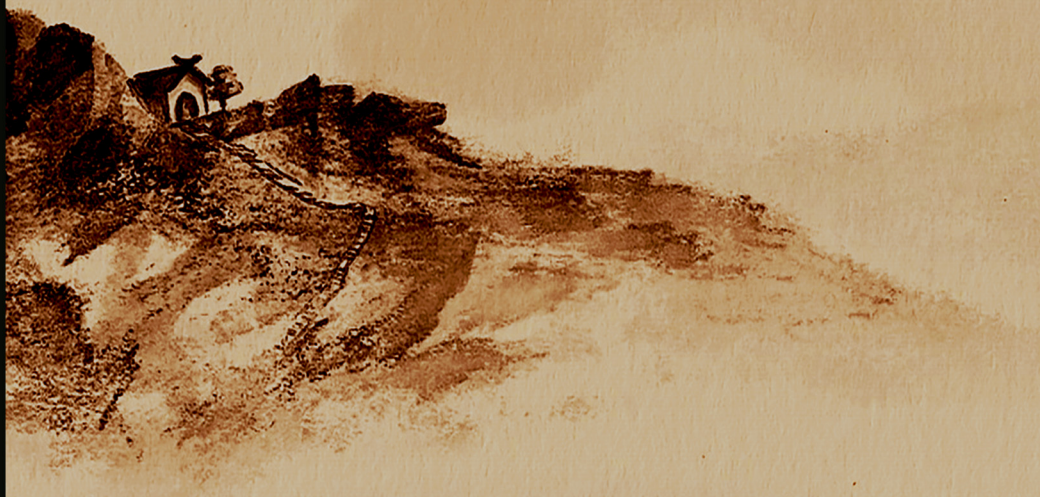
The Confucian Revival in Taiwan

Xu Fuguan and His Theory of Chinese Aesthetics



Téa Sernelj

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To my mother

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph deals with the work of Xu Fuguan (1904–1982), who was one of the central representatives of the second generation of the ideational current of Modern Confucianism. The focus of the work is on his theory of aesthetics and, in this context, on his analysis of the Chinese ideational tradition.

The second generation of Modern Confucianism, which includes Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), Tang Junyi (1909–1978), and Fang Dongmei (1899–1977), was concerned with how to reevaluate and adapt the Chinese intellectual tradition to meet the needs of the Chinese modernization process. Most modern Confucians understood modernization as a process of rationalizing the world. In their search for a new philosophical foundation, these Modern Confucians usually focused on the ontological issues they had come to know within the framework of Western ideas and philosophical systems. Therefore, in this study, I will be concerned *inter alia* with examining Xu's theories of Chinese modernization.

In general, Modern Confucians have followed the premise that questions about the inner reality of the cosmos, the substance of being and the absolute, in short, questions that determine the meaning of human life, are essential for the establishment of a new, modern society and the preservation of the integrated, inalienable cultural identity of the Chinese (Rošker 2013, 53). Thus, the ideals of Modern Confucians were not limited to efforts to revive and rehabilitate their ideational tradition. From this point of view, it was clear that they could begin the intellectual process of modernizing

Confucianism only on the basis of its synthesis with the ideas imported from the Euro-American philosophy, since this constituted the cultural background from which modernization actually developed.

In general, the second generation tried to revive their own cultural identity by means of "transplanting the old roots" of Chinese tradition (*Chong zheng jiuxue de genji* 重整舊學的根基),[1] believing that this was the only way to survive. However, this root transplantation did not only serve as a tool to enable their survival (ibid.), but the second-generation representatives sincerely hoped that it could also provide new methods for refining and advancing philosophy and ethics on a global scale. They were convinced that a consistent and precise renewal of the Chinese ideological tradition could lead to the establishment of a new philosophical system of modern Chinese thought that could actively engage in the international ideological dialogues of modern societies.

The central subject of this monograph is the theoretical contributions of Xu Fuguan to the ideational current of the second generation of Modern Confucianism, especially concerning the reinterpretation and reevaluation of the fundamental axiological concepts of original Confucianism, Daoist aesthetics, and modernization of Chinese aesthetics. As the second generation of Modern Confucians is characterized by the interpretation and reevaluation of the fundamental concepts of Chinese ideational tradition through a comparative analysis with Euro-American ideational history, Xu Fuguan also based his interpretation of traditional Chinese aesthetics on a comparative study with European aesthetics. In this segment, his analysis of European aesthetics proves to be generalizing and thus problematic,

[1] All Chinese characters are listed also in the Index.

which is also reflected in his understanding and interpretation of Western modern art.

The central areas of Xu Fuguan's research were philosophy, cultural sociology, literary criticism, and art criticism. He is considered one of the first theorists of Chinese aesthetics and modern Chinese thought. As an excellent essayist, Xu Fuguan is best known for his exceptional knowledge of the development of pre-Qin[2] society, especially its political, intellectual, and cultural characteristics. Because of the wide range of his research areas, Xu Fuguan did not create a philosophical system of his own, as most other Modern Confucians did, so he is relatively unknown in Western academic circles, while he is now the focus of study in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. The basic methodological approach that determines his specific view of the conceptual development of traditional Chinese intellectual culture and the results of his analyzes and interpretations in this field are undoubtedly very interesting, as they comprise an important contribution to the further development of research in comparative studies.

[2] The pre-Qin period is a technical sinological term referring to the central period of Chinese antiquity, which lasted from the Shang dynasty (1600−1046 BCE) to the Qin dynasty (221−206 BCE).

MODERN CONFUCIANISM

The complex situation in which China found itself at the end of the nineteenth century led to the emergence of new ideational and cultural guidelines that would make it easier to meet the challenges of modernization that were entering China more or less forcibly through Western imperialist forces. Although Confucianism was singled out as the main culprit for China's backwardness during this period, Modern Confucian philosophers saw great potential in the original Confucianism for establishing a moral and ethical system in Chinese society that would be able to fill the void in values and spirituality left in the wake of modernization in societies built on capitalist foundations. The philosophy of the Modern Confucians is therefore not only an attempt to establish new ideological guidelines that would enable China to make the most efficient and successful transition to a globalized modern society, but it is also a project that has the potential to establish a new ethic on a global scale.

The philosophical system of Modern Confucianism encompasses the fields of epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, ethics, morality, philosophical anthropology, and aesthetics.

Most Modern Confucians have grappled with the differences between Western and Chinese philosophy. They looked for a suitable framework to identify the different characteristics of Chinese and Western thought as a basis for interpreting the differences between the respective cultures. As they became acquainted with some of the influential currents in Western philosophy, they attempted to apply their own understanding of it in

interpreting Chinese philosophy and tradition. The reevaluation and reinterpretation of their own ideational tradition and culture were very important in this process. Thus, 20th century Chinese philosophy began with the discovery of Western philosophy and continued with the rediscovery of its own. In the process, of course, it sought ways to reform Chinese culture to meet the demands of modernization while rationally justifying and reconstructing traditional views of heaven or nature (*tian* 天), humanity and morality, and the individual and society. It adopted certain elements of Western philosophy, but also looked for starting points to criticise them. It sought a new interpretation of Chinese philosophy based on methods that combined modern and Western views (Cheng 2002, 375).

In general, they followed the premise that questions about the inner reality of the cosmos, the substance of being and the absolute question, determine the meaning of human life (Rošker 2013, 53). As such, these questions are essential for the construction of a new, modern society, as well as for the preservation of the integrated, inalienable cultural identity of Chinese people. The current of Modern Confucianism emerged from an attempt to establish a synthesis of Western and traditional Chinese thought, and this attempt was defined by the crisis of both discourses (ibid., 75).

Most Modern Confucians emphasised the importance of building a new ontology to serve as the basis for Confucian renewal. Xu Fuguan was actually the only representative of the second generation who believed that metaphysics and ontology were not appropriate tools for understanding traditional Chinese thought, let alone for developing its interpretation, because in his view the pragmatic core of these discourses did not lead to a coherently structured metaphysical system, such as that constructed by the ancient Greek philosophers.

The ideals of the Modern Confucians were not limited to efforts to revive and rehabilitate their ideational tradition. From this point of view, it was clear that they could only begin the intellectual process of modernizing Confucianism on the basis of its synthesis with ideas imported from Euro-American philosophy, since this constituted the cultural background from which modernization actually developed. The efforts of Modern Confucians, however, sprang not only from the desire to find a solution to the problems arising from their own tradition interacting with the modern world but also from the intention to detach this originally foreign ideational tradition, which eventually became entangled in its own philosophical currents (ibid.).

The philosophical movement of Modern Confucianism is divided into three generations. The philosophical content and guidelines of the first and second generations, which are crucial to this monograph, will be discussed below.

The first generation, which emerged in response to the generation of new intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement and, as mentioned above, vehemently opposed the annihilation of the Confucian intellectual tradition, worked between 1921 and 1949.

Its representatives were Liang Shuming (1893–1988), Xiong Shili (1885–1968), Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang) (1886–1969), Feng Youlan (1859–1990), and He Lin (1902–1992), but in terms of theory, the most important is Liang Shuming and especially Xiong Shili, who was the teacher of the second generation and had a great influence on the life and work of Xu Fuguan.

The second generation, which worked from 1950 to 1995, consisted of Fang Dongmei (1899–1977), Tang Junyi (1909–1978), Xu Fuguan (1903–1982), and Mou Zongsan (1909–1995).

The members of the third generation have been active since 1980, and as the successors of the second generation consist of Cheng Zhongying (Cheng Chung-Ying) (1935-), Liu Shuxian (Liu Shu-hsien) (1934–2016), Du Weiming (Tu Wei-Ming) (1940-), and Yu Yingshi (Yu Ying-shih) (1930-).

Historical background

Modern Confucianism (*Xinrujia* 新儒家 or *Xin ruxue* 新儒學) as a new philosophical current in China began to develop in the early 20th century and emerged after 1958, when representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucians living and working in Taiwan and Hong Kong published their *Manifesto for the Reevalution of Chinese Culture as a World Cultural Heritage* (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan* 為中國文化敬告世界人士宣言). This document defines the main tenets and goals of Modern Confucianism as a new philosophical current that emerged in response to the socio-political situation in which China found itself in the first half of the 20th century.[1]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, China was economically, politically, and psychologically exhausted by the invasion of Western imperialist and colonial powers, and was brought to its knees by the Opium Wars, with the Western powers forcing an economic opening that China itself did not truly desire. Out of this complex situation, new ideas and cultural guidelines emerged to better meet the challenges of modernization that more or less forcefully invaded China from the West. China was thus

[1] The content and meaning of the Manifesto will be discussed within an independent subchapter.

forced to come to terms with Western culture, its technology and ideology. In this regard, the slogan of Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909) in 1898 "Chinese Learning as substance, Western Learning for application" (*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* 中學為體, 西學為用), which referred to China adopting technology, especially military, from the West while preserving its cultural tradition.

This idea suffered crippling defeat in 1895, when China lost the war with Japan. Before entering the 20th century, China had to admit that it was in a severe cultural crisis. Its cultural identity, which was based on Confucianism as the dominant national doctrine and the backbone of Chinese tradition, thus became the target of criticism and the scapegoat for the given situation. Confucianism was accused of conservatism and dogmatism, and thus of its inability to adapt to the demands of the times, especially with regard to modernization. The crisis of Confucianism began several decades earlier when, under the strict and rigid censorship of Emperors Yongzheng (1723–1763) and Qianlong (1736–1796), it became merely the subject of ossified philological research that suppressed any development of creative ideas (Bresciani 2001, 12).

The first attempt to modernize China had already begun with the Hundred Days' Reform movement in 1898, but was crushed by the conservatives led by Empress Cixi. All subsequent political and military reforms that followed the crushing of the Hundred Days' Reform movement were suppressed, leading to the 1911 Revolution, in which China's tradition was proclaimed as the main culprit for its backwardness. The intellectual and cultural crisis and a serious call for China's modernization peaked among intellectuals with the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

The ideological and political turning point in the context of Chinese modernization is certainly the May Fourth Movement (*Wu si yundong* 五四

運動), which began in 1919 with student protests against unjust decisions made by the Versailles Peace Conference against China, and in the following years ballooned into a massive pan-Chinese movement of the so-called "new intellectuals," who advocated for a radical cultural and ideological renewal of Chinese society.

This movement, whose broad influence is known in Chinese history as the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) and which is often equated by modern theorists with the beginning of the period of Chinese Enlightenment, included both patriotic nationalist elements and sharp criticism or outright denial of Chinese tradition, especially Confucian state doctrine (Rošker 2013, 16).

The prevailing guideline of the new intellectuals was the rapid and most intensive Westernization of China. The cultural figures and intellectuals rejected everything that had to do with the past. This past, however, was synonymous with the Confucian tradition. The prevailing slogan among young intellectuals was "Down with Confucius and his sons!" (*Dadao rujia dian* 打到儒家店) (Bresciani, 2001, 14).

In the midst of these fiery passions, one of the leading intellectuals in China at the time, Liang Qichao (1873–1929), returned to China from Europe. He returned with an unenthusiastic view of Western culture, as not much more awaited him there than the wreckage left by the First World War. Disillusioned with the previously celebrated greatness of the Old Continent, he managed to sow doubts among young intellectuals about the complete Westernization of China. Influenced by Liang Qichao, in 1921 Liang Shuming (1893–1988), a young professor of Buddhist philosophy at Peking University, wrote a book on the *Eastern and Western Cultures and their*

philosophies (*Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學) that greatly influenced and divided the academic elite.

In his book, he emphasized the position and vision for China's modernization, which was to be realized by learning from Western ideological and cultural systems while preserving the Chinese spirit and outlook on life. He opposed those who advocated the adoption of the Western modern social system, arguing that the introduction of a foreign political and economic system into a completely different social context would not provide a solution for China. For him, modernization should begin with the renewal of the peasant population's spirit. To this end, he established the Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Shandong Province, which became a well-known social experiment in the 1930s, focusing on cultivating community unity, developing technology and science, and eliminating outdated peasant traditions (Lee 1998, 17).

Liang Shuming is considered the first representative of the first generation of Modern Confucianism. According to Bresciani (2001, 14), Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan) (1866–1925) is considered the father or at least the main inspirer of Modern Confucians. Sun Yat-sen was not a philosopher, but a very good connoisseur of Western culture. He wanted to open up new possibilities of development for backwards China through the fusion of Chinese tradition and Western ideas. In doing so, he did not adopt Western ideas unreflectively, but was also able to criticize them through the prism of Chinese tradition, which he respected greatly. He wanted to build China's future on three foundations: Democracy, Ethics, and Science. In doing so, he held that democracy and science were matters for the West and that ethics should be based on a renewed Confucianism. Among other things, he emphasized in the process of China's modernization the importance of the traditional Confucian ideological concept of the "sage within, ruler

without" (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王),[2] which refers to the ideal of moral rule (Rošker 2013, 54).

The basic characteristics of the First generation

Xiong Shili is considered the main theorist who laid the foundations for the revival of Confucian philosophy. He was a teacher of Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan, and Tang Junyi. The theoretical contribution of Xiong Shili, including the establishment of a new cosmological system based on holism, will be briefly discussed in the next subsection. At this point, however, I would like to highlight Zhang Junmai, who was the first to introduce metaphysics into the discourse of Modern Confucianism.

After returning to China in 1923, Zhang Junmai, who traveled through Europe with Liang Qichao, delivered a lecture entitled *Science and Metaphysics* (*Kexue yu xingshangxue* 科學與形上學) at Peking University that angered both Marxists and liberal pragmatists. In his lecture, Zhang Junmai emphasized the view that metaphysics must be the basis for the philosophy of life, since science was not that which could solve the problems of the human mind. On the contrary, the representatives of the aforementioned currents argued that science was the only system of knowledge that can encompass the whole of reality, and not only the physical laws of the universe. According to them, science was that which could prescribe how society should function and develop:

[2] This concept is one of the key conceptual concepts in the political philosophy of Modern Confucianism. The "sage within" is a symbol of the transcendental subject, while the "ruler without" is a symbol of the empirical subject.

> To most Chinese intellectuals of the time, science represented the most convincing and acceptable achievement of Western civilization. They were largely convinced that science and rationality could serve as the most reasonable substitute for the discredited traditional codes of ethics. After a successful tour and series of guest lectures given by the American pragmatist John Dewey in China during this period, most proponents of science irrevocably subscribed to the theories of modern American pragmatism. They were no longer willing to accept philosophies that would be limited to the interpretation of various phenomena of reality, but only those that could also be used as a tool to change them. (Rošker 2006, 131)

The heated debate between the two groups lasted more than a decade. In it, the proponents of science (*kexue pai*) prevailed as the overwhelming majority. The debate is considered very important because it introduced metaphysics into the philosophy of Modern Confucianism.

The demand for the abolition of the so-called ossified and dogmatic Confucianism and the adoption of the Western model of democracy and science, which was supposed to lead China from a backward to a modernized society, thus led to a new rethinking of the role and significance of the Confucian tradition of ideas. Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming were the key exponents who sought to revive and reinvigorate the essence of Confucian philosophy. In doing so, they drew on both the original or classical Confucianism and the Neo-Confucianism of the Song (960–1127) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, integrated by Buddhist and Daoist concepts, since Confucianism represented only a rigid system for fulfilling official examinations in which there was no room for creative thinking. Therefore, the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties indeed represents a qualitative leap in the Confucian ideological tradition.

Xiong and Liang argued that Western theorists such as Russel, Darwin, Huxley, Bergson, and even Dewey had failed to create an ethics or metaphysics that met the demands and expectations of Chinese Confucian intellectuals who searched for a deeper truth in Confucian and Daoist metaphysics as well as in Chinese Buddhism. The fact that they both studied Buddhism intensively testifies to the fact that they were searching for a spiritual truth beyond political and social reality. The chaotic and complex reality in which China found itself in the first half of the 20th century led Xiong and Liang to become sincerely concerned about the actual state of society and culture, so they turned back to Confucian philosophy in search of pragmatic solutions. The difference between them is mainly that Liang held that Confucianism as a philosophy can be both surpassed and enriched, so that it is possible to incorporate Western science and democracy into Chinese society and culture. Xiong, on the other hand, saw Confucianism as ontology and cosmology, and thus as self-sufficient. In other words, Xiong sought and focused on the metaphysical dimensions of Confucian philosophy, while Liang devoted himself to the practical or pragmatic solutions that the Confucian ideological tradition offered for the construction of modern Chinese society (Rošker 2006, 166).

General philosophical contents of the second generation's teacher: Master Xiong Shili

A representative of the first generation of Modern Confucianism, Xiong Shili developed the metaphysical component of Chinese philosophical tradition at several levels of epistemology in the philosophy of Modern Confucianism. He is considered a Modern Chinese philosopher who helped erase the prejudice that Confucianism is merely a ethical system, adding a

metaphysical foundation as well as a more dynamic character to it (Yu 2002, 129).

Xiong Shili held that the philosophy of the future would undoubtedly be based on a synthesis of Indian, European, and Chinese traditions of thought. He advocated for the rediscovery of the strongest pillars of the Confucian thought, i.e. the search for those elements of this mentality that could not only help China out of the crisis of that time, but that also represent a specific and valuable contribution to the further development of world philosophy (Rošker 2006, 214).

Although Xiong Shili received no formal education due to family circumstances, he began studying Buddhism in 1920 and two years later began teaching Buddhist philosophy at Peking University. There he became acquainted with Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophy, which made a profound impression on him, so much so that he turned away from Buddhism. Nevertheless, we find considerable influence of Buddhist thought in his philosophy, especially in epistemology and ontology. In 1932, he published his first work, the *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* (*Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論), which is still considered the most complex and sophisticated philosophical system in the philosophy of Modern Confucianism (Yu 2002, 128).

While Buddhist philosophers sharply attacked him as a subversive, his work was regarded by most modern theorists as “an important seed of an original philosophy that could enable the synthesis of Chinese tradition and modern currents of thought” (Rošker 2006, 216).

Xiong Shili was strongly influenced by the oldest classical Chinese work, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), which led him to question the Buddhist concept of pure illusion. In Buddhist philosophy, the entire phenomenal world is considered an illusion in which there are only changes that form a

cognitive process within the cognitive subject. However, this cognitive subject is also considered illusory. Xiong disagreed and argued that change exists only as change within human awareness, awareness being a part of consciousness and further consciousness existing within the self. Of course, since the self is an illusion in Buddhist philosophy, it is unclear where consciousness is supposed to exist and where knowledge is supposed to come from. Is everything supposed to float in the void (Bresciani 2001, 17)? Xiong drew this question from the *Book of Changes*, which for him was a foundational classic of Confucianism and according to which all phenomena in the world are real and result from the interplay of the binary category of yin and yang. In his work, he makes it very clear that Buddhist epistemology, in his view, does not stand on solid ground (ibid.).

The main reason for his switch from Buddhism to Confucianism was the realization that Buddhism placed too much emphasis on the negative or passive aspects of human character, which therefore prevented the positive and active aspects of leading human life (Yu 2002, 130). He characterized Buddhism as a doctrine of daily decline (*rishen* 日沈) and a philosophy of the dark sides of the human character (ibid.). The opposite is the position of Confucianism, according to which human character is fundamentally good (with the exception of Xunzi, who considers it fundamentally bad), but it consists of positive and negative aspects. The cultivation of human character according to one of the central Confucian virtues, humaneness (*ren* 仁), is a dynamic process of the development of human morality and ethics that is carried out daily, hence Xiong describe Confucianism as a doctrine of "daily renewal" (*rixing* 日性) (ibid., 131).

In this context, Xiong adopts Mencius's distinction between "small" (*xiaoti* 小體) and "big" (*dati* 大體) body, which refers to the heart-mind

(*xin* 心).[3] Both "bodies" refer to human desire and heart-mind, which are both part of the human character. It is the heart-mind that acts in accordance with fellow human beings, while the human desires and passions (i.e. *xiaoti*) are those that human beings must cultivate. To cultivate is not to deny them, but to transform them in accordance with humaneness. This concept is what Xiong calls bodily recognition or the embodiment (*tiren* 體認). It is this concept that had a great influence on Xu Fuguan's discussion of innate human qualities and aesthetics, so we will discuss it in more detail in the chapter six.

Important fact for Xu and other representatives of the second generation is that Xiong Shili in his work *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* criticized and rejected the insurmountable division between absolute and unchanging reality (*faxing* 法性) and the ever-changing world of forms (*faxiang* 法像) in Buddhist philosophy.[4] Xiong therefore rejected this theory of separation and introduced the theory of unity, into which he introduced the binary category of essence (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用). Essence refers to the original, objective reality, and function to the world of

[3] Heart-mind refers to a cognitive form of the subject's inner life, combining both rational and sensual elements.

[4] This separation of the spheres, however, is not characteristic only of Buddhist philosophy, but is also found in Western philosophy, especially in Plato's philosophy. The separation between noumenon (substance) and phenomenon is reflected in language (separation into subject and verb), psychology (separation between soul and body, mind and feelings), epistemology (separation between opinion and behavior and between sense impressions and rational analysis), and in metaphysics (separation between perfection and imperfection, the eternal and the changeable) (Yu 2002, 134).

phenomena. These two poles differ from each other only on a descriptive level—essence has no physical form, while function has one; essence is hidden, function is realized; essence is one, functions are many, and the like. In fact, according to Xiong, they are united because their existence is mutually interdependent and therefore they cannot exist without one another. Thus, Xiong grounds his cosmological system in accordance with binary categories and with traditional Chinese holism, which is one of the methods of traditional Chinese complementary dialectics existing in all Confucian ideational currents.

Xiong Shili built a specific ethical system from the complementary relationship of essence and function, based on the classical Confucian political theory of the "inner sage and outer ruler" (*neisheng waiwang* 内聖外王), which had already served as an ideal to Sun Zhongshan. In this case, the noble person is the one who is inwardly wise, i.e., in the spiritual sense, and the wise ruler outwardly, i.e., in social and political activities. Xiong accused the Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Song and Ming dynasties of being too concerned with the inward aspect of the noble person and too little with his socio-political and epistemological aspects (ibid., 232). According to Xiong, the overemphasis on morality and the neglection of the theoretical and political aspects, led to the regression and crisis in China (ibid.).

The equation of the relationship between the inner sage and the ruler who governs the people with wisdom points to Xiong's ontocosmological paradigm of the unity of essence and function. The realization of the inner sage and the outer ruler is indeed a perfect moral subject who, through the mastery of his passions, attains the moral maturity and wisdom of the ancient sages and actively participates in the social and political matters of his time.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Xiong remained at Peking University, where he taught until he retired. Then he moved to Shanghai, where he continued to research and write. Unlike his colleagues, the communist oligarchy left him alone and did not force him to write Marxist self-criticism and correct his previous theories. Even after 1949, he received financial support from the communist government to publish his works. However, at the beginning of Cultural Revolution he suffered physical violence despite general support. He died in 1968, crushed, despairing, and angry at the realization that Confucianism had once again been struck by disaster.

The second generation of Modern Confucians adopted and developed their teacher's views on the importance of emphasizing the metaphysical and moral aspect of Chinese philosophy in dialog with Western philosophy.

The basic characteristics of the Second generation

The second generation of Modern Confucians operated from 1949 to the mid-1990s. Xu Fuguan and Mou Zongsan retreated to Taiwan from the Mao Zedong regime and its tight control of intellectuals. Tang Junyi moved to Hong Kong, and Fang Dongmei to India and later to the United States. On the first day of 1958, they formally wrote down guidelines for the re-evaluation of Chinese culture and its traditional concepts with theoretical concepts from Western philosophy in the form of the famous *Manifesto for Re-Evaluating Chinese Culture as World Heritage* (*Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan*), which is still referred to by Chinese theorists as the *Magna Carta* of Modern Confucianist philosophy. The content and significance of this manifesto will be discussed in detail in the next subchapter. At this point, we will outline or illuminate the general

philosophical orientations of the second generation and the fundamental problems with which they grappled.

Within the framework of the second generation of Modern Confucianism, there were two ideational currents, the moral-metaphysical and the practical-cultural. The first current focused on the ontological and cosmological aspects of Chinese philosophy, and developed a metaphysical view of reality to guide human moral life. Methodologically, its proponents started from moral and ethical experiences, which they then expanded into a metaphysical understanding of reality based on the paradigm of the unity of essence (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用) (Cheng 2002, 380).

The second current, on the other hand, stemmed from the study of values in the Chinese tradition, whose main aim was to show how Chinese culture should be explored and developed in order to realize a meaningful human existence and create a more culturally rich world. According to Cheng, Xiong Shili and Mou Zongsan belong to the first current, while Xu Fuguan and before him Liang Shuming belong to the second. Tang Junyi, on the other hand, is a representative of a combination of both currents (ibid.).

As Xiong's successor, Mou Zongsan further developed the moral metaphysics of Confucianism in the post-Kantian system of knowledge and existence, and Xu Fuguan shaped the general wisdom of Chinese cultural tradition into a philosophical understanding of life, morality and aesthetics. Based on a deep interest in Chinese morality, Tang Junyi developed an essentialist and at the same time dialectical and metaphysical view of moral rationality (ibid.).

Basic characteristics that are, according to Cheng Chung-Ying (Cheng 2002, 396–400), common to all generations of Modern Confucianism (and modern Chinese philosophy in general) and are most clearly expressed in

the second generation, Cheng[5] summarizes vividly and systematically in the following four common features.

The first feature is the predominant role of the philosophy of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), from which were derived the ontocosmological unity of essence and function, reality and its processes, and the fundamental character of all being. The philosophy of the *Book of Changes* offers an understanding of change, innovation, renewal, revolution, transformation, the creative activities of human being and nature, and transcendence. This philosophy has consistently been a source of knowledge and understanding of reality from Confucius, through Daoism, Neo-Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Modern Confucianism to the present day (ibid.). Its main function was seen as laying the foundations of Chinese ontology and cosmology from which all philosophical schools derived. The metaphysical view found in the *Book of Changes* had a significant influence on Chinese philosophy in the 20th century in all its elements, especially on Xiong Shili and its theory on the inseparability of essence and function and their connection to the creation of life and reality. Such cosmological insight was combined by Modern Confucians with an understanding of human consciousness and moral virtue, leading to the establishment of moral metaphysics as a unique feature of Modern Confucianism.

The second feature emphasised by Cheng is the focus of Modern Confucians on human beings. If change is the basis of reality, then there is

[5] Cheng Chung-Ying is considered a representative of the third generation of Modern Confucianism. Since he is still alive, the question of his categorization is not yet officially valid, since according to traditional Confucian criteria, the categorization of individuals as to which of the Confucian currents they officially belong is decided only posthumously.

no need to concern oneself with a transcendent God. The focus on human beings in this context does not mean anthropocentrism, but the tendency towards holism and the organic connection or unity between man and nature, which is already reflected in the traditional Chinese concept of the unity of man and nature or the cosmos (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一).

The third feature is the application of modern natural science and scientific methodology to Chinese philosophy. From the earliest beginnings of modernization, all Modern Chinese philosophers have accepted the validity of modern science and scientific methodology. The holistic paradigm of modern Chinese philosophy is dominated by the importance of human values. It is primarily concerned with how scientific knowledge can be transformed into wisdom for life.

The fourth feature is the discussion of political philosophy in terms of the fundamental concepts of political power, common good, and equality. Modern Confucianism, in its holistic and organic view of reality, places democracy within the Confucian framework.

These features are, of course, only a superficial and rough outline of the content of Modern Confucian philosophy. Each individual representative added his own theoretical contributions, which are necessary for a wholesome understanding of this philosophical current.

In the following subchapter we will present the fundamental content of the Manifesto, written by the second generation, which is not an academic text, but which opens up questions and offers certain solutions to the prevailing problems of Chinese ideational tradition and culture in the middle of the last century.

Fundamental declaration of the second generation: *Manifesto for the Re-evaluation of the Chinese Culture as a World Heritage*

The Manifesto was published in Chinese and English on January 1, 1958 in the journal *Democratic review* (*Minzhu pinglun*) in Hong Kong, and a little later in the Taiwanese journal *Revival* (*Zaisheng*), almost a decade after the second generation of Modern Confucians had emigrated from mainland China. The central aim of these long essays was to show the global public (especially Western as well as modern Chinese academic circles) the true face of traditional Chinese thought and culture, and to draw attention to essentialist prejudices based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations of basic paradigms of Chinese ideational tradition. According to the authors, these prejudices, which became entrenched in Western Sinological circles during the West's encounter with China, are the result of Eurocentric and Orientalist discourses. The authors therefore formulated their critique of the West in the Manifesto, which called for reflection on the reasons for the West's alleged feeling of superiority over other cultures and the need for intercultural dialogue to establish a new global ethics that would embrace intellectual traditions of the West and the East.

The declaration addresses the cultural, political, and ideological characteristics of traditional and modern China, and places them in a contrastive and critical dialogue with Western thought. The Manifesto's resolving of the aforementioned prejudices against Chinese ideational tradition and culture is based on a more objective evaluation and examination of its central concepts.

In terms of content, the twelve chapters are concerned with the discussion of the fundamental misunderstanding of Chinese culture in the past and present, explaining the main characteristics of the Chinese

ideational tradition and its future prospects. This rethinking of their own culture partly arose from the loneliness and suffering the authors experienced as a result of migration from their homeland. They were convinced that the problems Chinese culture is facing in the mid-twentieth century had a global dimension, as China had played a significant role in the development of the entire world. Moreover, the authors point to the fact that China is home to more than a quarter of the world's population. In which direction and in which way it will develop is not only a matter of China itself, but a problem of the whole world.

The central idea behind the manifest was based on two visions: the first was to ensure that Western and Chinese academic circles would recognize the value of traditional Chinese culture, and the second aimed to create an ideational platform for the reconstruction of Chinese culture based on Confucian philosophy. In doing so, the authors emphasized and defended the fundamental position of Modern Confucianism, namely that Confucianism is not a relic of a surviving feudal social order, as criticized by modern Chinese academics, and that it is inherently compatible with both modern science and democracy. Moreover, in their view, the Confucian moral concept of humaneness, or Confucian ethics in general, can heal the overly rationalistic and mechanistic Western world.

However, the fundamental aim of the manifest, namely to recognise the importance and value of Confucianism as an ideological system capable of providing an ethical basis within the discourse of Chinese modernization on which China could offer solutions to the spiritual void and alienation as a product of the capitalist economic and political order on a global scale, was not achieved at the time, but is again becoming the subject of discussion and debate today (see Makeham, Cheng, Fan, Rošker).

The basic content, scattered through twelve chapters, can be narrowed down to three central sections. The first deals with the supposed prejudice that the Chinese ideational tradition lacks a religious or transcendent dimension, which they attempt to justify or show through a precise outline of Confucian moral metaphysics.

The second set of issues touches on the socio-political question, particularly the question of modernization and democracy, as well as the critique of the communist ideology that prevailed in mainland China. In this context, it is emphasized that China certainly does not have a modern democratic system and the scientific and technological achievements of the West, but that the standpoint that Chinese culture does not contain democratic beginnings and tendencies, as well as a negative attitude towards science and technology, is wrong.

The third section includes a critical evaluation of the West or Western culture, which they believe is based on a sense of superiority, the exclusion of other cultural traditions, and the emptiness of values, through which they aim to remind Euro-Americans of the need for intercultural dialog. In their opinion, intercultural dialogue is of utmost importance to establish a new ethics on a global scale, which is necessary for the further development of humanity as a whole, as it cannot be based on exclusion, certainly not on the value system originating from the so-called developed capitalist Western world. In the following subchapters, we will present all three problem areas in more detail.

Traditional Chinese culture and the problem of its pragmatism and atheism: A transcendent moral subject vs. the transcendence of religion

The authors point out that the misunderstanding of Chinese culture that prevails both in the West and in modern China is based on ignorance of its distinctiveness and origin. China is a unified cultural system with the same origin and continuity. This unity and continuity refer mainly to the Confucian ideological tradition. In this respect, the Chinese world of ideas is said to be distinctly different from the Western world, i.e. the European world, which consists of different cultures and origins; Western science and philosophy originated in ancient Greece, the legal system in Rome, and religion in Hebrew culture. While the West takes for granted the separation between abstract speculation and ethical practice, between religious piety and socio-political action, Chinese culture is said to understand these levels as continuities (Chang et al. 2018, 13). Because of these differences, the West does not recognize the religious feelings of transcendence that are present in the daily practice of ethics in China (ibid.).

The authors point out (ibid.) that, in the last hundred years, Western merchants and missionaries who invaded China with warships and forced it to trade became the symbol of the cultural invasion of the West. The ideological leaders of the May Fourth movement were therefore indifferent to Western religion, but at the same time neglected the religious element in Chinese culture. They admired science and democracy, while in the philosophical realm they believed in pragmatism, utilitarianism, materialism, and naturalism. Their interpretation of Chinese culture therefore completely eliminated the element of religiosity, and they also labelled the traditional moral principles manifested through social rituals and customs as harmful and decadent.

Chinese ethical and moral principles were treated as mere formalities within human and social behaviour, lacking any spiritual value (ibid., 5). The attitude of communist ideology towards tradition is said to have dealt an even heavier blow to Chinese culture, as it completely lacked insight into the transcendent dimension of human existence, which forms the basis of Chinese ethical and moral principles. The authors of the Manifesto emphasize here (ibid., 7) that there has never been a religious system in China as in the West, which does not mean that there is no religious spirit or transcendent dimension, but only ethical and moral principles that govern human relations and behaviour in a pragmatic way to maintain political and social order. Thus, the prejudice that there is no religiosity in China is, in their view, inaccurate, as it is found in the idea of the unity of heaven and man, with moral practice also imbued with belief in the *Dao* (ibid.). In this prejudice, the West and Chinese Sinologists mostly assume erroneously that these principles should only regulate the external forms of human existence, completely devoid of transcendent elements that would also affect people's spiritual lives (ibid., 20).

To overcome this prejudice, it is crucial to understand traditional Chinese humanism, in which there is a central Chinese concept of the unity of man and heaven or nature (*tian ren he yi*).

This concept can also be interpreted to mean that man and nature are not separate (*tian ren bu er* 天人不二), as they are the same substance (*tian ren tong ti* 天人同體) and are in harmony. Of course, heaven expresses several meanings; for one thing, it can be the heaven we see, for example. However, in ancient China, heaven clearly referred to a higher transcendent power. Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi all ascribed a transcendent meaning to the concept of heaven (ibid).

They also point out (ibid., 21) that this type of belief in the divine nature of heaven or nature manifests itself within Chinese tradition through a combination of the worship of heaven, earth, rulers, ancestors, and teachers. In ancient China, the rite and worship of heaven could only be performed by an emperor, thus combining politics and religion into one system. This inseparability of political and religious elements, together with the traditional emphasis on the inner, i.e. moral, perfection of the individual at the expense of the development and cultivation of outer, i.e. social and political, factors, resulted in a system that often tended toward despotism; it certainly hindered the development of modern democracy.[6]

[6] The views of the individual representatives of the second generation were different. Unlike Fang Dongmei and Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan believed that traditional Chinese culture actually neglected the development of an individual's political consciousness (*wai wang*) because it was too focused on the cultivation of the inner moral self (*neisheng*). This concept is one of the key tenets of the political philosophy of Modern Confucianism. As already mentioned, the "inner sage" is a symbol of the transcendent and the "outer ruler" is a symbol of the empirical subject, both of which refer to combining personal morality with broader social ethics while living a successful life in society (Rošker 2013, 54). Traditional Confucians adopted the external ruler according to the Daoist work Zhuangzi, in which such ruler is defined as one who, together with the inner sage, forms the ideal path of man, forming a metaphor for the complete perfection of man as an individual who cultivates his inner spiritual self and is active in society. However, in the discourse of Confucianism, this concept was the ideal of moral rule. The first generation of Modern Confucians adopted this ideal, but also emphasized the importance of scientific knowledge. However, the second generation had already noticed that the ideal of moral rule could not be realized in the society of that time, so they mainly incorporated Western science and democracy. However, the third generation believes that the content of modernization is not only in science and democracy, but

However, the practical side of Chinese humanism is reflected in the doctrine of reasonable justice (*yi li zhi xue* 義理之學), which involves the distinction of right and wrong, along with moral reason, which shapes or regulates human intentions and behaviour. Of course, this process is not limited to relationships between people in order to maintain political and social order. Its real goal is the perfection of man's moral personality, which arises from the consideration of justice in terms of rational action and does not look to one's own gains or losses, advantages (ibid., 22). This goal was emphasized by the Confucian school, which stressed the importance of moral integrity in achieving justice (moral perfection) based on the individual's own responsibility.

> How can this be achieved if there is no belief in absolute justice? This faith can also be interpreted as an act of appeasing one's conscience without necessarily submitting to divine command. Where conscience finds its rest, there is the justice (and morality) of the cosmos. The *Dao*, in which conscience finds its consolation, is on the one hand embedded in human consciousness, and on the other hand transcends the narrow limits of man's concrete life. (Ibid.)

In this context, members of the second generation wondered whether belief in the *Dao* was not exactly the same as religious belief in a supernatural order. In their view, the extraordinary longevity and vitality of the Chinese tradition was due to its constant requirement to reconcile social life with the cultivation of transcendent consciousness. This view contradicts the

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it is even more important to find a reasonable adaptation to the development and achievements of modern capitalism (ibid.).

hypothesis that Chinese culture develops only the principles of external forms of human relations at the expense of neglecting transcendent aspects, i.e. the prejudice about the purely pragmatic character of traditional ethics, which contains no transcendent elements. Modern Confucians vehemently rejected this thesis, stressing that this kind of transcendence is an inseparable and important part of the Chinese ideational tradition. According to the authors of the Manifesto, the reason why Western Sinologists usually do not even perceive the transcendental dimension of Chinese culture is that such transcendent feelings are not directed towards an external god, but remain part of the individual's inner self and are realized through the cultivation thereof.

In this aspect, they focus on discussing the so-called Chinese rationalism of the Song and Ming dynasty's Neo-Confucianism, or the doctrine of heart-mind and humaneness (*xinxing zhi xue* 心性之學) (ibid., 8–11), a discourse that discusses the reasons for the existence of a moral imperative between heaven (nature, cosmos) and man, and at the same time for a doctrine that they believe Western Sinologists have largely neglected or misunderstood. The authors believe that this doctrine represents the core of Chinese culture, which includes the fundamental concept of the unity of man and heaven. The relationship between heart-mind and humaneness is at the heart of Confucian thought as well as of Daoism of the pre-Qin period. The Jesuits equated the concept of heart-mind and humaneness (*xinxing* 心性) with the rational soul[7] in Western philosophy, and the authors point out that the

[7] Because the Jesuits translated humanness into a dichotomy with the supernatural, the authors argued that they completely distorted its meaning and deprived it of the transcendent dimension inherent in it (ibid.). A human being is directed towards the attainment of the inner, i.e. transcendent dimension. Thus, a human being carries

doctrine of heart-mind and humaneness handed down from Confucius and Mencius to the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties could also be interpreted as a doctrine of transcendent consciousness in terms of morality with similar metaphysical implications established by Immanuel Kant in Western philosophy. This forms the basis for moral practices in the daily life of individuals and the community at large. In this context, every practice of morality springs from man's own inner effort of moral consciousness and moral reason. When man fully develops its so-called transcendent consciousness, it can eventually approach heavenly virtue, heavenly reason, and cosmic consciousness, and thus achieve the unity of virtue between man and the cosmos, which is the essence of traditional Chinese rationalism. Such an idea of transcendent consciousness is the source of all evaluation in Chinese culture, through which man becomes aware of the values of his own life, of the cosmos, and of the interrelatedness of the two. This awareness gives man satisfaction and reassurance and thus also enables a state of acceptance of the present. Therefore, in the Chinese tradition, acceptance of the present and reconciliation with its conditions is not necessarily associated with the constant pursuit of progress and gains as in the West (ibid.).

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within itself a line of communication in the systematic transmission of social, ethical and ritual activities, which are then combined into unity through inner transformation or cultivation, and in conjunction with religious spirit and metaphysical perception. Since this kind of rationalism is, according to the authors, the essence of Chinese culture, they appeal to the need to dispel the prejudice that the essence of Chinese culture is limited to the adjustment and regulation of interpersonal relations at the expense of inner or metaphysical transcendent feelings.

In this context, the concept or wisdom of detachment (*fangxia zhi zhihui* 放下之智慧) (ibid., 23), which occupies a very important place in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, as well as in Indian theology, is very important. Western culture, which mostly has an analytical, rational apparatus of knowledge and operates more or less from the particular to the universal, lacks flexibility. This wisdom of detachment, which the Manifesto's authors call "circular and miraculous" and which can already be found in the *Book of Changes* (*yuan er shen de zhihui* 圓而深的智慧) (ibid.), is in itself dynamic in contrast to the static (Western) approach mentioned earlier.

In the Western philosophy of ethics, the question of morality often refers to the rules of conduct and the social value of moral precepts in the context of religious worship (ibid., 14). Few have emphasized that practice must change human behaviour and virtues. However, the original Confucianism emphasized precisely this dimension. In the Confucian view, all Chinese virtues originate in the supreme cosmic spirit inherent in human heart consciousness. Thus, according to the authors, the prejudice that Chinese culture is solely focused on the pragmatic regulation of human relations and a social order in which there is no transcendent dimension lacks any real basis and becomes extremely unfair to the actual content of Confucian moral theories of the subject and Chinese culture as a whole.

