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**SPECIAL ISSUE: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN SINIC
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY**

Guest editor of the special issue
Téa Sernelj

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***SPECIAL ISSUE:
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN
SINIC INTELLECTUAL HISTORY***

Editor's Foreword

Introduction

Téa SERNELJ

Guest editor

Social transformations in Sinic intellectual history reveal a complex interaction among evolving cultural, philosophical, and artistic ideas and socio-political shifts. The Sinic region, encompassing areas in East and Southeast Asia influenced by Chinese script and culture—particularly Confucianism and various forms of Chinese Buddhism—includes China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, parts of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other neighbouring countries. The term “Sinic”, originating from the Latin word for China, highlights the shared cultural and linguistic heritage across these regions (Rošker 2022, 81). This history illustrates how shifts in intellectual thought have continually influenced and been shaped by changes in societal structures and governance.

From the ancient moral prescriptions of Confucianism shaping the imperial bureaucracy, to the challenges posed by Legalist thought during the Warring States period, these intellectual movements have profoundly influenced governance and societal norms. In modern times, the import of Western philosophies and Marxism sparked significant shifts, leading to revolutionary changes in the 20th century, which redefined identity, governance, and the role of the individual in society (Ambrosio 2017, 113). This historical continuum showcases how intellectual debates and ideological shifts are pivotal in driving social change in Sinic contexts.

The most recent large-scale transformation in the Sinic region began with the process of modernization, which was, to a significant extent, “imported” from Europe, and often compelled by economic pressures (Sigurðsson 2014, 25). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, this shift precipitated profound changes in both the cultural and political landscapes of the region.

The traditional core state ideology of Confucianism, which had been the foundation of East Asian societies for centuries (Yu, Tao and Ivanhoe 2010; Rosemont and Ames 2016), was found to be inadequate for the needs of modern society (Bell 2010). Several progressive political movements at the threshold of the 20th century marked a significant shift in this ideology, as they criticized traditional ideologies for their inflexibility and harmful social effects while also opposing Western imperialism (Rošker 2017, 46). These movements helped shape the cultural and political landscape of the Sinic region, paving the way for the modernization of

East Asian societies. Initially, the modern Sinic intellectuals aimed to renovate the outdated cultural and political systems by incorporating elements of Western thought. However, after World War I and the Great Depression, they re-evaluated their previous blind admiration of Europe and reconsidered their approach to modernization. This re-evaluation led to a reassessment of the value of traditional cultural practices and the development of new ideologies in the Sinic region. The crisis of European political and philosophical theories also influenced intellectuals, causing a decrease in their enthusiasm for progressive European thought and making many question their previous beliefs. In the face of such an impasse, the revival of traditional Sinic philosophical, cultural and political thought gradually gained significance among such individuals.

However, it is important to recognize that this period of ideological transformation was not the first nor the most profound change the region had encountered. Historically, the Sinic area underwent several significant shifts that shaped its cultural and philosophical landscape, some of which predated and arguably had a deeper impact than the modern engagements with Western ideologies.

One of the most pivotal of these shifts was the arrival and subsequent adoption of Buddhism. This new religion brought with it profound philosophical doctrines that challenged and eventually blended with the existing Confucian and Daoist traditions. The integration of Buddhist concepts such as *karma*, *samsara*, and *nirvana* introduced new dimensions to Sinic thought, leading to enriched spiritual and ethical discussions. These discussions catalyzed the development of distinct schools of thought and religious practices that uniquely synthesized with local traditions, profoundly influencing the societal norms and intellectual debates of the time. Another significant period of transformation within the Sinic intellectual tradition occurred during the Wei and Jin dynasties. The Song and Ming dynasties saw the emergence of Neo-Confucianism, a revitalization of Confucian thought that integrated Buddhist and Daoist insights.

The adaptation and adoption of Chinese philosophical thought by other East Asian regions represent a significant chapter in the intellectual history of the area (Huang 2005). As Chinese culture and philosophy spread across East and Southeast Asia, notably to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, it sparked a series of transformations in each receiving culture, leading to unique interpretations and innovations that both preserved and altered the original discourses in political theory, literature, philosophy and arts. On the other hand, this process was not merely a one-way transfer of ideas, but a complex interplay of assimilation, adaptation, and reinvention.

These periods of significant philosophical development and cultural exchange within the Sinic region highlight the dynamic nature of its intellectual history.

They illustrate that the region's engagement with internal and external philosophical influences has been a long and complex process, deeply woven into the fabric of its cultural identity. Each era of transformation contributed layers to the rich tapestry of Sinic thought, demonstrating a resilient adaptability that continues to influence contemporary discussions on cultural and intellectual modernization. All of these intellectual shifts have been tightly connected to the modifications in the relation between individual and society, which is the focus of this special issue of the journal *Asian Studies* titled "Social Transformations in Sinic Intellectual History".

This publication explores the intricate relationship between the individual and the state—a theme that resonates deeply through the annals of Asian thought. This relationship, characterized by an evolving dialogue between personal autonomy and state authority, serves as the backdrop to the discussions presented in this issue. Each paper contributes to a broader understanding of how individuals have negotiated their space within the structures imposed by state ideologies, influencing and reshaping them in turn.

In today's world, the relevance of East Asian intellectual traditions, particularly Confucianism, remains profound (Elstein 2015, 12). Confucian philosophy, with its emphasis on ethics, governance, and social harmony, offers valuable insights into the balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities. As societies globally face challenges related to governance, social justice, and cultural integration, the philosophical tenets of Confucianism provide a framework for addressing these issues in a manner that promotes societal welfare and ethical governance.

This issue is organized into four thematic sections, each highlighting different facets of Sinic intellectual history:

The first section deals with "Ethics and Politics", and it opens with Lee Oh Ryun's exploration of Jia Yi's philosophy during the early Han dynasty, focusing on his concept of the sages and their role in governance. This paper is juxtaposed with Ferenc Takó's analysis of Maruyama Masao's post-war interpretation of the Japanese family-state, where familial structures influence and reflect broader nationalistic ideologies. Together, these two studies question the ethical foundations of political structures and their implications on governance and societal norms.

The second section, titled "Religion and Ideology", investigates the transformative ideological landscapes of the Mekong River Delta in the first paper, written by Nguyen Tho Ngoc, Nguyen Thanh Phong, and Nguyen Trung Hieu. Their research highlights the resilience of local religious sects against colonial and dy-

nastic oppression. Živa Petrovčič's study on the Daoist scripture during the Eastern Jin dynasty further examines how religious texts responded to social crises, providing a lens to view the adaptive strategies of spiritual communities during turbulent times.

The next section explores transformations of East Asian traditions through the lens of "Literature and Art": Téa Sernelj's examination of the role of the individual in early medieval Chinese art and philosophy uncovers the shifting perceptions of the artist and philosopher in the Chinese society of the time. Yuan Gao's discussion on the transnational journey of Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* across East Asia illustrates the fluidity of cultural and artistic boundaries, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity.

The fourth and final section is titled "Intellectual History and the Method of Sublation". It investigates different possibilities of applying this method through the lens of two distinct examples of transcultural philosophy and theology. Andrew Ka Pok Tam's paper on Zia Nai-zin's Christian reinterpretation of Confucian concepts challenges traditional philosophical boundaries, proposing a syncretic approach to understanding the divine and the human. Jana S. Rošker's exploration of Confucian ethics through the lens of sublation discusses the dynamic interaction between individual agency and societal expectations, aiming to build a transcultural planetary ethics that resonates across different humanistic traditions.

The contributions to this special issue not only deepen our understanding of historical and philosophical perspectives, but also bridge past insights with contemporary issues. From exploring the foundational texts and philosophical debates of ancient times to addressing the modern reinterpretations and challenges, this issue invites readers to reflect on the ongoing evolution of the relationship between the individual and the state. Through a diverse array of approaches and topics, this collection underscores the rich intellectual heritage of Asia and its relevance to global discussions on social transformation and individual agency in the face of state power.

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SPECIAL ISSUE:
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Ethics and Politics

Jia Yi's 賈誼 Research on the Theory of the Sages

LEE Oh-Ryun*

Abstract

Jia Yi was a Confucian scholar active during the early Han dynasty, whose philosophy appears in compressed form in his investigation of the concept of *shengren*. He exhibits the qualities of Confucianism in his analysis of the fall of the Qin dynasty while also clearly showing the political ideals that he was pursuing in his essay on the sages. First, Jia Yi considers people able to learn the *Dao* and make appropriate use of it to be sages, and believes that the sages' outstanding abilities were rooted in their study of the *Dao*. In his discussion of the sages Jia Yi inherits the view of previous Confucian scholars, while also deepening it from an original perspective. In addition, he argues that the sages are able to achieve *minbenzhuyi* and keep the people as the centre of their attention, not contradicting the people's sentiment.

Keywords: *shengren* 聖人 (the sages), Jia Yi 賈誼, *Xin Shu* 新書 (New Writings), *jiaohua* 教化 (moral edification), *minbenzhuyi* 民本主義 (people-oriented thought)

Jia Yijeva 賈誼 raziskava o teoriji modrecev

Izvleček

Jia Yi je bil konfucijanski učenjak, dejaven v zgodnji dinastiji Han; njegova filozofija se v strnjeni obliki izraža v raziskavi koncepta modreca (*shengren*). V analizi padca dinastije Qin predstavi lastnosti konfucijanstva, hkrati pa jasno prikaže politične ideale, ki jih je zasledoval v eseju o modrecih. Jia Yi meni, da so modreci tisti ljudje, ki se naučijo, kaj je Dao, in ga ustrezno uporabljajo, ter verjame, da so izjemne sposobnosti modrecev zakoreninjene prav v njihovem proučevanju Daota. V svoji razpravi o modrecih prevzema pogled predhodnih konfucijanskih učenjakov, hkrati pa ga pogloblja z izvirne perspektive. Poleg tega trdi, da so modreci sposobni doseči *minbenzhuyi* in ohraniti ljudi v središču svoje pozornosti, ne da bi bili v protislovju z njihovim mišljenjem.

Ključne besede: modrec (*shengren* 聖人), Jia Yi 賈誼, *Xin Shu* 新書 (Novi zapisi), *jiaohua* 教化 (moralna vzgoja), *minbenzhuyi* 民本主義 (ideja osredotočenosti na ljudi)

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Introduction

Jia Yi 賈誼 was a Confucian scholar who was active during the early Han dynasty. *Shiji: Qu Yuan Jia Sheng Liezhuan* 史記: 屈原賈生列傳 (*Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of Qu Yuan and Jia Sheng*) includes the following about him:

Emperor Xiaowen (*Xiao wendi* 孝文帝) called upon Jia Sheng 賈生 [Jia Yi] and made him a court academician. At this time, Jia Sheng was the youngest to hold this position, at about 20 years old. Every time policy documents or orders were discussed, Jia Sheng could answer all issues, and even when other academicians were unable to respond he would say exactly what the others would have liked to say. Others considered their abilities to be less than Jia Sheng's. Emperor Xiaowen was happy with Jia Sheng and promoted him to *taizhong dafu* 太中大夫 (the imperial adviser in charge of public discussion of the government) within a year. [...] Jia Sheng died after weeping for more than a year, criticizing himself for not having done his job properly as an adviser. Jia Sheng was 33 years old when he died. (*Shiji* 1959, 2491–92, 2503)

Although he did not live a long life, Jia Yi made contributions to the political stability of the country through the policies he proposed. Of course, his political ideals were never achieved in reality, but later Confucian scholars fully agreed with his views, as can be confirmed by Liu Xiang's 劉向 (ca. 77–6 BCE) judgment: "Even the old Yi Yin 伊尹 or Guan Zhong 管仲 cannot surpass [Jia Yi] because he was extremely good at what he considered, and he mastered the condition of the country. If he had been appointed at the right time, his services and edification would have been great" (*Hanshu* 1962, 2265).

Jia Yi's thinking on all subjects was rooted in his systematic philosophy. In his *Xinshu* 新書 (*New Writings*), he expressed his philosophy without restraint; the scope of his essays covers metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. In particular, Jia Yi's *Xinshu* takes a striking approach to a certain concept, that of the *shengren* 聖人 (the sages), recognized in Chinese philosophy as people with the ideal characters. Jia Yi integrates a statement of his philosophy into his consideration of the sages, in his portrayal of which he clearly presents his understanding of the world and his social goals. As such, Jia Yi's essays on the sages are key both to his system of thought and the political ideals that he pursued.

Jia Yi differentiates himself from previous Confucian scholars in his discussion of the sages. Confucianism considers a sage to be someone who completely exhibits the aspects of *neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 (inner sageliness and outer kingli-

ness). Jia Yi follows this tradition, asserting that a sage has his status based on his *neisheng waiwang*.¹ He then develops the implications of the status of a sage by expounding on the nature of the sages from an original perspective without being entirely beholden to that of previous Confucian scholars. His presentation of the sages shows a more sophisticated Confucianism, developed through his philosophy. Taking another look at Jia Yi's views on the sages will thus have considerable academic value in terms of understanding how the later assessment of Confucianism's sages unfolded.

This paper analyses Jia Yi's perspective on the sages and examines its characteristics. Because Jia Yi's philosophy appears in compressed form in his essays on the sages, a study of his unique views on the sages can be a means of clarifying the world that Jia Yi sought to bring about. Such a study may prove of considerable value in exploring the worldview and political ideals of Confucian scholars during the Han dynasty.

The Importance of Confucianism through the Rise and Fall of the Qin Dynasty

For intellectuals in the early Han dynasty, studying the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty was a necessary task. They desired to identify a moral from that period, as it was relatively near to them in time and could contain lessons from its failures for the young Han dynasty to learn from, and so increase its stability. They thus focused on finding a causal relationship between the Qin dynasty's ability to unify the whole country over a short period of time and its failure to maintain this unification in the long term, as well as its eventual collapse. Jia Yi inevitably participated in these discussions with his contemporaries and developed his own views on the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty. He took a relatively objective position in his analysis of the dynasty's vulnerabilities in spite of its success in unifying China, and drew lessons for the Han regarding the right path to take to avoid the fate of the Qin. As recounted in the *Sinseo* 新書:

Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 [259–210 BCE] continued the work that the kings of the previous six dynasties could not finish and wielded a long whip, ruling the people by force. He annexed the Eastern Zhou and the

1 Regarding the school to which Jia Yi belonged, the claims consist mostly of Fajia 法家 (the Legalist School), the Confucian School, the Daoist School, and Zonghengjia 縱橫家 (the Diplomatic School). See Wang (1992, 322–25). However, when viewed in regard to his response to real social problems using basic principles of Confucianism as a basis, he can be sufficiently classified as a Confucian scholar. See Xu Kangsheng, Nie Baoping and Nie Qing (2011, 48).

Western Zhou, destroyed the *zhuhou* 諸侯 [feudal lords], took the emperor's throne, brought the whole country under his rule through harsh and punitive actions, and made people all over the world tremble under his grandeur. The kingdom of Qin was never weak, and the land of Yongshou 雍州 and the fortresses of Yaoshan 峽山 and Hanguguan 函谷關 remained intact. The status of Chen She 陳涉 [Chen Sheng 陳勝] did not rise higher than those of the kings of Qi 齊, Chu 楚, Yan 燕, Zhao 趙, Han 韓, Wei 魏, Song 宋, Wei 衛, and Zhongshan 中山, and weapons such as hoes, staves, and pikestaffs could not compete with sharp hooks or long spears. The band of prisoners that Chen She had mustered was not large enough to face the armies of the nine countries, and it also fell short of those forces in resourcefulness, thought, command, and skill. However, the relative success and failure of the two changed, and their accomplishments developed contrary results. What was the reason for this? A comparison of the size and power of Chen She with those of the feudal lords in Shandong 山東 shows that the two were not the same level. However, the Qin dynasty could muster 10,000 war chariots in a confined area, and it had been more than 100 years since the remaining eight provinces became able to pay their respects to the court. The Qin dynasty made the whole world the monarch's own house and made Yaoshan and Hanguguan into the walls of his palace. However, when one ordinary man launched a rebellion the country collapsed, and the emperor died at the hands of the rebels and became the laughingstock of the world – why? It was because the politics of *renyi* 仁義 [benevolence and righteousness] were not firmly established, and the circumstances dictating when to attack the world and when to protect the world changed. (Jiayiji 1976, 2–3)

Jia Yi believed that the Qin dynasty was able to unify the world through its coercive treatment of the people through harsh punishment. However, shortly after the reunification of the Qin, the peasant uprising led by Chen She shook the nation and eventually led to the rise and unification of the Han dynasty. According to Jia Yi, analysis, the Qin dynasty did not collapse due to anything physical, such as national power or geographical location, but because of defects in the governing system. Jia Yi noted that while the peasant uprising began at a humble level and at a small scale, it nevertheless caused the Qin to suffer greatly, forcing the Qin dynasty down the path of ruin. On this view, the Qin dynasty failed to engage in Confucian politics with *renyi* at its core. Jia Yi concluded that Qin knew how to assault the world but did not know how to protect it, where latter would

involve the politics of Confucianism based on *renyi*.² *Ren* 仁 (benevolence) and *yi* 義 (righteousness) are key virtues of Confucianism, and all Confucian scholars recognize that politics must be cultivated and conducted based on these concepts if it is to reach its most proper state. In Confucian doctrine, when *ren* and *yi* are embodied in reality they take on the form of expression called *li* 禮 (rites), which then becomes the standard for all aspects of human activity. Thus, *li* is an inner expression of human morality, which contains the Confucian desire to achieve a harmonious society. Jia Yi considers that Confucianism possesses an exemplary theoretical system and emphasizes that *li* plays a very important role in promoting social stability.

Ethics and *renyi* are not complete without *li*, and teaching and correcting customs is not complete without *li*, and disputes and lawsuits are not judged without *li*. Even [for the relationships] between lord and subject, the high ranking and the low ranking, father and son, and older and younger brothers, who is above and who is below are not determined without *li*, and when it comes to the learning of the Imperial Court and serving one's teachers, one does not become close without *li*. Even when setting status levels in court, ruling the army, and exercising the law, dignity is not practiced without *li*, and even when sacrificing to the spirits at a shrine, it is not sincere and solemn without *li*. Therefore, *junzi* 君子 [a man of virtue] embodies *li* by being respectful, keeping a disciplined attitude, and backing down and refraining. (Ibid., 101)

Here, Jia Yi indicates out that the channel through which morality and *renyi* are manifested is *li*, and clearly states that *li* can be a means of cracking down on the disturbance of customs and resolving disputes. In other words, it is only with *li* that society can move in the right direction. He thus asserts that all human acts that fall under the heading of government, such as those related to the home, learning, military, law enforcement, and rituals, should be based on *li*. He focuses in particular on the importance of *li* in terms of politics, which he argues should be strictly based on *li*.

Li strengthens and stabilizes the country to ensure that the monarch does not lose hold of his people. The monarch, acting as a monarch, and his subjects, acting as his servants is the proper path of *li*, and behaving

2 This was an argument shared by the intellectuals of the early Han dynasty. This can be confirmed by Shusun Tong's 叔孫通 remarks, "It is difficult for Confucian scholars to take the world, but they can keep it" (Hanshu 1962, 2126), and Liu Jia's 陸賈 description, "One can get the world on a horse, but one can't rule it on a horse" (Shiji 1959, 2699). See Feng (2001, 28).

with dignity and virtue with respect to the monarch, are the causes of *li* and remain in place according to their dignity, size, and strength as their proper limit through *li*. According to *li*, *tianzi* 天子 [the Son of Heaven; emperor] loves the world, the feudal lord loves his region, the *dafu* 大夫 [high official] loves his men, and the *shi shuren* 士庶人 [low ranking officials and commoners] love their families. If you lose this love, you will not be merciful, and if you love too much, you will no longer be righteous, so *li* entails maintaining the standard of dignity and vulgarity and maintaining harmony between strength and weakness. According to *li*, when the emperor goes to the palace of a feudal lord, the lord does not dare to stand on the east stairs himself because that is where the owner stands. When the emperor visits to the feudal lord, the feudal lord does not dare to live in his own palace because he does not dare to perform *li* there as a master. (Ibid., 101–102)

First, Jia Yi clearly shows that *li* is the foundation for governance of the state. Thanks to the ability of *li* to make distinctions, if people know their proper limits and respect others, society can be stabilized (Lin 2017, 125). The argument that politics should be based on *li* would have been supported by any Confucian scholar, and Jia Yi believes that it is only a politics based on *li* can produce positive results. In other words, Jia Yi believes that *li* can form an ideal society if it expands to the arena of politics, and argues for the development of a Confucian theory that takes the virtue of *renyi* as a core concept.³ According to Jia Yi, the reason why the Qin dynasty was able to unify “the world” but then suddenly collapsed was that it did not uphold a politics based on *li*, that is, founded in Confucian theory. Jia Yi emphasizes the practical utility of Confucianism and puts a strong emphasis on the value of Confucianism, stressing that the Han dynasty must adopt Confucianism and use it as the basis for the administration of the state to prevent a repetition of the history of the Qin dynasty.

The Sage as the Embodiment of Confucian Politics

The moral that Jia Yi drew from the fall of the Qin was that Confucian politics are directly linked to the stability of the country. He insists, therefore on actively promoting Confucianism and conducting a politics that is completely based on it. However, it was not easy to embody Confucian politics during the early Han dynasty. This is because the rulers of the early Han sought to rescue politics from

3 Therefore, Jia Yi argues that officials should also have Confucian scholar status. See Guan (2018, 38–39).

the chaos caused by the fall of the Qin by choosing a policy of recuperation and propagation (*xiuyang shengxi* 休養生息). It is in response to this that Jia Yi puts forward an ideal figure who can embody Confucian politics, making Confucianism attractive to the ruler on the one hand and revealing Confucian political superiority on the other. The ideal person that he has in mind here is, of course, the *shengren* 聖人, the sage.

In general, in Chinese philosophy, the sage is a figure of perfection in terms of *neisheng* 內聖 (inner sageliness) and *waiwang* 外王 (outer kingliness), and he is portrayed as the ultimate figure who all scholars seek to become. Confucianism laid out a philosophical foundation supported by a list of sages, such as Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, Wen 文, Wu 武, Duke Wen of Zhou, and Confucius, using these thinkers to develop and present its positions on various topics.⁴ Jia Yi also inherits the Confucian view of sages and implements it in his philosophy, where he maintains the ideal that the sage should be the first to serve as king. Only then, if he had the political status of king, did Jia Yi think that the sage could express his capabilities.

In the old days, *shengwang* 聖王 (the sage-king) followed laws when he stayed still and the discipline of *liyue* 禮樂 (rituals and music) when he moved. When he was still, he placed his penmen to his left and right, and when he was moving, he went out with a ringing of jade beads. A ringing jade bead is a ball that is filled with the body, with a pair of ornaments at the top and a pair of *ruiyu* 瑞玉 [a piece of jade that serves as the credentials of a feudal lord] at the bottom, and ivories and pearls in between and mixed with two *peiyu* 佩玉 [jade worn by barons]. When he walked, it was to the sound of the music of *cai ci* 采齊 [the Royal Processional], when running, it was to the music of *sixia* 肆夏 [the General Processional]. When he walked back, it was as if the way was set out with a round ruler, and when walking around, the way was as if it was measured out with a curved ruler.

A superb king makes people fear him when he is in his place and love him when he is virtuous. His actions must follow the law, his conduct must be obeyed by the law when he goes around, his virtue must be imitative, his voice must be pleasant, his movements must have law, and his language must have logic. In this way, he should support his superiors, treat his colleagues well, govern his subordinates, and lift his people up. Therefore, superior men respect and believe in him, and his colleagues

4 This is also a common concern of the early emperors of the Han dynasty. See Liu (2024, 100).

are close to him while valuing him, his subordinates respect him and love him, and the people fear him and love him. In this way, the top and bottom are harmonized, and scholars and ordinary people follow the leadership placidly. (*Jiayiji* 1976, 108)

Jia Yi assigns to the sage the status of a king, but a king who does not act frivolously and keeps his posture in line with rituals and music while pursuing politics. Thus, the sage's political acts produce a successful outcome, and the benefits of these extend to the people around him. In this way, it is a natural consequence that the sage becomes an object of awe. It is worth noting that there is a basis for the sage to implement the ideal Confucian politics, and the sage's excellent ability thus has a clear reason underlying it. Here, Jia Yi represents the sage as a person who has a closer relationship to the *Dao* 道 (the Way) and identifies the reason that the sage is able to show outstanding ability in the *Dao*.

A person who protects the *Dao* is called a scholar, and a person who enjoys the *Dao* is called a gentleman. Those who know the *Dao* are called bright, and those who practice the *Dao* are called wise, and those who are both bright and wise are called sages. (*Ibid.*, 138)

Here, Jia Yi on the one hand calls those who protect the *Dao* and enjoy the *Dao* scholars and gentlemen, respectively, while also recalling that people exist who know the *Dao* and practice it. He refers to the sage as a person who has both knowledge of the *Dao* and right conduct with respect to it. In other words, the sage is a person who has learned the *Dao*. In general, the *Dao* is taken as the basis for the creation and change of the universe and all things, and Jia Yi characterizes the *Dao* as follows: "The *Dao* is formless, peaceful, and mysterious. It is a carrier of things, and everything runs in a reasonable and harmonious manner, making things clear and rich" (*ibid.*, 144). Here, the *Dao* has an empty but mysterious action, producing all things, raising them, and leading the change, and he finds that where a sage has acquired the *Dao*, he can easily take up and exhibit Confucian political ideals. Therefore, Jia Yi characterizes the consequences of the sage taking the lead in politics as follows:

A government decree has stated that 'If a sage-king is at the top, the people of the world will not die from war'. So feudal lords do not attack each other, and the people do not kill each other. Therefore, if a sage-king is at the top, the people will have the chance to live one more time and avoid dying once. When a sage-king is at the top, the ruler tries to learn the *Dao*, the official tries to build virtue, and the people work hard. Women make

clothes to wear and men produce food to eat, so that the people will not be naked or hungry. Therefore, if a sage-king is at the top, the people will have a chance to live two more times and avoid dying twice. If a sage-king is at the top, then the ruler is working to achieve for *renzheng* 仁政 [benevolent government], the officials work hard to love the people, and the people work hard to obey, so punitive measures are abolished so that the people do not die early from punitive actions. Therefore, if a sage-king is at the top, the people have the opportunity to live three more times and avoid dying three times. If a sage-king is at the top, he will be able to mobilize the people and use his wealth properly, so that the people will not become ill. Therefore, if a sage-king is at the top, the people will have the opportunity to live four more times and avoid dying four times. If a sage-king is at the top, virtuous teachers are recommended throughout the country to prevent vile evil. Therefore, the wise will be appointed and the wicked will not come forward, so the people will enjoy their lives. Therefore, being rich and long-lived is the accomplishment of the sage-king. (Ibid., 168)

Jia Yi says that if a ruler puts into practice the politics of the sages, this will prevent a multitude of threats to the lives of the people. In particular, they will not be mobilized into a brutal war, the accumulation of goods will prevent starvation, the ruler does not impose extreme punishment, the people are protected from plague, and the standard of living is increased by employing wise teachers. In other words, the sage, who Jia Yi calls the ruler, realizes the *Dao* and puts Confucian views at the forefront in seeking to promote political and social stability. In this way, Jia Yi presents a type of blueprint for *datong shehui* 大同社會 (a grand unity society) through the character of the sage.

The Importance of the Sage in the Realm of Moral Edification

Jia Yi considers that Confucian principles should guide the administration of state affairs, and he sought to embody Confucian ideal politics in his description of the sage. In doing this, he does not merely mention that the sage pursues ideal Confucian politics, but also highlights the sage's role in terms of his specific activities. A prominent feature of the sage noted by Jia Yi is that he focuses on guiding people in the right direction and stabilizing society in a broad sense. Moral edification was a very important issue for Confucianism in politics in the pre-Qin period,⁵

5 The following comments by Confucius and Mencius prove this: "Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and the will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by ritual and they will keep their self-respect

and Jia Yi inherited the Confucian perspective on this earlier era, developing the sage's role in edification.

When a person has learned the logic of virtue, its practice becomes calming and beneficial, coming to be called blessings. There is no one who does not wish for blessings, but not everyone can receive them. Therefore, people believe that ghosts can be beneficial or harmful, so they hope that after washing themselves, they will be blessed from the sacrifices and ritual offerings they prepare and offer to ghosts. Therefore, it is said that 'the sacrifices to ghosts are to obtain these blessings'. Virtue is performed for all, but it is difficult to see inside of a person. Therefore, *xianwang* 先王 [prior sage-kings] presented the form of virtue, spoke of it, revealed its logic, and spread it out throughout the world so that people could see it. (Ibid., 146)

If a *renren* 仁人 [a humane person] performs *li*, the world will increase in peace, and all things will become right. When virtue pervades everything, the benefits are evenly distributed, and harmony is spread out, the sky becomes clear and the land becomes rich, making everything in its time; the public mind does not try to deceive or steal, and the national spirit is purified. (Ibid., 104)

In the above quotations, the terms sage-kings and humane persons both refer to the sages, and Jia Yi clearly presents the sage as having an active role in edifying the people. He believes that all people seek blessings, but blessings come from virtue. In other words, without virtue, no blessings arrive. However, because people do not know this they expend a great deal of effort in performing sacrifices to ghosts, and Jia Yi takes a sceptical attitude toward these acts. Furthermore, because virtue cannot be grasped through the five senses, it will inevitably be difficult for the public to gain it. Therefore, Jia Yi explains that a sage can help the people receive blessings by radiating his virtue to the outside world. In other words, he says that if the sage's virtues are expressed outwardly, people will naturally become enlightened, and customs and public sentiment will be corrected.⁶ Furthermore, the sage

and come to you of their own accord." (Analects 1999, 11) "Benevolent music affects people more deeply than benevolent words. Good education enjoys greater popularity than good government. Good government inspires awe in the people while good education inspires love in them. Good government gains the people's wealth while good education gains their hearts." (Mengzi 1999, 297)

6 Jia Yi thinks that the core of the edification lies in revealing the edification itself. See Zhang (2009, 56). When approached from this angle, there is no more reasonable person who implements edification than the sage.

seeks to preserve moral edification from generation to generation without being cut off. The result of this effort is the Confucian classics.

However, even if a person embodies *liuxing* 六行 [the Six Virtuous Acts], these actions are weak and difficult to identify, and only the earlier sage-kings could have identified them in detail. Because ordinary people cannot reach *liuxing* on their own, they must learn what to do after being taught by prior sage-kings. Therefore, prior sage-kings used what the people had when preparing to teach the world and guided people's emotions to be true. As such, internally, it was based on *liufa* 六法 [the Six Codes], and externally, *liuxing* was practiced to raise the six disciplines of *Shi* 詩 [Book of Odes], *Shu* 書 [Book of Documents], *Yi* 易 [Book of Changes], *Chunqiu* 春秋 [Spring and Autumn Annals], *Li* 禮 [Book of Rites], and *Yue* 樂 [Book of Music] to make it one great cause. These six works are called *liuyi* 六藝 [The Six Classics]. Let people cultivate themselves accordingly, and people can achieve *liuxing* if they are cultivated. (Ibid., 140)

Thus, *liuxing* are the externally expressed six virtues of the *Dao* 道, *de* 德 (virtue), *xing* 性 (nature), *shen* 神 (spirit), *ming* 明 (brightness), and *ming* 命 (decrees),⁷ which everyone can practice. However, Jia Yi holds that the sage creates edification for ordinary people, as it is very difficult for them to practice *liuxing* in reality. The sage encourages people to better reveal *liuxing* by compiling the contents of this edification into six philosophical scriptures, namely *Shi*, *Shu*, *Yi*, *Chunqiu*, *Li*, and *Yue*.⁸ In other words, a sage can realize direct enlightenment through the Confucian classics. Therefore, Jia Yi finds that if people learn these classics, they can find *liuxing* in response to edification by the sage.

In the following excerpt, Jia Yi points to one person who must be edified: the crown prince. Because this prince is the son of a monarch, he must take up the heavy task of running the state after his father passes, so edifying him is extremely important (Tang 2005, 263). Jia Yi emphasizes the education of the prince by mentioning that edification by the sage must be performed by means of the Confucian classics.

7 Jia Yi says: “dao 道, de 德, xing 性, shen 神, ming 明, and ming 命, these six are li 理 (principles) of virtue. Nothing is not created by liuli 六理 [the Six Principles], so if something has already emerged outside, liuli exists within it. Therefore, yin and yang, Heaven and Earth, and people all use liuli as the intrinsic law, and what the intrinsic law is based on is called liufa 六法 [the Six Codes]. Liufa is equipped inside a person and then comes out to form liushu 六術 [the Six Measures], which is called liuxing 六行 [the Six Virtuous Acts].” (Jiayiji 1976, 140)

8 Liuyi 六藝 is another name for liujing 六經 [the Six Classics] and was widely used in the early Han dynasty. See Jiang (2006, 35–36).

Some say that *Chunqiu* increases good and suppresses evil in the prince's heart, and when the prince learns *Li*, he learns the laws dictating who is above and who is below. Some also say that *Shi* allows the prince to broaden the Way and identify virtues and their meaning, and when the prince learns *Yue*, his dirty mind becomes cleansed and his excitement suppressed. These works teach the prince the good words of the sage and the worthies, exhibiting the old days and letting the prince know of the prior sage-kings who attempted to assist the prince in realizing his virtues. They teach the prince of the old records to allow him to recognize the rise and fall of history that allows him to be careful and afraid. They teach the prince how to engage in government posts and let him understand how to manage, govern, and educate for all government posts and duties. They allow the prince recognize the lessons and institutions of the prior sage-kings, making it possible for them to know the close and distant relationship of his relatives and examines their order. This is thanks to the sages, who allow the prince to learn. (*Jiayiji* 1976, 87)

Here, Jia Yi describes a prince who is focusing on boosting his competence for the next generation by studying the scriptures, including the *Shi*, *Chunqiu*, *Li*, and *Yue*, the sayings of the sages, institutions, and specific histories. In other words, the prince's responsibility here becomes advancing himself and edifying others based on the scriptures and the teachings of the sages (Yi 2009, 206). According to Jia Yi, edification through the sages is to be based on the scriptures, which guide the prince onto the right path, and ultimately the prince spreads the edification received by the sages to the world. Thus, Jia Yi writes:

The destiny of the world depends on the prince, and the prince's excellence depends on his education from an early age and the surrounding talent who take care of him. If the prince is told and taught before his mind is chaotic, the edification is easily achieved. [...] If the throne is properly educated and those surrounding the throne are correct, the crown prince will be right, and if the crown prince is right, the world will be stable. (*Jiayiji* 1976., 93–94)

The Sage and *Minbenzhuyi*

In ancient Chinese society, the people form the foundation of the state, and the actual power to run the state comes from the people. Because the state is ruled by a small group, but a large number of people actually make the state a reality,

rulers cannot make orders if the people do not exist. Therefore, Confucianism in the pre-Qin period saw from early on that the people should receive as much respect as the ruling minority, and raised several arguments related to *minbenzhuyi* 民本主義 (people-oriented thought).⁹ Jia Yi notes and further develops the people-oriented perspective received from pre-Qin period Confucianism.

I have heard it said that the people are fundamental in politics. The state is founded upon the people, and the monarch is founded upon the people, and officials are founded upon the people. Therefore, because the security of the state is determined by the people, the sovereign honour and disgrace are determined by the people, and officials high and low are determined by the people. [...] A win in a battle is earned because the people sought to win, and attacking the enemy and taking spoils is earned because the people wanted to gain, and protection of the country from external aggression is also the result of the people who seek to protect the country. Therefore, even if the monarch attempts to protect the people, unless the people wish it, he cannot exist, and if the monarch attempts to attack the enemy using the people, unless the people want it, he cannot gain, and if the monarch attempts to fight using the people, unless the people want to fight, he cannot win. Therefore, if the people are willing to advance because they are happy to fight against an enemy for their monarch, they will surely embarrass the enemy and win the war. If the people are afraid to face the enemy, however, they will surely flee, so they have no choice but to lose the war. Therefore, disasters and blessings are not limited to Heaven but depend on the people. (Ibid., 149)

In Jia Yi's view, politics is based on the people, and the wealth and survival of a nation are determined by its people. This means that all of the acts that a country can undertake, including going to war with other countries, begin with the participation of the people. Jia Yi writes that the people are ignorant but have power that

9 "A country of a thousand war-chariots cannot be administered unless the ruler attends strictly to business, punctually observes his promises, is economical in expenditure, shows affection towards his subjects in general, and uses the labour of the peasantry only at the proper times of year." (Analects 1999, 3–5) "Deal with the common people as though you were officiating at an important sacrifice." (Analects 1999, 125) Although Confucius did not explain much about people-oriented thought, the following comments express some ideas on people's values and love. Mencius spoke directly of people-oriented thought. "Of the first importance, [...] are the people, next comes the good of land and grains, and of the least importance is the ruler." (Mengzi 1999, 321–23) Xunzi also described people-oriented thought through examples of ships and water. "The lord is the boat; his subjects the water. It is the water that sustains the boat, and it is the water that capsizes the boat." (Xunzi 1999, 217)

can never be ignored (Wang 1992, 144). Jia Yi acknowledges that the consequence of this is that the state cannot survive if it goes against the feelings of the people, and he is extremely wary of engaging in politics because the ruler may do just this when conducting state affairs. In other words, for Jia Yi people-oriented thought is key for determining national policy (Li 1995, 59). It is for this reason that disasters and blessings depend on the people, in addition to the transcendent being that is represented by Heaven. Jia Yi exhibits a firm belief in people-oriented thought, when describing the sage by highlighting the sage's people-oriented character.

If a monarch treats his people as an enemy, the people must defeat him. If a monarch does good deeds, officials also do good deeds, and if officials do good deeds, the people also do good deeds. Therefore, officials sin when the people do not do good, and it is the fault of the monarch that they do not do good. If the monarch pursues good on one side, all of the people will quickly pursue good on the other side, in the way that a shadow reflects the original appearance. If the monarch does evil on one side, all the people also tend to do evil on the other, in the way that an echo responds to a sound. For this reason, *shengwang* 聖王 [sage-kings] and *junzi* 君子 [men of virtue] are careful about how they live from day to day in dealing with the people, and they refrain from evil actions so that the people will also be careful about their own actions day to day and practice restraint in doing things every day. (*Jiayiji* 1976, 152)

Here the relationship between the monarch and the people is compared to that between a body and its shadow or to a sound and its echo. When a monarch does good, that good reaches the people through the state officials, and in the same manner, evil also reaches the people through the officials. Jia Yi is worried that the country will perish if the monarch exerts a negative influence on the people and the people express their dissatisfaction with him. Therefore, he emphasizes that sages do not treat the people recklessly and do nothing that may violate public sentiment. In other words, a sage faithfully realizes people-oriented thought. In addition, Jia Yi finds concrete evidence of the claim that sages practiced people-oriented thought throughout history.

The sage is a wise teacher, and *renyi* 仁義 [benevolence and righteousness] are the characteristics of a wise monarch. Therefore, when Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang ruled the world, the people admired them as wise monarchs. They all passed away a hundred years after they were crowned, but the people thought that their deaths were too soon. Jie and Zhou were violent monarchs, and the people suffered because of them. They

all fell within decades of accession, but the people still thought that they ruled too long. Therefore, if the people love the feudal lords, the country will surely prosper, and if the people suffer because of the feudal lords, the country will surely perish. Therefore, the people should not be taken lightly because they are the basis for the state to stand on and the basis of feudal lords. (*Jiayiji* 1976, 152–53)

Jia Yi refers here to the importance of people-oriented thought by using the examples of Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang, who are revered in Confucianism as sages, and Ji and Zhou, who are considered tyrants. He notes that in the former case the rulers were praised by the people and respected by future generations, because they cared for and loved the people, but in the latter case the people suffered because these tyrants treated the people badly, and their kingdoms were ruined. In this way, Jia Yi shows that compliance with people-oriented thought determines the rise and fall of the country, finding a basis in the fact that the sages of history practiced people-oriented thought. For Jia Yi, that is, a sage is inseparable from people-oriented thought and is a person who actively practices it.

Conclusion

Jia Yi, a Confucian scholar of the early Han dynasty, developed a perspective on sages based on Confucian ideas from the pre-Qin period while adding some of his own. A study of Jia Yi's essays on the sages is a way to clearly understand his philosophy and political goals.

For intellectuals of the early Han dynasty, analysis of the cause of the fall of the Qin was a major research topic. Jia Yi believes that the reason why the Qin regime could not be maintained for a long time, despite its unification of “the whole world”, was that the Qin did not respect Confucianism. Therefore, he argues that it is right to choose Confucian ideas that value *renyi* 仁義 (benevolence and righteousness), and the only way to run state affairs properly is to achieve the Confucian ideal.

Jia Yi describes Confucian political ideals by describing the Confucian sage at the same time as he emphasizes the superiority of Confucianism. He indicates that the sage produces the most efficient results when he is also able to serve as a monarch who can stabilize the world by pursuing politics based on *liyue* 禮樂 (rituals and music). Jia Yi proposes that the reason why the sage can engage in ideal politics is that he can understand the *Dao* 道 (the Way), which is the law of the universe, and utilize it appropriately.

He also explains that the sage is the best person to practice the edification that Confucianism values enable. In other words, the sage can edify the people by expressing his virtues outward toward them. Furthermore, Jia Yi argues that the sage can produce written wisdom in preparation for the potential loss of his edification. Here, Jia Yi depicts the prince as someone who must be edified, and he shows that the edification by the sage must be delivered to the prince through scriptures.

Confucianism in the pre-Qin period tended to encompass perspectives relating to people-oriented thought, and Jia Yi takes up the meaning of Confucianism in the pre-Qin period and emphasizes people-oriented thought more actively. He is extremely wary of violating public sentiment, and even when writing of the sage he relates this figure to a people-oriented perspective. He sees the sage as a person who sees the capabilities of the people early on, and thus develops a people-oriented perspective. Jia Yi believes that the survival of the nation depends on the people, so the sage should always be a person who protects them.

As such, Jia Yi further deepened the discussion of the sage by introducing his views into the Confucian conception of the sage while inheriting the idea of the sage from earlier stages of Confucianism. In other words, through Jia Yi's work, the Confucian sage developed a deeper expression. In addition, Jia Yi's view of the sage had a great influence on the subsequent decision by the Han dynasty to make Confucianism the basis of state affairs.

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Family, State, Family-state: The Role of Family (*kazoku* 家族) in Maruyama Masao's Interpretation of the Family-state (*kazokukokka* 家族國家)

Ferenc TAKÓ*

Abstract

Maruyama Masao (1914–1996) became a leading figure of post-war Japanese democratization with the publication of his essay “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism” (1946). The idea of *kokutai* was central to his interpretation of ultra-nationalism as a concept that connected ‘nationalistic’ ideas of the late Tokugawa period with the imperialist propaganda of the 1930s. This concept was linked with the millennia-old Chinese notion of the ruler as the ‘father’ of the people in a land that is an extension of the family (*jia*). In Japan, however, the connection between the family (*kazoku*) and the nation(state) (*kokka*) was based on the imperial lineage that upheld the blood-relation between the *ten-nō* and the deities. In the present paper, I will examine Maruyama’s interpretation of the role of the family in Japanese ultra-nationalism on the basis of his studies “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism” (1948) and “Nationalism in Japan: Its Theoretical Background and Prospects” (1951) (in *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, 1956; in English, 1963), linking these essays with Maruyama’s war-time studies on the Tokugawa era. I will show that the elements on which Maruyama focused his analysis of the ‘family-state’ (*kazokukokka*) are those features of Japanese nationalism that he had already detected in his war-year studies; that is, features in which he saw the preservation of the Tokugawa social structure of *hōkensei*. I will argue that this social structure was understood by Maruyama as a power structure in which the ‘transfer of oppression’ is possible due to the *decentralized*, i.e., family-like character of social relationships.

Keywords: Maruyama Masao, family, family-state, *kazokukokka*, *hōken*

Družina, država, družinska država: vloga družine (*kazoku* 家族) v Maruyamovi interpretaciji družinske države (*kazokukokka* 家族國家)

Izvleček

Maruyama Masao (1914–1996) je postal vodilna osebnost povojne japonske demokratizacije z objavo eseja »Teorija in psihologija ultranacionalizma« (1946). Pojem *kokutai* je bil

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osrednjega pomena za njegovo interpretacijo ultranacionalizma kot koncepta, ki je povezoval »nacionalistične« ideje poznega tokugavskega obdobja z imperialistično propagando tridesetih let 20. stoletja. Ta koncept je bil povezan s tisočletno kitajsko predstavo vladarja kot »očeta« ljudstva v deželi, ki predstavlja razširjeno družino (*jia*). Na Japonskem je bila povezava med družino (*kazoku*) in narodom oziroma nacionalno državo (*kokka*) osnovana na cesarski liniji, ki je ohranjala krvno vez med *tennōjem* in božanstvi. V pričujočem prispevku bom proučil Maruyamovo interpretacijo vloge družine v japonskem ultranacionalizmu na podlagi njegovih študij »Ideologija in dinamika japonskega fašizma« (1948) ter »Nacionalizem na Japonskem: teoretično ozadje in obeti« (1951) (v *Mišljenje in delovanje v sodobni japonski politiki*, 1956, v angleščini: 1963), povezujoč te eseje z Maruyamovimi medvojnimi študijami o obdobju Tokugava. Pokazal bom, da so elementi, na katere se je Maruyama osredotočil v analizi »družinske države« (*kazokukokka*), tiste značilnosti japonskega nacionalizma, ki jih je že odkril v svojih medvojnih študijah; torej značilnosti, v katerih je videl ohranitev tokugavske družbene strukture *hōkensei*. Pokazal bom, da je Maruyama to družbeno strukturo razumel kot strukturo moči, v kateri je »prenos zatiranja« mogoč zaradi *decentraliziranega*, to je družinskega značaja družbenih odnosov.

Ključne besede: Maruyama Masao, družina, družinska država, *kazokukokka*, *hōken*

Introduction

Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 (1914–1996) became a leading figure of post-war Japanese democratization with the publication of his famous essay, "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism" (*Chōkokkashugi no ronri to shinri* 超国家主義の論理と心理) in 1946 (1969a). While his interpretation of Japanese ultranationalism was debated heavily (Sasaki 2012, 46–49), there is no doubt that this text played a crucial role in the process of self-understanding of Japanese intellectuals after the tragic end of the war (Mori 2020, 42). A central element of Maruyama's interpretation was the idea of *kokutai* 国体/國體 (literally 'the body of the country', usually translated as 'national polity') as a concept that connected 'nationalistic' ideas of the late Tokugawa period with the imperialist propaganda of the 1930s. This concept was linked, on the one hand, with the millennia-old Chinese notion of the ruler as the 'father' of the people in a land understood as the extension of the family (Chin. *jia* / Jap. *ie* 家). On the other hand, the connection between the family and the country that was rooted in traditional Chinese thought was used in Japanese nationalist ideology in a way that "had little or nothing to do with Confucianism or Confucian family values" (Skya 2009, 288). In Japan, the connection between the family (*kazoku* 家族) and the nation(state) (*kokka* 国家) was based on the imperial lineage that upheld *blood*-relation between the *tennō* 天皇 and the deities (*kami* 神) through Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大御神 the Sun Goddess, lineal ancestor of Jinmu 神武, the first ruler of Japan

(on Maruyama's understanding of the 'charisma' of the *tennō*, see Tanaka 2009, 137–41). While Maruyama did not detail the role of the family in his frequently analysed essay on ultra-nationalism, he said much more about the topic in his studies "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism" (*Nihon fashizumu no shisō to kōdō* 日本ファシズムの思想と行動, 1948 [1969b]) and "Nationalism in Japan: Its Theoretical Background and Prospects" (*Nihon ni okeru nashonarizumu — Sono shisōteki haikai to tenbō* 日本におけるナショナリズム — その思想的背景と展望, 1951 [1969c]), both included in the volume *Gendai seiji no shisō to kōdō* 現代政治の思想と行動 (1956) translated into English as *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (1969 [1963]). In the present paper, I will examine Maruyama's interpretation of the role of the family in Japanese ultra-nationalism based on these writings, linking them with Maruyama's war-time essays on the Tokugawa era. Through this analysis of Maruyama's concept of the family I will show that the elements on which Maruyama focused his analysis of the 'family-state' (*kazokukokka* 家族國家) are the same features of Japanese nationalism that he had already detected in his war-year studies. These are features in which he saw the preservation of the Tokugawa social structure of *bōkensei* 封建性 (usually translated to Western languages as 'feudalism'). I will argue that this social structure was primarily understood by Maruyama as a power structure in which the 'transfer of oppression' is possible due to the *decentralized*, i.e., family-like character of social relationships.

From *guo* (*koku/kuni*) 國 and *jia* (*ka/ie*) 家 to *kazokukokka* 家族國家

The characters 國 (国) and 家 have a history of their own and as a compound embracing thousands of years. In classical Chinese, *guo* 國 'state', 'country' (Karl-gren 1957, 929*o–p*) understood as a 'territory [of a country]', that is, a certain unit of the whole,¹ and *jia* 家 meaning 'house' or 'family' (ibid., 32*a–d*) usually appear together as 國家. While in his notes to the *Mengzi* James Legge explains the term as "a State, with its component great families" (*Mengzi* 2015, 529), in the text he translates such loci in most cases simply as 'state' or 'kingdom'. However, *Mengzi* IVA5 is an important exception.

孟子曰：「人有恆言，皆曰『天下國家』。天下之本在國，國之本在家，家之本在身。」

1 國 is usually translated as 'state'. In the present study, to be clear about the difference between 1. units of the country as a whole, 2. this whole itself, and 3. the Chinese and Japanese translation of Western notions of 'state' and 'nation', I will consequently use 'territory' in case 國 refers to smaller parts of China or Japan.

Mencius said, ‘People have this common saying, – “The kingdom, the State, the family.” The root of the kingdom is in the State. The root of the State is in the family. The root of the family is in the person *of its Head*.’² (*Mengzi* 2015, 295)

This passage reflects the Confucian concept of the relation between the family and the larger whole that not only consists of but also operates like families. There is a clear correspondence between ‘the realm below Heaven’ (*tianxia* 天下) as the unity of ‘territories’ (*guo* 國), territories as unities of ‘families’ (*jia* 家), and families as unities of ‘persons’ (*shen* 身). The realm below heaven is, at the same time, one unity in itself and a hierarchy of smaller unities. This correlation lies at the core of the Confucian teaching about the strict hierarchical structure of society that is governed by ‘the son of heaven’ (*tianzi* 天子) who is, at the same time, ‘father’ of the people. Thus, filiality (*xiao* 孝) in the family towards the father is the foundation of obedience of the people towards the son of heaven, and of the son of heaven towards *tian* itself. It is based on this idea that the Chinese state is very frequently referred to as ‘family-state’. This term generally lacks specification or historical context, and it is misleading in that it only reflects the ‘family-like’ nature of ‘states’ but loses the meaning clearly present in the passage cited above from the *Mengzi*, i.e., 國家 referring to ‘territories-regions’ (sub-states, sub-principalities) and their ‘families’. In this latter meaning, larger elements of the ‘state’ and their smaller parts appear together, indicating different ‘levels’ of the whole they constitute together.

The same section of the *Mengzi*, IVA5 is referred to in Morohashi, Kamata and Yoneyama (1985, 74) with the meaning (the third definition of *kokka*) given as “the countries [國] of the *zhuhou* 諸侯 and the families [家] of the *taifu* 大夫”. This interpretation brings us to the concept of the *fengjian* (*hōken*) 封建 social structure, an important component of Maruyama’s interpretation of Tokugawa society. While the characters of 封建 are regularly used today to translate ‘feudal’ or ‘feudalism’ into Chinese and Japanese, and are translated with the same terms to Western languages, this interpretation is problematic. The ‘*zhuhou*’, ‘feudatory prince’ (cf. Karlgren 1957, 113a–d) presided over land rents, being responsible for collecting taxes and transferring them to the king (*wang* 王). The reason why this is important in the present context is the fact that *fengjian* 封建 meant the stipend provided by the *wang* to the *hou* as part of the official revenues (ibid., 1197i–j), i.e., the land *from which* the *hou* collects the rent (see Várnai 2024, 2 ff). 封建 thus refers to the stipend and *not* to the land as *feudum*. The concept behind this term is thus focused on the fact that the *hou* has certain responsibilities in a certain territory based on his relationship with the king. Consequently, in the Japanese context including, as

2 “Of its Head” is Legge’s interpretation.

I will argue, Maruyama's analysis, *bōken* 封建 is most importantly characterized by the *decentralized* social structure related to it as opposed to the centralized structure of *gunken* 郡県 (Chin. *jūnxiàn* 郡縣; cf. Zhong 2015, 18 ff).

The same way as the characters of 封建 are associated today with 'feudalism', the characters of 國家 are in most cases associated with the 'state'. It is not possible in the scope of this paper to analyse the transformation of the terminology related to *guojia* 國家 in Chinese, nor the various translations in Western languages. However, it is important to stress a certain shift in the interpretation of the term in Chinese intellectual history. Referring to Gu Yanwu, Levenson argued that by the 17th century it became interpreted as a virtuous deed to make "*tianxia* of *guojia*" (Levenson 1964, 137), that is—in Levenson's definition—a "regime of values" from a "regime of power" (ibid., 133), while "[i]n large part the intellectual history of modern China has been the process of making *guojia* of *tianxia*" (ibid., 138). Levenson rightfully stresses an important aspect in which *guojia* in its modern meaning is opposed to *tianxia*: of *tianxia* (in the original sense of the term) there can only be one, while it is much less contradictory to speak of many/several *guojia*. For the same reason, *tianxia* could not become the equivalent of 'nation'.

The latter argument is not similarly valid in the case of Japan. While the Chinese tradition was based on the notion of a hierarchy with a pyramid structure and one ruling entity, i.e., *tian*, at its top, the Japanese court made it clear as early as on the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries that it was thinking in different categories. The Sui ruler received a letter from the Yamato state under Shōtoku taishi's 聖德太子 regentship, which began:

日出處天子致書日沒處天子無恙。

The son of heaven where the sun rises writes to the son of heaven where the sun sets and trusts he is free from ill-health. (cited by Duthie 2014, 41)

This form of address is considered the first known written example in which the Yamato ruler claimed the same rank as the son of heaven in China (ibid.). This interpretation stresses that *tian* 天, *tianxia* 天下 or *tianzi* 天子 were seen by the Yamato court as terms that could be as creatively modified as other characters and compounds which referred less specifically to Chinese social structures.

While the 'realm below Heaven' had a modified interpretation since the earliest times in a Japanese context, the meaning of 國家 was near to that of its Chinese usage. The *Seventeen Article Constitution*, traditionally also linked to Shōtoku taishi, contains the compound of 國家 three times (Articles 4, 6 and 7), referring to 'the country' as the unity of 'the territories and the families':

[...] 君臣有禮。位次不亂。百姓有禮。國家自治。

[...] when lord and subordinate keep themselves to the rites, ranks are not confused. When the people keep themselves to the rites, the territories and the families are governed by themselves / the country is governed by itself. (Article 4, in *Nihonshoki* 1897, 377, my translation)

While in most translations we find ‘country’ in this paragraph, *kuni* or *kokū* 國 (国) in Japanese could refer to ‘territories’ of the country the same way as in Chinese, making it plausible to understand 國家 as ‘the territories and the families’.

The case of *ie* 家 is somewhat different because over time it came to designate the Japanese family model, yet was still functioning similarly to the Chinese usage in the sense that it preserved its meaning of ‘family’. The Japanese concept of this family was, similarly to the Chinese one, based on the family head. This person was considered father of *all* family members, not only those who had a blood relationship with him (see Eisenstadt 1996, 353 ff). The ruler of the country, the *tennō* 天皇, was sometimes referred to as *tenshi* 天子, as in the above example, based on the Chinese usage of the term and mainly in a ceremonial context (Miyata 2012, 279 ff). However, it was clearly the origin from the *kami* 神 that provided the extraordinary character of the *tennō* as a divine descendant and, legitimized by that, ruler of the country. This uniqueness was shadowed by the shogunal reign from the Kamakura period until the end of the Tokugawa era, although the shogun also filled the symbolic role of family head (Morimoto 2009, 245–46).

The role of the *tennō* as father of the people became a central element of the restoration of his power after the Meiji transition. This was the period in which *kokka* 國家, the same way as its Chinese equivalent, became one of the translation terms of ‘nation’.

At several points in the 1870s the nation appeared in various forms: *kokka* [国家], the nation-as-family; *kokumin* [国民], the nation-as-people; and *minzoku* [民族], the people-as-tribe. All of these expressions functioned less like ‘people’ and more like ‘society’ in that they directed attention to the state’s internal constituents. (Howland 2001, 185)

Howland’s point is well reflected in the fact that 國家 could stand within the same text as the equivalent for ‘nation’ and that of ‘society’, like in Nagamine Hideki’s 永峰秀樹 (1848–1927) translation of Guizot’s *The History of Civilization in Europe* (*Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*) from English (*Yōroppa bunmeishi* 欧羅巴文明史, see Katō and Maruyama 1991, 100, 106). As Howland’s translations ‘the nation-as-...’ also imply, the term 國家 still represented not only its ‘new’

meaning, the ‘nation’, but also the two elements constituting it: the ‘territories’ and the ‘families’.

Still, in texts stressing the relationship between family and nation in the nationalist propaganda of pre-war Japan, we usually find an additional compound, *kazoku* 家族, ‘family’, used together with *kokka*: *kazokukokka* 家族國家. While quite rare, the compound of 家族 can also be found in the Chinese classics, where 族 in itself refers to ‘clan’, ‘kin’ or ‘group of families’ (Karlgren 1957, 1206a–c). 家族 thus refers to the families of the same ‘stem’. One can see an obvious analogy with the original meaning of *natio* as the ‘stem’, that is, ‘main unit’ of the people, and its modern application to the ‘nation’. The Japanese compound of 家族國家 should in this sense be understood as ‘the country as (one) *natio*’, in the modern sense, ‘nation’.

