

The Polish Journal | Estetyka  
of Aesthetics | *i Krytyka*



**The Polish Journal  
of Aesthetics** | **Estetyka  
*i Krytyka***

**Vol. 32 (1/2014)**

**Jagiellonian University in Kraków  
Minzu University of China**

The Polish Journal of Aesthetics / *Estetyka i Krytyka*

Editor-in-Chief:

Leszek Sosnowski

Editorial Board:

Andrzej Warmiński (Deputy Editor), Paulina Tendera (Secretary),  
Franciszek Chmielowski, Anna Kłonkowska, Janusz Krupiński,  
Marcin Lubecki, Piotr Mróz, Józef Tarnowski, Dominika Czakon,  
Natalia Anna Michna, Katarzyna Kleczkowska, Anna Kuchta

Advisory Board:

Władysław Stróżewski, Tiziana Andino, Arthur C. Danto, Nigel Dower,  
Grzegorz Dziamski, Mauro Perani, Bogdan Dziemidok, Tadeusz Gadacz,  
Maria Gołaszewska, Carl Humphries, Teresa Kostyrko, Andrzej J. Nowak,  
Elżbieta Paczkowska-Łagowska, Zofia Rosińska, Beata Szymańska,  
Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, Bogusław Żyłko

Published by

Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University  
52 Grodzka Street, 31-004 Krakow

&

Institute of Comparative Scripture and Interreligious Dialogue  
Minzu University of China, Zhongguancun South Avenue 27  
Haidian, Beijing, 100081

Co-publisher:

Wydawnictwo Nowa Strona – Katarzyna Migdał  
ul. Łagodna 85/26, 43-300 Bielsko-Biała

Proofreading:

Carl Humphries

Editorial Layout, Typesetting, and Cover Design:

Katarzyna Migdał

First Edition: 100 copies

© Copyright by Jagiellonian University & Minzu University

All rights reserved

e-ISSN 2353-723X / p-ISSN 1643-1243

# **Expression in Asian Philosophy and Art**

**Editors of the Volume:  
Bin You and Rafał Banka**



# Contents

*Preface by Bin You and Rafał Banka* 9

## ***Expression in Poetry***

- Marina Kravtsova *On Poetic Discourses and Ways of Expression of 'Empty' and 'Silence' Categories in the Chinese Lyric Poetry of Six Dynasties (Liu Chao, III–VI A.D.) and Tang (VII–X) Epochs* 15
- Sandra A. Wawrytko *The Interpenetration of Art and Philosophy in East Asian Poetry: the Metaphysical Threat to the Platonic Hierarchy* 31

## ***Expression in Art***

- Rafał Mazur *Spontaneous Expression and Spontaneous Improvisation – What Contemporary Improvising Artists Can Learn from Chinese Artists-Philosophers* 53
- Jinli He, Rafał Banka *The Great Body Has No Shape, the Great Art Is Embodied. Conception of Body in Zhang Huan's Performance Art* 67

## ***Expression in Classical Texts***

- Marta Kudelska *The Hierarchy of the Transcendentals According to the Advaita Vedānta* 81
- Katarzyna Pażucha *Notes Towards Defining 'Theory' (Śāstra) in Sanskrit; Systematic Classification Presented in Rājaśekhara's Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* 97

Anna I. Wójcik *The Image of the World in the Yijing 易经 –  
an Attempt to Identify the Intellectual  
Context Proper to Chinese Philosophy* 117

Agnė Budriūnaitė *The Tension Between Illusion and Reality  
in Zhuangzi's 'Dream of the Butterfly.'  
Philosophical Analysis of Western Reception* 137

### ***Dimensions of Human Life***

Bin You *To Be Harmonious with the Heaven,  
the Others and the Self: Late-Ming Christian  
Literati Li Jiugong's Meditation and His  
Comparative Scriptural Interpretation* 155

Chengyou Liu *The Virtue Reality of Humanistic Buddhism  
by Ven. Yinshun* 175

Leszek Sosnowski *Body – Tradition – Expression.  
Remarks on Japanese Culture* 187

*About the Contributors* 199

# Preface

The guiding theme of the book can be described as *expression in Asian cultures*. The phenomenon of expression can be conceived of in many different ways, which in some cases do not even overlap. For this reason, in editing the book we wanted to maintain a potentially wide margin of interpretation, so as not to petrify the understanding of expression into one specific form, or confine it to the realm of a particular discipline. The indeterminate character of the phenomenon beyond a specific definition is intentional, as it enables authors who represent different approaches to expression throughout cultures to encounter one another. Thus, the papers included in the book are not monolithic in their approach. Rather, they present different viewpoints focussed on the same subject matter.

The book attempts to apprehend the phenomenon of expression across a potentially wide range, in that the selection of papers is not confined to a particular culture or definition. An approach to the issue is approximated through various traditions of the Far East and India. It is more a rule than an exception that presentations not encapsulated within a unifying cultural or methodological paradigm give the impression of not covering the whole area of concern and therefore of being fragmentary. However, in transcultural studies, lack of continuity or the impossibility of filling blank spaces is often no less essential than finding common ground.

The wide scope of the presentation is also maintained by viewing expression through different disciplines. Some of these, such as poetry and art, are generally regarded to be connected with expression by definition. However, their overall transcultural character poses the question whether philological, and more especially philosophical, approaches cannot be perceived in a similar way, as more abstract expressions of the intellec-

tual traditions from which they stem. The book follows this assumption of cultural complexity and thus includes papers on poetry, music, performance art, philosophy and philology. The fact that these disciplines quite often pervade one another in the papers testifies to their significant and inseparable cultural contextualisation.

As regards composition, the book is arranged in four chapters, organised in terms of addressing similar aspects of expression in Asian philosophies and cultures.

The first chapter is devoted to poetry, most naturally associated with expression. However, the study of poetic texts in this chapter simultaneously asserts that literary discourse is not far from pondering questions usually ascribed to investigations of a philosophical nature.

Marina Kravtsova has recourse to the poetic expression of seclusion, presented by two types of imagery in Chinese poetry of the 2nd century and Tang dynasty poetry. In her thorough discussion of selected poems by various authors, including Wang Wei, interspersed with references to classical Chinese philosophy, she reveals that refraining from perception is thought to be conducive, if not essential, to self-reflection, tantamount to authentic and undisturbed unity with the world. The organising axis of analysis is based on the explication of emptiness and silence, the states which enable the most personal contemplation of one's feelings.

Sandra A. Wawrytko undertakes a challenging task by showing that we should not assume *a priori* that poetry is incapable of accompanying philosophical investigations. Her argument is intricately built on diverse literary, artistic, philosophical and even political references belonging to Chinese, Korean and Japanese traditions, in which the augmentation of a poet and philosopher has unquestionably been present over centuries. Her discussion provokes the reader to cast a suspicious glance at Plato's low opinion of poets and their inferiority to philosophers.

The second chapter focuses on artistic performance from two separate angles or media of expression: music and the body.

Rafał Mazur discusses the phenomenon of improvised music. He questions the status of free improvised contemporary European music or art in general, as they resort to previously prepared patterns or strategies. As an alternative, he proposes Chinese spontaneous expression, which is primarily concentrated on artistic creation directly related to the actual state of the artist's mind.

Jinli He and Rafał Banka discuss the perception of the body as a medium in contemporary Chinese art, on the example of Zhang Huan's artwork. The

roots of the Chinese conception of the body, or corporeality in general, can be traced back to classical Daoist and Confucian philosophies, which amalgamate what in Western tradition is viewed through the psycho-physical prism.

The third chapter explores ancient scriptures which belong to Indian and Chinese traditions.

Marta Kudelska is mostly concerned with the importance of both aesthetic and moral values, which, though relative, become indispensable when viewed from the ultimate perspective. To justify this statement, she analyses the relations between the three *gunas*, which are comparatively referred to as three cardinal transcendentals.

Katarzyna Pażucha in her philologically-oriented paper explores the identity of *śāstra* as a genre in Indian writing. The task is based on *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, written in the 10th century by Rājaśekhara, combined with other classical as well as recent Indological research into this subject.

The subject of Anna I. Wójcik's paper is the presentation of the classical Chinese worldview which underlies almost all intellectual traditions in China, the most prominent representatives of which are the Daoist and Confucian philosophies. The presentation of philosophical foundations in China with primary reference to the *Book of Changes*, comparatively complemented with Western tradition texts, encourages the interpretation that philosophies are particular expressions of intellectual reflections which cannot be completely disconnected from their original cultural contexts.

In her paper on the *Zhuangzi*, Agnė Budriūnaitė presents possible interpretations of the dream of the butterfly which can be found in the chapter *Qiwulun*. The discussion is based on selected translations of the classical text into English, which are treated as philosophical interpretations of the original.

The papers in the fourth chapter are predominantly focussed upon cultural interaction in life and society.

In his analysis of *Meditations* by Li Jiugong, a Catholic scholar from the late Ming period, Bin You examines the meeting of Confucian tradition and Catholic theology. The text study reveals the twofold cultural interaction which consists in the appropriation of Confucian harmony by the Christian doctrine, as well as reflecting which aspects of Catholicism were modified in Ming Chinese society.

Chengyou Liu discusses the importance of Humanistic Buddhism in China. His arguments are based on views concerning *samadhi* according

to the Venerable Yinshun (1906–2005), one of the most important figures in 20th-century Chinese Buddhism.

Leszek Sosnowski examines the cultural intersection of Shintoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism on the example of the body in both private and public spheres of Japanese culture. Departing from the context of multiple-tradition influence, his paper addresses the issue: to what extent is individual expression genuine or socially disciplined?

The editors would like to thank the authors for their valuable contributions to the book as well as their patient collaboration throughout the editing process. The final form of the papers would not have been achieved without the valuable remarks and helpful advice of external reviewers Józef Bremer, Beata Szymańska-Aleksandrowicz, Łukasz Trzeciński, Anna I. Wójcik and Maciej St. Zięba, to whom we wish to convey our gratitude. We would also like to express special thanks to Paulina Tendera of the *Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, who has been of inestimable help in coordinating the formal side of the publication.

*Bin You, Rafał Banka*  
Beijing, Kraków 2014

# *Expression in Poetry*



Marina Kravtsova\*

## On Poetic Discourses and Ways of Expression of 'Empty' and 'Silence' Categories in the Chinese Lyric Poetry of Six Dynasties (Liu Chao, III–VI A.D.) and Tang (VII–X) Epochs

### Abstract

The written Chinese language has a broad scale of lexical meanings for articulating the 'empty' and 'silence' categories in all their essential aspects. The present study is limited to a discussion of the *kong* 空 cognitive term, in its single semantic case only, as 'empty' ('emptiness'), coinciding normally with 'silence' (ji 寂, jing 靜); and of two poetic scenarios, which can be roughly defined as 'dwelling in empty mountains' and 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber.' The first of these is most typical of Tang lyric poetry, especially the works of Wang Wei 王維 (ca 701–ca 761); the second, of poetry on amorous themes beginning with the individual verses of the second century A.D. In this paper I argue that in spite of all essential differences between these scenarios – one praising living alone as escaping from social existence, the other representing living alone as loneliness, i.e. having an utterly negative sense – both are grounded at bottom on ancient views of vision and audial perception. Their archetypal background is formed by the idea of spiritual movement, implying the 'cutting off' of sensory perception in favour of self-concentration, which leads to the sharpening of receptive faculties for gaining keener and keener perception of all external things. Above all, the 'empty' and 'silence' categories appear to universally express the abundance of one's surroundings and inner conditions, including mentality and feelings, which places these categories among the chief artistic techniques of Chinese lyric poetry.

### Key words

China, lyric poetry, poetic means, sensory perception, audial, visual, 'empty,' 'silence,' spiritual movement, self-concentration, verses with eremitic motifs, verses on amorous themes, Taoism, Buddhism

---

\* Department of Philosophy and Culture of Orient  
Saint Petersburg State University, Russia  
Email: [kravtsova\\_sin@mail.ru](mailto:kravtsova_sin@mail.ru)

The written Chinese language has a broad scale of lexical meanings for articulating the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories in all their essential facets. This study is limited to a discussion of the *kong* 空 cognitive term in its single semantic case as ‘empty’ (‘emptiness’), coinciding normally (Luo 1991: 409) with ‘silence’ (*ji* 寂, *jing* 靜); and of two poetic scenarios, which can be roughly defined as ‘dwelling in empty mountains’ and ‘dwelling in [an] empty chamber.’ In both, *kong* is applied, if considered in terms of the poetic surface, to spatial distinctions of the narration and to the entourage of the poem’s protagonist.

The motif of dwelling in *kong* mountains or another, more local, natural place, usually a forest (*lin* 林), is most typical of Tang lyric poetry, particularly of the works of Wang Wei 王維 (ca 701–ca 761). Among them, the most notable for this analysis is the famous ‘Lu zhai’ 鹿柴 (‘Deer Park’) poem, the fifth of twenty pentametric quatrains (*jueju* 絕句), grouped in the likewise very well-known *Wangchuan ji* 輞川集 (Wang River collection), created during the *Tianbao* 天寶 era (742–56)<sup>1</sup> and, as Wang’s preface explains,<sup>2</sup> on his Wangchuan country estate,<sup>3</sup> each poem in a particular spot within the place. ‘Lu zhai’ reads:

空山不見人，但聞人語響。返景入深林，復照青苔上。

On the empty mountain, seeing no one, / Only hearing the echoes of someone’s voice; / Returning light enters the deep forest, / Again shining upon the green moss. (transl. by Richard W. Bodman & Victor H. Mair: Mair 2000: 92)

Upon first reading, the poem provides an impression of either linguistic or essential simplicity (insofar as the notion of ‘simple’ can generally be applied to Chinese poetry), giving the illusion that it is no more than a masterfully executed landscape miniature, reflecting, certainly, the poet’s mood (longing to be a recluse), and the perceptive specifics of his personal nature (including aesthetic insight), but lacking a true deep core

<sup>1</sup> On this period of Wang’s life, his internal conditions and creative activities see: Liu 2002: 73–85.

<sup>2</sup> The *Wangchuan ji* original text is presented in many Chinese editions, ongoing from the Chapter (*Juan* 卷) 128 from the *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (*Complete Tang Poems*) compendium, compelled at the beginning of 1700s by a numerous group of experts under the leadership of Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719), and several times republished in China, including: Peng 1999: II, 1300–1301.

<sup>3</sup> In the foothills south of Changan 長安, the Tang imperial capital, at the place of modern Xian 西安 city, Shaanxi 陝西 province.

beneath its surface, along with any additional required expositions. (e.g. You 1981: II, 41) No wonder that it could have been published with only brief commentaries and explanations, or even entirely without, (e.g. Mair 2000: 92) or that it is sometimes taken merely as a sample of the formal (in terms of tonal patterns) and linguistic perfection of the Tang 'recent style' (*jin-ti* 近體) lyric poetry. (e.g. Liu 1962: 41; Yu 1985: 199) The apparent simplicity of 'Lu zhai' is one of several possible reasons it attracts translators. (Kroll 2001: 295) About 30 (or even more) alternative renditions have been published in English, French and other European languages.<sup>4</sup> Under different titles ('Dear Enclosure,' 'Deer-Park Hermitage,' 'Deer Fence,' 'The Form of Deer,' etc.), and authored by scholars as well as professional poets, they vary from near-literal translations<sup>5</sup> to variations on a theme.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past few decades, scholarly approaches to the poem have changed considerably in the direction of recognition of its semantic richness. Evaluations predominant in current Chinese<sup>7</sup> and Western studies<sup>8</sup> can be condensed into the following summary. First, the 'Lu zhai' poem is the most important from the Wang River collection and introduces us to some of the key modes of consciousness of the poet's entire oeuvre: emphasis on perceptual and cognitive limitations, transcendence of tempo-

<sup>4</sup> The most concentrated amount of these renditions is given at: Weinberger & Paz 1987. On English translations of Wang's verses after 1980s see: Yu 2012: 91–92. There are also several renditions of 'Lu zhai' in Russian, made by A. Gitovich (1909–1966) and A. Shteinberg (1907–1984), in the first hand, published and republished in various editions, see: Sorokin 1986: 117–122.

<sup>5</sup> E. g. 'On the empty mountains no one can be seen, / But human voices are heard to resound. / The reflected sunlight pierces the deep forest / And falls again upon the mossy ground.' (transl. by James J. Y. Liu: Liu 1962: 41)

<sup>6</sup> E. g. 'Deep in the mountain wilderness / Where nobody ever comes / Only once in a great while / Something like the sound of a far off voice. / The low rays of the sun / Slip through the dark forest, / And gleam again on the shadowy moss.' ('Deep in the Mountain Wilderness', transl. by Kenneth Rexroth, 1905–1982, in: Weinberger & Paz 1987: 22)

<sup>7</sup> On the Chinese studies since the 1980s of Wang's poetry and *Wangchuan ji* in concrete in the aspect of its philosophical implications and spiritual background see: Lü & Zhang 2003: II, 735–759.

<sup>8</sup> The Western revisions of 'Lu zhai,' including arguments in favor of its Buddhist overtones (starting with connotations of its title with the name of the site near Benares where the Buddha preached his first sermon after becoming enlightened), are summarized best of all in: Yu 2012: 87–88.

ral and spatial distinctions, and a sense of the harmony of the individual and nature. Second, it links keenly observed and deceptively simple perceptions with far-ranging Buddhist, Chan-Buddhist (Buddhism's southern branch, *Nan-Chan zong* 南禪宗),<sup>9</sup> and Taoist implications.<sup>10</sup> Third, *kong* is the crucial word of the text, used by Wang in its Buddhist meaning as a translation of the Sanskrit word *śūnyatā*, a key term in Buddhist traditions, denoting the illusory or 'empty' nature of all reality and the ultimate reality; the word embodies natural 'silence' and 'emptiness.' Within Chinese scholarship the *kong shan* binome is also commonly recognised as representing the exterior of empty and silent mountains and forests (*kongji de shanlin* 空寂的山林: Tao 2004: 162); or a more composite picture of an evening landscape becoming immersed in darkness and silence after the sunset. (Liu, Tian and Wang 1988: 351) Thus we come to the question of the connotations of *kong* in terms of visual and audial perception, which deserves to be an item of special inquiry.

The idea of visual and audial perception as the basis for human sensitivity goes back to ancient (*Zhou* 周 epoch, ninth to third centuries B.C.) thought, where it is realised in two variant models related to Confucianism and Taoism. The first is offered in the frame of the theory of *wu shi* 五事: 'five personal matters,' (Legge 2004: II, 110) or 'Five Duties,' (Nylan 1992: 16) initially narrated by the *Hongfan* 洪範 (Great Plan) treatise, a chapter of the classical *Shujing* book (Documents, Book of History, or Book of Documents; also known as the *Shang shu*, Hallowed Documents). Current scholarship (reversing the traditional chronological order and challenging the authenticity of *Shujing* as a record of high antiquity<sup>11</sup>) would date the compilation of *Hongfan* chapter roughly to the fourth century B.C. (Nylan 2001: 137)

The five personal matters spoken about in the *Hongfan's* Section 2 are: *mao* 貌, 'bodily demeanor'; *yan* 言, 'speech'; *shi* 視, 'seeing' or 'vision'; *ting*

<sup>9</sup> On Southern Chan impact on Wang's poetry see, for example: Ge 1993: 240–241; Su 2007: 183–185.

<sup>10</sup> The Taoist influence on Wang Wei and his woks, Taoist implications of *Wangchuan ji* and Taoist correlations of *kong* are mostly accurate argued in: Qiao & Chen 2000: I, 326–327.

<sup>11</sup> Tradition held that a divine Great Plan of governance was originally conferred by Heaven upon Xia (Great) Yu (Xia Yu 夏禹, Da Yu 大禹), the primeval flood-queller and founder of the Xia Dynasty; and then was passed on to King Wu (Wu-wang 武王), the Zhou founder, by Jizi 箕子, a wise uncle of the last king of Shang 商 state, who had been forced to join to the King Wu. (Nylon 2001: 139–140)

聽, 'hearing'; and *si* 思, 'thinking.' (Gu and Liu 2005: III, 1156) *Shi* and *ting* are associated respectively with *ming* 明, 'clearness ('clarity'), and *cong* 聰, 'distinctness' ('perceptiveness'), which produces, in its turn, a perceptible result in the man of virtue (a ruler), characterising his capabilities: *ming* makes for wisdom (*zhe* 哲), *cong* for deliberation (*muo* 謀).<sup>12</sup> A parallel is also constructed between these physical and personal resources (cognitive and sensory) and 'Five Agents' (*wu xing* 五行) or five natural resources of the state in that context (Nylan 2001: 140): 'water' (*shui* 水), 'fire' (*huo* 火), 'wood' (*mu* 木), 'metal' (*jin* 金), and 'earth' (*tu* 土), listed exactly in that order in section 1. 'Seeing' is placed so as to correspond with 'fire,' 'hearing' with 'water.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, human sensory perception appears to be in harmony with natural forces and cosmic patterns. Yet, proceeding as it does from *Hongfan's* broad-spectrum aim of fashioning a model of ideal kingship, (Nylan 2001: 141–2) the *wu shi* theory is frequently considered merely in terms of its connections with social order and governmental affairs.

The Taoist model of visual and audial perception is expressed best of all in Chapter 8, 'Pianmu' 駢拇 ('Webbed Toes' or 'Joined Toes') of *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Master Zhuang*) attributed to the half-legendary thinker Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (fourth to third centuries B.C.) As *Zhuangzi* says (Guo 1988: 148):

吾所謂聰者，非謂其聞彼也。自聞而已矣。吾所謂明者，非謂其見彼也。自見而已矣。

What would I call 'keen of hearing' does not refer to what is heard, but self-perception. What I would call 'keen of sight' does not refer to what is seen, but a keen insight.' (transl. by Wang Rongpei: Qin & Sun & Wang 1999: 133)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'Demeanor is characterized by respect. Speech is characterized by compliance. Sight is characterized by clarity. Hearing is characterized by perceptiveness. Thought is characterized by capaciousness. Respect makes for gravity. Compliance makes for orderliness. Clarity makes for wisdom. Perceptiveness makes for deliberation. Capaciousness makes for sageliness.' (Nylon 1992: 16)

<sup>13</sup> Afterwards there came into being another renders of 'Five Agents,' due to what the pointed connotations also changed. (Gu & Liu 2005: III, 1158)

<sup>14</sup> The cited passage also has several renditions, beginning with the translation of James Legg (1815–1864): 'When I pronounce men to be quick in hearing, I don't mean that they hearken to anything else, but they hearken to themselves; when I pronounce them to be clear of vision, I do not mean that they look to anything else, but they look of themselves.' (Legg 1970: I, 274) Or: 'What I speak of good hearing, I don't mean listening to others, I mean simply listening to yourself. When I speak of good eyesight, I don't mean looking at others; I mean simply looking at yourself.' (Watson 1968: 103) Or: 'What I mean by calling a person "keen of hearing," does not refer to her hearing

Keen vision and hearing are obviously assumed by the *Zhuangzi* to be maintained by paying attention to one's inner self instead of becoming subservient to external qualities. (Mair 1994: 72) Thus it is quite correct, in the primary approach to the problem, to assume a diametrical opposition between the Confucian and Taoist models, one being of an extroverted type among instruments of the state, the other entirely focused on self-reflection.

It must be kept in mind, however, that, on one hand, the hedonist strand in the *Zhuangzi* has, along with its underlying idea ('what is good for me is good for the universe'), this reasoning behind it: if the individual is part of *dao*, then whatever he or she feels and wants is also part of *dao*, and therefore all one's personal desires are expressions of the greater cosmic goodness and must be satisfied without fail. (Kohn 2009: 37) This leads to the idea of self-reflection as gaining spiritual potential for knowing the patterns of *dao* and adapting to its rhythms. On the other hand, the Confucian thinkers also work with the conception of self-cultivation, which implies a self-reflective understanding of the self for making a choice in regard to a goal or a vision. (Cheng 2004: 125) Emphasising the importance of self-cultivation, they ascribe, first, this capacity for self-reflection to the heart-mind (*xin* 心), assigning it a guiding role. And, second, the process of constantly reflecting on and examining oneself was aimed at bringing about primary ethical improvements in oneself. (Shun 2004: 187) Regarded from the paradigm of the heart-mind and ethical self-cultivation, sensory perception could only lose the relevance attached to it by the *wu shi* theory, as stated by Confucius's idea of three levels of 'listening': with the ears, with the heart-mind, and with the *qi* 氣 (inner substance). 'It is better to listen with your heart-mind than to listen with your ears, but better still to listen with your *qi* than to listen with your heart-mind. Listening stops with the ears.' (Slingerland 2003: 182–183) This notion can be reduced to the basic statement that one who follows the heart-mind is a great person, while one who follows his (or her) sense organs is a petty person (*xiao-ren* 小人). (Taylor 2005: I, 236–237)

While differing seriously regarding the mechanism of the self-reflecting process, the Confucian and Taoist views on self-reflection neverthe-

---

anything else, but only to her hearing herself. What I mean by calling a person "keen sighted," does not refer to her seeing anything else, but only to her seeing herself.' (Mair 1994: 79)

less have more in common than not in designating the strategy of spiritual movement: reflecting on and examining oneself in order to (to summarise the above) improve one's personal abilities and obtain perfection in understanding external things, even, in this case, the social order or cosmic patterns. This strategic scheme, joined with the ideas of sensory perception, crystallised as in *Zhuangzi* as the *wu shi* theory (emphasising precisely vision and hearing), was theorised and transferred to poetic creative activities by Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) in his *Wenfu* 文賦 (The Art of Writing, or, The Poetic Exposition on Literature, or, Rhapsody on Literature) rhapsody, one of the germs of Liu Chao rhyming prose (Xiao 1959: I, 345–56)<sup>15</sup> and among the most important works, as is widely known, in the field of the literary mind.

The second section of *Wenfu*'s main (following the Preface) text or the 'Process' section (Fang 1974: 8) opens with the following passage:

其始也，皆收視反聽。耽思傍訊，精驚八極。心游萬仞。(Lines 15–18)

Thus it begins: retraction of vision, revision of listening, / Absorbed in thought, seeking all around, / My essence is galloping to the world's eight bounds, / My mind roaming ten thousand yards, up and down. (transl. by Steven Owen: Owen 1992: 96)

There is no question of determinative position in these phrasings of the *shou shi*, 'retraction of vision,' and *fan ting*, 'revision of listening' binomes, which are used, in accordance with the commentaries of interpreters, in the sense of 'not seeing and hearing' (*bu shu ting* 不視反聽, Xiao 1959: I, 350); and which mean, according to Steven Owen's observations, (Owen 1992: 96–7) not a vacuity achieved by 'cutting off' the senses, but rather a true 'inversion' of the senses – looking and listening within the microcosm of the self. One of the sources of the *shou shi* and *fang ting* phrasing cited by commentators is a passage from *Shiji* (Historical Records): 'Reversing of listening is called quickness of mind, internalised vision is called understanding.' (Owen 1992: 97) Consequently, the main goal of spiritual concentration by looking at and seeing oneself is not

<sup>15</sup> Four its English renditions are verse to mention, authored by Ernest Richard Hughes, 1883–1956, (Hughes 1951) Sam Hamill, (Hamill 1987) David R. Knechtges, (Knechtges 1996: 211–232) and Steven Owen, (Owen 1992: 76–181) the latter one is mostly close to the original version and notable for additional comments and clarifications. Translation and on it in Russian see: Alekseev 2002: I, 367–376.

self-examination as such, but once again the sharpening of receptive faculties in order to gain keener and keener perception of all external things, which, in my opinion, is strongly confirmed by another passage of *Wenfu*, this time from the concluding sections of the work:

思風發於胸臆. 言泉流於唇齒. 紛葳蕤以駁遞. 唯毫素之所擬. 文徽徽以溢目. 音泠泠以盈耳. (Lines 229–234)

Winds of thought rise in the breast, / A stream of words flows through lips and teeth, / Burgeoning in tumultuous succession, / Something only the writing brush and silk can imitate. / Writing gleams, overflow the eyes, / The tones splash on, filling the ears. (Owen1992: 175)

Beginning with the ‘cutting off’ of sensory perceptions, the spiritual movement ends with the triumph of vision and hearing; the last two lines could be understood as referring not only to written patterns (*wen* 文) and poetic tones (*yin* 音), but all outward patterns and sounds, the idea expressed in Sam Hamill’s rendition of *Wenfu*: ‘Every eye knows a pattern, every ear hears a distant music.’ (Hamill 1987: 26) It is hard not to agree also with Patrick Laude’s remark on Lu’s theoretic assembly as a kind of ontological participation in the whole of reality by means of concentration on its Mysterious Centre. (Laude 2005: 95)

The next point to be discussed involves possible methods of not-seeing and not-hearing. One of them is described by Ly Ji: the *shou shi* binome, from a physiological point of view, can mean nothing but how to close one’s eyes. Let us refer once again to Hamill’s rendition: ‘Eyes closed, he hears an inner music.’ (Hamill 1987: 11) Another method comes from the *Jiude song* 酒德頌 (Ode to the Virtue of Wine, Xiao 1959, II: 1034–35) by Liu Ling 劉伶 (ca 225–ca 280), the text on drinking as major vehicle for the Great Man (*Da-ren* 大人). Picking up on the *Zhuangzi* metaphor of a drunken man (immersed in utter forgetfulness, he did not know he was riding, he does not know he has fallen), Liu Ling takes it literally when picturing his hedonistically inspired ideal, that is, the happy-go-lucky immortal, with a wine flask or gourd, who has in his own way found ease in perfect happiness. (Kohn 2009: 45)<sup>16</sup> With the help of wine, the latter

<sup>16</sup> ‘He takes Heaven and Earth as a single morning, / A thousand years as one short moment. / The sun and the moon are windows for him, / The Eight Wilds are his garden... / Stopping, he grasps his wine-cup and maintains his goblet; / Moving, he carries a casket and holds a jar in his hand. / His only obligation is toward wine, / And of this he knows abundance.’ (Kohn 2009: 46) On Liu’s work see also: Xu 1999: 168–169; transl. and on

obtains a kind of ecstatic, or, better yet, mystical inner condition, leading, along with perfect happiness, to physical insensitivity to any external factor (heat, cold), and loss of audial and vision perception in its profane nous:

靜聽不聞雷霆之聲, 熟視不都泰山之形. (Lines 32–33)

[His ability of] listening [is so] calm, that [he] does not hear sounds of thunderstorm. / [His ability of] vision [is so] skilled, that does not see the [gigantic] form of the Mount Tai.

Whether caused by ‘closing eyes’ or ecstatic ‘not-seeking’ and ‘not-hearing,’ such artificial deafness means nothing more than one who is as if enclosed by silence and emptiness, which leads us directly to its equivalence with *kong*.

Thus, there are reasons enough to suggest that the ‘case of dwelling in empty mountains’ aroused in its bottom from the Chinese ancients, crystallised primarily within Taoist thought, is a model of spiritual movement allied with the ideas of sensory perception. It is quite apparent also that the strategic scheme of self-perfection it suggests is more suitable than any kind of meditation process. If so, then logically one might assume that poetic scenarios with *kong* must be influenced in some way by works belonging to thematic poetic mainstreams derived from Taoism, i.e. lyric poetry with philosophical overtones and inspired by Taoist religious motifs. Both mainstreams flourished during the third and fourth centuries A.D. and are embodied in a large number of texts of various titles and essences, the most representative of which are the *zhaoyin* 招隱 (summoning a recluse) and *youxian* 遊仙 (wandering immortals or roaming into immortality) categorical groups, arranged by a set of verses, ordinarily titled, respectively, *Zhaoyin shi* 招隱詩 (Summoning a recluse) and *Youxian shi* 遊仙詩 (Wandering immortals). (Kravtsova 2011: 186–7) But none of these works, best exemplified by the poems of such men of literature as Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), Lu Ji, Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), and Zuo Si 左思 (ca 250–ca 305), deals with the ‘*kong* mountain’ subject or any of its separate details. The only explanation for this, in my opinion, is that the above-mentioned groups, though focussed on eremitic motifs, were intended to highlight the magnificent and weirdness of nature rather than to speak of one’s self-perfection. Thus they present descriptions of land-

---

it in Russian: Alekseev 2006: I, 200–221; Menshikov 2007: 71–73; Titarenko 2008: 347.

scapes, whether natural or with a scent of mystery, saturated by various pictorial details, while devoting no space to silence or emptiness.<sup>17</sup>

Apparently the 'kong mountain' scenario came into being under Buddhist influence, perhaps primarily in connection with Buddhist meditative practices instead of the *śūnyatā* concept. These assumptions are based on *Guo Juxishan fan ceng* 過瞿溪山飯僧 (When Passing by Mount Juxig, Give Alms to a Buddhist monk) by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), one of the first Chinese lyric pieces on Buddhist themes authored not by a poet-monk but by a lay believer (*upāsaka*).<sup>18</sup> It contains the following passage (Huang 1958: 40):

清霄浮颺煙。空林響法鼓。忘懷狎鷗鱗。攝生馴兕虎。(Lines 9–12)

Light smoke drifts windborne on the pure air, / Through the empty forest echoes the Drum of Law. / They tame seagulls and wishes by forgetting their minds. / Daunt rhinoceros and tiger by holding firmly on life.<sup>19</sup> (transl. by J. D. Frodsham: Frodsham 1967a: 127)

The cited passage not only anticipates Wang's 'Lu zhai' poem in its quintessence and vocabulary, but establishes the overall composition of the 'kong scenario': being in a 'kong situation,' possibly real (a silent and empty place in the bosom of nature), or possibly artificial (by 'cutting off' the impact of external factors), achieving a moment of self-concentration to the extent that one is able to perceive something previously enigmatic, and gaining certain spiritual values. It is also noteworthy that in both Xie's

<sup>17</sup> E. g. '...The hidden man lives deep in the valley... / Light branches there seem to form a cloud-reaching palace, / And dense leaves, a canopy of kingfisher plumes. / Clear sounds haunt the orchid-filled forests; / Sweet-smelling odors hover the splendid trees. / How the mountain brooks gurgle / As the gushing fountains rinse the singing jade-like!...' (Lu Ji, *Zhaoyin shi*: Lu 1983: I, 689–690; transl. by Donald Holzman, Holzman 1996: 114–115) And: 'I built my hut upon the Eastern mountains, / Where nut fall down and grow into hazel-trees... / Among these fresh and brilliant blues and emeralds, / Bamboo and cypress realize their true nature. / Their tender leaves are hung with frost and snow, / But from their soaring verdure water drips...' (Zuo Si, *Zhaoyin shi*: Lu 1983: I, 735; transl. by J. D. Frodsham, Frodsham 1967a: 95)

<sup>18</sup> The formative stage of by the poetry with Buddhist overtones corresponds with the Eastern Jin (*Dong Jin* 東晉, 317–420) and is marked by literary activities of the Buddhist priesthood. The most active was Zhi Dun 支盾 (Zhi Dao-lin 支道林 314–366), to whom 18 poems are attributed. (Lu 1983: I, 1077–1083; transl. and on it: Xu 1999, 558–559; Frodsham 1967: I, 86–105)

<sup>19</sup> Both phrasings come from the Taoist lexical figures and metaphors standing for the Taoist virtues, but applied by Xie to Buddhist monks. (Frodsham 1967a: 127–128)

and Wang's texts the transitive flash is marked by a distant sound, *xiang* 響, originating, respectively, from a musical instrument (though this could be a metaphor for 'sounds of Teaching') and from some human voices. Then why not assume that 'the echoes of someone's voice' phrasing, besides signifying that other people are actually present on the mountain at some distance, contains an implicit allusion again to the Buddhist authenticities or symbols: the voices of monks, from a monastery hidden in the mountains, for instance, or the metaphor of sounds engendering faith in the Teaching?

One more remark applies to the specifics of 'silence' (*jijing* 寂靜) as expressed by Wang Wei's landscape verses related to the '*kong* scenario.' Its main quality, also pointed out by Chinese scholars, (Ge 1993: 190) consists of never being absolute, as in 'silence without sounds' (*jijing wu sheng* 寂靜無聲), but full of various auidal images like birds' voices and flowing noises, sounds of spring or autumn rain, or echoes of a stream. It is suggested that this inner richness of 'natural silence' is a result of 'keen listening to the world,' (Liu, Jun and Wang 1988: 353) which completely corresponds to the spiritual movement scheme, its mode coming from ancient thought and the Six Dynasties literary mind. Ithaca, as 'Lu zhai' in concrete as Wang Wei's verses in a similar spirit, all have much more complicated ideological and artistic origins than those derived from the pure Buddhist and Taoist concepts, and accumulate the entire native intellectual and creative experience.

Most intriguing is that the *kong* category, accompanied by ideas of visual and auidal perception, was rather actively employed by poetry on amorous themes, which would seemingly keep its distance from any theoretical constructions. This refers to the case of 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber.'

The new '*kong* scenario' also coincides with two general images, of an 'empty chamber' (room, *kong fang* 空房) or 'apartment' (*kong shi* 空室) and of an 'empty bed' (*kong chuang* 空床), marking again a general spatial configuration and its local microcosm, placing these images in a semantic parallel with those of 'empty mountains' and 'empty forest.'

Within the massive corpus of individual lyric poetry (*shi* 詩), this motif originates from three poetic epistyles by Qin Jia 秦嘉 (second century A.D.) to his wife, known as *Zeng fu shi* 贈婦詩 (To My Wife) and considered one of the first works in this area. (Xu 2001: 23–4, also in: Lu 1983: I, 186–7; You 1981: I, 180; transl.: Birrell 1982: 45–6) Coverage images are used twice in this loop:

獨坐空房中，誰與相勸勉。長夜不能眠，伏枕獨展轉 (Poem 1, lines 11–14)

[I am] sitting alone in empty [bed]room / With whom to talk and consult? / Long night cannot sleep / Leaning on pillow, alone toss and turn [on bed]

And:

顧看空室中, 髣髴想姿形。一別懷萬恨, 起坐為不寧 (Poem 3, lines 5–8)

Turning around, [I am] observing empty apartment / [As if] looking in distance, imagine [your] face and appearance / Once parted, have fostered ten thousand misgivings, / Get up, sit [again], not able to calm down.

The cited passages look quite different from all other kinds of poetic pieces on reclusiveness and landscape details and lack any observable traces of the impact of certain concepts. Nevertheless, a person's love-caresses are pictured in a way that has much in common with the spiritual pavement scheme. It is precisely the '*kong* situation' that makes him concentrate on his self-experience and feelings of love in this state of affairs, because his sensory perception is sharpened through the imaginary vision of his distant beloved.

The next example of this type comes from the *Wei Guan Yanxian zeng fu wang fan si shou* 為觀彥先贈婦往反四首 (Four Epistles, Sent by Guan Yanxian to his Wife and Written by Her in Answer) by Lu Yun 陸 (262–303), an imitation of spousal epistles. (Xu 2001: 86–88; also in: Lu 1983: I, 717–718; transl.: Birrell 1986: 94; transl. and discussed in Russian sources: Kravtsova 2004: 168–70; Titarenko 2008: 342) The '*Kong* situation' is embodied there in the rather rare lexical formula *kong jin* 空襟 ('empty garments'), strengthened by the word *du* 獨 ('alone'):

目相清惠姿, 耳在淑媚音。獨床多遠念, 寤言撫空襟 (Poem 1, lines 5–8)

Before [my] eyes is [still you, so] perfect and charming, / In [my] ears [your voice is still] sound, [so] gentle and enchanting. / Sleeping alone, in [my] dreams [I am always] going far away [to you], / When awake, [start to] speak [to you], stroking empty garments.

Moreover, the '*kong* situation' greatly intensifies one's awareness of external phenomena and natural patterns, including the rapid passage of time as exemplified by the *Daowang* 悼亡 (Bereavement or Lament for a Dead Wife) of Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300), arranged in three separate stanzas. (Xiao 1959: I, 500–2; also in: Xu 2001: 69–70; Lu 1983: I, 635–636; transl. by Birrell 1986: 83, Frodsham 1967; 86–88; transl. and discussed in Russian sources: Kravtsova 2004: 172–178; Titarenko 2008: 380)

皎皎窗中月，照我室南端。清商應秋至，暑暑隨節闌。凜凜涼風升，始覺夏衾單。豈曰無重纊，誰與同歲寒。歲寒無與同，朗月何朧朧。展轉晒枕席，長簾竟床空。床空委清塵，室虛來北風 (Poem 2, lines 1-12)

So bright the moon in the window, / Shines upon the southern end of my room. / Pure *shang* [sounds] responds to arriving of autumn, / The damp head fades away following ending of the [summer] season. / Cold gust of cold wind, / Makes me realize summer guilt to thin. / [But] to whom [I can now] say, that lack padded quilt? / With whom shall spent the winter frost? / [During] the winter frost [days] there'll be no one with me, / Bright moon can be closed by haze, [but then will be bright again]. / Tossing and turning, [I] stare at [her] pillow and mat, / Long canopy closes the bed, which should remain empty. / Empty bed will be covered by untainted dust, / [My] chamber broke into a gust of northern wind.

Do not the initial lines of this passage resemble, in some portion of their details, the nature pictures typical of landscape poetry or poetry with eremitic motifs? Yet there is a clear and unequivocal line separating the 'kong scenarios.' The fundamental distinction between the two is that 'dwelling in empty mountains' has an absolute positive implication praising living alone as escaping from social existence, whereas the case of 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber' stands for living alone in an utterly negative sense. Such double meanings are found in all other poetical footings associated with *kong*, beginning with 'silence' (in all its lexical presentations) and 'alone' (*du* 獨, *gu* 孤), terms which, in the case of living alone as escape, are used for strengthening one's apartness from other people; and in the case of living alone as loneliness, as one's solitude. Let me refer to one more textual example, a second poem from Zhang Hua's *Qinshi wushou* (Five Poems on Love-emotion or Emotion) set (Xu 2001: 65-66):

明月曜清景。朧光照玄墀。幽人守靜夜。迴身入空帷。(Lines 1-4)

The bright moon shimmers with clear rays, / Soaring light shines on a dark porch. / A secluded person keeps still night vigil, / Turns and enters empty bedcurtains (transl. by Anne Birrell: Birrell 1986: 79)

The main criteria for this difference and for recognising the meaning of *kong* and its attendant vocabulary in each concrete case derive not from the poetic experience, but from the opposition between free action and random action. When caused by the choice of a human being, living alone turns out to be affirmative in all its aspects; when caused by external circumstances, it transforms through contrast.

My analytical outline of the ‘dwelling in empty mountains’ and ‘dwelling in [an] empty chamber’ poetic scenarios affords an opportunity to draw a set of primary conclusions. First, the poetic discourses of the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories are centred on the views of sensory (visual and aural) perception. Their archetypical background is formed by the ideas of spiritual movement, implying the ‘cutting off’ of sensory perception for self-concentration, which leads to the sharpening of receptive faculties for gaining keener and keener perception of all external things. Second, this scheme was realised within poetic practice in two general modes, determined again by reasons external to creative activity. If caused by human choice, remaining in ‘emptiness and silence’ stands for reclusiveness and self-perfection. If caused by a random action, the same situation leads to solitude in its absolutely negative implications. Third, having principally altered semantics, the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories appear to express universally the great abundance of one’s surroundings and inner conditions, including mentality and feelings, which put them among the chief artistic means of Chinese lyric poetry.

## Bibliography

1. Alekseev, V. M. (2002), *Trudy po istorii kitaiskoi literatury (Works on History of Chinese Literature)*, in 2 vol., Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura.
2. Alekseev, V. M. (2006), *Shedevry kitaiskoi klassicheskoi prozy (Masterpieces of Chinese Classical Prose)*, repr., in 2 vol., Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura.
3. Birrell, A. (ed.) (1982), *New Songs from a Jade Terrace. An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry*, London–Boston–Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.
4. Cheng, Chung-ying (2004), ‘A Theory of Confucian Selfhood: Self-Cultivation and Free Will in Confucian Philosophy’ in Shun, Kwong-loi & D. W. Wong (eds.) *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community*, 124–147, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Fang, A. (1974), ‘Rhyme prose on Literature, the *Wen-fu* of Lu Chi’ in Birch, C. (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres*, 3–21, Berkeley: University of California Press.
6. Frodsham, J. D. (1967), *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of Hsieh Ling-yun*, in 2 vol., Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya.
7. Frodsham, J. D. (ed.) (1967a), *An Anthology of Chinese Verse: Han Wei Chin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
8. Ge, Xiaoyin 葛曉音 (1993), *Shan-shui tian-yan shipai yanjiu 山水田園詩派研究*, Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe.
9. Gu, Jiegang 顧頡剛 & Liu, Qiyu 劉起鈞 (ed.) (2005), *Shangshu jiaoshu yilun 尚書校釋譯論*, in 4 vol., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

10. Guo, Qingfan 郭慶藩 (ed.) (1988), 'Zhuangzi jishi 莊子集釋 in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成, vol. III, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
11. Hamill, S. (1987), *Lu Chi. Wen Fu. The Art of Writing*, Portland: Breitenbush Books.
12. Holzman, D. (1996) *Landscape Appreciation in Ancient and Early Medieval China: The Birth of Landscape Poetry. Six Lectures Given at National Tsing Hua University, February–March 1995*, Taiwan: National Tsing Hua University.
13. Huang, Jie 黃節 (1958), *Xie Kangle shi zhu* 謝康樂詩注, repr., Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe.
14. Hughes, E. R. (1951), *The Art of Letters. Lu Chi's "Wen fu" A.D. 320*. New Jersey: Princeton.
15. Knechtges, D. R.(ed.) (1996), *Wen xuan, or Selection of Refined Literature, Volume Three*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
16. Kohn, L. (2009) *Introducing Daoism*, New York: Routledge.
17. Kravtsova, M. (ed) (2004), *Reznoi drakon. Poeziya epohi Shesti dinastii (The Carved Dragon. The Chinese Lyric poetry of the Six Dynasties)*, Saint-Petersburg: Petersburgskoye Vostokovedeniye.
18. Kravtsova, M. (2011), 'On Thematic Variety of Six Dynasties (Liu Chao, III–VI CC. A.D.) Lyric Poetry' in: Rošker S. J. & N. Vampelj Suhadolnik (eds.) *The Yields of Transition: Literature, Art and Philosophy in Early Medieval China*, 181–202, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
19. Kroll, P. W. (2001), 'Poetry of the T'ang Dynasty' in: Mair, V. H. (ed.) *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, 274–313, New York: Columbia University Press.
20. Laude, P. (2005), *Singing the Way: Insights in Poetry and Spiritual Transformation*. Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc.
21. Legge, J. (ed.) (1970), *The Texts of Taoism. The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzū. The Writings of Chuang Tzū*, repr., in 2 vol. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
22. Legge, J. (ed.) (2004), *The Shu King, or Book of Historical Documents*, repr., in 2 vol., Montana: Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints.
23. Liu, Bingling 劉並玲 & Tian, Jun 田軍 & Wang, Hong 王洪 (ed.) (1988), *Zhonguo lidai shige zuoshang cidian* 中國歷代詩歌鑑賞辭典, Beijing: Zhongguo renjian wenyi chubanshe.
24. Liu, Ning 劉寧 (ed.) (2002), *Wang Wei Meng Haoran shi xuan ping* 王維孟浩然詩選評, Shanghai: Guji chubanshe.
25. Luo, Zhufeng 羅竹風 (ed.) (1991), *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, vol. VIII, Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe.
26. Lü, Weifeng 呂薇芬 & Zhang, Yanjin 張燕瑾 (ed.) (2003), *Sui Tang Wu Dai wenxue yanjiu* 隋唐五代文學研究, in 2 vol., Beijing: Beijing chubanshe.
27. Liu, J. J. Y. (1962), *Chinese Theories of Literature*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
28. Lu, Qinli 遼欽立 (ed.) (1983), *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei Chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, in 3 vol., Beijing: Zhonhua shuju.
29. Mair, V. H. (1994), *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, New York: Bantam Books.