Views on Democracy, Communism, Modernization, and Scientific Development

In this context, the authors point out that, despite the rich ethical and moral dimension of the Chinese ideational tradition, Chinese culture lacks science and democracy, so it needs to develop as an empirical and political subject (ibid., 15).

At this point, they give their view of China's current political situation and ask whether the Chinese people want democracy at all, given the prevalence of the communist regime or Marxist Leninism, which they regard as anti-democratic (ibid., 7), even though democratic thinking and the pursuit of scientific progress prevailed in the early days of the Republic of China. In this regard, they cite a number of reasons why they believe the dictatorship of the Red Army will not exist as a guiding principle in Mainland China's cultural and political institutions for much longer (ibid., 19). They see their ideologies as a discourse that runs counter to human beings as such and violates a priori the rights of individuals. According to them, communist ideologies are dogmatic and constitute an obstacle to the free development of humanity. They point out that a certain segment of the Chinese population embraced communist ideology with open arms, primarily because of its resistance to the aggression of Western capitalism and imperialism. Communism, then, in its dynamic force, has managed to meet the Chinese social and political demands of the moment. Marxism is thus only a temporary tool to achieve the positive demands and goals of the Chinese people, which are primarily anti-imperialist (ibid.).

According to Modern Confucians, the beginnings of democracy existed in traditional Chinese culture (ibid., 16). Daoist and Confucian political thought speaks of the ruler that should never abuse his power and act by the principle of non-action (*wuwei* 無為) or ruling by virtue (*dezhi* 德治). Even before the Zhou dynasty (11th–3rd century BCE), there was the belief that the empire belonged not to one individual but to the people as a whole (*tianxia wei gong* 天下為公) (ibid., 17). These principles were handed down by Confucius and Mencius and can be considered the beginnings of Chinese democracy. The authors believe that the formation of a democratic system in China should be based on the traditional Confucian political

philosophy, but it should be developed and refined. At the political level, the people could theoretically claim the right to co-decide on state administration, but in practice this was not feasible because there was no legal system that protected people's rights and could judge and evaluate the actions of those in power. Moreover, Chinese history was dominated by Confucianism, which emerged from legalism, which is a priori anti-democratic. Therefore, the contradiction between the moral spirit of Chinese culture and monarchical absolutism can be resolved, in the view of the authors, by establishing a democratic constitution (ibid.).

According to Modern Confucians, China has not been able to modernize and industrialize because it has not developed a democratic system, science, and technology (ibid., 15). Nevertheless, they do not agree with the prevailing view that there was no internal tendency in Chinese culture to develop a democratic system, nor do they accept the thesis that Chinese culture was hostile to science and radically contemptuous of technical knowledge. They point out that ancient China paid great attention to the development of practical knowledge and skills. The Confucian school emphasized not only the need to establish virtue, but also the use of tools or technology to improve survival (ibid.). Therefore, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine flourished in ancient China. Until the 18th century, China was far ahead of the West in craftsmanship and cultivation techniques. Despite all this, the second generation also believes that Chinese culture lacked Western-style science because it was only focused on everyday use and short-term benefits. Therefore, for the future development of Chinese culture, it is necessary to establish a theory of science and a new academic system through the continuous study and dissemination of scientific behaviour (ibid.). On the question of modernization, the second generation of Modern Confucians assumed that the Chinese tradition also had the

potential to modernise, even though in its specific case it was “imported” from the West due to a number of external and internal factors. Therefore, the problems of modernization in China also differ from those of modern Western societies. While the West’s are characterised by an excessive prevalence of individualism, rationalism, and social alienation, the biggest problem in China is the lack of development in technology, law, and democratic social structures (ibid., 27). According to the representatives of the second generation, China therefore needs to learn from the West in some respects, but on the other hand, the Confucian tradition can also provide the West with much valuable knowledge to alleviate—if not eliminate—many serious problems in Western societies.

The question of the presence or absence of transcendence in traditional Chinese philosophy and ethics was extremely important for the authors of the Manifesto because classical Western theories of modernization have always emphasized that Chinese culture (like all other “non-Western” cultures) could not modernize itself at all, since the internalized concept of transcendence and the creative tension between man and God is supposed to be one of the central assumptions of modernization, while the Chinese ideational tradition has never produced such a transcendental tension (Rošker 2013, 189). It was therefore extremely important for the second generation of Modern Confucians to clearly demonstrate that Chinese culture also contained key elements in its tradition that would potentially enable such a modernization of China based on its own ideational foundations.

The Critique of Western culture and a call for change

As mentioned above, a significant part of the Manifesto is also devoted to the analysis of Western culture and to the debate concerning why Western

culture has dominated the modern world since the early 19th century and why the whole world is trying to adopt Western religion, science, philosophy, literature, law, and technology. In doing so, however, the authors question whether Western culture is really the thing that can spontaneously lead human civilization as a whole. They are interested in whether the "East," which otherwise learns from the "West," can also learn something from it (ibid., 20).

The authors do concede that Western culture has made remarkable achievements, using the theory of scientific progress to reconstruct the natural world and reform the social, political, and economic spheres. In the last one or two hundred years, its progress has outstripped and left behind all other traditional cultures of the world. This cultural progress of the West has a universal and eternal value that other nations would have to respect, imitate, and study if they wanted to compete with it. On the other hand, in the process of progress, Western culture provoked various conflicts and serious problems, such as wars (including religious ones), antagonism between workers and employers or capitalists in the Industrial Revolution, colonialism etc. (ibid, 21). According to the authors, the West has already solved most of these problems, but they believe that they result from the shortcomings of Western culture that still exist today, which is why a reassessment of Western culture as such is urgently needed. In the following, the authors therefore list various deficiencies of Western culture.

Westerners, in their opinion, lack respect and compassionate understanding of other cultures. As a result, they usually ignore their genuine need for their own development. In this regard, we must not forget the Orientalist approach that Westerners use when studying other cultures. Orientalism, Eurocentrism, cultural provincialism, modern colonialism, and false universalism are thus still living mechanisms by which the West

"justifies" its own sense of superiority over others. Such an attitude, in their view, is a product of Greek culture and its analytical-scientific methods, the Hebrew tradition, and the modern technological mind.

If we understand the cultural background on which the West's sense of superiority is built, we must at the same time understand and forgive Westerners. But if this culture is to continue to exist and, together with other cultures, to secure world peace, it will also have much to learn from other cultures (ibid., 22). This is especially true for Western intellectuals and scientists, who should perform their function of creating explanatory models with more responsibility and greater openness towards non-European cultures.

Among the most important values of the Confucian tradition that would certainly benefit Western culture are contentment without the constant pursuit of gain, compassion, kindness, and gentleness. We should also learn that interpersonal relationships must be based on equality, but also on humaneness (ibid., 24). In other words, the fraternity emphasized by the West must be transformed into humaneness and compassion. God, who is the source of ardent love, should be perceived not only as one who transcends the human spirit and is at the same time the object of human prayer, but also as one with whom or behind whom human beings are united (ibid.).

Thus, the West can also learn from Confucian culture the importance of respecting traditions, family ties, international solidarity, and ethical values. The main problem of Western culture and ethics, then, is that it treats society and human history only as an object of rational and objective inquiry, and fails to draw attention to the importance of the meaningfulness of human existence.

The Analysis and critical evaluation of the Manifesto

As we have seen above, the revitalization of Chinese culture pursued by the second generation, the guidelines of which are clearly formulated in the present manifest, is on the one hand a tendency to rehabilitate Confucianism and on the other a call for global ethics that should be based on Confucian theories of the moral subject.

Despite its undoubted importance for the preservation of China's cultural heritage, the Modern Confucian Manifesto also contains some problematic points, which we will highlight below.

The essay assumes that culture is a product of people's spiritual life. In the West, this spirituality is generally limited to religion, while in China spirituality is said to be based on the philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. This is problematic due to the fact that Christian theology itself, and especially medieval scholasticism, was largely fed by the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Moreover, European humanism is based on ethical and moral values that are as universal as Confucian values. The spiritual emptiness of Western culture is attributed to the constant drive for progress, which is also based on religious foundations, especially the emptiness of religious rituals and the inherent separation of man from the Creator. This is largely true, of course, but the authors of the Manifesto fall into an essentialist generalization, for "Western values" certainly cannot be limited to those propagated by Judeo-Christian theology. This is related to the following inconsistency of the text: its authors speak of the West as a cultural formation that has emerged from several traditions, but they do not take into account the specific differences of the individual cultural areas, which mostly concern different value systems within different cultures. In doing so, they seem to refer primarily to America in their critique of the

West, since they emphasize pragmatism and utilitarianism, ideological guidelines that developed precisely there and not in the European tradition.

Otherwise, the Manifesto's criticisms of the West are justified and credible in most of their arguments. They rightly point to its Eurocentric sense of supremacy and superiority over other cultures, to the provincialism of its own culture that fails to recognise the ideological systems of other cultures based on its own conceptual world, and to imperialist and colonial interests manifested in the oppression and humiliation of peoples. Even the suggestion they make to Western academics to consider the world's further development seems justified and appropriate: the West must learn from the East if it is to preserve and develop its own culture. They also point to the sense of compassion and detachment that they believe is lacking in Western culture, but in this segment I think they are being essentialist because there is primarily no critique of capitalism as an economic and political system and accompanying ideology, in which these sentiments naturally do not have much a priori validity.

The critics and their predictions about the fate of the communist regime are mostly visionary, but their thesis that the system will not survive in China or anywhere else in the world because it works against basic humanistic principles is quite generalizing and naive in my opinion, since the overthrow of communist regimes in the countries of the so-called "real socialism" was driven primarily by the rise and aggressive domination of capitalism, and by the unbridled lust for power and privilege of the internal communist elites (high cadres and other leaders).

A number of modern Western and Chinese Sinologists accuse the Manifesto of many other shortcomings. The post-colonial critic Arif Dirlik warns of the danger of its association with Chinese nationalism in this Modern Confucian revival of the Chinese ideological tradition and its value.

Heiner Roetz, on the other hand, draws attention to the dubiousness of the Modern Confucian thesis of the religious dimension of the original Confucianism, which, in his opinion, is neither appropriate nor necessary, since, in his view, a non-religious reading of these ancient texts—through an appropriate interpretation and adaptation—could allow for an objective conceptualization of such a modernity that is not limited to instrumental rationality and, on the other hand, does not negate social progress, which is a necessary consequence of the Enlightenment (Rošker 2013, 57).

Mainland Chinese theorists accuse Modern Confucians of idealistically promoting Confucianism as the ideological basis on which the modernization of Chinese society is actually possible to realize. If Confucianism, as the surviving ideology of the feudal tradition, was unable to do so in the past, they argue that it is likewise impossible in the present or will not be possible in the future (ibid.).

Modern Daoists generally accuse Modern Confucians of excessive and rigid formalism, which inhibits critical dialog and the development of critical thinking. The most famous modern Daoist, Chen Guying from Taiwan, for example, accuses them of an obsession with morality and ethics. In doing so, he agrees with the assumption that a modern, market-oriented society needs an ethical sense. However, he stresses that this sense of purpose should not be achieved at the expense of excluding other traditions of thought and ascribing exclusive values and schools. Such views, in his view, are an expression of intolerance and absolutism.

Although Modern Confucians advocate dialogical openness in principle, Chen believes that they themselves are incapable of it precisely because they do not follow the traditional Chinese concept of "free dialog among a hundred philosophical schools (*baijia zhenming* 百家爭鳴)," which is a genuine dialog and a prerequisite for any true philosophy. Chen believes

that their commitment to the synthesis of Chinese ideational tradition and Western science and democracy is therefore empty (Rošker 2013, 58). On issues of adopting the intellectual tradition of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, he also accuses them of a lack of innovation, as he believes they failed to upgrade it.

Personally, I think that the criticism of Chen Guying in this regard is unjustified, since Modern Confucians have built their philosophical system on the synthesis of Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism, and the analysis and comparison of Chinese and Western ideological concepts, which led to the elucidation of some completely new aspects in both conceptual systems. Worth mentioning are Mou Zongsan's comparison of the moral self and Kant's moral imperative, as well as Xu Fuguan's comparative analysis of Zhuangzi's onto-aesthetics and Western phenomenology, and his thesis as to why no monotheistic religion developed in China, which also illuminates certain inconsistencies in Karl Jaspers' theory of the Axial age.

The second generation's view on the compatibility of Confucian tradition and modernization

Most of the members of the Modern Confucian movement proceeded from the supposition that the Chinese ideational tradition lacked a coherent development of rational and logical reasoning, which belongs to the crucial precondition for the development of scientific thought and technological innovations. In their view, the prevailing currents of traditional philosophy were focused upon ethical and moral thought, particularly upon questions linked to the inner moral cultivation (see for instance Ott 2017, 80–82). In the traditional binary category of "internal sage and external ruler (*neisheng waiwang*), this inconsistency manifested itself in the domination of the

former over the latter.[8] Lee Ming-Huei (2001, 15) states that while most Modern Confucians saw the inner sage as a basis for the concept of the external ruler, the latter was never understood as merely an extension of the former. Their aim was to establish the subject within the complementary relation between both poles. The development of science, democracy, and modern technology, however, was a crucial for the advance of modernization. They thus explored their own tradition for authentic concepts comparable to the two Western paradigms essential for modernization, i.e. the concepts of subjectivity,[9] and of reason and rationality.

In search of a new philosophical basis, most of the Modern Confucians focused on metaphysical and ontological issues, which they recognized in the context of Western ideas and philosophical systems. They thus emphasized the importance of establishing ontology and metaphysics as the basis for Confucian renovation.

Xu Fuguan, however, was practically the only representative of the second generation who did not consider metaphysics and ontology as appropriate frameworks or tool for understanding and interpretation of classical Chinese thought, and much less for its development. He argued that it was precisely the pragmatic core of Chinese traditional thought that

[8] An important methodological step had already been taken previously by Mou Zongsan, with his concept of the self-negation of the moral Self (*daode ziwode kanxian* 道德自我坎陷, see Mou 1975, 123).

[9] According to Jana Rošker (2013, 262), the historical positioning of the notions of subjectivity and autonomy as were developed in the Chinese intellectual tradition, was elaborated by several Modern Confucian scholars, particularly by Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi.

did not lead to any composition or any structured and coherent conception of a metaphysical and ontological system, as has been established, for instance, by the ancient Greek philosophers (Rošker 2013, 89). Instead, it developed the idea of ethics based on the divine core of the human inner self directly from a "primitive" stage of religious and mythological society, where ethics relied neither on metaphysics nor on religion, but was based upon internalization of morality (ibid.).

> Based upon the nature and heart-mind of a single human being, it is possible to reflect upon, comprehend and determine the fate of all of humankind. And every person can attain a complete self-sufficiency in their own nature or heart-mind, without recourse to the aid of some external force or entity. (Xu in Rošker 2013, 89)

According to Xu, ethics, morality, Confucian virtues, and Chinese traditional culture in general, are all based on the sense of "concerned consciousness" (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識).[10] For Xu, concerned consciousness is the realization of the consequences of individual actions and decisions that emerge from a sense of responsibility.

Xu Fuguan comprehended and discussed human beings within the framework of socio-political history, as an individual struggling according to or against historical processes, while other Modern Confucians emphasized the transcendent nature of people. In this sense, Xu Fuguan's position is a materialistic one, while most of other representatives of the second generation could be regarded as idealistic.

[10] The concept of concerned consciousness (*youhuan yishi*) will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

The ideals of Modern Confucians were not limited to the quest for revitalization and rehabilitation of the ideological tradition from which they arose. For them, it was clear that the intellectual process of modernizing Confucianism could only begin on the basis of its synthesis with the ideas imported from Euro-American philosophy, since it was the cultural background from which modernization actually emerged. The presupposed acceptance of the Western models of democracy and science, which ought to lead China from a backward to a modernized society, has therefore led to a new reflection on the role and meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition. The main guiding principle for Modern Confucians was to revitalize the traditional Chinese intellectual tradition based on the original Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, combined with a deeper knowledge of Western philosophical concepts and cultural specifics. Of course, this process did imply the reproduction of a Confucian intellectual system of thought, albeit one based on the reinterpretation and redefinition of Confucian concepts through Western philosophical systems (Chang et al. 2018, 53).

In the process of modernization, the second generation advocated the position that China must preserve and develop important elements of its own traditions, as these contained the seeds for its democratic and scientific development. Contrary to most other Chinese intellectual currents at that time, which believed that Confucian ideology was the main obstacle for China's modernization, the second generation was convinced that it was compatible with both science and democracy, and that East Asian societies would fail to develop modern democratic social systems insofar as they did not originate from and consider various segments of the Confucian tradition (ibid., 97).

In this regard, it is important to mention Xu Fuguan's argument that Confucian theory is inextricably compatible with democracy, since already in classical Chinese texts, such as the *Book of Documents* (*Shu jing*), records are found listing people as the basis (*minben* 民本) of the state, as well as important and active subjects in constructing a righteous and harmonious society. Although these records are vague, Confucius took over this idea, and Mencius then upgraded and elaborated it further, explicitly stating that the people are a state's most important element, and the ruler its least (*Mengzi* s.d., Jin xin xia).

On the other hand, Xu points out that, in autocratic Chinese history, such presumably democratic elements could not be realized in practice, and therefore the idea of the subject as a political actor failed to develop (ibid.). He also claimed that the realization of Confucian "democratic" ideas failed to be realized in practice because there was no legal system in the autocratic society that would protect people's rights, as well as regulate and judge rulers' actions (ibid., 17).

Regarding the development of science, Xu claimed that, although Confucianism did not contain a scientific dimension, it did not suppress or disapprove science as such. He claimed that Chinese tradition did not develop a methodology apt for the development of scientific research because such an approach would be naïve, but instead it developed a methodology based on the cultivation of personality (Rošker 2013, 104). Xu argued that this originates from a perception of the world that is based on the concept of "concerned consciousness" in ancient China, in contrast to the sense of curiosity, which was the basis for understanding humans and the world in ancient Greece, and resulted in the pursuit of objective knowledge, especially regarding the development of metaphysics and science. According to Xu, Modern Western thinkers inherited this position

but shifted from “knowing” as a way of education to knowledge as a persistent search for power through possessing and controlling the external material world (Ni 2002, 283). According to Xu, Western science treated people as a mechanistic integral part of nature, while in Confucianism humans always remain at the forefront of interest. Nature is therefore interpreted through the lens of the human (Rošker 2013, 103). Besides, the Confucian tradition was not interested in abstract laws of the objective world, but it objectified the world through moral virtues.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF XU FUGUAN'S LIFE AND WORK

Xu Fuguan[1] was born on 3 January 1904,[2] at Fengxingwan Village in Xishui County, Hubei Province. When he was eight years old, the Wuhan

[1] His name was actually Xu Bingchang 徐秉常, but he changed it to Xu Foguang 徐佛觀 (Foguan means Buddha-view) after he read Buddhist texts at the age 17. When he met his teacher Xiong Shili, Xiong changed his name to Xu Fuguan 徐復觀. The new character *fu* 復 (return) referred to the *Book of Changes*: 復：亨. 出入无疾 (*Fu: Heng: Churu wu ji*); the hexagram representing a free and unimpeded flow (*Zhou Yi* s.d., Yi Jing, Fu: 1). The new name Fuguan referred to Xiong's understanding of things from a circular perspective. Xiong also made a clear distinction between the meaning of *fo* 佛 and *fu* 復: "The Buddhist perspective (*fo*) views all things and the world as illusory and therefore unreal, while the Confucian (*fu*) sees the world positively and actively. In his view, the state of Modern China in the middle of the 20th century might have seemed desperate, but the circular movement of ultimate reality will bring a better future for this nation" (Lee 1998, 83).

[2] There are two versions concerning the year of Xu's birth. Bresciani gives the year as 1903 (Bresciani 2002, 331), while Lee Su San in her dissertation gives the year as 1904 (Lee 1998, 15). Since Lee has also included interviews with Xu's children and other relatives and colleagues in her work, I have chosen to include her information in this paper, as it seems more accurate. For example, Bresciani states that Xu Fuguan did not migrate to Taiwan until 1961, while Lee writes that he settled in Taizhong with his family as early as 1949. Because he was a member of the GMD (Nationalist Party under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek), he had to leave his

Uprising in 1911 led to the overthrow of the previous Chinese dynasty. Although the official examinations had already been abolished in 1905, Xu's father did not give up the dream of his son becoming a high official. So his father took the barely eight-year-old Xu under his wing and introduced him to the study of classical Chinese works and essay writing. The poems and ghost stories that Xu loved to read ended up in the fire, because for Xu's father, reading this kind of literature was a waste of time. Besides studying, he also had to work in the fields and take care of the livestock. Hence his understanding of the hard peasant life, which was reflected in his later emphasis on the importance of the peasantry in Chinese society and in his efforts to reform the countryside. His peasant background also shaped his understanding of traditional Chinese culture. Thus, he always held the view that Chinese culture was composed of three dimensions: Despotism, Confucianism, and peasant (or rural) society. Xu considered the peasantry to be the true spirit of traditional Chinese culture, while the true Confucians were to be its protectors in the struggle against despotic exploitation (Lee 1998, 16–18).

Xu was the only one of four children to receive a proper education. At first he was educated by his father in the traditional way, meaning that he had a fairly good background in classical Chinese philosophy, history, and literature. At the age of twelve he went to the primary school in Wuchang, the capital of Xishui County, thirty kilometres from home. In spite of the lack of food, he was fortunate enough to escape his father's strict

native China along with other party members when the Communist Party established the People's Republic of China in 1949.

discipline.[3] For three years, he enjoyed reading novels, even while attending classes, but otherwise he did not make much progress during those years. Before graduation, he was expelled from school for a semester for offending the classroom teacher and the principal, but after his father's intervention, he was allowed to return and finish his studies.[4] After graduating from primary school, his education almost ended because his family could no longer support him financially. Just before he was about to open a pharmacy with a classmate, he heard that Hubei Provincial Normal School offered free schooling and accommodation. At the age of 15, he passed the entrance exams and completed his schooling in 1923. The high school, founded by Zhang Zhidong, who was known for his famous slogan "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application (*Zhongti Xiyong* 中體西用)," was designed as a military academy. The curriculum focused on Chinese literature, history, and geography, but also included science, art, and English. Because of the strict requirements, three students died of exhaustion in two years. The school administration insisted on this kind of discipline, striving to revive the spirit of Confucian education and to inculcate in the students responsibility for culture and moral integrity. The strict school regime had a stimulating effect on Xu. His passion for reading novels faded and he began to read classics again, with a particular

[3] Unlike his strict father, Xu's mother was very loving and gentle to her son. Her devotion and unconditional love nurtured in Xu faith and trust in the potential goodness of humanity. Lee (1998, 16) stresses that Xu's feeling for his mother was very affectionate, direct, and even Oedipal.

[4] Su San Lee notes in her work (1998, 13) that Xu was a very hot-tempered character from an early age, which caused him many problems as an adult, both in the workplace and in interpersonal relationships.

fascination with the pre-Qin philosophers, especially Zhuangzi. In his third year of study he read all the major works of the pre-Qin period, and in his spare time he also read the works of Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming and Hu Shi[5]. However, with all the knowledge he had acquired from reading the classics, he lacked practical solutions to the difficult social situation in China (Lee 1998, 20–21).

In 1920, the May Fourth movement also reached Wuhan, and students began to form various literary associations. The principal was convicted of backwardness and forced to leave the school. With the arrival of leftist professors, the movement spread. Xu was very active in this and became a real hero among students, writing impassioned speeches and pleas (ibid., 23).

After finishing school, he returned to his home district of Xishui and became a primary school teacher. Since he received a miserable salary for his work, on which he could not survive, he returned after a few months to Wuchang, where he studied for three years (from 1923 to 1926) at the faculty of National Studies (ibid., 24).

After completing his studies in China, Xu could not survive as a teacher or professor at the faculty, so he decided to pursue a military career, which he followed from 1926 to 1942. He attended a military academy in Japan

[5] In Taiwan in the 1960s, the liberal current, of which Hu Shi was the main representative, dominated intellectual circles. This current advocated complete Westernization and held that there was nothing in Chinese political thought worth studying and adopting in the process of modernization. Xu sharply criticized this liberal current, which was led by Hu Shi, and got himself into a lot of trouble. Among other things, this is probably why he lost his job at Donghai University, because Hu Shi was very influential in political circles as the president of Academia Sinica.

and frequently attended lectures at Meiji University, where he became familiar with the works of the first influential Japanese Marxist, Kawakami Hajime. When Xu arrived in Japan, the Japanese Communists were actively participating in trade unions and on university campuses, despite the severe repression and police control they faced. At that time, many Chinese and Taiwanese students, among which were later famous intellectuals and politicians such as Guo Moruo and Li Dazhao, were strongly influenced by Kawakami's translations and interpretations of Marxism (Lee 1998, 43). After Xu became familiar with Kawakami's works, he often organized readings of Marxist texts at the military academy.

According to Xu, before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, socialist ideas had inspired all Chinese political groups, and to some extent even surpassed the May Fourth demands for democracy. For Xu, the socialist idea of the common good was compatible with Confucian humanism; in his opinion, this was one of the reasons for its popularity among young Chinese intellectuals. On the other hand, Marxism, which originated from the West and was at the same time critical of it, coincided with the tendency for westernization, as well as with the rejection of Western imperialism (Xu in Lee 1998, 44). Thirdly, for Xu, Marxism provided concrete guidelines for practical action in a transitional society.

However, in 1931, Xu and many other Chinese students studying in Japan strongly protested against the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. The Japanese military police arrested them, and he was expelled from the academy half a year before completing his studies.

After returning to his homeland, Xu was disappointed and outraged over Chiang Kai-shek's conciliatory policy towards Japan. However, already in June 1932, Xu started working as a colonel of the Nationalist Party (GMD) in Guangxi. During his military career, he was rarely involved in direct

battles. The duties he held as a commander in Guangxi were mostly linked to strategic and political planning, and to ensuring public safety. During the Sino–Japanese war, Xu occupied increasingly high positions as a strategic and political adviser, and the conflict made a strong impact on him. He witnessed death, sickness, and hunger, as well as rampant corruption in politics. In 1942 he was transferred to Chongqing, where he served as a military instructor. Soon after that, Xu was offered a position of an adviser to the Alliance in Yan'an (Lee 1998, 52).

Xu Fuguan's political career in Chiang Kai-shek's National party and encounter with Mao Zedong

Although Xu, like Chiang Kai-shek, advocated for national unity, he resented the attitude toward Japan. This resentment lasted until 1936, when Chiang Kai-shek decided to go to war with Japan without compromise. Xu was thrilled by this decision, and even more thrilled that the National and Communist parties would unite in the struggle against Japan.[6]

When Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, after losing the battle at Niangzi Pass, Xu realized that the Chinese army was lagging behind, lacking even the basic means of communication that are crucial in war. Moreover, he was most annoyed by the incompetence and immorality of the military commanders.

[6] This period also marks a turning point in Xu's personal life, for in 1934 he found the love of his life, Wang Shigao, whom he also married in 1935 (ibid., 33). It is certainly interesting that Xu, unlike Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi, emigrated to Taiwan with his entire family, wife, and four children, which was by no means easy in 1949.

During the war, Xu moved around China and held increasingly higher positions as a strategic and political advisor. The cruel wartime situation marked Xu forever. In addition to dying, disease, and starvation, he was affected by political corruption, which made an already unbearable situation even worse. In 1942, he was transferred to Chongqing, where he worked as a military instructor. At the same time, he longed to return to his hometown, where he wanted to farm the land and lead a simple family life. In Chongqing, he was offered the opportunity to take over the role of Alliance Adviser in Yan'an (ibid.).

Given his interest in socialist and Marxist ideas, it is not surprising at all that Xu found himself in close company with the leading Communist politicians. His task in Yan'an, which he visited in 1943, was to establish a liaison with the Communist army as part of the United Front to resist Japan, and as the negotiator between the Communist guerrillas and the Nationalist government with regard to lifting the blockade of weapons, food, and medicine by the latter if the former were to hand over the occupied territory and army. Xu met up with some of the key figures of the Communist Party, namely Zhu De (1886–1976), Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), and Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969), and expressed deep respect for their idealism, patriotism, and self-sacrifice.

However, for Xu, Mao Zedong (1893–1976) was undoubtedly the most charismatic personality of all. Although he was 11 years younger than Mao, they both grew up in similar social conditions. In addition, they were both experienced military strategists and loved philosophy, literature, and history. During their five long conversations, they dealt with a variety of topics, and Xu was deeply impressed by Mao's vision of revolution and by his analysis of Chinese history (Lee 1998, 52).

Xu and Mao attributed great importance to the peasant population, and they were equally disturbed by the intellectual elite's arrogant and superior attitude towards peasants. First and foremost, they both criticized the exploitative and oppressive attitude of local autocrats towards the peasant population. Nevertheless, Xu Fuguan did not agree with the communist idea of class oppression, which was seen by Mao and his comrades as the main reason for the poverty in rural areas. In contrast to Mao, Xu claimed that in addition to the polarity between landlords and tenants, there was also a huge number of land owners and partial owners (such as his own family); therefore, in his opinion, improvements to the means of production and resources were much more important than overthrowing the dominant production relations (ibid., 53).

Xu thus claimed that the class struggle would not help much in resolving the problems of the China's countryside. Still, he partially agreed with Mao's Agricultural Collective Project, arguing that in order to solve the problems of the rural population it would be necessary to remove harmful factors, such as corruption and exploitation by local property owners, because only in this way would it be possible for the peasants to plan their own survival independently and without external intervention. However, he emphasized the danger of the deforming and destroying of interpersonal relations that could happen in the name of collectivism and the class struggle.

Even though he served under the Nationalist government, Xu remained a secret admirer of the Chinese Communist Party. When he heard Zhou Enlai's speech on international politics in 1937, he declared that there was no one in the GMD who was as gifted and intelligent as Zhou. The reason why he never joined the Communist Party was that he saw a great discrepancy between Marxist theory on the one hand and the communist reality on the other. Xu's enthusiasm for the Communist Party diminished

in 1940, when he travelled to the Taihang Mountains as a Nationalist guerrilla supporter. He initially advised the guerrillas to try to understand the Communists and learn from them. But when he met with the local population, this positive view of the Communists changed radically.

In order to expand its Red Army, the Communist Party seized all the villagers' property of, and only fed young boys on the condition that they had to join the army. Such exploitation of the population was something that the GMD also did, but Xu initially hoped that the Communist Party (CCP) would be different in this respect and truly protect the poor (ibid.).

In addition, he soon became aware of the duplicity of the CCP as it worked to consolidate its power. In the areas under the control of the GMD, the Communists defended "freedom and democracy," and spread slogans such as: "Those who have money contribute money; those who have power contribute power." They thus advocated "cooperation between workers and capitalists." Everyone was attracted to such slogans in those times. On the other hand, in the areas under Japanese occupation, which could not be governed by the Nationalists, Xu saw that the Communists used denunciation and the breakdown of local communities to take full control under the pretext of resolving the conflict between the oppressors and oppressed (ibid.).

Xu Fuguan's shift to the academic career

After six months in Yan'an, Xu returned to Chongqing and became Chiang Kai-shek's advisor, confidant, and secretary. In this position Xu was quickly promoted, and became the general's daily reporter on the functioning and strategy of the CCP. Even after the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945, Xu remained an indispensable advisor about the strategies used against the

CCP and the reformation of the GMD. He thus moved back to Nanjing with the Nationalist government.

According to Lee (1998, 65), the relationship between Chiang Kai-shek and Xu at the time was comparable to the typical traditional Confucian relationship between the ruler and one of his ministers. The later clash between Chiang Kai-shek and Xu was due to land reform, which for Xu was the only possible way to defeat the prevailing power of the CCP, while Chiang did not see this as a top priority. Instead, in order to maintain his political power he sought allies among the bourgeoisie and warlords in the countryside. In August 1945, the war with Japan ended. To Xu, it became clear that the Nationalist Party would not sacrifice its new political power in order to carry out land reform (ibid.).

In 1949 Xu Fuguan, disappointed by the incompetence and corruption of the GMD as well as the manipulation and "inhumaneness" of the CCP, decided to finish his political career, leave the GMD and dedicate himself fully to academic life. This shift happened when he met Xiong Shili, who became his teacher. In addition to his faith in nationalism and socialism, he began to believe in democracy, and was convinced that Confucianism, especially its humanism, was of key importance for the modernization of Chinese society.

The first "proof" of Xiong's influence was Xu's foundation of the academic journal *Academic Monthly* (*Xueyuan*) in 1947 in Nanjing. When the situation in the GMD deteriorated after the Sino-Japanese war, Xu's efforts for political reforms began to diminish. In the same year, Chiang Kai-shek asked him to establish secret combat units that would prolong the *status quo* of the Party's power, which also disappointed Xu. He considered that such plan was far from his original idea of a complete reorganization of the GMD. He gained the feeling that there was no one in the military or

political circles who was honest and determined enough to save China, so he adopted Xiong's idea that academic research was the key to the nation's rehabilitation and that the solution to China's problems lied among its intellectuals. Xu persuaded Chiang Kai-shek to financially support the *Academic Monthly*, whose aim would be the establishment of a connection between the government and university professors (Lee 1998, 82).

Xiong Shili believed that a democratic republic would promote creativity. He therefore encouraged his students to study biology, psychology, Western philosophy, sociology, and political science, all in order to interpret Chinese classical texts more scientifically. While most of Xiong's contemporaries considered that Chinese culture (or Confucianism) had nothing in common with Western culture and science, he argued they were compatible because Ancient Chinese thinkers had already begun with rudimentary scientific research. In addition, he was convinced that Confucian ontology and morality were as crucial as science for the contemporary world. This position inspired Xu, and after 1949 he chose the Chinese history of ideas as his main field of research, and studied it according to Xiong's recommendations. Despite his great respect for the teacher, Xu retained intellectual autonomy and developed his own method of academic research. However, Xu and Xiong shared their enthusiasm over socialism, patriotism, and democracy.

In 1949, Xu and other Modern Confucians found exile abroad. Xu and Mou moved to Taiwan, Tang to Hong Kong and Fang to the United States. Xiong decided to stay in his homeland, although Xu persistently tried to convince him to follow him out of the country.

Arrival to Taiwan in 1949

Xu traveled from Canton to Taiwan with his wife and four children in early May 1949. The family settled in Taizhong with the help of Xu's Taiwanese colleagues. By selling rare books to the Gaoxiong Municipal Government, Xu and his colleague Tu Shoumei were able to buy a Japanese-style bungalow. The new immigrants not only had problems adapting to the Taiwanese climate, but were also surprised by Taiwanese culture. Under fifty years of Japanese colonization, Taiwanese intellectuals tried to preserve their "Chineseness" by staging Peking Opera performances, holding literary meetings, writing poetry and calligraphy, worshipping ancestors, and the like. They sent their children to private classes, where they read Chinese classics. Still, the new Chinese immigrants were shocked by Taiwan's "Japaneseness." The Taiwanese wore Japanese wooden shoes, lived in wooden houses, and slept on tatami mats (Lee 1998, 99).

On the one hand, the new immigrants were uprooted from their homeland and deprived of the privileges they enjoyed there, and on the other, they were respected for helping the island recover from Japanese imperialist rule. The greatest irony, however, was that the Chinese immigrants who survived the eight-year Sino-Japanese War had to adapt to the Japanese way of life (ibid., 100).

While the Chinese immigrants who came to Taiwan between 1945 and 1949 tried to learn the language of the natives of Amoy, with the arrival of the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek, Chinese became the official language of Taiwan. Children who spoke their native language in school, that is, the language of the Amoys, Hakkas and other minorities, were punished. High-ranking national party officials occupied all public institutions, just as the Japanese imperialists had done before. Most of the

newcomers were demoralized, however, as they generally had to take much lower positions than in their homeland. University professors had to teach in high schools.

In December 1948 Chiang Kai-shek sent to Taiwan a considerable amount of Chinese cultural heritage, including ancient objects from the Museum Palace, rare and valuable books from the Central State Library, and oracle bones and other historical documents from the Institute of History and Philology. In all this, of course, the most important thing for the survival of the national government was the delivery of gold reserves from the central bank (ibid., 101).

To ensure political stability, Chiang Kai-shek appointed his confidant Chen Cheng (1897–1965) and his son Chiang Ching-Kuo (1910–1988) as commanders of the secret police. A state of war was declared on 20 May 1949. Transportation between mainland China and Taiwan was completely banned. Strikes, demonstrations, and large gatherings were also strictly forbidden. People without identity cards were immediately imprisoned. People convicted of spreading rumours and collaborating with communists or agitating in schools and workplaces were sentenced to death. This marked the beginning of a decade-long period of White Terror in Taiwan (1947–1987) (ibid.).

The specifics of Taiwan's economic development after 1949 were driven by investments of Japanese and American capital (Rošker 2013, 23). Thus, the modern Confucians who arrived on the island in 1949 were not concerned with the Sinicization of Marxism like their colleagues in mainland China, but with issues of modernization and capitalism. With American support, largely informed by the struggle against Communist China, a democratic alternative was promoted in Taiwan, and with it the Westernization of society. Traditional Confucian ethics, based on a

hierarchical system of obedience to authority, had already been shown in Japan to be fully compatible with the socio-economic forms of early capitalism. It is not surprising, therefore, that from the very beginning of the establishment of this new philosophical trend, modern Confucians argued that Confucianism was compatible with the capitalist system and modernization. In the 1950s, there was a controversy between Modern Confucians working in Taiwan and Hong Kong and the liberal current of Taiwanese intellectuals led by Hu Shi over whether Confucianism and Chinese culture were at all suitable for the development of democracy, science, and technology. Modern Confucians held that these elements were not at the forefront of traditional Confucianism, but this did not mean that it hindered the modernization of Chinese society. Taiwanese liberals took the opposite view, arguing that modernization required an end to the Confucian way of thinking (ibid., 26).

Disappointed by the incompetence and corruption of the National Party, Xu Fuguan decided to leave it in 1949 and devote himself entirely to his academic career. In addition to his belief in patriotism and socialism, he also began to believe in true democracy and felt that Confucianism, especially its humanism, was crucial to the modernization of society. He changed in all these ways within the first three years of his arrival in Taiwan (Lee 1998, 118).

Xu broke off all contact with National Party in 1951, risking years of unemployment. When he came to Taiwan, he was still financially strong enough to support his family as well as his colleagues Mou Zongsan and Qian Mu (1895–1990). Most of his financial income came from publications in the journal “Democratic tribune.” In 1951, he travelled to Tokyo for six months, where he worked as a newspaper correspondent covering the precarious relations between Japan and Taiwan. However, he

failed to find regular employment for a long time. His financial situation deteriorated visibly and did not improve somewhat until 1953, when he obtained a half professorship at Taizhong Agricultural Institute, where he taught international politics (ibid., 130). Xu did not achieve financial stability until 1955, when he received a full professorship of Chinese literature at Donghai University in Taizhong. In Taiwanese intellectual and artistic circles, Xu had many supporters because of his sharp criticism of the West and his pro-American orientation, but his circle of opponents was even larger. Due to direct criticism from Taiwan's political elite, he eventually lost his job at Donghai University in 1970. In the same year, he was employed at the "Academy of New Asia" in Hong Kong founded by Tang Junyi and Qian Mu in 1950; both Xu and Mou lectured there.

In 1980, he was diagnosed with a stomach ulcer in Hong Kong, but in Taiwan, where he was attending a conference, an examination at a university hospital in Taipei diagnosed him with stomach cancer. Despite his illnesses and the therapies he received in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and America, where his children lived, he continued to teach, write articles, and attend conferences. When he attended a conference in Taiwan in February 1982, he was hospitalized. Shortly after his hospitalization, the lower half of his body failed. Trusting the doctors at Taipei University Hospital, he remained there until his death on April 1, 1982.

Students and friends visited him in the hospital until his death, reading newspapers to him and commenting on political and cultural events. Xu was well liked by students and academic colleagues, despite his sharpness and hot-blooded character.

Before he was hospitalized, he wrote a paper for a conference in Honolulu that he planned to attend in June 1982. In this paper he wanted to state his understanding of the Confucian model of learning, which he

believed was not only a process of knowledge accumulation but also an active process of understanding and forming the self (*weiji zhi xue* 為己之學) (ibid., 476).

Xu Fuguan's political views: A critique of Communism and the interpretation of Confucian democratic ideas

Xu Fuguan published his political views mainly in two books, which are otherwise less theoretical but say much about possible syntheses of classical Confucian political thought and theories of modern social systems. These include Confucian *Political thought and Democracy, Freedom and Human Rights* (*Rujia zhengzhi sixiang yu minzhu ziyou renquan* 儒家政治思想與民主自由人權) and *Between Politics and Theory* (*Xueshu yu zhengzhi zhijian* 學術與政治之間).

As we saw in chapter two, the second generation of Modern Confucianism, which can also be called the neo-traditionalist current, sought to establish democracy in the process of China's modernization. Xu Fuguan argued that the implementation of the Confucian model of "rule by virtue (*dezhi*)" and the Confucian democratic principle of "people as the basis (*minben*)" is fundamental for the establishment of democracy in China and Taiwan, and thus to the preservation of the Chinese ideological tradition. As we shall see below, Xu, unlike other representatives of the second generation, also sympathized with socialist models of social order, which for him were based primarily on social equality and everyone's general social welfare. Nevertheless, he firmly rejected the communist idea of class struggle.

Through reading Sun Yat-Sen's political philosophy of the "Three principles of the people" (*sanmin zhuyi* 三民主義), which did not

overwhelm Xu, he became acquainted with, among other things, the ideas of the materialism of Marx and Engels. Even before he became involved with Marxism, he had already participated in the Wuhan campaign of the leftist current of the Nationalist Party against the Shanghai massacre of the communists and trade unionists in Shanghai in 1927. Learning about Kawakami's interpretation of Marxism in Japan, he held a reading of Marxist periodicals at the Military Academy. From then until 1940, Xu was inspired by Marxist philosophy, economics, and political science. For him, the socialist idea of the common good was comparable to Confucian humanism; in his view, this was one of the reasons for its popularity among younger Chinese intellectuals. On the other hand, Marxism, which originated in the West and was at the same time critical of the West, was accompanied by a tendency toward post-Westernization as well as a hatred of Western imperialism (Lee 1998, 44). Besides, Xu saw in Marxism concrete guidelines for practical action in a transitional society.

The reason why he never joined the Communist Party is that he saw a great discrepancy between Marxist theory on the one hand and communist reality on the other. He was shocked by the dismissal of the main Soviet theoretician Nikolai I. Bukharin, as well as by the brutal repression of the people and the purges of the Russian Communists in general. Although he served under a Nationalist government, he was a secret admirer of Chinese Communist Party. When he heard Zhou Enlai's speech on international politics in 1937, he declared that there was no one in the Nationalist Party so gifted (ibid., 129).

