

Xu Fuguan's Concept of Anxiety and Its Connection to Religious Studies

Tea SERNELJ*

Abstract

Although Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) belongs to the most important representatives of the Modern Confucian intellectual movement, he is rather unknown outside China. However, his concept of “anxiety” (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識) is not only relevant for the recognition of the special characteristics, which determines the ideological and political structure of ancient Chinese society, but also for the intercultural elaboration of Jaspers's “axial age” theory. This article introduces this concept to the European academic readership, and provides an analysis of its connection to the Modern Confucian hypothesis regarding the absence of an external God (or Deities) in classical Chinese culture.

Keywords: Xu Fuguan, Modern Confucianism, anxiety, *youhuan yishi*, Chinese religions

Izveček

Četudi sodi Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) k najpomembnejšim predstavnikom Modernega konfucijanstva, je zunaj Kitajske še precej neraziskan. Vendar je njegov koncept “zaskrbljenosti” (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識) izjemno pomemben ne samo za teoretsko razjasnitev posebnih značilnosti, ki določajo ideološko (in s tem tudi politično) strukturo antične kitajske družbe, temveč tudi za medkulturno nadgradnjo Jaspersove teorije »osnega obdobja«. Pričujoči članek namerava predstaviti ta koncept širšim akademskim krogom v Evropi; avtorica v njem hkrati izdelava analizo njegove povezave z Moderno konfucijansko hipotezo o odsotnosti zunanjega Boga (ali božanstev) v klasični kitajski kulturi.

Ključne besede: Xu Fuguan, moderno konfucijanstvo, zaskrbljenost, *youhuan yishi*, kitajske religije

* Tea SERNELJ, PhD Candidate and Assistant Researcher, Department of Asian and African Studies, Faculty of Arts, Ljubljana

The author wishes to express her gratitude to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation which enabled her to carry out research work, necessary for the creation of this article in the framework of the research project RG003-U-11_Taiwanese modern Confucians and their philosophical contribution to Asian modernization.

1. Introduction: Xu Fuguan's Life and Work

Although Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) is a significant Chinese philosopher of the 20th century whose theoretical contribution is in the centre of academic interests in China and Taiwan, he is still completely unexplored in the Western academic world. He was born in the beginning of the previous century in the Hubei Province in mainland China. His father was a traditional scholar, so Xu was at first educated in the traditional way which means that he had a rather good background in classical Chinese philosophy. Later, he attended the high school in Wuhan, which was the capital of this province. There, he was confronted with Western thought for the first time. Wuhan was also an important area for the Republican Revolution which ended China's 2000-year old imperial rule in 1911.

After this vivid period, Xu went to Japan and studied at the Meiji University, where he became influenced by several Western theoretical currents including Marxism. He then joined the Nationalist army and attained the rank of senior colonel. After leaving the army, Xu worked in various teaching positions, published an academic journal, and then involved himself in politics, working as political advisor until 1946. In the beginning of the forties he met his most important teacher Xiong Shili, the famous pioneer of the Modern Confucian movement; Xu was profoundly fascinated and influenced by his philosophy. Due to Xiong's influence, he began to devote himself again to the study and research of the traditional Chinese thought (Ni 2002, 283).

Shortly before the end of the civil war, he moved to the island of Taiwan to where the Nationalists (Guomin dang 國民黨) retreated in 1949. Between 1955 and 1969, he taught at the Donghai University (東海大學), and later at the famous New Asian Academy (新亞學院) in Hong Kong (Ni 2002, 285) where he stayed till his death in 1982.

Xu Fuguan's fields of research were mostly philosophy, sociology of culture, and literary and art criticism. He is noted as one of the first theoreticians of the specific Chinese aesthetics in Contemporary Chinese thought.