This *kazokukokka* was, furthermore, conceptually connected with *kokutai* 國體, a central concept of the Meiji period and later of imperialist propaganda. *Kokutai* literally means ‘the body of the country’, also understood as the ‘character’, ‘structure’, or ‘condition of a country’ (Morohashi, Kamata and Yoneyama 1985, 82), usually translated as ‘national polity’ (in the present paper, I will consequently refer to it as *kokutai*). It is important that the interpretation of this term in 19th and 20th century Japan, that is, *kokutai* understood as the ‘essence’ or the distinguishing features of the country in an evaluative sense, significantly differs from the original, rather practical meaning. In 19th century Japan, *kokutai* came to symbolize the essence of the country’s inner characteristics as represented or ‘embodied’ by its divine ruler, the *tennō* as the descendant of the *kami*. “Over time”, as McVeigh writes, “*kokutai* acquired two key components: an unbroken imperial line and the idea of nation as family writ large” (McVeigh 2004, 43). McVeigh refers to Hozumi Yatsuka 穗積八束 (1860–1912) who “originated the ‘nation-state as family’ concept (*Kazoku kokka*) and supported imperial sovereignty, thereby adding theoretical muscle to the idea of *kokutai*” (ibid., 44). As Hozumi saw it, “Our family state is a racial group. Our race consists of blood relatives from the same womb. The family is a small state; the state is a large family” (Hozumi, cited in Minear 1970, 74; on Hozumi’s interpretation of *kokutai*, see Skya 2009, 56 ff).

It seems that ‘family’ (ie 家) being included in the term *kokka* 國家 did not represent the family-character of the nation to an extent sufficient for nationalist requirements of the time, and thus the word *kazoku* 家族 was added to *kokka* to stress the connection between family and nation. If Levenson was right in arguing that making *guojia* of *tianxia* meant stressing ‘power’ instead of ‘values’, then the emphasis on the family in *kazokukokka* can be interpreted as a concept that keeps the ‘power’ (and legal validity) of *kokka*, but (re)adds to it a certain value orien-

tation that stems from the family tradition. This also shows how Japanese state ideology ‘returned’ to the Confucian teaching of filiality (*xiao/kō* 孝) in the midst of nationalist propaganda. However, it must be noted, on the one hand, that the originally Confucian teaching of *xiao* was applied here in a context very different from its classical Chinese sense (not for the first time, considering the Buddhist ‘adaptation’ of *xiao*; see Hamar 2021, 3–4), and that the state to which this concept was now applied *officially* avoided all kinds of traditionalistic foreign influences. On the other hand, this way of using an element of another tradition modified according to the needs of a new social context fits very well in the methods applied by a great many thinkers in the most different periods of Japanese intellectual history. As Oguma says:

by extending the Confucian ethic of ‘respecting one’s parents’ to include ‘loyalty to the emperor’, it was possible both to pacify the populace and rural power-brokers who were anxious about the collapse of their traditional status, and at the same time to channel their loyalties towards the state. Therefore, state education, with the help of the Kiki myths, taught that the ancestors of the Imperial Household who had descended from Heaven were the ancestors of all ‘Japanese’ nationals. (Oguma 2002, 31–32)

In this regard, we find the following passage in Part I of *Kokutai no hongī* 国体の本義 (1937), a symbolic writing of imperialist ideology:

The unbroken line of Emperors, receiving the Oracle of the Founder of the Nation, reign eternally over the Japanese Empire. This is our eternal and immutable national entity. Thus, founded on this great principle, all the people, united as one great family nation (一大家族國家) in heart and obeying the Imperial Will, enhance indeed the beautiful virtues of loyalty and filial piety. This is the glory of our national entity. (*Kokutai No Hongi* 1974, 59)

In this case there is no doubt that the text does not talk about ‘territories’ and ‘families’ in the plural, there is *one* family nation, and that family nation is *great* due to the fact that it is founded on the divine origin of its ruler, that is, on the foundation of a kin relationship between the ruling family and the *kami*. “Since the ancestor of the Emperor was the creator of Japan, all Japanese people were the descendants of the creator, and they were just like a family with the Emperor as a father and the people as children.” (Sasaki 2012, 39) Furthermore, while in the early 7th century the court could imagine more heavens with more realms be-

neath them, it is obvious that there can be no other ruler claiming blood relationship with the *kami*. Against this background, in the next sections, I will focus on Maruyama Masao's interpretation of the peculiarities of the 'family' relationships within Japan in different periods of history.

The Family and the Individual in Maruyama Masao's Analysis of the Tokugawa Period

Maruyama Masao opened his first study on Tokugawa intellectual history, "The Sorai School: Its Role in the Disintegration of Tokugawa Confucianism and Its Impact on National Learning" (*Kinsei jukyō no hatten ni okeru Soraigaku no tokushitsu narabini sono kokugaku tonō kanren* 近世儒教の発展における徂徠学の特質並びにその国学との関連, 1940 [Maruyama Masao shū – henceforth: MMS – 1]) with a citation from Hegel's *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*:

The Chinese and Mongol Empire is the empire of theocratic despotism. Underlying it is the patriarchal condition. A father stands at the summit and controls even what we would subordinate to conscience. In China, this patriarchal principle has been organized into a State. [...] In China, there is a single despot at the summit who leads a systematically constructed government via the many levels of the hierarchy beneath him. Here religious relations as well as family matters are regulated by State laws. The individual is morally selfless. (Hegel 1930, 236–37, cited in Maruyama 1974, 3. Omission by Maruyama)

In the next paragraph, Maruyama continues by stressing that while this situation appears in the most diverse nations, China is unique in the sense that the described circumstances do not change with time. The state "as it is founded upon family relationships", he says, remains as it is, producing what Hegel famously called "unhistorical history" (*ungeschichtliche Geschichte*), (Hegel 1930, 234–35, cited in Maruyama 1974, 4).

While Maruyama acknowledges that "Hegel is here thinking in terms of the pattern of his philosophy of history" (*ibid.*, 3), he basically agrees with Hegel's account of China as the preliminary stage of history that does not actually enter the progression of *Weltgeschichte*. This Hegelian interpretation symbolically represents a view of China that places 'patriarchal' structures in a negative light and labels China as belonging to the 'childhood' of history, understood as a linear developmental process. This interpretation replaced 17th- and 18th-century idealistic descriptions of China such as those of Leibniz and Voltaire, who admired

paternal authority as the foundation of the *philosophia practica* of the Chinese (see Davis 1983), and precedes later 19th-century thinkers—such as Tocqueville, Mill and Marx—who were no longer satisfied by declaring the ‘static’ character of China but enquired about the possibility of the ‘opening’ of the Chinese empire (see Takó 2024). Maruyama was, beyond doubt, well aware of notions of China’s ‘static’ and ‘despotic’ character that were more recent and more sophisticated than Hegel’s—still, he chose Hegel’s description of China as a framework for his own analysis of Tokugawa intellectual history. This world-historical perspective suited Maruyama’s approach so well because it interpreted Chinese social structures as essentially unchangeable; not as structures that secured stability but as structures that hindered actual historical change. These structures were, as Maruyama saw them, closely linked with the family: “The closed family society under the absolute authority of the patriarch constituted the unit of social relations. The state structure was built hierarchically upon this basis, and at its summit was the despot with his ‘fatherly care’” (Maruyama 1974, 4). For Maruyama the consequence of this hierarchy was, as is shown by the opening quote cited above, the “morally selfless” individual.

Maruyama emphasizes the rigidity of social relations based on the samurai family in a similar vein when describing the social structure of Tokugawa Japan:

Aside from his rights as parent and husband, the head of the samurai family did not have any special patriarchal legal authority. But because the family system was dependent upon the politico-economic relationship of the stipend [*hōroku* 封禄], the real power of the head of the family over its members was very great and the latter could hardly ever assert their individuality against the paternal and conjugal authority of the former. (Maruyama 1974, 11, I omitted the term ‘feudal’ from the translation of *hōroku*, for the original see MMS 1, 134)

In a footnote to this part, Maruyama quotes Fukuzawa Yukichi’s 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901) description of the family structure of the era that, as Fukuzawa writes, also symbolizes society as a whole. “The head of the family was like an autocratic dictator and held the entire family authority in his hands. He dealt with the members of his family with stern dignity.” (*Zoku Fukuzawa zenshū*, [1932], V, 631–32, cited in Maruyama 1974, 11. n. 17). Maruyama wrote similarly about Tokugawa social structures in a note in the second Tokugawa-study:

the family system that, together with the master-servant relationship, was the fulcrum of the *hōken* legal system acquired a clear-cut political significance and began to emerge as an important element in *hōken* authority relations, owing to the indissoluble link between the family [*ie* 家] and the stipend [*hōroku* 封禄] among the samurai and the establishment of Five-Man-Groups (groupings of five to ten heads of households who were held jointly responsible for the payment of taxes and violations of the law) among the common people. (Maruyama 1974, 194. n. 5, translation altered in terms of *hō(ken)*—for the original see MMS 2, 9, n. 1)

From these descriptions of the *hōken* social structure of Tokugawa Japan one understands that Maruyama saw the ‘family system’ as the static foundation of ‘paternal’ authority *outside* the family not only in China but also in Japan. A central question related to these authority relations was whether and to what extent there was space for individuality to develop; that is, whether the individual had any space to exist outside of or separated from the structure of society. In Maruyama’s interpretation of China—built on Hegelian grounds—such a process could not even be started there. However, the situation is, according to Maruyama, different in Tokugawa Japan. This assumption lends great importance to Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728) and particularly to his separation of ‘public’ (*kōteki* 公的) and ‘private’ (*shiteki* 私的) in Maruyama’s analysis. Although he does not talk about the ‘family’ as such in relation to this topic, his statements about the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are closely linked to the ideas about the family and the possibilities of ‘individuality’ appearing. At the same time, one can easily find the connection with the circumstances of Maruyama’s present:

‘public’ refers to political, social, or external matters, while ‘private’ refers to individual, internal matters. As these definitions are more or less identical with the meanings these words have today, it hardly seems necessary to discuss them. [...] The independence of the public domain in every sphere of human activity, which implies the liberation of the private domain, is surely the crucial hallmark of ‘the modern’. (Maruyama 1974, 103)

In the following section, I will return to Maruyama’s discussion of the “failure to draw any clear line of demarcation between the public and the private domains” (Maruyama 1969a, 6) in modern Japan. Now I turn to the question of how the topic of Sorai’s separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ is linked in Maruyama’s interpretation with the problem of Japan’s entering ‘world-history’.

Maruyama's attention turned to Tokugawa Confucianism while reading Fukuzawa's *An Outline of Theories of Civilisation* (*Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 文明論之概略) (Hiraishi 2003, 244). In the early 1940s, parallel to the Tokugawa studies, Maruyama wrote a paper titled "Fukuzawa Yukichi's critique of Confucianism" (*Fukuzawa Yukichi no jukyō hihan* 福沢諭吉の儒教批判, 1942), and it was under the influence of Fukuzawa that he turned against the views of his influential contemporary, Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (1873–1961), who doubted the importance of Confucianism in Tokugawa times (Hiraishi 2003, 248; for a critical reading of Maruyama's arguments against Tsuda see Paramore 2016, 173). In contrast, Maruyama stressed that Confucianism still affected the whole society, albeit not in a direct and obvious way:

since it became usual that obligations of the *hōken* system [*hōkenteki mibun* 封建的身分] were perceived in Confucian categories, it was quite natural that the Confucian ethics of the five relationships and the five virtues [*gorin gojō* 五倫五常] infiltrated, almost unconsciously and step by step, all social relationships as conceptual bounds. (MMS 2, 140)

Fukuzawa's critique of Tokugawa Confucianism was harsh in so far as he made it responsible for all the characteristics of the period that he considered negative.

For who were the ones teaching government autocracy [*sensei* 専制]? Even if in essence all government contains an element of autocracy, were not those who were helping that element develop and encouraging it none other than the teaching of Confucian scholars [*jugakusharyū no gakumon* 儒学者流の學問]? Of all the Confucianists who have ever been in Japan, those who enjoyed a reputation as most talented and most capable were the greatest experts on autocracy, and the greatest tools of the government. [...] Alas, we Japanese of today are their descendants! For us to be practicing autocracy in this day and age, and to be subjected to it, is not entirely the fault of the present generation; we have inherited this poison [*doku* 毒] from our distant ancestors. But who are the ones who helped spread this contagion? The contribution of the Confucian teachers was great. (Fukuzawa 2008, 197, translation slightly altered – for the original see Fukuzawa 1898, V, 27–28)

Maruyama saw the 'historical role' of Fukuzawa's critique of Confucianism in the fact that it connected Fukuzawa's ideal of 'independence and liberty' (*dokuritsujiyū* 独立自由) with his ideal of 'national sovereignty' (*kokkenschugi* 国権主義) (MMS 2, 147–48, on *dokuritsujiyū* see Kitaoka 2018, 130 ff). Although he separated an

‘early’ and a ‘late’ period in Fukuzawa’s oeuvre, Maruyama’s critics rightly point out that he did not stress at all the process through which Fukuzawa moved from an interpretation of a half-civilized Japan *and* China to the opposition of a civilized Japan *vs.* barbarian China, criticizing China for much more than its Confucianism (Koyasu 2003, 12–20; Sakamoto 2001, 149 ff). In the midst of the imperialist propaganda of the late 1930s that built the unity of *kokutai* on the divine blood line of the *tennō*, Fukuzawa was referred to by Maruyama simply as someone who made the autonomous individual the foundation of an autonomous nation (Karube 2008, 70–72), and who turned against Confucianism because of its ‘merging of ethics and politics’ and ‘fixing’ Tokugawa social relationships (Kersten 1996, 71).

These relationships are usually referred to with the term *hōken*(teki) 封建(的). In the framework of the present paper it is impossible to analyse the complex question of the Tokugawa period under the heading of ‘feudalism’. It is important, however, that for Maruyama, *hōken* meant a *decentralized* social structure existing in opposition to a centralized, *gunken* 郡県 society, rather than a system similar to that of European ‘feudalism’. This opposition of *hōken* and *gunken* was clearly described by Ogyū Sorai himself in *Bendō* 辨道, characterizing *hōken* with the symbol of the family:

The way of the early kings is the way that brings peace to the realm below heaven. In later generations, none of those who discussed statecraft (*keizai* 經濟) could avoid addressing the early kings’ way. However, in later generations *fengjian/hōken* 封建 gave way to *junxian/gunken* 郡縣, and the way of the early kings became an irrelevant banner for the world [to wave as it would]. [...] Generally speaking, *fengjian/hōken* government treats the people like they are part of a family, in a father-son [relationship]. With *junxian/gunken*, there are only laws to rely upon. (Sorai 2006, 150–51, translation altered in the cases of *hōken* and *gunken* only – for the original see Sorai 1973, 203)

Sorai was, obviously, talking about *hōken* as a desirable state of society as opposed to the despotic character of *gunken* (on Sorai’s understanding of *hōken*, see Kurozumi 2003, 388 ff). In contrast, Maruyama was interested in Fukuzawa’s critique of Confucianism precisely because Fukuzawa interpreted the Confucian teaching as a peculiar kind of despotism in a *decentralized* social system that was treated by its leaders as a family, i.e., as a group of blood-relatives *instead of* a group of ‘individuals’. Based on this interpretation, Maruyama contrasted Tokugawa era decentralization with Meiji period centralization, the latter of which, as reflected

in Fukuzawa's early writings, was meant to ensure the sovereignty of Japan *based on* the independence of the Japanese people.

While the first Tokugawa study focused on Ogyū Sorai's 'politicization of Confucianism' and separation of 'public' and 'private', the second work centred around "Nature and Invention in Tokugawa Political Thought" (*Kinsei Nihon seijishisō ni okeru 'shizen' to 'sakui'* 近世日本政治思想における「自然」と「作為」, 1941–1942 [MMS2]). Maruyama's aim in this study was also to

demonstrate that this issue is not simply a technical problem inside the framework of *hōken* society, but that it implies the world-historical problem [*sekaishitekina mondai* 世界史的な問題] of the conflict between the medieval view of social and state [*kokka* 国家] institutions and the modern bourgeois view. (Maruyama 1974, 191–92, translation altered in case of *hōken* only—for the original see MMS 2, 7)

On one side of this world-historical conflict, as Maruyama saw it, there stood the 'natural' unity that was symbolized in early Tokugawa Japan by Zhu Xi's *ri* 理 (Chin. *lǐ*), a concept that unified diverse elements of the Confucian understanding of how the 'ten thousand things' (all things, including man) came into being and operated (regarding *ri*, see Maruyama 1974, 195 ff). Regarding the creation of the way (Chin. *dao* / Jap. *tō/michi* 道), Ogyū Sorai responded that the way was neither *ri*, nor the 'Way of Heaven and Earth' but an *invention* of the sages (Chin. *shengren* / Jap. *seijin* 聖人). By claiming this he took a revolutionary step in Japanese intellectual history (Maruyama 1974, 207). This step, however, contains a strong internal tension: while Sorai tried to bring back the *hōken* social structure to its original, harmonious form, at his time these structures were already falling apart. When Sorai replaced the natural order with an invented order that can be created again, at any time, by anyone, he "brought forth a demon [*mamono* 魔物] whose actions he was unable to control" (Maruyama 1974, 238; MMS 2, 49). The reason for that is to be found in the social structure of Tokugawa society, which was

a *hierarchical structure of immanent values* [*naizaiteki kachi no kaisōteki taikei* 内在の価値の階層的体系, emphasis in the original]. The values of the total social system are diffused and embedded in each closed social sphere. As a result, each of these social spheres plays an indispensable part in the preservation of the total structure. [...] The instant this closure is breached and the values that have been distributed between the different social spheres condense at the top of the pyramid, the *hōken* structure collapses. When control ceases to be indirect and *pouvoirs intermédiaires* are absorbed by the supreme authority; when the material facilities necessary for administration

[*gyōsei* 行政] (such as buildings, horses, military equipment, etc.) are removed from the private ownership of the administrators and concentrated in the hands of the state; when the broadly distributed legislative and judicial powers are unified under a central authority—then we have the birth of a modern nation-state [*kindaikokka* 近代国家]. These illustrations should clarify the meaning of the statement that the Sorai school corroded the *hōken* order. (Maruyama 1974, 244–45, translation altered in case of *hōken*, emphasis in the original – for the original see MMS 2, 54)

The birth of a modern nation-state thus means the dissolution of certain values. Still, only the complete development of this modern state could mean real historical progression. This is a central point for Maruyama. Although in the Meiji period Japan established a modern nation-state in terms of its institutions, the country still lacked a modern individual in the sense of the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’. This was due, first, to the fact that in *kokugaku* 国学, particularly Motoori Norinaga’s 本居宣長 (1730–1801) thought, the spheres separated by Sorai were reunited and the ‘private’ was melted again into the ‘public’ (Maruyama 1974, 171 ff); second, because all reforms were conducted from above; third, because industry had not reached a proper level of development; and fourth, because the ideology of *sonnō* 尊王 (‘reverence for the *tennō*’), which was in favour of the new system, was linked with *jōi* 攘夷 (‘expelling barbarians’), which included the earlier framework proper for keeping foreigners away from the country (ibid., 299–304). Despite the efforts of Meiji intellectuals who were to build national unity on the unity of individuals (cf. Karube 2008, 81–82), the period could not fully overcome its ties to the Tokugawa era. This situation was interpreted by Maruyama, so to speak, as a pause in the progression of world-history in the sense of Hegelian *Weltgeschichte* (Conrad 1999, 166 ff). Japan *could* but *did not* enter that world-history. In the next section, and using Maruyama’s interpretation of the role of the family in nationalist propaganda, I will analyse how this led, in his understanding, to the events of World War II.

Maruyama Masao on the Role of *kazokukokka* 家族國家 in Ultra-nationalism

Although “Maruyama’s post-war works barely mention Confucianism at all”, mainly due to “Confucianism’s post-war association with fascism” (Paramore 2016, 169), Maruyama’s examinations from after the war are most closely linked with his war-time essays. In “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism” (1946 [1969a]), Maruyama built his powerful argumentation on a thesis that had clear

connections with his analysis of the Tokugawa period: he stated that the failure that led to the constellation of events of World War II was the “failure to draw any clear line of demarcation between the public and the private domains” of life (Maruyama 1969a, 6). This is a distinction that would have already been possible according to Maruyama’s interpretation as early as at the time of Ogyū Sorai and without any Western influences (Stevens 2018, 59–60). However, the public and the private spheres were not permanently separated, and despite the modernization of the Meiji era, it was nothing else but the *kokutai* that included “all the internal values of truth, morality, and beauty” (Maruyama 1969a, 6). This *kokutai* was embodied by the *tennō*, whose authority stemmed from his divine origin and was handed down from stage to stage in the state hierarchy, thus doing away with any kind of personal responsibility on any of these levels.

The essential point was that the final decision about the content of Japanese art, scholarship, and so forth, in other words, the definition of what was actually for the good of the country, was handed down by officials whose duty it was to give loyal service ‘to His Majesty the Emperor and the Imperial Government’. (Maruyama 1969a, 6, citation from the “Public Service Regulation for Officials”)

The role of the *tennō* was not merely symbolic, it was not simply ‘representing’ the unity of *kokutai*: the ruler himself literally *embodied* ‘absolute values’. This meant, at the same time, that no moral standards were applied when making judgements about individual actions (Maruyama 1969a, 8; see Stevens 2016, 161; 2018, 64). More precisely, there were no ‘individual’ actions since there were in fact no ‘individuals’ to commit such actions. Single entities were only elements of the whole, and their “position in society and in the nation was based less on social function than on *relative distance* [*kyori* 距離] *from the Emperor*” (Maruyama 1969a, 13, emphasis added as per original: MMS 2, 28).

The role of the family and its relationship with the nation is not discussed in the study on ultra-nationalism. Maruyama only talks about the imperial family, more precisely, about the imperial lineage, stressing that the fact that the *tennō* embodied ultimate values did not mean at all that he would have been ‘free’ in his actions:

Though the Emperor was regarded as the embodiment of ultimate value [*kyūkyokuteki kachi no jittai* 究極的価値の実体], he was infinitely removed from the possibility of creating values out of nothing. His Majesty was heir to the Imperial line unbroken for ages eternal and he ruled by virtue of the final injunctions of his ancestors. [...] Thus the Emperor too was saddled with a burden—in his case a tradition that derived

from the infinitely remote past. It was only because his existence was inextricably involved with the ancestral tradition, in such a way that he and his Imperial Ancestors formed a single unit, that he was regarded as being the ultimate embodiment of internal values. (Maruyama 1969a, 20; MMS 2, 34)

Beyond this web of dependencies related to the imperial lineage, Maruyama does not eliminate the relationship of family and nation in his study on ultra-nationalism. He does not speak more about the role of the imperial family in the Japanese state, nor does he deal with war-time propaganda stressing the family-nature of the nation. The family receives, however, far more importance in two papers Maruyama wrote somewhat later: in “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism” (*Nihon fashizumu no shisō to kōdō* 日本ファシズムの思想と行動, 1948 [1969b]) and “Nationalism in Japan” (*Nihon ni okeru nashonarizumu* 日本におけるナショナリズム, 1951 [1969c]).

In the study on Japanese fascism, Maruyama examined the unique characteristics of the phenomena he had already investigated in the study on ultra-nationalism “without having recourse to any abstract *a priori* definition” of the term ‘fascism’ (Maruyama 1969b, 25). As Mori stressed, “aside from how he called it”, Maruyama did not merge the Japanese phenomenon into European ones of similar kind, “on the contrary, he described them as something having characteristics contrastive to those of Nazism” (Mori 2020, 44). Before listing the main characteristics, Maruyama provides a periodization of Japanese fascism in three phases: a “preparatory period” (from 1919, the end of World War I to 1931, the Manchurian Incident); “period of maturity” (from 1931 to 1936, the *coup d’état* ‘February Incident’); “consummation period” (from 1936 to the end of the war in 1945) (Maruyama 1969b, 26–27). Regarding the first period, he talks, first, about early groups he calls “reactionary bodies rather than fascist organizations”. Of such groups he says that their platform had “*pure hōken* character” (*jun hōkenteki seikaku* 純封建的性格) (MMS 3, 264).

For example, the platform of the Great Japan National Essence Association states: ‘This association is a body sustained by the Heart and dedicated to chivalry.’ The Great Japan Political Justice Corps intones,

The master is like the parent; the follower is like the child. The comradeship of followers is like that of brothers in a family. The orders of the master must be obeyed through thick and thin. The brothers are to assist each other in mutual affection and must not forget the rules of courtesy. (Maruyama 1969b, 27–28; MMS 3, 264)

The link of these early quasi-fascist groups with the formation Maruyama described as *hōken* 封建 will become important for the present investigation. However, at this point Maruyama does not detail the role of Tokugawa *hōken* heritage in Japanese fascism, and turns his attention to those movements closer to the later formations he calls ‘fascist’. These movements end, as he stresses, with the 1936 February Incident that “determined that Japan’s course towards fascism would not take the shape of a fascist revolution” but remained in the framework of the “existing political structure that may be termed the strengthening of State control from above” (Maruyama 1969b, 33). This element returns at several points in the analysis as well as in the concluding statement: the fact that Japanese fascism was forced on the nation from above was due to the lack of a ‘bourgeois revolution’ similar to those seen in Europe (ibid., 80). Thus, in the same way as Maruyama emphasized the internal tensions in the Meiji period that in some respects transcended but in some others preserved Tokugawa structures (Takó 2021, 359), he also pointed to tensions inherent in the ‘pre-modern’ features of Japanese ‘fascism’ (Conrad 1999, 166). These tensions are, of course, among the reasons why it is so difficult to compare the social formation and the power structure of 20th century Japan to Europe, where the various ‘fascist’ systems had foundations very different to those of Japanese ultra-nationalism as described by Maruyama (regarding the definition of fascism, see Kersten 1996, 139 ff; on related theories, see ibid., 142 ff; on Maruyama’s standpoint, see ibid., 150; for an early analysis, see Fletcher 1979, 39–40).

After the historical overview in the second part of the analysis, in Part III Maruyama discusses the ‘distinctive characteristics’ of fascism in Japan: the family-character of the state structure; agrarianism; and the Greater Asia Principle (*ajiashugi* アジア主義) (see also Kersten 1996, 152). He mentions, first,

the family-system tendency [*kazokushugiteki keikō* 家族主義的傾向]: that is, the family system extolled as the foundation of the State structure. The basic characteristic of the Japanese State structure is that it is always considered as an extension of the family; more concretely, as a family-nation [*kazokukokka* 家族國家] composed of the Imperial House as the nation’s [*kokumin* 國民] ‘main family’ and [the people as] its ‘descendants’. This is not merely an analogy as in the organic theory of the State, but is considered as having a substantial meaning. It is maintained, not as an abstract idea but as an actual historical fact, that the Japanese nation preserves unaltered its ancient social structure based on blood relationship. (Maruyama 1969b, 36, translation altered—for the original, see MMS 3, 273; see also Mori 2020, 43)

Maruyama mentions that the emphasis on the family ideology and the virtues of loyalty and filiality (忠孝 *chūkō*) were not novelties at the time, and that they had stood at the centre of state ideology since the Meiji period (regarding *chūkō*, see Mustățea 2019). However, it is precisely the fact that this interpretation of the state remains the main idea of a “fascist movement that stresses the ‘national polity’ [*kokutai*] as a political slogan” that makes the *kazokukokka* principle a distinctive feature of ‘Japanese fascism’ compared to the German and Italian versions. As an example, Maruyama cites the following passage from the “The Present State of Japanese Fascism” (*Nihon fassho no gensei* 日本ファッシヨの現勢) by Tsuda Kōzō 津田光造 (1889–?), chief secretary of the Japan Village Government League (*Nihon Murajiba Dōmei* 日本村治派同盟):

In the family-system principle [*kazokushugi* 家族主義] of Japan the keynote of society is not the demand for individual rights [*kojin no kenri* 個人の権利], as in the modern countries of the West, but service to the family as a whole. Socially each family is an independent animate body, a complete cell in itself. The individual is no more than a part or an element of this complete cell. [...] Our nationalism [*kokkashugi* 国家主義] should be the extension and enlargement of this family-system principle. This is perhaps because our nationalism is nothing but the union of these families at the national level. The Emperor is the sovereign, family head, centre, and general representative of the State as a united body. (cited in Maruyama 1969b, 37, cited in Fraser’s translation—for the original, see MMS 3, 274)

This example also shows how, for Maruyama, the lack of individuality on all levels of society was a central characteristic of the “family-system principle”. In a system of legality—like the Western state as described by Maruyama in his study on ultra-nationalism (Maruyama 1969a, 3)—individual morality can be clearly separated from the formal place of the person in society. In a country, however, which is built on and is imagined through the family principle, moral obligations do not follow from individual considerations and decisions, but from the mere fact that one is a member of the family. In this case, one can see a peculiar kind of centralization by the interpretation of the state as *one* family—as opposed to the decentralized (*hōken*) structure that is based on *separate* family units.

At the same time, the second characteristic analysed by Maruyama, agrarianism, strengthens the decentralization of the operation of society.

On the one hand, there is a tendency towards an ever-greater strengthening of absolute State sovereignty focused on the Emperor; on the other, a tendency to centre the conception of Japan on provincial rather than on State affairs. (Maruyama 1969b, 38)

Thus, “the concentration of powerful authority and the strengthening of state control, which was common in world fascism, was limited in Japan by the ideology of agrarianism” (Maruyama 1969b, 44). This connects 20th century Japan with pre-Meiji times. Then, as a third element among the characteristics of Japanese fascism Maruyama mentions the imperialist idea of *ajiashugi* rooted in the Meiji period; that is, “the idea that Japan should seize hegemony in Asia in place of European imperialism” (ibid., 51). These conflicting directions, as well as the lack of a mass movement and a bourgeois revolution, which are examined in the fourth part of his study, reflect internal tensions that penetrated imperialist Japan and were similar to the tensions Maruyama detected in the Tokugawa and Meiji periods.

Last but not least, and without discussing the entire analysis, it is important to mention Maruyama’s unfortunate distinction between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘pseudo-intellectuals’ (in Part V), the former said to be free from fascist influence, the latter described as its supporting social stratum (ibid., 57. ff; see also Fletcher 1979, 42). With this interpretation, as Kersten put it, “Maruyama did great harm to the credibility of his reading of Japanese fascism” (Kersten 1996, 152). It has several shortcomings, most importantly that it falsely suggests that there were no ‘true’ intellectuals supporting fascism, which was, of course, not the case (see Barshay 1992, 389; Kersten 1996, 152–53). It is also important, however, that Maruyama’s argument here was based on a consideration of the transmission of ideologies downwards within the peculiar social structure of the era.

It is precisely these pseudo-intellectuals who directly controlled the thought and sentiment of the ‘masses’. From the viewpoint of the Japanese political and social structure as a whole, they clearly belonged to the class of the ruled. Their standard of living was not very high, being scarcely different from that of their subordinates. Nevertheless, they were the undisputed rulers of their own microcosms, in which they had the authority of petty emperors. (Maruyama 1969b, 60)

This description, however one-sided, shows a close relationship with the way Maruyama described the “transfer of oppression” (Maruyama 1969a, 17–18; see Sasaki 2012, 44) in the study on ultra-nationalism. At the same time, it is also linked with the characteristics of the family-system tendency as well as with the decentralization implied by agrarianism. All these features point back in the di-

rection of features Maruyama stressed when discussing Tokugawa *hōkensei* 封建性 (see the previous section). This relationship becomes explicit in his 1951 study “Nationalism in Japan”.

In “Nationalism in Japan” Maruyama examines the uniqueness of Japanese nationalism, pointing to the “confusion that still surrounds the country’s position in world history” (Maruyama 1969c, 135). He leaves no doubt about what is at stake in the interpretation of these characteristics:

There can be no complete break [*danzetsu* 断絶] in history. Japan’s future nationalism, whether it emerges as a reaction against the past, as a compromise with its heritage, or as a revival of the pre-war form, cannot escape being branded by its own past. (Maruyama 1969c, 137; MMS 5, 59)

This point is crucial considering Maruyama’s distinction between ‘ultra-nationalism’, the object of his strongest critique, and ‘modern nationalism’, which he held to be not only desirable, but a requirement for a modern nation (on Maruyama’s distinction of *kokuminshugi* 国民主義 and *kokkashugi* as ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ nationalism, see Kersten 1996, 149; on Fukuzawa as a representative of ‘modern nationalism’, see Sasaki 2012, 31, 35. ff). For Maruyama, Japan should have become a modern nation-state, but it stepped onto an extreme nationalist path instead, a path that still endangered the nationalism that remained a requirement as long as the country wanted to form a unity similar to Western nations. To understand the factors that were shaping the previous period is, thus, an essential instrument in shaping the present. Harootunian referred to Maruyama as an example of “anxiety” and an “unwavering belief in the need for constant vigil against recurrence” of pre-war nationalism (Harootunian 1971, 58). However, based on Maruyama’s constant warning against presupposing *any* ‘turning points’ or ‘breaks’ in history, it might be fairer to say that the foundation of his analyses was a view of historical progression that did indeed include the possibility of recurrence or, more precisely, *excluded* the possibility of a ‘complete break’ in history. The same view can certainly be the source of the ‘anxiety’ mentioned by Harootunian.

Japan, as Maruyama saw it, followed a path of nationalism that was different from that of all other countries in Asia. One of the main reasons for this uniqueness was that “[i]n Japan the powers that overthrew the Tokugawa regime and seized authority in a unified nation were themselves constituent elements of the old ruling class” (Maruyama 1969c, 142). Because of this, a seemingly successful modernization was carried out without the emergence of the modern citizen, “popular movements being repressed in the name of national unity” (*ibid.*, 143). In Maruyama’s understanding,

from the beginning tension existed between external and internal impulses, in the form of National Sovereignty towards the Western nations, and Popular Sovereignty towards the government itself. For Maruyama it was particularly crucial that instead of coexisting as dual facets of a subjective identity, these two impulses were regarded as incongruous, even antithetical. It was not possible to defend the nation and be democratic at the same time. In other words, the subject greeted the modern era as a divided self, a dichotomous subjectivity in hostile cohabitation within the state and the citizen. (Kersten 1996, 63–64)

This internal tension caused by the fact that nationalism developed without democracy concluded in two central tendencies:

first, the tendency to symbolize the State as the *direct extension* [*chokusetsu-teki enchō* 直接的延長] of the primary group (family or village [*kazoku ya buraku* 家族や部落]) in which the individual is submerged; secondly, love of fatherland, expressed pre-eminently as love of one's native place which in turn is an aspect of *love of the environment*. (Maruyama 1969c, 144, emphasis added as per original MMS 5, 67)

The three features of Japanese ultra-nationalism; that is, 1. Tokugawa *hōken* structures hidden behind the modernized surface of (post-)Meiji Japan, 2. the lack of individuality and citizenship, and 3. the family-nature of the state are most explicitly linked with each other in this aspect.

With the democratic front silenced, the Meiji leaders zealously injected national consciousness by a full-scale mobilization of irrational attachments to the primary group. Above all, this meant that traditional loyalty of the *hōken* system and devotion to the father as family-head [*dentōteki hōkenteki oyobi shikafuchōteki chūsei* 伝統的封建的及至家父長の忠誠] were centralized in the Emperor, the concrete manifestation of Japan's national unity. (Maruyama 1969c, 145, translation slightly altered: see MMS 5, 68; see also Barshay 1992, 386–87; Sasaki 2012, 32)

This loyalty was the characteristic that, for Maruyama, symbolized wartime propaganda, and one that he linked to the (mis)use of the family model as both the foundation and the symbol of the nation-state.

Conclusion

With his observations on the role of the concept of family in Japanese ultra-nationalism, Maruyama stressed his central thesis that pre-war ultra-nationalism was not a sudden phenomenon but the consequence of a process that leads back to the Meiji transition, the period usually labelled the most liberal and democratic era in Japanese history. For Maruyama, it was not the ultra-nationalism of the 1930s that destroyed responsibility: it was the Meiji era that failed to “produce *citoyens* able to bear the burden of political responsibility in a modern nation-state” (Maruyama 1969c, 146). In the present paper I have shown that the family-nature of the ultra-nationalist state meant for him the appearance of what he called the *hōkenteki* 封建的 structure of society. The most important element of this, as I argued, was neither the land (*feudum*), nor the service of subordinates provided to their lords as it is suggested by the broadly applied term ‘feudalism’. For Maruyama, *hōken* essentially meant *decentralized* authority and a system in which the conservation of oppression-relationships is guaranteed by filial loyalty. This does not mean that local authorities would not be part of the same hierarchy. It means that the control that keeps this hierarchy together is *not* the direct control of one centre of power but many ‘family heads’ who have the filial loyalty of their people and are loyal, in the same way, to their superiors. As Maruyama wrote in the study on ‘ultra-nationalism’:

In the absence of any free, subjective awareness the individual’s actions are not circumscribed by the dictates of conscience; instead he is regulated by the existence of people in a higher class—of people, that is, who are closer to the ultimate value. What takes the place of despotism in such a situation is a phenomenon that may be described as the maintenance of equilibrium by the transfer of oppression. By exercising arbitrary power on those who are below, people manage to transfer in a downward direction the sense of oppression that comes from above, thus preserving the balance of the whole. (Maruyama 1969a, 17–18)

This is what Maruyama saw symbolically represented in the family-state ideology:

One of the major characteristics of *hōken* society [*hōkenshakai* 封建社会] is the preservation of the ordered unity of the total structure by linking together in layers closed, self-contained social spheres (centered on the master-servant and father-son relationships). Politically, this takes the form of the *principle of indirect control*. (Maruyama 1974, 243; MMS 2, 54)

This relationship between master and servant, father and son and, in a later stage, the *tennō* and all Japanese, was described by Maruyama in the concept of the family.

Maruyama never criticized the importance of the family as such. It was not the family but a certain glorification or mystification of family relationships that he saw as the root of a dangerous misinterpretation of social relations. That misinterpretation was expanded to a theory of the state in the concept of *kokutai*, becoming the source of an irrational form of modernity that included modern institutions but lacked the concept of a free individual. From among the different aspects of the nature of the ultra-nationalist state, Maruyama was mainly interested in the ‘psychological’ background of the operation of society. As he concluded in “Nationalism in Japan”:

In order to unite nationalism and democracy effectively, an internal reform in the psychological structure of Japanese society must occur. For Japan to accomplish this union, nationalism must be rationalized in the same degree that democracy is irrationalized. (Maruyama 1969c, 152)

This would only be possible by founding the nation on free, responsible individuals instead of a misinterpreted concept of the family. The present investigation focused on the nature of this concept as Maruyama saw it. As I pointed out, it was rooted in classical Confucianism, it became (in Maruyama’s interpretation) a central element of Tokugawa rule, it did not disappear with the ‘modernization’ of the Meiji period, and it symbolically represented national unity in the pre-war era. This concept was for Maruyama further proof that “[t]here can be no complete break in history” (Maruyama 1969c, 137)—at the same time, a central element of his arguments urging change.

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***SPECIAL ISSUE:
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN
SINIC INTELLECTUAL HISTORY***

Religion and Ideology

Mobilizing Frontiers: “Heretical Masters” and Their Ideological and Religio-political Change in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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Abstract

Since the late 17th century, the Mekong Delta has become a vibrant place for Vietnamese, ethnic Khmer, and ethnic Chinese settlements, forming mixed communities in terms of race and culture. As a new frontier, the Delta has continuously undergone state-sponsored “civilizing” processes. The resulting hybridity in folk culture gave birth to various religious sects, especially on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. From the view of late imperial Confucianism, these groups were judged as “heretical sects” and their leaders “heretical masters”. Despite being classified as “heretical”, these local “masters” and their communities still insisted on the core Confucian values of benevolence, righteousness and patriotism. Chinese secret societies and rebels escaped to the Delta in different times, bringing new ideas to the region, especially the cults of Five Lord Buddhas, Maitreya, and the concept of the birth of the wise king. Under French suppression, these “heretical masters” changed their religious strategies, supported local military leaders and secret societies to “fight the French and restore Đại Nam”. This research aims to investigate and analyse the “heretical” religious movements and ideological transformation of “heretical masters” in the Mekong River Delta in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thereby strengthening the argument that although Vietnam’s local religious elites were marginalized and suppressed by state governance (the Nguyễn dynasty, French colonialists), they always cared

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about national independence and social prosperity, and therefore transformed their sectarian strategies into a special form of religio-political hybridity. National independence was definitely prioritized, and therefore the concept of “loyalty” in the traditional Confucian view turned into “patriotism” in the new context of French invasion and colonialization. This study uses a mixture of extensive field data collected between 2015–2017 and 2022–2024 (the primary data source for this study) with limited original texts from the Nguyễn dynasty and the research findings of selective previous scholars, and applies the theoretical concept of “standardization” and/or “orthopraxy” from the pre-modern Confucian tradition to examine and analyse political-religious practices, ideological transformation, and implicit narratives among local religious masters in rural Southern Vietnam, confirming that the Mekong Delta has fostered an environment of cultural and religious dynamism and pluralism since the late 19th century.

Keywords: “heretical masters”, the Mekong Delta, standardization, patriotism, anti-French movements

Mobilizacija novih področij: »heretični mojstri« ter njihov vpliv na ideološke in versko-politične spremembe ob delti reke Mekong v Vietnamu konec 19. in v začetku 20. stoletja

Izvleček

Od konca 17. stoletja dalje je bila delta reke Mekong dinamično področje za naseljevanje Vietnamcev, etničnih Kmerov in etničnih Kitajcev, ki so tvorili rasno in kulturno mešane skupnosti. Kot novo mejno območje je bila delta nenehno podvržena »civilizacijskim« procesom, ki jih je spodbujala država. Posledično so hibridne ljudske kulture botrovale nastanku različnih verskih skupnosti, zlasti na vietnamsko-kamboški meji. Z vidika poznega cesarskega konfucianizma so bile te skupine ocenjene kot »heretične sekte«, njihovi voditelji pa kot »heretični mojstri«. Čeprav so bili ti lokalni »mojstri« in njihove skupnosti opredeljeni kot »heretični«, pa so še vedno vztrajali pri temeljnih konfucijanskih vrednotah, kot so dobrohotnost, pravičnost in patriotizem. V različnih obdobjih so v delto prihajale razne kitajske tajne združbe in uporniki, ki so v regijo prinašali nove ideje, zlasti kult petih Bud, Maitreje in idejo »modrega kralja«. V času francoskega zatiranja so ti »heretični mojstri« spremenili svoje verske strategije, tako da so podpirali lokalne vojaške voditelje in tajna združenja ter se na ta način »borili proti Francozom in tako obnovili Đai Nam«. Namen te raziskave je proučiti in analizirati »heretična« verska gibanja ter ideološko preobrazbo »heretičnih mojstrov« v delti reke Mekong ob koncu 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja ter s tem podpreti trditev, da so bile lokalne verske elite v Vietnamu sicer marginalizirane in zatirane s strani državne oblasti (dinastija Nguyễn, francoski kolonialisti), vendar so vedno skbele za nacionalno neodvisnost in družbeno blaginjo, zato so svoje sektaške strategije preoblikovale v posebno obliko versko-politične hibridnosti. Ker je bila nacionalna neodvisnost vsekakor v ospredju, se je tradicionalni konfucijanski koncept »zvestobe« v novem kontekstu francoske invazije in kolonizacije spremenil v »patriotizem«. Ta študija je osnovana na obsežnih terenskih podatkih, zbranih v letih 2015–2017 in 2022–2024 (to je primarni vir podatkov), na izvirnih besedilih dinastije

Nguyễn ter izbranih raziskovalnih izsledkih predhodnih raziskovalcev. Za proučevanje in analizo politično-religioznih praks, ideološke preobrazbe in implicitne pripovedi med lokalnimi verskimi mojstri na podeželju južnega Vietnama pa ta študija uporablja teoretični koncept »standardizacije« in/ali »ortopraksije« iz predmodernega konfucijanskega izročila. Raziskava potrjuje, da je delta Mekonga od konca 19. stoletja spodbujala okolje kulturnega in verskega dinamizma ter pluralizma.

Ključne besede: »heretični mojstri«, delta Mekonga, standardizacija, patriotizem, protifrancoska gibanja

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Pre-modern East Asia and Vietnam

Heterodoxy and Orthodoxy

Since the early 19th century, many “*ông Đạo*” (sectarian masters) uniquely appeared in the Mekong Delta. They were mainly Vietnamese religious specialists, but a number of influential Chinese and Khmer masters classified as “heretic masters” by later members of religious movements and present-day local residents have been found in local folk stories. Therefore, the term “heretical masters” used in this study is not limited to Vietnamese religious specialists, but also includes ethnic Khmer and ethnic Chinese masters who played significant parts in the common wave of “*ông Đạo*” in the region during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. All masters had the “mysterious” faith and ability to do things ordinary people could not do. While authorities named them “heretical masters” (*gian đạo sĩ*), many local people believed and followed them (see Phan 2010, 349–50). Indeed, the authorities and ordinary people had different views on “heretical masters”, making these men a symbol of anti-royalty from the state’s perspective. French colonization led to changes in traditional ideological foundations. The multivocality in interpreting the symbolic notation of “heretical masters” greatly transformed, becoming consistent with orthodoxy. Similarly, the ambiguity in classifying orthodoxy and heterodoxy disappeared. We would argue that despite being condemned and attacked by state-sponsored “orthodox” ideologies, the “heretical/heterodox sects” in the Mekong River Delta were rooted in and operated on official Confucian norms and values; therefore, their faith, motivation, and practices extend far beyond the realm of religion.

In East Asian cultures, being “heretical/heterodox” means to be suppressed ideologically and politically (see DeGroot [1903] 1904). The term “heretical” (i.e., in “heretical masters”) indicates the arrogant way that imperial authorities and common folk used to view Confucian hermits, folk Daoists, liturgical priests in folk beliefs, and folk healers, those who did not conform to the official ideology,

norms, and policies. Throughout the centuries, the two concepts of “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy” have existed in the history of East Asian thought as the products of the uncompromising struggles between the monarchy and the “margins”. The term “heretical/heterodox”, widely used in the literature, is not a conclusive assessment of the attributes and value of these forces, but a separate term that implies East Asian cultural and political discourses. Accordingly, the non-conformists of the central court and their groups were assigned the “heretical/heterodox” concept, regardless of how much they contributed to the community.

The terms “heretical/heterodox” in this study are based on the socio-political perspective of Confucianism rather than any religious basis. The term “heretical/heterodox (or heterodoxy)” must be interpreted in relation to “orthodox (orthodoxy)”. Both were first judged based on the “value” of contributing to the state (see Faure 2004). As Steven Sangren (1987, 76) notes, “structures of value that valorise order and legitimate existing social institutions and authority” are defined as “orthodox”, while the failure of this principle is titled “heretical/heterodox”. In Chinese and Vietnamese, the term “heretical way” is widely used to refer to the ideologies and practices of “heterodox” institutions and people (see Hoàng 2016, 1115).

Orthopraxy¹ is a channel to “screen” political and cultural realities and social actors to ensure state power and social order (see further Sangren 1987, 76; McDonough 2005, 6909). The “orthopractic” mechanism might change under each dynasty, and the later dynasties might have rejected or replaced the norms and evaluation standards the previous one(s) left. The key to evaluating orthodoxy and heterodoxy lies in value; however, in this case the criterion for determining value lies not in culture but in politics. In the case of the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam, the concept of “orthodoxy” among sectarian groups should be defined in the process of political and ideological transformation, especially in the context of the direct operation of Western values in the country since the end of the 19th century. In this study, we mainly conducted fieldwork investigations and discovered that geopolitical factors matter. The farther away from the central government, the less “orthodox” the local culture became.

In East Asian history, orthodoxy must be in line with the concept of the “Heavenly Mandate”. The emperor and his ministers used this concept to judge orthodoxy/heterodoxy and consolidate the legitimacy of their rule. Based on specific conditions of each period, they “formalized” their legitimacy through different strategies (see Taylor 1986; Woodside 2002; Liu and Shek 2004), especially in the new frontiers such as the Mekong River Delta. The process of civilizing new

1 The term “orthopraxy” is derived from the ancient Greek words “orthos” (straight, right) and “praxis” (doing, practice) (McDonough 2005, 6909).

frontiers was not always easy. In almost all periods, “heterodoxy” continued to exist and mix with “orthodoxy”. Donald Sutton (2007, 7–8) uses the term “liturgical orthopraxy” to refer to the phenomenon of certain Daoists who wisely refused to accept state orders. They set their own guidelines but formally tried to restrain, reform, and cooperate with the government to not be equated with folk beliefs (and thus have a higher status than them) (see Strickmann 2002, 1–4; Katz 2007, 80). Even so, under the Confucian viewpoint they were judged to be between the two main lines of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, as were the “heretical masters” in the Mekong River Delta considered in this study.

During the early Qing dynasty, the fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism gave birth to many folk sects in South China. Many political forces were dissatisfied with the Manchurian rule and wanted to restore the power of the Han Chinese, using early folk factions to explain the “Divine Destiny and Power” (天命神權) theory. Accordingly, they explained that “Heaven” gave them a mission to launch anti-Qing movements and restore the Chinese monarchy. The Qing court used the term “heretical/heterodox practitioners” to refer to these forces.

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Vietnamese Culture

Regarding Vietnamese culture, many historians (e.g., Marr 1984; McHale 1995; Wolter 1996; Keith Taylor 2002; Philip Taylor 2004; Liam 2006; Whitmore 2010, etc.) have done pioneering work on the issue of Confucian orthopraxy; however, only a small number of articles deal with “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy” in Southern Vietnam. Among these, Philip Taylor (2004) discusses in detail the “formalization” and “legitimation” trend in the worship of the Goddess of Realm (*Bà chúa Xứ*) in Southern Vietnam in the 20th century. Claudine Ang (2019) discusses the fact that Nguyễn Hoàng entered the land of Thuận Hóa (present-day Huế) and established the state of Đàng Trong (Cochin-chine), and “standardized” the central and southern regions by encouraging Confucian intellectuals to become more active in “civilizing” local traditions. Some other Vietnamese writers have recently conducted specific research on this approach, e.g., Tạ Chí Đại Trường (2006 [1989]) and Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (2017), shedding light on the complex layers and discourses intertwined throughout the history of ideological orthopraxy in Southern Vietnam and interpreting the symbolic meaning of divinity in Vietnamese culture.

Vietnamese Confucianism was not strong, and the Confucianists’ ability to “standardize” the local cultures was ineffective (see McHale 2002, 409–10; Young 1998, 137; Liam 2006). Therefore, Confucianism, Buddhism, and folk beliefs are mutu-

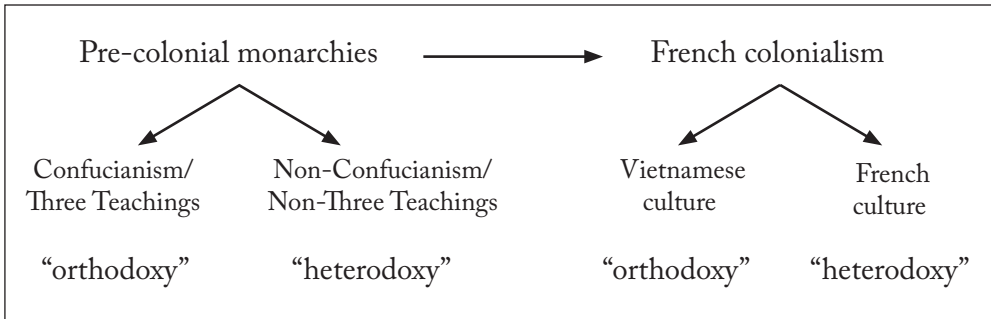
ally opposed, interdependent, coexisting, and developing in shaping the history of Vietnamese culture. As Young puts it, “even while conforming to the orthodoxy, Vietnamese intensely seek something more satisfying than performance of duties” (Young 1998, 147). As a result, the concept of “orthodoxy” is too loose, and just because something is seen as “orthodox” behaviour today does not guarantee that this will remain true in the future (ibid., 154, 161). If there are significant changes in society, “heretical” behaviours and customs may be consistent with orthodoxy. For example, the Nôm-script² literature of the 17th century was described as “de-emphasising Confucian orthodoxy and official views in favour of more ‘popular’ themes” (Ostrowski 2010, 21).

When Vietnamese culture was forced to collide with French culture and civilization under French colonialism (1858–1945), the separation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy became more acute, especially in the Mekong River Delta—the “farthest” region from the royal court’s perspective.³ Opposition to the French “heterodox” culture was popularized since the late 19th century, causing the concept of heterodoxy to dramatically change. Instead of judging orthodoxy/heterodoxy by the Confucian norms, the new classification was based on the separation of “*Ta*” (“We”, referring to traditional thought and culture, the Nguyễn dynasty) and “*Tây*” (“the West”, the French and their culture and ruling policies). The line between Confucian and non-Confucian traditions was gradually blurred, and that is when Confucianists, Daoists, monks, priests, and folk physicians were on the same front to fight against the French rulers. Many uprisings in Southern Vietnam linked patriotic martyrs with Confucian scholars, Daoists, members of secret societies, and sectarian leaders, such as the Phan Xích Long Uprising (Saigon, early 20th century), the Nguyễn An Ninh Secret Society (1920–1930s, Saigon), and the Bình Xuyên Group (mid-20th century, Saigon), among others.

2 The Vietnamese scriptures in the pre-modern periods developed from the Chinese scriptures, with local phonetic marks.

3 Until the end of the 19th century, the territorial boundaries between Vietnam and Cambodia in the Mekong Delta remained blurred. French rulers later drew and established the exact borders in 1873.

Table 1. Comparing ‘orthodox’ and ‘heterodox’ views in pre-colonial and colonial periods in Vietnam



Why did this take place in the Mekong River Delta? In 1698, Southern Vietnam was formally incorporated into Vietnam under the leadership of Nguyễn Phúc Chu, lord of Cochinchina (r. 1691–1725). As many of our ethnographic findings indicate, the first Vietnamese farmers had arrived earlier on the Đồng Nai and Saigon Rivers with popular Buddhism in the 1620s. The region quickly became the destination for the lower-class peasants and fleeing soldiers, who were not bound by Confucian norms and royal rules. In the late 1670s, the Chinese arrived and established the Đồng Nai, Mỹ Tho, and Hà Tiên settlements, adding more diversity to the region. Contact between Mahayana Buddhism (by the Vietnamese and Chinese) and Theravada Buddhism (by the Khmer) also changed what it meant to be a good Vietnamese in other ways, beyond the traditional Confucian meaning. The slow and less effective civilizing policies of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945) failed to eliminate all “unorthodox” ideological trends and groups in the region, especially in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural border areas. In addition, the French rulers began colonizing the southern region of Vietnam in 1859, which limited the Vietnamese royal court’s contact and control over the region of the south and opened the way to introducing French values into the region.

Elite culture in Southern Vietnam was based on the Three Teachings and folk wisdom, and thus the fate of Confucianism is closely related to that of Buddhism and Daoism. Due to the local culture and ethnicity diversity, local Confucianists and ordinary people were not strict about orthodoxy. Therefore, in the past three hundred years various new religious movements continued to arise, making the region’s cultural landscape extremely diverse. The image and unique role of the “heretical masters” from the 19th century to the early 20th century appeared against such a background.

This study mainly focuses on the following issues: how these “heretical masters” emerged and worked in the Mekong Delta region in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries, how they responded to the pre-modern state's "standardization" policy, how they changed their attitudes toward the royal court and French rulers during the colonial periods, and how significant this shift in thought among "heretical masters" was in the context of the Vietnamese political culture during the colonial period. The study demonstrates the power of the Vietnamese peasant elite (even considered "heretical" in the official view of the time) on the frontier regions during a period of national unrest, allowing readers to understand their aspirations and actual contributions to the country. The study also aims to provide proof/evidence of the Nguyễn dynasty's greatest efforts to coordinate official and unofficial forces (political and religio-political movements) to expel the French and regain the southern regions (in the first phase of French colonization) and the country as a whole (end of the 19th century to the early 20th century). Through the voices and actions of local people (including religious specialists, fellow rebels, and mass groups) in the southern region at different times, this study partially engages in a dialogue with the common view among contemporary Vietnamese historians that the Nguyễn dynasty was so powerless when "selling three Eastern provinces"⁴ and then "selling the three Western provinces"⁵ to allow the French to colonize the south and expand throughout the country.

The primary data of this research come from five sources, namely (1) the Nguyễn dynasty royal documents; (2) published monographs and journal articles, (3) on-site investigation/survey, interviews with current "masters" and descendants in the Mekong River Delta, (4) oracle information circulated among ordinary people, and (5) classics and esoteric books circulated internally within the religious groups. This study uses the concept of "standardization" and the alternative transformation of orthopraxy mechanisms in pre-modern East Asian cultures by James L. Watson (1985) and other scholars, as well as Frederic Barthes' rational choice theory, to explore the ways and practices of heretical masters. Among them, we focus on the behavioural changes of the heretical masters to the royal court and their contribution to the anti-colonial movements, thereby arguing that "heretical masters" can be regarded as "heterodox" from the pre-colonial Confucian perspective, but when the country responded to non-Confucian factors then the concept of orthodoxy changed, and the "heretical masters" became "orthodox and patriotic masters", even leading people to engage in local revolutionary movements. This case study in the Mekong River Delta is uniquely defined in Confucian classifications of orthodoxy and heresy, and thus it is unlike the situation across Southeast Asia, where Theravada Buddhism and Islam are dominant. To clarify all these points, we start with a general overview of the concept of orthodoxy and

4 Including Đồng Nai, Gia Định, and Định Tường (northern part of the Mekong River system).

5 Including An Giang, Vĩnh Long, and Hà Tiên (southern part of the Mekong River system).

heterodoxy from a Confucian perspective in East Asia and Vietnam, describe the practices of typical “heretical masters” in the Mekong Delta, and finally analyse ideological changes and their contributions in the national history to study multi-dimensional ideological movements at the grassroots level in pre-modern Southern Vietnam.

“Heretical Masters” from the Nguyễn Dynasty’s Viewpoint

“Heretical Masters” and the Shared Vision in the Cult of Five Lord Buddhas (五公王佛)

This study analyses the Nguyễn dynasty’s official views on “masters” based on the above descriptions of orthodox and heretical concepts. As stated above, “heretical masters” were once popular only in the Southern region,⁶ where orthodox and “heretical/heterodox” complexes popularly co-existed throughout history. Richey (2013, 68–69) argues that “Northern Việt Nam remained more rigidly committed to Confucian social hierarchies, while the relaxation of Confucian orthodoxy in the south enabled a newfound social mobility to develop there”. Although many policies and activities were adopted to revitalize the orthodox Confucianism in the south (see Ang 2019), the Nguyễn dynasty failed to “unify” and “standardize” the cultural differences of local communities (Woodside 2002, 141).