This enthusiasm for the Communist Party died in him, however, between 1939 and 1940, when he travelled to the Taihang Mountains as a nationalist guerrilla chaperone. Initially, he advised the guerrillas to try to understand and learn from the Communist Party. However, when he met

with the local people, his positive attitude toward the communists changed radically. To expand their Red Army, the Communist Party confiscated all the villagers' property to feed the young boys who had to join the army. Impoverishing the population was something that the National Party also did, so Xu initially hoped that the Communist Party would be different in this and protect the poor. Besides, he soon realized the hypocrisy of the Communist Party in consolidating their power. In the areas controlled by the National Party, the communists advocated "freedom and democracy"; they spread slogans like, "Those of you who have money contribute money; those of you who have power contribute power." They advocated for "cooperation between workers and capitalists." Such slogans were attractive to everyone at that time. On the other hand, in areas not under the control of the nationalists, the communists used methods of subordination and disunity among local communities under the pretext of resolving the conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed. He soon realized that the idea of class struggle and class consciousness carried out by the Communist Party with its tactics was actually a negation of universal humanity (ibid.).

One of the stories that most shocked Xu, was about a son who denounced his father, resulting in the whole community wanting to publicly execute the man. In fact, the son himself was supposed to kill his father, but could not do it, as he fainted and collapsed on the ground. All the villagers then covered their heads and cried. In that moment, a member of the Red Army came by, picked up a knife and killed both father and son.

Xu recounted this story along with his recent attitude towards Communism in an essay entitled *The humanness of the Communist Party* (*Gongchandang de renxing* 共產黨的人性), published in 1951, when he was already in Taiwan. In this he emphasized that the mutual slaughter and the destruction of local communities' cohesion and coherence in the name

of class struggle would never end under the Communist regime. He argued that, if the relationship between father and son were devalued and denied, then no other interpersonal relationships would be possible. Xu was enchanted by the Marxist aspiration for social justice, but was equally horrified by the idea of the class struggle and its tactics of denunciation and betrayal, which were allegedly necessary in order to achieve this justice (Xu in Lee 1998, 129). In this sense, Xu defined Communist ideology to be in its essence a denial of universal humanity.

In his essay entitled *The lesson given by the Soviet Union to humanity* (*Renqu sulian suo geiyu renlei de jiaoxun* 人去苏联所给与人类的教训), written in 1953, Xu explains why the class struggle would continue after the defeat of the bourgeoisie. Since the Communists denied humaneness, they would sooner or later regard the workers themselves as their potential enemies. And even dictators at the top of the political power hierarchy must continue to fight with their comrades in order to maintain their position. This necessarily leads to an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and denunciation in interpersonal relations. Because of their disregard for the intrinsic value of human beings, the Communists were used to resorting to violence to resolve conflicts (ibid.).

Here, we might already see a first connection with Xu's later turn to Confucianism, because the abovementioned story is very similar to the famous Confucian criticism of the son who denounced his father for stealing a sheep:

> 子路:葉公語孔子曰：吾黨有直躬者，其父攘羊，而子證之。孔子曰：吾黨之直者異於是。父為子隱，子為父隱，直在其中矣。

> Zi Lu: The Duke of She informed Confucius, saying, "Among us here there are those who may be styled upright in their conduct. If their father has stolen a sheep, they will bear witness to the fact." Confucius said, "Among us, in our part of the country, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this." (*Lunyu* s.d., Zilu: 18)

Xu also questioned the position of the Communist Party, saying that it could not come to power without a military fight, and thus made efforts to arm itself, and at the same time transform each of the Party's members into both politicians and fighters. He also condemned their secret police, who worked inside and outside the Party. Within the Party, it controlled all members who were prevented from any personal relationships beyond the organization. Outwardly, it carried out various strategies to win over the Nationalists. According to Xu's analysis, the Communist Party would be able to defeat the GMD for two reasons. First, it recruited the peasant population, which consequently became part of their army. The GMD failed to establish its power in the countryside because it did not care enough for the people's struggle for survival, and was mostly occupied with getting the support from the domestic and international political elite. In addition, the CCP used "democracy" as a convenient tool to win domestic and Western support. Prior to assuming leadership over a particular area, it underlined the freedom of association. When it gained power, it then banned people's independent activities and integrated all groups into its organization's military wing (Chang et al. 2018, 63).

As already mentioned in the first chapter, the authors of the Manifesto emphasized that the reason why Chinese people accepted Communist

ideology so easily was mainly because of its resistance to the aggression of Western capitalism and imperialism. In its dynamic power, Communism managed to meet the Chinese social and political demands of the time. The Chinese people's anti-imperialist movement was mixed with the premise of fighting for their own independence and survival, as well as with the desire to propagate their culture in the modern world. As they saw it, this positive requirement had been incorporated in the Chinese people's spiritual life people from time immemorial. For these authors, Marxism was therefore only a temporary tool (or phase) for achieving the positive demands and goals of the Chinese people.

In this context, however, the authors of the Manifesto listed a number of reasons why, in their view, the dictatorship of the Communist Red Army would not exist for a long time as a guiding principle in Chinese cultural and political institutions in mainland China (Chang et al. 2018, 19). The authors saw in the Red Army's ideology a discourse that runs contrary to human nature and *a priori* violates people's rights. According to them, Communist ideologies are dogmatic and constitute an obstacle to humanity's free development. The danger of mutual slaughter and political purges is always present as a mode of action, because in Communist ideology everyone is treated as a potential enemy. Any expression of disagreement with the leaders' positions leads to a struggle for dominance among fractions. There is only one solution to avoiding bloodshed, namely a free and democratic elective system along with a fundamental rule of law, with these laws put forth by the people themselves. Only in this way would the transfer of political power be possible through a peaceful process (ibid.)

Xu Fuguan's position regarding the Communist regime in China and its alleged in humaneness and destruction of interpersonal relations seems to be very problematic, and in the first place too generalized. First of all, the

horrible social situation in mainland China improved after the Communist Party defeated the government of the GMD. Not only because they managed to consolidate the rural areas and provide concrete solutions and actions regarding citizens' survival, but also in terms of strategic solutions concerning China's future economic and social development. In this situation, the main problem was precisely the survival of the devastated and hungry populace and not any concern as to how China could (or could not) become a democratic and modernized society. In this respect, Xu's accusation of the Communist Party's in humaneness seems exaggerated and even inappropriate. After 1949, the connections between Taiwan and mainland China were cut off, and thus Xu and other Modern Confucians were not aware of what was going on in the Great Leap Forward and in the Cultural (or Great Proletarian) Revolution. Only at that did point Xu's supposition of the danger of Communist ideology and its strategies concerning the consolidation of political power become relevant, and thus also plausible. In this sense, his fear of the destruction of interpersonal relations, of the devaluation of humans, as well as of the in humaneness of the Communist ideology set out by Mao Zedong and the Communist cadre including the Red guards, seems almost visionary.

The disenchantment with communist ideology led Xu to a gradual return to Confucianism, or to the core values of the Chinese tradition, especially the concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), which Xu saw as the essence of Chinese humanism and humaneness (*ren*). His confidence in the Communist Party, which promised to build socialist China, was shaken precisely because of its refusal to embrace humanism, which he believed was at the heart of Confucianism.

Xu did not become a social democrat until after 1949. Even three to four years after he moved to Taiwan, he was not fully convinced that

Confucianism, as China's cultural essence, could really help solve the pressing social and political problems of Chinese society.

His belief in democracy strongly influenced his interpretation of Confucianism (especially his political thought), and at the same time Confucianism shaped his criticism of liberalism and democracy. He undertook his first in-depth critical analysis of Confucianism in 1951. By analysing the Confucian concept of the inner sage and the outer ruler (*neisheng waiwang*), and their interconnection, he concluded that Confucianism lacked a coincidence of ethics and politics. Confucian belief in the positive potential of human character did lead to the political doctrine of "rule by virtue" (*dezhi*) and "the people as the basis (*minben*)," but traditional Chinese society did not rid itself of despotism at all (Lee 1998, 174). In this regards, Xu did not mean to exclude the importance of ethics in politics, nor did he deviate from the fact that a ruler must be compassionate and responsible. For him, both were necessary, but these two elements themselves were not enough to establish democracy.

Confucian thinking, which is oriented toward the ruler, has always focused on solving problems based on an idealized image of a virtuous ruler, rather than on regulating the ruler's power. Thus, people are supposed to passively accept their ruler's benevolence instead of actively fighting for their rights. In this regard, Xu adopted Xiong Shili's view was that Confucianism could not serve as a political theory because it was mostly concerned with questions of how to be "a ruler" or "a minister," how to enter the public sphere, and how to get out of it. According to Xu, Confucianism wrongly assumed that the ruler's virtue could be extended to the whole society. The lack of a civil society in the Chinese tradition meant that Chinese intellectuals always had to become officials if they wanted to

connect with the public sphere and be heard. As a result, they were forced to submit to the criteria of an institutionalized Confucian system.

Last but not least, according to Xu, the idea of "virtue-based governance" contributed to the "endless expansion of hegemony" (Xu 1991, 186), which was particularly detrimental to democratic initiative. In other words: in a society where there is no awareness of individual rights, the power of the ruler (or dictator) cannot be limited. In a democracy, on the other hand, the requirement for limiting the political power of the ruler was paramount. He also held that the original Confucianism had been distorted in the Han dynasty by incorporating elements of legalism into it, which is the reason why many people today still do not fully comprehend the profoundness of Confucianism.[7]

Xu considered the original Confucianism as an antidote to despotism. Although this doctrine was later greatly distorted and transformed into a

[7] Examples for this include his defence of Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) and the Confucian doctrine of filial piety. Contrary to the prevailing view that Dong Zhongshu was to blame for the dominance of despotism because he canonized Confucianism and suppressed other philosophical schools, Xu admired him for being able to limit the inhumanity of legalism by emphasizing the Confucian humanism of humaneness (Xu 1971, 176). Xu's analysis of the development of the concept of filial piety indicates his preference for original Confucianism as opposed to its later variations. Filial piety emphasized by the pre-Qin Confucians was based on love and mutual respect, not just on paternal authority. By emphasizing this difference, Xu aimed to prove that the *Classic of filial piety* (*Xiaojing*) was a text that served the interests of the ruling class, since it was written only in the course of distorting the original teaching during the Han Dynasty. This text, which emphasizes obedience to the authorities, thus had nothing to do with the original Confucianism or was even partly in contradiction to it (ibid.).

despotic state doctrine of Confucianism, the true Confucians were mostly political dissidents who opposed the political authorities of official Confucianism and were the parasites of a corrupt system. Such true Confucians included "Xu himself" (Lee 1998, 178).

Xu's political theory began to take shape after 1951, when he became editor of the journal "Democratic review" (*Minzhu pinglun*). In his 1950 article entitled "Let Us Trust Democracy" (*Women xinlai minzhuzhuyi* 我們信賴民主主義), he emphasised two points in this regard; first, he believed that it was important in a democracy to protect social minorities, and second, that the people's voice must overcome the voices of the elites. On the last point, he advocated the introduction of quantitative criteria to prevent the dominance of qualitatively superior and privileged elites (ibid. 188). He also used traditional Confucian binary categories in his political writings. In addition to the aforementioned "inner sage and outer ruler," he attempted to incorporate the traditional binary category of essence and function (*ti* and *yong*) into his theory. In this context, essences (*ti*) are political contents, i.e. concrete proposals on political issues, and functions (*yong*) are the processes of implementing these proposals. Concrete political content(s) may be based on various political beliefs, but the only legitimate form of their realization (*yong*) is democratic procedures, which include freedom of thought, freedom of association, elections, and the like (ibid.). In an authoritarian system, political form and content are inseparable. Autocratic power allows only one kind of political content, namely that which is in its own interest, while suppressing all others. In consensus-based democracies, on the other hand, political content is constantly changing to adapt to the current times. Taiwan was neither a fully autocratic nor a democratic country. In his political theory of Taiwan, Xu naturally advocated the establishment of democratic forms of political system in

which different political contents can coexist and compete with each other (ibid., 189). Even more ideal for him was a form of representative democracy. In a democratic system, an individual can participate in politics or not, depending on his or her will. If one wants to engage, the democratic system does not prevent one from doing so, nor does it punish people if they prefer to engage in other aspects of life (ibid.).

In the traditional Chinese political context, Xu points to the concept of the "double subject." This concept means that the people are the subject of politics only in the ideology of "the people as the base," while in practice the actual subject who decides politics is only the ruler or the ruling elite. According to Xu, this contradiction can be successfully resolved through modern democracy, which has the potential to realize Confucian ideals through active intervention in society. In this context, politicians—as prescribed by the traditional ideal of the minister—become mere servants of the people, responsible for the functioning of the government.

With regard to issues related to political theory, the views of individual representatives of Modern Confucianism differed, so in this respect we cannot speak of a kind of common modern Confucian political discourse. Xu's political theory is also quite specific in this common context; his discussions with Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan clearly show the multifaceted differences in their views on the link between Confucianism and democracy.[8]

[8] Most of the discussion between the three took place through written correspondence, with some published in essays published by Mou, Tang, and Xu in academic journals in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Here, they are adopted from Su San Lee's dissertation (1998, 192–214).

For example, Tang Junyi argued that democracy was important because it could curb despotism and totalitarianism, but it could not exist on its own without the establishment of humanistic and idealistic cultivation (ibid., 194). He wanted to emphasize the need to create suitable and appropriate social conditions for the growth of democracy. In this respect, Mou Zongsan agreed with Tang. For Mou, liberalism lost its "spirituality" after it became part of democracy and capitalism. Liberal democracy, in his opinion, needed a stronger cultural system to consolidate it, otherwise science, philosophy, and art would collapse with the decay of liberal democracy. He therefore emphasized that Christianity is an essential element that preserves Western civilization; Confucianism in East Asia and China should play a similar role. According to Mou, ideals must be separated from politics precisely to preserve autonomy and continuity. When the political system becomes democratic, the link between them will also soften and ideals will be the ones that guide and regulate politics, keeping the whole society in harmonious unity (ibid.).

In response to Mou and Tang, Xu emphasized the problem of distinguishing between politics (political form) and theoretical views (political content) in democratic systems (ibid.). As he saw it, public opinion (the positive, popular electoral vote) was the most important criterion in the political sphere. Theory, according to Xu, must be secondary, because the will of the people comes first. His intention was not to devalue academic analysis as such, but to emphasize the autonomous interaction of the two, that is, political theory on the one hand and the practical interests of the people on the other (ibid.). Indeed, theory directly affects society through education, not through politics. The difference, then, is that education is free and spontaneous, whereas politics necessarily requires coercion. This distinction between the two spheres is also necessary for Xu because "truth"

has different meanings in each. In science, only those who consistently adhere to certain fundamental premises of "absolute and universal truth" can make important contributions to social development and progress. It does not matter whether these theorists are idealists, materialists, or even sceptics. All of these "absolute truths" necessarily become variable and relative in a true democracy, because in a democracy they are conditioned at all times by the changing will of the people over time. Of course, politicians can also have their own personal and intimate beliefs. Thus, they may be members of different religions or philosophical schools. But the most important thing is that they consciously separate their personal beliefs from public policy.

According to Xu, politics is judged by "quantity," while academic opinion is judged by "quality" (ibid., 196). In this context, he points out that Confucius put human life first. For Xu, democracy is humanistic precisely because, like Confucianism, it unconditionally respects human life and human beings as such. That is why it is important that every person have the right to vote, regardless of social class, nationality, or education. And that is why the intellectual elite must not have the privilege of making decisions for the whole of society according to their will (and needs) (ibid.).

Tang regarded Xu's emphasis on the value of life itself as vulgar naturalism and materialism, but, on the other hand, he agreed with Xu's distinction between quality and quantity. According to Mou, however, the system of democracy as a common framework of politics, science, technology, and academic theories is flawed because it lacks humanistic elements. Mou rather held that the role of discourse, which provides society with such a humanistic foundation and thus promotes cultural creativity and strengthens community cohesion, should be taken over by Confucianism in China (ibid.).

From Xu's view of democracy, it is clear that for him only a democratic political form is able to ensure equal rights for all members of society while safeguarding the integrity of each individual. His vision of Chinese development is the path of democratic socialism, mixing both idealist and materialist ideas. In this respect, Xu's political outlook differs significantly from that of other representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucianism. Which concepts in original Confucianism support this vision of his will be considered in more detail below.

XU FUGUAN'S THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERPRETATION OF CONFUCIANISM

Xu Fuguan 's theoretical contributions to the interpretation of original Confucianism and to the history of Chinese ideology are collected in three very extensive monographs. As concerns the Chinese history of ideology, his most important works are *The History of Ideology of the Two Han Dynasties* (*Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史) and *The History of Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature (humanness)* (*Zhongguo renxing lunshi* 中國人性論史), in which he examines the development of Chinese thought, explains its specific features, and highlights its basic paradigms. By presenting, analyzing, and interpreting them with key features, he also shows the development of Confucianism in an innovative and lucid way. As we shall see below, in his reflection and re-evaluation of Chinese culture and philosophy, he focuses almost exclusively on the content of the original Confucianism, which for him is not only a reference point for the formation of the ethical system, humanism, and political theory, but also a starting point for democracy.

Based on the transformation of Confucianism that began with the establishment of centralized power during the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) and the two Han Dynasties (206 BCE–220 CE), he shows how Confucianism was mixed with legalism and thus lost its humanistic and democratic dimensions. In this way, Confucianism was established as a dogmatic state doctrine. The philosophy of original Confucianism was thus misused to legitimize the autocratic regimes that often oppressed people,

especially intellectuals, throughout Chinese history. Unlike other Modern Confucians, whose interpretations of Confucianism are based mainly on the neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, the School of heart–mind, and humanness (*xinxing zhi xue*), Xu focuses more on the characteristics and limitations of original Confucianism. In the two aforementioned central parts, he addresses the aforementioned problems through detailed philological analysis. In them, he also explains in detail the methodology of his research.

Xu Fuguan's methodology

Xu defined himself as a historian or historian of ideational tradition of the pre-Qin China, focusing his study on its socio-cultural characteristics. In addition, he was also an outstanding philologist, political scientist, and literary and art critic. In the context of the history of ideational tradition, he naturally dealt extensively with philosophy, but he did not create a philosophical system of his own.

In analyzing and interpreting the history of Chinese ideational tradition, he introduced a new methodology based on a consistent consideration of the hermeneutic circle,[1] calling his methodology dynamic and structural holism.

The essential meaning of his holism was to understand the entity and its parts in their concrete historical contexts. Outlining the interaction between an entity and its parts is a methodological principle that Xu uses to understand different currents of thought in ancient China. When he studied

[1] This method is very similar to Gadamer's hermeneutic method, although I doubt that Xu would have adopted it after Gadamer, since the latter was his contemporary and his works in Taiwan and Japan were very likely not yet translated into Chinese and Japanese at that time. Xu, however, spoke no other language than these two.

literature and thought, he placed them in the socio-political and economic context of the particular era, and, conversely, when he studied the socio-political and economic structure of a particular era, he examined it through literature and philosophy. He defined this approach as a dynamic methodology and a comparative perspective, and the comparative perspective is also called structural holism (Huang 2018, 220). Thus, his holistic methodology consists of dynamic and structural holism, where dynamic holism is characterized by constant change and development.

Xu's structural holism is based on the idea that a structural unit is an entity composed of parts of classical texts, a system of thought, and reality. Xu believed that interpretation and criticism of texts are insufficient tools to understand ancient Chinese thought, so it was necessary to use the structural unity method, which is similar to the hermeneutic circle method, to study it. His method of analyzing the history of ideas can be summarized in two points (ibid.):

(a) Every system of thought is a structural and holistic network of meanings, constructed in such a way that it derives from individual parts of meaning and passes from them to the whole.
(b) Since the thought system is a network of meanings shared by the researcher and the object being researched, a dialogical connection is established between them, creating a mutual or intersubjective relationship.

This second point is also what Xu calls the "method of seeking experience" (*zhui tiyan de fangfa* 追體驗的方法) (Xu 2010, 3), which he believes should be mastered by all who research the history of ideational tradition,

since it is possible to make contact with the spiritual (intellectual) cosmos of the pre-Qin thinkers and the past from a distance (i.e. present).

According to Xu, researchers of the history of ideational tradition must begin with a concrete thing, that is, a written work, and move from it to the abstract level, which is thinking or reflecting on that work. At the same time, we should also begin with the abstraction of thought and move to the concrete reality of human life and its times. When we go through all these stages, the work and its author can reappear within ourselves and the time we live in. According to Xu, this means that we not only study classical works, but also have in mind a dialog with the authors of these works. Thus, for the researchers of the Chinese ideational tradition, the thought system of the pre-Qin thinkers has no objective existence, but there must be an intersubjective (*zhuti jianxing* 主體間性) connection between them. The deeper one goes into the intersubjective system of meaning, the more one can, at the same time, put oneself into the thinking of the authors of the classical work(s) one is studying and thus thoroughly broaden one's own horizons (ibid.).

The second dimension of Xu's structural holism deals with the question of human thought and reality. Xu believes that there is a continuous interaction between human thought and reality that forms a holistic structure in which the two elements are inseparable. This is explained in more detail in the following quote:

> The genesis of a person's thinking is often influenced by four main factors. The first one is the person's temperament; the second is the school of thought to which the person belongs, as well as the depth of the person's work; the third is the context of his or her epoch; and the fourth is the person's life. The influence of these four important factors is different in each thinker; for

> some is considerable, for others minimal. At the same time, there is also a reciprocal influence between these four essential elements; therefore, one cannot determine an author's thinking from a single, isolated element. (Xu in Huang 2018, 28)

His point was to emphasize that the study of the history of ideas must always take into account the socioeconomic and political context in which thinkers lived. According to Xu, a person's history is a painful record of the struggle between reality and said person's thought or ideas, while for Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan, for example, history is actually the process of the continuous journey of heaven (*tian dao* 天道) (Huang 2018, 226). While Xu Fuguan treats a person as a subject struggling according to or against historical processes, Tang and Mou see people as transcendent beings (ibid.). This shows the essential difference between Tang's and Mou's tendency to construct a moral metaphysics, while Xu's tendency is just the opposite. Xu Fuguan's method of studying the thought is to "discuss ideas through socio-political history" (ibid.).

Since Xu conceives of thought and social reality as two interconnected dimensions of his structural holism, he is able to present original ideas and commentaries on various orientations of thought in a very concrete way. According to Xu, it is only from a comparative perspective that it is possible to truly grasp the reasons for the existence of a particular school of thought. He uses a comparative perspective because he pays much attention to the specific character of the history of ideational tradition. Thus, he believes that the study of Chinese culture and thought must begin precisely with its specificity because only in this way can its essence be clearly revealed (ibid., 222). According to Xu, the specificity of Chinese culture and thought, and its difference from Western culture, lies in the fusion of the subjective and

the objective, the individual and the community, which is prevalent in the Chinese ideational tradition. In Chinese culture, a person's self-cultivation and their cultivation of the external world form a unity and are not two separate things. Only based on a true understanding of the peculiarities of Chinese ideational concepts, which, according to Xu, are always a product of the socio-political factors of a particular time and constantly change throughout history, can scholars of the history of ideas take the next step and compare the Chinese ideational tradition with the Western one.[2]

Under his holistic methodology, individual research questions are considered as a whole or interconnected. As Xu saw it, the best way to understand concepts is to examine them in their space-time context. According to Huang, his interpretive method, which he applies to the analysis and interpretation of Chinese classics, can also be called the interpretive method of contextualization (ibid., 221).

This method consists of two procedures; in the first, he places Confucian thought in a historical context to examine its interaction with the society of the time, while in the second, he analyzes Confucian thought by situating it in the present and, through this interpretation, adds new meaning to the classical works. With these two methodological procedures, Xu's analysis of Confucian classics, Confucian commentaries, and Confucians themselves does not separate them from the actual reality in which they lived and worked.

[2] As we will see in the last two chapters, however, Xu's intercultural comparative method is problematic in that it interprets Western conceptualizations in very general terms and does not take into account the socio-political contexts in which they arose, whereas he consistently pursues them when examining the history of Chinese ideational tradition.

The second level of Xu's methodology is to review and further evaluate Confucianism by placing it in the context of the 20th century. The focus here is on Xu's critique of the examination of political problems of Confucianism and the reasons for 2,000 years of autocracy in China. Thus, he considers despotism to be a central feature of the political tradition in Chinese culture. The despotic system, which established itself only after the pre-Qin period, supplanted the democratic beginnings of the original Confucianism. In this context, Xu developed his thesis of the "double subject" mentioned in the previous subchapter, according to which the people were always seen as active political subjects in the ideological tradition of ancient China, but in concrete social reality the subject was always exclusively the ruler (Rošker 2013, 86). For Xu, therefore, the conflict between these two dimensions could only be resolved by establishing a democracy based on such democratic elements that were already present in the original Confucianism.

According to Huang (2018, 235), Xu's interpretation of the original Confucianism represents a typical example of hermeneutic analysis, which can be understood as a method of political science and which belongs to the Chinese classical hermeneutic tradition. The foundations of this tradition are neither ontological nor epistemological, but politico-economic and socio-political, for this method is not concerned with the study of abstract concepts, but with the history of thought in relation to socio-political history. It cannot confine itself to the nominal world, because it intervenes intensively in the phenomenal world of experience, thus combining intellectual activities with practical ones. This kind of interpretive tradition is capable of generating its own internal dynamic by establishing a strong creative reciprocity between the performer and the classics that form the content of the interpretation (ibid.). Xu's method of interpretation thus

belongs to the realm of political sociology and economy. Xu held man as a political and social being involved in the activities of daily life. His methodology involves the study of both essence and practice, that is, the conceptual and the concrete (ibid.).

Xu's greatest contribution to Confucian thought was his rediscovery of the original Confucianism's political idea of the "people as political agent," which he associated with democracy and whose establishment he saw as crucial to modern China. In doing so, he assumed that all pre-Qin Confucian philosophers lived in a time of warring states, which is considered to be a time of pluralistic political regimes and in which autocratic rule had not yet emerged. For this reason, in their works the people constitute the focus of the politics. However, as already mentioned, from the Qin and Han dynasties onwards, the political concept of "the people as the base (*minben*)" gradually died out and did not develop further due to repressive central power. Xu methodological approach here to interpreting the political ideas of the original Confucianism provided the axis for the restoration of Confucianism in the 20th century.

As regards the history of ideational tradition and its political theories, Xu is highly regarded among Modern Confucians precisely because of his emphasis on the original Confucian concept of "the people as the basis of politics," the dynamic spirit of Confucianism, and the concept of anxious (or concerned) consciousness, which became important as the centre of debate in the 20th century precisely through Xu's analysis and interpretations.

The key concept on the basis of which Xu sought to transform and reconstruct Confucianism is the concept of concerned consciousness (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識), which originated in the *Book of Changes* and became the ideological foundation of Zhou dynasty rulers. According to Xu, this concept forms the core of the moral subject and manifests itself in

fundamental Confucian virtues such as filial piety (*xiao* 孝), humaneness (*ren* 仁), and rites (*li* 禮).

In the next chapter, we will examine in detail the dimensions of meaning and content behind the concept of concerned consciousness, which forms the core of Xu's contribution to the interpretation of original Confucianism and at the same time extends to his theory of Chinese aesthetics.

The concept of "concerned consciousness" (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識)

As we have seen, for Xu Fuguan Confucianism s a dynamic system of thought that is in constant interaction with concrete reality and its historical processes. This Confucian dynamism comes to light in his interpretation of basic Confucian concepts such as concerned consciousness (*youhuan yishi*), rites (*li*), filial piety (*xiao*), and humaneness (*ren*).

Xu's interpretation of original Confucianism focuses on the idea of concerned consciousness, which he presented in his work *The History of Chinese Theories of Human Nature* (*Zhongguo renxing lunshi*), published in 1963.

According to Xu, concerned consciousness emerged at the moment when human beings began to address their problems or concerns through their own actions and efforts. This change occurred in the transition from the Shang to the early Zhou dynasty, when traditional deities lost their credibility and people could no longer project their worries onto comforting external (higher) powers. For Xu, the basic characteristic of the Chinese philosophic tradition was its origin in the sense of "concerned consciousness" in contrast to the beginning of the Western philosophic tradition, which has

been marked by a sense of wonder or curiosity to know the human being and the natural world:

> The Greeks held rationality to be the defining feature of human being, and the love of wisdom or contemplation the source of happiness. They took knowing as a leisurely activity pursued for the sake of itself. These characteristics of Greek culture resulted in the pursuit of objective knowledge, especially the development of metaphysics and science. Modern Western thinkers inherited this tradition. However, while the Greeks took "knowing" as a way of education, modern Western thinkers shifted knowledge to be the persistent search for power through possessing and controlling the external material world, as expressed by Francis Bacon's famous motto "knowledge is power." (Xu in Ni 2002, 283)

Xu maintained that the entirety Chinese traditional culture and philosophy was based on these characteristics of the sense for *concerned consciousness* that have led the Chinese tradition towards the search for virtue and value rather than for science and understanding, and to moral practice rather than to speculation. Xu believed that *concerned consciousness* results from human's first awakening to their own responsibility to the world and will eventually solve the quandary because he/she is morally autonomous (Ni 2002, 284ff).

The sense of *concerned consciousness* leads to discovery, understanding, and transformation of human beings themselves. It is a psychological state in which one feels responsible to overcome difficulties by virtue of one's own efforts. It originated from a moral conscience, a *concerned consciousness* about not having one's moral quality cultivated It is a sense of responsibility, responsiveness, discernment, and self-reflexivity. What it leads to are ideas such as reverence, respect for, and the manifestation of

moral character. This sense enabled humans to apprehend the purpose of human life from the perspective of cosmic creativity or religion. In contrast, the Christian idea of the sense of guilt in original sin and the Buddhist idea of suffering and impermanence both lead to a search for an escape from reality, either for salvation in Heaven or in the tranquil realm of Nirvana, respectively:

> 憂患與恐怖,絕望是最大不同者點,在於憂患心理的形成,乃是從當事者對吉凶成敗的深意熟考而從的遠見; 在這種遠見中, 主要發現了吉凶成敗與當事者行為的密切關係, 及當事者在興未上所應負的青任。憂患正是有這種青任感來的要以已力突破因難而尚未突破時的心理狀態。乃人類精神開始直接對事物發生青任感的表現, 也即是精神上開始有了人地自覺的表現。
>
> The biggest difference between the sense of anxiety and the sense of dread and despair is that the sense of anxiety originates from a person's vision obtained through deep thinking and reflection about good fortune and bad fortune, success, and failure. The vision entails the discovery of a close interdependence between a person's fortunes and their own conduct, as well as said person's responsibility to their conduct. Concern is the psychological state of a person when their feeling of responsibility urges them to overcome certain, as yet unsurmounted difficulties. In a religious atmosphere centered around faith, a person relies on faith for salvation. They hand all the responsibilities to God and will therefore have no anxiety. Their confidence is their trust in God. Only when one assumes responsibility for oneself will they have a sense of anxiety. This sense of concern entails a strong will and a spirit of self-reliance. (Xu 2005, 20)

In a religious, or in faith-oriented atmosphere, a human being relies on faith (or hope) for salvation. They postpone all their responsibilities to God and are therefore unconcerned. Their self-confidence is in their trust in God. Only when people take responsibility for themselves will they have a concerned consciousness. This feeling includes a strong will and a spirit of self-confidence and one's own responsibility (ibid.).

From a formal point of view, Confucianism does not predict any kind of religious ceremonies, and yet is familiar with the idea of the creator, which manifests itself in the way of heaven/nature (*tiandao*), or creativity itself, but with the difference that Confucian (or Chinese) creativity is not personified as it is in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In his explanation of the emergence of concerned consciousness, Xu Fuguan thoroughly explains the connection between the decay or the decline of "primitive" religions and the creation of the idea of the moral self, which falls into the basic characteristics of the Chinese (especially Confucian) intellectual tradition.

Concerned consciousness as a product of vanishing deities

Anthropomorphic deities were known by Chinese during the Shang (or Yin, approx. 1600–1066 BCE) and the Zhou dynasties, but Confucius and Mencius transformed the originally anthropomorphic form of the "Heaven or Nature" (*tian* 天) into the concept of the "Mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命), which was a moral or ideological concept. Confucians were therefore uninterested in the personification of the "Way of Heaven" (*tiandao*) and its transformation into an external, anthropomorphic god. They were more interested in the method of its individual internalization than in its symbolic forms of creativity.

Most of the Modern Confucians have critically questioned ethical systems that are based on religious worship of external deities; as they saw it, such systems represent a primitive form of social faith and belong to incipient stages of social development, in which the majority of people have not yet established the inner strength and autonomy that could enable them to bear the transience of life, and provide them a possibility to cope with the external world. As Jana S. Rošker (2013, 198) points out, God, as an expression of a higher, incomprehensible and uncontrollable force that has the ability to make decisions about destruction and salvation, is in this context actually only a kind of consolidating consciousness, only a projection of the actual helplessness of the individual and their inability to deal with the facts that enable, define, and limit their being.

According to this view, Modern Confucians see people who need religion as like children, who in their immaturity cannot completely separate themselves from the paternalistic care and simultaneous restrictions embodied by their parents. In the context of ethics, which is based on the idea of god, such people are thus all but able to live an autonomous life, i.e. to possess a truly internalized (or innate) ability to bear the ethical responsibility for their own actions and decisions (Rošker 2013, 198).

Xu Fuguan saw the reasons for different concepts of ethics in Chinese and Western societies respectively in different ideological reactions to similar conditions of social transitions:

> In his view, all cultures had their earliest beginning in religion, originating from the worship of god or gods. The peculiarity of Chinese culture has been that it soon came down, step by step, from heaven to the world of men, to the concrete life and behaviour of humans. The preoccupation with earthly

> matters had begun during the Zhou Dynasty[3] (1459–249 BC), when the spirit of self-conscience was beginning to work and those people developed clear will and purpose. They were moving progressively from the realm of religion to the realm of ethics. Since that early stage, the Chinese people were free from metaphysical concerns. Unlike the Greeks, who at the same critical stage in history moved from religion to metaphysics, the Chinese moved from religion to ethics. (Bresciani 2001, 338)

Xu Fuguan, who interpreted the concept of *concerned consciousness*, thus provided a fruitful foundation for the further development of many aspects of Modern Confucian philosophy that were later elaborated by his colleagues and followers. According to Bresciani, Xu also showed in detail how the concept of this sense of *concerned consciousness* was developed by the duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong), and how it became known in Chinese culture later on through Confucianism (ibid.).

Bresciani (2002, 342), in his analysis of the Xu's concept of concerned consciousness, correctly points out that it has become a part of Chinese culture only through Confucianism, since Confucius was the one who added the social dimension to the concept. But, from the following quote by Xu, it is clear that the concept of concerned consciousness was not created by certain individuals, such as King Wen or the Duke of Zhou dynasty, but developed gradually, through a long historical process.

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[3] Similar to the prevailing currents of Western historiography, which have viewed Ancient Greek society as the "cradle of Western culture," the society dominated by the Zhou dynasty was understood as the "cradle of (Han)-Chinese culture" by most Chinese historians (ibid.).

周人革掉了殷人的命, 成為新的勝利者。但通過周初文獻所看出的, 並不像一般民族戰勝後的趾高氣揚的氣象,而是易傳所說的憂患意識…在於憂患心理的形成, 乃是從當事者對吉凶成敗的深思熟考而來的遠見。在這種遠見中, 主要發現了吉凶成敗與當事者行為的密切關係,及當事者在行為上所應負的責任。憂患正是由這種責任感來的要以及力突破困難而尚未突破時的心理狀態。所以憂患意識,乃人類精神開始接對事物發生責任感的表現,也即是精神上開始有了人地自覺的表現。

The Zhou people took over the mandate of the Yin (Shang) people and thus became the new victors. The texts and documents from the beginning of the Zhou dynasty testify that the conquerors were not imbued with the feeling of triumph, but with the concerned consciousness that we find in *Yizhuan*.[4] Concerned consciousness was formed by the ruler's contemplation of good luck and bad luck, of success and failure at a particular time. When the ruling elite contemplated the political changes they caused, they discovered that there was a close connection between them, i.e., on the one hand, luck or bad luck, success or failure, and on the other hand, the responsible behavior of the ruler. Concern is precisely what derives from this sense of responsibility, and the state of consciousness in which a person wants to get through their problems on their own but is unable to do so at that particular moment. For this reason, concerned consciousness is the expression of the manifestation of the immediate sense of responsibility one feels towards the external world and one's own actions. In other words, the human mind begins to become aware of itself. (Xu 2010, 20–21)

According to Xu, even though this state of consciousness arose within a political context, it still represents a transition from the religious culture of

[4] Commentaries on the *Book of Changes.*

ancient China to humanism (Huang 2018, 202). The transformation of the religion that occurred during this period was based on the Mandate of Heaven. Throughout the eight centuries that the Zhou dynasty lasted, the ancient Chinese gradually abolished beliefs in gods and strove for humanism, which focused on daily life, thus promoting and protecting human values. Consequently, they strove for certain of the highest values that became the cornerstone of their faith in humanism.

The Zhou Dynasty established a system of the Mandate of Heaven,[5] which was to preserve their political power forever (Huang 2018, 204). In this regard, Xu points out that the foundation of the specific form of the feudalism of the Zhou dynasty was the patriarchal clan system, whereby kinship relations were the basis for attaining leading positions. Hierarchical relations between the ruler and the nobility were not directly based on political authority, but were maintained through ritual and music. Although the rituals established strict boundaries between the social layers, they also established a series of behavioral norms, the fulfillment of which was regarded as civilized or cultivated behavior. Thus, the internal antagonism caused by strict hierarchical relations was extenuated. The necessary conditions for practicing the ritual were respect (*jing* 敬) and ritual regulations (*jie* 節) or self-control and modesty through which, according to Xu's view, it was possible to control a ruler's wishes (ibid., 205).

The transition from the reign of Shang to Zhou marked the spread of kinship. In the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BC), the feudal system began to disintegrate and was completely destroyed by the end of the period.

[5] The earliest reference to the Mandate of Heaven dates back to 998 BCE, i.e, about half a century after the defeat of the Shang dynasty, but is discussed very clearly and precisely, which naturally indicates its long development already before.

In this, the ritual as an antique tool of control was replaced by punishment. At the end of this period, Confucius was the one who studied the forms of the ritual and discovered the system of values which they embodied. In this, Confucius transformed ritual in such a way that it was not intended only for the elites, but became a system of norms for the people, thus guiding the behavior for all generations (ibid., 206).

Concerned consciousness, which emerged at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty and played its original role in maintaining the political regime, spread throughout the population and established itself as a moral basis for the whole society in the Spring and Autumn period.

The "Moral Self," as essentially interpreted by the second generation of Modern Confucianism in terms of ideological core of perception and possible identification of the individual, was established during the period of "the clash" of various local cultures. This was provoked by the fact that all non-transparent series of the Zhou dynasty's "feudal" states were rooted in different traditions that formed various religious ideas.

Broadly speaking, the Zhou dynasty was a successor of two different types of culture: it was a fusion of an agrarian system that represented the typical production and reproductive form of the defeated Shang dynasty (or Yin, 1600–1066 BCE) on the one hand, and of the hunting and food gathering system that represented the socio-economic mode of production in the society of predominantly nomadic invaders on the other. The conceptual world of the Shang dynasty was based on the cult of fertility, and its economic system of cooperation and division of labour within the family clan, whereas the nomadic religion of the Zhou invaders was founded upon the cult of heaven.

> In a cultural sense, both of these production modes were the heritage of the Zhou society. The mixture of elements of agrarian and nomadic religions was a result of their collision. The cult of ancestors as a type of ritualized worship that combines both aspects gradually became a common thread throughout all periods of Chinese history. (Brecsciani 2001, 23ff)

There is a fairly widespread opinion in sinology that the cult of ancestors is in fact a religion, since it relates to the belief in the afterlife and seeks protection for the individual (and their clan) from the spirits of ancestors. Since Confucius was agnostic (see Rošker 2005, 49), his emphasis on the cult of ancestors cannot be understood as a religious, but rather a moral ritual.[6] This position was also highlighted and emphasized by Xu Fuguan, mainly in his research on the ideologies of pre-Qin period:

> 至於鬼神祭祀這種風俗, 孔子在知識上不能證明其必有, 但也不能在知識上證明其必無, 而主張將其改造為對祖先的孝敬, 一表現自己的誠敬仁愛之德。因此, 孔子及由孔子發展下來的祭祀, 實質上不是宗教性的活動, 是使每一個人以自己為中心的自私之念通過祭祀而得到一種澄汰與純化。
>
> As regards the custom of worshipping the spirits and deities, Confucius wasn't able to prove the urgent need for its existence at the cognitive level, but also failed to demonstrate the urgent need for its nonexistence. Therefore, he advocated that this custom transforms itself into the custom of respectful

[6] The transformation of the religious form of the cult of ancestors into a kind of moral ritual also occurred during the Zhou dynasty. In the Shang dynasty, the cult of ancestors enabled contact with the supreme divinity of Shangdi, and thus the legitimacy of the political royal authority.

> worship of the ancestors, through which the individual could express the virtues of sincere respect, humanity and love. This worship, which began with Confucius and developed further after him, is in fact no form of religious activity. The meaning of this worship is only to purify and enrich the egocentric self-awareness of the individual. (Fang & Li 1989, III/614)

On the other hand, as has been clearly shown in various studies, a clear developmental pattern of transformations from nature to moral self can be observed in most human religions:

> 从宗教学上来看，殷人所具有的宗教信仰本质上是属于'自然宗教'的形态，而尚未进至'伦理宗教'的形态。这个重要的判断与宗教发展的一般规律是相吻合的，因为人类社会发展的历史表明，宗教的进化基本上都有一个由自然宗教向伦理宗教发展的过程，很少能有例外。殷代的卜辞完全没有关于道德智慧的术语。
>
> From the viewpoint of religious studies, it can be claimed that the religion of the Yin dynasty still belonged to "natural religions" and did not have any characteristics typical of "moral religions." This important supposition is linked to the general laws of religious development. The developmental history of human societies has namely clearly shown that religions have always developed from natural into moral ones, and that this process has almost no exceptions. The still preserved inscriptions from the time of the Yin dynasty do not imply any moral wisdoms or moral terminology. (Chen 1996, 23)

God, or "the ultimate ruler" (*Shang di* 上帝), who represented the highest religious entity in the Shang (Yin) culture, did not yet refer to interpersonal or human ethics (Yang 2007, 2). According to Yang Zebo, this fact clearly

demonstrates that the religion of the Shang period was still at an early stage of development, and thus limited to the sphere of the nature. This has radically changed after the defeat of Shang (Yin) dynasty by the Zhou invaders. In Yang's opinion, the reason for the transformation from the prevailing natural religion to a system of morality lied in the "concerned consciousness" of the ruling class, which in turbulent times of political and social chaos wanted to ensure their power and to justify it through this ideology (ibid., 3).

It can be argued that the traditional religious concepts, which were central parts of the dominant beliefs during the early Zhou dynasty, almost completely dissolved after the consolidation of the new culture, which implied both agrarian as well as nomadic elements. This turning point was extremely important, for it indicated that in this time Chinese society had already entered into the period labelled as the "Axial period" by Karl Jaspers[7] (1956, 98).