Although Xu was primarily an excellent essay writer, he also excelled with a wide knowledge about the development of ancient Chinese society especially concerning its political, spiritual, and cultural characteristics. Due to such special interests, he did not publish any excessively profound philosophical discussions, which was otherwise the case with the majority of other Modern Confucians. His

fundamental methodological approach which determined his specific vision of the conceptual development of traditional Chinese spiritual culture still remains widely unknown until the present day, although the results of his studies in this field are extremely interesting, and could represent an important contribution to the further research in comparative cultural studies.

As we shall see later, almost all Modern Confucians emphasized the importance of building a new ontology that could serve as a basis for Confucianism's renewal. Xu Fuguan was practically the only representative of the second generation of Modern Confucians who considered that metaphysics and ontology were not appropriate instruments for understanding ancient Chinese thought, and much less for the development of its interpretation, because, according to him, its pragmatic nucleus has never led to any composition or any structured and coherent conception of a metaphysical system, as has been established, for instance, by the ancient Greek philosophers (Xu 2005, 43ff). Instead, ancient Chinese philosophers have developed an idea of ethics, based on the “divine or heavenly” essence of human beings, directly from the “primitive” state of religious and mythological society.

2. Xu Fuguan's Intellectual Context: the Modern Confucian Movement and its Relevance for Modern Chinese Social and Philosophical Studies

Xu Fuguan is one of the central representatives of Contemporary Modern Confucianism (新儒學 *Xin Ruxue*) which belongs to the most interesting and relevant theoretical currents in modern China and Taiwan. The Confucian revival belongs to the most important reversals in modern Chinese history. For almost a century, Confucianism has been condemned to the “dustbin” of history as dysfunctional ideology to the Chinese progress toward modernity. In his classical work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the 19th-century German sociologist Max Weber argued that Confucianism was incompatible with the development of a modern economic system (Rošker 2013, 89ff). He saw in the brand of Protestantism practiced in northern Europe the only ethical system with the attributes needed to make capitalism work. History has proved Weber wrong. Now, it is quite clear that the most capitalistic societies at the dawn of the 21st century are to be found in Asia. It is no coincidence that all of them are located

within the so-called Confucian cultural zone. The success of Japan and the “Four Tigers” (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore), and recent rapid development of P.R. China owe much to such crucial Confucian virtues as social hierarchy, selfdiscipline, social harmony, strong families, and respect for education. This has led to unprecedented and increasingly broader international interest in this ideology.

The current of Modern Confucianism mainly developed during the 20th Century in Taiwan and Hong Kong, but soon also gained popularity in Korea and Japan (Lee 2001, 69). In the early eighties, Modern Confucianism also began to reappear in the P.R. China as one of the most important ideological concerns. This phenomenon is very much worth examining for it can tell us about our times and the fate of one of the most important philosophical legacies in the world.

Modern Confucianism, to which we count this theoretician, is a discourse within which the development guidelines of the rehabilitation of Chinese traditionalism were most clearly expressed. This fraction developed in the beginning of the 20th century, and was not completely established before 1957. In this year, a group of Taiwanese and Hong Kong philosophers published the famous *Declaration for the Re-evaluation of the Chinese Culture as a World Heritage* (為中國 文化敬告世界人士宣言 *Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shiji erenshi xuanyan*) on the first day of the year 1958. This document represents the fundamental manifesto, and specifies goals and contents of Modern Confucianism.

The members of the group who published this declaration were, besides Xu Fuguan also Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang, 1887–1969), Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), and Tang Junyi (1909–1978).

These Modern theoreticians still count as the founders of Modern Confucianism, a system which aims to provide a systematic reinterpretation of traditional Chinese philosophy (and thus, of the Chinese culture in general through the lens of a deeper and broader understanding of Western, in particular Plato's, Kant's, and Hegel's philosophy) (Bresciani 2001, 27).

These philosophers are generally referred to as the main representatives of the second generation of Modern Confucianism (Bresciani 2001, 27). In contrast to the pioneers of this movement who (at least till the year 1949, but most of them till their death) lived in mainland China, they have mostly lived and worked in Taiwan, and partly in Hong Kong.

