preserve, upgrade and bring to life new perspectives in artistic production and aesthetic theories. This paper presents Shitao's defence of subjectivity as a vital catalyst for the rejuvenation of artistic perspectives and the restoration of Chinese art, thus providing an invaluable contribution to the discourse on artistic creativity and subjectivity.

Keywords: Shitao, Holistic brushstroke, aesthetics, subjectivity, Traditionalist school of painting, Individualist school of painting

V bran subjektivnosti in avtonomiji: Shitaova estetska teorija in njegova kritika prevladujoče struje slikarstva v zgodnji dinastiji Qing

Izvleček

Članek prouči estetsko teorijo slikarja Shitaota iz zgodnjega obdobja dinastije Qing, ki je pripadal struji individualističnega slikarstva. Ta zagovarja slikarstvo, ki izhaja iz subjektivnih izkušenj življenja in učenja od Daota, s čimer sledi estetski tradiciji krajinskega slikarstva literatov. Shitao je ustvaril lastno teorijo slikarstva in estetike v delu *Zapisi o*

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slikarstvu (*Huayulu* 畫語錄), ki predstavlja rezultat njegove vseživljenjske umetniške prakse in filozofskih razmišljanj. Članek se osredotoča na Shitaovo kritiko tradicionalistične struje slikarstva, ki je kot glavni slog slikarstva prevladovala v njegovem času in temeljila na doslednem posnemanju starih mojstrov. Za Shitaota in druge individualistične slikarje je takšen pristop in odnos do umetnosti vodil v ustvarjalno stagnacijo in odmik od estetskih idej klasičnega krajinskega slikarstva. S svojim umetniškim in teoretskim posredovanjem so individualistični slikarji uspeli ohraniti, nadgraditi in oživeti nove perspektive v umetniški produkciji in estetskih teorijah. Članek predstavi Shitaovo zagovarjanje subjektivnosti kot ključne pobudnice v produkciji novih umetniških perspektiv in obnovitvi kitajske umetnosti, ki predstavlja neprecenljiv prispevek k razpravi o umetniški ustvarjalnosti in subjektivnosti.

Ključne besede: Shitao, Holistična poteza čopiča, estetika, subjektivnost, tradicionalna struja slikarstva, individualistična struja slikarstva

Introduction: Shitao's Life and Work

Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707, birth name Zhu Ruoji 朱若極) was one of the most important painters of the early Qing dynasty. He belonged to the so-called Individualist or non-Traditionalist school of painting (*feizhengtong pai* 非正統派), which advocated painting from the artist's subjective experience of life, learning from nature and freedom in artistic expression. This approach opposed the Traditionalist school (*zhengtong pai* 正統派) which favoured imitation and copying of the old masters of painting in terms of technical skills in brushwork and style. Shitao created his own aesthetic theory, in which he directly criticized the Traditionalist painters and sought a revival of aesthetic taste of the literati landscape painters that emerged in the Wei Jin period (or the Six dynasties; 220–589 CE) and gradually developed fully with Song dynasty painters. For Shitao, the aesthetics of literati painters represented the genuine essence of Chinese art and aesthetics.

Shitao was born in 1642 in Guilin, and was part of the eleventh generation of descendants of a grandnephew of the founder of the Ming dynasty (1364–1644). He was only two years old when the Ming dynasty collapsed (Strassberg 1989, 12). When Shitao was around ten years old he was taken to a Chan Buddhist monastery in Wuchang in Hebei province and began studying calligraphy following the renowned Tang master, Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785). Captivated by the master's bold and vigorous brushstrokes, as well as the solid structure of his work, Shitao developed an enduring fondness for these artistic qualities that would last a lifetime.

He was later encouraged to explore the style of the famous late Ming dynasty painter, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), a founder of the Traditionalist

school.[1] However, upon examining Dong's work, Shitao was far from taken by his approach. Instead, he decided to wholeheartedly embrace the artistic expression of more ancient styles (Strassberg 1989, 14). At the age of fourteen he had already gained reputation as a talented painter of flowers, birds, landscape and figures. From this young age on, Shitao travelled around China and practiced painting and Chan Buddhism. In 1657, he declared his affinity with the Individualist path in art and disdained the Traditionalist approach, as written in a colophon of a painting from that year:

> In painting there are the "Northern" and "Southern" schools … do I follow them or do they follow me? Suddenly I grasp my sides and break out in laughter as I say, I use my own method (*wo fa* 我法). (ibid., 15)[2]

In 1662, Shitao started Chan training under the guidance of the renowned Chan master Lü'an Benyue 旅庵本月, and received the transmission of the dharma from him two years later. However, Shitao was always travelling around China, and throughout his journeys he frequently visited the Huangshan mountain in Anhui, which became his profound source of inspiration and played a pivotal role in his artistic development. He stayed in Anhui for a decade, and during that period Shitao came into contact with prominent Individualist painters and poets from the local Anhui school and further explored the artistic depiction of Huangshan. Anhui Individualist circle held paramount importance in Shitao's artistic development, as it offered him a unique and powerful example of nature from which he could reassess the unconventional compositions and ink effects of the Individualist approach. In 1680, he travelled to Nanjing and became a resident in a temple south of the city. There he embraced a solitary life, fully devoting himself to meditation and eventually achieving the status of a Chan master (ibid., 22).

In the tradition of Chinese art, the role of a monk-painter was well-established practice and did not conflict with a religious vocation, as both pursuits acted as mutually reinforcing paths toward spiritual enlightenment. Shitao even referred to his profession as "painting Chan" (*hua chan* 畫禪). In a colophon to a painting, he stated:

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1   The Traditionalist school (*zhengtong pai* 正統派) is often referred to as the Orthodox or Loyalist school of painting by art historians. However, due to its religious connotations, I prefer to avoid using the term "Orthodox".

2   In the reference to two subsequent colophon entries on Shitao's paintings, Strassberg does not provide the original Chinese text.

> Discussing painting is like discussing Chan: what is important is to forget one's knowledge of things and enter into the Primary principle,[3] which is what defines the master. Otherwise, one sinks into dualism, which definitely indicates that one is not an expert. (ibid.)

Around 1693, Shitao renounced his formal status as a Chan master and assumed the role of a Daoist priest. His Daoist name, *Dadizi* 大滌子, meaning "The Pure One" (or according to Chai (2021, 97) "Master of Great Cleansing"), symbolized the purification of all accumulated worldly impurities. This decision reflected his rejection of the political corruption that had become associated with Buddhism (Coleman 1978, 29).

Shitao resided in Yangzhou from 1697 until his death. Around 1700, he completed writing his renowned theory of painting, *The Remarks on Painting* (*Huayulu* 畫語錄). A revised version of the text, known as *Manual for Painting* (*Hua Pu* 畫譜), was published ten years later[4] (ibid.).

Shitao's aesthetic theory that he wrote in the last decade of his life encompasses his entire theoretical and practical knowledge as a philosopher and an artist. His *Remarks* eloquently reflect the profound influence of classical philosophy, i.e. the *Yijing*, *Daodejing* and Chan Buddhism, and of literati landscape painting. This influence is evident in the aesthetic concepts, categories and rhetoric that he masterfully employs in his theory of painting.

Shitao's aesthetic theory undoubtedly promoted a subjectivity and artistic freedom that led to innovative forms and expressions in art.

As mentioned above, Shitao's painting theory challenges the "traditionalist" understanding of art, which adheres to strict rules and promoted the imitation of the old masters.[5] This approach advocates exact copying (*fang* 仿), correctness (*zheng* 正) and the transfer of past techniques (*gu* 古) as the ultimate model to be imitated in the present and future, dismissing individual expression as unnecessary and even undesirable. Shitao, however, vigorously resisted this mainstream school that prevailed in his time and led to a creative closure in art.

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3   The concept of the Primary principle originated from Song poetry critic Yan Yu 嚴羽 (1180–1235), who emphasized that poets should experience spiritual enlightenment. For Shitao this represented a profound insight into reality, surpassing mere knowledge of styles and techniques. While Shitao embraced Daoism when he wrote *The Remarks on Painting*, many of his ideas can be traced back to Chan or remain highly compatible with its teachings (Strassberg 1989, 36).

4   For an in-depth study of Shitao's life, see Hay (2001).

5   Paul D'Ambrosio describes this attitude as a "tradition-focused approach", which "requires coherence to the past in its support of 'new' interpretations" (D'Ambrosio 2023, 52).

According to Strassberg (1989, 3–4), Shitao's approach to overcoming creative stagnation goes beyond the constraints of historicism and embraces a holistic foundation in art. By tracing the act of painting back to the principles of unity and autonomy, Shitao strove to recover the innate harmony between nature, art, and the heart-mind, as originally formulated by the classical literati painters. This pursuit of a spiritual connection with nature and an attempt to visually represent one's inner self revitalizes painting as an original and unique experience, liberating it from mere imitation of other artists' styles. Within the Chinese aesthetic tradition, there is no other theory that exhibits such deep literary consciousness and originality of expression, eloquently voicing a distinctively personal perspective (ibid.).

Shitao's *Remarks on Painting* is composed of eighteen relatively short yet comprehensive essays or chapters exploring the notions of the "holistic brushstroke" and "method", while the subsequent three essays examine the act of painting. Chapters eight to 14 specifically elucidate these concepts in relation to painting's symbolism and its profound power of representation. The concluding four essays interweave the aforementioned themes through discussions on the paradigmatic person (*zhiren* 至人), the interdependence of things, and the art of mastering life (Chai 2021, 98).

Historical Development of Literati Painting and the Formation of the Traditionalist School

Literati painting (*wenrenhua* 文人畫) refers to art created by scholars and writers that shows a distinctive aesthetic taste. Its origins date back to a change in the status of painters. Unlike other professional painters, who were trained in workshops, literati painters had a humanistic education and excelled in poetry, calligraphy and painting, which together are known as the three perfections of Chinese art. For them, painting became an extension of writing and calligraphy, linking the visual arts to the written word (Gao 2018, 66). From the Six dynasties (220–589 CE) to the Tang dynasty (618–907), the theoretical foundations of figure and landscape painting were gradually established by important artists such as Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (344–406), Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443) and Xie He 謝赫 (479–502). During the Tang (618–907) and Song dynasty (960–1279), landscape painting gained prominence and became a central focus in literati art and aesthetics.

Literati painting, however, fully developed during the Tang dynasty, especially with Wang Wei 王維 (699–759), who was a famous poet but excelled not only in poetry but also in painting and music. He incorporated poetry and prose into his

landscape paintings, blending water, ink and landscapes to create a simple and lyrical mood. Wang Wei significantly influenced the development of literati painting in his time, and served as a model for future generations of literati painters.

During the Northern Song period (960–1127), literati painting was represented by the intellectual circle of poets, writers, painters, calligraphers, and theorists of aesthetics around Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), a poet and calligrapher, who praised Wang Wei's ability to combine his poems with painting to create a poetic feeling. The scholars of the Northern Song period believed that painting should go beyond the mere appearance of forms and express the ideas and cultivation of the artist. Literati theory however, placed the utmost importance on painting as a means of expressing individual character. It was seen as a "mind-print" (*xin yin* 心印) that transmitted the artist's inner cultivation and the aesthetic quality of *qiyun* 氣韻 (harmonious resonance of *qi*)[6] shaped through a process of spiritual refinement rooted in a profound understanding of the patterns of natural order (*li* 理) in nature and from broadly absorbing the spirit (*ru shen* 入神) of great masters. Within the creative process, the artist was envisioned as actively participating in the spontaneity of the universe, crafting their work without deliberate reference to techniques typically associated with professional painters (Strassberg 1989, 4). This approach, profoundly influenced by Daoist and Chan philosophy, laid the cornerstone for literati painting.

In the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) a significant change occurred in the orientation of literati painters, who moved away from the artistic traditions of the Song masters. The concept of antiquity gained prominence and became the most important value in art.[7] By the 13th century, the evolved tradition of landscape painting had established stylistic models that sparked debates among artists about how to effectively convey the spirit of antiquity (*gu yi* 古意) and which styles to follow. Yuan artists turned away from the naturalistic depictions of humans within the vastness of nature typical of the Song period, and instead took a more expressive

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6   The concept of *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 was first introduced by Xie He (6th century) in his work *The Records on Ancient Painting* (*Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄) as the first (and the most important) of the six principles (or methods *liufa* 六法) of painting. For an in-depth research of this aesthetic concept, see Sernelj (2021).

7   The shift towards antiquity during the Yuan dynasty was probably not merely a cultural and aesthetic preference, but a deliberate effort to uphold the Han tradition in the face of foreign rule. The Yuan dynasty's non-Han rule prompted a re-evaluation of traditional Chinese values and a resurgence of interest in Confucianism, which was closely associated with the Han dynasty. Scholars and literati of the time turned to the classics and the philosophical teachings of Confucius to help define and preserve Chinese identity and cultural values during this period of political change. Restoration of Confucian art and philosophy became a prominent trend among Chinese intellectuals and literati of the time, aiming for preservation of the rich cultural heritage of China.

approach that emphasized formal structure. Their focus shifted to technical aspects such as schemes, brushstroke textures, recurring formal motifs, and compositional arrangements, collectively referred to as "methods" (*fa* 法). This emphasis on technical skills and formal elements redefined the process of creating and appreciating paintings (ibid., 6).

This played an important role in the subsequent Ming dynasty, where these techniques formed the basis for various art schools. Finally, they laid the foundation for the emergence of Traditionalist painting in the 17th century, which sought a standardized and traditionalist approach to painting.

During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), literati painting underwent a process of differentiation, giving rise to distinctive schools. This evolution ultimately resulted in the classification of Northern and Southern schools of painting, and later the categorization into Traditionalist and Individualist schools formulated by the renowned painter and art theorist Dong Qichang.

Dong Qichang, a multifaceted figure who served as an official, scholar, and esteemed art collector, played a significant role in the preservation of traditional Chinese painting styles. He diligently recorded the stylistic attributes of authentic ancient paintings, encompassing aspects such as brushwork and ink techniques. Dong's meticulous work involved copying these ancient masterpieces and supplementing them with his insightful annotations.

Of particular importance was Dong's deep appreciation for artistic style and a commitment to upholding tradition, which left a lasting impact on the evolution of Chinese literati painting during the Ming dynasty.

In his interpretation, the famous contemporary expert on Chinese aesthetics, Wang Keping (2021, 306–307), highlighted Dong Qichang's advice to painters, urging them to channel their focus towards contemplative concentration and heartfelt tranquillity. Dong called for painters to establish a profound connection with the vital rhythm of Heaven and Earth, suggesting that by aligning with nature they could create their most exceptional "mind-inspired paintings" (*xin yin* 心印) that would reveal the profound beauty of the universe. Dong underscored the significance of directly experiencing and perceiving the vital rhythm inherent in all things, a practice that not only led to artistic pleasure but also held the potential for longevity in the artist's work.

In contrast, Strassberg (1989, 8) sheds light on a distinct aspect of Dong's position, emphasizing that he made a clear distinction between the "correct" lineage of painting and the "heterodox" one. By introducing his influential theory of the "Northern" and "Southern" schools, where he defined these two lineages, he

unapologetically asserted the superiority of the latter. For Dong, the Southern school, as exemplified by renowned painters like Wang Wei 王維, the Four Masters of the Yuan dynasty, and Ni Zan 倪瓚, had effectively preserved the genuine value of painting. In contrast, Dong believed that the Northern school had experienced a decline in quality. Dong not only traced the authentic continuum of artistic traditions but also provided a structured process for artists to identify with these great masters, with the ultimate goal of achieving a "Great synthesis" (*Da cheng* 大成) of formal elements derived from past works.

While Dong had adopted the concept of historical style transformation from the Individualists, he explicitly rejected the notion of creating one's own style:

> … Some people say, "One must create one's own style". This is terribly wrong. For willows, follow Chao Pochu, for pines, Ma Hezhi, for died-up trees, Li Cheng. These methods are unchanging and eternal. Even if some further transformation of them should be attempted, it should not depart from the basic source. How could there be individual creativity apart from the methods of antiquity? (Strassberg 1989, 9)[8]

Dong advocated studying paintings, particularly those of the old masters, as a precursor to observing nature. This approach, known as the correct transformation of correct style, established a confined realm of creative activity wherein transcendent spiritual meaning could be continuously transmitted and recycled (ibid.). The primacy of studying paintings first and then turning to nature is reflected in his famous saying:

> 以境之奇怪论，则画不如山水，以笔墨之情秒论，则山水绝不如画。
>
> From the state point of amazing scenery, painting cannot equal natural landscape; when it comes to the wonders of brush and ink, landscape is no match for painting. (Cf. Kong 2022, 11:10)

This obviously gives a taste for brush and ink a very high status, and had a great influence on later generations.

These painters, however, were staunch proponents of Confucian traditionalism, which led to the prevailing practice of imitating (*fang* 仿) the correct style (*zheng* 正) of the old ancient masters during the late Ming and early Qing dynasty.

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8   Strassberg does not provide the original text in Chinese.

In the early Qing dynasty, Wang Shimin 王時敏—who was Dong Qichang's student and successor—favoured ancient techniques (*gufa* 古法) and promoted them as equal to those of the "Southern" school, as defined by Dong. He focused on imitating ancient masterpieces, and by constantly reworking these he looked to gain new inspiration. This approach was upheld by all "Four Wangs",[9] commonly known as similarity (*lin* 臨) and resemblance (*mo* 摹), which both involve close replication. On the other hand, copying (*fang* 仿) and nurturing (*fu* 抚) entailed following the styles of predecessors (Strassberg 1989, 9).

The early Qing dynasty Traditionalist school, as represented by the Four Wangs following Dong Qichang's style, laid particular stress on brushwork, and their work shared common compositional characteristics in being fragmentary, building up the scenery in layers, elements following one another rather than mirroring what real mountains and rivers look like. This reflects a division-based technique of composition. It deprives landscape of its boundlessness and makes it impossible for viewers to see the vigour of the universe. However, their paintings excel in numerous kinds of brushwork and texture strokes, mainly derived from the Southern school. In composition they follow the classical principles of three levels[10] (cf. Kong 2022, 11:00–13:15).

However, this approach to painting prompted the Individualist artists, such as Shitao, Zhu Da 朱耷 (1626–1705, style name Bada Shanren 八大山人) and others, not only to question the custom but to completely abandon it (Chai 2021, 94), as they regarded it as a theoretical foundation for the complete closure of artistic creativity. They strove for the revival of the genuine spirit of Chinese art and aesthetics as formed by literati painters from the Wei Jin period onwards. The Individualists' rebellion against conservativism of the Traditionalist theory however, consequentially led to new and innovative expressions in art, and still has a significant influence on contemporary Chinese artists (see Yeh 2008).

Thematically, the Traditionalist theory emphasized conservative Confucian values, which resonated with the ruling class's ideology. It advocated for the preservation of the hierarchy of artistic sages and faith in the superiority of the past as a model. The paintings showcased bureaucratic values by skilfully handling technical intricacies and creating an atmosphere of serene philosophical tranquillity and impartial judicial detachment (Strassberg 1989, 12).

Moreover, the Qing court actively promoted this kind of conservative culture as part of its campaign to rebuild order and reintegrate "native" Chinese values

9   Wang Shimin 王時敏, Wang Jian 王鑒, Wang Hui 王翬, and Wang Yuanqi 王原祁.

10   As we will see in the next subchapter, Shitao severely criticized this traditional division.

following the collapse of the Ming dynasty. The Traditionalist school was favoured by the Kangxi Emperor, who bestowed official commissions upon its painters in the capital. On the other hand, the Individualist painters faced constant struggles for their everyday survival. Without patrons and commissions, they would not be able to sustain themselves solely through their art (ibid.).

Shitao's Aesthetic Theory of the Holistic Brushstroke

Shitao's aesthetic theory is based on the fundamental idea of the "holistic brush-stroke" or "oneness of brushstroke" (*yihua* 一 畫[11]), which represents his ultimate method of painting the so-called "method of no method" (*wufa zhi fa* 無法之法), or in short "no method" (*wufa* 無法). However, the term *fa* (法) in Chinese also conveys the notion of copying or imitating. As a result, its translation and conceptualization can vary depending on the context. In certain situations *fa* can be interpreted as a method that necessitates avoiding imitation or copying entirely, while in other contexts it signifies the elimination of any prescribed methods of painting style. The nuanced nature of the term therefore calls for a flexible interpretation, demanding careful consideration of the specific context in which it is used to precisely capture Shitao's intended meaning in his *Remarks on Painting*.

He considered the process of painting as a cosmogonic act in itself, the holistic brushstroke acting as the creative principle of the cosmos. By grasping the law of creativity, Shitao stressed that one must not adhere to fixed and restrained methods in the painting process, nor copying one's predecessors. Instead, the painter must seek freedom from rules. His holistic method derives from the absence of all methods and consequently represents the method or operation of the Dao itself. As such, the holistic brushstroke has the ability to reflect the entire universe on a microcosmic scale precisely because of its ability to represent the innermost reality (or structure) (*li* 理) of all things. Shitao's aesthetic theory of the holistic brushstroke, however, is deeply grounded on the onto-cosmology of the *Yijing* and *Daodejing*.

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11   The concept of *Yihua* was not coined by Shitao, but is an ancient concept in Chinese painting. According to Chai (2021, 98), the earliest recorded use of *Yihua* can be traced back to Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143 CE), a renowned master of the cursive-script calligraphy style and the author of the influential essay "Configuration of Cursive Script" (*Cao shu shi* 草書勢). This marks the inception of *Yihua* as an aesthetic concept. Soon after, it was accompanied by the emergence of "one-stroke writing" (*yibishu* 一筆書), exemplifying the cursive-script calligraphy style of Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–386 CE). Additionally, "one-line drawing" (*yibihua* 一筆畫) gained prominence, referring to the painting style pioneered by Lu Tanwei 陆探微 (dates unknown, approximately 485 CE) (ibid.).

In the first chapter of the *Remarks*, Shitao defines his holistic brushstroke as a no-method. The method used, however, refers to the principles of painting that were established in the past, i.e. by the literati painters who established them as cosmological principles deriving from the oneness of the Dao. Already in the second line of the first chapter, Shitao writes that people nowadays (i.e. referring to the Traditionalist school's painters) are not aware of this cosmological unity anymore and he himself established a holistic brushstroke which holds in itself the cosmological source of creativity.

> 太古無法。太樸無散。太樸一散而法立矣。 法於何立。 立於一畫。一畫者眾有之本。 萬象之根。 見用於神。 藏用於人而皆人不知。 所以一畫之法乃自我立。 立一畫之法者。 蓋以無法生有法。以有法貺眾法也。夫畫者。 從於心者也。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 1)

> There were no (painting) methods in remote antiquity, for the Uncarved block had not yet disintegrated. When it did, methods were established. But what is the basis of any method? They are all based on the Holistic brushstroke. The Holistic brushstroke is fundamental to depicting everything in existence and is the root of all images. It is perceptible spiritually, yet works mysteriously in the human-mind so my contemporaries remain unaware of it. Therefore, I, myself, established a "method" of Holistic Brushstroke. This method is created out of "no–method" to string together all other methods. Painting is guided by the heart-mind. (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 61)

The opening two lines can be seen as a parallelism which connects remote antiquity (*taigu* 太古) with primordial simplicity (*taipu* 太樸), usually translated as the uncarved block. In the Laozi, *pu* is used for the description of the *Dao*. In the Chapter 32 of the *Daodejing* we read:

> 道常無名。樸雖小，天下莫能臣也。(*Daodejing* s.d., 32)

> *Dao* is constant and cannot be speak of. Although small, no one can subjugate it.[12]

In the third line, Shitao writes that the principles emerged when primordial unity dispersed, which resonates with Chapter 28 of the *Daodejing*, where it is stated that the formation of material forms emerged after the dispersion of pure simplicity.

> 樸散則為器。(*Daodejing* s.d., 28)

> The dispersion of primordial unity forms vessels.

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12 If not noted otherwise, the translations of Chinese texts are mine.

Shitao's holistic brushstroke is grounded on the metaphysical level, presumably referring to the onto-cosmology of the *Yijing*:

> 形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器。(*Yijing, Xi Ci*, I/12)
>
> What is above forms is called the *Dao*. What is below forms is called the vessel.

Following the genuine cosmological principles of the literati painters, Shitao emphasized that there were no methods in the distant and remote past, which means that the painting methods were natural and spontaneous, following the way of the Dao, and were not the product of artificiality and purposeful endeavour. However, after the dispersion of oneness, the holistic brushstroke was established which is the essence of everything and the root of all phenomena-images (*xiang* 象). Yet his contemporaries were not aware of the great creativity of the Dao that is the source of any artistic action. The holistic brushstroke is thus a physical manifestation of the Dao in the art of painting and is the root of all subsequent interventions or methods in the painting process. The same onto-cosmological statement is presented in Chapter 42 of the *Daodejing*:

> 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以為和。(*Daodejing* s.d., 42)
>
> *Dao* gives birth to one, one to two, two to three, and three to myriad entities. Myriad entities, bearing *Yin* and embracing *Yang*, form a unified harmony through the fusing of these vital forces.

Applying the first stroke to the empty surface recapitulates the decisive moment of bringing things into being and set into motion the forms of nature and to endow the artwork with the spiritual coherence of the universe (Strassberg 1989, 39).

In this sense, Shitao emphasized the importance of subjectivity, since for him true creativity is possible only on the basis of one's own experience and understanding of the nature of things, which is then transferred onto the artwork. The transformation of the external reality into the artwork is hence twofold, being spiritual and artistic at the same time. For Shitao, the Traditionalist school of painting which advocates the exact copying and repetition of styles and techniques of the great masters from the past and neglects subjective expression denies the art of painting this essential spiritual dimension.

The holistic brushstroke can be understood as the first and initial act that pervades the painting process from the beginning till the end. It is done in one vital breath, which means that the scene or landscape that is to be presented in the painting as a microcosm of the macrocosm is already structured in the artist heart-mind. It gives the liveliness to the painting in the sense that it is a recreation of reality which is the result of spiritual synchronicity of the artist with the external world. For Shitao, the realization of the holistic brushstroke is attained through the complementarity of the ink and brush. The interplay of ink and brush, however, is a cosmic union of the two poles, i.e. the *Yin* and *Yang* which form a pair responsible for arranging all aspects of reality and their universal transformations or changes. This is reflected in Shitao's reference to the meaning of *Qian* and *Kun* from the *Yijing* (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 2).

The operation of the holistic method is hence rooted in the naturalness of the Dao (*daofa ziran* 道法自然). Using the principle of the oneness of *Yin* and *Yang*, the Dao harmonizes all things by allowing these natural elements to self-regulate and manage (*zhi* 治) themselves. Shitao argued that the holistic brushstroke, rooted in primal simplicity, governs the myriad strokes that emanate from it. This regulation occurs as the brush and ink freely alternate their positions of dominance and inferiority, much like the dynamic interplay of *Yin* and *Yang*, without disrupting the overall harmony of the artwork (Chai 2021, 103).

In Chinese art theory and aesthetics, the concept of copying (*mimesis*) reality (nature) and its entities (*wanwu*) is not something that has any particular aesthetic value. Instead, the artist should imitate and recreate it in such a way that it seems natural and spontaneous, in other words, the artist paints a microcosm of macrocosm. This is attainable through precise observation and profound understanding of external reality, along with a complete fusion of the inner world of human spirit with the external world, reflecting the ancient philosophical concept of the unity of humanity and nature (*tianren heyi*). In this context, artistic practice and the creative process have an extremely important place, in fact a fundamental one, in Chinese aesthetics This is not limited to the mastery of artistic technique or skill, but extends to the sphere of aesthetic transformation and transcendence. In this sense, self-cultivation of the artist refers to emptying of the self and harmonizing one's spirit with the cosmic Dao. Only on such grounds can the artist create the artwork that has the genuine aesthetic value which is able to transmit a transformative and transcendent experience of life to the audience.

Critique of Traditionalist Painters

Shitao claimed that a painting should follow and grasp the simplicity of nature (i.e. the Dao), in a process of artistic creation following the aesthetic ideal of the landscape literati painters. Hence for him the Traditionalist painters who blindly followed the styles and techniques of the past disregarded the essence of the art of painting. As we have seen, the aesthetic ideal of the landscape literati painters was by far not technical but spiritual. A truly genuine artwork was the product of a profound contemplation of the inherent nature of things, of the external world, i.e. the nature or universe on the one hand, and of internal reality on the other, i.e. of the human heart-mind or the spirit that is displayed in the artwork. In this context, they advocated that the artist should carefully observe transformation and changes in nature in order to grasp its intrinsic qualities which are then recreated in the painting.

Shitao's critique of Traditionalist approaches to the art of painting is elaborated in the subsequent two chapters of the *Remarks*, where he further explains and elaborates in a more concrete and detailed way the problem of the method (*fa*) illuminated in the first chapter. Shitao's greatest issue with methods, however, is that they are limited, inhibited and restrained, which hinders freedom of creativity and subjective expression in art:

> 規矩者。方圓之極則也。天地者。規矩之運行也。世知有規矩。而不知夫乾施坤轉之義。此天地之縛人於法。人之役法於蒙。。。一畫明。則障不在目。而畫可從心。畫從心而障自遠矣。夫畫者。行天地萬物者也。舍筆墨其何以形之哉。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 2)

> Compass and ruler measure perfect circles and squares. Heaven and Earth move in the patterns marked by compasses and rulers. While people know about these tools, few understand the activity of the Creative and Receptive forces of the Universe. Such a conception of Heaven and Earth traps one in rules, keeping one in ignorance […] when Holistic brushstroke is understood, then inhibitions vanish from sight and painting can proceed naturally [from the heart-mind). When painting proceed naturally, inhibitions fade away by themselves. Painting represents the forms of Heaven, Earth and all things. How else could they be depicted but with brush and ink? (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 63)

Compasses and square sets were used in ancient Chinese painting as the instruments for drawing lines—the latter for straight lines and the former for circles and curves. In the Tang dynasty, the famous painter critics and historian, Zhang

Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 815–907) discussed the traditional division made between "real" paintings and "dead" paintings.[13] The latter referred to paintings made using instruments, whereas real paintings were made freehand. As Zhang asserted:

> Now, if one makes use of marking line and ruler, the result will be a dead painting. But if one guards the spirit and concentrates upon a single thing, the result will be a real painting. Is not even plain plaster better than a wall of dead painting? Yet even one stroke of real painting will show its breath of life. (Gao 2018, 4)

In this passage of the second chapter, Shitao obviously refers to this distinction and criticizes the Traditionalists' rigidity in following the methods and rules that lead to the creation of so-called dead paintings because they were not aware of the true creativity that is behind real paintings, i.e. deriving from the creative source (the creativity of nature or Dao) itself via the spirit (the heart-mind) of the artist. Creative forces of Nature are represented by *Qian* and *Kun* (i.e. *Yang* and *Yin*) in the following lines, which argue that people were not aware of the true meaning of the harmonious creative dynamics of the two.

Shitao also criticizes the traditional division of space on three levels (land, trees and mountains) or two sections (main scene below and mountains above)[14] in Chinese painting that prevailed in the Traditionalist theory. However, this issue is again directly addressed in Chapter ten of the *Remarks*, entitled *Defining space* (*jingjie* 境界):

> 分疆三疊兩段。 似乎山水之失。 然有不失之者。 如自然分疆者。
> 。 。 每每寫山水如開閉分破。 毫無生活。 (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 10)

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13   This distinction has also been discussed by many contemporary Chinese experts Chinese aesthetics, see e.g. Wang (2023, 17). It is also in accordance with some European scholars, such as Selusi Ambrogio who formulates a similar distinction: "Mere technique does not nurture life, while a technique-art that express itself through 'artistic actions' grounded on sensibility, emotions and humaneness is able to penetrate and express Dao" (Ambrogio 2023, 164).

14   According to the first Chinese etymological dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* from the first century AD, the character *hua* 畫 consists of two graphic elements, consisting of the character *yu* 聿, which depicts a hand holding a bamboo stick, which takes on the meaning of a brush, and *tian* 田, an image of a field crossed by furrows. To paint therefore means to draw lines with a brush that outlines shapes in the same way that paths limit fields and determine their configuration. The dictionary therefore defines a painting as follows: a painting is made of borders, similar to paths that delimit fields. In Chinese painting, which actually originates from calligraphy, it is the line that dominates. However, this delineation is not about limitation, but rather, as the order of strokes the character *tian* suggests, the connection between above and below (Heaven and Earth) and left and right, which precedes it. The painter thus provides space for Heaven and Earth by inscribing the landscape between the two.

Dividing land areas, creating "three levels" or "two sections" may seem to doom a landscape to failure. Yet, there are such cases when Nature itself divides the land…But whenever a landscape is composed by chopping up the surface, it always lacks vitality. Such failure can be recognized immediately. (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 77)

For Shitao this traditional division is too restrictive and like cutting the space into pieces. When there is a demarcation, its role is not so much to isolate, separate, and define, but above all to establish interdependence between individual parts, in order to open up the field of their interactions which consequently represent vitality. Shitao's rejection of rigidity through the integration of all divisions is to avoid lifeless copying, in other words, it is his general admonition against conforming to the methods of past masters. He posits that in painting these three levels the painter must first of all integrate them into a united atmosphere by employing the single pervasive creative vitality or the breath—energy (*qi* 氣): 先要貫通一氣. (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 10)

In the next lines of the second chapter, we read:

古今法障不了，由一畫之理不明。一畫明，則障不在目而畫可從心。畫從心而障自遠矣。。。法無障，障無法。法自畫生，障自畫退。　　法障不參。而乾旋坤轉之義得矣，畫道彰矣，一畫了矣。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 2)

Throughout time, the reason that people have not liberated themselves from the inhibitions of methods is that the natural order (*li*) inherent in the holistic brushstroke has not been properly understood. When it is understood, then inhibitions vanish from sight and the painting can follow the heart-mind.[15] If painting follows the heart-mind then the inhibitions fade away by themselves… True method [holistic brushstroke] is without inhibitions, just as inhibitions destroy true method. True method arises from the act of painting, while it is through the act of painting that inhibitions are banished. When method can be separated from inhibitions, then the activity of creative and receptive forces [*Qian* and *Kun*] can be grasped. The Dao of painting will shine forth and enlightenment gained into the holistic brushstroke. (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 63)

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15   Heart-mind refers to intuitive mind and its penetrating power is sensitive to the moral and aesthetic and is not limited to rational, analytical or discursive thought (Coleman 1978, 44).

Shitao's holistic method arises from the absence of all methods, representing the method or operation of the Dao itself. Consequently, the holistic brushstroke possesses the unique ability to encapsulate the entire universe on a microcosmic scale, precisely because it can depict the innermost nature, or structure (*li* 理), of all things.

The Importance of Individual Artistic Subjectivity and the Unity with the Dao

This understanding of the innermost nature (i.e. the Dao), extends to the comprehension and application of transformation and change in nature within an artwork through the use of the holistic brushstroke, or no-method. Nevertheless, in the third chapter Shitao underscores that successfully portraying change in a painting is only achievable when one is open to transforming oneself accordingly. Here, Shitao delves into the notion that knowledge of past masters, or antiquity, should serve as a tool for the painter. He clearly expresses his critique of the Traditionalist school of painting by emphasizing the significance of the self in the creative process. In this context, the engagement of the self has a dual role. It serves as the origin for creating an authentic artwork that represents the Dao, grounded in a profound understanding of the nature of things. Simultaneously, it signifies one's capacity to self-transform and change.

Shitao most explicitly and lucidly presents his critique of the mainstream school of painting in the third chapter of the *Remarks*, elucidating the distinctions between his no-method and the conventional painting methods of the past. He highlights the primary reason behind his critique.

> 古者。 試之具也。 化者。 試其具而弗為也。 具古以化。 未見夫人也。 嘗憾其泥古不化者。 是識拘之也。 識拘於似則不廣。 故君子惟借古以開今也。 (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 3)

> Antiquity is but a tool of knowledge. Transformation involves recognizing it as but a tool while refraining using it in this way. For I have never seen anyone achieve transformation by using antiquity as a tool. Often I lament those who are mired in antiquity, unable to transform themselves because their knowledge has trapped them. It traps them in stylistic imitation so that their vision is narrowed. For this reason, the superior man just uses antiquity to expand the potentials of the present. (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 64).

When Shitao refers to the "ancients", he is not including all painters of the past, but rather specifically those who had succeeded in comprehending the fundamental principles underlying all things. These masters transcended established rules, and by reshaping and synthesizing their acquired knowledge, they ultimately forged their own unique artistic paths. It becomes evident that the art of any of these great ancient painters is a direct outcome of their profoundly personal life journeys. Consequently, any attempt to appropriate their artistry can only produce lifeless results (Lucchi 2021, 73).

The examination of past masters should solely arise from a painter's innate understanding that engaging in such a pursuit will enable them to attain novel insights beneficial to their own artistic journey. Implicit in this is the recognition that there exists no compulsion to study the ancients if one discovers that such an endeavour would yield unfavourable outcomes.

又曰。 至人無法。 非無法也。 無法而法。 乃為至法。 凡事有經必有權。 有法必有化。 一知其經。 即變其權。 一知其法。 即功於化。 夫畫天下變通之大法也。 山川形勢之精英也。 古今造物之陶冶也。 陰陽氣度之流行也。 借筆墨以寫天下萬物。 而陶泳乎我也。 今人不明此。動則曰。 某家皴點。 可以立腳。 非似某家山水。 不能傳久。 某家清儁。 可以立品。 非似某家工巧。 祇足娛人。 是我為某家役。 非某家為我用也。 縱逼似某家。 亦食某家殘羹耳。 於我何有哉。 (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 3)

Moreover, it is said the perfect man relies on no-method but this does not mean that he does not employ any method at all. His method is to empty out other methods which is the consummate "method". All things have both a constant aspect and one which responds to circumstances; similarly, any method must be capable of transformation. If one understands what is constant, then one can change what responds. Similarly, once any method is understood, one can bring about its transformation. Painting is the greatest method for representing the world in the process of transformation and interaction, for capturing the essential beauty of landscape's dynamic forms, the eternal activity of creation, the succession of day and night and of the seasons. With brush and ink, I can describe everything between Heaven and Earth, for all this is molded by myself. People nowadays don't seem to understand this so they are prompted to say, "One can use this master's texture strokes and dots as foundation", or "Unless it resembles that master's landscapes, it won't survive the test of time" or, "With the understated manner of this master one can reach a high level" or, "Works which fail to resemble that master's artistry are

merely entertaining". This is how the artist becomes a slave to this or that master, rather than the master serves the needs of the self. Even if one forces oneself to achieve a resemblance to such a master, it would be no better than feeding on his leftovers. What good is that to me? (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 64)

Here, Shitao is directly addressing Dong Qichao's opposition to the idea of creating one's own artistic style, and suggestion that artists should follow established methods associated with specific natural elements, like willows, pines, and dried-up trees, as exemplified by Chao Pochu, Ma Hezhi, and Li Cheng, respectively. For Dong, these timeless methods should serve as a foundation, discouraging significant deviations. Shitao questions the capability of one's own creativity if it is based on such foundations. He firmly believes that genuine creativity in the art of painting should originate from the individual self. It is only through the deep engagement of one's self with the world that one can truly represent it, akin to the concept of the Dao.

Shitao, however, recognized the importance of rules in an artist's learning journey. In the first three chapters of the *Remarks*, he underscores that the emergence of any order or system invariably results in the establishment of specific rules. However, the crux lies in the artist's ability to initially differentiate between the intrinsic rules of the universe and those that are artificial and, consequently, derivative. Even more crucial is the pursuit of understanding the fundamental principles upon which these rules are founded. Only by accomplishing this can an artist transcend the established rules, which were crafted by preceding masters and gradually incorporated into the traditional painting canon, enabling the creation of a genuinely unique style. As Shitao articulates, failure to grasp the concept of the holistic brushstroke will leave an artist subservient to rules, following them blindly (Lucchi 2021, 74).

Shitao perceives the artist's role as extending beyond the mere utilization of past knowledge, passionately advocating the imperative to transform that knowledge to convey one's distinctive individuality and produce innovative artworks that spring from the inner self.

知有古而不知有我知也。我之為我。自有我在。 。 。我於古何師而不化之有。 (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 3)

One may know of the existence of the ancient, but not realize that they have the existence of their own. I exist as myself. I am within myself… In the face of the ancient, how could I have learned from it without transforming it? (Trans. by Strassberg 1989, 64).

His perspective underscores that the holistic brushstroke, a perfect method, is the sole means to capture the dynamic process of change in the world through painting. He places great emphasis on the artist's agency in the creative process, rather than blindly following the masters. This agency stems from the artist's aesthetic immersion in the world and is manifested in their artwork.

Painting thus transcends being a mere action or object, and becomes an extension of the Dao's creative essence. Through brush and ink, the artist mirrors the fundamental processes of creation, making the painting a manifestation of life itself (Lucchi 2021, 72).

Shitao also critiqued the Traditionalist school's approach to the artistic process. Drawing from Daoist and Buddhist philosophies in literati painters' aesthetics, he stressed the importance of self-cultivation in the act of creation. Letting go of worldly concerns was key to liberating the heart-mind and achieving the holistic brushstroke, symbolizing a profound unity with the Dao. According to Shitao, this state was the starting point for joyful painting.

In Chapter 14, titled "Departing from the Dust of the World" (*Yuan chen* 遠塵), Shitao perceived the art of Traditionalist painters as the product of labour, devoid of the effortless spontaneity he advocated. Their work seemed driven by utilitarian goals, in contrast to Shitao's belief that a painting should physically manifest the embodied experience of unity with the Dao. This fundamental aesthetic concept had been overlooked by the Traditionalist painters. He writes:

> 人為物蔽。則與塵交。人為物使。則心受勞。勞心於刻畫而自毀。蔽塵於筆墨而自拘。此局隘人也。但損無益。終不快其心也。我則物隨物蔽。塵隨塵交。則心不勞。心不勞則有畫矣。畫乃人之所有。一畫人所未有。夫畫貴乎思。思其一則心有所著。而快所以畫。則精微之人。不可測矣。想古人未必言此。特深發之。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 14)

When a person's vision [a painter] is beclouded by things, one associates with earthly matters [i.e. with the dust of the world]. When a painter's vision is determined by things then his heart-mind is burdened. A burdened heart-mind portrays a self-destructing painting, the artist movement of brush and ink that is beclouded by worldliness becomes self-restricting. This is a situation of narrow people. But it is the loss without any gain since in the end they lose all joy [enthusiasm] in their heart-mind. As for me, I leave things to becloud other things and dust of the world associate with the worldliness. My heart-mind is then not burdened by these matters and I can paint. People know how to paint

but no one knows about the holistic brushstroke. The most valued thing in painting is the thought [contemplation]. When the artist concentrates on oneness then one's heart-mind has something to paint and is joyful. Then a person who is following this profound and subtle realm becomes unfathomable. I think that ancients may not have speak of this unique profoundness that I have expressed here.

The critique of the Traditionalist departing from the genuine spirit of literati landscape painters who saw the painting as the result of the artists' spiritual and creative communion with the nature (i.e. the Dao) based on one's own understanding and experience of its processes and transformations is even more evident in the fifteenth chapter, titled "Casting off the Vulgarity" (*Tuo su* 脫俗[16]). In this essay we see that for Shitao painting is not just another human activity, but is based on an enlightened insight into the nature of things. For him, such an ideal artist is a *zhiren* (智人), i.e., a person who has gained profound understanding of the Dao and acts (i.e. artistically engages) in accordance with its fundamental principle, and thus in a spontaneous, effortless way. The precondition for any true creativity, which is a manifestation of the spiritual communion with the world, is wisdom. Among other issues, such wisdom includes *leaving no traces* (*wu ji* 無跡) in the representation of forms. This refers to an action that is in complete resonance with the way of the Dao, so effortless that it mirrors the creativity of the Dao itself. The artistic production of Traditionalist painters who are more or less only reproducing artworks is for Shitao problematic precisely because it lacks this essential spiritual dimension. This can be seen as a critique of artistic production that produces art for art's sake, without reflecting its metaphysical origins, along with the absence of the subject's own individuality reflecting the world and expressing their own creativity in a unique way.

愚者與俗同識。愚不蒙則智。俗不溅則清。俗因愚受。愚因蒙昧。故至人不能不達。不能不明。達則變。明則化。受事則無形。治形則無跡。運墨如已成。操筆如無為。尺幅管天地山川萬物。而心淡若無者。愚去智生。俗除清至也。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 15)

An ignorant person and vulgar person denote the same thing. If ignorance is not concealed, then there is wisdom. If vulgarity is not splashed

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16   Interestingly, "su" (俗) also means customs, conventions, secularity, popularity, and tastelessness. It stands in opposition to "ya" (雅), which means elegant, graceful, refined, and correct. Confucius made a very clear distinction between popular or vulgar music (*suyue* 俗樂) and elegant court music (*yayue* 雅樂), with the latter being perceived as promoting morality, while popular (*su* 俗) music was seen as harmful and morally corrupting.

around, then there is purity. Vulgarity derives from ignorance, and igno-
rance derives from obscurity. The genuine person attains understanding
and enlightenment. Because one understands, one changes; because one
is enlightened, one undergoes transformations. The genuine person per-
ceives things beyond the form. In managing forms one leaves no traces
[of effort]. The movement of the ink then seems as the painting would
already be created. The operation of the brush derives from effortless ac-
tion, being spontaneous and natural. A few feet long scroll can contain
heaven and earth, mountains and rivers and all existing entities, yet the
heart-mind is bland as in a state of nothingness [or absence]. Then igno-
rance is banished and the wisdom born. Vulgarity is thus eliminated and
clearness realized.

Conclusion

Shitao's theory of the holistic brushstroke is without a doubt one of the most pen-
etrating and breakthrough aesthetic theories in the field of Chinese painting. It is
distinguished above all by its deep philosophical basis, which Shitao mapped onto
the field of artistic process and production. Shitao's aesthetic theory, however, is
deeply rooted in Daoist philosophy and aligns with the aesthetic theories that
have been developed from the Wei Jin period onwards.

Nevertheless, in his *Remarks on Painting*, Shitao criticizes the Traditionalist school
of painting because for him it represents the deviation or departure from the gen-
uine essence of Chinese art. Shitao sees artistic process and production as the act
of freedom. His holistic brushstroke represents the subject's total oneness with
the world (or the Dao) and the painting as the active process has to be executed
in effortless way (*wuwei* 無為) without any bonds or inhibitions. Therefore, the
holistic brushstroke is defined as a method without the method (*wufa*) which
directly mirrors the effortless action in the painting process. On the other hand,
Shitao's holistic brushstroke liberates the artist from any limitations of imitating
and copying in order to attain the Dao of painting.

Shitao criticizes the Traditionalist painters because they follow the regulations
and methods of painting from masters at the expense of their own experience
and engagement with the world, and are thus ignorant of the great oneness of
art behind the rules and regulations of painting. The individualism that is strong-
ly emphasized in Shitao's aesthetic theory derives from this position. Certainly,
the painter must be familiar with the regulations. However, if one aims to create
artwork in alignment with the Dao, the great oneness, these regulations must be

integrated to such an extent that they appear spontaneous and natural, allowing for the unimpeded expression of the artist's spirit. It is only through this approach that one can effectively convey individuality and foster artistic innovations. However, Shitao states that:

> 古之人未嘗不以法為也。無法則於世無限焉。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 3)
>
> The ancients did not work without rules. Absence of rules leads to absence of restraints in this world.

In this context, Shitao refers to the ancient tradition of Chinese landscape painters who transferred the Daoist idea of unification with the Dao, into the painting. Through their artwork, these painters aimed to recreate the world's essential and deepest reality by drawing from their personal experiences and contemplations. Consequently, Shitao resonates deeply with these classical origins, a connection underscored in the closing chapter of the *Remarks* where he states:

> 古之人寄興於筆墨，假道於山川。不化而應化，無為而有為。(*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 18)
>
> The ancients expressed their feelings through brush strokes and ink wash by painting mountains and rivers. Their approach was to meet all variations through the invariable. They proceeded to action through non-action.

This passage illuminates Shitao's commitment to upholding the essence of classical landscape painting. Nevertheless, as we have observed, he ardently opposed the institutionalization of rules and painting techniques. He issued a resounding caution about the hazards inherent in blindly adhering to prescribed rules without a comprehensive understanding of the foundational principles on which they rest.