Official records of the Nguyễn dynasty hardly recorded or described every “heretical master” and their activities (with the exceptions of the Nguyễn Trung Trục Movement in Rạch Giá written in *Đại Nam thực lục*; the Trương Định Movement in Gò Công, the Thủ khoa Huân Movement in Mỹ Tho, the Trần Văn Thành Movement and Láng Linh-Bảy Thửa Revolution in An Giang reported by Phan Trung and recorded in the Royal Documents by the Nguyễn Dynasty Privy Council), and thus this study is mainly based on local unofficial texts, oral data, and field surveys. On the other hand, the very limited official historical records classify these masters as a “heretical group”, and describe them from a non-neutral perspective. According to folklore, many masters “were conferred” by the Nguyễn court, but there are no official records. The Seven Mountains is a frontier area, the studied events may have been much local and did not need to be recorded in national history, or they may have been created and exaggerated by later masters and their followers. The authors of this study stay focus on the royal perception of these masters through general decrees and secret instructions in the relevant networks.

6 In the North and Central Vietnam, anti-French movements were normally led by Confucian elites such as Phan Bội Châu (1647–1940), Hoàng Hoa Thám (1858–1913), etc.

Overall, there are few contemporary studies of Mekong “heretical masters”, and most related scholarship focuses on a common description of the religious movement and practitioners of the Seven Mountains (An Giang, Vietnam) and Tà-lon Mountain (Bokor Mountain, Cambodia), rarely covering the roles and symbolism of sectarian leaders. For example, Dật Sĩ and Nguyễn Văn Hầu (1955), Nguyễn Văn Hầu and Nguyễn Hữu Hiệp (1973), Uno Koichiro (1973), Sơn Nam (1973; 2005; 2009), Hue Tam Ho Tai (1983), Đinh Văn Hạnh (1999), Takeuchi Fusaji (2013; 2019), and George Coulet ([1926] 2019) all emphasize religious movements and the birth of large sects such as Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, while Trương Thị Thu Hằng (2011) focuses on the case of Ông Đạo Trần in Vũng Tàu. Do Thiên (2003) investigates religious activities in villages in southern Vietnam to study their impact on daily life at the grassroots level and how folk religious institutions (*đình*, pagodas, folk temples, etc.) have resisted the threat of external domination through various forms of “negotiation”. Georges Coulet ([1926] 2019) and Nguyễn Thanh Tiến (2005) examine secret societies and their possible relations with the sects. It is worth noting that Phan An (2010) and Nguyễn Thanh Phong (2019) directly discuss the priests and sectarian leaders in the Mekong Delta. However, neither author goes beyond a general description and evaluation of this. Nguyễn Hữu Hiếu and Nguyễn Thanh Thuận (2019) search for and systematically analyse details of the Nguyễn dynasty’s secret decrees and instructions to the anti-French movements in the south, including many details related to “heretical masters”. In addition, during the field research we found some anonymous texts circulating among relevant people, such as *Phép Giảng Năm Ông và Mười Sáu* (*The Teachings of Five Masters and Ten Sorrows*) and *Ngọc lịch đồ thơ tập chú* (*Notes on the Collection of Ngọc lịch Poems*). These works depict the historical outlook of the “heretical masters”, their origins and practices, as well as the socio-religious movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thanks to a combination of survey data and written documents from a discursive perspective, this article further enables us to have a new understanding of “heretical masters” from the perspective of discourse analysis.

This study is the first to analyse and synthesize a large amount of data on endogenous religions in the Mekong Delta region, such as the “heretical masters” movements, the introduction and adoption of the cult of Five Lord Buddhas in local religious movements as well as pre-modern political, cultural and social data collected based on original documents, using the memories of heretical masters’ descendants and followers and research results of previous scholars to figure out the nature of the “heretical masters” movements, the quest for standardization, and the change in perception and practices of related masters and the Nguyễn court during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. This study aims at pro-

viding a broad, normative perspective on the evolution and temporary status of religious movements in pre-modern Southern Vietnam against the backdrop of early French colonization and international exchanges with the country. Members of this research team have published a few short articles regarding the heretical masters in Vietnamese journals (mainly introductory and descriptive articles in the Vietnamese language in the journal *Religion Studies*) so far (Nguyễn Thanh Phong 2018; 2019). However, this interdisciplinary study not only generalizes and systematizes the findings to date, but also includes a wealth of newly discovered field data based on deeper theoretical constructs of ideological standardization and discourse analysis.

The “heretical masters” movements in Southern Vietnam are closely related to Qing movements in South China through immigration flows. Due to the continuous growth of the Qing army, especially under the Kangxi-Qianlong rulers, the anti-Qing forces brutally eliminated and suppressed the “heretical” groups, forcing them to immigrate to Southeast Asia. After two Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), the Qing dynasty was forced to sign a compensation agreement and give land to the Western colonists. Sectarian groups and anti-Western movements emerged widely; among them, the Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth Society) was very strong throughout eastern and southeastern China. Especially after the defeat of the Taiping Uprising (1851–1864), another wave of Qing immigrants flocked to Southeast Asia, and this contributed to the establishment of Chinese civil sects and religious groups in Vietnam.

In the Mekong Delta region, the earliest Chinese settlements are said to be the Mạc Cửu group in Hà Tiên and the Dương Ngạn Địch group in Mỹ Tho (and the Trần Thượng Xuyên group in Biên Hòa, north of Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City) from the 1670s.⁷ They were mainly the remnants of the anti-Qing army and maritime merchants, and their arrival and settlement in the region opened the way for a steady stream of early Chinese immigrants, including members of various religious groups and secret societies in the Delta. According to Huỳnh Ngọc Đăng (2018, 88), at the end of the 18th century the number of Chinese residents in central and southern Vietnam was about 50,000, with the largest number in Saigon-Đồng Nai and the Mekong Delta regions.⁸ They were suppressed by the Tây Sơn in Đồng Nai in 1777 and in Chợ Lớn in 1780, resulting in many of

7 During our recent field trip to Trà Vinh City, we discovered that the year 1556 was engraved on a plaque at Phước Minh Cung Temple (福明宮) of the local Hokkien Chinese. There are no clues yet to confirm this is the year of construction of this temple.

8 In the Saigon-Đồng Nai region there have been more Cantonese residents than other Chinese groups, while in the Mekong Delta Region there have been more Chaozhou Chinese residents (see Nguyễn Ngọc Thọ 2017).

them wandering around the Mekong Delta region. In general, they enjoyed more privileges and a more favourable income and tax system, even slightly more than the Vietnamese during the first Nguyễn King, Gia Long (1802–1820); however, many local Chinese participated in and/or supported the Lê Văn Khôi riot in Saigon during 1833–1835, leading to minor changes in policy under Minh Mạng and after (Nguyễn, 2000, 18; Huynh, 2018, 162).

The Chinese became more active under French colonial policies. According to Victor Purcell (1965, 19), there were 57,000 immigrants from southern China in 1889 alone, 16,800 of whom came to the Mekong Delta region (see also Huỳnh 2012, 19). The Chinese were initially divided into seven *bang* (幫, “native place groups”) based on their dialects, but in 1871 this was reduced to four *bang*, including Cantonese, Hokkien, Chaozhou, and Xiazhou. By 1885, the Nguyễn Dynasty recognized five *bang*—Cantonese, Hokkiens, Chaozhou, Hainanese, and Hakka. It was during these periods that most of the anti-Qing groups, known as the Tiandihui, spread to the Delta. At the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to the treaties signed between the French and the Qing dynasty and then the Kuomintang, the number of Chinese immigrants in South Vietnam increased significantly. Due to the increasing influx of Chinese immigrants who had no anti-Qing mentality and the influence of local anti-French revolutionary thoughts in Vietnam, the ideologies and practical strategies of Chinese religious groups and secret societies changed. Many members wandered to the Seven Mountains area and joined local Vietnamese and Khmer groups to spread Chinese revolutionary thoughts and religious enlightenment ideas, and so enrich the people (e.g., with the cult of the Five Lord Buddhas, the cult of Maitreya and the concept of the birth of the wise king, Phan Xích Long and his secret society, the Bình Xuyên group, etc.) while others changed their secret societies into “gangster groups” such as the Kèo xanh (Nghĩa Hưng) by the Hokkiens in Saigon-Cholon area and the Kèo vàng (Nghĩa Hòa) by the Chaozhou in the lower Mekong Delta (see Hứa 1993, 126). By 2019, there are 179,110 ethnic Chinese residents living in the Mekong Delta Region among 723,000 Chinese residents nationwide (see Lưu, 2016, 22).

Stories about “heretical masters” were widely circulated in the Mekong Delta, where folk sects were often born and prospered during the second half of the 19th century. Most of the stories occur in An Giang Province, which borders Cambodia. They are related to exciting legends about sectarian “masters” practicing magic on the sacred Seven Mountains and Tà-lon Mountains. This secluded border area is also where Vietnamese and local Chinese “masters” retreated after the failure of many movements to resist French invasion. This is why, since the end of the 19th century, the Nguyễn court and the French colonialists have been vigilant

about this area. They intervened in the residents' lives, and disbanded, attacked, and suppressed groups. We would argue that the “heretical masters” in the region must be best discussed through the beliefs of the Five Lord Buddhas (五公王佛, or Five King Buddhas)—the core political-religious framework that united all heretical masters to deal with the royal court and fight against the French rulers. So here we associate the relationship between the “heretical masters” and their political-religious ways with the Nguyễn dynasty and the French rulers through the worship of the Five Lord Buddhas.

Sangren (1987, 82–83) believes that the “unorthodox” structure in traditional Confucian society seems to determine the value and effectiveness outside the state system. Likewise, they appear more in local history than in official historical records. Therefore, stories about “heretical masters” in the south can be found among the people but are rarely seen in the history books of the Nguyễn dynasty (except details regarding the connection between the royal court and the masters for fighting against the French—see Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia 1 and Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam 2019) or in written documents by French colonial government. Before examining the mainstream political and religious transformation of “heretical groups” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we first review the outstanding “heretical masters” who had a significant impact on local culture.

Prominent “Heterodox Masters” and their Wish of “the Birth of a Wise King”

The first person to be referred to is Tô Quang Xuân (?–1842), the founder of Quan Âm Cổ Tự Temple in Cà Mau. The followers believed that he was the “Lord/King Buddha” in the “*Tứ bửu linh tự*” (four sacred words)⁹ that appeared in an oracle of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect. According to Nghê Văn Lương (1972), Tô used medical treatment to save people and taught about morality. For this reason his reputation spread, and his followers increased. Some people accused him of being a “heretical master”, corresponding to the verse handed down in folklore: “*Tập trung đông đúc cả ngày; Toàn mưu làm phản có ngày phé vua* (Gathering in crowds all day; Attempting to commit a coup d'état and kick off the king)” (oral statement, interview in Cà Mau, 2020). Because of this, he was arrested and taken to Gia Định by the authorities. Our on-site investigation in Cà Mau showed that the temple once enshrined the Five Lord Buddhas and various gods of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The main hall still houses the altar of Five Lord Buddhas in different colours together with a tablet that reads “Nam Mô Ngũ Công Dương Phật” (南無五公陽佛, Namo Five

9 The four sacred words (“*Tứ Bửu Linh Tự*”) are Bửu, Sơn, Kỳ, and Hương.

Lord Buddhas).¹⁰ Unfortunately, only three Buddha statues are now visible in the main hall, and two other statues have been taken away.¹¹ In addition, the temple also worships the Jade Emperor and has a pair of ancient Chinese traditional couplets hanging, showing the fusion of the three teachings in the early religious forms of southern Vietnam:

勅勸勤勤勉勵動劬勞君師父一勸竭力/志忠恕念慈悲思感應儒釋道
三教同心.¹²

Be useful, diligent, hard-working, and grateful to the meritorious kings who were striving to do build the country; be loyal, forgiving, merciful, and thankful of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism in just one mind.

As many old believers have said, although the red sacred cloth is no longer visible in the temple, an ancient frame is still decorated with exquisite ornate decorations written “Beaming ritual¹³ on April 4, 1877”. All the above information matches the legend that Tô Quang Xuân “went to the forest to cut wood” and got the Five Lord Sutras, which shows that Tô adopted the cult of Five Lord Buddhas and believed that a wise king would be born to replace the temporary royal court and restore the true virtues. Tô posed an existential threat to King Thiệu Trị’s government by spreading discontent with the contemporary political system and expectations for the emergence of a new wise king among the people, leading to his imprisonment (see Nghê 1972; Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia 1 and Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam 2019). He passed away before French colonization.

Tô’s faith and activities are somewhat consistent with those of Đoàn Minh Huyền (1807–1856), founder of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect recorded in various texts such as *Đức Phật Thầy Tây An* (*Master Buddha Tây An*), *Sa Đéc xưa và nay* (*Sa Đéc: Now and Then*), *Sấm truyền đức Phật Thầy Tây An* (*Oracles of Master Buddha Tây An*), *Văn sấm, điển tích đức Phật Thầy Tây An* (*Oracles and Stories about Master Buddha Tây An*) and especially in the oral stories of followers. There are few documents that record Đoàn’s life, but recently we found a short description in the book *Ngọc lịch đồ thơ tập chú* (*Jade Calendar Book Notes*). Accordingly, he moved

10 The character 陽 (*Dương, Yang*) was incorrectly engraved due to the phonetic characteristics of the Southern Vietnamese people reading from 王 (*Vương, Wang*) to 陽 (*Dương, Yang*).

11 Specifically, one statue is enshrined on the altar of the Five Lord Buddhas, one on the altar of the Jade Emperor, and one on the altar of the Masters.

12 In Vietnamese: “Răn phò tá, gắng siêng năng, nhớ đức cù lao vua thầy cha một phen hết sức; Nhớ trung thú, niệm từ bi, ơn cảm ứng Nhỏ Phật Lão ba đạo cùng lòng.”

13 The “beaming ritual” is very common ritual in the construction process of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Sect.

from Phú Quốc Island to Tà-lơn to study sutras and rituals. During this period, he probably communicated with newly arriving Chinese “masters” and thus adopted the cult of the Five Lord Buddhas.

Believers in Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương still passed on many legends related to Đoàn’s treatment of cholera and other diseases. Accordingly, in 1849 an epidemic broke out in the Tòng Sơn area, and people came to ask him for help. He told people to find a five-colour flag hidden on the roof of Tòng Sơn communal temple, chop it up, boil it, and drink the water. The five-colour flag, called a “Five Lords amulet” (derived from the Chinese Five Lord Sutras), was a popular talisman used by Đoàn and other Vietnamese and Chinese “masters” to treat cholera. Later, when running out of Five Lords amulets, Đoàn provided other amulets and “incense ash” as “medical” items. In 2005, we also found a description of the efficacy of the Five Lords amulets in the handwritten text of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương in Bà Rịa—Vũng Tàu Province. This proves that the cult of Five Lord Buddhas was trusted by the local followers of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, and the amulets were widely used to treat diseases and exorcise evil spirits in the late 19th century. Đoàn told people about the birth of the “holy king” in a religious way and called for better rulers, thereby positioning himself as a traitor in the eyes of the Nguyễn court.

Most likely in the mid-19th century, Chinese “masters” from overseas and local “masters” met and exchanged ideas during their asylum in the Seven Mountains Region. Đoàn Minh Huyền travelled around the Mekong Delta and finally lived in seclusion in the mountains, adopted the local belief, and successfully cultivated the “Five Masters Mantra” under the guidance of Chinese “partners”. He advised believers to practice more, recite Buddhist sutras and not call for armed resistance against the government. However, he actively used spells to suppress the epidemic, save people, and performed many mysterious sacrificial rituals to spread the belief that the temporary dynasty was over, and a new virtuous king was about to emerge, leading King Tự Đức to order his imprisonment.

Master Hà Minh Nhựt (Hà Văn Giáo, 1802–1877), or Minh Nhựt for short, was the founder of An Long Cổ Tự Temple (or Su Cổ Temple), located on Ông Chưởng island in the middle of the Mekong River (An Giang Province). Hà studied Buddhist sutras since he was a child and later accepted the concept of “The Return of the Wise King” from other “heretical masters” and members of the Tiandihui. He built a temple and attracted many followers who called him Su Cổ (Grand Master). He began to treat diseases, especially “mental disorders”. He “treated patients with beautiful words and then instructed them to adopt Buddhism.” The so-called ‘Buddhism’ in Hà’s consciousness is the cult of Five Lord

Buddhas. His reputation spread widely, and more people began to look for his teachings. The Nguyễn court pursued him, but the common people protected and hid him (fieldwork data, 2018). He then joined the Tiandihui Society (天地會) and used Long An Temple as a base to fight against French rulers, leading to his pursuit and arrest in the 1870s (fieldwork data in Cái Bè, 2021).

In folklore, the stories of the relationship between Hà Minh Nhựt, Đoàn Minh Huyền, and others have been passed down. They may have lived at the same time and had close ties that made people put them together. For instance, one account says that Đoàn Minh Huyền paid a visit to Sư Cổ in 1825 and presented a statue of Maitreya Buddha. Both men used amulets to treat people's diseases and gave lectures, which caught the attention of the local authorities. Another account states that Đoàn paid many visits to Master Kiến's shrine (the present-day Tây An temple on Ông Chuông island) and founded the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect in 1849 on the island. So far, no one knows who Master Kiến was and how he conducted his religious activities. On August 12, 2018, during a field visit to the shrine, we found an old table with Chinese text in the back hall: "The tablet of His greatness, Master Lê Văn Kiến". This is possibly the tablet of Master Kiến, as discussed above. Local monks and followers call him "Grand Master" (*Sư Cổ*), similar to what people called Master Hà Minh Nhựt. Through the heritage, relics, and folklore, it can be seen that Tô Quang Xuân, Đoàn Minh Huyền, Hà Minh Nhựt, Sư Kiến, and other Vietnamese "heretical masters" had a close relationship with each other and with members of Chinese secret societies and other anti-Qing partners in the Seven Mountains Region. The basic sutras that inspired and tied these "masters" together came from China: the *Five Lord Sutras*.

Many other "masters" sacrificed their lives during the anti-French activities throughout the Delta. For instance, Master Thử (Nguyễn Phước Thử, ?–1879), was arrested and beheaded by the French during his religious journey in 1879 in Phú Lâm (Phú Tân District, An Giang Province). Master Ba Thới (Nguyễn Văn Thới, 1866–1927) had his throat cut, and although he was rescued by his followers the attack left him with a permanent wound. During our on-site investigations in the Seven Mountains area as well as the Long Xuyên Field (An Giang Province) in 2015–2017 and 2022–2024, elders from different villages were willing to tell us stories of similar masters and their (the masters') merits and sacrifices.

The Khmer "heretic masters" have also enriched the diversity of the religious anti-French movements in this frontier region. The following are two cases obtained by the authors during field investigations in 2023–2024, which may provide some representative clues. Local Vietnamese and Khmer people in the

present-day Seven Mountains area continue to tell the story of Master Achar Sva (Vietnamese: Master Ong Bướm), who gathered Khmer and Vietnamese on both sides of the Vietnam-Cambodia border to fight against the French and pro-French authorities in Cambodia and Southern Vietnam. Achar Sva linked up with anti-French Vietnamese patriots in the Seven Mountains and Mekong Delta regions, such as Thủ Khoa Huân, to enhance their political power (Theam 1981). Today, there is a large stone named Vồ Ong Bướm on Mount Cấm (the highest peak of the Seven Mountains), which is said to be his mark on the mountain. Local people also spread the story that Achar Sva was conquered by Trần Văn Thành and became a good disciple of Master Phật thầy Tây An (fieldwork note, 2023). Another Khmer Buddhist master, Pou Kompo, gathered a large number of Khmer, Cham and Vietnamese people between 1866 and 1867 to resist the Cambodian court on the one hand and the French rulers in Cambodia and Southern Vietnam. He worked closely with the army of Trương Quyền (son of Trương Định) and other remnants of the anti-French movements such as Thủ Khoa Huân, Achar Sva, Võ Duy Dương, and so on to make his force increasingly powerful throughout the Vietnam-Cambodia border area from Đồng Tháp Mười to Tây Ninh (the northern part of the Mekong River). Although we have not found any Vietnamese or Cambodian documents that refer to Pou Kompo as a “heretical master”, in the folk consciousness of the Seven Mountains area he is listed as one of the esteemed religious “masters” (fieldwork notes, 2023; 2024).

The Cult of Five Lord Buddhas and the Five Lord Sutras

The Five Lord Buddhas¹⁴ is a folk belief which has been circulated along the southern coast of China (mainly Zhejiang and Fujian Provinces) since the 10th century. This cult particularly flourished from the 18th to the 19th centuries when the “anti-Qing” and “anti-Western” movements were on the rise. The *Five Lord Sutras* consists of three volumes, independent of Buddhist and Daoist sutras. So far, the specific author is still unknown. People only know that this book was

14 The Five Lord Buddhas include Tanggong King Buddha (唐公王佛), Langgong King Buddha (朗公王佛), Huagong King Buddha (化公王佛), Baogong King Buddha (寶公王佛), and Zhigong King Buddha (志公王佛). However, the *Five Lord Sutras* (五公經, *Ngũ Công Kinh*) makes another list, including Maitreya Buddha—Tanggong, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva—Langgong, Aksaya-mati bodhisattva—Huagong, Four-Continent Lord—Baogong, and Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva—Zhigong. In Southern Vietnam, they were called under different names, such as *Năm ông tướng Tàu* (Five Chinese Generals), *Ngũ phương long thần* (Five Earth Dragon Gods), *Năm ông Phật Xiêm* (Five Siamese Buddhas), or *Ngũ Công Vương Phật* (Five Lord Buddhas), mainly adopted and circulated among the “heretical masters” and their followers.

written by a group of Daoist masters to “lay the foundation of public opinion” for the Dongchang Uprising in the late Tang dynasty (see Ko 1983). From then until now, China’s *Five Lord Sutras* were designed for resistance and rebellion against the imperial court. The sutras claim that rising up against royal rule is consistent with the idea of the “Heavenly Mandate”, and that any uprising will usher in an era of peace and prosperity under the rule of a virtuous emperor. Later rebellious leaders modified *Five Lord Sutras* and added their own names to prove their roles had been assigned by the “Heavenly Mandate”, and thus there are many versions of the *Five Lord Sutras*.

The cult of Five Lord Buddhas and *Five Lord Sutras* contain information about “the last days of the world”, “the birth of the virtuous king”, “the change of dynasties”, “the chaos of the world”, “the remaking of Heaven and the Earth”, “the salvation of the Five Lords”, “the Birth of Maitreya”, and so on. People were advised to chant the *Five Lord Sutras* and use Five Lord amulets to avoid chaos and disasters and wait for the new virtuous king. Accordingly, the Five Lord Buddhas were praised for their salvation and for leading people into a world of peace and happiness (see Ko 1983, 197–203; 1987, 364–71; 1990, 181–95). This concept fits perfectly with the temporary political-religious context of Southern Vietnam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

This cult followed the spread of Chinese “masters” to Southern Vietnam, but there is no reliable document to determine who specifically spread it, who first adopted it, and how it spread. In recent years, during many field trips, we found five Chinese-character books related to the *Five Lord Sutras*, including *Ngũ Công thiên đồ kinh*, *Ngũ Công bản đạo kinh*, *Ngũ Công bát nhã kinh*, *Ngũ Công cứu kiếp kinh*, and *Phật thuyết Ngũ Công kinh* in the classical system of the Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Sect in Ba Chúc village (An Giang Province). In addition, the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect has the sutras *Kinh Năm Ông* written in Nôm scripture, indicating that the sect adopted the worship of Five Lord Buddhas. As far as we know today, Tô Quang Xuân, Hà Minh Nhựt, and Đoàn Minh Huyền seem to have been the first Vietnamese people to adopt this belief. The Seven Mountains (Vietnam) and the Bokor Mountains (now in Cambodia) became the centre of religious activities for monks and folk “masters” in mainland Southeast Asia, and they are also holy mountains in the minds of folk sects in southern Vietnam and Cambodia. As such, then this belief could have initially passed from China to Southern Vietnam in the first half of the 19th century and was modified many times after the Opium Wars and the fall of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in China. Therefore, the “heretical masters” in Southern Vietnam appeared based on a combination of internal and external factors. The endogenous factors come from the geographical location (a frontier region),

historical conditions (migration and semi-autonomous settlements), and ideological-cultural factors (hybrid ideology and culture). The external factors lie in the transmission and synergy of the Chinese “heretical masters” from overseas.

In the religious life of Southern Vietnam, the cult of the Five Lord Buddhas, in one form or another, is still popular, although most devotees do not know who the Buddhas are. Vestiges of such a cult can be found in today’s folk activities, such as the worship of Năm Ông Thê,¹⁵ Five Gods of Directions, Five God-Officials of “sacred” mountains, the custom of using five-colour Ngũ Công amulets in Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương temples, and so on.

In the daily recitation ceremony of the followers of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương in Bà Rịa—Vũng Tàu province, there are many texts and prayers related to the Five Lord Buddhas. Still today, the belief in the Longhua Ceremony, the birth of a virtuous king, the birth of Maitreya Buddha, the concepts of great chaos and the reconstruction of Heaven and Earth, etc.—which originated in the Five Masters Sutras (through the interpretative lens of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and other sects)—are still valued in the Mekong Delta. Many local texts are derived from the Chinese Five Lord Sutras (五公經), such as the *Năm Ông and Mười sáu Sutras*, and *Five Masters Sutras* stated above (Nguyễn 2019).

The cult of the Five Lord Buddhas is currently absorbed by many emerging religions in the region, such as Minh Sư, Minh Lý, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, and Caodaism, among others, but its political aspects have been greatly abandoned to match the believers’ interests and the state’s requirements. The wish for a wise king (leader) is no longer current, nor is the desire for a virtuous king (leader), but the idea of a new wise society built by all virtuous people is still widely spread among local religious groups.

In sum, the heretical masters of the Mekong River Delta were influenced by the worship of the Five Lord Buddhas, which provided a political-religious framework for their secular activities (the desire to cure diseases, gather people, and cultivate a new wise dynasty that would save the country and its people, etc.). Therefore, they were thus condemned as “heretical masters” in the eyes of the Nguyễn court.

15 The Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương version of the Chinese cult of Five Lord Buddhas.

The Political-religious Transformation among “Heretical Masters” under French Rule

The Change in the Ideology and Sectarian Strategies of “Heretical Masters”: “Saving the Country and Respecting the King”¹⁶

In 1858, artillery fire by French colonists broke out in Danang, shaking the Nguyễn dynasty and the people of Vietnam. The nation’s long history of Confucianism faced a fierce test against Western guns and warships. After the battles in 1859 and 1862, the Tự Đức Cabinet tasted defeat and gradually abandoned its anti-French role in Southern Vietnam (renamed “Cochin-chine” by the French). At this time, the mission to protect the fate of this land was handed on to the Confucianists, the local army leaders, and “heretical masters”.

In a chaotic society, the patriotism of Confucianism, the Purdue spirit of Buddhism, and the “mysterious” folk practice tradition of Daoism all met and mingled. In the Seven Mountains Region, this alliance reconciled with the Five Lord Buddhas’ worship from China, gradually transforming into a strong belief supportive of the Nguyễn dynasty. Followers expected to see the return of a virtuous Nguyễn king (rather than the king of a new dynasty), who would lead people to fight against the French and, once again, build a peaceful and prosperous Vietnam.

The French wanted to take advantage of Confucian orthodox ideology to establish their rule in Vietnam, considering Confucianism as “a convenient, conservative social ideology that could legitimate their rule” (Elman, Duncan and Ooms 2002, 6), but completely failed. In contrast, under the spiritual banner of community leaders and “heterodox masters”, the people of the south (as well as the entire Vietnamese people) used the lens of the orthodox-heterodox dualistic classification to fight against the colonial regime. In *Văn tế Nghĩa sĩ Cần Giuộc* (*The Funeral Oration on the Cần Giuộc Righteous Martyrs*), the well-known writer Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (2007) associated the French, their culture, and their rule in Vietnam with the heterodoxy. He criticized those who followed the French as follows: “Why thou follow with the heretical forces, throwing away the ancestor’s altar and destroying the incense burner. What a tragic! We won’t live as mercenary soldiers, drinking unrighteous wine and eating unrighteous bread. What a shame!”¹⁷

16 “Cứu quốc, tôn quân” (救國尊君).

17 In Vietnamese: “Sống làm chi theo quân tà đạo, quảng vừa hương xô bàn độc, thấy lại thêm buồn; sống làm chi ở lính mã tà, chia rượu lạt, gặm bánh mì, nghe càng thêm hổ.”

Furthermore, the “Sát tả bình Tây”¹⁸ Movement that broke out among Confucian scholars in 1864 reinforced the negative views of the French and their rule among the Vietnamese. This event inspired and strengthened the belief in the return of a virtuous king among the sectarian communities.

At first, the expected virtuous king seemed to be King Minh Mạng (1791–1841, r. 1820–1841), who had taken the Nguyễn dynasty to its peak. One of the oracles of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương said: “*Minh Mạng tái sinh, quân sư Trạng Trình*” (Minh Mạng will get reborn to be the King again, and Trạng Trình¹⁹ will get reborn as an official-adviser). Later, when King Hàm Nghi (1871–1943, r. 1884–1888) issued the “Cần Vương Edict”²⁰ calling on the country unite against the French, rumours emerged in the Seven Mountains Region that King Hàm Nghi was not exiled to Algeria by the French,²¹ but fled to Tà-lơn Mountains to rebuild the army, waiting to defeat the French. In the early 20th century, when the secret leader Phan Xích Long (1893–1916) from the Seven Mountains launched the rebels against the French, he declared himself the Crown Prince of King Hàm Nghi and attracted the support of former officials and people who wished to restore the Nguyễn dynasty. Accordingly, Cấm Mount (“Forbidden Mount”, one of the Seven Mountains) has been believed to be the site of the Grand Meeting of Salvation,²² the place where “the virtuous king would appear, the Emerald Palace would rise”, and it would be “the place to conquer eighteen foreign invading armies”. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th, a new wave of heretical masters appeared in the Delta (such as Ngô Lợi, Trần Văn Thành, Lâm Văn Quốc, and others), showing a new attitude to the Nguyen court in terms of politics and religion. These masters were born poor, some were even of unknown origin, and later they adopted the worship of the Five Lord Buddhas and practiced in a secularized way (e.g., living at home, not bearing the obligation of eating vegetarian food or fasting, and not chanting sutras). They abided by the ethics of Confucianism, practiced the inner metallurgy of Daoism, and conducted Tantric rituals and activities. After a few years of remote practice, these “masters” got “enlightened” and were said to have “magical powers and the ability to heal people”; they returned to the community, serving and attracting a large number of believers. Although representing a great hybrid of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies, as well as ideas from popular cults, they were called “living Buddhas” (*Phật sống/hoạt*

18 “Killing the ‘heterodox’ Catholics and defeating French colonists.”

19 Trạng Trình: Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, a wise Confucian scholar in the fifteenth century.

20 The Edict was first issued on July 13, 1885, and again on September 20, 1885.

21 King Hàm Nghi was the eighth king of the Nguyễn dynasty who was exiled to Algeria by the French on December 12, 1888. He later died on January 14, 1944, and was buried in Algiers.

22 Hội Long Hoa, the final enlightened day in the faith of various sects in the region.

Phật) by the common people. The “heretical masters” of the region managed to combine both religious and political life, although the Western colonial rule of the time did not allow them to become very concentrated as religions.

Ngô Lợi (1831–1890) led believers to the Mount Tượng area (Tri Tôn District, An Giang Province) and established the Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Sect on Mount Tượng, which is closely related to the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect of Đoàn Minh Huyền. The French colonial government regarded these two sects as “heretical” political-religious and organizations, threatening their rule in Southern Vietnam.

According to author Hà Tàn Dân (1971), Ngô Lợi was born into a carpenter’s family in Mỏ Cày (Bến Tre Province). At age 20 (in 1851), he wrote the *Bà La Ni Sutras* to praise the virtue and power of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (a symbol of a new future). In 1867, he “slept for seven days and nights”, then woke up, “obtained the enlightenment”, becoming a “master”. After that, Ngô wandered the entire area, attracting and inviting believers to Mount Tượng to build villages, temples, and practice Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa rituals. He also supported the Nguyễn court in fighting against the French colonists. He did not establish the image of a new dynasty and a new king for the people, but cultivated in people’s minds the concept of a wise Nguyễn king returning and gathering people throughout the Mekong Delta to save the country. The French sent troops a total of seven times to break the sect and burn down the temples. According to folklore, thanks to his intelligence and “miraculous transformation”, Ngô managed to escape to the Bokor Mountains as a refugee. In 1881, when the French attacked Mount Tượng, Ngô Lợi led 1,800 followers to seek refuge at the Cambodian border. Many of his followers participated in the local anti-French movements in Cambodia. Later, he returned to Mount Tượng and instructed his followers to rebuild the temples and resume their religious activities (Hà 1971, 53; Sơn 2005, 124; 2009, 239; further reading Ho Tài 1983). He died in 1890 in An Định Village, the religious centre of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Buddhism.

The early 20th century witnessed the Bảy Do Movement throughout the Seven Mountains area. Bảy Do (unknown full name) was born in Bến Tre Province in 1855, went to the mountains to established a Confucian-Buddhist integral cult that mainly worshipped the Earth God (Thổ thần), and erected Phật Lớn Pagoda (also called Nam Các tự or Nam Cực đường) in 1906 to gather anti-French masters and soldiers. In 1917, Phật Lớn Pagoda was seized by the French, and Bảy Do was arrested and committed suicide in protest against the French decision to sentence him to life imprisonment on Côn Đảo Island (Coulet 2019, 110–12; Nguyễn and Nguyễn 1970, 167).

Trần Văn Thành (?–1873) was respected by both followers of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Hoahaoism because he was (1) one of the 12 excellent students of the Master

Buddha Tày An, making many contributions to the sectarian construction and development from the very beginning, (2) a well-known governor, who led people to reclaim the wilderness of Láng Linh area (Châu Phú District, An Giang Province), turning it into rice fields and villages, and (3) a patriotic national hero and a military leader of the Láng Linh-Bảy Thửa Uprising against the French (Dật Sĩ and Nguyễn, 1955, 117; see also Nguyễn and Nguyễn 1956). Historically, Trần joined the Nguyễn dynasty's army in the Mekong River Delta. He was then admitted as a Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương follower. When the French invaded and ruled Southern Vietnam, he responded to King Tự Đức's call to fight the French. He once joined the Nguyễn Trung Trực Movement in Rạch Giá before heading to Láng Linh area (Sơn 2009, 233). After many failures, he retreated to Láng Linh to rebuild the force called Bình Gia Nghị Troop to continue to fight the French until the last minute of his life (see further Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia 1 and Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam 2019, 148–49). His Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương movement, called “Đạo Lành”, was then strictly prohibited throughout the Mekong Delta in 1873; however, vestiges of Đạo Lành were discovered in the Mỹ Tho and Gò Công areas many years later (Sơn 2005, 113, 123; Trần 2021).

Due to the actions of its followers and the close relationship between the sect and local army leaders, Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect was defined as a “heretical religion” and severely suppressed by the French Admiral Dupré, on April 22, 1873. The decision clearly stipulated that those who taught and spread the philosophy and practice of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương would be regarded as insurgents and their actions would be judged as “criminal” (see Trần 2011).

In the first half of the 20th century, many religious movements that actively opposed the colonial law continued to emerge. Their philosophies and behaviours were very similar, more or less religiously related to the aforementioned sects. Take Master Tường in Tân Châu as an example. His real name was Lâm Văn Quốc (?–1939), and he was born in Bạc Liêu Province. He adopted Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and became a “master”. At the peak of his activity he had over 10,000 followers. When providing physical therapy to people, he used to dream and imagine a scene of independence, peace, and prosperity in the country (under the leadership of a wise Nguyễn king); therefore, people called him “Master Tường” (“Master Dream”). He was good at martial arts and used amulets for medical treatment. He worshiped Guandi, the Chinese God of War, and the Five Lord Buddhas. He later became the leader of the 1939 anti-French rebellion in the region, especially in the Tân Châu area (An Giang Province). Faced with defeat, he was killed and his people were imprisoned on the Côn Đảo islands (Nguyễn 1966, 178–85; fieldwork notes, 2018).

Both similarities and differences are found between the “heretical masters” of the early Nguyễn dynasty period and the years of French rule. The core similarities include the belief in Five Lord Buddhas, the focus on the chaos of the world, the reconstruction of Heaven and Earth, the Grand Salvation Ceremony, the birth of a “virtuous king”, and so on. But there are also many differences. Ontologically speaking, during the pre-colonial period the “heretical masters” were separated from official Confucianists and bureaucrats, and therefore, they did not support the Nguyễn court, but actively encouraged the idea of an ideal dynasty and the birth of an ideal king. However, during the colonial period there was a close connection and integration between the masters, central officials, local military leaders, and followers of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and folk cults (see Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia 1 and Hội Khoa học Lịch sử Việt Nam 2019). The idea of a wise king saving the country and his people still existed, but in many cases, this king was said to be either King Minh Mạng (1791–1841) or King Hàm Nghi (1871–1943) of the Nguyễn dynasty. It is true that the “heretical masters” thus became the “orthodox leaders” from a new perspective, while the French colonialists were regarded as a “heterodox force”. Despite the belief in political reforms, the early “heretical masters” had no intention of rebellion, let alone an armed uprising against the monarchical government. Instead, they performed life-saving practices (e.g., medical treatment) and promoted religious beliefs and morals to inspire and enrich communities. The Nguyễn dynasty did not declare them as “orthodox masters” (since they had not changed their Confucian moral framework), and did not call for their eradication. Instead, the Nguyễn dynasty appointed state-level officials to go south and establish contacts with the masters to start uprisings against the French. In this way, the “masters” and their followers engaged in armed struggles against the French colonialists, such as the Tháp Mười Uprising (1861–1866), Bảy Thưa-Láng Linh Uprising (1867–1873), and Phan Xích Long Uprising (1913–1916), among others. This is why the French directly attacked, persecuted, and suppressed them. This shows that the political-religious nature of the “heretical masters” changed dramatically in both periods, and the views of the Nguyen court also changed under the pressure of anti-French policies.

It is undeniable that some Vietnamese bureaucrats helped the French occupy and colonize southern Vietnam in the early days of the French invasion and colonization, such as Trần Bá Lộc, Huỳnh Công Tấn and Đỗ Hữu Phương (Son 1973, 174; Ho Tai 1983, chapter 3; Brocheux 1995, 15; see further Osborne 1969; Goschar 2012). Among them, Trần Bá Lộc (1839–1899) is mentioned the most often in works by Vietnamese and international writers. He was described as an ambitious man who actively conducted campaigns against the “heretical masters” and insurgents, and was finally appointed as a regional administrator by the

French. Tran's tomb and related remains can be found in the Cái Bè area (Tiền Giang Province), and today local residents and historians still tell the story of his "betrayal". Huỳnh Công Tấn (1837–1874), born in Gò Công (Tiền Giang), led the colonial army to suppress several uprising movements (such as the Nguyễn Duy Dương in Tháp Mười in 1866, the Nguyễn Trung Trực in Rạch Giá and Phú Quốc Island in 1868) and was rewarded by the French Government. However, eventually he was treated unfairly by the French and ended his life at the age of just 37, and all remains of him were destroyed by local residents in Gò Công in 1945. Đỗ Hữu Phương (1841–1914) was born in a Chinese family in Saigon, and he was involved in many repressive campaigns against Vietnamese revolutionary and religio-political movements in Saigon, Chợ Lớn and even in the Mekong Delta. He was highly praised by the French government and granted French citizenship. Like Trần Bá Lộc and Huỳnh Công Tấn, he has become a figure of betrayal in the minds of the South Vietnamese. Indeed, when people tell stories about their revered "heretical masters", these men are often harshly criticized. Of course, during the 1920s onwards, more Westernized elites and personnel began working for the French colonialists throughout the country as well as in Cambodia and Laos (see Goschar 2012); however, this trend declined when Ho Chi Minh established the Communist Party of Vietnam in the north of the country. In general, Trần, Huỳnh, Đỗ, and others are often classified as "traitorous local administrators" rather than Confucian elites, although it should be noted that followers of Nguyễn Confucianism mainly protected and supported patriotism in the early French colonial period.

The Confucian Orthopraxy Policies and Responses of "Heretical Masters"

When the "heretical masters" widely promoted the concepts of "dynastic change", the cult of Maitreya, and "the birth of the virtuous king" to believers, the authorities quickly discovered and isolated them from their communities. Tô Quang Xuân was put in jail in Gia Định (Saigon), Hà Minh Nhứt was taken to detention in Cái Bè, while Đoàn Minh Huyền was detained in Châu Đốc (Nguyen 2018, 110–30). Many believers were advised (by the "masters" themselves) to wait for leaders to be released and return to them.

Although the "masters" were talented and virtuous, "orthodox" Buddhists (i.e., the Lin-ji zong) did not accept them because their faith, spiritual practices, and doctrines bore the colours of the Five Lord Buddhas cult. Therefore, the orthopraxy policies were applied to "correct" the philosophies and practices of these "masters". Under the compulsory control of the Nguyễn government, many "masters" were

forced to “self-cultivate” and “practice” under the leadership of the senior monks of the Lin-ji zong Buddhism. For example, Tô Quang Xuân was set to the Kim Chương Temple in Gia Định, and Đoàn Minh Huyền practiced with the Zen master Hải Tịnh at the Tây An Temple (Châu Đốc, An Giang), and Hà Minh Nhựt was sent to “study the systematic Buddhist teaching with the Master Monk” in Cái Bè (Tiền Giang Province). These “masters” joined the orthodox Lin-ji zong as official disciples and were as respected as the former masters of the sect. For example, the tombstone of Tô Quang Xuân in Cà Mau clearly shows that he the 37th master of Lin-ji zong. The tablet and stupa of Hà Minh Nhựt at An Long Temple (An Giang) state that he was the 38th master. Similarly, the tablet and tombstone of Đoàn Minh Huyền at Tây An Temple record him as the 38th master (Nguyen 2018, 110–30; fieldwork notes, 2018). As many believers said, some masters were offered titles by the Nguyễn dynasty. For example, Tô Quang Xuân was awarded the “imperial monk” title in 1842, and after his death his followers were given two rolls of silk to wrap the body. However, this does not prevent us from doubting the authenticity of these offers. Similarly, Hà Minh Nhựt is said to have been given the “imperial monk” title and received a golden sword thanks to his healing of people. People keep emphasizing these “official titles” to show the “orthodoxy” of the masters and their sectarian institutions (fieldwork notes, 2022). As stated above, these “masters” were forced to “standardize” their faith and practices in line with orthodox religious norms and values by cultivating the Lin-ji Buddhist philosophies, and if such grants of titles and gifts are true, then it might have been the result of this.

Under the influence of the Nguyễn dynasty’s orthopraxy policy, the “heretical masters” transformed in two directions: integrating (or reverting) the Lin-ji zong system (e.g., Hà Minh Nhựt) or continuing to maintain contacts and expand their sectarian communities beyond the Linji-zong (e.g., Đoàn Minh Huyền). In both cases, they were closely related to local secret societies (Nguyen 2018; fieldwork notes, 2022).

Did the Nguyễn change the standards for judging Confucian orthodoxy? We believe this is not the case, and rather the Nguyễn dynasty had no choice due to the reality of the situation (e.g., the six provinces of Cochinchina were ceded to France, and the imperial court was unable to directly establish an anti-French armed movement, but had to indirectly use the role of some influential “heretical masters” in the region). The imperial court always maintained a silent attitude toward heretical masters and their religious groups, and somehow expressed its rational choice of how the masters participated in politics (the dualistic view) (see Nguyễn and Nguyễn 2019). On the Cambodian side, the situation was quite similar (see *Công Luận Newspaper* 1938). In contrast, “heretical masters” did not

care much about what the courts meant and what tactics were adopted against them and their groups, as long as the courts did not prevent them from gathering righteous men to oppose their political-religious activities. It can be seen that the attitude of the “heretical masters” towards social issues was very clear and quite consistent:

1. In the early days, when the court objected, they calmly treated illnesses, saved people, and promoted morality among the masses. Even if they preached that a wise king would appear and save the country and people, they mainly preached social virtues without any hope of usurping the throne. They were just dissatisfied with the imperial court imposing too much Confucianism in the south, and the imperial court did not have enough resources to civilize the land, causing tragedy among the people, who thus lived in darkness and backwardness. They promoted the image of a wise king simply to express their desire for their country to be governed wisely and for the people to live prosperous lives. This concept became even more profound when the worship of the Five Lord Buddhas and Maitreya by members of the Chinese Tiandihui Society and anti-Qing rebels brought the idea of a Maitreya Buddha and a new, better future to the Mekong Delta region.
2. When the country fell into crisis (French colonization), the heretical masters naturally expanded their vision of serving the local people to serving the country because “the country was invaded” and “families were destroyed”. In a sense, their establishment or participation in the anti-French revolutionary movement in the region was essentially within the knowledge and teachings of the *Five Lord Sutras* from the beginning.

Political views were thus present in the consciousness of the “heretical masters” from the beginning, but only became truly strongly expressed when the French began to rule Southern Vietnam. There was also no ideological shift among “heretical masters”, just a difference in the scale and scope of social service practices they engaged in.

As for the French colonialists, their view of the local religious masters was the same as the Nguyễn court: the local religious groups were “heresies” and needed to be eradicated. At first, the French rulers rationally used the views of the Nguyễn court to correct the heretical ideas of the masters and their sects; later, they (the French rulers) found that the masters were gradually supported by the Nguyễn court and so tried their best to suppress them.

This is also the reason why the anti-French movement of religious leaders in the Mekong Delta region only existed among the common people from the beginning

of the 20th century on, without any significant rebellion (except the Phan Xích Long Uprising in 1913–1916 in Saigon). Only a few groups, such as the Caodai, Hoahao, Minh Sư, and Minh Lý, among others, began to look for something more after seeing that participating in the anti-French movements or simply using amulets to save people was ineffective. They began to explore and establish organized religious practices, which gradually developed into new religions in Vietnam. The Caodai and the Hoahao were mainly founded by Vietnamese monks on the basis of integrating Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism, ancestor worship, and the worship of the Five Lord Buddhas; the Minh Sư and the Minh Lý retained the basic beliefs of Southern Chinese Daoism and incorporated significant local Vietnamese elements (e.g., mass Buddhism) (see further Phạm 2007).

“Heretical Masters” and Anti-French Secret Societies

Among the “heretical masters”, Hà Minh Nhứt had a very close relationship with the secret societies in the region, especially the Heaven and Earth Society. Many believers used the detail of the imperial grant of a golden sword to express the Nguyễn court’s support for Hà’s anti-French activities in the late 19th century. A local believer said, “Until the Heaven and Earth Society resisted the French invasion, the French had been searching for people related to An Long Temple where Hà had stayed. Out of fear, the abbot threw the sword in the Ông Chưởng River. So far, we have not found it” (fieldwork note, 2018). More research should be done on the sword and imperial support for Hà to learn more about this story.

The Nguyễn court in the colonial period changed its treatment of “heretical masters” and folk sects in the Delta. This transition occurred in the 1860s to the 1870s. Four years after the death of Đoàn Minh Huyên, Hoàng Văn Tuyền, an official, submitted to the Nguyễn King a report in 1864 about the abnormal “charisma” of local religious sects and “heretical masters”, and their popularity among the public. However, in 1867 many Confucian intellectuals and soldiers participated in the anti-French armed movements led by these “heretical masters”. A report dated January 26, 1873, written from patriotic representatives in the south to King Tự Đức, noted there were many leaders of rebellions in the Seven Mountains area. Of these, Trần Văn Thành, a “master” of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect, was one of the most prominent (see Trần 2011). A royal document from the Nguyễn dynasty dated January 26, the 26th year of King Tự Đức (1873) recorded a request that the court should have sent officials to the Mekong River region to gather uprising leaders and religious masters in the Seven Mountains area to fight against the French. All the “heretical masters” and secret societies members in this period

followed the common slogan of “fighting French to restore the Kingdom of Đại Nam²³ (*phân Pháp phục Nam*, 反法复南)”. This is why, even today now, many followers of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa spread the belief that King Hàm Nghi “was not exiled to Algeria (by the French)”, but “went to the Seven Mountains to guide the resistance movements against the French and then took refuge and died in Tà-lơn Mountains” (orally stated by current “masters”, interview in 2022). In the early 20th century, Phan Xích Long (who declared himself the son of King Hàm Nghi) continued to lead the secret society movement at Tà-lơn and the Seven Mountains bases. An altar to the Hundred Officials (*Trăm quan cựu thần*) dedicated to anti-French patriotic figures can be found at current temples of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa sects, as well as at one dedicated to Hoahaoism. In the eyes of ordinary people in the Mekong Delta, “heretical masters” and members of secret societies engaged in the anti-French movements are still considered “heroes”. They are worshiped in public temples and temples of specific religions.

Chinese secret societies and pro-Ming movements in the Mekong Delta region contributed to the region’s overall anti-French mentality. Initially, these groups came to Vietnam with the ambition of “destroying the Qing dynasty and restoring the Ming dynasty” and the hope of gathering strength, waiting for the day when they could return to their country and revive their fortunes. However, the reality of internal conflicts between the Nguyễn and Tây Sơn at the end of the 18th century and the anti-French revolutionary ideas at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th bound them tightly to their local destiny. Based on the Vietnamese-Khmer uprising mentality and the fusion of these pro-Ming Chinese movements with Mekong Delta folk culture, new local religions and endemic secret societies were born. The ideals of members of the Chinese secret societies coincided with the ideals of Vietnamese religious masters to oppose the French and establish an ideal dynasty (with Confucian patriotism, the Buddhist spirit of salvation, and Daoist mysticism). These values permeated the mentality of the “heretic masters” and were made into the principles of the sects/movements they founded. Phan Xích Long (1893–1916) and his secret society is a clear example of this. He was born into a Chinese family in Chợ Lớn, went to cultivate his religious nature in the Seven Mountains, established the Phan Xích Long Secret Society and declared himself to be “the son of King Hàm Nghi”. Phan and his followers widened anti-French activities in both Vietnamese and Cambodian border provinces. He was arrested during his journey to Phan Thiết and was imprisoned in Saigon in 1913. His fellows and followers tried to rescue him, but failed, and he was finally executed in Saigon on February 22, 1916, at the age of 23. Phan Xích Long and his religious-political activities inspired many other anti-French societies among

23 Vietnam was named Đại Nam (Great South) during the Nguyễn dynasty.

later generations, such as the Nguyễn An Ninh Society and Minh Tân Movement. More significantly, Phan Xích Long became a representative figure in the local Chinese community's transformation from the spirit of "destroying the Qing dynasty and restoring the Ming dynasty" into the mentality of "defeating the French and saving Vietnam" (Sơn 2005; 2009; Coulet 2019).

It is worth noting that some Vietnamese members of the anti-French Heaven and Earth Society also joined the customs of the Lin-ji zong temples. For example, in 2019 we found a tombstone at Giác Lâm Temple which recorded the fact that Monk Thích Quảng An (1827–1876), a peer of Đoàn Minh Huyền and Hà Minh Nhựt, was a member of the Heaven and Earth Society. However, the local Chinese and Khmer people have different views and ways of conducting socio-religious activities. Early Chinese members of the Tiandihui Society who immigrated to the Mekong Delta contacted local "heretical masters" and married local women. Most joined the "heretical groups" in the Delta, and some gathered to form "gangster groups". Among the latter, there are two prominent groups of Hokkien in Saigon (the *Kèo xanh*) and Teochew in Bạc Liêu (the *Kèo vàng*). They soon abandoned political actions and became groups protecting nightclubs, restaurants, hotels, and bus stations in Saigon and throughout the Delta for profit. The local Khmer people during the early Nguyễn dynasty and French colonial period did not change their beliefs and lifestyles, as the faith and practices of Theravada Buddhism had been strictly protected for centuries.

In short, the "heretical masters" always stood by side with the nation and people, so how "heretical" were they in reality?

Conclusion

Orthodoxy and heterodoxy in premodern Vietnam and East Asia are two components of a dual concept based on Confucian views, as defined by a relatively stable standard that supported the government and its policies. Under the orthopractic policies of the imperial court, the "heretic masters" of the Mekong Delta maintained their status despite their Confucian ethics and focus on the social well-being of local communities. French colonialization from the mid-19th century on has led to a change in heretical masters' policies and actions, as well as in the court's view of the "heretical masters". History, however, has "superscribed" the new face of the concept of orthodoxy, and so the "heretical masters" and orthodox forces merged in the anti-French uprising movements. Whether it is orthodox or heterodox, this reality is loosely defined. In the eyes of the Mekong Delta's "heretical masters", only "nation" and "people" are eternal. Compared with national

culture, frontier religious and sectarian groups show a popularized model of social mentality and well-being; however, when the “nation” and “people” face challenges, “heretical masters”, local scholars, leaders, and border communities all reach a compromise: *patriotism*. The administrative and political relations between Vietnam’s traditional “centre” and “periphery” might be loose, but national consciousness and patriotism remained the same in both. As a periphery, the Mekong Delta is the region with the most pluralism in the country due to the emergence and evolution of these various “heretical” religious sects.

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“Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Emperor of the North” Through the Lens of Social Crisis

Živa PETROVČIČ*

Abstract

This article explores the Daoist scripture titled *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Deity of the Pole Star, Emperor of the North of the Supreme Ultimate, A Dongzhen Canon*), which was arguably composed during the Eastern Jin dynasty in Southeast China. The examination aims to illuminate portrayals of crisis and the presented solutions, and thus investigate reflections of and responses to the social crisis of the period. The study demonstrates how the messaging about the crisis is structured and how individual aspects inter-relate, while simultaneously exploring its correlations with historical circumstances, thus also revealing information on the movement from which the scripture originated, i.e. the author and the intended audience. In doing so, it shows how the author creates a proselytizing strategy which is particularly tailored to the audience in the social crisis of the time. The purpose of this study is also to highlight the significance of considering crisis-related content or message in the scripture as a whole, including correlations with specific historical circumstances.

Keywords: Daoist religion, Eastern Jin dynasty, social crisis, *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing*, *Yuanshi tianzun*

“Sijajno sveto besedilo o božanskih zaklinjanjih Severnega cesarja” skozi optiko družbene krize

Izvleček

Pričujoči članek raziskuje daoistično sveto besedilo z naslovom *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miao-jing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Sijajno sveto besedilo kanona Dongzhen o božanskih zaklinjanjih božanstva Severnice, Severnega cesarja Najvišje skrajnosti*), ki je bilo verjetno napisano v obdobju dinastije Vzhodni Jin na jugovzhodu Kitajske. Razprava želi osvetliti prikaze krize in predstavljene rešitve ter tako raziskati odseve družbene krize tega obdobja in odzive nanjo. Študija prikazuje, kako je sporočanje o krizi strukturirano in kako se posamezni vidiki medsebojno povezujejo, hkrati

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pa raziskuje korelacije z zgodovinskimi okoliščinami, s čimer razkriva tudi informacije o gibanju, iz katerega sveto besedilo izvira, tj. o avtorju in ciljnem občinstvu. Pri tem pokaže, kako avtor oblikuje prozelitsko strategijo, ki je posebej prilagojena občinstvu v tedanji družbeni krizi. Namen te študije je tudi poudariti pomembnost obravnavanja s krizo povezane vsebine oziroma sporočila v svetem besedilu kot celote, vključno s korelacijami s specifičnimi zgodovinskimi okoliščinami.

Ključne besede: daoistična religija, dinastija Vzhodni Jin, družbena kriza, *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaojing*, *Yuanshi tianzun*

Introduction

This study explores the Daoist scripture titled *Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaojing* 洞真太極北帝紫微神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Deity of the Pole Star, Emperor of the North of the Supreme Ultimate, A Dongzhen Canon*). It attempts to ascertain which correlations can be drawn between its content and the social crisis of the period of its composition. The discussion focuses on the analysis of the scripture in its historical context by employing a systematic comprehensive and integral approach. The examination aims to illuminate aspects or parts of its crisis-related content, namely portrayals of the crisis (including depictions of the manifestations of the crisis and explanations of its causes) and proposed solutions. At the same time, it endeavours to shed light on the interrelatedness among such aspects and with the actual social crisis of the time.

Below, I will begin by discussing the origin of the scripture and its structure and explore the tumultuous world of the time during which it was composed. Next, I will identify where the scripture reflects on the social crisis by examining how it depicts the crisis by means of its manifestations and how it explains its causes. Lastly, I will identify which solutions it proposes as responses to the social crisis of the time. I will determine key groups of actors, analyse their roles, means, options, goals and mutual relationships, and so elaborate on the presented plan to solve the crisis. The discussion will thus also reveal information on the movement from which the text in question emerged.

The Scripture's Origin and Structure

Dongzhen taiji beidi ziwei shenzhou miaojing is a scripture preserved in the Ming Daoist Canon (DZ¹ 49). It originated in the movement of a tradition, which later documents refer to as the tradition of Fengdu 酆都 or of the Emperor of the North (*Beidi* 北帝). It developed on the fringes of the Tianshi dao 天師道 (Way of Celestial Masters) organization in the southeast in the lower Yangzi region (Mollier 1997; 1990, 24; 2006, 84). The scripture under discussion is one of the earliest extant texts that emerged from this tradition, and seems unrelated to other major contemporary Daoist currents (ibid. 1997, 335–37). It is presented in the form of a calendar, which covers the last 10 years of a sexagesimal cycle,² namely from *jiayin* 甲寅 to *guihai* 癸亥. Internal and external evidence suggests that it was composed during the Eastern Jin dynasty (Dong Jin 東晉, 317–420).³ Thus, the time frame from *jiayin* to *guihai* corresponds to the final years of either the cycle that started in 304, i.e. from 354 to 363, or the one which began in 364, namely from 414 to 423. The latter time frame seems more likely since the scripture contains several similarities with certain Daoist scriptures of the time.⁴ Concerning the upper bound, we can observe that the Jin dynasty is mentioned in the description of the last year (possibly corresponding to 423), but the Liu-Song

- 1 The abbreviation “DZ” refers to the *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 (*Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Era*).
- 2 Based on its subtitle and content, Schipper (2004, 273) presumes the preserved text is but one *juan* of the original complete work constituted of six *juan*, which is supposed to have discussed the entire 60-year cycle.
- 3 In describing the last year (i.e. *guihai* year), the text mentions the age of the Great Jin (*Da Jin zhi shi* 大晉之世) (DZ 49, 9b), which is direct internal evidence of the time of its composition. Schipper (2004, 273) considers it to be the current period and dates the text to the Eastern Jin dynasty, while Mollier (1990, 24) sets a narrower time frame, namely from the end of the 4th to the beginning of the 5th century.
- 4 In the case of the former time span (i.e. from 354 to 363), this would signify that the text originated slightly before the revelation of the Shangqing scriptures (*Shangqing jing* 上清經; *Scriptures of the Highest Clarity*) between 364 and 370. However, there are several similarities to the early Lingbao scriptures (*Lingbao jing* 靈寶經; *Scriptures of the Numinous Treasure*) and the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經 (*Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Supreme Cavernous Abyss*) (DZ 335) in particular. It uses terminology which connects it to the Lingbao texts (Mollier 1990, 24), which started to emerge slightly before the end of the 4th century. One such example is *Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning), who appears in the role of speaker both here as well as in several Lingbao scriptures. There are also similarities in vocabulary and phraseology with the earlier part of the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* dated around 420. For instance, Schipper (2004, 273) noted that both texts referred to themselves using the alternative title *Sanmei jing* 三昧經 (*The Samādhi Scripture*) (DZ 49, 3a, 9a; DZ 335, 8.9a and passim). Furthermore, terms denoting various types of demons resemble or are identical with those found in the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* and the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經 (*Most Excellent and Marvellous Scripture of the Numinous Treasure on the Limitless Salvation*) (DZ 1). (see below)

劉宋 (420–479) dynasty was established in 420. This indicates that the text was written before the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty, as the author⁵ seems to have no knowledge of the Liu-Song. Thus, we could roughly define the most likely time frame to fall somewhere from the late 4th century to the beginning of the 5th, which is in agreement with the dating suggested by Mollier (1990, 24).