In the process of modernization Modern Confucians mostly saw a kind of rationalization of the world. In search for its new philosophical basis, they focused mainly on questions connected to ontology which they usually came to know in the framework of Western ideas and philosophical systems. Generally they followed the premise according to which the questions of innermost reality of the universe, the substance of being and the Absolute, are the very questions that determine the meaning of human life (Bresciani 2001, 27). As such, these questions are essential for the establishment of a new, modern society, and for the preservation of an integrated, un-alienated cultural and personal identity of the individuals in China.

The current of Modern Confucianism emerged from the attempt to synthesize Western and Chinese traditional thought, whereas at their time, these attempts were defined with the crisis of both types of discourses (Rošker 2013, 75). The ideals of Modern Confucians were not limited to the striving for revitalization and rehabilitation of ideological traditions from which they arose; it was obvious that they could begin the intellectual process of modernizing Confucianism only on the basis of its synthesis with ideas “imported” from Euro-American philosophy, because this philosophy represented the very cultural context from which the modernization actually emerged.

However, the Modern Confucian efforts to modernize Confucianism did not derive only from the tendency for a solution of their own tradition, but were also based, on the other hand, upon their wish to rescue the Western philosophical tradition which had, as it seemed, become caught into their own intellectual traps.

In general, the members of the “second generation” strove for a revitalization of their own cultural identity in the sense of “transplanting old roots” of their own tradition, because they saw this method as the only way for a possible survival of the cultural tradition from which they arose. This renovation of the “roots,” however, should not merely serve as a tool for the survival of Chinese tradition. The members of the second generation (including Xiong Shili) sincerely hoped that it could also provide new methods for an elaboration and further development of general philosophy and ethic on the global level. If this renovation of traditional Chinese thought was carried out conscientiously and accurately enough, it could thus in their view lead to the establishment of a new philosophical system of modernized Chinese thought which could actively involve itself into international dialogues in modern societies.

Among the above mentioned arguments the central thesis of the Declaration (also known as the *Manifesto*) is based upon the supposition that Chinese, especially Confucianism, contained “seeds of democracy.” As we shall see later, Xu also developed this supposition further in his historical and philosophical work, striving for the establishment of a liberal constitutional democracy in a modernized China. In this task he saw an internal precondition for the further development of the Chinese tradition (Chen 2009, 19). But not only Xu Fuguan, but other authors of the Manifesto also claimed that many central ideas and practices in Chinese tradition were consistent with the spirit of democracy. They believed, for instance, that the Will of Heaven (*tian zhi* 天志) reflected itself in the will of the people. Thus, the ruler should follow people's wishes, especially considering the Confucian suppositions that “everything under the Heaven belongs to the public (*tianxia weigong* 天下為公)” and that everyone has the moral potential to become a sage, thus implying human equality (Chen 2009, 19):

Xu Fuguan developed the contradiction of double subjectivity (*shuang chong zhutixing*) in Chinese history which is one of the central notions of his political thought. According to true Confucian thinking, the people should be the subjects (*zhuti*) or primary actors in the political order, in practice in Chinese history the monarch or emperor was the subject or primary actor in the political order. In his view, Confucianism requires the rulers to put aside their self-interests and to serve only the interests of people. However, in the actual course of Chinese history, such Confucian ideal was seldom realized and Confucianism did not develop sufficient institutional safeguards to restrain the exercise of absolutist imperial power. (Chen 2009, 19)

One of Xu Fuguan's main theses about Confucianism and democracy is namely that the Confucian¹ theory of the goodness of “human nature” (*renxingshan* 人行善) provides the moral foundation for democracy². This positive and optimistic view of human nature affirms human dignity and leads to respect, trust and faith in the people. Xu argued that democracy is based on such views. He also argued that the opposite view of human nature—that human nature is basically evil would lead to the opposite of democracy: If people are evil and not to be trusted, then authoritarian rule is to be justified to keep them from evil. Xu believes that Western liberal democracy is universally applicable, and points out that there is no

¹ Or, more precisely, Neo-Confucian, for this theory is based on the Mencian interpretation of original Confucianism which had been elaborated and further developed during the Song Dynasty by the main representatives of the School of structure (理學) (Rošker 2013, 87).