Shitao's piercing critique of the Traditionalist school's inclination to rigidly mimic past styles, especially in its approach to technical brushwork and calligraphy derived from ancient masters, stands as a pivotal moment in the revival of the authentic essence of Chinese art. His brave dissent breathed new life into the art form, steering it away from the precipice of stagnation. This reawakening finds its roots in the profound tenets of Daoism, permeating the realms of ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics. Within this philosophical framework, Chinese art is not confined by imitation or convention, and instead it becomes a manifestation of the boundless, inexhaustible wellspring of human creativity. For Shitao, this creative

power only truly blossoms when the self is unshackled from all constraints, free to explore uncharted territories of artistic expression. In this unfettered state, the genuine transformative potential of art emerges, where the artist's unique subjective experience breathes life into their work, transcending mere imitation and echoing the deep resonance of the Dao.

Shitao's support for subjectivity as a fundamental postulate of artistic creativity does not solely stem from his practical and philosophical involvement with Daoism, but is also deeply rooted in his extensive commitment to Chan Buddhism throughout most of his life. Within the framework of his aesthetic theory, Daoism and Chan Buddhism seamlessly complement each other. This philosophical fusion becomes especially evident in the concluding chapters of the *Remarks on Painting*, where Shitao extensively explores mastering of life and enlightenment:

> 故至人不能不達。不能不明。達則變。明則化。受事則無形。 (*Huayulu* 畫語錄 s.d., 15)

> The genuine person necessarily attains understanding and clarity. Because one understands, one changes; because one obtains clarity, one undergoes transformations. The genuine person perceives things beyond the form.

Here, he accentuates the profound insight of the subject into the ultimate reality of things. According to Shitao, this insight serves as the cornerstone for any creative pursuit that transcends temporality, reaching the highest aesthetic realm.

Acknowledgements

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From "Humble Things" to the "Great *Dao*": A Philosophical Reading of Ancient Chinese "Cricket Books" (*Xishuai Pu* 蟋蟀譜)

YANG Xiaobo*

Abstract

China's distinctive cricket culture—related to the insect, not the game—has given rise to a unique genre of texts known as "cricket books" (*xishuai pu* 蟋蟀譜). These texts, serving as instructional manuals for cricket-fighting, fall under the branch of *pulu* (譜錄) in traditional Chinese bibliography. Beyond scientific and technological merits, this genre has profound aesthetic and philosophical significance. Nurtured by the highly developed urban leisure culture of the Song dynasty, it embodies a philosophy of leisure. During the Ming dynasty, cricket books ultimately attained the esteemed title of "Classics" (*jing* 經) due to their profound philosophical resonance and embodiment of Confucian values. This article undertakes a philosophical exploration of these texts, aiming to unveil the embedded interpretative framework of *Dao-Qi* (道-器) in their examination of the colouration (*se* 色) and physiognomy (*xiang* 相) of crickets. This framework represents a fusion between Confucianism and Daoism: while Daoism embarks on a journey of transcendence from the very bottom (the most minute and humble things under Heaven, or *weiwu* 微物) to the very top (the "Great *Dao*"), Confucianism strives to bridge these two extremes through the emotion (*qing* 情) inherent in human hearts. This fusion can be aptly characterized as a philosophy of "emotion towards things" (*ai wu* 愛物). Moreover, this article addresses the challenges posed by modern society to traditional Chinese cricket culture, articulating concerns about the survival and revival of these time-honoured traditions in today's technology-driven world.

Keywords: cricket, cricket-fighting, cricket books, Chinese cricket culture, Chinese philosophy

Od »skromnih stvari« do »velikega Daota«: filozofsko branje antičnih kitajskih »knjig o čričkih« (*Xishuai Pu* 蟋蟀譜)

Izvleček

Kitajska kultura čričkov je ustvarila edinstveno zvrst besedil, znanih kot »knjige o črič-kih« (*xishuai pu* 蟋蟀譜). Ta besedila, ki služijo kot priročniki z navodili za boj čričkov,

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v tradicionalni kitajski bibliografiji spadajo pod zvrst literature *pulu* (譜錄). Poleg znan-
stvene in tehnološke vrednosti ima ta zvrst globok estetski in filozofski pomen. Izhaja iz
visokorazvite urbane kulture prostega časa dinastije Song in uteleša filozofijo prostega
časa. V dinastiji Ming so knjige o čričkih zaradi njihovega globokega filozofskega pomena
in utelešenja konfucijanskih vrednot končno dosegle cenjeni naziv »klasikov« (*jing* 經).
Ta članek se loteva filozofskega raziskovanja teh besedil, katerega namen je razkriti vgra-
jeni interpretativni okvir *Dao-Qija* (道-器) v njegovem proučevanju upodobitve (*se* 色)
in fiziognomije (*xiang* 相) čričkov. Ta okvir predstavlja zlitje med konfucijanstvom in
daoizmom: medtem ko se daoizem podaja na pot transcendence od samega dna (najbolj
majhne in skromne stvari pod nebom ali *weiwu* 微物) do samega vrha (»veliki Dao«), si
konfucijanstvo prizadeva premostiti ti dve skrajnosti s čustvi (*qing* 情), ki izhajajo iz člo-
veških src. To zlitje lahko ustrezno označimo kot filozofijo »ljubezni do stvari« (*ai wu* 愛
物). Poleg tega pa članek obravnava izzive, ki jih sodobna družba postavlja tradicionalni
kitajski kulturi čričkov, ter izraža zaskrbljenost glede preživetja in oživitve te spoštovane
tradicije v današnjem svetu, ki ga poganja tehnologija.

Ključne besede: črički, boj čričkov, knjige o čričkih, kitajska kultura čričkov, kitajska
filozofija

The "Five Virtues" of crickets: Chirping at the right times shows trustworthiness;
fighting once encountering an enemy shows bravery; never surrendering despite severe
injuries shows loyalty; remaining silent when defeated shows a sense of shame; seeking
shelter as it is cold shows an understanding of the importance of timing.

蟋蟀五德：鳴不失時，信也；遇敵必鬥，勇也；傷重不降，忠也；敗則不鳴，知
恥也；寒則歸寧，識時務也。

Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅, 1045–1105)[1]

Introduction: The Unique Cricket Culture in China

As I write this article, the cricket-fighting season in China is in full swing. This
season commences in mid-autumn and lasts until the onset of winter. The crickets
engaged in these battles were meticulously chosen from their peers captured in
early autumn and then underwent careful nurturing for at least one month. Now
it is time for them to fight not just for their own pride, but for the honour of their
owners. This tradition, unique to Chinese culture, boasts a history of almost a

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1   All the translations of the citations from Chinese texts are provided by the author of this article.
The "Five Virtues" of crickets have traditionally been attributed to Huang Tingjian, a renowned
literati and calligrapher of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). However, Bai Feng (2017,
20–21) argues that this attribution lacks substantial textual evidence. According to him, the earliest
documented instance of this quote can only be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty, thus suggest-
ing a much later origin than previously believed.

millennium, tracing its origins back to the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). Its allure has captivated Chinese people from all walks of life—commoners, intellectuals, aristocrats, and even emperors.

China's distinctive cricket culture has given rise to a unique genre of texts known as "cricket books" (*xishuai pu* 蟋蟀譜), which serve as instructional manuals for cricket-fighting. This article endeavours to provide a philosophical interpretation of these texts, recognizing their significance beyond mere technical knowledge of cricket-fighting; as they convey a profound philosophical understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. After outlining the development of cricket books, this article delves into the reasons behind their elevation to the esteemed status of "Classics" (*jing* 經). It further introduces the unique genre of *pulu* (譜錄) in traditional Chinese bibliography, a category to which cricket books belong, unveiling the philosophy of leisure inherent in this genre. By exploring the philosophy of cricket physiognomy presented in these texts, this article aims to reveal the embedded interpretative framework of *Dao-Qi* (道-器). As a fundamental interrelated duality in Chinese philosophy, *Dao-Qi* represents a profound fusion between Confucianism and Daoism: while Daoism embarks on a journey of transcendence from the very bottom (the most minute and humble things under Heaven, or *weiwu* 微物) to the very top (the "Great *Dao*"), Confucianism strives to bridge these two extremes through the emotion (*qing* 情) inherent in human hearts. This fusion can aptly be characterized as a philosophy of "emotion towards things" (*ai wu* 愛物), which, in my view, embodies a distinctive feature of Chinese philosophy.

The cricket (Latin name: *Gryllus*), often referred to as "the insect of autumn" (*qiuchong* 秋蟲)[2] in China, has been regarded as a symbol of this season since at least the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BC). Indeed, archaeological discoveries of the oracle shell and bone inscriptions (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文) of the Shang dynasty reveal that the character for autumn (*qiu* 秋) was depicted pictographically as a singing cricket (see Figure 1). Furthermore, the pronunciation of this character resonates with the melodious chirps of crickets, further highlighting the profound connection between this insect and time of year.[3]

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2   Crickets are known by many names in China, with "*ququ*" (蛐蛐) being the most common, especially in the north. It also carries the poetic name "*cuzhi*" (促織), which literally translates as "encouraging weaving". This is inspired by the insect's chirping sound during the autumn season, resembling an encouragement to weave cloth.

3   An alternative interpretation suggests that the character "*qiu*" (秋) pictographically depicts a locust, which is also a symbol of autumn. However, considering that the pronunciation of this character mimics the chirps of crickets, I am more inclined to believe that it actually represents the latter.

Figure 1: Some variations of the character "*qiu*" (秋) in oracle shell and bone inscriptions. (Source: Liu and Feng (2019, 181): *Dictionary of Commonly Used Characters in Oracle Shell and Bone Inscriptions*)

This connection between crickets and autumn has been further enriched through literature. The presence of crickets in Chinese literary tradition can be traced back over 2,500 years to the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經), China's earliest poetry collection, acclaimed as one of the "Five Confucian Classics" (*Wujing* 五經). This anthology includes two poems that depict crickets moving from the wilderness to the warmth of human dwellings as colder days approach, a poignant metaphor for time's relentless march.[4] Although these verses do not explicitly mention the chirping of crickets, it was likely this sound that truly captured the imaginations of ancient listeners. This evocative chirping, emblematic of autumn's arrival and winter's approach, has resonated throughout Chinese literary history. It appears frequently in numerous literary works as a classic metaphor for "lamenting the advent of autumn" (*beiqiu* 悲秋), a recurring theme in classical Chinese poetry.

During the Song dynasty (960–1279), crickets once again captured the popular fascination, yet for an entirely new reason—cricket-fighting (see Figure 2). In the long tradition of rearing crickets for their melodious songs, people discovered that the males of certain species displayed a remarkable capacity for fighting. The game of cricket-fighting began as a mere pastime but evolved, over time, into an activity often associated with gambling. This transformation led to this activity being stigmatized by some, as well as unease among those who initially sought pure enjoyment from it. The particular species of crickets chosen for fighting games is known as the Chinese fighting-cricket (*zhonghua douxi* 中華斗蟋, Latin name: *Velarifictorus micado* or *Gryllus chinensis*) (see Figure 3), although it is not the only species capable of fighting. While the exact reasons for the dominance of this species remain unclear, I can offer some conjectures. Firstly, crickets of this species

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4   These two poems are "Crickets" (*xishuai* 蟋蟀) and "July" (*qiyue* 七月), included in the section of "Folk Ballads" (*feng* 風) of the *Book of Songs*.

were likely abundant in the areas where this game was popular. Secondly, they exhibited remarkable fighting abilities. Thirdly, their complex and varied fighting techniques provided a captivating spectacle.

Figure 2: *Children Playing in a Garden in Autumn* (*Qiu ting ying xi tu* 秋庭嬰戲圖) by Su Hancheng (蘇漢臣, 1094–1172), which depicts three children engaged in cricket-fighting. (Source: The National Palace Museum, Taipei, CC-BY-4.0 @ www. npm.gov.tw)

Figure 3: Two male crickets in a fight. (Photo by the author, with the crickets also captured by the author.)

Cricket-fighting held a captivating allure for ancient Chinese literati and scholars, who esteemed it as a refined form of entertainment. In my view, this attraction can be ascribed not only to the enthralling spectacle it presents, but also to two additional factors. First, the diminutive size of crickets ensures that their fights are not as gruesome or bloody as those between larger creatures. This aspect makes cricket-fighting less susceptible to ethical critiques than cock-fighting or dog-fighting. Second, the short life of a cricket, spanning only a single autumn, mirrors the fleeting nature of human life. This transitory existence elicits contemplation of life's brevity and evokes a sense of melancholy for heroes facing their twilight years.

Gu Wenjian 顧文薦 (birth and death dates unknown), a scholar of the Southern Song dynasty, traced the tradition of cricket-fighting back to the years of *Tianbao* (天寶, 742–756) during the Tang dynasty (618–907). However, Bai Feng (2017, 9–15) raises scepticism regarding this claim, citing not only the lack of textual evidence but also the adverse and unusually cold weather conditions during that period, which were unsuitable for crickets. According to Bai (ibid., 27–36), a substantial body of textual and archaeological evidence reveals that cricket-fighting became a prevalent form of amusement during the Southern Song dynasty, although its origins may be traced back to an earlier period. Furthermore, it was during this era that the first known cricket book emerged, reportedly compiled by Jia Sidao 賈似道 (1213–1275), who served as the prime minister at that time.

The cricket culture in China exhibits two distinct facets: one associated with gambling and the other with pure entertainment,[5] as referred to in the preface of *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book* (*Chongbian dingzheng qiuzhong pu* 重刊訂正秋蟲譜) (see Wang 2013, 3). This duality may explain why the chirping of crickets, a literary symbol canonized in the *Book of Songs*, has resonated throughout Chinese literary works, while cricket-fighting has seldom received praise, and instead is often criticized as "a pastime that can erode one's aspirations" (*wanwu sangzhi* 玩物喪志). In contrast to literary works, cricket books serve as instructional manuals specifically designed for cricket-fighting enthusiasts. However, as previously mentioned, these texts provide not only technical knowledge about cricket-fighting but, more significantly, a philosophical understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, with crickets, such a tiny creature, serving as a medium to express this. Regrettably, however, these texts have become obscure to today's cricket aficionados, and are even less known to a wider readership. Therefore, this article aims to illuminate the philosophy embedded in these texts, offering insights that I believe are relevant in today's global context.

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5   以資博賽，以逸性情焉。

The Emergence of "Cricket Books" and Their Canonization as "Classics"

Cricket books, known as *xishuai pu* or *chong pu* (蟲譜) in Chinese, primarily focus on capturing, selecting, nurturing, and training crickets for the purpose of cricket-fighting. They emerged during the Southern Song dynasty, as a result of the growing commercialization of cricket culture in China, when the popularity of cricket-fighting reached its first peak.

Traditionally, Jia Sidao is credited with the compilation of the first cricket book. However, as Jia's original version has not survived, the versions accessible to us today are actually adaptations and expansions by various cricket connoisseurs since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). While it is generally accepted that the first cricket book emerged during the Southern Song dynasty, there is a lack of concrete historical evidence to definitively attribute authorship to Jia Sidao. Given Jia's dual role as a cricket aficionado and a prime minister under the Southern Song, it is plausible that he played a pivotal role in organizing the compilation of such a book. This association is precisely why many subsequent cricket books, driven by commercial motives, claimed to be based on Jia's work. Jia, mockingly dubbed the "Cricket Prime Minister" (*xishuai zaixiang* 蟋蟀宰相), became the first real celebrity among fans of the game.

The renaissance of ancient cricket books for modern readers is credited to Wang Shixiang 王世襄 (1914–2009), a distinguished connoisseur and collector of Chinese cultural relics. Delving deeply into vast reservoir of sources, Wang (2013) completed a groundbreaking compilation titled *A Comprehensive Collection of Ancient Chinese Cricket Books* (*Xishuai pu jicheng* 蟋蟀譜集成), which comprised 17 volumes. Building upon Wang's pioneering efforts, Bai Feng (2013), another contemporary cricket expert, produced an annotated edition and expanded it with two additional volumes. Subsequently, Chen Tianjia (2013, 147–48) made a contribution to this genre by discovering an additional six volumes, thereby bringing the total number of extant cricket books to 25. The earliest of these, as revealed by Wang Shixiang's (2013, 2) research, was published in 1546 during the Ming dynasty, titled *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book*. This claims to be the compilation put together by Jia Sidao, revised by the lay Buddhist Wang Qizhu 王淇竹 and subsequently by the Daoist monk Buxuzi Long 步虛子隆.[6]

During the Ming dynasty, cricket books were granted a status akin to that of the revered Classics. This is evident from the titles of some of the books published during that period, such as the *Classic of Cricket* (*Cuzhi jing* 促織經) and *A Revised*

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6   Buxuzi (步虛子), literally the one treading in the void, refers to a Daoist monk.

and Illustrated Edition of the Classic of Cricket (*Dinxin tuxiang chong jing* 鼎新圖像蟲經). The canonization of cricket books as Classics, as noted by Bai Feng (2013, 103), might be associated with the influence of the fifth Ming dynasty emperor, Xuande 宣德 (1398–1435), who was said to be addicted to cricket-fighting. Additionally, I believe this canonization can also be attributed to the Confucian values embedded in these texts. Crickets are always praised for displaying both literary and martial virtues, known as *wende* (文德) and *wude* (武德) in Chinese: "As it leaps and chirps, displaying a tranquil demeanour, it embodies the essence of literary virtues. When fearlessly confronting the enemy and consistently emerging victorious with valour on the battlefield, it embodies the essence of martial virtues"[7] (from *A Treatise on Crickets* [*Xishuai pu* 蟋蟀譜], see Wang 2013, 65). These qualities exhibited by crickets, especially in their fighting, resonate with the Confucian concept of a "virtuous person" (*junzi* 君子), as encapsulated in the "Five Virtues of crickets" (*xishuai wu de* 蟋蟀五德) cited at the beginning of this article.

In the preface of *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book* (see ibid., 3), influenced by the Confucian doctrine of "rectifying the name" (*zhengming* 正名), the compiler sought to destigmatize cricket-fighting by tracing its presence in the Confucian Classics back to the *Book of Songs*, and citing Confucius' involvement in a similar activity of hunting as a precedent. The compiler's intention was to argue that cricket-fighting "never compromises what is considered righteous".[8] Furthermore, he asserted that, after examining Jia Sidao's cricket book, he "felt as if he had touched upon the *Dao*, which is embodied in the affection for things under Heaven".[9] He then inquired: "Could one genuinely cultivate such a universal love without the harmonious convergence of one's heart and the external world?"[10] This realization led him to conclude that "by embracing and furthering this *Dao*, one may foster benevolence towards one's fellow beings".[11]

Chinese people have a special fondness for insects, rearing them for pleasure, enlightenment, and to draw upon the virtues embodied in these tiny creatures. For instance, the cicada is frequently revered as an emblem of a pristine and noble spirit. However, among all the insects cherished by Chinese people, the cricket stands unparalleled, epitomizing so many admired human virtues. For the Chinese, the world of crickets presents a microcosm that mirrors the intricacies of

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7   乃若始躍以股，鳴能以翅，其安閒之狀，擅文德也。臨場不避敵，遇戰必揚威，其勇敢之氣，備武功也。

8   無害於義。

9   似有得其愛物之道矣。

10   使非心與物化者，何能愛之周詳如是耶？

11   推此道而上，亦可以仁民矣。

human society. As Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), a celebrated literati of the Ming dynasty, once passionately remarked, "Alas, how intricate and enigmatic the world of crickets can be! From this perspective, even the tiniest of creatures, such as ants and lice, manifest a world strangely akin to our own"[12] (from *An Essay on Crickets* [*Cuzhi zhi* 促織誌], see ibid., 54).

The Genre of *Pulu* 譜錄 as a Philosophy of Leisure

Cricket books, known as *xishuai pu* or *chong pu* in Chinese, belong to a special genre named *pulu* in traditional Chinese bibliography. The terms "*pu*" (譜) and "*lu*" (錄) denote presenting and recording, respectively. Thus these books are dedicated to the meticulous presenting and recording of specific subjects, often accompanied by illustrations. This genre of literature has a longstanding presence in Chinese history, originally used for recording family lineages, known as "*jiapu*" (家譜). However, it was during the Song dynasty that this genre was formally established, owing to the proliferation of such publications during that era. Centuries later, in the Qing dynasty (1616–1912), this genre found its place in the *Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* (*si ku quan shu* 四庫全書) under the "Branch of *Zi*" (*zi bu* 子部),[13] and was further divided into three subcategories: utensils (*qiwu* 器物), foodstuffs (*shipu* 食譜), and flowers, birds, fishes and insects (*hua niao yu chong* 花鳥魚蟲), with cricket books belonging to the last of these.

The proliferation of *pulu* during the Song dynasty can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, this era witnessed remarkable advances in science and technology. As stressed by Joseph Needham in the first volume of *Science and Civilisation in China*, "whenever one follows up any specific piece of scientific or technological history in Chinese literature, it is always at the Song dynasty that one finds the major focal point" (Needham 1954, 134). Secondly, the urban leisure culture during this period reached an unparalleled zenith, as reflected in the titles of the *pulu* publications of that time, such as the *Bamboo Book* (*sun pu* 筍譜), *Incense Book* (*xiang pu* 香譜), *Peony Book* (*mudan pu* 牡丹譜), *Tea Book* (*cha lu* 茶錄), and many others. As such, the genre of *pulu* can be examined from two perspectives: that of science and technology, and that of culture and art. While these two perspectives might appear distinct, they are in fact deeply interconnected. The insights into the

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12   嗟乎，蟲之微妙曲折如此。由此推之，雖蟻虱蟣蠓，吾知其情狀與人不殊矣。

13   This branch in the *Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* contains the most diverse contents. The reason it is named "*zi*" (子) is that its main component consists of various schools of thought from the Pre-Qin period, represented by esteemed masters who are often referred to with the honorific title "*zi*".

natural world presented in these books are invariably infused with the authors' unique aesthetic worldviews. From my perspective, this aesthetic lens holds much greater significance for contemporary society. Therefore, I regard *pulu* as more than just an assemblage of scientific and technological knowledge, as this genre embodies, essentially, a philosophy of leisure.

The concept of "leisure", as explored throughout Western intellectual history by Johan Bouwer and Marco van Leeuwen (2017, 230–31), is multifaceted. However, at its core, leisure "is the search for the *important*, for meaning in and of life. That could be manifested in play and recreation, but also in work, its beckoning horizon being the good life, *eudaimonia* and becoming fully human". Therefore, leisure should not be perceived as simply "killing" time, but rather as a means to enrich every moment of our lives, encompassing not only play and rest but, more importantly, work.

Pulu books typically focus on everyday objects, especially those with aesthetic value, which serve as a bridge connecting human beings and nature. They reflect Confucius' teaching of "acquiring extensive knowledge about the names of flora and fauna"[14] (see *Analects of Confucius: Book 17 Yanghuo* 論語·陽貨篇). However, in Chinese philosophy the practice of "investigating natural objects" (*ge wu* 格物) serves a purpose far beyond merely "acquiring knowledge" (*zhi zhi* 致知), as it ultimately aims at "attaining the *Dao*" (*zhi dao* 治道). The term "*Dao*" in Chinese—often translated as "the Way"—signifies both the ultimate goal and the path to reach it. The search for the meaning in and of life, which is central to leisure, is thus realized through the very act of searching itself. If we consider leisure as a pathway to transcendence, a quest for spiritual liberation, it becomes clear that this transcendence is never detached from our everyday lives. The philosophy of leisure conveyed in the *pulu* books offers an enlightening perspective. It underscores the notion that our search for meaning is intimately interwoven with our daily experiences. This recognition brings new insights to our understanding of leisure, highlighting its profound significance in shaping our lives.

Se (色) and *Xiang* (相): The Philosophy of Cricket Physiognomy

What if Jean-Henri Fabre, the esteemed French entomologist, had come across the ancient Chinese cricket books? Undoubtedly, he would have been both captivated and perplexed by the distinct insights and enigmatic knowledge contained in these works, which would have provided perspectives differing from his own observations

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14   多識於鳥獸草木之名。

on crickets. The detailed knowledge about capturing, selecting, nurturing, and training crickets for the purpose of cricket-fighting, as detailed in cricket books, was developed over centuries of practical experience. Many of these insights have now been validated by modern science. For instance, entomologists have discovered why male crickets display heightened aggression after mating, a behaviour different from that of other male creatures, which become more aggressive in the presence of females, but tire after mating (see Rillich, Rillich and Stevenson 2019). Notably, mastery with regard to the best method and optimal time to facilitate cricket mating, with the aim of enhancing the males' combativeness, was elaborately documented in these cricket books around one thousand years ago.

The skill of evaluating a cricket's potential for combat, known as *xiang chong* (相蟲) in Chinese, usually occupies a prominent place in a cricket book. As implied by the Chinese term "*xiang*" (相) used as a noun, which carries the meaning of appearance, this practice involves a careful examination of the physical traits of a cricket. In this regard, *xiang chong* can be viewed as a form of "cricket physiognomy", a crucial skill for those intending to engage in cricket-fighting. There are two primary criteria for evaluating a cricket: physical traits and colouration. The physical criteria are more straightforward, including attributes such as large teeth, sturdy limbs, a robust head, and a broad neck. On the other hand, the criteria related to colouration are far more complex, as they involve scrutinizing the hues of the cricket's body segments and the markings on its head. These colours are considered indicators of a cricket's lineage. Herein lies the essence of cricket physiognomy—the subtle art of "evaluating a cricket by examining its colouration" (*xiang se* 相色). This practice, replete with its profound intricacies and an air of ineffability, mirrors the enigmatic nature of *Dao* in traditional Chinese philosophy.

Crickets have traditionally been categorized based on their colours typically falling into six groups: cyan,[15] yellow, red, black, white, and purple. However, the categorization of cricket colours remains a contentious issue due to conflicting interpretations found in various cricket books (Bai 2018, 2). These disputes arise because such classifications lack a solid biological foundation. Additionally, the concept of "colour" in cricket physiognomy, known as "*se*" (色) in Chinese, goes beyond mere visual or optical recognition, as it carries cultural and philosophical significance. From a

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15   Cyan is the English translation of the Chinese term "*qing*" (青), yet it falls short of fully capturing the richness of this unique Chinese colour. In Chinese aesthetics, the colour *qing* embodies a hue that fuses elements of green and blue, sometimes leaning towards greenish blue, and sometimes towards bluish green. However, no cricket in reality exhibits a purely cyan colouration. In traditional Chinese culture, *qing* is typically associated with the "wood" element within the framework of the "five basic elements in the universe" (*wuxing* 五行). Hence, a cricket with the colour *qing* stands as a symbol of a tree with a verdant canopy and umber branches. Such a cricket exhibits varying shades of light or dark brown across its body, with wings shimmering in a cyan hue under sunlight.

visual standpoint, cyan and white crickets cannot exist in reality; moreover, distinctions among other colours are often unclear. The combination of colours displayed on different body segments of a cricket, including the head, neck, abdomen, wings, legs, and the so-called "fighting lines" (*dou xian* 鬥線 or *dou si* 鬥絲) (see Figure 4),[16] is usually adopted as a defining criterion. As a result, beginners often find it difficult to accurately identify the colour of a cricket. Bai Feng (2018, 21–26) suggests that the categorization found in *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book*, the earliest extant cricket book, may be the closest to that adopted by the cricket books during the Southern Song dynasty. According to this standard, when determining the colour of a cricket, that of the "fighting lines" takes priority, followed by the colours of other body segments. For instance, a "cyan cricket" is characterized by having white fighting lines with a slender and straight shape, while a "white cricket" is differentiated from a "cyan cricket" by its white fighting lines with a flattened shape and wings that shimmer in a pale hue under sunlight.

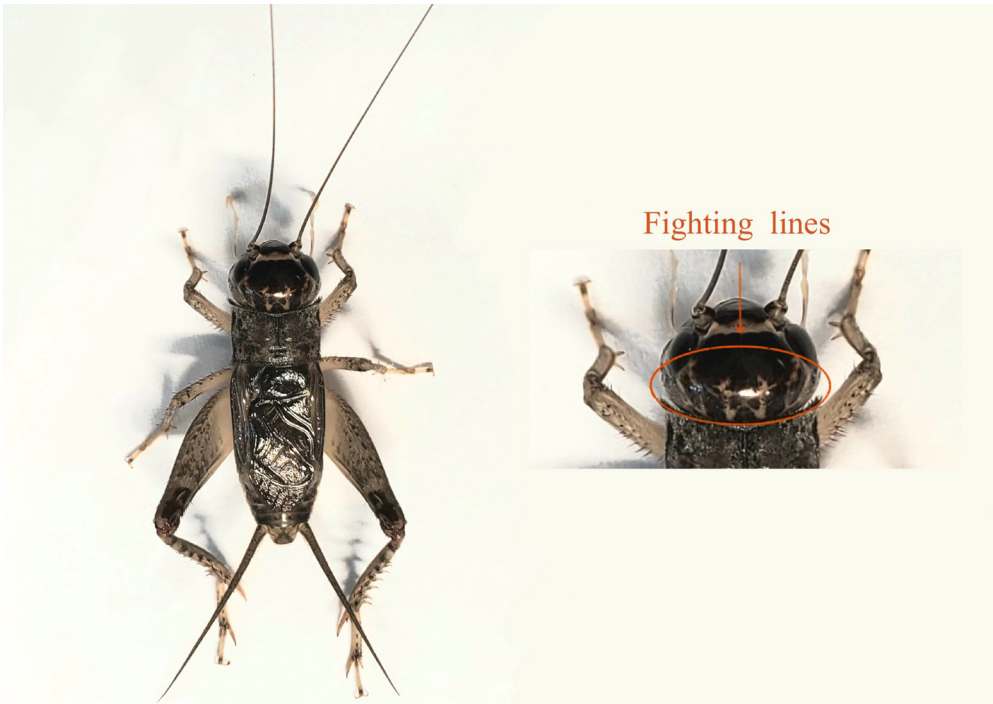Figure 4: The "fighting lines". (Photo by the author, with the cricket also captured by the author.)

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16   Fighting lines, known as "*dou xian*" (鬥線) or "*dou si*" (鬥絲) in Chinese, are a series of horizontal lines displayed on top of a cricket's head, extending outward from the juncture between neck and head. They are called fighting lines because of their central role as indicators of a cricket's combat potential.

The intricacies of differentiating cricket colours are not our concern in this article. Instead, we aim to explore a deeper question: Why are there six colours, and not another number? To shed light on this matter, it is crucial to note that in ancient cricket books, crickets were not treated merely as biological beings. Rather, "they were seen as creatures that resonate with the rhythms of the Heavens and embody the balance of *Yin* and *Yang*, the opposing forces that shape the universe",[17] as they "draw upon the life force of both Heaven and Earth, absorb the essence of rain and dew, and evolve with the shifting times"[18] (from *A Treatise on Crickets*, see Wang 2013, 65–66). Essentially, crickets are regarded as a microcosm of the universe. Therefore, as noted by Bai Feng (2018, 8), the six colours of crickets can be interpreted within the framework of the "Six Vital Energies" (*liu qi* 六氣). This theory, foundational in traditional Chinese medicine, associates six climatic elements, namely, wind (*feng* 風), heat (*re* 熱), fire (*huo* 火), moisture (*shi* 濕), dryness (*zao* 燥), and cold (*han* 寒), with six vital energies inherent in the human body, which are symbolically represented by six colours—cyan, purple, red, yellow, white, and black, respectively—corresponding to the six colours attributed to crickets.

In cricket physiognomy, a cricket's colouration holds more significance than mere aesthetics, since it serves as an indicator of its lineage and potential prowess in combat. Within the six basic colour categories of crickets, each comprises a range of subcategories. When a cricket adheres strictly to a specific colour criterion within its category, displaying a consistent hue throughout its body, it is recognized as possessing the purest lineage, indicating exceptional combat potential. Such crickets epitomize the "authentic" or "pure" colours characteristic of their respective categories. They are thus bestowed with names such as "authentic cyan" (*zhenqing* 真青) or "pure cyan" (*zhengqing* 正青), with analogous designations for other colours. This naming convention, in my view, finds its root in the Confucian doctrine of "rectifying the name", which postulates that a name should precisely correspond to the reality it represents, and the reality should merit its assigned name (*ming shi xiangfu* 名實相副 or *ming fu qi shi* 名副其實).

However, a crucial question arises: Can a cricket with "authentic" or "pure" colouration be defeated by those with hybrid colours? This very inquiry is explored in a chapter titled "On the Defeat of a 'General'" (*jiangjun bai lun* 將軍敗論), which is included in *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book* (see Wang 2013, 12). We may draw a parallel between this question and the one posed by Zilu 子路 to his mentor Confucius: "Can a virtuous person also be reduced to such impoverishment

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17   似順天時而達陰陽者。

18   秉天地之氣，感雨露之精，隨時變化。

and have no way out?"[19] (see *Analects of Confucius: Book 15 Weilinggong* 論語·衛靈公). Perhaps regrettably, the response to both questions is a resounding "yes", since given the complexities of reality, triumph in cricket-fighting is influenced by numerous factors, and this is even more pronounced in human competition. Nevertheless, the essay still asserts that "the pure and authentic colour bestowed upon a cricket by Heaven and Earth grants it [the cricket] a greater potential to become a 'general'; even if defeated, this occurs only once or twice in every ten battles"[20] (see ibid.). Establishing "authentic" or "pure" colours as the orthodoxy in cricket physiognomy reflects Confucius' unwavering adherence to the ideal of becoming a virtuous person. Even in defeat, such a person stands in stark contrast to the base person who, as Confucius put it, "abandons principles in the face of impoverishment and adversity"[21] (see *Analects of Confucius: Book 15 Weilinggong*).

From "Humble Things" to the "Great *Dao*": A Philosophy of "Emotion Towards Things" (*ai wu* 愛物)

As highlighted in the introduction, the interrelated duality of *Dao-Qi* is a distinctive feature of Chinese philosophy, embodying a fusion of Confucian and Daoist thought: while Daoism embarks on a journey of transcendence from the very bottom (the most minute and humble things under Heaven, or *weiwu*) to the very top (the "Great *Dao*"), Confucianism strives to bridge these two extremes through the emotion inherent in human hearts. Viewed within this context, Chinese philosophy could be interpreted as a philosophy of "emotion towards things". This perspective, as I will further explain in the ensuing discussion, has significant implications in the contemporary world.

"Crickets, though being tiny creatures in the vastness of the universe, resonate with the rhythms of the Heavens and draw energy from the Earth"[22] (from *Cricket Appraisal* (*Wangsun jian* 旺孫鑒), see ibid., 95). While this portrayal may, at first glance, appear to be just the ancient Chinese perspective on crickets, it is more accurately an illustration of how they comprehended the universe itself, utilizing crickets as a lens to observe and interpret the world around them. In this context, the cricket transcends its status as a tiny creature in nature, and transforms into an epitome of all things under Heaven.

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19   君子亦有窮乎？

20   天地既賦其正色，必多將軍，間有敗北者，必十中之一二也。

21   小人窮斯濫矣。

22   趣織微物也。然因乎天時，應乎地氣。

Even in its minute form, it discerns the intricate balances between *Yin* and *Yang*, the opposing forces that shape the universe, grasps the nuanced timing between action and inaction, and possesses the true artistry essential for triumph in combat. Such a creature, indeed, transcends its physical limitations.

夫一物之微，而能察乎陰陽動靜之宜，備乎斗戰攻取之義，是能超乎物者也甚矣。 (from *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book*, see ibid., 4)

In Chinese philosophy, objects with physical forms are commonly referred to as *Qi* (器), a term that literally translates to "instrument" or "vessel". Thus, in the above quote the cricket is considered as transcending the confinement of *Qi* and entering the realm of *Dao*. This depiction resonates with Dongguozi's 東郭子 question to Zhuangzi 莊子 regarding the dwelling place of *Dao*. Zhuangzi's response is profound, as he asserts that *Dao* exists ubiquitously but is to be found particularly in the smallest and most humble things, such as ants, barnyard grass, tiles and bricks, and even excrement (see *Zhuangzi: "Knowledge" Rambling in the North* 莊子·知北遊). Zhuangzi's intention is to emphasize that *Dao* can never be detached from *Qi*. Instead, *Dao* is realized through the medium of *Qi*. The profound interplay between *Dao* and *Qi* is based upon on the "one-world (the mundane world) view", a fundamental tenet of Chinese philosophy. This naturally leads to a question: What bridges *Dao* and *Qi*, ensuring their interconnectedness? Daoism does not provide a definite answer to this inquiry. In contrast to Daoism's profound detachment from the world, Confucianism offers a distinct solution—perceiving the world with emotion. Therefore, emotion emerges as the bridge connecting *Dao* and *Qi*. This notion, known as "*qing*" in Chinese, is deeply ingrained in Confucianism and was considered by Li Zehou 李澤厚 (1930–2021) as one of the "roots" (*benti* 本體) of his philosophical system.

Li Zehou traced the connection between *qing* and *Dao* back to the ancient texts found within the "Guodian Bamboo Slips" (*Guodian zhujian* 郭店竹簡),[23] which articulate the ideas that "emotion springs from disposition" (*qing shengyu xing* 情生於性) and "*Dao* derives from emotion" (*Dao shiyu qing* 道始於情). Expanding upon these, Li formulated the innovative concept of "emotion as the root" (*qing benti* 情本體) (see Li 2008a, 258–59; 2008b, 106–07), which is central to his philosophical system. This concept reveals a distinctive pathway in Chinese philosophy for attaining the *Dao*—nurturing profound emotional connections and

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23   The "Guodian Bamboo Slips" are a collection of inscribed bamboo slips, discovered in 1993 in a Chu State tomb. They are named after their discovery site in the village of Guodian, located in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province. These bamboo slips contain a wealth of highly significant literature from the Chu State, covering a period from the mid-fourth century to the early third century BC.

achieving a harmonious integration with the world. It is important to note that the Chinese term "*benti*" is also used to translate the Western philosophical concept of "noumenon", which represents a transcendent reality beyond the empirical realm of phenomena. However, Li distinguished his interpretation of *benti*, emphatically stating that "it is not noumenon, but rather the root, the substance"[24] (Li 2016, 1074). In Chinese philosophy, there exists no direct equivalent to the Western notion of "noumenon", and instead Li's *benti* signifies a fundamental essence intrinsic to human existence and experience.

Establishing "emotion" as the "root" holds modern significance, as it dispels the mystical aura surrounding the concept of *Dao* and infuses it with the richness of human emotional experience. In contrast to the Daoist worldview of "all things being equal" (*qiwu* 齊物), Confucianism starts with the premise that there exists inequality beneath the Heavens, giving rise to the inherent hierarchies in both the natural world and human society. In the Confucian worldview, the proper functioning of each element within societal hierarchies is maintained through the practice of "rituals" (*li* 禮). At the core of these "rituals" lies "benevolence" (*ren* 仁), a profound and innate emotion deeply ingrained in the human heart. These fundamental Confucian concepts find resonance in the way ancient Chinese people expressed their fondness for crickets.

> Of all things under Heaven, those that inspire love in people will never be forsaken by a person of virtue. Why is this so? It is because the creations of Heaven are incredibly diverse, and people's preferences vary widely. Affection is never imposed from external forces; rather, it wells up from our innate emotions. It is when emotions are stirred that we naturally develop affection for certain things. This is because within these things, there are qualities worthy of love. Without these qualities, no one would express affection for them at all. This embodies the true essence of human nature.
>
> 天下之物，有見愛於人者，君子必不棄焉。何也？天之生物不齊，而人之所好亦異也。好非外鑠，吾性之情發也。情發而好物焉，殆有可好之實存於中矣。否則匪好也，豈其性之真哉。(from *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book*, see Wang 2013, 4)

From the passage cited above, it becomes evident that the inherent qualities of an object worthy of love, and the natural inclination of a subject to love what is lovable, coexist. This observation may remind us of Zaiwo's 宰我 inquiry to his mentor

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24   I personally favour translating "*benti*" (本體) as "root" because it metaphorically aligns with the concept of core or foundation, as implied by the Chinese character "*ben*" (本).

Confucius regarding the necessity of observing a three-year mourning period for one's parents. Confucius responded succinctly: "If you choose to forego it, do so, provided you find peace in your heart"[25] (see *Analects of Confucius: Book 17 Yanghuo* 論語·陽貨篇). This suggests that "rituals" are not externally imposed mandates, but rather are external manifestations of innate emotions harboured deep within us. Therefore, the significance of the "rituals" remains self-contained and does not require external validation.

In modern Chinese, the word "emotion" is often rendered as the two-character phrase "*ganqing*" (感情) or "*qinggan*" (情感). The character "*gan*" (感) signifies "being emotionally evoked". When paired with *qing* (emotion), this expression suggests that emotions arise from internal sentiment evoked by external stimuli. It highlights the emotional resonance between humans and the universe. In Chinese philosophy, this resonance does not occur directly, but is always mediated through natural objects. This approach is termed *tuoxing* (托興), which refers to projecting one's sentiments or aspirations onto an object. "In the *Book of Songs*, out of its three hundred and five poems, a majority seek to project the sentiments and aspirations of the poets onto insects and plants"[26] (from *Cricket Appraisal*, see ibid., 94). In classical Chinese poetry, crickets typically symbolize the passage of time. This symbolic association can be traced back to the poem "July" in the *Book of Songs*, where the movement of crickets from the wilderness to human dwellings signals the approach of colder days.[27] Notably, ancient cricket books often cite this poem to emphasize the intimate relation between humans and crickets.

> Crickets, as tiny creatures, inhabit the wild when it is warm, and draw near humans as the weather turns cold, as if they have an understanding of seasonal changes. When you gently touch their heads with the tip of grass, they will turn and respond with their cerci, and when you do the same to their cerci, they will also turn and respond with their heads, as if they can comprehend your intentions.
> 況促織之為物也，暖則在郊，寒則附人，若有識其時者；拂其首則尾應之，拂其尾則首應之，似有解人意者。(from *A Revised Edition of the Cricket Book*, see ibid., 4)

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25   女安，則為之。

26   詩三百篇，其托興於昆蟲草木者居多。

27   In the poem "July", the lines depicting crickets go like this: "In July, they dwell in the fields; in August, they hide under my eaves; in September, they come to my door; and in October, these crickets take shelter beneath my bed" (七月在野，八月在宇，九月在戶，十月蟋蟀入我床下).

Contrasting with Daoism's view of an emotionless universe, Confucianism posits a world brimming with emotions. This raises the question: why are emotions so deeply embedded in the human heart? The answer lies in their intrinsic existence within the fabric of the world itself, leading to an emotional connection between humans and the universe. Therefore, the core tenet of Confucianism, *ge wu* (investigating natural objects), is intimately linked with *ai wu* (emotion towards things), underscoring its emphasis on emotional resonance with the natural world.

Conclusion: Challenges to the Cricket Culture from Modern Society

In recent decades, the cricket culture in China has encountered unprecedented challenges. The rapid pace of urbanization and environmental degradation has posed a significant threat to the natural habitats of crickets. As a result, the number of cricket aficionados has dwindled dramatically. The age-old tradition of cricket-fighting, once a cherished pastime, is now a fading memory for younger generations, who are increasingly drawn towards the allure of a fast-paced urban lifestyle and its modern entertainments. What is even more disheartening is the fact that within the ever smaller community of cricket-fighting aficionados, a substantial number have shifted their focus to gambling rather than pure entertainment. When crickets are viewed merely as tools for making money, stripped of their cultural significance, it signifies the demise of cricket culture. In fact, it is not the crickets that are reduced to instruments in gambling, but the gamblers themselves. Those who instrumentalize the world risk being, in turn, instrumentalized by the world. Thus Confucius wisely cautioned us: "A person of virtue should never become a mere instrument"[28] (see *Analects of Confucius: Book 2 Weizheng* 論語·為政篇).

One thousand years ago, the cricket culture began to thrive in the southern regions of China, particularly in the capital of the Southern Song dynasty, Lin'an (臨安)—present-day Hangzhou—since these regions were both economically and culturally developed, and the crickets nurtured there were renowned for their robust physical qualities, making them ideal for combat. With the shifting of China's political, economic and cultural centre to the north, the cricket culture also found its footing in the northern regions. In recent decades, as rapid urbanization has swept through China, especially in the coastal areas of the south, the primary hubs of cricket culture have shifted northwards to the less developed regions. Of these, some regions in Shandong Province—such as Ningyang, Ningjin, and

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28   君子不器。

Laoling—have gained the most fame. In these regions a new "cricket economy" has emerged, generating substantial profits that surpass those from traditional agriculture. Every year, commencing in August, cricket aficionados from cities embark on a pilgrimage to these rural areas, seeking their ideal cricket "warriors". This annual event, spanning nearly two months, yields significant economic benefits for the local cricket catchers, who are otherwise occupied with agricultural production for the rest of the year. During this period the urban cricket fans and the rural cricket catchers—two groups that otherwise seldom cross paths—come together. However, once this annual event concludes, they return to their very different lives, reverting to their usual social roles. This transient meeting mirrors the deep-seated "urban-rural dual structure" (*chengxiang eryuan jiegou* 城鄉二元結構) that persists in China.

In the past, the trade between urban cricket fans and rural cricket catchers was established based on friendship and mutual trust forged over years. However, the insatiable pursuit of profits through gambling on cricket-fighting has led to the excessive commercialization of cricket culture, empowering those with substantial capital to wield significant influence over the market. This, in turn, has spurred the rise of "cricket brokers" catering to these demands. Consequently, the emotional bonds between cricket catchers and their loyal clientele have been disrupted due to the intervention of these brokers. Those possessing enough capital can effectively exert control over the entire market through the intermediary role played by these brokers (see Mou 2018, 214–16).

Traditional cricket culture is also facing unprecedented challenges brought about by contemporary science and technology. On the one hand, just as performance-enhancing drugs persist in sports, driven by gambling interests, similar underhand tactics are increasingly being employed in cricket-fighting. Crickets exposed to various performance boosters are colloquially referred to as "doped crickets" (*yaoshui chong* 藥水蟲). The pace of technological advancement in this realm matches that in human sports, making detection increasingly difficult. On the other hand, with the gradual depletion of high-quality wild cricket resources, the technology of breeding crickets artificially has emerged and undergone continuous refinement. Currently, the cricket market is inundated with such crickets, which are commonly referred to as "white crickets" (*baichong* 白蟲) or "autumn imitators" (*fangqiu* 仿秋).[29] In their earlier generations these artificially bred crickets could not match the combat prowess of their wild peers. However, their large size and impressive appearance made them attractive for unscrupulous

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29 Correspondingly, "black crickets" (*heichong* 黑蟲) and "rising-in-autumn" (*qiuxing* 秋興) refer to wild crickets.

traders who mixed them with wild crickets and sold them at inflated prices. Yet, as technology has advanced and breeding expertise improved, these artificially bred crickets are now rivalling—and at times, even outperforming—their wild peers in fights—much like AlphaGo has now triumphed over a human Go champion.

This technological breakthrough implies that in the future access to ideal cricket "warriors" will become virtually limitless, and simultaneously costs will significantly decrease. We might even envision a future where cloning is employed in cricket breeding, or other novel types of artificial crickets, such as cyber-crickets, are created. These lab-cultivated creatures, meticulously bred in controlled environments, will become available throughout the year with guaranteed consistent size and quality, surpassing their wild counterparts as mere autumn insects. But is this truly beneficial for cricket culture? Drawing a conclusion at this juncture might be premature, although personally I am pessimistic. This situation calls to mind Walter Benjamin's reflections on "art in the age of mechanical reproduction". It also poses a compelling question: Will the cricket in the age of artificial breeding lose its profound connection to humanity and nature, becoming a mere commodity devoid of its inherent value and reduced to a mass-produced entity? This thought-provoking issue prompts us to reflect not only on the fate of traditional Chinese cricket culture, but also on the broader implications of how these time-honoured traditions can survive and even be revived in today's technology-driven world.

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Is Confucianism Compatible with a Laclauian Conception of Democracy?

