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Reflections on Lao Sze-Kwang and His Double-Structured "Intracultural" Philosophy of Culture*

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Abstract

In his own time, Lao Sze-Kwang formulated his own intra-cultural approach to the philosophy of culture that begins from the interdependence and organic nature of our cultural experience. In this essay, I address three questions: Why did Lao abandon his early reliance on the Hegelian model of philosophy of culture and formulate his own "two- structured" theory? Again, given Lao's profound commitment and contribution to Chinese philosophy and its future directions, why is it not proper to describe him as a "Chinese philosopher?" And why is the much accomplished Lao Sze-Kwang not installed in the CUHK pantheon as yet one more of the great "New Confucian" philosophers (*xinruxuejia* 新儒學家) to be associated with this institution?

Keywords: intra-cultural, philosophy of culture, Hegel, New-Confucian philosophers, double-structured philosophy of culture, "aspectual" language

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Lao Sze-Kwang 勞思光 (1927–2012) was an "*intra*-cultural" philosopher. As the progeny of a distinguished and much accomplished family lineage, Lao in his early years had had the benefit of a traditional Chinese education that set the foundation for his continuing studies. Then he attended Peking University and National Taiwan University for his studies in philosophy. Beyond this formal training, he as a consummate teacher over a long lifetime continued to pursue his prodigious intellectual intimacy with both the Western and Chinese philosophical canons. He was thus philosophically ambidextrous, as comfortable with Confucius as he was with Kant. And through an assiduous personal discipline, his singular contribution to the best kind of "*intra*-cultural" or "world philosophy" has made him one of most distinguished philosophers of culture in our times.

I use this neologism "*intra*-cultural" in describing Lao's philosophy of culture to distinguish his hard-won approach from the presuppositions of those who would classify their avocation as "*com*-parative" or "inter-cultural" philosophy. The prefixs "com-" (or co-) and "inter-" suggest a joint, external and open relationship that conjoins two or more separate and in some sense comparable entities. "*Intra*-" on the other hand, as "on the inside," "within," references internal and constitutive relations contained within a given entity itself—in this case, philosophy. In this essay, I will argue that for Lao Sze-Kwang, philosophy in all of its complexity, is one thing.

Of course, this same perception of Lao's understanding of philosophy as "one thing" is much remarked upon by many of his colleagues and students. Favorite targets of Lao Sze-Kwang's ire were the romantic and idealizing traditionalists, who in advocating for Chinese philosophy, exaggerated its moral profundities while ignoring its cognitive, analytic, and scientific limits. For Lao, these partisans, rather than using reason and rigor to enlighten their interrogation, used it only to rationalize the dictates of their occulted ethnocentrism. Lau Kwok-ying 劉國英, for example, remembers his teacher's exhortations:

> Professor Lao would constantly remind us: We should not and cannot set China up in contrast to the world (the May Fourth reformers who advocated for complete Westernization and the traditional

> cultural purists were both guilty of making this same mistake). We can only see the way forward for Chinese culture from the vantage point of "China in the world."[1]

Cheng Chung-yi 鄭宗義 in his reflections on Lao's attitude toward Confucianism makes the same point:

> Professor Lao would repeatedly stress that it is only when we deliberate upon and analyze Chinese philosophy within the context of world philosophy (or universal philosophical problems) that we begin to fathom its real meaning.[2]

I want to appeal to Lao's *intra*-cultural approach to the philosophy of culture to address three questions: Why did Lao abandon his early reliance on the Hegelian model of philosophy of culture and formulate his own "two-structured" theory? Again, given Lao's profound commitment and contribution to Chinese philosophy and its future directions, is it not proper to describe him as a "Chinese philosopher?" And why is the much accomplished Lao Sze-Kwang not installed in the CUHK pantheon as yet one more of the great "New Confucian" philosophers (*xinruxuejia* 新儒學家) to be associated with this institution?