[7] According to Jaspers, this period refers to the time between the 8th and 3rd centuries BC, when the significant qualitative change in thinking and perception of reality took place, simultaneously in different parts of the world, between which there was not necessarily mutual interaction. The conceptual change primarily refers to the questions about the nature of human existence, focusing on the issue of transition from mythological beliefs to ethics and morality. During this period, people begin to realize their own limitations; in addition, the concepts of individuality, self-reflection and the practice of self-cultivation are formed. At this time, there was a religious crisis in which monotheistic religions developed. According to some theorists (cf. Heiner Roetz 1993, Anthony Black 2008), Jaspers was too generalizing and universal in his theory of the Axial age, as he wanted to limit the development of different cultures or civilizations to the simultaneous and unified development of humanity as a whole. In our case, Jaspers' theory is also

Chen Lai (1996, 4) points out the reasons for this turning point in Chinese history. He claims that this transformation did not emerge because people recognized their own limitations and were therefore directed towards the search for some kind of transcendent and infinite existence that could have led to the establishment of a monotheistic religion, but, on the contrary, they recognized the limitations of deities, and thus focused upon the real world and upon problems connected to regulating society and human relations. Thus, this important shift in Chinese history did not manifest any kind of a "breakthrough towards transcendence"; instead, it has marked a "breakthrough towards humanities" (Chen 1996, 4).

All this indicates an important difference in the intellectual and spiritual development of Chinese and European cultures after the "axial period." While the latter ones stepped on the path of "more developed" forms or stages of religion, the further ideal development of Chinese society was not determined by any turn towards monotheism, but rather to the pragmatically defined search for an ideal social order. The reason for this orientation lies in the fact that China's major religious crisis occurred before the onset of axial age, in which Heaven as the supreme god and supreme moral instance lost its credibility.

And since this morally defined religion during the early period of western Zhou dynasty lost all of its moral glitter, it would be difficult to overcome the doubt that had already prevailed in the broadest strata of population and re-establish the theological mindset that would enable the

problematic in that in China a qualitative breakthrough in thought, which refers primarily to the transition from mythological belief to ethics, occurred much earlier (with the beginning of Western Zhou Dynasty, around 1066 BCE) and not with Confucius and Laozi (around 6/5th century BCE).

development of monotheistic religion. Thus, the supreme deity had been replaced with belief in the rational structure of the universe, while the concept *tian*, which previously denoted "Heaven" (in a spiritual sense), was simply turned into "nature" (Yang 2007, 3).

Xu Fuguan (and some other representatives of the second generation, particularly Mou Zongsan) followed the assumption that due to such historical process of social transformation in China, the idea of Heaven or nature transformed from an anthropomorphic *force majeure* into something that defines the inner reality of every human being (Fang & Li 1989, III/608).

Xu Fuguan points out (2005, 15) that the original Confucianism tried to establish an ethical basis for moral decisions in the idea of subjective justice, which should have replaced the previous fear of ghosts (or, in other words, the hope for the salvation in heaven instead of the suffering in hell) as a basic criterion. He points out that the reason for such a transformation lied in the higher level of spiritual development, in contrast to transformations that led to monotheistic religions that were based upon the idea of (an external) God. In his opinion, this transformation led to humanism, which is based on a rather high level of "self-awareness" (*zijuexing* 自覺性):

> 人類的文化, 都是從宗教開始, 中國也不例外。但是文化形成一種明確而合理的觀念, 因而與人類行為以提高向上的影響力量, 則需發展到有某程度的自覺性。宗教可以誘發人的自覺; 但原始宗教, 常常是由對天滅人禍的恐怖情緒而來的原始性地對神秘之力的皈依, 並不能表示何種自覺的意識。即在高度發展的宗教中, 也因人, 因時代之不同, 而可成為人地自覺的助力; 也可成為人地自覺的阻礙. 從遺留到現在的殷代銅器來看, 中國文化, 到殷代已經有了很長的歷史, 完成了相當高度的發達。但從甲骨文中, 可以看出殷人的精神生活, 還未脫離原始狀態; 他們的宗教, 還是原始性的宗教。當時他們的行為, 似乎是通過卜辭而

完全决定於外在的神 – 祖宗神, 自然神, 及上帝。周人的貢獻, 便是在傳統的宗教生活中, 注入了自覺的精神; 把文化在器物方面的成就, 提升而為觀念方面的展開, 以啟發中國道德地人文精神的建立。

All human cultures begin with religion. China is no exception in this perspective. But cultures form a series of clear and reasoned ideas that affect the development of human behaviour—they have to develop a certain kind of level of human self-awareness. Primitive religions are mostly defined by the crude belief in the miraculous supernatural powers, which originates from feelings of horror concerning death and disasters that are caused by Heaven/nature. We do not find any kind of self-consciousness in these religions. Highly developed religions differ among one another according to the society and period in which they arise. The factors specific to these societies and times can either accelerate or inhibit self-awareness.

The bronze vessels that have been preserved from the Yin period show that the Chinese culture at that time already had a fairly long history and quite a high level of development. But if we look closely at the records written on the bones and turtle shells, we can see that the spiritual life of the people in that time was still at a primitive level; the oracles attest that they still believed their lives were completely dependent on the various deities. That case involved the spirit of ancestors, natural deities, and the supreme ruler Shang di. The contribution of the people from the period of the Zhou dynasty was their implication of the spirit of self—awareness in their traditional religious life. With that contribution they managed to raise up the culture that had been based on material accomplishments into the realm that lead to the establishment of the Chinese moral and humanistic spirit. (Xu 2005, 15–16)

The concept of *jing* (respect), which emerged in the early Zhou dynasty, and which reflected such a humanistic attitude, also resulted from the sense of concern which differed from religious piety in the following way:

> 宗教的虔敬, 是人把自己的主體性消解掉, 將自己投擲於神的面前而徹底皈歸於神的心理狀態。周初所强調的敬, 是人的精神, 由散漫而集中, 並消解自己的官能欲望於自己所負的青任之前, 凸顯出自己主體的積極性與理性作用。
>
> Religious piety is a state of the mind when one dissolves one's own subjectivity and throws oneself entirely before God, and takes refuge thoroughly in God. The reverence of the early Zhou is a humanitarian spirit. The spirit collects itself from relaxation to concentration; it dissolves bodily desires in front of one's own [moral] responsibility, and manifests rationality and autonomy of the subject. (Xu 2005, 22)

Xu investigates the process of consolidation of this individual autonomy and analyzes how it was connected to the concept of anxiety; he also clearly shows that the appearance of various central Confucian virtues has also been part of this process.

Among other things, the recognition of the belief that one should try to find the resources for overcoming difficulties within oneself has led ancient Chinese thinkers to study and to cultivate "the governing part of the Self," i.e. *xin*, or the "heart-mind." According to Xu, what represented *ren wen* 人文 (the humanities) in the Spring and Autumn period (770–476) was the concept of *li* (rituality—rules of propriety). Confucius located the foundation of *li* in what is in human heart-mind, namely, the central virtue of humaneness (*ren*). *Ren* is an enduring quest for self-perfection and an

awareness of one's unconditional duties toward others. Confucius thereby turned an external world of human rules (*li*) inward and opened up "an internal world of moral character" as the foundation of morality, in contrast to primary functions of *li* and *ren*, because at this primary level *ren* is an innate quality and *li* is the outward manifestation of this innate quality. This transformation was a part of the general process of the establishment of the inner moral self. According to Xu, this was Confucius' greatest contribution to Chinese civilization (Xu 2005, 22).

Manifestation of concerned consciousness in the central Confucian concepts of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), humaneness (*ren* 仁), and ritual (*li* 禮)

For Xu, Confucian filial piety is the origin of humaneness, which is the foundation of humanism and the core of Confucian ethics and morality:

> humaneness means being a human. It does not come from the will of the gods, but is the essential character of a person, for human character is already endowed with the virtue of humaneness. (Xu in Huang 2018, 210)

Filial piety springs from children's love for their parents and constitutes a source of humaneness. In this respect, the practice of filial piety precedes the practice of humaneness. According to Xu's interpretation, filial piety is the source of Confucian moral conduct and the foundation for all other virtues. This virtue is based on kinship relations. In reality, Confucianism emphasizes filial piety for socio-political reasons.

For Xu, there is a close connection between filial piety and the patriarchal clan system. In Chinese antiquity, where the ruling family and the patriarchal clan (determined by blood ties) corresponded, the role of

filial piety was to prevent the danger the ruler (or king) being overthrown, that is, to preserve political power. In this respect, then, filial piety is a concrete expression of concerned consciousness (Huang 2018, 211).

As pointed out by Huang (ibid.), for Xu humaneness and rituals were also the manifestation of concerned consciousness. Both concepts are interrelated and represent the inner and outer aspect of a human being. humaneness denotes the inner world of the individual and rituals the outer world. The idea of the inner world that Confucius advocates opens up the possibility of people cultivating and connecting with each other. The inner world is one that people create over the course of their lives and that cannot be limited or measured by the criteria of the outer world. This is because the outer world is measurable and three-dimensional, while the inner world is qualitative and multi-faceted, and can be presented by the idea of humaneness:

> 仁的自覺地精神狀態,即是要求成已而同時即是成物的精神狀態。此這種精神狀態,是一個人努力於學的動機, 努力於學的方向,努力於學的目的。同時,這種精神狀態落實於具體生活行為之上的時候,即是仁的一部份的實現。而對於整體的仁而言,則又是一種功夫,方法。
>
> A state of mind (consciousness) that is aware of humaneness is a state that simultaneously demands self-realization and fulfillment of things in external reality. This state of mind is the motivation, direction, and goal of the individual who strives to learn. When this state of mind is expressed in the everyday behavior of an individual, it is part of the realization of the practical dimension of fellow human beings. When we talk about the wholeness of humaneness, it is a kind of ability or method. (Xu 2010, 91)

Xu therefore holds that, according to Confucius, humaneness is a state of mind that stimulates the individual towards self-realisation (self-completion) and the completion of external things, as well as a skill or method of practicing daily life. Consequentially, rituals (*li*) represent the embodiment of the method (or ability) of humaneness.

Xu points out that the spirit of humaneness of which Confucius speaks is in the process of practice. After overcoming obstacles, including one's desires generated by the body and the vital potential of *qi*, one is able to fully experience the humaneness already present in the inner world[8] and extend it to the outer world. At this very moment, the perceptual dimension of humaneness emerges.

The idea of the inner world to which Confucius refers opens up the possibility for people to cultivate and deal with each other. The inner world is the world that people create in the course of their lives and cannot be limited or measured according to the criteria of the objective outer world. This is because the objective external world is quantitative, while the internal world is qualitative. In the Spring and Autumn Period, ritual represented the human world, but Confucius went a step further, placing ritual at the heart of being human. Therefore, he said, "If human beings are not human, what is the point of ritual? (*Ren er bu ren, ru li he* 仁而不仁,如禮何)" (ibid.).

[8] Here he refers to Mencius' theory of the four germs (*si duan* 四端). In the interpretation of the original Confucianism, the second generation followed the Mencian current, in which human character is fundamentally good because the four germs mentioned in it are already present at birth. Any bad human actions or underdevelopment of these germs is only the result of bad or inappropriate upbringing.

Xu Fuguan elaborates on the fundamental meaning of humaneness (*ren*), saying that according to Confucius, humaneness is a state of mind that stimulates the individual towards both self-realization and the accomplishment of external things, and is therefore the capacity or method of life.

Xu points out that for Confucius, the spirit of humaneness exists in the process of everyday practice. After a human being overcomes obstacles, including their own desires that arose through the body (and the vital potential of *qi*), they are able to fully experience the humaneness that is already present in their inner world and extend it to the external world. It is precisely at this moment that the perceptive dimension of humaneness emerges.

The Confucius quote "The whole world returns to one's fellow man" (*Tianxia fu ren yan* 天下歸仁焉) (*Lunyu* s.d., Yan yuan: 1) refers to the level of practice at which the individual is united with external reality. Xu understands the process of self-mastery and self-fulfillment as one through which one returns to ritual.

According to Xu, Confucianism has two main components. The first is a theory of internal morality based on the doctrine of the goodness of human character; this is the most important thing that distinguishes human beings from animals. According to this doctrine, only human beings are able to transform themselves into a being imbued with the virtue of humaneness. Thus, people can become a noble beings (*junzi*) who are responsible to the world.

The second component, however, concerns inner morality and its embodiment in the form of everyday interpersonal interactions. By practicing these (orderly) interpersonal relationships, one can sincerely cultivate "love for others." Morality as related to one's fellow man and the

practice of interpersonal interactions are inseparable, for in this context of individuals, the inner world and the outer reality are united (Huang 2018, 240).

Xu viewed Confucius as the first to develop the idea of the inner moral world of the individual, the unbounded nature of humaneness, which is directed towards and also concretized in the external reality. This enables human being to live in a world of reason. In each individual dwells a moral subject, without remnants of the old religions.

The equality between the inner and outer worlds of the human being, pointed out by Mencius, is seen by Xu as an unbounded process, and it is precisely the absence of boundaries that leads one to be in a constant state of concern.

According to Xu, concerned consciousness is therefore the true basis of humaneness, as he explicitly writes:

> 仁的基本表現還是憂患意識。
>
> The fundamental expression of humaneness is therefore precisely concerned consciousness. (Xu 2010, 184)

Moreover, he explains that, according to Confucius, the purpose of practicing humaneness is also to develop oneself. According to Xu, a connection with other people and things comes not only from learning about people and things or phenomena in the external world, but also from striving to develop and discover oneself, and from striving to transform the physiological self into a moral self. In this way, fellow human beings and things that previously belonged to the individual's external reality unite with him or her, and thus create a unity (ibid., 186).

For Xu, humaneness does not spring from momentary enlightenment and is not mystical in character. Instead, it is formed in an individual's active participation within socio-political and economic processes. Thus, according to Xu, the value of human beings is manifested through their interactions with the world (ibid.).

The concept of concerned consciousness is therefore the central concept of the interpretation of Confucianism by Xu Fuguan. The meaning of concerned consciousness that Xu ascribes to it connects important moral ideas of original Confucianism, such as filial piety, humaneness, and rituals. For Xu, these moral ideas and proper conduct as their concrete consequence are a manifestation of concerned consciousness. At first glance, this concept appears to us as something that preserves the political power of the rulers, that is, as a concept of political philosophy. But if we consider it from its role in cultivating an individual's personal moral consciousness, it becomes clear that it belongs equally to the sphere of moral philosophy (Huang 2018, 220).

As we will see below, in the context of the specifics of Chinese ideational history, moral philosophy is an important segment of Chinese aesthetics. Therefore, in the next chapter we will introduce the general characteristics of traditional Chinese aesthetics, its basic concepts and paradigms, as well as its modernization in the 20th century. With this basic explanation of the fundamental characteristics and development of Chinese aesthetics, it will be easier for us to enter the realm of Xu Fuguan's theory of Chinese aesthetics.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE AESTHETICS

Aesthetics as a philosophical discipline is not merely the study of beauty, but rather a philosophical discipline that studies the activities of the human mind or consciousness when it enjoys or experiences beauty (both natural beauty and the beauty of works of art).

Chinese theorists developed aesthetics at the level of moral philosophy. In this respect, questions related to aesthetics and art are connected with questions concerning the cosmos, society, life, and interpersonal relations. These relationships had an influence on Chinese aesthetics, therefore, even in ancient China, it was closely or inextricably linked with social ethics and humanistic ideals. True beauty existed in harmony between individuals and society, and between human beings and nature. Respect for art and beauty was seen as a means of achieving this harmony (Liu 1995, 180). Because traditional Chinese aesthetics discusses issues of human existence, the universe, human relationships, and society, aesthetic problems in the Chinese tradition are not seen as problems of knowledge, in the sense of finding answers to what aesthetics and beauty are—which has been a central issue in traditional Western aesthetics, but is built on the background of humanity and is reflection on human relations and society, where philosophy, aesthetics, and life experience are connected as a whole (Xu 2006, 78).

Chinese aesthetic is neither the internalization of reason (cognition), nor its condensation (ethics), but the sedimentational incorporation of both reason and sense (Wang 2007, 251).

This view shows a great distinction from Western aesthetics, which is defined as "a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty[1] and aesthetic judgments."[2] Furthermore, Western aesthetics is clearly distinguished from ethics and epistemology, since in its conceptual framework art is an autonomous entity, for it deals with the senses. Hence, art as such is necessarily free of any moral or political purpose (Gethmann-Siefert 1995, 7). The moral and ethical implications of traditional Chinese aesthetics have played an important and central role in traditional Chinese society and culture.

Li Zehou[3] and Xu Fuguan also repeatedly emphasized the close connection between aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology, with Xu also highlighting with phenomenology.

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[1] Definition 1 of "Aesthetics" from *Meriam-Webster Dictionary* online.

[2] Definition 2 of "Aesthetics" from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: the term "aesthetics" has been used to describe, among other things, the nature of the object, the nature of judgment, the nature of relationships, the nature of experience, and the nature of value. Aesthetic theories are usually divided into questions characteristic of one or another of these designations: whether works of art are necessarily aesthetic objects.

[3] Li Zehou (1930–) is considered the most important theorist of Chinese aesthetics in the 20th and 21st centuries, so I refer largely to the content of his theoretical contributions in this chapter. However, Xu Fuguan's theory of Chinese aesthetics is presented in detail in the last two chapters of the book.

Chinese aesthetics, however, is also concerned with the study of beauty as manifested in nature and art. Beauty is revealed in human consciousness through aesthetic activities. These activities of human consciousness relate to our experiences, imagination, or the transformation of natural and artistic objects into aesthetic objects. Aesthetic activities people transform natural scenes from a mere substance into idea-image (*yixiang:* a united, meaningful, and sensuous world). Within traditional Chinese aesthetics, it is this idea-image that determines beauty. This means that beauty can only exist in those idea-images that represent a combination of human feelings and concrete scenes of the external world around us. In this interfusion, the human inner and outer (objective) world form a harmonious unity (Ye 2010, 113).

In this context, aesthetic activity is not determined by conceptual thought or rational cognition, but is fundamentally limited by human experience, so that aesthetic activity is not based on cognition but on pure experience. In traditional Chinese aesthetics, it is precisely in the realm of aesthetic experience that human beings establish a communicative state with the world and thus experience how they exist or live.

The theory of traditional Chinese aesthetics is scattered in works on philosophy and artistic literary theory, so by the 20th century, when it begins to form as an academic discipline, it lacks a logical and coherent theoretical system, but its content is certainly extremely deep and rich, and occupies a very important place and function within Chinese ideational tradition and culture (*Xinbian meixue baike cidian* 1989, 709).

The *Chinese Dictionary of aesthetics* (ibid.) presents the basic characteristics of Chinese culture, which are also reflected in traditional Chinese aesthetics, and highlights the fundamental ideational differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes morality and ethics, humaneness, and righteousness (*renyi*), with goodness (*shan*) also being the basis of human cultivation. At the conceptual level, traditional Chinese thought does not emphasize separation and differentiation, reasoning and analysis, or the scientific spirit, as Western culture does, but rather a harmonious connection between human beings and nature, subject and object, individual and community. These basic tenets form an important conceptual background for understanding traditional Chinese aesthetics, which is generally based on the following basic conceptual positions (ibid., 709–710) and will be presented in more detail in the following subsections and in the context of the chapter on Xu Fuguan's theories of Chinese aesthetics.

a.) The idea of goodness (*shan*) contained in the unity of beauty and goodness (*shanmei tongyi*) constitutes the embodiment of ethics in aesthetic consciousness. Traditional Chinese aesthetics therefore highly values works of art that have deep moral and ethical content, and emphasizes the importance of moral and ethical cultivation in aesthetic and artistic performance.

b.) Conceptual image (idea-image) (*yixiang*) is an aesthetic concept that expresses the union of feelings and images or the fusion of the inner and outer worlds. The concept of idea-image illuminates a sensuous world that is full of vital energy (*qi*). In Chinese cultural psychology, human beings perceive all things in interconnectedness and unity. The principle of unity of man and nature (*tianren heyi*) in traditional Chinese philosophy emphasizes the interdependence and connectedness of people and nature, and perceives the functioning of nature as the

functioning of people and vice versa. This differs from the Western view in which nature is the object of science and analysis. In the Chinese ideational tradition, nature is an aesthetic and emotionally experiential category. Many specific concepts in Chinese aesthetics express the fusion of human feelings and scene, external objects and the self.

c.) Intuition is a basic cognitive method in Chinese aesthetics, emphasizing the union of human emotion and reason, or rational and sensory perception. This type of intuition is about anchoring reason in emotions and *vice versa*.

d.) Freedom is a key category in Chinese aesthetics, emphasizing the liberation of the human mind from natural necessities and the transformation of the everyday into an aesthetic way of living. In Chinese culture, the experience of freedom does not exist outside of everyday human life, but precisely within all kinds of human action through which human life can be transformed into something artistic and aesthetic.

Chinese aestheticians generally agree that aesthetics is the study of aesthetic activities, which are the spiritual activities of mankind (Ye 2010, 115). Li Zehou, on the other hand, emphasizes that we must be careful to understand what spiritual activities actually are, as they transcend the categories of sense perception, morality, and religion (Li 2006, 20). Li believes that this is most clearly expressed in the notion of the complete unity of the self and the external world. Such identification of subject and object can only arise in the creative intuition of “pure consciousness,” which cannot be

understood within the framework of psychology or logical science. Nor can it be placed in the realm of religious experience, but can only be found in the realm of aesthetics (Li 2010, 82).

Traditional Chinese Aesthetics is divided into three main streams: Confucian, Daoist, and Chan Buddhist, the main features of which we shall discuss below. The *Chinese Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* divides the historical development into five phases, in which the aesthetic views differ in certain segments but most of them complement and enhance each other:

a) from the pre-Qin period to the end of the Han dynasty (from the 16th century BCE to 220);
b) from the Wei Jin period to the middle of the Tang dynasty (from 220 to the 6th century);
c) from the middle of the Tang Dynasty to the middle of the Ming Dynasty (from the 7th century to the 16th century);
d) from the middle of the Ming Dynasty to the period of the 100 day reform in 1898;
e) from the period of 100 day reform to the present day (*Meixue baikequanshu* 1990, 687).

This chapter will focus on the first two phases of the historical development of Chinese aesthetics, especially the Wei Jin period or the Six Dynasties (2nd–6th centuries), since it was during this period that the basic concepts and paradigms in the theory of traditional Chinese aesthetics were formed. Indeed, this period is considered an conceptual breakthrough in Chinese ideational tradition and even as the birth of traditional Chinese aesthetics, as it saw the creation of the fundamental theoretical works that even modern

Chinese aesthetics draws upon and engages with. We will discuss 20th century aesthetics in detail in the next subchapter.

Historical development

According to Xu Fuguan and Li Zehou, the historical development of Chinese aesthetics begins in shamanic culture and proceeds through the centuries while being influenced by various currents of philosophical thought, especially Confucianism and Daoism. After the ancient period, it was strongly influenced by the so-called approaches of Chu Sao[4] and later by the philosophy of Chan Buddhism. All these discourses focused on the concepts of beauty, aesthetic, experience and aesthetic consciousness, and their direct and inseparable connection with the morality and ethical values of traditional Chinese culture.

According to the first Han Dynasty Chinese etymological dictionary, *Shuowen jiezi*, the Chinese word beauty or beautiful (*mei* 美) means the same as good or goodness (*shan* 善) (*Shuowen jiezi* s.d., Yang bu, Mei).[5] Li Zehou's analysis of the character *mei* 美 showed that the pictograph depicts a person wearing a ram's head and/or feathers on his brow, most likely performing a ritual representing the shamanistic tradition of the early societies of ancient China (Li 2010, 1). On the other hand, looking at both parts of the pictograph, it may also show a large ram. The big ram implies

[4] Liu Ganji adds to the three central currents, namely Confucian, Daoist, and Chan Buddhist aesthetics, the aesthetics of Chu Sao (Liu 1995, 181), which refers to the aesthetics of the famous poet Qu Yuan (340–277 BCE) and represents a fusion of Confucian and Daoist aesthetics.

[5] "Beautiful and goodness have the same meaning (*Mei yu shan tongyi* 美與善同意)."

beauty in the sense of appearance, but at the same time it also implies its inner quality, which is good food and wool for clothes, among other things. Both meanings refer to people's sensual existence, needs, and feelings on the one hand, and their social existence and rationality on the other (Li 1984, 44). Another aspect of beauty in Chinese tradition refers to works of art and other objects (e.g. objects of external nature) that produce aesthetic pleasure (ibid., 43).

Li Zehou points out that, even in modern China, the word beautiful is used in several contexts related to human sensory experience, ethical values, and aesthetic pleasure (ibid.). According to Li Zehou, material and spiritual production (and aesthetic consciousness) began with the making and using of tools, a stance that he adopted from the tool-centered materialism of Engels and Plekhanov,[6] claiming that all historical changes were due to the development of tools. In this view, tools were the objects made for survival and constituted the material basis of primitive societies, whereby their ornamentations were the results of human ideas, fantasies and imagination, and thus they led to the development of religion, art, and philosophy (Li 1984, 17). Thus, the totemic magic and rituals of remote antiquity were, as he understood it, transformed into political and social institutions, and the totemic songs and dancing developed into art (music, dances) and literature (myths, songs, poetry, and legends). The worship of totems in shamanistic songs and dances was gradually replaced by the worshipping of heroes and ancestors; in other words, they became humanized and rationalized (ibid.).

[6] Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov (1856–1918) was the first Russian who identified himself as a Marxist. He aimed to develop an aesthetic theory based on scientific socialism and Marxist philosophy, in order to promote the proletarian class struggle. He was a founder of the social-democratic movement in Russia (Chong 1999, 52).

This process of transformation was completed in transition from the Shang to the Zhou dynasty, along with the establishment of the patriarchal system. The evolution of aesthetic awareness and experience resulted in the transformation of realistic animal images into abstract symbols that can still be observed on Neolithic pottery and in the bronze art objects from the time. These symbols contained a complicated conceptual significance. Their forms are significant, for they imply socially defined characters; thus, they represent an origin of aesthetic emotion and of beauty as such. The pure presentation of natural objects was replaced by lines, which included characteristics such as symmetry, balance, continuity, intermission, rhythm, change, unity etc., expressed in a concentrated way. They were often representations of subjective feelings in motion (ibid., 27). This transformation is very important for understanding Chinese calligraphy as well as Chinese literature, because they are both based on the above-mentioned principles. Chinese characters contain both symbolic meanings and abstract significance, and as such they possess an imaginative as well as simulative dimension (ibid., 40). The creative essence of lines made the expression of feelings, ideas, and emotions possible through its variety of forms, which later developed further and which eventually turned into “the art of line” or Chinese calligraphy. Gradually, it developed complex laws regarding its structure and followed the intention of producing “soundless music and motionless dancing on paper to express human feelings and ideas” (ibid., 43). This attribute in Chinese calligraphy, i.e., “soundless music and motionless dancing on paper” to express human feelings and ideas,” which is also inherent in other genres of art, is one of the fundamental aesthetic qualities. As we shall see below, it is the aesthetic effect produced by music that determines the value and quality of a work of art.

Xu Fuguan points out in the introduction to his work *The Spirit of Chinese Art* that it is possible to seek the origin of human culture in religion, but in his opinion culture derives from art. Art itself derives from play, since it is that human activity which first appears in life and from which song, dance and music arise, which are interrelated. According to him, music is also the origin of all other art genres (Xu 1966, 1). Its intrinsic qualities of harmony, pause (or silence), and resonance have been applied to other art genres in traditional Chinese aesthetics, especially calligraphy, painting, and poetry, and so it is not surprising that art critics have described Chinese art as musical.

As Park points out (2017, 1), the extensive use of musical metaphors based on the dynamics of *qi* (creative vitality) such as "rhythmic vitality (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動)" [7] or "literary vitality (*wenqi* 文氣)" for art and literary criticism in early China can be deemed as conceptual mappings between music and other arts. These are mostly guiding principles in individual art theories:

> I argue that this widely accepted practice of musical metaphors implies that the conceptual framework of early musical discourse was embedded in later art theories. It also implies that Chinese aesthetics sought something beyond the physical composition of colors, shapes, and brushworks on paper, namely, dynamics in the way that music moves. (Ibid.)

Here we must keep in mind the distinction between music in figurative usage and music as a conceptual metaphor. The latter is a sense that is

[7] This central aesthetic concept will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

unique in Chinese art and aesthetics. It is an aesthetic ideal, not a description of a particular work of art in musical terms (ibid).[8]

We will discuss the role and importance of music in Confucian philosophy, but let us mention already at this point that both Confucius and Zhuangzi used music as a conceptual metaphor at the core of their philosophical thought. Confucius was the first to apply the structure and effects of music to ethical and social relations, and to the cultivation of human emotions, while Zhuangzi understood music as an ontoepistemological and aesthetic ideal.

The aesthetic value and aesthetic awareness of art became apparent in the so-called Pre-Qin period (770–221 BCE), when China separated from primitive magic and religion and entered the era of rationalism (Li 1984, 46).

Confucius transformed the religious character of primitive culture, rites, and music into the pragmatic and atheistic nature of human relations, socio-political concepts, and art in people's daily lives. The central focus was on applying moral ethics through the process of education and self-cultivation

[8] According to Park (2017, 2), the conceptual metaphor theory claims that a metaphor is not just a rhetorical device but also and more significantly a fundamental conceptual framework operating at the level of thinking. A metaphor maps one kind of domain onto another, which were not necessarily connected before, and this mapping occurs at the conceptual level prior to being expressed in language. I will discuss further about the relation and the difference between linguistic metaphor and conceptual metaphor in the later sections, but what I am suggesting here is that the musical metaphor in Chinese art is more like a conceptual metaphor rather than a linguistic one. In Chinese esthetics, many concepts are based on an analogy with music. Traditional Chinese painting is said to have a tendency towards poetry and music, while Western painting is said to be closer to sculpture and architecture (ibid., 8).

of human beings. He transferred the religious role of primitive rituals to the sphere of interpersonal relations and defined them as humaneness (*ren*). The previous worship and subordination to gods was transformed into a kind of inner, incorporated ethics, which also became significant in the prevailing character and social functions of Chinese art and aesthetics (ibid., 49).[9] Art was not the external form of rites, "but had to appeal to the senses and be of a general nature, as well as having to be related to social ethics and consequently to current politics" (ibid., 50).

Music was considered as the highest form of art because its harmonious structure most clearly embodied the integration of human reason and emotion. In addition to providing joy and pleasure,[10] it was capable of molding and balancing individuals' social and moral feelings. In this respect, Confucius was the first to emphasize the social significance of beauty and art (Liu 1995, 181). For him, beauty was the embodiment of humaneness (*ren*), which was the highest goal of Confucian philosophy. The Confucians emphasized the functional character and the utility of art in education and in self-cultivation, which were seen as the crucial processes in establishing a moral and harmonious society based on human rationality and humaneness. Therefore, the form and content of art were quite rigorously

[9] This transformation was due to the establishment of a sense of concerned consciousness as the fundamental basis of human existence, discussed in previous chapter.

[10] The meaning of the character *yue* 樂 was music as well as joy.

structured and regulated, which can be seen, for instance, in the rigorous Confucian distinction between "proper" and the "improper" music.[11]

In contrast to such pragmatic function of art, the Daoist approach provided a freer and more autonomous position of art and the expression of human emotion in comprehension of the external world. They were the first to unite art, beauty, and freedom with natural regularity and purposefulness. Daoists rejected distinguishing between right and wrong (*shi/fei* 是非) and the purposiveness of art, which were all very important elements in Confucian thought.

The highest goal in Daoist philosophy was the fulfilment of individual freedom in accordance to nature or *Dao*, which can be achieved through the methods of *fasting of the heart-mind* (*xinzhai* 心齋) and *sitting in forgetfulness* (*zuowang* 坐忘),[12] i.e. by overcoming emotions and attachment, and eliminating knowledge (the above-mentioned distinction between right and wrong, and the like).

According to Li Zehou and Xu Fuguan, the philosophy of Zhuangzi and Laozi represents the aesthetic view of life. They emphasized the expression of human imagination, emotions, and intuition in perceiving the world, as well as a

> *laissez-faire* relationship between humanity and the external world that transcended utility. They focused on an aesthetic relationship, on inner, spiritual, and substantive beauty, on the non-cognitive laws of artistic

[11] Appropriate music refers to sublime or courtly music (*yayue* 雅樂), while inappropriate music refers to popular or unrefined music, namely the co-called vulgar music of common people (*suyue* 俗樂).

[12] These two methods will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

> creation. If the influence of the Confucians on later literature and art lay mainly in topic and content, that of the Taoist lay mainly in the laws of creativity—in aesthetics. And the importance of art as a unique form of ideology lies precisely in its aesthetic laws. (Li & Cauvel 2006, 51)

Consequently, the naturalness, spontaneity, imagination, and free expression of emotions were the most important Daoist contribution to ancient Chinese aesthetics.

The synthesis of Confucian and Daoist aesthetics emerged in the form of Chu Sao aesthetics, and its representative was Qu Yuan (340–277 BCE) (Liu 1995, 185). Chu refers to the southern state of Chu and Sao to Qu Yuan's song *Li Sao* 離騷 (*Encountering Grief*). The south was influenced by northern Confucianism and culture, but also by shamanistic traditions, where magic and myths were still very much alive.

> Li Sao fused the unbridled romantic fancies of primitive original myth and the fiery individual character and passions that appeared with the awakening of man's rational nature into a perfect, organic whole that marked the real beginning of Chinese lyric poetry. (Li 1994, 67)

Qu Yuan accepted the Confucian doctrine of humaneness and goodness, but rejected obedience and moderation. Thus, he preferred to incorporate the Daoist concepts of free expression of individual emotions and imagination, while excluding issues of right and wrong (Liu 1995, 185). The romantic spirit of Chu Sao's aesthetics continued and developed in the Han Dynasty. The world of humans and gods merged in a positive way; the gods were no longer the dominant force but, on the contrary, had been defeated by humanity (Li 1984, 74).

This transformation of psychological states was expressed in pictorial representations of everyday life (e.g., harvests, customs, food, dwellings), which merged with the imagination, fantasy world, hope, desires, joy, and love of life in the present moment.

The aesthetics of the Wei Jin period (or the Six Dynasties (222–589), however, stood in stark contrast to the romanticism of Chu and Han. Because of the skepticism that prevailed as a philosophical current, for example, fear of the transience of human life, grief over the uncertainty of life, the loss of loved ones, and the homeland were the main themes that prevailed in literature and art. Some of China's most important aesthetic concepts, such as the "rhythm of *qi*" (*qiyun* 氣韻)[13] and "words cannot fully convey meaning" (*yan bu jin yi* 言不盡意) were the product of the nihilistic spirit of the Wei Jin period, which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

The prevailing intention to express the inner spirit culminated in the discourses of Chan Buddhism, became a new trend in Chinese aesthetics in the middle of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Chan incorporated both Daoist ideas of separation and withdrawal from worldly affairs and a Daoist pursuit of spiritual freedom, but differed from Daoism in method. In particular, the Daoists focused on the harmonious merging of the subject with unlimited and eternal nature (or the *Dao*) in order to achieve spiritual freedom, while the Chan Buddhists argued that the *Dao* and the entire external world were merely an illusory product of human consciousness and as such did not exist. Therefore, Chan philosophy proposed a retreat into the inner world of man, into the practice of detachment and the elimination of desires. However, its

[13] We shall speak of the proper translation of this fundamental and complex concept into Indo-European languages and of its content and meaning in the next chapter. At this point I adopt Li Zehou's English translation.

contribution to Chinese aesthetic judgment and art is found in the expression of the subject's conscious inner life and introspection (Liu 1995, 187).

For Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan, the aesthetic experience is the highest state of the human heart-mind. This state can be achieved through constant practice (*gongfu*) and mastery of artistic skills, as well as in the practice of everyday human activities, ultimately leading to the embodiment of the *Dao* (essence or noumenon of the universe). Given the initial stage of aesthetic cultivation and the elimination of desires and attachments, Chan certainly seems similar to Daoism, but Daoism, particularly Zhuangzi's aesthetic view of life, differs significantly from Chan's, whose ultimate goal is the liberation of this life and the world (including art). Because of Zhuangzi's affirmation of life, his philosophy had the greatest influence on Chinese art and aesthetics.

The central ideas, concepts and methods in traditional Chinese aesthetics

According to Karl-Heinz Pohl[14] (2009, 87–103), the first ideal of traditional Chinese aesthetics is to achieve a level of artistic perfection in a work of art that, imbued with the rhythm of *qi*, looks like a work of nature yet reveals a sense of spiritual mastery.

This is not a *mimesis* or realistic representation, but a representation based on one's experience of the world. Pohl highlights four fundamental characteristics of traditional Chinese aesthetics that combine to form the highest aesthetic ideal and thus the aesthetic value of a work of art.

[14] Karl-Heinz Pohl (1945–) is considered a Western pioneer in the study of traditional and modern Chinese aesthetics.

The first characteristic is suggestiveness (*xieyi* 寫意), which, according to Pohl, refers to a poetic quality in a work of art. In poetry itself, this quality can be observed in metaphorical language determined by images from nature on the one hand, and on the other hand the attention that is directed to a meaning that lies beyond words and images. In the theory of Chinese aesthetics, there are conceptual expressions, such as meaning beyond words (*yanwai zhi yi* 言外之意) and image beyond images (*xiangwai zhi xiang* 象外之象), that reflect this fundamental quality of Chinese aesthetics. This quality is also required in painting. The aesthetically perfect image must express a poetic image that resonates beyond the actual depiction of the scene (*miao zai hua wai* 妙在畫外).

This fundamental characteristic is not merely a poetic feature in the work of art, but an indication of a deeper aesthetic meaning beyond the concrete representation that allows the audience complete freedom in experiencing and interpreting the work of art, and thus the highest (i.e. transformative) aesthetic experience.

As we will see in the subsection on the aesthetics of Wei Jin, the aesthetics of traditional painting is primarily concerned with the transmission of spirit in a work of art (*chuanshen* 傳神). *Xieyi*, however, refers to suggestiveness as an aesthetic quality in traditional Chinese painting and literally means a description of an idea or thought, while in poetry and literature the term *hanxu* is used for this aesthetic quality, namely suggestiveness, which means to be full of implicit, hidden meanings.

Another feature is the expression of *qi* in the work of art, which Pohl translates as a vital quality. Namely, it expresses vitality in calligraphy, painting, and poetry. The meaning of *qi* within the concept of *qiyun shengdong* is the first principle in painting, which was described by Xie He

in his theory of the six laws in the 6th century. It touches on cosmological ideas or ideas about the creativity of nature, among other things. In the ideal sense, a work of art should be created as a work of nature or *Dao*.

The third characteristic refers to cosmological ideas that support a balance between binary opposites in the artwork. In poetry, this characteristic manifests itself in a preference for parallelisms through which certain pairs in a poem are antithetically linked. The tendency to balance pairs (or poles) that do not contradict each other but are mutually dependent and interdependent stems from the theory of *Yinyang*. This characteristic is very visible in landscape painting (*shanshui hua* 山水畫), as it expresses the harmonious cosmic order of the world and its forces at the micro level.

The fourth feature of traditional Chinese aesthetics for poetics and art theory is seemingly a contradictory idea, the balance of spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) and correctness or regularity (*fa* 法). Both are, of course, a binary aesthetic category whose aesthetic effect is most clearly seen in the *lüshi* poetry of the Tang dynasty. This poetic form has strictly defined rules regarding the length and number of lines, meter, rhythm, rhyme, parallelisms, etc. Reading these poems gives a sense of complete naturalness and stylistic ease and simplicity. The same can be seen in painting, where there are strict rules, but in the works of the greatest masters, we can feel the freedom from restrictions and rules, which is illustrated by one of the most famous painters, Shitao, who lived at the end of the Ming Dynasty (1641–1717). In his theory of painting, Shitao introduced a rule without a rule (*wu fa zhi fa* 無法之法), which means to internalize the rules

to the point that they seem completely natural.[15] This level can be reached with *gongfu*, i.e., the level of mastery that can be achieved after strenuous and prolonged practice, leading to complete intuitive control over an artistic medium called spirit (*shen* 神) in aesthetics. *Shen* (spirit) is a central concept in traditional Chinese aesthetics, first introduced and defined theoretically by Gu Kaizhi (345–406) in the Wei Jin period, which is considered a turning point in Chinese ideational tradition and can also be regarded as the birth of

[15] Shitao (1642–1707) was born a member of the imperial family in the final years of the Ming Dynasty. He became a Buddhist monk at the age of eight, narrowly escaping death as the Manchurians persecuted and condemned members of the noble families. At the age of 38, he converted to Daoism because he received no support at the Buddhist temple for his advancement within the monastic hierarchical system. He remained a Daoist until his death in 1707. Shitao's painting is diverse in both style and subject matter. He excelled in all genres of painting, including landscape, bird, flower, and portrait painting. In his theoretical work *Huayu Lu* 画語錄 (*Records on Painting*), he talks about the "rule without rules" and the aesthetic theory of "one brushstroke." In his theory of aesthetics, Shitao defines one brushstroke as the essence of everything, of all phenomena that man perceives through the spirit, wherefore the method of one brushstroke is based on the self. One brushstroke arises from unity, and when it manifests, a multiplicity of all things arises. However, its realization is necessary, because the original oneness has already dissolved into a multitude of things (Motoh 2007, 142). Shitao says in the first chapter of his Records on Painting that painting follows the heart. Therefore, with the help of self-knowledge, a painter can achieve a spirit that unites individuality into unity, and then implement that in the painting. The spirit is that state in the dynamics of qi from which all beings and things emerge, i.e. the great void. The one brushstroke method shows the same origin and implication of all things (ibid.).

Chinese aesthetics, as it was at that time that aesthetic concepts were formed within literary theory and the theory of painting.[16]

The Wei Jin period and the birth of classical Chinese aesthetics

The Wei Jin period is considered one of the most fertile and creative periods in philosophy, art, and psychology in Chinese history. The cultural and ideational breakthrough was facilitated by major socio-political changes caused by the fragmentation of power and the invasion of nomadic peoples from the north (especially the Huns and later the Xianbei) Economic and socio-political power was taken over by wealthy aristocratic clans (especially the Cao and Tuoba clans), who (in addition to constant political intrigue and struggles for supremacy) were passionate about poetry, calligraphy, wine drinking, and Daoist philosophy, the same as philosophers and artists were in those turbulent times.[17]

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[16] The central works of the theory of aesthetics that emerged during this period, and are still regarded as classics of Chinese aesthetics are: Xie He's *Records on Painting* (*Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄), Liu Xie's literary theoretical work *Literary Spirit and the carving of Dragon* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍), and the essays of the Sages from the Bamboo Grove (see next note), which deal mainly with the theory of music. All the above-mentioned works derived from the philosophy of Neo-Daoist School the Mystic learning (*Xuanxue*).

[17] From this period we know the famous *Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* (*Zhulin qi xian* 竹林七賢), among whom the most famous are Ji Kang and Ruan Ji. Although most of them had the opportunity to act at a political level, they decided, due to the uncertain political situation and the depravity and corruption of the aristocratic clans, to retire to solitude, where they devoted themselves to the creation of poetry, music, calligraphy, and philosophy. They deliberately avoided political

This led to the decline of the study of Confucian classics that prevailed in the Han dynasty (from 206 BCE to 220 CE), bearing in mind that Confucianism in the Han dynasty had little to do with the original Confucian doctrine, since Confucianism in the Han dynasty merged with Legalism, which we know as the first reform of Confucianism that led to Confucianism as a state doctrine. On the other hand, the invasion of foreign peoples into the central Chinese plain in the north was also responsible for the decline of Confucianism. They did not continue the system of imperial examinations, whose beginnings were laid by Emperor Han Wudi in the Western Han Dynasty. As a result, officials lost the opportunity to attain high official titles and and began to focus more and more on art, painting, and literature.