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Abstract

This paper will introduce a novel perspective on Confucian democracy by connecting it with Ernesto Laclau's (2005) conception of democracy in *On Populist Reason*. Specifically, I argue that the normatively ideal ruler-ruled relationship in Confucian political theory can be conceptualized as the people making a radical investment in a virtuous leader. This argument will proceed in several steps. Firstly, I will provide context surrounding Confucianism and Laclau's (2005) novel political ontology. Secondly, I will draw on the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan (2001) to explore the notion of a radical investment and how it can be appealed to by politicians, rhetoricians and philosophers through their use of empty signifiers, signifiers without a fixed conceptual signified (such as MAGA or "Take Back Control"). In Laclau's application of Lacanian psychoanalysis these represent an unachievable full harmonious community with no conflicts between different interests. I will then argue that a core part of Confucius' political message, his constant advocacy for a virtuous ruler modelled on the Sage-Kings of the Zhou dynasty, is essentially a Laclauian conception of politics, because the Zhou kings are playing the role of empty signifiers in Confucius' political theory. That is, they represent an unachievable ideal of a fully harmonious community. Finally, I argue that this increases Confucianism's potential for compatibility with democracy since these psychoanalytic dynamics could be replicable in modern democracies and would be normatively desirable should a virtuous leader utilize them.

Keywords: Confucianism, democracy, virtue, ruler, Laclau

Ali je konfucianizem združljiv z laclauovskim pojmovanjem demokracije?

Izvleček

Ta članek uvaja nov pogled na konfucijansko demokracijo z navezavo na koncept demokracije Ernesta Laclaua (2005) v delu *On Populist Reason*. Natančneje, trdim, da je normativno idealno razmerje med vladarjem in vladanimi v konfucijanski politični teoriji mogoče konceptualizirati kot radikalno naložbo ljudstva v krepostnega voditelja. Ta argumentacija bo potekala v več korakih. Najprej bom predstavil kontekst okrog konfucijanstva in Laclauove nove politične ontologije. Drugič, oprl se bom na psihoanalitično

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delo Jacquesa Lacana (2001), da bi raziskal pojem radikalne naložbe in kako se nanjo lahko sklicujejo politiki, retoriki in filozofi z uporabo praznih označevalcev, označevalcev brez fiksnega konceptualnega označenca (kot sta MAGA ali »*Take Back Control*«). V Laclauovi aplikaciji lacanovske psihoanalize ti označevalci predstavljajo nedosegljivo popolno harmonično skupnost brez konfliktov med različnimi interesi. V nadaljevanju bom pokazal, da je osrednji del Konfucijevega političnega sporočila, njegovo nenehno zagovarjanje krepostnega vladarja po vzoru kraljev modrecev iz dinastije Zhou, v bistvu laclauovsko pojmovanje politike, saj imajo kralji dinastije Zhou v Konfucijevi politični teoriji vlogo praznih označevalcev. Predstavljajo namreč nedosegljivi ideal popolnoma harmonične skupnosti. Nazadnje trdim, da to povečuje potencial združljivosti konfucijanstva z demokracijo, saj bi bilo te psihoanalitične dinamike mogoče ponoviti v sodobnih demokracijah in bi bile normativno zaželene, če bi jih krepostni voditelj uporabil.

Ključne besede: konfucijanstvo, demokracija, vrlina, vladar, Laclau

To what extent is Confucianism compatible with democracy? This is a very salient question for East Asian countries influenced by this philosophy. Some previous authors have answered the question affirmatively, such as Fukuyama (1995). Others have clearly dissented, like Daniel A. Bell (2015), who has argued that a political meritocracy is a more appropriate model. In between, there are a variety of approaches to this question. Some of these try to reconcile the two through an institutional compromise, for example, Joseph Chan's (2013) proposal for a bicameral legislature composed of a democratic house and a meritocratic house, while others try to combine Confucianism with less traditional conceptions of democracy, like Sor-Hoon Tan's (2004) attempted reconciliation between Confucianism and Deweyan democracy.

This paper will outline a novel take on this question through a comparison between Classical Confucianism and a less traditional (and less liberal) form of democratic theory, as outlined by Ernesto Laclau (2005) in *On Populist Reason*. I will argue that the Confucian ideal relationship between the ruler and the people can be conceptualized in Laclauian terms and thus that there is potential for compatibility between Confucianism and this form of democracy. More specifically, my argument in this paper is that the normatively ideal Confucian ruler-ruled relationship can be conceptualized as the people making a radical investment in a virtuous leader.

This argument will proceed in several steps. Firstly, I will provide some context surrounding Confucianism and Laclau and a fairly detailed overview of my methodology and scope. Secondly, I will explain what it means to radically invest in what Laclau calls an "empty signifier". Thirdly, I will argue that Confucius' political vision can be conceptualized using the Laclauian framework. Specifically, I will

argue for an interpretation of the Sage-Kings the Confucians admire as empty signifiers (signifiers that signify a mythical version of the past) characterized by a full and harmonious community. Fourthly, I will argue that a Confucian investment in a virtuous ruler can be conceptualized as involving Freudian identification, which can be used to explain how a virtuous ruler can transfer their virtue to the people. Finally, I will show that conceptualizing Confucianism in these terms allows for a degree of compatibility between Confucianism and a Laclauian conception of democracy. To illustrate this final point, I will first use Nelson Mandela as an example of a virtuous leader who utilized the dynamics of Laclauian democracy established up to this point. I will then consider an objection that candidates who are unvirtuous by Confucian standards (such as Donald Trump and Yoon Suk Yeol) are more likely to emerge in Laclauian democracy, but I will respond by showing this risk can be mitigated through the use of candidate restrictions.

1. Context

1.1 Confucian Democracy and my Methodology

Before I proceed further it would help the reader to understand the purpose of this comparison between Confucianism and Laclauian democracy if I first outline the general task facing Confucian democratic theory, explaining my purpose, scope and methodology in relation to this problem and previous literature in this area.

One problem with the potential compatibility of Confucianism with democracy is that there are serious concerns over the level of compatibility between the "liberal" in "Western liberal democracy" and Confucianism. As Sor-Hoon Tan vividly puts it: "The democracy that crusading Westerners usually preach to Asian societies is a liberal one that emphasizes the rule of law and universal rights, based on the assumptions of individual autonomy and of the government as a necessary evil to be limited as much as possible" (Tan 2004, 9). The problem with this is that "for most Asians, the philosophical baggage of liberal autonomy slows down the spread of democracy. A Confucian democracy would not be a liberal democracy à la America" (ibid.). I will not offer a detailed explanation of exactly why there are tensions between Western liberalism and Confucianism, as this would be beyond the scope of this article. What is important in the current context is that these tensions are widely established in the literature on Confucian political theory. This is important because it creates an opening for work that considers how compatible Confucianism is with other forms of democracy that are less in line with liberalism. Indeed, my motivation for this article is that Laclauian democracy constitutes a

form of democracy that differs substantially from Western liberal democracy, but has hitherto been unexamined in relation to Confucianism.

This brings us to the question of defining democracy. This is made difficult by the fact that there is no consensus as to the details of the definition of democracy within the democratic theory literature. As Sor-Hoon Tan puts it: "Whatever consensus there is on the value of democracy, it tends to be at the expense of specificity of content. Democracy is government by the people, but who constitutes the people? What does it mean for them to govern? What institutions and practices best serve that purpose?" (ibid., 10) As such, whenever we try to provide a clear definition of democracy we face the problem of either having a definition so thin that it is subject to a great many interpretations, or we have a specific and clear definition that many people will disagree with. This is not a problem unique to Confucian political theory either, as the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* defines democracy broadly as "a method of collective decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the decision-making process" (Christiano and Bajaj 2022). In this article, I will focus on examining Confucianism's potential compatibility with Laclau's specific definition of democracy where "the construction of a 'people' is the *sine qua non* of democratic functioning" (Laclau 2005, 112). To put it all too briefly, this means that the competition between different constructions of "the people" (social movements constituting collections of initially unrelated demands from various sections of the population that come together under an empty signifier) is itself constitutive of democracy. To fully elucidate this definition, it is necessary to explain the context surrounding Laclau, hence I will comprehensively define this at the end of section 2. All I hope to have established so far is that Confucianism is likely to be more compatible with forms of democracies less attached to Western liberalism, and that Laclauian democracy could be one example of this, and one that still satisfies a very thin definition of democracy as "government by the people". Therefore, beginning some examination of its compatibility with Confucianism in the form of this article is a worthwhile pursuit.

What method am I being guided by in answering this question? Any extensive examination of philosophical methodology would be beyond the scope of an article that has the aim of laying some foundations for further comparative work involving Confucian political thought. However, it is nonetheless important to give the reader a few pointers here, in particular to show that my approach is heavily guided and inspired by existing approaches in the literature on Confucian democracy. In particular, my approach is heavily influenced by another prominent academic in Confucian democratic theory, Joseph Chan and his work in *Confucian Perfectionism* (2013), where he develops an account of Confucian democracy that

blends elements of Classical Confucian political thought with elements of liberal democratic thought to form a new Confucian political philosophy applicable in modern East Asian societies. As Chan puts it, his project is "a critical reconstruction of certain Confucian political ideas of the classical period for modern times" (Chan 2013, XI). What this constitutes is not contemporary political philosophy as traditionally conceived, and even less a project in history of Chinese philosophy involving a close exegesis of historical Confucian texts. Instead, Chan defines his project as an exercise in "philosophical reconstruction" and comparative political theory (ibid.).

The definition of comparative political theory is fairly self-explanatory. What, however, is "philosophical reconstruction" as Chan defines it? This method involves applying an ancient thinker's view to contemporary issues. Hence "the primary interest in an ancient thinker is contemporary rather than historical, and comparative rather than exegetical. It does not simply interpret what is said in a text but extends and develops it to a point where comparison with contemporary perspectives is possible […] the primary techniques of this method are conceptual analysis and comparative methodology" (ibid., 207).

A key element (and presupposition) of the philosophical reconstruction approach involves what Chan terms a piecemeal approach to traditions, which "holds that a complex tradition of thought such as Confucianism is multilevel and multifaceted and has evolved dynamically over time, and hence can be somewhat deconstructed into different elements and perhaps different levels" (ibid., 208). Therefore this approach "is sensitive to the fact that there are different elements at different levels of the tradition" that have the potential to be combined, mixed or synthesized with elements of other traditions (in this case Laclauian democracy) in a myriad of different ways (ibid., 209–10).

To understand this better it might help to visualize contrasting approaches. The contrast to the piecemeal approach would be seeing Confucianism as an organic unity, inseparable from its original cultural context. Chan (ibid., 209) labels this the ideal-type approach, an ideal type being an idealized version of a philosophical theory or cultural system that captures certain features about a complex reality and then constructs an idealized description of that reality by artificially drawing precise and clear conceptual boundaries around those features and ignoring those which do not fit the construct. Under this approach an analysis of the compatibility between the dynamics of Laclauian democracy and the Confucian sense of a virtuous ruler would not make sense, as what Confucianism constitutes is one organic unity with concepts such as the ideal sage ruler (*sheng* 聖) being inextricably linked to other concepts, such as *li* (禮) and *ren* (仁), so as to constitute a

philosophical system whereby parts cannot simply be carved off and said to remain legitimately Confucian. Therefore under an ideal-type approach examining one element of Confucianism (the ideal ruler-ruled relationship) against a very different theory of democracy developed in a different cultural context (Laclauian democracy) would not be a worthwhile exercise.

However, plenty of people in the Confucian democracy literature adopt the piecemeal approach over the ideal-type one. Another example is Sor-Hoon Tan, who adopts a similar approach to Chan here. In her own words "I am concerned with what Confucianism could mean now and in the future, not with what Confucianism is essentially […] the survival of Confucianism is not dependent on preserving an idem-identity, requiring some kind of essence to remain the same; it has to do with an ipse identity that lies in meaningful continuity" (Tan 2004, 8–9). To Tan this continuity involves recognizing that what the key values within Confucianism (such as the family, filial morality, loyalty and respecting the old) mean and how they are actualized could change over time and space, including manifesting themselves differently in different cultural contexts (Tan 2004, 9). What I want to present in this article is a comparison of the ruler-ruled relationship in Confucianism with this same relationship in Laclauian democracy, with a view to laying the groundwork for showing how the two are in some ways compatible. Using the methodologies of Chan (2013) and Tan (2004) this is a legitimate pursuit, as it is justifiable to take one element of Confucianism (the ruler-ruled relationship) and analyse it in relation to democratic theory.

So, it should now be evident that I am not suggesting that the Classical Confucians thought in explicitly Laclauian terms. This would be both anachronistic and absurd. Rather I am arguing that the psychological dynamics of the Confucian ideal ruler-ruled relationship can be captured by a Laclauian conceptualization and that this reading is helpful because it has the potential to inform the debate surrounding Confucian democracy. I also want to reemphasize that I am not claiming to have established an argument in favour of a full and detailed account of Confucian democracy, this would be too ambitious for one journal article. Rather I want to draw attention to one aspect of what a fully-fledged theory of Confucian democracy would require (an appropriate ruler-ruled relationship) from a novel perspective, hopefully in the process giving new credence to the broader idea of Confucian democracy.

Finally, I should be clear that the primary audience for this article is those people in countries culturally influenced by Confucianism and whose decision to adopt (or maintain) democracy is influenced by how compatible certain forms of democracy are with Confucianism. In other words, I am asking whether Laclauian

democratic theory can be combined with Confucianism to make it presentable as an option in Asian countries where Confucianism forms an important part of the cultural heritage. In practical terms, I acknowledge that this is unlikely to have much impact on the political reality of contemporary Chinese society in the short to medium term, in the sense that China is certainly not going to adopt anything like a Laclauian model of democracy in the near future.

However, I would like to make two points in relation to this. Firstly I would like to point out that this is meant to apply to a wider context than China alone, and to cover other East Asian countries with a Confucian heritage. For example, established democracies in the form of Taiwan, Japan and Korea and countries with a hybrid model, such as Singapore, where the political reality of democracy and questions over which kind of democracy fits the culture is more salient than in China in the short to medium term. Secondly, in relation to China I would argue that there is still value in doing ideal theory in this way. As Chan lays out, ideal theory "explains or justifies an ideal conception of social and political order, bracketing off practical questions about feasibility and compliance" (Chan 2013, 1) whereas non-ideal theory "develops a nonideal conception that addresses these practical questions". Chan uses an analogy to explain the importance of ideal theory here, stating that: "any form of political theorizing that lacks an ideal is like a ship embarking on a voyage without destination" (ibid.). I conceive of myself as operating on the level of ideal theory for the most part during my conceptual analysis of the compatibility of Confucianism and Laclauian democracy in this article, although I do start to consider non-ideal practicalities in sections 4 and 5. Even if the political reality in China means that the ship is unlikely to begin any significant progress towards this destination at present, it is still worth laying it out, as the ship is certain to never move at all if there is no destination set in the first place. So, what I hope to do in this article is to set out a promising point of departure for further explorations of Confucian political thought's compatibility with Laclauian democracy that can give more consideration to certain non-ideal concerns than I have space for here.

1.2 Confucianism

Before I move on to the main body of my argument I should clearly set out the definition of Confucianism I am using here. Again, my approach is inspired by Chan (2013, 206) in that I am restricting my focus to Classical (pre-Qin) Confucianism. Going further than Chan, I specifically restrict my focus to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), and the *Mencius*. So what I am referring to in this article with the

word "Confucianism" is the core tenets of the pre-Qin Confucianism in these texts, which in this article are those tenets that relate to the normatively ideal ruler-ruled relationship for the early Confucians. What is the justification behind this definition? Given the space constraints of a single journal article, it is inevitable that I will do some injustice to the breadth and complexity of Confucianism, given how many different versions have been developed over the past 2,500 years, such as Neo-Confucianism and New Confucianism. This necessitates zooming in on one point in the tradition, and the most sensible point to focus on here is the core classical Confucian texts, as these are the main basis of the Confucian tradition. As Chan puts it, the *Analects* and *Mencius* in particular "have constituted the paradigm and basis for critical reflection in the Song-Ming period and after" (Chan 2013, 206). As such, henceforth in this article "Confucianism" refers specifically to key tenets of the core Classical Confucian texts in the pre-Qin period.

Let me now give some brief background to this period. Confucius (*Kongzi* 孔子) was born in 551 BCE, during the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE), which was followed by the Warring States period of 475–221 BCE, a time of chaos and anarchy in ancient China. Here the term "ancient China" refers to an area much smaller than modern China, and one sometimes known as the central plains (*Zhongyuan* 中原), which was centred around the Yellow River. The sizes and boundaries of this area and the different states within it changed significantly and often rapidly throughout the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Indeed, Cartwright (2017) estimates that at one point there were 100 rival states in the Spring and Autumn period and that there were 358 separate conflicts throughout the Warring States. What caused this chaos? From 1046 to 771 BCE the various states that constituted ancient China were unified under the Zhou dynasty, which in this period (the Western Zhou) exerted a reasonable degree of centralized power over the territory it controlled (Li 2011, 11). However, in 771 BCE the Zhou capital was ransacked and the King killed. After this the Zhou king still had nominal authority, but, in reality, was so weak that real power was in the hands of his vassals, who effectively governed their own states within what had previously been the more centralized structure of the Zhou dynasty (ibid.). Confucius' time was thus a time of war, chaos and anarchy, caused by the conflicting goals of the leaders of the different states. However, as Ni comments, this chaos led to China's "most fertile and glorious period in philosophy" (Ni 2011 26), because several different schools of thought emerged to try to offer a way out of the chaos. Not just Confucianism, but other philosophies such as Mohism and Legalism were also developed in this period.

What was the Confucian diagnosis and remedy for the chaos? A key part of Confucius' diagnosis was that the rulers of his time now lacked the virtue of the early

Zhou rulers (and prior Sage-Kings). For example, in *Analects* (13.20) the rulers of Confucius' time are dismissed as "petty functionaries not even worth considering", and in *Analects* (19.19) Master Zeng (a prominent Confucian disciple) states that "for a long time those above have lost the way and the common people have therefore become confused". Following on from this, Confucianism's distinct answer to the question of how to get back from the current chaos to peace and harmony was to advocate for a return to the ways of the Zhou dynasty, most importantly its rituals and virtuous leaders (the latter will be the focus of this paper). Confucius regularly heaps praise on the early rulers of the Zhou dynasty (as well as prior Sage-Kings) (*Analects*, 7.5, 8.11, 8.20, 18.10, 18.11), particularly the Duke of Zhou—the brother of the dynasty's founder, King Wen—whom Confucius admires for having the wisdom and virtue to peacefully assume regency until King Wen's son was old enough to rule, as opposed to trying to seize the throne for himself. For Confucius, one of the key things ancient China needed to overcome the chaos it faced was the re-emergence of virtuous rulers. For example, in *Analects* (12.19) Confucius emphasizes that the virtue of a good ruler is like the wind and the common people are like grass, meaning that "when the wind moves over the grass the grass is sure to bend". Moreover, *Analects* (2.3) emphasizes that the people will fail to respond to purely legalistic means of control and that governing them by virtue is necessary to give people the sense of shame they need to rectify themselves. Confucius' vision of the ruler-ruled relationship is thus that of a virtuous ruler who can unite the heterogenous population of the different states that constituted ancient China, in a manner reminiscent of the Western Zhou dynasty, while at the same time transferring their virtue to them.

1.3 Laclau

In *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau aims to build a new theory of political collective identity that can explain how people with radically different political preferences or demands can come together under the same movement (think, for example, of how the Brexit movement contained both ardent free-traders and ardent protectionists). Laclau develops this theory by starting with political demands (rather than individuals or groups) as the fundamental units of social analysis. Laclau sees demands as beginning in isolation (Laclau 2005, 73). For example, say the electricity supply breaks down in a slum. In response, the slum dwellers affected by this will demand that the relevant authority (say the local council) address this problem. However, if the problem is not solved, then this demand has the potential to become conjoined with other, similar demands, such as those for better housing or a better water supply, and this creates a collective

identity among those who possess these various conjoined demands. What precisely is it that conjoins these demands? In other words, what is it that transforms a vague feeling of solidarity between the people holding these individual demands into a collective identity or movement? To Laclau a collective identity can form around a plurality of demands when these demands are unified under a common "empty signifier" (Laclau 2005, 99), that is to say, a signifier that does not signify any fixed, conceptually representable signified. For example, a possible scenario in the case of the slum dwellers is that their demands are eventually absorbed under a slogan such as "Justice for Slum Dwellers". To Laclau, "justice" acts as an empty signifier here because it does not signify any fixed, timeless conceptual content. To visualize this, consider how, until around two hundred years ago, beheading was viewed as a just punishment for serious crimes in most areas of the world, whereas almost everyone today thinks beheading is unjust. On this reading, what "justice" refers to has changed so radically over time that it would be bold to claim that the term always signifies some fixed, timeless conceptual content. To be clear, on the Laclauian view "justice" does not refer to a Platonic eternal form of justice and nor does it refer to something more banal like Rawls's (1971) conception of "justice as fairness" with its two principles of justice. What then does an empty signifier signify? This is the subject of section 2.

2. Radical Investment in an Empty Signifier

To understand what an empty signifier signifies, we need to understand the Lacanian psychoanalysis that inspired Laclau's notion of the empty signifier itself. Hence, this section will begin by giving a brief overview of Lacan, before using this to explicate the meaning of a radical investment in an empty signifier.

In Lacanian psychology we are understood as subjects of lack within a symbolic order. A detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief outline of Lacan's system is necessary for our purposes. To Lacan we begin life without a distinct sense of ourselves as separate from our mother, and are instead initially part of a mythical mother-child dyad. Gradually though, this unity is broken, as we come to recognize ourselves as distinct beings (Lacan 2001, 2). Lacan labels this period of individuation "the mirror stage", reflecting the fact that when we come to recognize ourselves as distinct individuals we recognize our own reflection as ourselves (ibid.). At this stage in our lives we gain both a pre-cognitive sense of ourselves (what Lacan labels "the imaginary") and start to think of ourselves using our particular society's language and concepts (what Lacan terms "the symbolic order"). However, at the core of this sense of ourselves

there is always a gap. This is because reality is simply too complex to be inscribed into a fixed symbolic order. To understand this, consider how most theories and models, such as in economics (Friedman 1953, 160), do not purport to represent every complexity of reality, and this is because reality is simply too complex to be inscribed into the ontological categories which theories and models that attempt to describe reality have to use or presuppose. To Lacan this applies to the symbolic order, it is a discourse developed for the purpose of communication (and hence societal cohesion), and thus does not and cannot represent every aspect of reality (Lacan 2001, 279). However, this inability to fully comprehend ourselves leads to "the constant sense we have, as subjects, that something is lacking or missing from our lives […] the Lacanian real [or lack] is this abyss at the core of our being" (Homer 2005, 87). To Lacan, this gap between the concepts we use to define ourselves and the complex multifaceted reality of our existence ultimately leaves us as subjects of lack.

Applying Lacanian psychology to political theory, Laclau argues that visions of a full harmonious society emerge to fill this gap by signifying a mythical fullness, akin to that of the mother-child dyad that existed prior to the emergence of any lack. Specifically, Laclau argues that the dislocations brought about by unfulfilled demands can be read in Lacanian terms as a lack in the symbolic order (society) (Laclau 2005, 114–15). This is where empty signifiers come in. An empty signifier is a sign—usually in the form of an aim, figure or symbol—that comes to fill the gap between society and the subject by signifying (on an unconscious, conceptually irrepresentable level) this lack's opposite, a full and harmonious society where all demands are satisfied (ibid., 117). To visualize this, think of the communist utopia postulated to be the final stage of history in Marxism or the liberal democratic order that Fukuyama ascribes to Hegel's account of the end of history, where there is so little political conflict that our main problem is boredom (Fukuyama 1989, 18). In these cases, concepts that are rather amorphous and highly pliable are presented as stable objects of political affection, capable of orientating and motivating political action.

We can now understand that an empty signifier is not a signifier without *any* signified. As Laclau (2005, 105) emphasizes, a signifier without any kind of signified would just be nonsensical noise, since it would not mean anything. What an empty signifier signifies is something within the unconscious part of our psyche that is conceptually irrepresentable but that can be signified in some form. This is the Lacanian lack or the inability of any symbolic order to incorporate all political demands, as well as its opposite, the idea of a full and harmonious society, a symbolic order that *can* resolve all demands. This can be illustrated well by going back to our previous example of the slum dwellers. Recall that lots of individual

demands became conjoined under the empty signifier "Justice for Slum Dwellers". This signifier mobilizes those affected by unfulfilled demands, by signifying the current absent fullness of the community (the lack in the symbolic order caused by the unfulfilled demands of the slum dwellers) and the opposite notion of a full harmonious community (a symbolic order or society without lack that incorporates all demands of the slum dwellers).

Crucially, this also illustrates how empty signifiers can overcome the heterogeneity of political preferences to create coherent collective identities out of unrelated (or even contradictory) demands. To Laclau there is nothing inherent in different isolated demands that conjoins them into a movement or collective identity, meaning we should regard the unity of a group as a retroactive effect of naming it using an empty signifier (Laclau 2005, 119). To illustrate this, let us once again return to our example. What constitutes the collective identity of the slum dwellers is that they have come together under the slogan "Justice for Slum Dwellers". This is because there is nothing *inherent* to societal structure linking their demands. For instance, consider members of this hypothetical slum who are only affected by one of the following: a lack of electricity, lack of water or lack of appropriate housing. In theory the people affected by these issues could form sectionalist groups focused solely on their own issues, and the local authority could treat their demands differently, with different solutions for each, instead of negotiating with the movement as a whole. It is only through the conjoining of the demands under the empty signifier "Justice for Slum Dwellers" that we can talk of the "Justice for Slum Dwellers" movement as a unified movement or collective identity. As Laclau emphasizes, by signifying the absent fullness of society, empty signifiers go beyond the isolated demands conjoined within them, to become the name that unifies unrelated or even contradictory demands into coherent collective identities (ibid., 99).

We have now reached the definition of a radical investment in an empty signifier: making that signifier the "embodiment of a mythical fullness" (ibid., 115). In other words, to radically invest in an empty signifier is to see within it a full harmonious community, where all political demands are satisfied. Section 3 characterizes Confucius' political vision in these terms.

Before I move on to section 3 though, I should revisit the definition of Laclauian democracy, as promised in section 1. There I said that the competition between different constructions of "the people" is itself constitutive of Laclauian democracy. We can now understand that this means a Laclauian conception of democracy can be defined as a competition between different popular identities (peoples), where these identities involve certain social demands coalescing around a certain

empty signifier. This definition of democracy does two important things. Firstly, it is in accord with a general thin definition of democracy as "a method of collective decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the decision-making process" (Christiano and Bajaj 2022), and can therefore be regarded as a legitimate definition of democracy. Secondly it is clearly a definition of democracy that is not necessarily attached to liberalism. Indeed, Laclau explicitly endorses the idea that liberalism and democracy are not necessarily related but rather are related only as a contingent historical articulation (Laclau 2005, 167). This makes exploration of its compatibility with Confucianism worthwhile in light of the context explored in section 1.

3. The Sage-Kings in Laclauian Terms

In this section I will argue that there is a case the normatively ideal ruler-ruled relationship for the Classical Confucians can be conceptualized in Laclauian terms. This will take two steps. Firstly, I will argue that through the notion of governing via *wu-wei* (無為), or ruling by not ruling, it is possible to view the Sage-Kings Confucius and Mencius admire in Laclauian terms. That is, it is possible to view these Sage-Kings (or at least the vision of them as set out by Confucius and Mencius) as empty signifiers which signify a full harmonious community, where all political demands are satisfied (in opposition to the lack that the chaos in ancient China could be characterized by). Secondly, I will argue that Freudian identification (another underpinning of Laclau's theory of populism and democracy) could serve as a psychological mechanism for the phenomenon (promised by Confucius) of the ruler's virtue being transferred to the people, with this reinforcing the emphasis placed by Confucius and Mencius on ruling through virtue and benevolent government.

3.1 The Sage-Kings as Signifying Absent Fullness

What does Confucianism offer in its remedy to the chaos in ancient China, as explored in section 1? Firstly, it is insightful to note how much more emphasis is placed on the character of a ruler compared to any specific set of policies. Indeed, there is very little mention of any precise policies that the ruler should enact in either the *Analects* or the *Mencius*. There are a couple of notable exceptions to this in the form of *Mencius* (3A3), which discusses taxation and land policy in a lot of depth, even stating at one point that "benevolent government must begin with land demarcation", and *Mencius* (5B2), where Mencius describes the system of

rank and income under the Zhou dynasty in depth. However, other than this the focus is very much on the personal qualities of the ruler and the idea of "benevolent government", rather than on any specific policies. To be clear, the point I am trying to make here is not that the pre-Qin Confucians did not have any specific policies they wanted the rulers of their time to implement, rather it is the more modest point that the focus is very much elsewhere, on the character of the ruler, as well as the ability of a sage ruler to rule via *wu-wei*.[1]

What is rule via *wu-wei? Wu-wei* can be defined as the ideal of effortless action, action performed in a manner which is spontaneous, unselfconscious and perfectly efficacious (Slingerland 2003, XIX). This is a style of governance that Confucius attributes to have belonged to Sage-Kings like Shun, who were seen to have been capable of governing with this effortless, harmonious ease (Slingerland 2003, XIX). While the concept of *wu-wei* is implied multiple times in the *Analects*, the only explicit mention of the term *wu-wei* is in *Analects* (15.5) where Confucius states: "Is Shun not an example of someone who ruled by means of *wu-wei*? What did he do? He made himself reverent and took his proper [ritual] position facing South, that is all." Shun here is one of the ancient Sage-King's Confucius admires. In his commentary Slingerland discusses the meaning of *wu-wei* in this passage, differentiating between two distinct schools of thought. One interpretation, (beginning with He Yan) understands this *wu-wei* institutionally, in its literal sense of doing nothing (Slingerland 2003, 176). The notion here is that if the ruler can effectively fill the government with the right people and effectively set the machinery of government in motion, the government will more or less run itself, without the need for any action on the part of the ruler themselves. The other interpretation, which Slingerland regards as better supported, is that ruling by *wu-wei* means ruling by virtue, with the ruler morally perfecting themselves and thereby effortlessly transforming everyone around them (ibid.). The point according to this interpretation is that *wu-wei* does not literally mean doing nothing, but instead one does not force anything or consciously attempt to achieve results.

The notion that the ideal ruler rules via *wu-wei* is supported by other passages in both the *Analects* and *Mencius*. For example, governance by *wu-wei* is expressed—albeit without the use of the term *wu-wei*—in *Analects* (8.18), where Confucius declares: "How majestic! Shun and Yu possessed the entire world and yet had no need to actively manage (*yu* 與) it." On the institutional reading of *wu-wei* this means that if one employs others to take care of government one does not have

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1   Accordingly, I can acknowledge that the *Xunzi* goes into more depth on the details of practical policies the ruler may want to implement with this more modest point still holding. I would suggest that even in *Xunzi* the themes identified above, especially the character of the ruler, are the core tenets, and not any specific policies.

to personally participate. Alternatively, and based on the rule by virtue conception of *wu-wei*, it is the perfection of Shun and Yu itself that is what allowed them to rule without ruling. Throughout the *Mencius* the advice given to the various rulers Mencius interacts with is consistently to practice benevolent government, often as opposed to increasing their territories. For example, in *Mencius* (2A1) the King of Qi is advised that no further increase in his territory or population is necessary and, after citing the example of King Wen, Mencius advises the king that he "can become a true king just by practising benevolent government, and no one will be able to stop him". It thus appears that in pre-Qin Confucianism it is important for the ruler to have the qualities of virtue and benevolence, with the details of specific policies falling into place as a result of this.

The effect of a virtuous ruler on the people will be examined in section 3.2. For now, I want to consider how we could conceive of the idea of ruling by *wu-wei* or "ruling by not ruling" from a Laclauian perspective. As a project in philosophical reconstruction, my aim here is to suggest that there is compatibility with a key notion in Laclau's theory, that of the ruler serving as an empty signifier. Namely that there is a case that the idea of the Sage-Kings serves the purpose of signifying a mythical past fullness, in the form of the harmonious society the Confucians claim to have previously existed under the rule of these Sage-Kings. Let me explain my reasoning behind this. Both interpretations of *wu-wei* given above present a picture of the past without conflict, where the ruler is capable of dealing with the political demands of their people spontaneously and efficaciously. On the institutional view this is because the ruler has the right ministers in place, on the rule by virtue view this is because of the ruler's virtue itself. Either way, through this style of governance a state of harmony is achieved. Slingerland offers some interesting comments that further illuminate this. After quoting *Analects* (15.5) he states that, for Confucius, "in the ideal state of harmony between heaven and humans that prevailed in ancient times, the ruler had no need to act or to speak. He simply rectified his person and took up the ritual position fitting for a ruler and the world became ordered of its own accord" (Slingerland 2003, XXI). In Confucius' view this sort of natural, spontaneous, unselfconscious harmony had once prevailed during the reigns of the ancient Sage-Kings Yao and Shun as well as during the Golden Ages of the three dynasties, the Xia, the Shang and the Zhou (ibid.). So, an idealized version of the past serves as Confucius' moral, religious and political benchmark. Seen through a Laclauian lens it makes sense that these rulers are not specified as ruling by doing anything in particular. This is because instead of representing something concrete and specific they instead serve as empty signifiers that people can project their various demands onto.

Importantly, Confucius can also be interpreted as saying his time lacks this full-ness, meaning, as per Lacan and Laclau, this fullness is presented in opposition to a current lack. Confucius constantly bemoans how far the rulers in his current time have descended into petty obsessions such as the desire for more territory, wealth and fame, as opposed to virtue (for example, *Analects* 16.1). This results in Confucius' dismissal of the rulers of his time as "petty functionaries not even worth considering" (*Analects* 13.20). A final point that can serve as evidence for this reading is that Confucius sees himself as put into the world by *Tian* (天), or Heaven, to bring China back to the fullness and harmony of the Zhou dynasty. For example, *Analects* (3.24) suggests that *Tian* intends to use Confucius to restore China to its prior state, and in *Analects* (9.5) Confucius says that King Wen (the first Zhou ruler) lives on in him and that he can come to no harm because *Tian* does not want his teachings to perish. As Slingerland puts it, for Confucius "the social world should function in the same *wu-wei* fashion as the natural world, and Confucius has been summoned to speak, to bring the world back into a state of wordless harmony, only because the way has been lost in his age" (Slingerland 2003, XXI). It is thus feasible that Confucius conceived of his purpose in the social world as to be aiding the restoration of this lost harmony that existed during the reigns of the ancient Sage-Kings, a purpose apt to be described in Laclauian terms.

Hence, overall, Confucianism's diagnosis of the problems in Chinese society at the time can be conceptualized using the Laclauian framework built up in section 2. There is a sense of a current profound *lack* in Chinese society at the time of the Classical Confucians, and the chaos of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods indicates this. Moreover, a Laclauian conceptualization of Confucius' solution to this is also possible, in that Confucius appeals for the restoration of what he presents as a past state of fullness, through the coming of a virtuous ruler modelled on the ancient Sage-Kings. Confucianism's political vision can therefore be characterized using Laclau's definition of radical investment as making an object the "embodiment of a mythical fullness" (Laclau 2005, 115), since this is what Confucius makes the Sage-Kings the embodiment of. Section 3.2 explores this ruler-ruled relationship in more depth, arguing that the idea of benevolent government could be given a psychological underpinning due to the Freudian identification that takes place if the radical investment is in the figure of a particular leader.

3.2 The Freudian Ruler-Ruled Relationship

Laclau's (2005) notion of the psychological dynamic that results from people making a radical investment in a leader is based on Freudian identification. Specifically, Laclau believes that when a particular person becomes the empty signifier, the radical investment people then make in them involves Freudian identification. In this section I will show that there is overlap between the Confucian tradition and Freud on identification, before arguing that identification can serve as a psychological mechanism whereby the ruler's virtue is transferred to the people.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, identification is the earliest form of emotional tie with another person (Freud 1921, 105). It happens, in the first instance, because boys take their fathers and girls their mothers as their ego ideal (their unconscious notion of a perfect ideal self that they aspire towards). To Freud, group identity operates according to this same psychological mechanism extended beyond its original familial function, in that group unity comes about through identification with the same leader (ibid., 108). A group is hence defined by Freud as "a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego-ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego" (ibid., 115). In this Freud's main point is that people identify with each other to form groups when they all take a certain leader as their aspirational ideal self, and, importantly, this psychological dynamic is an extension of the one that operates within the family.

The idea of benevolent government in reality (a key aspect of government by *wu-wei* on the virtue interpretation of *wu-wei*) can arguably be given a psychological reinforcement by being conceptualized in Freudian terms. Firstly, there is a strong case that the Confucian tradition identifies a similar psychological dynamic to Freud in terms of the relationship between the family and wider politics. For example, *Analects* (1.2) emphasizes that showing filial piety (having the appropriate psychological relationship with the father and mother) is the psychological root of the correct relationship with political leaders. *Mencius* (4A5) also suggests this, emphasizing that "the empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family and the family in one's own self". Also, as we have seen, the *Analects* highlights that having a virtuous ruler is crucial to having a virtuous and harmonious population. For example, *Analects* (2.3), which asserts that the people will fail to respond to purely legalistic means of control and that governing them by virtue is necessary to give people the sense of shame they need to rectify themselves.

Freudian psychoanalysis gives us reason to think the *Analects* and *Mencius* are not wrong to place a large amount of emphasis on the virtuous ruler. To Freud, the moral qualities of the leader are important because, like the father, the leader is a

key person that ego-ideals are based on. Since the ego-ideal is one whom you desire to be like or emulate, then a virtuous ruler in power will make the people more virtuous because the people will seek to emulate them. Conversely, non-virtuous rulers will lead to a population with no sense of shame and the chaotic disunity the Confucians warn comes with this (and which was certainly present in Confucius' time). There are of course important qualifications and nuances to this psychological dynamic in practice. For example, a virtuous ruler is unlikely to inspire everyone, and even people to whom the ruler successfully transfers their virtue will have a degree of autonomy from this identification process. Nonetheless I hope to have demonstrated that there are some similarities that can serve as a basis for further reflection on the compatibility of Confucianism and Laclauian democracy. Therefore, in summary, the ideal ruler in Confucianism is a virtuous one who inspires virtue in the people, which the Freudian notion of the people taking a leader as their ego-ideal can serve to give some psychological reinforcement to, in terms of the practical reality of this idea. This practical reality and implications of the conceptualization built up thus far are what I now move on to.

4. Confucianism and Laclauian Democracy

What are the implications of the conceptualization developed above with regard to Confucianism's compatibility with modern-day democracy? "Seeing the Confucian ideal ruler-ruled relationship through a Laclauian lens can make sense of what Confucius is advocating politically in a way that has the potential to allay doubts about the replicability of the ruler-ruled relationship in modern democracy, where a plurality of (often competing) interests or demands needs to be accounted for (see, for example, Elstein 2010)." The major question is how is this virtuous leader supposed to unite heterogenous political demands? Laclau highlights two important elements behind an assemblage of heterogenous demands kept together by a leader. The first is the fact that group unity is retrospectively constituted by the name of that leader and the second element is Freudian identification with that leader (Laclau 2005, 100). The first element points to the fact that the leader's name itself acts as an empty signifier, a signifier that points to the absent fullness of society. The leader hence becomes capable of acting as an impossible object, an object capable of taking within it multiple contradictory demands and thus forging a degree of homogeneity out of what simultaneously remains a fundamentally heterogenous population (ibid., 70). Viewed in these terms, there is hope that Confucius' virtuous leader could unite the different sections of a population, or at least a substantial proportion of them. Secondly, there is Freudian identification with the leader, whereby the

people take the leader as their ego-ideal, and hence come to identify with each other in their ego. As well as unifying people, this Freudian identification also explains how a leader could transfer their virtue to their people. Taking the leader as an ego-ideal means taking them as their—the people's—aspirational ideal self that they aspire to be, hence the people *are* more likely to show more virtue if their political leaders are virtuous. Conceptualized in Laclauian-Psychoanalytic terms, there was thus the potential for Confucius' solution to political conflict to work in ancient China.

Arguably there is also scope for a similar relationship to take place in modern politics. To see this it is helpful to consider Nelson Mandela, perhaps the closest modern equivalent to Confucius' notion of a virtuous ruler. Indeed, Laclau briefly cites Mandela as an example of a leader whose name became the symbol of a nation (Laclau 2005, 100), and Olberding (2011) cites Mandela as a moral exemplar. Consider the situation in South Africa between the release of Mandela from prison in 1990 and his ascension to the presidency in 1994. Different sections of the population had different grievances against De Klerk's incumbent National Party regime. These ranged from disillusionment due to racism (a concern held by almost all black South Africans and many white ones), to black South Africans concerned with poor living conditions as a result of the Bantustan policy (which put 90% of the population in 10% of the country), to white business owners who were suffering from their inability to hire black workers (Rees 2015). This shows that the political grievances against the National Party regime varied widely and were often contradictory. For example, many white business owners hated the employment policies but supported the Bantustan policy, as it prevented overcrowding in the areas they lived in. Nonetheless, the ANC managed to unite all these people (the substantial majority of the country) under the slogan "Free Nelson Mandela". On a Laclauian reading, this overcoming of heterogeneity was due to the demands being conjoined under the empty signifier of Mandela's name, which came to contain the promise of an absent fullness, a harmonious South Africa where the demands of all were satisfied. There is also evidence of Freudian identification here. At the time South Africa was ripe for violence, but Mandela managed to significantly diffuse this, resulting in far less violence than there otherwise would have been (Rees 2015, 380–81). In the psychoanalytic framework I have outlined, this can be interpreted as the people taking Mandela as their ego-ideal, and hence replicating his virtuous stance of non-violence. As such, in Mandela we have a modern example of Confucius' virtuous ruler in practice.

5. Virtuous Rulers in Practice—An Objection

In this final section, I want to spend some time addressing a serious potential concern with this conception of Confucian democracy, namely how, in practice, do we ensure or encourage the emergence of virtuous rulers, like Mandela, as opposed to non-virtuous ones, so that we can have a normatively desirable ruler-ruled dynamic? This is a very salient objection with regard to modern-day politics. After all, arguably the most prominent group currently taking advantage of the populist psychoanalytic dynamics explored above are not virtuous people like Mandela, but right-wing populists, such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, people who do not come anywhere close to meeting a Confucian standard of virtue. This is not a phenomenon unique to the Western world, either. For example, the right-wing populist Yoon Suk Yeol was recently elected in South Korea despite a series of controversial statements, including praising the former military dictatorship and blaming low birth rates on feminism (Rashid 2022). Neither is it a uniquely modern problem for Confucianism. As we saw with *Analects* (13.20), Confucius bemoans the rulers of his day for lacking virtue. Therefore, it is important to outline a response to this if my case for Confucian democracy rests on the presence of virtuous rulers in practice.

To respond to this objection, I will advocate for the permissibility of certain restrictions on who is eligible to run for office in the first place. I do not want to be too specific about what kind of electoral rules would be best here, as this would require a full and detailed account of this system that is beyond the scope of this article. It is enough for my purposes to point out that there are a variety of ways in which we can influence the political system to encourage the emergence of those who are virtuous by Confucian standards within these political systems. The objection to this form of Confucian democracy on the grounds that a virtuous ruler is unlikely to emerge has less force if there are mechanisms in place to try and encourage their emergence (or at least to eliminate the chance of people that Confucian standards would deem actively unvirtuous emerging).

The issue of candidate restrictions has already been examined in the Confucian democracy literature, for example by Joseph Chan (2013) in *Confucian Perfectionism*. It would not be beneficial for this article (given the space constraints) to delve into the details of previous normative justifications for this (as opposed to outlining why it might be a useful response to the objection above given my prior argument). It is however perhaps worth briefly reminding the reader that the nature of the debate surrounding democracy in East Asia is very different to that in the West. Unlike in the West, it is not going against the grain to not be in favour of democracy (and even more so a liberal type of democracy) in many East Asian

countries, as evidenced by the concrete fact that many are not democracies (e.g., China and Singapore) and many academic authors argue that non-democratic models may be more appropriate than democracy in this context.[2] So, given that the aim of this article is to contribute to the debate over what form Confucian democracy may take in East Asian countries influenced by Confucianism, it is appropriate not to spend too much time reviewing arguments over whether democracy is something we have a right to in the first place, and details of what this right consists of.

What I want to do here instead is show broadly why some form of candidate restrictions (or candidate selection system) could be justified as a response to the prior objection. Let me lay this out in relation to my argument in previous sections. Firstly, why the focus on leaders in the political system? I explained above that leaders in the political system become empty signifiers, with people taking them as their ego ideal and emulating their actions. This means that, for the purposes of comparison between Confucianism and Laclauian democracy, it is far more important that the key leaders—as well as other figures who are likely to come to public attention—are virtuous, while this is less important for those who hold less prominent positions, such as MPs in a legislature. These key leaders could be presidential candidates in a presidential system (such as in the US or South Korea) or the key leaders of political parties in a parliamentary-style system (such as Britain). What is important is that there are certain restrictions applied to those with potential for leadership positions who are in the public eye.

Now we have discussed who these candidate restrictions would apply to, let us move on to describing the form they could take. To start with we could have a list of restrictions on who can run that reflect what society sees as virtuous (which in countries influenced by Confucianism would involve Confucian virtues). This is not as controversial or as different from practice in even the most liberal democracies as it might initially sound. For example, the US Constitution prevents people under 35 from running for president, reflecting the value their society places on maturity and having some experience of life before being in a position as important as president. If we want to avoid a Trump-style populist taking advantage of a semi-democratic system in an Asian country, it would not be too much of a stretch to extend this exclusion to people facing court cases and certainly those who have been found civilly liable for sexual assault and defamation (as Trump was found guilty of in relation to E. Jean Carroll (Halpert and Matza 2023)). Quite how immaculate we would want the records of these politicians to be is

2   For example, Bell (2015) in *The China Model* argues that China's political system represents a viable alternative to the West, more appropriate for East Asian countries influenced by Confucianism than a democratic system would be.

a matter for debate in the relevant country. Any criteria set in this context could reasonably include past inflammatory comments or even conduct in the candidates' personal lives. This would lead to candidates like Boris Johnson (who called Muslim women "letterboxes" and has had multiple extra-marital affairs (BBC News 2018)), Yoon Suk Yeol (who has made a series of controversial statements, including praising the former military dictatorship, blaming low birth rates on feminism and more recently calling the US Congress "bastards" (Shin 2022)) and Donald Trump (who is facing multiple court cases for fraud, election rigging, sexual assault and defamation (Greve and Cameron 2023)) being ruled non-eligible to stand for high office in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, not dissimilar suggestions have already been proposed in the Confucian democracy literature, including by those who broadly support some form of Confucian democracy. This can involve going further and advocating not just candidate restrictions but also candidate selection. For example, in *Confucian Perfectionism* Joseph Chan entertains a non-democratic way of selecting representatives, which in his view is a selection mechanism that should be used to select one house in a bicameral legislature. According to Chan, these representatives should be "seasoned participants in public service" (Chan 2013, 107), with those responsible for selecting them including "senior secretariat staff serving in any of the public institutions mentioned above or experienced political affairs journalists who interact with senior public servants on a regular basis" (ibid., 108). Chan's rationale for this is that these people have a mature and developed understanding of any potential "seasoned participants". There is no barrier in principle to this being applied to the key leaders in the political system, possibly with some elections then being held amongst those deemed worthy to stand in them. Of course, having the background of being seasoned participants in public service, and being seen as good enough to be chosen by senior secretariat staff and other relevant people who know these individuals, such as journalists, would also likely be effective at precluding the emergence of characters such as Trump, Johnson and Yoon, so long as there are also checks within this system and it does not become corrupt. Therefore, a system of initial candidate selection applied to the leaders of the political system would be another way of solving this problem and hence, resolving the objection considered in this section.

Finally, it is worth saying that this idea of candidate restrictions places no restriction on the ideological type of politics one can support. What I mean by this is that it does not restrict, say, someone's ability to argue for a left-wing set of policies, a right-wing set of policies or a mixture of the two (as we have seen for example with the Five Star Movement in Italy). It only restricts the *character* of the people who are arguing for this. This is worth mentioning because one potential

worry about this idea of candidate restrictions is that it imposes a certain kind of politics on people. This could be said to be particularly concerning within the context of my argument, as the very idea of an empty signifier depends upon the ability of this signifier to potentially absorb any possible demands (as outlined in section 2). I therefore want to highlight explicitly that it is not the case that the idea of candidate restrictions prevents this. It is certainly fair to say that, broadly and historically, different sides in politics have each possessed both virtuous and less virtuous characters, in other words among the subset of people we could regard as virtuous (or at least not actively unvirtuous) there has been little commonality in the type of politics they support. For example, there are Republican members of Congress who have none of Trump's personal vices, but still support the same set of policies he does. Equally, among the Democrats in Congress who opposed most of Trump's policies, there are virtuous and less virtuous characters (for example, Senator Bob Menendez was recently charged with bribery and corruption but refused to resign (Cohen, Zengerle and Goudsward 2023)). Someone with a set of policies mostly the same as Donald Trump's during his time in the White House—for example, tax cuts for the wealthy, immigration restrictions and protectionism—would not be prevented from running under this system. It is Trump's character, not his policies, that candidate restrictions would attempt to counter. Therefore, candidate restrictions do not prevent the conjoining of any number of different political demands under an empty signifier.