30. Mair, V. H. (ed.) (2000), *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, Bodman R. W., Mair V. H. (trans.), New York: Columbia University Press.
31. Menshikov, L. N. (2007), *Kitaiskaya poeziya v perevodach (Translations of the Chinese Poetry)*, Saint-Petersburg: Petersburgskoye Vostokovedeniye.
32. Nylan, M. (1992), *The Shifting Center: the Original "Great Plan" and Later Readings* (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, 24), Nettetal: Steyler Verl.
33. Nylan, M. (2001) *The Five "Confucian" classics*, Michigan: Sheridan Books.
34. Owen, S. (1992), *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series N 30), Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
35. Peng, Dingqiu 彭定求 (ed.) (1999), *Quan Tang shi 全唐詩*, repr., in 15 vol., Beijing, Zhonghua shuju.
36. Qiao, Xiangzhong 橋象鐘 & Chen, Tiemin 陳鉄民 (ed.) (2000), *Tang dai wenxue shi 唐代文學史*, in 2 vol., Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe.
37. Qin, Xuqing 秦旭卿 & Sun, Yongchang 孫雍長 & Wang, Rongpei 汪榕培 (eds.) (1999), *Zhuangzi* (Library of Chinese Classics), in 3 vol. Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe.
38. Shun, Kwong-loi (2004), 'Conception of the Person in Early Confucian Thought' in Shun, Kwong-loi & Wong, David W. (eds.) *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community*, 183–199, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
39. Slingerland, E. (2003), *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.
40. Sorokin, V. F. (ed.) (1986), *Kitaiskaja klassicheskaja literature* (Chinese Classical Literature), Moskva: Biblioteka inostrannoi literatury.
41. Su, Xinyi 蘇心一 (2007), *Wang Wei shanshui shi hua meixue yanjiu 王維山水詩畫美學研究*. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe.
42. Tao, Wenpeng 陶文鵬 (ed.) (2004), *Wang Wei Meng Haoran shi zhuping 王維孟浩然詩注評*, Xian, sanqin chubanshe
43. Taylor, R. L. (ed.) (2005), *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, in 2 vol., New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.
44. Titarenko, M. L. (ed.) (2008), *Duhovnaya kultura Kitaya. Encyclopedia (Spiritual Culture of China. Encyclopedia)*, vol. III, Moskva: Vostochnaya literatura
45. Watson, B. (ed.) (1968), *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, Columbia University Press.
46. Weinberger, E. & Paz, O. (1987), *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, Asphodel Press.
47. Xiao, Tong 蕭統 (ed.) (1959), *Wenxuan 文選*, repr., in 2 vol. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan.
48. Xu, Gongchi 徐公持 (ed.) (1999), *Wei Jin wenxue shi 魏晉文學史*, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe.
49. Xu, Ling 徐陵 (ed.) (2001), *Yutai xinyong 玉臺新詠*, repr., Taipei: Shijie shuju.
50. You, Guoen 游国恩 (ed.) (1981), *Zhongguo wenxue shi 中国文學史*, in 4 vol., Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe.
51. Yu, P. (2012), 'Wang Wei' in Reisman, R. V. (ed.), *Asian Poets*, 83–92, Massachusetts: Salem Press.
52. Yu, Shouzhen 喻守貞 (ed.) (1985), *Tang shi san bai shou xiangxi 唐詩三百首詳析*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

Sandra A. Wawrytko\*

## **The Interpenetration of Art and Philosophy in East Asian Poetry: The Metaphysical Threat to the Platonic Hierarchy**

### Abstract

Why should art matter to a philosopher? In the context of Asian philosophy it is clear that a distinctive aesthetic underlies artistic expression encountering reality in such diverse art forms as Japanese haiku, Chinese landscape paintings, contemporary Korean cinema, and even Bollywood films. Art has informed and guided politics in Asia, where artist philosophers continue to function as reformers and revolutionaries challenging the status quo en route to connecting with reality. This is especially true in the case of Asian poets. In sharp contrast, the Euro-centric tradition of philosophy has tended to marginalize and even denigrate the arts. Plato famously observed 'there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (*Republic*, 607b5–6), seeking to circumscribe the role of poets in his ideal state. This essay will focus on East Asia, both in terms of its historical embrace of poetry and contemporary manifestations. Special emphasis will be given to Buddhist poets from China, Korea, and Japan who wield poetry as a form of *upāya* or skillful means to evoke, provoke, or document awakening. Buddhist epistemology challenges and dissolves the dualistic preconceptions that assume the existence of an insurmountable divide between 'self' and 'other,' inner and outer, human and Nature. This may also yield important insights into why Plato and his followers have been so obsessed with the inherent power of the poet to undermine their vision of philosophy and the task of the philosopher.

### Key words

Buddhism, China, Japan, Korea, philosophy, poetry

---

\* Department of Philosophy  
San Diego State University, United States of America  
Email: wawrytko@mail.sdsu.edu

## Introduction

Why should art matter to a philosopher? In the context of Asian philosophy it is clear that a distinctive aesthetic underlies diverse artistic forms of expression tracking encounters with reality. Li Zehou demonstrates that an ‘inner connection between the Chan philosophy and landscape painting [...] provided the ideological background for the development and maturity of landscape painting in China.’ (1994: 183) It has been argued that Bashō’s Zen Buddhist approach to the haiku form, both in composition and teaching, was ‘a unique epistemological methodology of perceptual revolution to see reality clearly.’ (Wawrytko 2011: 10) Contemporary art forms display similar tendencies. Korean cinema has tackled complex philosophical themes in such works Bae Yong-kyun’s ‘Why has Bodhidharma Left for the East?’ (1993) Scholars have presented evidence that ‘Sanskrit drama is the aesthetic forebear of Hindi cinema.’ (Joshi 2004: 23)

Philosophically grounded art has informed, guided, and not infrequently plagued the self-proclaimed upholders of law and order in Asia. From the artist-philosophers known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*zhu-lin qi xian* 竹林七賢) to Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (1957–) and Yue Minjun 岳敏君 (1962–), the status quo continues to be challenged by those who posit and present alternate views of reality. Thus Yue, who identifies with Daoism, has described his enigmatic, smile-infused paintings as ‘not a denial of reality but a questioning of it.’ (Bernstein 2007)

Among Asian artists, poets have been especially active opponents of authority figures touting the virtues of their version of ‘natural’ law and order. In sharp contrast, the Euro-centric tradition of philosophy has tended to emulate Plato, who famously asserted in the *Republic* that ‘there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry’ (607b5–6). This led him to marginalize the role of poets in his ideal state, by controlling, circumscribing, and even denigrating the artistic process. I will argue that Plato’s assumed conflict between philosophy and poetry is in fact a conflict between different approaches to philosophy. His dualistic metaphysics gave priority to noumenal abstractions, thereby dooming poets for their associations with phenomenal ‘imitations’ of the Forms. It also mandates an epistemology grounded in logocentrism as well as anthropocentrism.

Alternative metaphysical and epistemological approaches, such as found in East Asian philosophies, are often dismissed as mere mysticism.

Yet the nondualistic openness of philosophical poets to both noumena and phenomena spawned visions of a salutary co-creativity between humans and Nature that influenced political aspirations. We will demonstrate the historical embrace of poetry by philosophers of East Asia as well as contemporary examples of activist artists. Special emphasis will be given to Buddhist poets from China, Korea, and Japan who wield poetry as a form of *upaya* or skillful means to evoke, provoke, and document awakening. Representative samples of poetry will document how Buddhist epistemology challenges and dissolves the dualistic preconceptions predicated on the existence of an insurmountable divide between 'self' and 'other,' inner and outer, human and Nature. In exploring why Plato and his followers have been so obsessed with the inherent power of the poet to undermine their vision of philosophy, we may come to a broader understanding of the philosopher's presumed task in Asia as well as globally.

### **Plato's Metaphysical Hierarchy: Poets as Mere Imitators**

What is the source of poetry's potential potency, which makes Plato fear it as a threat to the forces of philosophy? To be more precise, poetry threatens Plato's version or vision of philosophy. He is only prepared to acknowledge his own dualistically-driven version of Idealism as legitimate philosophy, and hence defensively rejects any approaches that unmask his metaphysical assumptions. Friedrich Nietzsche, of course, has masterfully tracked the emergence of Plato's 'True World' in *Twilight of the Idols* under the heading 'The History of an Error': 'The true world – attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man: he lives it, *he is it*. (The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I, Plato, *am* the truth.")' (1968: 485) Indeed, Nietzsche refers to his work as 'a great declaration of war' in which he would wield his hammer to sound out philosophical idols, thereby exposing their hollowness. (1968: 466) Perhaps this exposure is what Plato feared from the poets, most especially Homer, as competing sources of wisdom that he regarded as an invitation to chaos. The perceived threat level of the Asian poets reviewed here, I will argue, would have been heightened inasmuch as their poetry is consciously presenting a philosophical position in many ways antithetical to Platonic assumptions.

If Nietzsche seems to exaggerate Plato's dogmatic turn, recall that the upper portion of his Divided Line metaphysics was inspired by the Pre-So-

cratic philosopher Parmenides (c. 515–445 b.c.e.), a poet whose ‘diction was Homeric through and through’ (Henn 2003: 1) According to philosopher of science Giorgio de Santillana, through Plato Parmenides has become ‘enshrined in the realm of pure philosophy, as the First Metaphysician’ and equally foundational to the emergence of science. (1961: 95) In *On Nature (Peri Physeos)* Parmenides set forth the philosophical dualism of phenomena and noumenon under the respective headings of ‘the Way of Opinion’ (*doxa*) and ‘the Way of Truth’ (*aletheia*).

Significantly, in the poem Parmenides is allowed to pass through ‘the gates of the way of Night and of Day’ with the assistance of ‘Justice the Great Avenger’ (presumably Dike). (de Santillana 1961: 90) Then he is warmly received by an unnamed goddess who enlightens him about the truth of Being. The accommodating goddess/guide often has been identified as Themis, the embodiment of Law and Order, originally in the sense of social custom, but later extrapolated to include eternal, cosmic Law. Considered by some to be a manifestation of the Earth goddess Gaia, Themis belonged to the ancient race of the Titans, who predated the Olympian deities. In keeping with this primal origin, she has been described as the binding force of the social imperative, ‘herd instinct, custom, convention slowly crystallized into Law and abstract Right.’ (Harrison 1912: 485) Harrison also astutely explains the paradoxical birth of Dike, ‘natural order,’ from Themis, ‘social order,’ by qualifying the former as ‘man’s conception, his representation of that order.’ (1912: 533) As to their mutual appearance in the poem, ‘Parmenides may be supposed to have meant that insight led him to justice of right action [Dike], from which he passed to the mother or source of justice [Themis], which explained everything to him.’ (Davidson 1870: 11)

As the facilitator of metaphysical insight, first in Parmenides and later in Plato, Themis deserves closer attention. A fascinating connection exists between the Greek word ‘themis,’ law, and the English word ‘doom’ derived from it. Although doom now denotes a dire situation, it originally conveyed a positive notion of something ‘set, fixed, settled,’ in the sense of social consensus. (Harrison 1912: 482) In the early context established order seemed infinitely preferable to chaos and uncertainty, just as common sense and English common law came to define socially acceptable behavior. This crucial ability to instill order and regulation in human interactions may explain why Themis is described by Homer as having sole power to convene the assembly of gods and offer the first drink at their feasts. (*Iliad* xx 4–6) Themis also is identified in many myths as a close advisor to Zeus, often offering prophetic warnings to the other deities. Harrison goes as far

as to claim that Themis is 'the substratum of each and every god [...] above and below each and every god.' (1912: 485) Her power extends to human life and death in that her daughters, the three Fates (Moirai), determine human destiny by spinning, measuring, and then cutting off the threads of individual lives. They are depicted performing these functions in the reincarnation story told by Plato at the end of the *Republic* (620).

The very amorphousness of Themis would seem to facilitate the evolution from the personification of an abstract concept of justice and order to what Plato would deem a pure abstraction, imbued with the highest degree of reality in the metaphysical hierarchy. The triumph of abstraction in Greek philosophy begins with Parmenides' grounding in Pythagorean ruminations on the metaphysical status of numbers. This prepared the way for his uncompromising championing of abstract thought in defiance of contradictory sense data, for 'it is the same to be thought and to be.' (de Santillana 1961: 91)

In the *Republic* Plato focuses his attention on the abstract sense of Justice (*dikaisyne*), particularly as it applies to an idealized social structure. In the course of the discussion of justice, Plato uses Socrates to build his case against the poets by depicting them as consummate imitators, and in fact dealing in 'imitations thrice removed from the truth.' This attack in Book Ten is clearly grounded in his metaphysical assumptions concerning a hierarchical dualism between phenomena and noumena, outlined in his famous Allegory of the Cave in Book Seven. Prisoners chained in the cave mistake mere shadows (art; imagination, *eikasia*) cast by puppets (physical objects; belief, *pistis*) as reality. The philosopher is awakened from his phenomenal slumbers by daring to leave the darkness of the cave and experience the dazzling light of the dialectic. Socrates summarizes the epistemological framework in hierarchical pairings: '*As being [of Parmenides] is to becoming, so is pure intellect to opinion. And as intellect is to opinion, so is science to belief, and understanding to the perception of shadows.*' (1971: 398)

## The Philosophical Poet: Power and Political Threat

The political aspirations of Plato have engendered ongoing debates. He has variously been credited with inspiring the Third Reich, Fascism, and Communism based on 'the idealization of absolutism in the *Republic*.' (Morrow 1971: 144–145) He has been both accused of and absolved from promoting a totalitarian political philosophy (Leys 1971; Popper 1945), and even characterized as a non-political or anti-political thinker. (Sparshott 1971) In the

present context we will assume Plato does espouse political goals, defined in a broad sense, as set forth by George Orwell: 'Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples' idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.' (1946) Certainly Plato, as a philosopher and following the role model set by Socrates, is intent on changing the way his fellow citizens think about their society toward the end of modifying its structure.

The core of the argument against Homer rests on his failure to render any public service, as a legislator or victorious warrior, or even as a private teacher. Socrates imagines a cross-examination of Homer, daring him to prove his credentials as a maker: 'if you are only in the second remove from truth in what you say of virtue, and not in the third – not an image maker or imitator – and if you are able to discern what pursuits make men better or worse in private or public life, tell us what State was ever better governed by your help?' (1971: 429) In the absence of a clearly defined goal that has been in some way realized through poetry, Homer stands defenseless before his Platonic interrogator.

When Plato goes on to proclaim that the imitative art 'is only a kind of play or sport,' Chinese philosophers would not necessarily disagree. (1971: 431) And yet Zhuang Zi characterizes his own philosophizing as 'leisurely strolling' (*xiao yao you* 逍遙遊) in the opening chapter of his eponymous work. Inspired by Zhuang Zi, philosopher Thomé H. Fang (1899–1977) has compared the philosopher's task to that of a child flying a butterfly kite. (Fang 1981: 14) Fang effusively transforms Plato's condemnation into a benediction:

To play the sport of bliss in lyrical enchantment, to enter into a sympathetic unity with the soul of men and things, to set forth rhythmic vitality in unison with the soul of men and things, to make men great in the achievement of beauty and the sublime: these are the Perennial efforts of Chinese art. (Fang 1957: 235)

A dualistic macrocosm is matched by a dualistic microcosm in which feeling is at war with reason (even identified as womanly part vs. manly part respectively); the soul is presumed to possess inherent forces of good and evil – 'to see her as she really is, not as we now behold her, marred by communion with the body and other miseries, you must contemplate her with the eye of reason, in her original purity.' (1971: 436) However the hedonistically-oriented poet, in thrall to phenomena, is not motivated 'to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul.' (1971: 432) Rather the poet incites rebellion of feeling against reason, while 'poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up.' (1971: 433)

The corrupting influence of the poet extends beyond the individual soul, and 'he who listens to her, fearing for the safety of the city which is within him, should be on his guard against her seductions and make our words his law.' (1971: 434) This demands that we limit poetry in the ideal state to 'hymns to the gods and praises of famous men.' (1971: 433) Plato cites common phrases characterizing (caricaturing?) poets as 'yelping hound howling at her lord'; 'mighty in the vain talk of fools'; 'the mob of sages circumventing Zeus'; no more than 'beggars.' (1971: 434) Justice, however, 'has been shown to confer reality, and not to deceive those who truly possess her.' (1971: 436) Such vigilance will be rewarded with an orderly state as well as the eternal life of the soul.

Many Asian poets promote an idea of society that deconstructs anthropocentric absolutes and political authoritarianism. Just as Shakespeare's wouldbe usurpers in *Henry the Sixth* decide 'The first thing we must do is kill all the lawyers,' (II,4-2,71-78), tyrants throughout history have felt the need to control artists – or crush them. Emperor Augustus commissioned Virgil to memorialize and legitimize him in the *Aeneid*. Joseph Stalin's propaganda campaign utilizing Socialist Realism permeated the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong promoted literature and art during the Cultural Revolution as a 'powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy.' (1972: 301) More recently, the Taliban has sought to exert dictatorial power over people's lives by destroying Buddhist monuments and banning music.

Artists have taken note of this tendency, sounding the warning in works about fictional dystopias. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* present us with political regimes that have declared war on free expression as subversive to their interests, giving us the incendiary jargon of doublethink, the thought police, and Big Brother. Viktor E. Frankl, a prisoner of the Nazi death camps, even traced the Holocaust to academia, arguing 'If we present a man with a concept of man which is not true, we may well corrupt him. [...] I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek were ultimately prepared not in some Ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.' (Frankl 1973: xxi)

Art and poetry have been deemed a threat to those intent on imposing their versions of law and order because they also have the power to thwart their schemes. John F. Kennedy noted 'When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concerns, poetry reminds him of the richness

and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.' (1963) China has a long history of such cleansing poetry, beginning with the ancient Chu poet and court official Qu Yuan 屈原 (b. 340 b.c.e.). His suicide by drowning in the Mi-Luo River to protest government corruption has been rewarded posthumously with a yearly observance on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, now known as the Dragon Boat Festival. Centuries later the poet-musician Xi Kang 嵇康 (223–262), an outspoken critic of Confucian hypocrisy, was executed on charges of moral depravity. In the twentieth century the much-lauded poet Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–1996) was persecuted by both the Guomintang and the Communist Party. In Russia poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) ran afoul of the Stalinist government, suffering censorship and constant threats.

### Rehabilitating Phenomena: Poets As Co-Creators of Reality

As discussed above, Pre-Socratic philosophy initiated the obsession with pure abstraction that led to the privileging of the noumena and corresponding devaluation of phenomena in Plato's metaphysical hierarchy. While Heraclitus of Ephesus (d. 460 b.c.e.) expressed doubts about the veracity of sense data, he assumed that human participation in 'universal reason' (*logos*) allowed us to decode reality – 'Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men, if they have souls that understand not their language.' (de Santillana 1961: 49) Parmenides went even further, decisively rejecting the testimony of the senses in favor of the testimony of reason and logic. Since Plato associates phenomena with 'confusion,' 'the art of conjuring and of deceiving [...]having an effect upon us like magic,' the poet's continued dependence on phenomena necessarily relegates them to the lowest reaches of his metaphysical hierarchy. (1971: 431)

However, from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy, the magic (*maya*) is produced by the mind itself, not the phenomena. The opening chapter of the *Lankavatara Sutra* conveys this epistemological analysis in its depiction of the Buddha conjuring up jeweled mountains and magical beings after emerging from the depths of the sea. When these glorious visions abruptly vanish, Ravana, the Lord of Lanka, is 'immediately awakened, feeling a revulsion (*paravriti*) [transformation] and realising that the world is nothing but his own mind; he was settled in the realm of non-discrimination [...] obtained the faculty of seeing things as they are.' (Suzuki 1978: 9) As Suzuki explains, Ravana's 'intellect is no longer snared in the

meshes of dualistic logic, he intuitively perceives that the world of particularization is no more than a reflection of his own mind.' (1999: 100) In other words, 'all of magic, every little sleight, is really happening in our minds.' (Macknik & Martinez-Conde 2010: 259)

The figure of Ravana is itself philosophically significant. It seems odd that the king of the *raksasas* or demons (literally those to be guarded against), who is also the villain of the *Ramayana*, would serve as interlocutor in the *sutra*. This role usually is assumed by the Buddha's closest disciples, such as Shariputra in the *Lotus Sutra* or Subhuti in the *Diamond Sutra*. At one level the choice of Ravana supports Mahayana Buddhism's advocacy of 'wisdom embracing all species,' as emphasized in the *Lotus Sutra*. In terms of Buddhist epistemology the choice of Ravana is significant in that his name means 'clamorous, demanding.' (Soothill & Hodous 1937: 472) This is the same quality found in the inquiring mind of a philosopher. More specifically, Buddha informs Ravana that 'the world is like an image magically transformed,' an insight that has escaped the grasp of 'philosophers and the ignorant.' To see the truth we must see through the magic show conjured up by the discriminating mind that makes us 'cling to dualism.' (Suzuki 1978: 20) These mentally constructed shadows cause us to misinterpret reality.

Based on this epistemological assessment, the natural order implied by Themis, whether put forth by a philosopher such as Plato or a post-modern scientist, is merely a construct grounded in human evaluations of orderliness. Moreover, anthropocentrism imposes its own glass ceiling. The human preference for unchanging and static laws, including the fixation on eternal perfection, explains the privileged position of the Platonic Forms (*Eidos*) as a form of wish-fulfilment. Contemporary neuroscience validates the skepticism of Buddhist philosophers here. For example, visual sense data is not the source of the 'corruption' described by Plato. Rather our flawed data is the product of the interpreting mind, such that 'the richness of your visual experience is an illusion created by the filling-in processes of your brain.' (Macknik & Martinez-Conde 2010: 13)

The dualistic vision of a passive mind misled by external phenomena nonetheless underlies Plato's depiction of the poet. When William Shakespeare describes the end of the player's art 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature' (*Hamlet* III:2:18–19), he is simply echoing the Platonic view of artists as imitators that had become grained in classical thought since the time of the Greeks. The passivity of the artist is highlighted in the *Phaedrus* (244–245), where the Muses are credited with inspiring poets

by means of a divine madness that is compared to the madness of prophets and those besotted by love. Similarly, Shakespeare observes ‘The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact!’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* V:1:7) In the *Apology* Socrates, Plato’s presumed source for this view, reports on his disappointing interaction with the poets when he sought someone wiser than himself: ‘Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them.’ (1971: 202) The priority of law and order in quelling chaos comes to the fore yet again in *Laws* Four where the contrasts between poet and legislator are laid out. The poet ‘when he sits down on the tripod of the muse, is not in his right mind; like a fountain, he allows to flow freely whatever comes in,’ which stands in stark contrast to the revered ideal legislator, who wields the dual tools of ‘persuasion and force’ to accomplish his crucial social task. (1971: 684–685)

Although the imagery of a reflective mirror was invoked by Buddhist philosophers, it rests on a dynamic interaction between mind and Nature. In the *Lankavatara Sutra* Buddha compares the discriminating, dualistic mind to ‘seeing one’s own image reflected in a mirror, or one’s own shadow in the house, or hearing an echo in the valley.’ (Suzuki 1978: 20) In the mind mirror we can both see the reality of buddha-nature and be seen as that reality, as explained by Tian-tai Master Zhi-yi 智顓 (538–597) (*Stopping and Seeing Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, *Taisho shinsho Daizokyo* 46:12c):

Reflections in a mirror do not come from outside and do not arise from within; one spontaneously sees one’s features because the mirror is clear. Insofar as the practitioner is physically pure, what is there is pure: wishing to see Buddha, you see Buddha. [...] Think to yourself. Where does Buddha come from? Not that I am going anywhere. I only see what I think of: mind makes Buddha, and mind itself sees the mind seeing the Buddha mind. This Buddha mind is my mind seeing Buddha. (Wang 2005: 262, 264)

Similarly, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* includes an evocative use of the mirror as the point of intersection between ourselves and the Buddha, reflecting the shared buddha-nature:

This pure presence, without any second reality or subreality, is not located anywhere, nor does it come from anywhere, nor does it belong anywhere, much less is it going anywhere or evolving in any way. It is precisely because this pure presence does not belong anywhere that it is total and simple. (Hixon 2004: 129–130)

Like the mirror image, this 'pure presence' exists outside of both time and space. Neither the mirror image nor buddha-nature can be attained or evolved, each simply is what it is. Only when dust distorts the surface of the mind is the reflection compromised.

Since Nature is part of what is reflected in the mirror mind, the phenomenal image is not to be degraded or summarily rejected, but rather used as a means to the end of comprehending reality, an end shared with reason's noumenal approach. In an influential philosophical passage that pays tribute to Zhuang Zi, Neo-Daoist philosopher, Wang Bi (226–249 c.e.) explains the intertwining roles of language and image:

Image (*xiang*) reveals the meaning (*yi*), and speech (*yan*) clarifies the image. To exhaust the meaning nothing is better than the image; to exhaust the image nothing is better than speech. Speech arises out of images, and we can thus divulge the meaning through the image. [...] Therefore, speech is what clarifies the image and must be forgotten once the image is grasped; image is what preserves the meaning and must be forgotten once the meaning is grasped. [Speech is] like a snare used to catch a rabbit; the snare is to be forgotten once the rabbit is grasped. [Image is] like a net used to catch a fish; the net is to be forgotten once the fish is grasped. Thus, speech is the snare of image, and image is the net of meaning.

This assessment of images differs considerably from the Platonic notion whereby images 'by interpreting the real nature of their objects, try to suggest something of the world of Ideal Being, but [...] never belie their irrational origin and the limitations of their medium.' (Verdenius 1971: 272)

Poets are adept at letting go of the snare and the net of language. Contemporary artist Ai Weiwei (son of poet Ai Qing) observes, 'Poetry for me is almost like a religious feeling [...]. Poetry is for keeping our intellect in the stage before rationality. It brings us to a pure sense of contact with our feelings. [...] to the innocent stage in which imagination and language can be most vulnerable and at the same time most penetrating.' (Foster & Obrist 2009: 21–22) Ai also dismisses the idea of humans competing with Nature as 'basically a western idea. As a Chinese, you're always part of your surroundings. Nature can be man-made or an industrial postmodern society.' (Foster & Obrist 2009: 29)

## **The Buddhist Poet's Middle Path: Evoking, Provoking, and Documenting Awakening**

If the source of our deluded views of reality is the discriminating mind, what could be the antidote? Neuroscience suggests an approach similar to Buddhist philosophy's nondualism, which assumes a continuum between reason and sensory intuition rather than a dualistic dichotomy. Thus one needs to 'cast your attentional spotlight over each detail [...] even if some initially appear insignificant or ephemeral.' (Macknik & Martinez-Conde 2010: 259)

Nietzsche, a poet in his own right, sounded out Plato's 'true world' using his philosophical hammer en route to obliterating the 'true world' and the 'apparent world' simultaneously. He regards this as 'Noon: moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.' (1968: 480) Despite the benefits of Nietzsche's project, he has yet to escape the lingering shadow of humanism that threatens to perpetuate the magic mind show without fully penetrating its source. Martin Heidegger offers a fuller explanation of Nietzsche's mission: 'What is needed is neither abolition of the sensuous nor abolition of the nonsensuous. On the contrary, what must be cast aside is the misinterpretation, the deprecation, of the sensuous, as well as the extravagant elevation of the supersensuous.' (2010: 128) As stated, this seems to be a form of the very nondualism being discussed here. However, when Heidegger goes on to call for 'a new hierarchy' the similarity begins to fade. Perhaps that is because he associates 'overturning Platonism' with 'a twisting free of it.' (2010: 128) As Nietzsche's Zarathustra recognized, there is a crucial difference between the reactive Lion and the Child's 'new beginning.' (1968: 139)

What if there were no need to twist free? No addiction to Platonism to be overcome? The Middle Path of Buddhist epistemology is more radical in the sense of getting to the root of the self-imposed *maya*. Guided by the methodology of 'skillful means' (*upaya*), Buddhist philosopher-poets are able to extricate themselves from the snare and net of language, without rejecting language entirely by a skillful use of imagery that is both phenomenal and noumenal. Moreover, Buddhists apply the meditative techniques of 'stopping' (止 *zhi*; Sanskrit *samatha*) and 'clear observation' (觀 *guan*; Sanskrit *vipasyana*) to first recognize and then see through the magic trick of the mind by suspending the automatic pilot of concepts, constructs, expectations for direct insight into reality (Such-

ness, 眞如 *zhenru*; Sanskrit *tathata*). This allows us to transcend the limits of reason identified by Immanuel Kant, who famously assumes that his equivalent of Suchness, the thing-in-itself or *Ding-an-sich*, remains ever elusive, something we can think but never know. (1961: 27) The appropriate starting point, as reflected in the Eightfold Path, is Right Understanding and Right Thought, seeing clearly what is there to be seen.

We will conclude our exploration of the philosophical-poets by analyzing examples of nondualism manifested in their poetic output. Also in evidence will be the self-reliance that eschews dependence on the authorities and hierarchical structures so esteemed by Platonic law and order advocates. From China we will sample the work of Layman Pang Yun 龐居士 (740–808), a Tang Dynasty Confucian scholar-official who became the Patriarch of a Chan quartet including his wife, daughter and son. Soen Master T'aego 太古 (1301–1382), a National Teacher in Korea's Goryeo Dynasty, was known for both his poetry and his engagement in the court. Finally in Japan we will encounter the idiosyncratic Red Thread Zen of Master Ikkyu Sojun 一休宗純 (1394–1481), multi-faceted artist as well as political reformer in the transitional Muromachi Period. None of them can be dismissed as mere imitators who have been seduced by the hedonistic corruptions of appearance. Each recognizes the continuum that exists between noumena and phenomena, responding with a freshness and spontaneity that resonates with the Buddha's reaction in the *Lankavatara Sutra* as he casts us wisdom-eye on his own magic show: he 'laughed loudly and most vigorously like the lion-king.' (Suzuki 1978: 13)

## Layman Pang Yun

Pang represents a trend during the Tang Dynasty away from humanistic Confucian values and toward the alternative offered by Buddhism. In his own life he turned away from the status quo and toward personal meaning to address an existential vacuum. The traditional social priorities of career, family, and wealth, grounded in the social institutions of government and Confucian ritual, were no longer satisfying. Social hierarchies and role distinctions were supplanted by the egalitarian principle of a shared buddha-nature. Gone were the delusions that fixated on a conventional sense of security. The priority now became awakening to true reality through everyday mindedness, transcending the final dichotomy between life and death.

Among Pang's most quoted poems is this expression of everyday mindedness that contrasts his past life of social constraints with his new sense of liberation:

My daily activities are not unusual,  
 I'm just naturally in harmony with them.  
 Grasping nothing, discarding nothing,  
 In every place there's no hindrance, no conflict.  
 Who assigns the ranks of vermillion and purple? [official rank] –  
 The hills' and mountains' last speck of dust is extinguished.  
 [My] supernatural power and marvelous activity –  
 Drawing water and carrying firewood. (Sasaki, Yoshitaka & Fraser 1971: 46)

The poem is a response to a query from Chan Master Shi-tou, who approved of the poem and extended an invitation to join the monastic ranks. Pang declined the offer with its possible entanglements in institutional structures.

It is useful to read the next poetic selection from Pang in the context of Plato's *Laws*. Book Four indicates that the first law to be promulgated by the legislator should concern matters of birth and hence marriage as 'observing the order of nature.' (1971: 685) It is reasonable to assume that Plato would be horrified by Pang's defiance of what he regards as natural law and the flaunting of family hierarchy:

I have a boy who has no bride,  
 I have a girl who has no groom;  
 Forming a happy family circle,  
 We speak about the Unborn. (Sasaki, Yoshitaka & Fraser 1971: 47)

Pang seems very contented with his 'happy family,' although it defies the primacy of the 'gift' of propagation recognized by Plato. This point is underscored by the reference to 'the Unborn,' eliminating any need for the immorality that Plato declares 'the human race naturally partakes of.' (1971: 685) Moreover, Pang's relationship to his wife and children is an egalitarian one, each being a Dharma Friend or Dharma Companion of the others. We can presume that his words would be equally shocking to his Confucian contemporaries and were intended to be so.

Another poem addresses the illusion of time and how we should respond to its deconstruction. The past is gone and cannot be regained; the present is fleeting and cannot be grasped; the future, being non-existent, does not merit any forethought. Hence 'Whatever comes to eye leave it

be.' Pang denies the existence of obligatory commandments or laws. Contrary to Plato, he does not believe there is any filth or corruption to be cleansed. Accordingly,

With empty mind really penetrated,  
The dharmas [mental constructs] have no life.  
When you can be like this  
You've completed the ultimate attainment [realization]. (Sasaki, Yoshitaka & Fraser 1971: 85–86)

All dualistic tensions dissolve in nondualism.

Finally, the efficacy of language is often questioned by Pang, as in an exchange with a disciple of Ma-zi, Ben-xi. When Pang is asked 'What was the first word Bodhidharma spoke when he came from the West?' he immediately replied 'Who remembers!' (Sasaki, Yoshitaka & Fraser 1971: 64) Thus, echoing the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra*, Pang declares 'I go the non-Way,' that is, the way of no way, a way without definitive and static laws. (Sasaki, Yoshitaka & Fraser 1971: 80)

## Master T'aego

A poem by T'aego entitled 'How Can I Speak?' poses a ubiquitous question in Buddhism concerning the ultimate efficacy of language:

All phenomena are beyond names and forms  
The sounds of the streams and the colors of the mountains are closest  
What is 'closest'?  
You can only please yourself: how can I speak? (Cleary 1988: 145)

To deny the applicability of names and forms to phenomena does not dismiss their existence. Instead it reasserts the underlying relevance of appearances, without privileging them over linguistic constructs. In doing so, the Platonic hierarchy is not simply reversed, but enriched by nondualism.

In 'Moonlight Pond' T'aego skillfully reveals the interpenetration of phenomena and noumena by interweaving images of light and water with Buddhism's philosophical insights. The 'round light' of the moon, a familiar representation of awakening, floats in 'the great expanse of silent sky.' The noumenal moon/awakening is able to reflect the phenomenal 'myriad waves [...] without omitting a single one.' Similarly, 'wondrous profound

depths' encompass 'the hundred streams'; the moonlight effortlessly 'penetrates a galaxy of worlds.' In doing so, it reveals nondualism of both/and, neither/nor logic:

The pond reflects the moon: they are not the same  
 Not different, not the same: this is Buddha  
 [.....]  
 Eternal night, pure sky  
 Wind in the cool pines cool and strong  
 This is the moonlight pond, a spirit land where there's no 'attainment'  
 It's not just the one color of an autumn midnight (Cleary 1988:135)

Even in his Dharma talks to members of the ruling elite, T'aego demonstrated his upayic expertise in melding the concrete with the abstract. Addressing the Korean royal court at the Temple for the Protection of the Military in a time of war, he mixes Confucian platitudes with Buddhist calls to action and self-reliance. With Soen directness, he challenges the audience to 'collect your minds and listen. [...] If you're stuck in thinking what to do, you won't accomplish the noble task' (Cleary 1988: 94) He concludes, not with static absolutes or rigid laws but 'the one phrase that accomplishes the great enterprise [...] the true imperative whole [...] cutting down stubborn stupidity.' (Cleary 1988: 96)

Following in the footsteps of T'aego is contemporary Korean poet Ko Un (1933–), a former Soen Buddhist monk, former political prisoner, and ongoing activist. 'A Stone Between Two Fields' evokes the interdependence of appearance and deeper reality:

Aha, real Buddha's out of doors  
 The future world  
 Should be opening like this:  
     no distinction between inside and outside.  
 And all the long day  
     cuckoos chant prayers. (2008: 93)

Updating the core Buddhist recognition of *pratitya-samutpada*, Ko Un mixes current scientific terminology with a mundane example, 'The Drunkard':

I've never been an individual entity.  
 Sixty trillion cells!  
 I'm a living collectivity.  
 I'm staggering zigzag along,  
 Sixty trillion cells, all drunk! (2008: 39)

Ko Un has thought deeply about the function of poetry, concluding ‘Sorrow is the mother of poetry.’ (Donegan 2006: 2) As for the poet’s role, ‘the poet is not the teacher of other people, but a friend. When other people are sad or sick, if there is no poet to speak about it, then what is there?’ (Donegan 2006: 3) He characterizes Zen as ‘truth without the words,’ while poetry is ‘the truth with words.’ Given the silence that punctuates all poetry, ‘all poetry is related to Zen, to meditation [...] Although we read the words, [...] between there is the silence.’ (Donegan 2006: 5) He identifies both human and buddha-nature as inherently poetic, while ‘The great masters of Zen meditation are all in some sense poets.’ (Donegan 2006: 7) More specifically he regards Soen as ‘an intense act of mind liberated from the established systems of speech and writing, a new and completely unfamiliar leap’ adding ‘Perhaps all poems are in fact Seon poems.’ (2008: 17)

## Master Ikkyu Sojun

Ikkyu’s personal motto is perhaps the best example of his seemingly counterintuitive insight. Scrawled on a scroll in his distinctively bold calligraphy are the words ‘Entering the realm of the Buddha is easy, entering the realm of the devil is difficult,’ the size and force of the characters diminishing as they descend from the top to the bottom. (Stevens 1993: 28) The noumenal/nirvanic realm of the Buddha is similarly diminished in comparison to the elusive phenomenal/samsaric realm of the devil. The same message is conveyed in a poem that has Ikkyu escaping the confines of the temple, driven by the primal instincts of ‘the red thread,’ to enjoy the temptations of the fish stall, sake, and brothel forbidden to monastics. (Stevens 1993: 22)

Another poem questions daily practice as ‘priests minutely examine the Law [Dharma]’ and chant Buddhist *sutras* ‘endlessly’; instead he advises them to ‘Read the love letters sent by the wind and rain, the snow and the moon.’ (Stevens 1993: 25) Ikkyu also excelled at performance art, such as when he welcomed the New Year by parading around with a human skull on a bamboo pole to stimulate awareness of death (a common focus of Buddhist meditation), proclaiming

Of all things  
There is nothing  
More felicitous  
Than this weather-beaten  
Old skull! (Stevens 1993: 27)

On another occasion he brandished a wooden sword to demonstrate the impotence of Buddhist institutions, observing 'As long as this sword is in the scabbard, it looks like the real thing and people are impressed, but if it is drawn and revealed as only a wooden stick, it becomes a joke.' (Stevens 1993: 29) Perhaps Ikkyu's most poignant artistic flourish with a philosophical intent involved the death of his pet sparrow, eulogized as 'Honored One of the Forest.' He conducted a funeral service for his feathered friend and even compared it to the historical Buddha. (Stevens 1993: 32)

Inevitably the combative Ikkyu was challenged by someone attempting to best him in his own arena. When he demanded to know 'What is Buddhism' Ikkyu responded, 'The truth within one's heart.' His antagonist then threatened to cut out Ikkyu's heart to 'have a look.' His defense came in the form of a poetic counter-challenge:

Slice open the  
Cherry trees of Yoshino  
And where will you find  
The blossoms  
That appear spring after spring? (Stevens 1993: 33)

In other words, the truth both is and is not within the heart, just as the blossoms both are and are not within the cherry trees; the noumena both are and are not within the phenomena.

## Conclusion

Our discussion has argued that the poet is not a threat to philosophy, but rather that the philosopher-poet offers an alternative to the metaphysical hierarchy presumed by Plato and his followers. Denigrating phenomena as a corrupting influence on the eternal soul casts the noumena as privileged manifestations of reality. Asian philosophy, however, approaches appearances as legitimate means of access to reality. The nondualism of Buddhist philosophy is particularly effective at revealing the interpenetration of noumena and phenomena. Unlike the Platonic stereotype of the poet as mere imitator, the Asian philosopher-poet engages in a dynamic and co-creative interaction with Nature that allows us to awaken not simply to reality, but as reality.

---

## Bibliography

1. Bernstein, R. (2007), 'An Artist's Famous Smile: What Lies Behind It?', in *New York Times*, 13 November viewed 17 January 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/13/arts/design/13smil.html>>
2. Cleary, J. C. (trans.) (1988), *A Buddha From Korea: The Zen Teachings of T'aego*, Boston: Shambhala.
3. Davidson, T. (1870), 'Fragments of Parmenides', in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 4 (1): 1–16.
4. Donegan, P. (2006), 'Human Nature Itself Is Poetic: An Interview', in *Manoa* 18:1, 1–8.
5. Fang, T. H. (1981), *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development*, Taipei: Linking Publishing.
6. Fang, T. H. (1957), *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony*, Hong Kong: Union Press.
7. Kennedy, J. F. K. (1963), Address at Amherst College, 26 October, viewed 29 January 2012, <<http://www.arts.gov/about/Kennedy.html>>
8. Foster, E. O. and Obrist, H. U. (2009), *Ways Beyond Art*, London: Ivory Press.
9. Frankl, V. E. (1973), *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, Winston R. and C. (trans.), New York: Vintage Books.
10. Harrison, J. E. (1912), *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
11. Heidegger, M. (2010), 'Nietzsche's Overturning of Platonism', in Kul-Want, C. (ed.), *Philosophers on Art from Kant to the Postmodernists: A Critical Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press.
12. Henn, M. J. (2003), *Parmenides of Elea: A Verse Translation with Interpretive Essays and Commentary to the Text*, Westport: Praeger.
13. Hixon, L. (2004), *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*. New Delhi: Alchemy.
14. Joshi, S. (2004), 'How to Watch a Hindi film: The Example of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*', *Education About Asia*, Spring: 22–25.
15. Kant, I. (1961), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Smith, N. K. (trans.), New York: St. Martin's Press.
16. Ko Un (2008), *What? 108 Zen Poems*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.
17. Leys, W. A. R. (1971), 'Was Plato Non-Political?', in Vlastos, G. (ed.), *Plato II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, 166–173. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.
18. Li Zehou (1994), *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*, New York: Oxford University Press.
19. Mao Zedong (1972), *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tsetung*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press.
20. Macknik, S. L. & Martinez-Conde, S. (2010), *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals About Our Everyday Deceptions*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.
21. Morrow, G.R. (1971), 'Plato and the Rule of Law', in Vlastos, G. (ed.), *Plato II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, 144–165. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.

22. Nietzsche, F. (1968), *The Portable Nietzsche*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.), New York: Viking Press.
23. Orwell, G. (1946), 'Why I Write', Gangrel, London, viewed 22 January 2012, <[http://www.george-orwell.org/Why\\_I\\_Write/0.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/Why_I_Write/0.html)>
24. Pang Yun (1971), *The Recorded Sayings of Layman P'ang: A Ninth Century Zen Classic*, Sasaki R. F., Yoshitaka I. & Fraser, D. R. (trans.), New York: Weatherhill.
25. Paton, H. J. (1921), 'Plato's Theory of Eikasia', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 22: 69–104.
26. Plato (1971), *The Dialogues of Plato*, Jowett B. (trans.), vol. 7, Great Books of the Western World, Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.
27. Popper, K. R. (1945), *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London: Routledge.
28. de Santillana, G. (1961), *The Origins of Scientific Thought: From Anaximander to Proclus, 600 B.C. to A.D. 500*, New York: Penguin Putnam.
29. Soothill, W. E. & Hodous, L. (1937), *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company.
30. Sparshott, F. E. (1971), 'Plato as Anti-political Thinker,' in Vlastos, G. (ed.), *Plato II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, 174–183. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.
31. Stevens, J (1993), *Three Zen Master: Ikkyū, Hakuin, and Ryōkan*, Tokyo: Kodansha International.
32. Suzuki, D. T. (1978), *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text*, Boulder: Prajñā Press.
33. Suzuki, D. T. (1999), *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, Delhi: Motilal Banaridass.
34. Verdenius, W. J. (1971), 'Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation,' in Vlastos, G. (ed.), *Plato II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion*, 259–273. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.
35. Wang Bi, *Ming Xiang*, in *Zhou-yi lüe-li* (A Brief Discussion of Some Basic Philosophical Ideas of the *Yi Jing*); trans. Charles Wei-hsun Fu (unpub).
36. Wang, E. Y. (2005), *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
37. Wawrytko, S. A. (2013), 'Aesthetic Principles of Epistemological Awakening: Juxtapositioning (Bi 比 and Xing 興) in Bashō's Haiku Pedagogy', paper presented at the 17th Conference of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy, Paris, 4-8, July 2011; published in Escande, Yolaine (ed.), *Interculturalism and Philosophic Discourse: Retrospect and Prospect*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 233–250.

# *Expression in Art*



Rafał Mazur\*

## **Spontaneous Expression and Spontaneous Improvisation: What Contemporary Improvising Artists Can Learn from Chinese Artists-Philosophers**

### Abstract

*Spontaneous expression* is a unique method of artistic creation that emerged from within a circle of Chinese Confucian scholar-philosophers for whom artistic creation complemented their philosophical activities. *Free improvisation* is a new phenomenon of the European art scene. It is typified by spontaneous, often *ad hoc* creation, without prior preparation of the act or the object. I want to illustrate the similarities in the strategies of creation between 'spontaneous expression' and 'free improvisation' and the extent to which the philosophical foundations and resulting strategies of the former can be used in the latter, demonstrating the philosophical basis for this artistic discipline. I will primarily consider the mind of the creator, and justify the thesis that the state of mind, or mental attitude, necessary for the practice of spontaneous expression could be useful in the development of the practice of free improvisation in contemporary art (*European art* here would be inaccurate). A 'method without method' built on the basis of Chinese philosophy can help generate a strategy to develop and improve the skills of improvisation among contemporary European artists and contribute to the development of a contemporary philosophy of free improvisation. It is my opinion that these are fields that lie fallow. This would be an attempt to adapt the strategy of creation borne of original Chinese philosophy to contemporary artistic activities and aesthetic studies: a kind of transcultural bridge.

### Key words

spontaneous expression, spontaneous/free improvisation, Daoist strategy, Chinese aesthetics

---

\* Institute of Philosophy  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland  
Email: rafal@rafalmazur.eu

At first glance it seems that there is a great difference in meaning separating *spontaneous expression* and *spontaneous improvisation* (despite the use of an identical predicate). The first term refers to an artistic practice created in China several hundred years ago in a circle of Confucian scholars, *wenren*, among whom the practice of art and philosophical work were complementary activities. The second term refers to a practice developed in contemporary European art, mainly music, with its origins in the British avant-garde music of the 1960's and intuitive scores of Karlheinz Stockhausen. These two phenomena of artistic creation are divided not only chronologically, but also culturally, which is proverbially incomparable.