² For Xu Fuguan's practical strategies to attain this aim see Lee Su-San, 1998.

specifically Chinese style of democracy. Xu's writings also affirm the basic proposition of the 1958 Declaration: the democratization of China is not only consistent with its Confucian cultural heritage, but could represent a natural development of the Confucian tradition and enable Confucian ideals to be better realized than before (Chen 2009, 20ff).

Although Xu was fully committed to Confucianism, he recognized that there were deficiencies and weaknesses in the Confucian tradition. For example, he points out that the Confucian conception of “five cardinal relationships” (*wulun* 五倫) did not sufficiently address the relationship between the government and the people. He suggests that traditional Confucianism looks upon politics mainly from the standpoint of the ruling elite rather than from standpoint of the people. He also notices that, in emphasizing duties and obligations, Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture did not facilitate the development of the individual subject's self-consciousness, nor the assertion of his/her subjectivity, legitimate interests and rights. Therefore, he suggests that the modernized Confucian philosophy should not only preach the achievement of moral excellence by human beings, but also preach liberty, equality and human rights (Xu 2005, 20–23). At the same time, he believes that Confucian ideas of conscience and moral restraint in recognition of the interests of others can enable Western liberal democracy—which originated in the struggle for individual's rights—to find a firmer moral foundation. Thus, in his view, Confucianism can not only give rise to democracy in China, but can also provide deeper roots for it in the West.

3. The Concept of *Anxiety* and its Socio-cultural Origins

As a co-signer of the above-mentioned 1958 Declaration, Xu Fuguan also tried to capture the central or basic spirit of Chinese cultural tradition which could link all of its parts together. Through it, he hoped to be able to reveal its values and to revitalize and re-appropriate them rather than to construct a theoretical system that would force upon tradition. According to him, the basic characteristic of the Chinese philosophic tradition is its origin in the sense of “anxiety” (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識) or, literally, in a “concerned consciousness,” in contrast to the beginning of Western philosophic tradition, which has been marked by a sense of wonder or curiosity to know the human being and the natural world:

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

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

The sense of anxiety leads to discovery, understanding and transformation of human beings themselves. It is a psychological state in which one feels responsible to overcome difficulties by virtue of one's own efforts. It originated from a moral conscience, an anxiety above not having one's moral quality cultivated and not having learned. It is a sense of responsibility, responsiveness, discernment and self-reflexivity. What it leads to are ideas such as reverence, respect for, and the manifestation of moral character. This sense enabled humans to apprehend the purpose of human life from the perspective of cosmic creativity or religion. In contrast, the Christian idea of the sense of guilt in original sin and the Buddhist idea of suffering and impermanence both lead to a search for an escape from reality, and for a salvation in Heaven and in the tranquil realm in Nirvana respectively:

憂患與恐怖,絕望是最大不同者點,在於憂患心理的形成,乃是從當事者對吉凶成敗的深意熟考而從的遠見;在這種遠見中,主要發現了吉凶成敗與當事者行為的密切關係,及當事者在興未上所應負的責任。憂患正是有這種責任感來的要以己力突破困難而尚未突破時的心理狀態。乃人類精神開始直接對事物發生責任感的表現,也即是精神上開始有了人地自覺的表現。