To conclude this section, what matters is that I have shown some kind of candidate restrictions could be used to increase the chances of virtuous people gaining high positions in modern-day politics. The idea of candidate restrictions represents one of these, as does Chan's proposal of candidate selection. Exactly what form is adopted and in which countries are practical questions beyond the scope of this article. The idea here is simply to show that there are many feasible and implementable versions of candidate restriction or selection that could be used to increase the virtuousness of the people we see in politics.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the Confucian ideal ruler-ruled relationship can be conceptualized in Laclauian terms as the people making a radical investment in a virtuous ruler, and that this leads to a degree of compatibility between Confucianism and Laclauian democracy. I first illustrated that to radically invest in an empty signifier means to take that signifier as the embodiment of a mythical fullness. Next, I argued that the Sage-Kings (including the early Zhou rulers)

referenced in the *Analects* could be conceptualized as empty signifiers precisely because they represent a mythical fullness, which was absent in Chinese society at the time and which Confucius viewed as his task to revive. After this, I showed that an important part of radical investment in a leader is Freudian identification, and argued this can help us conceptualize how a virtuous leader could transfer his virtue to the people. I then demonstrated Confucianism's potential compatibility with a Laclauian conception of democracy. Specifically, I argued that Mandela met the criteria of a virtuous ruler under our Laclauian conception of Confucianism, because (with the help of the rest of the ANC) he united a series of heterogenous political demands around the empty signifier of his name and managed to transfer his virtue to the people through the psychological mechanism of Freudian identification. Finally, I answered the objection that these kinds of virtuous leaders are few and far between in modern world politics, with actively unvirtuous characters being common, by exploring the possibility of candidate restrictions to increase the virtuousness of those in power. Overall, we can conclude that there is a potential for compatibility between Confucianism and a Laclauian conception of democracy, albeit with some potential caveats to adapt Confucianism to a democratic context, such as candidate restrictions. I hope in presenting this argument I have provided a promising point of departure for further explorations of the compatibility of Confucian political thought and Laclauian democracy.

Acknowledgements

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Interplanetary Revolutions: Marxist Transhumanism, Mao's Cosmic Communism, and Beyond

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Abstract

The paper introduces the transhumanism and cosmic communism of Mao Zedong and discusses its relation to a Marxian conception of human nature and analogous Soviet visions. Having shown that the two-sided understanding of human nature in Marx opened doors for its transhumanist interpretations, the article identifies instances of the latter in the ideal of the New Soviet Man, the views of Trotsky, and the communist (or at least Sovietized) cosmism of Tsiolkovsky and Bogdanov. In parallel to and prior to his contact with Marxism, Mao became occupied with the problems of immortality, alternative spaces, the destruction of the Earth, and the power of human will, and his early transhumanism only revived after 1949. It is shown that based on his revision of historical materialism and belief in the limitless potential of human powers, Mao envisaged that technological and cultural revolutions would still and endlessly occur under communism(s), including their cosmic phases, and even after a global nuclear catastrophe. This would be, however, a future of "something more advanced" than humans, free from their current physical limitations.

Keywords: Mao, cosmic communism, transhumanism, accelerationism, continuous revolution

Medplanetarne revolucije: marksistični transhumanizem, Maotov kozmični komunizem in še kaj

Izvleček

Prispevek predstavi transhumanizem in kozmični komunizem Mao Zedonga ter obravnava njegovo povezavo z marksističnim pojmovanjem človeške narave in analognimi sovjetskimi vizijami. Potem ko prispevek pokaže, da je Marxovo dvostransko razumevanje človeške narave odprlo vrata transhumanističnim razlagam, opredeli primere slednjih v okvirih ideala novega sovjetskega človeka, pogledih Trockega in komunističnem (ali vsaj sovjetskem) kozmizmu Ciolkovskega in Bogdanova. Vzporedno z marksizmom se je Mao ukvarjal s problemi nesmrtnosti, alternativnih prostorov, uničenja Zemlje in moči

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človeške volje, medtem ko je njegov zgodnji transhumanizem oživel šele po letu 1949. Prispevek pokaže, da je Mao na podlagi svoje revizije historičnega materializma in prepričanja o neomejenem potencialu človeških moči predvideval, da se bodo tehnološke in kulturne revolucije v komunizmu(-ih) še vedno in v neskončnost dogajale, vključno z njihovimi kozmičnimi fazami in celo po globalni jedrski katastrofi. Vendar bi bila to prihodnost »nečesa naprednejšega« od ljudi, nečesa osvobojenega trenutnih človekovih fizičnih omejitev.

Ključne besede: Mao, kozmični komunizem, transhumanizem, akceleracionizem, kontinuirana revolucija

…τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον ὑπὸ δυοῖν τούτοιν μεγίστοιν τυραννούμενον,
ἐλπίδος καὶ φόβου, καὶ ὅτι ὁ τούτων ἑκατέρῳ εἰς δέον χρήσασθαι δυνάμενος
τάχιστα πλουτήσειεν
ἄν· ἀμφοτέροις γάρ, τῷ τε δεδιότι καὶ τῷ ἐλπίζοντι,
ἑώρων τὴν πρόγνωσιν ἀναγκαιοτάτην τε καὶ ποθεινοτάτην οὖσαν…

… Human life is under the absolute dominion of two mighty principles, fear and hope, and anyone who can make these serve his ends may be sure of a rapid fortune.
Whether a man is most swayed by the one or by the other, what he must most depend upon and desire is a knowledge of futurity …
Lucian, *Alexander, the False Prophet*[1]

Human beings probe the limits of their capabilities across times and cultures, and once the cosmos becomes the subject of their knowledge, they start to ponder whether and how it could become the arena of their future history. Such questions are usually first expressed within literary narratives, and then philosophical utopias, which only have social and political implications after science proves them to be mere fantasies. Already in the second century CE, the above-quoted Lucian wrote *A True Story* (Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα): a tale about the cosmic war between the King of the Moon and the King of the Sun over the colonization of the Morning Star. This work included descriptions of alien lifeforms, spaceships, and

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1   *The Works of Lucian of Samosata: Complete with Exceptions Specified in the Preface*, translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905, 215–16.
"Alexander, the False Prophet" (Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις), also known as "Alexander, the Oracle-Monger", is a satire written by Lucian of Samosata (c. 120–180 CE), a Hellenized Syrian writer and Epicurean thinker. The titular Alexander of Abonoteichus (c.105–170 CE) was a charlatan who claimed to be a healer and the prophet of the serpent-god Glycon. The cult of Glycon spread across the Roman Empire and even Marcus Aurelius himself sought prophecies from Alexander; Marcus' predecessor, Antoninus Pius, struck Roman coins in honour of Glycon.

interplanetary weapons, and is usually considered the first work of science fiction. And yet it is only with the Enlightenment that the next works in this genre were produced (such as Voltaire's *Micromégas* of 1752), a genre which then entered its "classical" phase at the turn of the 20th century (H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* of 1898 and others).

While philosophers were typically sceptical of these visions, their audiences still fell under their spell, particularly since 19th-century philosophy itself provided them with hitherto unknown ideas of progress, evolution, and antagonism. Sooner or later, these philosophies of history were bound to become the conceptual basis for the refinement and justification of what had been merely an exercise in philosophical imagination. Such was also the case with Marxism, all of its (original) views on the natural and historical limitations of human nature notwithstanding. It is most clearly seen in the works of the Soviet "cosmic communists" and other Russian Marxists who followed them with their transhumanist ideas, including Lev Trocky. This essay demonstrates that analogous yet distinctive "cosmic" ideas are to be found in Chinese Marxism, and specifically in the thought of Mao Zedong. It is shown that the theoretical foundations for the cosmic communism of Chairman Mao were already firmly established in his early transhumanism, and then in his accelerationist revision of historical materialism. Unlike the Soviet Marxists, however, the later Mao's vision of a post-human future departed from idyllic technoutopias and decidedly broke with the remnants of Christian eschatology still present in the fantasies of Russian cosmic communists. This overlooked part of Maoism testifies to the "long march" of transhumanist ideas across divergent historical backgrounds and cultures, and can possibly extend our own philosophical imagination when it comes to the challenges of space colonization, human enhancement, and the trans/post-human future of societies.

Marx on Human Nature

Marx's conception of human nature is reconstructed based on remarks scattered throughout both his earlier and later writings, and is therefore still a matter of heated debate. Hence, although at first glance it does not seem to offer much room for any transhumanist projects, its two-level character partially allows for such unexpected developments.

Marx's view of human nature is most frequently associated with his refutation of Feuerbachian naturalism. His *Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach* famously states that "The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations" (*Das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen*

Individuum inwohnendes Abstraktum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das ensemble der ge-sellschaftlichen Verhältnisse) (MECW vol. 5, 4). This would suggest that Marx was a social constructivist who dispensed with any abstract definition of human nature.

And yet only a year later (1846), in *The German Ideology*, the first chapter of which the *Sixth Thesis* was essentially an outline of, Marx and Engels start delineating the premises of their materialist conception of history with the following statement:

> The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. The first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature […] Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. (MECW vol. 5, 31)

The natural constitution of human beings is the most fundamental factor that conditions their productive activity, which distinguishes them from other animals. This natural endowment does not *define* humans, but rather *delimits* them. However, for that reason it cannot be detached from human nature. Human powers are naturally limited, and this is one of the crucial points of Marxian anthropology.

What's more, it was also central for Marx's *Capital*. The very concept of labour power presumes its natural limits: "The minimum limit of the value of labor power is determined by the value of the commodities, without the daily supply of which the laborer cannot renew his *vital energy*, consequently by the value of those means of subsistence that are physically indispensable" (MECW vol. 35, 183). The minimum limit of the value of labour power translates into the maximum limit of the working day:

> The working day has a maximum limit. It cannot be prolonged beyond a certain point. This maximum limit is conditioned by two things. First, by the physical bounds of labor power. Within the 24 hours of the natural day a man can expend only a definite quantity of his *vital force*. (ibid., 240)

These limits, regardless of the level of technological advancement, are most brutally tested by the capitalists who do not respect the fact that, besides the time required for work and the regeneration of their energies and powers, workers also need time to satisfy their intellectual and social needs.

These needs are, in fact, the key to Marx's conception of human nature. The human vital energy (force) in question is not a hidden mysterious entity, but something

used to satisfy human needs and visible only in the satisfaction of the latter. As Marx observes in his *1844 Manuscripts*, man is "endowed with natural powers, vital powers", but the objects that man needs, which exist outside of him, are "indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his *essential* powers" (MECW vol. 3, 336). In some places, Marx goes as far as to identify human nature with a "totality of needs and drives". The nature of these needs constitutes the true *differentia specifica* between humans and animals. Animals, such as bees or ants, also produce, but Marx believes that they produce only "under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom" (ibid., 276). This means that man does not produce only in accordance with the standard and needs of his own species, but universally, that is "in accordance with the standard of every species" and in compliance with "the laws of beauty" (ibid., 277).

It is through free labour and its products that man most fully expresses himself *as a man*, to the extent he "sees himself in a world that he has created". Only in this way can individual human beings understand what it means to be human (in general), or as Marx puts it, "man is a species-being [*Gattungswesen*] (…) because he treats himself as a universal". Consequently, when man "makes his life activity, his *essential being*, a mere means to his existence", he then becomes alienated from his own nature: his species-being turns into something alien to him, he is reduced back to his animal form (ibid., 275–77). Human nature, whether authentic or "estranged", must therefore relate to the social way human beings satisfy their unique needs.

There is, in fact, no contradiction between human nature *qua* "vital energy" and human nature as an "ensemble of social relations". When humans "proceed from themselves", as Marx and Engels phrase it in *The German Ideology*, they always encounter "their needs, *consequently their nature*, and the method of satisfying their needs", due to which they have to enter into certain social relations (MECW vol. 5, 437). Hence, historical materialism does not exclude Marx's conception of human nature. As Norman Geras points out, "the mode of production is said to be the form in which individuals express their life, which form is said in turn to bear intimately on what they are" (Geras 1983, 64). In other words, both the natural constitution of humans and the socioeconomic circumstances of their productive activity constitute the liminal conditions of human self-expression via the satisfaction of genuinely human needs. As Erich Fromm observes in his celebrated *Marx's Concept of Man*, there is no opposition between the "young" and "old" Marx in terms of his understanding of human nature. The differences concern only the matters of language (for instance, the old Marx no longer uses the term "essence"), but in principle, "labor and capital were not at all for Marx only

economic categories; they were anthropological categories, imbued with a value judgment which is rooted in his humanistic position" (Fromm 2004 [1961], 32). This continuity between the young and old Marx with regard to the double meaning of human nature is testified by one of his footnotes in *Capital*, which criticizes utilitarianism. "[Human] nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility", Marx writes; on the contrary, "the principle of utility must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch" (MECW vol. 35, 605).

With this conclusion, however, Marxism knocks on transhumanist doors. Human nature *is being* modified in *each* historical epoch, which must include the future. The emergence of new relations of production—and new needs!—will open doors to new ways of understanding of what it means to be human. "All history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature", wrote Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy* of 1847 (MECW vol. 6, 192). Marx was not a positive ontologist, Alfred Schmidt reminds us, and the human nature he deals with "is only to be conceived as a historical process"; the essence of man arises in each case from a definite form of society (Schmidt 2014 [1962], 90).

Soviet Transhumanism and Russian Cosmism

The continuity between the natural and social dimension of human nature (or "human nature in general" and "human nature as modified in each historical epoch") has significant practical, if not emancipatory, implications. Unless we (the people) change the current, capitalist mode of production, we will not know which limitations of our capabilities and shortcomings in our achievements—which are typically taken to come from the limits of natural constitution of humans—in truth result from our self-determined socioeconomic confines. If capitalism is built upon estranged labour which wastes the vital energy (force) of human beings by consuming it almost exclusively for the sake of their subsistence, then under communism people should finally be able to make full and free use of their natural potential. Such were also the conclusions of Russian communists.

As noted by Nikolai Berdyaev, a keen observer of the Russian Revolution, "communism claims to have created not only the new society but also the new man. They talk a great deal in Soviet Russia about the new man, about a new spiritual make-up" (Berdyaev 1960 [1937], 182). These ambitions were most evidently expressed in the ideological model of "the New Soviet Man" (новый советский человек), as well as the New Soviet Woman, which was then exemplified in the numerous works of Soviet literature and art of that time. This ideal was closely

associated with the Stakhanovite movement, which called for breaking the records for human productivity known from capitalist societies. Unlike the New Soviet Man, the ideal of the Stakhanovites (стаха́новцы) was limited to the socialist mode of production, and specifically to strengthening the socialist state. However, both the socialist model of the Stakhanovite worker and the communist ideal of the New Man (and Woman) entailed a new, hypothetical type of human psyche, which was vividly discussed by contemporaneous Soviet psychologists. The New Man was supposed to be self-conscious yet selfless, internationalist yet respectful of a particular public order; he was envisaged as someone who had achieved true self-mastery and, at the same time, was more concerned with the social good than with his own. Yet, as Raymond Bauer aptly observes, "in holding this position, Soviet psychologists walk a very thin chalk-line" (Bauer 1952, 134–35), which readily suggests that human consciousness can determine man's existence—an idealist and voluntarist standpoint unacceptable for any Bolshevik.

However, the most palpable images of the New Soviet Man were still expressed in the products of human consciousness, namely literature and art. It is therefore no coincidence that the boldest transhumanist vision ever made by a Russian Marxist comes from *Literature and Revolution* (Литература и революция)—a canonical work on Marxist literary criticism written by Leon Trotsky in 1924. Trotsky distances himself from the futile utopias of the ("bourgeois") Futurists and pungently remarks that "the workers' revolution in Russia broke loose before Futurism had time to free itself from its childish habits" (Trotsky 1957 [1924], 225). On the other hand, communist art did not as yet have a firm basis, as this would only emerge out of the new conditions of human life. These Trotsky envisions as follows, at the very end of his book:

> Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.
>
> More correctly, the shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of Communist man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise. (Trotsky 1957 [1924], 376–77)

That the creation of a "higher social biological type" necessitates remoulding the existing social relations was beyond any question; whether the peaks of a "superman" require new territories was, however, a matter of an open and vivid debate, strongly influenced by Russian cosmism. At an intersection of Proletkult and cosmism there arose an "image of the universal 'Proletarian', who strides forth from the earth to conquer planets and stars" (Seifried 2009, 70). The central idea of Marx—according to which the emancipation of the proletariat entails, along with the abolishment of classes, the liberation of all humanity—was taken as a premise for a new conclusion: whatever the New Man is, he must be a true Proletarian, whose activity is no longer delimited by Earth.

This alliance was facilitated by the fact that for many Russian cosmists, humankind's future life in space must follow technological innovations. Nikolai Fyodorovich Fyodorov (1828–1903), the *spiritus movens* of the movement, believed that with the help of scientific methods humans would soon be able to achieve life extension and, eventually, immortality and resurrection, based on the cloning of human cells. The main representative of the movement, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935), was, in turn, a pioneer and the founding father of modern rocketry and astronautics. His book *The Will of the Universe* from 1928 predicted that humans would colonize the galaxy, while his scientific discoveries were motivated by the desire to provide a comprehensive design for such space missions. In so doing, however, humanity would have to align with the transcendent, mysterious cosmic will; only by expressing this could it evolve towards greater perfection and self-empowerment. This would be manifested by exploration of the solar system and, eventually, populating other planets suitable for life. When the same year, 1928, witnessed the publication of Stalin's First Five-year Plan, the compatibility of Tsiolkovsky's visions with the Soviet strategy and narrative became evident. As Tijana Vujošević observes, it matched the doctrine that socialism is a "path toward the end of history, and communism is this history's end, a perfect classless and stateless society in which the imperfections of the human race [...] will finally vanish". In this way, Tsiolkovsky's work presented "the course of Soviet history as part of cosmic evolution" (Vujošević 2017, 28). As a result, his achievements became instrumental for Soviet propaganda:

> Tsiolkovsky's reputation reached a peak on May Day 1935, when he was invited to address the nation by radio during the grand annual parade. Due to ill health, he could not attend the ceremony in person, but a speech he recorded in his Kaluga laboratory was broadcast over all nine Soviet time zones and from speakers atop the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square, with Stalin leading the applause. (Young 2012, 150)

One cannot possibly imagine any higher or wider approval for any idea in the Soviet Union.

These scientific-political ambitions were accompanied by literary-artistic visions, following the sci-fi novel *Red Star* (Красная звезда) published in 1908 (and re-published in 1918 and 1922) and written by Lenin's main rival amongst the Bolsheviks, Alexander Bogdanov (1873–1928). The novel depicts a fictional communist society on Mars encountered by a revolutionary and scientist, Leonid, who observes the lives of happy, equal, and indistinguishable Martians who, while not being forced to work at all, do so out of an inner need, and freely exchange the assigned jobs among themselves (see Bogdanov 1984). The common feature of both literary and scientific images is seeing the cosmic future of humankind as a period of peaceful and unlimited co-operation, and this was precisely the assumption challenged in the transhumanist musings of Chairman Mao.

Pre-Marxist Mao, the Transhumanist

Mao Zedong was acquainted with the ideas of social evolutionism, which had a great impact upon early transhumanism, prior to his contact with Marxism. He read the books of Herbert Spencer as well as T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (cf. Allinson 2020, 30), and became deeply influenced by their emphasis on the inevitability of struggle (Meisner 2007, 4). In his notes in the margins of *A System of Ethics* by Friedrich Paulsen (1846–1908), written in 1917–1918, the young Mao expresses his belief that change is permanent, and the substitution of an old order by a new one, destruction followed by a revolution and transformation, occurs both on the scale of nations and the universe. A pure peace without any disorder, as awaited by those who proclaim the advent of paradise or Great Harmony (*datong* 大同), would be, in Mao's eyes, "unbearable" to human nature; "the waves of competition and friction would inevitably break forth" (Mao 1992, 237–38). In fact, the greater the obstacles, the greater are, as a result, the human forces that face them (ibid., 235). With successive "waves" of resistance from the universe and social reality, human beings should then be able to transform themselves into something more advanced. In line with this, Mao praises Paulsen for claiming that "human beings are capable of changing their basic natures by using their wills" (ibid., 310). This means that external reality only provides a stimulus for self-development, which can ultimately come only from within human nature:

> The truly great person develops the original nature with which Nature endowed him, and expands upon the best, the greatest of the capacities of his original nature. This is what makes him great. Everything that comes from outside his original nature, such as restraints and restrictions, is cast aside by the great motive power that is contained within his original nature. It is this motive power that it the strongest and truest reality. (ibid., 263)

This passage is, undoubtedly, the earliest expression of Mao's voluntarism. The relation of our nature to Nature is, as Mao explains, comparable to that of individual to the people. While such basic nature (*benxing* 本性) is certainly moulded by external influences, it is also "our potential nature", the development of which we bear responsibility for (ibid., 308).

At their current stage, humans are still relatively "powerless" in comparison with Nature, and lag behind their potential powers. With the "progress of human wisdom", however, humans will be able to extend themselves to the "greater self" that can benefit not only humankind or living beings, but also the entire universe (ibid., 202). There is no reason to believe that the development of human nature must be limited to the possibilities offered by this world:

> The universe does not contain only the world of human life. There are many other kinds of worlds in addition to that of human life. When we have already had all kinds of experience in this world of human life, we should leave this world to experience other kinds of worlds. If human life knew no dying, and if we were to live forever on this venerable world, we cannot imagine what the content of such an ahistorical life without the changing of the generations might be like, but even if we could imagine it, what point would there be in forever experiencing one kind of life? (Mao 1992, 245–46)

Death is not, therefore, an obstacle in human development, but the most basic factor that pushes people towards surpassing their limits across generations. Only a limited life can yearn for its own transcendence. As such, death should not be feared, but welcomed with the inborn "sense of curiosity", the same that pushes humanity ahead.

Eventually, even death is not a complete destruction, but rather a dissolution (*jie-san* 解散); it is a dispersal that can be united again, as Mao (ibid., 245) mysteriously hints at. The same concerns the possible end of the Earth, as "the destruction of the universe is not an ultimate destruction" and "it is certain that its demise here will necessarily be a formation there". "I very much look forward to

its destruction", Mao shockingly continues, "because from the demise of the old universe will come a new universe, and will it not be better than the old universe!" (ibid., 250). The relationship between the two is one of complete transformation, or of an "infant" to its mother's womb, which is quite emblematically compared to "great revolutions, periodically cleansing the old". This parallel shows that the capacities of human beings and, specifically, the human body, must be closely intertwined with the current physical conditions of that part of the universe we inhabit. By means of transcending the current physical limits of human life and, especially, by travelling in space, we should be able to reach the full potential of human nature and even immortality:

> The question of formation and dissolution [*cheng-hui* 成灰] is a question of space […] By extension, we may infer an entirely different sort of world. I can imagine space without time, and feel that I am placed in an infinite, unbounded, broad, and expansive great place that has no present, no past, and no future. In this context, it is possible to maintain the view that both body and spirit are immortal. Is this not an entirely different world? (Mao 1992, 303)

The faith in the possibility of achieving immortality—along with the idea that one can imagine space without time—follows Mao's conviction about the redundance of the physical category of time, which, as a human concept reducible to physical change, is not to be found in the objective world. From that viewpoint, "the revolution of the Earth around the Sun is merely motion in space" (ibid., 304). Transgressions of the current limits of human motion should therefore translate into greater longevity: new possibilities for space travels are then expected to extend the temporal limits of human experience, if not absolutely, then at least relatively.

The philosophy of science was of continuing interest to Mao from his youth onwards, and in the 1930s he enjoyed engaging in discussions with top nuclear physicists such as Qian Sanjiang 钱三强 (1913–1992) about the nature of matter (Friedman 1983, 52). Eventually, his interest in natural science and early transhumanist visions had to be set aside for revolutionary activity and involvement in the (Second) Sino-Japanese War. They re-emerged in a new, Marxist guise only when Mao, now Chairman Mao, became equipped with the political power necessary to implement his visions of the future.

Maoist Accelerationism

As a leader of a communist country during the Cold War, Mao was soon confronted with challenges that revived his youthful reflections about the future of the Earth and humanity. One of them was the hypothetical nuclear threat coming from the United States, and in estimating its seriousness Mao oscillated between famously considering it a "paper tiger" meant only to scare people, and a "real tiger" to which China must respond by building its own nuclear weapons (cf. Shu 1999). At the same time, he almost carelessly observed that "even if the US atom bombs were so powerful that when dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the Earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, though it might be a major event for the solar system" (Mao 1977a, 152). In a similar vein, in one of his critiques of the Stalinist *Short Dictionary of Philosophy* (the third edition of which appeared in 1951), Mao made the following "dialectical" statement:

> If life and death cannot be transformed into each other, then please tell me where living things come from. Originally there was only non-living matter on Earth... Life and death are engaged in a constant struggle and are being transformed into each other all the time. (Schram 1989, 137)

While these remarks display a great degree of affinity with the Daoists' (specifically Zhuangzian) conception of nature, which was eagerly evoked by the later Mao, Robert Allinson aptly observes that they also "echo the early philosophical musings of the young Mao in the Margins reflected in his reading and commenting upon Paulsen" (Allinson 2020, 126), which testifies to a continuity of Mao's anthropology and the philosophy of nature. The struggle between opposites and their mutual transformation are the major laws describing the life of human beings and their planet, regardless of current narrow perspectives. Such was also the message of Mao's *On Contradiction*.

The biggest difference between the early and later transhumanism of Mao lay, in turn, in the latter's rootedness in the revised and expanded categories of historical materialism. To formulate his own futuristic visions in the language of Marxism, Mao must have "deviated" from the basic assumptions of the materialist conception of history, which he did by reaching for the notion of the complementarity of changes, taken from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) itself (cf. Tian 2005, 147–55). These complementarist overtones were only strengthened in the official (post-1949) edition of *On Contradiction* and later editions, following Mao's own desire to portray himself as the only creative theoretician of Marxism-Leninism behind the Iron Curtain, and gradually replaced the Engelsian idea of one-way determination within the historical process.

First of all, Mao considered the superstructure capable of the principal and innovative influence upon the base. The Marxian standpoint was, of course, a dialectical and far from crude mechanical materialism, but Mao still went further and argued that the superstructure can directly clear the way for an unobstructed development of the productive forces (see Rogacz 2023, 23–24, 36–37). Second, within the base itself Chairman Mao treated the productive forces and the relations of production as mutually influencing each other, and in fact gave priority to social relations in terms of their potential for initiating major historical breakthroughs. As he explicitly stated in *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (1967), one of the crucial theoretical texts validating the Sino-Soviet Split, "the major development of the productive forces always comes after changes in the production relations" (Mao 1977b, 66). In other words, a mere rearrangement of the relations of production, such as creating the people's communes, was expected to foster economic development. The relations of production are, however, all the necessary (involuntary) social relations people must enter to live under given mode of production and cannot be, by definition, changed without any modification in the productive forces. This critique was later explicitly formulated by Deng Xiaoping, who viewed the improvement of production as the only viable way to "reform those aspects of the relations of production and of the superstructure that do not correspond with the rapid development of our productive forces" (Deng 1997, 108).

Most importantly, even within the productive forces Mao insisted on the mutual influence between the means of labour (tools, instruments, infrastructure, etc.) and human labour, meaning that technological backwardness could be overcome by the will of the people: "Of all things in the world, people are the most precious; under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed", said Mao amidst the Great Leap Forward (Mao 1961, 454). Mao seemed to believe that the dynamic energy of the masses is almost infinite: "Now the enthusiasm of the masses is like atomic energy. Release that power. After fifteen years we'll have 40,000,000 tons of steel." (Mao 1969, 155) Such voluntarism entailed that people's labour power is no less limited, which eventually led to their limitless exploitation and alienation. Accompanied with the transhumanist hope, it stood against the Marxian conception of human nature: "the maximum limit" of the working day can be prolonged, because the "definite quantity of vital force" that Marx speaks of in *Capital* is only that which he knew from capitalist societies. Maoist accelerationism did not know these limits.

Whether these hopes and faith in human potential were directly inspired by Trotsky remains an open question. It must be remembered that anti-Trotskyism was one of the key elements of the Chinese Communist Party's ideology (cf. Benton 2017, 38). One of the reasons for that was that Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942),

the Party's cofounder and a great theoretical rival of Mao became a Trotskyist and even exchanged letters with Trotsky himself (Kuhfus 1985). Even so, *Literature and Revolution* was translated in its entirety into Chinese by Wang Fanxi 王凡西 during Mao's life, in 1971. Parts of this work, not to mention the Soviet idea of the New Man, must have been known earlier, and, as either too familiar or anathematized, spread without direct citations. The same can be said for Mao's central idea of continuous revolution, *buduan geming* 不断革命 or *jixu geming* 继续革命, which, while distinct from that of Trotsky, could have been indebted to its antecedent and shared with it the assumption that to achieve the victory of socialism the proletariat must continue revolution beyond the measures known from bourgeois revolutions, and revolutionary activity must therefore enter into a wider (and most importantly international) phase, given the hegemonic pressure of world capitalism.

Unlike Trotsky, Mao believed that revolution would continue after the victory of socialism and even during the communist stage of history, when all social classes would already have been (by definition at least) abolished. The communist future of mankind would thus not be short of cultural and technological progress, although any such advances could only can come to life through antagonism:

> Under socialism there may be no war but there is still struggle, struggle among sections of the people; there may be no revolution of one class overthrowing another, but there is still revolution. The transition from socialism to communism is revolutionary. The transition from one stage of communism to another is also revolutionary. There is technological revolution and cultural revolution. Communism will surely have to pass through many stages and many revolutions. (Mao 1999, 108–109; translation following Mao 1977b, 71)
>
> 社会主义制度下，虽然没有一个阶级推翻另一个阶级的革命，但是还有革命，技术革命，文化革命，也是革命。从社会主义过渡到共产主义是革命，从共产主义的这一个阶段过渡到另一个阶段，也是革命。共产主义一定会有很多的阶段，因此也一定会有很多的革命。

What Mao foresees and anticipates is thus a series of communisms (literally the stages of communism), following the cultural and technological revolutions between the backward and progressive sections of society. At some point, this development must enter a cosmic phase.

Due to the scale of the whole process, Mao did not specify what particular stages communism must or will go through. It might as well pass through "decades of

thousands of stages" (*jiwange jieduan* 几万个阶段) (Mao 1999, 108). This does not mean, however, that the communist future will undergo merely quantitative changes. Mao openly doubts communism "can remain qualitatively the same, unchanging for millions of years" (Mao 1975, 227). One reason is that it is not possible for the communist society to "completely satisfy all needs at one blow", while another is that with new inventions, new needs will incessantly emerge (Mao 1999, 136). In other words, communism is subject to dialectical transformation and self-transcendence, just as in all other periods of history. This implies that, at some point, communism itself must also be transcended. While Mao seems sympathetic to such a conclusion, what he has in mind is rather "communism as we know/imagine it", and not the common ownership of the means of production *per se*. As Mao wrote in 1960: "After the world realizes communism in the future, people's mutual relations in labour production and distribution will continue to undergo endless changes, but there will not be much change in the system itself" (将来全世界实现共产主义以后,人们在劳动生产和分配中的相互关系,还会有无穷的变化,但是所有制方面不会有多大变化) (Mao 1999, 136). Future revolutions, understood as groundbreaking shifts, will involve other spheres of social life.

On the Issue of Human Cognition (1964): Mao's Cosmic Communism

What follows from Mao's understanding of communism and the continuous revolution is that all innovations are to occur without any change in the means of production, which implies that the extension of human capabilities should become one of the chief factors pushing communist society forward. As Stuart Schram observes, "In his [Mao's] view, man and society will be re-shaped in a never-ending process of struggle which will continue even after full communism has been established." (Schram 1967, 164)

This idea led to Chairman Mao's wildest and most explicit transhumanist vision, which evokes his earlier speculations about the chances of achieving immortality in a different type of space. It was expressed in one of his lesser-known essays, "On the Issue of Human Cognition" (*Guanyu ren de renshi wenti* 关于人的认识问题), from August 24, 1964, based on his conversation with Zhou Peiyuan 周培源 (1902–1993) and Yu Guangyuan 于光遠 (1915–2013). Zhou was a theoretical physicist, who studied under Einstein himself (in Princeton), and a founding member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, later becoming the president of Peking University. Yu was an economist and philosopher, and later an architect

of the Dengist market reforms, but at that time he studied theoretical physics under Zhou. The conversation was held two weeks after the Tenth World Conference organized by the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Tokyo from July 30 to August 9, 1964 (which commemorated the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), and only a week after the first Chinese nuclear test was conducted at the Lop Nur test site on October 16, 1964 (so-called Project 596, also known as Miss Qiu, *Qiu xiaojie* 邱小姐), which in all likelihood was not a coincidence. The issues of atomic energy and the possibility of the Earth's destruction were already closely connected with the future of humankind for the pre-Marxist Mao, and all the more so for the now "Great Helmsman" who was in charge of deciding some of that future.

The original transcript of the conversation was published under the title *A Conversation on Sakata's Paper* (*Guanyu Sakata wenzhang de tanhua* 关于坂田文章 的谈话). Sakata Shōichi 坂田 昌一 (1911–1970) was a physicist and Marxist, and also the first Japanese physicist to visit the People's Republic of China, whose works were read by Mao and who was in turn familiar with Mao's *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* (Friedman 1983, 54–57). Mao was exceptionally impressed by one of Sakata's papers on basic particles, admitting that he has "never before seen such an article" (Mao 1969, 560), and predicted that in the future electrons would also be split (which did in fact happen, cf. Merali 2012). One of these papers was most probably the starting point for Mao's conversation with Zhou Peiyuan and Yu Guangyuan. Mao did not, however, engage in a genuine exchange of opinions (definitely not in the year that witnessed the publication of the *Little Red Book*), and most probably sought scientific confirmation for his philosophical visions.

Accordingly, Mao's speculations start with epistemology (*renshilun* 认识论), which was, in his eyes, rather neglected in traditional Chinese philosophy. Premodern philosophers could be, however, partially excused for that lack of interest. As Mao noted, due to the advances of science, which a few years before this conversation had led to artificial satellites being sent into space, we know now much more than they did. On the other hand, humans are also increasingly aware of how much is still to be known. The universe is infinite in both time and space, Mao claimed, and just as there are multiple galaxies beyond the Milky Way, so atomic particles can be subdivided into infinity. If that is the case, our knowledge has potentially no limits and no end" (*wu qiong wu jin* 无穷无尽), but only because it will try to exhaust the knowledge of the world that cannot be encompassed. In this sense, Mao agrees with Zhuangzi and his view that even ten thousand generations will not be enough to exhaust the universe (*wanshi bujie* 万世不竭) (*Zhuangzi* 33.7; Mao 1999, 389).

In response to a question for clarification, Mao specifies what is here understood by knowledge. It is not, first of all, knowledge belonging to an individual, but rather to the group. If we cannot control the climate, it is because humanity does not know how to do this. At the current, pre-communist stage of history, it is "the social class that is the subject of knowledge" (*jieji shi zhishi de zhuti* 阶级就是一认识的主体). The nature of class knowledge is the key to all knowledge: it goes from unaware "being-in-itself" (*zizai* 自在) to "being-for-oneself" (*ziwo* 自我). It is thus practical: all "knowledge comes from practice" (*ren de renshi laiyuan yu shijian* 人的认识来源于实践), and is deepened as a result of the transformation of the world (*gaizao shijie* 改造世界) by means of tools, facing its respective, qualitative leaps (Mao 1999, 390–91).

These passages echo and integrate ideas from *On Practice*: human beings acquire knowledge through social, and mostly productive, practice, and this practice is of a class nature and dialectically transforms the objective world. In his 1964 essay, however, Mao develops these ideas in a hitherto unformulated direction. Our brain is also a tool, even a "processing factory" (*women de naozi shige jiagong chang* 我们的脑子是个加工厂), and we should expect its imminent upgrade (*gengxin* 更新), which happens to all tools in the process of their practical adaptation to reality, Mao writes. The same will also happen to the cells of our body, which only follows the fact that all forms of energy and elementary particles are subject to constant and dialectical change (ibid., 392–93). In other words, in the course of further exploration of the universe, human beings should adapt to a new reality using new kinds of tools and technologies, and thereby self-consciously transform themselves. The question remains as to what extent the "results" of that process would still be *human* beings, especially in the face of the challenges posed by nuclear war and the possible destruction of the Earth, which might entail a hitherto unknown level of adaptation:

> The end of *human*kind and the end of the Earth we speak about has nothing to do with the Doomsday foretold by Christianity. What we mean by the end of humans and Earth is that something more advanced than humans will replace them, and that through this process things will develop into a higher stage. (Mao 1999, 391)
> 我们说的人类灭亡、地球灭亡,同基督教讲的世界末日不一样。我们说人类灭亡、地球灭亡,是说有比人类更进步的东西来代替人类,是事物发展到更高阶段。

The end in question is, therefore, no end at all: it is just a transformation, which means the end of humans and the death of a certain era, but, contrary to Christian teleology, neither the end of history nor, in particular, its communist phase.

What is striking in Mao's description is that he does not seem to expect that any organisms will replace human beings, and sticks to the very general and vague category of "things" (*dongxi* 东西) and "objects" (*shiwu* 事物). Of course, we cannot predict the future result of an upgrade of our brains and cells. Yet, whatever that will be, whatever would be able to survive the end of the Earth, should be capable of reaching immortality. "All humans must die" (*mei yige ren dou yaosi* 每一个人都要死), as it is written in their nature; anything that would be able to transcend this limitation is, by definition, "post-human" (ibid., 391).

These predictions, expressed merely a week after the first Chinese nuclear test, were Mao's firm answers to the question of whether the history of communism could continue even after the hypothetical destruction of the Earth, and specifically in space. At the end of the essay Mao refers to the Soviet (pseudo-)scientific research of Olga Lepeshinskaya (d. 1963), who was an advocate of the spontaneous generation of life from inanimate matter, although he disappointedly admits it has not yet brought any results (Mao 1999, 393–94). As such, and in light of Mao's antifinalism, these predictions should be read against another axiom of his vision of the future: the idea of continuous revolution. If one phase of communism can be replaced by another only through either technological or cultural revolution, the "higher stage" of technological advancement initiating the post-human phase of history cannot come to life other than in a revolutionary way. This means that unlike the Soviet cosmic communists, who believed that the exploration of space would coincide with the communist endpoint of history, Mao rejects all such beliefs as remnants of Christian eschatology and predicts, if not awaits, the advent of yet another period of cultural and technological revolutions, this time ignited between post-human entities.

Despite all this, Mao's essay from 1964 has remained generally overlooked in the existing literature, as has his transhumanism. One of the main exceptions in that regard is the recent comprehensive study by Robert Allinson who, while not referring to *A Conversation on Sakata's Paper* by title, alludes to its content and states that "such thinking goes far beyond either Marxism or early Chinese philosophy. It extends to the future and augurs the contemporary philosophical discussions of the trans-human" (Allinson 2020, 153). Mao's transgression of classical Chinese (and probably any) philosophy in this text is rather indisputable. As for Marxism, it is, however, more complicated for the reasons delineated above. Allinson refers to the *Talk on the Questions of Philosophy* where Mao points out that "Marx put forward the view that man *is* a tool-maker", but this feature of men was formed only "after undergoing a million years" of evolution, and there are no reasons to suspect the evolution of human nature will stop (see Mao 1968, 151). But Marx never denied the theory of evolution, although he did not see the struggle for existence

as anything more than a biological law; for Engels (MECW vol. 25, 493, 513), in turn, "history is only differentiated from natural history as the evolutionary process of self-conscious organisms". In addition, Marx's idea of "a continuous transformation of human nature" allowed for the later transhumanist developments of Marxist anthropology, such as that of Trotsky and including that of Mao. On the other hand, Mao's cosmic communism crowns his futuristic visions and proves the continuity between his early transhumanist musings and later reflections, rooted in the radical revision of the Marxist philosophy of history. In its radical antifinalism, Mao's vision was ready to assume that even communism itself would be transcended, or at least evolve into a quantitively new stage of human development that barely reminds us of what we know and imagine as "communism".

Such a speculative vision was quite novel in the communist world. It would also certainly surprise some Western Marxists who were otherwise inspired by Mao, such as Louis Althusser, for whom any concept of human nature is entirely ideological, devoid of any historical-material basis, and always created to reproduce existing social relations. In some respects, however, Mao's vision was akin in its spirit to the view of the Yugoslav Praxis School. (Although for clarity, there is nothing that indicates an exchange of ideas, much less an influence, between their representatives and Mao, cf. Tang 1986.) For Gajo Petrović, for instance, revolution cannot be reduced to the transformation of social structures, as this would not be possible without the creation of a new man. And even much more than that: "Revolution is not merely a change in man, it is a change in the 'universe', creation of an essentially different 'mode' of Being, free, creative Being, which differs from every non-human, anti-human and not-yet-fully-human Being" (Petrović 1979, 152). The chief contrast between Petrović and Mao is that the former does not prophesize any advent of a "post-human" era but instead anticipates the full realization of human essence as discussed by the young Marx (whose manuscripts are nowhere cited by Mao). Another difference is that for Petrović this future is completely open: he rejects the "construction of the future as a new phantasm that paralyzes human creativity and freedom" (Vodovnik 2012, 443), and sees it as something to be created through prefigurative politics. For Mao, future technological and cultural revolutions are bound to happen regardless of whether society wants them, even after humankind's extinction. With Mao being more open and Petrović being bolder, both could have hypothetically met halfway. Assuming that we cannot genuinely think through and about this future, Petrović argues, "then we are condemned to create the new without thinking", in an almost irrational way.

> Perhaps this is not so catastrophic? Would it not be possible to think the old, to respect the existing as the holy limit of our thinking, and nevertheless in our practical activity, in Being, to produce something new, even to progress to higher forms of life? (Petrović 1979, 157)

While Mao would certainly advocate such an activity, he would not be convinced that, during its course, we must respect any sacred limits or be terrified by the prospects of a catastrophe.

Conclusion

The brief comparative analysis presented in this essay shows the intricacy of the connections among Mao, Marx, and various Marxisms, which brings us to the following summary.

Marx's conception of human nature as delimited by its physical organization and the boundaries of human labour power may seem immune to transhumanist visions, but his idea of human nature as productive activity constantly transformed throughout history, which shall be unleashed upon abolishing estrangement, opened the doors for more transgressive positions, as testified by Soviet writings and art. Behind the programme of the Stakhanovites and the ideal of the New Soviet Man there lay clearly transhumanist assumptions, most openly expressed by Trotsky, which soon became merged with the ideas of the Russian cosmists, as shown by the likes of Tsiolkovsky and Bogdanov. Cosmic life devoid of the imperfections of human nature was supposed to coincide with the further development of communism. Such ideas became highly attractive to Mao, who had expressed his transhumanist hopes and fears even before getting acquainted with Marxism. His early preoccupation with the issues of immortality, alternative spaces, destruction of the Earth, and the power of human will did not end but only revived after 1949. Supported by the complementarist revision of historical materialism and a belief in the almost limitless potential of human labour power, Mao envisaged that just as technological and cultural revolutions will not stop after the victory of communism, so they will continue in the new, cosmic phase of history, most probably after a global nuclear catastrophe. In that regard, he differed from Soviet cosmic communists and tried to purify Marxism from the remnants of Christian eschatology. This would, however, be the future of "something more advanced" than human beings and free from their current physical limits. For Mao, this was only a question of "when", not "if."

Acknowledgments

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Re-inventing Chinese Philosophy through the Method of Sublation: Introducing a New Methodology for Research in Chinese Philosophy from the Perspective of Transcultural Comparisons

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Abstract

In this article, I will introduce and describe my current research work, which centres on re-interpreting Chinese philosophy by implementing an innovative approach suitable for transcultural philosophical comparisons. To commence this undertaking, I was compelled to address certain issues, leading me to seek a novel methodology for transcultural research.

This article will begin by briefly addressing the still existing general problems of transcultural philosophical comparisons. I will then examine the recent and current landscape of research in the field of Chinese comparative philosophy, with a specific focus on emerging paradigms referred to as "post-comparative" approaches.

In the latter part of this paper, building upon a concise overview of my previous research findings, I will elucidate the current stage of development of the method of sublation. Furthermore, I will provide a theoretical framework outlining the subsequent phases of investigation.

Keywords: sublation, methodology, post-comparative research, Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy

Preporod kitajske filozofije s pomočjo metode sublacije: predstavitev nove metodologije za raziskovanje kitajske filozofije z vidika transkulturnih primerjav

Izvleček

V tem članku bom najprej predstavila in opisala svoje trenutno raziskovalno delo, ki se osredotoča na reinterpretacijo kitajske filozofije z uporabo inovativnega pristopa, primernega za transkulturne filozofske primerjave. Kot sinologinja sem se pri svojem raziskovalnem

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delu namreč nenehno srečevala z mnogimi problemi, povezanimi z metodološko proble-matiko medkulturnih raziskav. Le-ta me je privedla k iskanju novih metodoloških rešitev za primerjalne transkulturne študije.

Članek se pričhne s kratkim opisom še vedno obstoječih splošnih problemov na področju medkulturnih filozofskih primerjav, nadaljuje pa se s predstavitvijo nedavnega in trenut-nega stanja raziskav na področju kitajske in primerjalne filozofije, s posebnim poudarkom na trenutno nastajajočih paradigmah, ki so znane kot »postprimerjalni« pristopi.

V zadnjem delu tega članka bom na osnovi kratkega pregleda svojih dosedanjih razisko-valnih izsledkov predstavila trenutno stopnjo razvoja metode sublacije. Poleg tega bom v njem vzpostavila nov teoretski okvir za nadaljnje faze raziskovanja.

Ključne besede: sublacija, metodologija, postkomparativne raziskave, kitajska filozofija, primerjalna filozofija

Introduction

Against the bleak backdrop of a globalized but increasingly fragmented world, to-day's academia has a crucial role to play in developing and promoting new models of exchange that can foster a more stable and interconnected global community that embraces and values diversity. This is especially important given the current state of the world, where issues such as social and political divisions, economic inequality, and environmental degradation are increasingly pressing. By imagin-ing, crafting, and advocating for new models of exchange, academia can play an important role in addressing these challenges and working towards a more just and equitable world.

Therefore, the main objective of the proposed method is to enhance and promote the exchange of ideas and knowledge between different cultures and traditions by elaborating and improving existing models for intercultural comparisons of dif-ferent theories embedded in the domains of different cultures. In this regard, my primary goal is to improve and complete various elements and approaches of the so-called transcultural philosophical sublation which has been tentatively elabo-rated and schematically demonstrated in my previous research (see e.g., Rošker 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). To provide context for this endeavor, I will begin by examining the key issues related to traditional forms of ideational exchange be-tween Europe and East Asia, especially China.

When European and, more generally, "Western" scholars engage with the so-called "Eastern" philosophical traditions, their interpretations are often embedded in the cognitive frameworks of their own cultures – that is, the cultures in which they were born and educated. As a result, their understanding of the various ideational

traditions tends to be Eurocentric and inextricably linked to the intellectual heritage of their own sociohistorical backgrounds, without fully accounting for the multiple and complex differences in culturally divergent patterns of philosophical language and thought.[1] All these problems occur in any type of intercultural research, which is always embedded in the diverse cultural backgrounds of the subject and the object of interpretation. As such, it is by no means coincidental that—without a thorough reflection of cultural characteristics which defines any particular culturally conditioned subject matter in the realm of intercultural research—all histories of ideas and all cultural discourses are ethnocentric. In such an unreflected ethnocentric view, one's own people "historically stand for civilization and its achievements, whereas the otherness of the others is a deviation from these standards" (Rüsen 2004, 62–63). In this sense, Eurocentrism as a formally and informally institutionalized discourse, which represents a psychological foundation and a central approach of Orientalism, is simply a form of ethnocentrism, one among many others. Nevertheless, and the same as Orientalism as such, Eurocentrism is also a discourse of power. Since the colonial era, it is therefore more influential than most of the other ethnocentrisms. It is an approach, based upon a "higher" position of economic and political supremacy, which is the result of specific social, ideational, and historical developments. Although the economic and partly political rise of Asia in recent decades has shifted the global political landscape, the lingering effects of colonialism continue to shape intercultural discourse, including in philosophy. The reason for this persistence lies in the historical development of modernization, which began in Europe and subsequently spread worldwide. This history has led to the present state of globalized international relations, in which the standards and criteria used in theoretical analysis are primarily determined by Western or European principles. This is no accident, but rather the result of the historical and cultural context in which modernization took place. This process also brought about a "modernization" of knowledge and created an asymmetrical relationship between the two sides, in which European indifference to Asia and Asian interest in Europe were anything but balanced.