Readily employed by established artists from the *wenren* circle, and the subject of philosophical reflection and many aesthetic treatises, spontaneous expression as a specific method of action has existed for many hundreds of years. Yet the method of spontaneous improvisation in European art is a relatively new phenomenon. Improvisation has long been practiced in Europe, but for instance in music, where it has most fully developed, it existed through the centuries as a strongly formalized activity limited by the rules of organizing sound material and musical forms. In Renaissance, baroque or classical music, improvisation was only a method of enrichment of form or other compositional parameters and had to be strictly subordinated. A similar relationship was in place in theatre. The highest level of improvisation was attained in *dell'arte* comedy, in which the content of actors' speech was not actually predetermined and scenic action was only loosely organized. But the action was programmed in advance and convention defined the necessary development. Finales and characters were strongly defined. Reacting to this paradigm in music that determined the understanding of the practice of improvisation, Stockhausen called his method of collective creation of music in real time 'intuitive music.' The reasons why spontaneous creativity was thus approached in Europe are beyond the scope of this essay. Significantly, however, music – one of the seven medieval *artes liberales* – was considered a theory of numbers and proportions at the medieval universities. Scholars engaged in it were not instrumentalists and musical practice did not interest them. This contributed to the lack of evolved tools for the development of an art of spontaneous/intuitive improvisation in Europe. It was thus natural to search for an alternative culture in which that kind of creation was regarded differently than in Europe, and where tools could be found for its development.

*Spontaneous expression* is a unique method of artistic creation that emerged in the circle of Chinese Confucian scholar-philosophers known as *wenren*, and intimately bound with their philosophy. Strictly speaking, Chinese philosophers treated the artistic practice as an extension of their philosophical activity. It is an attempt to externalize the fields of philosophical reflection that elude verbalization. In the earliest history of Confucianism, when the philosophy was mainly a doctrine of the governance of state, scholar-clerks used art for self-realization and self-improvement. Over the course of time, understanding of the practice and its role changed. Following the fusion of Confucian and Daoist schools, when neodaosism and neoconfucianism emerged richer in elements of metaphysics and cosmology, art became a refined presentation of non-verbal elements of philosophical reflection and the expression of feelings and states of mind. Spontaneous expression has its roots in notions of the naturalness of the act of creation that is shared between humanity and Heaven and Earth. It is based on the belief that human creative ability is equal to that of Nature, ingrained in the Daoist worldview. It seems to have emerged with the reading and interpretation of Daoist texts by Confucian scholars. Spontaneous expression consists in immediate creation, inspired creation, a fierce eruption of creativity. We can say that it is the expression of *Dao*, in accordance with the Daoist perception of activity in agreement with Nature. It was used in a variety of human activity: in artistic creation like playing on *guqin*, *yihua* (one strike brush painting), *caoshu* ('grass script' spontaneous calligraphy), and for example in the Daoist martial art *Taijiquan*.

An original text describing an artist engaged in the act of spontaneous expression demonstrates precisely the phenomenon of spontaneous expression. Fu Zai describes Master Zhang Zao as he

suddenly appeared at the party and in a coarse voice asked for a piece of raw, white silk, since he desired to show his own eminent skills. The host rose [...] loudly expressing his own approbation. [...] The master sat on the ground with his feet stretched out in front of him, he took a deep breath and began to create in inspiration. The people gathered around him were scared, as if thunder or an air trumpet broke out in the sky. [The hand of the Master] moved briskly, bolting, then again jerking, piercing the air with devastating strength. Ink flying from the brush sprayed everywhere. From the maze of separations and connections emerged a strange shape. When he finished, [what was visible was] a pine tree with cracked bark like fish scales, dangerously steep rocks, craggy cliffs, crystal clear water and

clouds. The Master rejected the brush, arose from the ground and looked around. And as heaven is clean after a storm, so was the essence of all things visible. (Zemanek 2007: 169–170)

Chang Chung-Yuan writes about spontaneous expression:

In the execution of this style the painter's brush moves swiftly, absolutely free from restricting rules. There is no hesitation or deliberation when he handles the brush. Hand and mind are unified, there being no interference from the intellect or the emotions. It was said that Wang Hsia's brush sometimes waves and sometimes sweeps. The color of his ink is sometimes light and sometimes dark. Following the splotches of the ink he shapes them into mountains, rocks, clouds, and water. His action is so swift as if it were from Heaven. Spontaneously his hand responds and his mind follows. (Chang 1970: 219)

This type of spontaneous artistic creation is based on a conviction about human creative capabilities, which are considered equal with the capabilities of Heaven and Earth. But the origin of the capabilities of the triad lays deeper, in the very base of reality – it is *Dao*, the one, invariable, unspecified source of 'ten thousand things.' As Laozi said, 'The Dao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.' (Laozi: 42) The three are Heaven, Earth, and human beings between them.

According to Daoist thought, a person united with *Dao* can achieve the creative force of 'the dragon in the sky in his actions.' The phrase refers to the first hexagram of the *Book of Changes*, consisting of the uninterrupted lines of *yang*, and called *Qian*, or 'Creativity.' In the opinion of Hellmut Wilhelm, it symbolized the 'Creative Principle,' which refers to Heaven, Earth and also human beings. The symbol of creativity is a dragon, initially hidden in water. In another step the dragon emerges but his flight is 'unstable over the abyss.' The hexagram culminates in the final line: 'dragon is flying in the sky.' The image is a symbol of the pinnacle of creativity. Rooting one's operation in *Dao* makes it extremely effective and effortless. Moreover it creates effortlessly and without end. Laozi said 'The Dao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness.' (Laozi: 4) Elsewhere he said 'The Dao in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do.' (Laozi: 37) The outstanding neodaoist philosopher Wang Bi explains that this is in accordance with Nature. He writes 'in the midst of everything that is there is nobody and nothing that could be not supported by Dao – from the very beginning till full of maturity.' (Laozi &

Wang Bi 2006: 82) In his commentary on the *Daodejing* he states that in speaking about *Dao* we refer to '[the name of] a single, great substance acting such that there is no place it does not appear. That is why it is said that it works everywhere.' (Laozi & Wang Bi 2006: 65) Following the *Dao* gives one unusual efficacy and at the same time does not diminish one's energy to live. We extract creative power directly from the unexhausted *Dao*.

The conception of action, characterized by extreme efficacy, underlies the practice of 'spontaneous expression.' Since philosophers employed it in their artistic activity, we can say that it is an artistic-philosophical practice.

Chang Chung-Yuan calls the feeling of unity with *Dao* a fundamentally ontological experience, the experience of unity between a person and the universe, confirming that humanity occupies its place in the world. Chang writes that 'this experience leads inevitably to the interfusion of subjective and objective reality. This interfusion initiates the process of creativity, which in turn establishes unity in multiplicity, the changeless in the ever-changing. The artist who has reached this state of oneness is supported by all the powers inherent in multiplicities and changes, and his work will be far beyond what his ego-form self could accomplish. Such a reflection of strength from the centre of his being, however powerful it is, is completely nonintentional and effortless.' (Chang 1970: 207) The capability to create works that 'will be far beyond what his ego-form self could accomplish' occurs when one can say, in the words of Zhuangzi: 'Heaven and Earth and I live together, and all things and I are one.' (Chang 1970: 204) The ontological experience of unity with Nature was highly valued by Chinese masters of painting and calligraphy and often described in aesthetic treatises. Zhan Hui wrote in his *Treatise on Painting*: 'Only he who reaches Reality can follow Nature's spontaneity and be aware of the subtlety of things, and his mind will be absorbed by them. His brush will secretly be in harmony with movement and quiescence and all forms will issue forth.' (Chang 1970: 206) And in the text about Master Zhang referred to earlier, we find the commentary: 'When we look carefully at the work of Master Zhang, we no longer see a painting but a real Tao in and of itself. Whenever he created, it was clear that he rejected all usual painting techniques, because he reached his mind further, to the deepest mysteries of things. And things exist, not before the eyes or ears, but in the mind.' (Zemanek 2007: 170)

It seems that to achieve the experience of unity with *Dao* and to consequently practice 'spontaneous expression' the key is a suitable state of mind. Zhang Yanyuan wrote about this in *Notes about Painters Through*

*the Ages*: ‘Someone asked me: “How could Wu Daozi bend arcs, bare the blades of weapons, place the columns of buildings [...] without compasses and rulers?” I said: “He cultivated spirit in himself and concentrated on Unity. He achieved harmony with works of Nature”’ (Zemanek 2007: 176)

People with a clear state of mind can achieve an amazing fluency in their operations, in every kind of activity. Anything they decide to do will be realized with highest efficacy. Such fluid activity is called *wu wei*, ‘action without action’ or ‘effortless action.’ It refers to doing something in accordance with the course and force of Nature that supports human activity. This notion is captured by the image of sailing, or a raft drifting downstream. *Wu wei* fits our actions with the actions of the world.

When we fit with reality it is easy to realize what we are planning. This is to follow *Dao*. Shitao writes of this in *Dialogue on Paintings*: ‘Compasses and rulers can be used to make circles and squares. But in the universe there is a continual process by which circles and squares are created. If one can grasp the principle of the universe, one is freed from the necessity of using artifices, like compasses and rulers.’ (Chang 1970: 203) It is important to note here that to ‘grasp the principle of the universe’ does not mean to achieve speculative knowledge of ‘what,’ but rather knowledge of ‘how.’ For ‘he who is open accepts everything, sees everything. When he is open he is able to accept people. When he is calm he is able to manage the situations.’ (Winn 2006: 31) And the ability to act ‘here and now’ and the effective response to changes of situations is an essential attribute of the practitioner of ‘spontaneous expression’ or ‘free improvisation.’

Since I am an improvising musician in addition to my work as a philosopher, I will use the example of ‘improvised music’ to highlight the problems connected with spontaneous artistic creation in Europe and how recognizing the idea of ‘spontaneous expression’ might be helpful in solving them. In other words, I will demonstrate what improvising artists and musicians can learn from artist-philosophers about spontaneous creation in real time. The essence of ‘improvised music’ eludes analysis, mainly because any considerations of it focus on the music – a specific phenomenon of sound. Here there is a paradox. Since improvisation is not a style but rather a working method, it is not possible to say something about improvisation in the analysis of an improvised ‘piece.’ Music theory is based on the analysis of works, because every style has had its idiomatic sonic characteristics. Music reveals its genres by sound identity. By listening we can identify the genre of a piece. And composers think about genre when they compose music so that the music is easily recognizable.

With 'improvised music' the situation is different. According to British guitarist Derek Bailey – one of the pioneers of 'free improvised music' – a characteristic of 'improvised music' is 'the confused identity which its resistance to labeling indicates. [...] Diversity is its most consistent characteristic. It has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it.' (Cox & Warner 2004: 256) In other words, we recognize 'spontaneous improvisation' in music not by its sound effects but by the method of creation that is used by musicians – by its manner of creation. The analysis of 'pieces' does not reveal anything about improvisation because the concentration is on sonic effects that are as 'incidental effects' of the process. 'Improvised music' is able to provide listeners any kind of sound phenomena we can imagine. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner write in their book *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* that improvised music 'abandoned virtually every prop or anchor for improvisation in order to spur musicians to play genuinely in the moment, relying solely on their ingenuity and their instantaneous responses to the contributions of fellow performers.' (Cox & Warner 2004: 251) As Stockhausen noted, a situation in which musicians create music in real time during a concert without any prior arrangements for the expected shape of a piece of music presents 'completely new standards which we have never learned before for playing music.' (Stockhausen 1971) It is a situation unprecedented in the history of European music. Therefore any tools for creating and playing music (strategic, rather than physical tools), i.e. compositional and instrumental techniques, cannot be used in the practice of intuitive improvisation since they concern a different kind of creation.

Analysing both types of creative methods we can easily observe fundamental ontological differences between them. An idealistic 'perspective' emerges from traditional methods of creating music and art in Europe: a piece of music exists before its physical implementation, in the moment of reading notation. In 'improvised music' a 'perspective' emerges that I would call 'relationist/relational': music comes into being only through the relations between musicians engaged in the very act of creation. When compared with preceding creative methods, in the practice of spontaneous improvisation the process of creation gains autonomy and becomes available for audiences in all its splendour. 'Improvised art' thus manifests as a performative art *par excellence*. In the act of music making, the myriad sonic effects are the result of what is most important in 'improvised mu-

sic': the kind or manner of activity. In other words, in 'improvised music' the emphasis is on the process of making rather than a non-existent, idealized 'Music' with a capital 'M.' The work of art is primarily the process, the authentic and real moment of the creation of a work.

Artists and audience alike appreciate the unique emotional and mental states they can enter through contact with a 'living' creative process expanded 'in front of their eyes.' Here impressions are as strong as they are fleeting because an inalienable attribute of improvised works is the limitation of time. Works arise and disappear immediately, moments recorded and transformed by artistic sensibility, records of 'here and now.' The creative process that is developed during a performance of improvised art 'grabs' all receivers and allows them to experience sensations that do not compare to the perception of traditionally created art. And I want to emphasize once again that in this type of creation sophisticated formal arrangements are far less important than what we can call (in language not especially academic but most apt) the flow of energy, both through the creators and the audience. Maybe it is an extra-musical element of a musical work, as Ingarden might say, but it is intimately bound to the sound activity called *playing*.

It is thus necessary to prepare a new strategy for engaging in this kind of artistic practice. It is more evident when we read up on significant comments of precursors of 'improvised music' in Europe. Derek Bailey spoke of the 'telepathic' properties of improvisation and Stockhausen addressed playing 'something that is in the air.' Further, when we look at the rather short history of spontaneous improvisation in Europe, we note that few practitioners of 'improvised music' actually practice free improvisation. The present moment is characterized by an inability to grasp the essence of spontaneous improvisation on the part of many young people, who do not improvise but rather prepare tools and strategies in advance and imitate the sound effects of the discipline's pioneers. Thus improvised music becomes another stylistic idiom and ceases to be improvised. It seems that 'free' or 'open' improvisation has become a cliché. (Cox & Warner 2004: 250) But the discipline is about something other than rapid calculation, or previously stated sound arrangements restated, or a splurge of technical skill. Rather, it is about truly spontaneous creation, something worthy of critic Richard Pinnelli's observation: 'Ah improvisation – the fire, the passion, the discussion, the coming together of personalities. No matter how unoriginal or otherwise a recording of improvised music may turn out to be, in my opinion no other music is as alive and vibrant as regularly.'

Why should we search for 'tools' for free improvisation in another culture, in the philosophy of the Far East? 'Free improvisation' in European art is first and foremost a particular type of activity, in the sense that the quality of a work of art is a result of its being acted out, such that it is inseparably linked with the quality of its practice. Improvisation is both the practice of art as well as the art of practicing. In music, for example, the quality of a piece that is created in the process of free improvisation depends on the quality of the process. A better improviser can play better 'improvised music.' Daoism contains within it a remarkable theory of effective operation/action upon which the practice of 'spontaneous expression' is based. Hajime Nakamura, among others, claims that Daoism and other ancient Chinese philosophical systems are strategies of operation that assist in the survival of extreme situations. Improvisation is a type or method of unarranged action that we can employ beyond art. I would call it the 'capacity to act adequately in extremely unarranged situations.' It is thus valid to attempt to transfer the experiences of activity based on Daoist strategy to the practice of improvisation in modern art.

The common element that determines the quality of action both in 'spontaneous expression' and 'free improvisation' is the ability to effectively act 'here and now.' As I have stated, a situation of creation 'here and now' – a situation in which a work of art is created and presented in the same moment – is unprecedented in the history of European arts. The capability to engage effectively, instantaneously, and especially collectively, in creating 'here and now' is the most important capability in the work of an improviser. Recall that the artistic activity of Chinese scholar-clerks was characterised by spontaneity and immediate realisation. A. Wójcik writes that 'calligraphy is the record of a real event that occurred, and the traces remain after it on calligraphy paper or silk. It can be said that Chinese calligraphy is the art of the document.' (Wójcik 2010: 138) We can say the same thing about the art of free improvisation in music.

The question is now: how are such creative abilities achieved? What are the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for an artist to create with the power of Nature, like *Dao*. I think we can take a risk and say: all roads lead to the mind. According to the Daoist strategy of action, in a suitable state of mind an artist-philosopher can unite with Nature and follow *Dao*. The state of mind allows for the deep perception of reality and the employment of the *wu wei* strategy. Only in the right state of mind can it be said that 'the skilful traveller leaves no traces of his wheels or footsteps [...] the skilful reckoner uses no tallies.' (Laozi: 27) The right state of mind

seems to be the key to spontaneous, free creative activity, to ‘spontaneous expression.’ We can presume that it will be useful also in development of ‘free/spontaneous improvisation.’

We find a strategy of action in the *Nanhua Zhenjing* of Zhuangzi, for example in the story of Prince Yuan who desired a painting and invited painters to his court. I recall here the final fragment:

There was one who came late, with an air of indifference, and did not hurry forward. When he had received his instructions and made his bow, he did not keep standing, but proceeded to his shed. The duke sent a man to see him, and there he was, with his upper garment off, sitting cross-legged, and nearly naked. The ruler said, ‘He is the man; he is a true draughtsman.’ (Zhuangzi 2009: 221)

The painter begins his work thus, sitting cross-legged with his shirt off, he enters a process that would result in a picture. Art is begun by reaching the right state of mind. Marcin Jacoby writes that

there is a single meaning of the story: the artist sat down relaxed, trying to concentrate before beginning the work. The paragraph is one of the oldest to mention Chinese painters and was repeated in countless treatises in the following ages. It became one of the key stories in the theory of Chinese painting and a symbol of creative freedom and the importance of inspiration. (Zhuangzi 2009: 226)

As we can see, completing a work of art became conditional on attaining the right state of mind. It is a clear reference to the Daoist ideal of detachment, or forgetfulness. An artist ‘sits in the silence and calm of his workshop to rid his mind of all that fills it – to sit in forgetfulness (*zuo wang*). Empty – he truly can, he is a real painter.’ (Wójcik 2010: 2008)

I want to draw attention to one important thing, particularly essential from the standpoint of the contemporary practice of collective improvisation. To be rooted in Daoist mind work, to empty the mind and the consequent state of detachment and forgetfulness, is not to separate from the world or to enter into a state in which one is insensitive to reality. On the contrary, it is a state of mind that allows for extensive and careful perception of the world. The mind remains unfocused on any distinctive thing, but simultaneously and with the same attention perceives all of them. This is the state of the ‘transparent mind,’ all perceptions and emotions flow through it, but do not remain in it, leaving it undisturbed. A correspondence can thus be established and preserved between the observed state of the world and our actions in it. This state of mind permits the effective activity ‘here and now’ – what the Chinese call the ability to work with *qi*.

The *qi* is a subtle layer of reality that pervades all things, the condition of which depends on the level of density and the quality of the flow of *qi*. The *qi* is unmeasurable and unwatched, but the Chinese believe that there is a natural relation between *qi* and the work of the mind. Thus the mind that is in a suitable, tranquil state, the state of 'diffused' attention that allows for the careful monitoring of reality without focusing on only one part of it, is able to direct the flow of *qi*. And to use *qi* in action, one can achieve amazing efficacy. The resonance of *qi* plays an important role in the aesthetic theory of *wenren* exemplified by the first principle from *Six Principles of Chinese Ink Paintings* by Xie He: *qiyun shendong* – 'spirit resonance, life-motion.'

Thus in the right state of mind the artist-philosopher is able to create with the force of Nature. In such a situation the attention is not on the preparation of a work of art but on the preparation of the artist himself. This is relevant to 'free improvisation' in that one cannot work with works of art, because works of improvised art do not exist before the act of improvisation. And yet, since one must work with something (the works of art are neither arrived at by miracle nor magic), concentration on and work with the state of mind seem to be very reasonable. Daoist strategy proposes that when the artist achieves a suitable state of mind, 'action without action' will be within reach. Then, coupled with the forces of Nature, the artist is able to create without effort. This is why the painter from the *Nanhua zhenjing* sat down relaxed to prepare his mind before 'licking brushes and preparing ink' as others did. Mentally prepared with a 'transparent mind' he probably made the paintings by 'one stroke of the brush' in the most favorable moment, acting by 'non-acting.' Zhang Huaiguan, author of *Evaluation of Calligraphy* explains that 'when we apply the action of non-action our brush work will be comparable to the works of Nature, when we identify our writing with the true nature of things we follow the fundamental principle of creativity.' (Chang 1970: 217) It seems that the musician who practices 'free improvisation' should also first of all mind the state of his mind, so nothing would slow creativity.

It follows from the foregoing that the most important 'tool' in the practice of 'free improvisation' is the mind; the mind in a suitable state, of course. In the right state of mind an improviser engaged in a creative act may react quickly and adequately as an unplanned situation develops. In the right state of mind an improviser can enter into authentic relations with other participants and with the other elements of a given situation, such as space, time, audience, and so forth, which are of utmost importance in the case of spontaneous creation. The improviser should be in

a state of mind that allows for immediate reaction to the sounds of the other musicians. And the kind of reaction matters, it must be adequate. In other words, 'when others make a move, he has to already be there.' All of the participants in an improvisation must similarly react. The necessary condition for creating a piece is the ability of each musician to enter into deep relations simultaneously with every person in the band. The improviser does not operate teleologically, does not define in advance how the music might look. S/he should become part of an 'organism' that is the ensemble of improvisers, a part that is in equal relations with every other. It is not possible (in contrast to conventional methods of creation) to use prepared sound material in playing. One must play the sound that derives from context, from the unfolding of events.

As the conventionally working musician is deeply engaged in the realization of ideas embedded in notation, an improviser is as deeply engaged in the concrete moment, in the 'here and now.' The development of the music depends only on the interaction between the players. The right state of mind, achieved through the arduous and consequent practice adapted from any of the artistic disciplines cultivated by ancient Chinese scholar-clerks, should guarantee the creation of perfect works created through the method of 'free improvisation.' The state of mind that arrives at the power of Nature should be for contemporary improvisers what it was for artist-philosophers: the tool for real-time creative expression. To this end I would recommend the practice of some Chinese art of the *wenren* circle, like calligraphy, monochromatic paintings or *Taijiquan*, to all contemporary improvisers and people who are interested in Chinese philosophy as well. And so as with this lecture, as with all theory that takes in Daoist strategy, as with Chinese philosophy: one must practice it in life, and not only study it.

## Bibliography

1. Chang, Ch. (1970), *Creativity and Taoism. A study of Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Poetry*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row Publishers.
2. Cox, C & Warner, D. (ed.) (2004), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, New York, London: Continuum.
3. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, trans. Legge, J., Chinese Text Project: <http://ctext.org> HYPERLINK "<http://ctext.org/>" <http://ctext.org>, viewed 17 December 2011
4. Laozi & Wang Bi (2006), *Księga dao i de z komentarzami Wang Bi*, trans. Wójcik, A., Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

- 
5. Stockhausen, K. et al. (1971), 'Questions and Answers on Intuitive Music', [http://www.stockhausen.org/intuitive\\_music.html](http://www.stockhausen.org/intuitive_music.html), viewed 12 August 2014.
  6. Winn, M. (2006), *Alchemia taoizmu*, trans. Zagajewski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo A.
  7. Wójcik, A. I. (2010), *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
  8. Zemanek, A. (ed.) (2007), *Estetyka chińska – antologia*, Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas.
  9. Zhuangzi (2009), *Prawdziwa Księga Południowego Kwiatu*, trans. Jacoby, M., Warszawa: Iskry.



Jinli He\*  
Rafał Banka\*\*

## **The Great Body Has No Shape, the Great Art Is Embodied. Conception of Body in Zhang Huan's Performance Art**

### Abstract

Zhang Huan (b. 1965) can be considered a pioneering contemporary performance artist in China. His position on the Chinese art scene is highly regarded not only from a historical perspective. The use of the artist's body as a means of expression can serve multiple purposes, which can touch upon, e.g. social or political issues, and seldom reflects the role of the human body as a vehicle for mediation. Through his artistic activity, the artist tries to discuss this issue based on the Chinese philosophical intuitions of this aspect of human existence. In our paper, we shall try to examine the theoretical foundations of the artist's approaches to performance and illustrate them with selected works.

### Key words

Zhang Huan, contemporary Chinese art, body, Chinese philosophy

---

### **Introduction**

Zhang Huan (b. 1965) can be considered a pioneering contemporary performance artist in China. His position on the Chinese art scene is highly regarded not only from a historical perspective. The use of the artist's body as a means of expression can serve multiple purposes, which can touch

---

\* Department of Modern Languages and Literatures  
Trinity University, United States of America  
Email: jhe@trinity.edu

\*\* Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland  
Email: rafal.banka@uj.edu.pl

upon e.g. social or political issues, and seldom reflects the role of the human body as a vehicle for mediation. Through his artistic activity, the artist tries to discuss this issue based on the Chinese philosophical intuitions of this aspect of human existence. In our paper, we shall try to examine the theoretical foundations of the artist's approaches to performance and illustrate them with selected works.

## **The Interpretational Context of the Body in Chinese Culture**

What appears to be the crucial guiding factor in interpretation is the conception of the body, which, apart from its essential cultural implications, can be viewed from a philosophical perspective. The issue is relevant in this case for two main reasons. The first is that performance art, which stems from Western culture, is situated in a specific context which involves an ontological conception, among others, of the human body. This can be viewed in terms of the psycho-physical problem, a philosophical issue which has been discussed since the days of ancient Greek philosophy.

Bearing in mind the fact that performance art is understood in a specific ontological context, we need to know the precise difference in the corresponding Chinese conception in order to prevent interpretational inclusivism. Another equally essential reason is that, apart from these differentiating features, we should present the Chinese conception of the body in order to ultimately refer it to the artistic activities of Zhang Huan. Therefore, we shall briefly refer to ontological foundations and their explanatory value, which will enable us to properly place the human body within the correct Chinese context.

It is worth posing the question whether we can perceive the conception of the body in Chinese philosophy in terms of Western duality, i.e. juxtaposed with the mind. Of course, we cannot argue here that the Western conception is monolithic; on the contrary, it is considerably diverse, as exemplified by both the dualist and monist varieties of the psycho-physical problem. It is virtually impossible to reconcile this variety with the use of a common denominator. However, at the same time we have to admit that despite being confronted with this diversity, all theories become entangled in the discussion concerning whether the division of body and mind is ontic or merely apparent. In other words, on the level of ontological discussion there is a variety of solutions; however, to some extent cultural discourse imposes a departure point which makes the dualist perspective more fundamental, if not natural.

Departing from this, we could consider the case that the dualist issue occupies a privileged position as a departure point and therefore is indispensably formative in the discussion. 'Cultural dualism,' so to speak, testifies to some characteristic features of Western thought, namely that at least on the level of appearances we have intuitions of the dualistic character of the psycho-physical problem, which necessitates the making of philosophical declarations in this respect. This intuition is even more prevalent in cultural discourse, and enjoys a safer position there, as it does not have to adhere to philosophical discipline and as it favours most popular intuitions.

However great the prevalence of the above approach can be, it cannot be universalistically extended to the Chinese case. We can roughly state that the Chinese understanding of art should be contextualised in accordance with Daoist and Confucian philosophical intuitions, which do not converge with the Western tradition at least as far as the issue of the body is concerned. This shows that cultural dualism does not necessarily cut across cultures. In order to illustrate the difference, we shall briefly refer to the views on the body in both of the above-mentioned philosophical schools.

For the sake of explanatory clarity, it is convenient to begin with the Daoist general interpretation, presenting those assumptions which can lead us to the ontological interpretation of the body. The opening chapter of the *Daodejing* 道德經 states that *dao* 道, 'which is unnamed, is the beginning of everything' (無名, 天地之始). (Laozi 2006: 5) From this we can learn that the whole universe stems from the same source. This, however, is insufficient evidence to testify to the identity of all things. Another fragment from chapter 34 makes a crucial point for our interpretation by stating that:

大道泛兮, 其可左右 (The great *dao* omnipresent, both on the left and right) (Laozi 2006: 136)

Thus, *dao*, as both the logical and cosmological beginning, is complemented with its being the whole universe. From this we can also infer that the universe is not characterised by ontic stratification in the sense that we have to differentiate between two or more different ontic formations.

What is also important about the world is that on the level of particulars,<sup>1</sup> its constituent parts are interrelated and subjected to an incessant process, which is described in chapter 25 as 'natural':

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'particular' should not be understood in opposition to 'universal.' This usage refers to objects which possess qualities enabling differentiation and reference to them as concrete objects, regardless of their ontic status.

人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然 (Humans act in accordance with the earth, the earth – with heaven, and heaven – with nature/naturally) (Laozi 2006: 103)

The translation of the Chinese '*ziran* 自然' specifically means 'naturally' or 'spontaneously,' which reflects the undistorted functioning of the universe in accordance with its own nature. This bears an important implication for the particulars. We can state that they constitute an organismic whole with the universe, which emphasises their integrity and at the same time slightly limits their individual character.<sup>2</sup>

From the above brief introduction of the Daoist vision of the universe we can conclude that a human being, a special case of a particular, is an integral part of the whole universe, not only in terms of her or his ontic status; however, he or she is also subject to the same natural process of self-identity, which is also identity with the whole universe. Therefore, if we focus on the human body, we can clearly notice here that it is understood entirely differently from the Western tradition. The human body does not provide a borderline between what we define as human and the rest of the world. The impossibility of separation is conditioned by identity on the ontic level as well as being an integral part of the cosmic process. Humans, and, it follows, human bodies, are not atomised individuals, but should rather be perceived as organismic parts. Because of the Daoist 'one-world view,' we are prevented from raising the question of the psycho-psychical problem. Undoubtedly, this question is asked from a comparative perspective, but it would appear as a quite unnatural problem even asked within Daoism alone. As Chinese cultural discourse is consistent with these philosophical intuitions, the body is not perceived as particularly distinct from the rest of the non-human world. Obviously, this does not mean that Chinese tradition fails to distinguish between 'bodily' and 'non-bodily.'<sup>3</sup>

It has to be remarked that the above conception is not exclusively characteristic of the Daoist school. It is understood in a more particular manner in Confucianism, where it is described within a social context. Confucian philosophy shares with Daoism the intuition that human be-

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation, however, should not lead us to the conclusion that nature is deterministic. The Daoist universe leaves a place for will in human action. However, this is not strictly connected with the objective of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Presenting the distinction in the form of bodily and psychological/spiritual would be a false analogy with the notions of Western tradition; thus we use 'non-bodily' as more neutral.

ings are interrelated with the rest of the world. Therefore, actions taken by any single individual cannot be isolated; rather, they alter the network of relations, which is predominantly understood here in social terms. Particularly characteristic of this conception is that Confucianism puts considerable stress upon which actions should be taken in order to attain an ethical target. A typical fragment devoted to this issue is the following:

弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾，而親仁，行有餘力，則以學文

A young man's duty is to behave well to his parents at home and to his elders abroad, to be cautious in giving promises and punctual in keeping them, to have kindly feelings towards everyone, but seek the intimacy of the Good. If, when all that is done, he has energy to spare, then let him study the arts (Confucius 1996: 4–5)

Confucius prescribes here a particular form of conduct, which is tantamount to being moral. There is something specific here to which we should pay attention. We can observe that no stress is put on ethical deliberations; however, the ethical is explained by concrete practice. Thus, human behaviour is given utmost importance in constituting human moral qualities. At the same time, it has to be remarked that moral behaviour does not play an instrumental role in the sense of realising certain absolute, ideal values. Quite the contrary: the very performance of moral actions is equivalent to being moral.

The role of practice in the Confucian ethical scheme gains even more importance when we view it in terms of the self-cultivation, or *xiushen* 修身,<sup>4</sup> of a human being. This means that proper behaviour should optimally contribute to developing dispositions in order to ensure a proper response in concrete situations. Each action gains more importance in itself, as it cannot be reduced to the mere realisation of some mentally arranged set of rules. This makes the performance a vitally constitutive and powerful factor in defining oneself in the world. The identification of oneself as moral is equal to behaving in a moral way. Morality is, as it were, not represented by behaviour but present in the very actions of a human being.

---

<sup>4</sup> The second character of the word means, among others, 'body,' which accentuates the importance of self-cultivation through conduct. However, it also includes what we might describe as proper conduct of the mind. In the Great Learning 大學, it is explained that: '所謂修身在正其心者,' (1999: 29) which, for the purpose of our discussion, we could roughly translate as: 'self-cultivation requires proper mind.' Therefore, self-cultivation encapsulates human conduct which should be understood in a comprehensive manner. This could also testify to the fact that human subjectivity is free from psycho-physical disintegration.

In other words, morality does not supervene on a particular performance but is the performance itself.

As we can see, the Chinese context perceives the body more in terms of relationships than in an attempt to grasp its features as a separate identity. This results from the conception that the human body has no clearly defined boundaries as it extends itself and is inseparably entangled in relationships with the whole world. This should not be mistaken for determinism, however. These relations are volitive and consist of particular performances. Bearing in mind that we are beyond the psycho-physical context, volition cannot be perceived as a purely separate mental operation which is properly reflected by an action; quite conversely, it should be viewed organismically as entangled in particular performances.

From a comparative perspective, we can see that the Western problem of discussing dualism is not particularly convergent with the Chinese tradition. Therefore, Chinese culture works in a different interpretational context, at least as far as the perception of body and bodily actions are concerned. The works of Zhang Huan, although inspired to some extent by Western art, do not disagree with the Chinese cultural context.

## **Zhang Huan: Presence through Participation**

The impulse which led the artist to using his own body as an artistic medium was quite spontaneous. Chinese art academies did not offer a programme in performance art at that time, as a result of which Zhang Huan received his education in painting. We can state that his resort to another means of expression was caused by other than academic reasons.

Zhang Huan attributes his interest in the body to his personal experience from everyday life. As he stated:

My inspiration comes from daily life, from the most average things, small things that wouldn't grab anyone's attention. Things like eating, sleeping working and taking a shit everyday. Through these insipid activities that go completely unnoticed by people, we can discover and appreciate intrinsic qualities of human nature. In doing my work I try my best to experience life, the reality of the body and I hate the performative, artificial aspects of work. (Zhang & Geuna)

Daily life in Zhang's work has often placed him in conflicts of a physical nature, (Zhang et al. 1999: 63) by which we can see that the body constitutes an important part of his identity and actions, not only in ordinary experience. It has to be mentioned that Zhang's works are considerably

diverse and spread over time. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we will narrow the discussion to the most representative ones.

If we approach Zhang's works in chronological order, the two most popularly discussed examples of the explicit deployment of the body in artistic activity are *12 m<sup>2</sup>* and *65 kg* from 1994. It is also worth paying attention to *Original Sound* (1995).

It is customary to discuss an artist's works chronologically in order to trace her/his linear development. However, this strategy would not work optimally in discussing the dimension of the body in Zhang's artistic activity. Thus it is best to begin with three works from the 1990s: *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995), *Nine Holes* (1995) and *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* (1997). The three works share something very fundamental, to the point that they can be even viewed as realisations of one paradigm.

*To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* is in fact a collective piece of performance art, which apart from Zhang involves, among others, Ma Liuming. Naked performers are piled up to add to a mountain, which is possible by assuming that their bodies are in continuity with the rest of the world. It is worth noticing that the absence of discretion is not only manifested in terms of the quantity of the bodies, which are bereft of their individual aspects and boundaries. What plays a more material role is that no distinction in quality is made either. The bodies are one with the mountain, which reveals the underlying conception of perceiving the body as a non-discrete part of the world.

The same can be said about *Nine Holes*, which is also performed in mountain surroundings. This time we have nine performers who cling to a rugged mountain slope. The random layout of the bodies on the uneven surface suggests the amalgamation of humans and earth. Judging by the title of the performance, it can be argued that the bodies 'make a difference'; however, holes naturally belong to the earth's surface and do not accentuate anything related to humanness.

*To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* differs slightly, perhaps, from the previous two performances. It also departs from the perception of a world beyond distinctions which deprive the human body of idiosyncrasy; but what makes it different is that the aim of exceeding the water level is indiscernible, yet existent. In comparison with *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*, there is no precise measure or sensually accessible result. If we view this work in terms of the body, it does not make a difference, similarly to the milieu of processes in the world which take place beyond

our cognition. The body is merged with this underlying holistic structure and, although important within it, does not matter individually.

What is also characteristic of the above performances is that they took place in East Village in Beijing and were done by artists who lived there. The 'natural' setting not only separates it from exhibition space but also disengages it from possible interaction with an audience. The bodies are not being observed; they are more 'felt' by the participating performers by means of the activity in which they are involved. There is nothing beyond the performance, which is a manifestation of the holistic process in which the cultural identity of the body (which could be construed by the audience) is abandoned.

Besides the above group performances of the 'collective body,' it is also worth examining two other works which come from the earlier 1990s, *12 m<sup>2</sup>* (1994) and *65 kg* (1994). These performances are exclusively concentrated on the individual body of Zhang, and they can initially be interpreted as highly personal pieces. However, bearing in mind the previously discussed works, we are aware that within the Chinese context this is not the case.

In *12 m<sup>2</sup>*, Zhang closes himself in a very dirty public toilet on a very hot summer day, his naked body rubbed with honey and the viscera of fish. In *65 kg* he is hung from the ceiling by tight iron chains and 250 millilitres of blood drip from his body slowly onto a radiator, to completely evaporate in the air. Both of the performances last one hour. Both works can be easily interpreted as conveying a strongly individualistic and personal experience of the human body. As many of us know, the East Village artists in the 1990s were vagrant artists who did not want to join the system or who had been abandoned by the system. Some of their works indeed have a strong 'rebellious' and avant-garde spirit. However, it may be an oversimplification, or misleading, to look at these two works in this way. In these works, looked at carefully, the individual sense of expression of self-identity in the body is rather vague. Quite on the contrary, in both cases, the body becomes augmented with the whole. But in comparison with previous group performances, these highly individual pieces only enhance this spirit of being with the whole, since the pieces give prominence to the meditative power with which Zhang plunges himself into his works.

The living conditions depicted in *12 m<sup>2</sup>* are rather severe. Beneath the very straightforward and powerful statements concerning reality (these were the actual conditions of living in the East Village in the 1990s) of Zhang's art is a soaring inner meditative state in relation to living condi-

tions of this kind. Does the very meditative attitude of the artist in these situations shock the audience in order to keep a distance from reality or to achieve an inner transformation to be one with it?

Zhang's *12 m<sup>2</sup>* reminds us of Zhuangzi's famous invented dialogue between Confucius and his favorite student Yan Hui in one of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, 'In the World of Men':

'You must fast!' said Confucius. 'I will tell you what that means. Do you think it is easy to do anything while you have a mind? If you do, Bright Heaven will not sanction you.'

Yan Hui said, 'My family is poor. I haven't drunk wine or eaten any strong food for several months. So can I be considered as having fasted?'

'That is the fasting one does before a sacrifice, not a fasting of the mind.'

'May I ask what the fasting of the mind is?'

Confucius said, 'Make your will one! Don't listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don't listen with your mind, but listen with your *qi*. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.'

Yan Hui said, 'Before I heard this, I was certain that I was Hui. But now that I have heard it, there is no more Hui. Can this be called emptiness?'

'That's all there is to it,' said Confucius. (Zhuangzi 2003: 53–54)

Zhuangzi's strategy of living in a turbulent 'world of men' is applicable to analysis of Zhang's work. Zhang's sixty-minute exposing of the body is a meditative process of forgetting the body and concentrating on the emptiness. But this emptiness is to be filled with all the events of the universe, including the flies and the challenging living conditions. What makes this one hour bearable and extraordinary is the strong individual will not to fight the harsh human conditions, but to empty oneself and to be one with it. Zhang's response to concrete life conditions through his bodily experience is rather constructive and contributive, but not destructive.

There is an awe-inspiring aura about *65 kg*. The performance silenced the entire audience in a room filled with the smell of smoking blood. How are we to understand this work? Can we read it as a demonstration of a heroic individual's extreme power, or does it try to convey a 'collective' feeling of human spirit? In this one-hour performance art work, a 65-kg naked body hangs on tight iron chains and identifies itself with the human spirit itself; the mouth is sealed; and the dripping blood evaporating into the air silently and expressively portrays the history of humanity, its power and its fragility that establishes reality as well as the meaning of human civilisation. The slowly dripping blood gradually diminishes the

strong, intensively tragic feeling of the audience and the artist himself; instead, the meditative attitude towards the unbearable human condition enhances the Chinese cultural sensibility in this work. It represents a deep understanding of human civilisation and a very harmonious spiritual transformation as a consequence of this understanding. It is essential that the transformation is worldly to this degree, and therefore the meditation should not be perceived as a 'mystical journey' but as a plunge into the ultimate reality of the world.

Silence is very expressive in Zhang's performance art, which echoes one of the Chinese aesthetic ideals: 'the greatest sound is ever so faint, the greatest image has no shape' from chapter 41 of the *Daodejing*. (Laozi 2006: 171) Zhang's work *Original Sound* expresses the very greatest 'sound.' As Zhang says about this work on his website:

The performance was created under a flyover in Beijing. There is a railway on the bridge and a road for vehicles and bikes underneath. I invited ten artists to observe and each had their own explanation of the work... For me, it is about the earth. I feel like human beings, like earthworms, have a close relationship with the earth. They come from there and go back to it in the end. (Zhang 2014)

The work clearly demonstrates what we discussed in the preceding section: namely, how Chinese people understand themselves, their bodies/ identities and the universe. This work of Zhang's is his genuine representation of a human being paying homage to the mysterious synthesised force of the universe. The silent, awe and easy atmosphere created in this artwork reflects a human's humble understanding of his own identity, human history and humanity's relationship with the whole environment during a harmonious transformation in the universe.

Zhang's performance art, either in a public lavatory in *12 m<sup>2</sup>* or the extreme situations he created for himself as in *65 kg* or *Original Sound*, challenges living conditions and the artist himself, and eventually succeeds in understanding and appreciating the human spirit itself. In each case, the meditative attitude shown in the artwork expresses human veneration of the subtle relationship between our life experience and the circumstances under which our life is experienced: all the extreme, difficult, challenging but harmonious physical and inner experiences in one's personal life representing one's ongoing interactions with one's surroundings. Expressing such experiences deeply through one's body is precisely a spiritual experience and a contribution to the significance of this life and this world.

## Embodied Art: Conclusion

One of the most natural approaches to the interpretation of body language consists in comparing what is immediately revealed and expressed by it. In this way, Zhang's performance art can be readily seen as consistent with that of many Western artists. This is the case especially regarding *12 m<sup>2</sup>* and *65 kg*, which by virtue of being one-person and apparently provocative actions can be potentially regarded, delusively, as extremely individual statements. We can agree with this, but only to a certain extent. The crucial difference lies in the fact that the vehicle of expression, Zhang's body, is not 'thrown' into the circumstances as an independent object. Despite being individualised, the body is on a more realistic level in continuity with the world, which necessitates a different perception and interpretation of these actions. We can say that instead of being thrown into the situation, the body is a distinct yet integrated element of it. This also undermines the conception of a viewer isolated from the work of art, which can be testified to by the artist's lack of particular interest in the presence of an audience or institutional framework. The audience is naturally in a state of continuity with the performance as with the world.

The key to Zhang's artwork, which doubtlessly belongs to contemporary art, lies in the Chinese tradition, which can be exemplified by, among others, classical texts. This approach not only questions the apparently universal issue of dualism but also brings us closer to this conception of performance art, which is partly Zhang's contribution.

## Bibliography

1. Confucius (2000), *The Analects*, (transl. A. Waley), Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe.
2. *Daxue* 大學 (1999), in *Daxue Zhongyong* 大學中庸, Beijing: Huayu Jiaoxue Chubanshe, pp. 1–50.
3. Laozi 老子 (2006), *老子校釋 Laozi Xiaoshi*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
4. Zhang Huan and Elena Geuna (2009), *Rebirth: Between Spirituality and Tradition*, <http://www.zhanghuan.com/ShowText.asp?id=42&sClassID=3> [viewed 29.5.2012].
5. Zhang Huan, *Original Sound*, <http://cn.zhanghuan.com/ShowWorkContent.asp?id=76&iParentID=42&mid=1> [viewed 02.17.2014].
6. Zhang, Huan Ma, Liuming & Qian Zhijian (1999), 'Performing Bodies: Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, and Performance Art in China', *Art Journal*, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 60–81.
7. Zhuangzi (2003), Chuang Tzu: *Basic Writings*, (transl. B. Watson), New York: Columbia University Press.

Zhang Huan's works discussed in the paper:

1. 12 m<sup>2</sup> (1994).
2. 65 kg (1994).
3. *Nine Holes* (1995).
4. *Original Sound* (1995).
5. *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995).
6. *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* (1997).

# ***Expression in Classical Texts***



Marta Kudelska\*

## The Hierarchy of the Transcendentals According to *Advaita Vedānta*

### Abstract

In *advaita vedānta*, the status of real existence is ascribed to the *Brahman* only. The *Brahman* is the transcendental ultimate reality and it is not possible to describe it by any attribute. The present paper will focus on the problem of values. What is the status of values according to the pure monistic system? When *advaita vedāntists* call the empirical world *sad-asad-anirvacanīya* (real-unreal-indefinable), are we entitled to speak about the existence of values? And if they are real, what does 'real' mean in this context?

All the attributes by which we describe the world can be grasped in groups. This division depends on the way in which we experience the world. One group encompasses objects experienced by the external organs, by the senses; its realm is responsible for aesthetic values. The second group leads to discrimination; its domain is ethics. The third prejudges the status of the world and advances metaphysical arguments. These three groups are arranged hierarchically. This order includes the cosmological and the soteriological model as well; thus the vision of the world in classical Indian thought appears as total harmony.

### Key words

*advaita, nirguna, transcendental, satyam, dharma, bonum, ananda*

---

There are two ways of speaking of the Brahman in the *advaita-vedānta* system of philosophy. The first way is apophatic: it expresses the indefinable nature of the ultimate reality, defining the Brahman as *neti! neti!* (not this! not this!). Therefore silence epitomises the description of the Brahman.

---

\* Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland  
Email: kudelska@poczta.onet.pl

The second way attempts to ascribe to the Brahman the ultimate and the primordial attributes, or *guṇa*. Traditionally, advaitists speak about three primordial attitudes: *sat*, which denotes the real and truth; *cit*, which denotes the domain of consciousness and pure thought; *ānanda*, whichever denotes beauty and bliss. Together, these three gunas give the classical definition of *saguṇa brahman* as *saccidānanda*.

My interest is focussed on the relation between the gunas. If we say that the ultimate reality, for *advaita-vedānta*, encompasses the whole world, including the phenomenal level, and if we also say that in this system reality is a total unity, can we find a hierarchy in the various levels, spheres or domains? And if there is a hierarchy, how is it oriented?

Before beginning my analysis of the primordial gunas I would like to point out one thing. *Advaita-vedānta* is a system of philosophy; accordingly, it can be interpreted from the Western methodological point of view. But it is primarily an Indian system of philosophy, or *darśana*; this means that ultimately all considerations are soteriologically oriented and must be related to a transcendental goal. That goal is called *mokṣa*, or liberation. In that sense we can judge any phenomena in the world and any activity in terms of its bringing us as near as possible to *mokṣa*. I would like to show that because of the process of reaching *mokṣa* we can speak about a hierarchy of the gunas. This will be the main subject of my present considerations.

But I would like to look at these gunas from the Western point of view as well. Although all literal comparisons between different cultures are weak by nature, sometimes they help not only to translate but also to understand the main thesis in both contrasting cultures. Accordingly, the three primordial Vedantic gunas will be referred to the three cardinal transcendentals which exist in European philosophy. The cardinal transcendentals have been present since the time of Plato, for whom the idea of the Good is at the top. However, for scholastic thinkers, Truth is at the top. The scholastic scheme is closer to the Vedantic; therefore I will start by analysing the three gunas in that order.