The preserved text is arranged in 13 sections. The beginning of each is marked by an opening passage, i.e. “*Yuanshi tianzun shuo* 元始天尊說 (The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said)” that addresses the so-called “*xiayuan zhongsheng (shengren)* 下元眾生 (生人) (the living beings /humans/ of the latest cosmic era)”. The content of most sections seems to be related to specific years written in the *ganzhi* 干支 (stems and branches) binome. In sections 2 to 11, the years from *jiayin* to *guihai* appear in chronological order. In the remaining three sections, there are no references to specific years. The sections contain depictions of manifestations of crisis and its causes, which are then followed by some proposed solutions.

The Tumultuous World of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

The Eastern Jin dynasty was a tumultuous era of military conflicts, migrations, and power struggles. Throughout the period, there was a constant threat of invasion from the non-Han peoples, who were creating kingdoms in the North and sometimes invading China (Holcombe 2019b, 124–44). Towards the end of the 3rd century, civil wars and an attack by the Xiongnu 匈奴 state led to the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (Xi Jin 西晉; 266–316) (ZGS 1979, 199–211)⁶. The court fled to the southeast and founded the Eastern Jin dynasty, which ushered in an era of disunity. These events also triggered mass migrations to the South. Many independent farmers and most prominent Han families and their households went into exile. They arrived in several phases or waves, beginning in the following years: 307, 321, 349, 383, 416, 450 and 466. Approximately 900,000 people migrated between the Yongjia 永嘉 (307–313) to the Liu-Song dynasty periods. As a result, about one sixth of the population in the South were emigres⁷ (Wang 1979, 320–22, 343–46).

5 Since the authorship of the text is unknown, the term “author” in singular form is used to refer to one or possibly multiple individuals.

6 The abbreviation “ZGS” refers to the *Zhongguo gudaishi* 中國古代史 (*History of Ancient China*), edited by Nanjing daxue lishixi Zhongguo gudai shizu 南京大學歷史系中國古代史組.

7 Wang (1979, 346) also pointed out that these are approximate assessments, since the people included are only those who were registered.

The imperial family leaned on the support of the members of established Northern emigree families. They became increasingly powerful and wealthy, regained privileges, and occupied the highest government posts. However, only descendants of the early arrivals gained access to power. On the other hand, the old Southern aristocracy was almost entirely excluded from the court and political power (Holcombe 2019a, 98–103, 106–109). It is not surprising that these old Southerners felt discontented and resentful (*Jin shu*, 58: 1574). Moreover, they were also pressured by Northerners to convert to their Daoist religion, i.e. the Tianshi dao (Strickmann 1977, 6–7). The imperial line was relatively powerless, while large Northern and Southern families constantly struggled for power and prestige. In addition, members of newly empowered families holding military commands over the central Yangzi region were a threat to everyone. Military conflicts between central and local powers broke out and fighting took place between two macro-regions, namely the lower and central Yangzi regions. For instance, Huan Wen 桓溫 (312–373), an emigree from a military family, dominated the political and military spheres for a quarter of a century and weakened the influence of the eminent families. At the turn of the century Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), his son, took centre stage in terms of military domination and even established his own dynasty. Then in 404, Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422) successfully attacked him. Moreover, these military commanders and the court also sent expeditions to reconquer the North.⁸ During the period of Huan Wen's domination, a trend arose of demilitarization among the Southern elite (Lewis 2009, 62–69; Holcombe 2019a, 109–12, 116–17). It became more desirable for young people to choose the path of the literati rather than that of the soldier, a trend that was also due to the dangers of socio-political life (Mao 1990, 93–95).

On the other hand, commoners who fled to the South sought protection by becoming dependants of large Southern families, entered monasteries, or fled to the mountains to live as recluses, where they were thus able to escape tax and public service obligations (Crowell 1990, 175–77). Such individuals remained socially and economically disadvantaged. Heavy taxation burdened independent native farmers,⁹ pushing the smaller ones in particular into poverty. The public service or corvée labour (*yaoyi* 徭役) obligations were also highly exacting. As a result

8 After the move, the emigree families hoped to return to their homelands but gradually got accustomed to life in the South. The temporary tombs built even up to the early 5th century reveal that some still maintained the hope of a return throughout this period. Nevertheless, the court was distrustful of those generals who favoured trying to reconquer the North (Holcombe 2019a, 101–102).

9 A few attempts were made to correct the registers to improve the levying of taxes and conscription of manpower, but these impacted not only the commoners, but also the upper classes (Crowell 1990, 187–99).

of these challenges, the commoners often instigated or joined rebellions. In 399, these culminated in a bloody uprising on the eastern coast led by Sun En 孫恩 (?–402)¹⁰ and his successor Lu Xun 盧循 (?–411). They were joined by numerous discontented and poverty-stricken peasants and other commoners (ZGS 1979, 228–34), and later also by aboriginal people (Holcombe 2019a, 115–16).

However, the above events were arguably not the only ones to trigger a sense of crisis. The *Jin shu* 晉書 (*Book of Jin Dynasty*) (27: 807, 809, 818, passim) mentions natural disasters,¹¹ such as floods, fires, droughts, windstorms, and earthquakes, and also speaks of bad harvests and famine. By analysing extant data on floods and droughts, we can observe that the percentage occurring in the central region (including the lower Yangzi region and the capital in modern-day Jiangsu province) was much higher compared to earlier periods (Yao 1943, 367, 369, 371). In addition, during the Eastern Jin era their frequency and duration also increased (ibid. 1942, 275–76). Moreover, data on outbreaks of epidemic diseases in the South show a rapid rise in their number from the year 400, surpassing the number in the North around the mid-5th century (McNeill 1976, 259–69; Morabia 2009, 1364). While the data may be incomplete in both instances, natural disasters and epidemics arguably threatened members of all social strata. Thus, the death rate was high during this period due to wars, plagues, and poor harvests, and people even turned to cannibalism (Yang 1946, 114).

From the Eastern Jin period onward, the South also saw a loosening of ties among family members and a decrease in social closeness between large families and the local rural population. Various authors observe that loyalty and cooperation among family members in the South was no longer as emphasized as in the North, and some relatives even fought each other for power at court or engaged in military conflicts (Lewis 2009, 129–31; Mao 1990, 101–102).

Moreover, from the end of the Han period onwards, faith in the Confucian understanding of social and political order diminished. Both lower and upper classes increasingly began turning to the Daoist and Buddhist religions that promised salvation and immortality (Buckley Ebrey 1996, 86).

In summation, the period of the Eastern Jin dynasty was a time of many changes. I was able to identify several aspects of the crisis, i.e., political, military, social, religious, moral, health, economic, legal, and natural, which in some way affected members of various strata or social groups. As outlined above, the manifestations of crisis include power struggles, military conflicts, wars, loosened social ties, in-

10 For more on the rebellion and religious ideas behind Sun En's uprising, see the studies by Miyakawa Hisayuki (1971) and Eichhorn Werner (1954).

11 For more data on disasters from the official sources, see Satō Taketoshi (1993).

vasions of the non-Han peoples, rebellions, decline in morality, disunity of the Chinese realm, poor harvests, burdening public service obligations, mass migrations, epidemics, natural disasters, political instability, lack of reliable leadership, religious competition and pressures, poverty, a high mortality rate, and more. They all arguably contributed to a growing sense of fear, danger, unease, and threat, as well as to feelings of lack of peace, safety, cooperation, well-being, stability and order, and thereby to a general sense of crisis and loss of hope.

Portrayals of the Crisis as Reflections of the Social Crisis of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

Below, I examine how the crisis is described in the scripture and how its causes are explained, thus identifying reflections of the social crisis of the Eastern Jin dynasty.

Depictions of Crisis

Let us look at an example to illustrate how the scripture portrays the crisis.

The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said: The humans of the latest cosmic era live unhurried lives. They do not know that in the age of the Great Jin, thirty thousand demon soldiers descend on the kingdom, disseminating severe infectious diseases and red *Qi*¹², and riding the Heavenly flood waves. The devil kings of the Six Caverns spread all under Heaven, chasing and suppressing myriads of people. Large armies slay one another. Those in official service are scattered. Since the demon soldiers starve all under Heaven, they devour living beings. The hundred surnames are forced to go into exile, fathers [go] to the south and sons to the north. Great bandits overpower all under Heaven, the homeland is disunited. There is no peace on the five roads, provinces and counties are cruel towards one another. High ranking officials impose punishments upon each other, and minor functionaries [re]move one another. Myriads of people lose their means of existence and roam all under Heaven in desolation. The humans are stricken by calamities. By *guihai* year, millions upon millions of savage demons walk around all under Heaven. They kill and injure the humans; they disrupt the world. Their brutal

12 The *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* explains that demons spread toxic *Qi* of various colours and kill stupid people. The effect of the red *Qi* is to cause swelling (DZ 335, 1.4b).

violence causes damage and loss of property; injuries to camels and horses are innumerable. Barbarians¹³ are spreading in more than one region. (DZ 49, 9b–10a)

From the passage above, we can already see that depictions of the crisis touch upon various problems, ranging from socio-political to natural. With regards to the latter, natural disasters, floods and fires in particular, are among the most frequently mentioned phenomena across the entire text (*ibid.*, 2b, 5b, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10b, 11a, 11b). There are also entries indicating bad harvests. For instance, the text states that grains are not ripening (*ibid.*, 5a), which suggests famine in a predominantly agricultural society. In addition to such natural catastrophes, epidemics (*ibid.*, 1b, 2b, 5b, 5a, 5b, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10b, 11a, 11b) and wars (*ibid.*, 2b, 3b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 11a, 11b) are also prevalent and presented as major issues. Demons (or demon armies) invade China (*ibid.*, 1b, 8a, 9b). Bandits (*ibid.*, 1b, 9a etc.) and non-Han peoples (*ibid.*, 10a) are widespread. Evil rebels form large states (*ibid.*, 1a). In other words, violence, rebellions, treason, attacks, battles, invasions, and defeat permeate the text. As a result, the mortality rate seems to be increasing, as numerous entries refer to people (including the ruler(s) and the officials) being killed or dying of disease (*ibid.*, 6b, 8b etc.). Cannibalism is also indicated (*ibid.*, 5b). People are burdened by public service or *corvée* labour (*ibid.*, 6a, 8a) and lose work (*ibid.*, 6a, 10a). Their property is lost or damaged (*ibid.*, 10a). Many flee their home(land) (*ibid.*, 1b, 8b, 9a). The country is disunited (*ibid.*, 10a), families are separated, and people scattered in different directions (*ibid.*, 5b, 6a, 8b, 9a, 10a, 11b). The land and households are empty (*ibid.*, 1b, 2b, 5a). Morals among the people have declined. There is disharmony in human relations, i.e., within family units (*ibid.*, 2b, 8b, 9a), between ruler(s) and subjects or ministers (*ibid.*, 8b, 9a), among officials (*ibid.*, 8b, 10a), and between counties and provinces (*ibid.*, 10a). Some entries indicate power struggles within the higher social strata (*ibid.*, 8b, 9a, 10a). People conspire in unlawful activities, turn traitorous, and impose punishments upon each other (*ibid.*, 1b, 8a). Laws and decrees are produced in an abrupt manner (*ibid.*, 5a).

It is pointed out several times that, in general, things, including official matters, are not going well, not having good results (*ibid.*, 1b, 5a, 5b, 6b, 10a), and that the populace is suffering, burdened by hardships and misfortune (*ibid.*, 1a–b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 11b). Ordinary people, military men, minor functionaries, high officials and

13 In ancient times, the term *yi* 夷 designated “barbarians (‘less cultivated’ peoples)” in general and/or the southern or eastern non-Han tribes in particular, while the term *rong* 戎 held a meaning of the northwestern or western ones. *Rong* also became a term for “war” (Theobald 2013a; 2013b). As it would be difficult to determine which specific tribes or wars the author had in mind, a more general term, i.e. “barbarians”, is used here.

ruler(s), men and women (ibid., 6b), adults and their descendants (ibid., 5b, 6b), and their kin (ibid., 6a, 6b), are all affected in some way. In other words, the crisis hit across the social strata and regardless of gender or age, and the world is in chaos due to various factors (ibid., 1a–b, 2b, 3b, 5a, 6a, 6b, 8a, 8b, 9a, 10a, 11a–b). Unsurprisingly, the general lack of peace, feelings of unease, worries, and discontent are stressed throughout the text (ibid., 1b, 5a, 6b, 8b, 9a, 11b). The world is not in harmony (ibid., 6a). This is not the world of Great Peace (*taiping* 太平)¹⁴ (ibid., 5b), but rather its opposite. In short, both the socio-political and the natural environment are portrayed as heavily disrupted. The traditional Chinese or Daoist holistic worldview suggests a severe disharmony between Heaven and human beings, i.e. a cosmic disharmony. In addition, all these occurrences towards the end of the cycle, the so-called Great *Kalpa* (*dajie* 大劫) (ibid., 11a–b), indicate the world nearing a culmination of cosmic disharmony, i.e. an apex of crisis of cosmic proportions.

Although our text does not refer directly to any specific historical event, the reference to the present era of the Jin dynasty (ibid., 9b) suggests that the author intended to draw the audience's attention to the events of this historical period. We also see that certain events in the text bring to mind several of the above occurrences of the tumultuous world of the Eastern Jin. For instance, the text speaks of the disunity of the Chinese realm, wars, the spread of the non-Han peoples, and people being scattered and forced into exile. This seems to indicate mass migrations from the North due to the invasion of non-Han peoples, and reflect the frustration and stress of the people who had to move to the South. At the same time, these may be expressions of their sadness and hopes to return. It thus seems likely that the author and/or at least a part of the intended audience were emigres.

This movement clearly included one or more educated individuals, who wrote the text and were somewhat informed of events in the highest circles. The text addresses many aspects permeating the life of the upper strata in that period, such as political instability and power struggles. Moreover, several entries portray the loosening of social ties and moral decline. The text covers a wide range of problems also present at the time, and thus has the potential to attract members of both Northern emigree and old Southern elites. On the other hand, it also shows much concern for the problems of the common people, which suggests that the author may have also intended to attract people from the lower social strata, who were affected by these problems, such as bad harvests. Several depictions, e.g., those that speak of heavy burdens on the people, corvée labour, social chaos, and

14 See note 27.

rebellions, also bring to mind the circumstances of the commoners during the period of the Eastern Jin dynasty. Furthermore, the text also portrays manifestations of crisis that arguably presented a threat to members of all social strata, such as epidemics, warfare and natural disasters.

Although the sections seem to be chronologically arranged, it is not clear where exactly the portrayals of the present or recent past flow into predictions.¹⁵ Regardless, similar portrayals of crisis appear throughout the text. However, there is a sense of a growing intensity of troubles, violence, dangers, and difficulties towards the end of the text, where the audience is warned of the imminence of the end of the Great *Kalpa* (ibid., 11a–b). In the early medieval Daoist eschatological system,¹⁶ the Great *Kalpa* represents a culmination of *Yin* (Earth) and an exhaustion of *Yang* (Heaven), or the so-called Yang-nine (*yangjiu* 陽九) of the *Yangjiu bailiu* 陽九百六 (Yang-nine and hundred six) theory.¹⁷ This is a time of calamities (*zai* 災), when the Six Heavens (*liutian* 六天)¹⁸ reach a climax. Pre-apocalyptic time is portrayed as a time of decadence, when the evil demonic *Qi* (*gui Qi* 鬼氣), also called the old *Qi* (*gu Qi* 故氣) or *Yin Qi* 陰氣, is growing and billions of demons are populating the Earth (Mollier 1990, 162–65). Analysing the Daoist eschatology including the *Yangjiu bailiu* theory in some scriptures, Li Fengmao (1996) argued that it was related to the (sense of) crisis towards the end of dynastic cycles, or rather, that a sense of crisis caused the formation of ideas of the end of the world. In addition, Stephen Bokenkamp (1994, 72) pointed out that portrayals of apocalypse “were based on both actual events and contemporary perceptions of disorder during the tumultuous days of the Period of Division” (ibid.). Because potential followers heard of, witnessed, or experienced such indications or heralds of a catastrophic future in their world, these portrayals could appear believable

15 It could be argued that most of the text can be regarded as predictions, which is similar to what Mollier stated, i.e. that the text *predicts* catastrophes in the following nine years of the sexagesimal cycle and beyond (Mollier 1997, 336).

16 For more details, see studies by Christine Mollier (1990, 162–65), Kobayashi Masayoshi (1990, 403–81), Li Fengmao (1996), Stephen Bokenkamp (1994) and Wu Yu (2014).

17 The terms *yangjiu* (Yang-nine) and *bailiu* 百六 (hundred and six) are not specifically mentioned in the text under discussion. However, we can find them in another early scripture from the Beidi tradition, which originated in the same milieu, namely the *Taishang dongyuan beidi tianpeng huming xiaozai shenzhou miaojing* 太上洞淵北帝天蓬護命消災神呪妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Tianpeng Divine Incantation for Protecting Life and Eliminating Calamities by the Emperor of the North of the Supreme Cavernous Abyss*), which also portrays a decadent society (DZ 53). On this text, see the study by Christine Mollier (1997, 335–37).

18 The Six Heavens refer to the realms of evil, impure spirits of (sacrifices of) popular religion, while the Three Heavens are presented as the spheres of pure deities of *Dao*, representing pure forces of life. On these notions, see the studies by Wang Zongyu (1999), Stephen Bokenkamp (1997, 188–94), and Kobayashi Masayoshi (1990, 482–510).

and function as an effective attracting force. Thus, the above depictions can arguably be viewed as reflecting historical occurrences (at least to some extent) as well as a sense of crisis among members of various social groups or Jin society as a whole. In addition, we could also say that some of these aspects of the crisis were projected into the near future and possibly at least in part exaggerated.

Explanation of Causes of Crisis

The inclusion of the imminent end of the Great *Kalpa* indicates that these drastic changes are viewed as occurring due to the revolution of cosmic eras or cycles reaching a certain culmination point. We saw above that the main actors or agents of these changes are demons, which are depicted as creating a wide variety of misfortunes and catastrophes. Thus, they are not only presented as manifestations of the crisis, but at the same time also as one of its primary causes.

In our scripture, there are several depictions of demons arriving in China and various consequences, i.e., they are creating social disorder, disseminating diseases, devouring humans, causing natural disasters, engaging in warfare, bringing death, causing a decline in morality, destroying families, and the like.¹⁹ The passage “*gui lai/ru/ Zhongguo* 鬼來/入/中國 (demons are coming to /or entering/ China)” is repeated in slightly different variants (DZ 49, 1b, 7a, 8a, 8b, etc.). Daoists redefined the ancient Chinese concept of demons, which now included not only souls of the dead or animist energies but also living beings, specifically non-adherents or those not in line with the norms of a Daoist group. One example of the latter type are the non-Han peoples, the so-called “barbarians” (Mollier 2006, 94).²⁰ Thus, the above passage likely refers to the invasions by non-Han peoples reflecting a feeling of severe threat and revealing the hardships the people endured or perceived to endure as a result of their arrival. For instance, they may not only have been viewed as causing suffering and death through military attacks, but also as bringing diseases to which the Southerners were not accustomed. In addition to the non-Han peoples, the term demons can also refer to other living non-adherents, particularly since the South around the turn of the 5th century knew many spiritual or religious traditions, Daoist (Tianshi, Taiqing 太清 / Great Clarity /,

19 For more details on the concept of evil and on the impact demons have on the world in Daoist medieval scriptures, see the study by Christine Mollier (2006).

20 For instance, the *Nūqing guilü* 女青鬼律 (*Demon Statutes of Nūqing*) (DZ 790), an early Tianshi dao demonology text, which Terry Kleeman (2016, 146) dates to the (late) 3rd century, portrays the non-Han peoples as demons who are entering China, devouring human blood etc. (DZ 790, 5.1b–2a). In addition, the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* contains numerous demons of foreign origin, also called “the barbarians (yi)” (Mollier 1990, 169; 2006, 94).

Shangqing, Lingbao) and others (Buddhism, popular cults). The numerous references to demons thus also suggest that the author and/or at least a part of the intended audience were among those affected by non-Han peoples and/or other non-adherents, whom they blamed for various misfortunes.

Moreover, judgements are also directly cast on the people. The most problematic are characterized as "evil (*e* 惡)" (DZ 49, 1a), "stupid (*yu* 愚)" (ibid., 3a)²¹ or "the sinners (*zuiren* 罪人)" (ibid., 6a). The text makes it clear that many are evil (ibid., 1a) or turning evil (ibid., 1b, 5b). Their sins (*zui* 罪) include immorality (ibid., 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b etc.) and religious transgressions, such as not knowing, believing in, following, or practicing the (correct) *Dao* (*/zheng/ Dao* / 正/道) (ibid., 1a, 3a, 3b, 5a). Particular blame seems to be cast on members of the elites (ibid., 1b, 5a, 8a), which reflects a sense of lacking reliable and efficient leadership during the (Eastern) Jin dynasty. At the same time, the audience is informed, or rather, warned of the consequences of all these sins, this increase in evil, which is causing demons to spread, and it is these who are causing the many manifestations of crisis. The people are thus actually bringing misfortunes upon themselves (ibid., 2a, 2b–3a, 3b, 5b–6a).

You, worldlings, why do you not believe in the Great *Dao*? As a result, there are these demons that roam all under Heaven and create turmoil among humans. The members of one's family in the homeland perish between Heaven and Earth, harmed by severe diseases. By the *jiayin* year, flood waters and fires grow in strength, there are many demonic epidemics. Living beings get severe diseases and Heavenly disasters are prevalent. (Ibid., 2b)

The speaker, *Yuanshi tianzun*, presents the problems as far from being unrelated to human beliefs and behaviour, but rather as stemming from them. He, speaking as the personified and deified *Dao* (I will elaborate on this below), condemns evil and presents it as a destructive force. This signifies that those who are evil, i.e. those who are immoral, and those who do not believe in or practice the *Dao*, actually become misaligned with or distanced from the *Dao*. Hence, we can ascertain that the people and demons are presented as having contributed heavily to the above-discussed worsening of the cosmic crisis (the social crisis included) due to their misalignment or disharmony with the *Dao*.

To conclude, we saw that the scripture touches upon various aspects or factors of the social crisis present at the time, including socio-political, military, health,

21 It was believed that people became stupid due to a gradual loss of pure simplicity of the world occurring since high antiquity (Kamitsuka 1999, 222).

moral, economic, and natural, and reflects the severity of the feelings of crisis among the people. In other words, the social crisis is presented as an aspect of a cosmic one, and its various manifestations reflect the many problems of the Eastern Jin dynasty, such as epidemics, invasions of non-Han peoples, power struggles, political instability, lack of reliable and capable leadership, loosened social ties, warfare, migrations, high mortality rate, natural disasters, bad harvests, rebellions, disunity of the Chinese realm, the burden of corvée labour, cannibalism, and more. Particular emphasis is placed on the hordes of demons entering China, which likely reflects the foreign invasions of the Jin dynasty. The author employs a proselytizing strategy by including and often repeating such problems witnessed or experienced by the people of the time, while also explaining why they occur. With this, the author creates a specific perception of crisis, wherein contemporaneous members of the audience can identify their own difficulties. In addition, such portrayals also acknowledge and intensify such feelings of crisis as a sense of threat, danger, helplessness and loss, and a lack of cooperation, peace, harmony, well-being, safety and stability. This indicates that the author intends to attract a specific though relatively broad audience: members of various classes and social groups discontented and affected by a wide range of problems, as well as those who may blame such problems on the morals of the elites and non-adherents (non-Han peoples in particular). The author places these depictions into the mouth of a supreme deity, which adds credibility to his words and invokes trust and respect. The audience is thus given a sense of confirmation, clarity, and acknowledgement of their own experiences and feelings.

Solutions to the Crisis as Responses to the Social Crisis of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

The apex of cosmic crisis is expected to be imminent, but the text does not convey that all is hopeless. On the contrary, its subtitle, the *Shenbing hu guo an jia qu gui xiao zai feng chi zhou pin* 神兵護國安家驅鬼消災奉勅呪品 (*The Article on Revering Orders Issued on the Incantations for Divine Soldiers to Protect the State, Bring Peace to the Families, Expel Demons and Eliminate Calamities*) (DZ 49, 1a), reveals that it aims to provide a remedy. The audience can find the proposed solutions in the second parts of sections in the scripture. Regarding handling the crisis, the actors featuring in the scripture could roughly be divided into three key groups, namely divine and immortal forces, human beings, and demonic forces.

22 Regarding which state or kingdom (*guo* 國) is to be protected, we may assume that it refers to China or the Jin dynasty, since it is depicted in the text as being attacked.

Below, I will analyse their roles, means, goals, options, and mutual relationships and so elaborate on the proposed plan to solve the crisis as a response to the social crisis of the time.

Divine and Immortal Forces

I will begin by discussing the divine and immortal forces as part of the presented solutions.

Supreme Divine Force

The highest deities featuring in the scripture are *Yuanshi tianzun*, the speaker, and *Taishang daojun* 太上道君 (Most High Lord of the *Dao*). They are known as two gods of the *Sanqing* 三清 (Three Pure Ones) trinity, symbolizing the *Dao*.²³ The text also refers to the cult of the *Sanzun* 三尊 (Three Heavenly Worthies) (DZ 49, 6b; cf. Schipper 2004, 273), but the third deity does not appear in it. In the Shangqing and Lingbao scriptures,²⁴ *Yuanshi tianzun* represents the cosmic and creative aspect, the *Dao* at the origin of everything. He is regarded as the number one deity, an underlying power of the cosmos and creator of the world, who also revealed some of the earliest and crucial scriptures. He manifests in various *kalpas* to lead humanity to the right path, reminding us of *Laozi*'s transformations (Kohn 1998, 124–26).

Throughout the text, we can observe *Yuanshi tianzun*'s continuous proselytizing, which includes assurances, warnings, threats, promises, and more. The pronoun *wu* 吾 (I, my) in the text thus refers to this deity in particular. He is the leading force that creates everything and reveals the scripture or the teachings. In addition, the importance of (his words in) the scripture and the doctrine is also stressed repeatedly as "great (da 大)", "true (zhen 真)" or "orthodox or correct (zheng 正)" (DZ 49, 2a, 3a, 9b, 10a, 10b, 12a, etc.).

23 During the 5th and 6th centuries, the leading Daoist schools endeavoured to form a unified teaching and organizational structure. This process also resulted in the reorganization of the pantheon with the *Sanqing* trinity at the top. These three deities are associated with the *sandong* 三洞 (Three Caverns) and the Three Heavens. They are to stand for the teachings of the major schools, i.e. *Yuanshi tianzun* represented the Shangqing, *Taishang daojun*, the Lingbao, and *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 (Most High Lord Lao) or *Daode tianzun* 道德天尊 (Heavenly Worthy of the Dao and Its Virtue) the Sanhuang 三皇 (Three Sovereigns) and Tianshi traditions. Together, they are identified as one, i.e. they symbolize the *Dao*. Thus, it is not surprising that their attributes and roles in the texts are similar or the same (Kohn 1998, 121–27; 2011, 840–44).

24 In the Shangqing scriptures, he still holds an appellation of *Yuanshi tianwang* 元始天王 (Heavenly King of Primordial Beginning), whereas the Lingbao tradition transformed this title into *Yuanshi tianzun* (Kohn 1998, 124).

His main role and purpose are to persuade other forces to follow and join him, i.e. the *Dao*. “Returning to the *Dao* (*gui dao* 歸道)”, which is also expressed with phrases such as “revering the *Dao* (*feng dao* 奉道)”, “believing in the *Dao* (*xin dao* 信道)”, “practicing the *Dao* (*xing dao* 行道)”, “entering into the Dao(ist movement) (*ru dao* 入道)” (ibid., 1b, 6a, 8a, 9b, 10b, 12a etc.) is presented as crucial. The importance of (re)aligning with the *Dao* is not surprising, since misalignment of the people and demons with the *Dao* is presented as the key reason for the cosmic crisis.

He provides various means, such as his teachings revealed in the form of a scripture (ibid., 10b, 12a etc.), and specifically the orders (*ling* 令) (ibid., 1b, 10b)²⁵, the law or method (*fa* 法) (ibid., 10b, 12a etc.), the incantations (*shenzhou* 神呪) (ibid., 3b, 12a), and so on. He also explains that the crisis necessitates his teaching.

The Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning said: The living beings of the latest cosmic era confront epidemics [caused] by large armies, difficulties due to floods and fires, and all demon-caused calamities. Therefore, I now issue orders to 36 deities of the *Marvellous Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Orthodox Doctrine of the Samādhi*²⁶ of the Emperor of the North to disseminate the scripture [throughout] the kingdom, to educate and enlighten the living beings, to let them know the Great Law. Therefore, the Masters of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North descended to discuss and teach the emperor, ministers, high and local officials, and governors, to let them return to the Great *Dao*, [so that] everything will be harmonious. (Ibid., 10b–11a)

In addition, he assures that he sent or will send help through several figures not only to educate but also protect and save the people and the state (ibid., 3a, 3b, 4a, 6a, 7a, 10b, 11b, 12a). These portrayals bring to mind an image of a movement leader endeavouring to attract followers and thus organizing missionary activity, where educating the elites seems to be of key importance.

25 Most sections close with a phrase “*ji chi lüling* 急勅律令 (Quickly, [according to] issued statutes and orders!)”, which resembles one often used in early medieval Daoist scriptures, namely “(*jiji*) *ru lüling* (急急)如律令 (/Quickly, quickly,/ in accordance with the statutes and orders!)” and seems to be its variant. The latter was adopted from Han dynasty texts, i.e. it was a standard formula used at the end of official documents as well as funerary texts, which also functioned as orders to the dead to not harm the living. It can already be found in the earliest Daoist codebooks, such as the *Nüqing guilü*, as well as in Daoist ritual petitions and incantations (Seidel 1987, 39–42). Another similar phrase is “*jiji ru santian dafa zhi ling* 急急如三天大法之令 (Quickly, quickly, in accordance with the orders of the Great Law of the Three Heavens!)” (DZ 49, 3b), which specifies orders as the “*santian dafa zhi ling* 三天大法之令 (orders of the Great Law of the Three Heavens)”.

26 *Samādhi* (Ch. *Sanmei* 三昧) is a Sanskrit term, which in Indian traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, refers to a high state of consciousness invoked by meditation.

Moreover, he also explains the effectiveness of honouring and following his solutions, i.e. the desirable consequences of aligning with the *Dao*. He promises that returning to the *Dao*, honouring the teachings, the scripture itself, and the ritual masters will result in solving specific problems of the world in crisis (see Chapters on human and demonic forces). Thus, we can ascertain that he shows much concern for the people and the world at large.

As we saw above, the speaker condemns evil, which is also presented as a cause of the crisis. Thus, it comes as no surprise that he not only threatens the wicked and requires the elimination of evil, but also directly or indirectly demands goodness and promises salvation to the good (see Chapter on human forces). In other words, doing good or ceasing to do evil, i.e. converting to good, signifies alignment with the *Dao*. A reader can also find warnings of undesirable consequences if one (a human being or a demon) does not follow the *Dao* and remains wicked, such as being sent to the underworld, i.e. the earth prisons (*diyu* 地獄) (DZ 49, 3b) and being left to perish without hope of rescue (*ibid.*, 5a, 6a, 6b).

Thus, the apparent primary goal of the above-discussed strategies is to help the good people in particular so that they may survive catastrophic times (see Chapter on human forces). But the promises of the *Dao* go beyond this, as they imply that peace and order in society are to be restored (*ibid.*, 2a, 10a), and that all things will be improved and turned into a state of harmony (*ibid.*, 2a, 11a). Moreover, it also speaks of harmonizing natural phenomena, i.e. the weather will be smooth (*ibid.*, 2a). Thus, although it does not directly mention the term *taiping* 太平 (Great Peace)²⁷ as a part of a promise, these phenomena indicate just that this will be achieved. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the supreme divine force is to achieve social and cosmic harmony.

The means *Yuanshi tianzun* has at his disposal are his supreme divine powers, which he uses to make decisions with regard to the crisis, including creating the perception of it and developing a plan to solve it. This portrayal of *Yuanshi tianzun* can remind us of an image of a movement leader who endeavours to attract followers affected in times of crisis by revealing manifestations of the crisis the people were aware of and making it clear that the situation will only get worse, thus making his remedies even more urgently needed and desired. He also points out what and who is to blame and then offers guidance, tools, helpers, and a promise

27 On the development of the idea of Great Peace in premodern Chinese philosophies of history, see the study by Dawid Rogacz (2022). On this utopian vision in the early Daoist scripture with the term Great Peace in its title, namely the *Taiping jing* 太平經 (*Scripture on Great Peace*), see the study by Barbara Hendrichske (1992). This ideal of a world of social and cosmic harmony also appears in several other early medieval Daoist scriptures, such as the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (DZ 335, 1.11a).

that these problems can be solved. Imbued with the authority and power of the supreme cosmic force, he gives the impression of a figure whose proposed solutions should be followed and whose promises should be believed. In other words, he demonstrates his intentions to lead the process of dealing with the crisis but does not go about executing his plan on his own.

Taishang daojun, who is the second god of the trinity of the *Dao*, appears in the text with an alternative appellation, i.e. *Taishang* 太上 (Most High Lord). He is also the revealer of scriptures and serves as a mouthpiece of *Yuanshi tianzun*. In the Lingbao texts, he is learning from *Yuanshi tianzun*, i.e. receiving scriptures and precepts to help humanity in distress find salvation. He is portrayed as a disciple and a messenger of the supreme god of the trinity (Kohn 1998, 124–26). In our text he only appears in a few instances, either ordering demons not to create distress for the people and the country (DZ 49, 8a, 9b) or sending helpers to deal with evil people (ibid., 5a). His role is to mitigate the impact and scope of evil with his divine powers. It is evident that he is working in agreement with *Yuanshi tianzun* on the mission to protect people and the country, eradicate evil and recreate cosmic harmony. In addition, the reference to the Three Heavenly Worthies, from whom the people may receive the scripture (ibid., 6b), further confirms that these deities symbolize the highest cosmic force, the *Dao*, and that they are acting in accordance with each other.

Other Divine and Immortal Forces

A titular deity called *Beidi*, a central figure of a tradition of Fengdu or of the Emperor of the North, is the supreme sovereign of the world of the dead. He resides on the Fengdu shan 酆都山 (Mount Fengdu)²⁸ and governs the *Liu gong* 六宮 (Six Palaces), i.e. a large infernal bureaucracy of repentant spirits. In the *Beidi* tradition he appears in various roles (Mollier 1997, 329, 337–50). The daily individual practices of this tradition, which fall under the generic term *Beidi sha gui zhi fa* 北帝殺鬼之法 (the method of the Emperor of the North for killing demons), were a part of exorcistic and longevity practices and already popular during the Six Dynasties. They were known to be used in meditation and prescribe reciting incantations²⁹ and invoking the names of the Six Palaces of Mt Fengdu³⁰. They

28 Mount Fengdu refers to a mythic mountain in the northern quarter of the universe, a purgatory, a realm of the dead, where sinners and all the dead are judged (Mollier 1997, 337–45).

29 The above-mentioned early text of the *Beidi* tradition, namely the *Taishang dongyuan beidi tianpeng huming xiaozai shenzhou miaojing*, focuses on the so-called *Tianpeng* 天蓬 incantations. As the title suggests, its purpose is to protect life and eliminate calamities (DZ 53).

30 These methods also appear in the Shangqing scriptures. For instance, the *Shangqing tianguan santu jing* 上清天關三圖經 (*Highest Clarity Scripture of the Three Diagrams of the Heavenly Passes*) (DZ

were also accompanied by visualization practices (ibid., 355–65). In our text, this deity holds the appellation of *Beidi dasheng* 北帝大聖 (Great Saint Emperor of the North) (DZ 49, 11a). As the title, its alternative versions (ibid., 10a, 10b), and the subtitle suggest, our text focuses on incantations. When the Emperor utters them, various assistants, i.e. divinities, immortals and devil kings, assemble to listen and aid the world in distress (ibid., 11a).

In addition, the *Sanguan* 三官 (Three Office/r/s)³¹ also feature in the scripture. It is their duty to inspect and keep records of human actions in the registers of life or jade register (*yuli* 玉曆) and registers of death (*sishu* 死書). Evil actions incur punishment, while good deeds bring favourable fortune to the living, their ancestors and descendants, as well as the dead. The Three Offices have also been regarded as the Daoist Hell of Fengdu and a place of interrogation³² (Kleeman 2011a, 833–34; Ma 1998, 60–66). Our text states that during the “cycle of the Three Office(r)s (*sanguan zhi yun* 三官之運)”, when the world suffers from diseases, death, social disorder, and demonic invasions, the Three Offices inspect the oaths (DZ 49, 6b) and their troops punish demons by executing them (ibid., 7a). Another deity appearing in the text is *Wenchang* 文昌. As a deity he seems to have played a role in the administration of destiny during the Han and Six Dynasties. (Kleeman 2011b, 1033; Ma 1998, 111) Our text contains an example, where *Wenchang* is sent by *Yuanshi tianzun* to eliminate those that do not submit (DZ 49, 6b). We can see that the particular role of these deities is to manage evil.

In addition, the text also mentions various deities and immortals whom *Yuanshi tianzun* sends to help and save the living as well as to protect the country, such as *yunü* 玉女 (jade maidens) and *miaotong* 妙童 (mysterious lads) (ibid., 3a), or the 36 deities of the scripture, whose role is to transmit the scripture and instruct.

Therefore, with regard to the crisis, other prominent deities and immortals play the role of assistants of the supreme cosmic force. They are aligned with its intentions and act in support of its plan, in the course of which they employ means, such as their divine and immortal powers, and ritual tools.

1366) promotes the individual practices of the *Beidi* method, i.e. the *Tianpeng* incantations combined with invoking the names of the Six Palaces of Mt. Fengdu. They were designed to evade danger and death caused by demons and calamities (Mollier 1997, 355f, 359).

31 The belief in the *Tiandishui Sanguan* 天地水三官 (Three Office/r/s of Heaven, Earth and Water) had already developed during the Han dynasty and was absorbed into later traditions (Lai 2002).

32 See also Wang Zongyu (1999, 38–41, 44–46).

Human Forces

Below, I will discuss the group of human forces as a part of the proposed plan to solve the crisis.

Masters of the Law

Our text provides us with one of the earliest titles of ritual masters of the *Beidi* tradition,³³ namely the *Beidi sanmei fashi* 北帝三昧法師 (Master of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North) or *Sanmei fashi* 三昧法師 (Master of the Law of the *Samādhi*) (Mollier 1997, 350–54). These ritual masters are presented as being sent by *Yuanshi tianzun* as his helpers and play various roles. They are shown to spread teachings, bringing people, particularly members of the social elites, back to the *Dao*. They also disseminate the scripture and perform Daoist practices (DZ 49, 3a). It is evident that they are supposed to be respected. In fact, those who revere them are promised that their various problems will be solved, they will receive additional help, they will be saved, the country will receive protection and so on (Ibid., 3a, 4a–b, 7b, 10a–b, etc.).

If a person reveres the Law, receives the scripture, and makes offerings to the Masters of the Law of the *Samādhi* of the Emperor of the North, the sick will immediately recover, and everything will be well. (Ibid., 7b)

The ritual masters are thus those human actors³⁴ who are portrayed as most in harmony with the *Dao*, and who act in support of its plan, in which they are included as assistants. Their primary means in dealing with the crisis are the scripture and Daoist practices.

Other Human Beings

Since living human beings are included among those actors responsible for the aggravation of the crisis, it would make sense to expect that they should also contribute to remedying it. The members of the elites seem particularly misaligned, therefore their alignment with the *Dao* is crucial. Thus, the ruler(s), ministers, and other people of high rank and importance are pointed out as key object of the masters' teaching endeavours (DZ 49, 10b–11a). However, the text also shows concern for and targets the (Chinese or the Jin) people at large. Terms such as

33 During the Six Dynasties the ritual masters of this tradition were travelling masters, exorcists, therapists and preachers. They performed community rituals and were active in private homes (Mollier 1997, 350–54).

34 These masters are said to have descended, which could mean they were considered to be immortal (DZ 49, 10b), but the text is unclear in this regard.

wanmin 萬民 (myriads of people, populace), *baixing* 百姓 (hundred surnames, common people) and *guomin* 國民 (citizens) are used frequently. The speaker evaluates their beliefs and behaviour as mentioned above and instructs them on how to cope with the crisis and be saved. This indicates that the *Dao* targets all social strata as its audience. Moreover, it is evident that the scripture is meant for both men and women (ibid., 2a, 11b–12a).

People have several means at their disposal to align with the *Dao* (see above), and their roles include receiving and revering the scripture and the *Dao*'s teachings (DZ 49, 2a, 3a, 7b, 8a, 9a, 10a, 12a), also expressed as "the true words of the Three Heavens (*santian zhen yan* 三天真言)" (ibid., 8a), disseminating the scripture (ibid., 12a), reciting the scripture (ibid., 6a), venerating the incantations (ibid., 3b, 11b), revering the Law (ibid., 7b, 10b) and respecting the orders (ibid., 1b), the ritual masters and so on. They also know the demons' names (*gui ming zi* 鬼名字), and so can use a technique by which the demons can be driven away (ibid., 9a).³⁵ In addition, a chief method of turning misalignment into alignment is moral behaviour.

If a person reveres the *Marvellous Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Samādhi of the Emperor of the North*, myriads of people will be at peace, diseases will be cured immediately, and all the heart's desires will be fulfilled. Large armies will disperse on their own, demon bandits will perish, and official disputes will be resolved. (Ibid., 10a)

Thus, provided they follow the guidance of the *Dao*, their problems are promised to be solved. The dangers and calamities will simply dissolve (ibid., 1b, 2a, 9a), they will recover from diseases (ibid., 1b, 4a, 6a, 7b, 8a, 10a), demons will perish or leave (ibid., 1b–2a, 4b, 6a, 10a, 10b), armies will disperse (ibid., 10a), official affairs will be resolved (ibid., 6a, 8a, 10b), helpers will come to aid, protect, and save them (ibid., 4a, 6a, 10a–b, 12a), their wishes will be fulfilled (ibid., 10a), and all will be well (ibid., 2a, 4a, 7b, 11a). There will be harmony in society and nature, as discussed above. We can see that several concrete problems are repeatedly pointed out to reach desirable outcomes.

Moreover, those aligning with the *Dao* will be transformed and cross over (*hua du* 化度) (ibid., 11b), ascend to (become) immortals (*sheng xian* 昇仙) (ibid., 4a), and their names will be entered into the records of names of immortals, i.e. the jade calendar (ibid., 12a). The promise of immortality seems to also extend to

³⁵ Whether the text refers to the names of the Six Palaces of Mt Fengdu is not clear, as the Six Palaces are not directly mentioned in relation to these demons' names. However, we can find an example of the name of demon(s) in the text, i.e. the Demon(s) of Heaven (*Tian zhi gui* 天之鬼) (DZ 49, 2b).

their descendants and later generations (ibid., 4a). The alternative option, i.e. not following the *Dao*'s intentions and strategies, does not seem very attractive, as we saw earlier.

From all of the above, we can ascertain the roles of other human beings—they should first accept the views and strategies on the crisis presented by the supreme divine force, and then cooperate with it and its helpers, i.e., follow the instructions, use the means provided, and accept their help. As a result, they can be saved and contribute to eliminating evil, and to restoring social and cosmic harmony.

Demonic Forces

Since demons are regarded as a critical cause and manifestation of the crisis, it is not surprising that they, too, are tasked with doing their part in the process of remedying it. Some high-ranking demons, usually referred to as *mowang* 魔王 (devil kings), *shenwang* 神王 (spirit kings) and *guiwang* 鬼王 (demon kings),³⁶ receive orders from the *Dao* to command and control subordinate demons (DZ 49, 7b, 9b). In other words, they should reform themselves and act in service of the *Dao*.³⁷

You, demon kings, quickly issue orders to your demons to let the sick rapidly recover, official affairs be promptly resolved, and all matters to become harmonious and good. If a demon does not submit, demon kings must not give it much thought but swiftly chop its head off. (Ibid., 7b)

We can see that not only high-ranking demons but demons in general are required to change their ways. They should cease their harmful impacts on the people, use their powers to do good, and strive to restore harmony and peace in all matters (ibid., 7b, 8a, 9b). If they do not comply or succeed, they get slaughtered instantly by superior demons (ibid., 6a, 7b, 9b). These demons may also include the living.

36 Demons of various types or ranks, such as *guizhu* 鬼主 (demon lords), *guibing* 鬼兵 (demon soldiers or armies), *guiwang*, *shenwang* and *mowang*, also appear to populate the hierarchically organized eschatological pantheon of contemporary texts, such as the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (Mollier 1990, 165–70). *Guiwang* and Buddhism-inspired *mowang* are typically viewed as leaders of demon hordes. The former holds the same or higher position as the latter. *Shenwang* is another similar character that leads low-ranking demons. Kamitsuka (1999, 223–28) considers it to be almost the same as *mowang*. The *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* explains that although both share the same *Qi* with the ruler of multitudes of spirits, the *Dao*, they became distanced from it due to their evil hearts and actions, and thus remained in the realm or the cycles of birth and death (ibid.).

37 These high-ranking demons similarly reform themselves in the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* and *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* (ibid., 221–34).

Moreover, our text makes it clear that high-ranking demons have the authority to try people and send the evil to earth prisons (ibid., 3b). Moreover, some demons sent by Heaven can even kill wicked people or let them die in catastrophes or warfare (ibid., 2b). Thus, high-ranking demons function as helpers of the supreme divine force in eradicating evil and protecting the country and its good people (ibid., 2b, 7b, 8a, 9b, 10b). We can ascertain that demons have two options: to reform themselves or perish. In addition, it seems our text may be indicating that salvation is not only attainable by people, but also by demons (ibid., 5a).³⁸

To sum up, the role of demons is to accept the perception of crisis put forth by the supreme divine force, including their role in bringing it about. Next, they should align with the *Dao's* plan, namely, they should follow the directives or orders of the divine forces to deal with evil on the one hand, and to protect the good on the other. The above account implies that the author or the movement's leader, who speaks through *Yuanshi tianzun*, may require higher-ranking converts to make non-adherents (non-Han peoples included) change their ways according to his teachings. Moreover, it also seems to justify punishing or killing those who do not submit to his will.

Strategic Plan of Cooperation for Cosmic Harmony

The grand plan for handling the crisis involves three major groups, i.e., humans, demons, and the divine and immortals. The lines between them are porous or somewhat blurry, and some entities could be understood as belonging to one or more groups. In addition, these categories are not static as, in some cases, mobility between them is possible. The relationship among them is hierarchical, i.e. the categories of the living mortal human forces and demonic forces are subordinate to that of the divine and immortal. The former two are lower in rank than the latter as regards their (decision-making) powers and resulting ability to handle and impact the social and cosmic crisis. The entities within each group are also hierarchically arranged. The relationship between humans and demons is more complex and mostly depends on the level of alignment of entities with the *Dao*. Thus, the highest cosmic force, the *Dao*, leads the process of dealing with the crisis, other divine and immortal forces support it, while everyone else must either follow or fail to be saved. The misalignment of the two groups with the *Dao* has been explained to have heavily contributed to the crisis, and their (re)alignment in terms of beliefs and behaviours is presented as necessary to turn disharmony with the *Dao* into harmony. The relationship among the

38 In comparison, the *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* elaborates on this topic (ibid., 228–34).

three groups is also presented as one of cooperation, which is not voluntary but obligatory for everyone subordinate to the *Dao*. Thus, the plan is designed to deal with the key cause(s) of crisis, i.e. to remove or reform those who are blamed for causing it. The presented strategies, though religious in nature and wrapped up in religious language, still suggest that the author is first and foremost attempting to instruct the extant ruling elites, seemingly particularly with regard to dealing with demons, i.e. which include non-Han peoples, in order to protect the state, bring peace and save the people. Moreover, the strategies are also clearly explained as designed to successfully deal with various concrete socio-political, moral, health, military, natural and other problems, such as epidemics, natural disasters or bad weather, warfare and invasions of demons (i.e. non-Han peoples), troubles in official affairs, and social chaos. However, they aim beyond that, namely at achieving immortality and social and cosmic harmony, where such occurrences and discontent will be absent. The text thus presents solutions which members of the audience of varied social backgrounds may recognize as addressing issues they have been witnessing or experiencing in their own time. They may provide comfort and relief to the sense of crisis, and a conviction that the supreme divine force is watching out for them. As such, this plan represents a carefully formed response indicating an urgent need for solutions. By rendering all this in the voice of a divine narrator who is *Dao* personified, it would not be a far cry to view the author at the head of a movement the scripture originated from.

Conclusion

The author is conveying a clear message regarding the crisis to the audience through the words of *Yuanshi tianzun*. Neatly incorporated aspects or factors of the social crisis that were observed or faced by people of various classes during the Eastern Jin dynasty are presented as manifestations and causes of an aggravating cosmic crisis. They include epidemics, non-Han peoples' invasions, loosened social ties, warfare, migrations, power struggles, political instability, high mortality rate, rebellions, disunity of the Chinese realm, natural disasters, bad harvests, the burden of corvée labour, and more. And a cosmic crisis requires a cosmic response. Thus, the supreme cosmic force, the deified and personified *Dao*, presents an overarching strategic plan for saving people and restoring social and cosmic harmony, which includes other forces and requires their cooperation. In other words, as a response to the sense of lack of reliable and efficient leadership of the Jin dynasty the text presents a powerful cosmic leadership with an actionable plan, one that involves everyone. Their means,

roles, options, and mutual relationships are clarified, and, if they participate, their desired outcomes are assured. It addresses the social crisis as part of a cosmic one by providing religious strategies intended to successfully solve the above-discussed concrete issues, which offer a broad audience the solutions to their difficulties and relief to their sense of crisis. If the plan is implemented, their problems will all cease to exist. As the text is greatly concerned with demons (referring to non-Han peoples in particular) and various consequences of their arrival in China, it naturally also focuses on solving this issue to protect the state and its people and bring peace, which includes instructing the ruling elites. This suggests that the author and/or at least a part of the audience were the Northern emigres, i.e. including most of the members of ruling elites. In the uncertain, changing world of the Eastern Jin dynasty, this plan seems to attempt to address confusion and disorder with clarity and order, tackle disunity, loosened social ties, and separation with cooperation and unity with a powerful cosmic authority, face down hopelessness and helplessness with hope and help, provide protection from threat and danger, tackle death with immortality, and in short turn disharmony into harmony. Thus, through repetitive inclusion of the above-discussed problems and repetitive assurance of the effectiveness of the presented solutions the author creates a proselytizing strategy that is particularly tailored to those living through the social crisis of the Eastern Jin dynasty. We can conclude that the entire scripture under discussion and its well-thought-out message revolves around such a crisis, and that considerable effort was invested in its creation. As such, it reflects the severity of the (sense of) crisis, but first and foremost, it represents a response to it.

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***SPECIAL ISSUE:
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN
SINIC INTELLECTUAL HISTORY***

Literature and Art

The Rise of Individual Personhood in Early Medieval China

Téa SERNELJ*

Abstract

The term “Early Medieval China” usually refers to the Wei Jin period, also known as the Wei Jin Southern and Northern dynasties (*Wei Jin Nanbei chao* 魏晉南北朝). This era was characterized by extreme sociopolitical circumstances, marked by constant instability, upheavals, wars, corruption, intrigues, external invasions and the exhaustion of the population. These conditions led to significant and unprecedented social and intellectual transformations that profoundly impacted Chinese culture, especially in the fields of philosophy and art. This article explores the cultural and philosophical ideas of the period that contributed to the rise of individual personhood, which emerged as a response to the suppressive and authoritarian Han Confucianism, which was heavily influenced by Legalist doctrines. Neo-Daoism, the most important stream of thought that arose from the political turmoil of the period, provided intellectuals with a refuge during these traumatic times, allowing them to explore new ways of philosophizing and experiencing an aesthetic way of living. The article examines the philosophical inquiries of the School of Profound Learning (*Xuanxue* 玄學) and Pure Conversations (*Qingtán* 清談) movement, which gave rise to self-awareness and fostered new perspectives on individual personhood.

Keywords: Wei Jin Period, Neo-Daoism, Profound Learning (*Xuanxue* 玄學) and Pure Conversations (*Qingtán* 清談), Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, Individual personhood

Vznik individualne osebnosti na Kitajskem v zgodnjem srednjem veku

Izvilleček

Izraz »zgodnj srednjeveška Kitajska« se običajno nanaša na obdobje Wei Jin, znano tudi kot obdobje Wei Jin ter južnih in severnih dinastij (*Wei Jin Nanbei chao* 魏晉南北朝). Za to obdobje so bile značilne ekstremne družbenopolitične razmere, zaznamovane s stalno nestabilnostjo, pretresi, vojnami, korupcijo, spletkami, zunanji vdori in izčrpavanjem prebivalstva. Te okoliščine so pripeljale do izjemno pomembnih družbenih in intelektualnih preobrazb, ki so močno vplivale na kitajsko kulturo, zlasti na področju filozofije in umetnosti. Članek raziskuje kulturne in filozofske ideje tega obdobja, ki so prispevale k vzniku individualne osebnosti, ki je nastala kot odgovor na zatiralski in avtoritarni hanski

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konfucianizem, na katerega so močno vplivale legalistične doktrine. Neodaoizem, najpomembnejši miselni tok, ki je izhajal iz družbenopolitičnih pretresov tega obdobja, je intelektualcem v teh travmatičnih časih dajal zatočišče ter jim omogočal raziskovanje novih načinov filozofiranja in doživljanja estetskega načina življenja. Članek proučuje filozofska raziskovanja šole misterijev (*Xuanxue* 玄學) in gibanja čistih pogovorov (*Qingtan* 清談), ki so spodbudila samozavedanje in nov pogled na individualno osebnost.

Ključne besede: obdobje Wei Jin, neodaoizem, šola misterijev (*Xuanxue* 玄學) in čisti pogovori (*Qingtan* 清談), sedem modrecev iz bambusovega gaja, individualna osebnost

Historical Background: Political Turmoil and its Impact on the Intellectuals

The Wei Jin period 魏晉時代 (220–420 CE) began after the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, which had ruled China for over four centuries. The loss of imperial authority and thus of the central government powers, which was followed by several natural disasters and the Yellow Turban Rebellion during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), plunged the Central Plain into a state of war and disorder (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2019, 47) leading to the eventual disintegration of the Han Empire. Following the fall of the Han dynasty, China entered a period of division known as the Three Kingdoms period (*san guo* 三國時代, 220–280 CE), characterized by the struggle for power among three major states: Wei 魏, Shu 蜀, and Wu 吳.

The Wei 魏 and Jin 晉 dynasties were a period of significant change in Chinese history. In economics, politics, military affairs, culture, and the entire intellectual realm, including philosophy, religion, art, and literature, there were pivotal turning points brought about by a second transformation in social structure since the Pre-Qin era. The urban prosperity and commodity economy of the Warring States and Qin-Han periods had declined, but the manorial economy that began in the Eastern Han consolidated and expanded steadily. Thousands of small farmers and industrial and commercial slaves became serfs or quasi-serfs tied to land owned by landlords and held very much in bondage. Conforming to this standard form of natural economy, a hereditary and rigidly stratified class of powerful families and aristocratic clans, each with its sphere of power, now occupied the centre of stage of history (Li 2003, 82).

Within each state, power struggles and intrigues at court were commonplace. Ambitious officials, noble families (in particular, Cao and Sima families), and eunuch factions competed for influence over the ruler, employing tactics of manipulation, bribery, and even assassination to further their agendas. Imperial courts became battlegrounds for political factions vying to control state policies, appointments, and resources. Loyalty to the ruler often took a backseat to personal ambition and self-interest.

The breakdown of the Han Confucian bureaucratic system allowed noble families to consolidate power locally, often at the expense of the imperial authority. They became *de facto* rulers in their respective regions, administering justice, collecting taxes, and raising armies. Inter-marriages among aristocratic families further strengthened their power base, creating intricate networks of alliances and allegiances. This interconnection of elites formed the backbone of the political landscape during this period.

Cao Cao 曹操, a prominent figure in the late Eastern Han dynasty, wielded significant influence over the imperial court. In 196 CE, amidst political chaos, he took control of the court by manipulating the last Han emperor as a puppet ruler. While outwardly appearing to support the Han dynasty, Cao Cao exerted power behind the scenes in order to validate his authority and expand his own power and territory. Despite never officially deposing the last Han emperor, Cao Cao effectively controlled his actions and decisions. He exploited the emperor's name and authority to further his own interests, thus bending the imperial court to his will. Cao Cao's manipulation of the emperor highlights the corruptive influence and power struggles that defined the late Eastern Han dynasty.