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1   The issue of the legitimacy of non-European philosophies is a highly relevant topic in this context. In recent years, there have been ongoing debates and discussions about whether traditional East Asian thought, particularly Chinese thought, should be considered as a form of philosophy. These debates have been quite intense and have been entered into from multiple perspectives. Due to the complexity of the issue, it may not be possible to address it fully within the limited scope of this project proposal. However, readers who wish to gain a deeper understanding of these controversies can find an in-depth examination of the topic, including some crucial arguments in favour of recognizing Chinese thought as philosophy, in the prologue of my book *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology*, published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2021. The prologue is titled "Chinese Philosophy: Fact or Fiction?" and provides a comprehensive overview of the topic, shedding light on the different perspectives and arguments surrounding the problem.

Defining Central Concepts

In order to gain a deeper (and much needed) understanding of non-Western philosophical theories, it is necessary to acknowledge and move beyond these Eurocentric perspectives and instead approach them using their own unique methodologies. This project posits that Western epistemology is just one of many ways to understand the world, and aims to present and critically evaluate the various methodological approaches used in transcultural philosophical research. If they want to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the focal issues, scholars working in the field of comparative philosophy must try to overcome any potential divergencies in thought and intellectual history between different philosophical traditions.

In my investigation of new modes of interpretation that could arise from applying the method of sublation, I therefore proceed from the presumption according to which different philosophical discourses from various traditional cultures are, *inter alia*, products of different (culturally conditioned) paradigms, or of theoretical frameworks deriving from divergent cultural and linguistic environments. Western researchers who work in the field of non-Western thought and philosophy still tend to lack a conscious reflection of the analytical and interpretative procedures they are applying. These procedures are usually the results of particular (and specifically Western) historical developments and the associated, emblematic social orders and structures. Much too often such techniques and the corresponding methodological apparatus prove themselves to be misleading and dangerous. Notions, ideas, categories, and concepts, which have been shaped in a certain sociocultural or ideational context, can hardly be simply transferred into other, differently structured cultural or traditional contexts.

Numerous concepts that work well in a processual paradigm that is typical of Chinese and most traditional East Asian philosophies make absolutely no sense (or are simply invalid) in a static formal-logical framework. The dynamic paradigm which underlies the dominant East Asian streams of thought causes many problems for most Western scholars, who are not trained in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean conceptual history.

Here we must consider the subtle but significant differences between cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural approaches. While the term cross-cultural is the most general and refers to the comparison or study of different cultures, interculturality (especially philosophical interculturality) is a specific type of communication or interaction between different intellectual, linguistic, and cognitive traditions in which differences in cultures and corresponding linguistic structures decisively influence the shaping of meaning. In this sense, intercultural

interactions certainly involve the process of transferring meanings, implications, and connotations between different cultures. Nevertheless, numerous current theoreticians (e.g., Welsch 1999) criticize the very notion of interculturality with its problematic embeddedness into a static and one-dimensional understanding of cultures as fixed "realms", "spheres", or "islands". In such a view, the very idea of culture is being defined by a separatist character. Therefore, many contemporary scholars advocate a transcultural approach instead, for the suffix "trans-", which is included into the notion of transculturality, proposes that it is able to transcend the borders and limits of a fixed and static idea of culture. In this sense, it suggests the possibility to step beyond the very fragmentation and separateness of various cultures and philosophies. As such, a transcultural view of cultures enables us to gain a multi-perspective attitude, which implies inclusion rather than an exclusion or isolation. Transcultural approaches to the study of intercultural phenomena—including philosophical concepts, categories, and methodologies—help us overcome obsolete, static, and fixed concepts of culture. This does not imply, however, that there is no culture. Cultures, the same as their various elements, such as customs, religions, rituals, symbols, or languages, are still real things. Just like different languages, they all belong to dynamic, historically grown and constantly changing entities without fixed limitations.

In such a dynamic image of different cultural-linguistic traditions there is no place for cultural essentialism, nor for any static and durable individual or group identities that are based upon a "cultural substance". What this image shows is only that we are formed in different, but always concrete symbolic, linguistic and epistemological worlds. On such bases people have throughout history produced a series of different forms of knowledge, which are connected with the world and Earth itself in different ways and through diverse, specific multifaceted relations that cannot be measured only with the criteria of linear progress of modern science and technology. Only an insight into the existence of such heterogeneity will allow us to resolve the tensions between reality and understanding.

Transcultural Comparisons: Theoretical Models, Paradigms, and Frameworks of Reference

Against this background, I start from a critical problematization of traditional intercultural exchanges and, within this framework, focus on theoretical models of comparison. In recent years not only the methods but even the very concept of comparative philosophy have become somewhat controversial. Many researchers (e.g. Griffiths 2017, 473; Ouyang 2018, 244) believe that comparison is an elementary

function of any form of genuine philosophical thinking. It is doubtless true that our reasoning is based upon contrasting between different phenomena, ideas, forms and concepts. Such principles underly and guide the elementary procedures of human perception and interpretation of the external world. In such models, of course, comparison is more than simply juxtaposing certain elements of comprehension and identifying similarities and differences between them. It is a much more complex procedure, but one that is also increasingly seen as problematic because it involves several serious methodological problems. These problems are especially troublesome in the field of transcultural philosophies, i.e., when comparing different philosophical schools or currents of thought that originated in different cultural traditions and are embedded in frames of reference that differ from one another.

The development of transcultural sublation as a method of comparison is therefore based on the assumption that comparative philosophy requires different methodological approaches than philosophical studies that focus exclusively on one philosophical system or a single tradition of thought. If it aims to go beyond their respective limitations and produce a unifying discourse that valorizes both *comparata*, it must take into account possible incommensurabilities between different traditional contexts and the semantic or referential frameworks in which they were developed. Even the very relationship between comparative methods and the objects of comparison themselves is highly problematic, because in such procedures we employ a unified methodology built on culturally discrete material. On the basis of such assumptions, Rafal Banka (2016, 605) explains why it is important to treat the material of philosophical comparisons as arising from culturally discrete linguistic and conceptual contexts.

However, the problems regarding comparative philosophy go even further, particularly regarding comparisons of Chinese and Euro-American philosophies. They are not limited to the fact that we work with a unified methodology which has been built upon culturally divergent concrete resources (ibid.). In our view, the crucial difficulty in intercultural comparative philosophy is linked to the fact that the abovementioned "unified methodology" is a system underlying one of the philosophies under comparison, namely the traditional European or "Western" one. There is no third, external methodology that could provide us with objective criteria for comparison. In other words, the *tertium comparationis* is part of one of the *comparata*. The same is true for understanding and evaluating concepts and categories. The cognitive processes in such a transcultural comparative procedure apply one (usually "Western") philosophical language,[2]

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2   In this context, the notion of a "philosophical language" is applied in the widest sense. It encompasses a broad range of elements including terminology, concepts, and specialized vocabulary. This language is used not only to convey specific philosophical ideas, but also to reflect the complexity

even though the material they investigate is culturally discrete, which means that it is usually written in different languages and relies on different thought patterns. Numerous traditional comparative methods were based on such an idea of a universal philosophical language, referring not only to the specific disciplinary terminology, but also (or even more) to the concepts and categories used and expressed in it. These theories are united in the assumption that there can in principle be an "impartial" (Shen 2003, 357) language in which comparative or intercultural philosophy can be conducted. In contrast to such views, we agree with Ma Lin and Jaap van Brakel (2013, 298), who argue that different cultures produce different philosophical languages. However, a single language is not necessary for intercultural philosophical dialogue and comparative philosophy to work.

In addition to the awareness of the lack of such an "ideal language", we must also be aware of the supposition that any coherent philosophical comparison should not be limited to the level of paralleling and describing differences and commonalities of different abstract entities, for philosophical comparisons, more often than not, separate and connect at the same time what are very likely or unlikely pairs of, or entire sets of, *comparata* ("that which we set out to compare") (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 2). Hence the usual understanding of comparative philosophy as a simple one-dimensional discourse which erects meaningful bridges between different traditions, and creates new possibilities for "intercultural dialogues", is naïve and outdated.

Based on thorough reflection and analysis of such axiological and conceptual issues inherent in traditional comparative methods, many scholars have elaborated new methodological tools that could overcome such problematic approaches. Such experiments and new models of transcultural philosophizing, based on a thorough awareness of the problems described above, have often been called post-comparative philosophies.[3]

Another problem that arises in traditional intercultural comparisons is related to the fact that many of their authors have not recognized the significant role that referential frames and discursive translations play in this context.

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and nuance of the concepts being discussed. It includes not only abstract and technical terms, but also the categorical framework used to understand and explore ideas such as the nature of reality, knowledge, and morality. Additionally, it is specific to certain branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

3   At this point it should be mentioned that some scholars use the term post-comparative differently. Ralph Weber, for example, uses it to refer to a certain stage of the comparative process itself. See, for instance, Weber (2014, 162).

By applying different languages and different patterns of reasoning that are linked to their individual grammatical structures, different cultures continuously create different frameworks of reference. However, understanding the basic structure and applying the concepts included in these frameworks is not an issue limited to transcultural philosophies, and not even to transcultural studies in a wider, more general sense. In fact, what we are confronting here is a universal phenomenon, which has been discussed by a broad range of Western theoreticians (e.g. Lakatos, Feyerabend, Kuhn, Quine, etc.). The Chinese analytical philosopher Fung Yiuming from Hong Kong reminds us in this context of the well-known example of the relation between Newton's and Einstein's theories: even though both of them were written in Indo-European languages, and although they apply the same concepts and notions, they are in practice mutually incompatible (Feng 1989, 123). Because they represent different referential frameworks, the functions and semantic connotations of the same notions applied in them are also different.

Frames of reference are an important aspect in theoretical frameworks, as they serve to organize and structure the concepts and terms within it. These frames of reference act as relational semantic networks, which define each term and establish the connections between them. By doing so, they shape the overall composition and structure of the theory, making it a comprehensive and coherent system of knowledge.

Such frameworks of reference therefore assume a defining role in human understanding and interpretation of a given reality. In this context, it is important to note that this defining role not only pertains to the meaning of particular notions, but also to their mutual relations. As such, referential frameworks are comprehensive tools that filter perceptions and create meanings. Different referential frames can lead to different descriptions and interpretations of the same objective reality. This is also the reason why transcultural research can sometimes produce misunderstandings between different cultures instead of eliminating or at least diminishing them. The greater the historical, semantic, structural and axiological differences between two languages and cultures, the more likely the occurrence of such misunderstandings.

However, the existence of different frames of reference does not at all mean that different culturally conditioned philosophical worldviews are incommensurable. The basic structures of the human perception of reality are universal, as is the human capacity to generate language and thought. In this respect, our commonalities far outweigh the culturally conditioned differences in the general understanding of our existence. While there may be culturally specific variations in how people understand and interpret their experiences, these differences do not necessarily

hinder our ability to understand one another. Recognizing and acknowledging the existence of culturally conditioned frames of reference is important, but it should not be taken as a barrier to mutual understanding between people and societies. On the contrary, they are bridges that connect us in ways that reduce the possibility of mutual misunderstanding. Nevertheless, in order for these connections to be productive it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the fundamental principles that underlie the frames of reference of all the philosophies being considered.

These questions are crucial for both understanding and interpreting Chinese and wider East Asian philosophies, and they play an important role in creating a diverse and comprehensive global philosophy that includes non-Western concepts and perspectives. Reliable and intelligible interpretations require discursive translations, which are based on a thorough understanding of the original texts, as well as their historical and social contexts, to ensure a hermeneutically sound and analytically flawless transfer of content. They must be able to convey the multiple connotations of concepts and categories across different semantic and referential networks. In other words, such "discursive translations" of different philosophies belonging to different semantic frames, different linguistic structures, and different methodological paradigms can never be limited to merely rendering one language into another. They must also involve the transfer of different discourses, as well as interpretations of individual textual and linguistic structures, categories, concepts, and values that differ according to sociocultural contexts. In this work, which relies on both analytical and hermeneutic methods, researchers often encounter a discrepancy between the etymological and functional understanding of a given expression. In some cases the same notion may even be understood completely differently, depending on the general socio-historical context of the different societies in which it appears (see Rošker 2012).

Towards a New Approach

Based on the awareness of the above problems and the need to develop methodologies that allow for genuine transcultural exchange and dialogue, the main goal of my current research is to develop an appropriate methodology for further, less culturally biased intercultural (post-)comparative studies, which could lead to new understandings of reality. Such a culturally sensitive approach aims to transcend the limitations of traditional comparative methodologies, which often rely on one-dimensional mechanisms and simplistic evaluations based solely on similarities and differences of the *comparata*. Instead, it should allow for a more

nuanced and holistic understanding of the cultural contexts and perspectives being compared, without being constrained by fundamental biases or deep-rooted prejudices.

In other words, the methodology of post-comparative philosophical sublation I am developing in my current research is not solely based on identifying commonalities and differences between different philosophical systems or theories, but should rather lead to a deeper understanding and new insights into the underlying content of the comparison through the increased exchange of knowledge and ideas. What I am aiming at is a theoretical model for philosophical comparison that will enable scholars working in Chinese and comparative philosophy to shape new forms of philosophical theory, rather than being limited to the simple results of one-dimensional comparisons. This implies working on a theoretical model that will enable (and create the conditions for) new forms of philosophizing rooted in new paradigms of transcultural knowledge exchange. Such exchanges can potentially lead to innovative ideas through the application of new or upgraded methods. I believe that the improved and accomplished method of transcultural philosophical sublation can enable researchers in the field of transcultural philosophy to gain new insights and provide new explanations for the particular research questions that underlie the comparisons they are working on. The development of foundational elements for such new methodological approaches can also be facilitated through the creation of new paradigms and principles that form the basis of the method of sublation. These paradigms and principles will be explained in more detail in the subsequent sections of this paper.

The proposed method of transcultural philosophical sublation is a new approach that is still under development and will be substantially improved and completed during the ongoing research. The application of the sublation method needs to be extensively tested and verified on a larger number of cases, including the contrastive conceptual analyses of numerous ideas, systems, and procedures from the comparison between particular East Asian and European theories. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the method's applicability and potential.

In this way I am able to explore uncharted territories of transcultural philosophy, in order to offer a preliminary, but comprehensive and substantiated analysis of the sublation method. In a more general and fundamental sense, my main goal is to improve and promote the transcultural exchange of knowledge and ideas, because I believe that it is high time to balance the above-mentioned epistemological asymmetry in intercultural studies and global exchanges.

In this regard contemporary Chinese and East Asian philosophy deserves special attention from a European perspective, because through the reception and

transformation of Western sources (which it was actually forced to do two centuries ago) it has accumulated a transcultural potential that philosophy in Europe has yet to develop. This fact is of immense importance not only for the global exchange of knowledge, but also for Europe and our efforts to free it from the relics of its colonial history, which often still block its understanding of different cultures and the deeper levels of their traditional discourses. Indeed Europe, composed of different cultures that use different languages and have developed in different historical traditions, urgently needs to find a way to reflect self-critically on the notion of its own heterogeneous cultural identity. Therefore, better knowledge of transcultural interactions is important not only for Europe's international relations at the global level, but also internally, i.e. with regard to the interactions between individual European countries.

Before going into the novel approach intrinsic to the method of transcultural philosophical sublation, let us briefly examine the current state of the field under consideration. This domain is characterized by vigorous debates and a continuous quest for inventive methods and approaches. As previously highlighted, various issues and deficiencies persist within conventional methods of intercultural comparative philosophy, encompassing both formal and substantive inconsistencies. Given these challenges, I will propose some fresh, "post-comparative" approaches designed to address and resolve these issues. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these new approaches remain the subjects of ongoing scholarly debates within the realm of transcultural comparative philosophy.

State-of-the-art in the Proposed Field of Research and Relevant Problems

"Transcultural philosophy" is a relatively new approach with continuously evolving principles and patterns of thought. It began with Eduardo Valera's construction of its methodological foundations (Valera 1972a; 1972b), and in the following decades it has also increasingly been applied in the framework of philosophical dialogues between different cultures.[4] Vytis Silius (2020, 275), for instance, highlights that transcultural philosophies rest on a cluster of interrelated ideas and concepts, focusing thereby on the dynamic (i.e., transitional and transforming) elements of cultures and ideas. In this context, he upgraded Pablo Blitstein's approach, who critically examined the problems linked to the static ontology of culture, emphasizing that transculturality "assumes that everything moves and changes; it posits

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4   See, for example, Fredericks (1988, 299–315), Nielsen (1995, 803–35), Siegel (1999, 387–409), Heubel (2011, 584–601), Heubel (2020, 211–30), Lee (2013), Dai (2020) and many others.

that stasis is only the momentary interruption of motion, and that the actual flows of persons, things, and ideas across the world prevent the definitive consolidation of any boundaries" (Blitstein 2016, 139). Hence, in the framework of transcultural philosophy all terms make sense only as relational, and not as essential notions,[5] describing fundamentally static and stable phenomena (Silius 2020, 274).

Within the framework of such an understanding of culture and transculturality, numerous interesting and significant approaches have also been developed in the narrower area of comparison between Western and East Asian philosophies and ideas. Since this area also represents the focus of our project-related work, we will concentrate our presentation of the relevant background literature on the main works that have been of great importance for the development of the discourse in question.

In this particular field of research, the search for an applicable, effective, and creative post-comparative model of philosophizing has resulted in several new theoretical presumptions and proposals for new approaches and methods, mostly based upon or following Robert Neville's distinction between objectivist and normative approaches (Neville 2001).

Already in 1987, David Hall and Roger Ames aimed to demonstrate to researchers "whose scholarly sensibilities have been formed in the West what they must acknowledge about their own traditions before they can engage Chinese thinkers constructively" (Frisina 2016, 563). Purushotyama Bilimoria (2000), on the other hand, emphasized that any new methods we seek to employ should offer us a means of surpassing the very othering entailed in such processes, remaining therefore a "disturbing presence" for mainstream postcolonial cultures and the corresponding modes of thought.

Proceeding from the goal of "de-essentializing" intercultural philosophy, Ma Lin and Jaap van Brakel (2013, 298) suggest that we should consciously follow the crucial procedures defining contemporary humanities and apply the principle of mutual attunement (Ma and Van Brakel 2016, 12). Li Chenyang aims to further develop the positive aspects of comparative philosophy by deepening the understanding of specific philosophies, thereby enhancing our ability to do creative philosophy, and he emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural patterns in intercultural philosophy (Li 2016, 534). In the search for the most suitable and

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5   Transcultural language then speaks about how we see ourselves in the Other. Such a reciprocal vision of different entities of the relation between the self and Other has been expressed in many phenomenologies arising from very different intellectual traditions, starting with the traditional African concept of *ubuntu*, through the Confucian virtue of humaneness (*ren*), to those of the contemporary Euro-American phenomenologies that are based on Heidegger's idea of the Being-with (*Mitsein*).

achievable method in this context we cannot ignore the approach elaborated by Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber. Proceeding from the need for a "philosophy of comparison" (Weber 2014) that could surpass the limitations of a mere "comparative philosophy", and provide new theoretical grounds for creating new transcultural philosophies, their analyses resulted in the idea of "fusion philosophy" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 2). In order to exceed the limitations and fix the inconsistencies of traditional comparative philosophy, they suggested its application as an inventive method of transforming simple comparative approaches. In fact, the "fusion philosophy" method has also been proposed and advocated by several other scholars. Among the more radical "fusionists" are Mark Siderits (2023, xi), who claims that comparative philosophy has been superseded by what he terms fusion philosophy, Graham Priest (2015, 55), Owen Flanagan (2020, 23) and perhaps Bo Mou.[6] Chakrabarti and Weber highlight that this method surpasses the customary comparative attitudes, and implies a completely different methodology, which is based on and results in a new transcultural mode of philosophizing. What this proposed method suggests is a philosophical comparison in the sense of a new form of philosophical theory rather than a simple comparison of (different) philosophies. In other words, it is a new form of philosophizing and not merely a method, based on identifying differences and similarities in various philosophical systems. Indeed, Chakrabarti's and Weber's proposal offers us a "sound and ambitious definition" (Coquereau 2016, 152) for new forms of transcultural post-comparative philosophy. However, irrespective of the discrete content of this methodological proposal, which is significant and will doubtless contribute to the emergence of a new shift in the construction of new models of transcultural philosophies, it is precisely this "definition"—or, in other words, its naming—which is somewhat troublesome. These problems have been critically analyzed by different theoreticians, for instance by Michael Levine (2016) and others, and among alternative approaches we should mention the "philosophy of confluence" (Kirloskar-Steinbach, Ramana, and Maffie 2016) and "synthesis philosophy" (Dewey, Radhakrishnan, and Santayana 1951; for an upgraded version, also see Deutsch 2002).

In September 2022 and January 2023, a special double issue to this topic was also published in this journal (Vol. 10, issue 3, and Vol. 11, issue 1). The issue was entitled *Transcultural (Post)Comparative Philosophy*. The first part of the double issue (https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/782) was subtitled *Methods and*

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6   See Mou Bo (2022a, 5). Although Bo Mou never explicitly uses the term or refers to "fusion philosophy", some scholars believe that what he calls the "constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy", or CECP for short, is at times sufficiently similar to fusion philosophy to warrant the same appellation (see Levine 2016, 3).

Approaches. It dealt mainly with purely theoretical and methodological issues, but also proposed some innovative practical approaches. The second part of this double issue (https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/issue/view/810) dealt with more concrete examples or demonstrations of the theory presented in the first. The contributions in this volume contrastively analyze philosophers, theories, methods, and exchanges between East Asian and European philosophical discourses. The subtitle of the volume is therefore *Philosophical Dialogues between Asia and Europe: from Plotinus to Heidegger and Beyond*. Many internationally renowned and influential scholars in the field of Asian and comparative philosophy contributed their works to this double issue, such as Eric S. Nelson (2023), David Chai (2023), Steven Burik (2022), Bo Mou (2022b), Hans-Georg Moeller (2022), Dimitra Amarantidou and Paul J. D'Ambrosio (2022), Robert A. Carleo (2022), Li Chenyang (2022), Jaap van Brakel and Ma Lin (2022), Fabian Heubel (2023), Geir Sigurðsson (2023), Jay Hetrick (2023), Abe Hiroshi (2023), and Vytis Silius (2022), to name just a few.

Sublation Method – Research Background and General Description

The method was first introduced in one of my recent monographs, *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology* (Rošker 2021) and further discussed in my paper "Chinese and Global Philosophy: Postcomparative Transcultural Approaches and the Method of Sublation" (Rošker 2022a) published in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*. The method has been demonstrated through various contrastive analyses and further developed through presentations at international academic conferences, invited guest lectures, and publications in high-impact factor journals.

The sublation method has attracted significant attention in the international academic community. It has been extensively presented in book reviews of the aforementioned monograph (e.g. DeLapp 2023; Ditrich 2022), widely discussed at several conferences and symposia, and featured in a series of interviews.

In a post-comparative context, our understanding cannot remain limited to objective normative standards, but is necessarily also shaped by the historical, conceptual and even social contexts in which the objects of our inquiry are embedded. Therefore, the philosophy of sublation with its dynamic relational structure, its broad discursive context, and its consideration of the referential frameworks underlying our investigations,[7] is only one among many different approaches

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7   All these abovementioned features of the sublation method will be explained in greater detail and further elaborated in the upcoming section.

defining new transcultural philosophical research. In the broad and rich arena of transcultural methodologies, it simply represents one of the many possible ways to reconcile different philosophical approaches, forms and contents. It is a method which can transform inspiration to contemplation, thereby helping us to shape new ideas and to gain new forms of knowledge and understanding. It is thus well worth being further developed, improved and upgraded. The sublation approach has demonstrated its potential, but for it to be suitable for widespread use in international (post-)comparative studies, it needs to be supplemented with comprehensive additional materials and research. This will enhance its capabilities and make it applicable to a wider range of research scenarios. Given the keen interest in the initial drafts of this innovative approach, the sublation method undoubtedly warrants dedicated elaboration and further research to establish itself and gain widespread recognition as a valuable and inventive approach that addresses certain inconsistencies in traditional comparative systems. Therefore, in the near future, my research will center on advancing, enhancing, and finalizing this method, along with introducing it to a broad spectrum of international scholars engaged in the study of comparative intercultural philosophy.

But how does this method function, and what are its fundamental characteristics? Despite the complexity that makes it challenging to describe its foundational structure and how it functions in a concise manner, I will attempt to outline its operation in the following sections. The method of transcultural (post)comparative sublation is a novel dialectical method aimed at enhancing our comprehension of diverse philosophical ideas, theories, and principles originating from different cultural traditions. It aims to facilitate the development of innovative ideas and theories based on this foundation. Its primary objective is to foster a productive dialogue among various ideas, philosophical currents, and intellectual traditions, leading to fresh insights through this exchange.

The term "sublation" itself is, of course, derived from Hegelian dialectics, yet it diverges significantly from it in various aspects. To highlight these differences it is important to note that the sublation method is rooted in dynamic paradigms of processual philosophy. It veers away from adhering to the formal laws of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle. Unlike the conventional Hegelian model, it does not yield an entirely new, distinct, qualitatively different synthesis as the fusion of two opposing ideas engaged in dialectical interaction.

In contrast, the zenith of this process manifests in a pivotal stage termed "sublation", encompassing a transformative shift that can be understood as sublation in a narrower context. Although merely one among the eight constituent phases of this method, this stage is of paramount importance. It emerges from the tension

inherent in the *comparata* and engenders a decisive shift, propelling our cognition toward fresh and innovative insights.

Precisely within this context lies what could arguably be considered the most significant and decisive divergence that sets sublation dialectics apart from the Hegelian model. The phase of sublation, which pushes us toward a shift in perspective and consequently a new idea, distinguishes itself markedly. Unlike the Hegelian framework, this phase is not a product of automatic structural principles governing our thought processes. Instead, sublation's transformative shift emerges autonomously and creatively through the unfettered subjectivity of the individual employing the method.

However, this subjective shift does not stand alone as the sole function of human subjectivity within the sublation method. It also assumes a critical role in several preceding phases. For example, it is our subjectivity that determines what should be discarded and what should be retained in the process of our dialectical comparison. Similarly, subjectivity guides decisions on how and where the *comparata* can complement each other.

Now some people might interject by contending that such a method lacks scientific rigor due to its absence of objectivity, rendering it seemingly arbitrary. Critics could also argue that its outcomes lack universal validity. However, when looking into these objections more deeply we must recall that, from a Heideggerian perspective, even the act of thinking itself lacks a truly scientific nature. According to Heidegger, "science does not think" (Heidegger 1954, 4). A scientific theory that merely validates existing states of affairs lacks the capacity to engender novelty or to foster positive change in the world. This resonates with the Marxist critique of philosophy—a critique that advocates for the discipline to transcend its role as a mere interpreter of the world and instead embrace its potential as an agent of transformation.

In this context, the sublation method transcends the boundaries typically assigned to the operations of scientific methodologies in a fundamental sense. Sublation, much like philosophy itself, occupies a space that is simultaneously scientific and unscientific. It conforms to scientific principles through its logical coherence, systematic structure, and verifiability at each operational step. However, it surpasses the confines of scientific methods as it operates as a tool of thought woven into the fabric of free, autonomous, and often temperamental human subjectivity.

Nonetheless, the sublation method remains inherently dialectical, although this dialectic does not adhere exclusively to the Aristotelian or Hegelian models. Instead, it refers to dialectics in a broader context as a method of thought and discernment. It arises from a dialogical or contrastive engagement, where two

distinct ideas, theories, or systems of thought are brought into confrontation and mutual evolution.

Sublation encompasses a dynamic and process-oriented method of dialectical interaction involving two or more *comparata*. These *comparata* manifest within diverse philosophies, philosophical systems, discourses, paradigms, or ideas. The method comprises eight distinct yet interconnected phases. Progressing through the initial six phases is relatively straightforward, as we more or less adhere to the designated steps. During this procedure, we move into the unique phases defined by family resemblances, construct relational research inquiries, discern similarities, differences, referential frameworks, and shortcomings, and identify prospects for potential mutual enhancements between the *comparata*.

However, in the subsequent seventh phase—the phase where we apply sublation in its narrower sense, the sublation that signifies a transformative shift from preexisting knowledge to novel ideas—we must grapple with the tension arising from a sequence of preceding contrastive analyses and the quest for coherently woven interpretations. This tension, resulting from the preceding analyses and interpretations of the mostly contrasting elements, serves as a catalyst for generating fresh ideas, novel insights, or intriguing avenues for further exploration.

For a clearer comprehension of the entire process that leads to this crucial stage, I will now offer a concise description of all eight phases of the dialectical development inherent in the method of sublation.

The Eight Phases

In its basic structure, the sublation method can be implemented in eight distinctive phases, which are summarized below:

    I. Relational research question (enabling conceptual comparisons)

    II. Similarities (in the framework of family resemblances)

    III. Differences (within similarities)

    IV. Linkages (of differences) to referential frameworks and paradigms

    V. Identifying insufficiencies (elimination)

    VI. Mutual complementarities (preservation)

    VII. Sublation (shift)

    VIII. New insight (uplifting our ideas to a new, higher level)

These phases constitute dynamic components within an ever-evolving process, wherein each phase builds upon and enhances the insights gained from the preceding one. The overall trajectory is characterized by accumulation and refinement. Let us now move onto a more comprehensive description of each phase:

I. We start from a particular philosophical problem or idea that was treated in two (or more) distinct philosophical discourses under consideration. To initiate our investigation, we formulate a research question that is not merely fixated on comparing isolated concepts, but instead emphasizes the establishment of relationships among them. This relational approach opens up possibilities for engaging in conceptual comparisons and going deeper into the nuances of the problem. Such an approach allows us to transcend a superficial analysis that solely focuses on identifying disparities or similarities between concepts. Instead, we embark on a journey of intellectual exploration, allowing us to uncover the varied connections between various philosophical perspectives.

II. After carefully selecting the *comparata* that deal with the chosen research question, our next step is to identify the similarities in how these *comparata* address the question. During this phase, where we analyse and compare the treatment of the question in different *comparata*, the concept of family resemblance becomes an invaluable tool. By acknowledging the fluid and context-dependent nature of categories, we can approach transcultural comparisons with heightened sensitivity and refrain from imposing a rigid framework from one *comparata* onto another. In this second phase, we aim to uncover and examine the similarities that emerge in the elaborations of the *comparata* under observation, despite their diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the concept of family resemblance prompts us to consider the contextual nature of categories and avoid the presumption of a fixed or exclusive understanding. It encourages us to explore the nuanced meanings and associations carried by concepts within their respective cultural and historical contexts. As we engage in this comparative analysis, we can more easily map out the network of connections and associations among the concepts, uncovering patterns, divergences, and interactions. When engaging in (post-)comparative philosophy in particular, the concept of family resemblances allows us to focus on the shared similarities and interconnectedness of concepts in a broader, relational way, rather than attempting to find universal definitions or essential characteristics.

III. In the third step of the sublation method, we engage in the process of identifying differences within similarities in how our *comparata* treat a philosophical research question. This might initially seem paradoxical or counterintuitive, but it becomes possible through a nuanced analysis that explores the subtleties and unique perspectives within each philosophical discourse. To begin with, while

two philosophies may share a basic position towards a common research question, they often approach it from different angles or employ distinct frameworks, methodologies, or conceptual lenses. These differences manifest in the various interpretations, emphasis, or underlying assumptions that each philosophy brings to the table. By closely examining the treatment of the research question in each philosophy, we can uncover subtle variations in how they conceptualize and approach the problem at hand. These differences may arise from disparities in historical contexts, cultural influences, philosophical traditions, or the perspectives of individual philosophers. This process of identifying differences within similarities demands a comprehensive and open-minded analysis that transcends a simplistic binary of agreement or disagreement. It necessitates a deep understanding of the underlying philosophical concepts, the historical context of the discourses, and the subtleties of philosophical arguments.

IV. In the subsequent phase of the sublation process, we establish connections between the identified differences within the treatment of the research question in different philosophies and the diverse referential frameworks that underlie the perspectives being compared, including the distinct paradigms by which they are defined. This enables us to identify the various basic paradigms under which the research question has been treated by each of the *comparata*. As we have seen before, these frameworks are semantic networks that serve as the intellectual scaffolding upon which the philosophies are built, providing the basis for their conceptualization and analysis. When examining the differences within the treatment of the research question, we explore how these dissimilarities align with or reflect the underlying referential frameworks of the respective philosophical theories or ideas. By analysing the foundational principles, theoretical orientations, or epistemological and ontological assumptions within each discourse, we can discern the roots of these divergent perspectives. This process involves a deep dive into the philosophical traditions, historical contexts, and intellectual heritage that have influenced the development of each *comparata*. We consider how the philosophies draw upon different schools of thought, engage with varying philosophical paradigms, or integrate distinct conceptual frameworks to shape their respective perspectives on the research question. Connecting the identified differences with the referential frameworks allows us to uncover the relationship between the philosophical paradigms underlying these frameworks and the treatment of the research question. In this way we might gain a clearer insight into how these paradigms influence the interpretation, analysis, and conceptualization of ideas within each discourse. Moreover, this part of the procedure illuminates how the chosen paradigms implicit in the referential frameworks shape the reasoning, argumentation, and theoretical contributions of each *comparata*.

V. Building upon this foundation, our next step involves identifying and examining the inadequacies present in each of the approaches we have investigated. These weaknesses become apparent through a contrastive perspective that highlights the differences and their connection to the referential frameworks underlying the philosophical theories under scrutiny. By juxtaposing and comparing the various philosophical approaches, we gain a clearer understanding of their limitations and shortcomings. This process allows us to critically assess the elements or aspects within both *comparata* that have proven ineffective or unproductive in addressing the primary research question and generating novel insights within the realm it explores. In this phase of the sublation process, we aim to eliminate those aspects that hinder the satisfactory resolution of the research question or are simply redundant. By identifying and eliminating these unproductive or displaced elements, we can refine our understanding and focus on the more constructive and fruitful components within each approach. This step enables us to shed light on the gaps, contradictions, or methodological weaknesses that may exist within the investigated approaches. By revealing these insufficiencies, we create an opportunity for intellectual growth and the generation of new knowledge.

VI. Moving into the sixth phase, our focus turns towards mutual complementarity, aiming to combine the preserved productive elements from each comparatum while simultaneously compensating for the eliminated elements. This process of mutual complementarity allows us to explore uncharted territory and gain fresh insights into the treatment of the philosophical question under examination. By bringing together the productive elements that have withstood critical assessment, we harness their potential and seek to integrate them in a synergistic manner. This integration involves reconciling and synthesizing the preserved elements from each comparatum, taking into account their inherent strengths and compatibility. Through this process of mutual complementarity, we unlock new possibilities and paths of exploration. By combining the strengths of the preserved productive elements and compensating for the eliminated elements, we can transcend the limitations of individual *comparata* and uncover novel approaches to addressing the focal philosophical question. Ideally, the resulting framework benefits from the enriched perspective and integration of diverse insights. It goes beyond the confines of any single comparatum, incorporating a more comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the research question. The interplay between the preserved and the compensated elements opens new perspectives and contributes to a more comprehensive exploration of the philosophical problem we are dealing with.

VII. Following the sixth phase, a significant shift emerges in the seventh, and as these constructive elements of both (or all) *comparata* converge and mutually fulfil one another, a transformative process unfolds. This transformative phase can be

understood as a form of sublation in a narrower sense. This sublation phase is driven by the inherent tension between the synthesized unity of combined elements and the distinct perspectives and conceptual boundaries found within each individual comparatum. Rooted in the elimination of insufficiencies, the preservation of productive elements, and their mutual fulfilment, this phase propels our thinking towards the discovery of new ideas or insights into the fundamental nature of the initial research question.

VIII. Sublation, which manifests as a pivotal shift occurring in the seventh phase, marks a critical turning point in the overall process. It serves as the foundation for the eighth and final phase, which holds the potential for novel discoveries and the expansion of our intellectual horizons. This transformative phase relies solely on the inspirations provided by the *comparata*, the very sources that ignited our deep curiosity through their similar yet distinct approaches to solving the initial philosophical problems. This curiosity, guided by the process of sublation, has the potential to propel our thinking through the logically coherent phases of the entire process, leading us to an unexplored realm of potential discoveries. The eighth phase is thus characterized by the pursuit of knowledge expansion and the development of new ideas.

In essence, the sublation process, coupled with the inspirations derived from the *comparata*, propels us towards new intellectual landscapes. It fosters an environment where curiosity flourishes and logical coherence guides our exploration. Here, it is important to emphasize that, in contrast to the Hegelian model, the sublation method is not a rigid apparatus that proceeds automatically, linearly, and hierarchically from one stage to another. This process is not controlled by any transcendent or divine power like the absolute spirit. A significant characteristic of the sublation method is its subjective nature. The individual engaging with the method must maintain an open mind throughout the entire process. The methods, procedures, and outcomes of the analyses are always subject to our own choices, as long as those choices adhere to a reasonable degree of coherence.

Conclusion

Collectively, these phases can be viewed as a productive dialogue between two distinct ideas or philosophies originating from diverse cultural contexts. This dialogue takes shape as a dialectical perspective, yielding more than mere small talk. Irrespective of the novel insights that surface upon the culmination of any dialogue, the conversation itself stands as a potentially enriching confrontation. From this engagement, we can glean valuable lessons on the art of addressing and

attentively engaging with the Other. In this process, we cultivate the capacity to remain receptive in our responses to the perspectives we have encountered and absorbed from our interlocutor.

In my view, it is sublation that empowers our thinking to execute such transformative shifts, engendered by diverse viewpoints concerning identical questions. Sublation can thus serve as a methodology that can elevate our ideas to higher levels, granting us the capability to transcend the confines of and transit through existing horizons and unveil novel perspectives. This paper was written with the modest hope of illustrating to both myself and its readers one of the many potential approaches to achieving this.

I am acutely aware that the sublation method, which holds a special place in my heart, is not the only way to uncover fresh perspectives or foster new ideas through the comparative, dialogical, and dialectical examination—or encounter—of culturally distinct philosophies or systems of thought. It is a method that resonates with me and has proven effective, potentially offering assistance to fellow scholars who share a similar approach. However, it stands as merely one among various paths that can facilitate thinking—all following distinctive routes, all contributing to the same aim. The journey toward novel knowledge is inherently multifaceted, achievable through the diverse contributions of many individuals engaging in a pluralistic manner. However, it is always through collective action and creation, by gazing upon new, shared horizons, that this endeavour unfolds.

Acknowledgements

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OTHER TOPICS

Why Is "A White Horse Not a Horse"? A New Perspective on Gongsun Long's "A Discussion on the White Horse"

SHE Shiqin*

Abstract

This paper attempts a new reading of Gongsun Long's "Baima lun", through comparison with the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin's "Being and Judgement" as a critique of self-consciousness and its judgmental form. It demonstrates that "Baima lun" correspondingly employs a reflectivity, or logic-transcending, anti-foundational perspective of "Being", in order to undertake *an ironical critique of judgment by a judgment* as an illustration and confirmation of the epistemological ideas developed in "Zhiwu lun" and "Mingshi lun". Consequently, based on the *GSLZ*, this paper proposes a new nominalist approach which differs from that of Hansen. Derived from further elaboration of the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin's conception of Being, this paper posits that "things", as read in "Mingshi lun", are a specific dimension of "Being", as singular infinity, and "name", as superior to "zhi" or judgment in the rendering of things as criticized in "Zhiwu lun" and "Baima lun".

Keywords: Gongsun Long, "A Discussion on the White Horse", critique of judgment, the Heidelberg School, Hölderlin

Zakaj »beli konj ni konj«? Novi pogledi na Gongsun Longovo »Razpravo o belem konju«

Izvleček

V tem članku se lotevamo nove interpretacije Gongsun Longovega poglavja »Baima lun« (Razprava o belem konju), ki ga primerjamo z interpretacijo heidelberške šole Hölderlinovega dela *Bit in sodba*, ki predstavlja kritiko samozavedanja in njegove sodbene forme.

Članek izpostavi, da ta študija nakazuje refleksivno razumevanje biti, torej takšno, ki presega logiko in vključuje perspektivo, ki biti ne priznava narave osnovne podstati. Namen članka je v stvaritvi ironične kritike sodbe prek sodbe; to služi kot ilustracija in hkrati utemeljitev Gongsunovih epistemoloških idej, ki jih razvija v svojih drugih poglavjih, na primer v »Zhiwu lun« in v »Mingshi lun«.

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Na osnovi dela *Gongsun Longzi* članek nato predlaga nov nominalističen pristop, ki se razlikuje od Hansenovega. Z dodatno razčlenitvijo razlage heidelberške šole Hölderli-novega pojmovanja Biti članek predpostavlja, da so »stvari«, kot so opisane v poglavju »Mingshi lun«, specifična dimenzija »Biti« kot singularne neskončnosti, medtem ko ima »ime« pri prikazovanju stvari prednost pred »*zhi*« ali sodbo, kot je kritično izpostavljeno v poglavjih »Zhiwu lun« in »Baima lun«.

Ključne besede: Gongsun Long, »Razprava o belem konju«, kritika sodbe, heidelberška šola, Hölderlin

I. Introduction

The *Gongsun Longzi* (公孫龍子) (*GSLZ*) remains one of the most mysterious works in the history of Chinese philosophy, while the chapter entitled "Baima lun" (白馬論), remains one of the most famous philosophical debates. The Jesuit Matteo Ricci was the first Western scholar to have interpreted the *GSLZ*. Ricci wished to convert the Chinese people through the dual influences of natural reason and Christianity and believed that a solution to "Baima lun" could be found through application of Aristotelian notions of substance and accident (Zhang 2019). His interpretation, though misleadingly based on the rationalistic trend of Western thought, remained the common tendency of most subsequent scholars.

Similar to the eternal Platonic ideas, Feng Youlan read the "names" (名) of "white", "horse", and so on as abstract universals which belonged to the intelligible world, while "things" (物) were read as transient, belonging to the sensible world and opposed to names (Ren and Liu 2019). Firstly, it is generally accepted that "there is no historical background for discovery of such abstract entities" in Chinese philosophy, for according to Hansen (1976) "China was entirely unaware of a closed system of concepts". Secondly, in "Mingshi lun" (名實論) "things" are considered "real", and are categorized in the same realm as names. ("A thing is a thing and does not exceed what it is. This should be reality" (物以物其所物/而不過焉/實也) ("Mingshi lun" 2)); "To rectify (the expression of) a thing, is to rectify it by its reality; to rectify it by its reality, is to rectify its name" (其正者/正其所實也/正其所實者/正其名也) ("Mingshi lun" 6)). Thirdly, abstract universals or Platonic ideas actually belong to "zhi" 指 which is rejected by "Zhiwu lun", as "zhi" can never correctly depict things (see part III of this article).

Based upon Emil Benveniste's comparative linguistic approach, Zhang concluded that the claim "A white horse is not a horse" is a result of the specific syntax structure of the Chinese language. As opposed to Western languages that operate with

copulas, since there is no copula "is" in Chinese which calls for predication, this claim can only be read as inclusion and not identity. However, Zhang recognized herself that this reasoning cannot explain the relation between the categories of "shape" and "colour" (Zhang 2019, 4). Relatedly, neither can the reasoning explain the remainder of the "Baima lun" nor relate it to other chapters of the *GSLZ*. This linguistic approach is misleading, for authors of the *Xunzi* (荀子), the *Zhuangzi* (莊子), and so on,[1] who spoke the same Chinese language as the author of the *GSLZ*, all criticized the *GSLZ* for playing with words without regarding their corresponding reality. This leads to the fact that if the linguistic perspective indeed plays a role, it cannot be counted as decisive.

These studies from a rationalistic, logical or linguistic perspective fragmented the *GSLZ*. Actually, the logical approach functions only as a method of persuasion for presenting the epistemological ideas. Gongsun Long's fundamental concern should be essentially opposed to the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction and the law of identity (She 2022).

Hansen's famous nominalist mass-noun hypothesis regarded "names" in the Chinese language as concrete mass substantives rather than abstract universals (Hansen 1976). This approach tended to reduce the *GSLZ* to its mere materialistic aspects. This aspect is not generally considered an essential feature of Chinese—and especially of pre-Qin—philosophy since its first period. Moreover, not only was the philosophical value of the *GSLZ* reduced to a linguistic one, thus rendering the statement "White horse not horse" a counterintuitive false statement, but neither could Hansen explain the rest of the *GSLZ*.[2] Finally, the materialistic plane (mass nouns) cannot escape from "zhi" 指 and thus, from realism, which is radically rejected by "Zhiwu lun" (指物論 4), as will be shown in this paper (part III).

From an anti-rationalistic perspective, Rieman (1977) interpreted "Baima lun" as sceptical about linguistic designation while favourable about its practical "use", compared to Wittgenstein. Thompson (1995) and Schilling (2020, 211) developed the similar idea of linguistic communication. This pragmatic interpretation is an important insight, but it did not allow these scholars to draw the necessary conclusions which would have enabled the interpretation of the remaining parts of the *GSLZ*.

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1   The early Chinese sages were not necessarily actual existing authors, and in most cases they are more fictitious characters than actual historical people (Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003). Here, Gongsun Long is referred to as the author of the text for the sake of convenience.

2   Ren and Liu (2019) following Hansen, attempted to reconcile the mass-noun theory with pro-realist abstract universals. This approach presents the same problem as that of Hansen.

Rieman (1980, 1981) further related the idea of "language use" to the Confucian "rectification of names". However, the textual evidence for this political interpretation only consists of the very end of "Mingshi lun": "How perfect were the ancient farsighted kings! They examined names and their corresponding realities and were careful about their designations!" (Perleberg 1952). This claim should be considered an illustration of the epistemological ideas of "Mingshi lun" (She 2022).

Bo Mou made a distinction between a semantic referent, "A white horse is a horse", and a pragmatic one, "A white horse is not a horse" (Mou 2007) and claimed that the two referents should be complementary to one another as ultimate solutions. However, while this distinction is important for "Baima lun", there is no sign of Gongsun Long having assigned *equal* value to the two referents, as his conclusion "A white horse is *not* a horse" attests to. Gongsun Long's attitude towards the linguistic and logical ("semantic") referent is *a refutation*. This refutation is confirmed through "Zhiwu lun": "Judgments/designations (指) are what does not exist in the world; things are what does exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not admissible" (指也者/天下之所無也/物也者/天下之所有也/以天下之所有為天下之所無/未可) ("Zhiwu lun" 4[3]). Here, the linguistic and logical sphere is radically separated from that of "things". Failing to relate this distinction to "Baima lun", Mou claimed that Gongsun Long's "pre-theoretical" solution of "due place actuality" in "Mingshi lun", cannot be found in the *GSLZ*, but in the *Xunzi* (Mou 2020, 42). Nevertheless, it is precisely the *refutation* of the logical and linguistic sphere (指), which not only constitutes the theme of "Zhiwu lun", but also that of the *GSLZ*, that allows for the subsequent elaboration of "names" (名) in "Mingshi lun" as the epistemological remedy for 指, thereby deducing all the qualities of "names" as *opposed* to the ones of 指 in "Zhiwu lun" (She 2022).