If we wish to find the main difference between the European and the Indian ways of philosophising, we have to form a basic scheme or ground structure. As the ancestor of European philosophy, the Greek way of thinking, is founded on a logical scheme, so the Indian systems are founded on a philological one. Therefore it is quite natural that in India philological analysis is included in the mainstream of philosophical considerations.

I will start from an analysis of the basic words denoting the term 'truth.' In Sanskrit there is a group of terms which denote 'truth' or 'truth-

ful.' The main term is *sat*, which comes from the root *as*, to be or to exist. The word *sat* has several derivatives: *satyam*, *sattvam*, *sattā*. The word *sat* belongs to the metaphysical domain, where it denotes truthful, real existence, and to the epistemological domain, where it denotes the way we speak of existence when we want to state its reality, truthfulness or vicariousness. Thus, what exists is truthful as well; the ultimate truth, *sat*, can be ascribed only to full real existence.

One of the main derivatives of the word *sat* is the word *satyam*, which extends its semantic field. Apart from the classical senses – namely, truth, real within its field – it includes senses with axiological connotations: honest, pure, virtuous, righteous, chaste. This combination in one domain of two aspects of reality, aspects which appeal to the realms of both truthfulness and righteousness, reminds us of the ancient Greek notion of *kalokagathos*.

The word *sattva*, apart from its classical meanings, also denotes real nature, character, consciousness, and wisdom. In classical Sanskrit the most frequent use of this term belongs to the *sāṃkhya* system of philosophy and names one of the three *gunas*, which are compounds of matter, or *prakṛti*. From the point of view of yogic procedure, the *guna sattva* is responsible for the process of enlightenment and disclosure of the truth of real nature, thanks to which liberation can be gained.

We also have one more old Vedic term which applies to that notion. It is the word *ṛta* – truth, law, rule, cosmic order. It comes from the root *ṛ*, or to go, to move, to become, and indicates in that sense a more dynamic, rather than static, dimension of the truth.

It can be also very interesting to look for the opposite of the notion of the truth, to terms denoting something untrue, false. This topic would require an additional paper, so I will only list several groups of these terms. The first group covers simple negations: *asat*, *asatya*, *anṛta*. To the second group belong *mithyā* (invertedly, contrarily, incorrectly, wrongly) and *mṛṣā* (in vain, falsely, meretriciously). The next group denotes something imaginary, artificial. Thus, we have: *kṛtrima* (made artificially, falsified, not natural) *kalpita* (made, artificial, fabricated), *kālpānika* (existing only in fancy, fictitious). Generally, all of the above terms indicate the mechanism of false appearances or something which does not really exist, something artificial, an imaginary reality.

In this context we have the term *māyā*. *Māyā* denotes empirical reality, reality which is not ultimate but which implies the appearance of incorrect knowledge leading to incorrect apprehension of the world. The

word *māyā* comes from the root *mā* (to measure, mete out, mark off). This meaning suggests some kind of structure, scheme, or mean which is using to measure one thing in opposition to another. Therefore it is the beginning of differentiation and categorisation. By appealing to the cosmological scheme and taking from it the idea that there exists only one reality (which can, of course, appear on many levels), we can see that *māyā* is not an outer measure but remains in the world and constitutes its inherent energy. *Māyā* is in the world, adhering to nature and to the structure of the world.

In the old Vedic texts *māyā* means magic, illusion, extraordinary and supernatural power; earlier, such power belonged to the demons, later, to the gods. In later times it begins to be identified with *prakṛti* (nature, matter, the principle of change and the lack of consciousness). In this context *māyā* signifies the changing, mutable world, a world devoid (by its nature) of consciousness, wisdom and the knowledge necessary to see true reality. In *advaita-vedānta*, *māyā*, first of all, is understood as energy. This energy becomes its primary *upādhi* (limitation, adjunct, anything which can be taken for or has the mere name or appearance of another thing).

In this system the term is interpreted radically as something unreal, not true, something not really existing. Then *māyā* becomes a universal aspect of individual ignorance, or *avidyā*.

All descriptions of *māyā* are given through analogy to illusory human experiences. The ultimate being of the world does not have to be stated as a theory, as it is strictly implied in the very definition of the *Brahman* itself. Śankara is very emphatic about the factual reality of the things that are mistaken for something else. *Māyā* does not simply mean denial of the world. Explicit speech about its non-existence is an indirect recognition of its phenomenal existence. It is out of the question (for *advaita*) that phenomenal reality could come into being through speech. *Māyā* will last as long as the *Brahman* can be spoken, and the world will last as long as *māyā* will last. That is why no positive language is adequate to describe the *Brahman*. This way of thinking leads to the apophatic definition of the *Brahman*, to state that by nature It is *neti, neti*.

The notion of *māyā* becomes one of the key terms in the philosophical system of *advaita*. But what does it mean that the empirical world is not simply a negation of the *Brahman*, given that the very acceptance of real existence is ascribed to the *Brahman* only? If nothing except the *Brahman* really exists, what will happen to all activities in the empirical world? Should we say that all deeds, behaviours, systems of values, etc. are not real? And

if so, what does not-real mean in that context? The notion of *māyā* helps to resolve this problem. Generally speaking, the world itself does not change; only our apprehension of the world is subject to change. One of the most acute issues in *advaita* is to find a proper mechanism to explain the transition from consciousness to awareness. When objects appear to this witnessing consciousness they are the work of *avidyā*; they are superimposed on pure consciousness, which remains unaffected by that relationship.

*Advaita* uses many examples and analogies to explain the mechanism of this superimposition. One of the best-known is the story about 'grasping a snake in the darkness instead of a rope.' In the darkness we see something long, thin, and moving, so that our first association is with a snake. We start to behave according to that impulse: we can escape, stand still, or even try to avoid the danger. According to that impulse, we act, and our actions have their own consequences. After the discovery that the thing in question was not a snake but a rope, only then do questions arise. Where did the snake disappear to? It could not have disappeared because it was not real. But the results of our behaviour resulting from that impulse remain, and for us they were and still are real. For Indian thinkers, to resolve this riddle is to resolve the enigma of the world.

For *advaita*, the rope that is seen as a snake is the objective foundation of the illusion. Illusory experience, like normal experience, may be considered in its noetic phase. The false content seems to possess a noematic character, and, in relation to everyday experience, a character of an intermediate type, embodying a reference, but not to reality. When the false realm is negated the real one shines alone. And only the *Brahman* is pure consciousness and self-luminous. The concept of *svāprakāśa* (self-luminousness) is the fact of being conscious of being conscious, when conscious of anything. And only this is real existence and truth: *sat*. The snake did not disappear because it did not become, which means that it does not really exist: *asat*. Therefore we can speak about ultimate real existence and about related non-existence. Thus only the term existence, or *sat*, is admitted to the ultimate reality. And only this is the ultimate truth. Other attributes are founded on this main one. This means that all systems of values are founded on the metaphysical level.

The second *guna* ascribed to the *Brahman* is *cit*, the domain of consciousness and the domain of knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidyā*) as well. Knowledge understood as the act of knowledge leads to discrimination, primarily between the subject and the object. This primordial discrimination clears the way for all schemes of discrimination. I am going to show that

all such schemes are founded on ethical values, which stand between the ultimate reality, or *sat*, and the world experienced by the senses.

The first question connected with the problem of ethical values, which arises for anyone brought up within European culture, is to find an equivalent for the Latin term *bonum*. I do not think there is a single equivalent for this term in Sanskrit. Thus, I find it important to examine this problem, to answer this question and to compare *bonum* with a group of related terms.

First, I shall discuss, analogously to the considerations of metaphysical terms, various groups of words denoting the terms 'good,' 'bad,' and 'good-bad' as a pair. In Sanskrit the prefix *su*, describing some positive value, is used generally. Here we have: *su-asti* (well-being, fortune, luck, success); *su-kṛta* (good or righteous deed, meritorious act, reward, recompense, well done, made, formed or executed); *su-dharma* (good law, justice, duty); *su-carita* (well-conducted, moral, virtuous). When we look for a group denoting something that we should attain or gain we find: *hita* (put, placed, set, laid, fixed, planned, given, beneficial, convenient, suitable, benefit, advantage, profit, good); *bhadra* (blessed, auspicious, fortunate, gracious, friendly, kind, excellent, good i.e., skilful); *bhāga* (good fortune, fortunate lot, luck, destiny); *śubha* (splendid, bright, beautiful, pleasant, suitable, fit, good); *kalyāṇa* (beautiful, auspicious, illustrious, noble); *kuśāla* (right, proper, suitable); *kṣema* (giving rest or ease, security, happiness); *bhūti* (well-being, prosperity, might, power); *śreyas* (more splendid, more beautiful, more excellent, best, superior). All of these terms are related to the term 'good' with its sensual connotation. Things which are considered good for us are connected with gaining or keeping goods marked by their sensual characteristics. The sensual connotation is connected with the realm of the unmanifested world as well as with aesthetic issues.

As we know, Indians (following *advaita* tradition) do not consider the manifested level to be the absolutely real one. Therefore, 'goodness,' by definition, cannot be something ultimate. Yet, the above-mentioned terms do not include the meaning of 'good' as something 'useful.' For this idea, they employ another group of terms: *artha* (cause, motive, reason, advantage, thing, object, object of the senses, wealth, property); *upayoga* (use, fitness, any act tending to a desired object, good conduct, observing established practices); *phala* (fruit, consequence, effect, result, retribution, gain or loss); *lābha* (obtaining, getting, attaining, gain, profit). And here we also deal with aesthetic rather than purely ethical issues.

We have some groups of terms which very often come in pairs as opposed terms: *hita-ahita*, *śubha-aśubha*, *bhadra-abhadra*. These are related

to the first group. We also have a group denoting first 'virtue' and then 'good.' This includes: *punya* (auspicious, propitious, fair, pleasant, good, right, virtuous, meritorious, pure, holy, sacred); *sukṛta*; *sucarita*; *sādhuvṛtam* (well-rounded, well-conducted, virtuous or honest man); *dharmya* (legal, legitimate, just, virtuous, righteous).

The term 'bad' is primarily connected with its opposition to 'good.' Here we have terms which are simply negations like: *asādhu*, *adharmya*, *aśubha*, *ahita*, *akuśala*. We have also the prefix *dus-*, describing something with negative value: *duṣṭa* (spoiled, corrupted, defective, faulty, wrong, false, bad, wicked, guilty); *durgati* (misfortune, distress, poverty, hell); *duṣkṛta* (wrongly or wickedly done, badly arranged, evil action, sin, guilt). The above terms are related to a situation that initially appears to be good, but which is going to be spoiled; the primary harmony or perfect order is going to be damaged. Next, we have a group of terms with an independent etymology: *pāpa* (bad, vicious, wicked, evil, wretched, vile, low); *doṣa* (fault, vice, deficiency, want, inconvenience, disadvantage, damage, harm, bad consequences); *kleśa* (pain, affliction, distress, anguish, worldly occupation, trouble). To throw something out of balance or to spoil harmony is connected with a mistake and is called 'bad.' This mistake does not come from the outside; it is just a lack of inner harmony.

All the groups under consideration refer to both *profanum* and *sacrum* stages. This division derives from the primordial cosmogonic rite. The myth of *Puruṣa* from the *Puruṣasūkta* is the earliest pattern for that rite. The world which emerged as a result of the primordial sacrifice is the cosmic order and harmony. It can suggest that ideal order is inherent to the pre-creational stage. This model shows that the world, broadly understood as the macro- and microcosmos, and all categories that govern these orders, as well as all relations between them, are of the same nature. All of them are manifestations of the one pre-entity.

In the unmanifested world there exists no absolute, independent category nor any value, moreover, their opposites are of the same nature. Action that submits to the primary order, and imitates it, is called 'good action,' or *sukṛta*. It can be judged as proper action rather than as good action because its fulfilment brings no extra reward. However, one who fails to fulfil his duty to the cosmic order is punished. That punishment is called sin, or *pāpa*.

This understanding is connected with the primordial ritual act. The primary being related to the ritual act is an ideal state: a state of harmony, deriving from sacrifice and maintained by sacrifice. Therefore the basic prescription is connected with the persistence of this state, i.e. with the re-construct-

tion of the cosmogony. When the primordial state is taken as a state of harmony and a perfect state, all acts must follow the primordial rules, for the act of seeking something new is treated as spoiling the primordial harmony. The proper celebration of the sacrifice is called *sukṛta*. When there is any mistake or deviation from a rule, the sacrifice is called *duṣkṛta*, or wrongly done.

In this context, it is quite natural to describe the term 'bad' as something connected with an omission, a mistake, incomplete action, impure thing or sin. I consider that we are justified in understanding this group of terms as denoting negative values only if we explain the etymological sources of these terms by the idea of the ritual act. Therefore 'bad' means something that spoils the primordial harmony, something that does not 'imitate' or 're-create' the cosmic order.

The pan-Indian law of *karma* generally arose out of such interpretations of the terms *sukṛta* and *duṣkṛta*. The etymology of the word *karman* comes from the same root, *kr*, as the terms denoting 'good and bad,' generally describing an act. An act, or *karman*, is not understood as an independent event. It refers to the past because it arises out of previous events, and to the future because it bears the consequences of these events. The law of *karma* transcends and, at the same time, contains the diametrically opposed values 'good and bad.' This kind of comprehension of values is characteristic for *saṃsāra*.

In this context, it is very interesting to examine how the term *sukṛta* describes man. (The best example may be found in the *Upanishads*, especially in the *Aitareya*.) After subsequent manifestations of the primary being, out of the face of the primordial man arise entities which are treated as divinities. They are called at the same time *devatā* (divinities) and *indriya* (senses). Thus, their sensual character with all its consequences is pointed out here. The self, or *ātman*, marks the divinities with thirst and hunger, which is connected with *kāma*, the main impulse of these entities toward action in the manifested world.

As long as an individual exists in the realm of the manifested world, he is submitted to the nature of *kāma*, desire, and he experiences the world through the senses. Therefore, the most common reception of the external world would be translated into aesthetic categories. And what at the beginning meant: 'I like it, I do not like it' or 'it is good for me (or not)' begins to be treated according to the absolute categories: 'it is generally good' or 'it is generally bad.'

From the *Aitareya* we know that only man can comprehend all created worlds. Man is called *sukṛta*. This is the same term used for the properly

celebrated sacrifice, which imitates the primary cosmogonic myth; man imitates by himself all the manifested worlds. The term *sukṛta* does not refer to the pre-creative stage but to the first stage or hypostasis of the manifested world.

All the terms under discussion appear as relative categories and they are secondarily absolutised from aesthetic values. But classical Indian thought assumed the intention to attain the ultimate ethical model as the postulated ideal of action. This is obviously connected with assuming the model in which full reality and perfection can be ascribed only to the unconditioned, primordial world.

As is widely known, the goal of that method is to leave *saṃsāra*, i.e., to attain *mokṣa*. Therefore, the beginning and the end, which are presented in the *Upanishad*, show two oppositely oriented goals. One is connected with maintaining the world by means of sacrifice; the second is aimed at liberation, or escape from the world of *karman* and *saṃsāra* by means of *yoga*. The above goals are marked by the two principal ethical values. The choice between them is responsible for remaining within *saṃsāra* or with attaining *mokṣa*.

The good is one thing, the gratifying is quite another; their goals are different, both bind a man.

Good things await him who picks the good; by choosing the gratifying, one misses one's goal.

Both the good and the gratifying present themselves to a man;

The wise assess them, note their difference; and choose the good over the gratifying;

But the fool chooses the gratifying rather than what is beneficial. (*Kaṭha* 2.1–2)

The above fragment confirms all our considerations on the subject of 'good and bad.' From the linguistic analysis and by appealing to the model of the world marked by the cosmogonic rite, we come to the conclusion that it is very difficult to speak about absolute values in the ethical aspect. And here also, although the description is related to the opposition 'good and bad,' the choice is not simply judged as 'good' or 'bad.' This is connected with absolute goodness, i.e., *mokṣa*, which is called *śreyas*. The term *śreyas* denotes the most splendid, most beautiful, the highest good, fortune, the state of happiness, sometimes connected with the possession of many goods. A similar state is designated elsewhere in the *Upanishads* places by the terms *sukha* (happiness) or even *ānanda* (bliss). Keeping in mind that Sanskrit terms from the first *Vedic* texts denote the goal and the

way to attain that goal simultaneously, we see that the choice of the realm of one value is connected with the aim, i.e. with *mokṣa*.

The description of the polarisation of the two ways or two models of life, symbolised by the terms *śreyas* and *preyas*, recalls the Stoic understanding of wisdom. The fragment of *Kaṭha* discussed above shows that in the *Upanishads*, as well as among the Stoics, we cannot speak of gradations of good or of wisdom. Someone is totally wise or not wise at all. He is wise who knows – that is, who knows the real nature of reality and of the world. Through this knowledge he can attain *mokṣa*. It takes a great deal of time and requires a great deal of work, but the result is immediate. And if the equation *jñāna = mokṣa* is true, it means that wisdom cannot be graded. Wisdom is attributed to somebody who possesses complete knowledge. Action plays a secondary role. What is meant by a secondary role has been a point of discussion among Indian philosophers and theologians. However, an ultimate solution has not yet been found.

In the light of the above considerations, we have to look for a description of the realm of *preyas*, which is placed in opposition to the term *śreyas*. The realm of *śreyas* is univocally good and homogenous; it is the return to the source, to the state of ultimate harmony. The realm of the *preyas* is the realm of action, of gradation. The term *preyas* is the comparative of the adjective *priya* (liked, favourite, wanted, own, dear). Thus, the realm of *preyas* denotes something nicer or dearer, in the sensual and volitional context. The choices of somebody who belongs to the realm of *preyas* are motivated by feelings and desires: *kāma*. And *kāma* is the basic motive on which sinking into *saṃsāra* depends. Thus, once again we see that all categories constituting the manifested level of the world have merely relative values.

From the analysis of terms appealing to the ethical domain, the conclusion is derived that all values contrasting with the ultimate level appear to be related. The aim of every activity is ultimately submitted to transcending the phenomenal world and reaching the level which is above all valuations and discriminations. Ethical values are closest to the absolute domain and they stand between two dimensions of reality: the absolute and the sensual world. The analysis of these terms revealed that ethical values can be interpreted as the transfer of aesthetic values in the moral dimension.

The classical Indian model appears from one side as a nonlinear, dynamic system in which every part remains in a restored relationship with the whole, but from the other side that system is 'built' as a hierarchy in which the external, unobtrusive levels and dimensions are transcended by higher ones. The

cosmological and cosmogonic apprehensions of the world of phenomena and aesthetic theories are founded through understanding the complex of the body, nerves, and psychological reactions and of focussing attention on the moment of experience leading to liberation from discrimination. Most important, in the context of this idea, is to stress the interdependence of conditions, interactions and relations between the whole and the parts. Every part expresses the whole (as in a hologram). In such a system there is no place for any dichotomy or polarisation into binary oppositions such as: animated/unanimated, limited/ unlimited, nature/man, physical/spiritual, *sacrum/profanum*. However, we have seen that, apart from treating the world as a whole, we can speak about the transcendence of particular levels and transfers of one system of values to a higher dimension. Therefore we can speak about a hierarchy. The way up starts from the realm experienced by the senses, which can be judged according to aesthetic categories.

Let us start with a short philological analysis of terms denoting the aesthetic domain. These terms appeal to the third *guna* ascribed to the *Brahman*, to *ānanda*, which denotes the state of bliss or happiness and refers to the state in which the ultimate reality is experienced. In *advaita* the absolute is above any discrimination, so it should be essentially identified with primordial attributes. But to experience something, to feel happy in some state, is still an act and every act is due to discrimination, even if very subtle. We have seen that the same could be said about the domain of *cit – jñāna*. But when we consider this *guna* within the European scholastic frame, we have the transcendental, Beauty, which does not denote our reception of the absolute but rather its primordial attribute.

So let us look at terms denoting 'beautiful.' In Sanskrit some of the terms used to describe beauty are: *cāru*, *sundara*, *rucira*, *sudṛśya*, *śobhara*, *rūpavān*, *rūpī*, *surūpa*, *manorama*, *manojña*, *sumukha*, *sādhu*, *śriyukta*. Among these terms we can discriminate two groups. The terms: *rūpavān*, *rūpī*, *surūpa* denote beauty as possessing a form (*rūpa*), as something external which can refer us to the material dimension. The term *surūpa* extends that interpretation and suggests that the form is good and proper (*su*). In this context beauty is that which possesses the proper form. It is a kind of denotation of an aesthetic object. To these groups we can add also the following terms: *manorama*, *manojña*, *sumukha*. These notions refer to the relation between the subject and the object of aesthetic experience.

We have also other terms. The word *sundara* probably comes from: *su-nara* and denotes simply 'the good, proper man.' It harmonises with the term *sādhu* (goodness, virtue; later, a person on a very high, spiritual

level). This is an example of a situation where the same terms appeal to the sensual, aesthetic and ethical levels.

The terms *śobhana* and *śrīyukta* denote clear, luminous, brilliant. Among the categories used in Indian aesthetics, they describe pure sattvic experience.

Now a few words about the terms denoting something ugly, unsightly, hideous. Here we have: *kurūpa*, *aparūpa*, *virūpa*, *rūpahina*, *kadākāra*, *kut-sitākāra*, *durdarśana*. The first group appeals, analogously to the words denoting beauty, to the presented, phenomenal reality, to the domain of matter. But here they mean some kind of deprivation, lack of something, rejection. The term *durdarśana* can be translated as bad conduct, bad view, or bad opinion.

Without going into detailed philological analysis, we can say that terms denoting beauty and ugliness refer to an object of experience and to the state deriving from that experience as well. Even these terms can refer to a dynamic situation which, from the dimension that has been experienced as the presented level, should lead to a much more primordial level. This harmonises with the classical Indian view that the phenomenal dimension of the world is subordinated to the unconditioned level. The manner of action and of conduct in the empirical world depends on the level of knowledge of reality.

Now we should focus on aesthetic values only. The quality of aesthetic experience depends on the quality of our choices. One of the domains of our choices is initiated by the sense of taste. I think that it may be interesting to analyse particular terms denoting something tasty or not-tasty in the context of our considerations of beauty and ugliness. All our above considerations have concluded that primary aesthetic subjective categories became absolutised, and thus the categories of beauty and ugliness fall into the categories of good and bad. Let us look at the notion of taste, which is one of the motives for some kind of aesthetic experience and which can lead to the categories of beauty and ugliness.

In Sanskrit something tasty (generally: good, proper taste) is denoted by the terms: *rasika*, *sarasa*, *surasa*. Something not-tasty is *arasika*, *arasajña*. Thus, the main term denoting taste is *rasa*. The term *rasa* has a few other meanings as well. *Rasa* is something fluid, that is, the sap of a tree in the context 'essence of a tree.'

Now, take the bees, son. They prepare the honey by gathering nectar (*rasa*) from a variety of trees and reducing that nectar to a homogeneous whole. In that state the nectar from each different tree is not able to differentiate: 'I am the nectar of that tree', and 'I am the nectar of this tree'. In exactly the same way, son, when all

these creatures merge into the existent, they are not aware that: 'We are merging into the existent'. No matter what they are in the world – whether a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a moth, a gnat, or a mosquito – they all merge into that. The finest essence here – that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is truth, that is the self (*ātman*). And that's how you are, Śvetaketu. (*Chāndogya* 6.9)

This is a very important passage in the Indian tradition. For the first time there appears the famous formula *tattvamasi* which indicates the identity of the principle of the macrocosmos, *Brahman*, and the principle of the microcosmos, *ātman*. In this *Upanishad*, *rasa* is compared to taste, to nectar. The impression of particular tastes is secondary. In reality there exists one taste only, the ultimate one. This example exemplifies the thesis that ultimately only the one *ātman* exists and particular souls are something secondary, conditioned, therefore not real in the absolute sense. And due to the experience of the world through particular rasas, by differentiating between particular rasas and clinging to them, we go deeper and deeper into *sāṃsāra*.

The term *rasa* also denotes marrow; in ancient India marrow was identified with the principle of man in his physical aspect. *Rasa* is also mercury, quicksilver, the alchemic stone. It was a symbol of the principle and the secret of life. Therefore it was associated with semen – in mythology, with Śiva's semen.

Then he said to them: 'You who know this self here, the one common to all men, as somehow distinct – you eat food. But when someone venerates this self here, the one common to all men, as measuring the size of a span and as beyond all measure, he eats food within all the worlds, all the beings, and all the selves. Now, of this self here, the one common to all men – the brightly shining is the head; the dazzling is the eye; what follows diverse paths is the breath; the ample is the trunk; the earth is the feet; the sacrificial enclosure is the stomach; the sacred grass is the body hair; the householder's fire is the heart; the southern fire is the mind; and the offertorial fire is the mouth. (*Chāndogya* 5.18)

There are certain considerations concerning the Agni-Vaiśvanara who is identified with *ātman*. There, a problem of identity appears between the whole and the parts. The ritual act is celebrated for the benefit of every particular part. Every particular rite is consummated and tested to prove if it is *priya* (good, nice, gratifying). Let us recall how important a role the term *priya* plays in the context of ethical values.

Reality as a whole is more than a simple sum of all the parts. Every element connected with a given domain of activity is necessary and struc-

turally integrated into the whole scheme. It is some kind of repetition of *Puruṣasākta*. This fragment indicates the theory, very common in Indian thought, that everything is very deeply founded in the world of biology and the organism. The picture of the world is connected with the earthly impression of the body and the mind. Let us quote:

Appearance and taste, smell and sounds, touches and sexual acts –  
That by which one experiences these, by the same one understands –  
what then is here left behind? (*Kaṭha* 4.3)

Even in the smallest phenomena of reality, every part of the world reflects the whole, as in a hologram. The touch of what is unconditioned can be recognised on every level, at every moment, but if its transformation was to be stable it had to be transformed and transcendent on all levels, starting from the very material and ending in the subtle mist. Thus, in such a picture of the world understood as a total harmony, for the sake of soteriology, there must be some hierarchy, some linear order. The following *Upanishad* helps us to find that order:

The separate nature of the senses; their rise and fall as they come separately into being –  
When a wise man knows this, he does not grieve.  
Higher than the senses is the mind; higher than the mind is the essence;  
Higher than the essence is the immense self; higher than the immense is the unmanifest.  
Higher than the unmanifest is the person, pervading all and without any marks.  
Knowing him, a man is freed, and attains immortality. (*Kaṭha* 6.6–8)

Knowledge begins from sensual experience. All Indian philosophical systems put perception, or *pratyakṣa*, as the first among many sources and means of knowledge. *Pratyakṣa* denotes, exactly, what is before the eyes, or *prati-akṣ*. Therefore it can refer to sensual knowledge. The same is true of *advaita*, although its ultimate reality is above any discussion and transcends the phenomenal world. Then, how to combine the sensual and the transcendental understanding of the act of knowledge?

Generally speaking, we can say that the mechanism for knowing an object always remains the same; even the principle of the object remains the same, but, thanks to the more subtle act of knowledge, we more and more subtly penetrate the nature of the object. Thus, by looking in a linear order, we grasp and recognise a particular thing, starting with sensual experience and moving step by step to more subtle levels. This sensual aes-

thetic experience (*rasa*) refers to the most fundamental and to the most sensual form of reality as well.

*Rasa* is aesthetic experience; it is emotion which is cause and effect as well. Emotion is the state and *rasa* is the quality of that state. I believe that this is the key to understanding the typology of many *rasas*.

Know the self as a rider in a chariot, and the body, as simply the chariot.  
 Know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind, as simply the reins.  
 The senses, they say, are the horses, and the sense objects are the paths around them;  
 He who is linked to the body (*ātman*), senses and mind, the wise proclaim as the  
 one who enjoys.  
 When a man lacks understanding, and his mind is never controlled,  
 His senses do not obey him, as bad horses, a charioteer.  
 But when a man has understanding, is mindful and always pure;  
 He does reach that final step, from which he is not reborn again. (*Kaṭha* 3.3–8)

The senses are the fundamental components of action. Without the senses the act of knowledge does not exist, just as a chariot does not move without horses. The senses initiate every process of knowledge. Primary energy, by its nature, above everything, creating all forms, entered a domain which can be evaluated in aesthetic categories as well.

When we place any element in a cosmological scheme, on one hand we give it a higher value because it is universal (every part influences the whole in a distinctive manner), but on the other hand we deprive it of its personal, individual, creative character. All activities, understood ideally, should have not a creative but a re-creative character. The same is true of aesthetic experience; it derives from the individual level and, by transcending particular levels of the recognising subject, it reaches the supra-individual state. Thus the subsequent steps of knowing an object move toward the state of reality, which is beyond any description.

From the ultimate point of view all values appear relative. Is there any sense in this context in speaking about any values, making any differentiations? Is there any sense in speaking about good and bad things, about beautiful and ugly objects? Our considerations lead us to the conclusion that even though all values appear relative, they are still indispensable. The process of valuation enables us to prepare norms of action; in turn, these norms indicate which kind of action and which kind of experience serve the aim of reaching the ultimate goal. So aesthetic and ethical values delineate the passage between what is given in sensual experience and the ultimate undifferentiated reality.

All English quotations from the *Upanishads* are taken from Patrick Olivelle's translation, *The Upaniṣads*.

## Bibliography

1. Gambhirananda, S. (1977), *Eight Upanisads with the Commentary of Śankaracarya*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
2. Gupta, Som Raj (1991–1999), *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man*, Vol. I–III, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
3. Kaplan, S. (2007), 'Vidyā and Avidyā: Simultaneous and Coterminous? A Holographic Model to Illuminate the Advaita Debate', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 178–203.
4. Myers, Michael W. (1998), 'Śaṅkarācārya and ānanda', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 48, No.4, pp. 553–567.
5. Shastri, J. L. (ed.) (1984), *Upanisat – Samgrahah, Containing 188 Upanisads*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
6. Sivananda, S. (1977), *Brahma Sutras*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
7. Suthren Hirst, J. (2004), 'Images of Śaṅkara: Understanding the Other', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1/3, pp. 157–181.
8. *Upaniṣads* (1996), transl. by Patrick Olivelle, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Katarzyna Pazucha\*

## Notes Towards Defining ‘Theory’ (*Śāstra*) in Sanskrit; Systematic Classification Presented in Rājaśekhara’s *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā*

### Abstract

Even though the genre of *śāstra* is one of the most familiar and important constituents of the cultural and intellectual history of South Asia, it did not receive the proper attention and the term itself remains obscure. Also in the tradition of Sanskrit letters itself the scope and nature of *śāstra*, it would seem, is not precisely delineated. Using the discussion presented by Rājaśekhara, the tenth century poet and theoretician, in his *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā*, this article will try to bring together recent evaluations of the genre with a contextualized discussion of the tradition’s selfunderstanding.

### Key words

*Śāstra*, theory, Rājaśekhara, *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā*, Vedas, *vedāṅga-s*, *vidyā-s*, *vidyāsthāna-s*, theoretical writing

---

### Introduction

The genre of *śāstra* is one of the most familiar and important constituents of the cultural and intellectual history of South Asia. Even though as a genre it looms large in the history of Sanskrit literature, or, rather precisely because of its ubiquity, the term itself remains obscure. Pollock, in his article on the relationship between theory and practice in South Asia notes:

In light of the major role it appears to play in Indian civilization, it is surprising to discover that the idea and nature of *śāstra* in its own right, as a discrete problem

---

\* South Asian Languages and Civilizations Department  
University of Chicago, United States of America  
Email: kpazucha@uchicago.edu

of intellectual history, seem never to have been the object of sustained scrutiny. Individual *śāstras* have of course received intensive examination, as have certain major sub-genres, such as *sūtra*. But a systematic and synthetic analysis of a phenomenon as a whole, as presenting a specific and unique problematic of its own, has not to my knowledge been undertaken. (Pollock 1985: 500–501)

It is important to note that this last proposition holds true not only of the comparatively recent branch of knowledge, Indology, but is largely accurate even when we take into account the tradition of Sanskrit letters itself: the scope and nature of *śāstra*, it would seem, is not precisely delineated, and attempts to do so today are what one might term ‘reconstructions’ of the genre. Thus, the word ‘theory’ and ‘knowledge systems’ or even, in a recent proposal by Ashok Aklujkar, ‘science,’ must be seen as attempts to get at the significance of the genre and must require careful attention to the self-understanding of the authors and critics in Sanskrit; otherwise, such reconstructions would only cast a blinding glare in place of an attempt to shed light.<sup>1</sup>

Virtually any kind of human activity could be a subject for a particular *śāstra*: there are *śāstras* belonging to religious, philosophical, literary, and also more practical fields (e.g. there exist *śāstras* on elephants, horses, weapons, and perfumery). By the time of Rājaśekhara (the beginning of tenth century), the concept of *śāstra* as a separate genre of literature was well established. In this article I will attempt to use this particular discussion [the one presented by Rājaśekhara in his *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*<sup>2</sup>] as an opportunity to bring together recent evaluations of the genre with a contextualized discussion of the tradition’s self-understanding.

The word itself<sup>3</sup> means ‘teaching, instruction’ (from the verbal root *śās* – ‘teach, instruct’ with the suffix *-tra* forming a noun indicating an in-

<sup>1</sup> Already Aristotle warned: ‘a definition should not be more precise than its subject allows.’

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth *KM*.

<sup>3</sup> Difficulties with defining *śāstra* are also visible in the dictionary definitions. For example, in his Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Monier Monier-Williams defines *śāstra* as follows: ‘*śāstra* – n. an order, command, precept, rule; teaching, instruction, direction, advice, good counsel; any instrument of teaching, any manual or compendium of rules, any book or treatise, (esp.) any religious or scientific treatise, any sacred book or composition of divine authority [applicable even to the Veda, and said to be of fourteen or even eighteen kinds [see under *vidyā*]; the word *śāstra* is often found ifc. after the word denoting the subject of the book, or if applied collectively to whole department of knowledge, e.g. *vedānta-śāstra*, a work on the *vedānta* philosophy or the whole body

strument or means of the action of the verbal root).<sup>4</sup> In earlier times, especially in the grammatical tradition, it meant 'authoritative rule,' while outside that tradition it had a broader meaning of 'system of ideas,' or 'philosophical system' in general. (Pollock 1985: 501)

We can find one of the first formal definitions of *śāstra* in Kumārilabhaṭṭa, the seventh-century Mīmāṃsaka:

*śāstra* is that which teaches people what they should and should not do. It does this by means of eternal words or those made by men. Descriptions of the nature [of things/states] can be embraced by the term *śāstra* insofar as they are elements subordinate [to injunctions to action]. (*Śloka-vārttika*, p. 288, after: Pollock 1985: 501)

This definition is broad enough to include within the province of *śāstra* any type of human endeavor, as long as the rules for it are put into words (be they human or eternal). It appears that almost everything that seemed worthy of and amenable to systematization (because of its practical importance, its appeal to the universal or common interests of men, etc.) was systematized by the thinkers of pre-Islamic India. Thus not only do we have huge compendia on subjects such as proper conduct and medicine, but also manuals on jewels and perfumery.

## Rājaśekhara's Classification

The first fairly systematic list of *śāstras* can be found in Rājaśekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, a tenth-century text. In the second chapter of his work, entitled "*Śāstranirdeśa*" (*The Specification of Theories*), Rājaśekhara offers an explanation of the domain and scope of *śāstras*. He divides all literature – *vāṅmaya*, in the broadest sense of the word, into two groups: *kāvya* – poetry, or 'high literature' (which one might term 'literature' in the narrow sense of this word, as per Pollock's argument) (Pollock 2003: 39–41) and *śāstra* – science, theory. Rājaśekhara devotes this chapter only to the field of *śāstra*; *kāvya* is discussed in later parts of the work.

---

of teaching on that subject; *dharma-śāstra*, a law book or whole body of written laws; *kāvya-śāstra*, a poetical work or poetry in general; *śilpi-śāstra*, works on the mechanical arts; *kāma-śāstra*, erotic compositions; *alaṅkāra-śāstra*, rhetorics, etc.' (Monier-Williams 2002 [1899]: 1069)

<sup>4</sup> Buddhists give the following *nirukta*: 'śās' – 'subdue' [the *kleśas* (afflictions)], and 'tra' for 'tārayati,' it carries us across to the other shore. (The definition comes from Vasubandhu' *Vyakhyayukti*.)

Rājaśekhara gives a detailed exposition of *śāstras*, since in the world of literature, it is *śāstra* that precedes *kāvya*; only after studying theories can a poet can move on to composing poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Rājaśekhara proceeds then to a discussion of the sciences, and divides them into two categories: *apauruṣeya* – transcendent, of non-human origin, and *pauruṣeya* – human. Transcendent *śāstra* consists of fourteen parts: the four Vedas (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva); the four *upavedas* (history (*itihāsa*), the science of weapons or war generally (*dhanurveda*), music (*gandharvaveda*), medicine (*ayurveda*)); and the six *vedāṅgas* or ancillary disciplines of the Vedas, which are listed as: phonetic observations (*śikṣā*), appropriate conduct or procedure in personal, ritual, and social life (*kalpa*), language analysis, grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), context-sensitive word derivation (*nirukta*), prosody (*chandas*), and astronomy (*jyotiṣa*). To the traditional list of six *vedāṅgas*, Rājaśekhara adds *alaṅkāra* (poetics),<sup>6</sup> promising to discuss it later.<sup>7</sup> He explains the necessity for adding *alaṅkāra* as the seventh *vedāṅga* in the following way:<sup>8</sup>

According to Yayavariya, *alaṅkāraśāstra* is a seventh *vedāṅga* because of its usefulness; without thorough knowledge of its nature there can be no comprehension of the meaning of the Vedas.

As, for example, in the following:

Two birds – friends, companions – cling to the same tree  
One of them eats the sweet fruit,  
the other one keeps watching continually, not eating at all.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *śāstrapūrvakatvāt kāvyānām pūrvam śāstreṣv abhiniviśeta.*

*na hy apravarttitapradīpās tamasi tattvārthasārtham adhyakṣayanti.* (Rājaśekhara *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* 1934: 2.16–17) (Due to the priority of *śāstra* (science) to poetry one should first resort to sciences. Since those whose lamps are not kindled do not see a caravan of real things in the darkness.) Necessity of studying sciences prior to writing poetry is elaborated upon in later chapters devoted to the training of poets.

<sup>6</sup> Adding *alaṅkāra* as the seventh *vedāṅga* was part of Rājaśekhara's great project of securing a place for *kāvyaśāstra* among other respectable *śāstras* (affiliated with and drawing their authority from the Vedas).

<sup>7</sup> From the table of content in the introductory part of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* we know that Rājaśekhara intended to discuss *alaṅkāras* in the later nine *adhikaraṇa*-s. (4–12)

<sup>8</sup> Unless stated otherwise all translations from *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* are mine.

<sup>9</sup> *upakāratvād alaṅkāraḥ saptamam aṅgam iti yāvāriyaḥ. ṛte ca tatsvarūpa-parijñānad vedārthānavagateḥ. yathā dvā suparṇā sayujā sasvāyā samānam vṛkṣam pariśvasvāte.*

The example comes from Ṛgveda I.164.20 and was quoted in many later Upaniṣads. This verse can be understood only after analyzing the poetic figures used in it. According to Rājaśekhara, it is only proper to include *alaṅkāra* in the list of *vedāṅgas*, since without its assistance, uncovering the obsolete meaning of Vedas (which was precisely the function of the other *vedāṅgas*) would be impossible.

Rājaśekhara includes in the category of the human sciences four *śāstras*: ancient stories (*purāṇas*), logic or philosophy in general (*ān-vīkṣikī*), hermeneutics or Vedic exegesis (*mīmāṃsā*), and non-Vedic scripture<sup>10</sup> (*smṛtitantra*). There are eighteen *purāṇas*, and for most part they are descriptions of the tales from the Vedas. Some add *itihāsa* (history) as a subdivision of the *purāṇas*. And *itihāsa* is twofold: *parakriyā* (if it has one main hero; the *Rāmāyaṇa* is an example of this type), and *purākalpa* (if it has many heroes; for example, the *Mahābhārata*). (*Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* p. 3) As for *ān-vīkṣikī*, it also is divided into two sub-categories: *pūrva* and *uttara*. The first one comprises *jaina*, *bauddha*, and *lokayata*; and the second – *sāṅkhya*, *nyāya*, and *vaiśeṣika*.

These are six *tarkas* (philosophical schools). Here Rājaśekhara gives a detailed description of the types of arguments appropriate for philosophical discussion.<sup>11</sup> *mīmāṃsā* is the exegesis of Vedic passages. It is divided into two groups: *vidhivivecanī* (exegesis of Vedic ritual injunctions) and *brahmanidarśanī* (looking into/investigation of Brahman). There are eighteen *smṛtis* involved in the preservation of the Vedas' meaning.

These four human *śāstras*, together with the four Vedas and six *vedāṅgas*, form fourteen *vidyāsthānas* (abodes of knowledge).<sup>12</sup> They pertain to everything existing in the three worlds – earth, sky, and heaven. Rājaśekhara admits that it would be impossible to discuss all the topics covered by *vidyāsthānas*:

---

*tayor anyañ pippalaṃ svādvatti anaśnann anyo abhicākaśīti. (Kāvya-mīmāṃsā 3.1–4)*

Meaning of this particular verse was broadly discussed by various authors. See for example Dalal, Shastri, Notes, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> According to Pollock *smṛtitantra* refers to *dharmaśāstra*-s. (Pollock 1985: 502)

<sup>11</sup> Discussion on *ān-vīkṣikī* is given later in the chapter, where it is listed as one of the four *vidyā*-s.

<sup>12</sup> This was not the only, universally accepted division of *vidyāsthāna*-s. Rājaśekhara himself presents us with the views of other scholars. To the list of fourteen *vidyāsthāna*-s, some added *vārttā* (economics), *kāmasūtra* (erotology), *śilpiśāstra* (hand craft), and *daṇḍanīti* (criminal science), thus counting eighteen *vidyāsthāna*-s.

Even one living for thousand years  
 Would not be able to reach the end of *vidyāsthānas*.  
 Therefore, the multitude of topics is presented here briefly;  
 The expanded version is abandoned for the sake of those fearing long treatises.<sup>13</sup>

After discussing this traditional division of the *vidyāsthānas*, Rājaśekhara adds a fifteenth one – *kāvya*. He claims that it is the single abode of all other *vidyāsthānas*.<sup>14</sup> He explains how *kāvya* (poetry) follows *śāstras* (theory) because it consists of prose and metrical form; because it is the *dharma* of poets; and because it provides proper instruction.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the category of *vidyāsthānas*, there is also a group of *vidyās*. There are different opinions regarding the number of *vidyās*.<sup>16</sup> Rājaśekhara, following Kauṭilya, poses four *vidyās*: *ānvīkṣikī* (philosophy), *trayī* (the Vedas), *vārttā* (economics), and *daṇḍanīti* (law). Only theories through which *dharma* and *artha* can be obtained are considered *vidyās*.<sup>17</sup> Based on that, Rājaśekhara adds *sāhityavidyā* (the theory of literature) as the fifth *vidyā*, because it is the essence (*niṣyanda*) of the traditional four.<sup>18</sup> Here ends his enumeration of the sciences.

<sup>13</sup> *vidyāsthānāṃ gantum antaṃ na śakto  
 jived varṣāṇāṃ yo 'pi sāgraṃ sahasraṃ.  
 tasmāt saṅkṣepād arthasandoha ukto  
 vyāsaḥ saṃtyakto granthabhīrupriyārtham. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 3.27–4.2)*

<sup>14</sup> *sakalavidyāsthānaikāyatanaṃ pañcadaśaṃ kāvyam vidyāsthānam. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 4.3)* Yāyavāriya says: *kāvya* is the fifteenth *vidyāsthāna* (department of knowledge), being a single abode/culmination of all other *vidyāsthāna*-s.

<sup>15</sup> *gadyapadyamayatvāt kavidharmatvāt hitopadeśakatvāc ca. taddhi śāstrānyan-  
 udhāvati. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 4.4–5)* (Because it consist of prose and metrical forms, because it is a *dharma* of poets, and because it gives a proper instruction, it follows the sciences.)

<sup>16</sup> *'daṇḍanītir evaika vidyā' ity auśanasāḥ. daṇḍabhayād dhi kṛtsno lokaḥ sveṣu  
 sveṣu karmasv avatiṣṭhate. 'vārttā daṇḍanītir dve vidye' iti bārhaspatyāḥ. vṛttir vinay-  
 agraṇaṃ ca sthithetur lokayātrāyāḥ. 'trayīvārttādaṇḍanītayas tisro vidyāḥ' iti māna-  
 vāḥ. trayī hi vārttādaṇḍanītyor upadeṣṭrī. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 4.7–11)* (According to the followers of Uśanas *daṇḍanīti* is the only science. Since, fearing a stick, all people obey their own duties. Followers of Bṛhaspati say there are two sciences: *vārttā*, and *daṇḍanīti*, because worldly existence is sustained by livelihood and obedience. For followers of Manu there are 3 sciences: *trayī*, *vārttā* and *daṇḍanīti*, since *trayī* gives instructions on *vārttā* and *daṇḍanīti*.)

<sup>17</sup> *ābhir dharmārthau yad vidyāt tad vidyānāṃ vidyatvam. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 4.15)*

<sup>18</sup> *pañcamī sāhityavidyā iti yāyavāriyah. sā hi catasṛṇām api niṣyandaḥ. (Kāvyaṃimāṃsā 4.13–14)*

The above-cited examples do not give an exhaustive list of possible divisions of the *śāstras*; Rājaśekhara himself presents us with many other viewpoints. But there is one valuable thing that we can glean from this tenth-century discussion: we can infer that already by the time of Rājaśekhara the idea of *śāstra* as a separate, specific field of human activity was commonly accepted. It also shows us that there existed a notion of some finite number of *śāstras*, and that scholars generally worked towards compiling an exhaustive classification of human practices. After discussing various propositions regarding a definite number of sciences, Rājaśekhara admits that there is no such thing.

The number of *śāstras* is not the only problem we encounter when trying to understand this phenomenon. As is evident from the above discussion, we are dealing with nomenclatural confusion. *Śāstras* in general can be divided into *pauruṣeya* (human) and *apauruṣeya* (transcendent), *laukika* (secular) and *alaukika* (regarding sacred subjects), *dṛṣṭa* (seen, secular) and *adṛṣṭa* (unseen, sacred). But where in this scheme do we fit *vidyāsthānas* (abodes of knowledge), *vidyās*, and *āgamas*?

Aklujkar states:

The most common and closest indigenous generic name for Brahmanical, Jain, and Buddhist sciences is *śāstra*, 'means of instruction', although it is not the case that all systematized bodies of knowledge are referred to as *śāstra*. Generally, a body of knowledge needs to acquire some respectability – a connotation of mature or age-old, proven wisdom in the minds of a large enough group of society members – before it begins to be referred to as *śāstra*. Sometimes words like *āgama* 'inherited information or knowledge' and *smṛti* 'memory-preserved information or knowledge' take the place of *śāstra*, with the understanding that one tradition's *āgama* or *smṛti* is not authoritative for another. (Aklujkar: 16)

And also:

The situation is made more complex, as in any vibrant tradition, by the emergence and disappearance and by the convergence and divergence of different ways of sectioning knowledge. These ways, in turn, reflect different points of view and different 'historical' needs. Thus, sometimes a segmenting may be found with *śāstra* as the presiding node and sometimes a segmenting in terms of *vidyā-sthānas* 'stations or abodes of wisdom'.