The biggest difference between the sense of anxiety and the sense of dread and despair is that the sense of anxiety originates from a person's vision

obtained through deep thinking and reflection about good fortune and bad fortune, success and failure. The vision entails the discovery of a close interdependence between the fortunes and the person's own conduct and the person's responsibility to his conduct. Anxiety is the psychological state of a person when his feeling of responsibility urges him to overcome certain difficulties, and he has not got through them yet. [...] In a religious atmosphere centered around faith, a person relies on faith for salvation. He hands all the responsibilities to God and will therefore have no anxiety. His confidence is his trust in God. Only when one takes over the responsibility oneself will he have a sense of anxiety. This sense of anxiety entails a strong will and a spirit of self-reliance. (Xu 2005, 20)

From a formal point of view, Confucianism does not predict any kind of religious³ ceremonies, and yet is familiar with the idea of the creator which manifests itself in *tiandao* 天道 (the way of heaven/nature) which is creativity itself, but with the difference that Confucian creativity is not personified.

4. Anxiety as a Product of Vanishing Deities

Anthropomorphic deities were known by Chinese during the Shang (or Yin, approx. 1600–1066 BC) and the Zhou dynasties, but Confucius and Mencius transformed originally anthropomorphic form of the “Heaven or Nature” (*tian* 天) into the concept of “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命) which was a moral or ideological concept. Confucians were therefore not interested in personification of the “Way of Heaven” (*tiandao* 天道) and its transformation into an external anthropomorphic God. They were more interested in the method of its individual internalization than in its symbolic forms of creativity.

Most of the Modern Confucians have critically questioned ethical systems that are based on religion of external deities; according to them, such systems represent a primitive form of social faith and belong to the earlier stages of social development, in which the majority of people has not yet established the inner strength and autonomy which could enable them to bear the transience of life, and provide them a possibility to cope with the external world. As Jana S. Rošker (2013, 198) points out, God, as an expression of a higher incomprehensible and uncontrollable force which has the ability of making decisions about destruction

³ Here, religion is understood as a form of spiritual faith, which is rooted in the concepts of immortality, divine creator and the existence of the soul.

and salvation, is in this context actually only a kind of consolidating consciousness, only a projection of the actual helplessness of the individual and his/her inability to deal with the facts that enable, define and limit its being.

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

Similar to the prevailing currents of Western historiography which have seen the Ancient Greek society as a “cradle of Western culture,” the society dominated by the Zhou dynasty was understood as the “cradle of (Han)-Chinese culture” by most Chinese historians (Rošker 2013, 198).

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

In his view, all culture had their earliest beginning in religion, originating from the worship of God or gods. The peculiarity of Chinese culture has been that it soon came down, step by step, from heaven to the world of men, to the concrete life and behaviour of humans. [...] During the Zhou Dynasty (1459–249 BC), the preoccupation with earthly matters had started: the spirit of self-conscience was beginning to work and those people developed clear will and purpose. They were moving progressively from the realm of religion to the realm of ethics. Since that early stage, the Chinese people were free from metaphysical concerns. Unlike the Greeks, who at the same critical stage in history moved from religion to metaphysics, the Chinese moved from religion to ethics (Brecsciani 2001, 338).

Xu Fuguan who developed the concept of *anxiety*, thus provided a fruitful foundation for further development of many aspects of Modern Confucian philosophy that were later on elaborated by his colleagues and followers. He also showed in detail how the concept of this sense of anxiety was developed by the duke of Zhou and how it became known in Chinese culture later on through Confucianism (Brecsciani 2001, 23ff).

The “Moral Self,” as essentially interpreted by the second generation of Modern Confucianism in terms of ideological core of perception and possible identification of the individual, was established during the period of “the clash” of

various local cultures. This was provoked by the fact that all non-transparent series of “feudal” states of the Zhou dynasty were rooted in different traditions that formed various religious ideas.