The authority of the ruling Cao family declined notably after the removal and execution of Cao Shuang 曹爽 and his kin. Cao Shuang, a regent for the third Wei emperor, Cao Fang 曹芳, witnessed his influence diminish, with control gradually passing to Sima Yi 司馬懿 and his family from 249 CE onwards.

The last Wei emperors effectively served as figureheads under the influence of the Sima clan until Sima Yi's grandson, Sima Yan 司馬炎, compelled the final Wei ruler to abdicate, and in this way establishing the Western Jin dynasty. In 249, Sima Yi seized the capital Luoyang 洛陽 and prevented Cao Shuang from entering the city. The whole Cao family was captured by Sima Yi and executed, along with several thousand other people. Around half of the scholars supported the Cao family—or were forced to do so—and were executed, and the whole state fell in a state of terror. But Sima Yi knew that he would not be able to stay in power without the support of the scholars, and therefore started a campaign to win over those who were not close to Cao Shuang with threats, bribes and persuasion. Still, this horrible situation has had a profoundly negative impact on Chinese intellectuals, leaving them in a traumatic state of uncertainty and insecurity.¹

1 Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263 CE), a key figure in the cultural movement known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢), exemplifies the dangers due to the power struggle between the Cao and Sima families. He was married to a daughter of Cao Pi 曹丕, also known as Emperor Wen 魏文帝 (r. 220–226). When the Sima clan, led by Sima Yi 司馬懿, usurped the throne in 249, they initiated a purge against the Cao clan and its allies, resulting in Ji Kang's execution (Chai 2020, 229).

In general, the Wei Jin intellectuals endured immense hardship amidst the era's political turmoil and social upheaval. With frequent changes in the ruling authorities and civil conflicts, they often found themselves caught in the crossfire of power struggles between rival states, risking persecution or even death if perceived as threats. Fluid loyalties forced intellectuals to navigate treacherous alliances to safeguard their survival. Those unfortunate enough to be on the losing side faced dire consequences, including exile, imprisonment, or execution. Government censorship stifled dissenting voices, with literature, philosophy, and art critical of the regime often being banned or destroyed. Challenging the status quo or advocating for change invited harsh reprisals from officials or conservative factions within the ruling elite. Many intellectuals resorted to self-censorship to avoid punishment. Daoist hermits, Buddhist monks, and wandering scholars were particularly vulnerable, often retreating into seclusion to escape persecution. The era's political instability and warfare exacerbated economic hardship, leading to widespread poverty and social dislocation. Intellectuals, reliant on patronage or official positions, faced uncertainty as government support for education dwindled. Some were compelled to compromise their principles or sell their talents to survive.

The struggle of the intellectuals naturally led them to find alternative ways of survival, while the uncertain political situation rendered conditions hazardous for all individuals. Scholars felt threatened, prompting many to retreat into seclusion, with forests emerging as popular havens for refuge, and the Daoist philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi gaining in prominence. Reverting to the Daoist ideal of reconnecting with nature, they embraced a rustic lifestyle, relishing in the pleasures of wine and music while limiting discourse to non-politically sensitive matters—termed *Qingtan* 清談 or Pure Conversations.

At the end of the Han dynasty, the protest movement known as *Qingyi* 清議, or pure criticism, based on fair and unbiased critique towards those in power and initially led by scholar-officials and students of the imperial academy, targeted the corrupt practices of powerful eunuchs. The scholar-officials and students of the Imperial Academy,² who were committed to Confucian ideals of morality

2 The Imperial Academy of the late Han dynasty, also known as the Taixue (太学), was the highest educational institution in China during the Han dynasty. It played a significant role in the intellectual and political life of the period, especially during the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). The Taixue was established in 124 BCE during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han. It was initially intended to train government officials in Confucian classics. The Academy grew significantly during the Eastern Han dynasty. By the 2nd century CE, it had thousands of students, reflecting its importance in the bureaucratic and intellectual life of China. Students were often selected for government positions based on their performance in examinations that tested their knowledge of these texts. This practice laid the groundwork for the later imperial examination system. Graduates of the Taixue often went on to occupy important bureaucratic positions, influencing the administration and

and good governance, found the actions of the eunuchs deeply troubling and thus initiated the *Qingyi* movement to expose and criticize these malpractices. In response to the growing criticisms, the eunuchs orchestrated severe repressions against the *Qingyi* advocates. This included arrests, executions, and the exile of prominent critics. The harsh measures were intended to silence dissent and serve as a deterrent to others who might consider joining the movement. The brutal crackdowns successfully instilled fear among the scholar-officials and students, significantly diminishing the momentum of the *Qingyi* movement which consequently evolved into the Pure Conversation (*Qingtan* 清談) movement, as intellectuals deliberately steered clear of political matters to ensure their own safety. However, with the ascent of the Wei dynasty the emergence of a first wave of neo-Daoism, exemplified by figures like He Yan 何晏 and Wang Bi 王弼, sought novel avenues for reinstating unity and harmony, which had been disrupted by the autocratic policies and coercive governance of the legalistically imbued Han-Confucian state doctrine. Not only was it oppressive politically, but this doctrine also stifled freedom of thought and expression. The interpretation of classical works was confined to Confucian classics, with a prescribed methodology. However, amid the new political climate, characterized by turmoil and disunity, the pursuit of order necessitated freedom from ideological constraints (Chan 2003a, 214).

Consequently, scholars embarked on discussions of metaphysical (*xuan* 玄) topics detached from the exigencies of contemporary reality. Delving into subjects insulated from political implications, they centred their discourse on the theoretical frameworks elucidated within the texts of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the *Yijing* and thus forming the so-called Neo-Daoist school of Profound learning (*Xuanxue* 玄學). These discussions remained inconsequential with regard to the prevailing events and figures within the political sphere, effectively enabling scholars to evade entanglement in political discord.

The most famous figures of this new intellectual movement were He Yan 何晏, Wang Bi 王弼, Guo Xiang 郭象 and the seven sages of the bamboo grove (*zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢: Ji Kang 嵇康, Ruan Ji 阮籍, Ruan Xuan 阮咸, Xiang Xiu 向秀, Liu Ling 劉伶, Wang Rong 王戎, and Shan Tao 山濤).

policies of the empire. The model of the Taixue influenced later educational institutions in China and other East Asian countries, contributing to the development of a scholarly bureaucracy. The Imperial Academy of the late Han dynasty was more than just an educational institution; it was a cornerstone of the imperial administration and a pivotal player in the intellectual life of the era.

New Intellectual Movement: Neo-Daoist School of Profound Learning (*Xuanxue*) and Pure Conversations (*Qingtan*)

Because scholars could not engage in political matters they turned their focus to metaphysics, and thus problems that have no “real” connection to social and political life. With the rising interest in redefining individual personhood, they searched for new ways to redefine the relationship of the individual to the cosmos, state, moral order, and other individuals (Yu 2016, 147).

While *Xuanxue* (Profound Learning) and *Qingtan* (Pure Conversations) undeniably intersect, their distinguishing feature lies in their methodological approaches to comprehending ultimate reality and individual personhood. In elucidating core Daoist principles such as absence (*wu* 無), presence (*you* 有), naturalness or spontaneity (*ziran* 自然), non-action (*wuwei* 無為), and non-governance (*wuzhi* 無治), *xuanxue* relied predominantly on logical or analytical methods rooted in the Moist School of Names (*Mingjia* 名家 or *Mingjiao* 名教), whereas *qingtan* also pursued experiential understanding of the *Dao* 道, engaging in artistic expression and meditative practices³ aimed at attaining a liberated and harmonious existence in unity with nature.

In the context of the Pure Conversations movement during the Wei Jin period in China, intellectuals engaged deeply with logical methodologies reminiscent of those found in Nominalist and Dialectical traditions. They utilized these approaches in classical disputes to navigate and challenge the constraints imposed by language. Their ultimate goal was to access and experience final reality, transcending ordinary linguistic and perceptual boundaries. This intellectual exercise was part of a broader quest for spiritual freedom and enlightenment, reflecting the era’s characteristic blend of metaphysical inquiry and personal cultivation. (Rošker 2005, 205)

Xuanxue philosophy is notably complex and intricate, and we shall focus solely on its pivotal concepts that directly shaped the emergence of a novel paradigm of individual personhood. Whereas Pure Conversations, as a form of dialectical artistry, centred on disputes and debates often accompanied by artistic performances and drinking wine, Profound Learning drew upon written sources, particularly the works of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the *Yijing*. It is pertinent to note that Profound

3 In particular, these practices referred to Zhuangzi’s concept of “sitting in oblivion” (*zuowang* 坐忘), which is reminiscent of the meditation techniques performed while sitting down and which lead to the absence of thoughts, the end of conceptual differentiation and unification with everything living (Rošker 2016, 39).

Learning was underpinned by a syncretic fusion of Daoism with classical Confucianism, as well as Buddhist philosophy.

Conversely, the Seven Sages, most notably Ji Kang, vehemently repudiated Confucianism, contending that it encroached upon the innate naturalness of humanity by imposing rules and behavioural norms that ran counter to their intrinsic freedom and self-so-ness (*ziran*).

Although Pure Conversation and Profound learning were both politically detached, the latter nonetheless engaged in discussions regarding methods to reestablish unity and harmony grounded in naturalness. This approach advocates for a form of governance characterized by *non-action*, a principle underscored by Laozi. Central issues that were debated within the framework of both will be elaborated below.

As Chan notes (2003a, 215), one of the most important debates in Profound Learning was the question of interpretation, and thus hermeneutics stepped to the forefront of Chinese philosophy. In this respect, the main philosophical problem was about the relation between words and meaning expressed in the famous phrase “words cannot fully express meaning” (*yan bu jin yi* 言不盡意), first elaborated by Xun Can 荀粲 (212–240) and further developed by Wang Bi. However, the debate on words and meaning derives from the *Yijing*, where Confucius questions whether words can fully disclose meaning which lead to investigation of the nature of understanding itself since words often fail to express intense emotions or complex ideas (*ibid.*).

子曰：書不盡言，言不盡意。然則聖人之意，其不可見乎。子曰：聖人立象以盡意，設卦以盡情偽，繫辭以盡其言，變而通之以盡利，鼓之舞之以盡神。(*Yijing* n.d., Xi Ci I/12)

The Master said: “The written characters are not the full exponent of speech, and speech is not the full expression of ideas; – is it impossible then to discover the ideas of the sages?” The Master said: “The sages made their emblematic symbols to set forth fully their ideas; appointed (all) the diagrams to show fully the truth and falsehood (of things); appended their explanations to give the full expression of their words; and changed (the various lines) and made general the method of doing so, to exhibit fully what was advantageous. They (thus) stimulated (the people) as by drums and dances, thereby completely developing the spirit-like (character of the Yi). (Trans. by J. Legge)

For Xun, meaning transcends the limiting confines of language, whereas for Wang Bi, although meaning is expressed by words, they must be forgotten before meaning can be understood. This forgetfulness enables one to reach the underlying world of ideas, where a deeper meaning resides.⁴ This phrase also became a central concept in the aesthetics of that period, and will be explored in more detail in the last section.

The School of Profound Learning focused on the ontological question of the origin of *Dao*. Inspired by the *Yijing*, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, they discussed issues concerned with the nature of reality and the human condition. Wang Bi's position that *Dao* and all that exists originates from absence (*wu*) derived from his interpretations of the *Yijing* and in particular from the *Laozi*. Referring to the famous 40th chapte

天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

All under Heaven is born of presence, presence is born of absence (*Daode-jing* n.d., 40)

Wang Bi interpreted absence as the basic principle of existence:

天下之物，皆以有為生。有之所始，以無為本。 (Wang n.d., 40)

All things under Heaven are born of presence. But the beginning of presence, its origin, is absence.

For Wang Bi and He Yan, presence (*you*) originates from absence (*wu*), but for Guo Xiang, arguably the most important commentator on the *Zhuangzi*, this position does not explain the origin of being. *Wu* or absence is for Guo something entirely conceptual and abstract, and as such cannot bring forth being. Within the framework of the problem of a created natural order, he posited that it came into existence spontaneously, and that the origin of existence can be understood only in terms of a process of self-transformation (*zihua* 自化) (Chan 2003a, 216).

However, the vibrant ontological debate between valuing absence (*wu*) and exaltation of presence (*you*) laid basis for a *Dao*-centred ethics and political philosophy. In spite of certain differences among School of Profound Learning philosophers, they sought order in naturalness and spontaneity based on the concept of

4 A poem may depict actual objects or events, but the sense is not limited to these referents, and the meaning of the whole transcends the identity of its parts. This position was in sharp contrast to the Han hermeneutical model, which assumes that meaning is defined by external referents, and brought a new hermeneutical perspective in which they strove to recapture the core teachings of the sages (Chan 2003a, 215).

wuwei, or non-action, attributed to Laozi and the Sage King Shun, which was undoubtedly in sharp contrast to Legalist policies of the Han dynasty based on punishment and political domination (ibid., 217). Nonaction or non-interference in the natural order enables the myriad things to flourish by elimination of wilful intervention, and thus enabling simplicity and freedom from desires.

He Yan and Wang Bi died at the end of Zhengshi's reign (240–249) in the Wei dynasty, marking the first phase of Neo-Daoism. During the Wei Jin transition when the Sima family came to power, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove represented the voice of the School of Profound Learning. The most important figures of the Grove were Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, who advocated for naturalness (*ziran*) as the basis for renewal (ibid., 218).

Basically, the debates in the School of Profound Learning revolved around naming (*Mingjiao*) and naturalness (*ziran*). While the former was concerned with the doctrines of propriety and government—in other words with social institutions, norms and rituals—the latter focused on classical Daoist concepts of nonaction, transcendence and freedom from mundane world.

However, for Wang Bi and Guo Xiang these two concepts were not in opposition but were rather intertwined. In this regard, Wang and Guo synthesized Confucian and Daoist philosophies. For Wang Bi, government and society should ideally conform to nature. Guo Xiang argued that the norms and rites that define civilization are not foreign to nature, but flow spontaneously from it (ibid.).

The Seven Sages, however, were convinced that *Mingjiao* impinges on nature. They saw a contradiction between maintaining inner purity and transcendence and being involved in a normal life. Genuine freedom is possible only if one aligns completely with naturalness. They were primarily engaged in interpretations of Laozi, Zhuangzi and the *Yijing*, striving to embody Zhuangzi's ideal state of freedom and authenticity called *xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊, or free and easy wandering.

For Ruan Ji, absence (*wu*) was not the ontological basis of the classics, but instead the starting point for philosophical reflection flows from the plenitude of nature in which diverse phenomena function in harmony, and depends on one's transformation of the vital *qi* energy that pervades the universe. The fulfilment of *ziran* is possible only in emptiness, quietude, nonaction and in the state of being without self-interest and desires. Ji Kang, unlike most of his contemporaries, followed the religious dimension of Daoist teaching, aiming for longevity or even immortality based on self-cultivation, breathing exercises, dietary control and lifting one's spir-

it with the help of drugs⁵ to maximize the limits of one's natural endowment and bring about rejuvenation and a long life (*ibid.*, 218).

For Ji Kang, self-cultivation was essential for restraining one's desires or any form of emotional disturbance, since these do not serve the interests of personal well-being with regard to achieving calmness and emptiness of the mind. In his essay "On Nourishing Life" (*Yangsheng lun* 養生論), he emphasized that such practices are not only a matter of health and longevity, but are also used to attain a more authentic mode of being, characterized by dispassion (*ibid.*).

Regarding the problem of emotions or feeling which was in the centre of debate among neo-Daoists, Ji Kang's famous essay "Sounds Do Not Have Joys or Sorrows" (*Sheng wu ai le* 聲無哀樂) argues that emotions and desires are not intrinsic to nature, and since sounds are naturally produced, it cannot be the case that music embodies sorrow or joy. Subjective feelings and cognitive responses are the things that produce joy or sorrow, and they should be distinguished from what is natural and objective (*ibid.*, 219). This position, however, was in sharp opposition with traditional Chinese music theory, in which the function of music was to mould and harmonize one's emotions.

However, the expression of emotions was a crucial topic among the Seven Sages in the context of an ethical life. Apart from Ji Kang, who advocated for dispassion, many saw a display of strong emotion as a sign of authenticity and expression of individual personhood. Wang Rong, another of the Seven Sages, did try not control his grief when his son died, and although a sage should be able to leave behind emotions he argued that "in people such as ourselves, this is where feelings find their deepest expression" (*ibid.*).

The unrestrained expressions of emotions and individual personhood exhibited by the Seven Sages were in stark conflict with the established norms and behaviours of Han Confucianism. For instance, when Ruan Ji's mother passed away he consumed alcohol and meat before the funeral, thereby violating the moral code

5 The use of drugs and alcohol was widespread among these scholars, often denoted as Neo-Daoists. One of the most popular choices was a psychoactive substance known as Cold-Food Powder (*hanshisan* 寒食散) or Five Mineral Powder (*wushisan* 五石散) accompanied by drinking of yellow wine (*huangjiu* 黃酒). He Yan and Wang Bi propagated the consumption of the drug in their philosophical circles to achieve greater spiritual clarity and physical strength. Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, who were considered as the most prominent of the Seven Sages, were enthusiastic users of the drug, using it to prolong life and forget spiritual anguish. The drug caused a rapid rise in body temperature, making users want to drink lots of fluids and eat cold food. It was believed to make people feel calm, improve their aesthetic sensitivity, and boost energy. Users wore loose and lightweight clothes to stay comfortable, which became a signature style of the Wei Jin period, while the drug became a hallmark of the free thinkers of the age.

of filial piety and ritual propriety. Similarly, Liu Ling, another sage known for his excessive drinking, was often seen carrying a bottle and even naked.

The unconventional behaviour of the Seven Sages was tolerated primarily because they were perceived as existing outside the boundaries of conventional society. However, as renowned intellectuals of their time they eventually faced constraints imposed by the ruling elite, leading them to abandon their unorthodox lifestyles and accept positions at court.

The Seven Sages intentionally defied established moral codes and rituals to express their naturalness and individuality. This defiance also served as a silent protest against the political degradation, violence, and corruption of their era.

The Rise of Self-awareness and Individual Personhood

Another major debate within Neo-Daoism focused on the nature of sages and emotions, with Wang Bi, He Yan, and Guo Xiang presenting opposing views. He Yan and Guo Xiang shared the opinion that sages are without emotions or feelings (*qing* 情), arguing that a sage's extraordinary constitution of pure being excludes emotional disturbances. The sage can rule the world without being enslaved by emotions. Wang Bi, on the other hand, posited that the sage is not without emotions but differs from ordinary beings in spirituality and understanding. With feeling, a sage is able to respond to things, but because of his clear understanding he is never burdened by them:

應物而無累于物 (Wang Bi, cited in Feng Qi 2001, 1488)

(He) feels things and reacts to them, but does not become attached.

For Wang Bi, it is logically invalid to conclude from the absence of attachment an absence of emotions (Chan 2003a, 217).

This is important in our disposition of the individual personhood in early medieval China. The awareness of individual personhood that came forth in the Wei Jin period was predominately focused on the characteristics of human beings with all their attributes, with emotions being a crucial or integral aspect of humanity. The Sages of the Bamboo Grove in particular were advocates of expressing and philosophizing on their emotions or feelings within the scope of their artistry in music, poetry, calligraphy and painting.

The political crisis took place in the realm of moral codes and social relationships, and led to a dissolution of the so-called Three Bonds and Six Rules (*san-*

gang liuji 三綱六紀). The Three Bonds refer to the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife, whereas the Six Rules refer to those between paternal uncles, elder and younger brothers, other relatives of the same surname, maternal uncles, teachers, and friends. This strict hierarchical relationship dynamics shifted towards a more relaxed atmosphere (Yu 2016, 135). Women expanded their roles beyond the confines of the household and actively engaged in society, participating in various social gatherings, particularly informal mixed parties where they indulged in conversation, drinking, and music alongside men.

Personal relationships between husband and wife, father and son and especially among friends were characterized by “closeness” (*qinmi* 親密) or “intimacy” (*qin-zhi* 親炙). In this regard, emotions and feelings became one of the central topics of the Wei Jin period.

The breakdown of Confucian ritualism at the end of the Han dynasty was closely linked to the rise in the self-discovery and self-awareness of the individual (*ibid.*).

The classical Daoist idea about the importance of an individual life was rediscovered in the second century, with singularity (*yi*) becoming a positive value. A personality would be judged favourably precisely because it was singular, different, and extraordinary, even eccentric. On the other hand, the idea of identity, or sameness (*tong*), was held in contempt (*ibid.*, 139).

By the late second century the art of character appraisal⁶ (*Renwu zhi* 人物志) had evolved into an independent discipline, though it continued to play a role in the official recommendation system during the Wei Jin period. It is particularly noteworthy that their approach to character appraisal was not solely physiognomic but also psychological, aiming to capture the individual's spirit (*shen* 神). This is clearly demonstrated in Liu Shao's 劉紹 (early third century) “Treatise on Personalities” (*Renwu zhi* 人物志), the only characterological work from this period that has survived. Liu's treatise begins with an analysis of human feelings (*qing* 情) and inborn qualities (*xing* 性), which he considers the foundations of personality. In terms of physiognomic observations, the focus was on transcending physical appearance to reach a person's spirit. This process culminated in

6 Character appraisal began in the Later Han era as a method for selecting officials for bureaucratic posts, with leading local scholars evaluating and recommending candidates based on Confucian moral criteria. During the Wei-Chin period, character appraisal gradually moved away from its political focus and evolved into a comprehensive study of human nature. This practice sparked intense competition among the gentry, fostering a heightened self-awareness that emerged from the collapse of Han Confucian moral codes. This self-awareness enriched character appraisal with a variety of personalities, steering its development towards psychological and aesthetic considerations (Qian 2001, 6).

the study of the eyes, which uniquely convey a person's spirit. Liu Shao wrote that every person has a body, and each body has a spirit. He emphasized that no one can study a person exhaustively without understanding their spirit (Yu 2016, 140).

Furthermore, both character appraisal and self-awareness found their theoretical foundation in the School of Profound Learning, accelerating the systematization of this new scholarship. This involved a reinterpretation and re-evaluation of Han Confucianism through the lenses of Daoism and the newly imported Buddhism. The School of Profound Learning elevated character appraisal and self-awareness from concrete concerns about individual traits to an ontological, psychological, and aesthetic exploration of the subtle, elusive aspects of human nature (*ibid.*).

While the Han dynasty focused on moral categories and the Han - Wei transition emphasized abilities, the Wei Jin period considered individuals from all possible angles. This included *de* 德 (potency, potentiality, efficacy), *cai* 才 (innate ability, talent, specialty), *xing* 性 (inborn qualities, temperament, disposition, temper), and *qing* 情 (feeling, emotion, passion) (Qian 2001, 9).

The profound emphasis on the complexity of emotions, particularly leaning towards sadness and introspection, became primary forms of expression. The Sages of the Bamboo Grove in particular were advocates of expressing and philosophizing on their emotions and feelings within the scope of their artistry in music, poetry, calligraphy and painting. As mentioned earlier, for Ji Kang self-cultivation was essential for restraining one's desires or any form of emotional disturbance, since they do not serve the interests of personal well-being in achieving calmness and emptiness of the mind (Chan 2003b, 791). While Ji Kang valued emotional restraint, others viewed strong emotions as authentic expressions of individuality. The music and literature of the Wei Jin period notably explored themes of sadness, grief, and regret, reflecting the widespread sense of alienation among the literati amidst societal unrest and dynastic shifts. Increased self-awareness not only deepened people's comprehension of their identities, but also profoundly influenced their artistic expression. This newfound liberty in self-expression was crucial in moulding Wei Jin aesthetics, prompting a move towards individualized creativity and guiding the evolution of aesthetic principles.

The Expression of Individual Personhood and Subjectivity in Aesthetics and Art

As mentioned above, one of the most important topics in neo-Daoism was a debate on the relation between words and meaning. Wang Bi's argument that words cannot fully express or convey meaning brought about new hermeneutics as well as the significance of contextuality and subjectivity. As he posits:

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

In this context, Wang Bi elaborated on Zhuangzi's theory, echoing his metaphorical language. Specifically, Wang employs Zhuangzi's popular analogy of the fish and fishing basket, suggesting that once we have captured a sufficient quantity of fish, we can discard the basket from our consideration. Words and symbols serve as aids in comprehending meaning, yet paradoxically, if we become excessively fixated on them they can hinder our complete understanding of meaning. This raises a significant hermeneutic concern, particularly emphasized by Wang, when interpreting the classics (Rošker 2005, 147).

The debate on words and meaning, however, is rooted in the classical discussion on names and reality (*ming* 名 and *shi* 實). In transmitting the meaning (or truth) of the classics or poetry, the words act as a referent and are not able to fully present the reality. Wang suggests that symbols function as tools of cognition, aiding our comprehension of meanings, whereas words act as descriptors, facilitating our understanding of symbols. Nonetheless, the amalgamation of these elements falls short of fully encapsulating meaning, and instead they merely gesture towards it, as meaning itself transcends verbal and visual expression (*ibid.*).

Given that Wang wrote commentaries on a Confucian classic grounded in symbolism, he was inevitably compelled to address the interplay between symbols and meaning. However, by introducing the term *xiang* 象 (image) to denote symbol, he injected fresh perspectives into the classical discourse on the relationship be-

tween names (*ming*) and reality (*shi*).⁷ His ideas had a significant influence on subsequent developments in aesthetic thought, centred on the pursuit of profound meaning unveiled through the experience of tangible images of reality. Equally impactful was his contribution to the conceptualization of “visualness” (*ibid.*, 148), or vivid depiction.⁸

The relation between words or symbols and meaning is another manifestation of Wang Bi’s ontology with absence (*wu*) as the basis of existence (the so-called root, or *ben*), and being or presence as the branches or physical manifestation.

In the Wei Jin era, both art and aesthetics were profoundly shaped by Wang Bi’s ontology, which delved into the pursuit of infinity or boundlessness (*wuxian* 無限) by transcending limitation or finitude (*youxian* 有限) within the philosophical discourse of presence (*you* 有) and absence (*wu* 無). As we have seen, Wang Bi posited that the *Dao* and all existence originated from absence, forming the basis of his ontology known as “absence is the root of existence”.

The essence of the *Dao*, synonymous with nature, infinity, purity, and truth, remains nameless. The moment it is named, it vanishes, reflecting Wang Bi’s perspective. His ontology revolves around the binary concept of roots and branches (*benmo* 本末), where roots signify the origin and source (*Dao*) of all existence (*wanwu* 萬物), while branches represent their tangible (physical) manifestations. Wang Bi defines beauty as the embodiment of the infinite and boundless, transcending limitations and forms, colours, melodies, and sounds to symbolize a state of absolute freedom of spirit.

7 *Xiang* 象 serves as a pivotal bridge that traverses the realms of the visible and invisible, the concrete and abstract, the actual and imagined, as well as the interplay between imitation and creation. The establishment of *xiang*, denoted as an “image” or a “symbolic image”, as a paramount aesthetic term, found its roots in the profound influence of Wang Bi’s epistemological interpretation of the intricate interweaving between linguistic components—words (*yan* 言), symbolic images (*xiang* 象), and meaning (*yi* 意)—within the *Yijing*. While “form” (*xing* 形) encapsulates an object’s physical shape, and thus is worthy of imitation, “*xiang*” represents the construct that must find its place on the canvas of painting. It encapsulates the mental imagery that materializes when one keenly observes tangible forms, skilfully processing their diverse qualities through a meticulous curation involving selection, editing, and rearrangement. As a term intertwined with artistic discourse, “*xiang*” first made its appearance within the literary and painting theories of the Six dynasties or Wei Jin era, subsequently maturing into a profound aesthetic concept during the Tang dynasty (Kang 2022, 33).

8 The “vivid depiction” school of thought in Chinese painting diverged from conventional methods by prioritizing the capture of a subject’s spirit or soul rather than an accurate physical likeness. This shift placed greater emphasis on emotional depth and artistic interpretation, leading to the emergence of new directions in Chinese painting. It became a cornerstone of various art disciplines such as figure painting, landscape painting, and the painting of birds and flowers, highlighting a humanistic approach in creative practice and reshaping the artist-subject relationship (Bao 2023, 17).

These ideas are reflected in fundamental aesthetic concepts such as “words cannot fully convey meaning”, “depiction of the spirit through form”, and “harmonious creativity”, which were widely discussed in theoretical works of the Wei Jin period. Such ideas established a new aesthetic notion of suggestiveness (*xieyi* 寫意) which embodied a poetic meaning within a work of art. This quality manifests in poetry through metaphorical language, drawing from nature’s imagery, while simultaneously directing attention to a realm of meaning that transcends words and images. Rooted in Wang Bi’s notion that words cannot fully convey meaning, Chinese aesthetics encapsulate concepts such as “meaning beyond words” (*yan wai zhi yi* 言外之意) and “image beyond images” (*xiangwai zhi xiang* 象外之象) to articulate this fundamental quality. In the realm of painting, this quality became indispensable and led to the emergence of landscape painting (*shanshui hua* 山水畫).

Under the influence of the art of characterology, Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (317–420 CE) the famous painter of the Wei Jin period, introduced a new aesthetic idea, i.e. the transmitting the spirit (*chuanshen* 傳神) as the main criteria of figure painting expressing its individualistic style. Artists aimed to capture the spiritual uniqueness of the human subject. The central challenge in portraiture thus became how to “convey or transmit the spirit” (*chuanshen*) effectively, and the artistic representation of the eyes became pivotal in this endeavour:

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 crucial is the representation of the spirit transmitted through the eyes. (Gu, cited in Li 2003, 88).

Gu claimed that the crucial meaning in the art of painting is precisely the author’s portrayal of spirit (*chuanshen xiezhao* 傳神写照⁹) 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* 神), however, referred to the essence of human beings and the specific characteristics of every individual. Gu Kaizhi promoted the idea of integrating the subject’s feeling into an object, so that the spirit of the object could obtain an artistic image. Such an aesthetic image thus embodies the life spirit of the object (Zhu 2022, 236). The image serves as the vessel through which the spirit expresses itself, with the spirit being the essence behind the image’s purpose. The image gains its life and energy from the spirit, and

9 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).

in turn the spirit depends on the image for manifestation. The synergy of image and spirit is essential for art to align with the principle of nature (*Dao*) (ibid., 115).

According to Xu (2002, 19), the aesthetic criteria of transmitting the spirit (*chuan-shen* 傳神) was later upgraded by the famous painter and art critic Xie He 謝赫 in the fifth century, a man best known for his “Six Principles of Chinese Painting” (*huibhua liufu* 繪畫六法). He introduced the concept of *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動, translated mostly as spiritual resonance and life motion. The binary category of *qiyun* represents a harmonious fusion of the complementary cosmic forces of *yinyang* 陰陽 with their attributes such as hardness and softness (*gangrou* 剛柔), emptiness and fullness (*xushi* 虛實), nearness and distance (*jinyuan* 近遠), clearness and murkiness (*qingzhuo* 清濁), and so on that creates a life-like or vivid representation of the painted scene. Consequently, *qi* 氣 as the breath-energy or creative vitality became the central concept in Chinese aesthetics.

In this context, *qi* 氣 referred to the human creative potential that forms the basis of artistic creation. This potential is closely linked to the emotions, feelings, and imagination that emerge through the perception and comprehension of the world through the sense organs. In the aesthetics of the Wei Jin period, *qi* reflects the profound beauty of human inwardness and the unique attributes of individual personhood. The representation of this inner world constituted the fundamental goal and aesthetic criterion in Wei Jin period art, emphasizing the intricate interplay between the individual’s inner life and the external world.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to elucidate the factors that contributed to the emergence of individual personhood during the Wei Jin period. The transformation of the concept of the subject and its individuality was shaped by various political and social factors, most notably the decline of the unified Confucian state doctrine of the Han dynasty, which included many autocratic, Legalist elements.

The disintegration of the normative moral code, rituals, and rigid social hierarchy facilitated a reorganization of social relations and, more importantly, the liberation of the individual. This liberalization of the subject provided new insights into the human mind, emphasizing the complexity of humans as holistic beings, particularly their emotional perceptual world and their interconnectedness with the cosmos. Scholars of the Wei Jin period predominantly drew upon Daoist philosophy, and within the framework of Neo-Daoism they reinterpreted the ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and the cosmology of the *Yijing*.

Despite the general spirit of the Wei Jin period being permeated with themes such as the transience of life, anxiety, pain, death, and loneliness due to the social and political situation, scholars of the Wei Jin period created a new conception of the human subject based precisely on the integration of these deepest aspects of human existence, liberated from the constraints of the Confucian state doctrine, which incorporated many Legalist elements. The breakdown of the moral code based on a strict social hierarchy enabled considerable freedom in social life and thinking, leading to immense creativity in the realm of philosophy and art, and reflecting new comprehensions of individual personhood.

The philosophical and artistic production of the Wei Jin scholars always served as a model and inspiration during periods of suppression and stifling of intellectual freedom. For us in today's globalized, AI-integrated, and alienated world, their works and thoughts demonstrate that art and philosophy can act as a therapeutic salve for societal traumas, offering new modes of expression, reflection, and connection. Such inspirations empower individuals to transcend their traumatic experiences, encouraging resilience and hope. Exploring the creative aesthetics and philosophies of this ancient era can provide contemporary societies with fresh perspectives and alternative approaches to the intertwined economic and political challenges facing humanity today.

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The Metamorphosis of the Novel *Moment in Peking* in Japan, Taiwan, and China

YUAN Gao*

Abstract

This article focuses on the migration of Lin Yutang's most-read novel, *Moment in Peking* (1939), across linguistic, geographic, and media boundaries in East Asia from the 1940s to recent times. It aims to reveal how this novel, originally composed in English and published in the US during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, is translated, adapted, presented, and situated in different literary, cultural and ideological contexts in Japan, Taiwan and Mainland China.

Drawing on the principles of Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and the Manipulation School's literary translation studies, my analysis highlights the agency of translators, adaptors and publishers in literary production conditioned by the evolving social, historical and political circumstances. The research contends that the metamorphosis of *Moment in Peking* embodies a literary power game directly linked to shifts in power dynamics between the three entities. At the cultural level, it provides insights into the intricate interplay of three distinct cultural imageries—competing, conflicting or assimilating within a relational framework.

Keywords: translation, adaptation, East Asia, power relations, censorship

Metamorfoze romana *Trenutek v Pekingu* na Japonskem, Tajvanu in Kitajskem

Izvilleček

Članek se osredotoča na širitev najbolj brane Lin Yutangove knjige, *Trenutek v Pekingu* (1939), prek jezikovnih, geografskih in medijskih meja Vzhodne Azije od štiridesetih let 20. stoletja do danes. Cilj prispevka je pokazati, kako je bil ta roman, ki je bil prvotno napisan v angleščini in objavljen v ZDA, med protijaponsko vojno prevajan, prirejen, predstavljen in situiran v različnih literarnih, kulturnih ter ideoloških kontekstih na Japonskem, na Tajvanu in v celinski Kitajski.

Na podlagi načel teorije adaptacije Linde Hutcheon in študij literarnega prevajanja šole manipulacij analiza izpostavi vlogo prevajalcev in prevajalk, oseb, ki so besedilo prilagajale danim okoljem, ter založnikov in založnic v literarni produkciji, ki je bila v obravnavanih obdobjih pogojena z različnimi ter nenehno spreminjajočimi se družbenimi,

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zgodovinskimi in političnimi razmerami. Raziskava pokaže, da predstavlja preobrazba *Trenutka v Pekingu* literarno igro moči, ki je neposredno povezana s premiki v dinamiki moči med tremi obravnavanimi državami. Na ravni kulture pa pričujoča študija ponuja nove vpoglede v zapleteno medsebojno delovanje treh različnih kulturnih imaginarijev, ki so bili bodisi v vzajemnih tekmovalnih oziroma konfliktnih odnosih ali pa so se poskušali drug drugemu prilagajati.

Gljučne besede: prevajanje, adaptacija, Vzhodna Azija, razmerja moči, cenzura

Introduction

This article explores the migration of *Moment in Peking* (1939), a novel written by Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895–1976), across geographic, linguistic, and media boundaries in East Asia from the 1940s to recent times. Originally composed in English, the novel was first published in 1939 in the United States. Shortly after its initial publication, multiple Japanese and Chinese translations emerged in Japan and Republican China. In post-1949 Taiwan, Republican-era versions were reprinted, and a new local translation was produced. However, *Moment in Peking* did not become available in Mainland China until 1987 when the local Taiwanese version was introduced. Since 1987, three television series based on the novel have been produced and broadcast in both Taiwan and Mainland China.

Numerous factors have contributed to the popularity of *Moment in Peking* in Japan, Taiwan, and China, as well as to the complexities involved in its adaptation, translation, and circulation within these regions. Firstly, it is the international fame and influence of the author Lin Yutang. Lin relocated from China to the USA in 1936 after his book, *My Country and My People* (1935), achieved huge success on the American market. Following this, he authored a series of best-sellers such as *The Importance of Living* (1937), *Wisdom of Confucius* (1938), and *Moment in Peking* (1939), thereby establishing his reputation as the foremost and authoritative interpreter of Chinese cultural characteristics and traditions in the Euro-American world.

A second reason for the work's continued popularity is Lin's political positioning between Japan, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 1930s China, Lin was known for his commitment to self-expression, situated between the politically charged pragmatic literary approaches embraced by both the left-wing/communists and the right-wing/nationalists. However, he became a staunch supporter of the KMT government led by Chiang Kai-shek, following the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in 1937. With his established literary fame ensuring Lin's exposure and

influence on the international stage, he actively participated in China's wartime propaganda, advocating for China in public speeches, interviews, radio talks, and in the mainstream media such as *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, and others. As Satō Ryōichi 佐藤亮一 (1907–1994), a Japanese translator of *Moment in Peking*, commented, “the presence of Lin Yutang alone far surpasses that of several capable diplomats” (Satō 1950, 2).

A third reason is the purpose and content of *Moment in Peking*. As a cultural interpreter, Lin initially aspired to translate *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, into English. As a spokesman of the Chinese government, he felt a strong sense of duty to represent and speak for his country. The convergence of two aspirations led to an adjusted plan: instead of translating *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an ancient Chinese novel, he decided to write a modern one in a similar style to publicize Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression. This decision culminated in the publication of *Moment in Peking* in 1939. Like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Moment in Peking* depicts the lives of extended families and the romances of their youth, specifically three upper-class families in what was then Peking from 1900 to 1938, weaving in nearly all significant historical events of that era including the establishment of the ROC, the rise of the Chinese communists and their cooperation and split with the KMT, and the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war. Dedicated to “the brave soldiers of China who are laying down their lives that our children and grand-children shall be free men and women”, this novel integrates anti-Japanese sentiment into a narrative style reminiscent of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, leading Nakano Yoshio 中野好夫 (1903–1985), a Japanese translator and critic, to label it as disguised “propaganda literature, even national policy literature” (quoted in Kawamura 2007, 60).

Lin's international renown as a cultural interpreter, along with the literary and cultural merits of *Moment in Peking*, were something that could be easily appropriated by the ROC, the PRC, and Japan, to bolster their cultural identities as either Chinese or Asian. Entangled in the intricate power relations, the anti-Japanese sentiment in *Moment in Peking* became sensitive for the Japanese, while the portrayal of the KMT government as representing China and its leadership in resisting Japan became sensitive for the CCP. Even for the KMT, this English-language novel was not nationalist enough. Within these complicated literary, cultural, and political contexts, various versions of *Moment in Peking* were created across different times and places, each serving distinct purposes. The following table provides an overview of the major translations of *Moment in Peking*.

Table 1. Japanese and Chinese Translations of *Moment in Peking*

No.	Title	Language	Translator(s)	Year	Publisher
v1	Days in Peking (北京の日)	Japanese	Tsuruta Tomoya 鶴田知也	Jan. 1940	Tokyo: Kyō no Mondai-sha 今日の問題社
v2	<i>Good Days in Peking</i> (北京好日)	Japanese	Oda Takeo 小田獄夫 at al.	1940	Tokyo: Shikishobō 四季書房
v3	<i>Days in Peking</i> (北京歴日)	Japanese	Fujiwara Kunio 藤原邦夫	1940	Tokyo: Meisōsha 明窓社
v4	<i>Good Days in Peking</i> (北京好日)	Japanese	Satō Ryōichi 佐藤亮一	1950	Tokyo: Jipu-sha ジープ社
v5	<i>Moment in Peking</i> (瞬息京华)	Chinese	Bai Lin 白林	June 1940	Beijing: Dongfeng shudian 东风书店
v6	<i>Moment in Peking</i> (瞬息京华)	Chinese	Shen Chen 沈沉	1940	Shanghai: Oufeng she 欧风社
v7	<i>In the Mist of Peking</i> (京华烟云)	Chinese	Zheng Tuo 郑陀 and Ying Yuan-jie 应元杰	1940-1941	Shanghai: Chun-qiu she 春秋社
v8	<i>In the Mist of Peking</i> (京华烟云)	Chinese	Zhang Zhenyu 张振玉	1977	Taipei: Dehua chubanshe 德华出版社
v9	<i>In the Mist of Peking</i> (京华烟云)	Chinese	Zhang Zhenyu 张振玉	1987	Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社
v10	<i>Moment in Peking</i> 瞬息京华	Chinese	Yu Fei 郁飞	1991	Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe 湖南文艺出版社
v11	<i>In the Mist of Peking</i> 京华烟云	Chinese	Zhang Zhenyu 张振玉	1994	Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe 东北师范大学出版社

It should be noted that this table provides a compilation of available translations published as books, and is not an exhaustive list of all existing translations. It does not include those serialized in a few issues of a magazine or incomplete translations, sometimes with unknown translators. Scholars interested in various editions of *Moment in Peking* have been actively seeking to identify and locate different printings, editions, translations, or any other variations that exist over time or across different publishers (Zhang 2012; Zhang 2014; Bu 2017; Xing

and Chen 2018). My research focuses only on the major versions listed in the table, discussing how each was translated, adapted, presented, and situated in various literary, cultural and ideological settings in Japan, Taiwan and Mainland China, and how each was connected to and resonated with other versions across different contexts.

To do so, I draw on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and the Manipulation School's literary translation studies. Exploring various forms of adaptation, Hutcheon proves that adaptations are not mere reproductions of the original works but rather creative reinterpretations that engage in a complex dialogue with the source text. She defines adaptation as, in one aspect, "a product (as extensive, particular transcoding)", representing a transformation of the source material into a new medium or format, and in the other, "a process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality)" that can generate new meanings over time (Hutcheon 2006, 22). The Manipulation School, consisting of various scholars with different cultural backgrounds, shares a core idea that "all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose" (Hermans 1985, 11). André Lefevere (1945–1996), a prominent figure of this school, regards translation as a form of rewriting—an "adaptation of a literature to a different audience". He contends that all rewritings "reflect a certain ideology and poetics", intending to "manipulate literature to function in a given way" (Lefevere 1992, xii). Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler expand on this notion, viewing translation as "a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication—and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes" (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xxi).

Hutcheon's theory underscores the creativeness and intertextuality of the adapted work, while the Manipulation School focuses on the intentional manipulation of texts to suit specific cultural, ideological, or aesthetic objectives. They both recognize that adaptation and translation are dynamic processes that shape and are shaped by social-historical circumstances, including cultural and ideological considerations, and that faithfulness or authenticity of the reproductions is an illusion.

Grounded in these principles, my research extends beyond the examination of linguistic and cultural aspects to encompass social-historical contexts and power shift in East Asia. My inquiry explores a number of textual details, especially the contentious aspects in various adaptations—using the term in a broader sense that encompasses translations—situated in the power dynamics of East Asia. In embracing this comprehensive and comparative approach, my objective is twofold.

Firstly, I seek to highlight the manipulation of political ideologies over literary adaptations. Various versions of *Moment in Peking* have delineated a literary power game, wherein divergent and at times conflicting worldviews and political ideologies contest and vie for prominence. Secondly, I intend to show how the dynamics inherent in this literary power game intersect with the broader narratives of nationalistic aspirations and the formation of collective identities. This perspective considers literary adaptation as part of the imaginative process, contributing to the construction of disparate imagined communities such as China (Republican or Communist), Taiwan, and Japan.

Republic of China: Anti-Japanese Sentiment and Anti-communist Ideology

This section examines translations that emerged during the 1940s in Japan and China, as well as those from the Martial Law period (1949–1987) following the retreat of the KMT government to Taiwan. The two time periods witnessed a shift in the dominant ideology from Japanese influence to that of the KMT, with the former leading to the suppression of anti-Japanese sentiments and the latter resulting in the repression of the Chinese communist ideology in translations.

In the early years of the 1940s all the Japanese versions, while highlighting the literal and cultural significance of *Moment in Peking*, were abridged to varying degrees to obscure Japan's conduct in the war. From the Japanese imperialist perspective, the Japanese were not invading but rather helping and liberating the Chinese. This perspective is illustrated in a proclamation by the Japanese army in the novel, stating that the war was aimed “only to establish peace in East Asia and increase the happiness and welfare of the Chinese people, that our desire of mutual prosperity and close interdependence of China and Japan may be realized. Beyond this, there is no other objective” (Lin 1939, 765). Within the ideological framework of the New Order for East Asia and Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japanese aggression and Chinese resistance were missing from these translations.

The earliest Japanese version (v1) came out in January 1940. The translator Tsuruta Tomoya 鶴田知也 (1902–1988) took pride in outperforming his Chinese counterparts, claiming the “No. 1 position in the global translation competition” for *Moment in Peking* (Tsuruta 1940, 1). As the translator vaguely admitted in the Preface, however, some changes had been made “given the nature of the subject” and “the current circumstances” (ibid., 3). These changes, as it turned out, substantially shortened and altered the last few chapters, which most intensively

depicted and criticized Japanese transgressions in China, including invasion, aggression, exploitation, smuggling, killing, raping, and so on. For example, in the original English text there is an extensive narrative spanning dozens of pages detailing the tragic death of Mannia, an important character in the novel, who was raped by Japanese soldiers and subsequently hung herself. Tsuruta did not omit the chapter entirely, but instead shortened the story and modified the immediate context leading to the death of Mannia by substituting “Japanese soldiers” for “Chinese soldiers” (中國兵), creating the impression that it was the retreating Chinese soldiers who committed the crime amidst the chaos of war. To support that impression, he omitted the subsequent response of Mannia’s adopted son, who, in front of his mother’s dead body, uttered aloud, “I will avenge you, Mother ... I will kill and kill and kill,” feeling himself “ready to meet a Japanese and to die at any moment” (Lin 1939, 770). Example 5 in the following section presents another instance where anything related to the Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression was omitted. The rationale is straightforward: if there is no aggression, there should be no resistance.

A similar adaptation strategy was also identified in v2. Unlike v1, which comprises only 43 chapters with the 42nd condensed to only two pages, v2 retained the original 45 chapters but omitted specific information. Take the chapter on the death of Mannia as an example for the purpose of comparison. V2, in addition to omitting explicit criticism of the Japanese, also altered the immediate context, though in different ways. V1 replaced “Japanese soldiers” with “Chinese soldiers”, while v2 employed more ambiguous terms such as “soldiers/troops” (兵隊) and “remnants of a defeated army” (敗殘兵), and also omitted the vow or actions of Mannia’s son to seek revenge.

In comparison to v1 and v2, v3 exhibits a higher degree of condensation and embodies some characteristics of Japanese literary aesthetics. Condensing the entire book from 45 chapters down to 30, the translator rewrote the death of Mannia into a short paragraph within which the crime was attributed to “routed Chinese soldiers” (敗走する支那兵) and the “atrocities of defeated soldiers” (敗殘兵の暴行). Unlike v1 and v2, which begin each chapter with chapter numbers, v3 uses a title to lead each chapter, reminiscent of a traditional Japanese literary form—*Monogatari* (物語)—such as the *Genji Monogatari* (源氏物語), known in China as the Japanese *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Half a century later, the Chinese translator Zhang Zhenyu 张振玉 (1914–1995) made a similar endeavour to infuse *Moment in Peking* with the essence of a classical Chinese novel (see below).

In terms of preserving the original content, the post-war translation (v4) published in 1950 stands out as the sole Japanese version characterized by its ad-

herence to the original text, free from explicitly discernible omissions, modifications, or fabrications. Following Japan's surrender in World War II, the nation fell under the control of the American occupation forces led by General Douglas MacArthur. The former Japanese wartime administration dissolved, and individuals accused of war crimes faced trial. Post-war Japan underwent demilitarization and democratization accompanied by significant social, political, and economic reforms. With this power shift and social-historical transformation, what was concealed and altered in the previous versions became what should be exposed and promulgated, and thus v4 contained the complete text, including the parts on Japanese aggression.

Compared to the "incomplete" Japanese translations, the early Chinese versions (v5 and v6) underwent more significant abridgement, condensing the original story to such an extent that even classifying them as "translations" becomes problematic. In order to understand these versions, factors such as the publication timing, location, and prevailing ideology should all be considered.

Bai Lin's v5 was published in Beijing in 1940, while Shen Chen's v6 followed later in the same year, with subsequent republications in 1941 and 1942 (Bu 2017). By 1940, Beijing, then known as Beiping, had already fallen under Japanese control following the full-scale outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, marked by the Marco Polo Incident on July 7, 1937. Shanghai, from July 1937 to December 1941, was usually referred to as *Gudao* (孤岛, isolated island), a metaphorical description for the only areas of the city that remained free from Japanese occupation: the International Settlement and the French Concession.

In Japanese-occupied Beiping, strict censorship was conducted to prohibit all anti-Japanese publications. Under such conditions, Bai's v5 was reduced from approximately 500,000 words in the original to 100,000. It benefited from two sources: firstly, the earliest Chinese version—Yue Yi's "brief narration" serialized in three issues in *Essence of World Masterpiece*; and secondly, "two Japanese versions"—likely referring to v1 and v2, upon which "the first half" of this book was based (Bai 1940, 333). Bai managed to purchase the English version after completing half of his work. Upon reading the original story, he discovered that the two Japanese versions he had been relying on were "full of mistakes", which unfortunately remained in his translation because he lacked the time to re-translate the text due to the tight publication schedule (*ibid.*). This version omitted, according to the translator himself, "some" content involving "the current political situation" (*ibid.*, 334). Reading Bai's work, it becomes evident that his excessively concise and ambiguous wording was in reality indicative of the avoidance of specific vocabulary, notably terms such as "Japan" (日本), "Japanese" (日本人), "an-

ti-Japanese” (抗日), and associated information. In short, his narrative underwent a thorough process of de-Japanization, resulting in the complete eradication of visible traces of Japan, let alone Japanese aggression.

During the Shanghai *Gudao* period, most publishers either existed in or relocated to the foreign concession areas, where the influence of Japan was relatively limited, allowing more space for survival. On the one hand, primary resistance was conceived “within the foreign concession” (Gunn 1980, 21). Yue Yi, in his serialized “narration”, was able to keep a short passage in which Mannia was “killed by bayonets”, igniting her son’s vengeful desire to take the lives of several Japanese soldiers (Lin/Yue 1940a, 493). On the other hand, the Japanese sought to exert their influence through Chinese agents in the concession and negotiations with the concession authorities. The magazine *Essence of World Masterpiece*, which published Yue Yi’s “translation” containing discernible anti-Japanese sentiments, did not last beyond one year.

Amidst the complex power relations and publishing environment in Shanghai, Shen’s v6 and Zheng/Ying’s v7 came out. V6 resembles v5 in both length and de-Japanization strategy. The translator attributed his abridgement to “the constraints of the situation”, which left him no choice but to dismiss “three fifths” of the original novel, specifically the author’s accounts of the situation after the “Sino-Japanese Incident” (Shen 1941, 1). Significant amounts of text describing Japanese war-time behaviour, and Chinese suffering and resistance, were missing. The death of Mannia was reduced to a single, de-contextualized sentence—“Mannia has died” (曼娘已死) (Lin/Shen 1941, 155)—the exact same sentence used in v5 (Lin/Bai 1940b, 306).

The only complete translation (v7), presented in two separate volumes, adopted a different de-Japanization practice. With the aim to provide a full version of the original story, the translators endeavoured to retain as much information as they could, making it impossible to erase the traces of Japan as v5 had done. Creatively, they used ×× (placeholders) in the text as a substitute for “日本”. For instance, “Japanese” was translated into “×× people” (××人), “anti-Japanese” into “anti-×” (反×), and occasionally “Japanese government” (日本政府) was rendered as “the government of some country” (某國政府). Despite the initial successful publication in 1940 and 1941, v7 was banned shortly after the fall of Shanghai in December 1941, with existing copies and proofs being destroyed.

Similar de-Japanization strategies and the various tactics shown in these versions reflect the censorship policy that forbade explicit mention of Japan in such publications. This was highly effective in practice, and even if the censors lacked proficiency in the Chinese language, as was often the case, they could easily enforce

the policy by searching for the keyword “Japan” (日本). Chen Qingsheng 陈青生 noted that substituting Japan with ×× was a common practice widely adopted to comply with such a censorship policy (*Ifeng News* 2022).

In summary, during this period both v5 and v6 were generated in contexts where formidable Japanese influence intervened to suppress Chinese resistance. De-Japanized and significantly abridged, they read more like a light short novel telling traditional Chinese tales about young scholars and beautiful girls (才子佳人小说). It is understandable that neither of them was republished after the war, and the complete version by Zheng/Ying (v7) became the only one that reappeared in the so called “free China”—Taiwan.

In 1940s Republican China, Japanese-dominated censorship primarily revolved around Japan-related materials, while in Republican Taiwan after 1949, the central focus shifted to Chinese communism, triggering another round of adaptation that specifically targeted materials related to the Mainland and the communist ideology.

According to Lin Yutang himself, Zheng/Ying’s v7 was republished in Taiwan in 1952. Lin noted that this book, as well as the Chinese version of *My Country and My People*, did not specify the translators’ names, which “seems not good because it makes people think they are my Chinese works” (Lin 1975, 748). In fact, from the 1950s to the present day, all Chinese versions of Lin’s works in Taiwan, except for one—Zhang Zhenyu’s *In the Mist of Peking* (京华烟云, v8)—appeared without informing readers of the translators. This phenomenon cannot be attributed merely to a careless mistake or a lack of copyright awareness, but rather reflects a long-standing practice in adherence to the publishing policies of the Martial Law period, similar to the omission of references to Japan in early 1940s Shanghai in response to Japanese censorship.

The predominant national policy during the Martial Law Period was “anti-communism and restoration of the nation” which influenced all aspects of society, and the production and publication of translations were no exceptions to this. Shortly after Martial Law was announced in Taiwan, the Regulations Administering Newspapers, Magazines, and Books in Taiwan Province Under Martial Law were issued on 22 June 1949. This primary document, along with other supplementary materials, constituted the legal basis for censorship not only targeting left-wing and communist ideologies in publications, but also singling out specific authors (Cai 2010).

Lai Ciyun describes how the prohibition policy towards authors developed in three stages from the 1950s to the 1970s. Initially, “any work and translation done by the heads or backbones of the bandits, published or sold by the publishers or

bookstores of the bandits” were banned (Lai 2017, 56). In the first stage, the prohibition was extended beyond the bandits (the Chinese communists) themselves to those “affiliated” with the bandits. In the second stage, the law became more specific: any work or translation published before ROC 37 (1948) by those affiliated to the bandits or trapped on the bandit-controlled Mainland were all banned; exceptions were granted on the conditions that censors confirmed they contained no problematic content and held important reference value, and that the publisher removed the name of the problematic author or translator and repackaged the book. In the third stage, any work or translation by the heads or backbones of the bandits, or published by the bandits, were all banned, which implied, Lai said, a possibility for those located on the Mainland but persecuted by the bandits to be published in Taiwan.

These censorship policies targeting authors and translators significantly influenced the presentation and translation of Lin’s works in Taiwan. Since Lin Yutang was a famously anti-communist supporter of the KMT government, living in the US, he should not have been on the list of banned writers. His translators, however, all belonged to the Republican era and could easily be related to the Mainland and the communists in one way or another. As mandated by policy, their names had to be suppressed and their books had to be repackaged to make them appear different from the previously published Republican versions. The absence of translators’ names from all Chinese versions suggested their illegality, or at least questionable legality in Taiwan. In fact, there is little information available about Zheng Tuo 郑陀, one of the translators of v7, in either Mainland China or Taiwan beyond the fact that he translated some of Lin’s works, including *Moment in Peking* and *My Country and My People*. We can only assume, yet with confidence, that he either was “trapped” on the Mainland or somehow associated with it. Compared to Zheng Tuo, Huang Jiade 黄嘉德 (1908–1993), who also translated *My Country and My People*, worked in a Mainland university after 1949 and was certainly among those affiliated with the “bandits”. All Chinese versions of *My Country and My People*, either by Zheng or Huang, were therefore never published with the translator’s name in Taiwan.

This awkward situation—the publisher had no other option but to choose a mainland translator’s work and erase his name—continued until 1977, when Zhang Zhenyu, then a professor at Taiwan University, published his translation titled *In the Mist of Peking* (v8). Zhang’s name appeared on the cover and this newly published translation, as noted by Cai Feng’an, a well-known Taiwanese publicist, immediately “came under the spotlight, received the most critical acclaim, and was widely considered to be a matchable translation of Lin’s famous fiction” (quoted in Yang 2014).

Produced and published in Taiwan in 1977, v8 displayed a clear ideological alignment with the KMT discourse. For example, it adopted the ROC year-numbering system and rendered “boxer” into “the Boxer bandits” (拳匪), obviously a reflection of the KMT’s sensitivity to peasant uprisings. In the view of the KMT, the Boxers (rebellious peasants) and the communists fell into the same category of “bandit”, the former being “the Boxer bandits” (拳匪) and the latter “the communist bandits” (共匪). In the translation appearing in the communist context, “boxer” is rendered as more neutral “the Boxer members” (拳民) as in the 1987 mainland version. In the eyes of communists, peasant uprisings against a cruel ruler are laudable causes, just as the peasant communists had justly defeated the KMT government. After 1949 the communist government reconstructed ancient Chinese history and justified all peasant uprisings throughout history on this basis.

In addition to the translator’s personal ideological horizon, further adaptations were made by the publisher to give it a more nationalist appearance. According to the translator (Zhang 1994), some taboo words in v8 were deleted or white-washed by the Taiwanese publisher. He gave two examples, one in Chapter 36, the other in Chapter 40. Here is the example taken from Chapter 36.