Sometimes *śāstra* is distinguished from *śilpa* 'craft, practical or technical skill' or *catuḥṣaṣṭi kalās* 'sixty-four arts (many of which are manifestations of craftsmanship),' while sometimes no such distinction is made. (Aklujkar: 8)

I have been unable thus far to solve this problem. It seems, moreover, that it was never entirely clear even within the tradition itself; oftentimes we find different terms for ‘theory’ used interchangeably. It is not certain what the relationship was between *śāstra* in the broader sense, the *vidyāsyhānas*, and the *vidyās*.<sup>19</sup>

It seems that Rājaśekhara in his *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā* uses these three broad categories to deal with the world of Sanskrit theoretical writing. The main one, encompassing the other two, is *śāstra*. It is divided into two types: *apauruṣeya* (the four Vedas, the four *upaveda*-s, and the six *vedāṅgas*), and *pauruṣeya* (the *purāṇas*, *anvikṣiki*, *mīmāṁsā*, *smṛtitantra*). He then introduces two other subdivisions, which are composed of various individual theories belonging either to transcendent or human *śāstra*. The first of them are the fourteen *vidyāsthānas*: the four Vedas, the six *aṅgas*, and the four human *śāstras*. It comprises some transcendent sciences (the Vedas and *vedāṅgas*) and all human *śāstras*.

Clearly the *vidyāsthānas* (sometimes treated as subcategories of the *vidyās*) occupy an important place within the broader field of the *śāstras*, although neither the number nor the content of this group is fully agreed upon.<sup>20</sup>

## **Sūtras and Their Commentaries**

Before we return to the case of Rājaśekhara’s *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā*, a brief review of the specific works belonging to the providence of *śāstra* will help us to better understand the terms under discussion. The earliest examples of works that are included within the field are the *vedāṅgas*, or ‘the limbs of the Vedas’ (c. 600–300 B.C.E.). They were the six ancillary sciences<sup>21</sup> created to preserve and to help understand the obsolete Vedic texts. At first, the *vedāṅgas* were descriptive in character, concerning themselves with

<sup>19</sup> *vidyā* – f. knowledge, science, learning, scholarship, philosophy (according to some there are four *vidyās* or sciences, 1. *trayī*, the triple Veda; 2. *ānvikṣiki*, logic and metaphysics; 3. *daṇḍa-nīti*, the science of government; 4. *vārttā*, practical arts, such as agriculture, commerce, medicine, & c. [...] according to others *vidyā* has fourteen divisions, viz. the four Vedas, the six *vedāṅgas*, the *purāṇas*, the *mīmāṁsā*, *nyāya*, and *dharma* or law; or with the four *upavedas*, eighteen divisions; others reckon 33 and even 64 sciences [= *kalās* or arts]. (Monier-Williams 2002: 963–964)

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Pollock 1989: 20.

<sup>21</sup> For the list of *vedāṅgas* see above.

sacred subjects. They were never meant to generate new material; since the Vedas were unchanging and eternal, the only function that *vedāṅgas* could serve was to guide the practical, ritualistic activity required by the Vedas. As Sheldon Pollock puts it: 'The *vedāṅgas*, thus, are in their very nature taxonomical, not stipulative; descriptive, not prescriptive.' (Pollock 1985: 503)

But already among the *vedāṅgas*, i.e. grammar and prosody, we can find traces of *laukika* (secular) material. Gradually, the mode of exposition became injunctive and took on a prescriptive aspect – and those two aspects led to the development of more worldly (*laukika*) *śāstras*.

Not long after the creation of the *vedāṅgas*, the so-called *trivarga* or 'triad' of human activity, namely *dharma* (social/religious laws), *artha* (polity), and *kāma* (erotology), obtained their *śāstric* or 'scientific,' treatment. The oldest *dharmaśāstra* texts come from around the third and second centuries BCE, while the production of the *artha-* and *kāmasāstra* texts followed in the next few centuries, with the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautiliya around the first or second century CE and the *Kāmasūtra* of Vatsyayana not long after.

Activity in the field of the philosophical inquiry also dates to the centuries before the common era. From around the second century BCE we have the *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtras* of Jaimini – the core text for the school of Vedic exegesis, *mīmāṃsā*. The *sūtra* text for *nyāya*, or reasoning, is available sometime around the second century CE. The texts for the rest of the traditional *darśanas*, or philosophical systems, were also created in the first centuries of the common era.

A prominent *śāstra* within the Sanskrit intellectual circle was *vyākaraṇa*, or grammar. Being traditionally one of the *vedāṅgas*, grammar held very respected position among the other sciences. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini (fifth century BCE) is the oldest known text on grammar and one of the first *sūtra* texts, which soon became the template for the genre. Houben, writing about the sciences in South Asia says:

The earliest traceable roots of sciences in South Asia [...] lie in the works of the Vedic ritualists and the Sanskrit grammarians. Especially the grammarians attained widely acclaimed success in the development of a science, and it was their system that started to play a paradigmatic role in practically all areas of the South Asian scientific and philosophic literary production. (Houben 1997: 271–305)

Looking at the earliest available examples of Sanskrit knowledge systems, Pollock offers the following summary comment:

*śāstra* was thought of generally as a verbal codification of rules, whether of divine or human provenance, for the positive and negative regulation of particular cultural practices. (Pollock 1989: 18)

One of the indispensable features necessary for a system to be included into the field of *śāstras* was the expression of its rules in some form of text, and, in the case of the *śāstras*, *sūtra* texts became paradigmatic for the tradition. The term '*sūtra*' literally means 'thread, string.' Houben, citing Renou, gives a few examples of possible interpretations of this term: 'the term stems from the terminology of weavers,' '(guiding) thread,' hence 'rule,' 'the pearls on the string.' (Houben 1997: 274) The first *sūtra* texts can be found in the *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) tradition, as mentioned above, and in *kalpa* (ritual instructions). The oldest examples are the *śrauta-sūtras* (Vedic rituals), then the *grhya-sūtras* (domestic rituals) and the *dharma-sūtras* (rules of conduct). Both *kalpa* and *vyākaraṇa* belong to the category of the *vedāṅgas*, which means that they are mainly descriptive in character. With the development of the *śāstra* field and its expansion to *laukika* (secular) topics, the style of the *sūtras* also changed from the descriptive-normative towards the prescriptive-argumentative.

The main characteristic of *sūtra* texts is their brevity and systematicity. They are collections of short aphorisms, and the term itself can refer either to such a collection or to individual aphorisms themselves. Although ideally *sūtras* are free from narrative or versified parts, in practice we find texts, like the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, containing versified passages. (Houben 1997: 275) Since the main goal of the *sūtra* texts was brevity, it was impossible to understand them without some help. And here we come to another important feature of Sanskrit theoretical writing: in addition to the *sūtras*, there is a huge body of commentarial literature, without which many *sūtras* would be entirely opaque and of no use.

With this background in mind, we can now return to the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*. Rājaśekhara, after discussing the various *śāstras*, continues in the second chapter of his work with a discussion of the literary genres appropriate for theoretical (*śāstric*) writing. He begins with the definition of *sūtra*<sup>22</sup>,

<sup>22</sup> *sūtrādibhiś caisām praṇayanam. tatra sūtraṇāt sūtram. yad āhuḥ:*

*alpākṣaram asandigdham sāravad viśvato mukham,*

*astobham anavadyañ ca sūtraṃ sūtrakṛto viduḥ. (Kāvyamīmāṃsā 5.1–3)*

(They [*śāstra*-s] are composed in *sūtras* and the-like. It is called *sūtra* because it is [composed of] aphorisms strung together. As is said: 'Composers of *sūtras* regard

and after defining the basic text, he continues with a systematic explanation of the various types of commentary:

The exposition of the entire essence of the *sūtras* is called *vr̥tti*. Discussion of the *vr̥tti* of the *sūtras* is called *paddhati*. Introducing objections and answering them is called *bhāṣya*. Internal *bhāṣya* is *samīkṣā* (a thorough investigation). It is a section on subordinate matter (monograph). Appropriate glossing of the meaning is *ṭikā*. Explanation/classification of difficult words is called *pañjikā*. Expository verses displaying meaning are *kārikā*. Consideration of *ukta* (what is said, expressed), *anukta* (what is not said), and *durukta* (what is badly said) is called *vārttika*. That is how the sciences are divided.<sup>23</sup>

He also supplies us with their generic definition, explaining the expansion of theoretical literature:

Just as the currents of rivers, thin at first and broad afterwards  
Thus the workings of sciences, which are to be honored in the world.<sup>24</sup>

We learn that the *śāstras*, originally composed as *sūtras*, in the course of time gathered all the commentaries and sub-commentaries and became more and more extensive – just like rivers, though small at their origin, become broader by the joining of additional streams.

By the end of the first millennium of the common era, most of the sciences or systems of knowledge aspiring to the name of *śāstra* each had their own *sūtra* or other core texts,<sup>25</sup> along with a huge body of corresponding commentarial literature. Every such core or foundational text was treated as authoritative, and later writings could be construed at most to be reinterpretations or clarifications of those foundational ideas. As Houben puts it:

In the course of time, all self-respecting sciences, disciplines and philosophical-religious systems in the South Asia traditions (especially as far as their Sanskrit literature is concerned), created basic *sūtra*-texts and accompanying commentaries.

---

*sūtra* to be [composed of] few syllables, unambiguous, meaningful, comprehensive, without superfluous words, faultless.' (*Kāvyamīmāṃsā* 5.1–3)

<sup>23</sup> *sūtrāṇāṃ sakalāsāravivaraṇaṃ vr̥tti. sūtravr̥ttivivecanaṃ paddhatiḥ. ākṣīpya bhāṣaṇād bhāṣyam. antarbhāṣyam samīkṣā. avāntarārthavicchedaś ca sā. yathāsambhavam arthasya ṭikanaṃ ṭikā. viśamaṇapadabhañjikā pañjikā. arthapradarśanakārikā kārikā. uktānuktaduruktacintā vārttikam iti śāstrabhedāḥ. (Kāvyamīmāṃsā 5.4–8)*

<sup>24</sup> *sāritām iva pravāhas tucchāḥ prathamam yathottaram vipulāḥ  
ye śāstradamārambhā bhavati lokasya te vandyāḥ. (Kāvyamīmāṃsā 4.25–26)*

<sup>25</sup> For example *sañkhyā*, where *kārika* text preceded a superimposed *sūtra*.

It is usually this *sūtra*-text which, at least in name, occupies a central place, while the commentaries and sub-commentaries, being more peripheral, derive their authority to a great extent from their claim to be faithful to the statements and intentions of the *sūtra*-author. (Houben 1997: 272)

## Necessity for a Theory and the Source of Its Authority

Now that the nature of *śāstra* (theory) has been discussed, it is time to ask the following questions: Why would one need *śāstras* at all? What was the relationship between theory and practice in Sanskrit culture? In answering these questions an article by Sheldon Pollock (1985) is of great help; in fact, it is a mine of information on the topic. After presenting a short history of the *śāstras*, looking into particular examples, and analyzing the traditional understanding of this phenomenon, Pollock comes to the conclusion that in Indian intellectual history, it is theory that necessarily precedes practice. As was already mentioned, *śāstra* literature had its beginnings in connection with the Vedas. In fact, the Vedas are considered to be *śāstra* par excellence. In the brahmanical tradition it is accepted that the Vedas are eternal, infinite, author-less, and hence infallible. There cannot be any fault or error in something that was not created; error can exist only on the part of a creating agent.

The first theories that acquired the name of *śāstra* can be found among the *vedāṅgas*. As discussed above, they were mainly descriptive in character, but already among them we can find the seed of new, worldly, and prescriptive *śāstras*. The best example of a *śāstra* moving from a purely descriptive to more injunctive mode is *vyākaraṇa*. This *vedāṅga*, which was meant initially to describe the sacred language of the Vedas, could not entirely escape the secular side of linguistic practice. In the first text on Sanskrit grammar, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, we can find passages that concern themselves with the language as employed in everyday practice.<sup>26</sup> Even if Pāṇini intended his work to be merely a description of language, later authors, commenting on his work, took it to be a collection of normative

<sup>26</sup> Pāṇini in his work refers to two types of languages: *chandās*, the language of the Vedas and *bhāṣā*, spoken or common Sanskrit. There is no agreement among Paninian scholars as to the exact meaning of the term *bhāṣā*, the question being whether Pāṇini in his *Aṣṭadhyāyī* was describing the spoken language of the educated elite or the language as he spoke it, his mother-tongue. For more detailed discussion on the subject see: Meenakshi 2002.

rules for linguistic practice rather than a mere description of it. The transition from descriptive to prescriptive is even more visible in the field of *dharmasāstra*. The essence of *dharmasāstra* is a discussion of the rules governing human activity. There are rules appropriate for each human class, and the main goal of *dharmasāstra* is not to simply describe them, but rather to impel people to follow them. That is why in later *sāstras* the injunctive mode of exposition is not uncommon. Following the development of the *sāstras*, we can observe their transformation from texts intended to describe reality into texts dictating a normative code. As Pollock puts it:

For here, on a scale probably unparalleled in the premodern world, we find a thorough transformation – adopting now Geertz's well-known dichotomy – of 'models of' human activity into 'models for', whereby texts that had initially shaped themselves to reality as to make it 'graspable', end by asserting the authority to shape reality to themselves. (Pollock 1985: 504)

If *sāstras*, instead of 'describing' reality started to 'prescribe' it, what did it mean in terms of their relationship to practice? With this shift in perception of the role of theory, the idea of practice also had to change. In order to be accepted as indispensable for successful human action, theory had to prove its authority. But where did this authority come from?

Here again we have to go back to the Vedas. If they are infallible (since they are not created), literature describing them (i.e. *vedāṅgas*) should also be authoritative. Since these auxiliary sciences were descriptive, and what they described were the Vedas, they themselves, by extension, were also infallible. The logic behind this argument, if one accepts the infallibility of the Vedas, is admissible. But what about the other *sāstras*, which did not necessarily concern themselves with the Vedas?

In order to acquire the status of infallibility, all the *sāstras* that could not base their authority directly on the Vedas had to prove their primordial existence. If theory was to be unerring, it could not be the creation of a human author. From the earliest times, we find this kind of account of the mythical origin of various *sāstras*. There were two main paradigms for proving the a priori status of *sāstra*:

Extant *sāstras*, consequently, come to view themselves as either the end-point of a slow process of abridgment from earlier, more complete, and divinely inspired prototypes; or as exact reproductions of the divine prototypes obtained through uncontaminated, unexpurgated descent from the original, whether through faithful intermediaries or by sudden revelation. (Pollock 1985: 512)

A generic story depicting divine origin of all human knowledge can be found in the *Mahābhārata*. It represents the first type of Pollock's division, namely 'the end-point of a slow process of abridgment from earlier, more complete, and divinely inspired prototypes.' Pollock summarizes the story thus: at the beginning of time, when there was no king to protect people, confusion befell them and their *dharma* perished. The gods, worrying about the welfare of the world, sought help with Brahmā. He then 'composed a work of one hundred thousand chapters, arising from his own mind, in which *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* were described; [...] the triple Veda, philosophy [*ānvīkṣikī*], economy, political science, and many other sciences were set forth there. Included in Brahmā's text were all matter of political practices, the *dharma*s of country, sub-caste, and family, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*; witchcraft, magic, yoga, the application of poisons, history, the *upavedas*, and logic in its entirety were described. In fact, whatever was able to be formulated in language (*vācogatam*) was all contained in it.' (Pollock 1985: 512) After enumerating the sciences created by Brahmā, we also learn about the process of their abridgment. Considering the brevity of human life, Śiva shortened this *śāstra*, then Indra, Bṛhaspati, and finally Śukra did the same (to one thousand verses). The *śāstra*, then, took refuge with the first king.

Eventually, most individual *śāstras* found their own way to present their mythological origin. The fullest and most representative example of the *śāstra* as originating from a god and coming down to humans in its abridged version is one found in the *Kāmasūtra*:

Prajāpati enunciated the 'means of achieving the three ends of life' (*trivargasādhanā*) in one hundred-thousand chapters at the beginning of time, when he created them. Svāyambhuva Manu separated out the one section dealing with *dharma*, Bṛhaspati the one dealing with *artha*, while Nandi, the servant of Śiva, formulated a *kāmasūtra* in one thousand chapters. Śvetaketu, son of Uddālaka, abridged this into five hundred chapters, Bhābravya of Pañcāla into two hundred and fifty chapters, with seven topics. Different people thereupon separately reworked the seven topics. But because these independent treatises were too specialized, and Bhābravya's encyclopedic work too vast to study, Vātsyāyana took up the task of summarizing the whole subject in a single small volume. (Pollock 1985: 513)

Similar stories can be found in many other *śāstras*,<sup>27</sup> for example, in the *dharma-śāstra*, the *artha-śāstra*,<sup>28</sup> texts on astronomy, architecture, medicine, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Very similar story can be found in Rājaśekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* – it was the first, and the only example of this sort in the field of literary theory.

<sup>28</sup> Kauṭilya, at the beginning of his *Arthaśāstra*, states: *prthivyā lābhe pālāne ca*

The second model of the origination of knowledge presents a perfect, unabridged transmission of the divine prototype, either through an uninterrupted line of teachers (*guruparampāra*) or as a direct revelation. An example of the first subtype can be found in the *Agnipurāṇa*. There, the knowledge is presented as coming from Viṣṇu through an unbroken line of teachers:

Vyāsa says, 'Hear what Vasiṣṭha told me, when I asked about the essence of *brahma*.' Vasiṣṭha says, 'Hear what Agni told me once...' Agni says, 'The Blessed One is higher and lower knowledge. Lower knowledge consists of the four Vedas, the six *vedāṅgas*, Mīmāṃsā, *dharmasāstra*, *purāṇa*, Nyāya, the sciences of medicine, music, weapons, statecraft [that is the eighteen *vidyāsthānas*]. The higher knowledge is that whereby one goes to *brahma*. I shall explain to you as it was explained to me by Viṣṇu, to the gods by Brahmā long ago' (*Agnipurāṇa* 1.1–18, after: Pollock 1985: 514)

Here we see a direct channel from the god himself, through intermediary teachers (both divine and human), to the last link – a worldly 'author' of a text. The knowledge itself does not undergo any changes or abridgment; it comes down to us in its full, perfect form.

In the second subtype of this model, a transmission of the *śāstra* from the divine to the human happens directly as a sudden revelation. There are no transitional links; the knowledge is given directly to the worldly author. A good example of this type is the *Bhāratanaṭyaśāstra*, the earliest text known to us concerning dramaturgy. In this case, it is Brahmā who reveals the art of dramaturgy to Bhārata. The text was meant to function as the fifth Veda. When Bhārata was asked by sages about the origin of the *Nāṭyaveda*, he said:

*yāvanyarthaśāstrāṇi pūrvācaryaiḥ prasthāpitāni prāyaśastāni saṃhṛtyaikam idam arthaśāstraṃ kṛtam.* (*The 'Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra'* 1969: 1.1.1) (This single (treatise on the) Science of Politics has been prepared mostly by bringing together (the teachings of) as many treatises on the Science of Politics as have been composed by *ancient teachers* (*ācaryaiḥ*) for the acquisition and protection of the earth.) (Translation after: *The 'Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra'* 1972: 1.1.1.) Based on the fact that this statement is preceded by the benedictory verse to Śukra and Brhaspati (*namaḥ śukrabṛhaspatitibhyām*), Pollock concludes that the story is of the same type as one found in *Kāmasūtra*. He understands: 'by the ancient teachers' (*ācaryaiḥ*) as referring to the two gods of political theory, evoked in the *maṅgalācaraṇa*. I am not entirely convinced that this was a case; the term *ācarya* (ancient teacher) is used throughout the text as representing the views of 'others,' usually to be refuted by the author. The same formula is used in *Kāmasūtra* and *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*.

O Brahmins, in the days of yore when the Golden Age (*Kṛtayuga*) passed with the reign of Svāyambhu [Manu], and the Silver Age (*Tretayuga*) commenced with the career of Vaivasvata Manu, and people became addicted to sensual pleasures, were under the sway of desire and greed, became affected with jealousy and anger and [thus] found their happiness mixed with sorrow, and Jambudvīpā protected by the Lokapālas (guardians of the worlds) was full of gods, Dānavas, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and great Uragas (Nāgas), the gods with the great Indra as their head, [approached] Brahmā and spoke to him, 'We want an object diversion, which must be audible as well as visible. As the [existing] of Vedas are not to be listened by those born as Śūdras, be pleased to create another Veda which will belong [equally] to all the Colour-groups (*varṇa*).'

'Let it be so,' said he in reply and then having dismissed the king of gods (Indra) he resorted to yoga and recalled to mind the four Vedas.

He then thought: 'I shall make a fifth Veda on the Nāṭya with the Semi-historical Tales (*itihāsa*), which will conduce to duty (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*) as well as fame, will contain good counsel and collection [of traditional maxims], will give guidance to people of the future as well, in all their actions, will be enriched by the teaching of all authoritative works (*śāstra*) and will give a review of all arts and crafts.'

With this resolve the Holy One from his memory of all the Vedas, shaped this Nāṭyaveda compiled from the four of them. (*The Nāṭyaśāstra* 2002: 2–4)

## Status of Śāstras

This self-representation of the *śāstras* may seem to be merely a curiosity; but in reality, it has pervasive implications, and can help us in understanding the traditional perception of knowledge systems and their place within the realm of human activity. What, after all, does it mean for a theory to present itself as having a divine origin? Based on such an assumption, any given theory can claim transcendent status for itself. Just like the Vedas, thought of as eternal, uncreated, preceding any material universe, and considered infallible; thus the *śāstras*, having divine origin, are necessarily transcendent. If all knowledge is preexistent, then the *śāstras* expressing it must be as well. A theory is never created; it is either an abridgment of an always-existing divine prototype too complex for humans, or it is a divine work itself handed faithfully down to the human world. Just as the Vedas are the preexisting blueprint for all material universe, thus the *śāstras*, theories (existing eternally in the divine realm) have to necessarily precede any human practice corresponding to them.

Such an approach to the *śāstras* has far-reaching consequences. Not only does it claim absolute priority of theory to practice, but it also assures the

indispensability of the *śāstras*. If all human activity is based on the theory that comes before it, then, it is impossible for any practice to exist without theory. As inconceivable as it may seem, that is how the status of the *śāstras* was perceived. A good example here might be from the *Kāmasūtra*, a theoretical text from the field of erotology. It will be all the more compelling, as it comes from one of the least likely fields of human activity in which one would expect to find theory. Yaśodara, commenting on Vātsyāyana's *sūtras* (and explaining the need for a theory of sexual activity), says:

[...] *Kāma* is a function of the union of man and woman, and this requires some procedure, the knowledge of which comes only from the *kāmaśāstra* [...]

The procedure must therefore be enunciated, and the purpose of the *Kāmasūtra* is to do just this and so make it known. For how does one come to know anything except by means of a given *śāstra*? Those who have never studied the *śāstra* cannot on their own attain knowledge of the various procedures enunciated in *śāstra*. This can happen only through the instruction of others. If the instruction of others were itself not admitted to be founded on *śāstra*, then the efficacy of the instrumental knowledge supplied by such people would be as fortuitous a thing as a letter etched into wood by a termite [...] As it is said: 'A man who does not know a given *śāstra* may occasionally achieve his end, but do not think too much of it; it is like a letter etched into wood by a termite.

That some who know the *kāmaśāstra* are not skilled in practice is entirely their own fault, not the fault of *śāstra*. It is not peculiar to *kāmaśāstra* but universally attested that *śāstra* is rendered useless by faulty comprehension. Note that those skilled in such *śāstras* as medicine do not invariably maintain a healthful dietary regimen. People, therefore, who pursue the precepts of *śāstra* and do so with faith and devotion achieve its purposes. (*Kāmasūtra* 1.1. [Yaśodara's commentary], after: Pollock 1985: 506–507)

It is quite obvious that Vātsyāyana foresaw the objections to his claim; after all, who would seriously think about the necessity for studying the theory of erotics before pursuing its practice? He offers the following answer: one can go straight to practice disregarding theory, but, even if one is successful, it is pure coincidence, just like when a termite accidentally curves a letter in wood.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is not only in the field of erotology where *śāstra* is indispensable; any human activity, in order to be efficient, requires a theory that precedes it.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle had a similar argument regarding the necessity of 'method' in practical reasoning.

<sup>30</sup> According to Pollock, what followed from such self-representation of *śāstras* and from the way they were understood, was an acceptance of the fact that it was

In summary, *śāstras* have their origin in connection with the Vedas, as a body of auxiliary literature meant to help understand and preserve the Vedic texts. At the beginning they were purely descriptive, dealing with the unchanging Vedas. In the course of time, *śāstras* entered into the realm of secular human practices, encompassing all human activity. It also changed its character from descriptive to prescriptive; it became a template and guide for every human activity, becoming the means of instruction. There are innumerable *śāstra* texts aiming at a theoretical explanation of even the most trivial fields of human practice. Since it emerged from some divine source, all knowledge had to be eternal and unerring, and existing prior to any human activity for which it was a blueprint. Whatever practice there is in the world, in order for it to be successful, it has to follow the *śāstras*.

As is clear from this brief presentation of the field of *śāstras*, the Sanskrit world of theoretical writing is vast, entangled, and multifaceted. It is not easily approachable, and even less easily explainable. A good example of the general admission of this difficulty is a title of Prof. Aklujkar's attempt to write about Sanskrit *śāstras*: 'Attacking an amorphous giant: An introduction to science literature and/or *śāstra* literature in Sanskrit.'

## Bibliography

List of primary sources (both in Sanskrit and in translation):

1. Apte, V. S. (reprint 2007), *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Revised and Enlarged Edition, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
2. '*Kāmasūtra*' of Vatsyayana Mallanaga; with explanatory notes by the translators, Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (2002), Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
3. '*Kāmasūtra*' of Sri Vatsyayana Muni, with the *Jayamangala Sanskrit Commentary* of Sri Yashodhara (1997), Varanasi: Krishnadar Academy.
4. '*Kāvyaṁimāṁsā*' of Rājaśekhara. Edited by Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī Khiste, Part I (Adhyayas I–V). (1983), Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan.
5. '*Kāvyaṁimāṁsā*' of Rājaśekhara. Edited by the late C. D. Dalal and Pandit R. A. Sastri, (1934), Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Oriental Institute Baroda.

---

theory that necessarily preceded practice. (Pollock 1985: 516) From Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyaṁimāṁsā* it is obvious that, at least *akāṅkārāśāstra*, literary theory, allowed its theory to be based on practice. Pollock himself refers to Rājaśekhara as a counterexample of this notion. (Pollock 1985: 516)

6. 'Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā' of Rājaśekhara. Original Text in Sanskrit and Translation with Explanatory Notes, by Sadhana Parashar. (2000), New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd.
7. Monier-Williams, M. (2002 [1899]), *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass.
8. 'Nāṭyaśāstra' of Bharatamuni, with the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* of Abhinavagupta, Vol. I–II, Edited by R. S. Nagar and K. L. Joshi. (reprint 2003), Dehli: Parimal Publications.
9. Rājaśekhara viracitā Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā. Edited with his own commentary *Madhusūdanāvivṛti* by Madhusūdanamiśra. (1934), Benares: Jai Krishna Das Gupta Vidya Vilas Press.
10. *The 'Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra'; pt. I. A critical edition with a glossary.* Edited R. P. Kangle. (1969), Bombay: University of Bombay.
11. *The 'Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra'; pt. II. An English translation with critical and explanatory notes.* Edited R. P. Kangle. (1972), Bombay: University of Bombay.
12. *The Nāṭyaśāstra: A treatise on ancient Indian dramaturgy and histrionics.* Vol. I, Translated by Manomohan Ghosh. (2002), Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office.

List of selected secondary sources:

1. Akhujkar, A. (Forthcoming), *Attacking an Amorphous Giant; An Introduction to Science Literature and/or Śāstra Literature in Sanskrit.*
2. De, S. K. (1947), 'Rājaśekhara' in: *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Research Institute*, vol. V, pp. 1–11.
3. De, S. K. (1960), *History of Sanskrit poetics.* Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
4. Ganeri, J. (2008), 'Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures' in: *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 36/5–6, pp. 551–562.
5. Halbfass, W. (1988), *India and Europe: an essay in understanding.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
6. Houben, J. E. M. (1996), 'Socio-Linguistic Attitudes Reflected in the Work of Bhartrhari and Later Grammarians' in: *Ideology and status of Sanskrit: contributions to the history of the Sanskrit language.* Edited by J. E. M. Houben. E. J. Brill, Leiden, New York, pp. 157–196.
7. Houben, J. E. M. (1997), 'Sutra and Bhasyasutra in Bhartrhari's Mahabhasya Dipika: On the theory and Practice of a Scientific and Philosophical Genre' in: *India and beyond: aspects of literature, meaning, ritual and thought; essays in honour of Frits Staal.* Edited by Dick van der Meij. New York: Kegan Paul International, pp. 271–305.
8. Meenakshi, K. K. (2002), 'Making of Pāṇini' in *Festschrift in Honor of George Cordona*, Dehli: Motilal Banarsidas.
9. Pollock, S. (1985), 'The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History' in: *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 105/3, pp. 499–519.
10. Pollock, S. (1989), 'The Idea of Śāstra in Traditional India' and 'Playing by the Rules: Śāstra and Sanskrit Literature' in: *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts.* Edited by A. Libera Dallapicola, Steiner, Stuttgart, pp. 17–26 and 301–312.

- 
11. Pollock, S. (2006), *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
  12. Venkateswaran, C. S. ([1970?]), *Rājaśekhara and his Kāvya-mīmamsā*. Madras: Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute.
  13. Vijayan, V. K. (1989), 'Rājaśekhara's Kāvya-mīmāṃsā' in: *Studies in alankāra śāstra: Dr. G. Marulasiddaiah commemoration volume*. Mysore, pp. 35–40.

Anna Iwona Wójcik\*

## **The Image of the World in the *Yijing* 易经 – an Attempt to Identify the Intellectual Context Proper to Chinese Philosophy<sup>1</sup>**

### Abstract

Before we think about reality, before we talk about it or remain silent, first we have some of the most basic images. What do philosophers brought up in the given culture have in mind when they use the term 'reality'? In this article I attempt to identify and elaborate the intellectual context proper to Chinese (especially Confucian and Daoist) philosophical culture, by presenting its most general features. How deep must we probe to find the internal network of sense that is the basis of Confucian, and Daoist images of reality? What we are looking for can be found by trying to think in a context that is broader than the merely linguistic context. This broader context is that provided by philosophical understanding of the terms: 'world,' 'individual being,' 'thing,' 'truth,' 'wisdom.'

### Key words

Confucianism, Daoism, images of world, ways of thinking of Chinese philosophy, thing, truth, world.

---

<sup>1</sup> The more elaborate version of such investigation was presented by me in the book entitled *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego* (*The Philosophical Basis of the Confucian Art. Classical Sources Pre-Han Period.*)

---

\* Department of Philosophy  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland  
Email: aiwojcik@poczta.onet.pl

'Is it possible to be a Confucian without being East Asian, as so many philosophers have been Platonists without being Greek?' Robert C. Neville asks provocatively in his book, *Boston Confucianism. Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World*. The problem of the extent to which Confucianism is connected with a given nation and of how strongly it is rooted in East Asian culture can be reformulated as follows: Someone who was not born in the Far East and did not grow up there can certainly read about Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, but he will never understand what he has read sufficiently to be able to philosophize like a real Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist.

Neville notes that western philosophy is not tied to a particular nation or culture:

Very few American philosophers have a Greek ethnic heritage, and few have a working knowledge of the classical Greek language. Yet nearly every American philosopher identifies herself or himself as a Platonist or an Aristotelian. And every American philosopher without exception who holds a Ph.D. in the field can discuss ideas attributed to Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle are world philosophers to Westerners who are not Greek; they are also world philosophers in the curricula of the most contemporary philosophical academies in East Asia and India. Now the Chinese philosophies should also be world philosophies in all philosophic academies [...]. (Neville 2000: xxii)

The following two questions arise: Can Chinese philosophy become universal, one among many modern areas of university research, taught with profit in all academic institutions? And what is necessary for philosophers who see themselves as representatives of western culture be able to use effectively in their own research concepts, ideas, and modes of reasoning found in Chinese philosophy?

However, before turning to these questions perhaps we should first consider the following question, which Neville does not formulate explicitly: What is the basis of the universality of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks? The answer is relatively simple. It is the universality of the rules of thinking marked out by logical correctness, in which references to a particular cultural context and to a particular nation are – or at least should be – practically insignificant. The reasoning of the ancient Greeks was based on the rules of logic, which were not and could not be defined or determined either by the language (classical Greek) or by the concrete experience of one thinker. Anyone can understand the law of the excluded middle and use it correctly independently of the language he uses and of

the tradition which shaped him. We may ask whether in Chinese philosophy there is also such a basis of reasoning that is universally available to any thinking person.

At first glance it might appear that there is not. Confucianism, as well as Taoism and Buddhism, places less emphasis on logic and more on immediate local experience in shaping human convictions. This in turn is clearly connected with a given concrete culture and with how our surroundings have taught us to behave in the world of our daily affairs and hence it does not seem to have universal scope and character.

However, if we consider Chinese thought from a broader and more general perspective, a universal context does indeed come to light. If we examine the reasoning schemes used by Chinese thinkers and if we look at the most general contexts within which, even according to them, their views must be considered, a consistent and entirely understandable system of concepts emerges. It is a system that is diametrically opposed to the Platonic or Aristotelian schemes, but it is equally clear and understandable. A systematic attempt first of all to understand the semantic context proper to Chinese philosophy and next to consider concrete philosophical conceptions will prevent us from being overwhelmed by the initially mysterious character of the basic claims of Chinese philosophy. Such a possible mistaken first impression is due not to the fact that they are irrational and purposely illogical, or that the philosophers themselves are interested only in unreflectively experiencing the world, but rather to the fact that when we study Confucian or Taoist texts, we continue to be guided by the semantic context of western philosophy, which refers to a different basic interpretational model.

We should therefore begin our attempt to understand the philosophical foundations of Chinese culture by trying to adopt a perspective that will allow us to evaluate rationally the difference between the two basic contexts. This will enable us during the present inquiry to suspend the unreflectively adopted context in situations in which logic itself tells us that it should not be assumed. This is precisely what I attempt to do in this work: to identify and elaborate the intellectual context proper to Chinese philosophy, presenting its most general features and content.

How deep must we probe to find the internal network of sense that is the basis of Confucian culture, Taoist thought, and Buddhist meditation practices? The response to the question of how deep we must probe to understand philosophical conceptions different from our own and the modes of reasoning connected with them is that we have to begin with the

category of 'world.' Logic, or more precisely inquiry which preserves the rigors of thinking imposed by it, is the most basic instrument for knowing and understanding not only a different culture, but also what is implicitly assumed by people in one's own culture, which has a definite sense for them and allows them to live in their world effectively and correctly. From among a number of possible alternative logical systems one always chooses the system that manages best within a set of tacitly accepted convictions which are assigned by the culture and which establish the meaning of the term 'world.' The answer to this question, accepted by the representatives of a given culture – very often unreflectively, as something obvious – determines the content of the most general interpretational model, which later serves as a point of reference, as the proper context in which particular conceptions and concepts are understood – conceptions like 'reality,' 'expression' and 'silence.'

In other words, the strategy for seeking sense is always the following. If people accept that the world is as it is (the intellectual context marked out by the semantic and pragmatic content of the term 'world'), then we must ask what, logically speaking, must be regarded as important and sensible, and deserves to be taken into consideration. The process of deciphering different cultures is basically nothing other than the science of reasoning within an interpretational model distinct from one's own.

The most important methodological postulate that I also assume can be called the 'contrast and complement scheme.' According to what has been said above, it is necessary to attempt to purify our considerations from unconsciously accepted references to our own culture. We must therefore make an effort to bring such assumptions to light. That is why in my investigations of what Chinese philosophers have in mind when they speak about the 'universe' I will use the view of the world which, on the one hand, is most different from the one that I am seeking, and on the other hand is commonly (though often not fully consciously) presupposed by the authors of western culture. To this end I will make use of the vision of the world that we have in Christianity. I do this not because I believe that western culture is reducible to Christian ideas; it is obviously completely unjustifiable to neglect the ancient Greeks in this context. But I do think that for explanatory purposes it is best to contrast the contents of Chinese culture with the Christian view of the world, one of whose very important elements is the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, made available through the theology of St. Thomas and St. Augustine. I also choose it because, apart from the universality with which it is accepted by western thinkers,

this view of reality is also one that very radically differs from what is presupposed in the intellectual context proper to China.

The basis of the original images that were used to understand the world in many great civilizations may be found in the so-called books of wisdom. Christian culture has Holy Scripture, the books of the Old and New Testaments, Islam has the Koran, and Hinduism possesses the Vedas. The Chinese believed that wise men of the past left the most basic indications for understanding the world in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经). This was certainly the conviction held by the great authors of the first Chinese systems and philosophical schools. Confucius himself wrote in one of his dialogues: 'If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults.' (*Lunyu*: 7,16)

The *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) is included among the so-called classical books, denoted by the sign *jing* 经. In Chinese culture there is a tradition of singling out certain texts due to their special importance in creating the very intellectual foundations of the civilization. They contain the knowledge and wisdom of ancient thinkers, and their purpose is to be transmitted to their successors and to constitute an important point of reference for them, an inspiration in their own inquiries. Thanks to this, the ancient culture was able without interruption to influence the activity of people of subsequent historical periods as a continuously perpetuated vision of reality.

The first issue to be considered has to do with the origin of the books of wisdom of the respective cultures. Who wrote Holy Scripture and what does it contain? Who is the author of the *Book of Changes*? The differences that we encounter here turn out to be significant and fundamental.

According to Christian tradition, the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were written by persons who in this respect acted under divine inspiration, that is, they were 'chosen by God' to transmit His wisdom to others. The revealed books do not have their source in this world and the persons who wrote them did not have to be wise themselves. What inspired them and transformed their personal fate were not their own efforts to achieve maturity as regards wisdom, but a 'divine plan.' What is striking in this image is that the emphasis is placed upon transcendence. Both the origin and the character of the knowledge that Sacred Scripture transmits is not of this world.

The *Book of Changes*, on the other hand, has a form that can be described as immanent humanism, in the original Latin sense of the term.

Both the origin and the character of the knowledge that its presents grow out of this world, out of human life in the world, out of man's remaining where he is. According to a Chinese tradition contained in the commentaries found in the collection called the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼), the authors of the *Book of Changes* were the wise men or sages (*sheng ren* 圣人) of early antiquity. The classical form of the sign for wisdom is the ideogram *sheng*, which ancient form consists of graphs that symbolize an ear, a mouth, and a person standing between heaven and earth. The etymology of the sign directs us to the image of a sage as a person who listens to the world and understands what takes place in the heavens and on the earth, and who speaks, that is, teaches others.

Chinese myths speak of times when communication between heaven, earth, and man took place without any difficulty. People were generally able to 'listen and understand,' because wisdom is seen here as an ordinary, natural human ability, as something that people were able to do more or less effectively. Those who regularly practiced this ability were more effective than those who did not. With time the number of those who neglected this practice grew and thus wisdom came to be a rare virtue among men. Yet it continued to belong to them naturally. That is why at a certain mythical moment the wise men of antiquity decided to help others to 'listen and understand.' And this is how the *Book of Changes* came to be. It was written by the inhabitants of the world with a view to helping its other inhabitants once again practice the natural human ability to stand amidst the world and 'listen and understand.'

The next issue will be the problem of origin of the world. In the Revealed Books of Christianity, as they have been interpreted philosophically by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the world as a whole, that is, all that exists, was created by God (*creatio*), by His unconditioned Will – something that St. Augustine underlines – and because God is Goodness, Truth, and Life. God exists from Himself eternally, that is, in an atemporal reality, and by virtue of His creative power the world is dependent in its temporal existence on the Creator (*creatio continua*). The world is ineluctably not divine, but it comes from God, who created it from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). God's perfection transcends (*transcendere*) the world, which is full of defects and imperfections. As can be seen, in their philosophical reflections the Fathers of the Church focused especially upon the question of the source of the existence of the world. The answer to this question becomes the foundation of their knowledge about reality and the source of further logical consequences, which, however, do not go beyond the content of Revelation.

What do Chinese philosophers understand by the 'world'? An illustrious historian of Chinese philosophical thought, Fung Yu-lan answers this question as follows:

What the philosophers call the universe is *the totality of all that is*. It is equivalent to what the ancient Chinese philosopher, Hui Shih, called 'The Great One', which is defined as 'that which has nothing beyond'. So everyone and everything must be considered part of the universe. (Fung 1976: 2)

Let us consider the basic logical consequences of these definitions. We have here two important characteristic features of the category of 'world.'

First of all, the world is all that there is. However, the emphasis here is placed not upon the world's existence itself, on its source or its perfection, but on the fact that regardless of how it exists – whether of itself or due to some other cause, whether in a perfect manner or full of imperfection – the world and the things in it constitute a *whole*.

In Chinese mythology there are no original Chinese myths about the creation of the world. Mieczysław J. Künstler – one of the most important Polish experts on the topic – notes that

basically all that we can do is to say that there are myths that refer to the earliest times and we can try to find a precise connection between these myths and human memory that reaches back to the Neolithic period. In these myths [...] two cycles of stories can be distinguished: those which taught people how to live in the world and those that saved the world from catastrophe. [...] What is missing in these myths? Above all there is no story about the origin of man and no legend about the origin of families or peoples. There are also no myths containing reminiscences of migrations and no cosmogonic myths. The only cosmogonic myth, which we know about from a certain short textual fragment, is the myth about Pang, who was born inside a great egg, grew within it, until he broke it in a way that caused its heavier parts began to fall downwards and its lighter parts began to float upwards, thus originating the heavens and the earth. The antiquity of this myth, however, is very dubious. (Künstler 1994: 10)

And here Professor Künstler ends his exposition with the following conclusion:

the absence of myths about the origin of man is difficult to explain. One can only make the general claim that issues concerning the origin of man and the Cosmos did not interest people in those times. This is very interesting and worth bearing in mind. (Künstler 1994:10)

Many Western scholars have called attention to this fact and underlined its peculiarity. At the beginnings of Chinese civilization we find images of wise men of the past. Their activity in the mythical period gave the world its structure. In a text from the third century, when the first reference to Pang appeared, we read:

The heavens and the earth were in a state of chaos, similar to the chicken egg from which Pang was born. After eighteen thousand years the heavens and the earth separated from one another. The heavens became bright and clear, the earth became dark and obscure. Pang was in the middle and was transformed nine times a day. He became a spirit in the heavens and a holy sage on the earth. (Künstler 2001: 57)

What is also striking in this legend is the fact that not only the 'coming to be' of the heavens and the earth is connected with the activity of the sage Pang, but also his earlier overcoming of the primitive darkness of the chaos. Wanting to escape the egg of the primitive chaos, he struck the darkness with his axe, the egg cracked and there appeared light, and the heavens and the earth separated from one another even more. The myth itself is late, but it agrees with the image found in the *Book of Changes* and in commentaries to it.

Since the *Book of Changes* places emphasis on the world as a whole beyond which there is nothing (see point 4), then from a logical point of view the sources of light can be either in it or outside of it. Both of these possibilities appear in various contexts of Chinese philosophy. In the first case we have a vision of the world which, as a cosmic egg, matures and 'grows' by itself, and in this way achieves its present form. In the second case there is nothing beyond the world as the entirety of that which is, but this 'nothing' is understood as a completion of that which is. Something and nothing, being and nonbeing constitute a pair of contraries, that is, they continually accompany one another and one continually constitutes the source of being for the other. Since they are treated as a pair of contraries, the relation between them is always mutual. In both cases there is no reference to anything transcendent, as in the Christian image of the world, where the sources of the light are in the eternal presence of God, who transcends the existence of the world.

The mythical image of the 'separation of heaven and earth' in the *Book of Changes* has the philosophical form of naming (*wei* 谓). In the *Great Commentary* the symbol *wei* 谓 appears in all fragments that refer to cosmogonic issues. The appearance of distinctions, both the most primitive,

such as that between brightness and obscurity, as well those that are more important for defining a civilization and its cultural circle, is expressed by the following formula: 'the wise men discovered and named.' Nobody is interested in the source of the existence of these things; instead, everyone is interested in the 'naming.' It is as if precisely this moment determined the *form* (*xing* 形) of every concrete, individual entity. Anything that has come to be through a continuous process of change manifests itself as what it is for the first time, that is, is distinguished by its form from the undifferentiated whole of the world, once a sage calls (*wei* 谓) it by name (*ming* 名).

It is clear that formally, i.e. as regards structure, what in the Christian image of the world is seen as the creation of the world as a whole and of its particular elements by God is seen here as naming, which differentiates the undifferentiated whole of the world and distinguishes what is named from that whole. Therefore, it is seen primarily as a civilizational process. In the Christian image we find an ontological view of the creation of things which only later, once they already exist, are named by Adam. In Sacred Scripture there is an image of God who in Paradise presents the various creatures to Adam, the first human being created by him, and has him give each of them its own name.

In the *Book of Changes*, however, instead of an ontological vision we find a semiotic model, and in particular a pragmatic one, because it refers not to creation and existence, but to names and naming (*ming* 名, *wei* 谓), and hence it refers to a socially defined convention for distinguishing certain things, events, and situations whose useful function in culture, tradition, and language is deemed worthy of being repeated and fixed. The ontological relation of creating the world and all of its elements' corresponds to the pragmatic relation between a sign and its user. The creation of the elements of the world, in turn, corresponds to the vision of establishing stable cultural models that can be used by people in their everyday lives, cultural models created by people (sages) for people – models which in this way become part of the uniform whole of the world, which thus differentiates itself, and this whole is what is referred to by the term 'largest.'

The whole that is the world is the largest (*zhi da* 至大) logically possible whole, that is, something beyond which there cannot be anything else (*wu wai* 无外). This is how it is defined in the writings of the ancient logical school. According to Feng Youlan, a very good expression of what is meant by 'largest' and 'smallest' may be found in the logical writings of Hui Shi 惠施 (approx. 370–310 B.C.), one of the founders of the an-

cient School of Names (*Mingjia* 名家). The Taoist Zhuangzi 庄子 (approx. 369–286 B.C.) cites him when he writes that, considering the essence of things, Hui Shi 惠施 said:

The largest magnitude beyond which there is nothing I call the great one. The smallest magnitude inside of which nothing is to be found I call the small one. (*Zhida wuwei, wei zhi dayi. Zhixiao wuwei, wei zhi xiaoyi.* 至大无外, 谓之大一; 至小无内, 谓之小一.) (Czuang Tsu 1953: 340)

Let us note that we find here another important difference between the Chinese and the Christian image of the world. In Christianity not only is the term ‘greatest’ not used with reference to the universe, but as ‘created’ it is defined in reference to what is beyond it – to the existence of God, who transcends everything. At the beginning of Chinese culture, however, we find an image of the universe as the ‘largest unit,’ as ‘heaven, earth, and ten thousand things’ (*tian di wan wu* 天地万物), that is everything. The existence of everything supplements the nonexistence of nothing outside of this greatest whole.