In reaction to the rigidity of Han Confucianism and the rejection of its rigid moral principles and norms, Neo Daoism, known as the School of Mysteries (*Xuanxue* 玄學), whose chief exponents were the philosophers Wang Bi (226–249) and He Yan (195–249), emerged. The *Xuanxue* school was based mainly on the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, but also contained some Confucian elements. The philosophical debates involving the intellectual elite are known as Pure Conversations (*qingtan* 清談). They dealt with the search for a new morality, metaphysics, and logic. The sages from the bamboo grove also participated in the pure discussions (Rošker 2005, 86).

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issues altogether, mainly so as not to jeopardize their free lives and risk possible beheading by criticizing the political situation (unfortunately, Ji Kang could not avoid this). What they aspired to was to enjoy life in the most spontaneous way possible, which is known as Zhuangzi's free and easy wandering (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊).

Li Zehou describes the Wei Jin period as the awakening of man or people (*ren de juexing* 人的覺醒) (Li 2003, 80). In contrast to the rigid emphasis on ancient traditions, customs, honor, and moral integrity that characterized the Han dynasty, in Wei Jin the people and all aspects of their personalities come to the fore.

In the art and literature of the Wei Jin period, the emphasis was put on the value of human life and the expression of human emotions and feelings; human character and spirit, in the sense of unlimited potential possibilities, become the center of aesthetic, social, and cultural debates (ibid.). What kind of attitudes towards life there were during this period is most clearly and directly demonstrated in poetry and painting. Central themes in poetry were the awareness of mortality, the transience and brevity of life, grief and regret, the fear of premature death and the loss of loved ones, and at the same time the veneration and enjoyment of life while it lasts. The aesthetic ideal of the ruling elite lay in the expression of human wisdom and sublime character through striking appearance, reflected in painting in the depiction of a spirit that transcended physical likeness. In the aesthetic perception of the Wei Jin period, which was full of political upheaval and crisis, the consciousness of human individuality transcended the consciousness of community. People of the time preferred to enjoy nature and express their personalities in an aesthetic way, without the constraints of the ritual formality and politics that characterised Han dynasty aesthetics.

The emerging aesthetic style of Wei Jin was thus based on an awareness of the transience of life, a devotion to its enjoyment, and an immersion in philosophical discussions. These were no longer so concerned with human observation of nature and exploration of the external world (*waizaishijiede tansuo* 外在世界的探索), but rather focused on ontology in the sense of

finding the inner substance (*neizai shitide zhuiqiu* 内在實體的追求), whereby the richness and diversity of reality are only possible when all human potentials for it are fulfilled. This meant achieving a fully realized self or state of wisdom (*zhiren* 智人)—what Wang Bi also called great beauty (*damei* 大美)—while also preserving human suffering and joy. Focusing on the human inner self, which has unlimited possibilities, rather than on the outer world, was both a criterion of beauty in art and the heart of philosophy (ibid.).

Basic concepts of the Wei Jin aesthetics

The basic concepts of Chinese aesthetics and literary theory, the theory of painting and music, were developed precisely in the Wei Jin Period. As DeWoskin also points out (1982, 157), discussions of art's meaning and role in the Wei Jin period broke away from political and moral issues and sought to define art and the creative process. In contrast to the art and aesthetics of the Han Dynasty, which focused on accurate representations of the external environment, people's behaviors and attitudes, and important events of the time, the Wei Jin period rose to the level of abstraction and shaped aesthetic paradigms, based mainly on Chinese cosmology and Daoist (especially Zhuangzi) philosophy, So it is not surprising that at the center are concepts such as *qi* 氣 (vitality), harmony (*yun* 韻), the beauty of the complementarity of *Yinyang* (*yinyang zhi mei* 陰陽之美), purity or clarity (*qing* 清), murkiness (*zhuo* 濁), blandness (*dan* 淡), and serenity (*jing* 靜), which manifest themselves in the aesthetics of all artistic genres.

As already mentioned, the shift away from Confucian aesthetics that prevailed in the Han Dynasty towards Zhuangzi's approach was fueled by political crises and social instability, as well as a pervasive sense of an

uncertain future. While Confucius worked to change the world for the better, Zhuangzi chose to adapt to the chaos of his time. Rather than attempting to transform or cultivate others, he viewed the troubled world as a work of art (DeWoskin 1982, 157).

The art and aesthetics of the Wei Jin were heavily influenced by Wang Bi's ontology, which addresses the issue of attaining infinity or unlimitedness (*wuxian* 無限) by overcoming limitation or finity (*youxian* 有限) within the philosophical discourse of presence (*you* 有) and absence (*wu* 無), as Wang Bi held that the *Dao* and everything that exists arose from absence. Wang's ontology was thus based on the concept of absence (*yi wu wei ben* 以無為本) (ibid., 84–86):

> The most original *Dao*, equal to nature, infinity, the newborn, simplicity, and truth. But why is it called "absence"? Because all this—the *Dao*, nature, simplicity, truth—is nameless. As soon as a name appears, the *Dao* disappears. (Rošker 2005, 207)

Wang Bi 's ontology is based on the binary category of *benmo* (roots and branches), in which roots refer to the origin and at the same time the source (*Dao*) of everything that exists (*wanwu*), and branches to their concrete (physical) expression. Beauty, on the other hand, was defined by Wang Bi as a manifestation of the infinite, unlimited (*wuxian*) through the transcendence of finitude or limitation (*youxian*), which transcends forms, colors, melodies, and sounds to signify a state of absolute free spirit.

These ontoepistemological ideas are contained in basic aesthetic concepts such as "words cannot fully convey meaning" (*yan bu jin yi*), "depiction of the spirit through form" (*yi xing xie shen* 以形寫神), and *qiyun*

shengdong. These concepts were the subject of discussion in all theoretical works of the Wei Jin period.

The concept of *depiction of the spirit through form* (*yi xing xie shen*) was introduced to traditional Chinese aesthetics and art by Gu Kaizhi, while the concept that words cannot fully convey meaning, as we have seen above, comes from Wang Bi's ontology.

Xu Fuguan's interpretation of these central concepts, with a focus on the concept of *qiyun shengdong*, is discussed in detail in the next chapter; for an introduction, however, let's look at how Li Zehou defines these central concepts:

> 所謂氣韻生動就是要求繪畫生動地表現出人的內在精神氣質, 格調風度, 而不在外在環境, 事件, 形狀, 姿態的如何鋪張描述。
>
> The requirement of the so-called *qiyun shengdong* is that the painting vividly express the inner character and state of mind of the person, the artistic style and the moral qualities and attitude of the creator, which is not reflected in the luxurious description of the external environment, circumstances, events, forms, and attitudes. (Li 2003, 86)

Depicting the spirit through form (*yi xing xie shen*) has a similar meaning to *qiyun shengdong*. It is an expression of the inner being, character, state of mind manifested through physical (external) form. Gu Kaizhi, one of the most respected and famous painters and theorists in Eastern Jin Dynasty, who coined this concept, defined it as follows:

> 四體妍蚩本無關於妙處, 傳神寫照正在阿堵中。

> Whether the four limbs (parts of the body) are beautiful or not is not a standard. What is important is the representation of the spirit manifested through them. (Ibid.)

As Li Zehou says, the eyes are the mirror of the soul, and that is what the artists were trying to portray. This means that the actual form of the body or human actions is actually secondary and subordinate to the expression of the inner spirit (Li 2003, 87).

According Li Zehou, the aesthetic criterion and concept that words cannot fully convey the meaning (*yan bu jin yi*) in literary art is about conveying the meaning beyond words. This concept basically expresses the principles of Xuanxue philosophy. From Wang Bi's commentaries on the *Book of Changes*, we see that both words and images are tools of transmitting the spirit that are inherently limited. What is important is that despite these limitations, we strive to express the infinity of the essence (*benti*) of things:

> 盡意莫若象, 盡象莫若言, 言者所以明象, 得像忘言, 象者所以以存意, 得意忘象。

> Nothing can express a meaning more fully than a picture. Nothing can express a picture more fully than words. It is the words that make the picture clear. When this happens, the words are forgotten. The picture is the place where there is meaning. When meaning is achieved, the image is forgotten. (Wang Bi in Li 2003, 87)

According to Li, all three aesthetic concepts are either expressions of an inner character of the unique to the wise, unlimited, inexhaustible, and beyond the reach of ordinary people, or expressions of the transcendent experience of daily life through various emotions common to all people (ibid.).

THE CHARACTERISTICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE AESTHETICS AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The development of aesthetic theory in China at the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by the multifaceted adoption of Western ideas and thought, with aesthetics playing an extremely important role as an academic discipline. On the one hand, aesthetic theory was an academic field free from political encumbrances; on the other, the philosophy of art, as part of aesthetics, provided a platform for a recognition and reassessment of China's long and rich cultural heritage. It is therefore by no means coincidental that in the last two decades of the 20th century, which were marked by economic, cultural and to a certain level also political liberalization, led to numerous heated debates about Chinese aesthetics.

In the 1980s, these discourses blossomed under the fashionable label "aesthetic fever (*meixue re* 美學熱)," which represented a kind of ideological liberation movement that could also be called an enlightenment or renaissance in China (Li & Cauvel 2006, 23).

In order to better understand the socio-political context in which aesthetics emerged as an academic discipline, we will therefore first briefly present the principal stages of development that led to the Chinese "aesthetic fever" and point out its later implications.

Chinese aesthetics as an academic discipline started to form at the beginning of the 20th century. While Confucianism (and traditionalism in general)—together with all the conservative ideologies it brought along—

was completely rejected and discredited as a result of the May Fourth Movement,[1] many Chinese intellectuals still perceived their culture as an essentially aesthetic one. This position was of utmost importance, especially considering the entire anti-traditional atmosphere that prevailed in China during the process of exposure to Western ideas and appropriation of Western knowledge (Pohl 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that aesthetics as the academic study of beauty (*meixue* 美學)[2] began to flourish at this time. Moreover, aesthetics represented the intellectual field in which scholars attempted to redefine the essence of Chinese culture and establish a new Chinese identity after the end of imperial China (Chong 1999).

[1] I am referring here to the long period that exceeds the narrow time frame of mere demonstrations, i.e. to the so-called "May Fourth New Cultural Movement" (*wu si xin wenhua yundong* 五四新文化運動) which was sparked by these protests and took place between 1919 and 1923. Although many scholars claim that it was carried out under the banner of "total Westernization" (Pohl 2009, 95), this view should be somehow relativized, since, at the time, this movement showed some tendencies to preserve certain traditional concepts and values, as well as to create syntheses between traditional Chinese and Western thought.

[2] The term was introduced in China by Chinese students studying in Japan. Before World War II, Japan represented a mirror image of Europe to the Chinese. Many modern Chinese words are derived from the Japanese (and thus, actually European) system, such as philosophy, aesthetics, literature, art, etc. (Gao 2006a, 107). Li Zehou believes that the translation of aesthetics as *meixue* 美學 (lit.: the study of beauty) is not appropriate and accurate, since the Western term *aesthetics* derives from the Greek term referring to perception. Li Zehou thus suggests that *shenmeixue* 審美學 would be a far better and more suitable translation of the meaning, because it actually refers to the study of the process of recognizing and perceiving beauty (Li & Cauvel 2006, 19).

In the process of adopting Western concepts, skills and knowledge, Chinese intellectuals were not only the passive and unreflective recipients, but also critically engaged with their own cultural tradition in the new socio-political context. In doing so, they were initially strongly influenced by the Western intellectual tradition (especially German idealism and Marxist materialism), but at the same time they were also influenced by numerous elements of traditional Chinese culture. While aesthetics as a "theoretical discipline" was imported from the West, many modern and contemporary academics attempted to create a synthesis with certain Western concepts on the one hand, and some key concepts founded in the course of Chinese aesthetic history on the other.

The assimilation of Western ideas led to the formation of various intellectual currents within Chinese aesthetics. They were determined on the basis of different views on whether beauty is subjective, objective, or both, or how to develop Chinese aesthetics as a discipline. In defining Chinese aesthetics, they either sought a synthesis with Western aesthetics or tried to find its unprecedented uniqueness. In discussing these problems, Chinese aestheticians referred to 18th and 19th century German philosophy as well as to the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist philosophical traditions. The pioneers of this early phase of the establishment of aesthetics in China were Wang Guowei (1877–1927) and Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940).

Wang Guowei's concept of *jingjie* 竟界 as an aesthetic state and aesthetic idea is a typical attempt to synthesize the Chinese tradition with Western ideas. Wang interpreted this Chinese Buddhist concept of *jingjie* through Kant's "aesthetic idea" creating a new and very significant concept

within a new and unique Chinese aesthetics.[3] The encounter with Western thought and new and incredibly interesting ideas led, *inter alia*, to the search for comparable concepts within the Chinese cultural tradition. Cai Yuanpei, the dean of Beijing University during the May Fourth Movement, was the first to outline the idea of a cultural and aesthetic self-understanding of the Chinese. When studying in Germany, he became acquainted with Western philosophy, especially Kant. He recognized Westerners as a people who were decisively influenced by religion, and claimed that aesthetics, as a combination of rituals, art, beauty and ethics in China, was a practical "spiritual" equivalent to religion in the West (Pohl 2007, 425). In this context, he emphasized the importance of aesthetic education of Chinese youth. Such education was supposed to replace religious education as conducted in the West (ibid., 91). In the Chinese tradition, aesthetic experience was always considered the highest state of the human heart-mind (*xin*), which enabled people to experience a higher level of life or the transcendental, with comparable effects and meaning to the experience and function of religion in the West.

At this time, there were two intellectual currents concerning the development of Chinese aesthetics. The first maintained that, since aesthetics as a discipline has Western roots, it would be unnecessary to develop a special discipline called "Chinese aesthetics," just as it would be superfluous to establish "Chinese mathematics" or "Chinese logic." The

[3] *Jingjie* 境界 is one of the most fundamental and very complex concepts in Chinese aesthetics. It refers to perfect aesthetic fusion of the artistic idea (or feeling) with a concrete (external) scene. It later gained a general aesthetic meaning that signified the aesthetic idea as well as the most sublime state of human consciousness (Pohl 2015, 91).

second current held that it would be useful and necessary to re-examine Chinese literature and art (as well as literary and art theory), with an appropriate methodology because of its long tradition. This kind of theoretical investigation and research would then lead to the establishment of a new academic discipline, namely Chinese aesthetics, which could thus provide a good and valuable explanatory tool for the development of traditional Chinese thought (Gao 2006a, 28).

Gao Jianping[4] specifically singled out Zhu Guangqian, Zong Baihua, Cai Yi and Li Zehou as the most influential academics in the field of aesthetics of that time. According to Gao, Zhu Guangqian was a typical representative of the so-called "Western aesthetics in China." He translated numerous classics of Western aesthetics (Plato, Croce, Vico, Hegel, etc.) into Chinese and introduced the scientific method of combining Western thought and Chinese substance (or material). Zong Baihua was the first to translate Kant's *Critique of Judgment* into Chinese. He researched the arts in great detail, studied the theory of painting and uncovered a great difference between the Chinese and Western spirit of art, and thus between the two kinds of aesthetics. He claimed that Western painting originated from architecture and therefore contained many scientific implications, while Chinese painting originated from calligraphy and contained similar aesthetic elements to those found in music and dance. For Zong, Western aesthetics is based on spatial-temporal consciousness, and on the dichotomy between subjective and objective, while Chinese aesthetics implies understanding of the world through the identification with nature (ibid., 26). According to Gao Jianping, Zong Baihua sought to complement the model

[4] Gao Jianping (1955–) is one of the leading Chinese aestheticians of the 21st century, along with Li Zehou (1930–) and Wang Keping (1955–).

of Western theories through the originality of unique details from Chinese art (ibid.).

The Great Debate on Aesthetics based on Marxist ideology

However, the polemic on the development of Chinese aesthetics is considered to be the first phase of the whole discourse on aesthetics, since the main concern in the aesthetic debate in the mid-20th century was establishment of Marxist aesthetics in China as part of the spread of Marxist ideology[5] after 1949. Among all the so-called "open debates" on various problems, where the political elite of Chinese Communist Party actually decided which discussants were right and which were wrong (with the latter punished accordingly), the aesthetic debate was actually the only exception within these debates that was truly open, thanks to the intrinsic connection between art and society on the one hand, and to the established Marxist ideology on the other.

In the famous Yan'an Forum *On Literature and Art* in May 1942, Mao Zedong made the clear demand that the role of art is to serve the people and socialism in the spirit of class struggle and the needs of the revolution (Li & Cauvel 2006, 32). With the onset of the Cultural Revolution, aesthetics suffered a decline, but the results of the debate came to the fore again during the "aesthetic fever" soon after Mao's death. The 1950s and 1960s were thus marked by a major discussion on aesthetics between Zhu Guangqian,

[5] According to Amighini and Jia (2019, 271), the Sinicized Marxist theory emphasizes Marx's philosophy of history rather than any version of Marxist egalitarian political philosophy; this is doubtless not a coincidence and this also seems to be a main reason because of which it can be called ideology.

Cai Yi and Li Zehou,[6] whose political background was the Chinese Communist Party's striving for a national ideological re-education of intellectuals, in which idealism was to be replaced by dialectical materialism in order to strengthen the spread of Marxist ideology in China (Rošker 2017, 3).

While Zhu Guangqian and Zong Baihua belonged to the first phase of the development of Chinese aesthetics, which at the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by a multifaceted engagement with Western thought, Cai Yi and Li Zehou represented the second phase, which took place in the second half of the century and in which leftist ideas came to the fore.

In the first years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chinese aestheticians were under a strong influence of Soviet theories and

[6] Li Zehou began to develop his aesthetic thought in the 1950s; at that time, he was strongly influenced by Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, in which Marx developed the theory of alienation. Li became acquainted with Marx during his regular studies of philosophy at Beijing University. Soon after graduation, he started to participate in academic discussions regarding various interpretations of certain Marxist notions. In this respect, he gained a lot of attention in intellectual circles as early as 1956 (when he was 26 years old) with the publication of his first mature theoretical essay, entitled "On the Aesthetic Feeling, Beauty, and Art (*Lun meigan, mei he yishu* 论美感，美和艺术)." Later on, he further developed his own interpretations (Rošker 2019, 206). In addition to Marx, Li Zehou also sought great inspiration in Kant's philosophy. He endeavoured to reconstruct Kant's epistemology through Marx's ideas about social life and practice, namely, the material production activities, such as the making and using of tools. On this basis, he also examined the various concepts of human nature found in both original Confucianism and early Marx (Pohl 1999, XIV).

ideologies. They attempted to establish a Marxist aesthetics by applying a materialist epistemology and emphasizing that beauty is objective and "typical." At the same time, as leftist intellectuals they also strove for artistic intervention in the realm of social reality (Gao 2006a, 109). Although this theory of art did not completely oppose emotions or feelings, and although it argued that every "type" of art must be typical, that is, defined by specific and unique qualities in addition to its aesthetic element, both Cai and Li essentially advocated the transcendence of individuality and feelings in the realm of art. As leftist intellectuals, they also strove for artistic intervention in the realm of social reality (ibid.).

Another important issue in this debate was whether beauty is subjective or objective, or in other words, whether it is the result of an idealistic or materialistic worldview. Zhu Guangqian argued that beauty is a combination of the subjective and objective, Cai Yi claimed that beauty is objective, while Li Zehou insisted that it is social, objective, and intuitive (Chong 1999, 50). As a materialist philosopher, Li believed that beauty must be objective because it is socially preformed and as such must be independent of the psychology of the individual. In this aspect, he referred to Marx's theory that nothing in the external world possesses beauty *per se*, and that it is only through the objectification of the human being that it becomes "socialized" and thus acquires beauty. This, he argued, is a collective rather than an individual psychological process (ibid., 62). In this regard, Li claimed that idealist aestheticians reduced beauty to the individual's subjective sense of beauty and regarded it as the result of certain pre-empirical, subjective "psychological functions," which they believed were common to all human beings. In this respect, idealists denied the objective existence of beauty, which should be seen as the result of social and historical conditions (ibid., 60).

After relations between China and the Soviet Union cooled down in 1956, Chinese aestheticians attempted to establish their own aesthetic system. Unfortunately, this attempt was interrupted again, this time by the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," which lasted from 1966 to 1976 (Gao 2006b, 109).

However, the debate had another important focus. It had laid the theoretical foundations that emphasized the theoretical concepts of art and refuted the conceptualization of its so-called "sloganization" (i.e., ideological propaganda). On the one hand, there was a strong attempt in the field of art and literature to bring art into social reality; on the other hand, the aesthetic world emphasized the notion of pure art. Against this background, it is certainly no coincidence that China was swept by the wave of "aesthetic fever" shortly after the death of Mao Zedong. At this point a period of constant, increasingly turbulent, controversial debate began in the world of academic, artistic and literary discourse.

The Aesthetic Fever (*meixue re* 美学热)

The so-called aesthetic fever became extremely popular throughout the country and caused a huge wave of translations of various western authors of aesthetics, which indicated that aesthetics has become a leading discipline in the humanities in China. Schools and universities started teaching aesthetics, and books on the subject became bestsellers. The return of aesthetic thought was the result of exhaustion and boredom of previous omnipresent ideological constraints and revolutionary asceticism. People wanted to explore new ways of expressing their own individuality, and in this regard they also dealt with the question of what beauty is (Zhou 2005, 105).

All the aforementioned ideas led to a wider debate about aesthetics, which also included politics and culture, and resulted in what was called cultural fever (*wenhua re* 文化热). In the 1990s, a new standpoint emerged among some Chinese literary theorists, emphasizing that Western influences on the study of Chinese literature and art in the 20th century were very problematic, and that the existing Chinese literary and art theories were not fit for purpose. They argued that Chinese literature has its own tradition and that there are special systems and categories in Chinese literary criticism that were not taken into account by their predecessors. There were also many academics who idealized the West and wanted to apply Western concepts of literary theory to Chinese art and literature. In contrast, some literary theorists argued that it was essential to thoroughly study ancient Chinese works on art and literature and, and on such basis establish and develop new aesthetic theories, based on comparative study of Chinese and Western aesthetic theory. Most Chinese aestheticians then adopted this position and began to explore certain traditional Chinese concepts such as *qi* ("vitality, creativity") and *qiyun* ("rhythm of *qi*"), comparing them with concepts from Western aesthetics.

The period of aesthetic and cultural fever is considered as a very complex and important "movement" in Chinese modern aesthetics, which had a remarkable influence on contemporary Chinese aesthetics, as well as to the formation of more autochthonous theories.

The Significance and Implications of Aesthetic Fever in the 1980s and 1990s

In the search for the most appropriate strategies for China's successful entry into the third millennium, we cannot overlook the political or ideological role that aesthetics has played. On the one hand, as a latent rebellion against

the society of the prevailing pragmatism and as a manifested pursuit of beauty, or as a kind of emotional emancipation; and on the other, as a discourse that has always been closely linked to politics in China, with the possibility of reinterpreting or upgrading Marxist theories.[7] However, we should not forget the fact that Chinese aesthetics and literary theory focused primarily on rationality and the social dimension until the beginning of the 1980s. As already mentioned, the aesthetic fever gained an exceptional dimension in Chinese society at that time, spreading like a kind of theoretical epidemic; already in the early 1980s, the bookshelves were full of translations of Western authors who wrote about aesthetics. The entire decade was therefore defined by the systematic translation and presentation of Western formalistic literary theories. Thus, during this period, all the most important works of the Russian formalists, Anglo-American New Criticism, Chicago School, archetypical criticism and structuralist poetics were translated into Chinese.

Undoubtedly, the 1942 work of Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, in which the authors clearly distinguished between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" literary studies that form the basis of formalistic literary theory, had a major influence on the development of contemporary Chinese literary theories. Particularly popular became related ideas about the "intrinsic laws" of

[7] The further development and upgrading of Marxists theories was perhaps most visible in the field of Marxist dialectics, for many Chinese scholars aimed to complement or synthesize it with the basic tenets of traditional Chinese correlative dialectical models that were based on the principle of complementary and rooted in the so-called *tongbian* dialectics (see for instance Heubel 2019; Rockmore 2019; Tian 2019).

literature and its aesthetic laws, discussed by Jakobson in his discourses of "literariness" (Zhou 2005, 105).

These debates were at the core of intellectual attention until 1981, when a translation of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* from 1844 was published. This document was also given great attention, and many theorists saw it as the basis of modern Marxist aesthetics. As for the autochthonous discourse on Chinese aesthetics, Li Zehou attracted immense interest and respect in academic circles during this period, not only in China, but also abroad. Following the experience of ten years of chaos and catastrophes caused by radical left politics, the Chinese Communist Party slowly turned away from ideas such as the class struggle and began to introduce the slogan "finding the truth in facts" (*shishi qiushi* 实事求是). Li Zehou's idea of "practice" in the field of aesthetics contributed to the new research atmosphere. In addition, Li Zehou's coinages for his other concepts, such as "sedimentation" (*jidian* 積澱) and "subjectality" (*zhuguanxing* 主觀性), the fusion of the social with an individual in the historical process, enriched the aesthetic debate of that time. Li Zehou is considered to be the greatest personality in the field of aesthetics during those years. On the one hand, he presented new concepts such as subjectivity and practice, derived from the fusion of Kant's and Marx's ideas, and on the other, he produced innovative interpretations of Chinese aesthetic and art traditions (see *mei de licheng* 美的历程).

Related theories were also represented in the same period by a number of less known and less influential but equally interesting theorists, such as the aforementioned art historian Zhu Guangqian or the philosopher Hu Jun, who advocated a sinicized version of the Western concept of "aestheticization of everyday life." This aestheticization was perceived primarily as an

emancipation and the everyday space of freedom, a space in which professional politics, with its dictates of pragmatic functionality, cannot interfere. This emancipation carried within itself a revolt against the world of a strict political hierarchy and the unconditional authority of individual political positions within that hierarchy. The "subjective" negation of politics, which was the essence of the aesthetic fever of the 1980s, was constantly imbued with a charge of civil society politics. Thus the seemingly ivory tower of aesthetics was erected right in the realm politics; but this was not a policy of hierarchical relations of power and unquestionable authority, but a policy in the original sense, that is, a policy of people as *a priori* political beings (*zoon politicum*). The aesthetic fever that prevailed in China in the 1980s therefore stemmed precisely from the tendency to realize this kind of "subjective" political freedom. And yet the reality of the conditions of the rapidly changing Chinese society and its economic "liberalization" downplayed all such ideals, sadly drowned out in a flood of new, commercialized aesthetics that it is characteristic of all capitalist societies. Thus, it soon became clear that theories of aesthetic fever no longer fit the conditions of the rapidly changing Chinese social reality.

The end of the millennium and the new culture of consumer society

At the end of the 1980s, the role of aesthetics in China has been greatly transformed; aesthetics as an academic discipline relatively quickly (and for most intellectuals, unexpectedly) lost its revolutionary and emancipatory function. Already in the mid-1990s, it represented only a marginal academic discipline that dealt with abstract theoretical problems on the outskirts of social reality.

> Aesthetics nowadays no longer have any revolutionary and emancipatory functions. The enlightenment and humanistic significance it once had has been transformed. Since the expansion of capital included our everyday factors in the processes of the market, the way of our aesthetic experience radically changed. If you can easily buy any artistic object, activity, or even experience on the market, as if they were goods, then how can aesthetic values arouse utopian impulses? When the executive director of the advertisement company explicitly declares that "beauty can of course be ordered," how can we speak of aesthetic activities in the same way as in the past? (Zhou 2005, 110–11)

As elsewhere in the world, also in China, where the general sale and megalomaniac marketing of aesthetics has necessarily led to its devaluation. The former leading, emancipatory voice of aesthetics died, and the aesthetics of freedom sadly became silent: The "subjectivity of aesthetics," which Li Zehou, Zhu Guangqian and other theoreticians were advocating for, could not really face the large-scale turn of aesthetics as a factor in the commercialization of everyday life. The aesthetics of emancipation could never solve the acute contradiction between its primary tendency for liberalization of subjectivity on one hand, and the aesthetization of everyday life in terms of commodity culture on the other. Its theoretical framework was never able to encompass this completely new aesthetic phenomenon, one that includes the complete negation of humanity in which human sensitivity is reduced to the mediator of economic functions (Haug 1971, 17), and in which aesthetics as such is only a part of the "cosmetics of everyday life" (Welsh 1997, 3). The notion of consumer society mainly refers to post-industrial societies in which consumerism has become one of the central motives of social life and production. In a consumer society, aesthetics and culture, including aesthetic and cultural production, are

closely linked to economic values or economism. While in traditional societies the fundamental purpose of production is linked to the basic needs of members of society and their satisfaction, production itself in consumer societies far outweighs the principle of existence or survival.

When dealing with the question of whether today's Chinese society is already a completely consumer one we must be rather cautious, because the nature of China's transitional society encompasses specific historical, regional and other social elements that limit the possibility of establishing a single definitive definition that could relate to all aspects of society. Differences between rural and urban regions (centre and periphery), and imbalances in political, economic and cultural aspects, lead to the conclusion that China should be treated only as a society with extremely diverse connotations. If we consider it from the aspect of certain characteristics that are at the forefront in the developed regions and major cities, we can also refer to it as a society that has already entered the post-industrial and capitalist stage, especially if we take into account the vitality of its development and its economic boom, which was most clearly demonstrated in the last years of the 20th century after economic liberalization took hold.

> Regardless of whether we admit it or not, a successful consumer society is spreading in China. Producers and consumers of cultural symbols are so deeply involved in it, that they are subordinate to it, or they try to resist it and regain its power through confrontation. The consumer society's attack on literature is so unprecedented that no matter to which historical concepts we cling to, we must admit the profound changes that modern culture has suffered. (Chen 2005, 118)

Aestheticization of everyday life and its reflection in Chinese culture

The consumer society introduced a number of new lifestyles in China. The lives of modern, especially urban Chinese people are intertwined with new aesthetic interests and values. While in traditional and industrial societies aesthetic activities have been separated from production and everyday life, the everyday experiences of individuals in the consumer society of urban China are most closely related to the elements of art and its aesthetic characteristics. The feelings of modern people living in a consumer society are exposed to constant stimulation and are therefore more sensitive and colourful; aesthetic requirements have replaced only material needs, and all this is reflected in the external environment as well as in the inner worlds of individuals. The aesthetic interpretation of everyday life and the transfer of reality into an aesthetized illusion are two extremely important cultural mechanisms:

> Today, the everyday, political, historical, economic and other reality already includes the hyper realistic dimension of the simulation, so that we are now fully living in the "aesthetic" hallucination of reality. (Chen 2005, 127)

Since the 1990s, literary and visual art as well as the art of music have been confronted with the problems of commercialization, excessive simulation and universalization, which pose a challenge to traditional understanding of culture and aesthetics. This situation cannot be avoided, which is why we hope that contemporary artists will be able to confront these challenges in a constructive way. The challenges of a new, global culture also offer the possibility to reshape concepts and conceptual paradigms that were not present in traditional Chinese culture, such as individualism, free will, self-

determination and active participation. In any given period, the function of a particular culture and its impact on social reality are closely related to the conceptual elements existing in this culture.

The sudden development of modern China has completely changed the image of all of its major cities: the huge flows of internal migration of the population, the megalomaniac number of new ring roads, motorways and four-way avenues, the demolition of traditional houses and the construction of new, ever-higher glass skyscrapers, all this confronts us with previously unimaginable visual contrasts in China. The unstoppable development of urbanization that modern Chinese are exposed to, and the rapidly changing rhythms of everyday life, are also reflected in the new culture and its aesthetic creations. This does not apply only to the Westernized popular culture, but also to a large-scale billboards present everywhere, which create new criteria of popular aesthetics adapted to the contemporary society. The imaginary division between life and art has also been erased in contemporary Chinese society: art has become life itself, just as commercial capitalist activities are regarded as a kind of artistic imagination (ibid., 128). Contemporary Chinese art (both visual and literary) is mostly created for the masses, to whom it sells well. This art is quickly popularized and also quickly forgotten, since its primary goal is to facilitate the survival of individuals within the rapidly changing contemporary world, marked by the consumer culture. Similar dilemmas and problems of expressing and conveying the contradictions of modern society are also reflected in other spheres of artistic or aesthetic creation in contemporary Chinese culture.

> It comes from the past and lasts until now; and would have the possibility of expanding further—it can eternally exist in the struggle of resistance and absorption of aesthetic hegemony of the consumer society. (Ibid., 136)

Moreover, Chinese art is confronted with the ubiquitous influence of electronic and digital media on a daily basis, but it also contains a culture of past periods and a memory of them. In this sense, it is firmly anchored in the consciousness of society and its individuals, so it must be understood as one of the central, still existing milestones of history.

As we have seen, aesthetic debates in China during the 20th century provided an important platform for dialogue with Western discourses on the one hand, and recognition of the profound value and significance of the Chinese cultural and philosophical tradition on the other. However, although the development of aesthetics as an academic discipline was initially intertwined with the appropriation of Western knowledge which was later more or less reduced to sinicized Marxist ideology, its foundations are deeply rooted in the unique Chinese aesthetic tradition. In light of the global development of capitalist consumerism in the 21st century, art and aesthetics (like many other cultural aspects of societies, such as education and the value of knowledge as such) are constantly confronted with new (and not necessarily meaningful) challenges. To what extent the market will define or even destroy the aesthetic and artistic influence on the value and meaning of our lives remains an open question, not only in China, but globally.

In the last two decades, we have witnessed in China the phenomenon of a comprehensive revival of traditional Chinese culture. This restoration is not only a reflection of the general ideological developments in the twentieth century, but also exposes the depth of semantic dimensions and the uniqueness of concepts in traditional Chinese aesthetics. In this regard, Xu Fuguan is regarded as one of the pioneers who undertook a thorough theoretical analysis of traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts and attempted to conduct comparative research on Chinese and Western aesthetic

traditions. In the next chapter, we will discuss Xu Fuguan's theory of aesthetics and point out some of its weaknesses in comparative analysis.

XU FUGUAN'S THEORY OF CHINESE AESTHETICS THROUGH THE LENS OF AXIOLOGY

Xu Fuguan's main motivation for writing *The Spirit of Chinese Art* (*Zhongguo yishu jingshen* 中國藝術精神) in 1966 was his response to contemporary art arriving in Taiwan from the West. He criticized the unreflective and uncritical acquisition of Western modern and postmodern art and culture by young Taiwanese intellectuals and artists, and called on them to strive for a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of their own cultural tradition. It is therefore understandable that this book contains a rather broad spectrum of Western philosophical categories, especially aesthetics and phenomenology, e.g. the works of Husserl, Lipps, Heidegger, etc., through which Xu tried to point out that the Chinese tradition, especially Zhuangzi's and Confucius thought, already contained many of the concepts (questions and even answers) occupying Western contemporary philosophy which became popular in Taiwan at the time.

He regarded modern Western art as a symbol of destruction because of its intellect oriented, materialistic and alienated worldview, in which science and capitalism destroyed the balance of virtue and gave rise to irrational, anti-humanistic modern Western ideas such as logical positivism, behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Lee 1998, 309). Xu believed that modern art was an expression of a turbulent, grotesque and dismal primitive life force that would lead human beings backwards, towards complete destruction (ibid.). Xu's greatest critique of modernism and postmodernism

was that they were ignorant of their social responsibility, values and cultural tradition, in which the human spirit should be liberated from its constraints. Xu argued that modernism and postmodernism criticized the existing social and political order, but didn't manage to establish a new or better one. Furthermore, Xu tried to highlight that the postmodernist effort to liberate the human spirit was not exclusive to Western thought, as it could also be found in Zhuangzi's philosophy.

Xu's fear that young Taiwanese artists were eager to absorb such a Western worldview lay in the fact that they considered themselves not as a component of a specific society, but as members of humanity in general (Lee 1998, 318). This fear was quite understandable in the light of the specific social, political and economic development of Taiwanese society at the time.

Xu Fuguan's evaluation of art was based on the Confucian idea of humanity which contained moral and cognitive faculties, with the implication that morality inhibits the drive of sensual desires, whereas cognitive faculties could be mastered. With regard to the basic characteristic of the sense of *concerned consciousness*, according to which everybody was equal in terms of the moral nature conferred by Heaven and as divine as Heaven, this postulation of immanence encouraged a person's sense of responsibility toward their behaviour and guaranteed the meaning of life in this world (ibid., 325).

This evaluation of art is based on the Traditional Chinese aesthetics which do not consider the problem of aesthetics to be one of knowledge and do not pursue the answer to the questions as to what beauty and aesthetics are (as pursued by Western aesthetics), but is set against the background of humanity and a reflection of human life in which philosophy, aesthetics and life experience are integrated into a whole (Xu Bihui 2006, 216).

It is almost unnecessary to explore the axiology of aesthetics in Chinese Tradition. As is written in *Shuowen jiezi*, beauty and good are in fact synonyms (*mei yu shan tongyi* 美與善同意). The actuality of this innate relation is most clearly expressed in Confucius' thought, although Xu believed that the aesthetic spirit of Chinese tradition in the sense of *art of life* is best seen in Zhuangzi's philosophy of *Xiaoyao you* or free and easy wandering. Xu recognized Zhuangzi's thought as the best representative of the "Chinese aesthetic spirit," because of its unity between life and art (Ni 2002, 299) in which Xu considered the "aestheticized outlook on life" to be an equalitarian view of the world (Lee 1998, 326).

The traditional Chinese ideas of corresponding and interchanging between nature and man lead to an aesthetic attitude toward life. Hence, Xu Fuguan believed that the aesthetic spirit of Chinese tradition developed from Zhuangzi's and Confucius's philosophy. More precisely it changed from Confucius' to Zhuangzi's aesthetics.

Neither Laozi nor Zhuangzi formulated an aesthetic theory in their philosophy, but Xu argued that although the fulfilment of their *Dao* 道 did not necessarily involve the creation of any art work, Zhuangzi's speculation on the "art of life" unwittingly created the highest aesthetic spirit that consequently made artistic activities possible (ibid.).

The comparison of Confucius and Zhuangzi's aesthetics based on the interpretation of the aesthetic concept of wandering (*you* 遊)

Zhuangzi's philosophy of "wandering at ease" comprise the mastering of a skill (*gongfu* 功夫), aesthetic perfection, freedom and liberation of human spirit to achieve unity with *Dao*. Wandering at ease is the state of being free from all attachments, expectations and any type of utilitarianism. It has no

external aim, but is in harmony and unity with *Dao*. This unity represents the ultimate state of a liberated human spirit.

According to Zhuangzi, the freedom of the human spirit and the emancipation from secularity of human existence can be achieved in two ways. The first is to achieve the liberation of the human spirit and unity with *Dao* by the methods of *xinzhai* or fasting of the human heart-mind and *zuowang* or sitting in forgetfulness. The second option is, as we will see later on, through artistic creativity.

In the *fasting of the human heart-mind* method, bodily and emotional desires and any kind of utilitarian purposes are dispelled and one is able to integrate oneself with nature and discover (or grasp) its true essence (*benti)*.

In *sitting in forgetfulness*, Zhuangzi transcended conceptual or analytical thinking and the judgements gained through the process of socialization and moral cultivation, which is overwhelmed by anxieties, worries, desires, life and death, and tried to open up a way for dissolving the boundaries of interpersonal relations so that one could become one with nature (or *Dao*).

Zhuangzi proposed that one should master the methods of fasting of the heart-mind and sitting in forgetfulness, if one wishes to achieve a non-self or *wuji* 無己 state of mind, in which one is able to grasp the essence of human life, the universe and all phenomena, not on the basis of cognitive knowledge but on the basis of intuition. As we shall see in the following quotations, Zhuangzi proposed a direct experience of the world. Xu Fuguan found such a direct experience of the world in the aesthetic view of human life.

> 回曰：敢問心齋。仲尼曰：若一志，无聽之以耳而聽之以心，无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。

> Yan Hui asked: "May I ask about the fasting of the mind?"
> Confucius answered: "Maintain perfect unity in your will. Do not listen with your ears, but with your mind. Do not listen with your mind, but with *qi*. For hearing does not go farther than the ears, and the mind does not go farther than symbols. But *qi* is empty and responds to things. *Dao* condenses in emptiness. Emptiness is fasting of the mind." (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Neipian: Ren shijie 2)

Perceiving the world and its phenomena with *qi* means to comprehend *qi* as a constant change of nature and human emotions. Only in the state of emptiness, in which bodily and emotional desires are dispelled, is one able to integrate with nature and discover its true essence. Therefore, *qi* is like a mirror that expects nothing and responds to everything. Emptiness is a state of being tranquil and it contains all possibilities (Xu Bihui 2006, 220).

In such a state one is able to act without interfering (*wuwei*) with the natural course of *Dao* and can thus become an integrated part of nature (ibid.).

> 顏回曰：回益矣。仲尼曰：何謂也？曰：回忘仁義矣。曰：可矣，猶未也。他日復見，曰：回益矣。曰：何謂也？曰：回忘禮樂矣。曰：可矣，猶未也。他日復見，曰：回益矣。曰：何謂也？曰：回坐忘矣。仲尼蹴然曰：何謂坐忘？顏回曰：墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。仲尼曰：同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。

> Yan Hui said: "I'm making progress!" Confucius responded: "How so?" "I've forgotten humaneness and righteousness!" "Good, but you still haven't got it." They saw each other on another day. Yan Hui said: "I'm making progress!" "How so?" "I've forgotten rites and music!" "Good, but you still

> haven't got it." On another day, they met again. Yan Hui said: "I'm making progress!" "How so?" "I sit and forget!" Confucius looked surprised and said: "What do you mean, you sit and forget?" Yan Hui replied: "I destroy my limbs and organs, expel wisdom and sagacity, do away with form, get rid of knowledge, and make myself one with the great thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting and forgetting." Confucius replied: "Being one with it, you must have no likes. Having been transformed, you must have no constancy. So you are one of the worthies after all! I would like to become your disciple." (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Nei pian, Da Zong shi 9)

Sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang* 坐忘) refers to a method that goes beyond the moral implications and the striving to liberate the human spirit from the bonds of dichotomy between right and wrong. In the above quotation, we can see that Zhuangzi directly addresses Confucius' moral teachings that go through the learning of *renyi* (仁義) which enable the individual to realize moral subjectivity on the basis of self-cultivation. Zhuangzi does not consider that self-cultivation and the realization of the moral self is a sufficient method with which one can accomplish the ultimate freedom of the human spirit and unity with *Dao*. In order to achieve the freedom of the human spirit and become one with *Dao*, the human spirit should be liberated from the chains of moral restrictions such as the distinction between right and wrong (*shi/fei* 是非).

Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao you* is the highest state of the human spirit, which can be achieved with the use of the *xinzhai* and *zuowang* methods. It is oneness with *Dao*. In the process of the *fasting of the heart-mind* and *sitting in forgetfulness* one can comprehend the greatest beauty of Heaven and

Earth which doesn't need to be spoken of.[1] The state of emptiness when facing reality is a form of primordial knowledge that is purely intuitional and that represents Zhuangzi's perception of beauty (Bresciani 2001, 346).

In Zhuangzi's philosophy unity or oneness with *Dao* can also be achieved through the process of artistic engagement which is inseparably linked to the previously mentioned methods. In *Butcher Ding's story*[2] of the

[1]天地有大美而不言。

[2]庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然嚮然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：譆！善哉！技蓋至此乎？庖丁釋刀對曰：臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軱乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者无厚，以无厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謋然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。文惠君曰：善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。

"His cook was cutting up an ox for the ruler Wen Hui. Whenever he applied his hand, leaned forward with his shoulder, planted his foot, and employed the pressure of his knee, in the audible ripping off of the skin, and slicing operation of the knife, the sounds were all in regular cadence. Movements and sounds proceeded as in the dance of 'the Mulberry Forest' and the blended notes of the 'King Shou.' The ruler said, 'Ah! Admirable! That your art should have become so perfect!' Having finished his operation, the cook laid down his knife, and replied to the remark, 'What your servant loves is the method of the *Dao*, something in advance of any art. When I first began to cut up an ox, I saw nothing but the (entire) carcass. After three years

Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi emphasizes the importance of emptying the self (*xuji* 虛己) with the dissolving of the opposition between the subject and the object on one hand, and the opposition between the subject and the technique or artistic skill on the other, both carried out with the goal of achieving enjoyment within the unity with *Dao*. Therefore, the material enjoyment brought by the skill is of no significance for Zhuangzi, what counts is the transformation of the cook's spirit that achieved the

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I ceased to see it as a whole. Now I deal with it in a spirit-like manner, and do not look at it with my eyes. The use of my senses is discarded, and my spirit acts as it wills. Observing the natural lines, (my knife) slips through the great crevices and slides through the great cavities, taking advantage of the facilities thus presented. My art avoids the membranous ligatures, and much more the great bones. A good cook changes his knife every year; it may have been injured in cutting—an ordinary cook changes his every month—it may have been broken. Now my knife has been in use for nineteen years; it has cut up several thousand oxen, and yet its edge is as sharp as if it had newly come from the whetstone. There are the interstices of the joints, and the edge of the knife has no (appreciable) thickness; when that which is so thin enters where the interstice is, how easily it moves along! The blade has more than room enough. Nevertheless, whenever I come to a complicated joint, and see that there will be some difficulty, I proceed anxiously and with caution, not allowing my eyes to wander from the place, and moving my hand slowly. Then by a very slight movement of the knife, the part is quickly separated, and drops like a clod of earth to the ground. Then standing up with the knife in my hand, I look all round, and in a leisurely manner, with an air of satisfaction, wipe it clean, and put it in its sheath.' The ruler Wen Hui said, 'Excellent! I have heard the words of my cook, and learned from them the nourishment of our life.'" (Transl. by James Legge for the *Chinese Text Project*)

embodiment of *Dao ("What I like is the Dao which is prior to any skill")*.[3] The story outlines the journey from learning the technique to the embodiment of *Dao* and describes the process from learning the technique to the realm of artistic creativity (Xu in Ni 2002, 299).

The aesthetic spirit in Confucius' thought is the unification of ethics and art as seen in the quote in the *Analects* (*Lunyu*):

> 志於道，據於德，依於仁，游於藝。
>
> The Master said, "Let the will be set on the path of duty. Let every attainment in what is good be firmly grasped. Let perfect virtue be accorded with. Let relaxation and enjoyment be found in the polite arts." (Translated by James Legge)

Confucius valued art highly for its contribution to human education and moral improvement. Confucius' "six arts" (*liuyi* 六藝) were therefore educational tools for self–cultivation, and as such held the function of moulding and balancing the emotions that enabled people to discover moral subjectivity. Hence, in Xu's opinion, artistic accomplishments were achieved only when a person turned inward and discovered one's moral self (Bresciani 2001, 344). In order to create works of art or become creative, a person had to embody the ethical values.

[3] 臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。"What your servant loves is the method of the *Dao*, something in advance of any art." (Transl. by James Legge for the *Chinese Text Project*)

Xu Fuguan argued that Confucius paid great respect to art in general; his devotion to music in particular illustrated that virtue and art converged and reinforced each other (Lee 1998, 325).

However, the method and process of moral cultivation differed quantitatively from art training (*gongfu), xinzhai* and *zuowang*. In contrast to the moral spirit which strongly required altruistic action, Zhuangzi's aesthetic activity was devoid of all such interest and free from any utilitarian purpose. It was thus Xu's opinion that the Confucians failed to recognize the autonomy of art (ibid.).

On the other hand, Confucius' wandering or seeking delight (*you* 游) represents engagement in art through relaxation, moulding and contemplation of human emotions, as well as provides a deeper understanding of human nature in the context of self–cultivation (Li 2010, 77). Besides, Confucius' "wandering in arts" expresses the value of art in human life with respect to the unity of beauty and goodness which is directly connected to Confucian values. Therefore, Confucius' *you* in relation to art as such a unity provides a condition for a more profound comprehension of the process of realizing moral subjectivity (e.g. the highest realm of human spirit) as the highest goal in Confucian philosophy.

In Confucius' philosophy, the liberation of human spirit is possible only through the embodiment of values and through the realization of moral subjectivity. Only then can one reach the *Dao*.

Xu valued the Confucian unity of goodness and beauty in which art was worthwhile when it was beneficial to moral purposes, and thus he believed that only a virtuous being could create beautiful or aesthetic works. Xu Fuguan's effort to draw a parallel between Zhuangzi's equalitarian state of mind and Confucian, humaneness and righteousness failed due to Zhuangzi's equal confirmation of all values, pluralism and the identity of

opposites and—last but not least—the understanding of the true as the beautiful. The Confucian *the good as the beautiful* (*shanmei*) prevailed in his confrontation with modern art (Lee 1998, 329).

Xu Fuguan's comparison between Confucius' and Zhuangzi's understanding of the concept *you* illustrates significant differences in their view of the realization of the human spirit and its relation to art. Zhuangzi's understands it as a state of a liberated and free human spirit that is exempt of all individual desires, intentions, goals and utilitarian attitudes. Such a spirit is in total unity with *Dao* and therefore able to comprehend the world aesthetically, intuitively and creatively. In Zhuangzi's philosophy *you* as a state of unity with *Dao* in everyday life and in everything a person is engaged in is the highest state of human spirit. Therefore, Xu Fuguan recognized Zhuangzi as the one who truly lived the aesthetic life.

On the other hand, Confucius' *you* represents engagement in art with respect to relaxation and contemplation of human emotions as well as a deeper understanding of human nature in the context of self-cultivation. Besides, when Confucius talks about "*wandering in arts*," he expresses a value of art in human life regarding the unity of beauty and goodness, which is directly connected to Confucian values. Therefore, Confucius' *you* in relation to art as such a unity provides the conditions for a more profound understanding of the process of realization of moral subjectivity as the highest goal in Confucius' philosophy.

What Xu tried to point out is that although Western modernism and postmodernism were striving for the liberation of the individual's spirit, Zhuangzi's philosophy, his aesthetic view of life and creativity provided a far more profound and sophisticated basis for such freedom. However, in relation to art as one of the fundamental pillars of society, he considered the

Confucian unity of beauty and goodness to be more beneficial for the establishment of any harmonious society.

Since Xu Fuguan recognized the topics and problems in Zhuangzi's aesthetics to be present in contemporary Western art and philosophy (and therefore also within Taiwanese art and academic circles), he wanted to highlight the uniqueness of Zhuangzi's solutions in dialogic context with Western philosophy. Therefore, in the next section, we are going to examine Xu's interpretative analysis of Zhuangzi's philosophy and Western phenomenology, which reveals some crucial distinction in the perception of the human spirit in Western and Chinese thought. In this context, we will not only highlight Xu's comparative analysis, but also a problem of his methodological approach to the study of concepts that originate from different cultural backgrounds, and are as such a product of the historical and conceptual processes that affect them. In this respect, it is quite interesting that Xu Fuguan, who was the only representative among the second generation of Modern Confucians that interpreted Chinese ideational concepts through historical processes of material and conceptual production, almost completely ignored this important aspect in his interpretation of Western ideational concepts.

A comparative analysis of Zhuangzi's aesthetics and Western phenomenology

As already mentioned, for Xu, Zhuangzi's aesthetic thought refers to the aesthetic way of living, wherein the beauty is applied to the sphere of *Dao*, where human beings are able to liberate their spirit and relish the way of life that Zhuangzi refers to as "free and easy wandering" (*xiaoyao you*). As Xu points out, that is the highest and most beautiful sphere of human existence and is as such expressed or revealed in art.

Xu recognized some similarities between Zhuangzi's methods of "fasting of the heart-mind" (*xinzhai*), "sitting in forgetfulness" (*zuowang*), as well as mastery of a skill (*gongfu*) as the ways of achieving the highest level of human existence and some particular concepts in Western phenomenology of 19th and early 20th centuries. His comparative analysis comprises the world of some lesser known thinkers, such as Hermann, Cohen, Solger, Winkelmann and Fiedler, as well as the works of highly influential theoreticians, such as Schiller, Hegel, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger.

Xu strived to emphasize that some of the ideas that developed by the aforementioned philosophers are comparable to Zhuangzi's aesthetic thought, especially to his ideas of subjectivism and relativism, an integrated individual personality, and in particular to the idea of the liberation of human spirit. However, as already mentioned, in a methodological sense, Xu's comparative approach is often incoherent and inconsistent. Although Xu was very cautious in the outline of the parallels between Zhuangzi's philosophy and some Western ideas, he nevertheless thought that there exists a certain similarity among them, especially in the question of why and how the human consciousness (or heart-mind) is able to perceive the world aesthetically. In this subsection I want to show some methodological problems and inconsistencies in Xu Fuguan's comparative approach, on which Xu based his aesthetic theory.

The comparison of Zhuangzi's aesthetics of "free and easy wandering" (*xiaoyao you* 逍遥游) through the lens of Western theories

In this context, we have to point out that in China the word for art (*yishu* 藝術), as a general category, did not exist before the beginning of the 20th century, when it came from Japan, after having been translated from English

and French. Before that, the Chinese were using only separate and distinct words for particular artistic skills, like literature (*wenxue* 文學), painting (*huihua* 繪畫), engraving (*diaoke* 雕刻) and so on (Xu 1966, 49). Therefore, it is understandable that Zhuangzi himself did not directly write about art or the process of artistic creativity. However, similar to Confucius, Zhuangzi did apply the word artistic skill (*yi* 藝) when discussing the ability of mastering (*gongfu* 功夫) a certain ability, although their goals were quite different. According to Zhuangzi, through mastery of the skills they use in their lives people can achieve unity with the *Dao*, and therefore the liberation of their spirit. Confucius, on the other hand, emphasized the significance of the cultivation and education that can be achieved through learning and mastering of the six arts (ibid.). Zhuangzi thus only discussed "art" as a part of the process of transforming one's individual spirit (or heart-mind). Xu Fuguan related this process to the prevailing Western aesthetic thought, stressing that:

> 莊子則不僅不像近代美學的建立者, 一開始即以美為目的, 以藝術為對象, 去加以思考,體認。
>
> Zhuangzi's understanding of this process is different from the founders of modern aesthetics, who from the beginning on take beauty as the goal and art as the object of their reasoning and recognition. (Xu 1983, 49)

This argument is quite problematic if we take into consideration the aesthetic thought of some Western theoreticians, such as Kant, Husserl and Heidegger. In their elaborations, the content of aesthetics is not related solely to the observation (and cognitive recognition) of beauty itself, but also to issues such as the experience of human consciousness in the aesthetic

activity, and the feeling of freedom that emerges within (see for instance Thomson 2015, 1; Ginsborg 2014, 2.2; Deranty 2015, 2).

For Xu, Zhuangzi's *Dao* as cosmic creativity and the essence of all things[4] is also the essence of the spirit of art. Therefore, he talked about it in the sense of a creative concept of the spirit of art or artistic creativity. As already noted, Zhuangzi himself did not talk directly about art, but rather of the fulfilment of life. Therefore, this creativity is not necessarily expressed in an artwork. However, in Xu's opinion this highest spirit of art, namely the unity with *Dao*, is actually the fundamental basis and the precondition for creating any artwork, because Zhuangzi's experience of *Dao* connects directly to its realization within the performance of a skill or life activity itself. Therefore, for Xu, in Zhuangzi's philosophy, the comprehension of art and *Dao* are inherently connected[5] (Xu 1983, 52). Regarding the problem of pursuing *Dao* within the skill and the artist's process of creating the artwork, Xu saw these as one and the same, albeit with different goals. For the artist, the goal is in producing an artwork, and as such is limited to this, whereas for Zhuangzi the goal is in living the life of a liberated free spirit. In his analyses, Xu highlighted that such a life, free from all restraints, is Zhuangzi's aesthetic way of life. It is a continuous state and not a transient

[4] *Dao* in this sense is of course not only a concept of Zhuangzi's philosophy, but also represents a central notion of all other classical Daoist works, especially of Laozi's *Daodejing.*

[5] In this respect, Xu focused on Zhuangzi's well-known story of Cook Ding in the section Nourishing the Lord of Life (*Yangsheng zhu* 養生主) in the Inner Chapters (*Nei pian* 內篇). This discusses the question of how a person is able to achieve unity with *Dao* through the process of mastering a skill (*gongfu*) or mastering (nourishing) life itself.

one. Such a life is one of the liberated human spirit, or of free and easy wandering (*xiaoyao you*). It is the ultimate meaning and the highest goal of Zhuangzi's philosophy (Xu 1966, 56).

Zhuangzi claimed that living such a life is possible through the application of two methods: the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai*) and sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang*). In fact, these two notions are not just methods, but rather ontological and aesthetic concepts, which form a central part of Zhuangzi's philosophy.

As in most classical Daoist discourses, Zhuangzi's *Dao* is cosmological creativity *per se*, and hence it is continually creating beauty out of everything that exists:

> 天地有大美而不言。
>
> Heaven and earth have great beauty, but do not speak about it. (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Wai pian, Zhi bei you: 2)

Moreover, as Zhuangzi shows in an imagined dialogue between Confucius and Laozi, the state of a liberated human spirit achieved in unity with the *Dao* brings about pure beauty and delight:

> 孔子曰：「請問遊是。」老聃曰: 夫得是，至美至樂也。得至美而遊乎至樂，謂之至人。
>
> Confucius asked about the wandering (*you*), and Lao Dan replied: this is obtained in the highest beauty and highest delight. When highest beauty is achieved, you can wander in highest delight. This is being the sage. (ibid., Tian zi fang: 4)

As we have seen, the great beauty and great delight are actually the essential characteristics of *Dao*. When one is able to comprehend *Dao* through persistent work (on learning and mastering a skill), one can discover and grasp its beauty and attain delight from it. Such beauty and delight are intrinsic to *Dao*. People can thus experience *Dao* in its wholeness and connection to artistic life, when they are in the state of being a liberated spirit (i.e., free and easy wandering) (Xu 1983, 59).

In this context, Xu has again attempted to compare these ancient Daoist approaches to certain modern aesthetic theories. He stated that in the Western philosophy of art, art is considered as a confirmation and indication of human freedom, because it represents liberation from the finite (or limited) world. In order to show this more clearly, he quoted from various Western philosophers. He pointed out, for instance, that Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) considered the feeling of beauty as the delight (or pleasant sensation) of freedom. He also emphasized Heidegger's claim that the freer one's mental state, the more one can obtain pleasure derived from beauty. In this context, he tried to highlight the similarities between modern Western and ancient Chinese aesthetic thought, indicating that all the fashionable and seemingly imported theories of his time were more or less already present in Chinese antiquity.

Xu also noted Hermann Cohen's (1842–1918) understanding of art as the substance or fusion of science and ethics, where art stands above these and has the purpose of generating free activity. In the domain of art, human consciousness is rooted in free activity, which displays spontaneity. In this context, Xu Fuguan also mentioned Ernst Cassirer's (1874–1945) theory, according to which art gives an inward freedom which we cannot obtain in any other way. In his comprehension of art and freedom, Xu found the closest resemblance to Zhuangzi.

Xu also presented an overview of Hegel's[6] understanding of art and freedom, claiming that in his *Lectures on Fine Art* he emphasized the importance of beauty and art in human lives, when being confronted with difficulties, conflicts, crisis and so on. Art and beauty give people the strength to live and simultaneously act in ways that increase the freedom of the subject, which in Xu's opinion is a very important function of art. According to Xu, Hegel argued in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* that the highest stage of the human spiritual world is the realm of the Absolute Spirit, where art exists. Here, Xu emphasized that if we could simply change the name of the Absolute into *Dao*, then Hegel's theory would be quite similar to Zhuangzi's understanding of free and easy wandering. Both notions, he claimed, are comparable because they express a realm in which people can be liberated and obtain ultimate freedom within their lives (Xu 1983, 61).

However, here we come across a significantly greater simplification of the methods and objects under comparison. Xu not only quoted his citations out of their textual contexts, but also did not even consider (let alone provide) any broader scope or background to the theoretical ideas he was discussing. Xu's juggling with words with regard to Hegel's implications of the Absolute and Zhuangzi's notion of *Dao* is especially problematic. It seems that Xu did not understand the meaning of the concept the Absolute, not only in Hegel's philosophy, but in Western philosophy in general. The

[6] Hegel was writing in a time of intense development of ideas about the arts. Kant treated aesthetic experience largely in relation to the experience of the beauty of nature, but for Hegel, aesthetics became primarily the study of *art*. For him, it is art in which "consciousness of the Absolute first takes shape" (Hegel 2008, 169). The peculiarity of art lies in the *sensuousness* of the medium in which its content is objectified (see Redding 2016, 3.2.2).

concept cannot be interchanged with *Dao* in any way, because they are rooted in completely different referential frameworks. The Absolute in Hegel's philosophy is a notion without any counterpart, for it *contains* all phases of the dialectical process, which is based on the interactions between mutually exclusive contradictions. It is the abstract scheme of a strictly structured formal development with all its stages and transitions. Hegel's Absolute is hence static and unchangeable. The Daoist *Dao*, on the other hand, is a unity of all relativizations; it is continuously fluctuating and dynamic; it is the manifestation of a process of correlative complementary change, a harmonious unity of bipolar oppositions which do not exclude, but complement each other, and are also interdependent. As such, *Dao* can never exist in isolation from the world it is creating. While Hegel's Absolute has a divine, transcendent nature, *Dao* is a concept of immanent transcendence.[7] Hence Xu's attempt to simply exchange these two words to bring out the same meaning in these two thinkers is, in my opinion, a severe overgeneralization.

It is of course known that one can find numerous resemblances or similar contents (such as opinions) in the works of Zhuangzi and Heidegger, as well as in many other representative works from the Western and Chinese ideational tradition. However, we have to be extremely careful in constructing general comparisons. It is important to keep in mind the different ideational backgrounds of Western and Chinese philosophies, and the different referential frameworks in which their respective methodologies are rooted.

[7] For a more detailed elaboration on the paradigm of immanent transcendence, see Rošker 2016, 131–137.

Nonetheless, Xu Fuguan concludes that the liberation of free spirit can only be obtained in our heart-mind (*xin*). According to him, this achievement is what Zhuangzi termed as *to hear Dao* (*wen dao* 聞道) and *to experience (*or *incorporate) Dao* (*ti dao* 體道). Using terms from the contemporary language of aesthetics, this is the embodiment of the highest artistic spirit (Xu 1983, 62).

Zhuangzi's symbol of this liberation of the spirit is expressed in the character *you* 遊 and relates to the meaning of amusing oneself or to have fun (*xiyou* 嬉遊) and play (*youxi* 遊戲). Xu argued that play has no other intention or goal than to obtain immediate feelings of delight, joy and happiness, and that this is in accord with the inherent quality of art. Moreover, the power of imagination is a very important condition for creating the beauty of artworks. The activity of the pure sensation of play is composed of the abilities of imagination, creativity, and personification.

In this context, Xu opposed the arguments of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who claimed that the play of human beings and that of animals can be regarded as the same. Here, Xu Fuguan rather agreed with Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), who considered that "man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays" (Schiller 2016, Letter XV). Xu argued that there is a profound distinction between ordinary play and the playful creativity in art regarding the conscious display of freedom. However, if we eliminate the aims of seeking knowledge or other utilitarian means, and only experience pure delight (or pleasant sensation), it can be said that the two forms of play truly evolve from the same state of spirit.

Regarding the quote from Schiller set out above (which is one of his most famous sayings), Xu noted Zhuangzi's claim that the sage, or the true

man (*zhen ren* 真人), is the one who can wander (*you* 遊) at ease. They are a person who incorporates the spirit of art and is simultaneously transformed by it. In this sense, Xu claimed that Schiller's views on the idea of play and Zhuangzi's on *you* are very close (Xu 1983, 63).

However, Xu also warned against the oversimplification which could result from a somehow reductionist view of what Zhuangzi's meant by *you.* For Zhuangzi, this refers not only to the act of playing, but also, and more importantly, to the act of freedom that emerges within such play. Therefore, Zhuangzi made *you* the symbol of the free and liberated human spirit, one free from pragmatic intentions. In this respect, Xu argued, Zhuangzi's notion of free and easy wandering is similar to Kant's concept of disinterest in aesthetic judgment, namely in the judgment of taste. In this context, aesthetic judgement should be bare of any interests or intentions, for we take pleasure in something because we judge it as being beautiful, rather than judging it beautiful because we find it pleasurable. An important characteristic of this disinterest is that it does not emphasize any pragmatic aspects and purposes (Kant 1987, 90).

I find it interesting that Xu did not mention Kant's concept of free play at this point. In Kant's concept it is the harmonious free play of our imagination and knowledge that provides aesthetic pleasure or delight. In this respect it is worth mentioning that:

> Kant's notion of the free play of the faculties (sometimes referred to as the "harmony of the faculties") is probably the most central notion of his aesthetic theory. But what is it for the faculties of imagination and understanding to be in "free play"? Kant describes the imagination and understanding in this "free play" as freely harmonizing, without the

> imagination's being constrained by the understanding as it is in cognition. (Ginsborg 2014, 2.3.2.)

In *Zhuangzi*, the liberation of the human spirit which brings fulfilment and satisfaction is obtained through the attitude of uselessness (*wuyong* 無用),[8] which seems to be quite similar to Kant's notion of satisfaction in disinterest. The meaning of uselessness is a very important concept in Zhuangzi, and is connected with a non-utilitarian attitude toward the world as well as human relations with regard to having concerns and anxieties about them. Moreover, it is the condition for achieving the liberation of the human spirit. Only by releasing the utilitarian attitude or any kind of intentions is it possible to see *Dao* and thus beauty itself. Xu argued that a non-utilitarian approach is necessary in appreciating art. Similarly, one can enjoy wandering at ease in resonance with *Dao* only through abandoning any kind of intention or purpose.[9]

For Xu, harmony is the fundamental character of art and therefore it becomes a positive condition of Zhuangzi's *you*. In Zhuangzi, uselessness (*wuyong* 無用) and harmony (he 和) are in essence two aspects of one spirit (Xu 1966, 69).

Because aesthetics is immanently related to ontology and phenomenology, Xu also argued that Zhuangzi's *fasting of the heart-mind* (*xinzhai*) is

[8] See *Zhuangzi* s.d. Nei pian, Renjian shi: 9.

[9] However, Xu also believed that although this concept is of utmost importance for the liberation of the spirit, it cannot be easily applied to living in society, where people comprehend purpose (*yong* 用) as a kind of connection that holds things together. Xu sees some limitations or negative aspects of Zhuangzi's *you* in this respect, regarding it as a narcissist escape from society.

actually the philosophy of human consciousness, which, in that respect, has a lot in common with Western phenomenology. He thus compared Zhuangzi's *xinzhai* to Husserl's comprehension of human consciousness, which will be explored in the next subsection.

The interpretation of Zhuangzi's phenomenology: Onto-aesthetics[10] of "fasting of the heart-mind" (*xinzhai* 心齋) and "sitting in forgetfulness" (*zuowang* 坐忘)

Zhuangzi's non-utilitarianism, harmony and the demand for freedom are in Xu's opinion the concepts that constitute the basic spirit of art. However, he argued that Zhuangzi's subject of the spirit of art is actually the human heart-mind, i.e. our inwardness. What Zhuangzi revealed about the heart-mind is in Xu's opinion the spirit of art and the spontaneous achievement of an artistic (or aesthetic) way of life, as well as art itself. In this dimension, which can be experienced through the aforementioned free and easy wandering, the notion of a selfless state of mind (*wuji* 無己) is of central importance. In this context, Xu lays stress upon the following quotation: "If

[10] I adopted the term from Sebastian Hsien-hao Liao's article "Becoming Butterfly: Power of the False, Crystal Image and Zhuangzian Onto–Aesthetics," arguing that Zhuangzi's discussion of great beauty is always associated with great or absolute truth. And because his philosophy, firmly rooted in *Dao* which created the myriad things and keeps becoming and making them become, and is therefore creativity itself, may be considered an onto-aesthetics. On the other hand, Professor Cheng Chung-Ying also argued that because for Chinese poets and artists beauty is always a harmonious experience and representation of a dynamic creative reality called *Dao*, and called this theory of beauty the onto-aesthetics of beauty and art. His thesis is that Chinese aesthetics is onto-aesthetical and that onto-aesthetics is embodied and realized in the tradition of Chinese aesthetics (Cheng 2010, 128).

a human being can empty themself, in wandering the world, who can harm them?" (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Wai pian, Shan mu: 2).[11] As already noted, this state of ultimate aesthetic freedom can be achieved through the fasting of the mind (*xinzhai*) and sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang*). To achieve these two states, one has to follow one of two paths: the first is the path of abandoning all physical desires, which are enslaving the heart-mind, so that it can become free from their restraints. This is a direct method to obtaining the usefulness of uselessness, or the purpose of non-purpose (*wuyong zhi young* 無用之用), because desires themselves derive from the pragmatic orientation. In *xinzhai* no benefits or purposes (*yong* 用) have a place to develop themselves, so the spirit can instantly obtain freedom. The other path to achieving these states of mind is that when we connect with an object we do not allow the heart-mind to engage in analytical thinking, and thus in any kind of judgements about right and wrong, good or bad, which would disturb our heart-mind. In such a way our heart-mind would become able to pursue and achieve liberation and increase the freedom of spirit through the use of intuition or direct perception (Xu 1983, 72).

In this respect, Xu found some similarities between Zhuangzi and Heidegger, who held that when we psychologically inspect an aesthetic observation, the premise is that the subject can observe it freely (Heidegger 2008, 145). For instance, when we stand in a beautiful location and observe the scenery and experience a sense of freedom, we are able to feel the pure joy of beauty (ibid.). In Xu's opinion, when Zhuangzi talked about *xinzhai* he talked about freeing oneself from knowledge. When talking about *zuowang*, he talked about freeing oneself from both desires as well as

[11]人能虛己以遊世，其孰能害之！

knowledge. In this way the spirit can thoroughly obtain freedom (ibid.). Xu argued that for ordinary people the so-called "I" means the integration of desires and knowledge, but for Zhuangzi, forgetting this "I" in the *zuowang* actually refers to freeing oneself from physiological desires, as well as what is commonly known as intellectual activity. Here, Xu highlights the following saying:

> 墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知。
>
> My connection with the body and its parts is dissolved; my perceptive organs are discarded. Thus leaving my material form, and bidding farewell to my knowledge. (*Zhuangzi* s.d., translated by James Legge)

Freed from both, one is able to achieve emptiness (*xu* 虛) and quietness (*jing* 靜) in the selfless state of heart-mind. For Xu, desires need knowledge for their extension, and knowledge usually has desires for the intentions it brings about. As such, they are both often interdependent. Zhuangzi's *zuowang* is the same as Laozi's non-knowledge (*wuzhi* 無知) and non-desire (*wuyu* 無欲). It does not radically or absolutely negate desires, but just prevents them from controlling people's personalities.

Wangzhi is thus a method of eliminating axiological and conceptual knowledge, and what remains is pure perception or consciousness (*chun zhijue* 純知覺). Xu argued that this kind of pure perception (or consciousness) is the aesthetic observation (*meidi guanzhao* 美地觀照) (Xu 1983, 73).

In Xu's view, this aesthetic observation is a non-analytical comprehension of things (*phenomena*) through intuition or direct perception (*zhiguande*

huodong 直觀的活動). Such an approach is completely different from the pragmatic one, which aims to seek knowledge. It simply relies on the perception that occurs through the spontaneous activity of the sense organs, which occurs, for instance, through seeing and hearing.

As Zhuangzi wrote:

> 无聽之以耳而聽之以心，无聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。
>
> Do not listen with your ears, but with your heart-mind. Do not listen with your heart-mind, but with your *qi* (vital potential). The hearing stops at ears, the heart-mind stops at symbol. *Qi* (the vital potential) is empty, and therefore able to receive things, and the accumulated emptiness is *Dao*. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Nei pian, Renjian shi: 2)

Xu interpreted the perception of the ears in Zhuangzi's quote *hearing stops at ears* as only hearing, and the perception of the heart-mind in *heart-mind stops at symbol* as only the corresponding perception of hearing. In both cases, Zhuangzi describes non–analytical comprehension. This is even more obvious in the first sentence of the passage, which suggests we should "*not to listen with the heart-mind, but with the qi,*" for the notion of the heart-mind is still linked to knowledge. Hence, for Xu, the meaning of *qi* (vital potential) is analogous to the meaning of *xinzhai* (Xu 1983, 74). This mode of perception is an important condition for establishing aesthetic observation (ibid.).

For Xu Fuguan, explaining Zhuangzi's *xinzhai* only from the perspective of an individual is not sufficient, and neither is explaining aesthetic observation only through intuitive perceptive activity. The heart-

mind, as involved in the *xinzhai*, is the subject of the artistic spirit. In other words, it is the very basis on which aesthetic observation can be established. In order to explain this relation more clearly, Xu tried to compare the notion of *xinzhai* with certain aspects of Husserl's phenomenology.

Xu exposed Husserl's method of *bracketing*, or *epoché*, where we put in brackets our so-called natural attitude or our usual way of seeing reality, in order to focus on our experience of it. In this way we become able to explore our consciousness. According to Husserl, our consciousness is always intentional in the sense that it is actional (always doing something) and referential (it is always referring to something). In Xu's opinion this is not regarded as the experience of our consciousness, but as transcendence, and is in that sense similar to Zhuangzi's *xinzhai* (Xu 1983, 74).

Here, again, we could argue that it is questionable as to whether Zhuangzi's *xinzhai* can really be considered as a transcendent state. While the dominant currents of Western philosophy are based on the dualist separation of body and mind, and the unification of subject and object can thus only be achieved in the realm of metaphysical transcendence, Zhuangzi's *zuowang* is rather rooted in a holistic cosmology in which both aspects can be unified in the here and now of worldly life. This is also the focus of the method of *xinzhai*; Zhuangzi does not merely describe a certain (aesthetic) mode of perception, but also suggests in which way this unification of the subject and object can be achieved in our lives.

On the other hand, Xu Fuguan observed that Zhuangzi's heart-mind in *xinzhai* emerges from the forgetting of knowledge, and is therefore empty and silent. In Xu's opinion, consciousness in phenomenology emerges from the bracketing or setting aside of knowledge, and is therefore also empty

and silent (or calm). For Xu, the *noesis* and *noema*[12] that appear in consciousness are mutually related; they have the same origin and essence, for they are rooted in the unity of subject and object.

In this respect, he rightly noted that in Zhuangzi's "emptiness and quietness" of *xinzhai* also emerges the inseparable unity of the heart-mind and all other things. Behind Zhuangzi's "forgetting knowledge" is the activity of pure consciousness, which is—in Xu's view—the same as the origin of perception in Husserl's phenomenology (Xu 1983, 74). This view is also highly problematic, for the contents of knowledge, which are in Husserl's phenomenology put aside (into brackets), can still be applied or referred to, if necessary, for they still form the underlying basis of particular, concrete consciousness. Zhuangzi's "forgetting," which is the ultimate stage of his *xinzhai* method, aims at something completely different, namely at a different realm of perception, which is comparable to a trance, and in which there are not only no boundaries between subject and object, but also no borderlines separating dreams and the waking state, or even life and death.[13] In addition, this is not an isolated state of mind; it is tightly related and constantly communicating with other beings and cosmic entities.

Through Zhuangzi, Xu also tried to explain the essence of intuition and to clarify how perception can provide us with insights into things. He noted that for Husserl intuition means realizing the essential nature of consciousness, and represents the phenomenological approach that leads "*back to the things in themselves.*" In this respect, Xu highlighted the

[12] For Husserl, the intentional process of consciousness is called *noesis*, while its ideal content is called *noema* (Smith 2013, Ch 3).

[13] See for instance Zhuangzi's stories about the butterfly's dream, about the joyful fishes, or about the shadows of the shadow.

disposition of emptiness and quietness of the heart-mind in Zhuangzi's *xinzhai*. He also pointed out the clearness of the understanding that arises from emptiness, for emptiness and quietness are the common origin of all the things in the world (including all phenomena). Therefore, he stated, pure consciousness can only emerge in emptiness. According to Xu, this discovery can provide a more concrete solution to some of the crucial problems of phenomenology. Precisely because pure consciousness is necessarily empty, both *noesis* and *noema* can appear in it simultaneously. Only if consciousness is empty can we speak about a purely intuitional insight. In this context, Xu stressed that that Western phenomenology is searching for possibilities of establishing a concept of pure consciousness. He thus rightly raised the question of why, if this is the case, Zhuangzi's heart-mind in *xinzhai* cannot be seen as the foundation of aesthetic observation (Xu 1983, 79).

Xu's answer is that the aesthetic consciousness in phenomenology is equal to Zhuangzi's *xinzhai*. The aesthetic consciousness is observing objects, which become aesthetic objects through this very act. Therefore, observation itself can transform things into aesthetic objects. The precondition for this transformation is, however, that the act of observation must be derived from the unity of the subject and object. Within this unity, the objects are personified and the human being as observer is objectified, albeit the observer is not necessarily aware of this. The unity of the subject and object is possible during the observation because the observed and observer interact directly. If humans can free themselves from the omnipresence of judgements (e.g., through *xinzhai*), they can obtain the state of emptiness and quietness of spirit, and achieve aesthetic observation. However, for ordinary people such experiences can only be transient and

momentous. But for Zhuangzi, the heart-mind of *xinzhai* is the subject of the spirit of art (ibid., 80).

Overall, it can be argued that Xu's comparison of Husserl's phenomenological approach in exploring human consciousness with the ideas in Zhuangzi is extremely interesting, although Husserl himself did not talk about the elimination of our desires and knowledge in exploring our consciousness. As we have seen, he provided the method of bracketing or setting aside the knowledge we have in order to focus on our experience of things in our consciousness when encountering them. His phenomenology thus provides a method of understanding and exploring our consciousness when meeting the world. As already noted, this is hardly comparable to the elimination of knowledge in Zhuangzi's philosophy of *xinzhai* and *zuowang*.

Here, we could mention that Li Zehou also compared Zhuangzi's elimination of the mind and senses in the process of perception to Husserl's notion of pure consciousness. However, Li clearly stated that the difference between their respective approaches is that Husserl's pure consciousness is epistemological, while Zhuangzi's *zuowang* is an aesthetic notion (Li 2010, 81). Zhuangzi thus seems to provide us with a method to eliminate our desires and knowledge, and transform them into emptiness, in order to achieve the ultimate freedom of our spirit (or consciousness). Although (or perhaps because) this can be regarded or evaluated as aesthetic perception and the aesthetic way of life, it cannot be compared that easily with phenomenological notions or the comprehension of consciousness.

On the one hand, it can be argued that, in a certain sense, Xu upgraded the phenomenological comprehension of human consciousness by illuminating Zhuangzi's notion of emptiness. On the other, however, we cannot ignore the fact that in this process Xu eliminated (or simply ignored) the theoretical framework of phenomenology in the comprehension of

human consciousness, which is, as Li Zehou pointed out, epistemological. However, in spite of these shortcomings, Xu elaborations of Zhuangzi's *xinzhai* in the context of aesthetic thought is valuable and unique, and thus worth further attention and thought.

Xu's profound and extensive interpretation of Zhuangzi's aesthetic thought is of enormous importance, because he exposed a dimension of this thinker's philosophy which provides a new perspective for understanding the human spirit. However, his methodology of comparative analysis seems problematic, as he did not consider the broader backgrounds of the Western philosophical works included in his research. In order to illustrate their putative resemblance with Zhuangzi's philosophy, he merely highlighted certain parts of the theories, i.e., those which corresponded to the issues he was trying to emphasize in Zhuangzi. On the other hand, we also have to take into account the special circumstances of the period in which his main works were written, and his motivation for presenting these analyses. In the 1960s, Western liberal ideologies—which were largely imported via Japan—became very popular among many young people in Taiwan. At that time, attempts to achieve liberation from the constraints of tradition and morality, together with desires to establish a new and better society, based on the model of Western liberal democracies, prevailed in the (non-socialist) East Asian societies. For Xu Fuguan, these tendencies were extremely dangerous, ignorant and unreflective, for they might have led to a complete Westernization and to the loss of these societies' own ideational traditions (and consequently of their cultural heritage and identity), which he felt were still worth preserving and developing. Hence, through his analyses of Zhuangzi, especially his aesthetic thought, he tried to highlight this ancient thinker's high evaluation of integral subjectivity, relativism, and, in particular, his methods of liberating the human spirit. Through Xu's

(inconsistently elaborated) comparisons of these elements with certain dimensions of Western phenomenology, he hoped to establish a platform worth further examining and possibly also serving as an inspiration for young Taiwanese artists, who were searching for new ways of developing their art without being aware that they could draw more from the treasuries of their own aesthetic traditions.

As mentioned above, the prevailing trends of Western philosophy are based on dualistic separation of body and mind, where unification of the subject and object is possible only in the sphere of metaphysical transcendence. However, Zhuangzi's aesthetic thought originates from holistic cosmology, where both aspects are united in *here and now* of worldly living. Therefore, Zhuangzi does not only describe a certain (aesthetic) way of perception, but also provides a way in which we can achieve the unification of the subject and object in our lives. This unification or the unity of the subject and object, human and nature, the external and the, etc., as we have seen so far, is an inherent characteristic of the Chinese philosophical tradition.

In the next subsection, we will study Xu's interpretation of the unity of body and mind (heart-mind) within the concept of bodily recognition (*tiren*). The concept was founded and developed by Xiong Shili, but Xu Fuguan interpreted it in the context of aesthetics and phenomenology. For Xu, the complementary relationship between the body and mind is the basis of Chinese perception.

The relationship between body and mind was of course also discussed intensively by Western philosophy, but the breakthrough in this area happened only in the first half of the 20th century, when Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1940–1961) developed the concept of body and subject in which the relationships among human, mind, body, and the world were seen as

mutually intertwined and interdependent (see Merleau-Ponty 1965, *Phénoménologie de la perception*).

Until then, Western philosophy was dominated by Cartesian dualism, with its absolute division between body and mind, and which saw the mind as the substance capable of recognition, while the body as solely a sensory perceptive apparatus incapable of comprehension, because the mind is the way in which we can perceive and thus also comprehend things. As already mentioned above, the relationship between the body and mind in Chinese tradition is thus diametrically opposite to the understanding of the relationship between the body and mind in Western conceptual tradition, which was significantly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The interpretation of the concept of bodily recognition (*tiren* 體認)

For Xu, the concept of bodily recognition extends to the field of aesthetics, since it represents a process in which a person transforms their biological being into a moral, rational and aesthetic self through the exceeding of selfish desires and utilitarian tendencies.

As we have seen in Xu's interpretation of Zhuangzi's and Confucius' aesthetics, in the surpassing of such desires and tendencies a free and autonomous entity is established, capable of comprehending the true aesthetic nature of *Dao* on the one hand, and the realization of morality and ethics in interpersonal relations that can be also understood as axiological on the other. As noted above, there is no separation between the body and mind, the subject and external reality in the field of aesthetic knowledge in Chinese tradition, and this dualism can be traced in Western philosophical tradition, which mostly influenced the perception of human beings as cognitive, moral and aesthetic subjects.

The traditional Chinese interconnection of body and mind (or heart-mind) can already be seen in the following quotation from Zhuangzi:

> 三患莫至，身常無殃。
>
> If one manages to escape from the three forms of concern, his body will always remain free from misfortune. (*Zhuangzi* s.d., Waipian, Tiandi: 6)

In another important ancient Daoist work, namely in Laozi's *Daodejing*, we also come across the following statement, implying the same connection:

> 吾所以有大患者，為吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患？
>
> What makes me concerned is the fact that I own a body. Without having a body, what concerns could I have? (Laozi s.d.,13)

In his main work, *The Spirit of Chinese Art* (*Zhongguo yishu jingshen*), Xu Fuguan also repeatedly pointed out that body is also in the centre of Confucian interest; most Confucian philosophers base their theoretical models upon the direct presence of the body and physical discipline, although they always end with their central attention directed towards one's social duties (Liu 2008, 578). Mencius, for instance, laid stress on the fact that the body is the beginning of all human existence, including of social worlds:

> 天下之本在國，國之本在家，家之本在身。
>
> Man always links the world, the country, and the family together when he talks; the world is based on the country and the country on families, while family is based on the body. (*Mengzi* s.d., Li lou shang: 5)

A similarly fundamental role is prescribed to the body in the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*), one of the most important Confucian classics. In this work, we also often come across its relation to the mind (in the sense of *xin*, i.e. heart-mind or consciousness):

> 心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。
>
> Only after the hearth-mind has been properly settled, can the body be cultivated. The cultivation of the body makes then the regulation of the family possible, which preconditions a good government. A good government, again, is a precondition for world peace. (*Li ji* s.d., Da xue: 2)

This quotation shows very clearly that the mind was seen as having priority (or being more fundamental) to existence than the body. Similar statements can be found throughout the entire Chinese intellectual history, although in denoting the body the concept *shen* 身 has mostly been replaced by the concept of *qi* 氣, which has been very precisely and in great detailed investigated by Xu Fuguan in *The Spirit of Chinese Art*.

Because of the differences in linguistic and philosophical development, the traditional Chinese concept of the body differs from the one established in Western historical development. It can be expressed in many ways, implying numerous different semantic connotations which cannot always exactly match to Western ones. The abovementioned notion *shen*, for instance, can denote a (human or animal) body. In addition, however, it can also denote an individual or personality. In its verbal form, it can even mean personal experiences of some individual human being, their life, or even their own moral character and abilities, respectively (see Chinese Text Project Dictionary). The body in the Western sense, however, could be even

better translated with the notion *xueqi* 血氣, as seen in the following quotation from the *Book of Rites*:

> 夫民有血氣心知之性。
>
> Now, in the nature of men there are both the physical powers and the intelligence of the heart-mind. (*Li ji* s.d., Yie ji: 27)

Here, the binary anti-pole of the concept *xueqi* (血氣, literally: blood and vital energy) has been represented by the notion *xinzhi* 心知 (literally heart-mind and knowledge).