Example 1 (E1):

[Original English] Tragically, he had died in a hospital a few months later. His wife, *probably the greatest woman who ever lived in China*, was by his side. (Lin 1939, 601, emphasis added)

[1977 v8] His wife was by his side. (他妻子在身邊。) (Lin/Zhang 1977, 820)

“He” in the original refers to Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), founder of the KMT and first president of the ROC. “His wife” is Soong Ching-ling (1893–1981), a left-leaning KMT member who held several prominent positions in the communist government after 1949, including Vice President of China (1949–1975) and Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (1954–1959, 1975–1981). During the anti-communist Martial Law period, it was inappropriate to compliment a high-ranking official of the communist government. Consequently, the original English was reduced in the 1977 publisher-sanitised version to a simple “his wife was by his side”, with the compliment deleted.

The other example in Chapter 40 is a sentence relating to Chen San’s “getting very much disgusted with” the KMT government’s “anti-communist campaign and the slaughter of the peasants” (Lin 1939, 684), which the publisher opted to simply delete.

Furthermore, there is another example that the translator did not mention, yet it serves as an even more telling illustration of the publisher's "whitewashing".

Example 2 (E2):

[Original English] After the Nationalist Revolution had succeeded in overthrowing the old government, *the Kuomintang had broken with the communists and began to suppress them. The Kuomintang had gone Right and the youth of China had gone Left, and communist thought became an underground movement.* (Lin 1939, 676, emphasis added)

[1977 v8] The KMT and the CCP broke up; the CCP raised insurrections; the national government began to suppress the CCP; the KMT inherited orthodox Chinese culture; many of the youth were enticed by the left-wing thought and went astray. (國共分裂，共黨作亂，國民政府開始剿共，國民黨繼承中國正統文化，很多青年受左派思想誘惑，誤入歧途。) (Lin/Zhang 1977, 925)

In this example, the original English narrates facts without disclosing a political inclination. The 1977 translation, however, significantly different from the original, takes a KMT stance. "The communists raised insurrections" (共黨作亂) are words added to rationalize "the national government began to suppress the communists". "The Kuomintang had gone Right" in the original becomes "the KMT inherited orthodox Chinese culture" (國民黨繼承中國正統文化) in the translation, echoing the on-going Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement in Taiwan at that time. "[T]he youth of China had gone Left" is rendered as "many of the youth were enticed by the left-wing thoughts and went astray" (很多青年受左派思想誘惑，誤入歧途), thereby transforming the originally neutral narrative into one aligned with the discourse of the KMT-led Chinese nationalists.

And this was not only in the main text, as the paratext of v8 likewise embodied a KMT-centred ideology. The text on its back cover provided a list of the turbulent events from 1900 to 1938, including "the revelation of the true face of the Boxer", "national revolution overthrowing the Qing dynasty", "the Northern Expedition of the National Revolution Army", "August 13 Battle of Shanghai", and "Generalissimo Chiang and the Lushan military conference", obviously leaving out any events related to the Chinese communists.

People's Republic of China: The Nationalists, the Japanese and Chinese Nationalism

This section examines the reproductions of *Moment in Peking* emerging in Mainland China including translations and television series. The title of this section aims to underscore how the Chinese Nationalist Party (the KMT) and the Japanese during the war were interpreted in these adaptations, elucidating the role of each in shaping contemporary Chinese concepts of nationalism and patriotism.

In Mainland China, all of Lin's works, either in Chinese or English, were banned from 1949 onward due to his earlier divergence from left-wing literature and his later alignment with the "reactionary" KMT government during and after World War II. It is with the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 and the immediate thawing of cross-straits relations it triggered that *Moment in Peking* was able to debut in Mainland China in two artistic forms: a translated print version in 1987 and a television drama adaptation in 1988, both originating from Taiwan. The 1987 version (v9) was a publisher-sanitized version of Zhang Zhenyu's 1977 translation (v8), while the 1988 television drama was produced in Taiwan and broadcast in both Taiwan and Mainland China. In 1991, a new local version (v10) was released, produced by Yu Fei 郁飞 (1928–2014), son of Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896–1945), who was initially entrusted with the translation task by Lin Yutang himself, but tragically was executed by the Japanese before he could complete it. Additionally, two more television series came out in Mainland China in 2005 and 2014.

As we know, the 1977 v8 was adapted by the Taiwanese publisher to intensify its nationalist undertones. In contrast, the 1987 v9 embodied the mainland publisher's efforts to counter the nationalist narratives of their Taiwanese counterparts. The 1994 v11, a variation attributed to the same translator, differs in two ways: firstly, it largely restores the previously adapted parts by publishers from two areas; secondly, it introduces new literary features, giving it a resemblance to classical Chinese novels such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Here are the examples.

Example 3 (E3):

[Original English] When most of the *Chinese Army* was pursuing *the Communists* into western China ... (Lin 1939, 740, emphasis added)

[1987 v9] When most of the *KMT Army* in the anti-communist battle was pursuing *the Red Army* into western China. (国民党大部分军队在反共战役中把红军驱入西部时。) (Lin/Zhang 1987, 787)

[1994 v11] When most of the *Chinese Army* in the battle to suppress the communists was pursuing *the Communist Army* into western China. (中国大部分军队在“剿共”战役中把共军驱入西部时。) (Lin/Zhang 1994, 417)

Example 4 (E4) :

[Original English] The news that, at long last, *a Chinese government was ready to lead the nation to fight Japan* was too good to be true. (Lin 1939, 744, emphasis added)

[1987 v9] People of all ethnic groups and all sections were ready to fight Japan. (全国各族各界人民终于对抗日本了。) (Lin/Zhang 1987, 790)

[1994 v11] The central government was ready to lead the nation to fight against Japan. (中央政府终于领导全国对抗日本了。) (Lin/Zhang 1994, 421)

Example 5 (E5):

[Original English] ‘That man is the coolest and the most stubborn I ever saw’, remarked Sunya, ‘He has done things that Chuko Liang (in the *Three Kingdoms*) could not do. He had the worst task any man ever undertook in this world, in uniting China. *And now that he has done it, he is confronted with a still greater task, leading China to fight Japan. He is like a petrel that finds its natural element in a storm at sea—and perhaps enjoys it, too. He will carry the war to the end if anyone will.* I have watched him for these last ten years. He is so gaunt and bony, but look at his mouth! His face shows the most curious combination of stubbornness and wiliness I’ve ever seen.’ (Lin 1939, 778, emphasis added)

[1987 v9] This man was inactive and indecisive in anti-Japanese issues. He is the leader of the KMT and head of the central government. His negative attitude would definitely affect a great number of civil servants and military officers. The Xi’an Incident put him on the spot and badly upset him. He should be active now. That is what the entire country expects of him. If he is resolute to fight the Japanese, his officials would be. Would he let down the whole country? Only God knows. Looking at his official residence, I had a myriad of thoughts and feelings. These might be uncalled-for worries. If true, thank goodness. I believe what I felt is representative of many of my countrymen. (他这个人, 在抗日的事情上, 原来是消极的, 畏首畏尾的。他是国民党的领袖, 是中央政

府的首脑。他的消极态度不能不影响一大批党国要人，这是令人遗憾的。西安事变将了他一军，给了他一个深深的刺激，他应该变得积极了。全国同胞是这么期望他的。只要他坚决抗日，他手下那些文官武将也就会坚决抗日。究竟他会不会使全国同胞失望呢？只有天知道。看着他的官邸我心绪茫茫。也许这是多余的忧虑吧。果真如此，那就谢天谢地。我相信我的感情能够代表很多同胞的感情。) (Lin/Zhang 1987, 824)

[1994 v11] This man has done things that other people could not do. He took upon himself the unprecedented and formidable task of the Northern Expedition, and is now confronted with a greater task—leading China to fight Japan. He is accustomed to handling his own affairs in a storm and he is proud of it. He will carry the war to the end. I have watched him for these last ten years. He is so gaunt and rugged, but look at his mouth! The unyieldingness and resourcefulness displayed on his face is a rare sight to behold! (他这个人别人做不了的事他都做成了。北伐战争这项空前艰巨的任务，他必须要担当起来，他已经完成了。现在他又遇到更艰难的任务，要领导中国对抗日本。他已经习惯于在风暴里干自己的事，也许他以此为荣。他一定能够把这场战争进行到底。过去这十年，我一直注意他。他瘦削硬挺而骨骼嶙峋，可是你看他的嘴！他的脸上显出的坚强不屈与足智多谋，两者配合得那么神奇，我是从来没有见过的) (Lin/Zhang 1994, 459)

[1940 Japanese v1]: (Missing the highlighted part)

In E3, the 1987 version altered “Chinese Army” to “KMT Army” (国民党军队), suggesting a communist perspective that the KMT army could not represent the Chinese army and the KMT government could not represent China. The “Red Army” (红军) in 1987 v9 is a commendatory term used and known in a communist context while “the Communist Army” (共军) in v11 is a disparaging term used only by the nationalists. In E4 and E5, the 1987 v9 omitted “the Chinese government”, and added an entire paragraph about Chiang Kai-shek, showing the intention of denying the positive role the KMT leader and his government played in the War of Resistance against Japan. In the Japanese v1, as previously mentioned, the highlighted part of the original text reflecting Chinese resistance was deleted due to the absence of Japanese aggression in the context.

Now, I would like to direct your attention back to E2 in the preceding section. In the first place, this example demonstrates how the Taiwanese publisher rewrote the original translation in keeping with the nationalist ideology during the Mar-

tial Law period. In the 1987 v9, traces of double sanitization are revealed, as the alterations made by the Taiwanese publisher were subsequently “rectified” by the mainland publisher.

Example 2

[1987 v9] The KMT and the communists broke up; the national government began to resist against the Communists; the KMT claimed to have inherited orthodox Chinese culture; many of the youth had been influenced by the left-wing thought. (国共分裂，国民政府开始反共，国民党自称继承中国正统文化，很多青年受左派思想影响。) (Lin/Zhang 1987, 717)

Comparing this with the 1977 v8, “the communists raised insurrections” (共黨作亂) disappeared, “suppress the CCP” (剿共) became “resist the CCP” (反共), “claimed to have” was added, “enticed” (誘惑) became “influenced” (影响) and “went astray” (誤入歧途) was removed. The double sanitization exemplifies how literary adaptation became an ideological battlefield for publishers in the two areas: one side nationalized and the other de-nationalized, both disregarding the original content written by the author and translated by Zhang Zhenyu.

In general, the 1987 v9 embodied the Mainland publisher’s intention to diminish the imprint of Taiwan and the KMT in the translation. Its depiction of the historical role of the KMT government in the War of Resistance aligns with the narratives presented in modern Chinese histories constructed after 1949 with the Marxist class-struggle theory as a guiding principle. According to these histories, the War of Resistance was fought solely by the CCP and its armies, while the KMT government appeared as an enemy of the CCP-led class struggle, inactive and incompetent in resisting Japan, prioritizing instead the suppression of the communist forces. The emergence of the largely restored 1994 v11 coincided with a paradigmatic shift in Chinese historiography from class-struggle to “a patriotic narrative” where “the official Maoist ‘victor narrative’” was replaced by “a new ‘victimization narrative’” (Wang 2008, 791). The “victimization narrative” focused on a century of humiliation China suffered under foreign imperialists, including the Japanese, and the CCP’s leadership to end the humiliation and win national independence. In this emerging discourse of nationalism the internal class struggle between the CCP and the KMT lost its importance, and the KMT’s military resistance against the Japanese started to gain greater recognition. The largely restored 1994 v11, as exemplified above, reflected the growing acknowledgment of the KMT’s contributions and aimed to present a more unified narrative of China’s resistance against foreign aggression.

In 2005, marking the 60th anniversary of China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japan, a reprinted version attributed to the same translator, Zhang Zhenyu, was released in Mainland China, along with a television series of the same title. This version, published by Shaanxi Normal University Press, shows no easily discernible difference from the 1994 restored version, and the television series was not the first of its kind on the Mainland. However, appearing at this historical moment the book and series not only served as a homage to the historical victory but also solidified the patriotic attribute of *Moment in Peking*. In contemporary China, the concept of patriotism has expanded to absorbing historical domestic partisan conflicts in favour of fostering unity under the banner of nationalism, particularly when confronted with a shared external adversary, such as the Japanese invader.

As popular as Zhang's translation may be, it is not the only circulating version available in Mainland China. There is also a translation by Yu Fei, son of Yu Dafu, initially released in 1991 (v10). This version boasted its faithfulness to the original, as the translator claimed, "fidelity to the original is the guideline of my translation" (Yu 1992, 780). Zhang Top of Form translated the title of the novel as something like "In the Mist of the Chinese Capital" while Yu entitled it precisely *Moment in Peking* (瞬息京华), the same title Lin Yutang provided in correspondence with his father. Compared to other Chinese versions of *Moment in Peking*, this translation more consistently and frequently replaces terms such as "Japan", "the Japanese", or "Japanese soldiers" with "Japanese devils" (日本鬼子). For instance, on pages 675 and 676, Yu uses "devil" three times, contrasting with the neutral term "Japanese" used in other versions. This deliberate choice suggests the translator's hostility and resentment toward those who killed his father. Completed in 1991, when Zhang's *In the Mist of Peking* was already widely accepted by readers, partially due to the publicity of the TV adaptation of the same title in 1988, Yu Fei's *Moment in Peking* "ran a sale risk", just as he predicted. (ibid., 780). Zhang's *In the Mist of Peking* is republished almost every year by different publishers while Yu Fei's *Moment in Peking* has not seen a reprint since 1994.

Beyond political reasons, the popularity of Zhang's translation in both Mainland China and Taiwan should be attributed to his successful transformation of a novel originally composed in English for American readers into a Chinese novel with classical Chinese literary aesthetics. The translator, not being a politician, fully realized the novel was designed to be a modern *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and intended to

bring this treasure of Chinese literature stranded in the English world back to its homeland in a genuine Chinese-language look so that it can

be put onto the bookshelves of Chinese households along with other Chinese classics such as *Water Margin*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Journey to the West*, which surely will add lustre to the body of Chinese novels. (Zhang 1994, 10)

Like the Japanese translator's practice of assigning a title to each chapter, Zhang added a couplet to each chapter to give the gist of its content, a characteristic of a traditional chapter-linked Chinese novel (章回小说) found in all the four classics mentioned above. Following the classical artistic taste for parallelism and antithesis, he translated the dedication into a four-line rhymed poem, each volume's title into a four-character phrase, and all English poems into traditional Chinese ones. Zhang also avoided Westernized modern usages of Chinese and adopted a fair amount of vernacular Beijing dialect, inspired by Lin Yutang's comment on Zheng/Ying's translation (v7) that "regretfully does not adopt Peking dialect" (Lin 1975, 748). All this gave the impression that readers were actually reading a traditional chapter-linked Chinese novel. Even in 2009 it was still possible to find the following statement in a journal: "*Moment in Peking* is a chapter-linked novel written by Lin Yutang in English in the 1930s" (Qin 2009, 262). In fact, it is Zhang Zhenyu's Chinese translation, not Lin Yutang's English original, that is a traditional chapter-linked novel.

The unique Chineseness of Zhang's translation was thoroughly examined by Wang Hongyin 王宏印 and Jiang Huimin 江慧敏 (2012). They compared three reprinted versions by Zhang, Yu, and Zheng/Ying in terms of their rendering of the dedication, volume division, Daoist quotations, chapter and title arrangement, and more, with special attention to Zhang's strategy of "returning" to the chapter-linked style. They coined the term "rootless back translation" (无根回译) to characterize and conceptualize translations of this sort. This concept assumes the existence of an invisible Chinese "original" text from which Lin translated and paraphrased to create an English literary work, which was subsequently translated "back" into Chinese, a process they referred to as "original text restoration" (原文复现).

Beyond translations that infused *Moment in Peking* with more Chinese literary characteristics, three television adaptations, appearing in 1988, 2005 and 2014, with the first two titled *In the Mist of Peking* (京华烟云), the third *New in the Mist of Peking* (新京华烟云), further interpreted the story as a contemporary discourse on Chinese patriotism and nationalism, while presenting some characteristics of popular culture.

The 1988 TV drama, introduced from Taiwan, turned out to be a hit among Mainland audiences and was remembered by historians as an early event in Cross-straits

communication. This drama was set in nationalist-centred, Republican China which was natural for a Taiwanese audience and also acceptable on the Mainland with the recent easing of tensions between the CCP and the KMT and the termination of the Chiang family's rule over Taiwan. More importantly, it delineated the fate and entanglements of the three families within the historical backdrop of the national revolution against warlords and the War of Resistance against Japanese aggression. There were numerous scenes of enemy atrocities, patriotic resistance, and endeavours to preserve Chinese culture against Japanese cultural colonial policies. By focusing on the common enemies of the KMT and the CCP, as well as highlighting the shared Chinese culture between the Mainland and Taiwan, it sidestepped partisan politics, ensuring acceptance on both sides.

The 2005 series was broadcast on China Central Television (CCTV) as a tribute to the 60th anniversary of China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japan. According to the director Zhang Zi'en 张子恩, this version highlights nationalism and old Peking culture. Compared to the 1988 version, it drifted further from the original story, adding plot points of mismatched marriages, adultery, rape, suicide, and so on. While intensifying the dramatic effect by supplementing, moving, merging and regrouping the original material, the director did not forget the theme of nationalism: he made Oracle bones a symbol of patriotism and nationalism, and ended the story by showing one of the main characters—who was not a main character in the original work—burning his house and sacrificing his life to prevent the Japanese from taking the bones and exhorting his children to devote themselves to the war against Japan. This drama caused a sensation and gained very high ratings.

The more recent *New in the Mist of Peking* came out in 2014. According to the director Ding Yangguo 丁仰国, “innovation and subversion” were the principles of his adaptation, and “the new version downplays the social context of the story and focuses on romantic relations” (Cai 2014). That is to say, it depoliticized the story and only used the social and political context as a backdrop for love stories. Interestingly, the two Taiwanese directors, Ding Yangguo and Shen Yi 沈怡, are well-known for their films and dramas written by Qiong Yao 琼瑶, the most popular romance novelist in the Chinese-speaking world. Young and dynamic stars, including one from South Korea, along with exquisite costumes and props, the avoidance of late-Qing imagery, and the amplification of a Western aura, all served to make the directors' hope come true, that “the young audience can accept this drama” (Cai 2014). This version went much further than the previous one in adapting characters and plots. If the 2005 version was a recreation based on the original, the 2014 version was almost a completely new story. As *Beijing Evening News* commented, “If the names of all characters were replaced, nobody would

relate this drama to Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking*. It is but a romance drama starring young idols in republican costumes" (Yu 2015). Even this extreme adaptation ended in an uplifting scene in which the young children of the Yao family lay down their lives in a gunfight against the Japanese.

These adaptations, spanning different time periods, reflect the evolving political and cultural landscape of China. Despite their differences, they all present a pure Chinese story with patriotic attributes tailored for Chinese audiences, resonating with the official grand narrative of unity and nationalism, and serving as cultural touchstones that reinforce a collective sense of Chinese identity among the various audiences.

Conclusion

Tracing the metamorphosis of *Moment in Peking* across time and place, it becomes evident that each version emerges as a product of the power dynamics of its era, shaped and moulded by the dominant or ruling power, emphasizing or weakening certain aspects in keeping with specific ideological stances.

The Japanese translations, produced in the ideological constructs of the New Order for East Asia and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, strategically concealed the novel's anti-Japanese undertones while emphasizing its cultural and literary significance. This ideological framework sought to cultivate and promote a cohesive East Asian community with a distinct and unified East Asian culture. Miki Kiyoshi 三木清 (1897–1945), a key figure in the formulation of Japanese wartime policies, regarded the war as an opportunity for the emergence of a new history in Asia, one that would challenge the dominance of Eurocentric historical narratives. In "Principles of Thought for a New Japan" (新日本の思想原理, 1939), he distinguished between East and West in terms of culture, emphasized the "significance" of war being the unification of East Asia, and even redefined the war as a Holy War for building a new East Asian culture (Koyama 2016, 795–96). He interpreted Lin Yutang's cultural view as that of East Asian culture, believing "there are few Japanese people who do not resonate with or discover themselves as Easterners after reading Lin Yutang" (quoted in Kawamura 2007, 57).

While regarding Lin not only as Chinese but also as representing a broader Asian identity, and introducing his China-themed writings in English as "excellent reference materials for pursuing Eastern thought" (ibid., 57), these translators simultaneously distinguished themselves and Japanese readers from their Euro-American counterparts. They omitted or reduced the authors' detailed descriptions of

Chinese cultural nuances, considering them necessary only for “red-haired readers” (紅毛讀者, Tsuruta 1940, 3) and “Europeans and Americans” (歐米人, Fujiwara 1940, 5).

In Republican China, during the Japanese occupation and under the years of Japanese censorship, the abridged Chinese versions underwent thorough de-Japanization, resulting in more condensed versions of the story that often jeopardized either its literary and cultural significance or its “propaganda” merits. The only “complete” version was banned as it contradicted Japanese ideology preaching the unification and co-prosperity of East Asia. Different from the Japanese interpretation of it as both Chinese and East Asian, in Republican *Moment in Peking* China was not even unanimously rendered as distinctly Chinese. As *The China Critic*, an English-language magazine in Shanghai, commented, “It is not strictly comparable to typical Chinese novels, like *The Red Chamber Dream* [sic]. It belongs to a class of its own—the Chinese novel for foreign readers” (*The China Critic* 1940, 120). It has since faced intermittent criticism for its deliberate mystification of Taoism, its rigid imitation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and ultimately, its reinforcement of orientalist tropes.

In post-war Taiwan, the transition of power from Japanese colonialism to KMT governance created new circumstances for the publication of *Moment in Peking*. The republishing of the Republican version signals a cultural “void” following the power shift—a gap between the suppression of both Japanese and indigenous languages and the cultivation of the Chinese national language and literature. The removal of the names of translators presumed to be associated with the Mainland and the rebranding of the book underscore an ideological struggle against the Chinese communists. The new local translation, a joint effort by the translator and publisher, aligns with a KMT-centred Chinese history, where the KMT represents China and orthodox Chinese culture. In this nation-building process, both Japanese colonialism and Chinese communism are suppressed as international and domestic adversaries.

In Mainland China, the power shift in 1949 from the KMT to the CCP immediately led to prohibitions on Lin and his works due to his affiliation with the former “reactionary” regime. In 1987, riding the surge of the reconciliation between the two parties, *Moment in Peking* resurfaced with its KMT inclination suppressed. Following the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with events in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, a new narrative of patriotism and nationalism emerged, aiming to thwart perceived threats from foreign forces for peaceful evolution and to maintain the CCP’s leadership. In this context, the KMT was integrated into the “unified front of patriotism” (愛

国主义统一战线), while the patriotic elements of *Moment in Peking*, such as its embodiment of Chinese cultural identity and its anti-Japanese sentiment, were further appropriated through translations and television series.

In both Mainland China and Taiwan, the historical portrayal of Japan as an external colonizer or invader has played an important role in shaping Chinese identity, whether it leans towards the KMT or the CCP. Literary adaptations, as exemplified by the metamorphosis of *Moment in Peking*, serve a dual function, undermining conflicting or competing ideologies and reinforcing the cultural narratives of their own.

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***SPECIAL ISSUE:
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN
SINIC INTELLECTUAL HISTORY***

*Intellectual History and the Method of
Sublation*

Incarnation and the Unity of Heaven and Humans: Zia Nai-zin's Christian Reinterpretation of *Zhongyong*

Andrew Ka Pok TAM*

Abstract

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, Xie Fu-ya or Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991), a remarkable Chinese Christian philosopher, theologian, and translator, developed his unique philosophy of “in-ism” (唯中論) from the 1960s to 1980s to indigenize Christianity into the ideal “Chinese Christianity” (中華基督教). Zia declared that the essence of Confucianism is the concept of *Zhong* 中 (neutrality, avoidance of extremes) and compared the Confucian teaching of the Unity of Heaven and Humans (天人合一) with the Christian Christology, which argues that Jesus Christ is the unity of divinity and humanity. Zia further stated that New Confucians emphasize the Way of Humans over the Way of Heaven, while the Christian doctrine of incarnation balanced both divinity and humanity and achieved the Unity of Heaven and Humans.

While Zia's reinterpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* is controversial, following the recently developed method of sublation, this paper aims to evaluate whether Zia's Christian reinterpretation of *Zhongyong* 中庸 has successfully sublated Confucianism and Christianity. I argue that although Zia's interpretation of *Zhongyong* contains certain philological flaws, overall he successfully produced new insights enriching both Christianity and Confucianism by grounding both on the same ontological ground of *Zhong*.

Keywords: *Zhongyong*, Christianity, Confucianism, Zia Nai-zin, Chinese philosophy

Inkarnacija in enost neba ter človeka: Zia Nai-zinova krščanska reinterpretacija *Zhongyonga*

Izvleček

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, znan tudi kot Xie Fuya ali Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991), izjemen kitajski krščanski filozof, teolog in prevajalec, je med letoma 1960 in 1980 razvil svojo edinstveno filozofijo »teorije ravnovesja« (唯中論), s katero je želel krščanstvo »prirediti v idealno kitajsko krščanstvo« (中華基督教). Zia je izjavil, da je bistvo konfucianizma koncept *zhong* 中 (nepristranskost, izogibanje skrajnostim), ter primerjal konfucijanski

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nauk o enoti neba in človeka (天人合一) s krščansko kristologijo, ki zagovarja, da je Jezus Kristus enotnost božanskosti in človečnosti. Zia je nadalje izjavil, da moderni novi konfucijanci poudarjajo Pot človeka, ki jo vidijo kot bolj primarno od Poti neba, medtem ko krščanski nauk o utelešenju božanskosti in človečnosti oba vidika uravnoteži ter s tem doseže enotnost neba in človeka.

Čeprav je Ziajeva reinterpretacija *Nauka o sredini* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) sporna, ta članek s pomočjo nedavno razvite metode sublacije ugotavlja, ali je njegova krščanska razlaga *Zhongyonga* uspešno kombinirala konfucianizem in krščanstvo. Četudi njegova interpretacija *Zhongyonga* vsebuje določene filološke napake, menim, da se je Zia dokaj uspešno dokopal do novih spoznanj, ki lahko obogatijo tako krščanstvo kot tudi konfucianizem, saj oba idejna sistema temeljita na istem ontološkem temelju, to je *zhongu* oziroma uravnovešenosti.

Ključne besede: *Zhongyong*, krščanstvo, konfucianizem, Zia Nai-zin, kitajska filozofija

Introduction

“The International Seminar on Academic Xie Fuya’s Sino Christian Thought” was recently convened from 25–28 April 2023 at Drew University, New Jersey, in the United States. This conference was organized by the editorial board of Zia Nai-zin’s complete works, where some volumes have already been published by the Chinese Baptist Press. All these publications and conferences reiterated Zia’s remarkable yet widely disregarded academic contribution to modern Chinese philosophy and Sino-Christian theology. This timely paper echoes the recent wave of research on Zia’s philosophy and theology in the Chinese academic circle and aims to encourage further studies on Zia in the English academic circle.

Zia Nai-zin 謝乃壬, Xie Fu-ya or Hsieh Fu-yah 謝扶雅 (1892–1991) was a significant Chinese scholar in modern Chinese history with a wide range of interests in philosophy, theology, pedagogy, literature and history. He was also a well-known translator and editor who participated in the project of the *Christian Classics Library*, led by Francis P. Jones, George Thomas and John Smith from 1958 to 1974 at Drew University. The project aimed to translate Christian writings from Greek, Latin, German and English, into Chinese and produced 32 volumes.

Besides translation, Zia also developed his philosophy and theology of “in-ism” (唯中論) during his stay in the United States. According to Zia, the concept of *Zhong* 中 (neutrality, avoidance of extremes) in the *Doctrine of the Mean* is the essence of Confucianism. Yet Zia argued that Confucians failed to maintain *Zhong* because they overemphasized humans over Heaven and failed to achieve their ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. By contrast, Zia argued that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation fulfilled the Unity of Heaven and Humans because Jesus Christ

is the unity of divinity and humanity. Zia's redefinition of Confucianism and his controversial claim for the unity of Confucianism and Christianity led to a debate between him and contemporary New Confucians (and notably Tang Jung-yi and Mou Zongsan) from the 1950s to 1970s (Ho 2006). In this, Zia proposed the idea of constructing "Chinese Christianity" (中華基督教) so that Chinese Christians could understand the Christian faith in terms of the Confucian, Daoist and even Buddhist canons. Yet as we shall see, New Confucians criticized Zia for putting too many Christian concepts into Confucian texts. However, they did not provide a clear methodology to evaluate the success and failure of Zia's in-ism but merely condemned Zia's approach because Zia's ontology contradicts New Confucianism.

To evaluate Zia's strategy of integrating Christianity with Confucianism, this paper introduces the recently developed method of sublation. The method proceeds from the presumption according to which an ideal comparative philosophy should not only highlight the similarities and differences between two philosophies, but also "help us raise our ideas to a new level and provide new insights by preserving certain elements of both aspects and eliminating others" (Rošker 2022a, 307).

Zia' Biography

Zia's profound understanding of both Chinese and Western philosophies is deeply related to his family background and life experience. Zia was born in a traditional Chinese literati family in Shaoxing, Chekiang province, China in 1892. Since the age of four, Zia studied Confucian texts like the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* for the imperial examination. However, when the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) abolished the imperial examination in 1905, Zia had to give up studying such Confucian texts.

Zia was converted to Christianity during his undergraduate studies in Tokyo, Japan. He went to Tokyo in 1911 with his cousin to study Japanese and English at the age of nineteen. However, shortly after Zia's enrolment at Rikkyo University in 1915, he was hospitalized for some months because of acute retinal necrosis. It was during this time, according to his autobiography, that he was very much moved by the care he received from the Christians he shared an apartment with. After what he saw as a miraculous recovery, Zia was baptised at St Paul's Church, part of the Anglican Church in Japan, in 1916 (Zia 1978, 48–49). In the same year, Zia returned to China and became an editor and translator for the National Committee of China Young Men's Christian Association. From 1916 to 1925, Zia translated several philosophical and theological writings from English to Chinese, which built up his knowledge of Western philosophy and Christian theology.

Zia continued to deepen his knowledge of Western philosophy when he was working in the YMCA. From 1925 to 1927, the Chinese YMCA even sent Zia to study Western philosophy at the University of Chicago and Harvard University, where he attended lectures given by Alfred North Whitehead and George Edward Moore. When Zia returned to China in 1928 he was appointed a professor at Lingnan University, although between 1936 and 1939 he left this position and served as a teacher at the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement. Unfortunately, after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), Zia had to flee with his family, colleagues and students to Chungking. When the Communists' final victory in the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949) was confirmed in 1949, Zia fled to Hong Kong with his family and taught philosophy at Chung Ching College and the Hong Kong Baptist College until 1958, when Francis P. Jones invited him to be the translator and editor of the *Christian Classics Library* (基督教歷代名著集成). Zia and his family accepted the offer and moved to Drew University, New Jersey, the United States. During Zia's living in the United States, he also developed his theology of in-ism. In 1986, Zia finally decided to move back to Guangzhou, China, and died there in 1991 at the age of 99.

Owing to his profound understanding of Chinese and Western philosophies, the majority of Zia's works in philosophy and theology are related to comparative studies between the Eastern and Western Traditions. For example, in Zia's early work *Philosophy of Religion* 宗教哲學 (1928), Zia applied Whitehead's formulation of religion to analyse the religiousness of Confucianism and Buddhism. Furthermore, Zia's remarkable work in his late period, *Christianity and Chinese Thought* 基督教與中國思想 (1972), explicitly compared the *Doctrine of the Mean* to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation when he formulated his theology of Chinese Christianity. Since comparative philosophy accounts for a significant portion of Zia's works, in the following section we shall introduce an innovative, recently proposed methodology—the method of sublation—to evaluate Zia's philosophy and theology.

Methodology: Method of Sublation

While comparative methods are widely adopted by both Western researchers studying Chinese philosophy and modern Chinese philosophers who reformulate Chinese philosophy with the help of Western philosophy, contemporary philosophers' are still undecided over the best method of comparison. Some philosophers try to find an objective method to bridge Chinese and Western philosophies, and

Lin Ma and Jaap van Brakel proposed three necessary conditions for “interpretation in comparative and Chinese philosophy: the interpreter must presuppose that there are mutually recognizable human practices; the interpreter must presuppose that ‘the other’ is, on the whole, sincere, consistent, and right; the interpreter must be committed to certain epistemic virtues” (Ma and Brakel 2016, 575).

By contrast, instead of looking for a methodology that transcends Eastern and Western traditions, Jana Rošker argues that “the methodology in question is a system underlying one of the philosophies under comparison, namely the Western one. There is no third, ‘objective’ methodology” (Rošker 2022a, 306). She thus proposes a “framework of post-comparative approaches, i.e. the method of trans-cultural sublation” as follows:

- Step 1. *Similarities*: first we identify the similarities of the two *comparata*.
- Step 2. *Differences*: then we identify the differences between them by considering the main paradigms of the respective frames of reference to which they belong.
- Step 3. *Dialectic of eliminating and preserving*: in the next step we eliminate certain aspects of the two *comparata* and preserve certain other elements. This decision does not arise automatically from the internal structure of dialectical thinking (as, for example, in Hegelian dialectics), but is the result of a conscious choice made on the basis of inspiration arising from the tension between the differences identified in Step 2.
- Step 4. *Sublation*: the process established in steps 1–3 leads us to a cognitive shift that is the condition for the possibility of the realization of step 5.
- Step 5. *New insight*: this new insight is the result of the shift accomplished in step 4. This new insight can manifest itself in one or more new ideas, propositions or theses. (Rošker 2022a, 307)

Step 3 is a critical point because, from this step onwards the two *comparata* are no longer themselves, as certain aspects are eliminated while certain other elements are preserved, but there is no objective standard determining which parts are preserved or eliminated, for different philosophers may have different preferences.¹

1 On an online seminar organized by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Macau on 20 April 2022, the author asked Rošker whether she would propose any general standard to preserve or eliminate elements in the method of sublation, but Rošker explicitly refused to provide any standard because she thought every philosopher should have their own subjective criteria to decide which elements should be preserved or eliminated.

As Rošker clarifies, “There is no third, external methodology which could equip us with some objective criteria of comparison”, (Rošker 2022b, 170) because one cannot transcend from one’s own cultural horizon of understanding when comparing two cultural traditions.

Nevertheless, the impossibility of having a set of objective criteria for comparison does not mean that comparative studies are meaningless. By contrast, Rošker argues that the “translations” of concepts and accounts from one tradition to another can bring new insights to both traditions. “Knowledge of the specific frame of reference that has emerged in the historical development of Chinese philosophy is of paramount importance in order to interpret certain concepts and transfer them into the framework of global philosophy”. (Rošker 2023, 132) The ultimate goal of comparative studies under such a framework is to generate new insights answering existing philosophical questions by creating a “new cognitive substances”, which integrates two different referential frameworks. As Rošker puts it: “if we consider fusion as a metaphor for a particular kind of philosophical thinking, then we must admit that new philosophical insights are always based on new cognitive substances” (Rošker 2023, 133). As we shall see, Zia has also created a new cognitive substance generating new insights, because his neo-in-ism theology integrated the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean* to address the problems of insufficient religiousness in Confucianism and extremism in Christianity.

Preservation and elimination of elements are conditioned by the philosophical concerns and tasks prioritized by post-comparative philosophers. These are necessary tasks in post-comparative philosophy because, as Rošker claims,

Different referential frames can lead to different descriptions and interpretations of the same objective reality. This is also the reason why trans-cultural research can sometimes produce misunderstandings between different cultures instead of eliminating or at least diminishing them. (Rošker 2022b, 170)

In other words, to show the contributions of two philosophies to a particular philosophical question, one must select only relevant elements from them. For instance, Rošker was interested in Zeno’s Flying Arrow Problem and how Zeno and Hui Shi offered different formulations and solutions to this. While “Zeno actually deni[ed]the continuity of motion”, Hui Shi believed that “every object or entity has a multifaceted nature and can change depending on the point of observance, which is always relative” (Rošker 2022a, 308). For Hui Shi, whether an arrow is at rest or in motion is relative to different points of view. Here Rošker

states: “Hui Shi’s proposition includes and expands on Zeno’s argument, but due to its insufficiency it also negates it. Zeno argues the flying arrow stands still. In Hui Shi’s view, it does not stand still, (although it also doesn’t move)” (ibid., 309). Then Rošker proposes the “processual view, which is closer to Hui Shi’s theory” as the standard to decide which elements should be preserved and eliminated. “The processual view can include both static and moving phases, whereas the unmovable and unchangeable being cannot include any motion. In other words, the dynamic can include the static, but not vice versa.” (ibid.) Since Hui Shi’s view can include Zeno’s but Zeno’s cannot include Hui Shi’s, Zeno’s assumption that all motions are illusions is eliminated.

Based on the decision made in step 3, a new theory which is different from the two *comparata* is formed in step 4. In Rošker’s case, inspired by Hui Shi, she proposed the processual view that “the flying arrow is simultaneously moving and at a standstill”, but what Hui Shi claimed was that “there is a time in which a flying arrow is simultaneously not moving and not standing still” (ibid., 310). So Rošker was not simply interpreting Hui Shi’s argument but actually proposed a new one based on Hui Shi’s philosophy. In this sense, Rošker “sublated” Hui Shi’s discussion on the flying arrow, leading to a new insight in step 5.

A direct challenge to Rošker’s method of sublation is the problem of subjectivity and bias. Rošker did not propose a method to interpret Chinese philosophy with the help of the Western philosophical framework “properly”, but instead a method to produce “new insights” by comparing different philosophies. Moreover, Rošker did not propose any explicit standard to decide which elements to preserve or eliminate, as she believes that the *dialectic of eliminating and preserving* varies with persons and contexts.

Nevertheless, instead of viewing Rošker’s method of sublation as a *normative* principle evaluating the success and failure of comparative philosophy, one may regard it as a *narrative* explanation of how philosophers create a *new* philosophy. In doing so, the method of sublation helps one appreciate the *new insights* proposed by philosophers (remarkably modern Chinese philosophers) who formulate their innovative philosophies by comparing and criticizing existing philosophical frameworks, rather than criticizing their “misinterpretations” of Western or Eastern philosophical texts.

Yet from the perspective of hermeneutics, Rošker’s method of sublation lacks an essential step before “step 1”, namely, *horizons of understanding*. Identifying the similarities between two *comparata* naturally requires a pre-established understanding of both of them. Let there be two sets $\{x\} = \{a1, a2, a3, a4\}$ and $\{y\} = \{a4, a5, a6, a7\}$; without understanding the elements of these two sets, one could

not identify *a4* as a similar element shared by both sets. However, philosophical traditions are not necessarily clearly defined. Different philosophers may have different understandings of the same philosophical tradition and therefore disagree with each other on the elements it contains, or which element is its essence. For example, Zia argued that *in-ism* is the essence of Confucianism while Mou argued that moral subjectivity is the essence of Confucianism (Zia 1969b, 17). Hermeneutically speaking, it is because humans' understanding is always conditioned by their horizons of understanding.

When one understands a philosophical tradition, one's understanding is inevitably conditioned by one's horizons of understanding. As Gadamer stated:

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. ... A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, 'to have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond. (Gadamer 1975, 301)

Therefore, to understand how Zia picked up similarities between Confucianism and Christianity, it is important to articulate Zia's *horizons of understanding*.

Thus, in the following sections we will first outline Zia's development of his theology of Chinese Christianity before using the revised method of sublation to examine Zia's *in-ism* and acknowledge its innovativeness, for he sublated both Confucianism and Christianity by bridging the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the Doctrine of Incarnation.

Confucianism According to Zia's *in-ism*

There are only a few academic discussions on Zia's *in-ism* in both Chinese and English academic circles. In the former, one of the most comprehensive introductions to Zia's philosophy would be Ho Hing-Cheong's dissertation *Identity Development of Christian Diaspora: Thought Process of N.Z. Zia (1892-1991)* (離散中的基督徒身份建構：謝扶雅思想歷程) (Ho 2013), along with two journal articles, one written by Zhao Qingwen on Zia's concept of "Christian Nobleman (*Jidu tu Junzi* 基督徒君子)" (Zhao 2015) and another one by Jiang Ryh-Shin which criticized Zia for "cutting off the [Confucian] texts from their traditions to highlight the universality of an absolute God to legitimise his own 'vision'" (Jiang 2001, 154). Unfortunately, Jiang did not even articulate Zia's *in-ism* and merely outlined his misinterpretations of Confucian texts. Jiang did not reconstruct Zia's

philosophical arguments for in-ism, because he claimed that he only wanted to see “how Zia’s new interpretations of the tradition of Chinese Classics may be acknowledged” (ibid., 151). Moreover, Jiang did not mention the history of the concept of *Zhong* as proposed by Zia (as we shall see in the following) and misunderstood things in claiming that Zia’s reinterpretation of *Zhong* “merely focused on *Yi Jing* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*” (ibid.). Contrary to Jiang’s understanding, as we shall see, Zia’s reinterpretation of the Chinese Classics also covers the *Analects* and *Book of Documents*.

In the English-language academic circle, there are currently two journal articles focusing on Zia: one co-authored by Ho Hing-Cheong and Lai Pan-Chiu (Ho and Lai 2008), and another one by Albert Wu (Wu 2017). Unlike Jiang’s article, both articles provide some contextualization of Zia’s theology and philosophy in relation to the trends of Chinese philosophy, Western theology and political ideologies. Owing to the limited secondary literature, this section focuses on Zia’s primary texts and will only occasionally refer to the secondary writings listed above.

Zia’s philosophy and theology of in-ism or meanism² began with his reinterpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. In his article “In-ism—The Unique Philosophy in China” published in 1969, Zia outlined three principles of in-ism: *neutrality* (*Zhongli* 中立), *emptiness* (*Xuzhong* 虛衷) and *synthesis* (*Zonghe* 綜合).

Neutrality refers to the principle of *impence* from extremes. Zia claimed: “In the *Doctrine of the Mean* it is written that ‘how strong one would be when one is neutral without dependence!’ Here ‘neutral’ merely means independence” (Zia 1969b, 2). Zia’s interpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* here is based on Cheng Yi’s commentary on the *Doctrine*: “Being without extreme is called *Zhong*, being without changes is called *Yong*.” Zia continued:

The form of ‘*Zhong*’ varies with time but its principle remains ‘unchanged.’ Confucius is honoured as the ‘sage of time’ and the Way of *Zhongyong* is called *Shizhong* 時中. *Shizhong* does not refer to mechanical reduction by half or mandatory regulation on comprise but to the natural flow, as it is said that ‘all that depart are like flowing waters which flow ceaselessly by day and night’. (Ibid., 3)

Emptiness refers to the suspension of prejudices and bias. Zia cited the following line from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, “The status when joy, anger, sadness and happiness have yet occurred is called *Zhong*”, and argued that

2 While Ho and Lai translated *weizhonglun* 唯中論 as meanism, Zia himself translated the term as in-ism, hence this article uses the latter term.

Confucians believe that the Being of the universe is neutrality which is neither matter nor mind. [...] Confucians aimed to interact with objects with ‘emptiness’, which means the rejection of all prejudices and the elimination of coloured glasses so that one may interact with the objective objects with a mind without emotions. (Ibid., 4)

Since the *Doctrine of the Mean* transcends all prejudice, it also implies flexibility and freedom from the limitations of particular perspectives.

Synthesis refers to “collecting great achievements” (*Jidaicheng* 集大成). In his article from 1962, Zia did not explain the concept of synthesis in detail but simply cited the *Counsels of the Great Yu*, from the *Book of Documents*, which states that “the minds of humans are vulnerable, while the mind of the Way is mysterious. Being focus and uniform, one can sincerely hold fast the mean (*ren xin wei wei dao xin wei wei wei jing wei yi yun zhi jue Zhong* 人心惟危，道心惟微，惟精惟一，允執厥中)”, and argued that “*zhizhong* 執中 means exquisite synthesis” (ibid., 6).

Zia further elaborated on in-ism in 1967 and argued that

the philosophical perspective of the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a *Zhiliangyongzhong* 執兩用中 [balance between two extremes] of semi-realism and semi-idealism. All the established things we know are the so-called *Zhizhonghe* 致中和 [the achievement of the mean and harmony]. *Zhong* is a purely objective Being while *He* is a purely subjective field. (Ibid., 11).

When Zia wrote a review of Mou Zong-san’s *On the Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy* in 1963, Zia rejected Mou’s claims that “subjectivity” is the essence of Chinese philosophy and that Confucius, Mengzi and the Lu-Wang School are the orthodoxy of Confucianism, because Zia insisted that the essence of Chinese philosophies, including Confucianism, is the teaching of *Zhiliangyongzhong*, which is found in the *Analects*, *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Zia further argued that the in-ism expressed in Confucian classics transcends subjectivity and objectivity. He said:

If you read the *Analects* once, you should experience Confucius’ peacefulness and uprightness and see his magnanimous and cheerful face. [...] Confucius has a nice expression: ‘*Zhongyong* is a virtue so ultimate that people can hardly sustain it for long’ [中庸之為德也，其至矣乎！民鮮久矣。] (*Analects* 6.29). The problems of losing *Zhongyong* are ‘excess or lack’ [過猶不及] (*Analects* 11.16). Subjectivity is merely an ‘excess’ while

objectivity is just a ‘lack’. Individualistic liberalism is an excess while selfless socialism is a lack. However, the method of *Zhiliangyongzhong* is not to eliminate but actually manipulate both extremes as the ‘uses’ of the ‘Mean’. [...] Therefore, on the one hand, Confucius’ teaching on humaneness includes the subject of ‘starting from oneself to become humane’ [為仁由己] (*Analects* 12.1), and, on the other hand, includes the object of ‘suppressing oneself and restoring propriety to achieve humaneness’ [克己復禮為仁]. (Ibid., 16)

One may question Zia in that even if his reading of *Analects* is accurate, it only means that both *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* embrace in-ism but not the *Book of Documents* and *Yi Ching*. Therefore, in 1969, Zia proposed an etymological study on the concept of *Zhong*, arguing that there are four stages of development represented by *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents*, *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* respectively, which are:

- (1) Ancient period (during the mythological period of Fuxi 伏羲), where *Zhong* was understood as “the *Zhong* between the sexual intercourse between male and female” (男女牝牡之『中』) (ibid., 47), as Zia said:

The concept of *Zhong* in the ancient period arises from the observation of the interactions between *Yin* 陰 and *Yang* 陽. As it is written in the commentary on *Xi Ci* I, ‘In the ancient time when Fuxi reigned over the world, he looked up at the signs in Heaven, looked down at the laws on the Earth, and observed the traces of birds and beasts and the suitability of land. He drew inspiration from things close to him and distant from him. It was them that the eight trigrams were first created.’ (Ibid., 47)

- (2) Political period (during the period of Yao and Shun), “*Zhong* as the Mean between two extremes” (執兩用中之『中』): Zia quotes the *Xiong Fan* 洪範 from the *Book of Documents* “Great is the Kingly Way with no preference and no nepotism. Just is the Kingly Way with no nepotism and no preference. Right is the Kingly Way with no opposition and no one-sidedness” (無偏無黨，王道蕩蕩；無黨無偏，王道平平；無反無側，王道正直。) and argued that here *Zhong* refers to political neutrality which belongs to the field of “civic education” (ibid., 47).
- (3) Ethical Period (during the period of Confucius), “*Zhong* as avoidance of both excess and lack” (無過無不及之『中』): Zia argued that in the *Analects* Confucius “moralized the *Zhong* from its political context” and regarded the

Zhong as “the foundation of interpersonal interactions within the five relationships” (ibid., 47).

- (4) Philosophical Period (during the late period of Warring States) “*Zhong* as the foundation of all under Heaven” (天下之大本之『中』): Here *Zhong* argued that a “metaphysics of in-ism” which explained the creation of the universe was formulated because the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* and commentaries on *Yi Ching* “deeply theatricalized and even philosophically systematized the concept of *Zhong* which they had inherited from the orthodoxy” (ibid., 48).

In short, according to Zia’s reconstruction of the history of the concept of *Zhong*, in-ism implies mutuality, the mean, appropriateness and creativity. Here one may realize that there are at least two theoretical weaknesses of Zia’s in-ism: he only explained *Zhong* but disregarded *Yong* and he arbitrarily assumed the continuity and consistency of the concepts of *Zhong* expressed in the *Yi Ching*, *Book of Documents*, *Analects*, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Although this paper does not aim to criticize Zia’s interpretation of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, future research should pay attention to these weaknesses when discussing in-ism.

However, according to Zia, Chinese philosophy, which is dominated by Confucianism, failed to achieve the principle of mutuality of in-ism expressed in the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, because of the Confucian emphasis on humans over Heaven. Based on his philological knowledge, Zia argued that Chinese people understand Heaven in terms of humans.

The characters *xin* 信 [belief] and *lun* 倫 [relation] follow the radical of *ren* 人, while in the character *tin* 天 [Heaven] there is *ren* 人 inside. Therefore, *tinwen* 天文, *tindao* 天道, *tinlun* 天倫 and *tinxing* are all embedded in the concepts of *renwen* 人文, *rendao* 人道, *renlun* 人倫 and *renxing* 人性. (Zia 1972, 62)

Here humans and Heaven are not opposites but are interflows because they are defined by each other. In this sense, the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans is actually the restoration of the original common ground shared by Heaven and humans. “Therefore, on the one hand, the Chinese philosophy of life is not individualism; on the other hand, it is not collectivism. Instead, it is the harmony of mutuality. Such mutuality is both the Way of Humans, the Way of Heaven, and the Way of the Unity of Heaven and Humans” (ibid., 61–62).

However, in practice Confucians emphasize humans over Heaven, which fails to keep the mean (*bu Zhong* 不中). Confucians only propose a ‘bottom-up’ approach

to the Unity of Heaven and Humans through humans' moral practices but do not propose any "top-down" approach through revelation.

Chinese thought generally begins with human nature and emphasizes the 'original mind' *benxin* 本心 of humans. By contrast, mainline Western thoughts only desire to pursue an objective 'Being'. The Chinese emphasis on the problem of 'mind nature' *xinxing* 心性 assumed the teaching that 'what Heaven commands is called nature' (天命之為性). Thus, human nature is originally heavenly nature and human's mind can be heavenly mind. (Ibid.)

To overcome the Chinese emphasis on human moral practices, Zia argued that a "neo-in-ism" is needed. As a Christian theologian, Zia naturally turned to Christian tradition to look for solutions.

Christianity According to Zia's Understanding

As mentioned above, owing to his religious experience during his studies in Japan, Zia converted to Christianity, and his knowledge of theology and philosophy was further deepened by his study at Harvard and Chicago in the 1920s and his leading role in the Chinese translation project of *Christian Classics Library*. He finally developed his "incarnational" theology in *Christianity and Chinese Thought* in 1972, which he called "neo-in-ism theology".

Zia began his reformulation of Christian theology by defining Christianity as Jesus Christ's religion (*yesujidude zhongjiao* 耶穌基督的宗教). Zia mentioned Barth's reluctance to name Christianity as a religion because "all religions are bottom-up yet revelation is top-down" (Zia 1972, 22). He then contrasted Barth's views with those of Schleiermacher and Tillich, because Schleiermacher defined religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence" while Tillich defined it in terms of "ultimate concern" (ibid.). Zia was dissatisfied with Barth's views of religion, stating:

Christianity is one kind of religion which is widely acknowledged by Chinese society. It is neither bottom-up nor top-down. What we call 'Jesus Christ's Religion' today refers to an emphasis on our mediator Jesus Christ—to communicate with God 'in the name of Jesus Christ'.³ (Ibid., 23)

3 While Zia's view is similar to Pannenberg's claim that Christianity is both top-down and bottom-up, and thus defining Christianity solely as top-down or bottom-up is one-sided, it is unclear whether Zia was influenced by Pannenberg because he never cited him. Yet since Pannenberg's teacher, Karl Löwith, was the adviser to Zia's translation of the *Selections of Kierkegaard's Writings* in 1963, it is possible that Zia was influenced by both men.

Zia further clarified the relationship between Jesus and the *Old Testament*: Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament. Nevertheless,

the Messiah the saviour who descended to the world does not only save Jews but also Gentiles; he wants to restore Israel but also all nations in the world. In this sense, Jesus Christ expanded a typical national religion—Judaism—to a universal religion. [...] while Christianity is not the sole universal religion, Christianity remarkably highlights the grace of God. (Ibid., 26)

Since the grace of God is for all nations, it is also for the Chinese people. Thus Zia argued that if Christianity was able to be expressed by Greek philosophy in the early church, it could also be expressed by Chinese thought in the Chinese translation of the Bible. “The most obvious case is to translate ‘Logos’ carefully and prayerfully as ‘*Dao*’” (ibid., 28). Zia very much appreciated the Chinese translation of Logos as *Dao* 道, because *Dao* means not only the Way but also the Spoken Word, which are two important meanings implied by Logos:

The *Dao* 道 in the Chinese term *Daoli* 道理 is actually equivalent to the sense of *Dao* as “to speak” (in novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties). [...] But there is a difference between Chinese and Western cultures, as the latter values theories while the former highlights practices and the latter emphasizes “to know” while the former emphasizes ‘to act’. Since Jesus said ‘I am the Way’ (John 14:6) and sincerely asked people to ‘follow me’, his incarnation aligns with the practical teaching of ‘lead by example’ appreciated by the Chinese instead of merely saying some fine words. More concretely, God became a man and descended to the world as a living example to all humans, while the climax of Jesus’ life was his bearing of the cross on the way to Golgotha. (Ibid., 36)

Here one may realize that Zia’s understanding of Christianity is largely influenced by his Chinese Confucian tradition, as he frequently related Christian concepts to Confucian terms (e.g. *Dao*).

Then Zia argued that the incarnational theology of Christianity is the product of the interactions between Hebrew and Greek traditions:

Westerners are nations of reason, they emphasize reasoning and are good at logic. Unlike Jews who depend on intuition, they want to demonstrate and explain everything. When Jews were governed and suppressed by the Roman Empire, Jews earnestly looked for salvation by the Messiah.

When God responded to their demands, He sent his only begotten Son who became a man in the world. Yet Jews were astonished and did not believe in him. Some of his beloved disciples even betrayed him or denied knowing him. Until he died and was resurrected, when they were awakened and touched, as Jesus fulfilled his teachings: ‘For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’ (Ibid., 34–35)

For this reason, Zia regarded the Christian doctrine of the incarnation as a bridge between Hebrew and Greek traditions, and he also wanted to turn it into a bridge between Chinese culture and Christianity. Since Chinese tradition highlights “to act”, Zia argued that the Chinese may understand the Christian doctrine of incarnation by highlighting Jesus’s teaching “to follow him”. Zia cited Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* to elaborate on the relationship between the incarnation of Christ and following Jesus:

The incarnation, the words and acts of Jesus, and his death on the cross, are all indispensable parts of that image. But it is not the same image as Adam bore in the primal glory of paradise. Rather, it is the image of one who enters a world of sin and death, who takes upon himself all the sorrows of humanity, who meekly bears God’s wrath and judgement against sinners, and who obeys his will with unswerving devotion in suffering and death, the man born to poverty, the friend of publicans and sinners, the man of sorrows, rejected of man and forsaken of God. Here is God made man, here is man in the new image of God. (Bonhoeffer 1979, 340, cited in Zia 1972, 38)

According to Zia’s interpretation, Bonhoeffer argued that Christians should be inspired by the image of Jesus dying on the cross. However, because humans as sinners cannot transform themselves into the image of Christ, they must be transformed by Christ first. “Christ’s works on us must be completed by his image within ourselves, which is the image when Christ incarnated, died on the cross but was glorified. Therefore, in the great event of incarnation, the whole of humanity can restore its dignity in the image of God.” (Zia 1972, 38)

Having clarified Zia’s basic understanding of both Confucianism and Christianity, in the following section we shall examine how Zia’s Confucian reading of Christianity conditioned his sublation of both traditions and produced his theology of Chinese Christianity.

Step 1: Mutuality as the Similarity between Confucianism and Christianity

Zia saw the opportunity to integrate Christianity and Confucianism from the Confucian problem of the Unity of Heaven and Humans, and argued that the Christian doctrine of incarnation fulfils the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. As Zia said:

Only Jesus Christ has both divinity and humanity. To humans, he represented God, but to God, he represented humans to redeem their sins and to reconcile humans with God. Chinese religious thought is about the Unity of Heaven and Humans. Generally speaking, the Chinese idea of the Unity of Heaven and Humans has no contradiction with Christianity. Nevertheless, there is no concept of a mediator with both divinity and humanity like Jesus Christ in any Chinese religious idea or thought. (Zia 1972, 23)

For Zia, Jesus Christ is a perfect *Zhong* between God and humans and therefore the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. On the one hand, Christ is “top-down” because he is the Son of God, descended from Heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, Christ is also “bottom-up” because he died and was resurrected, and represented humans to redeem their sins in front of God the Father. In this sense, the incarnation is a bilateral process and overcomes the problem of the emphasis on humans over Heaven in Confucianism. Therefore, the major similarity between Christianity and Confucianism according to Zia is *mutuality* or *unity*: the Unity of Heaven and Humans in the Confucian ideal and the Unity of Divinity and Humanity in Christ. Yet Zia also realized that there is no one like Christ in Chinese history or tradition, which leads to step 2 of his sublation: differences.

Step 2: Differences between Confucianism and Christianity: Faith, Knowledge Practice and Incarnation

As mentioned above, the Christian doctrine of incarnation is not found in Chinese culture. To articulate the uniqueness of incarnation, Zia returned to the Chinese translation of *Logos* and *Dao*:

We have used the commonly used Chinese character *Dao* 道 to translate *Logos*, *verbum* and word. However, the concept that this *Dao* can become

and must become ‘flesh’ to reveal God’s ‘fullness of grace’ belongs to the realm of ‘faith’ and is not inherent in the Chinese cultural tradition. (Zia 1972, 64–65).