Lao Sze-Kwang was not alone in reading Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a philosophy of culture. The distinguished philosopher Albert William Levi also observes:

> The publication of the *Phenomenology* in 1807 was, in short, an unprecedented philosophic event. The work is so rich, and it has had such an ambiguous and controversial destiny since Hegel's time that it is easy to forget just where its epoch making character lay, and this, I think, was not as most believe in its dialectic or its absolute idealism or in its theory of development as such, but rather in that

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1 See Lau Kwok-ying (2003, 28). 勞先生不斷提醒我們: 我們不要也不能把中國與世界對立起 (五四時的全盤西化論與傳統主義者都犯上這同一錯誤), 我們要從《世界裏的中國》的高度, 才可望爲中國文化找到新的出路.

2 See Cheng Chung-yi (2003, 58). 勞先生再三強調必須將中國哲學放在一世界哲學 (或曰普遍的哲學問題) 的配景中來考量評析, 始能充分揭示出其中的涵義.

> here for the first time since Aristotle the subject of philosophizing is taken to be neither a particular science nor an aspect of social living, nor a segment of external nature, but the entire range and compass of human culture as a total and developing entity. (Levi 1984, 447)

Lao's own earliest forays into philosophy of culture are found in his *Shaozuoji* 少作集 (Early Works) and in his original 1965 *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 (The Essentials of Chinese Culture). Lao was steeped in German idealism and, sharing the same exuberance as Levi expresses here for Hegel's genius, in these early works relied heavily on Hegel. Specifically, and on his own reckoning, Lao was deeply committed to a Hegelian teleologically-driven "externalization" model of culture where the higher objective spirit overcomes and "externalizes" (*waizaihua* 外在化) the lower subjective spirit within the dialectical evolution of human culture. In this commitment to Hegel's model, Lao saw himself as walking the same road as his contemporary New Confucian philosophers, Tang Junyi 唐君毅 and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (Lao 2003, 277). But in the fullness of time and with his own going philosophical reflection, Lao found that Hegel and his teleological dialectic could not answer many of his questions about cultural diversity, and most importantly, his concerns about the integrity of Chinese culture and its future directions. At the same time, under the influence of Kant, perhaps, he grew suspicious of the metaphysical assumptions of his contemporaries, Tang and Mou, who in their work were much enamored of German idealism.

What then were Lao's reservations about Hegel's philosophy of culture? Beyond his panegyric on Hegel rehearsed above, Levi goes on to give a summary of the several dialectical stages in Hegel's philosophy of culture that will assist us in understanding Lao's reluctance to stay with the Hegelian model as Lao's own thinking about philosophy of culture continued to develop and mature. Levi explains the Hegelian cultural dialectic in the following terms:

> The new direction taken by Hegel is based upon the central conviction that the human spirit is the proper subject of philosophy and that the general character of spirit will differentiate itself in

> a series of cultural forms or phases of development culminating in philosophy. Subjective spirit is the lowest level: it includes sensory knowledge and reasoning, mathematics and the natural sciences. Objective spirit is the intermediate stage: it includes all that makes for the institutional life of man including law, ethics, political philosophy and world history. Absolute spirit is the culminating stage and it includes art, religion, and philosophy. (1984, 277)

What is of greatest moment in Hegel's philosophy of culture is its assumption that because truth must be whole, the evolution of human culture is a synthetic development in search of its culmination as a holistic vision of the human experience. Said another way, Hegel is convinced that common institutionalized cultural expressions in art, religion, and philosophy as the highest level of the human cultural experience are superior to all subjectivity and individuality. Again, in Levi's words:

> Hegel's view is that philosophic experience is of intrinsic value, not merely because it is in sharpest contrast to the thinking of the mathematician and natural scientist, but because its essence is a nisus toward wholeness—because it is a forming and a synthetic activity. Because philosophy knows that "truth is the whole" (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*), it attempts, perhaps fruitlessly, but at least courageously, to know the whole truth about human culture. . . . (1984, 277)

A fundamental and much remarked ambiguity in the methodology of Hegel's philosophy of culture is his dualistic juxtaposition and appeal to a seemingly static logically and structurally ordered whole on the one hand, and on the other to the temporally driven history of human culture in which such forms are manifested in the lives of conscious individuals. Hegel is certainly systematic, but there seem to be clearly two competing senses of system: the logical ordered cultural forms and institutions available for conceptual analysis, and the exploration of the human cultural experience as an historical phenomenon within a determinate historical tradition.