That which is in the centre of Xu Fuguan's interest, however, is the relation between the concept *qi* in the sense of an organism (i.e. an organic body) and the concept *xin* in the sense of consciousness or human heart-mind. Although the earliest missionaries who were in China translating the philosophical works of Chinese tradition mostly translated it as a form of matter, i.e. a pure physical entity (Rošker 2012, 275), it is evident that the concept *qi* can hardly be understood as matter in the "Western" sense. In fact, the Neo-Confucian philosophers defined it as something which is not necessarily substantial, for air or even a vacuum (the Great Void *taixu* 太虛) is composed of it. Thus, it represents a concept which could be more appropriately defined as creativity, or a potential that functions in a creative way and which can appear in the material sphere, but also in the abstract realm of ideas:

> 氣之聚散於太虛由冰釋於水。

> In the Great Void, *qi* condenses and dissolves again. This can be compared to ice dissolving in water. (Zhang 1989, 389)

As noted, the majority of traditional European and American sinologists have translated this concept as matter (Graham 1992, 59). To illustrate this aspect, we can quote the translation of this passage by the well-known French sinologist from the beginning of the 19th century, Le Gall, in which the notion *qi* is clearly understood as atom(s):

> Le condensation et les dispersions des atomes dans la T'ai-hiu peuvent se comparer a la fonte de la glace dans l'eau. (Le Gall, quoted by Graham 1992, 60)

Such a translation of the concept *qi* is questionable, because it derives from profoundly incorporated criteria based on the model of Cartesian dualism. Although Zhang Zai's comparison with water explicitly states that *qi* is a continuous state, and not an aggregate of atoms, the analogy with matter was so deeply rooted in Le Gall's perception that he automatically saw the notion *qi* as an entity which contains or is composed of atoms (Rošker 2012, 276). Hence, for centuries Le Gall and other sinologists who followed his interpretations have misled scholars regarding the question of whether traditional Chinese philosophy applied the concept of atomicity (Graham 1992, 61).

This creative potential, which can, as already mentioned, appear in both the material as well as the ideal sphere, and which has been most often denoted in contemporary esoteric New Age literature simply as "energy," or at the most as a "vital energy," could possibly be understood as a kind of dynamic organic potential or—depending on the context—an organic body,

i.e., an organism. Given the fact that all Modern Confucians, including Xu Fuguan, were proceeding from the onto-epistemological notion of the immanent transcendence, the concept of *qi* could, in this understanding, be viewed as possessing a double ontology. Thus, when appearing in the concrete sphere of life it is incorporated in the sense of a living body, and at a transcendental level it manifested itself as a creative potential, enabling and preserving physical life.

Since in Chinese philosophy central concepts seldom appear alone or independently, but rather in the framework of the so-called binary categories (Rošker 2012, 280), the concept of *qi* has also mostly appeared linked to an anti-pole, such as within the binary category *qi-zhi* 氣志 (vital or creative potential and human will, as applied by Mencius and Xunzi), or *li-qi* 理氣 (structure and creativeness, as applied by Zhu Xi). In the present context which regards the relation between body and mind, it has naturally been applied in a binary *qi-xin* 氣心, whereas the former could be (rather freely, of course) associated with the body, and the latter with the mind.

Although binary categories always function in a mutually complementary way, which means that they are interdependent and mutually completing one another, the primary role among them has in Chinese tradition most often been prescribed to the concept of mind or heart-mind (*xin* 心). This has been exemplified in the above cited quotation from the chapter *Daxue* 大學 of the *Book of the Rites* which clearly showed that the cultivation of the body was preconditioned by a "proper state" of the (heart-) mind. Similarly, Mencius also presented the primary role of the will in connection to the body, pointing simultaneously to the relation between the two aspects

of the body, namely of *qi* 氣 in the sense of a vital creativity which revives the physical body (*ti* 體).[14]

> 夫志，氣之帥也；氣，體之充也。
>
> The will is the leader of the vital organism, which pervades and animates the (physical) body. (*Mengzi* s.d., Gonsong Chou: I)

When introducing the concept of *q*i (in the sense of an organism) into this binary relation with the heart-mind, the former concept still mostly remains placed in a prior position throughout all of Chinese intellectual history.

In his famous *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu fanlu* 春秋繁露), for instance, Dong Zhongshu clearly stated:

> 凡氣從心。心，氣之君也。
>
> *Qi* is always following the heart-mind. The heart-mind is the ruler of the *qi*.

This priority, however, did by no means remain limited to Confucian sources. Even the egalitarian Daoist philosophers have often pointed out that

> 心之所之，則氣從之；氣之所之，則形應之。

[14] In the classical Chinese worldview, *qi* 氣 as the principle of organic creativity was seen as the very vital potential which animated the physical body *ti* 體 and which actually brought it to life.

> Wherever the heart-mind is pointing, the *qi* has to follow it; and wherever the *qi* is pointing, the form has to adjust to it. (*Wen shi zhenjing* s.d., Wu yan: 15)

On the other hand, however, the heart-mind has thoroughly been seen as a part of the body. Its ability to "think" comes from the body's changing of its function from that of a physical organ to that of a mental organ (Liu 2007, 579). See, for example, Mencius' view on this relation:

> 耳目之官不思…心之官則思。
>
> The organs such as the ears and eyes cannot think... the function of the heart is to think. (*Mengzi* s.d., Gaozi shang: 15)

It is quite obvious that the heart-mind (i.e. the consciousness and the central cognitive tool) was understood as one of the (although highly developed) bodily organs.

In this regard, the relation between body and mind (or *qi* and *xin*) can still be considered as a complementary structured unity.

Bodily recognition and the embodiment of moral self

Xu Fuguan was practically the only representative of the second generation of Modern Confucians who considered that metaphysics and ontology were not appropriate instruments for understanding ancient Chinese thought, and much less for the development of its interpretation, because, according to him, its pragmatic nucleus has never led to any composition or any structured and coherent conception of a metaphysical system, as has been established, for instance, by the ancient Greek philosophers (see Xu 2005,

43ff). Instead, ancient Chinese philosophers developed an idea of ethics, based on the "divine or heavenly" essence of human beings, directly from the "primitive" state of religious and mythological society (Sernelj 2013a, 73).

Xu argued that we can't find anything similar to the Western metaphysic tradition in Chinese philosophy and that, on the contrary, one of the basic characteristics of Chinese philosophy is immanent transcendence, which means that everything that appears in the abstract sphere, can—at least possibly—also exist at the physical level. He places the binary category of the heart-mind on the one, and the body at the other, at the centre of both human reasoning and the cosmos. He states:

> Although the 'heart' mentioned in Chinese culture refers to a part of the five physiological organs, China regards the heart's functions as where life's values originate, as we regard our ears as where our sound—hearing and colour—distinction originate. Mencius takes ears and eyes as 'small bodies' because their functions are of small significance, and heart as a 'great body' because its functions are great. Great or small, however, they are at one in that they are all parts of human physiological functions. Can we then talk of this physiological part as a mind of Western idealism? Does the West's idealistic mind refer to our physiological part? There may be traces left of our heart if we relate 'heart' in China to Western materialism, for physiology is something materialistic and the heart's functions are works of physiology, yet there would be no trace left at all of the heart if we relate it to idealism. (Xu 1975, 243 in Huang 2010)

He suggests that Chinese philosophy and the heart-mind culture should be considered as a *mesophysics* (*xing er zhong xue*) rather than metaphysics (*xing er shang xue*), not only because of the above mentioned characteristics

of Chinese philosophy, but also because of the physiological basis and implications of the heart's functions for value (and moral) judgments (ibid.).

Xu followed Mencius' distinction between the noble person (*junzi* 君子) and small-minded person (*xiaoren* 小人), which includes an understanding of the body and its functions as great (*dati* 大體) and small parts (*xiaoti* 小體) of the body in the following way:

> 公都子問曰：「鈞是人也，或為大人，或為小人，何也？」
> 孟子曰：「從其大體為大人，從其小體為小人。」
> 曰：「鈞是人也，或從其大體，或從其小體，何也？」
> 耳目之官不思，而蔽於物，物交物，則引之而已矣。心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得也。此天之所與我者，先立乎其大者，則其小者弗能奪也。此為大人而已矣。

> The disciple Gong Du asked, "Though equally human, why are some man greater than others?"
> Mengzi answered: "He who is guided by the interest of the parts of his person that are of greater importance is a great man; he who is guided by the interests of the part of his person that are of smaller importance is a small-minded person."
> The disciple asked: "Though equally human, why are some men guided one way and others guided another way?"
> Mengzi replied: "The senses of hearing and seeing do not think, and are obscured by external things. When one thing comes into contact with another, as a matter of course it leads it away. To the mind belongs the office of thinking. By thinking, it gets the right view of things; by neglecting to think, it fails to do this. These—the senses and the mind—are what Heaven has given to us. Let a man first stand fast in the supremacy of the nobler part

> of his constitution, and the inferior part will not be able to take it from him. It is simply this which makes the great man." (*Mengzi* s.d., Gaozi I)

What Mencius called the great body is the reasoning performed by our bodily heart-mind which consists of the enduring quest for self-improvement and self-cultivation. This self-cultivation is regarded as a cultivation of the body. As Ito Togai wrote:

> When people have this heart, there will be this affair. When there is this affair, it can be out of this heart. Is there a shooting? It is this heart shooting. Riding? It is this heart riding. Writing letters? It is this heart writing. However, if we merely concentrate on this one heart, pondering on how to train it, without the body exercising such affairs, we would end up being unable to shoot, ride or write letters, while the heart remains their lord and leader. So, the sage's teachings often talk about the body without talking about the heart, because within the talk of the body there naturally are the heart's operations. Thus, what they say about humanity, rightness, ritual – decency and music, is all about affairs of cultivation of the body. (Ito in Huang 2010, 32–33)

In Mencius' words, if we want to become a great man, we should think with our bodily heart-mind and avoid perceiving the world only by the senses. In such a way, the body becomes the manifestation of spiritual cultivation:

> 君子所性，仁義禮智根於心。其生色也，睟然見於面，盎於背，施於四體，四體不言而喻。」
>
> That which a gentleman follows as his nature, that is to say, benevolence, rightness, the rites and wisdom, is rooted in his heart, and manifests itself in

> his face, giving it a sleek appearance. It also shows in his back and extends to his limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words. (*Mengzi* s.d., Jin xin shang: 21)

Since according to Mencius our body and its complexion are given to us by Heaven, only a sage can give his body complete fulfilment (Huang 2010, 33). Xu Fuguan also argues that Confucius obtained the Decree of Heaven or moral decree through bodily recognition (*tiren* 體認). According to him, *tiren* is a retrospective and active process in which "the subject uncovers moral subjectivity from the pseudo-subjectivity of human desires and affirms it, develops it." One reveals one's own moral nature through "overcoming the self" and "reducing sensual desires." By freeing oneself from these constraints, the subject lets the original mind emerge. The way to determine what desires and inclinations need to be overcome is the same as the way to reveal moral subjectivity: bringing whatever feelings and ideas that one experiences before the light of moral subjectivity in one's own heart-mind, and seeing whether one can still take the feelings and ideas at ease (Ni 2002, 289).

Xu agrees with the Cheng brothers and Wang Yangming that there exists the identity of the Heaven and the human heart-mind which can be directly experienced through bodily recognition. If so, Heaven and its moral implications are not something abstract to human beings, but rather something implemented in our physiological and psychological structure. Therefore, we are able to reduce the sensations and feelings that are not following the way of the heart-mind to achieve the unity of Heaven as the moral instance and human nature (Ni 2002, 289). The method of achieving such unity is the learning for the self (*weiji zhi xue*), which is not learning merely to understand others, but rather serves for discovering, opening,

transforming and completing oneself through which one turns the biological self into the moral, rational and artistic self.

Qi is one of the most complex and multi-layered concepts in Chinese ideational tradition, since it appears in different contexts and therefore also carries various contextual connotations. In the next subsection, we will recognize this concept as an aesthetic concept within the binary category *qiyun*, which is the most fundamental and most important category in Chinese aesthetics.

The analysis and interpretation of the concept of *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動

The present chapter explores Xu Fuguan's analysis and interpretation of the concept of *qiyun shengdong*, which is considered to be one of the most important, fundamental and complex concept in Chinese aesthetics and art. It was created in the Wei Jin period (220–420 CE), a turning point in Chinese art and aesthetics. The complexity of the concept of *qiyun shengdong* is reflected in literary works, painting, calligraphy, and music as well as in literary theory and the theory of painting. According to Xu, *qi* refers to the external features of the artwork, while *yun* expresses the inner characteristics that are a matter of the human spirit. For Xu, *shengdong* signifies the manifestation and fusion of *qi* and *yun* in the artwork. Xu claimed that the profound comprehension of this concept is fundamental for understanding the essence of Chinese art (Xu 2002, 84).

In Western sinological, aesthetic and art theory works, *qiyun shengdong* is mostly translated as *rhythmic resonance*, *spirit resonance*, *creating rhythmic vitality*, *spiritual resonance and life motion*, *spirit consonance*

engendering a sense of life, and similar terms.[15] Xu Fuguan is however very critical of translating *yun* in terms of rhythm or resonance because according to him *yun* has much wider conceptual spectrum and its meaning also depends on the context in which it occurs (ibid.).

As an aesthetic concept, *qiyun shengdong* was first mentioned by Xie He[16] in his *Record of the Classification of Ancient Paintings* (*Gu huapin lu*)[17] in the middle of the 5th century CE, where he appointed it as the first

[15] As we will see further on, *qiyun shengdong* is very hard to translate into Indo-European languages because of its wide range of connotations.

[16] Xie He (ca 479–502 CE) was a painter and art critic. He is best known for his *six laws of painting* (*huihua liufa*), which must be taken into account in the critical judgment of a painting. Xie wrote these *six laws* in his foreword to the book *The Records on Ancient Painting* (*Gu huapin lu*), where he classified the artworks of 27 painters into three categories according to the artistic value of their works. These six laws changed over time, gaining different and new meanings, but within the framework of Chinese aesthetics they are still considered as the basic criteria of Chinese painting. Xie He's six laws are written in the form of parallelism, which is a typical form of writing in classical Chinese. According to Xu Fuguan, the first two characters are the core of parallelism, while the other to refer to its concrete application as revealed in praxis. The credibility of the translation of the six laws is still a subject of academic debate.

[17] Xie He specified the laws in the form of numerical listing, which was, according to Victor H. Mair adopted from an Indian theory of painting, the *Sadanga*. The credibility of Mair's hypothesis will be discussed at the end of the article. Xie He's six laws are as follows: 一曰, 氣韻生動是也: *yi yue qiyun shengdong shi ye*; 二曰, 骨法用筆是也: *er yue gufa yongbi shi ye*; 三曰, 應物象行是也: *san yue yingwu xiangxing shi ye*; 四曰, 隨類賦彩是也: *si yue suilei fucai shi ye;* 五曰, 經營位置是也: *wu yue jingying weizhi shi ye* 六曰,傳移模寫是也: *liu yue chuanyi moxie shi ye*.

and most important law and characteristic in the theory of Chinese painting.[18] However, *qiyun* itself appeared much earlier in poetry. This principle remained valid until the beginning of the 20th century, when the Japanese and Chinese theoreticians began to associate it with the idea of subjectivism, and subjective expression as something that was opposite to the form and, consequently, the objectivity of Western realism (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2013, 97–98).

Xu writes that *qiyun shengdong* was already mentioned by Gu Kaizhi before Xie He, although Gu used different terminology, namely the transfer of spirit (*chuanshen* 傳神) as the main criteria (or law) of painting. Gu claimed that the crucial meaning in the art of painting is precisely the author's portrayal of the transfer of spirit (*chuanshen xiezhao* 傳神寫照)[19] and its representation via the external form. This kind of representation is what we are able to see, while the spirit belongs to the unseen, but can be felt. The spirit (*shen*) is the essence of human beings and the specific characteristic of every individual. According to Xu, the expression and representation of the human spirit (and human relations) through painting was the conceptual shift in aesthetics that happened in the Wei Jin period. During this period, painting focused on representation of the inner world which became the main object in the art of painting. In the Wei Jin period, representation of the human being reflects the beauty of the human character

[18] Although Xie He's theory of painting was still somehow in the embryonic stage, it later became a concise and comprehensive system, which was, according to Xu, created masterfully already in the beginning (ibid.).

[19] In traditional Chinese painting, the verb to write or describe (*xiehua* 寫畫) was often used instead of the verb to paint (*huihua* 繪畫), because painting, as an artistic genre actually evolved from calligraphy (Xu 2002, 85).

and interpersonal relationships, thus it is not about the depiction of human physical characteristics, but rather the depiction of the human spirit. This tendency was not revealed only in painting, but in all art genres. In contrast to the sculptures and paintings of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), where painters mainly depicted legends and famous personalities of the Chinese antiquity, the aesthetic elements of the Wei Jin period reveal a completely new direction in Chinese art. Although the theme of Han Dynasty painting and sculpture was partially transposed to Wei Jin, it was with the difference that the painters focused primarily on the display of their spirit, through which they expressed their inner value and meaning. Representation of the human spirit therefore became the main principle and criterion of Wei Jin art and aesthetics. This conceptual shift represents a remarkable progress in traditional Chinese art, which is especially evident in the field of painting.[20] According to Xu, *qiyun shengdong* is precisely what makes this kind of transformation possible (namely, the transfer of human spirit into the painting or any work of art) (Xu 2002, 91).

The transfer of spirit (*chuanshen*) is thus the basis of figural painting in China that has been transmitted from the Wei Jin period. Xu believes that the significance of Gu Kaizhi's *transfer of the spirit* is more clearly and accurately reflected in Xie He's description of the concept of *qiyun shengdong*. In other words, all that Gu Kaizhi called *chuanshen*, as well as all other concepts related to the spirit, such as *shenqi* (vitality of the spirit), *shenming* (clarity of the spirit), *shenling* (the divine spirit), were merged into one by Xie He, which he called *qiyun shengdong* (ibid.).

[20] It is therefore not surprising that Xu emphasizes (2002, 91) that Chinese painting as an independent artistic genre does not begin before the Wei Jin period.

For Xu, *qiyun shengdong* is in fact a concretization and refinement of the idea of the spirit, hence it is worthy of a careful and profound examination. Xu Fuguan's research is thus multi-layered. He investigates individual concepts within the concept *qiyun shengdong*, namely the concepts *qi* and *yun*, that embody their own meanings and connotations but, as we will see further on, are inextricably connected in the artwork. In the following subsections, which follow Xu Fuguan's structure of analysis, we will examine and evaluate his analysis of individual concepts within the phrase (or category) *qiyun shengdong.*

Qi 氣 as the philosophical and aesthetic concept

Qi is one of the most complex concepts in Chinese intellectual tradition and philosophy. In Indo-European languages there exists a whole range of different translations of this term; the most frequent ones are air, breath, vitality, the source of life, energy, matter, and the like. Below, we are going to have a closer look at a series of additional connotations of this concept that are important for a more comprehensive understanding of the aesthetic concept *qiyun shengdong*.

From China's earliest philosophical discourses, *qi* has belonged to the most basic categories of understanding reality (Rošker 2017). Primarily, the ancient Chinese philosophers understood *qi* as an embodiment of natural phenomena. For them, there existed six types of Heavenly *qi* (*tianqi*): *yin*, *yang*, rain, darkness and light that were connected to the five phases (*wuxing*) of the earth: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Of the six Heavenly *qi*, the rain and the wind brought the birth of all things or beings. *Qi* of the light and darkness shows the change of day and night as one of the laws of nature; in this context, the binary category *yin* and *yang* represents the character of all earthly or weather phenomena. In addition to creating all phenomena of

nature, *qi* of Heaven and earth also created human beings (Wong 1989, 46). This definition can be found, for example, in the chapter *Neiye* (*Inner aspects*) of the important political text *Guanzi*, written in the Spring and Autumn period around 770–476 BCE:

> 凡人之生也，天出其精，地出其形，合此以为人。
>
> All human beings are created in a way that Heaven contributes its essence and the earth its form. When the two merge, a human being is created. (*Guanzi* s.d., Neiye: 7)

This essence (*jing*) is defined earlier in the text as the essence of *qi*:

> 精也者，氣之精者。
>
> The essence is the essence of *qi*. (Ibid., Neiye: 3)

The concept of *qi* as the essence or source of life has thus become a kind of ontological foundation of existence:

> 有氣則生，無氣則死。
>
> Things are alive, as long as the *qi* is present (in them); without *qi*, they die. (Ibid., Shu yan: 1)

The cosmic *qi* thus creates all things, and since it provides the survival of the human (and all the other) beings, a person has to respond to it in the way that he or she behave virtuously, otherwise the balance of heaven and earth is disturbed and leads to chaos:

> 夫天地之氣, 不失其序, 若過其序, 民亂之也。
>
> If human beings do not act according to the *qi* of Heaven and earth, chaos prevails among people. (Guoyu in Wong 1989, 47)

Qi, as a onto-cosmological entity, thus obtained a moral character which had a central importance in Confucianism. The concept *qi* in the sense of "cultivation of *qi*" (*yangqi*) begins with Mencius (379–289 BCE), and shows a connection with physical, bodily aspects, and thus we can also call it the physical life force (*shenglide shengmingli*) (Xu 2002, 94). However, Mencius emphasized that moral virtues are indispensable for the cultivation of *qi* in the human body, especially righteousness and sincerity, which reciprocally work on the operation of Heaven, as reflected in a calm and stable social and political situation (Wong 1989, 48).

Awareness and cultivation of *qi* was of course also central to Daoist physical and meditative practices such as *qigong*, *taiji quan* and *sitting in forgetfulness* (*zuowang*). The main difference between Daoist and Mencian or Confucian techniques of perfecting the personality is that the goal and purpose of the first was to achieve a harmonious fusion of human being with *Dao* or nature, and the purpose of the latter the cultivation of moral character.

As the essence of life, *qi* is therefore closely related to bodily senses and perception. In this sense, it already reaches the sphere of Chinese aesthetics:

> 天有六氣, 降生五味, 發為五色, 徵為五聲。
>
> Heaven has six sorts of *qi*, they give birth to five tastes, they manifest themselves in five colours and are fulfilled in five tones. (*Chun qiu zuo zhuan* s.d., Zhao Gongyuan nian: 2)

As mentioned earlier, *qi* as a moral concept first appears in the philosophy of Mencius. As a basic aesthetic concept it occurs in the Wei Jin period. Tastes, colours, sounds and other elements are all transmutations of *qi*. The mediation of *qi*, especially its essence, which is reflected through the interacting of *yin* and *yang*, is the central and most fundamental purpose and goal in Chinese art (Wong 1989, 45).

As an aesthetic concept, *qi* was first mentioned in the late Han Dynasty by Cao Pi in relation to literature in his work *Discussions on Literature* (*Dianlun lunwen* 典論倫文) where he stated:

> 文以氣為主, 氣之清濁有體, 不可力強而致。
>
> In literature, *qi* is the master, it can be dim clear and bright or dim and murky and cannot be attained by force.

According to Xu, *qi* is connected to the physical in the sense of the creative potential that is transformed into the artwork. For him, human emotions, feelings, and an imagination are born in *qi* and are secondarily expressed in a work of art, so for him all metaphysical connotations of *qi* are redundant (Xu 2002, 95).

The *qi* which in literary art expresses itself through ideas, emotions and imagination, is actually the accumulated *qi*. Therefore, the individual character that shapes the artwork is determined by *qi*. The transmission of the spirit (*chuanshen*), which we mentioned above, is actually expressed through *qi*. The *qi* which sublimates and fuses with the spirit (*shen*), becomes an artistic *qi*. Thus, through the acting of *qi*, the artist's inner life becomes visible outwardly. According to Xu (ibid.), this is one of the most interesting features of Chinese literary theory and Chinese art in general.

The connection of the *qi* with the spirit (*shen*) becomes the entity or unity. Therefore, the term *shenqi* (the spirit of *qi*) was used very often at that time (ibid.).

On the other hand, *qi* also represents the artist's moral character (*pinge* 品格) as a lofty quality that creates the background of the artwork. In the Wei Jin period, *qi* in the context of art was considered as the power of *qi* (*qili* 氣力) or the momentum of *qi* (*qishi* 氣势). Often the character *gu* 骨 (framework or bone) was used instead of 氣 which in fact symbolized it (ibid.).

From the foregoing, we see that *qi* as an aesthetic concept refers to the human creative potential, which is the basis of artistic creation. This potential is closely linked to the human emotions, feelings and imagination that emerge through perception and comprehension of the world through the sense organs, and in the aesthetics of the Wei Jin period reflect the beauty of human inwardness. The representation of this inner world was the fundamental goal and aesthetic criterion in the art of the Wei Jin period.

Basic semantic and aesthetic connotations of the concept *yun* 韻

The word *yun* first appeared in the Han Dynasty. We can find it in the oldest Chinese etymological dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* from the first century CE, where it is defined as a harmony or to harmonize: *yun, he ye* (韻, 和也). The same definition also exists in the *Guangya* encyclopedia from the Wei period in the 3rd century CE. According to Xu Fuguan, at that time the character for harmony 和 (*he*) was replaced by the character *yun* 韻 (Xu 2002, 94).

Like in the case of *qi*, the meaning of *yun* also differs according to the particular context and artistic genre. In phonology (*yinyunxue* 音韻學) it

holds the meaning of tone. In poetry it meant rhyme. In painting, *yun* is most often translated as a rhythm or rhythmic resonance. As mentioned earlier, in Xu's view such a translation is not adequate because it does not cover all its meanings. Wong (1989, 57) also believes that in the Chinese theory of music, the translation of the word *yun* as a rhythmic resonance is not incontestable.

In aesthetics and philosophy, *yun* has more profound and more complex meanings, and therefore it is necessary to study in detail its original meaning as well as its various connotations in different contexts (ibid.).

As Wong states (ibid.), In Chinese tradition, *yun* was related predominately to music. The earliest appearance of *yun* can be traced to Cao Zhi's 曹植 (192–232) *Essay of the white crane* (*Baihe fu* 白鹤赋):

聆雅琴之清韻。

I listen to the pure and clear *yun* of the subtle *qin.*[21] (ibid.)

We can also find it in Ji Kang's (224–263 CE) poetic essay on *qin* (*Qinfu*), where the following is written:

改韻易調,奇弄乃發。

From the change of *yun* and subtle melody, a wonderful feeling appears. (ibid.)

[21] Chinese string instrument similar to zither.

Although at first *yun* was used in the meaning of rhythm in music, the character *lü* 律 soon replaced it. From then on, *yun* was rarely used in relation to music (Xu 2002, 98). In music, *yun* referred to the musical expression or the melodic movement. But later, it was transferred to literature and phonetics. In the latter, *yun* is more or less defined as a tone. In poetry or in poetic essays, the meaning of *yun* becomes much clearer if we take a look at Liu Xie’s definition, written in his famous work *The literary spirit and the carving of the dragon* (*Wenxin diaolong*), the most important Chinese classic on literary theory and literary aesthetics, written in the 6th century CE:

> 異音相從謂之和，同声相应谓之韻。
>
> The sequence of different tones is called harmony, and the sequence of the same sounds is called *yun*. (Liu Xie s.d.: VII, Shenglü: 2).

Wong (1989, 58) points out that in this case *yun* refers to rhyme and not to rhythm. According to Xu, no matter if we use *yun* in music or in literature, it contains the meaning to be in harmonious proportion or to harmonize. For Xu, one of the connotations of *yun* refers to the harmonious sound or the spirit of sound, but in no case it could be understood as rhythmic (Xu 2002, 99).

Wong (1989, 62) specified the meaning of the *yun* in music, which in fact means the art of mastering the modulation of the tone, that creates a kind of surplus of feeling (*yunwei*).

In the art of painting, *yun* appears primarily in relation to *qi*, and therefore in the context of painting it is difficult to study *yun* independently, therefore their connection in the concept of *qiyun* will be discussed in more

detail below. However, we will first devote ourselves to some additional connotations of the term *yun* in the context of aesthetics.

As an aesthetic concept, *yun* primarily refers to the expression of human character and spirit as revealed in the artwork. Xu also defined it as the recognition of human relations (*renlun jianshi* 人倫鑑識) which was comprehended as a reflection of self-cultivation in the *Xuanxue* philosophy. In this context it actually expresses the unity of spirit and form (*shenxing heyi* 神形合一) that is represented outwardly, namely through images in the work of art. At that time, it was termed the atmosphere or general feeling (*fengqi*). According to Xu, this connotation of *yun* exists in nature: "自然有雅韻" (Xu 2002, 100).

Xu's interpretation of *yun* as the concept expressing the recognition of human relations (or their ethics) refers to the mapping harmony and reciprocity of sounds onto human relations. (ibid., 101). He believes that *yun* in music and literature is actually created through the unity of various sounds. This variety of sounds is exceeded in music of high quality and thus the so-called unified sound is created. We are able to experience this unity, but on the other hand it is not a matter that we can specifically point out. Therefore, we can say that *yun* is the spirit of the sound. We can imagine this by using the analogy of human beings: people cannot abandon their physical form or their character, but on the other hand, they are able to transcend their spirit into harmonious unity with others. Xu Fuguan is therefore convinced that *yun* carries the meaning of the beauty of the individual character and their feelings, but only as long as they are harmonious and based on the internalization of Confucian ethics. In this regard, Xu does not relate *yun* to sound. This type of beauty is reflected outwards, namely through human expression. This sort of *yun*, where the

spirit and the external world are fused together, is expressed in paintings and this is precisely the central meaning of *yun* in the concept *qiyun* (Xu 2002, 102).

At the first glance, it seems that *yun* as an aesthetic concept depends on *qi*. *Qi* is a vital or creative force that manifest itself throughout an artwork, while *yun* is reflected in the fragments of individual images or expressions. Therefore, the concept of *qi* was the central criterion in the evaluation of an artwork, while *yun* was more the expression of its (*qi*) perfection. A similar definition of both concepts in Chinese traditional aesthetics was given by Wang Qingwei (2004), arguing that *qi* is the source of all things and the basic idea of the cosmos, life and art itself in traditional Chinese culture, but the presentation and the expression of *qi* are achieved precisely through *yun*. The characteristic of *yun* is not the description or depiction of the external form, but the expression of the human inwardness (or the human spirit) which displays things beyond their external image and as such depends on the state of the spirit of the subject (Wang 2004).

In the Song Dynasty *yun* was considered as the highest beauty that an artist is able to achieve (Wong 1989, 63). Since then, *yun* has been, if not more important than at least as important as *qi* in Chinese aesthetics, representing a disclosure of perfected artistic performance, accompanied by a mature and accomplished personality (ibid.).

But in general, it was considered that *qi* includes *yun*. However, the elements such as inwardness, feeling and expression are factors that are more related to the *yun* than to *qi*.

Although there are differences between *qi* and *yun*, both concepts are essentially inseparable and reciprocal:

> If *qi* is considered to be the substance of the work, then *yun* determines the way in which the substance is expressed. *Qi* is a vital creative force, and *yun* a wonderful and sophisticated expression of *qi*. (Wong 1989, 65)

In the next subsection, we will focus on the reciprocal relationship between *qi* and *yun* and have a closer look at the internal structure of the term *qiyun*.

The concepts of *qiyun* 氣韻 and *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動

As we have seen, *qi* and *yun* both express the human spirit. Hence, *qi* was often defined as *shenqi* 神氣 and *yun* as *shenyun* 神韻. Xu considered (2002, 101) that *qiyun* is humans' second nature (*ren de di er ziran* 人的第二自然). The beauty of art can only occur within and on the basis of this second nature, as already described by Zhuangzi (ibid.). Xu emphasized that Zhuangzi pointed out the possibility (or potential) that humans in their first nature recognize their second. This is mainly about achieving the unity of nature (cosmos, *Dao*) and man. It is a state of breakthrough, which represents the highest sphere of Zhuangzi's philosophy. This breakthrough is a kind of inspirational leap, an act of transformed human consciousness, accompanied by a state of absolute freedom where a human being enters some other world or is able to see the world from a different perspective (ibid.). For Xu, *qiyun* is a deeper reflection of the emergence of this other human nature, namely, the fusion or unity of man and nature (*tianren heyi*), which is manifested in works of art. At the same time, Xu believes that both *qi* and *yun* derive from the recognition and respect of interpersonal relations. This recognition refers primarily to the human feelings and emotions that are common to all people.

Qi and *yun* also clearly express the beauty of the unity of the spirit and external form. In this context, Xu emphasized that *qiyun* has no connection

to sounds whatsoever, therefore he strongly rejects the idea of translating the term *yun* as rhythm (Xu 2002, 102).

The fusion of *qi* and *yun* into a single concept (or binary category) occurred in the Wei Jin period. The fact that Xie He determined *qiyun shengdong* as the first aesthetic criterion is not that surprising. As we will see below, Xie He added to the concept of *qi*, which is already multifaceted itself, the concept *yun*, which can also be understood as its binary counterpart.

In the context of Wang Bi's ontology of *benmo* (root and branches) we could also consider comprehending *qi* as *ben* and *yun* as *mo*. In this sense, *qi* would mean the essence and *yun* its expression (or reflection). Below, we are going to explore whether *qiyun* could in fact be understood as a binary category.

Xie He discussed *qiyun* in relation to the artwork, which is never determined objectively, but is established by artist's personality. Before Xie, this relation was already discussed by Liu Xie in his work *Wenxin diaolong* (Xu 2002, 102). The artist's personality consist of *yin* (shady side) an *yang* (sunny side); *gang* (strong and solid) and *rou* (softness and gentleness).[22] All four principles are transferred to the work of art. *Yinyang* and *gangrou* are the expressions of the dynamics of *qi*. According to Xu, Xie understood *qi* as depicting the beauty of *yang* and *gang* in the artwork, (*yanggang zhi mei* 陽剛之美), and *yun* the beauty of *yin* and *rou* (*yin rou zhi mei* 陰柔之美), where the basis of beauty lies in the clearness (*qing*). For Xu, this clearness refers to the artist's personality that is liberated from selfish desires and utilitarian tendencies (ibid.).

[22] These concepts or principles originate from the *Book of Changes*, in addition to the Heavenly and Earthly *qi*.

Despite the difference between *qi* and *yun*, we need to take into consideration their mutual and dynamic relationship. Therefore, they cannot be absolutely separated. Although some people comprehended *qi* as the guiding principle, neither of the two poles can dominate or be primal (Wong 1989, 64).

Yin, *yang*, *gang* and *rou* have to coexist in the artwork, and none of them should be too expressed or neglected. An artwork that contains too much *qi* has a lack of sensibility, if there is too much emphasis placed on *yun*, it can lead to a lack of internal tension and expressive power. Therefore, preservation of a harmonious balance between *qi* and *yun* is crucial for the creation of a great artwork (ibid.), and consequently for its aesthetic evaluation.

On the other hand, from the aforementioned analysis of *qi* and *yun* and their mutual relation, they can also be understood as a binary category in the sense of Wang Bi's ontology of *benmo* and his aesthetics of *yixiang.*[23] As mentioned above, in this binary category *qi* appears as a root, basis or essence (*ben*), while *yun* is a sophisticated and perfected expression of this essence (*mo*). In this respect, *yun* cannot exist without *qi*, and the quality of the expression of *qi* itself is thus possible only and merely through *yun*.

Xu Fuguan saw the structure of their relationship in a similar way, but he draws attention to the fact that in art *qi* can exists without *yun*, while *yun* cannot exist without *qi*. According to Xu, the very idea of *qiyun* originates from Zhuangzi's philosophy, since it contains many Zhuangzian concepts,

[23] *Xiang* (image, symbol) and *yi* (meaning, idea), are the central concepts in Wang Bi's cosmological and epistemological theory. Both concepts were transferred to the field of art and aesthetics. Their fusion is known as *yixiang*, which was first discussed by Liu Xie and is considered as an important aesthetic ideal.

such as *qing* (clearness, brightness), *xu* (emptiness), *xuan* (depth) and *yuan* (distance, remoteness) (Xu 2002, 102).

The question of the second part of the phrase *qiyun shengdong*, namely the *shengdong* part, has also been discussed by Xu. In classical works, we cannot find a more detailed or unambiguous explanation as to whether *shengdong* has an independent meaning or is the manifestation of their complementarity, as Xu suggested. He emphasized that before the Wei Jin theoreticians began to use the word *shengdong*, they often referred to the term *shengqi*, which can be interpreted as movement (*yuedong*), birth, reality and also the production of *qi*. It seems that this concept was later transformed into the term *shengdong* (Xu 2002, 108).[24] The whole structure of the concept *qiyun shengdong* is the same as the structure of the concept *qiyun*. While its first element can exist without the other, the reverse is not possible (ibid.).[25]

According to Xu Fuguan, the significance of Xie He's *shengdong* in the concept *qiyun shengdong* is defined as:

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[24] *Shengqi* is actually the basis of the concept of the spirit (*shen*) in Gu Kaizhi's concept of "the transfer of spirit" (*chuanshen*) and in Xie He's *qiyun*. *Shengdong* is the external expression of feeling that is displayed in the painting, while *shengqi* refers to the inner life that reveals itself via external appearance, namely the artwork. From this, we can conclude that *shengdong*, in its internal meaning, does not reach the depth of the meaning of *shengqi*. *Shengdong* occurs through *qiyun* and is its natural, spontaneous effect, to which narration is added. Therefore, *shengdong* refers exclusively to *qiyun* and has no independent meaning (Xu 2002, 108).

[25] Of course, the word *shengdong* may also appear in other contexts in which it has no connection to the concept *qiyun*, just as the concept *yun* in other contexts (that is, outside of the art of painting and aesthetics) can also occur individually and independently of the concept *qi*.

有氣韻, 則有生動矣。

If there is *qiyun*, then there is also *shengdong.* (Ibid.)

Since the term *shengdong* can also be understood as the dynamics of life or the life force, and since *qiyun* is therefore a precondition for its manifestation, Xu Fuguan is probably right when arguing that *qiyun* is the sublimation of the life force or—in a Daoist sense—the essence of life. Since this is about the essence of the artwork, which is the product of human creativity, the question arises as to whether *qiyun* is a matter of cultivation and education, or it is a product of intuition, talent and the perfected character of the artist.

The concept of *qiyun* in the artwork cannot be understood merely as the beauty of the balance between the individual elements or parts that compose the work of art, but it is primarily the expression of human feeling and emotion. Of course, we can talk about universal feelings, which in fact are felt by all people, however, *qiyun* is primarily the expression of the individual inwardness of an individual and their unique spirit, which in its own way experiences the internal and external world, and is able to express and reflect it through the artwork. In this context, Xu believes that *qiyun* is not something that a person can learn through education and practice, but is a natural (or inborn) talent that cannot be acquired.

Xu argued that one of the greatest abilities of the artist is precisely that they are able to recognize *the second nature* of human beings in the first one (Xu 2002, 119). To what extent this ability is present (or not) becomes evident if the artist can, in their own life, creatively sublimate this second life. *Qiyun* in the painting or in any other artwork is the expression of its spirit. The spirit of this artwork originates from the spirit of the artist. The

transformation of the artist's spirit and its transfer to the object of art are something that goes beyond the question of the artist's skill or technique. As Xu points out, *qiyun* is actually a "talent given from heaven" (*tiancai* 天才) or a kind of inborn (or innate) disposition (*tianfu de qizhi* 天賦的氣質) (ibid.).

To transfer the spirit of the landscape means to express the *qiyun* of the landscape. To be able to express this *qiyun*, the artist must first be able to transform themselves and become united with the spirit of the landscape. This means that the artist must eliminate desires and express the silence and calmness that are the subject and essence of the spirit of art. In this way, the illumination of the subject of their artistic spirit, which is actually in the observation of the beautiful, is able to transform the landscape into the object of beauty—and this is precisely the illumination and display of the spirit of the landscape. Therefore, the spirit of the landscape spontaneously penetrates into the beauty of the spirit as the subject of art. In this they mingle, and this is called "the searching for an inner remote landscape," or *qiyun* in Chinese aesthetics (Xu 2002, 120).

Xu emphasized that this transfer of spirit or *qiyun* is not about imitation or mimesis of the landscape or the external world on the painting, but rather the representation of the spirit of the landscape through the artist's own spirit, which is revealed through their skill.[26] The source of this representation is therefore not the skill, but the essence of the spirit of art which arises through the transcendence and transformation of the life of the artist. For this reason, art itself has the ability to transform and transcend human beings (ibid.).

[26] S*uishou xiechu, jiewei shanshui chuanshen.* 隨手寫出，皆為山水傳伸 (ibid.).

The precondition for the transfer of the spirit of life into the physical image of the artwork, namely the precondition for the realization of *qiyun* in the artwork, is the attainment of the empty and peaceful heart-mind and the state of absolute freedom that Zhuangzi speaks about in his philosophy of "free and easy wandering (floating)" (*xiaoyao you*).[27] Thus, for Zhuangzi, the creative input of *qiyun* into the work of art also derives from the purification or fasting of the heart-mind (ibid.).

Xu argued that if an artist wants to achieve *qiyun* in their artwork, they must follow a certain structure that can be represented through the mastering of technique or skill. But *qiyun*, which is manifested through the art object, in fact originates from the artist's own effort of self-cultivation, which clears the "mud and chaos" from the heart-mind. In the fusion of the spirit of the artist with the artistic object, there exists liberation.

According to Xu, this kind of self-cultivation (in a Confucian sense) and the ability to liberate one's own spirit (in the Daoist sense) was requested if one should become and be considered as a great artist in traditional China. Having such an ability or not was actually a dividing line that separated true masters from those who only master the skill (ibid.).

[27] This is not just Xu Fuguan's opinion, but it is also a standpoint that was represented by other traditional Chinese aestheticians. For example, Guo Ruoxu, a renowned art critic of the 11th century, wrote: "In all art paintings, the essence of *qiyun* is in the floating of the heart-mind" (*Fan hua, qiyun ben hu you xin.* 凡畫, 氣韻本乎遊心) (*Zhongguo hualun* 2017).

The problem of translating the concept *qiyun shengdong* and the question of its autochthony

In the final part of this chapter, we will provide a critical evaluation of Xu's interpretation of this important concept in Chinese aesthetics. We will focus mainly on two points that run like a red thread throughout Xu's whole discussion of this concept. The first is Xu Fuguan's emphasis on the autochthony of this concept and his negation of theories assuming the concept *qiyun shengdong* (together with the other five laws of painting) was adopted from the ancient Indian art theory of Sadanga (six limbs). A critical evaluation of these views in a contemporary context is important in the framework of re-evaluating classical Confucian and Daoist elements in classical Chinese art theory or aesthetics, as well as for integrating intercultural dimensions into discourses of this academic field.

The second point is Xu's position that we cannot translate the concepts *yun* and *qiyun* into Western languages as rhythm or rhythmic vitality.

Xu Fuguan came across the idea of the resemblance and presupposed adoption of Sadanga by Xie He in Percy Brown's book *Indian Painting*, written in 1920, but he strongly rejected this assumption (2002, 121). Xu actually believed that the similarity of the two is merely a coincidence, and that the origin of Xie He's *six laws* cannot be attributed to the Indian Sadanga, even though the very origin of the latter is supposed to have been even a few centuries older. Xu also argued that one can only find three out of the six laws of painting that correspond to Sadanga. Presumably one of them is supposed to be formal equivalent to *qiyun shengdong*, but Xu emphasized that its meaning is less profound and complex than Xie He's *qiyun shengdong*.