Yiu-ming Fung (2020b, 119–68) regarded 指 in "Zhiwu lun" as similar to Plato's ontological universals and thus, similarly to Mou, undermining Gongsun Long's radical *critique* of the cognitive capacity of 指 ("Zhiwu lun" 4, cited above). Although he highlighted the individual feature of 名 (names) in "Mingshi lun", he seemed to have confused the separate functions of 指 and 名, and did not

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3   As the *GSLZ* has found consensus neither in translation nor interpretation, I have provided my own translation, subdivision and comment on each proposition cited in this paper. The Chinese original text is from Perleberg (1952). Although the newest edition (*The Mingjia and Related Texts* (Johnston and Wang 2019)) is available, both the Daozang and the modern versions are provided with suggested subdivisions of propositions which do not entirely suit my interpretation. However, when compared to the 2019 version, the 1952 version inverted the Guest (the Opponent) and the Host (Gongsun Long). Therefore I changed this order to align to the 2019 version. The rest of the Chinese text follows the 1952 version.

succeed in relating "Zhiwu lun" to "Mingshi lun". Instead, Fung interprets the terms "horse" (馬) and "white" (白) in "Baima lun" as 指 (universals) rather than as 名 (names) (Fung 2020b, 119–68).

Other commentators view the line "A white horse is not a horse" as the *GSLZ* exposing a paradox which he was unable to resolve, or a form of sophistry (Suter, Indraccolo, and Behr 2020; Jiang 2020, 301). This would indeed be the conclusion if we take his intention to be the explication of a logical problem. However, the essential divergence between the Opponent and Gongsun Long is precisely that the Opponent argues primarily from a logical perspective of judgment, while Gongsun Long fundamentally argues from an anti-logical concern, although mostly via logical methods. This can be demonstrated as related to the key propositions of "Zhiwu lun" and "Mingshi lun".

As Gongsun Long "was not understood by any of his contemporaries nor by any subsequent Chinese philosopher *until* the contact with Western philosophy" (Hansen 1976), it is crucial to engage in a dialogue with the West. However, a new Western approach which differs from all previous mainstream analytical or rationalistic ones is needed. Hölderlin's relevance lies in the fact that, as a poet, he proposed a philosophical approach which not only radically transcended but was also opposed to most rationalistic, Aristotelian trends *in the West*. This departure is observable through the understanding of "Being" as *radically* out of grasp for all "judgments" in the widest sense (judgments which include but are not limited to abstract universals or entities, reflectivity, Platonic ideas, logical set, mass nouns, etc., echoing the radical critique of "zhi" compared to "things" in "Zhiwu lun" (see Part III of this article). On one hand, this anti-logical, anti-foundational approach of Being aligns exceptionally well with the dominant nominalistic character of the pre-Qin philosophy to which the *GSLZ* belonged, while on the other Hölderlin's conception of "Being" based on the equally widest semantic range (of which I will distinguish several dimensions upon the Heidelberg School's interpretation), when related to "things" in "Mingshi lun", evades the risk of reducing the *GSLZ* to its mere materialistic aspects (differing from Hansen, see Part III of this article). Consequently, this paper develops a new nominalist approach based on the *GSLZ*. It reads "things" as a specific dimension of Hölderlin's "Being" (as singular infinity) and "name" as superior to "zhi" or judgment in the rendering of things, as criticized in "Zhiwu lun" and "Baima lun". Finally, it bolsters the articulation of "Baima lun" with the theoretical chapters of "Zhiwu lun" and "Mingshi lun", an undertaking which has been found to be lacking in other approaches.

Therefore, I will propose to read "Baima lun" under the framework of the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin's *critique of self-consciousness and its*

judgmental expression in German idealism in the fragment "Being and Judgment". In equal parts a critique of Fichte's foundational principle of self-consciousness ("I am I") as well as building upon Kant's identification of thinking and judging (Frank 2004), Hölderlin understands "judgment" not only semantically as "making a judgment about something", but *in the broadest sense,* thereby as the "original separation" (*Ur-theil*) between subject and object in (self-)consciousness and the mere formal reunification of them. Thus, this separation is the basis of our object-oriented cognition *in general* in opposition to that which is "separated" by judgment, i.e., "Being" (Henrich 1997). In "Being", subject and object are intimately united, and thus it logically and ontologically transcends judgment and reflectivity and so is not only limited to the materialistic understanding (the realm of objects).

Moreover, what the Heidelberg School does not highlight is that the reunification of subject and object in a judgment, which constitutes its formal structure at the surface of this more essential "separation", is fundamentally *the logical identity* of the reflective self-consciousness "I" (the law of non-contradiction). I will put in parallel with this framework the central claim of "Baima lun". I will attempt to demonstrate that the claim "White horse (is) not horse", from a similarly expressed interpretation of "Being", undertakes *an ironical critique of judgment*. Methodologically, based on my interpretation of 指 as "judgment" in Hölderlin's sense in contrast to "things" (物) and "name" (名) as I elaborated in a previous paper (She 2022), I will verify the feasibility of my hypothesis of "Baima lun" through a textual analysis.

Although the *GSLZ* does not use terms such as Being or self-consciousness, the reasons why I consider this approach to be valid are as follows:

First, "Being and Judgment" (Being is inaccessible for judgment) and "Baima lun" ("A white horse is not a horse") textually appears to show common points of view.

Second, while until now almost all other interpretations remain fragmentary and even contradictory among them, "Being and Judgment" would allow for the interpretation of the core chapter "Zhiwu lun" in relation with "Mingshi lun" and "Baima lun", as I will subsequently demonstrate.

Third, the failure of other linguistic interpretations leads to the approach based on an idea of self-consciousness, which is an experience that shares a greater, though not as *abstract* as the aforementioned rationalistic frameworks, *generality* among different cultures rather than language.[4]

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4   Of course, the approach of self-consciousness also relies on language just as every thought or thesis relies on language. It is the minimum condition for every expression. Based upon this absolute level, it would make sense to differentiate language from consciousness and thus, semantics from facts, on a more sophisticated level, otherwise no expression would be possible.

Fourth, the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin has "developed a position of its own that arguably stands as the most important contribution to a clarification of self-awareness in recent German philosophy" (Zahavi 2007)—a negative approach to the description of the nature of our self-consciousness which transcends any reflective, i.e., judgmental, logic and dualist relation, and thus all the mainstream analytical and rationalistic trends in the West. Although it has long been thought that Chinese philosophy does not use logic and other analytical methods to express its ideas, and the mode behind its conceptualization is essentially different from that in the Western tradition, although some scholars show that the thinking in most philosophical arguments in ancient Chinese philosophy, especially in Later Mohism and the "School of Names", is comparable to that in the Western (Fung 2020a, 3). Nevertheless and most importantly, ancient Chinese thinkers do not consciously aim at making logical arguments. Their analytical and logical language is mainly for explaining philosophical problems (Fung 2020a, 3), which precisely transcend the expressibility of language and logic (Daoism, the "School of Names", etc.). In this sense, a suitable Western approach does not aim at imposing abstract ideas or foundations on Chinese philosophical discourse, but rather serves as an attempt to describe the ultimately implicit, ineffable bases of the latter via the Western language mode (which is also modern Chinese language mode), as an allegory of such bases.

In this sense, the Heidelberg School's approach to self-consciousness—deconstruction of the logical structure of judgment and reflectability in their reading of Hölderlin—would be a suitable perspective amongst the various Western philosophical trends. As "Baima lun" defends its thesis on the grounds of a play on words, its epistemological and ontological value becomes veiled. I thus attempt to demonstrate that the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin does not only provide a complementary justification, but also a theoretical reconstruction of the implicit presuppositions of "Baima lun", without claiming that Hölderlin would be the only valid reference in the Western tradition.

II. Critique of Judgment in the Heidelberg School's Interpretation of Hölderlin's "Judgment and Being"

The excerpt "Judgment and Being" was only published for the first time in the 1960s. After having been restructured by Dieter Henrich, it opened new paths of exploring the problem of self-consciousness in early German idealism: judgment (*Urtheil*) is the "original separation" (*Ur-theil*) of subject and object, while Being, their seamless unity. Being, as the original unity between subject and object,

essentially precedes their relation, and therefore can never be identified with an object of knowledge provided in the form of a judgment. As such, we should radically distinguish between any *object of knowledge* and Being.

This fragment is an intervention in an ongoing philosophical debate of Hölderlin's time. According to his critique of the early Fichte and Schelling, even in case of our self-consciousness (not to mention consciousness of external objects), described by a first principle of judgmental self-identity ("I am I"), it cannot provide this "seamless" ground for itself, and needs to presuppose a "Being" that can no longer be rendered by any form of subject/object dual self-consciousness. For in the form of knowledge based on self-consciousness, the subject is still separated *from itself as this object* due to the intentionality and unavoidable objectification intrinsic to the very structure of our self-consciousness. As a result, being can only be rendered by a boundary concept "intellectual intuition", where subject and object are in such a pre-supposed, absolute unity (Henrich 1997; 2004).

> … the I is only possible by means of this separation of the I from the I. How can I say: 'I'! without self-consciousness … Hence identity is not a union of object and subject which simply occurred, hence identity is not = to absolute Being. (Hölderlin 1988, 38)

For Hölderlin, judgment *only* introduces a dualist "original division" of the actual judgment, reflection, dualism or consciousness-transcending Being, into a subject and an object (the object is the subject itself in the case of self-consciousness) and reunifies them in a mere judgmental identity, which is relative and dualist in contrast to its formally pretended absoluteness, Being. Judgment is thus finite, mediated and dualist by its structure and can never render Being in its totality.

Henrich's student, Manfred Frank, reading "Objekt" in the fragment not only as that of the object-oriented knowledge in the widest sense, but also as *predicate*, emphasizing the semantic apprehension of the separating nature of judgment (Frank 2004), analytically expanded Henrich's interpretation (She 2022): first, the dual *form* of judgment dividing the expression into a subject and a predicate, contradicts its *content*. On the level of content, a judgment should present not a separation, but the unity of subject and object ("Being" of the subject with necessarily more than one predicate). Second, the predicate as concept only provides a *partial* image of the subject which is in fact an *intuition*. The predicate picks out only a single possibility among all the characteristics that the intuition of the "Being" of the subject possesses. For example, "Socrates is a philosopher". Here, "philosopher" is not sufficient to describe the integrity of the intuitive "Being" of Socrates, because it is only one attribute among all the potential attributes of it.

In the relation of subject and predicate, judging is the relativizing of the original Absolute *position* of "Being", separating the inseparable. Even in the particular case of the self-consciousness articulated in the judgement "I am I", there is also differentiation; an original division separates the I as subject and the I as object/predicate, otherwise self-consciousness would be inconceivable, as Hölderlin noted. In other words, what is intended in the judgment is the absolute bond of subject and object, whilst the form of the judgment consists in separating these non-separable terms. Judgment is only a relative identity, while Being should be an absolute unity. Being cannot be grasped conceptually, for, as according to Kant, to think is to judge and to judge is to differentiate (Frank 1997).

This leads to the distinction between the object-oriented act of (self-)consciousness and the non-objective intuition in which *Being is self-evident or self-aware.* Hölderlin names this "intellectual intuition". It is immediate and places no distance between itself and the object of its consciousness, even if this object is itself. Awareness of this original Being is neither conceptual nor judgmental, since what is known through concepts is only seized mediately (according to Kant) in a fundamental separation (Frank 2004).

Expanding the Heidelberg School's interpretation, Hölderlin's conception of "judgment" as the "original separation" between subject and object in (self-)consciousness includes object-oriented knowledge *in the widest sense*, such as semantic judgments, perceptions (which are never pure in themselves but also already imply the separation between the observer and the object of perception, and thus, conceptualities and judgments), conceptualizations, designations, syntheses, associations, signifiers, symbols, signs and so on, as well as actions. However, compared to the other texts of the *GSLZ* "Baima lun" is a discussion of the validity of linguistic claims and mostly centres on the semantic dimension of "judgment",[5] and I will mainly refer to Frank's interpretation for the elucidation of this dialogue.

What the Heidelberg School has not highlighted is the fact that since "Judgment and Being" belongs to Hölderlin's earlier texts, its critique is deepened and extended to an existential dimension in his later theoretical works. The separation of self-consciousness from Being is described as "the Tragic" of human subjectivity in challenging fate in his "Remarks" (She 2016). This draws the dimension of action into the scope of Hölderlin's critique of self-consciousness and adds an ontological aspect to the epistemological interpretation of the Heidelberg School. The aspect of action also finds its correspondence in "Baima lun".

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5   In contrast, "Jianbai lun" centres on the perceptive dimension of "judgment", whilst "Zhiwu lun" centres on judgment in the theoretical sense.

III. Further Elaboration of Hölderlin's "Being" in Relation to Gongsun Long's "Thing" and the *GSLZ*

Hölderlin, after already in the throes of a mental disorder, mysteriously described a concrete expression for this subject/object union in his later texts. Nevertheless, we can attempt to distinguish several dimensions of it based on the opposite features of judgment as already analysed by the Heidelberg School. In the statement "Socrates is a philosopher", the narrow focus on one particular predicate (… is a philosopher) is based on the abstract sphere of the logical identity of consciousness, where the grammatical subject (Socrates) is separated from the predicate or object, as Socrates' "being" is not exhausted by the single concept of "philosopher" (Dimension 1). As we become aware of Socrates' other, equally valid, potential predicates (he is also a man, citizen, cynic, not good-looking, etc.), we begin to transcend this *single* predicate. Our perception and knowledge of "Socrates" expands from the abstract to the physical and material. In this dimension, subject/object separation and logical re-identification are always present, as even in their entirety these concepts/judgments/definitions/predicates are insufficient in describing the totality of Socrates' being. Namely, they cannot be absolutely identified nor fuse with the totality of Socrates' being, and thus the logical bond linking the subject and object continues to exist as judgments (Dimension 2). This is the apprehension of reality/things/beings as individuals ("shapes" such as Socrates, horse, etc., which are individualities distinguished one from another by their materialistic boundaries and individualistic features).

Consequently, we come to discover that the amount of possible predicates, or attributes of Socrates, must necessarily be infinite. In other words, Socrates no longer possesses a human, materialistic boundary, and thus a "shape". As the single-intended predicate of Socrates expands infinitely, it progressively merges with the infinite predicates/objects that exist. Therefore, as it merges with all predicates/objects, there is no predicate/object to which it is not connected (the being of Socrates becomes infinity itself, and this paper names this quality "Socratesness", Dimension 3). As the subject disappears and merges with objects that have become infinite, *the logical bond* whereupon a specific predicate/object (or a series of specific predicates/objects) is attached to a subject as exists within a judgment, *is finally broken*. This dimension transcends the dualistic, materialistic, individualistic one and enters a quantum realm where every object is existentially (not logically) connected with all others.[6] It is from this point that the realm of Being, in Hölderlin's sense as seamless subject-object union, begins.

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6   Similar to the hypothesis of the Unified Field where there is no abstract separation between the knower (Observer) and the object known (Observed).

Dimension 3 is distinguished from a universal, a concept of set, a mass noun (Hansen, "white stuff", "horse stuff") or a Platonic idea of abstract entity. Ultimately, the latter cannot escape from being judged, as they all possess specific definitions/predicates which would distinguish them from other universals/sets/masses nouns or Platonic abstract entities. For example, the universal/Platonic idea of a "human-being" is distinguished from that of an animal through the definitions, predicates or judgments we attribute to it, e.g. definitions delineating the human or animal "boundary" ("shape" (形) in "Baima lun") or "essence". "Horse stuff" (Hansen) is still defined by the species "horse" and the material "stuff"; "white stuff" by the colour "white" and the material "stuff". In contrast, as Dimension 3 escapes from all predicates/judgments, it is unselectively related to infinity/all predicates/objects. It becomes an *unbounded, concrete, ineffable, singular, ever-changing, trans-individual, almost celestial* apprehension and awareness, and thus *radically predicate/language-transcending*. In this sense, it better fits with the general nominalist background of the pre-Qin period. For example, "horseness" refers to colour, weight, species, temperament, race, freedom, meadow, knight, war, and so on, infinitely transcending the "shape" that is "horse", connecting to infinite beings. Relatedly, "whiteness" refers to snow white, light grey, ashen, ivory, wedding gown, Casablanca, innocence, horse, sun, hospital, clouds, beginning, etc., infinitely transcending the "colour" white and connecting to infinite beings. "Whiteness-horseness" at once refers to both of these infinite series and more (see interpretation of "Baima lun" prop. 10–11).

Finally, the cognizing "I" (the logical identity in which self-consciousness is separated from itself) which underlies all judgments and always possesses subjective tendency and narrowness derived from the specific predicate, or series of specific predicates, intended by the expresser ("I") of the judgment, is also dissolved by the infinite expansion of its objects/predicates. In other words, the subject also infinitely expands itself and finally merges with its infinite objects/predicates. An infinite, unitary, non-objectal, non-intentional awareness is born (Dimension 4). Its scope transcends subjective, dualistic, object-oriented (self-)consciousness in its various forms.[7] This final, unitary cognitive dimension is not explicit according to the textual evidence of the *GSLZ*.

In many aspects, "zhi" 指 is comparable to judgment as understood *in the widest sense* by Hölderlin as separation between subject and object. I have already attempted to posit this *hypothesis* and verify its feasibility through a detailed textual analysis of "Zhiwu lun" together with "Mingshi lun" (She 2022), and I will briefly

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7   The Heidelberg School reinterpreted Fichte's absolute self-consciousness as this non-objectal, pre-reflective self-awareness (Henrich 1982). Here, I have provided a more concrete and expanded description of their notion via the example of Hölderlin.

present the general points here. "Zhiwu lun" shows that there is a paradox between "zhi"/judgment and things: although the entirety (of our perception and knowledge) of things is based on "zhi"/judgments, judgments can in no way be identified with the things/reality that they judge: "Things are all about judgments, but judgments are not what they judge/judgments are non-judgments" (物莫非指/而指非指)[8] ("Zhiwu lun" 1). "Judgment is not (in itself) non-judgment, however, when a judgment is considered as judging things, it becomes non-judgment" (指非非指也/指與物/非指也) (ibid. 16). "Moreover, judgment entails already in itself its own deconstruction (its own "non-judgment"), does it (judgment) need to relate itself to things in order to be judgment at all?" (且夫指/固自為非指/奚待於物/而乃與為指) (ibid. 19). While judgment, with its separating, dual nature, is neither absolutely fallible nor valueless in itself—for although "philosopher" cannot encompass all of Socrates' qualities, it provides nevertheless one possible depiction of his infinite unity—it is a *wrong* (非指, non-judgement) only as long as it is measured by its goal: things in their inseparable unity.

The fallacy of "zhi" has nothing to do with things, since things "cannot be judged" (不為指) (ibid. 10) in themselves anyway. In their nature, things simply exist and are not predicated through the human mind, even though they *always appear to us* in a judgemental form—the realm of our perception and knowledge in general is always conditioned by judgments: "There is nothing which is not judged (by us)" (非有非指) (ibid. 9). "[Things] cannot be judged. However, if we still identify them with judgments, this is doubling (兼) the unjudgeable nature of things" (不為指/而謂之指/是兼不為指) (ibid. 11). I more we attempt to judge things (via logico-linguistic methods), the more we find that things are far from being identical with our depiction of them—judgements can never exhaust the infinite unity of things. The fallacy and paradox of "zhi" inherently lies in its own structure: the contradiction between its dual, separating form (between a subject and an object) and its unitary content, its *intended* absoluteness, fullness and unity of Being (指與物/非指也, (ibid. 16)). This inadequacy in representing the seamless unity of things without objectifying, predicating and thus separating them, is the inherent paradox of "zhi"/judgement. Thus "zhi" as "judgment" is self-deconstruction in nature (固自為非指, (ibid. 19)), a form of irony.

"Things are Heaven and Earth and what they produce" (天地與其所產焉/物也) "A thing is a thing and does not exceed what it is. This is reality" (物以物其所物[9]/

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8   See footnote 19.

9   物以/物其/所物: the first 物 is a noun and the subject of the clause. The second 物 is the main verb, the third 物 is the verb of the subordinate clause 物其/所物. Literally, "A thing 'denotes' what it 'denotes' (the third 物)". Thus, "A thing is a thing", standing in opposition to what does not "denotes" what it "denotes" and consequently "exceeds itself" (judgment). This translation is confirmed

而不過焉/實也) ("Mingshi lun" 1, 2). Gongsun Long views things in terms of nature, as the products of "Heaven and Earth", and in this sense they are opposed to the fictive products of the human mind, "zhi". This is the right "place" (位) ("Mingshi lun" 3) of things and why only "things" can be considered "reality" (實).

Only things are reality (實) and radically transcend "zhi": "Judgments/designations (指) are what does not exist in the world; things are what does exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not admissible" ("Zhiwu lun" 4). "If there were no things to be judged in the world, who would claim that things were non-judged? If there were no things in the world, who would call them judged?" (使天下無物指/誰徑謂非指/天下無物/誰徑謂指) ("Zhiwu lun" 17). It is also worth noting that without things any attempt at judging or not logically becomes meaningless. Understood in the widest sense, the basic form of our perception and cognition, "zhi"/judgment, also includes universals, Platonic ideas, concepts of set and material nouns, as they *still* unavoidably possess specific characterizations/definitions/predicates, and thus separations and judgments. Consequently, "zhi"/judgment, i.e., universals, Platonic ideas, concepts of set (logical identity), and material nouns are *deconstructed* compared to things. This deconstruction of "zhi"/judgment and its relationship with things is the theme of "Zhiwu lun" (She 2022), and corresponds to the nominalist background of the pre-Qin period.

A thing is everything opposed to a judgment ("Zhiwu lun" 4). If things are understood as radically transcending judgments, they belong to the realm of Being as Dimension 3. Consequently, a thing is not an abstract universal, a Platonic idea of an abstract entity, a concept of set, nor a material noun, for they still have definitions – they are being judged and belong to the fictive realm of "zhi".

"Mingshi lun" explores the relation between name and reality/things, which confirms our interpretation of the relation between "zhi" and things in "Zhiwu lun". Only things are reality ("Mingshi lun" 2). Reality's place (位) is full (不曠) (ibid. 3) and does not *exceed* what it is (ibid. 2)—it consists of *infinite* possibilities of predicates and is not dualistically segmented by only one of them (Dimension 3). Only this fullness corresponds to reality's "place" and rectification (正) (ibid. 4). "To rectify the non-rectified with the rectified and to doubt the (already) rectified with the rectified" (以其所正/正其所不正/疑其所正) (ibid. 5). "Zhi"/judgement as understood in the widest sense would be that which is non-rectified, as it "exceeds" (過) (ibid. 2) the right place of the thing which should be an infinite,

by "Zhiwu lun" (4) ("Guest: Judgements are what does not exist in the world; things are what does exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not right") (She 2022).

intuitive, all-encompassing, unitary apprehension, and is instead "displaced" to the secondary, "wrong" place of the predicate/object (所位非位) (ibid. 4)[10]. As such, we should "leave the wrong place that it occupies, occupying its rightful place, makes it rectified/right (正)" (出其所位非位/位其所位焉/正也) (ibid. 4). We should leave the wrong place of the single abstract predicate of a judgment in favour of a return to the original place of the thing in its infinite possibilities of predicates and unitary fullness.

In order to rectify the non-rectified/"zhi", we cannot rely on the non-rectified itself. In order to justify any judgment, we need another judgment of a higher order, the validity of which requires a third judgment of a higher order, *ad infinitum*. In order to break the chain of infinite regress, the end of this justification—the thing—can only be an intuitive, infinite apprehension, which stands for its own validity and requires no further justification/predicate/judgment/logico-linguistic link. For example, only the infinite intuition of "whiteness-horseness" is capable of functioning as an absolute standard of knowledge applicable to the measuring of the incomplete, one-sided, abstract knowledge provided by the predicate "horse" in the judgment "A white horse is a horse". A different predicate (in a new judgment) can in no way deconstruct the predicate "horse", for it would be just as incomplete and rootless as the predicate "horse". Likewise, only the "rectified" can doubt the "only seemingly rectified". Apprehending the fullness of meaning behind the name "horse" does not equate to the predicate "horse" in the tautological judgment "A horse is a horse". The fullness of the meaning of "horseness", would also be overshadowed by the abstract predicate "horse" as well, for if we compare the poorness of the latter to the incessant memories, imagination and feeling that the name "horse" could simply evoke (the meaning of horseness), it becomes clear that tautology is not rectification.

"Judgments do not exist in the world. This arises from the idea that things have their own names and cannot be judged" (天下無指者/生於物之各有名/不為指也) ("Zhiwu lun" 10). Once the identification between "zhi" and thing is rendered moot, name becomes a superior method of rendering things/reality than "zhi". As the reality of the thing transcends any possibility of judgment as understood in the widest sense, it can only be an infinite, non-predicative apprehension provided by its name. The evocation of the "name" of each thing (known as the strict one-name-one-reality correspondence) could, to some extent, escape from the radical subject/object segregation and the logical re-identification of them in a judgment. Instead of saying "Socrates is X", or even "Socrates is Socrates", which still remains judgmental (tautology)—and thus in all cases our holistic

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10   See footnote 13.

apprehension and intuition of Socrates' infinite features would be hindered and overshadowed by the specific predicate in the judgment—it is sufficient to "call" the name of Socrates and nothing else. This serves *to avoid the risk of judging it with a predicate (of building a logical bond)*. In this way, we would have the chance *to freely feel, recall, imagine and intuit* all the possibly ineffable, unbounded qualities of "Socratesness" behind this evocation of his name, without having to build any logical bond which would only serve to separate and segment this infinite, inseparable whole by a specific predicate/judgment. In this sense a name is no longer a concept, a universal, a mass noun, a Platonic abstract idea, a logical set, or a predicate, but instead acts similarly to a "mantra", which *symbolically suggests* an infinity which linguistic means are incapable of directly representing.

Rectification of names means to break *any* judgmental expression—where two "names" are logically combined—into separate names, so that each name would be an independent window through which infinity is perceived as a concrete, unclassifiable, non-conceptual, non-predicative, ineffable, unbounded singularity (what "separates" the "whiteness" of the stone from its "hardness", "Jianbai lun"). However, how can infinity—the connection with all objects—be singular? Is it not rather homogenously infinite everywhere? An abstract universal (a Platonic idea, a mass noun, etc.) only presents a false/abstract infinity, as it still contains specific predicates/judgments and thus is only a logical set. In contrast, infinity as defined in Dimension 3 and confirmed via the *GSLZ* is an absolutely ineffable, incommensurable *experience*. Therefore, the "infinities" provided by different names are not homogenous. Instead, by the very definition of infinity, they are all necessarily singularities. True infinity is necessarily singular, while true singularity is necessarily infinite. This is a singular infinity.

"Once names (of things) have been rectified, (our apprehension of) each thing would be only about or limited to itself and be separated from each other" (其名正/則唯乎其彼此焉) (ibid., 7). The judgment "Socrates (white horse) is a philosopher (horse)" should be broken into the "names" of "Socrates" (white horse) and "philosopher (horse)", so that these names point to the realities of "Socratesness (whiteness-horseness)/philosopherness (horseness)" in their singular infinity. In this way they are presented in contrast to the judgmental state, whereby "Socratesness" (whiteness horseness) is not "only about itself", apprehended in its infinite possibilities of predicates, but only entangled with the abstract, logical set of philosopher (horse) in a judgment.

"Calling 'that' and 'that' is not limited at/not only about 'that', this is not the right way of calling 'that'" (謂彼/而彼不唯乎彼/則彼謂不行) (ibid. 8). "Taking (當) it as what it is not, this is chaos" (其以當不當也/不當而亂也) (ibid. 10). Therefore,

to apprehend the reality about a thing we should simply call (謂) its name and *linger* in that infinite feeling evoked by this name (行彼) (ibid. 11), without logically linking it to another name which functions as its predicate. When we take Socrates (white horse) as a philosopher (horse), this is making the judgment "Socrates (white horse) is a philosopher (horse)". The two terms concerned are not absolutely identical, as an infinity (Socratesness/whiteness-horseness) is being reduced to a logical abstraction (philosopher/horse). "Taking that for this, and taking this and that, this is not admissible" (此彼/而此且彼/不可) (ibid. 13). Taking philosopher/horse ("that") for Socratesness/whiteness-horseness ("this"), taking Socratesness/whiteness-horseness ("this") and philosopher/horse ("that"), this is making the judgements "Socrates (white horse) is a philosopher (horse)"—not admissible.

As all our perception and knowledge cannot avoid being based on judgments, they are rootless. The logical link in the judgment is ultimately arbitrary, since it randomly selects only one predicate amongst the infinite predicates of a thing. So our perception and knowledge can be said to be chaotic and radically separated from the reality of things (ibid. 10). This is a typical nominalist position—philosopher (horse) is just an *abstract* name based on logical identity and in no way can depict whichever reality it wishes to depict.

"A name must correspond to its reality. Knowing to what extent this is not this and to what extent this is not at its place, we would not call (this this)" (夫名實/謂也/知此之非此也/知此之不在此也/則不謂也) (ibid. 14) "zhi" would be the situation in which "this is not this" and "not at its place". A philosopher (horse) does not equal Socratesness (whiteness-horseness) and thus, should not be "called" such via a judgment.

A detailed articulation of these texts and *verification of the possibilities of these hypotheses* will be made in the textual analysis of "Baima lun".

IV. Textual Analysis of "Baima lun"

Guest: "May we say that a white horse is not a horse?" Host: "We may say so."

白馬非馬/可乎/曰/可. ("Baima lun" 1)

Guest: "Why?" Host: "Horse designates a shape; white designates a colour. What designates a colour does not designate a shape. This is why a white horse is not a horse." 曰/何哉/曰/馬者/所以命形也/白者/所以命色也/命色者非命形也/故曰/白馬非馬. (ibid. 2)

At the beginning of the debate, Gongsun Long presents what may be considered the most extravagant argument in the eyes of a Western reader. He separates the concept of a white horse into "shape" and "colour" which are actually two "names" (名, "Mingshi lun"), in order to persuade the Opponent of the distinction between a white horse and a horse. However, upon further analysis, it will be possible to reconstruct the presupposition of this claim as it relates to "Mingshi lun" and "Zhiwu lun".

> Guest: "If there is a white horse, we cannot say that there is no horse. If we cannot say that there is no horse, then is a white horse not a horse?" [Meaning the positive: a white horse should equal a horse!]
>
> 曰/有白馬不可謂無馬也/不可謂無馬者/非馬也. ("Baima lun" 3)
>
> Guest: "If there is a white horse, this means that there is a horse. How can (the qualification of) white make the horse non-horse?
>
> 有白馬為有馬/白之非馬/何也. (ibid. 4)

The position of the Opponent can be resumed as "A white horse is a horse". He argues from the perspective of the judgment and reflective (self-)consciousness, in which the bond between subject and predicate is essentially *a logical synthesis of identity*, and follows the principle of inclusion.

Semantically, judging represents the act of attributing a *predicate* to a subject of *intuition* in a dual, logical form. It is true that the copula "be", which belongs to one of the possibilities of the predicate, is bypassed in a judgment in Chinese due to the specific syntax of the language. However, the *separation* of subject and object theorized in "Judgment and Being" and the minimal intentionality of the speaker as reflectivity and (self-)consciousness based on this fundamental separation exist all the same, only to a weaker degree. As such, a judgment in the Chinese language and the underlying (self-)consciousness share the basic characteristics of their Western counterparts and remain a starting-point in the cognition of the ancient Chinese (She 2022).

Frank's interpretation of Hölderlin (Frank 2004) stands in contrast to the Guest's position: what a judgment *intends* to refer to in its content, is the subject considered in its absolute, seamless unity, the intuition of its "Being", the integrity of its existence without conceptual separation between itself and its object. However, in its form, judging a thing means depriving the subject of its original identity, separating it into a subject and a predicate and reuniting the two only formally. Judgment thus represents a partial capturing of what was an inseparable unity of Being and can never be absolutely identified with the Being of the thing. The reality of the

thing actually possesses much more possibilities of predicates ("fullness" (不曠) of its "reality" (實), "Mingshi lun" 3) compared to the one-sidedness of the single characteristic provided by judgment, *ergo* the single predicate in the judgment.

Expanding Frank's analysis, for example: Socrates is a philosopher. Although "philosopher" has been "correctly" attributed to Socrates intuited in his integral aliveness, the abstract concept of "philosopher" does not encompass and even dog-matically veil other possible predicates/objects we might as well attribute to him, such a man, a citizen, the ineffable meaning of his life, the incessant changes he underwent during his life time—what connected him with all objects, etc. The aggregate of all of Socrates' attributes should be a mathematically infinite set, the elements of which are *logically* independent from one another. The existence *per se* of Socrates occupying the subject position surpasses in quality the determinate meaning of any single predicate, the totality of a finite set of predicates and any logically organized predicative construction, all of which are based on the law of non-contradiction—one can never be absolutely judgmental about Socrates in his Being ("Socratesness"). From the perspective of the one-sided narrative and logical identity of judgment, the reality of the subject should be in a state of per-petual flux, polyperspectivity,[11] singularity and infinite cosmic transformation. The formal claim of truth of judgment would be illusory (曠), partial and ephemeral compared to its content, the "Being" of the subject in its totality which is infinite and incommensurable.

It is for this reason that Hölderlin radically separates the sphere of "Being" from that of judgment. Judgment is that which is deprived of real existence and sepa-rated from the world of "Beings". Semantically, this is because judgment is only a formal synthesis of the separation between two parts of an originally inseparable unity. The identity it provides, or rather *constructs*, is a logical, but not an absolute one, and thus, can only be considered a *fiction* of human mind, radically separated from the "Being" of the thing—its reality—that it judges.

指 in "Zhiwu lun" also belongs to a radically different sphere compared to that of "things": "指 are what do not exist in the world; things are what (do) exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not admissible" (指也者/天下之所無也/物也者/天下之所有也/以天下之所有為天下之所無/未可) ("Zhiwu lun" 4). There is thus a possibility of comparing 指 to (self-)consciousness as the separation between subject and ob-ject expressed in the judgmental form, and 物 (things, "Mingshi lun" 1, 2; "Zhiwu lun" 4) to "Being". These presuppositions have been closely tested through all the

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11   Professor Manfred Frank led me to this term when I described the phenomenon of Chinese land-scape painting to him.

propositions of "Zhiwu lun" (She 2022), and now they also need to be evaluated through "Baima lun". There are several reasons for these presuppositions:

First, 指 designates "what does not exist in the world"—it is *ontologically* secondary to "things", which are "what (do) exist in the world". In other words, only things are realities. In terms of Hölderlin, the ontological priority of Being over (self-)consciousness is expressed by the characterization of "things" as realities/existence/fullness (實,不曠, "Mingshi lun" 2, 3) and that of 指 as non-existence/absence/emptiness. 指 could then be understood as a "fiction", a "possibility" of our self-consciousness. It reappears in "Baima lun" as the hidden theme of the discussion on "A white horse (is) not a horse".

Second, in Chinese 指 means "pointing at something outside of oneself" (its ancient form is 旨, meaning intention, aim, or purpose). This attests to the dual structure of judgment as conceived by Hölderlin—the intentionality of (self-)consciousness to step out of its initial "Being" ("position" 位), "Reality is reality, not an absence. This is its place" (實以實其所實[12]/不曠焉/位也) ("Mingshi lun" 3) to dualistically reach for a "goal", a predicate, an object of knowledge or of action *outside*.

Third, for Hölderlin only Being is reality, for it enables self-consciousness and reflectivity. "Zhiwu lun" makes the same *radical* distinction between the realms of "things" and that of 指. As such it also seems to characterize things as transcending the fictional construction of human thought—dualism and reflectivity.

Finally, "A thing is a thing and does not exceed what it is. This should be its reality" (物其所物/而不過焉/實也) ("Mingshi lun" 2). This attests to the fact that things transcend judgments, for only when a thing is judged and attributed to by a predicate can it be said to "exceed" (過) its reality. The "thing" judged would then be interfered with by human reflectivity and *displaced* from the "place" (位) ("Mingshi lun" 3), reality and "fullness" (不曠) of its unbounded "Being" to a single, external object (a predicate), "out of its place" (所位非位[13]) ("Mingshi lun" 4), thus "exceeding" its nature ("Reality is reality, not an absence. This is its place" (實以實其所實/不曠焉/位也) "Leaving the wrong place that it occupies, occupying its rightful place, makes it rectified/right" (出其所位非位/位其所位焉/正也) ("Mingshi lun" 4; She 2022)). Semantically, this can be described by the dual structure of judgment A is A/B.

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12   實以實其所實: the same structure as 物以物其所物 and 所位非位 (footnotes 9 and 13). The first 實 is a noun and the subject (the "reality"), the second 實 is the main verb of the expression, the third 實 is the verb of the subordinate clause. Literally, "Reality realizes what it realizes", "Reality is reality" (She 2022).

13   In 所位非位, the first 位 is a verb, the second 位 is a noun—"to occupy" the "wrong position". 出其所位非位/正也, leaving the "wrong place" that it "occupies" equals being "rectified" (She 2022).

Moreover, "Baima lun", "Zhiwu lun" and "Mingshi lun" belong to the tradition of the Chinese philosophy of language, and specifically that concerned with the relationship between "name" (名) and "reality" (實). Although within the philosophy of language dating back to ancient Greece there is a difference between this relationship and its Western counterpart, Chinese tradition considers whether names are consistent with things, while Western tradition considers whether propositions are consistent with facts. From the perspective of consciousness however, there is 指, which in the widest sense can be understood as a separation between consciousness and reality. "Zhi"/指, even though defined according to two different semantic expressions, exists in both traditions and constitutes the common ground upon which this relationship lies in each of them.

Understood as a critique of this semantic dimension of judgment (指), "Baima lun" could be related to "Zhiwu lun", "Mingshi lun", and so on via a theoretical continuity:

> Host: "If you only require a horse, then brown and black ones all can meet the requirement. If what you require is a white horse, brown and black ones cannot."
>
> 曰/求馬/黃黑馬皆可致/求白馬/黃黑馬不可致. ("Baima lun" 5)
>
> Host: "Suppose white horses were horses; in this case, what is sought would be one and the same."
>
> 使白馬乃馬也/是所求一也/所求一者/白者不異馬也. (ibid. 6)
>
> Host: "If what is sought is not different, then in the case of brown or black horses, how is it that some are admissible and some are not? That admissible and not admissible contradict each other is clear. This is why brown and black horses are the same, and can meet the requirement for horse, but not that for white horse. This is evident for claiming that a white horse is not a horse."
>
> 所求不異/如黃黑馬/有可有不可/何也/可與不可/其相非明/故黃黑馬一也/而可以應有馬/而不可應有白馬/是白馬之非馬/審矣.   (ibid. 7)

The sphere of judging and (self)-consciousness (指) is only "one and the same"—a formal and logical identity. It depends on the existential sphere of "Being" in Hölderlin's sense. Even though implicit in "Baima lun", *the theoretical reason why* a white horse and a horse are "one and the same" is because it is based on the reflectivity of our dualistically positing and separating (self-)consciousness and its judgmental form presupposing the logical self-identity of the (self-)consciousness

of the speaker. Its form is definitively neither existential nor absolute, and thus unrelated to concrete, infinite "things" (the sphere of "Being").

Requiring (求) a horse is the demarcation between the sphere of judgment (identity in language and logic) and that of action. It constitutes the divergence between the arguments of the Opponent and that of the Host. In praxis and not logically, when someone *requires* a white horse and is provided with a brown or black horse, if we insist on the logical principle that a white horse is "whichever" horse, so something "not different", there would be a contradiction, as when it comes to brown and black horses, then "some would meet your requirement and some not". Here, the Host uses a logical term (*xiangfei* 相非, contradict) to ironically describe the deconstruction of the logical principle through the sphere of action. The condition of the validity of brown and black horses belongs only to the logical inclusion. Its requirement would not necessarily be met in real life. Consequently, a white horse cannot be mingled with the action of requiring a horse. On a purely theoretical and logical level, not only white horses but also brown or black horses all equate to "horse". However, it is only when we make this particular "requirement" in real life, pragmatically, that the equation is rendered invalid: "If you only require a horse, then brown and black ones all can meet the requirement. If what you require is a white horse, brown and black ones cannot" ("Baima lun" 5). Although we can logically say that a white horse is a horse, in real life the demand for a white horse is more precise than a horse of any random colour would provide.

If this pragmatic sphere which appears in "Baima lun" stands in opposition to the semantic sphere of 指 (judgments) in "Zhiwu lun", where preferential use seems apparent, is this the intent of the *GSLZ*? What is the status of this pragmatic sphere in the *GSLZ*, compared to 名 (names) and 物 (things) in "Mingshi lun"? Interpreting the *GSLZ* according to this pragmatic sphere is a view shared by various commentators (Rieman 1977; Thompson 1995; Mou 2007; Fung 2020b; Schilling 2020, etc.). Nevertheless, from Hölderlin's perspective, in the realm of action, the "separation" between subject and object is still present as "judgment", since the agent only *strives* (*qiu* 求) to be in fusion with a "Being", which by the very definition of action, lies *outside* the agent. The pragmatic sphere is a judgment which shifts from Dimension 1 to 3.

This is confirmed by "Mingshi lun". Through action, although it is sufficient to reveal the deficiency of the logical sphere, it would be equally difficult to *totally* "partake in" the infinite reality of the thing ("行彼", "Mingshi lun" 11, Dimension 3) and be "only about the thing" (唯乎此, "Mingshi lun" 11). The implicit foundation for action is equally the sphere of "Being" for Hölderlin and "things" for Gongsun Long. The *GSLZ*'s position for transcending the dual character of 指

lies instead in what "Mingshi lun" expects of 名 ("names", She 2022). This will be confirmed by the rest of the debate.

> Guest: "Then a horse with colour is not a horse. In the world there are no uncoloured horses. Are there no horses in the world then?"
>
> 曰/以馬之有色為非馬/天下非有無色之馬也/天下無馬/可乎. ("Baima lun" 8)
>
> Host: "Horses naturally are coloured, therefore there are white horses. If horses were uncoloured, we would have only horse and not white horse. This is why a white horse is not a horse."
>
> 曰/馬固有色/固有白馬/使馬無色/有馬如已耳/安取白馬/故白者非馬也. (ibid. 9)

The identity in the claim "White horse (is) horse" is valid only in a partial, logical and semantic sense, not absolutely. The perspective of the bond between the reality of the "white horse" and the predicate "horse" as logical identity has always been the position of the Opponent.

> Host: "(The word compound) 'white horse' means 'horseness' plus 'whiteness'. On one side, there is 'horseness', on the other side, there is 'whiteness-horseness' (And 'horseness' is not absolutely the same as 'whiteness-horseness')[14]. This is why I say 'A white horse is not a horse'."
>
> 白馬者/馬與白也/馬與白馬也/故曰/白馬非馬也. ("Baima lun" 10)
>
> Guest: "Horse without white is horse. White without horse is white. Horse, when combined with white, forms the compound, white horse. White and horse are compatible (相與) with one another (in the form of the compound 'white horse'). However, if we take white and horse to be incompatible with one another and take them to be (separate) names (white/horse), this is not admissible. This is why it is not admissible to say that 'A white horse is not a horse'."
>
> 曰/馬未與白為馬/白未與馬為白/合馬與白/復名白馬/是相與/以不相與為名/未可/故曰白馬非馬未可. (ibid. 11)[15]

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14   I have directly translated the language of the Host similar to the term "Socratesness" that I have defined.

15   There are still contentious issues in the translation of prop. 11 (See Johnston and Wang 2019, 280, note 449]. However, the issues in all these translations may arise from the lack of punctuation between 是相與 and 以不相與為名. This paper proposes to make this punctuation and has provided a new coherent translation of prop.11.

Since the argument of action (5–7) is not comprehensive to the Host, in (10), he provides a second argument. (10) is the answer to (2) and the true argument of "Baima lun", and it links "Baima lun" to "Mingshi lun" and "Zhiwu lun".

To no one's surprise, the Opponent finds the Host's way of dividing the compound term "white horse" into two "names", in order to make "white horse" different from "horse", naïve. These two names refer to whiteness and horseness (like Socratesness, Dimension 3).

For the Opponent and common sense, in the compound term "white horse", "white" should be considered as *qualifying* (相與) ("Baima lun" 11) "horse" and should not be separated from "horse". The compound term "white horse" is equal to the judgment "This horse is white", since from the implicit perspective of zhi 指 and consciousness, both cases "separate" the infinity of "horseness" via the abstract predicate "white".

The Host's point is precisely the opposite: *the making of this division* (馬與白也), or the critique of the judgment "The horse is white". We should not attribute "white" to "horse" to make the compound term "white horse", nor link the two terms in the judgment "This horse is white". This is because, each considered in itself, "white" and "horse" should be "names" indicating "things" (or predicate-transcending "Beings")—"whiteness" and "horseness".

How can "white" also be a thing of the same order as "horse"? Is it not simply an attribute of the horse? If we define things from the materialistic plane (Dimension 2, see Part III of this article), only a horse can be called a thing, and white is a possible attribute of the horse. However, since Gongsun Long also assigned a name to white, then white must also possess a reality, namely, a "thing" corresponding to it. Dimension 3 provides a quantum explanation. If a thing is considered as a certain amount of energy which possesses a vibration and a specific frequency ("Things are Heaven and Earth and what they produce", "Mingshi lun" 1), instead of a stable "shape" (a so-called "individual" with a specific, physicalistic boundary, e.g., a horse, Dimension 2), then whiteness can be considered a "thing" in the same order as horseness. Thus, in this sense, a memory, sadness, a sound, a smile, etc. are all "things", since they all exist in nature.

The justification and theoretical presuppositions for the Host's position can be made explicit both with Hölderlin's theory of judgment and the critique of 指 in "Zhiwu lun". "White" can certainly exist in the form of a universal/logical set and as a possible attribution/predication for "horseness" in its predicate-transcending "Being", but 1) it cannot encompass the infinite qualities that "horseness" might possess, which may include, but are not limited to, colour, weight, species,

temperament, race, freedom, meadow, knight, war, etc., infinitely transcending the "shape" horse and connecting to infinite beings. So this compound or synthesis is, absolutely speaking, partial, invalid and "absent" (*kuang* 曠) ("Mingshi lun" 3) from the totality of the reality of this "horseness" (its singularity constituted by infinite attributes); 2) after dividing this compound term "whiteness" (白), when it is no longer considered a predicate "white" (指) for "horseness", nor is itself attributed to another predicate (which is apparently also the view of Gongsun Long and Hölderlin), should be, just like "horseness", the "name" as an evocator of a concrete yet infinite singularity, and thus the predicate-transcending "Being" or "thing" of "whiteness". It is the infinite features that whiteness entails, including "snow white", "light grey", "ashen", "ivory", "wedding gown", "Casablanca", "innocence", "horse", "sun", "hospital", "clouds", "beginning" and so on, that infinitely transcend the "colour" white and connect to infinite beings. *Only* this incessant, infinitely ongoing totality could constitute the "reality" (實) of whiteness. An abstract predicate/attribute (the logical set of the colour "white", defined by a determinate scientific criterium of measuring light) only illusorily takes itself—a single aspect of this totality—to be this totality, in the form of a judgment (指) which is only a fictive ("Judgments do not exist in the world" (天下無指)) narrative of this reality: "Judgments 指 do not exist in the world. This arises from the idea that things have their own names and cannot be judged" (天下無指者/生於物之各有名/不為指也) ("Zhiwu lun" 10).

Consequently, "to rectify [the expression of] a thing, is to rectify it by its reality; to rectify it by its reality, is to rectify its name" (其正者/正其所實也/正其所實者/正其名) ("Mingshi lun" 6). To rectify "names" involves separating "names" (and consequently our apprehension of the "realities" and "Beings" of "things" behind "names") one from another, avoiding combining them one with another in the form of judgments (A is A/B). We should take the reality of each "thing" as it is (in its infinite "Being" and singularity), namely, we should take each "name" as independent in itself, and not as a predicate for another "name": "… taking this for this, this is only about this [*wei hu ci* 唯乎此] and partaking [*xing* 行] in this. Taking what it is for what it is, this is rectification" (… 此此當乎此/則唯乎此/其謂行此/其以當而當也/以當而當/正也) ("Mingshi lun" 11); "Once names have been rectified, (our apprehension of) each thing would be only about itself" (其名正/則唯乎其彼此焉) ("Mingshi lun" 7). Then, the name "white" indicating the "thing" behind it ("whiteness") would be "only about" the "thing" (唯乎此)—its "reality" and "Being" (the totality of its infinite attributes/predicates)—without the intrusion from a predicate which, by its logical, finite and abstract nature, is qualitatively different from and thus narrows and overshadows this concrete infinity. Since "a thing is a thing" (物其所物) ("Mingshi lun" 2), it cannot be judged

and should be radically distinguished from a predicate ("指 are what do not exist in the world; things are what (do) exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not admissible" (指也者/天下之所無也/物也者/天下之所有也/以天下之所有為天下之所無/未可), ("Zhiwu lun" 4)).