However, let us return once again to the naming that is the source of diversity within the world as this greatest whole. In order to reconstruct the understanding of the contents of the *Book of Changes*, which is so important for Chinese civilization, let us turn to the classical Confucian commentaries called the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼), since it is important to determine the intellectual context that characterizes precisely this cultural circle. Of course, we could examine the contents of this classical book from a more general perspective and try to find in it a merely formal scheme of reasoning carried out in a completely different conceptual system. However, we are particularly interested in the concrete interpretation that will give us the fundamental model underlying the reasoning that guided the activities of the *wenren* (文人), that is, the circle of educated persons in China from antiquity through modern times.

From this perspective we see that the first distinctions were made by sages, who were also the authors of the *Book of Changes* itself. They distinguished heaven and earth as what is above and below and defined them, respectively, as *Qian* and *Kun* (天尊地卑, 乾坤定矣. 1/1.1) *Qian* 乾 and *Kun* 坤 became the names of the first two of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) of the *Book of Changes*. Etymologically, the sign 乾 refers to the image of morning fog hovering close to the earth and beginning to lift. In a moment, a new day will begin, the sun will rise, and its rays will embrace everything with their benevolent influence. The sign 坤, in turn, is an im-

age of the earth, which receives a grain. Everything springs from the earth bathed by the heat of the sun.

In the *Great Commentary* these images there have been supplemented by additional images that expand the field of associations called to mind by this basic pair of names in the *Book of Changes*, heaven (*Qian* 乾) and earth (*Kun* 坤). During all the centuries in which a culture of educated people (*wenren* 文人) existed in China, these associations were not only known by everyone, but were considered to be obvious. Let us, therefore, examine some of them. The ancient authors of the commentaries presented *Qian* 乾 as the way to fullness proper to what is masculine, and *Kun* 坤 as the way along which maturity is achieved by what is feminine (乾道成男, 坤道成女 1/I.4).

The first was associated with the knowledge of great beginnings and with ease in directing one's own activities insofar as that knowledge permitted; the second was associated with the attainment of fullness by things and matters which were once begun and with the simplicity by which such fullness is attained (乾知大始, 坤作成物 1/I.5 乾以易知, 坤以簡能 1/I.6). The sages associated the former with symbolic images (*xiang* 象) and the latter with forms (*xing* 形). Let us consider this distinction in more detail.

The sages gave the name 'image' (*xiang* 象) to whatever appears as a visible sign (of something which should be connected with it by virtue of convention and the tradition that reinforces the convention). They gave the name 'instrument' (*qi* 器), that is, something that has a fixed used (*yong* 用), to whatever already has a given form (*xing* 形). They gave the name 'rule' (*fa* 法) to the activity itself of fixing a definite use (見乃謂之象; 形乃謂之器; 制而用之, 謂之法 1/XI.4).

In order to make it easier for readers to understand the vision of the unity of heaven and earth, the authors of the commentaries to the *Book of Changes* used the following image: 'They called the closing of a door *Qian* and its opening *Kun*. Opening and closing once they called change. Opening and closing back and forth forever they called passing.' (闔戶謂之坤; 闢戶謂之乾; 一闔一闢謂之變; 往來不窮謂之通. 1/XI.4) One member of the pair can be understood only in reference to the other. We are dealing here with an ancient image that was intended to make it easier to understand the concept of contraries or pairs of contraries (*liangyi* 兩儀) found in the subsequent passage of the text:

Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] contains the Great Beginning/End (*taiji* 太極), which gives birth to the Pair of Contraries (*liangyi* 兩儀), which in turn gives birth

to the Four Images (*sixiang* 四象), and they give birth to the Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). The Eight Trigrams help define what is useful and what is not useful (*jixiong* 吉凶), and this gives birth to the great field of activity (1./XI.5–6).

The ancient Chinese diagram that presents the contraries is the figure of a continuous and an interrupted line ---/ - -. These will later receive the names of *yang* 阳 and *yin* 阴, respectively. At this point in our investigation of the basic senses connected with the category of 'world' by the creators of Chinese civilization we encounter the following important feature. The 'world,' that is, the whole beyond which there is nothing, is differentiated. Through the activity of naming, various parts are distinguished in it. It turns out that everything that is a part of the world in this way has a complement somewhere. Nothing is without a pair. This may be found in the fragment already cited by us above: 'Therefore [the *Book of Changes*] contains the Great Beginning/End (*taiji* 太极), which gives birth to the Pair of Contraries (*liangyi* 两仪).'

The beginning and end of every distinction in the *Book of Changes* is a definition of something precisely as such, having a definite name and hence its own form, that is, a culturally established used. However, the attempt to understand the meaning of such a name will never have the character of a search for an essence or *eidōs*. Why? Because the authors of the *Book of Changes* assumed that names appear in pairs, which have a complementary character rather than exclusive one.

Let us consider this a bit more closely, since a correct interpretation of the intention behind this will allow us to understand correctly the context within which the statements of Chinese thinkers take on sense. In trying to understand the meaning of words expressed in the context of the image of the world assumed in Christianity, we unreflectively assume that names appear in pairs of contradictory concepts, and hence that they have an exclusive character (following the thought of Parmenides and the Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation of Revelation formulated by St. Augustine and St. Thomas). An example of such an important term is the category of 'being.' What does this term mean? It means 'everything that exists.' We do not need to refer to the concept of 'nonbeing' to understand what 'being' means. And what about 'nonbeing'? It means 'everything that does not exist.' And again, here too we understand its meaning without reference to the other member of the pair. This is because the pair of categories 'being' and 'nonbeing' is a pair of contradictories, not contraries. Their meanings exclude rather than complement one another. Something

either exists or it does not exist. According to the principle of the excluded middle we cannot say of anything that it both exists and does not exist without falling into contradiction. Either one or the other is true.

However, in the case of the *yin/yang* pair the situation is completely different. If we try to establish what the term 'continuous line' means without referring to the other member of the pair, the term 'discontinuous line,' we will see that it is impossible to understand the meaning of 'continuity' without reference to 'discontinuity.' Another example taken from the *Book of Changes* is 'opening/closing' a door. One can open only what earlier was closed, just as it is not possible to close what was not earlier opened. Closing constantly passes into opening, and opening into closing. Their meanings complement one another. It is not possible to understand the meaning of only one member of the pair, as was the case with the terms 'being' and 'nonbeing.' Either we understand both members, opening and closing, or we cannot understand either of them, for they constitute a pair of contraries. That is, according to the laws of logic their senses complement, but do not exclude, one another. We can see this in the numerous examples of pairs of contraries found in the *Book of Changes*: continuous/discontinuous, heaven/earth, light/dark, masculine/feminine, movement/rest, influence/reception of influence (activity/passivity), what is above/what is below, day/night, etc.

Moreover, when the *Book of Changes* refers to the motion of contraries, when one member of a pair constantly passes into and replaces the other (closing a door passes into opening it, and vice versa) we give priority to the concrete semantic contexts of the relation rather than of the things. Let us consider the following interesting situation. Etymologically, the *yang* 阳 symbol refers to a situation in which the sun shines on one slope of a mountain, while the *yin* 阴 symbol refers to the complementary situation, in which the other slope is at the same time in darkness. However, in its apparent journey through the firmament, after a certain time the sun illuminates the slope that was earlier in darkness and at the same time the slope that was earlier illuminated begins to be enveloped in darkness. 'illuminated slope,' but rather two relations: 'darkening' and 'illumination.'

These relations constitute a certain bipolar whole, in which each pole can be properly understood only when the meaning that complements it is known. Between these poles there exists a constant, unavoidable tension, which causes the motion of change-passing (*bian* 变) of one member of the pair of contraries into the other. However, let us note that in this case, logically speaking, the issue of whether my knowledge is one-sided

or whether it embraces the whole truth (by taking a stance in the middle and always having in view both complementary concepts) is much more important than the issue of truth or falsity. In the image of the world presupposed in the *Book of Changes*, the issue of truth and falsity is not treated as an important relation at all. Why?

In order to be able to doubt whether what we know or have in mind corresponds to reality (the classical Aristotelian definition of truth is *adequatio rei et intellectus*, correspondence between a thing and our representation of it in the mind) we must assume that things existed first (created by God) and that later man, standing before them, began to name them (as Adam did for the first time in paradise). And thus we must assume the existence of a reality prior to language, prior to concepts, that exists before we think about it.

In the case of the *Book of Changes* its authors were of course aware of the fact that something like this is logically admissible and later philosophers will study this possibility. However, assuming the 'existence' of such a reality, they understood that it could not consist of things, relations, or anything definite, because each such term refers to a linguistic reality. Therefore, it cannot indicate anything beyond linguistic reality. Such a conviction was very strongly emphasized by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thinkers. All of them philosophized in the 'intellectual context' marked out by the semiotic, not the ontological, character of reality. As we have already said, in the *Book of Changes* the existence of something precisely as such, named and distinguished in a definite way (*wei* 謂) is considered not in the context of the creation of things by God, but only in reference to a culturally valid and stable way of distinguishing between the definite and the indefinite that has its source in the history of a culture (and hence also of a language). Thus, the problem of the true representation to oneself in the mind of something that exists before the creators of a civilization become aware of it would necessarily be an attempt to think about something indefinite. Logically there cannot be any object of consciousness, and in particular there can be no problem of the adequacy (truth) of an image of something in the mind, because what is indefinite simply cannot be understood as 'something.'

Therefore, the problem of *adequatio rei et intellectus* cannot be philosophically fundamental, but can only be of practical importance for the circumstances of everyday life: 'Am I correct in thinking that the soup standing on the table is my favorite tomato soup?' All definitions have the conventional character of 'naming,' that is, of distinguishing a given form as precisely such and what is important, or more properly, what is most

important is the accompanying issue of the greater of lesser utility of such a distinction for human life.

This also includes the logical conclusion of defining the world as that 'beyond which there is nothing,' that is, defining it as the 'greatest whole.' All Chinese thinkers philosophize with the awareness that it is somewhat paradoxical to try to go outside the world of human cognitive activity. Hence those who are attracted by such a possibility, such as Taoists and Buddhists, create a philosophy of paradoxes, while others, such as Confucians, believe that knowing the world from the point of view of a participant in the world is the best solution to epistemological problems.

The next important issue is the problem of change and stability. In the *Book of Changes* it is assumed that the only thing that does not change is the constant changeability of everything that is part of the whole of the world. The world consists of contraries which constantly pass into one another: the illuminated into the obscure, life into death, acting (heaven, *qian* 乾) into being acted upon (earth, *kun* 坤), etc. This is one aspect of what change is. It is the ceaseless movement of contraries within a bipolar whole constituted by each pair of contraries.

In the *Book of Changes* we encounter still another important aspect of the changeability of the world as a whole and of each of its concrete parts. This intellectual context refers us to the concept of 'change' rendered by the sign *yi* 易 that appears in the title of the book.

When 'closing' passes into 'opening' we have a specific kind of change (*bian* 变), namely the passing (*tong* 通) of one member of a pair of contraries into the other. However, it is also possible to have a change in which something undergoes a process of maturation in which there is first an initial form (a seed in the case of a plant – for example, an acorn), then a young form (a seedling), next an adult form (a plant that produces fruit and seeds), and finally a fully mature form (an old, majestic oak). Such a change is signified by the term *yi* 易 and here our attention is directed not to the bipolar whole, but to the cycle of changes that characterize life in all of its manifestations. When we look at something living (*qi* 气) we are aware of the maturation and of the possibility of identifying the developmental phases of a given cycle. The majority of living beings in the world are not born fully formed. On the contrary, they need a more or less lengthy period of time in order to develop the possibilities that potentially inhere in the seed. Time, measured by the passage of the organism through subsequent phases of development, is required to bring to completion what was initiated at the moment of fertilization. Not only

time, but also luck is required, because in this process of attaining fullness maturity is merely possible, not necessary.

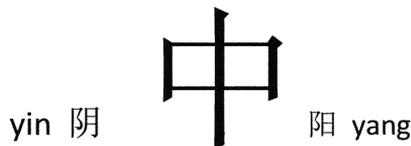
It is interesting that precisely this process of attaining fullness, characteristic of living beings, became the archetypical image used in Chinese civilization to understand every particular part of the whole of the world. Thus, the intellectual curiosity of its thinkers will always be focused on seeking answers to questions about these two kinds of change, *tong* 通 and *yi* 易.

The above scheme can obviously be used to try to understand those things which in Chinese culture are take to be living beings (*qi* 气), such as concrete plants (an oak) or animals (a lizard). Yet it can also be applied to other realities, such as the elements (wind, rain), political entities (a principality), virtues (prudence, courage), or finally man himself. In all of these cases Chinese thinkers will seek answers to the same two questions:

1. What sense complements the sense of what I am studying? (a *tong* 通 type of change)
2. What is the developmental cycle that is characteristic of what I am studying? This is a question not only about the characteristic developmental phases, but also about the source of the process of change (where it is rooted) and its characteristic fullness, maturity, or perfection. (*yi* 易 type of change)

If we were to try to present these two questions in the form of a diagram, they could take on the following form. The first part of diagram presents a bipolar (-, --) whole consisting of a pair of opposites, and the motion of change is indicated by a vector. The second part of diagram presents a bipolar whole, together with a graphic symbol that depicts the source of the process of change and the fullness toward which the process leads.

perfection, fullnes



Let us note how different the above is from the western way of seeking the identity of something. Since the times of the ancient Greeks, since the philosophy of Plato, everyone (and Christianity has not changed anything in this respect) when we ask about the identity of anything we are always asking about the essence or *eidos* of some individual thing. In asking what something is we seek something that is unchangeable, eternal, one. We seek an eidetic definition. Chinese thinkers are interested in change itself. That is why they ask about the cycle of change. What is of interest to us in this same cognitive context is the stable substrate of change – what is unchangeable in change – because this is what is most important to us. Chinese thinkers are interested in the uninterrupted persistence of constantly changing individual beings.

Yet there is one more feature of thinking about changeability that is characteristic of the authors of the *Book of Changes*. Etymologically, the sign *yi* 易 signifies a lizard, and not just any lizard, but a chameleon, which adapts the color of its skin to that of its immediate surroundings. How does this metaphor apply to the image of the world presented in the *Book of Changes*? The pair of opposites concepts ‘above’ and ‘below’ (*shang/xia* 上/下) are used to introduce a vision of cosmic hierarchy, in which subsequent levels are defined with respect to one another in the following manner. Each part of the whole of the world occupies a definite place in the hierarchy of cosmic levels. As definite, that is, as named and distinguished from the whole, it is on the one hand a part of the level above it and on the other hand it is itself a whole that consists of parts on the level below it. Furthermore, this is the case on every level. In order to be oneself it is necessary, like a chameleon, to have knowledge about one’s immediate surroundings. One must be able to answer the following question: What is the whole of which I am a part (*shang* 上 ‘above’) and what parts do I, as a whole, consist of (*xia* 下 ‘below’)?

Let us try to illustrate this by means of an example. We will use a contemporary example taken from western science, because it is intended to be illustrative to someone other than the reader assumed by the ancient authors of the *Book of Changes*. In contemporary western science, when we describe the human body, for example, we make use of a hierarchic system. The following functional levels can be distinguished in any human body. The cells of the body occupy a concrete place on the level of the tissues (‘above’). Their construction (‘below’) and functions are specified depending on the tissue that they are parts of. Thus, for example, the cells that constitute muscle tissue differ in structure, development, and

in the way in which they mature and attain fullness from the cells that constitute nerve tissue. If concrete cells, which themselves are wholes of a higher order in relation to the organelles out of which they are made, 'know their place' in the hierarchy of the organism and realize their development, that is, if they mature in accord with their immediate surroundings, adapting to them through harmonious and mutually interconnected changes, the result is the healthy development of the whole organism. If, however, as happens in the case of cells whose course of development is cancerous, growth takes place without reference to their environment, as if they 'did not know their place in the hierarchy,' then the result of such development in detachment from the immediate surroundings is the illness of the whole organism.

All of the formal features of such a hierarchical structure may be found in the image of the world contained in the *Book of Changes*. The hierarchical character of reality is seen here as a network of systems of mutual connections, in which concrete parts combine into structures of a higher order and are in turn also described as wholes that consist of structures of a lower order. Two general part-whole relations will be important and within a particular whole it will be a relation between a given part and other parts. These two relations are local in the literal sense of the term. The pair of concepts 'above' and 'below' is precisely what constitutes the locality of these mutual relations.

Let us note that the image that emerges in our first attempts to develop the most basic description of anything is not that of a hierarchy in the form of a pyramid or a ladder of beings. The authors of the *Book of Changes* do not focus only on identifying subsequent levels of perfection, as happens in the Christian image, but they specify a general dependence: whatever we distinguish as something and as definite becomes itself once we properly identify the appropriate 'above' and 'below' (in the later terminology of the philosophical schools this will be specified by the pair of concepts *shang/xia* 上/下) occupied by it in the reality of the cosmic whole.

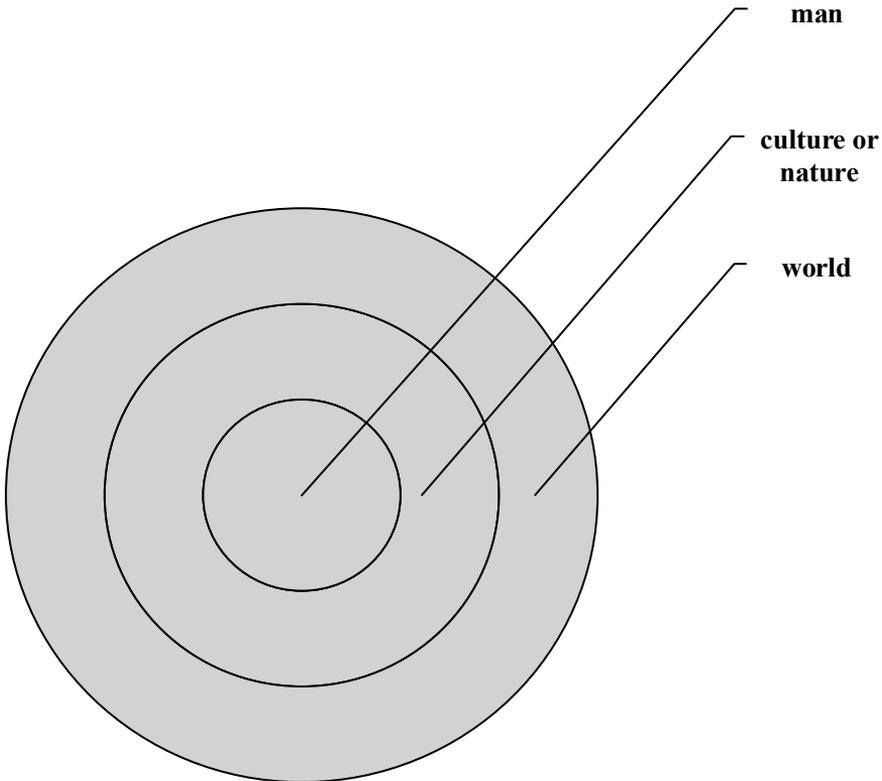
In the thought of Chinese philosophers the following two questions are the formal counterpart of the most important question of western philosophy, namely, the question about the essence of what I wish to know:

1. Is what I wish to know a part of some whole?
2. What are its parts when it is taken as a whole?

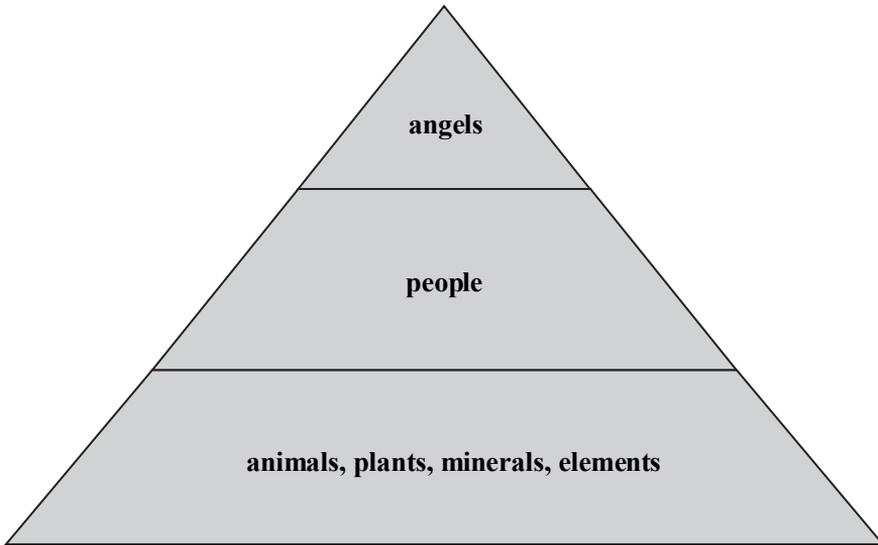
The answer to these two questions constitutes and directs the activity that determines the reality of the local network of connections, the reality

of the system of systems, the reality of the 'dwelt-in dweller,' as the poet Wisława Szymborska once very suggestively described this kind of hierarchy in one of her poems.

The following diagrams illustrate these dependencies. The first illustrates the Chinese image; it is a diagram representing the parts and the whole. It is a system of concentric circles, in which the smallest circle corresponds to the level of a concrete particular element of a given whole, and subsequent circles represent the relation of parts that are contained by the immediately higher wholes of which the lower circle is a part.



The second diagram illustrates the Christian image. It presents a hierarchy in the form of a 'pyramid of beings,' a pyramid of perfection in being:



I hope that this brief description of the proper domain for Chinese philosophy allow us more easily interpret classical Chinese books in search of the particular vision of reality, and the form of expression.

### Bibliography

1. Czuang Tzu (1953), *Prawdziwa księga Południowego Kwiatu* [*True Classic of Southern Florescence*], transl. W. Jabłoński, J. Chmielewski, O. Wojtasiewicz, Warsaw: PWN.
2. Künstler, M. J. (1994), *Dzieje kultury chińskiej* [*History of Chinese Culture*], Wrocław: Ossolineum Press.
3. Künstler, M. J. (2001), *Mitologia chińska* [*Chinese Mythology*], Warsaw: Artistic and Film Publishers PWN.
4. Confucius, (2006), *The Analects*, New York: Filiquarian Publishing, LLC.
5. Fung, Yu-lan, (1976), *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, transl. Bodde, D., New York: Free Press.
6. Neville, R. C. (2000), *Boston Confucianism. Postable Tradition In the Late-Modern World*, New York: State University of New York Press.

Agnė Budriūnaite\*

## **The Tension Between Illusion and Reality in Zhuangzi's 'Dream of the Butterfly.' Philosophical Analysis of Western Reception**

### Abstract

One of the most important allegories of Daoism is the 'Dream of the Butterfly' in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi (Qi wu lun)*. Sometimes it is supposed to be a representation of all Daoist or even all Chinese philosophy in the West. This allegory encompasses fundamental Daoist notions, such as spontaneity, 'free and easy wandering,' non-action (*wu wei*), natural self-alternation (*ziran*), the no-perspective of a sage and the understanding of correlation between life and death. The purpose of this paper is a philosophical analysis of the relationship between illusion and reality in the *Zhuangzi* looking from the 'Western' perspective. To achieve this, I will review some of the most distinct English translations of the allegory that show possible multiple meanings of the allegory and many fundamentally different, sometimes opposite interpretations of it and discuss the significance of the relationship between illusion and reality. There is a huge body of academic literature about translating and interpreting the texts ascribed to the *Zhuangzi*. I will mention only some of the commentaries and will pay more attention to other stories of the *Zhuangzi*, looking there for the explication and explanation of the main ideas found in the 'Dream of the Butterfly.'

### Key words

allegories in Daoism, Zhuangzi, illusion, reality, forgetting

---

\* Department of Philosophy, Centre for Asian Studies  
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania  
Email: a.budriunaite@gmail.com

## Translation and Understanding of the 'Dream of the Butterfly'

Reading of a Chinese text for us, Westerners, is a real challenge. Nowadays, a person able to read ancient texts in Chinese is an absolutely exceptional case. Even in the academic circles, people usually read the allegories of the *Zhuangzi* translated into European languages and use three or four different translations at best. Any translation, and particularly translation of such text as the *Zhuangzi*, is an interpretation coherent with translator's underlying presuppositions and cultural background. Accepting this, I will inquire into some Western receptions of the Daoist philosophy, appeal to some Chinese sinologists, and perform a conceptual analysis of the relationship between illusion and reality in the *Zhuangzi* without making any pretension to create the best or universal interpretation of it. Although the problem of understanding and translation is of high importance here, the article's research is conceptual but not linguistic in character. According to Victor Mair, the 'modern citizens of China are at least as far from the language of the *Chuang Tzu* as modern speakers of English are from *Beowulf*, or as modern speakers of Greek are from Plato's *Republic* – if not further.' (Mair 1998: xlvi) Consequently, translations of the *Zhuangzi* made by contemporary Chinese scientists are their own interpretations and may be influenced by their preconceived notions, for example their liking for the ideas of Confucianism. Taking this into consideration, the opinion of sinologists such as Liu Zongkun, Fung Yiu-ming, Han Xiao-qiang, and Wu Kuang-ming is considered neither better nor worse than thoughts of such Westerners like Angus Graham, Hans-Georg Moeller or Victor Mair.

One of the oldest and most popular translations of the *Zhuangzi* is that of Herbert A. Giles (published in 1889). Contemporary sinologist Hans-Georg Moeller criticizes it because of the 'westernization' of main Chinese ideas. According to him, the Giles' translation (and interpretation beyond it) has made an overwhelmingly damaging influence on understanding Daoism in the West. Moeller equates such translations to the food of Chinese restaurants in the West – it only looks Chinese. (Moeller 2006: 44) The allegory we are interested in sounds in the translation of Giles like this:

Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly, I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was

then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and butterfly there is necessarily a barrier. The transition is called *Metempsychosis*. (Giles 1926: 47; Moeller 2006: 44)

According to Moeller, 'Giles's rendering keeps the Oriental surface of the story alive, but completely converts the philosophical content into motifs of the Western philosophical tradition.' (Moeller 2006: 47) The similar translation we may find in the writings of James Legge<sup>1</sup> (first published in 1891) and in contemporary translation of Nina Correa, (Correa: 2009) only without an exceptionally Greek concept of 'metempsychosis.' The more broad interpretations differ but the continuous activity of the consciousness stays the main theme in most translations.<sup>2</sup> Zhuang Zhou wakes up and remembers his dream, then he understands he was dreaming and starts to doubt if his perception is right and raises a question about illusion and reality.

Moeller notices correctly that this highlighted relationship between doubt, remembrance and understanding of reality, and especially consciousness (or may be soul) experiencing transformations, not to mention the concept of 'metempsychosis,' is very close to the Greek philosophy and far from the Daoist thought. (Moeller 2006: 44–45) The westerner is able to understand the allegory offered in this way. The question is how right his/her understanding is. We may even ask: is the understanding (in the Western sense of the word) the aim of Zhuangzi talking about dream and awakening?

The most extreme 'westernization' of the Daoist ideas we can find in the attempt of Robert Elliot Allinson to rewrite the allegory according to his theory of 'inner transformation.' The preconditions of his theory are remembrance and continuous activity of the consciousness that causes enlightenment. (Allinson 1989: 79) Allinson calls the oldest version of the *Zhuangzi* edited by Guo Xiang the 'raw material' one has to work with. He says that there is an illogical sequence of events: Zhuang Zhou dreams, and then awakes, and then he does not understand who is who, and finally realizes that there must be a difference between butterfly and man.

---

<sup>1</sup> One can find the entire Legge's translation of the *Zhuangzi* on the net: <<http://oaks.nvg.org/ys1ra5.html>>

<sup>2</sup> Many of contemporary translators fallow similar interpretation avoiding so frequent usage of the pronoun 'I' but keeping the main perspective of the story the perspective of Zhuang Zhou. For example: Graham (2001: 61), Mair (1998: 24), Watson (1968: 49).

Allinson asserts that it is illogical to not understand who you are if you already awake. According to him, Zhuang Zhou only thinks he is awake and is confused about his own identity therefore. Allinson rewrites allegory (or maybe restores the original order of narrative as he thinks?) and counter-changes two lines – doubt and awakening:

Last night ZHUANG Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, spirits soaring he was a butterfly (is it that in showing what he was he suited his own fancy?), and did not know that he was Zhou. In fact, he did not know whether he was Zhou who dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly who dreamed he was Zhou. When all of a sudden he awoke, he was Zhou with all his wits about him. Between Zhou and the butterfly there was necessarily a dividing; just this is what meant by the transformations of things. (Allinson 1989: 82)

It is obvious in the version of Allinson that the entire transformation happens in the consciousness of Zhou only. He dreams and does not know who he is and everything becomes clear and logical when he awakes. It does not seem unusual or strange to our Western mind. As Allinson puts it into words: 'the transformation is a transformation in consciousness from unaware lack of distinction between reality and fantasy to the aware and definite state of awakening.' (Allinson 1989: 84) Such an indefensible treatment of an ancient original text was denounced by other academic sinologists (Lee 2007: 185–202; Yang 2005: 253–266) and I will not be paying too much attention to Allinson's theory. It is just a good example of a faulty projection of Western views onto Eastern ideas. It demonstrates how important the translation from such a complex language may be, not to mention the multidimensional character of the very text. How would the Allinson's theory have been developed if he had used a different translation, something closer to the original story?

Moeller proposes another English version of the allegory appealing to the Chinese text and commentaries left by Guo Xiang. Although the differences seem to be trivial, they change the deepest meaning of the allegory completely:

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt – and then he was a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly, self-content and in accord with its intentions. The butterfly did not know about Zhou. Suddenly it awoke – and then it was fully and completely Zhou. One does not know whether there is a Zhou becoming a butterfly in a dream or whether there is a butterfly becoming a Zhou in a dream. There is a Zhou and there is a butterfly, so there is necessarily a distinction between them. This is called: the changing of things. (Moeller 2006: 48)

So there is even no sign of *metempsychosis*, just changing of things... Similar nearness to the original allegory we can also find in Wu Kuang-ming's translation (Wu 1990: 153, 176) but Moeller's translation is more distinct from that of Giles' and is a better example of an alternative way of translating.

### ***Cogito and Xin***

Moeller criticizes Giles because of Western interpretation of the consciousness. The whole story in the translation of Giles is told from the first person's perspective. The 'I' is used ten times in his story while it does not appear in the original at all. The narrator of the original allegory stays beyond the story as in the Moeller's version ('One does not know...'). Moeller takes our notice of the Descartes' *cogito* that appears as the ground of the allegory in Giles' and many other English translations. (Moeller 2006: 46)<sup>3</sup> The same 'I' is dreaming, waking up, doubting and remembering. The same 'I' is undergoing transformation in the Allison's version. Zhuang Zhou in the Giles' and Allinson's versions doubts about his perception and about the reality but the very doubting consciousness of Zhuang Zhou is given as undoubted. Some other translators use the third-person perspective but do not lose the stability of consciousness and oneness of the story's subject. The notion of consciousness reveals one of the main differences between Western and Eastern mode of thinking and helps us understand the distinct interpretation of the relationship between reality and illusion.

Looking at the whole body of the *Zhuangzi* we see that the author<sup>4</sup> emphasizes again and again the fictitiousness of such stable, independent and separate from the world 'I' that becomes the foundation for Allinson's theory. For example it is said in the sixth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*:

We go around telling each other, I do this, I do that – but how do we know that this 'I' we talk about has any 'I' to it? You dream you're a bird and soar up into the

<sup>3</sup> More on this theme may be found in Han (2009: 1–9).

<sup>4</sup> Sinologists and historians are sure that the *Zhuangzi* was written by several authors and went through at least one serious redaction, namely that of Guo Xiang. I will use the singular, nevertheless, talking about authorship of the *Zhuangzi* because this is not crucial issue for the theme of the article.

sky; you dream you're a fish and dive down in the pool. But now when you tell me about it, I don't know whether you are awake or whether you are dreaming. (Watson 1968: 90)<sup>5</sup>

Here we see the same dilemma: the confidence in one's wakefulness as well as in one's independent individual 'I' may reveal it to be just another dream, an illusion, not reality. Neither rational activity of consciousness nor feelings or emotions does guarantee the reality of 'I'. The autonomy and independence of the 'I' is always under suspicion in Daoism. Zhuangzi says that the True Man has no 'Self,' he is like a perfect mirror – he reflects everything but keeps nothing for himself. The 'Self' or 'I' are presented in the *Zhuangzi* just as conditional illusions:

If there were no 'other,' there would be no 'I.' If there were no 'I,' there would be nothing to apprehend the 'other.' This is near the mark, but I do not know what causes it to be so. It seems as though there is a True Ruler, but there is no particular evidence for Him. We may have faith in His ability to function, but cannot see His form. He has attributes but is without form. (Mair 1998: 13)

This 'True Ruler' is our 'self' or 'I' or 'soul' that has the main quality – reasoning as it is believed in the Western tradition. From Plato up to contemporary phenomenology, mind or consciousness is something the most 'real' in the Western conception of human being. It is concerned to be rather essence than a feature of man. This causes one of the fundamental differences between the Eastern and the Western perceptions of reality, especially keeping in mind what is considered a 'tool' and a 'method' of perceiving.

Going into the problem of human essence, Zhuangzi talks about *xin* like all ancient Chinese philosophers. *Xin* is physical heart first of all. But westerners were used to translate it as a 'mind' in support of their Western mode of thinking. We see so many different notions of 'consciousness' and 'mind' in contemporary Western philosophy that it is very difficult to decide which one of them (if any) could be most suitable for *xin*. Recently sinologists started to translate *xin* as a 'heart-mind' or leave it as untranslatable. According to Harold H. Oshima, although thinking is the property of the *xin*, it by no means exhausts its functions. *Xin* is the place not only of thoughts, but of feelings, will, faith, imagination, guilt, etc. and we will misunderstand some important fragments of the *Zhuangzi* if we will interpret *xin* only as an 'organ' of thinking. (Oshima 1983: 65)

---

<sup>5</sup> I quote from different translations of the *Zhuangzi* choosing those translations which are most proper in the context of this article.

In the *Zhuangzi*, one of the leading themes is the 'fasting of *xin*' as the way to right understanding what reality and what illusion is. As we will see further, such fasting is emptying of one's heart-mind not only from erroneous understanding and from rationalistic logically-restricted thinking but from anything what we would attribute to the concept of 'Self.' It will be obvious that the notion of 'I' as independent individuality or Cartesian *cogito* cannot be the main idea of the 'Dream of the Butterfly,' and logical analytic thinking cannot help us discern illusion and reality.

### Memory, Forgetting And Fitting

It is a usual thing that people identify reality and illusion by the means of reason independently of culture they live in. Even if they are the ultimate empiricists, they usually consider these main features of reasoning (memory, critical doubt, evaluation of facts and ideas and definition of concepts) sufficient for distinguishing between reality and illusion. Doubt is a crucial point in the mentioned westernized translations of the 'Dream of the Butterfly.' Doubt is essentially connected with memory, because Zhuang Zhou has to remember his dream in order to doubt about its reality. Thus, doubt and memory are relevant for the radical insight as westerners understand it. Such attitude is apparent in the translation of Giles, but the conviction found in the *Zhuangzi* is quite opposite.

Appealing to Guo Xiang, Moeller states that there is no act of memory or doubt mentioned in the original version of the allegory. Neither Zhuang Zhou nor butterfly is unaware of the other's existence. Both phases are totally different and separated one from another. (Moeller 2006: 48) Somebody looking from the outside could say that on a physical level there was no butterfly, just Zhuang Zhou. But if Moeller's translation is more close to the original, we shall agree that Zhuang Zhou remembered nothing about his dream. He was 'fully and completely Zhou' without any reminiscence about butterfly's existence and without any doubt about his own existence.

Kelly James Clark and Liu Zonkung speak in support of Moeller's theory, though look at the problem from another angle and consider the allegory's most important point to be the transformation of perspective. According to them, the world of the butterfly is transformed into the world of Zhuang Zhou. The 'thing' – as this concept is used in the *Zhuangzi* – is not a neutral and independent definition but refers to the whole *a priori* belief system of the person which experiences this 'thing.' (Clark & Liu

2004: 166) So, we experience any-thing from one or another perspective. The world (or perspective) of the butterfly is totally different from that of Zhuang Zhou. There are two words, not two sides of one word. Therefore there cannot be any sign remembering regardless of close relationship between butterfly and man.

We may find support for such parallel between two words in other allegories of the *Zhuangzi*, especially in the allegory of happy fish. The free and easy wandering of human being is paralleled with free and easy swimming of the fish. Zhuangzi probably didn't think that a man and a fish could change places with one another and stay alive. The main thing here is harmony with one's surroundings and being in accordance with nature. This is possible only by being 'here and now' without remembrance of anything and without future plans or dreams. There is no place for doubt in this happy harmonious state of a fish as well as of a butterfly. This ignorance of each other is the fundamental cause and sign of harmony and authentic existence, according to Moeller:

Both phases are equally authentic or real because each does not remember the other. [...] Since Zhou and the butterfly do not remember each other, because the barrier between them is not crossed, the change from one to the other is seamless, spontaneous, and natural. The harmonious 'changing of things' is dependent upon the acceptance of the distinction and not on its transcendence. (Moeller 2006: 48–49)

Thus, forgetting – not a good memory – is a sign of an authentic existence and authentic thinking. When we look at the problem from the perspective of a scientist we need to employ our rational consciousness and memory. Zhuangzi was neither analyst nor representative of natural sciences but rather existentialist if the characterizations of contemporary philosophy should be applied. (Yang 2005: 264–265) Zhuangzi criticizes logical thinking and prompts us to forget everything. We find perfect explanation of what he means in the nineteenth chapter:

When the shoe fits the foot is forgotten, when the belt fits the belly is forgotten, when the heart is right 'for' and 'against' are forgotten. [...] Easy is right. Begin right and you are easy. Continue easy and you are right. The right way to go easy is to forget the right way and forget that the going is easy. (Merton 1969: 112–113)

The fitting of shoes, as fitting of everything else, is confirmed by forgetting. Such forgetting that itself is forgotten means detachment and independence from memory as activity of our consciousness, but not its extension. We cannot feel ourselves free and easy till we remember (or

we may say – till we pay attention to) our failures and successes, our plans and desires, our attitudes and the vision of ‘Self.’ As Moeller says, ‘if one revitalizes earlier phases, for instance by way of recollection, one cannot but give up one’s presence, which diminishes the fullness of the “here and now”’. (Moeller 2006: 50)

A doubt connected to remembrance shows the attachment to temporary things (for example one’s dream) and bigger or smaller dissatisfaction with one’s existence. Such doubt should be understood as an obstacle not as a means on the way to being ‘fully and completely’ oneself as well as to right perception of reality. In the version of Guo Xiang – Moeller, there is no doubt. Zhuang Zhou is ‘fully and completely Zhou’ like butterfly is ‘self-content and in accord with its intentions.’ That means the same – authentic existence without any doubt about it. Even a third person, a narrator of the story does not doubt but rather states: ‘One does not know whether...’

## A ‘Method’ of Forgetting

What ‘method’ for distinguishing between illusion and reality do Daoists find suitable if memory and doubt are not?

As it was said earlier, the fasting of *xin* is one of the most important themes in the *Zhuangzi*. The core of this fasting is emptying one’s heart-mind, for there is said in the fourth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*: ‘emptiness is the fasting of *xin*.’ (Mair 1998: 32)<sup>6</sup> The forgetting – not the memory – is relevant here because forgetting means process of emptying our memory. The concept of fasting helps us understand this Daoist emptiness that often is confused with vacuum or total negativity, especially when talking about the notion of ‘Self’/‘I.’ During ordinary fasting, our body doesn’t become totally empty like a shelled hazelnut. It is purged from unnecessary substance. The fasting of body means simple and modest food and drink necessary to maintain one’s life, not the starvation up to one’s death. Accordingly, the fasting of *xin* is the spiritual and mental emptying: the purification from one’s convictions, remembrance, future expectations, the influence of one’s surroundings, and everyday vision of oneself.

It doesn’t mean, however, the total disappearance of consciousness or complete dissociation from environment. On the contrary, it is open-

---

<sup>6</sup> I have changed the word ‘mind’ used by Victor Mair into ‘*xin*’ trying to avoid the misunderstanding discussed before in the chapter ‘*Cogito* and *xin*.’

ness to all things and all circumstances. Such empty openness is possible only when a person is not attached to any thing and any attitude towards things or even any presuppositions. We may say everything is ‘forgotten’ when the attention (active intellection) is not concentrated on any concrete object. The ability to think logically and to concentrate one’s mind isn’t lost nevertheless. A ‘method’ of seeking *dao* is named ‘sitting in forgetfulness’ (*zuo wang*) in the sixth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* but this is not an ordinary ‘forgetting.’ Yan Hui recites steps on his way to perfection: he has forgotten about rites and music, about benevolence and righteousness, and finally he just sits and forgets. He could not have spoken to Confucius as his acquaintance and could not have explained what he was doing without employing his memory. Despite such logical inference, Yan Hui elucidates what he means: ‘I let organs and members drop away, dismiss eyesight and hearing, part from the body and expel knowledge, and go along with the universal thoroughfare. This is what I mean by “just sit and forget”’ (Graham 2001: 92)

We could easily interpret these words as a description of a practice. A Zen meditation of emptiness is similar to this. It means, however, the way of life – not just a practice – in Daoism. The practice begins after and ends with other occupations while the way of life (*ren dao*) embraces all activities and passiveness. The opposite state of mind is also called ‘sitting’ as in the fourth chapter of the *Zhuangzi*: ‘Fortune and blessing gather where there is stillness. But if you do not keep still – this is what is called sitting but racing around.’ (Watson 1968: 58) The cause and precondition of the inner silence is forgetting. A cook Ding in the third chapter and a woodcarver Qing in the nineteenth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* forget everything – surroundings, their aim, the process of work, even (and especially) themselves as workers – and only then their work goes ‘self-so’ (*ziran*) accordingly to spontaneous process of *Dao*.

## Beyond the Oppositional Thinking

The notion of forgetfulness helps us understand another important feature of perceiving reality in Daoism. Forgetting indicates neither a defect of perception nor any deficiency. It is rather sign of going beyond the dividing of ordinary cogitation. There is no differentiation into ‘unreal’ reality of a dream and ‘more real’ reality of wakefulness in the ‘Dream of the Butterfly.’ One of the aforementioned features of Western thinking is

definition. We try to define objects, analyze and group them in order to say we 'know' them.

There are no precise definitions or narrow terms in the Daoist philosophy, nor in Chinese language. Every word/hieroglyph is round like a sphere, the meaning of which depends on a situation, a pronunciation and an intention of the speaker. A School of Names (*Ming jia*) nevertheless appreciated oppositional thinking, as a method of solving philosophical problems and seeking a proper naming of things. Distinguishing between 'so' and 'not-so,' 'right' and 'wrong,' 'this' and 'not-this' (*shi - fei*) was considered to be the right way of cogitation. (Fung 2009: 165)

Zhuangzi considers the attempts to define things to be an inauthentic and illusory attitude because definition means separation one from another and goes against the holistic harmony with all things. Zhuangzi criticizes oppositional attitude towards perception of reality persistently. In the second chapter, named *Qi wu lun* ('The Adjustment of Controversies' or 'Discussion on Making All Things Equal'), Zhuangzi says:

Right is not right; so is not so. If right were really right, it would differ so clearly from not right that there would be no need for argument. If so were really so, it would differ so clearly from not so that there would be no need for argument. Forget the years; forget distinctions. Leap into the boundless and make it your home! (Watson 1968: 49)

The boundlessness could be understood as openness to all possibilities and being unrestricted to one opinion. It could be understood as all-embracing 'forgetting' and being unattached to any opposition and to the very oppositional thinking. This doesn't mean that a sage doesn't see the conditional opposition of things or opinions. On the contrary, he doesn't take any side of argument because he sees the conditionality of the opposition. A sage doesn't care about oppositions and doesn't contend for his opinion because there is no single 'right' opinion or side for him. A sage stays in the center: equally open to all extremes and not identifying with any of them. In the seventeenth chapter, there is said about Zhuangzi himself: 'With him, there is neither north nor south, but only untrammelled release in all four directions and absorption in the unfathomable.' (Mair 1998: 163)

According to Daoists, we judge about illusion and reality and create opposition based on our vision of independent 'self.' By attaching ourselves to ideas and presuppositions, we evaluate facts and events as 'good' or 'bad,' 'right' or 'wrong' and so on. Such evaluation presupposes

our assumptive knowing what is 'more real' and 'true' and it is opposite to the openness and forgetfulness. We evaluate wakeful state as more real than a dream and life as better than death. In both cases, this evaluation is founded on our rational thinking and dependent on our 'Self.'

What if Daoists are right, and the very 'self' is an illusion? Zhuangzi warns us: 'While one is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things.' (Watson 1968: 47–48) An interpretation of a dream in a dream may be understood as a case of rational attempt to 'catch' the completeness of *dao* by the means of logic, division and definition.

It seems Zhuangzi still keeps oppositional thinking alive. He stands aside and evaluates what is real or wakeful and what is illusion or a dream. He negates this idea by saying: 'Confucius and you are both dreaming! And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too.' (Watson 1968: 48) The language is impossible without rational thinking and logic. Zhuangzi uses rationality while he talks and thinks. He is 'dreaming' like anybody else therefore. What is the 'great awakening' then?

At first glance, Daoists' focus on the oneness of Being seems to be obviously inconsistent with the 'necessary distinction' between Zhuang Zhou and butterfly that is found in all translations and commentaries of the allegory. The distinction between man and butterfly is stressed while distinction between dream and wakefulness seems to be trivial. The conviction 'I am not dreaming any more' can show up to be even a part of another dream.

Does Zhuangzi support opposition as such or denies it? Probably both. Man and butterfly are opposite to each other but all oppositions are trivial and conditional if we look from the empty *dao shu* – the 'pivot of *dao*.' All things are like spokes in the wheel – more or less opposite to one another but in the same position in regard to the hub. If man looks at everything from the perspective of a spoke, he sees opposition. If he looks at everything from the perspective of a hub, he sees the conditionality of such opposition. Since all these opposing views derive from one another are impossible one without another, Zhuangzi in the second chapter says:

The wise man therefore, instead of trying to prove this or that point by logical disputation, sees all things in the light of direct intuition. [...] The pivot of *dao* passes through the center where all affirmations and denials converge. He who grasps

the pivot is at still-point from which all movements and oppositions can be seen in their right relationship. (Merton 1969: 43)

There is no absolute opposition between reality and illusion and there is even no need to distinguish them if you are in the *dao shu*. Great awakening can be understood as seeing opposition in their right relationship. So, there is no theoretical method of differentiating between reality and illusion presented in the *Zhuangzi*. The only way to see the differences and their interrelationship is an internal act – to stand in the position of *dao shu*; in the no-position, to be precise.

### Who Has Awoken?

One can suspect that another (maybe 'higher') opposition is left in the allegory and in the example of a wheel. Somebody is telling the story about Zhuang Zhou and butterfly, thus is opposite to them as the hub is still opposite to the spokes or emptiness is opposite to things. Is the narrator of the story someone who knows the truth? Is emptiness in the hub better than materiality of spokes? Here we have to remember that *dao* embraces all things as well as space between them or thoughts about them. In Daoism, all oppositions (*yin* and *yang*, spring and autumn, light and darkness, life and death, thing and thought) are considered as creating one whole.

According to Moeller, the narrator in the original story is Zhuang-zi – a sage. Zhuangzi is another phase of the transformation process, totally different from Zhuang Zhou and from butterfly but not opposite to them. (Moeller 2006: 53) The great awakening means insight into illusion and reality and their conditionality but not their transformation into more real reality, as one may suppose. It is accepting everything as it is and not dividing or analyzing anything. Therefore a sage sees all at once – oppositions, their conditionality and the one whole. How is it possible?