In the article "Xie He's 'Six Laws'" of Painting and their Indian Parallels" (2004, 81), Victor H. Mair,[28] using linguistic and historical analysis, puts forward a thesis that Xie He's laws of painting were actually adopted or influenced to a great extent by Indian Sadanga. Mair argues that both classical works were created around the same time and that they had a significant influence on theory of painting in both cultures. India and China had a lot of contact at that time, especially through Buddhism, which strongly influenced Chinese culture during the Wei Jin period. Mair therefore argues that it is very likely that Xie He actually adopted the structure and content of Indian Sadanga in his theory of painting. For Mair, this assumption can be verified by the fact that ancient Chinese texts, namely the classical texts before the arrival of Buddhism, do not contain a numerical enumeration, which Xie used in his six laws of painting. Mair mentions that most Chinese academics hold the opposite view, arguing that the first two of the six laws were already visible in earlier works of the authentic Chinese traditional aesthetics of painting (ibid., 116).

Mair's position that the numerical classification[29], which is supposed to be transferred from ancient Indian text, is something rare in Chinese classical texts is completely wrong, however, because as even Mair himself

[28] Viktor H. Mair is a sinologist and specialist for Chinese history, literature and Buddhism.

[29] The very structure of the sentence of Xie He's laws is, as already stated: 一曰氣韻生動是也 (*yiyue qiyun shengdong shiye*), 二曰骨法用筆是也 (*er yue gufa yongbi shiye*), etc. Mair focuses on the first and last pair of characters (*yi yue*: where *yi* means one, the first; *yue* means to say, it is said; and *shi ye*, where *shi* means this or that, that; and *ye* means is or has the function of equalizing both parts of a sentence).

points out it can be found in the form of numerical designation, such as ten moral obligations (*shi yi* 十義), ten errors (*shi guo* 十過), five states (*wu xing* 五行), etc., as well as in the work of Han Feizi and in the *Annals of Lü Buwei*. As for the last pair of characters, i.e. *shiye*, Mair argues that he could not find these in dictionaries or lexicons with the meaning it is supposed to have in the six law," in addition to which, in his opinion, they are very rarely present. in classical texts, especially in sentences beginning with the first pair of characters, that is, *yiyue*. He points out that in Sanskrit it is quite common for sentences to end with *eso´isti*, which means "that is."

In fact, the situation is exactly the opposite, as the combination of the initial and final pair of characters, as well as the number of laws, can already be found in Xu Shen's etymological dictionary *Shuowen* from the 2nd century, which lists six categories of characters and ways of writing. In addition, in Liu Xie's literary theory work "The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons" (*Wenxin diaolong*), written shortly before Xie He wrote his theory of painting, we can also find the same structure of writing the individual laws of literary theory. Numerical enumeration can also be found in most Chinese classical works, whether Confucian, Daoist, or Moist, and even in the work "The Internal Classic of the Yellow Emperor" (*Huangdi Neijing*) from the 5th century BCE.

Although Mair himself points out in the article that Xie He may have been inspired by Xu Shen's dictionary, despite all these "technical" facts he still insists that Xie He took his theory of painting from the ancient Indian Sadanga and further tries to prove his thesis with the substantive parallels between the two theories. The six laws of Indian painting are:

a) *rupa bheda*: variety of forms – the depiction of things as they are seen concretely;

b) *pramana*: spatial distribution, relations between objects;
c) *bhava*: presentation of feelings, emotions;
d) *lavanya yojanam*: charm; the internal characteristics of the depicted figure;
e) *sadrashya*: similarity;
f) *varnikabhangam*: a way of painting and using colours.

Mair sees parallels between Xie He's first law, *qiyun shengdong* and *bhava*, and the second law of *gufa yongbi* (骨 法 用筆) with *lavanya yojanam*. I believe that *qiyun shengdong* does not include the representation of emotions or moods as required by the law of *bhava*, but reflects the dynamics of the binary and complementary poles of traditional Chinese cosmology and the harmonious unity of nature and man, which aesthetically expresses the artist's inner world.

As for the second resemblance, namely to *lavanya yojanam*, which means the inner properties of the image, I believe that the meaning of *gufa yongbi* is the expression of the balance of *qi* or vitality using (or via) the brush (*yongbi*). In his theory of literary art, Liu Xie speaks of *gu* (skeleton, framework) as the structural organization of the artwork. The etymological meaning of the character *fa* 法 is the balance. Xie He's first two laws are inherently related to each other, as they determine the aesthetic property and method for achieving the highest aesthetic value of the artwork.

As for the other laws of painting in both traditions, they are practically the same, as they highlight the universal (technical) laws of composition, as they also exist in the Western theory of painting. Although there may be some Indian influence in terms of inspiration for Xie He, I nevertheless agree with Xu Fuguan's view (as well as with the opinion of many other Chinese academics) that Xie He's theory of painting is originally Chinese

because it belongs to a tradition that is paradigmatically different from Indian or Buddhist ones, especially concerning the relationship between the human being and nature or the cosmos. The fundamental difference in the two aesthetics of painting can already be seen in the first law of Sadanga, namely the *rupa bheda* which is a demand for a realistic depiction. As we have seen, the fundamental feature of the Chinese aesthetic of painting is precisely in the recreation and not in the representation.

When discussing the parallels between the two theories or the authenticity of Xie He's theory, it may not be superfluous to consider the possibility that Xie He took the structural form of a hexagram from the *Book of Changes* when numbering the laws. The latter was at the forefront of the Wei Jin period within the Xuanxue Neo-Daoist school. Given that the concept of *qiyun shengdong* includes a manifestation of the dynamic relationship of *yinyang*, *gangrou* (hard and soft), and Heavenly and earthly *qi*, which derives precisely from the *Book of Changes*, we may consider the possibility that it was on this basis that Xie He opted for such six-part classification.

Moreover, the six-part classification can also be found in the *Book of Poetry* (11th–7th centuries BCE), where the individual forms and contents of the poem are divided chronologically. From these examples, we can conclude that the number six symbolized a kind of cosmic and structural order. Of course, this is the subject of further consideration and research.

As we have seen from the analysis of the concept of *qiyun shengdong*, Xu Fuguan considers *qiyun* to be a traditional aesthetic concept that is older than its presentation in the work of Xie He. Although it is theoretically possible that Xie He actually encountered the Indian theory of painting and that he transferred Sadanga and its structure to the Chinese context, as

Victor H. Mair argues, but we must nevertheless be extremely careful with such claims, as they are ultimately unprovable and therefore suspect.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Xu Fuguan in his work *The Spirit of Chinese Art* also offers plenty of hard-to-refute evidence for the thesis that the foundations of aesthetics created by Xie Hei are Daoist in nature, and contain many elements of the ancient Chinese classics from the period of the autochthonous Chinese, namely the pre-Buddhist tradition.

All this once again confronts us also with the problem of translating *qiyun shengdong* into Indo-European languages.

As we have seen in the first part of the present chapter, Xu disagrees with the translation of *qiyun* in terms of rhythm or rhythmic. He found such translation in the works of prominent experts on East Asian art, for example in Stephen Wootton Bushel's work *Chinese Art*, written in 1904, Laurence Binyon's book entitled *Painting in the Far East* from 1908 and *The Meaning of Art* by Herbert Read, written in 1931. Xu is problematizing the translation of *yun* as rhythm or rhythmic itself, as well as the fact that the Western scholars transferred such translations to the whole concept of *qiyun shengdong*.

He emphasizes that in the work *Shishuo xinyu* (*A new account of the tales of the world*), the collection of dialogues and stories from the late Han Dynasty (25–220) to the North and South Dynasties (420–589), written by Liu Yiqing (403–444), *qi* and *yun* were not discussed together, but separately. From this work, Xu quotes a phrase where *qi* and *yun* are mentioned separately in the following phrase *fengqi yundu*, where the expression *fengqi* was one word that meant the atmosphere, while the other, namely *yundu*, meant degree or intensity of the *yun*. According to Xu, the painters and theorists clearly distinguished *qi* and *yun* from each other until Xie He (Xu 2002, 94).

Xu strongly rejects Herbert Read's and Laurence Binyon's position that *qiyun* can be felt as rhythm through harmonious arrangement of brushstrokes. He argues that this is exclusively a matter of human imagination, subjective feeling and metaphor, and that *qiyun* is not rhythmic in this sense. According to Xu, *qiyun* is also linked to the unified harmony of brushstrokes, but this alone cannot create *qiyun shengdong*. In addition, Xu points out that the difference between Western and Chinese painting is that Western painters focus upon what is in brushstrokes themselves, while Chinese painters pursue what is beyond them.

In Western painting, rhythm is a surplus that is expressed through the harmony of brushstrokes (or lines). Of course, Chinese painters also focus on brushstrokes, but the final goal of their creative process is that the painter forgets the lines, frees themselves from their limitations and expresses creativity and the freedom of their spirit. Therefore, according to Xu, *qiyun* (or *yun*) cannot be translated as rhythm or something rhythmical (Xu 2002, 98).

Given that, on the other hand, rhythm has been emphasized by Xu as something that relates exclusively to the sequence of sounds (Xu 2002, 99), we can also ask ourselves whether Xu actually understood the English term correctly, since it is one that far exceeds the connotation of time-steady and repeated sequences of sounds in music. Besides, Xu also argues that the sophisticated (refined) *yun* exists in nature (*ziran you yayun* 自然 有 雅韵). From this *yun* (and also *qiyun*) can in fact be understood as a rhythm that is reflected through repeated processes in nature. Nature (or Heavenly *Dao*) does have a rhythm of its own, which it follows and at the same time creates. If we transfer the meaning of the *yun* (which, of course, is not its only meaning) into the field of art and concrete artistic creations, it can actually be understood in this way.

If the aesthetic ideal of Chinese painting in the Wei Jin period and later, in the landscape painting of the Song Dynasty, is the transfer of spirit of nature in the most direct way (bearing in mind that Chinese painting is not about mimesis), this is also necessary for representations of rhythms that actually happen in nature. This rhythm is created through brushstrokes, or in the case of poetry through rhyme, rhythm and the sound of individual words. However, I can agree with Xu that rhythm or rhythmic is not an appropriate translation of the concept *yun* or *qiyun*, because it does not cover all its conceptual meanings, but at the same time, I consider that, given the aforementioned argument, rhythm is also one of its important and central connotations. But on the other hand, Xu's position that such a translation is problematic in the sense that it is something that only belongs to the sphere of human imagination seems out of place, because art and aesthetics are dealing precisely with human imagination, inspiration, human emotions, perception, and so on, where the inclusion and usage of metaphorical language is of immense importance.

Nevertheless, Xu's analysis and interpretation of the concept of *qiyun shengdong* clearly shows that it is actually very difficult, if not impossible, to translate it into any Indo-European language that could adequately express its complex meaning.

Of course, further research will demonstrate whether it would be most appropriate to adopt this term and use it in the original as *terminus technicus*,[30] or the scholars dealing with Chinese aesthetics will decide on some general and hopefully credible translation of this central concept in Chinese art and aesthetics.

[30] Like the adopted concepts in their original form like *qi*, *yin* and *yang*, *li*, *dao* for example.

However, on the other hand, it is of course important that Chinese concepts find as many authentic translations as possible in other languages. That is why I have decided to translate *qiyun shengdong* as the "harmonious dynamics of vitality," which in my opinion captures the essential meaning of this term relatively well. Despite its complex and multifaceted meaning, I have translated *yun* as harmony, which corresponds to its original or fundamental meaning. *Qi* is translated as vitality and *shengdong* as dynamics, since in Chinese cosmology binary poles or categories such as *yinyang*, *benmo*, *liqi* as well as *qiyun* are in a reciprocal and dynamic relationship.

In the present subsection, we have examined Xu Fuguan's theoretical contributions to the interpretation of Chinese aesthetics, which, despite the aforementioned methodological inconsistencies reflected in his comparative analysis with the Western ideological tradition, undoubtedly bring great enrichment to the understanding of the Chinese intellectual tradition. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, his research in this area was driven by the desire to shed light on the rich heritage of Chinese aesthetics and art, which faced some resistance and negation in Taiwan in the mid-20th century from Taiwanese intellectual and artistic circles inspired primarily by Western philosophical, literary, and artistic currents. Xu's effort to recognize the intellectual depth of Chinese tradition in the face of Western modernity, in which he primarily recognized the danger of decay and the devaluation of humanism, did not achieve its purpose at the time. In recent years, however, Xu's legacy has become increasingly relevant in both Taiwan and mainland China.

In the last chapter, we will examine Xu's comprehension and critique of Western modern art (especially abstract painting) and culture, which will help us understand his negative attitude and resistance to this type of art,

that is, as we shall see, based mostly on his generalization and ignorance of the historical and ideological backgrounds and contexts on which modern art and culture was established. It will also reveal Xu Fuguan's erroneous substantive and semantic interpretations of modern art and culture in general.

XU FUGUAN'S CRITIQUE OF TAIWANESE AND WESTERN MODERN ART AND AESTHETICS

Xu Fuguan views on modern art were published in the form of essays written mainly before he published his main work on Chinese art and aesthetics, *The Spirit of Chinese Art*, in 1966. It is important to mention that Xu admired traditional Chinese art and aesthetics immensely, a sentiment that compelled him to write at length about its history, development, and central aesthetic concepts. After he came across modern (or abstract) art while living in Japan, his compulsion to bring forward the richness and the profound value of classical Chinese art became even more pressing.

As Su San Lee (1998, 318) pointed out, Xu's inspiration for writing *The Spirit of Chinese Art* was born after he visited Tokyo in 1960, where on the one hand he was overwhelmed by Japan's progressive economic and technological development, but on the other he was horrified by the popularity of modern Western art, in which, as we will see, he not only saw the destruction of art itself, but even the destruction of humanity itself. The popularity of modern Western art was also spreading among Taiwanese intellectual and artistic circles, and Xu was afraid that in their search for a new identity the Taiwanese youth would unreflectively and uncritically adopt this newly emerged art, and completely do away with Chinese traditional culture and its artistic heritage. In his view, this new Taiwanese identity should be founded on a creative fusion of Chinese aesthetic tradition with certain elements deriving from modern Euro-American and Japanese cultures.

Xu's fear that Taiwanese artists would adopt the Western worldview was also linked to the fact that Taiwanese youth did not perceive themselves as members of a specific (i.e. Taiwanese) society. Besides, in the White Terror period most young Taiwanese people were apolitical. In the 1960s, the young artistic, literary, and intellectual circles found inspiration in Western literature and philosophy, in particular in the works of Kafka, Sartre, Camus, Nietzsche, James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf, along with others who became the true cultural heroes of the desperate Taiwanese youth. In aesthetic circles, students of art quickly adopted abstract forms of expression. The members of these circles perceived themselves as representatives of a modern elite that was stuck in a conservative and backward society. The sense of alienation, one of the central features of modernism, coincided in this regard with the mindset of young Taiwanese writers and painters (Lee 1998, 318).

According to Xu, the loss of cultural identity could lead to a completely uncritical assimilation of elements and values with which Taiwanese men and women had not traditionally been associated. This was to result in them becoming a hybrid type of people that would have a hard time being truly creative, since he considered placement within a particular culture to be a prerequisite for any true creativity. At the same time, this would naturally lead to Taiwan's inferior position within the global world, resulting in a complete loss of Chinese and East Asian precious cultural heritage. This fear was completely understandable given the specific socio-political and economic development of Taiwanese society at the time.

The model of modern Taiwanese painting (*xiandai hua*) in the 1950s and 1960s represented a revolt against traditional Chinese painting, which was encouraged and financially supported by the Guomindang government through the national language (*guoyu*), folk music, and the national theater.

Through cultural traditionalism, the new government sought to legitimize its authority, with modern Taiwanese painting posing a potential threat to its cultural and political hegemony (Kuo 2000, 84–85).

In 1957, the Chinese-born, modernist Taiwanese painters Liu Guosong (1932–) and Chuang Che (1934–) founded the Fifth Moon Painting Society, which also included other avant-garde artists and writers. In 1965, Liu published a book entitled *The Path of Chinese Modern Painting* (*Zhongguo xiandai hua de lu*), in which he addressed the aspirations, problems, and dilemmas of his generation, uprooted from their homeland, as they searched for a cultural and artistic identity in the postwar period (ibid., 92).

The book focuses on his efforts to expand the boundaries of Chinese painting while at the same time narrowing the gap between the Chinese and Western painting traditions. He approached the creation of modern Chinese painting through abstraction. In the work, he points out that the deliberate depiction of nature or landscape is a limitation of the artist's consciousness. Any restriction of consciousness is detrimental to artistic freedom, so abstraction is a way to distil the character, spirit, and power of nature (ibid., 95).

Such views drew strong opposition from the conservative camp. Liu was very well acquainted with Chinese art history, the theory of Chinese painting, and traditional aesthetics, as well as the theory of Western painting. He published many articles on the intersection of theory and practice in painting, the history of Chinese art, traditional and contemporary painting, and the wealth of traditional techniques available to revive Chinese painting. These articles were received as highly controversial in the conservative artistic circles of the time (ibid., 97).

In one article, he emphasized the importance of the brush and ink in Chinese painting, citing Shitao's theory of painting,[1] which maintained that traditional Chinese ink painting allowed for a high degree of subjectivity. For Liu, it was Shitao's theory that was consistent with the aesthetic orientation of Western contemporary painting, which emphasized the inseparability of the artist's creativity, subjectivity, and technique. He concluded that total reliance on traditional techniques was a dead end and that even the most respected technique in Chinese art history could be perfected or improved. As a result, he had to endure harsh criticism and

[1] Shitao is one of China's most famous painters and painting theorists. He belongs to the so-called individualist painters of the early Qing Dynasty, who resisted the techniques of traditional painting through free painting. Shitao's works stand in contrast to his contemporaries, namely the orthodox school, as he did not engage in imitating the techniques and content of the old masters, which was an important, necessary, and highly valued practice in the Chinese tradition. He had a deep respect for the works of the old masters, but he saw the old forms as a source of knowledge to be tapped into rather than a material from which the painter had to start in his creative work. While the orthodox painters focused on a style that was conservative, restrained, subtle, and intricate, individualist painters tended to create more vivid works of art that emphasized their individuality. Thus, Shitao says that "the past is a tool of knowledge. To transform oneself is to know this tool without becoming its servant. Knowledge closely associated with imitation cannot have breadth; therefore, an honest person borrows from the past only to create in the present. As for me, 'I exist for myself and to myself.'"

Shitao's painting is diverse in both style and content, in all genres of painting, including landscape, bird, flower, and portrait painting. However, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, Shitao's independent spirit is also reflected in his theoretical works, such as *Records of Painting*, in which he speaks of "rule without rule" and the theory of "one brushstroke."

personal attacks. Some critics even called him a traitor to Chinese painting and culture.

Liu vehemently argued that abstraction was the most appropriate approach for modern Chinese painting, and since abstraction already existed in the traditional Chinese painting, it would be best for modern Chinese painters to combine the abstraction expression with the Western painting (ibid.).

The most notorious confrontation he had with conservative critics about his views was with Xu Fuguan, who at the time compared the works of young Taiwanese modernist painters to surrealists: "Suppose the destructive work of modern surrealist artists succeeds; where will it lead people? They have no path to follow, so they can only open the door to the communist world" (Xu 1980, 215).

As mentioned above, Xu became acquainted with abstract painting in Kyoto Art Museum when he visited Japan in 1960. He described abstract art as an expression of "primitive, grotesque, and destructive forces, the result of a mechanistic and materialistic approach as a product of the scientific and capitalist development of the West, in which there is no room for human virtues and humanism" (Xu 1980, 263). After his return from Japan, Xu wrote extensively and published essays critical of Western modern art and culture. As a professor of Chinese classical literature, he was particularly concerned with the question of where abstract art should lead, in which he recognized two qualities: the denial of the image of nature, irrationalism, and the destruction of the past, which inevitably led to communism, destruction of art itself, and the destruction of humanity. In the next subchapter we will introduce Xu's assessment of modern or abstract art through the lens of five essays that were all published under the *Collected Essays of Xu Fuguan* in 1980. However, most of the essays in which he

elaborated upon this kind of art were written and published independently during the early 1960s. His writing makes it clear that Xu was not only a traditionalist and a conservative, but also that he quite severely neglected the importance of the origins of modern Western art, its ideational development, and its socio-political backgrounds. The five essays discussed below elaborate on different aspects of modern art and Western culture, leading from simple historical descriptions to scathing critiques of their "destructive" elements.

The critique of abstract painting

For Xu, the elementary function of traditional art lied in the representation and integration of ethics, morality, and the freedom of the human spirit. In this regard, Xu Fuguan's axiological aesthetics is rooted in a fusion of Confucian and Daoist philosophy. Although Xu deeply valued the Confucian notion of art as an educational tool for self-cultivation, and as the function of moulding and balancing human emotions that enabled humans to discover moral subjectivity, he nevertheless emphasized that the Zhuangzian attitude towards life is aesthetic in itself. Xu exposed Zhuangzi's aesthetic notions such as relativism, integral subjectivity, liberation of the Self through the methods of fasting of the mind (*xinzhai*), and sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang*), in order to show that the tendency of pursuing human liberation was something that existed in the Chinese philosophical and artistic tradition long before its emergence modern Western art.

Xu maintained that the reckless and mass acceptance of so-called Western art and culture by Taiwanese artists and intellectuals was problematic because it would cause them to neglect their own ideological tradition and culture. As a Confucian, Xu sought to revive the beauty, and

profundity of Daoist and Confucian philosophy and aesthetics. As a traditionalist and a great admirer of traditional Chinese art and literature, he found it difficult to accept contemporary art created by Taiwanese artists based on Western models. In his opinion, contemporary (abstract) art and especially avant-garde movements such as surrealism, Dadaism, and cubism, with their destruction of tradition and apparent disinterest in the idea of beauty, led to the decay of human culture as a whole. He believed that contemporary art was a reflection of a turbulent, grotesque, and gloomy primitive life that would lead people to the end of civilization (Xu 1980b, 215–217).

In his essay *The Problem of the Eternity of Modern Art* (*Xiandai yishu de yonghengxing wenti* 現代藝術的永恆性問題), written in 1965, Xu pointed out that the spiritual background and characteristics of modern art derive from despair regarding the present era. Because of such despair, individuals sought to cut off all their ties to society and nature and lock themselves into their unconsciousness, expressing thereby either their suppressed libido or their feelings of isolation and darkness. As regards the historical development of art itself and its pursuit of new forms, these are just secondary factors. Therefore, Xu pointed out that modern art is but a transitional phenomenon in the development of art. This kind of art can hence be seen as an expression of a historical trauma, but it can by no means imply the eternity of art[2] (Xu 1980d, 268).

In his essay *Inhumane Art and Literature* (*Feirende yishu yu wenxue* 非人的藝術與文學), written in 1961, Xu argues that abstraction departs from

[2] For Xu, the eternity of art is found in mutual relationship between the subject (artist) and the object (nature and society) (Xu 1980, 268, 271).

nature and the surreal departs from human life and society. Abstraction and surrealism emerged as a reaction to the horrors of the First World War WWI. Both movements completely disintegrated and crushed previous artistic traditions and ideas. Art was no longer beautiful; it was no longer alive and was not a part of the human spirit. For Xu, Surrealists initiated the idea that art is stupid, bad, and purposely insane. Through the whole chaos and darkness of a revolt against nature, they want to establish a new realm. Painters and poets who concentrated on the human spirit and life belonged to the past, but abstractionists and surrealists thought that art was a collection of sporadic, everyday objects. In their view, parrots and similar natural creatures were able to create art, and combs, pieces of paper, nails, and stamps could be taken as material for artistic creations. Xu claimed that the attitude of modern art and literature towards tradition represented a thorough revolution. He believed that his analysis clearly showed such art to be merely an expression of the infinite depression of the era within the century of nihilism. Because its main source was despair and terror with regard to reality, modern art would necessarily lead to the destruction of humanity. In this way, modern artists themselves would nail in the final coffin in their era's inevitable demise (Xu 1980a, 212–214).

In the same year, Xu published an essay entitled *Modern Art's Revolt against Nature* (*Xiandai yishu dui ziran de panni* 現代藝術對自然的叛逆). He began his critique already in the foreword, where he emphasized that people in ancient China saw themselves as arising from the same source as all the things around them. Hence, there existed a mutually harmonious and loving relation between human beings and nature. This idyllic foreword is followed by a severe assessment of the modern age and modern art, in which Xu Fuguan argued that the latter left both human beings and nature behind. Modern art actually ran against nature itself. In Xu's view, this was inhuman.

For him, abstract and surrealistic art were fundamentally the same, for through their forms they both express chaos and irrationalism, deforming thereby human beings, society, and nature. He believed that the ideological background of surrealistic art could be found in Freudian psychoanalysis, and the ideational background of abstract art in detachment and elimination of human feelings. Hence, in his view art that departs from nature also necessarily departs from people (Xu 1980e, 249–252).

Xu Fuguan declared that an artistic image without a depiction of nature was a symbol of destruction and denial of art itself. He did not promote realism and naturalism as the appropriate art forms, for art is neither completely subjective nor completely objective, but a transfer of the artist's spirit through an objective image. Nevertheless, he emphasized the importance of "depicting nature" in order to limit the tendency towards excessive expression of individuality in modern art. He believed that nature had been the main theme of both traditional Chinese and Western art since the Renaissance (ibid.).

For Xu, nature could not be equated with the objective world as such, which includes both natural objects and objects created by man. Instead, it was a wild, untamed landscape where one was liberated from social pressures, and thus able to feel communion with all creatures (Lee 1998, 331).

In an essay entitled *The Signal of Dadaist Era* (*Dadazhuyi de shidai xinhao* 達達主義的時代信號) written in the same year, Xu discussed the Dadaist art movement and quoted from the *Dada Manifesto* the movement's main goal and content, emphasizing its negation and revolt against art as such, and against society, ethics, and law. He further explained his view on the movement and defined it as a form of destructive mischief that reflected the background of modern circumstances but was unable to bear any fruit.

He claimed that even though this movement's origin was connected to the revolt of spirit and individual temperament, the most important feature that led to it was actually the fact that, since the Renaissance, European thought had been defined by the contradiction between society and culture on the one hand, and by the opposition between mechanistic civilization and humanism on the other. This phenomenon became even more obvious after WWI, when people felt that (Western) civilization was moving straight to its own suicide.

He argued that people had lost their way out of this sense of terror, destabilization, and depression. Hence, weak-willed people saw no other way out than through the destruction of reality and the history from which it emerged. Xu held that Freudian psychoanalysis and the natural sciences encircled this callous atmosphere and encouraged these tendencies. Further in the text, Xu argued that Dadaism was the expansion of surrealism and abstractionism, while Sartre's existentialism as well as logical positivism were in their essence a kind of profound Dadaism. For Xu, the spirit of Dadaism was the inevitable emergence of the spirit of Western civilization in the present time. He concluded this essay with the rhetorical question: "Where is the present era actually leading us?" (Xu 1980b, 241–244).

In the essay *The Goal of Modern Art* (*Xiandai yishu de guiqu* 現代藝術的歸趨) written in 1961, Xu similarly wonders where the abstract art of modern times will lead to. He believed that in the eyes of modern artists anyone asking that question was considered ignorant, lacking knowledge about true art, or even as someone who wanted to destroy it. Xu argued that the crucial aim of modern art was to be found in the image of destruction; for modern artists, the true artistic image should arise from objective nature, and therefore their so-called abstraction completely eradicates the artistic images of nature. Xu's view was that the image was the life of art, so he

wondered why modern artists wanted to destroy it. Although artistic images come from nature, the depictions themselves actually convey the artists' emotions and individuality. They therefore represent the crystallization of the fusion of object and subject. For Xu, the image of an artwork was not imitation, but rather a sort of creation. The creation of art is unlimited like the universe, but modern art, which uses abstraction to destroy the image, disregards the fusion of new elements with the old tradition, and eliminates the significance of art. The second characteristic of modern art for Xu was its anti-rationalism. It did not recognize the laws of science and the natural order, and therefore it opposed morality and culture. Modern artists excavate a hidden consciousness of chaos and darkness. They consider reason as hypocritical and not as a part of the human character, and they cannot recognize the value system inherent in tradition and in social reality. Instead, they emphasize the need to overthrow tradition and humanism. In this aspect, they can be compared to communist materialism. The only difference between them lies in the fact that the communists still recognize objective laws and aim to construct a bright new future, whereas modern artists are a profoundly negative and chaotic group of people. They refuse the past and the future, and are stuck in gloomy darkness. If this destructive goal of modern surrealistic art were to be achieved, where would it actually lead people to? He concludes the essay with the statement: "They don't have anywhere to go and will only open up a path for communism" (Xu 1980c, 215–217).

This essay gained Xu quite a number of opponents in art circles, since he did not consider the fact that, under the White Terror in Taiwan, any denotation of communist tendencies was severely punished. Furthermore, he was not aware that there were quite a few young painters in Taiwan who were experimenting with abstract expressionism. The young painter Liu

Gongsong[3] responded harshly to Xu's essay and this was published in his book *The Path of Chinese Modern Painting* (*Zhongguo xiandaihua de lu* 中國現代畫的路) in 1965. Liu succeeded in convincing the public of the importance of modern art, and of the fact that it was "resistant" to communist manipulations, since it symbolized the individualistic creativity of the so-called free world (Lee 1998, 313).

In this essay, Liu Guosong also responded to Xu's attitude to Dadaism and showed that Xu most obviously did not know the differences between particular currents of Western art, since he often mixed up or equated Dadaism with surrealism and abstractionism. Besides, the slaughter of WWI led the Dadaist movement to a derogative scepticism towards art and all of Western culture; in contrast, surrealists and abstractionists still sought to develop new forms of art in order to create an artistic world that could coincide with the natural world. Liu Guosong argued that Xu misinterpreted Japanese sources on abstract Western painting, Dadaism and other art movements, and that Xu was incapable of understanding abstract paintings (ibid.). Nevertheless, Liu admitted that Xu correctly understood Dadaism as an artistic direction that mocks aesthetics, aesthetic taste, and meaning, and that indulges primarily in the expression of the human sub- and unconsciousness (Liu 1965, 157–176).

It is important to see that, although Xu recognized the fundamental issues brought about by Dadaism, as Liu pointed out, he completely misunderstood the actual reasons for its intervention in Western society. The Dadaist negation of the abovementioned features lies precisely in their

[3] Liu Guosong was the first and most important representative of modernist and abstract Chinese painting in Taiwan, and also the leading figure in Taiwan's avant-garde circles.

critique of the socio-political abolishment of the value of human beings, humaneness, and humanistic values. The existence and survival of art in such a world was for them impossible.

For Xu, then, the central problem of modern art was not its representation through external form, but the artists' own view of nature, society, and history. Young Taiwanese artists assumed precisely this idea as the basis of their adoption of modern Western art. However, Xu expected them to have not only a sense of the free spirit found in Daoist landscape depictions, but also a Confucian sense of social responsibility. However, young Taiwanese artists were mostly committed to the art's complete autonomy, so Xu's expectations seemed completely irrelevant for contemporary times.

Political implications of modern art

In addition to the link between communism and modern art, Xu despised logical empiricism for its implicit negation of humanity, existentialism for its emphasis on the unconscious as an expression of authentic human existence, and "stream-of-consciousness" in literature (though it reveals human psychology to some degree) for its irrationality and antisocial orientation (Lee 1998, 340).

He wanted to re-emphasize the value of the Confucian belief in human nature or in the innate qualities of human beings. This belief is closely related to religion, literature, art, customs and rituals, and the general outlook on life. Xu contended that the philosophy of humanness (*renxing*) was both the starting and end point for understanding the Chinese nation and culture. His criticism of the "syndromes" of Western culture, namely the original sin in Christianity, the theory of class struggle in Marxism, and the effect of the chaotic unconscious in modern aesthetics was based on his belief in the Confucian position of human goodness, rationality, and

humanism, which modern culture with the above-mentioned "syndromes" completely denies.

According to Xu, this resulted from the spread of the savage primitive impulse of modern scientific and capitalist progress in the amoral and excessively rationalistic Western culture. Later, he accepted and took into account the efforts of modern artists and philosophers to solve the crisis of the "dehumanization" of modern mechanized civilization by releasing human irrational impulses. Despite a more forgiving and tolerant understanding of their intentions, however, he continued to doubt the possibility of successful conversion to the adoption of Western civilization. Xu held that Western culture was strong in cognitive reason but weak in moral reason. In his view, in order to dissolve excessive rationalism, Westerners should transform their lives with the help of moral reason, not libido (ibid., 343). He pointed out that the main problem was the different and even contradictory understanding of nature and human character in Western and Chinese cultures respectively, taking into account that the perception of the relationship between nature and man had changed in Europe since the Renaissance.

The scientific progress of the West, which according to Xu was based on an excessive emphasis on reason, gradually led to the collapse of traditional Western values, resulting in a lack of love. He was particularly disturbed by Freud's analysis of the human unconscious and his insights into literature, art, religion, anthropology, pedagogy, sociology, and more.

He saw the central problem with Freud's theory in his analysis of love between children and parents, which for Xu, as we mentioned in the subchapter on filial piety, was the source of love between people, i.e., humaneness (*ren*). For Xu, Freud's concept of love becomes the source of eroticism. As Xu saw it, though, Confucianism never rejected emotions and

desires as some religions do, but believed that conscience was more deeply rooted in people than their sexual desires, and that autonomous people were therefore able to reconcile conflicts between their conscience and emotions or desires. In contrast, according to him, modern artists were imbued with Freud's theory of the unconscious, led by eros, which prevents people's moral conscience from being the driving force in human life. According to Xu, modern artists could originally attempt to mitigate the instrumental rationality of modern civilization, but in reality they had little difficulty influencing the ethos of that rationality and thus of science. In doing so, he believed, they actually threatened moral reason and its role in human life (ibid., 346).

In his essay "Posthistorical Man in the Realm of Science" (*Kexue wangguo de houshiren*), Xu writes that the rise of modernists in the West resulted from an overemphasis on science and rationality. Such an overemphasis was dangerous and problematic for him precisely because what modern China supposedly needs is precisely the development of material civilization, which should be based on such scientific rationality and such a "healthy" style of art and literature that would be harmonious not only with science as such but also with democracy (ibid.). The essay concludes with the thought that a true poet strives to explore and express both himself and the times in which he finds himself. If an existing poetic form hinders him in what he wants to express, he will strive to find a new form that will form an appropriate bridge between the individual and society (ibid.).

Xu thus identifies the modern crisis of morality as stemming from an excessive focus on science and rationality. But it should be reiterated that Xu was not opposed to science as such, but sought a deeper and broader

consideration of its limitations, given that man must be the one to have dominion over science and not vice versa.

As for art, on the one hand, he rejected the romantic idea that the artist's function was to enlighten society, and on the other hand, he did not even agree with the modernist idea of establishing art's autonomy. He believed that Confucianism and Daoism could serve as a cure for the negative effects of modernity in moral and aesthetic terms, in contrast to Western modern art, which provides its audience with despairing, cruel, and chaotic emotions.

Xu Fuguan's antipathy towards modern Western art was based on his belief that it radically opposed the moral consciousness of human nature and any form of civilized life. Modern art eliminated human reason and therefore brought out the manifestation of the obscure and absurd. He saw contemporary artists as not recognizing the rationality of human nature, nor the system of values, both of which are the foundations of any tradition, reality, and culture as such. They purposefully eliminate all these basic features of humanity.

Xu Fuguan's rejection of modern abstract art is based on his view that it denied the organic and interdependent connection between the individual, society, and culture, which results in a feeling of alienation, solitude, and sadness. Therefore, for Xu, the problem of modern Western culture and art is that they are antisocial and anti-cultural (Huang 2018, 142–144). According to Huang (ibid.), what Xu Fuguan emphasized in his opposition to modern art was the "individualist mentality" presumably existing in modern Western art and culture. For Xu, whoever manifests themselves in contemporary Western art and culture always exists outside of cultural, traditional, interpersonal, and social contexts. Among other issues, this assumption is doubtless also reflected in Xu's ethical thought.

Critique of Xu's critique

From Xu's critique of Western abstract art and aesthetics, we have seen that in his view they are the product of a strict individualism, a technocratic materialism, and a rebellion against tradition and traditional values.

To a certain extent, Xu's argument is certainly valid, but in my opinion it is also rather generalizing. Firstly, it bypasses the socio-political context in which abstract art emerged because it was the specific situation in which Europe found itself from the first to the end of the World War II that fuelled the emergence of resistance to the existing socio-political structures. through abstract art and literary creation. Again, it is interesting in this section that Xu ignores this context in favor of his bias against Western culture, for in his analysis and interpretation of classical Confucianism he constantly emphasizes the socio-political context that influenced the adaptations of the Confucian system to autocratic tendencies. Daoism, and Zhuangzi's philosophy of the free individual in particular, exemplifies rebellion against existing socio-political structures, where we can draw parallels with the rise of abstract art and 20th century Western philosophy. We can also draw parallels with the rise of 20th century Western philosophy. This does not stem from the defense of individualism, materialism, and capitalism, but on the contrary from the rebellion and criticism of these prevailing tendencies.

On the other hand, Xu's opposition to Taiwanese abstract painting seems rather problematic, as we have seen from the perspective of modern Taiwanese painters, perceived abstract painting as an inherent part of traditional Chinese painting and aesthetics, rather than as a new, potentially threatening trend adopted from the West.

As we have seen above, it was through the inspiration of Western abstract painting that Taiwanese painters rediscovered the value and depth of their own aesthetic tradition. The attempt to synthesise with Western painting, on the other hand, represented for them a new path of Chinese painting's development in the modern era.[4]

The synthesis of traditional Chinese painting with Western painting is also very clear, for example, in the works of the modern, internationally renowned Taiwanese painter Chen Qikuan (1921–2007), who is regarded as a pioneer of the transfer of traditional Chinese painting into modernity. Chen, who had lived and worked in Taiwan since 1957, revealed in his works an appreciation of tradition with a modern Chinese approach to painting. Traditional Chinese elements are reflected in his brush and ink technique, aesthetics in the balance between fullness and emptiness, manifesting the successfully implemented aesthetic concept of *qiyun shengdong* and the concept of transmitting the spirit (*chuanshen*) into a work of art. The fusion of the two traditions is also visible in the traditional Chinese vertical landscape revealed before us on the scroll and the calligraphic hint of his brush. At the same time, his work also resonates with Pollock's abstract expressionist, avant-garde painting (Kuo 2000, 131). His creative transformation of traditional elements into distinctly modern works has contributed significantly to the development of the modernist sensibility in contemporary Chinese painting.

[4] We must not forget that important Western modernists and painters were inspired by classical Chinese and Japanese painting, in which they saw refined ways of expressing spiritual dialectics, emptiness, and fullness (and not just painting the nature), leading to new trends in the development of Western painting and aesthetics in general.

From this, it is clear that Xu's opposition to modern abstract art and other avant-garde art movements stems primarily from his conservatism and a priori prejudices against modern art. As we have seen, the Taiwanese avant-garde was inspired by Western modern art, but at the same time it did not reject its own cultural heritage; on the contrary, it sought to upgrade Chinese aesthetic tradition.

Conclusion

The book has addressed Xu Fuguan's fundamental theoretical contributions to the analysis and interpretation of the Chinese intellectual tradition, which continue to have a decisive influence on the development of modern Chinese theory of aesthetics. His central contributions are reflected in specific interpretations of original Confucianism and traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Xu's methodology of researching the Chinese ideational tradition reveals his innovative and creative approach to interpreting the key Confucian concepts that form the essence of traditional Chinese philosophy. Applying his own hermeneutic method and structural holism, he showed that from the very beginning of the Chinese ideational tradition there has been a tendency toward a dynamic correlation between human beings, society, and nature or reality, which mutually influence and depend on each other through socio-historical processes. This reveals the fundamental character of Chinese philosophy, reflected in its holistic onto-epistemological and axiological character.

The specificity of Xu's approach to the study, analysis, and interpretation of Chinese ideational tradition was also strongly influenced by his knowledge of China's past and modern political history. Unlike other representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucianism, the deep influence of Marxist philosophy can be seen in Xu's analyses, reflected in his emphasis on the relevance of socio-political realities and their historical processes to ideational production.

Xu's analysis and interpretation of the concept of concerned consciousness are certainly among his greatest contributions to the understanding of ancient Chinese ideational history. This also answers the question of why a monotheistic religion was never established in China, despite the fact that the means of production and relations were at such a level that this reversal occurred in other highly developed civilizations during the same historical period. Despite the fact that Xu was in all likelihood unfamiliar with Karl Jaspers's theory of the axial age, it seems as though Xu wanted to address his generalizing points regarding China's ideational development. Jaspers' work, however, largely influenced Euro-American discourses on the sociology of religion and psychology.

The idea of concerned consciousness, which led the Chinese tradition from the belief in anthropomorphic deities directly to the development of ethics and the moral self, is reflected, among other things, in axiological aesthetics. Traditional Chinese aesthetics is concerned not only with the question of what is beautiful (and good) in art, but above all with the question of human perception and placement in the world, and of interpersonal relations.

According to Xu Fuguan, the axiological character of Chinese aesthetics is based on Confucian ethics, while the Daoist fusion of man and nature signifies an aesthetic way of life. This aesthetic existence is based on the people's liberation from their own limitations in the form of utilitarian tendencies, and from the emotional and cognitive burdens that prevent them from perceiving the absolute oneness with the world within themselves. The methods of the heart-mind's fasting and of sitting in forgetfulness that Zhuangzi indicates in his philosophy represent for Xu the path to absolute freedom, which is at the same time the basis for human creation of works of art, as well as the highest or aesthetic mode of human existence.

In this sense, in his work *The Spirit of Chinese Art*, Xu Fuguan intended to illuminate the ideational and substantive parallels or similarities between Chinese and Western aesthetics and philosophy, which mainly concern issues of human freedom and creativity. His comparative study of the two ideational systems, however, is overly generalising, since Xu did not properly apply his hermeneutic method, which he consistently used in analysing and interpreting Chinese ideational tradition, to the analysis of Western ideational discourses. Thus, through the analysis of his work, we can see that he removes Western concepts from the context of the ideational history and does not sufficiently justify their inclusion in the comparison. Therefore, in my opinion, such a superficial comparative study cannot be regarded as a successful attempt to establish the synthesis of Western and Chinese ideational traditions pursued by Modern Confucians.

In this critique, of course, I take into account Xu's tendency to acknowledge the depths and dimensions of the Chinese aesthetic tradition among young Taiwanese intellectuals and artists, but, despite this positive intention, I believe it is at least partly a form of reversed Orientalism. This is also reflected in his critique of Western abstract art and the Taiwanese avant-garde.

Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings of Xu's comparative study of Western and Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, his contributions are nonetheless very important. This importance is clearly reflected in his innovative methodology of analyzing and interpreting the Chinese ideational tradition, in which he illuminates its contents through careful and excellent philological research, such as the study of the concept of concerned consciousness, the unity of the body and heart-mind, and the concept of *qiyun shengdong* and its complex and multidimensional meaning within Chinese axiological aesthetics.

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