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

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

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

至於鬼神祭祀這種風俗，孔子在知識上不能證明其必有，但也不能在知識上證明其必無，而主張將其改造為對祖先的孝敬，一表現自己的誠敬仁愛之德。因此，孔子及由孔子發展下來的祭祀，實質上不是宗教性的活動，是使每一個人以自己為中心的自私之念通過祭祀而得到一種澄汰與純化。

As regards the custom of worshipping the spirits and deities, Confucius wasn't able to prove the urgent need for its existence on the cognitive level, but also failed to demonstrate the urgent need for its nonexistence. Therefore he advocated that this custom transforms itself into the custom of respectful worship of the ancestors, through which the individual could express his/her virtues of sincere respect, humanity and love. This worship, which began with Confucius and had developed further after him, is in fact no form of religious

activity. The meaning of this worship is only to purify and enrich the egocentric self—awareness of the individual (Fang and Li 1989, III/614).

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

从宗教学上来看，殷人所具有的宗教信仰本质上是属于‘自然宗教’的形态，而尚未进至‘伦理宗教’的形态。这个重要的判断与宗教发展的一般规律是相吻合的，因为人类社会发展的历史表明，宗教的进化基本上都有一个由自然宗教向伦理宗教发展的过程，很少能有例外。殷代的卜辞完全没有关于道德智慧的术语。

From the viewpoint of religious studies, it can be claimed that the religion of the Yin dynasty still belonged to “natural religions” and did not have any characteristics that are typical for “moral religions.” This important supposition is linked to the general laws of religious development. The developmental history of human societies has namely clearly shown that religions have always developed from natural into moral ones, and that this process has almost no exceptions. The still preserved inscriptions from the time of the Yin dynasty do not imply any moral wisdoms or moral terminology. (Chen 1996, 23)

God, or “the ultimate ruler” (*Shang di* 上帝), who represented the highest religious entity in the Shang (Yin) culture, did not yet refer to interpersonal or human ethics (Yang 2007, 2). According to Yang Zebo, this fact clearly demonstrates that the religion of the Shang period was still at an early stage of development, and thus limited to the sphere of the nature. This has radically changed after the defeat of Shang (Yin) dynasty by the Zhou invaders. In Yang's opinion, the reason for transformation of prevailing natural religion to the morality lies in the “concerned consciousness” (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識)⁴ of the ruling class which in turbulent time of political and social chaos wanted to ensure the power and to justify it through this ideology (Rošker 2013, 201).

It can be argued that the traditional religious concepts, which were central parts of the dominant beliefs during the early Zhou dynasty, almost completely dissolved after the consolidation of the new culture which implied both agrarian as well as nomadic elements. This turning point was extremely important, for it

⁴ Here, Yang Zebo, a theoretician from P.R. China, uses the central concept of Xu Fuguan's philosophy or social psychology, without quoting or at least mentioning him.

indicated that in this time the Chinese society already entered into the period labelled as the “Axial period” by Karl Jaspers (1956, 98).

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

All this indicates an important difference in the intellectual and spiritual development of Chinese and European cultures after the “axial period.” While the latter ones stepped on the path of “more developed” forms or stages of religion, the further ideal development of Chinese society was not determined by any turn towards monotheism, but rather to the pragmatically defined search for an ideal social order.

The reason for this orientation lies in the fact that it came to the major religious crisis in China before the onset of axial age, in which Heaven as supreme god and supreme moral instance lost his credibility.

And since this morally defined religion during the early period of western Zhou dynasty lost all of its moral glitter, it would be difficult to overcome the doubt that had already prevailed in the broadest strata of population and to re-establish the theological mindset that would enable the development of monotheistic religion. Thus the supreme deity has been replaced with the belief in the rational structure of the universe, while the concept *tian* 天, which previously denoted “Heaven” (in a spiritual sense), was simply turned into “nature” (Yang 2007, 3).

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

points out (2005, 15) that the original Confucianism tried to establish an ethical basis for moral decisions in the idea of subjective justice, which should have replaced the previous fear of ghosts (or, in other words, the hope for the salvation in heaven instead of the suffering in hell) as a basic criterion.