While keenly aware of this tension in Hegel's methodology, Levi gives Hegel his best argument in claiming that perhaps both systems

are necessary to do justice to the complex nature of the human experience itself. As Levi observes:

> But opposite as they are in terms of categorial analysis, cultural forms and cultural history are cognate dimensions of a single comprehensive "experience" of mankind, and they provide respectively the genetic and the morphological theory of a comprehensive cultural reality. (1984, 453)

And while Hegel's eliding of logic and history might be a source of ambiguity for us, on one interpretation of Hegel at least, his commitment to a strong, objective principle of teleology as an *a priori* concept provides the explanatory principle needed to discipline our empirical investigations and carry us beyond the limits of our empirical sciences. Hegel's strong teleology that is decidedly theological in its cast would bring logic and history together by conceptualizing both nature and history as having an inherent logical necessity.

The limitations, univocity, and the exclusions that the Hegelian model of the philosophy of culture brought with it were not lost on Lao Sze-Kwang. This kind of teleological necessity, for Lao, contrasts with the special and distinctive occupation of the "orientative" (*yindaoxing zhexue* 引導性哲學) Chinese philosophical tradition that has a continuing open-ended emphasis upon personal and world transformation. It was thus that in Lao's own evolving philosophy of culture at least, Hegel lost his hold on an honest philosopher who was quite comfortable in changing his mind and quite capable of deliberately formulating a more capacious theory that would serve his own intellectual needs. We might summarize the gist of Lao's reflections on his intellectual development that led him away from Hegel as he remembers his own philosophical growth and transition in his preface to the 1998 second edition of the *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi xinbian* 中國文化要義新編 (The Essentials of Chinese Culture: Newly Revised).

In his prefatory remarks, Lao certainly appreciates the power of the Hegelian model to conceptualize and explain the process of a single culture's evolution. But he is also worried that when we want to

distinguish between a specific culture's growth and development and the mutual influence that obtains among various ostensibly distinctive cultures—how these cultures influence and draw upon each other —we encounter questions that Hegel's dialectic cannot answer. Hegel can perhaps say something about the unique spirit of Chinese culture and how this culture undergoes a process of "externalization" to assume its objective institutional forms and achieve its complete cultural life. But how is Hegel going to explain the evolving way forward for Chinese philosophy and culture? From Hegel's holistic and synthetic point of view, cultural differences among either individuals or groups are in fact only a matter of degree rather than kind. Hence, in the light of Hegel's theory, if Chinese culture has modernization as its goal, it will have to understand its own evolution in terms of growing the fruits of a modernized Western culture. Moreover, as Lao observes, such an outcome has in fact been advocated in so many of the competing efforts to modernize China from the May Fourth down to the present—that is, a commitment to a thoroughgoing Westernization. Scholars who would resist such wholesale colonization, emphasizing as they do the intrinsic value of traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, and who thus want to preserve its distinctive spirit in undergoing any kind of change, are left behind. For Lao, these two positions—preserve the distinctive and substantial contributions of Chinese philosophy and yet at the same time, modernize to become wholly Western—are contradictory and cannot accommodate each other. And Lao was not ready to embrace the idea that traditional Chinese values will recede and whither as Chinese culture is subsumed into the Western canopy. Indeed, Lao rejected fundamentally what still continues to be the profound asymmetry of our own historical moment in the accelerating evolution of a changing world cultural order: that is, for the younger generation of Chinese themselves and their western counterparts who have little interest in Chinese philosophy and culture, there is an uncritical assumption that modernization is westernization.

Appealing to the language that Lao's contemporary, Tang Junyi, has drawn from *Yijing* cosmology—"the inseparability of the one and the many" (*yiduobufenguan* 一多不分觀)—it is clear that Hegel's philo-

sophy of culture, entailing as it does clear traces of an old theology, provides us with the "one" Absolute Spirit as it is synthesized from the "inter-cultural" "many" as the singular ultimate goal of the evolution of human culture: "the separation of the one and many" (*yiduoweier* 一多爲二). Lao on the other hand embraces a model of philosophy of culture that would resist this strong teleology by insisting upon the inseparability of the one and the many in the evolution of distinctive yet hybridic traditions. That is, Lao wants the "*intra-*" rather than the "inter-cultural" model in which vital cultures and their philosophies remain distinctive and yet are organically related to and have influence upon each other as always unique aspects of a complex, continuous, unbounded organism called philosophy itself.