In the infinity of this concrete, incessant, panoramic apprehension, not a single attribute is disregarded. This apprehension could be intuitive, and then each thing would occupy its "place" (位)—having not yet become "contaminated" by a qualification (which is supposed to refer to another predicate-transcending "thing" on its own) that only "displaces" this intuition out of its original "place",[16] to the "wrong" "place" of a predicate (指, "…is B") thus, narrowing the infinite features of the "Being" of the thing down to only one among them. As such, a "name" as a "road sign" or "mantra" of the "thing" in its reality, "leaves the wrong place that it (the predicate/attribute) occupies, occupies its rightful place, makes it rectified" (出其所位非位/位其所位焉/正也) ("Mingshi lun" 4), reconstructing the infinity of the "thing" by separating itself from other "names", avoiding any possibility of being combined with them in judgments, thereby radically destructing the dual structure of judgement. *Zhengming* (正名) would then deny the possibility of any predication of an attribute.

This is the signification of a "name" for a "thing". As a name does not possess a predicate (unlike a judgment), it is what restrains us from narrowing our cognition with judgments, and thereby opens us to the more intuitive, wider realm of "things". The respective predicate, or universal-transcending horseness and whiteness, are incommensurable singularities which should not be synthesized in the realm of logical inclusion.

This makes it equally wrong to say that "A white horse is a horse" ("On one side, it's 'horseness', on the other, 'whiteness-horseness'. (And 'horseness' is not absolutely the same as 'whiteness-horseness'")). This is because, the judgment "A white horse is a horse" is precisely based on the presupposition that we can attribute 1) the single abstract attribute "white" to the concrete, intuitive reality of the "thing"—"horseness" in the word compound "white horse" (the total attributes of "horseness" including "white", but *not excluding* height, weight, temperament, race, freedom, meadow, knight, war, etc., infinitely transcending the "shape" horse and connecting to infinite beings); 2) the single abstract concept/predicate "horse" to the concrete, intuitive reality "whiteness-horseness" in the subject position in the judgment "A white horse is a horse" (the total attributes

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16 The infinity which constitutes its true reality: "Reality is reality, not an absence. This is its place" (實以實其所實/不曠焉/位也) ("Mingshi lun" 3).

of "whiteness-horseness" including "white" and "horse" but *not excluding* the possibly implicit ivory, pearl white, light grey, paper, wedding gown, clouds, innocence, Casablanca, hospital, beginning; height, weight, temperament, race, freedom, knight, meadow, war, etc., infinitely transcending the "shape" (horse) and "colour" (white), connecting to infinite beings—the infinite features of "whiteness-horseness" constituting its singular existence), disregarding the fact that the former, in 1) and 2), can never exhaust the latter. Thus the judgment "A white horse is a horse" is based on the double judgments "This horse is white" (the word compound "white horse") and "A white horse is a horse" of logical identity, ignoring the predicate-transcending singular infinities, the "Beings" of "whiteness", "horseness" and "whiteness-horseness".

This is the same as with the claim of 2). The true meaning of the extravagant differentiation between "shape" (horse) and "colour" (white) is that the names "horse" and "white" indicate two "realities" which should be conceived of as existing in themselves, namely as predicate-transcending, infinite "things"—"horseness" and "whiteness" ("only about this" (唯乎此) "Mingshi lun" 11)), and not combined with one another in judgments, such as "This horse is white", "A white horse is a horse", etc., as the predicates are not absolutely identical with these "things" ("taking (當) it as what it is not, this is chaos" (其以當不當也/不當而亂也) ("Mingshi lun" 10)). By avoiding the chaos (亂) of judging, we finally take each "thing" as it is (物其所物)—apprehending it in its predicate-transcending, panoramic infinity, instead of as "what it is not"—a universal, a logical set and a mere fiction of our mind (white/horse) in a judgment/"zhi". This conclusion also echoes "Zhiwu lun": "… but judgments are not what they judge/are non-judgments" (… 而指/非指[17]) ("Zhiwu lun" 1)—judgments do not equate to the "things" they judge.

> Host: "If we have white horse and may take it for a horse, may we say then that a white horse can be taken for a brown horse? Guest: We may not."
>
> 曰/以有白馬為有馬/謂有白馬為有黃馬/可乎/曰/未可. ("Baima lun" 12)
>
> Host: "If there is a difference between horse and brown horse, this is differentiating brown horse from horse. If we differentiate brown horse from horse, this makes it also correct to say that "A brown horse is not a horse'."
>
> 曰/以有馬為異有黃馬/是異黃馬於馬也/異黃馬於馬/是以黃馬為非馬. (ibid. 13)

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17   See footnote 19.

> Host: "Taking brown horse for non-horse and white horse for horse, this is like flying into a pool, or to have the inner coffin and the outer coffin in different places. This is contradictory."

> 以黃馬為非馬而以白馬為有馬/此飞者入池而棺椁異處/此天下之悖言亂辭也. (ibid. 14)[18]

The Host reconfirms his position of (10) with the example of the brown horse.

> Guest: "The claim that 'having a white horse is not having no horse' is a claim which separates whiteness [from the 'whiteness-horseness' conceived in 10]. If not separated, you would claim that having a whiteness-horseness does not mean having a horseness. So, if you take a horse (for a white horse), you actually take a horse for a horse and not the whiteness-horseness for horseness. This is how a white horse is taken to be a horse. It makes no sense to claim that a horse is a horse."

> 曰/有白馬不可為謂無馬者/離白之謂也/不離者/有白馬不可謂有馬也/故所以為有馬者/獨以馬為有馬耳/非有白馬為有馬也/故其為有馬也/不可以謂馬馬也. ("Baima lun" 15).

This is again a reaffirmation of (10). The identity of the abstract predicate "horse" with the infinite intuition of "whiteness-horseness" is valid only logically—when we make the mere logical and illusory inclusion between the two terms "A white horse is a horse". However, this is "separating whiteness from the 'whiteness-horseness'" and is only equal to tautologically identifying "horse" with "horse" ("you actually take a horse for a horse"). Then one ignores the infinite meanings and nuances of the predicate-transcending singularities—"whiteness", "horseness" and "whiteness-horseness".

"You actually take a horse for a horse" reveals the essence of the judgment "A white horse is a horse"—tautology. It finally equals to the judgment "A horse is a horse". The two judgments are both based on the logical principle of identity. In contrast, to simply call a horse "horse" (via its "name") corresponds to the feeling of the infinite and ineffable qualities of "horseness" as evoked by this "name". This infinity (Dimension 3) transcends by far the cognitive and semantic poorness of the tautological "A horse is a horse" (Dimension 1). Therefore, we should simply call a horse "horse" and call white "white", intuiting them in their concrete infinity without predicates, without linking these "names" one to another via logical identity in the form of judgments.

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18   In this passage there are several differences between the 1952 version and the others. I have taken the advice of the reviewers and followed the Daozang version regarding these differences.

From Hölderlin's perspective, even in case of tautology a horse conceived by the speaker in the subject cannot be identical with the concept of the horse in the predicate, for the self-consciousness of the speaker changes permanently and does not retain a logical identity with itself ("In opposing myself to myself, separating myself from myself, yet in recognizing myself as the same in the opposed regardless of this separation. Yet to what extent as the same?" (Hölderlin 1988, 38)). Thus the speaker views the object, i.e., the horse, at a time that is already different from the time of the enunciation of the subject. Therefore, due to the dualist structure of judgment, this identity (A horse is a horse) is only logically valid, as there is still a "separation" between subject and object due to the time interval, and cannot depict the integrity and semantic infinity of the "thing"—the horseness in its predicate-transcending "Being", instead of conceptually doubling it (A is A).

It is a serious misunderstanding to take tautology for Gongsun Long's last word. Just like Hölderlin, he radically distinguishes the sphere of judgment from that of "things" or reality ("… and things cannot be named judgments" (… 而物不可謂指也) ("Zhiwu lun" 5), denying any possibility for judgmental knowledge, including tautological judgment, to gain access to things. Moreover, he claims that to gain real understanding of the reality of things and avoid "chaos" (亂) ("Mingshi lun" 10) in cognition, we should simply not combine "names" one with another, making one of them subject, the other predicate, namely, in a judgment: "Calling 'that' and 'that' is not limited at 'that', this is not the right way of calling 'that'" (謂彼/而彼不唯乎彼/則彼謂不行) ("Mingshi lun" 8); "Taking it as what it is not, this is chaos" (其以當不當也/不當而亂也) ("Mingshi lun" 10). When "calling 'that'" by its "name" one must "limit" oneself at the holistic, infinite intuition of the reality ("Being") suggested by its "name"—without adding any abstract predicate to this pre-predicative apprehension which only overshadows and distorts its infinity ("Taking it as what it is not, this is chaos"), even if it is the same predicate as its name (She 2022). A predicate appearing in the form of a judgment radically differs from the "thing" that it qualifies ("Judgments are not what they judge" (而指非指) ("Zhiwu lun" 1). Judging in all forms would be chaotic, as it segments and disturbs our widest possible cognition of a thing by separating our unity with it into a cognizer and object.

Consequently, a "name" should be distinguished from a concept as the logical identity of the noun with itself (tautology A is A), or a more complex predicate applied in a judgement such A is B, or a series of predicates. In all cases, a predicate belongs to the separation from the infinite intuition of the subject (指), abstracted from the "real" (實) ("Mingshi lun" 3) experience of the "Being" of things. In contrast, a "name" can be the indicator of the intuitive, ineffable feeling of a thing in its infinite features which constitutes its singularity, since

the intuiting consciousness would be in a, if not total (since the attribution of "names" involves minimum reflectivity), at least quasi-unity with the thing intuited (quasi-Dimension 3) and "participate" in (行此) ("Mingshi lun" 11) the flux of its ever-transforming reality (and thus no longer radically "separated" from it). As this unbounded feeling runs through infinite predicates without identifying itself with any of them, it experiences the "thing" *as* ever-changing and thereby, by "participating" in the infinite reality of the thing, transcends the dualism of judgment to some extent.

This would be the overcoming of the object-oriented thought, judgmental expression and even action in the usual sense: "Judgments do not exist in the world. This arises from the idea that things have their own names and cannot be judged" (天下無指者/生於物之各有名/不為指也) ("Zhiwu lun" 10). In this sense, a "name"—rather than an action which has to permanently *strive towards* (and thus, is separated from) reality, or a predicate, which only segments reality—would be a better solution for depicting reality.

> Host: "[the attribute] 'white' cannot determine the thing that it qualifies. If we forget this, we would claim that a white horse is a horse."
>
> 曰/白者不定所白/忘之/而可也. ("Baima lun" 16)

Again, we should not attribute "white" to a thing (the horse) as a predicate for the horse, for the single attribute "white" cannot cover (or "determine" 定) the whole range of infinite attributes of the horse in its "horseness". Instead, we should consider whiteness as it is and horseness as it is, not combining the two "names" in a judgment—one as the holistic, infinite intuition of the thing, the other as a predicate which divides it. Not only does horseness point to a predicate-transcending reality encompassing an infinity of qualities, *but whiteness as well*. Both "names" should be separated, so that each can be free from any predicative entanglement, and thus mutual limitations. If, on the contrary, we make one "determine" the other in a judgment such as "This horse is white", hence "separating", overshadowing and narrowing the holistic, infinite intuition of the horse through the predicate "white" and effectively determining the undeterminable (Being or the thing in its infinity), we would for the same reason be led to make another judgment, "A white horse is a horse".

> Host: "[The compound term] 'white horse' is saying [the attribute] 'white' as well as determining the thing that this [attribute] 'white' qualifies. The thing that this [attribute] white qualifies [its 'horseness'] is not [the attribute] 'white' [itself]."
>
> 白馬者/言白/定所白也/定所白者/非白也. ("Baima lun" 17)

(12)–(20) are further elaborations of (10). In the compound term "white horse" sharing the same "separating" structure in consciousness as the judgment "This horse is white", we are "determining" the infinite intuition of the "Being" or reality of the horse (horseness) through the attribute "white" which only has a linguistic nature ("saying" 言). However, the "thing" (horseness) determined by this attribute "white" should be distinguished from this linguistic sphere of the attribute "white". This means the horse, considered in itself, in its predicate-transcending infinity—horseness—is not absolutely identical ("Baima lun" 6) to the semantic sphere of the attribute "white" ("Judgments are what does not exist in the world; things are what does exist in the world. To identify what exists in the world with what does not exist in the world, this is not admissible", ("Zhiwu lun" 4)). A horse in its *reality* and horseness contains an infinity of qualities, among which the semantic feature "white" "determines" (定) only a part. This "determination", which essentially is 指, is based on a logical identity, ignoring the singular infinities of "horseness" and "whiteness".

> Host: "What a horse is, the colour of which is not yet determined, so brown horses or black horses would meet the requirement."
>
> 馬者/無去取於色/故黃黑皆/所以應. ("Baima lun" 18)
>
> Host: "What a white horse is, the colour of which is determined, so brown horses or black horses are all eliminated for their colours. This is why only a white horse would meet the requirement for a white horse."
>
> 白馬者/有去取於色/黃黑馬皆所以色去/故唯白馬獨可以應耳. (ibid. 19)
>
> Host: "those not eliminated are not those eliminated, this is why we say, a white horse is not a horse."
>
> 無去者/非有去也/故曰/白馬非馬. (ibid. 20)

Only a white horse can meet the requirement when one asks for a white horse, a random horse without specification of its colour may or may not have the white colour needed ("separate whiteness from the 'whiteness-horseness'" ("Baima lun" 15)). This sphere of action in "Baima lun" presupposes the predicate-transcending sphere of "things" in "Mingshi lun" and "Zhiwu lun": we should feel and intuit whiteness and horseness in their predicate-transcending infinities instead of composing these names in the logical form of judgment, be it the simple judgment "This horse is white" (the compound term "white horse"), or "A white horse is a horse". The logical identity made in both judgments can in no way guarantee an absolute identity and unity between the subject and predicate. What the

predicate of the judgment presents is nothing but a one-sided narrative ("horse") of the infinite reality of the subject ("whiteness-horseness"), which contains much more than this narrative. Since Gongsun Long's argument is based on the judgment-transcending realm of "things", and not on a logical and linguistic level of judgment (指), a white horse intuited as "whiteness-horseness" cannot be reduced to a single predicate "horse" in the logical realm, nor the intuition of the "horseness (without 'whiteness')" in the realm of action.

However, how should the conclusion "White horse (is) not horse" be explained? Although this is actually a judgment, and thus inevitably a separation of the absolute integrity of "whiteness-horseness" through the concept of the horse, due to the negation it is cognitively better than "White horse (is) horse". The structural fallacy of the judgment "White horse (is) horse" is to a certain extent resolved by the negation of the logical bond between subject and object, and exists as the distortion of the distortion of reality, namely as the *ironical* self-relativization of the initial dogmatic perspective of "White horse (is) horse". In this way "White horse (is) not horse" transcends the single-sided knowledge represented in the judgment "White horse (is) horse" and becomes dialectical (She 2022). However, this dimension remains implicit in "Baima lun" and needs to be reconstructed.

In the same way, for Novalis, the nature of *reflection* (*Spielgelung* in German) is an *ordo inversus*: thinking is like "reflecting in a mirror", it renders the left side of the object on the right and vice versa. To resolve this unavoidable paradox, we should overturn this inversion through an opposite reflection, reestablishing the right relation between judgment and Being in an act of "not-knowing of knowing" (Frank 1989). If we submit to Kant's claim that thinking is judging, then this semantically coincides with judgment.

Therefore, I would correlate Gongsun Long's conclusion, "White horse (is) not horse", with irony, mainly for following reasons:

First, irony is a style which is not only often observed in Gongsun Long's debates, but also in the few surviving anecdotes about his life. This should be the formal answer.

Second, Gongsun Long radically separates the spheres of judgment and things in themselves. "Guest: 'Things (物) are all about judgments (指), but judgments are not what they judge'" (物莫非指/而指非指)[19] ("Zhiwu lun" 1); "… and things

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19   非指 (non-judgment) is a term created by Gongsun Long and appears throughout "Zhiwu lun". 物莫非指 should be broken into 物/莫/非/指 instead of 物莫/非指: nothing is not about judgments (double negation with 莫 and 非). 而指非指 should be broken into 而指/非指 with the term 非指. Some translations are based on the subdivisions 物莫/非指, 而指/非指, taking both 非指 as fixed concepts, and consequently falling into this linguistic trap (She 2022).

cannot be named judgments" (…而物不可謂指也) (ibid. 5). There is an unavoidable paradox between judgments and things, for although everything that a judgement expresses about a thing is a rootless, fictive construction, this fiction seems to be all that we have and all that we can *take to be* the reality of thing. This irony lies in the dualistic, segmenting structure of judgment itself, for things are not segmented in themselves, they inherently "cannot be judged". So "White horse (is) not horse" is an ironical critique of judgment by a judgment, a self-negation rather than self-affirmation and confirmation of the critique of judgment (指) in "Zhiwu lun".

Third, on a more theoretical level Gongsun Long clearly criticizes *any* attempt at combining "names" in the form of judgments: "Calling 'that' and 'that' is not limited at 'that', this is not the right way of calling 'that'" ("Mingshi lun" 8). For example, not limiting at the infinite intuition suggested by the name of "whiteness-horseness" ("that") and adding the predicate "horse" ("this") to it in the judgment "A white horse is a horse", this is the wrong way of calling "that". "Taking this for that, and taking that and this, this is wrong" (ibid. 13). Namely, taking the predicate "horse" ("this") for "whiteness-horseness" ("that") and taking "whiteness-horseness" ("that") and the predicate "horse" ("this") together in the judgment "A white horse is a horse", instead of taking "whiteness", "horseness" and "whiteness-horseness" separately. As a result, the best way of thoroughly apprehending a thing is through the direct intuition of its predicate-transcending reality by the calling of its "name": "Once the names of things are rectified, (our apprehension of) each thing would be only about/limited at itself and be separated from each other" (ibid. 7). "This is why taking that for that, this is limiting oneself at that (唯乎彼) and partaking (行) in that" (ibid. 11).

Finally, as the system of "names" proposed by Gongsun Long points to a new system of language in contrast to the usual one based on dualism (be it in the Western or Chinese form), it would be impossible to directly express it in the usual language form. Irony would be a boundary-expression which suggests such a possibility of language.

To have true knowledge of a thing is to place it directly, without the interference of predicates which only segment, overshadow and hinder our widest possible apprehension of things, into its infinite reality (its "Being") via its "name". "Rectification of names" can be achieved this way, because only through an infinite, intuitive awareness can we fuse with the thing, "partaking in" its changing process without segmenting our holistic apprehension of it. Intuitive apprehension does not dualistically separate the thing into a subject and its predicate, which is the only possible characterization of the thing by a judgment, only to reunite them

afterwards in a synthesis. Instead, it panoramically holds together the infinite characteristics of things, without excluding, distorting or segmenting it through the predicate in the one-sided perspective of judgmental, dualistic cognition—"colluding" the mere predicates "white", "horse" and "white horse" with each other in the dual judgmental form. The judgment "White horse (is) not (a) horse" is thus valid as self-destructive irony.

Conclusion

Through the Heidelberg School's interpretation of Hölderlin's fragment "Being and Judgment", considered a complementary justification and reconstruction of the hidden premise of Gongsun Long's view, this paper has interpreted the famous paradox "White horse is not a horse" of "Baima lun" as the ironical critique of judgment by a judgment and confirmed this thesis through "Baima lun", "Zhiwu lun" and "Mingshi lun". Upon further exploration of the Heidelberg School's path, this paper has distinguished several Dimensions in Hölderlin's conception of "Being". "Things" in "Mingshi lun", interpreted as Dimension 3, are concrete, ineffable, non-conceptual, non-predicative, trans-individual, and a singular infinity. This singular infinity radically transcends a universal, a concept of set (logical identity), a mass noun or a Platonic idea of abstract entity, as the latter all still belong to the realm of "zhi" (judgment) and predication, which the "Zhiwu lun" considers as not only infinitely opposed to but also radically transcended by the realm of things. Consequently, a name is superior to "zhi" as a method for rendering things. As a single name escapes from any possibility of predication, it *allegorically* provides a means of viewing and *suggesting* things as this singular infinity. This approach thereby authentically places the *GSLZ* into the nominalist background of the pre-Qin period. As Hansen's approach is still considered as based on the realm of "zhi", thus remaining both abstract and realist, this approach can be seen as transcending it. Through this approach, "Baima lun", "Mingshi lun" and "Zhiwu lun" are theoretically interconnected.

Acknowledgement

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Toward a Critical Non-Humanism in Postwar Japan

Jay HETRICK*

Abstract

In this article, I argue that the infamous discussions around "overcoming modernity" that occurred in Japan in 1942 shared Michel Foucault's conceptual conflation between humanism and modernism. That is, these discussions were not only declarations—in line with other postcolonial struggles of the time—against the dominance of the West politically and culturally. Philosophically, the programme of overcoming modernity can be understood as a set of discourses on anti-humanism that, in some ways, foreshadow those we find in Europe two decades later. In the case of the Kyoto School, the anti-humanist standpoint arose quite naturally from the particular philosophical history of Japan, combined with the fact that the philosophers in this school were close readers of Nietzsche and Heidegger, anti-humanists *avant la lettre*. For Sakaguchi Ango, whose ideas were very much opposed to the Kyoto School, a critique of the human was developed from his enthusiastic embrace of Jean-Paul Sartre. Ultimately, I argue, we need both the Kyoto School and Sakaguchi in order to understand the theoretical foundation for the various forms of critical non-humanism we find in contemporary Japanese art, philosophy, and culture.

Keywords: Sakaguchi Ango, Kyoto School, Michel Foucault, subjectivity, non-humanism

H kritičnemu nehumanizmu v povojni Japonski

Izvleček

V tem članku trdim, da so zloglasne razprave o »premagovanju modernosti«, ki so se zgodile na Japonskem leta 1942, vsebovale konceptualno mešanje humanizma in modernizma Michela Foucaulta. To pomeni, da te razprave niso bile le izjave – v skladu z drugimi postkolonialnimi boji tistega časa – proti politični in kulturni prevladi Zahoda. Filozofsko lahko program preseganja modernosti razumemo kot skupek diskurzov o protihumanizmu, ki na neki način napovedujejo tiste, ki jih najdemo v Evropi dve desetletji pozneje. V primeru kjotske šole protihumanistično stališče povsem naravno izhaja iz posebne filozofske zgodovine Japonske, skupaj z dejstvom, da so bili filozofi te šole pozorni bralci Nietzscheja in Heideggerja, protihumanistov *avant la lettre*. Za Sakaguchija Anga, čigar ideje so močno nasprotovale kjotski šoli, se je kritika humanizma razvila iz njegovega

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navdušenega sprejemanja Jeana-Paula Sartra. V sklepnem delu pokažem, da potrebujemo tako kjotsko šolo kot Sakaguchija, da bi razumeli teoretske temelje za različne oblike kritičnega nehumanizma, ki jih najdemo v sodobni japonski umetnosti, filozofiji in kulturi.

Ključne besede: Sakaguchi Ango, kjotska šola, Michel Foucault, subjektivnost, nehumanizem

Introduction

In the midst of the general postwar movement towards Existentialism in Europe and, more specifically, following Jean-Paul Sartre's 1945 lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism", many thinkers began to problematize the conception of the human that had been at the core of Western philosophical discourse for several centuries. This tendency became theoretically robust with so-called French poststructuralism, especially after the publication of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, Louis Althusser's *For Marx*, and Jacques Lacan's *Écrits* in 1966 (which, notably, was also the year in which Sartre gave a series of lectures in Japan (Asabuki 1996)). Although the discourses on anti-humanism were heterogeneous and devoid of any "agreement on a positive definition of an alternative model to humanism" (Han-Pile 2010, 118), they generally entailed "a denunciation both of foundationalism and of an Enlightenment-inspired, progressivist view of history as the result of the actions of autonomous agents" (ibid., 119). Foucault's target is an idea of the human that he describes as an empirico-transcendental "folding" of subjectivity which, in the Enlightenment, became simultaneously "an object of possible knowledge" as well as "the being through which all knowledge is possible" (Foucault 1994a, 607). He argues, somewhat against the grain of scholarly consensus, that although Renaissance thinkers were "able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world", they were not yet able to conceive of this particular form of enfolded subjectivity (Foucault 1994c, 318). Crucially, because the human was no longer "grounded upon God's infinite transcendence", but was rather self-grounded in its folding upon itself, humanism marked a "threshold beyond which we recognize our modernity" (ibid., 317).

In the following, I argue that the infamous discussions around "overcoming modernity" that occurred in Japan in 1942 shared this basic conflation of humanism and modernism. That is, these discussions were not only declarations—concurrent with other postcolonial struggles of that time—against the dominance of the West politically and culturally. Philosophically, the programme of overcoming modernity should be understood as another set of discourses on anti-humanism that in some ways foreshadow those we find in Europe. As we shall see, in the

case of the Kyoto School this anti-humanist standpoint arose from the particular philosophical history of Japan, combined with the fact that Kyoto School thinkers were close readers of Nietzsche and Heidegger, anti-humanists *avant la lettre*.[1] For Sakaguchi Ango, whose ideas were very much opposed to the Kyoto School, humanism was problematized by way of his enthusiastic embrace of Sartre. We need both the Kyoto School and Sakaguchi in order to understand the theoretical foundation for the various forms of contemporary non-humanism we find in Japanese art, philosophy, and culture today. For example, in a particular trajectory of Japanese contemporary art, "it appears to be a perfectly normal and everyday affair to decenter subjectivity" and to affirm a paradoxical "synthesis between subjectivity and objectivity" (Hetrick 2022b, 552). In 1957, Kusama Yayoi claimed that "when I wish to paint a bird, I try to place myself inside the character of the bird and speak as I imagine the bird would speak. I do the same for a rock, a fish, a tree" (Kusama Yayoi, quoted in Hetrick 2022b, 551). Similarly, in 2012 Tanaka Min explained that "thinking of oneself as a center seems inseparable from our typical understanding of subjectivity. But I can shift my subjectivity to something other than a fixed center, for example, to a bowl of rice" (Tanaka Min, quoted in Hetrick 2022b, 551).[2] I maintain that such non-humanist standpoints are critical in the sense that they actively resist both the collapse into fascist ideology *and* the withdrawal into humanist, posthumanist, or transhumanist forms of individualism.

Versions of individualist subjectivity can be traced across the spectrum of contemporary Japanese thought and culture, including in the Anpō theorists Maruyama Masao and Yoshimoto Takaaki, the globally recognized philosopher Karatani Kōjin, as well as in the recent social phenomena of *otaku*. Yoshimoto was arguably the most influential thinker of the Japanese New Left. His "End of a Fictitious System" was a key text for student radicals in 1968 and, perhaps more importantly, his ideas were formative for the next generation of public intellectuals, including especially Karatani and Asada Akira. In this text, Yoshimoto expresses his aversion towards any ideology which demands that people "sacrifice the private, serve the public" (Yoshimoto 2005, 1097). His target was not simply wartime totalitarianism but, more directly, the form of democracy advocated by Maruyama as well as the ideology of the

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1   French anti-humanism also has a prehistory, with respect to its own readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, that can be traced back to at least the 1930s (Geroulanos 2010). Furthermore it should be noted that, in the early years of the postwar period, this embrace of anti-humanism became somewhat attenuated due to a perceived conflation with totalitarian ideologies.

2   Furthermore, Tanaka's practice might be productively situated within the Foucauldian lineage of ethico-aesthetic cultivation, since he frequently collaborated with the French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, who developed his own conception of ethico-aesthetics after the later Foucault. When asked about his collaborations with Guattari, Tanaka claimed that he can "translate through my body" Guattari's theory of de-subjectification (Tanaka, quoted in Fuller 2016, 254).

Japanese Communist Party. He claimed that in true democracy "private interests are the highest priority", and individuals are therefore more important than the state (ibid., 1098). The subject position he promoted was a form of radical autonomy (*jiritsu*) in which individuals were given the right to live freely and indifferently to any particular ruling power. However, this critical standpoint ultimately developed into a seemingly apolitical ideology in which Yoshimoto condoned the participation of autonomous individuals in the "super capitalism" of a post-Fordist consumer society. Interestingly, clues to the theoretical foundation of Yoshimoto's concept of autonomy can be gleaned from an interview he conducted with Foucault in 1978 on the theme of overcoming Marxism. Although it is not clear to what extent Yoshimoto was "a deep reader of Marx" (Hasumi Shigehiko, quoted in Foucault 2024, 182), it seems that he—like his political rival Maruyama—wished to recover a Marx before Engels, that is, a young humanist Marx who was primarily concerned with problems of "the individual will, self-consciousness, and individual ethics" (Yoshimoto, quoted in Foucault 2024, 127). In this interview, Foucault and Yoshimoto reached an impasse because French poststructuralism had vehemently rejected a return to the "young Marx". For Althusser, Marx's theoretical revolution occurred precisely in his break from an Enlightenment conception of humanism, which he identified as the moment of Marx's turn away from the ideology of his Hegelian youth. Similarly, just as Foucault tried to avoid Yoshimoto's persistent questions about political will in this interview, he tended to avoid the term autonomy—understood as an ontological property of the subject that exists somehow outside of power relations—throughout his work. As we shall see, even after Foucault introduced the concept of subjectivation in 1980, a form of ethical agency is decoupled from Kantian autonomy in the development of critical "techniques of the self".

Yoshimoto followed his logic of radical autonomy to its natural conclusion, and in 2001 stated that those who withdrawal from society should not be "dragged back", but rather granted the right of individual privacy and left alone (Yoshimoto, quoted in Cassegard 2008, 7). In the same year, Azuma Hiroki published his book about the *otaku* subculture in order to reveal "the psychological structure of contemporary Japan" (Azuma 2009, vii). Interestingly, one explicit goal of the book was to "resuscitate criticism and theory" (ibid., viii) from the likes of Karatani and Asada who, in different ways, follow Yoshimoto in the use of the rhetoric of withdrawal (Cassegard 2008). Azuma also claims that *otaku* subculture is not simply a phenomenon specific to Japan, but rather a symptom of our global contemporary condition. Turning an offhand remark by Alexandre Kojève on its head, Azuma argues that in its postwar period of Americanization, Japanese subjects became animalized. This "becoming animal" refers to a form of hyper-consumption that Azuma describes as a primal and un-reflective type of "craving" (Azuma 2009,

86), which is opposed to the more complex type of "intersubjective desire" that is necessary for building "social relations" (ibid., 87). This behaviour is further compared to that of "drug addicts" (ibid., 88), and is specifically conceived as a radically compounded version of the "logic of American-style consumer society" (ibid., 87). This subject position is therefore not "human" in the Enlightenment sense of the term, but should be characterized as an uncritical posthumanism that lacks "self-consciousness" (ibid., 86). The curious continuity between the critical humanism of Yoshimoto and the uncritical posthumanism of *otaku*—which both support forms of subjectivity based upon hyper-consumption and extreme social withdrawal—can already be detected in the writings of Sakaguchi Ango in his visceral rejection of the Kyoto School's anti-humanism.

Sakaguchi's intervention, while not officially part of the discussions on overcoming modernity, occurred alongside them. In terms of Japan's intellectual history, his writings function as a supplement to these symposia by injecting a spirit of critique into the more general postwar debates on Japanese subjectivity. Sakaguchi employed Sartre in his vehement critique of romantic and quietist images of pre-modern Japan, such as those depicted in the German architect Bruno Taut's *A Personal View of Japanese Culture*, which imagines a pure tradition of Japanese aesthetics that only bolstered and emboldened the nationalistic discourse on Japanese uniqueness. In retrospect it seems that Taut, who lived in Japan from 1933 to 1936, merely served as a strawman for Sakaguchi's critique against that discourse. But Sakaguchi was primarily a writer, and although he helped to introduce Sartre's literary works to a Japanese audience, he was seemingly uninterested in engaging with Sartre's wider philosophy. Therefore his critical spirit, while powerful and influential, was not developed into a systematic method. Quite possibly due to the relative dominance of the Kyoto School—and the influence of German thought more generally—"Sartre the philosopher did not catch the eye more than Sartre the writer" until after World War II (WWII) (Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 286).[3] In 1956, Takeuchi Yoshirō published the first philosophical introduction to Sartre's work in which he implored the Japanese to employ

> Sartrean thought as a weapon to fight against the many foolish ideas … of the Japanese spiritual climate. We must radically get rid of obscure thoughts, obscure human relationships, and obscure daily behaviors. For this mission no thought is stronger than Sartre's. (Takeuchi, quoted in Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 287)

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3   Similarly, Karatani claims that there was a basic "opposition between German thought and French thought" that fueled some of the internal disagreements at the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium (Karatani 2005, 104).

Even if his language is itself purposely obscure, it would have been clear enough to Japanese intellectuals that Takeuchi was advocating Sartre's philosophy in order to develop a method of critique to combat lingering prewar sensibilities: "learn radicalism in philosophical reflection, and in this way, strive to fundamentally get rid of the obscure Japanese reality where collusion is dominant" (Takeuchi, quoted in Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 289). For him, the first critical task was aimed precisely against the type of collusion suggested by members of the Kyoto School at the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium, which was repeated in Nishida Kitarō's 1944 essay "Theorizing the Kokutai" where he states that, in the ideal body politic "the individual and the whole form an immediate unity" (Nishida, quoted in Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo 2011, 1025). Rather than promote a kind of fascist mind-meld, Takeuchi instead follows Sartre in claiming that "genuine human relationships" truly function only through a logic of "conflictual encounter" (Takeuchi, quoted in Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 292).

The German philosopher Karl Löwith, who resided in Japan from 1936 to 1941, also notes the historical lack of a critical attitude in Japanese philosophy, particularly with regard to how foreign ideas have been appropriated. He claims that Japanese thinkers have generally not accounted for "the incongruity of the philosopher's concepts in contrasts with their own concepts" (Löwith, quoted in Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 288). While not typically referred to as "uncritical", this tendency has been traced back to the 6th century, at the time when various elements of Chinese and Korean culture were introduced to Japan:

> When foreign ideas or theories have entered Japan, its intellectuals have usually not resisted them as alienating or threatening (as Hegelianism would predict), but instead quite the opposite […] Japanese thinkers throughout history have generally been eager to consume the latest idea or theory from abroad. (Kasulis 2019, 83)

Japanese philosophers have tended to "consume" other ideas by way of three slightly different methodologies: what Thomas Kasulis has called allocation, hybridization, and relegation. Relegation, the most common method we find in Japanese intellectual history, is a form of syncretism that accepts "a new or opposing theory but only by consigning it to a subordinate position within an enlarged version of itself" which usually maintains a more "traditional" view (ibid., 85). We find relegation "in such modern philosophers as Nishida Kitarō", who absorbed a variety of Western theories, but only "partial[ly] when compared to his own" (ibid., 86). All three methods can be considered uncritical in the sense that, until quite recently, Japan did not adopt a system of logical argumentation comparable to that

of the West. The closest alternative is the logic of *soku-hi*—"a logic of sameness/difference"—which was developed most fully by Nishida, although "no Japanese philosopher ever developed this idea" into a formal system of analysis and refutation (ibid., 87).[4] It is only in the postwar period, with figures like Takeuchi Yoshirō and Ichikawa Hakugen, that we see the development of a critical method in Japanese thought, which would "shift the intellectual scheme" and thus "help change Japanese society after the war" (Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 285).

An important point to note, however, is that the inherently synthetic nature of Japanese philosophy disallows from the outset any notion of Japanese exceptionalism. The very concepts of subjectivity and critique—which together form the discipline of ethics—came to Japan from the outside, perhaps necessarily so.[5] But this does not mean the discourses around them were simply one-directional and hierarchical. For example, the notion of critique I rely upon here in order to investigate the non-humanist forms of subjectivity put forth by the Kyoto School and Sakaguchi Ango, comes itself from a lecture that Foucault gave immediately following his return from Japan in 1978. Furthermore, Félix Guattari—who builds upon Foucault's work in interesting ways and travelled to Japan eight times during the 1980s—argues that Japan has become the prototypical model for contemporary forms of subjectivation precisely because it hovers somewhere "between the animist worlds of Shinto and the non-places of a neon hypermodernity" (Hetrick 2015, 138). With this motley cast of figures, I hope to show that the complex problem of conceptualizing a critical non-humanism in postwar Japan means, in simplified terms, laying the foundation for forms of subjectivity that can accommodate a conception of no-self without becoming complicit with totalitarian politics. Ironically, Takeuchi has argued that the "poststructuralist critique of subjectivity can only be reactionary in Japanese culture where a truly modern political subjectivity has yet to be formed" (Takeuchi, quoted in Koschmann 1996, 6). Unfortunately, this claim betrays the reality of the various forms of subjectivity on display in contemporary Japanese art and culture. Furthermore, it betrays the direction of leading-edge Japanese philosophers today, who are very much concerned with the problem of contemporary subjectivation in our post-Fordist and post-Fukushima era, and who are deeply informed by French poststructuralism (Kohso 2020; Sato 2022). Furthermore, such critical non-humanism has much less to do with a transhumanist becoming-cyborg—which should be understood

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4   For a detailed analysis of the logic of *soku-hi*, as well as an alternative "comparative methodology of the gap" that takes into consideration the kind of conflictual *encounter* we find in Sartre, see Hetrick (2022a) and Hetrick (2023b).

5   "From the publication of Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* up to the present, the Kyoto School has not produced an adequate philosophy of ethics." (Kasulis 2018, 556)

as "enhancing individual senses or abilities" based upon an idea of human excep-
tionalism (Murata et al. 2024, 114)—than a more fundamental "unfolding of a
space in which it is once more possible to think" (Foucault 1994c, 342):

> What frightens me, in humanism, is that it presents a certain form of
> ethics as a universal model, valid for any type of freedom. I think that our
> *future* includes more secrets, more possible freedoms and inventions than
> humanism allows us to imagine. (Foucault 1988, 15)

Foucault—who provocatively claimed that Sartre remained, in some respects, a
"nineteenth-century philosopher" (Foucault 1994a, 542)—speculated, in conver-
sation with the Zen master Ōmori Sōgen, that the future of thought would inev-
itably occur by way of encounters "between Europe and non-Europe" (Foucault
2024, 156).

WWII and the Problem of the Japanese Subject

In the aftermath of WWII, one of the most urgent and heated debates within
Japanese intellectual circles concerned the concept of subjectivity. This urgency
arose from both the particular "socio-political circumstances and modes of con-
sciousness in the immediate postwar years" as well as the wider "intellectual his-
tory of Japan since the Meiji Restoration". As we shall see, these two interrelated
contexts, although specific to Japan, were always negotiated in relation to global
trends of thought. In fact, the significance of the term *subjectivity* is itself entirely
"bound up with Japanese readings" of European philosophy (Koschmann 1981,
610). The imperative to renegotiate the position of the subject within society was
initially driven by a very practical need, which was seemingly universal amongst
the Japanese even though a multitude of varying solutions across the political
spectrum as well as across academic disciplines were ultimately proposed. On Au-
gust 15th 1945, "the great Japanese empire collapsed … morally, politically, and
economically. The state was completely helpless in the face of popular demands
for such essentials as food, clothing, and shelter. As a result, the people were co-
erced to become 'individualists'" (Hidaka Rokurō, quoted in Koschmann 1981,
613). This very practical imperative to reconsider subjectivity was complicated by
recent memories of the prewar ideology of selfless devotion to the state apparatus.
However, the philosophical ground for the ensuing discussions had a complex
trajectory that stretched back at least half a century.

During the Meiji Restoration, Nishi Amane proposed that the modern West-
ern categories of objective and subjective were useful for thinking about the

relationships between Japanese systems of thought and those of China and Europe. By the time that Nishi coined a term to render "philosophy" into Japanese, these two traditions had impacted Japanese modes of thought so deeply that they fundamentally transformed the language itself, such that "new words based on Chinese sinographs" and a "Western conception of grammar" were integrated linguistically in ways that are nearly imperceptible today (Maraldo 2019, 337). But it was not until the publication of Nishida Kitarō's *Inquiry into the Good* in 1911 that we have the first original work of Japanese philosophy and, more specifically, the first Japanese concept of subjectivity. For Nishida, the concept of subjectivity found in East Asian Buddhism is grounded not upon a transcendent and essential self, but on a transcendental and immanent field of "pure experience" that precedes any bifurcation into the Western categories of the experiencing subject and experienced object. Remarkably, he articulates this idea in terms that are derived largely from Western philosophy, in particular William James and Henri Bergson (Hetrick 2023a, 144). Nishida spent the rest of his philosophical career further refining this seemingly "ontological and resolutely unpolitical" project of overcoming the modern subject (Stevens 2011, 232).

In 1942, following the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and the United States, several of Nishida's students—who had been grouped together under the appellation "Kyoto School"—participated in two symposia whose ambition was nothing less than renegotiating Japan's cultural and political relationship with modern Western civilization. Amongst some factions, there was a heightened sense that the notion of "Overcoming Modernity"—the title of the most famous of these discussions—productively dovetailed with concurrent postcolonial struggles that were occurring globally. At the other symposium—entitled "Japan and the World-Historical Standpoint"—Nishitani Keiji claimed that:

> Asia has been for Europeans something to act upon, and it is from that viewpoint alone that they have viewed this part of the world. … But Europe is ceasing to be the world. The reason for this decline in global status is the emergence of the colored races. This development appears to have cast a great shadow over the West. (Nishitani Keiji, quoted in Williams 2014, 116–18)

However, the political language employed at these symposia was completely inadequate and sometimes seemed to support the ultranationalist discourse regarding "the military overthrow of Western hegemony in favor of a Japanese hegemony" (Stevens 2011, 234) and, more generally, theories of Japanese exceptionalism. That is, the political dimension was often conflated with supposedly apolitical

discussions around aesthetics and culture. The war was seen as the culminating symptom of a long and deep spiritual struggle, which now sought to rid Japan of the "sickness" of Western modernity. And it had to be fought on two fronts simultaneously:

> The war we are fighting today seeks to overthrow Anglo-American pow-er externally, even as it serves internally as medical treatment for a sick spirit weakened by modernization. (Kamei Katsuichiro, quoted in Harootunian 2019, 199)

Such a conflation (and, ultimately, confusion) was perhaps due to the fact that, in an environment where "political and economic liberalisms themselves had been hunted down", explicit, implicit, and self-imposed censorship occurred to such an extent that "freedom was only realized at an imaginary level"—that is, in "mere" philosophical terms (Karatani 2005, 109). In particular, the language of Nishitani's contribution to the symposium on overcoming modernity performs this confusion, which is further compounded when we recall that Japanese philosophy has itself been deeply affected and inflected, from its origins, by Chinese and Western languages. This is how we should understand statements like "one of the characteristics of the overcoming modernity symposium was its criticism of German thought" (ibid., 104). Kobayashi Hideo—a Bergsonist who, as editor of the Bungakukai literary journal, was the organizer of the symposium—even went so far as to criticize Nishitani's paper for lacking "the sensuality of the Japanese people's language" (quoted in Karatani 2005, 105).

Nishitani begins his paper by explaining that the term "modernity" refers to certain elements of Western culture, as they were appropriated in Japan since the Meiji Restoration. These elements, with all their "discordant divisions", had "in-filtrated" Japanese culture to such an extent that there was a "danger of splitting apart the very foundation of the nation's unified worldview". Very quickly we understand that Nishitani's critique of modernity has to do, more specifically, with a conception of subjectivity that he traces from Renaissance "humanism" to the type of "individualism" that had been exported to Japan during the interwar period (Nishitani 2008, 52–53). This modern individual was symbolized in Japanese popular culture "as new subjectivities like the 'modern girl' and the 'Marx boy'" (Harootunian 2019, 202). Implicit to his argument is the idea that the Japanese subject should be understood with a motto that might be stated as—riffing on Bruno Latour—"we have never been human", in the technical sense that it cannot be drawn unproblematically from this Western tradition of humanism. This is because it is not based upon an "I am", an individual ego whose fundamental

cognitive capacity is to think (*cogito, ergo sum*), but rather a no-self (*muga*) that feels in the heart (*kokoro*). Nishitani takes specific aim at the Kantian subject, whose conditions of possibility are the transcendent ideas of God, World, and Soul, which have no real correlate in the immanent metaphysics of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. The call to overcome modernity, for Nishitani, therefore means first and foremost a reconstruction of the Japanese—but ultimately pan-Asian as well as trans-historical—worldview, starting with the "ethical" task of "looking within ourselves for what remains of subjectivity" (Nishitani 2008, 54). He argues that we will find "true subjectivity", a "subjective nothingness" that the "post-Renaissance West" could have never articulated because it lacks the Buddhist logic of "negation-*qua*-affirmation", which makes possible the proposition: "subjectivity appears as the negation of the conscious self," the "no-self that destroys the ego" (ibid., 55).

This conception of subjectivity is consistent with Nishida Kitarō's seemingly "unpolitical" onto-logic—which he calls "contradictory self-identity"—as well as the Mahāyāna view of no-self (Hetrick 2022a). However, it is in the second half of Nishitani's paper that the more politicized version of Kyoto School philosophy becomes apparent. As some have argued, Nishitani and the other Kyoto School participants of the 1942 symposia "had a more enthusiastic attitude toward Japanese imperialism than Nishida" (Ives 1994, 39). In this regard, there are two interrelated issues in Nishitani's paper. First, he argues that "only Oriental religiosity" can provide the proper conceptual foundation for the "standpoint of subjective nothingness" he advocates (Nishitani 2008, 56) and, "even in the Orient itself, Japan is the sole country"—with its unique mixture of Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism—that is able to do so effectively (ibid., 58). This is because the ethical task of extinguishing the ego is conflated with a "self-annihilation in devotion to the nation" (ibid., 56), an "ethics of service" that has deep roots in "Japan's traditional spirit" (ibid., 59). Therefore, the ethics of self-cultivation becomes a national ethics that seems to support the discourse of Japanese exceptionalism and, even worse, the fascist ideology of complete submission to the state. Second, although Nishitani specifically rules out the idea of founding "a world empire through conquest" by negating-*qua*-affirming "the standpoint of mere national self-interest" (ibid., 61), he explicitly employs this ideology to further justify Japanese military policy at the outset of WWII: "our activity of constructing a Greater East Asia while fighting the United States and England" has become "a world-historical necessity" (ibid., 60).

The blatant complicity of Nishitani's rhetoric with state ideology and policy has been somewhat mitigated by the discovery of memoranda which reveal that Kyoto School philosophers, including Nishitani, held top secret meetings at the behest

of the Japanese Navy with the aim of "correcting government policy", including "toppling the regime of Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki, who with the Army had pressed for war with the United States" (Ōhashi 2019, 371). Furthermore, in later writings Nishitani claimed that the real intention of his wartime writings was to "open up a path in thought that might overcome from within the ideas of ultra-nationalism" (Nishitani, quoted in Mori 1994, 316). From this perspective, the project of overcoming modernity has been seen as neither a simple overcoming of the West in favour of the East, nor a simple overcoming of the modern in favour of the traditional but, more fundamentally, an "overcoming of Japan and of the world" (Mori 1994, 319). This endeavour entails, first and foremost, a renegotia-tion of the seeming dualism between reason and practice through the paradoxical logic of negation-*qua*-affirmation. Whereas the formation of the post-Renais-sance subject in the West can be characterized as being "grounded in rationality" (ibid., 331), as indicated by an emphasis on the *cogito*, the kind of empty subject that Nishitani proposes to cultivate is based upon heartfelt (*kokoro*) "practice", by which he specifically means Zen meditation and chanting. This ethico-aesthetic practice depends on a paradoxical "disassociation from our traditional spirit and a continuation of it. It is a creative continuation of tradition" (Nishitani, quoted in Mori 1994, 331). We will come back to the creative use of tradition for the pur-pose of subjectivation in the next section. But it must be noted that although we can extract a robust, non-humanist conception of subjectivity from the writings of the Kyoto School, historically their impact upon postwar thinkers in Japan was negligible. This is largely due to the fact that young people—strongly persuaded by the presentations of the symposia, which ultimately "provided a foundation for resignation to death" (Ives 1994, 27)—had come to feel, in the postwar period, that they had been betrayed.