Seems, in the empty *dao shu* we can paradoxically be 'really awake' and stay like 'dead ashes' at the same time. One has to empty oneself by means of the fasting of *xin*, to forget his 'I' (*wo*) and to stop identify oneself with any social or psychological role, any belief or thought. That means to lose one-self. But who or what is subject of losing the 'self'? What is left after losing everything and the 'self'? According to Wu Kuang-ming, it is a non-subject, an empty self (*wu-self*): 'the self that lets go (*shih ju*) of its obtrusive self (*wo*), that is fasting away the objectifiable, identifiable com-

panion-self. The true *wu*-self is, in turn, authenticated in this activity of self-fasting and self-losing (*wu sang wo*).’ (Wu 1990: 183)

Is this another opposition or another overstepping of the opposition? It is obvious that a sage should be such a *wu*-self. We find nevertheless sage’s joy, sorrow and even anger mentioned in the *Zhuangzi*. A sage is still a human being, a ‘thing.’ On the other hand, it is said about sage’s emotions: ‘The ultimate joy is to be without joy’ (Mair 1998: 168) and ‘his anger is exhibition of non-anger.’ (Mair 1998: 236) That means, it is not so easy to discern illusion (ordinary joy, anger or indifference) from reality (peaceful happiness, harmony with nature and non-action) looking at a sage from the outside. We cannot even tell who is a sage because we cannot see the *wu*-self externally. True Man of Daoism can be a ruler or a well-known sage as well as a pure cripple or a madman, whereas the ‘expert’ of *dao* can be only on the way to the Way.

An attempt to find a logical theoretical explanation of the empty self of a sage is even less successful than looking for definition of it in the *Zhuangzi*. What part of me could be named ‘non-subject’? Who can name me so if there is no ‘me’? Wu Kuang-ming says that existence of non-subject is of other kind than existence of Zhuang Zhou or butterfly. It should exist in some way to perform the self-losing but we cannot find it like we find things. This non-subject is ‘a radical subject that encompasses even its own non-existence, its own self-losing, as well as itself as an object of thought.’ (Wu 1990: 277) There is no concept suitable for this empty self that loses itself.<sup>7</sup> Does it belong to reality or to illusion; or maybe it belongs to both areas? The answer and the notion of human essence will depend on what do you believe to be reality and illusion, and *vice versa*.

Giles in his translation and Allinson in his attempt to rewrite the text are following the Platonic tradition while trying to distinguish what is illusion and what is reality. They are following the Cartesian tradition as well while emphasizing the autonomy of rational ‘I’ and its independence from the world. Such attitude towards illusion and reality is typical to the whole contemporary, scientific-minded society, not exceptional to these authors. While reading allegories of the *Zhuangzi*, there is the temptation to find oneself ‘understanding everything correctly.’ It is the temptation to evaluate, define and explain the thoughts of this ancient Chinese sage and to place them within one or another group of philosophical ideas. In

---

<sup>7</sup> Comparison with I. Kant’s transcendental Ego may be found in Wu (1990: 276, 390–391).

the case of the 'Dream of the Butterfly,' this temptation manifests itself in the readiness to label a sage telling the whole story as representative of a higher reality and classify everything else as illusion. But wouldn't such way of thinking mean staying in the same realm of illusion – reality opposition that Zhuangzi is trying to transcend?

## Bibliography

1. Allinson, R. E. (1989), *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation. An Analysis of the Inner Chapters*, New York: State University of New York Press.
2. Clark, K. J. & Liu Zongkun (2004), 'Reflections on Natural Knowledge', in Wang, R. (ed.), *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalisation*, 163–184. New York: State University of New York Press.
3. Correa, N. (transl.) (2009), *Zhuangzi – 'Being Boundless'*, viewed 10 June 2011, <<http://www.daosipen.com/ZhuangziTranslation.html>>
4. Fung, Yiu-ming (2009), 'The School of Names', in Bo Mou (ed.), *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 164–188. New York: Routledge.
5. Giles, H. A. (transl.) (1926), *Chuang Tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*. London: Allen and Unwin.
6. Graham, A. C. (2001), *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
7. Han, Xiaoqiang (2009), 'Interpreting the Butterfly Dream', *Asian Philosophy* 19 (1): 1–9.
8. Legge, J. (1891), *The sacred books of China – The texts of Taoism in two parts. The writings of Chuang Tzu*. Dover: Dover Publications. One can find the entire Legge's translation of *Zhuangzi* on the net: <<http://oaks.nvg.org/ys1ra5.html>>
9. Lee, Jung H. (2007), 'What is it Like to be a Butterfly? A Philosophical Interpretation of Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream', *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 17 (2): 185–202.
10. Mair, V. H. (transl.) (1998), *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
11. Merton, T. (1969), *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, New York: New Directions.
12. Moeller, H.-G. (2006), *Daoism Explained: from the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory*, Chicago: Open Court.
13. Oshima, H. H. (1983), 'A Metaphorical Analysis of the Concept of Mind' in Mair, V. H. (ed.), *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, 63–84. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
14. Watson, B. (transl.) (1968), *Chuang Tzu. Basic Writings*, New York: Columbia University Press.
15. Wu, Kuang-ming (1990), *The Butterfly as Companion. Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu*, New York: State University of New York Press.
16. Yang, Xiaomei (2005), 'Great Dream and Great Awakening: Interpreting the Butterfly Dream Story', *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 4 (2): 253–266.



# ***Dimensions of Human Life***



Bin You\*

**To Be Harmonious with the Heaven,  
the Others and the Self:  
Late-Ming Christian Literati Li Jiugong's *Meditation*  
and His Comparative Scriptural Interpretation<sup>1</sup>**

Abstract

From the perspective of comparative scripture, this paper is using the *Shen si lu* (Meditations) by Catholic Literati Li Jiugong as a case study to investigate the dialogue and interaction between Confucianism and Christianity in the late-Ming period. Li's theology, incorporating the three aspects of being in harmony with Heaven, other people, and oneself, is expressed in Confucian terminology. It represents the late-Ming Chinese theological understanding of God, human nature, and society. The paper analyses Li's strategy of comparative scripture by which Confucian scriptural resources were reinterpreted, appropriated, and intertwined with the Christian meaning system. Finally, the paper also discusses the significance of using the methodology of comparative scripture in interreligious dialogue and in furthering the indigenization of Christianity in China.

Key words

comparative scripture, interreligious dialogue, Catholic literati, Li Jiugong

---

<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the Key Institute of Ministry of Education of China (Project no. 2009JJD730002), and partially supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project no. CUHK446109).

---

\* Institute of Comparative Scripture and Inter Religious Dialogue  
Minzu University of China  
Email: youbin99@gmail.com

In studying the history of Chinese Christianity and Chinese-Western cultural communication, much emphasis has been laid upon the collision and merging between Chinese and Western cultures raised by the Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing dynasty. However, both the focuses and perspectives of the Chinese and Western scholars are far away from each other. The Western scholars tend to do more research on the acts and achievements of those missionaries, while the Chinese ones pay more attention to the reception of Christianity among Chinese people. (Sun 1994, Gernet, 1991, Li 1998)<sup>2</sup> Therefore, two different scholarly views on the Christianity around this era in China are developed: the former often unintentionally sighs for the Chinese Christians who stick to their cultural and ethical tradition, while the latter believes that Chinese people received Christianity just as 'an absorption of western knowledge into Chinese tradition and a solution to their own intellectual or practical predicament.'<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, the tension between Christianity and Confucianism is most prominently reflected through those Chinese who accepted Christianity. Hence the research in Chinese local Christians' lives and works had been the greatest scholarly field of the history of Chinese Christianity in the late Ming and early Qing dynasty in recent decades. (Standaert et al. 2002; Standaert 2004: 1-59, Liu 2005)<sup>4</sup> That Chinese Christians how to deal with the tension between the two traditions both inherited by them has now become the focus of both the Chinese and Western scholars.

This paper attempts to analyze the work of *Shen si lu* (Meditation) 慎思录 by a Fujian Christian literati, Li Jiugong who lived in the middle-low stratum of late Ming Dynasty society, from a comparative scripture perspective, to see the way he dealt with the Christianity and Chinese traditions, in order to retrieve the experience for building Chinese theology in contemporary context. It tries to answer some questions as follows: 1. What is the comparative scripture as an inter-religious dialogue? 2. How it could be play as a research method in analyzing the Christian literati like Li Jiugong in the late Ming dynasty? 3. How these theological doctrine like 'be harmonious with the Heaven' (和天), 'be harmonious with the

---

<sup>2</sup> Some recent studies, see *Pneuma and Logos: Chinese Journal of Theology*, vol. 33 (2010) under the theme of 'Sino Christian Theology: Following after Matteo Ricci.'

<sup>3</sup> The former one see Gernet 1991, while the latter one see Sun 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Some case work, see Liu 2004; Li 2006.

others' (和人) and 'be harmonious with the self' (和己), as the titles for the three chapters in his *Meditation*, had expressed the effort made by the early Chinese Christians to do with the tension between Christianity and Chinese traditions, especially the Confucianism, in a way of doing comparative theology? 4. What inspiration can we get from the theological experiment of Li Jiugong for building a Chinese theology in a comparative way today?

## 1. Comparative Scriptural Interpretation as an Inter-Religious Dialogue

It is claimed that religious diversity, every religion in everywhere, did become a main feature of modern culture. Nonetheless, religious diversity had always been a culture context for Chinese intellectuals who exposed to two or three religious tradition since Han Dynasty. They were always wandering in-between the three religions, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The tension of the three religious identities had been an existential dilemma for most of them. When the Catholicism, as one of the successors of Abrahamic monotheism, was introduced to China in the late Ming Dynasty, though it surely shown a strong inclination of exclusivism, under the Matteo Ricci's policy of 'excluding Buddhism but complementing Confucianism' (排佛补儒), it did not cause an either/or tension among the religious identities of the Chinese intellectual coverts.

Hence, the comparative scripture, which lays stress on the border crossing dialogue between two religious traditions, is suitable for the analysis of the Chinese Christian literati's attitude towards both Christianity and Confucianism. A comparative scriptural study is not a simple finding of difference and similarity between different religions; it serves the idea that 'being committed to one religious tradition, meanwhile being sincerely persuaded by another religious tradition.'<sup>5</sup> Doing comparative scripture can help one to building its meaning system of his own tradition by bringing or learning from the scriptures of other religions.

---

<sup>5</sup> The similar methodology and cases study, see Li 2007. For the proposal of comparative scripture as a method of doing Sino-theology, see You 2011: 255–271. To do interreligious dialogue by comparative scripture, see Ford 2006 and Clooney 2010.

Differing from the American or African areas of no rich written scriptural traditions when Christianity entered into, China in late Ming Dynasty was very rich in terms of written scriptural resources. While Christianity owns the Bible as scripture, Confucianism the *Four Books and Five Scriptures* (四书五经); Christianity had built a profound system of theology, Confucianism a systematic science of *Li* (Principle, 理). For the Chinese literati with whom Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni were confronted, the Confucian works were the main cultural resources to apprehend the world and human beings. After accepting the Christianity, their minds committed to the Christian interpretation of the world through reading the writings of both missionaries and local Christian literati. So to speak, when those Chinese literati wrote down their theological works, or even do some theological translations, they were starting a comparative theological experiment with the Confucian and Christian Scriptures, though they might be not aware this by themselves.

For those being in-between the two traditions, it is difficult to decide to which tradition believers were committed, while to which one they 'truly persuaded.' In his landmark analysis of Li Jiugong, Eric Zurich held that '[we] came to see that the Catholicism needs to find its position in his complex context of Confucianism.' (Zürcher 2003: 73) But, on the contrary, this paper will argue that, in Li Jiugong's work, the Confucianism ought to find its own position in the fundamentally Christian meaning system. In other words, it's the Confucianism that Li Jiugong are persuaded but the Christian he committed. In his theology Christian messages play a dominant role, while the Confucian tradition had been manipulated, transferred, and re-interpreted into his Christian system, and it had become a good resource for him to build Chinese theology.

In analyzing Li Jiugong's work, as he had been soaked in the Confucian tradition since childhood but late committed fully to Christianity, the Confucian understanding of 'Scripture' may be a good analogy. In using scriptures to building their cultural identities, Christianity understand the scriptures as the 'rule of faith,' while Confucian understanding of the role of scripture much softer as an ongoing project of 'weaving' (经), a metaphor coming from the weaver. The work of *Meditation* in which Li Jiugong set forth his Christian faith, is like a piece of fabric of a weaver, and the Confucian thoughts were weaved at any moment into his Christian religious system.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> For the metaphor of 'weaving' in cross cultural study, see Standaert 2009.

## 2. The Life and Works of Li Jiugong

Compared with those famous upper-class Chinese Christian literati, like the ‘Three Pillars’ 三柱石, Li Jiugong represents the middle-low class Christian intellectuals. His birth date is unknown. In 1628, after met with Giulio Aleni, less than three months, he and his elder brother Li Jiubiao were baptized. Afterwards he went back to his hometown Fu-Tang in Fu Jian Province to do missionary work, write and publish books. Since then, he never attended the imperial examination, nor discussed the public policies, but only devoted to serve the local church. During this period, he helped his brother Li Jiubiao compile the work of *Daily Dialogue between Giulio Aleni and Chinese Followers* (《口铎日抄》), while he himself also wrote another book *Reflection of Spiritual Exercise* (《励修一鉴》) in 1639.

It was the time when Ming Dynasty was falling and Qing Dynasty rising. He couldn’t maintain a peaceful life of reading, writing and publishing. In 1645, the Qing army attacked the South China and South Ming Dynasty was collapsed. In 1646, Zhu Yujian 朱聿键, the king of Tang, was captured and killed by Qing army in Fu-zhou city. In 1647, the Fu-Tang where Li Jiugong was living in was taken by Qing army, his brother Li Jiubiao might die in this war. Giulio Aleni escaped and died in 1649. The aftermath work of Li Jiugong was closely related to the missionary work in Fu-zhou city. During this time, many of his books were published, one of them was *A Collection of Acts of Saints* (《主行粹抄》) in 1678, it mainly concerned the Catholic Hagiography and was divided into three volumes titled as ‘advocating the virtue,’ ‘amending the vice,’ ‘correcting the error,’ trying to provide a catholic ethical system for daily behaviors. Another unpublished manuscript *Questions and Answers* (《问答汇抄》) was also completed in this period. Thereafter, the Dominican aroused the ‘Controversy of Rites.’ Due to this controversy, Li Jiugong was invited by the Jesuits to attend the discussion of Chinese rites. He wrote two articles, *Discernment of the Rites* (《礼俗明辨》) and *A Basic Introduction to the Chinese Rites* (《证礼刍议》) for defending Matteo Ricci’s policy toward the Chinese rites. He claimed that both the sacrifice and worship to Confucius and ancestors are for ‘remembering and respecting for the ancestors,’ and not superstition or worship to heathen gods. In 1681, Li Jiugong passed away over this controversy in Fu-zhou City.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the life of Li Jiugong and his works, see Zürcher 2003: 72-95.

Among all his works, *Meditation* is a very special one, because it is not for publication, nor an apology asked by believers, but a collection of his understanding of Christian faith and practices. He wrote for himself, or rather for the 'drawer.' His son Li Yifen described the formation of this book as follows:

My father was almost eighty years old and always sleepless in bed at night, enjoying the consideration of the godly knowledge learnt in day. He prayed for the Lord's revelation and earnestly prayed Him to lead human to know the Heaven and Nature. He wouldn't relax until got some comprehensions. Once in the morning, he wrote down what was kept in mind. Those notes increasingly formed a booklet entitled with *Meditation*. However, they were written down freely by hands and not arranged in order. (Li 2002: 141-142)

This book was given the title of *Meditation* by his son when he edited it, and this name indicates the solemn attitude when his father probed into theology, although the name 'Random Thoughts' might be more suitable in terms of its purpose, style and background. After being edited and published, it was divided into three parts, namely 'be harmonious with the Heaven,' 'be harmonious with the other,' and 'be harmonious with the self,' yet each one overlapped with others in fact, and thus any of them was not able to be independent.

If the book were a random collection in that case, how could it help us understand the spiritual world of Chinese Christian literati in Late Ming Dynasty? On the one hand, while it was an informal record, many works of Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni were frequently quoted. The frame and premise of Li Jiugong's way to deal with problems was consisted of Jesuits' cultural strategies; on the other hand, those apothegms were left freely, without a purpose of publication, hence they are also his personal understandings about Christian faith, which could be called a sincere thought of middle-low class Christian intellectuals when they accepted the faith.

### **3. Heaven and Heavenly Lord: A Strategy of Proving Christianity with Confucianism and Transcending Confucianism**

No doubt that the discussion of God is the starting point of Christian Theology. Nevertheless, to those Christians living in late Ming Dynasty, the argument about God was not with philosophy but with Chinese cultural resources. For those Chinese Christians, the first strategy is to appropri-

ate or re-interpret the Chinese scriptural tradition to prove the Christian concept of God.

When it comes to the ultimate reality, the Confucianism traditions had always been plural and complex. The Heaven 天 is both the Heaven of natural or ethical. However, both of these two explanations were not discussed by Li Jiugong, he selected some parts of Confucian works to point out that there is a personal Heaven in Confucian tradition, that's the Heavenly Lord (天主):

The Confucius said, 'Being punished by the Heaven', and at other places said, 'A man of virtues serves the Heaven as his parents'. The Mencius said, 'Preserve the heart and cultivate the nature', in order to serve the Heaven. And at other places said, 'The Heaven didn't want to govern this world with peace'. Thus, we do not need to esteem the corporeal blue heaven as the Heaven. When the 'Heaven' is claimed, the meaning of 'Lord' had been implied. (Li 2002: 148-149)

That's to say, the Heaven in Confucianism are same as God in Christianity. He quoted the Chinese custom as well that this is just an honorable and ineffable way to avoid using the name Heavenly Lord:

In Confucius works, somewhere refers to Heaven is a metaphor of Lord. As people who respect the Emperor, they fear to call him directly, and then employing the metaphor of Court instead. This is just because of the grammar. (Li 2002: 148)

He followed the Matteo Ricci's strategy toward Confucianism, raising the ancient Confucianism against his contemporary Confucianism. He believes the real Confucians are very close to the believers of Heavenly religion (天教, namely Catholicism). But the contemporary Confucians had gone astray from the teachings of the ancient sages:

Both the Confucius and Mencius, they had never complained the Heaven. In my private opinion, as any true sage, one must know the Heaven well. So in their life, they serve, fear and are thankful to the Heaven, except for complain it. [...] Therefore any legitimate system of knowledge must base on the knowing of Heaven, which had been ignored by the succeeding Confucians. How hard is that! (Li 2002: 156-157)

He thought the contemporary Confucianism had distorted its original teaching. As long as it could go back to the time of Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou, 三代, 指夏商周) and Confucius-Mencius, the Confucian system of faith and ethics could be restored and must be alike to Catholicism. We can see that he was trying to judging Confucianism with the

standard of Christianity, yet he adopted the ‘panegyric for the ancient’ as a detour strategy. By using the ancient Confucianism which he had proved to be very similar to Christianity as standard, he said:

When the three Dynasties were of prosperity, the knowledge was still pure; and it was from Qin Dynasty 秦朝, the heresies had been rising through the later five Dynasties till today. The errors were hidden subtly within, to deceive those fools. [...] The noble man bearing the ambition to educate the world should be able to see far. Once the ‘panegyric for ancient’ is applied as a standard of judgment, it is like sitting inside the court to discern the outside of court, the borderline of right or wrong is clear thereby. (Li 2002: 154)

Hence, he brought forward such a system of judgment, the top is Heavenly religion (天教, Catholicism), next is the ancient Confucianism, and next is the contemporary Confucianism, the Buddhism is placed at last being regarded as an error.

I ever read the books of Heavenly knowledge, as human life is just a journey, the Heaven our home, the hardness helps the virtue and the ease breeds the complaints, etc. I wondered at those new messages. Now it is known that ‘To live is like being a pilgrim in the world, and to die is like returning home’ is from Great Yu (大禹). To get exercise in hard time, to perish in comfort, was discovered by Mencius. Although the Confucians know that well and practice daily, the heavenly writings are more correct and exact. The Buddhists discuss Cause and Effect wrongly, and then the true knowledge of the Lord is disturbed hugely. I’d plan to be here, make it known to people, the only one possessing the true knowledge of life and death, without the Heavenly religion, with whom can I resort to? (Li 2002: 165–166)

When describing the Heavenly Lord (天主) of Christianity, he adopted two other metaphors of Chinese cultural background instead of God, the Great Father (大父) and the High Sovereign (上君). This was an adjustment to Chinese cultural background, because in Chinese traditional society where holds to the *Three Cardinal Guides* (三纲), the sovereign 君 and father 父 are the authorized symbol of dignity. The name of God is called ‘The Great Father and the High Sovereign,’ though being borrowed from Confucian terms, it adopted a higher value than the Confucian *Three Cardinal Guides* for God was behold as the highest and greatest, more respectful than father and sovereign. As Li Jiugong said, the Heavenly Lord is the Master of the world just as a family has its master, a country its emperor, even though both of the two kinds of master are ruled by this Master. (Li 2002: 149)

He explained the reason why he calls the Heavenly Lord with the name of 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign.' According to the properties of God, it helps reveal the God's two properties, namely majesty and kindness, as in 'honoring the parents.' According to the human's attitude to God, this is also the two basic virtues, fear and love, toward God. He then even developed a special Christology centered upon the cardinal virtues, because the Heavenly Lord as 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign' is mostly concentrated and reflected through the Crucifixion of Christ:

The Heavenly Lord is the Great Father, the High Sovereign. He wishes the human not to commit the sins, but can't simply spare the sinners. So he came down to be the incarnated and suffered from death, in order to redeem us by abandoning himself, this event shows the greatest Charity and Righteousness. To the Charity, we ought to return with love. To the Righteousness, we must fear. The fear should pair with the thankfulness, and then even the slightest sins shall be cut off. While living, shall be blessed, when die, shall be exalted after death. This is the grace of redemption from my Lord, and greater than the birth grace from parents. Be grateful to the grace and hoping to repay him shall always bear in mind. (Li 2002: 174-175)

What he quoted here is from the classical understanding of redemptive Christology started from St. Anselm, although it was transferred into the view of Confucian *Three Cardinal Guides* which refers father and sovereign. However, based on this theory, he gets the conclusion that 'the grace of redemption is greater than the grace of birth from parents' and the relationship between Christ and human is greater beyond any other ethical human relationship. This is his creativity. His focus on the redemptive grace of Christ had made a radical change to traditional value system of Confucianism, that the grace of Christ is the fundament of all human relationship. It does not only transcend over the birth grace from parents, but also the cosmological understanding of Confucianism that human get his birth from the heaven and earth. This insight is both of theological creativity and of cultural relevance.

When it comes to the attitude towards 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign,' as titled as 'being harmonious with the Heaven' by his son Li Yifen, he tried to syncretize the Confucianism and Christianity, to incorporate Confucian virtues into Christian practices. But he also put the sacraments and spiritual meditation a very central place. The virtues are fundamental. He believed that the right attitude towards God should be 'serving, fearing the Heaven.' There are two basic virtues correspondingly, namely, fear and love. He said:

We serve God, only with two virtues, fear and love. They are two wings of exaltation, two ladders to the Paradise. Keep the justice of the Lord in mind, and then the fear rises. Keep the grace of Lord in mind, and then the love rises. (Li 2002: 158)

To take fear and love as the two basic virtues of people towards God is long standing tradition of Judeo-Christianity. However, Li Jiugong endeavors to incorporate the Confucius' idea of 'fear the Heaven and love the people' into the Christian system indicated his efforts to transform and transcend the Confucian tradition.

Next, he laid stress on the meditation in loneliness. His approach is very close to the Confucian theory of 'being cautious when out of supervision' 慎独.

The godly effort should be made every day, whether it's in morning or evening. When business doesn't come yet, and your mind is clear; then pray and meditate, or confess the sin to prevent commit any sins. Or thank the Lord's grace so that you will be sincerely grateful to your origin. (Li 2002: 163)

In another place he believes that God is supervising everyone in everywhere.

Believe the God is everywhere. My thoughts, speeches and actions, both in day and night, as if they are being shown before the Heavenly Lord, who you watch but not seen, you listen but not heard, this is the top rule of withdrawing the human desire and perfecting his Providence. (Li 2002: 156)

As God in Christianity is omnipresent, the Confucian theory of 'being cautious when out of supervision' could be strengthened and transformed for those Chinese Christian literati.

At last, he deemed that in the way of people's being harmonious with the Heaven, the sacraments shall be regarded highly too. This point is a new one compared to the Confucian tradition, but Li Jiugong did not hesitate to manifest this in his *Meditation*. Among these seven Catholic sacraments, the baptism and confession were especially important to him. He reckoned the importance of baptism as below:

Everyone since the birth has been infected by the original sin. Only the Bible is indubitable. The youths are more likely inclined to the evil than to the virtue, hence they must be taught strictly by the teachers. Not everyone can reach the achievement [...]. Well, that's the reason why the baptism was established in Heavenly Religion; Therefore to those who convert to the Lord firmly, the holy water is given, and their sins are wiped off. Then it could be seen that even the stubborn could

perceive, the coward could be encouraged, because the holy grace of the great Lord is given out in baptism. The root of goodness has been planted since the day of baptism. Compared with other graces, this one is first and foremost. (Li 2002: 160–161)

As to the spiritual and moral effects of confession, he said that,

Great is the rule of confession! That may let those who practice it more and more cautious in every day, and the sins are less and less. It must be known that, the rule of cleansing the sins is to guide people from surface into depth. The first confession is to correct the big errors; the next confession is to correct the small mistakes. Increasingly, there is no room for any flaws and the heart should be polished as the sleekest one, this makes people feel comfortable. The confession shall be done frequently. As the heart is more and more cautious, the sins become less and less. (Li 2002: 163–164)

His understanding of the spiritual and ethical function of confession could be compared with the view of a contemporary great Confucian Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周, who also pointed that repentance and confession as a moral practice of Confucians.

In discussing the state of being harmonious with Heavenly Lord, Li used the metaphor of ‘the vine branches and the vine tree’ in Bible to express the unity of human and the Heavenly Lord:

Who has been blessed and harmonious with the Lord, is like a branch with tree and the God is more approachable to us. Therefore in my heart, there shall be somewhere warm as fire, obedient as doves, where is loved by God. Where the heart cold as water, proud as lions, it would be like a branch cut off from tree. Once the grace is lost, the eternal death shall come. Consider it and keep it, why not being cautious? (Li 2002: 170)

In Li Jiugong’s theological arguments about being harmonious with the Heaven 和天, it can be seen that, the Confucian scripture, metaphor and ethical principles were a resource to elaborate his Christian faith. For example, he interpreted that the Heaven that had been heavily described by the ancient Confucian sages was the personal God. He used the Confucian metaphor of father and emperor to describe God as ‘the high sovereign and the great Father.’ The Confucian virtues of fear 敬 and love 爱 were regarded as an ethical manifestation of being harmonious with God. However, he is essentially a committed Catholic. The virtues of fear and love could be developed out of the gratitude to the redemptive grace of Christ, which is even higher than the Confucian essential grace of giv-

ing birth. He believed that an intimate relationship with a personal God is indispensable to developing the Confucian practice of 'being cautious in loneliness' 慎独. He even boldly praised the effects of sacraments in cleansing the sins. All of these are the new elements brought by Christianity to Chinese culture.

#### 4. Being Harmonious with the Others: A Christian Ethics Centered upon the Universal Love

The second part of Li Jiugong's *Meditation* was titled as 'being harmonious with the others' 和人, it is a discussion about the relationship between humans. Generally speaking, he followed the order of Confucian *Five Constant Virtues* 五伦, discussing those relationships consequently, with parents, wife, heirs, friends and neighbors. As to those conflicts between the Catholicism and Confucianism, he insisted up the Christian moral standard, and didn't mean to avoid to criticize fiercely the unlawful habits such as concubinage and sutteeism. One of the most prominent features of his treatise of 'being harmonious with the others' 和人 is his reinterpretation of Confucian scriptures to suit for the Christian ethical principles.

In the first place, he proclaimed the equality of humankind. He frequently quoted a passage from *The scripture of Shang Shu* 尚书, one of five Confucian scriptures, 'Oh God, bless all man,' to prove the equality of everyone.<sup>8</sup> In Confucian late tradition, the word that God bless all people was usually interpreted as a political principle that the sovereign should follow the Goodness to govern. But he transferred it to the ontological foundation of his fraternalism. He said,

Everyone is created by the Heavenly Lord and blessed by Him. I treat the strangers as the Lord, and then everyone is worth of love. (Li 2002: 177-178)

When the sages discuss the human destiny, there are two main viewpoints. The first one is that God bless all human being. Therefore all human being has the same nature, and that is the reason why the scripture of Shang Shu (尚书) claimed that 'everyone is equal in their natural endowment'. (Li 2002: 160)

Secondly, this view of equality also drives him consider the way of forgiveness and giving 恕施 as the basic ethical behaviors in dealing with others. The ontological reason is that all are created by God.

---

<sup>8</sup> It is commonly quoted by Chinese Christian literati, see Zhang 2003.

Thinking of everyone, including myself, comes from the same origin, and then you can practice forgiveness and giving upon others. This is the keystone expressed by the sages both in past or recent. If you can practice these two, all the other virtues would be fulfilled. (Li 2002: 161–162)

He quoted the Jesus' teaching in the Bible that the enemies shall be loved as well,

The same rain is sent on the field of the righteous and the unrighteous; only a whole heart of kindness, why should you distinguish the enemies and friends. (Li 2002: 190)

Finally, he thought the fraternalism of Catholicism could truly fulfill the Confucian ideal of 'all people are of the same family, the whole Chinese as one person' (天下一家, 中国一人):

Of loving people there are three levels in Heavenly religion, the first is self-love 私爱, the second affective love 情爱, and the third charitable love 仁爱. If we practice the charitable love, then all the people under the heaven are of the same family, and the whole Chinese as one person. This is the love of sages, and was hoped by all the generations. How great it is! (Li 2002: 191)

In general, in his discussion of 'being harmonious with the others' 和人, with the background of an equal Chinese-Western communication, he neither gravely criticized the Chinese traditional ethics, nor evaded purposely the difference of Christian and Chinese ethics. The regular human ethical rules in Confucian tradition are mostly accepted by him; however, the fraternalism of Christian ethics, especially the idea of equality of all man, is also introduced into the late-Ming China. Therefore, though he still respected the ethical relationship of Confucianism, the theoretical foundation had been essentially changed.

## 5. 'Being Harmonious with the Self': An Understanding of Life from the View of Death

To Li Jiugong and his Catholic friends, the science of 'being harmonious with the Self' 和己 corresponds to the principle 'the most crucial science is how to perfect oneself' (学莫切于为己) of Confucianism. In the title note of third volume of *Meditation*, written by Li Xiyan who is a close Catholic friend of Li Jiugong, it says,

It's said that everyone must die, and the most crucial science must be how to perfect oneself. The way to perfect self is to fulfill the love to Lord and other human fellow, and then a good life and a peaceful death you shall have. The way to earn a peaceful death is thinking of death and practicing oneself when one is alive. (Li 2002: 203)

In another word, the science of 'being harmonious with the Self' 和己 was placed after 'being harmonious with the Heaven and the others' 和天, 和人, but it also the fundamental concern of Li Jiugong's theology.

In the science of 'being harmonious with the Self,' the most characteristic point is his discussion of death. This is the greatest difference from Confucian tradition. According to his view, 'being harmonious with the Self' starts from 'knowing oneself' 知己, but what is the true self?

The most crucial science is to know oneself. People are all selfish nowadays, but few truly know themselves. Therefore, what we see and want is all concerned with ourselves. Let me ask that all the busy worldly man want goods and treasure, power and fame, but what could truly belong to you? Only the spiritual part would persist after the death, why do not you cherish it most? (Li 2002: 219-220)

So, his definition of 'self' was different from the Confucian way that put individual within a social network or at most an ethical subject. Li Jiugong's definition of 'oneself' has two special points. On the one hand it is a spiritual reality, on the other hand an individuality approaching the death. In short, the self is defined from the perspective of an individual eschatology.

Human beings are spiritual reality. This is the key doctrine of the Heavenly religion, as Li Jiugong said. All the Heavenly science (天学, another term for Catholicism) could be reduced into two words: 1. Subordinate the body to the spirit; 2. Subordinate the spirit to the Lord. (Li 2002: 155) For the human being who consists of the spirit and body, the spiritual should be higher than the bodily. That leads people to pursue the knowledge of the Way (道) and to love the Lord faithfully, which are separated from the profane knowledge.

Those who follow the Way shall not fear the profane hostility. This is natural, not pretended. The secular cherishes the body; the people of the Way prefer the spirit to the body. The secular pursuit is the worldly happiness, and the people of the Way hope the heavenly bliss rather than the worldly happiness. The secular desires to be famous among people; the people of the Way hope to be known by the Lord rather than by people. (Li 2002: 165)

To explain how the soul effects for humanity, Li even appropriated the cultural resources of the Taoism. Human soul could be divided into three parts: spirit 灵魂, perceiving soul 觉魂, and living soul 生魂. When a man dies, the latter two disappear and the spirit is eternal. He said,

The spirit of human doesn't disappear after death. The evidences were already explained in another book carefully. I thought it deep again that the spirit is the essence that separate human from animals. Therefore it must essentially different from the perceiving and living soul. (Li 2002: 173)

He defined the human being as an existence 'toward the death,' and there is a higher, essential spiritual aspect over the bodily or social existence. This is distinctive from the Confucian tradition which holds the ideas like 'sacrifice to God as it is' 祭神如祭在 and 'without knowing the life, how can the death be understood?' 不知生焉知死. Therefore, Li Jiugong needs explain further by the Confucian cultural resources. At first, he believed that the Confucius and Mencius are not careless of death. For him, the death is actually the central topic of both Confucius and Mencius, but the contemporary Confucians of Song-Ming Dynasty had distorted it in purpose. He said,

Well, how important is the business of life and death! The contemporary scholars don't like this topic, and I don't know why. Try to consider all these sayings of Confucius and Mencius. They are mentioned death all the times. (Li 2002: 225-226)

He even used the Confucius distinction between 'end' 终 and 'death' 死 to prove that the Christian view of death corresponds to the Confucian classical view of death. The death is not the end of life, but a 'return to its root' 归根.

I had ever considered thoroughly the word of Zi Zhang, who had ever said the death of man of virtue is an 'ending', and the death of villain is a 'death'. Now I realized that an end and a death can't be confused. Because an end is the name of accomplishment of a start, but the death is the opposite of life. Only the man of virtues receives the nature from heaven, who is perfect on virtue and knowledge, so he can go back to heavenly homeland joyfully, and this is an end out of death. As to those villains, who never have the knowledge and never practice their virtues, they will be sent to hell, to suffering the eternal pain, and the eternal death, so it is called the real death after death. Can it be said as an end? (Li 2002: 210-211)

He tried to explain the Confucian understanding of death of sage as an 'end,' that means 'going back to the heavenly homeland.' For him, it is

the same as the exaltation to the Heavenly Kingdom in Christianity. On the contrary, the 'death' of villain, is for the virtue-less heathen. Thus, the Confucian understanding of death is actually the same as that of Christianity.

Therefore, Li Jiugong had put forward his idea of 'life is actually a journey.' To him, this life is a pilgrim to the eternal heavenly kingdom,

There is no eternal party of friends in this world, as well as no eternal beings. So when the sage was alive, he regarded those worldly things and people contemporary and was busy with practice of holiness, on the road to heavenly kingdom. He is just a pilgrimage, who merely pays attention to his road, neither enjoys the beautiful things nor have a rest. Only hope to arrive the homeland, then his heart can be relaxed. If regard this world only as a lodge place, what else can delay the step? (Li 2002: 190–191)

The Catholic faith, accepted by Li Jiugong, had exploded the Confucian view of life and death. For him, no more the Confucius saying of 'without knowing life, no knowledge of death' is valid, but on the contrary, 'without the knowledge of death, the life becomes unknown.' The relationship of death and life was greatly discussed by him, and he thought that the only way to practice the life is to study the death. Only the heart is full of idea of death, then the sins can be cured and life can be perfect. He said,

Everyone must die, so who avoids this topic is a fool. The death is not welcome to everyone, but those who study it hard are the wise people; as you have studied it, you already have a preparation. You prepare it, then you are not worried [...] Those who enjoy the pleasure of their life, will not enjoy their death; those who prepare for death, will have a good ending. Because the pleasure of life is the poison to virtues; and the study of death is medicine curing the sins. (Li 2002: 208–209)

In his view, the key for both 'knowing the self' and then 'be harmonious with the self' 和己 is 'learning to die':

Only those who learn to die could see against the death at every moment, and his heart is watching the death all the time like a soldier watch against the enemy. Then when the death finally comes, he just welcomes it, and what an enjoyment it is. (Li 2002: 209)

In general, although there were some commonplaces between the Confucian and Li Jiugong's method in Late Ming Dynasty, such as the cultivation of universal virtues, the withdrawal of desires, and the control of sensations and sentiments, the personal practice of Li Jiugong is essen-

tially of Christianity. And the most distinctive view is to ‘understand the life from the view of death.’ The heavenly kingdom is the ultimate destination for life, and the secular life is just a journey to heavenly kingdom. Hence, the cultivation of virtues, the distinction of holy and profane, the withdrawal of desire are all linked to his understanding of death, which is regarded as The end of this life and the beginning of the heavenly home. In one word, to Li Jiugong, the key of ‘being harmonious with the self’ is to have a Christian view of life and death, particularly to lead a life as a ‘pilgrimage’ in the world.

## 6. Conclusions

The key issue for the further development of Christianity in China is to build a Chinese theology which could develop a healthy and mutual learning dialogue with Chinese cultures. The possibility of its creativity should rely on the discussion of Christian faith through the Chinese religions and their scriptural resources. Therefore, on the one hand it is committed to the Christian tradition; on the other hand, it is sincerely soaked into Chinese religions as well, especially the Confucian scriptural tradition. In being compared with Chinese religions and their scriptural tradition, the ability to build a theology through the Bible and the understanding of Christian salvation can be re-discovered, rebuilt and reinforced.

When we trace back the history of Christianity in China, it has been discovered that some Chinese Christians had done a lot of inspiring attempts, and Li Jiugong, a Catholic Confucian 天儒 in late Ming dynasty, was one good example. The building of Chinese theology today should be ‘a creative continuity with Late Ming theology.’ Those Christian literati and their works represented by Li Jiugong ought to be one significant intellectual resource for modern Chinese theology. Before the explosion of ‘controversy of rites,’ the Chinese Christian could dialogue with the Western missionaries in a gentle conversation with comprehension and respect, and they didn’t have to evade the tension between the identities of Christian and Confucian. Those who have read the *Meditation* of Li Jiugong would be impressed by his easiness and calmness in his theological thinking. At the same time, he quoted expertly those Chinese scriptural passages, which were re-interpreted, appropriated and ‘weaved’ into his Christian system. Those writings should be a classical work both for Christian theology and Chinese cultural heritage.

## Bibliography

1. Clooney Francis (2010), *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Oxford: Blackwell.
2. Ford David (2006), *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, Malden: Blackwell.
3. Gernet Jacques (1991), *Chine et Christianisme*, (trans. Geng Sheng), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press.
4. Li Jiugong (2002), *Shen si lu* (Meditations), in Nicolas Standaert et al., *Ye su hui luo ma dang an guan ming qing tian zhu jiao wen xian* (Chinese Christian Texts From The Roman Archives of The Society of Jesus) vol. 9, pp. 141–142.
5. Li Tiangang (1998), *Zhong guo li yi zhi zheng: li shi, wen xian he yi yi* (Debates of Chinese Rite Controversy: History, Documents and Significance), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press.
6. Li Tiangang (2007), *Kua wen hua de quan shi: jing xue yu shen xue de xiang yu* (Cross Cultural Interpretation: An Encounter between Text and Theology), Beijing: Xinxing Press.
7. Li Xiuchun (2006), *Lun li jiu gong dui tian zhu jiao jiao li de jie shou* (On the Reception of Catholicism by Li Jiugong) (M. Phil. Dissertation), Shanghai Normal University.
8. Liu Yingnan (2004), *Zi wo yu ta zhe zhi jian: ru jia ji du tu zhang geng si xiang lun xi* (Interaction between Self and Other: A Study of a Confucian Christian, ZHANG Geng) (M. Phil. Dissertation), Shanghai Normal University.
9. Liu Yunhua (2005), *Quan shi de yuan huan: ming mo qing chu chuan jiao shi dui ru jia jing dian de jie shi ji qi ben tu hui ying* (Circles of Hermeneutics: Interpretation of Confucian Texts by Late-Ming and Early-Qing Missionaries, and Local Responses), Beijing: Peking University Press.
10. Standaert Nicolas et al. (2002), *Ye su hui luo ma dang an guan ming qing tian zhu jiao wen xian* (Chinese Christian Texts From The Roman Archives of The Society of Jesus), Taibei: Taipei Ricci Institute.
11. Standaert Nicolas (2004), 'Ji du jiao zai hua chuan bo shi yan jiu de xin qu shi (New Trends in Research about Christianity in China)', in Sun Shangyang et al, *1840 nian qian de zhong guo ji du jiao* (Christianity in China before 1840), Beijing: Xueyuan Press, pp. 1–59.
12. Standaert Nicolas (2009), *Li yi de jiao zhi: ming mo qing chu zhong ou wen hua jiao liu zhong de sang zang li* (The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals in the Cultural Exchange Between China and Europe), (trans. Zhang Jia), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press.
13. Sun Shangyang (1994), *Ji du jiao yu ming mo ru xue* (Christianity and Late-Ming Confucianism), Beijing: Dongfang Press.
14. You Bin (2011), 'Lun bi jiao jing xue zuo wei han yu ji du jiao jing xue de zhan kai tu jing (Comparative Scriptural Studies: An Approach of Doing Biblical Studies in China)', in *Pneuma and Logos: Chinese Journal of Theology*, 34, pp. 255–271.
15. Zhang Xinyao (2003), *Tian ru tong yi kao* (Differences and Similarities between Catholicism and Confucianism), in Zheng Ande ed., *Ming mo qing chu ye su hui si*

*xiang wen xian hui bian* (Collection of Jesuit Writings in Late-Ming and Early Qing), vol. 3, book 37, Beijing: Institute of Religion Peking University.

16. Zürcher Erik (2003), 'Li jiu gong yu shen si lu (Li Jiugong and His *Meditations*)', in Zhuo Xinping (ed.), *Encounter and Dialogue*, Beijing: Religious Culture Press, pp. 72–95.



Chengyou Liu\*

## The Virtue Reality of Humanistic Buddhism by Ven. Yinshun

### Abstract

*Samadhi* is one of the most important ways in Buddhist practice. Why must we practice *samadhi*? What is the effect of practicing *samadhi*? Has it limitations? Ven. Yinshun, who was called the spiritual mentor of the Humanistic Buddhism, had written an important article named *To Practice samadhi: To Practice One's Mind and Idealist Mystery*. According to Ven. Yinshun, someone will easily lead to deviating from the Buddhism if he practices meditation without *prajñā*. I think this is the problem about the virtue reality in Humanistic Buddhism.

### Key words

Humanistic Buddhism, *samadhi*, virtue reality

---

In the 20th century, many famous monks proposed the Humanistic Buddhism in China. The Humanistic Buddhism has become the most important theoretical innovation in the Han areas. It is not only a theory but also a practical method. There are two main aspects of its practice: in social life and in personal religious training. The former is represented by the social activities which accord with its theory. The latter is mainly related to the method of practice and the ways one after another, which is less researched in the academic circles. Ven. Yinshun was called the spiritual mentor of the

---

\* School of Philosophy & Religious  
Minzu University of China  
Email: chengyoul@aliyun.com

Humanistic Buddhism. Based on his article *To Practice samadhi: To Practice One's Mind and Idealist Mystery*, I will discuss the virtue reality in practicing meditation of Humanistic Buddhism.

## I. The Effects and Limitations of *Samadhi*

Generally speaking, religions are transcendental. The followers who want to obtain this kind of transcendent experience must practice a special method. Among the ways of Buddhist practice, to practice *samadhi* or meditation (*xiu ding*, 修定) is one of the most important ones which can lead the trainees to get to the transcendent achievement. *Samadhi* (*ding* 定) means meditation in Buddhism. Sometimes it may be translated as 'concentration of mind.' Not only in the early period sutras (such as *Agama sutra*), but also in the later period scriptures and commentaries (as in tantric Buddhism), was *samadhi* numerously discussed. According to these classics, Ven. Yinshun mainly analyzed four possible results (with meritorious virtue) of *samadhi*. They were *xian fa le* (现法乐), *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见), *fen bie hui* (分别慧), and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽). These meritorious virtues are the achievements after meditation. This can be explained to the way-followers that why practicing meditation is necessary. But on the other hand, the four results show the limitations of each *samadhi's* result.

The first result is *xian fa le* (现法乐). *Xian fa* (现法) means present life. It is not about the future world. Practicing meditation may bring you benefits at present. When you practice *catur-dhyana* (four-stage meditation, *si chan*, 四禅), it may lead to obtain the states such as 'heaven with joy of leaving the bond of rebirth' (*li sheng xi le*, 离生喜乐), 'paradise with joy of cessation of rebirth' (*ding sheng xi le*, 定生喜乐), 'land of wondrous joy after the previous joys' (*li xi miao le*, 离喜妙乐), 'the Pure Land free from thinking' (*shen nian qing jing*, 舍念清净) and so on. They are all what you can get at present, and can make your body and mind happy. Although it is without the word *le* (乐, joy), the fourth stage *dhyana* (the Pure Land free from thinking) is surpassing previous stage. As the pure mind is correspondent with the clean body, one can get the freedom of the mind and the wisdom of attaining everything at will. This ideal realm is quite different from the secular world which is full of *klesha* (the delusion and temptation of the passions and of ignorance, 烦恼).

The second result is *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见). *Sheng* (胜) is victorious, surpassing. *Zhi* (知) means knowing and *jian* (见) means seeing. This re-

sult can be subdivided into three categories. They are ‘cultivating thought of clear light’ (*xiu guang ming xiang*, 修光明想), ‘cultivating thought of pure things’ (*xiu jing xiang*, 修净想) and ‘showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ (*fa shen tong*, 发神通). ‘Cultivating thought of clear light’ is a kind of spiritual training when someone is asleep. By overcoming lethargy and upside down in the dreams, a soundly sleep with bright light and correct memory of truth will be retained. Even with it, one can see the shape of celestial spirits, meet and talk with them. And then, one can know the name, the suffering and the joy, the desire for food, and the life-span of the celestial spirits. (TRET<sup>1</sup> 1924–1934a: 539–540) ‘Cultivating thought of pure things’ is a kind of meditation on the uncleanness of the human body. When meditating the disintegration of the dead body – stasis, decay, discrete all dead – one can destroy his desire, and understand the primary cause and conditional cause. But another effect such as pessimistic mood, the deed of suicide, maybe occur. To avoid these bad effects, Buddha taught followers the pure contemplation. Buddhists could meditate and think the purity of other things which are counterpart to the bones. ‘Showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ is also a practice way to see phenomena (*lakshya*, 见相, *jian xiang*), to know enlightenment (*bodhi*, 觉知, *jue zhi*). There are five different supernatural powers to see and to know all kinds of environment which are *deva-vision* (*siviyachaksus*, 天眼通, *tian yan tong*), *deva-ear* (*divyashrotra*, 天耳通, *tian er tong*), insight into other minds (*parachitta-jnana*, 他心通, *te xin tong*), recollection of previous existences (*purvanivasanusmriti-jnana*, 宿命通, *su ming tong*), and *deva-foot* (*riddhi-saksatkriya*, 神足通, *shen zu tong*). Yinshun said,

When practicing in the fourth stage of Dhyana, someone can show five different kinds of supernatural powers at will. Supernatural powers can make someone see and know things beyond conventional. Deva-vision, for instance, can make someone see things near and far away; visible things and invisible tiny material; its appearance and internal; at the front and the rear; in the bright and in the dark place. When someone cultivates thought of clear light, he may get Deva-vision. (Yinshun 2009b: 103)

That mentioned above – ‘cultivating thought of clear light,’ ‘cultivating thought of pure things,’ and ‘showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ – are the second result through meditation.