In Confucian tradition, *Dao* is always related to the concept of “corrected names” (*zhengming* 正名): namely, people fulfilling their duties according to their social roles. “The monarch ‘should’ act the *Dao* of being a monarch, a father ‘should’ act the *Dao* of being a father [...] Chinese explains *Dao* in terms of ‘one should do’ but never explains *Logos* in light of ‘God’s fullness of grace’.” (Ibid., 66)

However, Zia argued that *Logos* cannot be understood in terms of moral duties or reasoning but only religious experience:

the Holy name and the Holy word of Christianity are to be sought through Jesus Christ and prayer in His name (John 14:14). ‘Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven’ (Matthew 6:9–10). The sanctity and significance of the Holy name are not merely ethical matters of ‘names and duties’ (*mingfen* 名分) nor are they deductive or inductive logical problems. They are devout religious beliefs and spiritual communion through sincere prayer. (Ibid., 66)

Here Zia pointed out a trichotomy of Faith (*xin* 信), Knowledge (*zhi* 知) and Practice (*xing* 行) to outline the differences among the Hebrew, Greek and Chinese traditions. The doctrine of incarnation comes from the Hebrew tradition of faith, yet in the Chinese tradition practice is emphasized over faith. As Zia put it:

Jews and Indians are born to be religious nations. By contrast, when it comes to religion, Westerners prefer to articulate ‘faith’ by ‘knowing’ while Chinese prefer to manifest ‘faith’ by ‘practice’. Greeks particularly love theories while the Chinese highlight practices. [However,] the root of religion is only found in faith instead of theological doctrines or moral actions. [...]

Chinese’s straight-forward faith is totally different from Hebrew’s because Judaism is totally theocentric while Chinese culture is always human-centric; the religious life in China comes from Heaven, unlike Judaism where everything comes from God’s revelation. (Ibid., 60)

Having studied and translated Western Christian philosophical and theological writings into Chinese, Zia realized an intrinsic problem of Western philosophy and theology: they over-rely on reasoning and dialectics, leading to extremes and conflicts, e.g. nominalism vs. realism in scholasticism, and rationalism vs empiricism in the Enlightenment (ibid., 52).

Conversely, Zia is more concerned with the intrinsic limitations of Chinese culture which emphasizes humans over Heaven. As mentioned above, because the Confucian ideal is the Unity of Heaven and Humans, and yet Confucians only provided a one-sided approach to achieve this goal through human-centric moral practices, Confucians necessarily failed to achieve their goal. In-ism emphasizes the principle of *Zhong* which the human-centric Chinese tradition could never achieve. This determines Zia's decision to eliminate and preserve the elements of Christianity and Confucianism, respectively.

Step 3: Eliminating Knowing and the *Old Testament* and Preserving Incarnation, Faith and Practice

Surprisingly, Zia did not explicitly eliminate elements from the Chinese Confucian tradition when formulating his theology of neo-in-ism. Instead, he explicitly eliminated the Western or Greek element of Christianity, namely, the overemphasis on knowledge and reasoning, which leads to uncertainty. As he wrote:

The value of Western philosophy lies in its inherent scepticism, as it starts with doubt in everything. However, orthodox philosophy does not end with passive doubt but, instead, strives to investigate thoroughly, analysing every detail. Although the 'ultimate' truth may never be attained, this deep 'ultimate concern' [...] leads us into the realm of religion. (Zia 1972, 50)

Nevertheless, there is a conflict between the Western emphasis on reasoning and knowing and the Jewish emphasis on faith. "Belief leads to salvation while disbelief leads to death. It is straightforward and direct without the need for arguments. [However,] in the Western context where intellectual curiosity is strong, questioning and debating are essential to delve into the reasons behind belief." (ibid., 55–56) Instead, Zia preserved faith and practice so that Christianity and Confucianism can complement each other, as we shall see in step 4.

Moreover, although Zia highlighted the importance of the Hebrew concept of faith, he argued that a Chinese Christian Holy Scripture should be written and certain Hebrew cultural elements that are irrelevant to Chinese Christian life should be eliminated. In 1970, he wrote a letter to Fong Shen-Lei Paul 封尚禮, the editor of *Ching Feng* 景風, arguing that the Chinese Christian Holy Scripture should consist of four sections: (1) the *Complete New Testament*, (2) the Outlines of the *Old Testament*, (3) the Essentials of the Confucian Canon, and (4) References to Daoism and Buddhism. Zia argued that:

the Torah, books of prophets and poems should be studied by Chinese Christians, while the history books of Israel should be left for historians to study. Why should Chinese Christians spend time reading the history books of Israel? [...] If Christianity can accept the canon of Judaism, why cannot it accept the thirteen orthodox classics [of Confucianism] and the collections of Daoist and Buddhist texts? While faithful Chinese Christians and worldwide Christians from different nations and ethnicities share the doctrine of 'one God, one faith and one baptism' and in spiritual communion, they do not have to be uniform. (Zia 1977, 155)

Zia also stated that "the West has indeed employed the irony of Socrates to present the concept of 'God's irony' (Kierkegaard) [...] Why cannot Chinese believers also explore the teachings of Jesus Christ through the insights of Confucius, Mozi, Laozi, Cheng-Zhu, Lu-Wang, and others?" (Zia 1972, 64–65). As Zia's student, Kwok Shu-him 郭書謙, explained:

Although the Scripture represents the Word of God, He and His word are carefully interpreted by Westerners and God's revelation is not limited to the New and Old Testaments. ... Hebrew culture is about laws and prophets; Greek culture is deduced and developed from the term *Logos*, while Chinese culture is about the morality of humaneness and rightness. If Jesus were born in China, he would also say I have not come to abolish the morality of humaneness and rightness, but to fulfil them. (Kwok 1995, 81)

Zia's downplaying of the Old Testament is due to his "incarnational" or "Christocentric" interpretation of Christianity, as mentioned in step 0. Because he regarded the books on the history of Israel as something irrelevant to the salvation, incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ, Zia thought Chinese Christianity could simply omit them. Moreover, the parts of the Old Testament that are irrelevant to God's fullness of grace, salvation and incarnation could actually be replaced by Chinese philosophy.

Step 4: Sublation of the Unity of Heaven and Humans by the Unity of Faith and Practice

As mentioned above, according to Zia's diagnosis, the main problem of Christianity is extremism, which he argued came from the Western overemphasis on knowing. For this reason, he eliminated knowing and argued that Chinese culture,

as dominated by Confucianism, is more consistent with the Judeo-Christian emphasis on faith because Chinese culture does not highlight knowing and reasoning:

The Hebrew people consider 'faith' as their foundation, and for them God exists enterally (Exodus 3:14) without the need of any evidence. The Chinese people tend to verify 'faith' through 'practice', unlike Western nations that must require 'knowing' to justify 'faith'. Confucius said: 'Studying [*xue* 學] what is below, one comprehends [*da* 達] what is above. If there is anyone who knows me, it is Heaven!' (*Analects* 14.35) [...] Here *xue* and *da* are related to *xing* 行. It should be noted that in Chinese, the character *xue* originally means 'learning' and 'practice' rather than 'knowing'. (Zia 1972, 36)

Zia believed that the Chinese emphasis on practice is more consistent with Hebrew emphasis on faith, because the former does not highlight reasoning but asserts humility, a virtue that Christ also expresses:

In terms of attitudes and behaviour towards life, Chinese people emphasize the principle of 'gaining through humility' (謙受益). They deeply understand the truth of 'excessive gain leads to loss' (滿招損) (see the *Book of Documents*). The doctrines of incarnation, the cross and the glorious resurrection, are merely about the paradoxical truth that the supreme one willingly humbles himself and suffering can become a blessing. (Ibid., 65)

Therefore, for Zia, Confucianism and Christianity complement each other: the Christian belief in a transcendent and immanent God reveals the foundation of moral practices, while the Confucian emphasis on moral practices transforms abstract religious doctrines into concrete virtues.

On the other hand, Zia claimed that the main problem of Chinese Confucianism is the intrinsic and necessary failure to achieve the goal of the Unity of Heaven and Humans. Zia believed that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation could help Confucianism overcome the limitations of its human-centric approach. "Jesus Christ is the one who fulfils the human-centric Chinese culture and the idea of the 'mutuality between humans and Heaven'. He must enrich the Chinese thoughts with 'truth' beyond the 'Way' and grant the Chinese nation eternal 'life'." (ibid., 64–65).

A real Unity of Heaven and Humans, according to Zia, can only be achieved by spiritual communication when God and humans meet each other. Zia's emphasis

on communication is possibly influenced by Kierkegaard's concept of religious passion, as Zia repeatedly highlighted that the Chinese people lack this, as seen in the following passage:

The spiritual communication in Christianity is the profound and genuine Unity of Heaven and Humans, transcending the mere reciprocal interactions between Heaven and humans in the Chinese perspective. The Chinese saying 'doing one's best and leaving the rest to fate' reflects a lack of strong and fervent faith and a shallowness of spiritual intimacy. Like the Hebrew people, the Chinese also recognize the supreme and transcendent 'Heaven' and show reverence and piety towards it, even personifying it in some cases. [...] Nevertheless, there has never been a father-son relationship as intimate and sincere as the one expressed by Jesus, where the Father and the Son are inseparable, as stated in 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' and 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son' (John 14:11; 10:38). (Ibid., 66)

Although in the *Classic of Filial Piety* Confucius said that "No filial piety is greater than reverence for father, no reverence for father is greater than the universe," Zia argued that Confucius only "considers the Heaven-human relationship in terms of the kinship between father and son without addressing the aspect of 'spiritual' life. [...] if we can experience 'living in Christ' as the apostle Paul did, this 'new human being' will be blessed as they abide with God eternally" (ibid.). Therefore, the spiritual relationship between God and man in Christianity extended and sublated Confucianism at a religious level.

Step 5: New Insights: Critical Inclusiveness, Dynamic Neutrality and Mystical Practice

Based on Zia's comparison between the Unity of Heaven and Humans and the incarnation discussed above, Zia completed his theology of Chinese Christianity and outlined three characteristics: *critical inclusiveness* (批判的包容性), *dynamic neutrality* (動力的中庸性) and *mystical practice* (密契的實踐), as explained below.

Critical inclusiveness: According to Zia, the *Doctrine of the Mean* implies inclusiveness according to the principle of mutuality. "Therefore, not only does Chinese Christianity embrace the strengths of different Western denominations, but also respects and values other overseas and domestic religious beliefs. It believes in the coexistence of different beliefs, does not exclude others and does not isolate

itself.” (Zia 1972, 308) In doing so, Zia believed that Chinese Christianity avoids the religious extremism and conflicts seen in the West.

However, Zia did not explicitly explain why the *Doctrine of the Mean* implies inclusiveness in *Christianity and Chinese Thought*. He only proposed a brief argument in *Collected Essays on In-ism* (*Weizhonglunji* 唯中論集 1969):

The author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* adopted the traditional principle of ‘harmony in differences’ and argued that ‘inclusiveness’ (the ‘Greatness’ of Heaven and Earth) implies the avoidance of paradox and conflicts. Inclusiveness is not unity but harmony. Nor is inclusiveness chaos and disorder, for the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* said in paragraph 10 that ‘the superior man is united [with others] but does not follow [others]’ [君子合而不流]. Therefore, harmony [*he* 和] is the mean [*zhong* 中] between carelessness and manipulation. In this sense, harmony and the mean are de facto equivalent. (Zia 1969b, 165)

Zia’s distinction between *he* 合 and *liu* 流 in the quotation above is related to his criticism of the so-called unity under the state-sanctioned “Three-Self Patriotic Church” which integrated all Protestant denominations in mainland China after 1958. From Zia’s perspective, such unity had nothing to do with ecumenism but was merely a way to limit the freedom of religion.

If humans have no freedom of thought, humans lose the essence of human beings. Religion is the highest inwardness in culture and academics. The essence of religion is the inward peacefulness of individuals. The greatest harm of religions is made when religions are sanctioned by the government or when religions intervene in politics. Fighting for the freedom of religion is the most important task of human beings in the modern age. (Zia 1986, 81)

According to Zia, true unity in Christianity does not come from external forces like politics. Furthermore, unity does not mean the cancellation of differences (e.g. the dissolution of denominations) but instead faith in Jesus Christ. Zia’s understanding of ecumenism echoes the principle of “unity in differences” (*heyi feiyi* 合一非一) proclaimed by the Church of Christ in China, founded in 1927. As Zia argued,

The faithful brothers and sisters of Chinese Christianity can naturally revise their doctrines, ecclesiastical polity and liturgies according to their contexts and inherited traditions, for all churches in the world are united

(*beyi* 合一) but not uniform (*tongyi* 統一). Christ is the head while all churches in the world are bodies. (Ibid., 75)

Zia also criticized the prevailing view of certain Chinese fundamentalist Protestants who excluded Catholicism from Christianity, as he argued that Christians should respect the ecclesiastical polity of other churches:

All religions believing in the same Jesus Christ should be called Christianity, which is distinguished from Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, but not from Catholicism. Furthermore, a united Christianity should have a united Chinese translation of the Scripture, yet each Christian may go to different churches with different ecclesiastical polities and become their congregations. (Ibid., 145)

Moreover, Zia highlighted that such inclusiveness is conditional: it must be *critical*. The inclusiveness of Christianity must assume the priority of Christian doctrines, and especially those of incarnation and salvation. In other words, any teaching that contradicts essential Christian doctrines would be rejected:

However, inclusiveness is not careless integration like the arguments for ‘the same origin of three religions’ in the past or the ‘unity of six religions’ nowadays. Christianity is eternally Christianity. It would not be integrated or combined into Confucianism just because it wants to survive in China. (Zia 1972, 309)

While Zia did not clarify which principles were assumed behind the criticism, it seems that he prioritized certain essential Christian doctrines that should not be compromised for the sake of Christian contextualization, for Christianity is defined by these doctrines. These doctrines may include the Trinity and the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, which are frequently highlighted by Zia’s theological writings.

However, and surprisingly, Zia argued that the Holy Scripture could be compromised, which revealed the ambiguity of what should be upheld in critical inclusivism. As mentioned above, in 1977 Zia proposed the writing of a “Sino-Christian Holy Scripture” consisting of the *New Testament*, a summary of the *Old Testament*, the essentials of Confucianism and a selection of Daoist and Buddhist texts. As he said of this proposal:

Why must Chinese Christians spend effort on reading [the histories of Israel]? ... if Christianity adopts Jewish scriptures, why cannot it adopt

the thirteen canons of Confucianism and the classics of Daoism and Buddhism? The faithful in China and the Christians all over the world from different nations only need to keep the covenant of 'one God, one faith and one baptism' to maintain the unity of inwardness. Other than that, nothing should be uniform. (Zia 1977, 155)

Here Zia argued that the Old Testament is not something to be upheld in Christian contextualization because it is irrelevant to the covenant of "one God, one faith and one baptism". However, incarnation, which is the center of Zia's neo-in-ism theology, is also written in the minor prophets' books in the *Old Testament* (e.g. Malachi 3:1). One would wonder why Zia could arbitrarily conclude that the minor prophet's books and history books in the Old Testament are irrelevant to the covenant of "one God, one faith and one baptism" without further explanation. To overcome Zia's arbitrary and ambiguous concept of critical inclusivism, future contextual theologians should articulate the essential doctrines upheld in Christian contextualization.

Dynamic neutrality: as mentioned above, Zia identified extremism as a major problem of Western Christianity. By contrast, the *Doctrine of the Mean* highlighted the avoidance of extremes. Therefore, Zia argued:

The principle of neutrality is a consistent principle in Chinese cultural thought. Chinese Christianity will also inevitably be guided by this principle. For example, in terms of ecclesiastical polity, it will not lean towards the collectivist structure of Catholicism nor align itself with certain factions of extreme individualistic Protestantism. In theology, it will not lean too far to the right towards the so-called 'fundamentalist' doctrines, nor lean too far to the left towards the 'modernist' tendencies of liberal interpretation. However, neutrality is not about compromise or ambiguity, but is a creative synthesis. It is not rigid and mechanistic, but rather dynamic and innovative. (Zia 1972, 311)

The problem of extremism in Western Christianity, as identified by Zia, is related to his historical context. Having studied Western theology and lived in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s, Zia witnessed waves of social unrest and the theological divides in Western Christianity, as well as in Chinese Christianity, and notably those due to the divide between the "fundamentalism" and "modernism". As mentioned above, Chinese Christianity was severely challenged by the Communists during the Anti-Christian movement in the 1920s. To avoid being labelled an "imperialist spy", two approaches were adopted by the churches in China: fundamentalism, as represented by Sung Shang-chieh 宋尚

節 (1901–1944), Nee Tuo-sheng 倪柝聲 (1903–1972) and Wang Ming-Dao 王明道 (1900–1991), and progressive or liberal theologies, as represented by Wu Yao-tsung 吳耀宗 (1893–1979) and Ting Kuang-hsun 丁光訓 (1915–2012). The progressive campaign was deeply influenced by the Social Gospel movement in the United States led by Reinhold Niebuhr in the early 20th century. Being worried about the invasion of China, progressive theologians sympathized with the Chinese Communist Party and were devoted to social reforms and political movements from the 1920s to the 1950s. While the conservative fundamentalists merely highlighted individual salvation and evangelism, the progressive liberals emphasized social services and political action. Yet Zia identified both extremes as departing from the true Christian faith in his book *Individual Gospel* (個人福音) (Zia 1932). As Ho noted, Zia argued that “the summaries of Christian teachings are loving God and loving others as oneself, while the former is the Individual Gospel, the latter is the Social Gospel” (Ho 2006, 80). Therefore, a comprehensive Christian theology should be both individualistic and societal.

To overcome the problem of extremism in modern Christian theology, Zia introduced dynamic neutralism. Unlike dialectics in Western philosophy, which highlights oppositions (or even struggles, in the case of Marxism), dynamic neutralism emphasizes the dynamic interactions between opposites. As discussed above, according to Zia’s interpretation of the *Yi Ching*, the universe is created by the interactions between *Yin* and *Yang*, but not by the struggle between them. In the case of Christianity, there is no contradiction between the individual gospel (asserted by the fundamentalists) and the social gospel (asserted by the liberals), but the true Christian faith should integrate both aspects to avoid being one-sided, although Zia did not clarify how to manifest such ideal neutralism in evangelism and social actions.

Mystical practice: In the light of the Chinese emphasis on practice and Hebrew emphasis on faith, Zia proposed the concept of mystical practice, and thus that Chinese Christianity could use moral practices to manifest religious passions. As he argued:

Jesus used ‘to do’ to conclude the great teachings of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24–27). Fortunately, Chinese thoughts always experience ‘faith’ through ‘practice’ [...] unlike Westerners who verify ‘faith’ through ‘knowing’. We are good at using experience, love taking action and dislike speculation and arguments. Therefore, the church in China can understand the Lord’s teaching that ‘the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve’ and manifest the teaching sincerely. (Zia 1972, 310)

Zia's comparison of the Chinese emphasis on practicality and the Christian emphasis on faith echoes the perspective of one of his contemporaries, the Chinese philosopher and Kuomintang government officer Chiang Mon-lin 蔣夢麟 (1886–1964), who also studied in the United States, as expressed in his book *Tides from the West* (2012 [1943]). Zia adopted Chiang's categorization of Christian, Greek and Chinese thought, which stated that

Christian thought is heavenly or godly, Chinese thought is worldly, and Greek thought unworldly [...] The fruits of the tree of science ripen in intellectual gardens alone – within the system of Christian dogma or that of Chinese moral precepts no science could have been produced. (Chiang 2012, 384–85).

Both Chiang and Zia agreed that Chinese thought highlighted moral practicality, or as Chiang put it: “Chinese thought is centred upon the development of human relations. We are interested in natural laws only so far as they are capable of serving as guides for human conduct” (ibid., 376), and “Besides being practical, our people are imbued with a sound moral sense. It may also be said that because we are moral we are practical. For morals refer to conduct, which is necessarily judged by practical results” (ibid., 380).

Nevertheless, unlike Zia, Chiang was only interested in integrating Chinese moral thought with Western science but not religion. Furthermore, Chiang suggested that Chinese Confucianism is a better religion than Christianity because it does not contradict science:

Chinese morals are derived from nature; Christian morals from divine power; for the Chinese, the gods are but part of nature, while to Christians nature is but the creation of God. On these grounds it is plain that the conflicts between Christian dogma and science were bound to be very serious, as Western history has proven in abundance; while the conflicts between science and Chinese moral precepts would be mild since both started from the same ground—nature—only travelling in different directions. (Ibid., 384)

One may criticize Chiang's argument from Zia's perspective by pointing out his disregard for the importance of religiousness in the modern age. As we have seen above, Zia argued that owing to the Chinese one-sided emphasis on moral practicality, Confucians failed to achieve the ideal of the Unity of Heaven and Hu-

mans, which requires faith in a transcendent being.⁴ As mentioned above, Zia argued that mutuality between Heaven and humans was the original theme of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Yi Ching*, yet such an emphasis on mutuality is lost in Confucianism.⁵ As a Minister of Education, Chiang was not interested in the theoretical problem of the Unity of Heaven and Humans but was more concerned with cultural modernization, and he implicitly suggested that Christianity is an obstacle to science. Because of their different intentions, while Chiang and Zia shared a similar understanding of Greek, Christian and Chinese traditions, they proposed contrary conclusions.

In short, while mystical practice directly enriches Christianity by relating religious passions to moral practices, it also enriches Chinese Confucianism and addresses the fundamental problem of in-ism identified by Zia: that Confucianism focus on a human-centric approach to the Unity of Heaven and Humans downplays Heaven and therefore necessarily fails. Conversely, the Christian doctrine of incarnation enables one to establish spiritual God-man relations to achieve the Unity of Heaven and Humans when one believes in Christ and is reconciled with God the Father. Unfortunately, Zia did not further articulate the role of the Holy Spirit when restoring spiritual communication and God-man relations. Zia only advocated for a belief in Christ as the saviour and mediator between God and humans but did not explain how humans can “live in Christ” or how the Holy Spirit may transform transport people to the realm of the Unity of Heaven and Humans, owing to the intrinsic limitation of his incarnational theology: like Barth, Zia’s theology centres Jesus Christ and inevitably underemphasized the role of Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

To conclude, Zia’s theology of Chinese Christianity enriches both Christianity and Chinese Confucianism. It enriches Christianity by overcoming the problem of exclusivism and extremism and replacing knowing with practice. It also en-

4 Here Zia assumed that Heaven is a personal and transcendent God which establishes God-man relation with human beings, revealing the strong influence of Kierkegaard’s philosophy on Zia’s theology. Such an assumption, however, is challenged by the New Confucian Mou Zong-san, who argued that Heaven is merely a metaphysical foundation of humans’ moral capacity (Tam Forthcoming).
Future research may further explore whether the Unity of Heaven and Humans should be understood as a God-man relationship.

5 The exception would be the Korean Confucian Jeong Yagjong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) who identified *Shangdi* as a personal God and discussed the God-man relation expressed in *Five Classics* (Tam 2023).

riches Chinese Confucianism by overcoming the limitation of a human-centric approach to the Unity of Heaven and Humans. While Zia's interpretations of both Confucianism and Christianity contain several flaws and should be further criticized in future research, overall he provided a consistent sublation of both traditions, as we have seen above.

Nevertheless, Zia's emphasis on Christology and incarnation over pneumatology has significantly limited the contributions of his theology of Chinese Christianity to Confucianism. If the fundamental problem of Confucianism, as Zia diagnosed it, was the necessary failure of the human-centric approach to achieve the Unity of Heaven and Humans, merely highlighting the presence of Jesus Christ as the *other* is insufficient. Christ is the unity of divinity and humanity, yet human beings are not Christ. If the unity of divinity and humanity is the true Unity of Heaven and Humans, then people would require a *method to become Christ*. But Zia remained unclear on how humans can do this, and only briefly mentioned that "Christ's works on us must be completed by his image within ourselves" (Zia 1972, 38) without articulating the process of transformation, which requires a pneumatology explaining how human nature is transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit within human beings.

To extend Zia's project and enhance his new insights into Chinese Confucianism, the development of a Sino-pneumatology is necessary. Zia's emphasis on Christology and incarnation over pneumatology is largely because of the historical discussion on the similarities and differences between *Logos* and *Dao* among Catholic and Protestant theologians. By contrast, there are fewer discussions on the comparative studies among the spirit, *sheng* 神 and *ling* 靈. While recently several scholars have been working in this field, they did not focus on the etymologies of these Chinese characters but tried to reformulate the concept of the Holy Spirit in terms of other elements, including Chan Ka-fu Keith's studies of the common ontological ground shared by Confucianism, the Eastern Orthodox Church and Tillich in the light of sacramentality and cosmic anthropology, (Chan 2017), and Yun Koo-Dong's and Kim Ji-sun Grace's articulation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in different cultures in terms of the concept of *Ki* (*Qi* 氣) in the *Yi Ching* (Yun 2012; Kim 2011). None of them addressed the issue of the prevailing Chinese (mis)translation of the Holy Spirit as *Sheng Shen* 聖神 (Catholic) or *Sheng Ling* 聖靈 (Protestant), which originally referred to the spirit of the departed emperors. For example, in the chapter *Xi Yu* 西域 of *Yan Tie Lun* 鹽鐵論, it is written that "owing to the virtuous heritage of the sacred spirits of the departed emperors" (賴先帝聖靈斐然). Similarly, in a poem written by Bao Biao mentioned in the *Story of Ban Biao* 班彪列傳 of *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書, it is written that "going to the ancestry temple to sacrifice for the sacred ghosts" (登祖廟兮享聖神). In Clas-

sical Chinese, *Sheng* and *Ling* are ambiguous as they may refer to God, ghosts or human spirits. It is unknown why Catholic and Protestant missionaries did not realize the potential risk of confusion and adopted the terms *Sheng Shen* or *Sheng Ling* which refer to human spirits to translate the Holy Spirit. Yet the ambiguity of the Chinese characters *Sheng* and *Ling* may also be a resource for Sino-pneumatology, for it further strengthens the inseparability between God and humanity highlighted by Zia: because both humans and Gods share the same *sheng* and *ling* in their nature, one may reformulate a pneumatology of *sheng* and *ling* to explain the unity of God and humans in future research.

Using Rošker's method of sublation, this paper has demonstrated how Zia uses the resources of Christianity and Confucianism to construct his new theology of neo-in-ism, which enriches both traditions by providing new insights. Although Zia's diagnosis of and solutions to the theoretical problems of Christianity and Confucianism are debatable, theologians and philosophers should acknowledge Zia's new insights into both traditions and his contributions to intercultural and inter-religious dialogues rather than merely questioning his "inaccurate" interpretations.

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Sublating Humanism: The Relation between the Individual and Society in Confucian Ethics

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Abstract

Chinese humanism developed distinctly from European humanist discourses, reflecting unique cultural and philosophical traditions. Analysing these differences can enhance our understanding of both the specific characteristics of Chinese humanism and the diverse potentialities within contemporary global humanist thought. This comparative perspective, enhanced by employing the method of sublation, underscores the planetary relevance of humanism. It demonstrates how diverse cultural perspectives enrich and broaden the scope of global discourse, leading to a more inclusive understanding of humanism worldwide. In this paper I will give a brief historical overview of the origins and development of the formation of ideas which, in China, placed the human being at the centre of culture and the cosmos. But in order to better understand the differences that demarcate Chinese views of humans and their position in the world from European ones, we will first look at how the relationship between people and the communities in which they live is structured in the Chinese tradition. We will then examine the political and philosophical currents shaping Confucian discourse and take a look on the way in which each of them contributes to the Chinese model of humanism. By applying the method of sublation, we intend to investigate how these two systems could complement and enhance each other, thereby helping to establish a foundational framework for a newly proposed transcultural planetary ethics.

Keywords: Chinese humanism, planetary ethics, Confucian relationism, political Confucianism, philosophical Confucianism

Sublacija humanizma: odnos med individuumom in družbo v konfucijanski etiki

Izvilleček

Kitajski humanizem se je razvil ločeno od evropskih humanističnih diskurzov ter je odražal posebnosti kitajske kulturne in filozofske tradicije. Analiza teh razlik lahko izboljša naše razumevanje tako specifičnih značilnosti kitajskega humanizma kot tudi raznovrstnih potencialov znotraj sodobnega globalnega humanističnega mišljenja.

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Primerjalna perspektiva, ki jo bomo v pričujočem prispevku pridobili z metodo sublacije, poudarja planetarno pomembnost humanizma. Ta perspektiva nam nazorno prikaže, kako lahko različni kulturni vidiki bogatijo in širijo obseg globalnega diskurza, kar vodi v bolj vključujoče razumevanje humanizma širom sveta. V prispevku bom najprej podala kratek zgodovinski pregled izvora in razvoja idej, ki so v kitajski tradiciji postavile človeka v središče kulture in kozmosa. Toda za boljše razumevanje razlik, ki opredeljujejo kitajske poglede na človeka in njegov položaj v svetu v primerjavi z evropskimi, si bomo v nadaljevanju ogledali, kako je v kitajski tradiciji strukturiran odnos med ljudmi in skupnostmi, v katerih živijo. Nato bomo proučili politične in filozofske tokove, ki so oblikovali konfucijanski diskurz, ter si ogledali, na kakšen način je vsak od njih prispeval h konsolidaciji specifično kitajskega modela humanizma. Z metodo sublacije nameravamo raziskati, kako bi se ta dva sistema lahko dopolnjevala in drug drugega izboljšala, s čimer bi pomagala vzpostaviti temeljni okvir za vizijo nove transkulturne in planetarne etike, kakršno si predstavlja avtorica.

Ključne besede: kitajski humanizem, planetarna etika, konfucijanski relacionizem, politični konfucianizem, filozofsko konfucijanstvo

The Individual and Society: Varied Conceptual Perspectives

The core dynamics of institutional structures in Chinese and Western civilizations have evolved distinctly. In China, the concept known as “All under Heaven” (*Tian Xia* 天下) encapsulates this framework. This model has been extensively detailed in Zhao Tingyang’s renowned work (see Zhao 2021), which is also titled “All under Heaven”, and further explored by various experts in Chinese intellectual and institutional history such as Bai Tongdong, who explained:

To address the issues of how to bond a large state of strangers together, and of how to deal with state–state relations, early Confucians developed a *Tian Xia* model, while the Westerners developed the nation-state model and later, in response to its problems, the cosmopolitan model. According to the Confucian model, state identity is based on culture (rather than race) and is also based on a Confucian conception of universal but unequal compassion. Among states, a key distinction is between the civilized and the barbaric, and civilized states should form an alliance to protect the civilized way of life against the barbarian threat. A general principle of the Confucian world order is that it recognizes the sovereignty and the primacy of one’s own state’s interests, but limits both with humane or benevolent duties. (Bai Tongdong 2020, 969).

But the later rise of global civilizations and the process of globalization were predominantly shaped by the Western model of development, which is closely tied to

modernization concepts originating in Europe. Here, modernity revolved around the idea of the individual as an independent and proactive entity.

This individual-centric view is rooted in individualism—a political and social philosophy that values the independence and autonomy of the individual, positing them as society's core unit. Individualism upholds personal liberties and responsibilities, advocating for self-guided actions and minimal external intervention in personal pursuits. This ideology has profoundly influenced contemporary political and social frameworks, moulding public attitudes towards democracy, personal freedom, and social justice.

Furthermore, individualism has evolved into a doctrine that emphasizes personal interests, roles, and rights within societal contexts. Central to the humanist democracy seen in Western liberal societies is a notion of justice that balances individual rights with those of others, underpinning a fundamental equality among all people. This egalitarianism, advocated in both European and American contexts, draws from Christian doctrinal beliefs that all humans are equal before God—and in death—without exception.

However, this form of equality, often highlighted in Western political thought (see for instance Arendt 1998, 235), differs significantly from the equality discussed in collectivist ideologies, which we will explore further a bit later. True equality, beyond being a Western ideal, is also a crucial aspect of Confucian ethics, where it transcends mere theoretical equivalence and involves a more complex understanding of individual diversity within society.

In societies that prioritize individualism, the rights of individuals are often more protected (at least theoretically) than collective rights due to the social structure where individual interests supersede those of the group.

While this framework offers considerable benefits such as enhanced protection, autonomy, and freedom (particularly for men), it also presents numerous challenges. These include reduced cooperation skills, increased self-centredness, diminished communal solidarity, heightened social isolation, excessive value relativism, and loneliness, among others. Despite these issues, individualistic systems continue to be supported by several prominent modern liberal theorists, including John Rawls in his work *A Theory of Justice* (Rošker 2021, 58).

Individualistic ideologies continue to dominate not only social theories, but also the lives of Westerners. At the same time, the misunderstanding still exists in the West that East Asian societies—in contrast to Euro-American ones—are collectivistic (see for instance Han 2020a; 2020b; Komatsu, Rappleye and Silova 2019, 3; Schwartz 1990, 140, among others).

The misconception that collectivism does not value the individual is widespread yet baseless. Collectivism, like individualism, is fundamentally a social structure emerging from the concept of the individual. Both ideologies originate from the same principle of individuality and theoretically cherish the notion of individual freedom.

In practice, while liberal individualism primarily safeguards the material freedoms and property rights of individuals, Marxist collectivism aims to achieve individual freedom through the establishment of socialist collectives. In these collectives, individuals strive to resolve the alienation produced by capitalist structures by engaging in work and both public and private interactions, thereby fulfilling their personal potential.

However, when discussed by contemporary liberal theorists—who are more dominant in this discourse than Marxists—collectivism is often portrayed as a mechanistic system focused solely on efficiency and utilitarian outcomes. In such critiques, individuals are depicted as mere components of a larger machine, valued only for their contributions to collective goals rather than their personal attributes or relationships. This perspective suggests that in collectivist systems, human connections are not shaped by personal identities but by functional roles, reducing individuals to indistinguishable parts of a homogeneous mass.

Yet this very notion of individuals as interchangeable and uniform is also what underlies the principle of equality before the law, universal human rights, and the pursuit of equal opportunities for everyone. However, this idea of sameness, upon closer examination, often simplifies complex individual differences, falling short of true pluralistic equality where diverse values are equitably recognized. As David Hall and Roger Ames (1998, 25) have highlighted, and as I have previously discussed, this approach to equality can be problematic:

Such a Self belongs to the domain of the one-dimensional, empirical Self, or, in Chinese terminology, to the domain of the “external ruler” (*wai wang* 外王). But Hall and Ames also point to the fact that the notion of the individual or individuality can also be linked to ideas of uniqueness and non-repeatability that are not related to belonging or membership of a particular species or class. This is not, therefore, a question of the principle of equality, but rather of the principle of equivalence/sameness. Hall and Ames point out that it is precisely this understanding of the individual that is crucial to a better understanding of the Confucian concept of personhood. (Rošker 2021, 65)

While individualism and Western liberal ideologies of collectivism might be familiar concepts in Western societies, they are relatively foreign within the Chinese philosophical context, although traces of both can be seen in Confucianism (see Rossi 2020, 1109–13). However, China's intellectual tradition has developed a distinct social framework. Here, the interactions between individuals and society are not predicated on mutual agreements among equals, but rather on a hierarchy within various societal roles.

This unique interaction has shaped not only individual identities and the multiple facets and roles of the Self, which will be explored further in this text, but also the core ethical principles of the Confucian tradition. Known as the ethics of relationality or relationism, these principles have been central to ethical discussions and practices throughout Chinese history. This relational ethic, along with other ethical frameworks from Chinese and East Asian humanism, will also be detailed later.

Moreover, another key difference in how individuals and communities interact across cultures involves the criteria used to manage personal relationships. This distinction between individualistic and relational systems will be highlighted as we compare European and Chinese approaches.

While in the European, Hellenistic-Christian tradition this relationship is regulated by agreement, convention and law, in East Asia the idea that justice and harmony between people can be achieved by means of codified, normative and universally accepted rules that are valid in all situations never seems to have taken hold. This becomes clear if we look, for example, at the concept of individual rights, which is as alien to the Sinitic tradition of ideas as the unconditional observance of collective considerations and duties. (Rošker 2021, 57)

The concept of universal human rights predominantly focuses on individual rather than collective rights, overlooking the elements previously discussed. However, it is important to clarify that this critique does not justify the actions of autocratic governments that disregard human rights and systematically oppress and abuse their citizens, especially marginalized communities, without any constraints.

The Evolution of Chinese Humanist Ethics

During the Axial Age, as noted by Jaspers (2003), China transitioned from a culture dominated by basic, largely naturalistic religions to one characterized by the internalization of humanistic ethics.

Initially, in the Shang dynasty, popular beliefs in a supreme deity (*Shang di* 上帝) or Heaven (*tian* 天) lacked ethical dimensions. However, during the Zhou dynasty these beliefs began to incorporate moral principles. Previously, the notion of *tian*, or heaven, was central to religious life, gradually taking on more sacred and eventually divine attributes. By the 10th century BCE, *tian* was revered almost as an anthropomorphic god, acting not only as creator but also as the ultimate moral arbiter, rewarding or punishing human actions based on their morality.

This religious framework persisted into the early Zhou period, where *tian* was recognized as the supreme deity. However, by the transition from the Western to the Eastern Zhou dynasty (eighth century BCE), the credibility of this religious system began to decline. According to Yang Zebo (2007, 3), this decline was likely due to the corruption and inefficiency of the elite. This growing disillusionment is reflected in the Confucian classic, *The Book of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經), where there are indications of increasing resentment and scepticism towards Heaven (*yuan-tian*, *yitian* 怨天, 疑天), signalling a shift in public perception and the beginning of a challenge to the established divine authority.

As Xu Fuguan has shown, the authority of the Mandate of Heaven (*tian ming*) had already been completely eroded by the time of the ruler You of the Zhou dynasty. It can therefore be argued that the traditional religious concepts rooted in the early Zhou dynasty had almost completely disintegrated. This was an extremely important turning point, indicating that Chinese society in this period had already entered what Karl Jaspers calls the 'Axial Age'. However, we should be mindful of the fact that, unlike other civilizations, China did not develop theology during this Axial Period, but rather turned away from it. (Yang Zebo 2007, 3)

Under Jasper's theory of the Axial Period, China emerges as a distinct outlier among the great civilizations of that era. According to Jasper, the eighth to fourth centuries BCE saw a widespread questioning of natural deities across all advanced cultures, linked to developments in production technology and tools. In most cases, these "primitive religions" evolved into more sophisticated, often monotheistic, theological systems.

However, in what is now China this scepticism led not to the evolution of new religious doctrines but rather to the breakdown of structured religion altogether. This absence of deities meant that individuals could not externalize their fears and anxieties onto higher powers. According to Xu Fuguan (1987, 231), this situation fostered a "concerned consciousness (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識)", prompting a painful yet profound self-awareness and a deep sense of personal moral re-

sponsibility. Xu contrasts this development with the rise of European philosophy, which he attributes to a sense of wonder or curiosity. These differing origins of philosophical thought have significantly shaped how knowledge is perceived and valued in Chinese and Western cultures.

The Greeks saw rationality as the typical or defining characteristic of human beings, and the love of wisdom as the source of happiness. Knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge were regarded as a leisure activity, to be pursued for its own sake. This characteristic of ancient Greek culture led to the search for objective knowledge and, in particular, to the development of metaphysics and science, and modern Western thinkers have inherited this tradition. But whereas the Greeks took ‘knowledge’ as a kind of education, modern Western thinkers have transformed knowledge into something that represents a constant and persistent quest for power and authority through the conquest, possession and control of the external material world, as expressed in Francis Bacon’s famous dictum that ‘knowledge is power’. (Ni 2002, 283)

During the Axial Age, as noted by theorists like Chen Lai (1996), the questioning in China was not about human limitations leading to a search for transcendent, infinite presences or a monotheistic focus; rather, it was the perceived limitations of the deities themselves that catalysed a shift away from seeking a transcendent realm. Instead, attention turned towards earthly realities—governance, societal organization, and interpersonal relationships—marking a “breakthrough to the humanities” rather than a transcendental breakthrough.

This pivot from celestial to civic concerns can be traced back to an earlier religious crisis in China before the Axial Age began, during which the credibility of Heaven as a moral and supreme authority waned. With the moral foundations of early Western Zhou’s Heavenly religion eroded, scepticism flourished among the masses, precluding a return to theologically driven monotheism. Instead, a rational understanding of the universe emerged, and the concept of “Heaven” (*tian* 天) evolved into a more secular “nature”.

In the West, misconceptions about ancient Chinese spirituality persist, often simplifying Confucius’s role to that of a proponent of an outdated heavenly religion (Lee 2001). Contrary to these views, Confucius lived during a time of intense societal transformation—the end of the Spring and Autumn period and the beginning of the Warring States period—a time described in historical texts as an era of collapsing social mores and traditions. (Ibid.)

Confucianism arose amidst these upheavals, reshaping the traditional values of ritual (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂) to forge a new ethical framework centred on humaneness (*ren* 仁). This concept, symbolized by the Chinese character combining elements representing the human and duality, emphasizes the intrinsic connection and equality among people. Confucius envisioned *ren* as empathy towards others, a vital trait for fostering moral integrity and societal harmony.

He posited that true morality stems not from external norms but through the internalization of these values, deeply integrating social rituals with the principle of humaneness to enhance moral consciousness in society. This profound integration allows for the cultivation of a communal ethic that not only respects but nurtures interpersonal relationships, laying the groundwork for a more empathetic and cohesive community:

子曰：“人而不仁，如禮何？人而不仁，如樂何？”

The Master said, ‘How can a man who does not possess humaneness perform the rites? How can such a person enjoy music?’ (*Lunyu* n.d., “Ba Yi,” 3)

In this context, it was not only important to limit and control human behaviour through external rituals, for all this is not really possible (at least in the long run) unless one gains insight into the question of why it matters—even to oneself. The meaning of social morality can only be seen or understood by human beings if the virtue of humaneness is internalized. Only on the condition that we perform rituals and enjoy music on the basis of this kind of inner awareness can we actually develop a moral subject within ourselves that is both immanent and transcendent. But this, as Mencius, one of the two most influential successors of Confucius, points out, can only be done consciously by the individual alone. This is evident in many parts of his seminal book *Mengzi*, such as the quote below:

仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也。

Humaneness, propriety, respectability, and wisdom are not brought into me from outside, but are inherent in myself. (*Mengzi* n.d., “Gaozi I,” 6)

In Mencius’s philosophy, virtues are envisioned as four inherent predispositions, which he terms the “four sprouts” (*si duan* 四段, see *Mengzi* n.d. “Gongsun Chou I,” 6). These are foundational to the moral development of an individual, serving as prerequisites for achieving true humanity. This cultivation of humanity, according to Mencius, necessitates a comprehensive educational process that encompasses axiological training.

Moreover, within this framework of Confucian moral cultivation, a specific virtue among these four Mencian sprouts stands out as a moral guideline helping individuals discern right from wrong. This virtue is *yi* 義, which many scholars (e.g., Chen Yunquan 2015, 51) interpret as justice, defined by contextually appropriate actions.

To encapsulate, Confucius advocated that the regulation or moderation of natural impulses could be achieved through the practices of ritual and music. Rituals served as the outward expression and structuring behaviour of virtue, while music connected deeply with the inner emotional and sensory experiences of individuals. These practices were instrumental in channelling emotions into socially acceptable behaviours, guided by the principle of humaneness (*ren* 仁). This approach played a crucial role in shaping the cultural ethos of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, giving rise to a distinct form of Chinese humanism known as *renwen* 人文, interpreted as human order or culture.

Confucianism, deeply entrenched in this humanistic culture, offered a naturalistic view of human existence, aligning human life with cosmic principles and underscoring the inseparability of humans from the natural world.¹ This philosophical stance asserts that human culture and the natural universe are fundamentally interconnected² (Luque-Moya 2023).

Another key element of Chinese humanism is the principle of *minben* 民本, which translates to “the people as the foundation” or “the people as the root”. This concept is frequently discussed as highlighting the proto-democratic aspects inherent in early Confucian thought. In the oldest extant compilation of historical texts, the *Shang shu*, there is a notable passage that underscores the pivotal role of the people in society, thereby affirming the fundamental importance of human-centric governance:

1 When considering Cheng Chung-Ying’s distinction between exclusive and inclusive humanism, it is important to clarify that we are referring to the inclusive type. (For a detailed comparison of these humanisms, see Cabural 2023.) Additionally, scholars such as Hans Georg Moeller critically examine the Confucian belief in human supremacy, which is also a fundamental aspect of traditional Confucian perspectives on humanity’s role in the cosmos (see Moeller 2023)

2 Actually, this also includes a corresponding view to the relation between humanism and history. In order to understand the social, political and cultural background of Confucian humanism, it is by no means sufficient to analyse it merely through the lens of the Aristotelian concept of *homo politicus*, nor exclusively through the optics of the modern (Western) concept of *homo economicus*. In this context, many Chinese scholars emphasize the fact that humans both shape and are shaped by history; thus, in understanding and interpreting traditional functions of Confucianism, the concept of *homo historicus* also plays an important role (Sernelj 2014, 197).

民惟邦本，本固邦寧。

It is only people who are the basis of a country. If the base is stable, peace will reign in the country. (*Shang shu* n.d., “Xia shu, Wu zizhi ge,” 2)

During this pivotal period in Chinese thought, a significant concept related to the essential nature of humans, termed “humanness” (*ren xing* 人性), came to the fore. This idea is defined in the Confucian *Analects* as what is universally common among all people (*Lunyu* n.d., “Yang huo,” 2). However, Confucius’ two most prominent disciples had sharply contrasting interpretations of this notion. Mencius believed that this intrinsic quality of humans is inherently good, while Xunzi argued that it is fundamentally selfish and that any apparent goodness is actually a result of external influences like education and socialization.

Given the central role of education and socialization in Confucianism, both scholars emphasized these aspects strongly, albeit for different reasons. Mencius, who viewed human nature as fundamentally good, nonetheless acknowledged that it was imperfect at birth and required nurturing through education to fully develop its positive potential. Xunzi, on the other hand, saw socialization as essential to temper the basic selfishness of human nature.

Sublating Political and Philosophical Confucianism

This focus on the transformative power of culture and education highlights a core principle of Confucian thought: culture not only enhances the human condition but is also crucial in completing the individual, elevating them to a central and profoundly respected position within the cosmos.

In this context, it is important to recognize that Confucianism is not a monolithic philosophy. Throughout history, the foundational ethical principles of Confucianism have been subject to change and have diverged in different ways. As such, a clear distinction must be made between the original teachings of Confucian philosophy and the later state doctrine of Confucianism that was officially adopted and became institutionalized.

The foundational period of Confucian philosophical ethics lasted until the beginning of the Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BCE), under Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi. This era saw figures like Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi emerge as major proponents.

The evolution of Confucianism entered a significant new phase around 100 BCE during the Han dynasty. This period was characterized by the formulation of a comprehensive worldview that integrated concepts of body and spirit, matter

and thought, and merged the natural with the social, political, and moral spheres. Crucially, it was also during this time that Confucianism began to crystallize into the official state ideology, further solidified by the state examination system established to control access to governmental positions. This system, which persisted until 1903, became a central structure supporting Confucian doctrine.

Dong Zhongshu was a pivotal figure in this phase, interpreting Confucian teachings largely through the lens of Xunzi, who is often viewed as a transitional figure between Confucianism and Legalism. This period marked a significant transformation of Confucian philosophy, incorporating more autocratic Legalist elements, thus morphing the originally progressive and somewhat democratic nature of Confucian thought into a more rigid and hierarchical ideology.

This interpretation, heavily influenced by the *Guliang Zhuan* 穀梁傳 tradition articulated by Guliang Chi, stressed the values of filial piety, loyalty, and respect for authority, and portrayed Confucianism as fundamentally concerned with social order and hierarchy. While influential at the institutional level and within official ideologies, the *Guliang Zhuan* was not as dominant in philosophical circles compared to the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 interpretation, which linked back to Mencius and was foundational for the Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty around 1200 CE.

Neo-Confucianism during this time integrated elements from Daoism and Buddhism, significantly shaping societal values for over seven centuries through the philosophical framework developed by Zhu Xi and others. This movement interpreted classical Confucian ideas primarily through Mencius's more idealistic perspectives, contrasting sharply with the earlier, more rationalist interpretations. This later stage of Confucian thought continues to influence modern iterations of the philosophy, known as New Confucianism (*Xin ruxue* 新儒学).

Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the two main interpretations of the original Confucian doctrines. One is articulated in the *Guliang* commentaries on Confucius's *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the other is represented in the *Gongyang* interpretation and, more extensively, in the works of Mencius.³ Additionally, it is essential to recognize the distinct political and social orientations of these interpretative streams, as both have continued to exert their influence across the Sinophone world to this day. The first interpretation underpins not only the

3 Confucian thought has evolved through three distinct phases, yet it is primarily split into two main interpretations: one stemming from the *Guliang* commentary (or Xunzi's teachings) and the other from the *Gongyang* commentary (or Mencius's perspectives). These two interpretations form the foundational branches of the original Confucianism, which constitutes the initial stage of Confucian philosophical development.

institutionalized Confucian state doctrine but also a rigid normative ethical system characterized by a strict hierarchical structure, gerontocracy, discrimination against marginalized groups (including women), social uniformity, and the suppression of individual autonomy. In contrast, the second stream fosters a dynamic and flexible approach, continually reevaluating philosophical issues, valuing social diversity, and rejecting dogmatism and autocratic dictates.

This dichotomy highlights the complex nature of Confucianism, which intertwines elements of autocracy and freedom, rigidity and adaptability, dogmatism and openness. Such complexity suggests that Confucianism is not a uniform or static ideology but rather a diverse discourse encompassing varying, and sometimes conflicting, paradigms. These have manifested as either a philosophy of vibrant and varied relationships and a celebration of diversity, or as a more traditional state doctrine emphasizing uniform ethical norms.

Understanding these differing foundations is crucial, as viewing Confucianism as a homogeneous ideological structure can obscure the nuanced traits of Chinese humanism and the intrinsic diversity within Confucian thought. These two major currents stem from distinct classical interpretations, each shaping the ideology in unique ways.

Despite the state doctrine's bureaucratic, hierarchical, and formalistic nature, it still partly adopted the original Confucian philosophy, albeit often distorting or manipulating it for ideological ends. Consequently, the Confucian brand of humanism has become the leading discourse within all forms of humanist thought that emerged within the Chinese tradition. However, it is worth noting that this "cultural" humanism isn't the only humanistic strand within this tradition.

On this basis, our exploration can set out to achieve a thorough dialectical sublation of philosophical and political Confucianism, aiming to reveal a "meta-Confucian pattern" that is both historically coherent and conceptually integrated. The methodology of sublation can be outlined through eight progressive phases, initially examining the roles and responsibilities of individuals within society as influenced by different Confucian schools. This investigation serves to distinguish the cultural and historical underpinnings of philosophical Confucianism, which prioritizes personal moral development, from those of state doctrine Confucianism, which is often co-opted to support autocratic governance.

Following this, we can identify key themes common to both strands: the emphasis on social harmony and the vital role of hierarchical relationships in maintaining societal order. Despite their shared objectives, these forms of Confucianism approach harmony and hierarchy differently. Philosophical Confucianism, as es-

poused by figures like Mengzi, advocates for a harmony that respects diversity and individual morality, whereas political Confucianism, following Xunzi, promotes a more uniform and collectively disciplined approach.

The nuances in their views on hierarchy are equally distinct. Philosophical Confucianism sees societal roles as fluid, with ethics defined by reciprocal virtues and situational appropriateness, reflecting Mengzi's teachings. In contrast, political Confucianism, rooted in Xunzi's thought, supports a fixed and vertical order that stresses the importance of rigid social roles to maintain control.

Moreover, the way virtues are conceptualized within these frameworks varies significantly. In philosophical Confucianism, virtues are inherent human qualities that can be cultivated through education and self-reflection, emphasizing compassion and empathy as natural human traits. Conversely, political Confucianism views virtues as qualities to be inculcated through strict adherence to societal norms and rituals, portraying them as mechanisms to enforce conformity and uphold the social hierarchy.

In the next step, we try to connect each form of Confucianism to its fundamental philosophical underpinnings. In this it quickly becomes clear that philosophical Confucianism is tied to deontological ethics, focusing on personal integrity and moral duties within interpersonal relationships. State doctrine Confucianism, on the other hand, aligns with paradigms of power dynamics and social control, utilizing ethical principles strategically to maintain order and authority within the governance structure.

These insights can be critically assessed to pinpoint potential shortcomings in each approach. Philosophical Confucianism might be criticized for its limited engagement with political dynamics and societal injustices, focusing overly on individual morality at the expense of broader social concerns. On the other hand, political Confucianism could be seen as stifling individual autonomy and legitimizing authoritarian rule under the pretext of societal stability.

Such a comprehensive and thorough approach to investigating Confucianism and Confucian humanism can help us resolve many challenges that mark our contemporary globalized world. In this sense, this ancient philosophy can serve, for instance, as a meaningful partner for humanizing the functioning of artificial intelligence (D'Ambrosio 2023). The revival of Confucian philosophy can also help us to improve numerous corresponding issues in education, legislation and politics (Ambrogio 2017, 113). But in this regard, we shall also take into account the dangers linked to different attempts to establish Confucianism as a convenient ideological cover for authoritarian rule (Sigurðsson 2014, 21).

Conclusion

The methodology of sublation has helped us to integrate the ethical insights of philosophical Confucianism with the governance strategies of political Confucianism. In this way, we can propose a balanced leadership model that incorporates moral integrity and pragmatic effectiveness. This model advocates for a governance style that is both ethically informed and practically viable, aiming to create a harmonious societal structure that values individual moral growth as essential to communal well-being.

Undoubtedly, such a concept of a meritocratic system has already found its footing within a broad spectrum of Chinese ideologies, propaganda, and political theories, spanning both historical and contemporary dialogues. A meritocratic system's alignment with Chinese ideologies, spanning historical to contemporary dialogues, is evident. However, the sublation process brought forth an innovative notion, distinguishing two subjects through this dialectic. This is akin to the Confucian thought streams mirroring the binary of the empirical and the transcendental subject (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王). This parallel sets the stage for reevaluating theories using this duality to harmonize civil society and governance components.⁴

Finally, this dialectical method culminates in a novel perspective on Confucianism, potentially transforming current understandings and applications of Confucian ethics in governance. The emergence of the traditional *neisheng waiwang* category from a dialectic of contrastive analysis represents more than serendipity. It underscores the urgent need to incorporate “the voices of the affected” in examining meta-civilizational patterns, advocating for primary reliance on indigenous sources, concepts and categories. In the Chinese context, understanding the nuanced “Confucian combination of hierarchy and mobility” remains elusive without prioritizing native scholarly work over a predominantly Western-centric view. This shift is critical not just for the substance of the studies but crucially for their theoretical underpinnings. Additionally, this perspective enriches the civilizational discourse revival debate, underscoring the imperative of embedding a comprehensive cultural context in our examinations of social progress.

By merging the philosophical depth of Confucian moral thought with the practical necessities of state management, this new model seeks to offer a dynamic and

4 This binary category, initially introduced by *Zhuangzi* (n.d., “Tian xia,” 1), found later much resonance and adoption among Confucian thinkers. Its significance extended beyond the classical era into Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming dynasties. Later, this concept was revitalized within the framework of Modern New Confucianism, assuming a pivotal role in the theoretical discussions concerning subjectivity and political philosophy.

integrated approach to leadership and societal organization. This novel synthesis allows for an enriched understanding of how a modernized Confucianism might navigate the moral imperatives and pragmatic needs of contemporary governance, contributing to discussions and offering a holistic approach to ethical leadership within the emerging context of a planetary ethics.

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INTERVIEW

Intercultural Philosophy: A Reconstruction and Reimagining

Interview with Eric S. Nelson

*Kadir FILIZ**

It is not common to specialize in Western philosophy and non-Western philosophy, in your case Chinese philosophy, at the same time. You did your Ph.D. on German thought and continental philosophy, and still publish work in this field. How did your interest in Chinese philosophy start, and would you say it's more an interest than an expertise? You've written books and many articles on Chinese philosophy and its historical relation with Western philosophy, what role has non-Western thought played in your career?

Thank you for the invitation and your interest in my research. I'm happy to be here to discuss it with you. Those are vital questions for me, and hopefully, they'll be of interest to the audience as well. I have a background in German studies and Asian studies as well as philosophy as an undergraduate. I studied Chinese and Indian thought extensively as an undergraduate, and even worked with languages. In graduate school, I had to focus on one area, and my department was primarily only interested in Western philosophy. There was only a little Asian philosophy outside of philosophy in religious studies. I didn't really have an opportunity to integrate my interest in Asian thought into my work then. But immediately after I graduated I was offered the chance to teach a course in Asian philosophy as one of my options, since I had to teach a lot of different classes as a visiting lecturer. I agreed and it went well, and this renewed my interest. I continued to work on my language skills, especially classical Chinese.

That's the background and the reason why I was motivated to study non-Western forms of philosophy, if we can call them that, which I believe we should. These traditions have compelling ways of looking at the human condition and philosophical issues that are from different perspectives than we find in Western philosophy. There's a certain tendency in which Western philosophers tend to project and reproduce their own structures of thought when they encounter ideas

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from the Islamic, Indian, and East Asian worlds. It functions in this case as a form of self-referentiality and the self-reproduction of a hegemonic paradigm that has been criticised as a variety of Orientalism. What interested me was precisely what is distinctive and unique in these discourses, and what cannot be easily assimilated into the Western-European model of philosophising. That's what I've tried to emphasise in my research, whether I'm working on only Chinese philosophical sources or on intercultural projects. While I'm doing that, I'm also continuing my interest in European thought, especially in German, Jewish and French thought, which I enjoy working on as well. It makes philosophy more challenging for me, because I have to keep track of many more things than a lot of my colleagues, but I also find it personally stimulating and truer to the vocation of philosophy.

From this point, we can come to the definition of philosophy (φιλοσοφία) and its intercultural understanding. Since the emergence of the modern Western idea of philosophy, the meaning of philosophy has been limited to Western thought and gained a more ideological sense regarding non-Western people and cultures, traditions, thoughts, and so on. This definition is still being used, as can be seen from philosophy departments, their curricula, and public perceptions. I would like to ask about this definition and its history. How was this ethnocentric definition of philosophy born?