He points out that the reason for such a transformation lied in the higher level of spiritual development, in contrast to transformations that led to monotheistic religions that were based upon the idea of (external) God. In his opinion, this transformation led to humanism which is based on a rather high level of “self-awareness” (自覺性):

人類的文化，都是從宗教開始，中國也不例外。但是文化形成一種明確而合理的觀念，因而與人類行為以提高向上的影響力量，則需發展到有某程度的自覺性。宗教可以誘發人的自覺；但原始宗教，常常是由對天滅人禍的恐怖情緒而來的原始性地對神秘之力的皈依，並不能表示何種自覺的意識。即在高度發展的宗教中，也因人，因時代之不同，而可成為人地自覺的助力；也可成為人地自覺的阻礙。從遺留到現在的殷代銅器來看，中國文化，到殷代已經有了很長的歷史，完成了相當高度的發達。但從甲骨文中，可以看出殷人的精神生活，還未脫離原始狀態；他們的宗教，還是原始性的宗教。當時他們的行為，似乎是通過卜辭而完全決定於外在的神－祖宗神，自然神，及上帝。周人的貢獻，便是在傳統的宗教生活中，注入了自覺的精神；把文化在器物方面的成就，提升而為觀念方面的展開，以啟發中國道德地人文精神的建立。

All human cultures begin with religion. China is no exception in this perspective. But cultures form a series of clear and reasonable ideas that affect the development of human behaviour—they have to develop a certain kind of level of the self—awareness of human beings. Primitive religions are mostly defined by the primitive belief in the miraculous supernatural powers which originates from the feelings of horror from extinction and accidents that are caused by Heaven/nature. We don't find any kind of self-consciousness in these religions. Highly developed religions differ with one another according to society and period in which they arise. Therefore, the human self-awareness can either accelerate or be inhibited. If we look at the bronze vessels which have been preserved from the Yin period, we are able to see that the Chinese culture at that time already had a fairly long history and has been on a quite high level of development. But if we look closely to the records written on the bones and turtle shells, we can see that the spiritual life of the people in that time was still on a primitive level; it can be found from oracles that they still believed their lives were completely dependent on the various deities. That case involved the spirit of ancestors, natural deities and the supreme ruler Shang di. The contribution of the people from the period of Zhou dynasty was their implication of the spirit of self—awareness in their

traditional religious life. With that contribution they managed to raise up the culture that had been based on material accomplishments into the realm and thus contribute in the establishment of the Chinese humanistic spirit (Xu 2005, 15–16).

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

宗教的虔敬，是人把自己的主體性消解掉，將自己投擲於神的面前而徹底故歸於神的心理狀態。周初所強調的敬，是人的精神，由散漫而集中，並消解自己的官能欲望於自己所負的責任之前，凸顯出自己主體的積極性與理性作用。

Religious piety is a state of the mind when one dissolves one's own subjectivity and throws oneself entirely before God, and takes refuge thoroughly in God. The reverence of the early Zhou is a humanitarian spirit. The spirit collects itself from relaxation to concentration; it dissolves bodily desires in front of one's own [moral] responsibility, and manifests rationality and autonomy of the subject. (Xu 2005, 22)

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

Among others, the recognition of the belief that one should try to find the resources for overcoming difficulties within oneself has led ancient Chinese thinkers to study and to cultivate “the governing part of the Self,” i.e. *xin* 心, or the “heart-mind.” According to Xu, what represented *Ren wen* 人文 (the humanities) in the Spring and Autumn period (770–476) was the concept *li* 禮 (rituality—rules of propriety). Confucius located the foundation of *li* in what is in human heart-mind, namely, the central virtue of *ren* 仁 (human heartedness, mutuality). *Ren* is a conscious state of the mind that includes enduring quest for self-perfection and the awareness of unconditional duties toward others. Confucius thereby turned an external world of human rules (*li*) inward and opened up “an internal world of moral character” as the foundation of morality, in contrast to primary functions of *li* and *ren*, because on this primary level *ren* is an innate quality and *li* is the outward manifestation of this innate quality. This transformation was a part of the

general process of the establishment of the inner moral self. According to Xu, that was Confucius' greatest contribution to Chinese civilization (Xu 2005, 22).