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation ‘TRET’ is hereafter used for Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka.

The third result is *fen bie hui* (分别慧). *Fen bie* (分别) means someone can tell everything clear at every moment. *Hui* (*prajñā*, 慧) is wisdom. Man who practices meditation must keep an awake consciousness. Ven. Yinshun said,

When dressing himself, he knows he is dressing. When going for alms, walking, talking, arising a good or a bad memory, he knows what he is doing. So does he know when he obtains knowledge and awakes himself or others. It's easy to achieve the purposes in meditation if someone keeps a calm and clear mind in his daily life. (Yinshun 2009b: 103)

The way how to do it, is to observe commandments. If someone keeps commandments with all his heart for a long time, his mind will be pure and clear at last. This is so called to get concentration by depending on disciplines (*yi jie de ding*, 依戒得定). 'If someone enters into the state of *samadhi* with all illusions eliminated, the surplus power of *samadhi* will accompany with him when he comes out off the state of meditation. If so, whenever he speaks or not, comes into or out off a place, his mind is clear, just like he is still in the state of abstraction.' (Yinshun 2009b: 104) These kinds of result of *samadhi* are mentioned in *Yogacharya-bhumi-shastra* (《瑜伽师地论》). They are called 'to holdout the root' (*shou hu gen men*, 守护根门), 'not to drink and eat excessively' (*yin shi zhi liang*, 饮食知量), 'to awaken yoga' (*jue mei yu jia*, 觉寤瑜伽), and 'to stop when correct views has been gotten' (*zheng zhi er zhu*, 正知而住). (TRET 1924–1934f: 414–417)

The forth result is *lou yong jin* (漏永尽). *Lou* (*klesha*, 漏) means distress, worry, affliction, passion, or temptation etc. It is an appellative of all conflicting emotions. *Yong jin* (永尽) means to end it forever. The *dharma* (Buddhist law and principles, *fa*) declares that the basic of life and death is *klesha*. Only when someone cuts off the *klesha* entirely, can he attain a completion of enlightenment. But the power of *samadhi* can only cut off the *klesha* temporarily. As it is only an *upaya* (*fang bian fa men*, 方便法门, appropriate skillful method), meditation can not cut off the *klesha* from its root.

The above four *samadhi* results definitely have some special effects. Someone may get supernatural experience and power which differs from that of ordinary people. But there are some obvious limitations when meditation. Ven. Yinshun pointed out these limitations clearly. In his opinion, *xian fa le* (现法乐) is concerned with human's body and physiology. If someone pays particular attention on the joy in meditation, he might put forth his effort on his body only, and lay his daily life aside. They are

called ‘person to benefit self,’ because they seek the personal joy only in the meditation. And this can’t display its significance of *mahayana* (great vehicle, 大乘). *Sheng zhi jian* (胜知见) was evaluated by Ven. Yinshun as followed,

The meaning of Cultivating thought of clear light and pure things is surpassing. The objects of thinking are fake, not real ones. This kind of contemplating may strengthen one’s Samadhi, cut off one’s Klesha, but can’t lead into the complete freedom. If someone focuses on the material appearance (of all the sentient living, including Buddha) and material realm, then practices meditation, his mind may be pure and clear in the ideal realm with glorious material appearance. If this result were combined with Xian Fa Le (现法乐), someone would take spirit and ghost as faith which is quite away from the complete freedom. (Yinshun 2009b: 102).

In *dharma* (Buddhist law and principles), one can attain freedom and liberation (*mukti*, 究竟解脱) without cultivating thought of clear light and pure things. The meritorious effects, *xian fa le* (现法乐), *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见), as well as supernatural power, are not indispensable factors on the way to attain enlightenment. Although some *arya* (the holy) can prove the *bodhi* through the transcendent realm when they practice meditation, the similar state can also be attained through non-Buddhist doctrines. According to Ven. Yinshun, this is the limitation of merely *samadhi*. He said,

If Xian Fa Le (现法乐) and Sheng Zhi Jian (胜知见) are one-sidedly emphasized, secularization and deification may occur. (Yinshun 2009b: 104)

Ven. Yinshun animadverted fiercely on the secularization and deification in his life time. If *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见) is emphasized in the practice meditation, ‘it means the turndown of Real *dharma* (Buddhist law):’ (Yinshun 2009b: 103) Accordingly, he held the same critical attitude towards the seeking-salvation way of the Pure Land sect. He thought that the Pure Land is the retribution of Buddha’s deeds. Anyone who wants to live in the Pure Land in future, must make a great effort in cultivating himself like this,

‘Doing every tiny good deeds without any evil ones. Keeping a pure Buddha-nature in his mind, One must seek and practice the real virtue actually’. He can, then, obtain the Buddha’s fruits. In this process, the power of a vow from Maitreya (the Buddha of the Pure Land, 弥勒佛) is only one seed (Yinshun 2009a: 24–25).

## II. Cultivating *Prajnā* and the Supreme *Mukti* (究竟解脱)

In the 20th century, with the mighty impact of Western culture in China, and the rapid collapse of the Qing Empire, Chinese from all social circles were forced to reflect on the reasons thoroughly why there were a huge gap between China and Western society. At first, 'salvation,' 'enlightenment,' then 'science,' 'democracy' in New Culture Movement, dominated the main theme and its variations of Chinese intellectuals' thoughts. Under these circumstances, Humanistic Buddhism was produced and developed. In its theory, the *prajnā* was thought to have a rational spirit, which were connected with modern science, and of cause had been paid particular attention. Ven. Yinshun emphasized two aspects of the *prajnā* when someone practicing Buddhist conduct.

### A. The result of *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) is not complete

Among the four results of *samadhi*, Ven. Yinshun said, *fen bie hui* (分别慧) and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) are not the ideal effects of Buddhists' meditation, they are not complete. *Fen bie hui* (分别慧) puts stress on awakening of knowledge and seeing of objects, and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) may come from *samadhi* or *prajnā*. It is different ultimately for *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) coming from *samadhi* or *prajnā*. Buddha told us, because ordinary people tend to cling to things as real, they feel suffering. But the real state of things is impermanent. There is no ego (无我, *wu wo*), there is no one's belongings (无我所, *wu wo suo*). This kind of state is *shunya* (voidness, 空, *kong*). So the sutra says: 'To empty your desire, to empty your anger, to empty your ignorance.' 'If someone removes all of it, suffering will be ended, and the *mukti* will be got.' (Yinshun 2009b 104) One can achieve it 'depending on *samadhi*.' But the Buddhism theory indicates that the *mukti* 'depending on *prajnā*' is complete more. In order to get *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) entirely and permanently, wisdom is fundamental. (Yinshun 2009b: 104)

### B. *Samadhi* of *Tantra-Mahayana Dharma* is not supreme

As Ven. Yinshun praised the importance of *prajnā*, he criticized secularization and deification a lot, especially the extreme deed and thought in the spiritual training of *tantra* sect. From his view, *tantra-mahayana dharma* emphasizes the way of *samadhi* obviously. (Yinshun 2009b: 130) Three

kinds of *bodhi* (*bodhichitta*, 菩提心, *pu ti xin*) are mentioned in *Adaman-tine Pinnacle Sutra* (《菩提心论》). They are ‘action and vow’ (行愿, *xing yuan*), ‘beyond description’ (胜义, *sheng yi*), and ‘*samadhi*’ (三摩地, *san mo di*) (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574). Later, *tantra-mahayana* expanded *bodhichitta* to five kinds: ‘vow,’ ‘action,’ ‘beyond description,’ *samadhi*,’ and ‘*gunda*.’ *Samadhi* is important in any different way. Why is it? Ven. Yinshun pointed out the reason. Comparing with *madhyamika* and *yoga-chara* (two other practicing ways of Buddhism) which emphasize *prajñā*, *tantra-mahayana* stressed on draws a line the *samadhi* (定, *ding*) and the faith (*shraddha*, 信, *xin*) (Yinshun 2009b: 130).

Buddha is an enlightened one who awakes himself, awakes others, and attains the perfect enlightenment. He gets it by knowing the real essence of the world, and its law – the Absolute Noble Truth. The terms in Buddhism are ‘*shunyata* (the nature of the void, 空性, *kong xing*),’ ‘*bhutatahata* (the true nature of all beings, 真如, *zhen ru*),’ and ‘*dharmadhatu* (*dharm*-realm, 法界, *fa jie*).’ In order to obtain this Noble Truth, one must follow a certain path: Observing the object from body, mind, and the material world, making a choice, and the most important, wisdom. When Buddhism developed into the stage of ‘*tathagata-garbha*’ (the Buddha-treasury, 如来藏, *ru lai zang*), ‘mind of absolute purity’ (Buddha-natures 自性清净心, *zi xing qing jing xin*), and ‘I (我, *wo*), the importance of *prajñā* reduced. Whereas, the importance of ‘knowing with *shraddha*’ and ‘seeing with *samadhi*’ rised. *Abhaya-Tripitaka* (《无畏三藏禅要》) said,

Samadhi is, and only is the self-existent pure mind. the mirror-like pristine cognition (Adarshana-jnana, 大圆镜智) is its another name. All sentient beings, from Buddha (at the top) to the hungry ghosts (in the bottom), both have it, and can’t increase or decrease a little of it. Imagine that there is a round brightness, just like a pure moon [...] It is bright and pure, no other things in the world could compare with it. At first, someone may not see it in his mind. After a long time of observation, it becomes as clear as the moon [...] But in the end, the round line disappears, with the void brightness left [...] This is what is called Mind of absolute purity [...] When someone enters this realm, all Klesha will be ended [...] Whenever he is doing and thinking something or not, his nature is pure. This is the only path for him to obtain all the virtue of Dharma. (TRET 1924–1934e: 944–945)

This kind of method starts with ‘Imagine that there is a round brightness, just like a pure moon,’ and then meditation is practiced to achieve the *bodhi*. So it is obviously based on the faith and *samadhi*. The book *Pra-jnaparamita arhashatika* (《菩提心论》) also says,

Samadhi, not mentioned in other doctrines, is a real way to achieve the Bodhi [...] Because all kinds of sentient beings have the Buddha-nature in his mind. (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574)

The full moon is the metaphor of it. If I see a full moon then void, I will get the complete Prajna. (TRET 1924–1934f: 573–574)

So the basic of *tantra-mahayana's* practice method is *shraddha* and *samadhi*. 'Cultivating the mysteries of Buddha, Prove and realize the Buddha nature.' (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574)

There are four classes of *tantra*: *kriya* (action), *charya* (performance), *yoga-tantra*, and *anuttara-yoga-tantra* (supreme *yoga tantra*). *Anuttara-yoga-tantra* is the highest. If someone uses this method, what he meditates and thinks is not only Buddha, but also Buddha's Land, palace, and his families – *bodhisattva*, Queen of Mystic Knowledge, and Fierce Guardian of Buddhism. So, Buddha is not external. Buddha is in himself. He himself is Buddha. He possessed all Buddha virtue, and removed all obstruction of illusion. Also, the essence is to looking into (观, *guan*) and *samadhi* (定, *ding*) (Tsongkhapa 2012a). What's more, the book *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Tantra* ((密宗道次第广论)) indicates a method called six levels (六支).

In the second level, one must repair his body as a physical form. In third level, let winds to enter, and remain them in fourth level. With the dissolution of winds, the fifth level comes into the indestructible formless result. In six level, there are two kinds of truth to be awakened, the Void of Phenomenon and the Felling of Joy on the Unchangeable Enlightenment. (Tsongkhapa 2012b)

Ven. Yinshun maintained that it is important stage in practicing *tantra-mahayana* which depends on desire and then eliminating it. (Yinshun 2009b: 136) He said,

In the world of desire (Kamadhatu, 欲乐), lust is the highest. In world of form (Rupadhatu, 定乐), Samadhi joy of the Third Dhyana in Heaven of Form is the ultimate. But they both are not Mukti joy (解脱乐) Tantra-Mahayana wants to combine the Kamadhatu joy with Samadhi joy, and then makes an Unchangeable Mahasukha (great joy, 大乐), just like Yab-yum (masculine and feminine deities in sexual union, 男女和合) shows. (Yinshun 2009b: 141)

According to *dhama*,

this enlightenment can not be obtained from looking into the superlative wisdom. That's why Tantra-Mahayana must developed a Samadhi Bodhi, and put the superlative Bodhi aside. (Yinshun 2009b: 130)

In short, the practicing methods which are based on *samadhi* and *shrad-dha*, tend to ignore *prajnā*, and easy to deviate from the path of correct knowledge (正知, *samyak-jnana*) and correct views (正见, *samyak-drishti*). This is the main reason why *tantra-mahayana* is criticized.

### III. *Maitri-Karuna* (慈悲) and Virtue Reality in Practicing Meditation

Merciful and pity (*maitri-karuna*, 慈悲) has two aspects. *Maitri* (慈, *ci*) means 'To give joy', *karuna* (悲, *bei*) means 'To save from suffering'. So subject and object must be appear, and of cause, *maitri-karuna* can only be fulfilled through the interaction between the living beings. *Maitri-karuna* is mind itself, reflects the virtue nature of the way-seekers. *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says: 'People have worldly passions which lead them into delusions and sufferings. If the mind can be rid of these worldly passions, they can be freedom. (TRET 1924–1934b: 69) So, cultivating mind and cultivating *samadhi* possesses the significance of virtue nature.

*Maitri-karuna* and *prajnā* are twinning concepts in Buddhism. Some terms ('*maitri-karuna* and *prajnā* both running,' for instance) describe this kind of relationship. In the beginning of practice, 'generating the thought of enlightenment' means 'to seek to attain perfect wisdom' (*prajnā*) and 'to save of all living beings' (悲智双运). Only when combining two characteristics perfectly, one can attain the entry to Buddha-truth. Also in the process of the way, *prajnā* must be aware at any time in any places, in order to guarantee the virtue of Buddha nature would be emerged sufficiently. In vol. 47, *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says: You listeners should meditate your mind on the phenomena of forms, just like Clever Golden Master (the alchemist, 金匠) does – putting raw gold into the stove, adding firework, blowing wind, cooling by watering etc. Thus raw gold would be ready for the purpose. (TRET 1924–1934b: 342) The above sutra tells us that one's mind must be adapted to circumstances just like Clever Golden Master does in order to get correct *samadhi*. In every stage, he does the right things, and get the right virtue reality. As so, the virtue reality of enlightenment will appear apparently. Furthermore, *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says that gold is smelted procedurally – Picking out hard stone, grit, sand, black earth, goldlike dirty. Then to soften, to polish, to make something out of one's will. When a monk wants to cultivate thought, ways one after another should be followed too. First, to cut off *klesha* (烦恼), evil *kamma*

(evil action resulting in misery, 恶业, *e ye*), *mithya* (wrong views, 邪见, *xie jian*). Second, to cut off the consciousness of desire (欲觉, *yu jue*), hate (恚觉, *hui jue*), the thought to injure another person (害觉, *hai jue*), and good things (善法觉, *shan fa jue*). Finally, no support (from sutras) is added to the *samadhi*. Thus, one can obtain the surpassing pure realm, including all the effects (*catru-dhyana*) of *samadhi*, and the abilities possessed by a Buddha. (TRET 1924–1934b: 341) In short, alchemy is a metaphor to show the virtue reality in different stage of *samadhi*.

The theory of *tathagata-garbha* (the Buddha-treasury, 如来藏) appeared in 3 A.D. It raised the importance of the virtue reality of *dhama* to a high level. Ven. Yinshun explained that:

*Tathagata* (a title given to all Buddhas, 如来) is eternal, and this is original. Then all living beings should possess Buddha nature. *Tathagata* is everywhere. Then it should be in all the living. (Yinshun 2009b: 112)

*Avatamsaka sutra* (《华严经》) says,

The wisdom of Buddha, the wisdom of formless (无相, *wu xiang*), the wisdom of no obstacles (无碍, *wu ai*), are all in living being's body. Ignorant and unenlightened people don't know, see, believe it [...] If someone can see all the Buddha wisdom in his body, there is no difference between them. (TRET 1924–1934c: 624)

*Tathagata Garbha Sutra* (《大方等如来藏经》) also says:

Among the *klesha* of human beings, Buddha's wise, Buddha's eye, Buddha's body are there. It sits cross-legged without moving [...] If someone can cut all his annoyance away, Buddha's wisdom will be with him. (TRET 1924–1934d: 457)

So, in the theory of *tathagata-garbha*, Buddha is not only in human beings' mind, but also in their bodies. Obviously, it conveys the meanings that 'everyone has Buddha nature,' 'everyone can achieve Buddha realm.' (Yinshun 2009b: 113) Among all the Buddha nature, virtue is the most important. And the theory of *maitri-karuna* remarkably shows the virtue reality.

*Mahayana*, instead of *hinayana* (smaller vehicle), was chosen by Chinese. Among the *mahayana*, the theory of *tathagata-garbha*, which is not popular in India, was carried forward in the area of Confucian culture. Besides, the *tiantai* school, *huayan* school, and *chan* school (which were produced, developed in China, and with Chinese characteristics), they are much concerned about virtue. To some extent, the heyday of Buddhism in Tang Dynasty, was due to the 'conscientious reform' by the theory of

*tathagata-garbha*. I think that the theory and practice method of the Humanistic Buddhism in 20th Century continues the tradition. It was a positive responding to the modern scientific and humanistic thought that Ven. Yinshun revealed the virtue value of Buddhism.

## Bibliography

1. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934a), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 1, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
2. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934b), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 2, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
3. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934c), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 9, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
4. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934d), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 16, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
5. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934e), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 18, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
6. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934f), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 30, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
7. *Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經 (1924–1934g), Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku (eds.), vol. 32, Tokyo: Taisho Issaikyo Kankokai.
8. Tsongkhapa (2012a), *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Tantra* 密宗道次第广论, (transl. Fa Zun), vol. 17–18, Xining: Qinghai People's Publishing House.
9. Tsongkhapa (2012b), *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Tantra* 密宗道次第广论, (transl. Fa Zun), vol. 20, Xining: Qinghai People's Publishing House.
10. Yinshun (2009a), *Pure Land and Chan*, in *Complete works of Ven. Yinshun*, vol. 7, *Huayu Ji* (3), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, pp. 24–25
11. Yinshun (2009b), *To Practice Samadhi: To Practice one's Mind and idealist mystery* (修定：修心与唯心秘密乘), in *Complete works of Ven. Yinshun*, vol. 12, *Huayu Ji* (3), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, pp. 93–144.



Leszek Sosnowski\*

## **Body – Tradition – Expression. Remarks on Japanese Culture**

### Abstract

The way the Japanese attribute the meaning to their world and how it becomes understandable to them seems particularly attractive. This attitude underlies the fundamental difference between the European and Japanese culture. A Westerner seeks to fully disclose the world, unveiling all its secrets. Accordingly, various strategies to achieve this goal have been developed in the Western culture, leading to different results. All scientific (philosophical) and non-scientific (commonsense) stands share a common conviction that truth is a Holy Grail of cognition, and that it is equally unattainable. The Japanese have been shaped by three religions: Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism, and these regulate every aspect of their private as well as social functioning. An internal participant has no difficulties to adjust to the requirements of a particular religion. Likewise, the truth also acquires different meanings depending on the context. For an external observer, however, the overlapping of these diverse domains of life creates a problem, as it results in an original but complicated culture.

### Key words

Europe, Japan, culture, body, expression

---

In his book on Japan, Louis Frédéric wrote that

the accumulation of various factors, so characteristic of the entire Japanese civilisation since its dawn and which, until now, has made this civilisation profoundly original, gave rise to the most sophisticated culture one could imagine. (1988: 109)

---

\* Institute of Philosophy  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland  
Email: ls@iphils.uj.edu.pl

At the very beginning it was the Chinese influence which was half-consciously absorbed for many ages, and only later on fully and deeply integrated with the content of Japan's own culture. The adoption of patterns of the western culture in the Meiji period happened much more quickly, but thanks to deliberate involvement of Japanese people became equally effective. However, once Japan joined the international community, its culture proved extremely attractive to the European audience.

Researchers point to several cultural concepts of the body within the Japanese culture. Dominique Buisson described eight types of body, being distinguished according to the function performed, namely: sacred, social, festive, active, embellished, sensual, depicted and, finally, a mortal body. (2003) Certainly, this is not the only possible way of understanding the concept of the body in the Japanese culture, but the aim of this article is not to account for other classifications. For the sake of these remarks I adopt a general, commonsense division of the concept of the body into the individual (private) and social (public) body, while either is subjected to the rigour of traditional Japanese principles. It is the relation between the individual and collective body and these very principles that seems particularly interesting.

## The Traditional Body

In the Japanese history of art there are no realistic images of male or female bodies. The *emaki-mono* scrolls of the Kamakura period do not provide much information on the qualities of body and mind of the people of those times. The painterly orthodoxy does not allow any individualisation of the image. Faces of the ladies-in-waiting resemble one another in every detail and are deprived of any personal character, while their figures, hidden under loose robes, do not offer any idea on what the female ideal of beauty of that time could possibly be. A fairly similar vision can be found in the medieval journal of Murasaki Shikibu, whose description of the ladies-in-waiting does not go beyond the stereotype, where to a very detailed account of the clothing the author adds a description of a whitened skin, blackened teeth and contrasting red lips. There is also an interesting passage concerning an unusual situation which is emotionally shaking the audience, but even then the shock has merely an aesthetic character.

As Ivan Morris mentioned in *The World of the Shining Prince*, the body itself was not an object of aesthetic experience. Neither was the female

body perceived within the categories of beauty. A very meaningful passage can be found in Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji monogatari*. In a description of two women whose robes had been stolen, the authoress' attitude to nudity can be seen. It can be then assumed that this attitude reflects the general attitude towards a nude body, prevalent in that, and in the following centuries. Murasaki Shikibu relates that upon seeing two naked women, the ladies in her retinue started to panic and – as she compared it in her poetical manner – dispersed helplessly in all directions like frightened domestic fowl. Once the order had been restored, Murasaki contemplatively concludes that 'a naked human body is unspeakably disgusting. Indeed, it is deprived of the slightest charm.' (Morris 1973: 198) Women's reaction to nudity, which surprises us today, or even more astonishing comments made by the authoress reveal an important truth regarding how human body was perceived at that time. Was that an unusual reaction? How did the attitudes towards the body develop in the following ages? These are questions concerning ethics regulating attitudes towards the body in a broader aspect of its social function.

Japanese culture has been shaped by three main religious and ethical systems: Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism, which contributed to the frequently contradictory concepts of the private and public body. Shinto traces the origins of the body back to the Shinto divinities, thus objecting the opinion of its vanity. A body as a gift of gods ought to be respected and protected from profanation. In Shinto, a nude body constitutes a symbol of purity and divinity, and as a consequence human physicality and sexuality is never sinful. Some researchers even joke that the first striptease on the Japanese islands took place already in the mythological times, when goddess Uzume, dancing and taking off her clothes, provoked the sun goddess Amaterasu to emerge from a cave, intrigued. Gods' curiosity is a sign of their human nature. They rule over the Earth and all aspects of its cyclic change, which justifies the number of festivals related to rebirth, harvest and fertility-worship. There is a wide range of celebrations, from the secularised *Hanami* festival, through the trashy and 'muddy' *Hadaka*, to the 'phallic cortege' of the popular festivals related to the abundant harvest, like *Onda Matsuri* (Nara), *Hōnen Matsuri* (Tagata Jinja) or *Tsuburusashi* (Niigata).

Zen Buddhism introduced a different approach to corporality. Its ethics advocates the predominance of the society's interest over the interest of the family. (Szymańska 2005: 135) It was adopted by ordinary people and warriors, to whom it became an active way of life. The latter, having a particular

attitude towards death and therefore also towards life, established some very interesting ceremonials which were further ritualised in the Edo period, subsequently developing into a complex symbolism of interpersonal behaviours. Particularly interesting, mainly because of its consequences to life, is the symbolism related to death. The prospect of dying altered the perception of the world's phenomena and lead to their aesthetisation through the prism of beauty and loftiness. 'A sense of the world's impermanence did not evolve into grief and suffering, but into an aesthetic experience instead.' (Szymańska 2005: 139) The threat of death did not violate the rules of warriors' honorary code, either. For the warriors, death constituted an event which could become 'an object of aesthetic experience.' (Szymańska 2005: 138) This kind of attitude is described by the Japanese term *ukiyo*, which

defines the impermanence and fleetingness in the Buddhist sense. At the same time it contrasted the impermanence of the mundane world with the permanence of spiritual values. In the 17th century, the term came to mean rather the praise of enjoying the ephemeral moments while fully accepting their fleetingness. (Sosnowski 2002: 168)

This perspective marked off the space for pleasures originating mostly in sensuality. The isolation of the 17th century Japan resulted in significant changes including moral liberty. Geishas and courtesans embodied the ideal of beauty and romantic love. Prostitution had reached the peaks of perfection and sophistication becoming a form of art. A famous place of exhibiting those 'works' of art was the Yoshiwara district founded in 1617. Another popular professional group were the *kabuki* actors, who not only performed in the theatre, (Alberowa 1983: 129) but also attracted the warriors who, according to the common view in those times, saw love towards a man as being of a more noble nature and a more spiritual passion than love towards a woman. Beginning from middle ages, Japanese literature had confirmed this image. Over time the long, highly ritualised tradition of expressing and accepting extramarital love became a moral standard. An interesting perspective on how the body was perceived can be found in 'the impressions of ephemeral and fugitive moments' – *ukiyo-e*. (Sosnowski 2002: 169) Its erotic subject matter was well suited for the Japanese morals which then evolved, and according to which the interest in the body resulted from its social role rather than the artistic reasons. The individual character of this role was usually connected with the sphere of love and eroticism and did not go beyond the Buddhist rules.

The third system, Confucianism, propagated the principle of dependency of the hierarchised parts, (Wójcik 2001) modeling crucial social functions like morals, group patterns and individual experience. Highly conventionalised social behaviour, ceremonies and rituals, formally expressed in the etiquette and common law codes, became the essence of Japanese society. Confucianism regulated harmonious interpersonal relations, marking out everybody's rights and obligations, as well as formulating an etiquette of everyday and festive behaviour. Confucian etiquette needs to be understood in a broad sense; it consists of practical ethic regulations which introduce the cult of ancestors, organise the society along the social stratification lines and rule over both private and public life of each of its members. The latter function is of a particular importance since it obliges one to be obedient towards any higher authority or power. In this way proper relationships between a parent and a child, a teacher and a student, a husband and a wife, the older and the younger, a sovereign and a vassal in the old days, and an employer and an employee today are being established. These relationships give rise to particular duties which must be performed from birth to death, and which nobody can neglect.<sup>1</sup> One of the few places where a Japanese can be free from this tight corset of obligations is a bathhouse, where nudity abolishes duties while pleasure directs an individual towards oneself and one's own sensations.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, Buddhism gets the upper hand, allowing a person to change their attitude towards themselves, their body and another person.

To summarise, it could be suggested that Shinto seems to regulate the human attitude towards nature, Zen Buddhism is concerned with bodily pleasures, while Confucianism defines the social context of human activity. As much as physicality in its nudity gets individualised within the community, the denial of physicality leads to collectivisation of individuality. All the duties, norms and social rules of a Japanese result from his externality, while his appearance becomes property of the group. The appearance belongs to Others, to all, and is a result of their pressure. And it is not only dress but also the behaviour in ordinary as well as extraordinary circumstances. The body is restricted by the conventions of the social behaviour: collectivism in the way of dressing, behaving or reacting. The lack of individuality in clothing results in the lack of physical individuality. Everyone is

---

<sup>1</sup> Here occurs the interesting and complex issue of *gimu* and *giri* obligations.

<sup>2</sup> A contemporary pub where people spend free time is another such place, however it generates different reactions and behaviour.

equaled to the symbolic, ritualised group identity. This process of unification in appearance and behaviour begins at the very early age and continues through the entire life soon followed by the unification of personality; the social body becomes an individual body and *vice versa*: an individual body acquires traits of the cultural body.

In Shinto and Buddhism, corporality and sexuality are perceived as an integral part of human nature, hence they are present in many celebrations. However, it is the Confucian ethics that ultimately dominates the social forms of behaviour, establishing clear boundaries of expressing sexuality. Confucian morality does not include the idea of personal guilt, but refers to the sense of social shame related to the sexual abuse of an individual which harms his or her reputation. Therefore the only condition to pleasure that Confucian morality imposes is that it does not violate the law and order or someone's good name. As a result, sexuality became expressed in a more discreet and sophisticated manner.

## The Contemporary Body

Attentive observers will surely encounter many unexpected experiences in Japan. Difficulties or even cognitive contradictions arise as one attempts to understand the mutual relations between an individual and a society. Individuality is an expression of community; at the same time community affirms individuality and facilitates its coming into existence. There is a relation of acceptance and complement, which is the opposite to what we face in Europe, where the community negates and transgresses individuality according to its potential energy of destruction. Individuality – which surprises a European – is being referred to community for affirmation, not rejection. But in this sense individuality is not about individualism, but collectivism instead, or diverse collectivism at best. But does that not mean that what we are dealing with is an unindividualised – however diverse – general body? Barthes confirms the thesis, noting that

a Japanese body is headed towards the end of individualism, [...] but this individualism cannot be understood in its western sense: it is cleared from any signs of hysteria, it does not aim at making the individual an original body distinguished from all the other bodies and consumed by the fever of success from which the entire West suffers. Here, individuality is not about restriction, theatre, domination or victory; it is simply a broken, unprivileged diversity of bodies. (Barthes 1999: 163–164)

In Japan, the public body is asexual although at the same time it strongly underlines its sex, which is related to the social status. In Japan nudity has never been exhibited for its own sake; nakedness was exposed for religious reasons, for recreation or education. Japanese sexuality has more to do with immediate gratification than with the western concept of love as a postponed desire and satisfaction. A Japanese does not condemn pleasure itself, since it does not cause any sense of personal guilt, while the Judeo-Christian West perceives sex as permanently related to evil, however different names this evil may be given.

The body of a Japanese shrinks for fear of exposing its nudity, as what is sparingly covered matters far more because of what it suggests. Nudity is accepted predominantly within a family, but also in some public situations, e. g. during common baths.<sup>3</sup> In those cases the binding rule says that nudity is seen but not watched. The bath itself does not serve the hygiene of the body, which is performed beforehand, but allows the psychosomatic renewal and the sense of harmony and unification with the rhythms of nature. Still, these are rare occurrences; normally 'a cover' is required, be it clothes or a 'mask' of a fan or make-up.

Japanese images are deep-rooted in the world. Here, the individual body is transformed into the social one. The Japanese attitude towards one's own body is a result of a double relation: to the individual nature and to the general nature of which the body is a part. However, it is hard to reconcile that view with the images in which Japan, seen through the 'cultural' bodies of its inhabitants, becomes a combination of stereotypes. Samurais and geishas may serve here as an example: in both cases a human being is an element of a social body because a man being an individual body, is hiding behind an indifferent mask or make-up, but yet identified and judged by his or her affiliation to the group. (Buisson 2003: 10)

Contemporary Japan has strengthened these perceptions even further, adjusting them to the ongoing social changes taking place internally. Former class structures have been replaced by professional groups, which resulted in the mostly one-class society performing similar jobs or professions and spending their free time and leisure in a similar way. This membership – based on the likeness of thinking patterns, behaviour and

---

<sup>3</sup> Since the end of 19th century as a result of western cultural influences Japanese morality has changed significantly. Public bathhouses (*sentō*) meant for both sexes became rarer and by the 1945 they disappeared completely.

collective judgements – forms a certain organism, a social body additionally reinforced by the aversion to tradition.

Despite becoming commonplace, these images still remain attractive and the Japanese continue to cherish them. They were formed at the time of the country's total isolation during which elimination-based transformations were replaced by evolution aiming towards perfection. It is this unique situation that continues to fascinate strangers and provokes many questions. Was the attitude towards a body a sign of cultural narcissism, which contributed to the development of a highly ritualised and codified form of professional perfection, dressed up in proper clothes, gestures and facial expressions? Could such 'body' express individual desires and fears? Did not the transition between natural and stilted behaviour cause a tension characteristic of art, until the body became an abstract work of art itself? Could it still be beautiful in that case?

The form understood as symbolism and ceremoniousness continues to be present in today's Japan. One reads about it in foreigner's guides to Japan and its particularity still surprises in many places and situations. Despite many changes in social norms which took place in Japan in the 20th century, it can be still felt today that they have not gone very deep. It will suffice to read simplified Japanese *savoir-vivre* advice in social guides for foreigners. How is the *gaijin* supposed to behave being introduced to a Japanese?

It is a very complicated matter. As a rule, it is preferred that the introduction be accompanied with bows. [...] But is the guest also obliged to bow? This we cannot say for sure, since our own opinion in the matter is not exactly clear yet. [...] In any way, we think that a bow will always be appropriate. (Rubach-Kuczevska 1985: 44–45)

But what remains not quite clear regarding foreigners is, to the smallest detail, governed by the social etiquette applicable to the Japanese.

Similar rules apply to nearly all aspects of life in Japan. They regulate private life (bathing, eating, sleeping) and public life, both professional and social (giving and receiving presents, visiting temples, attending funerals or festivals, getting married). Male and female public behaviour as well as interactions between sexes are also governed by social norms and customs.

The only moral sphere of an individual is society so it is the society's duty to maintain harmony and avoid direct confrontation or risk of committing an unforgivable offence, which would force others to express their judgement. Often this principle of shame is taken to extremes: it is not allowed to help a person who stumbled and fell in the street, because it would oblige them to repay the debt which could be too heavy a burden.

In such situations a smile becomes a disciplining element of behaviour, showing what cannot be said. A smile can be a spontaneous reaction, modestly covered by the hand or with a fan, which is a sign of elegance. In Japan good manners require that both, laughter and smile, be covered. From the very early age children are taught to hide embarrassment expressed with a smile caused by a sudden expression of someone's conduct. Usually they do so by covering their mouth with their hand. Frequently though, their lips stretch in an expressive grimace of sternness rather than a smile with all its positive connotations.

It is the first trait of dualism in the attitude towards private and public life, namely the inner and the external, feeling and expressing, thinking and representing. The difference is well expressed by the pair of concepts: *honne* and *tatemae*. The first relates to this which is inner, or private, in the sphere of feelings and thoughts, remaining, however, hidden not out of choice, but because of the social norm prohibiting to express personal feelings or thoughts. This is why the face of a Japanese would hardly ever change under emotion and remain mask-like. The other trait relates to what is external and thus social in the forms of individual behaviour. This is not a matter of choice either, but a social norm. Which form of behaviour is authentic? And is authenticity equivalent to truthfulness?

## The Expressive Body

Japanese culture does not attempt to unveil or disclose everything, and it does not apply to the body alone. This attitude has been for ages sanctioned by the three religions present in Japan. The transition from uncovering and covering marks the distinction between the moral norms arising from Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism. While in Shinto uncovering is justified by the sacredness of nudity and the functional sexuality, in Buddhism it denotes a self-justified, artistically sublime eroticism. Hence in Japan, the body in its nudity recalls the source purity, becoming only an appearance rooted in an illusion when covered with clothing. What kind of illusion? The illusion of personality based on difference and distinctness on which the value of an individual is founded in the western society. The appearance refers a researcher to the cultural mask, while illusion points to playing with the mask (uncovering-covering), which is the source of expression. In this way, it is the 'mask' in a broad sense which is related to the important question of expression in Japanese culture.

The most subtle 'mask' is the traditional Japanese clothing, a kimono. Used since ages, it has acquired a new meaning in a sensual game of covering and uncovering. The kimono played an important role creating the atmosphere of charm and temptation. It revealed a few parts of a female body which, since not covered with make-up, were considered particularly sensuous: a peeping ankle, an erotic foot, wrist, hidden smile and finally the most important: the unpainted back of the neck, according to the pattern called 'three feet' (*sambon-ashi*), giving the impression of being wrapped in a thin white net. (Golden 1999: 72–73) The sleeves constituted a vital element of the kimono's eroticism, continuing the subtle game of covering-uncovering with the wrists, influencing the shape, speed and softness of movement, making it more meaningful or spare.

A kimono made a female body an object of temptation and seduction, a fetish through the dialectics of getting closer and turning away. An object not talked about but only approached by the playful imagination becomes an object of desire. Out of the absence-concealment – although not the lack of – the erotic and aesthetic tension arises. The access to the body wrapped in a kimono is protected only by the belt (*obi*), tied in the front or at the back in a knot shaped after a bird or a butterfly. The fetish of the body – so obvious in the western culture – in Japan depended mostly on the relation between openness and secretiveness, between what is revealed and what remains hidden. A kimono and its sensuous symbolism are part of the great traditional Japanese art. The female body 'given' through only a few fragments triggered the desire of unveiling the secret. It was further stimulated by the hair – the seat of soul according to the folk tales and the eternal sign of female beauty. A man instead, was thought attractive not for its sensual beauty but for his social meaning, namely his status and power.

Another equally interesting 'mask' can be observed in the Japanese form of behaviour, to mention only the bow and the smile. A child is taught to bow since birth; at first it 'bows' with its mother, when she carries it on her back and later it bows both in family and public life. Bowing is part of being Japanese; it is visible in the streets, at home, at work and in the shops. Obviously it is very different from a European bow, but the actual difference is hard to tell. The bow *maitre de place*, a bow of any public place (restaurant, shop, hotel, office) is so ritualised that it carries no external meaning. As Barthes very accurately noted: 'a girl in a deep bow, so ritual that it is void of any servility towards the customers rushing to the escalator of a huge store,' (Barthes 1999: 142) cannot be in any way re-

lated to European bowing. What is a bow then? Each of them – performed seating or standing – is a three stage bending of the body, a complex act, happening in time, and differentiated depending on the person to which it is addressed, their sex and social status.

In Japan smile is the first sign of politeness and kindness. It seems understandable and acceptable. Still, such an idea contradicts the facts, because we are talking about a very different kind of smile. Not a sign of satisfaction and joy, but a mysterious and inscrutable expression. If it does not communicate anything, it is just an empty smile, part of convention, it does not carry any meaning. Still, it does play an important role. In Japan a smile works as a double screen: an inner one – controlling the person's emotions and separating them from other people, and an outer one – protecting the individual from the emotions of others, not allowing any close relationship with them. Upon being criticised the Japanese smiles politely as this is the appropriate reaction to blame or reproof, and when the criticism is being repeated, the smile becomes even wider. This reaction seems irrational to a European, but it means only that the person understands the situation and accepts the criticism as valid. In that case, smiling is a way of avoiding shame, since Japan is first of all a country of shame, not guilt.

For a foreigner the expression itself is problematic. A facial expression, or its sudden change showing an emotion does not contain any sense; on the contrary, it frees that expression from any sense, since it is nothing more than an impression. A very apt remark comes from Roland Barthes in his famous description of haiku. (Barthes 1999: 60–61) An expression is a suspension of a meaning, and it makes the observer feel at a loss, which in turn inclines him to raise objections because of being kept away of the energy of that expression. The observer does not 'enter' the expression, does not experience it himself, does not understand it, even though he tries to. A typical reaction of the Westerner is to make a verbal comment which not only brings him no closer to the phenomenon, but destroys it as well, blurring the impression itself. Out of a brief sensation, a flash of experience and an understanding at the same time which exhausts itself, there is a completely strange to it description produced, through which an effort is made to catch and hold to the elusiveness, make it permanent and in this way attribute to it a meaning.

An expression as a phenomenon is allowed in the case of an individual body, but is not accepted in the sphere of a social body. The reasons seem obvious: such body is subjected to the canon of ritualised and formalised

regulations, ruling over every aspect of its collective functioning. Such cultural body does not suffer from any shortage understood as an individual's impossibility to adapt, or a breach of the rules by such individual. And when a shortage does occur, it is removed beyond the established relations. In an extreme situation the shortage can be expelled beyond the frames of social functioning of the individual or group (e.g. subcultures). For a social body the most important category is perfection as a never ending process of self-improvement. It could (and should) be understood as satisfying social expectations. In this case the ritualisation of the body becomes its institutionalisation.

*Translated by Marta Bręgiel-Benedyk*

### Bibliography

1. Alberowa, Z. (1983), *O sztuce Japonii*, Warszawa: PIW.
2. Barthes, R. (1999), *Imperium znaków*, Dziadek A. (tr.), Warszawa: KR Press.
3. Buisson, D. (2003), *Japan Unveiled: Understanding Japanese Body Culture*, London: Octopus.
4. Frédéric, L. (1988), *Życie codzienne w Japonii u progu nowoczesności (1868–1912)*, Bąkowska W. (tr.), Warszawa: PIW.
5. Golden, A. (1999), *Wyznania gejszy*, Nowakowski, W., Warszawa: Albatros.
6. Morris, I. (1973), *Świat księcia Promienistego*, T. Szafar (tr.), Warszawa: PIW.
7. Rubach-Kuczevska, J. (1985), *Życie po japońsku*, Warszawa: Iskry.
8. Sosnowski, L. (2002), 'Erotyka w sztuce japońskiej. Wywiad z Beatą Romanowicz', *Estetyka i Krytyka* 3 (2): 165–173.
9. Szymańska, B. (2005), 'Wartości etyczne w buddyzmie zen', in Kudelska M. (ed.), *Wartości etyczne w różnych tradycjach religijnych*, Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press.
10. Wójcik, A. (2001), 'Konfucjanizm', in Szymańska B. (ed.), *Filozofia Wschodu*, 347–364. Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press.

# *About the Contributors*

**Rafał Banka**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University. His research interests include Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy and contemporary aesthetics.

**Agnė Budriūnaitė**, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and senior researcher at the Centre for Asian Studies, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. Her area of interests includes: Eastern philosophy, existential philosophy, classical and modern mysticism, and interdisciplinary investigations into religious experience. Her publications include: *The Half-full and Half-empty Glass of Water: The Theme of Joy in Existentialism and Classical Daoism* (2013), *Investigations into Mysticism: Limits and Possibilities* (2013), *The Existential Experience of One's Own Death or The 'Dispute' of M. Heidegger and E. Levinas in the Eyes of Everyman* (2007), *The Concept of Nothingness in Buddhism, Existentialism and Christianity* (2004).

**Jinli He**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Trinity University. Her academic interest is Chinese and comparative aesthetics.

**Marina Kravtsova** is a Doctor of Sciences in Philology (academic degree), Professor (scientific degree, asserted by Supreme Certifying Department of the Russian Federation) in the in the area of Philosophy and Culture of Orient, Professor (current position) in the Department of Philosophy and Culture of Orient at Saint Petersburg State University and the Head of ed-

ucational branch 'Chinese Culture.' Her special interests include history of the Chinese classical culture, literature (primarily poetic phenomena) and arts. She is an author of more than 350 publications, including six monographs.

**Marta Kudelska** is a Professor and the Chair of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University. Her research interests include Indian philosophy and Sanskrit literature. Main book publications: *The Cosmological Scheme of Classical Upanishads* (1996), *Karman i dharma. Wizja śiwata w filozoficznej myśli Indii (Karma and Dharma. The Vision of the World in the Philosophical Thought of India, 2003)*, *Dlaczego istnieje raczej „Ja” niż „to”?* *Ontologia podmiotu w Upaniszadach (Why There Is 'I' Rather Than 'This.' Subject Ontology in the Upanishads, 2009)*. She has also translated the *Upanishads* into Polish.

**Chengyou Liu** is a Professor and the Dean of the School of Philosophy & Religious in Minzu University of China. His major works include *the Study of Modern Buddhist Buddhism in China, Buddhist Modernization – Ven. Yin Shun's Biography*.

**Rafał Mazur**, M.A. in Philosophy, is a doctoral student in the Philosophy of Culture Department at Jagiellonian University. His research field concerns the reconstruction of the Taoist strategical basis used in the art practices of Wenren, a circle of Confucian philosopher-clerics. In addition, he is a musician focused on free improvisation in contemporary music.

**Katarzyna Pażucha** is currently a PhD Candidate at the University of Chicago in the South Asian Languages and Civilizations Department. Her primary interests lie in Sanskrit poetry, *kāvya* and literary theory. Her dissertation concentrates on the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, the tenth century text of Rājaśekhara. She holds a Master's degree from Jagiellonian University, Poland in Indian Philology as well as from the University of Chicago. She has been involved with Sanskrit teaching since 2005. She is an author of 'King Bhoja of Dhāra and His Court, as Described in Ballāla's Bhojaprabandha' in: *The city and the Forest in Indian Literature* (Elipsa, 2010); and 'Kavirahasya, "The secret of poets;" Rājaśekhara's View on Poetry' in: *Cracow Indological Studies*, Vol. XV (Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013).

**Leszek Sosnowski** is a Professor in the Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University. His research interests include Plato's philosophy and its relation to contemporary philosophy, philosophy of art and cultural relation between European and Japanese art and values.

**Sandra A. Wawrytko**, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, San Diego State University. She specialises in Buddhist and Daoist epistemology, comparative philosophy. Her papers have been published in professional journals such as: *Philosophy East and West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, *Journal of East-West Thought*. She is currently developing a 7 volume book series entitled *Buddhism for Philosophers: A Guided Tour of Primary Texts*.

**Anna I. Wójcik**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Jagiellonian University in Kraków and a member of the research Team of Eastern Philosophy. Her areas of research include: Confucianism, Chinese philosophy of art, philosophy of gardens. Key book publications: *Konfucjusz (Confucius)* (1995), *Wolność i władza. Filozoficzne idee cywilizacji liberalnej i konfucjańskiej w próbie międzykulturowego porównania (Freedom and Power. Philosophical Ideas of Liberal and Confucian Civilizations at the Intercultural Comparison)* (2002); *Ogrody – zwierciadła kultury, tom I: Wschód, tom II: Zachód (Gardens – a Mirror of Culture; Volume I: East, Volume II: West; ed. with Leszek Sosnowski* (2004, 2008), *Filozoficzne podstawy sztuki kręgu konfucjańskiego. Źródła klasyczne okresu przedhanowskiego (The Philosophical Basis of the Confucian Art. Classical Sources Pre-Han Period)* (2010).

**Bin You**, Professor of Christianity at Minzu University of China, Director of Institute of Comparative Scripture and Inter Religious Dialogue, Publications: *The Historical, Literary, and Thought World of the Hebrew Bible: An Introduction* (Beijing, 2007); *Holy Book and Holy People: Historical Memory and Ethnic Construction in Ancient Israel* (Beijing, 2011).