This resentment fuelled a broader suspicion of any form of Japanese exception-alism in the years immediately following WWII. For example, Native Studies was "virtually a taboo topic in Japan's academic circles" until the mid-1970s (Fu-jiwara and Nosco 2021). Later this included various critiques of Zen, specifically with regard to how it might be utilized in the conceptualization of the contem-porary Japanese subject. Ichikawa Hakugen—who also criticizes the vestiges of state Shinto in postwar Japan—has argued that following the Meiji Restoration prominent figures in Zen took at best a submissive stance towards official state policy. At worst, some even "helped rationalize, glorify, or even promote Japanese imperialism" (Ives 1994, 16). That is, Ichikawa claims that modern Japanese Bud-dhism has generally tended to be complicit with "state power and authority", with "militarism and war" (Ichikawa Hakugen, quoted in Ives 1994, 22). For example, D. T. Suzuki called the Japanese involvement in the 1894 war against China a

"religious action" (Suzuki, quoted in Ives 1994, 17). Ida Tōin declared of the 1904 Russo-Japanese War that the "dyad of sovereign and subject is the intrinsic nature of our country", and that Japanese subjects should make themselves "of service" since the "imperial wind and the Buddha's sun are nondual" (Ida, quoted in Ives 1994, 18). Hata Eshō celebrated the attack on Pearl Harbor as a "holy day" on par with the "day on which Shakyamuni realized the Way" (Hata, quoted in Ives 1994, 19). Ichikawa makes a further claim that such statements reveal the ethical and political implications that naturally arise from the paradoxical onto-logic of Buddhist metaphysics, which leads to "a mental state that is static, aesthetic, and contemplative" (Ichikawa, quoted in Ives 1994, 26).

It is from this point of view that Ichikawa finds a "parallel problematic" in the late writings of Nishida Kitarō (Ives 1994, 16). We see this most clearly in the concept of acting intuition, one of the major outcomes of decades of persistent philosophical work to "transform and overcome the shortcomings" of his earlier notion of pure experience (Kazashi 1999, 108). Acting intuition, for Nishida, is an ethico-aesthetic standpoint that short-circuits the normal dichotomies between active and passive, subject and object, precisely because one has achieved a state of no-self:

> We see by becoming things. Acting intuition refers to that standpoint which Dōgen characterizes as achieving enlightenment by all things advancing […] An activity that is truly selfness is actively intuitive. (Nishida 1989, 102)

This statement, in itself, is indeed "ontological and resolutely unpolitical" (Stevens 2011, 232). Furthermore, I would argue that Ichikawa misconstrues Nishida's logic of contradictory self-identity, which he takes to entail simply that "non-freedom *is* freedom", or that "to become a master of every situation" *is* "to become a servant of every situation" (Ichikawa, quoted in Ives 1994, 26; my emphasis). There are indeed philosophical issues with Nishida's onto-logic, but these have nothing to do with the notion that it necessarily produces a quietist or complicit political stance (Hetrick 2023a). Rather, in his 1944 essay "Theorizing the Kokutai" Nishida remarkably eschews the subtleties of his own logic in order to make the claim that "the individual and the whole form an immediate unity" within the body of the state (quoted in Heisig, Kasulis and Maraldo 2011, 1025). Ideologically speaking, "contradictory self-identity had somehow come to signify the Emperor system" (Karatani 2011, 184). This ideological erasure of his onto-logic allows Nishida to then conflate the concept of acting intuition with a complicit political stance and declare that it is only with "a true religious awakening" that "one can submit to the state":

> Active intuition is to accord faithfully with the facts of national histo-
> ry … to empty the self and return to oneness with the Emperor as the
> center of the absolute present … to act in terms of the national policy as
> an individual in the historical world. (Nishida, quoted in Ives 1994, 23)

This statement is of course highly problematic and echoes similar statements made by Suzuki, Ida, and Hata before Nishida as well his younger colleagues Nishitani and Watsuji Tetsurō.[6] In a climate that already lacked a sophisticated political consciousness, it reinforces culturally engrained attitudes that function "more on the register of affect than conscious thought", which give rise to the feeling that "there is no individually responsible subject, but only a collection of the Emperor's subjects, and that all morality will be a social ethics of conformity with the group and submission to authority" (Stevens 2011, 239). It is easy to see how this ethico-aesthetic stance, pushed to the limit, might ultimately bolster "fascist lines of the *tokkōtai*" (Michelsen 2013).

But fascism is not simply a totalitarian form of political organization (which, in the case of the Kyoto School, was theoretically supported by their specific use of Hegel).[7] More fundamentally, it names a form of mass subjectivation charac-terized by an intense paranoid constellation of affects "in our heads and in our everyday behavior" that "causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (Foucault 1983, xiii). Remarkably, this idea of a fascism that "penetrates even the small corners of our sensibility in everyday life" was ex-plored in the Japanese context decades before Michel Foucault's groundbreaking work (Odagiri Hideo, quoted in Koschmann 1996, 65).

> We have to struggle with the semi-feudal sensibilities, emotions, and de-
> sires that are rooted in our own internal 'Emperor system'. That is the
> only way we can negate the Emperor system *per se*, and the only way that
> is conducive to the formation of a modern man. (Ara Masato, quoted in
> Koschmann 1996, 65)[8]

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6   Like Nishida and Nishitani's work, Watsuji's 1942 book *Ethics* "can be considered an ontological justification of the Japanese Empire" (Kobayashi and Seki 2020, 291). Furthermore, it was likely that "he was more sympathetic to the government's ideology" than they were (Kasulis 2018, 526).

7   "The Hegelian influence, determinative for Nishida and the Kyoto School as a whole, will go mas-sively in the direction of its monistic tendency, ontologically totalizing and politically totalitarian." (Stevens 2011, 240) To be clear, although the Kyoto School's appropriation of Hegel's dialectics and philosophy of history is complicated and polyvocal, because their political acumen remained for the large part underdeveloped, the type of political ontology we might extract from their writ-ings is in line with Hegel's state philosophy (Widder 2015).

8   Or again: "an internal reform in the psychological structure of Japanese society must occur" rather than mere "institutional and legal reforms in the State machinery." (Maruyama 1963, 152)

Well beyond the question of censorship, this idea seems to be a major reason why—more than discussions on overt politics—the debates within Japanese intellectual circles at this time repeatedly returned to the problem of conceptualizing the modern subject. The resentment felt by young people towards the Kyoto School after WWII was ultimately due to fact that the type of subject position it advocated left no room to "doubt, criticize, and resist the absolutism of the Imperial system". According to Ichikawa, "the subject with a modern critical spirit was obliterated" and, as a result, "the central ideology of the Imperial Way settled into an *a priori* position relative to the pure experience underlying the individual self, which from the start conditioned that pure experience" (Ichikawa, quoted in Ives 1994, 27). That is, in its attempt to put forth a conception of subjectivity beyond Western humanism, in particular by deemphasizing the idea of a rational *cogito*, the "the autonomy of the critical modern subject was not yet acquired" (Stevens 2011, 232).

It is here that we finally get to the crux of the debate on modern subjectivity. Given the shared project of developing strategies for negotiating the forms of microfascism, why does Foucault point to the necessary death of the humanist subject—meaning precisely the historical dissolution of the Western *cogito*—while the majority of postwar Japanese intellectuals were inspired by modes of subjectivity that fit squarely within the humanist tradition, which in some cases promoted the idea of Western individualism? For example, the Japanese historiographer Ōtsuka Hisao claimed that "as long as people hold to forms of thought and behavior that are traditional, feudal, or what Marx called 'Asiatic', our democracy will be no more than a shell of structure with no soul" (Ōtsuka 1970, 1). Foucault's position seems close to the Kyoto School when he says that "*homo dialecticus*" is "already dying" (Foucault 2006, 543) and, quite remarkably, that "the universality of the Western *ratio*" reaches its "vertiginous" yet "inaccessible" limit in the "Orient", which paradoxically also serves as its internal "dividing line" (ibid., xxx). Although Foucault later recanted this Orientalist language, his point is that unreason, as the condition of possibility of the humanist subject, is the very thing that will exhaust it from within. This "thought of the outside" refers to a paradoxical, or transversal, form of thinking—for example, the idea that a line can be both an external limit and internal division—which he associated with an under-conceptualized notion of Asian epistemic regimes.[9]

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9   "Foucault never considered himself sufficiently competent to treat the subject of Oriental forms of development", even if the question for him remains: "is there a process of subjectivation in Oriental techniques?" (Deleuze 1988, 148). Although some have claimed that this aspect of Foucault's work is indicative of a certain orientalism, more nuanced assessments explicitly do *not* ultimately "characterize him as an Orientalist" (Lazreg 2020, 8).

The outside is described as a "void" (ibid., xxviii) that is "absolutely empty" (ibid., 549), but also "intensely vibratory" since its "paradoxes upset the field of representation" (Foucault 2000a, 363). It moves by a logic of "nonpositive affirmation" (ibid., 74), opening onto "a scintillating and constantly affirmed world" that "affirms nothing", but "reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit" (ibid., 75), ultimately "shattering the philosophical subject" (ibid., 79). Not only does Foucault's "nonpositive affirmation" echo the Buddhist logic of "negation-*qua*-affirmation" as presented by Nishitani, but the resulting non-humanist form of subjectivity is also constructed, as in Nishitani, through the work of spiritual practice:

> We will call "philosophy" the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this "philosophy," then I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. (Foucault 2005, 15)

Although it is true that Foucault's research on such spiritual practice focuses on the Western tradition—for example Pseudo-Dionysus (Foucault 2000a, 150) whose work, incidentally, has been characterized as a "Christian version of the Heart Sutra" (Conze 1967, 220)—he did express an interest in Buddhist philosophy and, especially, practice. During his second visit to Japan in 1978, Foucault, in conversation with the Zen master Ōmori Sōgen, claimed that a "totally different mentality to our own is formed through the practice and training of Zen" (Foucault 2024, 152), which "attenuate the individual" (ibid., 154). It is in this conversation that he clarifies his earlier essentialist use of the term Orient: "What interests me is the Western history of rationality and its limit. In this respect, Japan raises a problem we cannot escape" (ibid., 153). For Foucault, "rationality constructs colonies everywhere" and, more generally, has created a crisis in thought due to its microfascist and universalist tendencies (ibid.). Finally he, like the Kyoto School philosophers, declares the end of a unilateral Western philosophy: "if a philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or it must be born of encounters and reverberations between Europe and non-Europe" (ibid., 156). It seems clear then that Foucault, like Gilles Deleuze, somehow needed to pass through a notion of Zen in order to construct his ethics (Hetrick 2023b). But we should add that however under-conceptualized their understandings of Zen actually were, their use of it falls outside of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, which does not consider discourses about the "Orient" that criticize Western ideologies.

This detour through Foucault ultimately helps us to clarify Ichikawa's main concern with Imperial Way Zen: that its ideology fundamentally prevents the formation of a *critical* subjectivity. The immanent telos of Foucault's entire project is ultimately to overcome the modern, humanist, rational Western subject. His method of critique disallows any ideology—especially a fascist or religious one—from "settling into an *a priori* position relative to the pure experience underlying the individual self" (Ichikawa, quoted in Ives 1994, 27). This is because the construction of a non-humanist subjectivity is, by definition, transgressive with regard to given relations of knowledge and power. In this sense, Foucault radicalizes Kant's critical philosophy in order to liberate the political processes of subjectivation from state-sanctioned forms of subjectivity or, in Kant's words, to "release man from his self-incurred tutelage" (Kant, quoted in Foucault 2007, 29). Additionally, Foucault's conception of critique disallows any "sort of theologization of man" (Foucault 1968, 20) into an essential, pure, or true self, which appears to be the *de facto* outcome of Nishida's description of acting intuition where "a true religious awakening" is conflated with submission to the Emperor (quoted in Ives 1994, 23). Here Nishida essentially repeats Kant's fundamental error of critiquing the transcendent use of the Ideas (World, God, Soul) only to give them a "practical determination" as postulates of the moral law (Deleuze 1984, 44). But what is Foucault's conception of critique? An initial answer might be that it is a method which combines the notions of philosophy and spiritual practice as stated above, where truth is understood in the special sense of that which "releases transversal lines of resistance and not integral lines of power" (Deleuze 1988, 95). Critique is therefore a method that both "seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object", as well as "the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject" (Foucault 2007, 153).

Interestingly, Foucault gave a lecture entitled "What is Critique?" to the French Society of Philosophy immediately following his return from Japan in 1978. In this lecture, he defines the "critical attitude" as "the art of not being governed quite so much", of not being "governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles" (Foucault 2007, 44–45). We are asked to rethink critique as an ethico-aesthetics, an "art of existence" in which self-transformation is understood as a "practice of liberty" (ibid., 108). If this sounds too vague or, even worse, as whimsical dandyism, it is because Foucauldian ethics proceeds without given normative rules. In fact, it begins with the "virtue" of exposing a "fundamental illegitimacy" (ibid., 46) within the epistemological framework that gives rise to such rules, a caesura that is precisely its unspoken "limit" or "outside". In order to define the transversal contours of a specific epistemological framework—"at this particular time, in this section of humanity" (ibid., 56)—we must follow Kant in understanding "critique's

primordial responsibility: to know knowledge" (ibid., 50). Only then can we hope to "follow the breaking points" (ibid., 62) in an "attempt to desubjugate the subject in the context of power and truth" (ibid., 50). Rather than simply obey seemingly universal moral codes, this type of critical ethico-aesthetics reconstructs such codes in an optional and facilitative way—given the transversal contours of an epistemic regime—in order to reshape subjectivity towards a self-defined mode of existence. In relation to a specific regime and its values, such practices thus tend to appear transgressive since they are anarchically indifferent to the moral law. Here Spinoza's ethics is historicized such that the question might be rendered as: Given the contemporary order of things, what can a subject become? "In this historical-philosophical practice, one has to make one's own history in terms of how it would be traversed by the question of the relationships between structures of rationality which articulate discourse and the mechanisms of subjugation which are linked to it." (ibid., 56)

This is one way to understand Ichikawa's charge that Kyoto School philosophy was not critical enough, which subsequently bolstered a form of subjectivity that passively adhered to a "suicidal" ideology (Michelsen 2013, 158). Another, analogous, way is to look through the lens of Hakamaya Noriaki's notion of Critical Buddhism. In response to the increasing rhetoric on Japanese exceptionalism in the 1980s, Hakamaya and his colleague Matsumoto Shirō launched a vehement attack on all forms of Buddhist philosophy—including the Kyoto School—which lacked a critical component. Hakamaya polemically declared that "Buddhism is criticism" and "only that which is critical is Buddhism" (Hakamaya, quoted in Shields 2016, 10). His central claim is that, due to its fundamental onto-logic of emptiness, Mahāyāna Buddhism disallows any suggestion of an essential, pure, or true self, in particular one supported by notions of Japanism or Buddha Nature. His project was therefore to rectify these errors critically, that is, "in the ethical and political—or one might say, modern Western—sense" (Shields 2016, 11). However, Critical Buddhism cannot be understood simply as "Cartesian rationalism or Western Enlightenment humanism in Buddhist guise" (ibid., 12). Rather it "borrows from but is not reliant upon Western philosophy", while remaining rooted in the Mahāyāna concepts of wisdom and compassion (ibid., 15). For Hakamaya, Critical Buddhism can be defined by three interrelated principles: 1) the onto-logic of emptiness; 2) the ethico-aesthetic of compassion that arises from meditation practice; and 3) the application of critical reflection. The second two principles are necessary in order ensure that the onto-logic of emptiness does not remain a mere object of belief or become reified into an ontological ground, but is rather confirmed experientially through practice and reflection. Hakamaya's method of critique seems to be as

radical as Foucault's in the sense that it cuts through any lingering ideological traces that limit one's "access to the truth" in order to facilitate "the necessary transformations" on subjectivity (Foucault 2005, 15), even to the extent that one must—as Rinzai encouraged his followers—"Kill the Buddha! Kill the patriarchs!" From this point of view, Nishida's logic of contradictory self-identity is still too dialectical and, while it may be an ingenious way of conceptualizing Buddhist metaphysics in a post-Kantian manner, does not in itself lead to the formation of a critical subject. Rather, as we have seen, it allows for a collapse back into a version of Foucault's "*homo dialecticus*" in its death throes (Hetrick 2022a). Furthermore, while it is true that Nishitani Keiji (1999) and Ōhashi Ryōsuke (2011) have similarly reconceived the first two principles of Hakamaya's Critical Buddhism—emptiness and compassion, respectively—in a contemporary and comparative idiom, their ultimate over-reliance upon the philosophical frameworks of Hegel and Heidegger, however stretched in remarkable ways, seems to have prevented the construction of a critical subjectivity.

We can therefore redefine the project of overcoming modernity—with or without Buddhism, which simply provides a framework for one amongst many possible non-humanist "techniques of the self" or "arts of existence" (Foucault 1990, 11)—as a critical overcoming of the "white, conscious, adult male subject" (Guattari 2010, 157) that has been serially produced and exported around the world to the point where a "certain universal representation of subjectivity, incarnated by capitalist colonialism in both East and West, has gone bankrupt" (Guattari 1995, 3). Just as the very concept of subjectivity was exported to Japan during the Meiji Restoration, the idea of overcoming modernity cannot be seen as an essentially Japanese problem, but rather as the historical outcome of a complex intertwining between East and West that became evident during the mid-20th century. After WWII, the ethico-aesthetic task of reconstructing subjectivity became doubly problematic since one was forced to negotiate not only the overt power relations of classical disciplinary subjection, but also the internal constellation of affects that penetrate the depths of our psyche, controlling us from within.

> The struggle for a modern subjectivity passes through a resistance to the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individuating ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attaching each individual to a known and recognizable identity, fixed once and for all. The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis. (Deleuze 1988, 106; translation modified)

That is, non-humanist forms of subjectivation must simultaneously pass through two registers: a surface level of the "active" individual and a more fundamental, seemingly "passive" level of individuation (Lapoujade 2018, 21). This requires a folding of subjectivity onto itself, an "aesthetic existence, a doubling, a relation with oneself" (Deleuze 1988, 101; translation modified). Remarkably, Naoki Sakai argues that this empirico-transcendental folding of subjectivity, which marks the emergence of the modern human, "corresponds exactly" to another doublet Foucault depends upon: between "geopolitical regions" and "categories of thought" (Sakai 2022, 170). More specifically, he argues that Foucault's conception of the human is ultimately grounded upon a particular "construction of respective Western and Eastern regions with their corresponding ways of thought" (ibid., 159). We see this clearly in a statement Foucault made on the eve of his trip to Japan in 1978—notably, the year of publication of Edward Said's masterwork—which I believe pre-empts any attempt to categorize his persistent interest in the non-West as Orientalist:

> What I mean by the West is that small portion of the world whose strange and violent destiny was ultimately to impose its ways of seeing, thinking, saying, and doing upon the entire world… It's true that the world has revolted against this West […] making it lose its pre-eminent position, but that doesn't take away from the fact that the instruments that have been employed worldwide to diminish the West and shake off its yoke were created almost entirely by this very same West. (Foucault 1994b, 368)

Within the postwar Japanese context in which there was a strong sense of resentment towards the main strands of *philosophy*,[10] it should not be surprising that we find the *aesthetic* doubling of subjectivity most clearly expressed in the arts. That is, Japanese contemporary art takes "a central place in the development of postwar culture" (Sas 2011, xv), especially with respect to the "debates on subjectivity" (ibid., xii). Here the rhetoric of overcoming modernity acquires another meaning: the artistic overcoming of modernism with the emergence of the contemporary. As a first step, Sakaguchi Ango employs the instruments of critical thought in an attempt to problematize the imported idea of humanist individualism.

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10   More than resentment from the youth, universities were purged of "professors like Nishitani who were identified as intellectual supporters of the militarist ideology during the war years". Subsequently, philosophy departments in particular were restructured in order to teach Western philosophy "almost exclusively" (Kasulis 2018, 544).

Have We Ever Been Individuals?

As we have seen, the issue of Japanese subjectivity came to the fore at the precise moment in which the Emperor declared that he was "an ordinary man" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 181). Now one was no longer subjected to an imperial wind from on high, but was forced to become an autonomous subject "at the individual level" (Dower 1999, 157). Much scholarship on postwar Japan has highlighted this imperative, made vocal by intellectuals and artists of all shades, to renegotiate subjectivity in relation to the notion of the individual. On first glance this makes sense, since the locus of power after WWII broadly shifted from the Japanese state to the American Occupation. The ideology of individualism—which, from this point of view, is associated with a particular brand of liberalism and democracy—"gradually seeped out of the meshes of the wire fences that surrounded American military bases", obliterating Japan's "traditional" past and laying the foundation for a "postwar without end" (Tōmatsu Shōmei, quoted in Munroe 1999, 16). However, even if new forms of subjectivity were conceptualized in relation to American-style individualism, sometimes they were defined precisely as a reaction against it. That is, a confusion has arisen with the under-conceptualized overuse of the word "individualism", which in fact has come to indicate a whole range of sometimes divergent ideas.[11] This is not a problem specific to Japan. For example, the type of individual we might extract from the work of Jean-Paul Sartre—as well as other European conceptions of the individual that tended, more so than their American counterparts, to retain a certain level of theoretical and political connection to the avant-garde—can be understood as a critique of the liberal subject, even if we understand both to be contemporary incarnations of humanism. In the following, I discuss the work of Sakaguchi Ango, who attempts to develop an "art of existence" that extends the project of overcoming modernity without collapsing back into the dangerous pitfalls of essentialism. While the mode of subjectivation exhibited in his work is critical of humanist individualism, it ultimately remains within its general theoretical framework. However, Sakaguchi paves the way for more recent interventions by Japanese artists and thinkers who, in different ways, express forms of non-human subjectivity beyond the ideology of individualism.

It has been frequently noted that the writings of Sakaguchi Ango captured the complex mood amongst the younger generation of artists and intellectuals from the immediate postwar period until early phase of Japan's "Red Years" in the long 1960s, during which his work was carried to the barricades by demonstrating

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11   "Scholars have overwhelmingly assumed that Japanese postwar art is about celebrating and engaging with a nascent democracy through expressions of individualism." (Kunimoto 2017, 17)

students (Walker 2020).[12] The literary critic Okuno Takeo describes the relevance of Sakaguchi's work for that generation as follows:

> Nothing that I read in the course of my life will match the amazing shock I got when I read Sakaguchi Ango's "Darakuron" in April 1946. In one stroke it freed me, then only 19 years old, from the wartime ethics, ideology, and taboos that had until that point kept me in chains; it was a thunder bolt that showed me a new way of life… It was through that essay that my postwar life as an autonomous subject began. (Quoted in Dorsey 2001, 358)

In order to understand the full importance of Sakaguchi's postwar essay, we have to read it within the context of his "A Personal View of Japanese Culture", which was published four years earlier, around the time of the debates on overcoming modernity. Even though he was not explicitly targeting these debates, his essay can be seen as a "fundamental critique" of their general standpoint (Karatani 2011, 186) and, more generally, as offering a view that "absolutely disposes of the concept of 'Japaneseness'" (Nishikawa 2001, 257). The main thrust of Sakaguchi's earlier essay is to show that there is nothing pure or essential about so-called "traditional Japanese culture", about which he provocatively claims to know "next to nothing" (Sakaguchi 2010a, 137). The call from "grim reactionary forces" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 189) to overcome modernity by way of a return to the premodern is exposed by Sakaguchi as futile, since culture is radically contingent and historically constructed: "It does not stand to reason that simply because a practice existed in Japan long ago, it is somehow innately Japanese" (ibid., 139). His own position is modernist in the sense that he advocates the "no frills" aesthetic of a "prison, factory, and a destroyer" (ibid., 155) over that of the ancient temples of Kyoto, which might as well be "burned to the ground" in order to construct a parking lot. For Sakaguchi, such an act would not affect Japanese culture in the least (ibid., 156). What caught his attention in Kyoto instead were the rambunctious activities of everyday Japanese decked out in "Western clothes" and "watching kitschy" theatre, since "humans love what is human, and that alone" (ibid., 152). His conclusion is that "as long as our day-to-day lives are rooted in human desires … Japan itself is in good health" (ibid., 141).

Sakaguchi's critique of traditional Japanese culture comes remarkably close to the radicality of Critical Buddhism which would, if necessary, deface reified concepts of the Buddha: "Landscape gardens and tea rooms, like the enlightenment of a

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12   "Sakaguchi's name remained inseparable from the chaos of the days immediately following Japan's defeat." (Karatani 2010, 24)

Zen monk, are castles in the air. 'Wherein lies Buddha Nature?' one may ask. The answer: 'In a shit stick" (ibid., 148). Like many of his peers Sakaguchi was drawn to Western and, particularly, French literature in his youth. But unlike other young intellectuals who had embraced "either Marxism or modernism" (Karatani 2010, 25), he studied Indian and Tibetan philosophy and aspired to become a Buddhist monk. Even at this early point, in the midst of monastic training, Sakaguchi's thought was focused on developing a critical ethico-aesthetics in relation to Buddhism: "the true path is to start a new life that follows common desires" (quoted in Karatani 2011, 196). Evoking the misty *wabi* aesthetic of Kyoto temples is not enough since it can never properly express a "critical spirit centered on emptiness" (Sakaguchi 2010a, 150). Like Foucault, this critical spirit is necessarily twofold. That is, one can only develop the capacity to approach emptiness when "practice and thought are unified" (Sakaguchi, quoted in Karatani 2011, 194). And like Hakamaya, "his criticism is eminently Buddhist" (Karatani 2011, 197).

Sakaguchi's "Darakuron" has been translated as "Discourse on Decadence", but in order to avoid an easy conflation with late-19th century tendencies in French literature, it might be better rendered as "On Fallenness" (ibid.). In this postwar essay, the critical project of "A Personal View of Japanese Culture" is extended to the figure of the Emperor—who had become a mere "apparition" in the face of historical forces (Sakaguchi 2010b, 181)—as well as to the ideology of the national body (*kokutai*) more generally. Sakaguchi begins the essay by describing how kamikaze fighters—who were previously understood as "the humble shields of our Sovereign Lord"—had fallen: either scattered "like cherry blossoms" as they plunged to their death or, if they did survive the war, forced to descend to the level of hawking "goods on the black market" (ibid., 175). In the period between 1931–1945, the notion of *kokutai* became synonymous with the state in relation to "the individual body, which was severely punished for any dissent". But, more than this, it was an "all-pervasive system of imagery" that served as "something like a state religion, with the mystical Emperor at the apex" (Slaymaker 2004, 12). It has been likened to Foucault's depiction of the relationship between individual bodies and the king's body as a symbol of the state before the French Revolution: "the body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1995, 25). The events of 1945 made visible the fact that the Emperor system, rather than being divinely ordained and therefore beyond the contingencies of history, was simply "another creation of politics" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 184). Without the ideology of *kokutai* holding their worldview together, the Japanese were forced to discover for themselves the "limitations and restraints of the human condition" without "conjuring up an Emperor"

or "piecing together warrior codes" (ibid., 182). For Sakaguchi, this required a "fall" from the transcendent law to an immanent ethico-aesthetics, which is seen as more fundamental than politics:

> The fall is not the result of having lost the war. We fall because we're hu-man; we fall because we are alive … Only by falling to the very depths can we discover ourselves and thereby attain salvation. Redemption through politics is but a surface phenomenon and not worth much of anything. (ibid., 182–83)

Notice the soteriological language. Not only is Sakaguchi's conception of the fall fundamentally informed by Sartre's Existentialism, as we shall see, but it also offers a "Buddhist critique of culture" (Shields 2011, 227) with an implicit metaphysics that "resembles the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness" (ibid., 240). Furthermore, the "refashioned subjectivity and new humanism" it promotes involves the accept-ance of temporal decay and historical contingency, which lie at the heart of the Buddhist concept of impermanence. Sakaguchi's fall can therefore be understood not as a romantic imperative to aesthetic hedonism, but rather as the refusal of any ideological "illusions that were posing as truth" (ibid., 233).

At the centre of Sakaguchi's new humanism is the ethical imperative to cast away all ideologies that prevent us from "acknowledging our desires" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 191). In particular, he singles out Buddhist inspired forms of "circular reasoning" (Karatani, quoted in Shields 2011, 234), especially when this type of overly-con-trived intellectualization attempts to "steer our attention back" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 189) towards tradition:

> The conventions of polite society, the taboos on romance, the rules dic-tating the places of duty and emotion—we should strip ourselves of these fraudulent kimonos and stand with our naked hearts fully exposed. To look long and hard at ourselves as restored to this naked state is the pri-mary condition for a resurrection of our humanity. (ibid., 191)

The goal is to recover a more "authentic" mode of existence, the "great truth about the human condition" (ibid. 192), by falling from the abstraction of the national body towards the physical or carnal body (*nikutai*). This carnal body was posited by Sakaguchi and other writers of his generation as the fundamental ground of the subject, which alone was adequate to their postwar condition. It was polemically opposed not only to the national body, but also to the phenomenological body (*shintai*) of philosophical discourse—for example, the body that Nishida employs in his idea of acting intuition—as well as to the more neutral and everyday notion

of the body (*karada*). That is, it was consciously employed in order to contribute to postwar debates on subjectivity from a new perspective. *Nikutai* was understood as "a strategy to attack the established ideal of the human" (Oda Sakunosuke, quoted in Slaymaker 2004, 28) and to attain a freedom beyond the "framework of individualism" (Honda Shūgo, quoted in Slaymaker 2004, 21). This strategy was inspired in large part by the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, who was revered as the "new master" of carnal literature (Sekine Hiroshi, quoted in Slaymaker 2004, 26). In this light, the Existentialist tones of "On Fallenness" become apparent: "It will take an existential gamble, betting with one's blood, with one's flesh, with the most basic of screams" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 192; translation modified).

Sakaguchi was instrumental in introducing Existentialism to postwar Japan and, in his comments on Sartre's short story "Intimacy", attempted to established a connection between it and Japanese carnal literature: "'Intimacy' does not preach one moral word". Rather, as we read the story, we come to understand that "the *nikutai* itself thinks and speaks … At first glance this is nonsensical, but in fact it is a wisdom beyond sense, and this is its revolutionary meaning" (quoted in Slaymaker 2004, 25). But his unreserved praise of Sartre is problematized when we recognize that he had no "interest in nor even understanding of Sartre's philosophy" (Slaymaker 2004, 25), which of course provides the basis for both the form and content of Sartre's fiction. It is true that Sakaguchi's thought was fundamentally "rooted in praxis or ethics" (Karatani 2010, 30) and he would certainly agree with Foucault that "rationalization leads to the furor of power" (Foucault 2007, 54).[13] This standpoint served him well in the critique of stagnant elements of Japanese theory and practice, including especially those that would come to bolster the type of subjectivity put forth by the Kyoto School. However, at this point we have touched upon an uncritical lacunae in his work that curiously repeats an ambiguity in Sartre's thought. Following Sartre's famous 1945 lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism", young French intellectuals were forced to choose between two possible, and indeed contradictory, interpretations of his work (Alquié 2008). On the one hand, there seemed to be a "pessimistic", idealistic humanism (Lyotard 1993, 86) and, on the other, an "adventurous", non-human materialism (ibid., 89). Most postwar French philosophers ended up abandoning, in different ways, "the side of the human in favor of the side of things" (ibid., 88). In fact, what has come to be called poststructuralism—including the philosophies of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari—might be understood as a series of attempts to theorize the emergence of the subject from a materialist (or ontological) reading of Sartre's pre-personal transcendental field. It is clear why Sakaguchi chooses to allow the carnal body to

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13   Notably, Foucault was not only interested in Zen but also in the work of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, whose fiction is regarded as precursor to postwar Japanese carnal literature (Macey 2019, 237).

speak for itself, but he does so in a way that ultimately betrays the critical force of his project and, consequently, resurrects a concept of the human which is, if not essentialized, reified with an uncritical kernel of "authentic" desire.

In "A Personal View of Japanese Culture", Sakaguchi's attempt to deconstruct and relativize traditional ideas of Japanese culture—which are described as not "true" or "authentic" enough (Sakaguchi 2010a, 156)—places "the *essence* of the Japanese spirit" beyond the scope of his critique: "we don't need to theorize on that" (ibid., 140). Again, in "On Fallenness" we are told that a "true" and "authentic human life is predicated upon existence" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 194). Like Sartre, Sakaguchi's concept of the human is tainted by a notion of authenticity. Sartre himself "tried to avoid reliance upon any positive conception of the self, but by introducing the notion of authenticity, he affirmed the requirement to conform with some notion of the true self" (Bernauer and Mahon 2006, 161). This can be most clearly seen in Sakaguchi's use of the term *furusato*, which literally means home, a place of familiarity and comfort. However, in Sakaguchi the term—which we find across his writings as something like an underlying thread—comes to connote almost the opposite: a placeless place of "extreme loneliness pregnant with life itself" (Sakaguchi, quoted in Slaymaker 2004, 111). It is, like the Freudian *unheimlich*, an unsettling place of return that pierces us in a moment of naked disorientation. It is understood as authentic because the body is pushed up against its own limits, supposedly beyond all ideologies, including romantic ideologies of pure hedonistic excess, which is what theoretically separates Sakaguchi from the typical discourse on decadence. However, there are still unresolved issues with this idea.

The *furusato*—as the true "topoi of the individual" (Slaymaker 2004, 103)—becomes a kind of abstract container for the falling carnal body in its "search for *satori*" (ibid., 105). That is, as in Sartre, we have in this conception of subjectivity an almost "theologization of man" (Foucault 1968, 20). There is the hint of a spiritual purity in this carnal descent that is reminiscent of Nishitani's idea of a "true subjectivity" that is reached through the "falling off of body and mind" (Nishitani 2008, 55), a phrase that both take from Dōgen. While Sakaguchi's position is philosophically problematic, this association is only superficial. It is therefore absurd to conclude that "Sakaguchi's idea of authenticity" is "fully in accord with the mainstream wartime logic and ideology" of Nishitani (Dorsey 2001, 347). It is even more absurd to argue that their "conceptions of the nation" are also "the same" (ibid., 375). As we have seen, the power and allure of Sakaguchi's work is that it completely deconstructs the ideology of the national body and disallows a conception of the subject that is formed through an act of "self-annihilation in devotion to the nation" (Nishitani 2008, 56). Sakaguchi replaces the national body with the carnal body, whose ethico-aesthetic imperative is to "acknowledge our

desires" (Sakaguchi 2010b, 191). But it is precisely these all-too-human desires that get reified as the authentic place of the subject, as somehow natural givens beyond the pale of critique. In this sense, Sakaguchi's new humanism comes dangerously close to a hyper-individualist "cult of the self" in which one is "supposed to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth", in short, to acknowledge its authentic needs (Foucault 2000b, 271). By contrast, the goal of critique is "not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are", to refuse not only the state, but also "the type of individualization which is linked" to modern structures of power (Foucault 2002, 336). But we will have to wait for subsequent postwar conceptions of subjectivity in order to move beyond Sakaguchi's veneration of the flesh and to understand desire critically as a radically heterogeneous construction.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the idea of some originary desire or will that is ontologically autonomous with respect to power relations is repeated in the work of Yoshimoto Takaaki who, in turn, enables philosophers like Karatani Kōjin to make similar claims. Even quite recently, we can hear Karatani dreaming of a nomadic non-place beyond the borders of the *polis*, where the "individual will" has "existed from the start […] free from community bonds" (Karatani 2017, 35). Despite his forays into poststructuralism, he is still dependent upon a Kantian conception of autonomy.[14] Rather than a conception of agency that is coupled to autonomy, poststructuralist theory—and especially the late Foucault—proposes "a new ontology that begins with the body and its potentials, and regards the political subject as an ethical one against the prevailing tradition of Western thought" (Lazzarato 2002, 100). In conversation with Watanabe Moriaki, Foucault reiterates his interest in the practices of "Buddhist spirituality", which he understands as enacting a form of agency "aimed at de-individualization, de-subjectification, at pushing individuality to and beyond its limits for the sake of freeing the subject" (Foucault 2024, 122). Watanabe replies by claiming that

> Japanese spirituality was always expressed through the body… And then
> in modern Japanese society, which was built on the 19th-century West-
> ern model, modernization simply meant adopting the political, economic,

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14   Karatani undoubtedly lifts this idea of a nomadic pre-philosophical space that is anarchically indifferent to the Western *polis* from Deleuze and Guattari's book What is Philosophy?, without properly acknowledging so. However, Deleuze's nomadism is necessary critical—precisely in the manner described in the present article—rather than utopian (Hetrick 2015; 2023b).

social, cultural norms of 19th-century Western society. The Japanese were especially concerned with establishing the Cartesian, Western subject. After the fascists' antiquated exploitation of the body, the formation of the modern Westernized subject was seen as a liberation with respect to imperial submission and an essential aspect of the country's democratization. Hence the success of existentialism, which had a longer lifespan in Japan than in France. *But one also wonders about the most important shortcomings in the formation of modern individuality. The problem you raise might shed some light on this sort of discrepancy,* whose nature is not only historical but also cultural. (Watanabe, quoted in Foucault 2024, 122; my emphasis)

Watanabe further explains the importance of the body in postwar avant-garde art and culture for resisting both fascism and modernization in a way that contextualizes Sakaguchi's critical reconceptualization of the body: "Some people of the avant-garde believed the bodily practices that persisted within traditional culture was a perfect anchorage point for calling out the political and cultural alienation the Japanese had endured for three quarters of a century during the country's modernization and Westernization" (Watanabe, quoted in Foucault 2024, 114). However, Sakaguchi's reification of bodily desire as a type of unreflective craving—so reminiscent of *otaku*—points to what Watanabe sees as the shortcomings and discrepancies of this discourse. It is interesting that he wonders how Foucault's ideas might help "shed some light" on this lacuna. It is here that the anti-humanism of the Kyoto School is still very relevant, since it makes concrete Foucault's somewhat impressionistic intuition that Japanese spirituality might be employed to conceptualize practices of de-individualization and de-subjectification. It is interesting to add that Yoshimoto wrote a long letter to Foucault after a year of reflection on the later's visit to Japan. He says that in the contemporary Japanese context—perhaps recalling the long shadow that the Kyoto School has cast upon it—the encounter between Buddhism and Western philosophy was still perceived with suspicion and Foucault's comments on Zen practice had therefore "provoked a lively reaction amongst Japanese intellectuals" (Yoshimoto 1979). Nonetheless, he ultimately seems to confirm Foucault's conclusions in a brief commentary on Dōgen's ethico-aesthetic care of the body. Echoing even Foucault's terminology, he claims that for Dōgen—who, Yoshimoto remarks, was critical of all political and religious systems of power—the realization of freedom through Zen practice is equated with "a dissolution of the distinction between the mind and the body" resulting in a "total loss" of "individual subjectivity" (ibid.).[15]

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15   Compare to Foucault's experience: "If I was able to feel something through the posture of the body in Zen meditation … it is that new relationships can exist between the mind and the body and, in addition, new relationships between the body and the external world." (Foucault 2024, 155)

Similarly, in *An Inquiry into the Good,* Nishida describes the ethico-aesthetic experience of *muga* as involving a self-effacement of the individual will, which in turn demands a new conception of action beyond the dualisms of subject and object, activity and passivity: "There is no fundamental distinction between things and the self, for just as the objective world is a reflection of the self, so is the self a reflection of the objective world" (Nishida 1990, 135). However, the type of ethical action entailed by this experience has not only become politically problematic, as we have seen, it also remains philosophically under-conceptualized throughout Nishida's work (Hetrick 2023a). This is why we can say that, from "Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* up to the present, the Kyoto School has not produced an adequate philosophy of ethics" (Kasulis 2018, 556). The discipline of ethics, as Foucault makes clear, rests upon robust concepts of subjectivity *and* critique. We therefore need the both the Kyoto School and Sakaguchi Ango, respectively, in order to piece together the theoretical foundation for a critical non-humanism in postwar Japan.

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BOOK REVIEW

Eric S. Nelson: *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom*

*Reviewed by Jana S. ROŠKER**

Eric S. Nelson's *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom* masterfully interweaves the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and classical Daoism, offering an intricate examination of their treatment of key concepts such as things, nothingness, and freedom. The book explores the nuanced variations and transformative interpretations of these central ideas, illuminating their profound impact on both Western and East Asian philosophical traditions. Both Asian and Western academics have long sought a book that offers a coherent and comprehensive introduction to the European reception of East Asian, and especially Daoist, philosophy, and thus one of the most significant contributions of this work is in fulfilling this need.

The book is structured into two main parts. The first, "Dao, Thing, and World", looks at the relationship between Daoism (specifically in the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi) and Heidegger's philosophy, focusing on the nature of things and their role in the world. The chapters in this section explore themes like the autopoietic self-transformation of things in Daoism and Heidegger, the concept of emptiness in Laozi's *Daodejing*, and the idea of uselessness in Zhuangzi's writings in relation to Heidegger's thought.

The second part, "Nothingness, Emptiness, and the Clearing", shifts focus to the themes of nothingness and emptiness. This section examines the intercultural interpretations of Daoist nothingness and Buddhist emptiness, their impact on Heidegger's philosophy, and the ethical and political implications of these concepts. The chapters here analyse the influence of East Asian philosophies on Heidegger's understanding of emptiness and the clearing, and how these ideas can be reimagined in the context of modern ethical and political challenges.

The introduction to *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom* is included in its first chapter. This adeptly establishes a comprehensive view of its core theme,

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namely the complex interplay between Heidegger's philosophy and the *ziranist* principles of Daoism. This text effectively readies the reader for the intricacies of the central part of this book, comprising in-depth analyses and insightful interpretations that enhance the comprehension of fundamental philosophical concepts crucial to its content.

Chapter two delves into the concept of the autopoietic transformation of things. It juxtaposes the Daoist perception of self-transforming nature in objects with Heidegger's notion of "thingness", underscoring a dynamic, interrelational aspect of existence that resonates in both philosophical traditions. The chapter emphasizes this shared focus on the continuous and intrinsic evolution of things within their respective ontological and cosmogonic frameworks. In the next chapter, the discussion pivots to the Daoist notion of emptiness as articulated in Laozi's *Daodejing*, and its parallel with Heidegger's concept of "the void". This chapter insightfully examines how both philosophies fundamentally integrate the concept of emptiness into their understanding of reality, proposing it as an essential and pervasive element that shapes their respective philosophical landscapes. Chapter four, which is the last chapter of the first part of the book, examines Zhuangzi's concept of "uselessness", drawing a compelling comparison to Heidegger's insights on the essence of things. The chapter stands out for its critical examination of conventional ideas about utility and purpose, challenging and redefining these concepts in a modern context through a thoughtful blend of Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives.

The insightful analyses in the first four chapters effectively lay the groundwork for the second part of the book, titled "Nothingness, Emptiness, and the Clearing". This section builds upon the foundational concepts introduced earlier, leading into a deeper exploration of these philosophical themes. In this chapter, Nelson examines the Daoist concept of nothingness and the Buddhist idea of emptiness. He does so after offering a solid critique of misleading and often completely inaccurate Western interpretations of these concepts and their associated notions. At the same time, Nelson skilfully establishes a compelling link between these Asian concepts and Heidegger's notion of "the clearing". His analysis not only draws intriguing parallels between these Eastern and Western ideas, but also underscores their collective significance in understanding the essence of being. This chapter serves as a crucial link furthering the exploration of how these philosophical traditions converge and diverge in their approaches to fundamental existential questions. Chapter six then looks at Heidegger's interactions with East Asian philosophies, with a focus on how these encounters shaped his thinking. Nelson critically assesses the influence of East Asian philosophical traditions on Heidegger, exploring the depth and implications of this often overlooked aspect of his

work. The chapter provides a critical examination of the extent and nuances of this intercultural influence, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Heidegger's philosophical evolution. In this part of the book Nelson scrutinizes the ethical and political ramifications of Heidegger's transcultural dialogues with Asian philosophies. He sheds light on the historical and social contexts of these subtle, often latent interactions and their influence on Western—and particularly European—academic thought. Here, the author also proposes how these intercultural philosophical exchanges might enrich and inform contemporary ethical and political discourse, highlighting their relevance in modern intellectual landscapes.

In the eighth, concluding chapter, Nelson synthesizes the book's major themes, re-emphasizing the significance of intercultural philosophy. He reflects on the enriching dialogue between Heidegger and Daoism, advocating for more innovative paths in philosophical research. This chapter extends beyond a mere summary, positioning the interplay between Western and Eastern thought as a catalyst for new philosophical explorations, thereby underscoring the profound impact of such transcultural engagements in shaping contemporary philosophical discourse.

As always with his work, Eric Nelson's latest book is laudable for its insightful and clear exploration of complex philosophical ideas. His comparative analysis of Heidegger's thought and Daoism is certainly profound, although it occasionally misses opportunities to explore some of the subtleties and diverse interpretations of Daoism. Moreover, the book could be further enhanced by more concrete discussions of the practical application of these philosophical concepts in modern contexts, which would provide a bridge between abstract theory and real-world relevance. This expansion into practical implications would enrich the book's impact, offering readers not only philosophical insights but also guidance for real-life applications of the ideas it explores.

Nevertheless, recognizing the challenges of integrating theory and practice, Nelson's approach is understandably cautious. The synthesis of abstract philosophical concepts with real-world applications risks oversimplification, potentially reducing complex theories to superficial solutions. Such a reductionist and individualized approach could inadvertently undermine the depth of theoretical insights, offering superficial, apolitical fixes to systemic social issues. Nelson's discernment in this matter likely informs his reluctance to deeply engage in the practical application of these philosophical ideas. His approach ensures the maintenance of academic rigor and depth, carefully balancing the exploration of theoretical concepts with the complexities inherent in their real-world translation. This decision underscores a commitment to preserving the integrity of philosophical discourse while acknowledging the complex relationship between theory and praxis.

In evaluating the overall significance of Nelson's *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom*, it is evident that this work is a major contribution to the domain of comparative transcultural philosophy. This book, with its depth and comprehensive analysis, is likely to be recognized as a landmark in intercultural philosophical studies. The author successfully bridges East Asian and Western, and particularly European, thought, offering insightful perspectives on the nature of reality, existence, and our place in the world. His work invites readers to rethink conventional philosophical boundaries and to embrace a more holistic view of human understanding and existence. Throughout, Nelson critically engages with both Heidegger's and Daoist philosophies, offering insights into their relevance in contemporary philosophical discourse. He highlights the transformative potential of these philosophies in understanding and responding to modern existential and ecological crises.

In conclusion, Nelson's work is a significant contribution to intercultural and transcultural philosophy, offering a nuanced understanding of Heidegger's engagement with Daoist thought. It encourages a re-evaluation of Heidegger's philosophy in light of Daoist concepts, ultimately suggesting a path towards a more open, responsive, and relational way of living and thinking. Nelson's critique is balanced, acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of Heidegger's and Daoist philosophies.

This book skilfully merges diverse philosophical traditions, urging a transcendence beyond established intellectual paradigms. It promotes a dynamic environment for transformative thought, enabling the elevation of ideas and the discovery of new perspectives. The work is instrumental in bridging the gaps between culturally distinct philosophies, uncovering innovative approaches and insights. Such a contribution is pivotal for enhancing our comprehension and capacity to forge fruitful connections among various concepts stemming from different cultural perspectives. In doing so, it enriches and deepens our insights into the diverse ideas that weave the inspiring tapestry of global philosophical discourse.

ERRATUM

Erratum

This erratum addresses a point of clarification within our special issue titled "Confucianism in Vietnam". It aims to rectify an inadvertent misinterpretation regarding the publication record of Vietnamese scholars Nguyen Tuan-Cuong and Tran Trong Duong. Specifically, in my overview article on the Confucian Revival in Slovenia, published in *Asian Studies* (Vol. 12, No. 1, 2024, pp. 287–304), it is necessary to correct any potential misunderstanding related to the publishing activities of Nguyen Tuan-Cuong and Tran Trong Duong. The original text highlighted "noteworthy contributions from Vietnamese scholars, many of whom had not previously published in English (e.g., Nguyen Tuan-Cuong 2020; Tran 2020)". This may have inadvertently implied that Nguyen Tuan-Cuong and Tran Trong Duong were cited as examples of scholars publishing in English for the first time. However, both scholars have established records of English-language publications. The intention behind citing them was to recognize their significant contributions to the issue, not to comment on their publishing history in English. It was, in fact, other scholars within the issue who were making their debut in English-language academic publishing. I apologize for any confusion and appreciate the opportunity to clarify that Nguyen Tuan-Cuong and Tran Trong Duong were highlighted for their noteworthy contributions, separate from the observation about first-time English publications by other scholars.

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