5. Conclusion

The present article was designed to determine Xu Fuguan's view on anxiety, and to investigate its connection to traditional Chinese philosophic and religious discourses. The research has revealed that Xu's studies in the history of social sciences, theology and moral philosophy can represent an important elaboration and a further development of Jasper's "axial age" theory. In addition, Xu Fuguan's work is also important for contemporary intercultural studies, since it points out certain culturally conditioned elements of religion and philosophy that have decisively influenced early (and later, the overall traditional) Chinese culture and society.

Xu has not only provided a complex analysis of the historical and cultural background of the specific Chinese "sense of anxiety," but also exposed that it was connected to the phenomenon of "vanishing Deities" in ancient China. These research results are not only relevant for an intercultural elaboration of the "axial age" theory, but are also important for the investigation of the Modern Confucian supposition, according to which the transformation of the ancient "external Deities" into the inner "Moral Self" represents an important, specifically Chinese contribution to the ethical heritage of humanity. Further research shall show whether this supposition can be verified, and thus whether the Modern Confucian concept of the "Moral Self" could represent a suitable and sustainable foundation for the establishment of new global ethical systems.

References

- Bresciani, Umberto, 2001. *Reinventing Confucianism – The New Confucian Movement*. Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies.
- Chen, Albert H.Y. 2009. *Three Political Confucianisms and half a century*. Hong Kong. University of Hong Kong Press. Accessed January 17, 2013. doi: 1366582.
- Chen, Lai 陈来. 1996. *Gudai zongjiao yulunli – rujia sixiangde genyuan* 古代宗教与伦理——儒家思想的根源 (*Ancient religion and Ethics – The Source of Confucian thought*). Beijing: Sanlian shudian.

- Fang, Keli 方克立 and Li, Jinquan 李錦全, ed. 1989: *Xiandai xin ruxue yanjiu lunji* 現代新儒學研究論集 (*The Collection of Studies on Modern Confucianism*). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe.
- Jaspers, Karl. 1965. *The Origin and Goal of History*. New Haven USA: Yale University Press.
- Lee, Ming-Huei. 2001. *Der Konfuzianismus im modernen China*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag.
- Lee, Su-San. 1998. *Xu Fuguan and New Confucianism in Taiwan (1949 – 1969): A Cultural History of the Exile Generation*. Providence: Department of History. Brown University.
- Ni, Peimin. 2002. “Practical Humanism of Xu Fuguan.” In *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chung-Ying, Cheng, and Bunnin, Nicholas, 281–305. Oxford. Blackwell Publishing.
- Rošker, Jana S. 2005. *Iskanje poti, prvi del: Od protofilozofskih klasikov do neokonfucijanstva dinastije Song (Searching the Way: From Protophilosophical Classics to Neoconfucianism of the Song Dynasty)*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Rošker, Jana S. 2013. *Subjektova nova oblačila (The Entity's New Clothes)* (in print). Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Xu, Fuguan 徐復觀. 2005. *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 (*The History of Human Nature in China*). Beijing: Huong shifandaxue chubanshe.
- Yang, Zebo 杨泽波. 2007. “Mou Zongsan chaoyue cunyou lun boyi – cong xian Qin tianlunde fazhan guiiji kan Mou Zongsan chaoyue cunyou lunde quexian 牟宗三超越存有论驳议——从先秦天论的发展轨迹看牟宗三超越存有论的缺陷 (Challenging Mou Zongsan's Transcendental Ontology – Errors of Mou Zongsan's Transcendental Ontology through the Prism of Development Guidelines of the Pre-qin's Doctrine of Heaven/Nature.)” In *Zhongguo lunwen xiazai zhongxin*. Accessed March 15, 2013. doi:060407/11563323