That's an excellent question. It's a complicated one, so I hope I can try to give a brief enough answer in this interview. First, if we return to the now almost mythological Greek origins of philosophy, we do see traces of encounters with non-Greek and non-European thought. We can already use this term, understood as an expression at that time, since early Greek thought had a certain discourse opposing Europe and Asia that Heidegger dwells on. The very distinction between Europe and Asia begins with the Greeks to a certain extent, in their conflicts with Persia. At the same time, if we look at the origin of the idea of philosophy, if we look at the speech of Diotima of Mantinea that Plato portrays as inspiring Socrates, or if we consider early Greek debates concerning the scope and extent of philosophy, whether it's a purely Greek practice or whether it includes non-Greek discourses as well, we can see that there is a pluralistic or intercultural milieu that shapes the origins and development of Greek philosophy. Even the most resolute Eurocentric thinker should acknowledge that the figure of Diotima is a figure of the foreign, for example, bringing unfamiliar near-Eastern wisdom to Socrates in the form of a revelation of the good. Plato is said to have been inspired by Egyptian thought and the Sceptics by Indian thought. Throughout the history of early Greek philosophy, as we see in Diogenes Laërtius, for example, there is a record

of a long debate in Greek philosophy about whether philosophy can only be a Greek intellectual discourse, or whether the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Persians have something similar to philosophy as well, even though they don't use that specific expression "philosophy" but speak of wisdom. Among the ancient Greek thinkers, both positions are found. For some Greeks, philosophy was specifically a Greek practice. It identified a Greek form of life in ways that could not be associated with other cultures. But others said no, what the Egyptians, for example, the Egyptian priests and intellectuals, are doing is parallel to what we're doing. This is philosophy as well. The very debate over whether philosophy is identified with one culture or with a multiplicity of cultures is an early one with Greek thought. And it only becomes more complicated in the Hellenistic period when Greek thought interacted with thought from the Near East to South Asia, as well. In terms of the formation of the idea of philosophy as exclusively European, there was initially a Greek idea of philosophy as potentially only Greek, but this itself was contested in Antiquity.

In the formation of the modern period, there were new encounters between Europe and the so-called non-European world in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Americas. Initially we see that people did not have this idea that philosophy was exclusively European. For example, one figure I've looked at closely is Leibniz. He's happy to say that there's Islamic philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and so on. He has no commitment to state that philosophy is only Greek or European in character, even though he privileges the latter in some ways. A radical shift happens from the 18th through the early 19th century. At the beginning of the 18th century, scholars still speak of philosophy in a broader way, where philosophy is still wisdom aiming at being a science. Even if it's not science *per se*, that's the intention. And different traditions of wisdom are trying to obtain insights into the nature of our life, the universe, God and so forth. But by the end of the 18th century, philosophy is identified with only one tradition, that transmitted from ancient Greece, which is one element of the formation of a Eurocentric ideology. The other element is the project of modernity itself. In modernity, the idea of a systematic science of reason is identified as a uniquely modern European achievement. Systematic science and freedom have at best only a preliminary form, even in previous European cultures. By the time we arrive at Hegel the realization of philosophy is only partial, even in Greek thought, in Hegel's view, as they love wisdom rather than possess science. Hegel examines Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and Jewish philosophy, and considers them fragmentary and incomplete. In his opinion they are not yet philosophy in the real, genuine, realized sense of the word, because only philosophy as a systematic science of reason is truly philosophy. Philosophy as a Greco-European transmission is one element in the construction of

Eurocentrism, and the other is this self-proclaimed realization of Europe as the realization of reason in history. This paradigm is at work not only in Hegel, but throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. We'll talk about it later in Husserl, as well. Even though he's no friend of Hegel's thought, they share a similar structure in how the idea of Europe is conceived in relationship to history and the exclusivity of modern European philosophy as a systematic science.

In terms of East Asia, it's true that if you go to any philosophy programme in East Asia today, they make a distinction between philosophy—which is European, Western philosophy—and the traditional forms of thought. Most universities in Korea, Japan, and China have this distinction built into the structure of their programmes. New students and teachers are often encouraged to stick to one or the other. People hired in Chinese philosophy, for example, in Beijing, are encouraged to focus on Chinese philosophy. And those who are hired to do Western thought are encouraged to Western thought. This divide is deeply entrenched. It globally structures present-day philosophy departments and philosophical publishing throughout the world, and this is a deformation of what philosophy should be. Philosophy has been increasingly specialized since the 19th century, where researchers focus on a specific set of issues or problems set in a limited context, whether it's the philosophy of language or Kant scholarship. Due to that focus on specialization, philosophers have lost the ability to work across different schools, transmissions, and cultures. It's a problem within European philosophical discourses insofar as these distinct groups likewise don't talk to one another. Continental and analytic philosophies are often construed as if they could never communicate with each other. But we have the problem of communicating across even more distant cultures and languages when we introduce Chinese philosophy. I believe a more pluralistic dialogical understanding of philosophy can begin to challenge this situation. In addition, there are structural problems that require radical structural changes in the very institutions and practices of philosophy.

This definition of philosophy supposes that there is a continuous Western identity from the Greeks to the moderns, and also that it mostly denies all possible entanglements, interconnections and interactions in history. How can we understand philosophy as opposed to these ideological constructions and illusions? In short, what is philosophy?

This is a key dimension to the Eurocentric understanding of philosophy. Another is, as you just alluded to, the definition of modernity. This concerns the prejudice that there is one continuous tradition. It assumes that we share an unbroken

transmission from the Pre-Socratic thinkers and Plato to now. There's a particular way of understanding tradition that plays a problematic role. Although I appreciate Gadamer's insights into tradition, the notion of tradition as this transmission from Greece to modernity is highly problematic because it does not want to perceive all the discontinuities, all the breaks and dialogical transformations that shape this history and don't merely expand the same horizon. So when I study hermeneutics, I prefer Dilthey because he better appreciates historical plurality and generational change. Dilthey offers a much more complex notion of tradition than found in Gadamer. There's a conflicting plurality of transmissions from generation to generation, as each generation adopts and transfigures them in ways that produce intervals (*Abstände*) that cannot be easily fused into one horizon or reduced to the continuity of one tradition.

Likewise, the critiques of tradition, beginning with Heidegger, and on into Derrida and Richard Rorty, presuppose what I described in my 2017 book as a form of negative Eurocentrism. They share the same flawed presupposition of identity as the communitarian or traditionalist model. On the one hand, they critique the metaphysical, onto-theological, and logocentric tradition of Western ontology. So that's good. I'm sympathetic to their diagnosis, and it helped inspire my research. That's why I often return to Heidegger, despite his many problems, because I find it fruitful for confronting the present and its history. This radical critique of that tradition is itself reifying of that tradition, because all three figures conclude that philosophy is only a European tradition, beginning with the pre-Socratic moment and concluding with globalized European modernity. That's why I spent a lot of time in *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* critiquing this Heideggerian model of the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy that still shapes contemporary thought. I'm sympathetic to Heidegger's project of destructuring the history of metaphysics and encountering the experiential sources of concepts and arguments. However, Heidegger himself undermines this strategy by positing the exclusivity and unity of tradition in critiquing it. Consequently, you can deconstruct but not overcome this tradition in Heidegger, Derrida, and Rorty, and philosophy remains a European category. One problematic side of Heidegger is this understanding of the history of being, which I examined in my 2017 work. Still, Heidegger should be appreciated for indicating ways of critiquing Western onto-theology and opening dialogues with varieties of Asian thinking that we should take even further. In that way, I find Heidegger an ambiguous, problematic, and yet highly significant philosopher for our time.

What is the attitude of Heidegger toward non-Western philosophies? In some of his texts there are some mentions of Daoist philosophy, but does it find a place in his overall philosophy?

First, Heidegger often doesn't mention his interactions and sources. It's typical of him to develop an idea in dialogue and confrontation with another discourse or thinker, then not speak of it again. Husserl, Dilthey, Natorp, and others played pivotal roles in the formation of *Being and Time* and faded into the background in the published work. It's characteristic of Heidegger to develop his thoughts in interaction with others that drop away in his final analysis. That's his style of writing and analysis. He's not pursuing "mere" historiography of philosophy in his own mind. He's doing phenomenology. Even if there's an occasion for the genesis of his insight, he presents the insight in a phenomenological way. That's my best explanation for that practice.

Secondly, we often see how earlier references and sources drop out over time. "The Essence of Truth" seems to have all these Daoist resonances in it. Readers have speculated about this. The first version has now been published and it explicitly mention Daoism. There are ways we can reconstruct this semi-hidden dialogue that he had in the emergence of his own analyses. This is what I undertake in *Heidegger and Dao*. There are a variety of reasons why he does this with the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. First, he wants to directly encounter phenomena and explicate them from themselves, and thus leaves behind the genesis of his arguments. Second, if he doesn't know the original language sources he's reluctant to speak about them at length. He's willing to talk about early Greek philosophy because he assumes his Greek is adequate. He's unwilling to engage with Chinese philosophy more extensively since he doesn't feel he can encounter the sources and what they're trying to say. Despite the accusation of arrogance, Heidegger does have a sense of deference and humility. When it comes to intercultural dialogue and sources that he cannot read in the original, he expresses a humility about whether he can adequately understand and communicate the ideas. On the one hand, it seems unhelpful if this limits communication. On the other hand, it's worthwhile to recognize the limits of interpretation and communication. Remarkably, at one point he tried to learn Chinese sufficiently to read the *Daodejing* and translate it together with a Chinese scholar. In the closing years of the Second World War, he met with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, the Chinese scholar who audited his lecture courses, and they pursued translating the *Daodejing* together. Even though this translation did not survive, analyses based on that translation do survive in his writings after 1943.

Can also I ask about your new book about *Heidegger and Dao*? Can you mention what you want to do in this book?

Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought is undeniably critical of Heidegger's model of the history of being as overly monolithic. Heidegger relies on selective key moments of the "great thinkers" and ignores the exceptions to his narrative, the intercultural elements—such as the role of Islamic philosophy—and ostensibly minor figures where radical shifts also occurred. This model doesn't acknowledge either the internal variety or the external entanglements of European philosophical traditions (as there is no one history or tradition). Heidegger's reductive model of the history of being is woefully inadequate and in need of critical intercultural transformation. There are insights we can gain through Heidegger's encounters and dialogues that move him beyond this limited definition of philosophy as Greek-Occidental. His engagement and learning from Daoism, Buddhism, and Japanese thought reflect what is best in Heidegger's thinking. In this book, *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom*, I'm more appreciative of how Heidegger is willing to learn from and adopt from Daoist sources from as early as 1919 and he remains in dialogue with these sources at crucial points throughout his life. I trace how these engagements shape the course of his own thinking concerning the thing, nothingness and the clearing, freedom and releasement. In the book, I reconstruct the historical context of Heidegger's engagement with Daoism and Buddhism and the philosophical issues involved. I trace how they shape his own thinking about a certain set of key pivotal issues. Most extraordinarily, there is a radical shift in his own thinking in 1942–1943 correlated an intensive engagement with the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. It is a quasi or partial Daoist turn in his thinking that helps him confront pivotal problems of his thinking during the Nazi era. This Daoist encounter launches the later stage of his thinking. Without this Daoist wisdom, which he doesn't dare call philosophy, we would not have the later Heidegger. Still, we need to be critical readers of the philosophers we interpret. When I consider Husserl, Levinas, Heidegger, or Adorno, I attempt to balance their better aspirations with their failures and unresolved problems that are now questions for us and our reading. This means that the history of philosophy is simultaneously a reimagining and a dialogue. We shouldn't be beholden in a devotional way. We ought to be encouraged to critique, transform, and reimagine their words and aspirations. This is what I do with elements from Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Heidegger. The historical contextualization and reconstruction lead to a reimagining of how we might interact with things, enregioning environments, and the world in ways that could help address the ecological and environmental crises that we're currently facing.

How was the term φιλοσοφία translated into Chinese and Japanese? Before the translation of the term into these languages, how did they express their love of wisdom, and their pursuit of truth? Is the term “philosophy” a univocal condition to “philosophize”?

That’s another intriguing question. Even within these cultural contexts, there are denials that what they were pursuing was philosophy. Sometimes they say it’s not philosophy in a negative Eurocentric way. But others argue it is a wisdom superior to philosophy. Traditional Chinese wisdom is not philosophy because it’s superior in how it interacts with and encompasses the world in contrast to European philosophy. So there are internal debates about adopting this expression. The notion that the Chinese had before the introduction of the modern Western notion of philosophy was expressed in several ways: the study of the Way (*Dao* 道), the study of patterning principle (*li* 理) that structures the world, or the study of one’s own heart-mind (*xin* 心) that encompasses the cosmos. From antiquity to the last dynasty, there were various forms of argumentation and reasoning about the self, nature, ethics, and politics. I think we should call this philosophy if philosophy is a self-reflective practice and a self-examining way of thinking that shapes a form of life. If philosophy is understood existentially rather than merely doctrinally, it begins when one begins to reflectively examine and question one’s own and the human condition. This existential definition of how philosophy originates signifies that philosophy begins in a sense of wonder and crisis that leads to questioning. We can find this moment of self-reflection and self-questioning in any culture, as people face existential questions about what they’re doing, why they are there, what it all means, and whether it has a value or purpose. There’s a kind of universality to philosophy through the existential particularity of the human condition, in the questions that we face on a daily basis when they call forth more than a habitual or customary response. Therefore, philosophy does have a reference to questioning and the inquiry that begins with our own self. In this sense, philosophy is found throughout the global religious and so-called wisdom traditions. For instance, religious sources such as Ecclesiastes and the Book of Job question the notions of God, justice, and the meaning of cyclic nature. This gives philosophy a critical tone for me. I don’t think ordinary unexamined opinions and the national mindset of peoples is philosophy. Some people talk as if philosophy is merely the mindset or the opinions of a group of people. For them, Chinese philosophy refers to how ordinary Chinese people typically think, as if they had one group mind. Description and categorization are, at their best and most complex, anthropology or sociology and, at their worst and most banal, cultural reification and essentialism. Philosophy happened in traditional China analogous to how it occurred in Greece: in questioning the order of nature and through examining oneself. We see

Zhuangzi and Confucius posing penetrating questions about the cosmos and how to live. Confucius asks questions concerning the best way to live in a distinctive way that parallels the Socratic question of how one should best live. You have these powerful forms of self-reflection that turn to reflection and discourse, which are then suitable to being explored in existential and philosophical ways.

The modern Chinese term for Western philosophy is “wisdom studies” (*zhhexue* 哲學). It retains the Greek reference to wisdom, and expresses that philosophy is a learning of wisdom. When we see philosophy merely as a specialist or technical study, then we lose the sense of aspiring to wisdom and self-examination. Academic Western philosophy, despite its appeal to Greek origins, is far more distant to what philosophy signifies than ancient Indian, Chinese, or Egyptian antiquity, as individuals reflectively encountered their own condition. This is philosophy’s genuine aspiration.

In your book, *Levinas, Adorno, and the Ethics of the Material Other*, you focus on the alterity and non-identity of the material others by dealing with two philosophers from two different movements, Adorno and Levinas. What brings these two figures into the same pot? The book also offers a form of hermeneutics for the contemporary environmental and political situation regarding ethics, religion, nature, and history. We would like to hear about the great project of your book and your critical inquiry into these philosophers through the notion of “nourishing life”, which you also used in your book *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy: Nourishing Life*.

I’ve worked extensively on Levinas in the context of phenomenology and Adorno in the context of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. I show how they each offer significant albeit underappreciated strategies for confronting contemporary ethical and political problems I seek to radicalize the figures of their thought. In many ways, I’m offering a reconstruction and reimagining of the practical side of that thought. I’d say the materialist side of Levinas and the ethical side of Adorno brings them into greater proximity and allows us to reimagine and critique contemporary ethical and political philosophy and its aporias, and specifically in Habermas and Honneth. I’m generally in alignment with that political sensibility, but they overly limit the social-political to intersubjective symmetrical relations of communicative action or recognition as a basis of equality. This is problematic, since we should acknowledge the asymmetrical structures of responsibility as Levinas elucidates, but also the asymmetrical ethical relations we have with non-human beings such as animals, plants, ecosystems, and environments, as I discuss in part one of this book and in my book *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy*.

I think the notion of non-identity or alterity connected with asymmetry can give us a more powerful ethical and political model to face a broader array of social problems within humanity, and also how humans interact with their environment, other species, and the natural world. That theme unites my books on Adorno and Levinas and Heidegger and Daoism. It's a pivotal concept in my 2020 *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy* and *Heidegger and Daoism*. They each concern in their specific way a damaged life *vis-à-vis* a nourishing life. We live, to adopt Adorno's well-known expression, damaged lives in modernity. As a return to past forms of life is not a convincing option, and such projects have their own destructive dialectic in modernity, we need to reimagine what modernity and rationality can be and renew for ourselves how humans and their natural worlds interact. This is where early Daoism is helpful. The *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* offer a less anthropocentric and more participatory conception of what it is to be human within the world. Humans are co-participants in nourishing or damaging life. We participate in intersubjective social relations, as Habermas and Honneth emphasize, but we also participate in natural relations with things, animals, and local and global environments. Because we are relational participants, there's an ethos of how we dwell and interact with things in nourishing life. The ethos of things, which Heidegger adopted from Daoism, is crucial to answering the more destructive sides of the dialectic of enlightenment and modernity. Naturally, we cannot easily return, as people like to say, to a so-called "primitive state". This is not what early Daoism is advocating. Rather, it's about what kinds of comportment we have in relationship to our activity and technology, in relation to the things and environments. As participants in life, do we nourish or damage life? Nourishing life is often not the focus of philosophical interpretations of Daoism. They focus on the other key concepts of non- or responsive action (*wuwei* 無為), often in a depoliticizing way, and nature as auto- or sympoietic self-ordering (*ziran* 自然). However, you only arrive at a holistic picture when you see how *wuwei* and *ziran* entail acting in a more responsive and resonant way with things and environments as part of the process of nourishing life. The point of this is a receptive action, resonant doing, with the autopoietic self-ordering of things and systems to nourish common life. We should begin to see ourselves as participants in nourishing the life of things, and not only in relations of intersubjective recognition. Early Daoism, or what I describe as the "ziranist" tendencies in these sources, indicates a different sensibility about how we comport ourselves as thoroughly relational beings who find freedom in relation. Daoism had, no doubt, a radically different historical context and interest than our own. Yet we can still adopt these exemplars and models from the past to confront and reimagine our own situation and the current environmental devastation and climate crisis that we're facing as humans with their own species-being, who exist within a broader relational nexus that Marx described as metabolic.

Your book *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy: Nourishing Life* focuses on the philosophy of nature in Chinese philosophy to shed light on the contemporary environmental crisis. For a proper account, you avoid many popular impressions about Daoism and the environment. Rather than simply finding a remedy for the contemporary problem in a non-Western form of philosophy, you offer a broad and critical understanding of Daoism on this matter by engaging in a phenomenological way with the Daoist philosophers. Do you want to mention your hermeneutical strategies for reading Daoist texts in the context of a contemporary crisis?

What motivated me in part is the popular misunderstanding that Daoism is intrinsically ecological in a simplistic and ideological way. For example, some speak of Daoism as a green philosophy, even green religion, and Chinese culture as intrinsically green and environmental. This is an ideological discourse promoted by the Chinese government to bolster Chinese identity. We should be suspicious of ideological deployments of historic philosophies as tools for the prevailing ideological purposes of different regimes and movements. This concern also applies to pure multiculturalism, which is simultaneously naïve and cynical. It suggests that whatever a culture does is legitimate, since it sets its own standards, and it is ethnocentric or racist to judge or criticize. This is a distortion that betrays people as participants in their own form of life. Many people, quite rightly, want to be critical of their governments and the traditions that have been transmitted to them. Should the Chinese people not question the Chinese government because it is taken to determine what it means to be Chinese? Can others not question their government because of culture and tradition? I find this a conservative definition of culture that redefines it into static identities that must be obeyed. My sense of multiculturalism is that it needs a less apologetic and a more intercultural and critical role that encourages individuals to be participants in and reflectively appropriate their own traditions. If a Chinese person wants to question whether Chinese culture intrinsically has a certain set of characteristics that are complimentary to the current government, they can do so without offending some cultural essence. That's the background concern of some of those statements concerning the need to be careful about apologetic and ideological uses of ideas we might otherwise advocate. Multiculturalism can critically challenge the *status quo* in given cultures and it betrays itself when it justifies the *status quo* in other cultures. When cultures are used in the opposite way to legitimate regimes, we should be encouraged to question them. This is why we should not just take green Daoism as a value in and of itself, because it has this ideological aura and use around it. My reconstruction and reimagining of early Daoism has to examine both its historical context as well as our own situation. I consider these differ-

ent varieties of Daoist and related distinctive philosophies such as Egoism and Legalism. They reveal how there are different models of ethically and politically co-relating with things and nature. They each have distinctive modalities with different implications for our present epoch. If you look at the Huanglao and more legalistic side of these discourses, you might conclude that the only way to resolve the ecological crisis would be to have an ecototalitarian green leviathan to regulate things so that everything would be done for the sake of the environment according to administrative and legal directives. Such a model is problematic. The *Daodejing* describes how the more that law and power are utilized, the more the people will resist, and the Way will wither. In addition to the anarchic autopoietic or sympoietic—which name the same process in Daoism—self-ordering of the *Daodejing*, there is the problem analysed by Max Weber: power leads to the entrenchment of bureaucracy and corruption. The path of power is neither a realistic nor an appealing way to resolve present ecological problems.

Instead, we need to aspire to or approximate a more ecological anarchic-participatory democratic process in which people are mobilized from their own motivations. Because the only way humanity survives as a species is through its own self-ordering motivations and activities; that is, from our own insight to act in a different way that is less destructive and more nourishing in relation to the environment and each other. In Daoist transmissions, there is an anarchistic tendency emphasizing self-ordering and self-organization. The systems of nature are mutually self-organizing, which calls for reverence, respect, and sharing with them in the nurturing of life. According to this model, human societies can maximize self-ordering, or they can fall into disorder by relying on coercive means. We see certain passages in the *Daodejing* and their outright “anarchistic” thinkers in the post-Han period. They consider how the best form of rule would be either a ruler who allows the people to order themselves, or the people order themselves without a ruler. I use such passages as a critical model for contemporary bio- and eco-politics. In our contemporary setting, given issues of economic and social complexity and the abuses of unchecked power, we might not be pure anarchists. It would be overwhelming for people to self-organize everything even with a developed ethos of mutual aid. A second-best approximation would be to maximize the participatory and deliberative potential of the public and social institutions in a democratic manner. Freedom as mutual self-ordering could be potentially more responsive not only to other humans, but also to natural environments and things. After a survey of different perspectives and arguments, I adopt a Lao-Zhuang ziranist model of nurturing life and then consider its implications for our contemporary situation. In that way, the notion of nourishing life from Daoism intersects with nourishing damaged life in the Adorno and Levinas and the Heidegger and Daoism books.

You propose the intercultural reinterpretation of philosophy. In which ways does intercultural philosophy treat notions of universality and relativism? In many discourses of Western philosophy, we are warned about a threat and risk of relativism or historicism if we attempt to think of philosophy outside of these discourses and Western history. On the other hand, in recent decades, inspired by the decolonization movement, some scholars in the humanities have become suspicious of all claims of universalism, even if they don't support any version of relativism. How can we think of the intercultural understanding of philosophy without any appeal to the dichotomic language of universalism and relativism? Is universality a univocal term or can we discern its different forms?

It appears to me that this is conceived in an exclusive, one-sided way where we must be either universalist or particularist. Both sides have these real dangers because we want to embrace the local, the particular, and the different in and of itself. But this can be reified in forms of ethnocentrism, nationalism, and fundamentalism. We should be a reflective and critical particularist rather than uncritically embracing whatever particularity we find ourselves within. I wouldn't want to, on the other hand, appeal to the universal in an abstract or unmediated way, because that too is part of our current dilemma. We can think of the universal in an abstract and reductive way and thus lose the capacity to responsively recognize differences that matter in a locality and situation. Universality must also be thought of in a self-critical way without subsuming everything into a generalized concept or systematic totality.

The question is how do we develop a discourse that's not committed to one-dimensional universalism or particularism? This intercultural model that I advocate addresses precisely this: we have to examine how the universal is never purely universal but is embodied in a concrete entangled situation. Existence is more complex than the conceptualist and universalist thinker would like to acknowledge. Still, we should recognize a certain value or worthiness in the aspiration towards universality. For example, one postcolonial or decolonial critique of human rights is that cosmopolitanism and human rights were associated with legitimating European colonialism and expansion. This is undeniably true. We must critique human rights insofar as they are conceptually and historically complicit with colonialism. But there's a danger here. Certain ideologies and regimes conclude that human rights must be eliminated as a form of foreign coercion. Then there's a problem on the other side, as oppressed peoples in every nation appeal to human rights, often as their last resort. Because these rights have a problematic use in the past, does that entail that we must disregard them altogether as intrinsically bad? Or do we want to interculturally rethink human rights in a way where we can still conclude that individual and social rights are important for people across different cultures? Even if how these rights are enacted and embodied in any given national

community will vary. There still should be a sense of a respect for the person, for the protester who wants to assert their freedom to say how society should be. In that sense, human rights have to be rethought in a more critical, less Eurocentric way, where it's not just this empty or ideological universal, but it has this critical function in relationship to particularity at the same time. Often this sense can be generated through a certain immanent critique. If you look at protest movements across the globe, they appeal to notions of rights, freedom, and equality to confront the current situation. We don't want to dismiss the thirst for more universal aspirations that various peoples have to critically confront ongoing injustices. This does not mean governments should invade other countries in the name of human rights, which is another ideological use. In that sense, we should be critical of both the universal and the particular.

Adorno notes how any given concept, no matter how worthwhile it might be in itself, has ideological uses. Freedom is a basic critical norm, and yet it is also an ideologically exploited term. It can be used to justify existing regimes. Nevertheless, even though it has this hegemonic ideological sense, it also has a critical sense to it. So even amidst an ideology of freedom, freedom can be reactivated or reimagined in ways that speaks to the freedom that repressed and oppressed individuals want to express. In that sense, I think we need to look at these concepts as multivalent. It depends on the systems in which they are enacted. They have a critical potential along with their ideological deployment. If we simply conclude that they are only ideology and power, then we lose the capacity to reflectively critique and change our situation.

The issue of understanding and encountering the other is one of the central concerns of intercultural philosophy, maybe of all human endeavour of thinking. With regard to intercultural philosophy, one can find different ways of dealing with the other. For example, some philosophers attribute almost an absolute alterity to non-Western philosophies, such as François Jullien's view of China. Or some others find in non-Western philosophies an alternative possibility and a means for decentring or deconstructing the Western idea of reason and history without a proper attempt of understanding them, but by a kind of marginalization of them. What are the fair and proper ways to understand other traditions of thought? Where does the critique take place in the encounter with the other?

Even the notion of absolute alterity can be heavily reified. It can take on an ideological character. Even though I appreciate and rely on this notion of alterity from Levinas and Derrida, we should think about it in more ambiguous and critical ways, because the absolute alterity of the other can itself function as another rei-

fied piece of identity, whether in religion or culture. One example is the notion of God and people in certain conservative readings of Levinas. If we're thinking of cultures in the sense of the absolute alterity of a different culture then it becomes a fixation, because we're not absolutely other than each other, but different in myriad intersecting ways. We still have possibilities of communication, understanding, and coming into agreements and engaging in common actions. The notion of absolute alterity is pivotal in my own work to critique notions of identity. I'm deeply appreciative of this strategy. But when it becomes an end in itself, to state that everything is different and there's no communication, then we end up in a bad relativism where everything is isolated in its particularity. Nothing is related to anything else or relatable through communication or imagination. The notion of absolute alterity then ends instead of opening encounter and communication. It ends up with a fragmented world where each culture has its own self-enclosed identity, but cannot genuinely communicate with others, and cannot examine and critique itself. That's an overly conservative outcome. The notion of alterity is itself a European concept that Jullien uses to think about China as the other of Europe. This notion of absolute alterity cannot be found in classical Chinese texts. They have their own, often binary and interactive ways of thinking of differences, and so absolute otherness is an overly European model to conceptualize this. Instead of thinking about absolute alterity, or identity as opposed to difference, we should think about alterity in relationship to entanglements. Entanglement is a concept I adopt from history, since we are relationally entangled with others in the world. The key is to trace how we are entangled with others in our differences and affinities and in different perspectives in shared structures. In the world today we have this global neoliberal market and state system that links us all together. Simply appealing to absolute alterity does nothing to confront the real situation of the neoliberal economic domination seen across the world today, despite differences in culture. The same logic of the market and the state relations determines Chinese, Turkish, or American politics. A more critical notion of alterity is needed. That's precisely what I develop in my 2020 Levinas and Adorno book: how we can use alterity in a critical way rather than endlessly fixating it. That's why I'm critical of certain readings of Levinas, Derrida, and even Adorno. Alterity, *différance*, and non-identity become an empty rhetoric without diagnostic consequences. Žižek states that Levinas is the most radical philosopher conceivable in his rhetoric, but this absolute alterity has no actual impact or relevance. That's an unfair criticism of Levinas, but it does make a point that we shouldn't reify alterity in ways that we can no longer engage in practices and forms of communication with others. This is pivotal to radicalizing the notion of alterity, not by making it more rhetorically radical and speculative, but by bringing it back to confront real human relations and relations between humans and non-humans.

Basically, to borrow Adorno's term again, the logic of identification must be interrupted, not only for its own sake, but to try to initiate a change in how we do things, how we experience ourselves, and how we engage in practices. A certain suspicion I have concerning the discourse of absolute alterity is its ideological use. In East Asia today, many people are not so much worried about Eurocentrism as much as Sinocentrism for various social and political reasons. This is not due to Eurocentrism or the absolute alterity of China, but to the current situation. We clearly need a notion of alterity that can move across different cultures and also challenge them, when necessary, when people feel that a certain ideology, culture, or political actor has become too powerful or to justify expanding ambitions. In this sense, we should be vigilant with both sides of the dialectic of alterity and identification and premature assertions of identity. Although this language stems from Adorno, Heidegger states something analogous when he engages with his Japanese interlocutors. When he reads Nishida and Nishitani, he's sympathetic to these Japanese thinkers and simultaneously worried about how they simply identify with European thinkers, including Hegel and his own thought. A process of identification too eagerly moves across cultures. It is premature and loses the sense of difference and thus potential for genuine dialogue between Japanese and German thinking. This gesture of anticipation rather than identification leads some to accuse Heidegger of undermining dialogue and communication. His warning is well taken, as we should be reticent before the other and careful how dialogue proceeds, since agreement cannot simply be assumed beforehand. A Sino-Japanese concept such as "*dao*" does not mean the same thing as the German word "*Weg*". They have radically different linguistic and experiential fields of relational significance. We always have to take this into account as well. Dialogue transitions across differences without presupposing one horizon. A given pair of words or ideas have affinities and differences at the same time. Even though Heidegger has other problems, this is a pertinent warning to avoid premature identification. Still, we shouldn't conclude that Germans and Japanese can never communicate. The other side of the criticism of Heidegger, which I explore in *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought*, is how Heidegger moves between opening and closing off communicative possibilities. He says that we do not truly communicate between the German sense of "*Sein*" and the Chinese sense of "*dao*". An overinterpretation asserts a multicultural essentialism of the impossibility of genuine conversation. This is incorrect, as Heidegger says we can with reticence and patience anticipate and prepare for the event of communication. Yet we can't assume that this communication is already decided. If we read Heidegger in that way, it serves as a critical reminder of how to engage in intercultural communication.

As a continuation of my earlier question, how does intercultural hermeneutics differ from other hermeneutical strategies of the 20th century? Can intercultural hermeneutics help us to reorient “Western” hermeneutics in a way towards culturally appropriate and philosophically adequate hermeneutics?

That’s an excellent question. That’s one of my key questions as well because of my passion for 19th-century hermeneutics. There are crucial insights in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey that are lost in Heidegger, Gadamer, and their students. For example, Heidegger and Gadamer have a much more communitarian sense of meaning and how it functions in contrast to the relational individualism of 19th-century German liberalism from Wilhelm von Humboldt and Schleiermacher to Dilthey. First, Schleiermacher and Dilthey recognize the importance of tradition and community in the formation of meaning, but they are more attuned to differences and individuality in communication. That’s why questions of one’s self-reflective starting point and method are essential to this 19th-century discourse that Gadamer finds so alien. This question means that we cannot assume that we directly understand the other through the collective reality of culture, society, or tradition. When we fail to understand our immediate neighbour, despite sharing all these collective truths, how then do we go about understanding? How do we reflectively check whether our understanding is appropriate or not? These are pertinent questions to ask, even if we disagree with the psychological models that Schleiermacher and Dilthey used. My understanding of hermeneutics is consequently quite different from how it is presently used based on Heidegger and Gadamer. Nineteenth-century hermeneutics is more concerned with individual self-understanding from the first-person perspective, the dialogical second-person relation, and with criticism as part of self-formation (*Selbstbildung*) and liberal reform in ways that were later underappreciated. Schleiermacher and Dilthey each connected the practice of hermeneutics, and hermeneutics is primarily a practice, with criticism. These are linked such that interpretation must self-reflectively consider the differences between the position of the text and one’s own positionality. It thus tries to contest the presentism of identity and fusion. In this context, hermeneutics is already intercultural even within a supposedly identical culture and tradition. It’s a key task of hermeneutics because not only between cultures, but even within our own culture, we face misunderstanding and misinterpretation all the time, as all of us experience in everyday life. Schleiermacher makes the pivotal statement that we should assume that misunderstanding is the norm. Gadamer criticizes this, as if we immediately understand each other since we share the same tradition. Schleiermacher’s point reflects reality. If I meet other English-speaking people from my own era and locality, I don’t immediately understand them. We share a similar background, but that background

does not guarantee mutual understanding and recognition. Indeed, I have met people from radically different cultures and shared a deeper understanding in the encounter and interaction itself. This is why we should be suspicious of the priority of the social that undervalues these deeply individual reciprocal moments that happen despite tradition. This relates to Levinas's insistence that there is a direct asymmetrical encounter with the Other that cannot be reduced to a social category such as tradition. Monolithic ideas of the presuppositions of understanding, rationality in Habermas and tradition in Gadamer, prevent understanding more than they nourish it. My emphasis on the intercultural character of hermeneutics is a crucial correction. We don't need to share a tradition or form of reason to communicate, we only need to engage in communication with all its difficulties and challenges. Obviously, we communicate through languages. Somehow, we understand across different perspectives and languages and don't need to fuse our horizons to communicate. Rather, we speak given the means that we have in the situation. Genuinely understanding the Other is a question within a given community. Even the most standardized conformist community faces issues of misinterpretation and miscommunication. It's more typical that we must contest the ordinary shared understanding to have a genuine encounter and understanding. The radical intercultural moment of interpretation is much richer and more complicated given the diversity of structures at play. It requires more work to realize what we are communicating about in that situation and yet understanding still occurs. Intra- and intercultural communication involve common problems of how to understand. We cannot assume that this is automatically predetermined or given even though they are socially reproduced through the lifeworld. Still, there's the potential to ask what we are doing, what we are understanding in ordinary unreflective activities. This concerns not only understanding the Other, but also understanding oneself in this relation.

How do you see the future of intercultural philosophy? Do you think that it remains a necessary task for contemporary philosophizing?

I would say yes: communication is a necessary task. Dialogue is needed both within and between cultures. I'm not fixated on an absolute distinction between intra- and intercultural philosophizing since that is another reification of self and Other. Asymmetrical differences arise across a relational continuum or spectrum of intervals that can neither be collapsed into identity or difference. Misunderstanding, miscommunication, problems of translation and interpretation are inevitable, and this situation is what it means to communicate. Perfect mutual understanding would not require language or hermeneutics. Philosophers need to

critically engage and analyse their own presuppositions and prejudices, or their own claims and arguments in relationship to others. Any monolithic idea of a tradition, culture, or society that assumes that all is already known and decided betrays the questionability at the heart of philosophical inquiry. The distinctiveness of philosophy consists in entering this questionability and examining one's own presuppositions. Scepticism is closer to the truth of philosophy than any dogmatism. Socrates didn't assert that one should live how everyone else in a tradition is currently living. He asked himself and others to engage in self-examination. Confucius likewise has this existential philosophical moment. He affirms appropriately following the right ritual life and ethical norms. But he reflects on how this enacts the good to arrive at this model. That's a prototypical philosophical movement. It's part of the existential condition of philosophy to pursue questions about ourselves, and to do so in a communicative way with others in dialogue, argument, and even disagreement. All of these are elements of the philosophical vocation to maintain its critical roles in examining its historical and present situations.

Thank you so much.

BOOK REVIEWS

Andrés Rodríguez: *Frontier Fieldwork: Building a Nation in China's Borderlands, 1919–45*

*Reviewed by Norbert FRANCIS**

(2022. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, pp. 221. ISBN: 978-0774867559)

The study of the relationship between the central government and the borderlands to the west of China during the Nationalist Republican period (1912–1949) is relevant to our understanding of today's policies and controversies in the Tibetan regions and Xinjiang. In this way, *Frontier Fieldwork*, a historical study, is important for engaging with the evolving debate on the political orientation and practice of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in this domain. The western provinces represent the one remaining serious unresolved problem of national integration in Mainland China regarding the country's minority nationalities. The study by Professor Rodríguez follows two histories that place it into the broader context—Liu (2020) on Tibet, and Rossabi (2022) on the history of the Uyghur people. The three volumes form a set that students of East Asia will find useful for their research, as together they provide a consistent account of the key issues. One common thread in particular runs through all three studies. In both Tibet and Xinjiang the conflicts and attempts to resolve them reveal a continuity not only between the Republican era and the current regime (pp. 103, 146, 152), but with regard to the relationship between the centre and borderlands of the last dynasty (1636–1912) (p. 20). Important differences from one period to another aside, this is one of the main ideas that this reviewer took away from the work.

The introduction and first chapter frame the examination of the role that student and professional fieldworkers played in the long-deferred task of nation building, a task already accomplished by the foreign powers arrayed along China's borders: most directly Russia and later the Soviet Union in the north and west, Britain and France in the west and south, and Japan in the east. But none of these powers were willing to recognize the imperative that impelled China to carry out national integration. The May Fourth Movement (M4M) spurred migration to the borderland countryside, as young people in particular came to grips with the hypocrisy of the

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international betrayal following World War I. A review of the book must start with this framing of the historic fundamentals, as the author himself does: “The term *mínzú* (民族) [ethnic group, ethnicity, nationality] would be the central focus of this discourse [of national integration] that attempted to draw common ties between Han and non-Han peoples” (p. 11).

The War of Resistance (1937–1945), the annexation of Manchuria in 1931, following the loss of Taiwan to Japan during the final years of the Qing dynasty, stood as the most significant threat to the very existence of the nation. With the east largely occupied, the western regions remained as China’s last bulwark, with the temporary capital established in the distant Sichuan province. The *frontier fieldwork* in the western borderlands (also targeted by foreign incursions) represented no less than the possibility of survival (p. 12). This field of work inspired a literature, emerging as a genre of wartime mobilization, sovereignty and resistance to local injustice and European and Japanese imperialism (pp. 14–16). The British invasion of Tibet (1903–1904), which foreshadowed the US Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored paramilitary campaign of the 1950s and 60s, is an example of the above-mentioned continuity spanning all three regimes—dynastic, republic and peoples’ republic—regarding the long-term conflict involving foreign intervention (Gyatso 2008). Another interesting historical parallel, of a different kind, is between:

- the continuing effort to populate the western provinces with migrants from the east, in recent years, and
- a similar policy initiated by the Qing government between 1850 and 1902 (pp. 20–21) and proposed in 1922 by Sun Yat-sen. Russian/Soviet interference spanned all three regimes.

Frontier development sought to bring together soldiers and researchers, scholars and students who answered the appeal to participate in an anti-imperialist campaign that would also help to break down isolation and the arbitrary and imposed divisions of language and ethnicity, eventually leading to a more united nation (pp. 29–39). The two objectives were perceived, from both historical precedent and the current example, as closely related.

Chapter 2 begins a discussion on the role of foreign religious missions and their relationship to scientific fieldwork and military expedition. Readers will be interested in comparing the different kinds of interaction in China and East Asia with that on other continents, perhaps most notably in the Americas. The one feature of the missionary enterprise that made the collaboration with the scientific expeditions as productive as it was consisted in the early and long-term insertion of church affiliated fieldworkers. Years of immersion in the languages and cultures

of various communities allowed for deep and exceptional knowledge that government agents, university professors and their students, in the beginning, could never attain first hand. While the work of proselytization contemplated a different kind of objective, the necessary description and understanding of material conditions and the objective assessment of indigenous artistic, literary and cultural knowledge coincided with the modern sciences of anthropology, linguistics, geography and economics. To the extent that missionaries participated (typically as initiators) in local development projects, the convergence with the scientific fieldworker would be seamless. The most prominent example of this partnership is the first such large-scale evangelization/colonization that a European nation carried out, in New Spain of the 16th Century, chronicled in the massive work of ethnography and history not published until the 19th Century (de Sahagún, 2011 [1829]). In China, religious-affiliated publications such as the *Journal of West China Border Research Society* became authoritative sources for the relevant international academic disciplines (pp. 53–57). As the Japanese occupation pushed progressively further west, eastern-based university departments hastened their exodus toward Sichuan to collaborate on the ground with the already established missionary workers.

One divergence of objectives between missionaries and nationalists in particular mirrors the same difference of outlook internationally and historically: the special attention on the part of the evangelist researchers that was given to the preservation of autochthonous cultures and languages, for example the tracing of origins and lineages, as apart from the mainstream national culture and history. Here they would place less emphasis than their secular colleagues on integration and assimilation, even coming into open disagreement over different aspects of this question (pp. 60–62). In turn, government and university-based fieldworkers often question the objectivity of missionaries' view on the same question given their ultimate "other-worldly" agenda (pp. 68–71). The journalist Chen Youqin summed up this complex relationship as follows: "Although Christian culture invades and has ulterior motives, our country's authorities actually use them as an indispensable reference" (p. 70). The founding of the Academia Sinica in 1928 was a precursor for the eventual transition away from research dominated by foreigners and missionaries.

Chapters 3 and 4 pick up again on the inevitable shift on the part of the national institutions and native scholars and writers toward systematic work in the provinces in response to the advancing invasion from the east and threats of intervention from the west. At the time the borderlands even lacked reasonably accurate and usable maps and geographic reports in Chinese, a minimal requirement to be able to defend them (p. 80).

Writers thus turned to the accounts of travellers and ethnographers, and other social scientists from the Academia Sinica—imbued with the dual maxim of the M4M, for Science and Democracy—undertook the indispensable task of conducting the first scientific population census, *mínzú diàochá* (民族調查, “ethnic survey”), of the region to count the *xīnán mínzú* (西南民族, “peoples of the Southwest”). The Democracy component of the M4M slogan corresponded to Sun Yat-sen’s principle of *mínzú píngděng* (民族平等, “ethnic equality”) for national reconstruction. Writers and spokespersons recruited by the Guomindang (GMD/KMT) from among the non-Han elites, in particular, came to be effective messengers for both promoting cultural exchange and cross-cultural learning, and for helping to correct early assessments of ethnography that overstated aspects of difference by, for example, excessively fractionating populations and language categories (pp. 97–98). This critique was perhaps related to the overarching concept, promoted by official social science, of common heritage on a higher level, of how “every nation of the whole country should hold hands together” as each nationality, deserving recognition of its integrity, belonged to the greater *Zhōngguó mínzú xìtǒng* (中國民族系統, “Chinese national system”) (p. 106). Crucially, and at variance with influential currents in anthropology, this conception foresaw an inevitable outcome of integration at the national level and of economic globalization: the weakening and even break-up of certain traditional socio-cultural structures (p. 113). A recent study of Yi language and culture (in Yunnan and Sichuan) is directly relevant to this difficult discussion (Zhang and Tsung 2019).

The large-scale movement of refugees from all walks of life converted the border regions, in the words of geographer Jiang Junzhang, into the “base area for [the] nation’s revival” (p. 101). As alluded to above, the emerging consensus conceived of rebirth as implying a pluralism of multicultural unity. The community fieldwork that would inform the new policy contemplated an extended immersion, exemplified by the missionaries and proposed by the leading school of anthropology internationally. Functionalism, associated with the method of Bronislaw Malinowski, differed from the strongly secular posture of rapid modernization that characterized the approach of many, if not most, ruling (GMD) party ideologues (pp. 124–126).

Chapter 5 focuses on the experience of the student frontier fieldworkers who found inspiration in the idea of a national revival as the wartime mobilization was presented to them by their teachers. Guided by the ideals of social work and *biān-jīāng fúwù* (邊疆服務, “frontier service”), their mission stood in stark contrast to the corruption and ineptitude of the governing party (p. 131). Again, the example of the Western missionaries, e.g. learning the indigenous language and applying the methods of participant observation, was held up above that of the practice of local government officials.

The conclusion correctly draws parallels (despite the important differences) between the regimes of the GMD and the PRC regarding the policies applied in the border regions, because both governments shared the problem of national integration in the face of foreign interference (although not of the same scale, as it was vastly more extensive and encompassing in the case of former). Both were, and are, challenged by persistent cultural and political conflict, often resulting in serious violations of the human rights of minority populations. On this note, readers will find misleading the favourable comparison between the scientifically motivated and generally enlightened cultural mobilizations by students of the Republican era and the Chinese Communist Party's punitive mass exile of young people to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (p. 49). The former to be sure is characterized accurately, and demonstratively as one of a different kind, throughout the entire study, in particular in Chapter 5.

As mentioned in the introduction to this review, studies of history present us with lessons on current social and political problems. Reflecting on the course of great historical tendencies allows us to look forward with more clarity. Among scholars in China and their assessment of the 1911 Revolution, from which emanated the various of governing bodies of the Republican Period, we can, in the first instance, compare:

- The standard (so to speak) Marxist analysis of various stages—the bourgeois revolution that leads the overthrow of the feudal system, succumbing to corruption and degeneration, flowing from the class origin roots of its leading participants. This intermediate stage is then swept away by the socialist revolution in 1949.
- The somewhat more nuanced and objective versions, sometimes within the same basic framework, resulting in greater plurality among researchers on the historical account. Pointing out the corrupting and dictatorial features of the Nationalist regime by and large, even from different perspectives, is a point of agreement. See Fung (1978) and Yu (1991) for a discussion of the evolution of this discussion.

On the other hand, the recent, 2024 elections in Taiwan reveal a different distribution of longstanding (dating back to the beginning of the democratic period) appreciations of 1911 and the Republican era. The two understandings are effectively evenly split down the middle between two poles: the “Taiwan-centric” DPP, with 40% of votes, “intermediate” TPP, 26%, and “China-oriented” KMT,

34%.¹ Significantly, even a stalwart defender of Taiwan autonomy, such as President Tsai Ing-wen, is sharply rebuked from within the same movement for her positive assessment of October 10 (explained eloquently, for example, during the official commemoration of 2016), for recognizing the historical turning point for democracy, in its long road in the region. The President's critics from within the "Taiwan-centric" constituency suggest that she should be indifferent to this heritage.

Overall, the study puts the discussion of recent developments in the western regions into perspective, independent of one's view on the controversies about pluralism and multiculturalism in China today. Finally, it should be noted that neither of these controversies appear in East Asia alone.

Flagstaff, 11th February 2024

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1 Readers will rightfully object to the coarse over-simplification among the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan Peoples Party (TPP), and Kuomintang (KMT), as "Taiwan-centric," "intermediate" and "China-oriented". But the dimensions of the persistent divide, coalescing around a moderate "status quo" consensus, for now, is beyond question. Noteworthy in the recent election was the favourable outcome for the KMT in the election for parliamentary speaker, thanks to how the "in-between" TPP voted.

Rens Krijgsman: *Early Chinese Manuscript Collections: Sayings, Memory, Verse, and Knowledge. Studies in the History of Chinese Texts*

*Reviewed by Newell Ann VAN AUKEN**

(2023. Leiden: Brill, pp. x, 220. ISBN 978-90-04-53627-2 (hardback); ISBN 978-90-04-54084-2 (e-book); DOI: 10.1163/9789004540842)

The book under review is a study of manuscript texts from Warring States and early imperial China (approximately the 5th to 2nd centuries BCE); its specific topic is “manuscript collections,” that is, “single manuscripts containing multiple (originally) distinct texts” (p. 1). In this book, Rens Krijgsman explores what happened when multiple texts came to be combined on the same material carrier: How were texts selected, organized, and integrated into individual collections? What relationships obtained among these different texts? And how did collections affect reception, including interpretation and perceptions of genre? Cautious not to overstep the evidence, Krijgsman acknowledges that certain basic information about production and use of early manuscript collections is wanting: we do not (and cannot) know who collected the texts and produced the manuscripts, nor can we know who used collections (pp. 14–15). Wielding impressive command of the technical aspects of early manuscripts and of a broad range of texts, he seeks to extract as much information as possible through a careful yet comprehensive analysis of the material aspects of manuscript collections, their content, and their organization. Although Krijgsman takes as his primary focus works from the substantial corpus of early Chinese manuscripts that have surfaced in recent decades, the issues he addresses in this innovative study are of great significance to the study of the transmitted textual tradition as well.

Early Chinese Manuscript Collections: Sayings, Memory, Verse, and Knowledge comprises an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, and as indicated by the subtitle, the four chapters that constitute the body of the book are organized by genre: sayings and aphorisms, corresponding in the transmitted tradition to sayings of masters; historical narratives—that is, historiographical texts; songs or poetry, parallel in the transmitted tradition to the *Shijing* 詩經 (Odes);

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and texts transmitting technical knowledge associated with divination and the occult. Within each chapter, the argument is illustrated and advanced through the discussion of a series of manuscripts, and these discussions are accompanied by translations and detailed descriptions of the material aspects, organization, and content of the manuscripts; the study draws on well over two dozen manuscript texts. The book is illustrated with images of ten of these manuscripts, and because of this, even those readers who prefer (and can afford) a hard copy of this book may wish to avail themselves of the open access digital version.

Chapter 1, “Manuscript Materiality: Organizing Sayings in a Collection”, takes on the topic of collections of sayings, maxims, and aphorisms, examining half a dozen manuscript collections, including the Guodian *Laozi* 老子, **Yong yue* 用曰 (Shanghai Museum), **Fan wu liu xing* 凡物流形 (Shanghai Museum), **Yucong* 語叢4, **Yucong* 2, and **Yucong* 3 (Guodian), devoting a separate section to each. As Krijgsman notes, in the transmitted tradition compilations of sayings are typically associated with specific authority figures—familiar examples include *Mencius* and *Lunyu*—but significantly, this is not the case in manuscript sayings collections. Instead, sayings collections tended to be arranged topically, and sayings “could move freely between texts” (p. 43) rather than being bound to a specific figure or text. He begins his analysis with the Guodian *Laozi*, the earliest example of a text that is somehow ancestral to a transmitted sayings collection. Observing that the transmitted *Laozi* includes material that seems to have been inserted in order to redirect the understanding of the text to make it applicable to new contexts, he suggests that the aim of collections was not faithful preservation of existing material but effective deployment of existing sayings to meet “new argumentative needs” (p. 28). Krijgsman draws heavily on the concept of textual “building blocks”, which he defines as “linguistically or codicologically distinguished textual units”; building blocks did not replicate speech contexts, but were produced by strategies for organizing text into usable segments (p. 26). These strategies included auditory organization employing rhyme, visual demarcation using punctuation and layout, and repetition of formulaic phrasing, as well as thematic clustering. This in turn generated textual units of manageable size that could be more easily memorized and reused in other contexts, such as speeches and persuasions. In this way, these manuscript collections played a crucial role in the formation of the genre, selecting and organizing sayings into new arrangements, recontextualizing them, and distributing them to users, who would in turn employ them in new ways.

Chapter 2, “Collecting Stories: The Reformation and Integration of the Past” engages with collections of historical accounts, exploring how these collections combined smaller units, “stories and anecdotes” concerning the past, to form “larg-

er historical narratives” (p. 63). The chapter opens with an overview of the cultural memory theory of Jan Assmann, who posits an earlier commemorative mode and a later textualized mode; Krijgsman proposes that Warring States period writings about the past occupy a transitional position between these two types. To illustrate the commemorative mode, he draws on songs from the *Shijing* and Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, showing that these very early accounts of the past are fragmented and sometimes conflicting, and that they had “not yet [been] molded into a single structure” (p. 67), a unified and comprehensive narrative. At the other end of the spectrum, the textualized mode is exemplified by *Rongchengshi* 容成氏 (Shanghai Museum), which conjoins “blocks” from “a body of commonly remembered lore” into a temporally structured, causally connected master narrative about the past (p. 76). As Krijgsman astutely observes, *Rongchengshi* exhibits sophisticated organization and great detail, and it thus differs fundamentally from earlier representations of the past. In the final part of the chapter, he explores the factors that led to the emergence of such a text, examining a series of smaller “(mini-)collections” that assembled multiple stories together under an “overarching argument” (p. 84), including **Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道 (Guodian), *Zi Gao* 子羔 (Shanghai Museum), **Gui shen* 鬼神 (Shanghai Museum), and **Qiong da yi shi* 窮達以時 (Guodian). Through perceptive reading and analysis, Krijgsman shows that these shorter collections employed a range of strategies to accommodate ostensibly conflicting conceptions of the models and “rules for the past” and accounts of the past under a single master narrative (p. 90). Competing accounts of the same events gave rise to scepticism, as did observed disparities between the idealized “master narrative” of the past and the recent remembered past, and this in turn left accounts of the past increasingly open to commentarial evaluation and moral judgment. As in the case of sayings collections, the process of selecting and organizing shorter historical accounts into a single manuscript collection guided how readers encountered and interpreted the material, and thereby wrought a larger transformation on the evolution of historiography in early China.

In Chapter 3, “Collection and Canon: The Formation of a Genre”, Krijgsman turns to collections of verse or *shi* 詩, exploring how collections organized, framed, classified, and interpreted verse, and how collections and also commentaries affected ideas about genre and *shi* (or *Shi*) reception. While some scholars have seen recent manuscript finds as evidence for the early existence of the collection that came to be known as the *Shijing*, Krijgsman challenges this view, proposing that it was not larger, “proto-*Shijing*” collections but small-scale collections of verse that were most influential. After giving an overview of a variety of small-scale collections, he turns to two somewhat longer collections, *Zhougong zhi qin wu* 周公之琴舞 and *Qi ye* 耆夜 (Tsinghua University), both of which include

verse pieces that share similar themes, language, and rhythmic patterns. Krijgsman insightfully notes that by assembling similar pieces together, such collections contributed to the perception of shared genre (or subgenre) affiliation. Over time, verse was increasingly unmoored from earlier performance contexts, and *shi* came to be treated as “written poetry”, separated from performance, while performative and ritual aspects of *shi* came to be associated with a different category, music (*yue*); this transformation is evident both in framing material in verse collections and in commentaries on verse. Thus commentarial discussions of performances, such as found in **Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 (Guodian) tend to focus on responses to musical performance, while verse came to be textualized as poetry, a “written phenomenon” that commentaries could “mine for the meaning of its words” (p. 127). *Shi* thus emerged as a literary genre that was associated with written collections, and commentarial “interpretative and teaching practices” (p. 133) such as those in **Kongzi shi lun* 孔子詩論 (Shanghai Museum) hastened this transformation.

The manuscript collections explored in Chapter 4, “Collecting and Disseminating: Using Technical Knowledge”, gathered knowledge concerning “problems of medical, ritual, divinatory, and magical nature” (p. 146), occult knowledge that was primarily possessed by experts. Among the earliest manuscripts recording technical knowledge are simple records of an extended sequence of divinations and prayers concerning the health of a single person; these collections (from Baoshan, Tangweisi, and Geling) seem to be documentary records associated with specific occasions that were not meant for wider circulation. By contrast, later manuscripts that collected technical knowledge seem to have been aimed at accumulating knowledge and transmitting it. Krijgsman describes the **Bu shu* 卜書 (Shanghai Museum) as a “divinatory handbook” that was probably designed for specialists; in support of this conclusion, he observes that it focuses exclusively on special (negative) outcomes and seems to presuppose some degree of expertise, and he also notes the care taken in preparing the manuscript. Other collections, such as the **Zhu ci* 祝辭 (Tsinghua University) and the text collected on the backs of the Beida Qin slips, are written in a secondary position on the same material support as other texts, and these collections simply stored knowledge, perhaps serving as memory aids. Still other collections, such as **Dao ci* 禱辭 (Tsinghua) and **Ci zhu zhi dao* 祠祝之道 (Beida Qin manuscript), were apparently “designed to withstand with more active use” (p. 159), and certain features indicate that these collections allowed non-specialists to make use of technical knowledge that would previously have been the sole purview of experts, and to do so without the mediation of experts. The final section concerns daybooks, which provided non-expert users with “unmediated access” (p. 166) to a wide range of technical

knowledge. Krijgsman notes that daybooks were the “apex” of the development of collections of technical knowledge during the period he examines, but that the collection process continued into later periods, and earlier collections contributed to the development of later collections such as those found at Dunhuang (p. 167).

In this book, Krijgsman has set forth a powerful and compelling vision for how early Chinese manuscript collections affected and transformed the early textual tradition across multiple genres, and in so doing, he has challenged many conventional assumptions. Regarding sayings collections and “masters” texts, scholarship on the transmitted tradition focuses on individual thinkers and schools; Krijgsman demonstrates that early sayings collections were *not* organized around authority figures, requiring us to reconsider ideas about the formation of these texts that many take for granted. Similarly, the historiographical meta-narrative and structure he observes in *Rongchengshi* is “an achievement for which we normally credit texts such as the *Shiji*” (p. 90); his incisive analysis of collections of historical accounts not only pushes this innovation back earlier in time but also illustrates the incremental steps that brought it forth. Writing about verse collections, which in time culminated in the *Shijing*, he perceptively traces the evolution of a performance genre into a textualized or written genre, and the attendant changes in commentarial interpretation and in perceptions of genre. Finally, his analysis of collections of technical knowledge touches on important issues surrounding circulation of and access to knowledge, and the changes that occurred as knowledge became textualized and access was no longer restricted to experts. Indeed, a major theme of this book is access to knowledge and the transformations wrought by changes in access, and my only reservation about it concerns exactly that: this book was written by a specialist in the field of early Chinese manuscript studies, and it seems to be directed at other experts in that field; thus the content is not always contextualized in a way that is readily accessible to a wider audience. This is a problem precisely because the arguments advanced in this book have immense relevance to scholars whose interests lie well outside the specialized field of early Chinese manuscript studies, and Krijgsman’s work and his conclusions deserve the full attention of this wider audience.

Rens Krijgsman’s repeated and highly apt emphasis on the role of collections as “catalysts of discourse” requires us to consider new dimensions of how texts were transmitted and how discourse evolved, demanding that we take into account material and visual aspects of texts alongside content. The significance of the issues Krijgsman takes on in this book extends far beyond “early China” and “manuscripts”. Most of the texts—I can think of few exceptions—that have been transmitted from early China are compilations that surely originated as manuscript collections of some sort, and the influence of collections on the literary,

historiographical, and commentarial tradition and on the circulation of knowledge was profound, shaping many aspects of the canon and its reception, and certainly extending into medieval times and arguably later still. It is to be hoped that this excellent study will itself serve as a catalyst for discourse concerning the formation of the early Chinese textual tradition.