In formulating his own philosophy of culture, Lao introduces an important distinction between the actual creation of culture as "initiation" (*chuangsheng* 創生) and cultural borrowings as "imitation" (*mofang* 模仿) that serves him in preserving the cultural integrity of the Chinese tradition. For Lao, the initiating processes of our cultural histories are fundamentally creative and are not a process of reduplication. On the other hand, if a particular cultural form has already been initiated—the introduction of a particular institution, for example—it requires borrowing and imitation from the population of a second culture who want to incorporate this same form into their cultural *ethos*. For Lao, the changes that have been occurring within Chinese culture are a largely matter of such learning and imitation, and they do not constitute the "initiative" process of creating a completely new stable cultural structure that Hegel's model would assume. Importantly, while endorsing cultural borrowing as a resource for enriching our philosophical narratives, an immediate corollary of Lao's *intra-*cultural philosophy is that the integrity guaranteed by the "initiation" nature of culture precludes the simple interpretation and assessment of one tradition in terms of another.

As another step in formulating his own theory of culture, Lao appropriates and adapts Talcott Parsons' sociological model of "internalization" (*neizaihua* 內在化) for his philosophy of culture as a counterweight to Hegel's "externalization"—that is, internalization as the process of one culture learning from and imitating the contents of

a second culture. Parsons argues that the source of social behaviors, institutional structures, and whole cultures is an external experience in the sense that it is the product of internalizing what other people or other cultures have themselves internalized.

In Parsons' own words, "the function of pattern-maintenance refers to the imperative of maintaining the stability of the patterns of institutionalized culture defining the structure of the system" (1985, 159). The internalization of culture is an important aspect of this function of pattern-maintenance at the level of the individual or of individual cultures. Parsons (1985, 141) notes that "internalization of a culture pattern is not merely knowing it as an object of the external world; it is incorporating it into the actual structure of the personality as such."

In formulating his own philosophy of culture, Lao wants to retain autonomy and cultural integrity on the one hand and allow for the growth available to us through our organically related social and cultural realities on the other. For Lao, the first "aspect" (*mianxiang* 面相)—and his deliberate appeal to inclusive "aspectual" rather than exclusive analytic language is significant—has intuition or self or cultural consciousness as its root, and out of this comes the externalization of the structures that shape the spirit of culture and gives rise to the cultural life itself. And the second aspect takes the mutually influencing social and cultural realities as its root, and out of this comes the internalization of the structures that shape our world of experience and our cultural consciousness. Together these two aspects provide us with what he calls the necessary elements for a "panoramic picture of culture" (*wenhuaquanjing* 文化全景), where neither aspect can take the place of the other.

Lao calls his own philosophy of culture a "double-structured theory" (*shuangchong jiegouguan* 雙重結構觀), and in formulating his theory about these two structures, insists that while each has its own proper function, it also has its functional limits. Importantly, we might say that Lao would regard the Hegelian teleologically-driven dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and the Parsonian individualistic and realist model of internalization as each having its own functional limitations. Far from "combining" Hegel and Parsons,

Lao rather replaces them with an aspectual, correlative, and holistic model that we might capture in the "forming and functioning" (*tiyong* 體用) language of an always emergent, hybridic cultural order, a familiar cosmological vocabulary appealed to ubiquitously in explaining the evolution of Chinese culture broadly.[3]

David Hall and I in our own reflections on how to think about the relations among distinctive cultures—perhaps the most important question that Lao ponders for himself—were also adverse to overly determinate teleological models. And we ourselves arrived at a position on "the value of vagueness" that I think in many ways but in a different language, resonates with Lao's "*intra*-cultural" conclusions. We formulated our argument in *Anticipating China* in the following terms:

> Our claim is that there is no plausible argument distinguishing, in any final sense, cultures and their languages. The conclusion we draw from this is that there is only one language (at most) and one culture (at most), and that many of the paradoxes involved in interpreting across cultural boundaries are dissolved when one recognizes there is but a single field of significance that serves as a background from which individual languages and cultures are foregrounded. (Hall and Ames 1995, 166)

Far from making any kind of a universalistic claim here, we are arguing for the primacy of relationality and the value of complexity and vagueness. We insist that first at the level of the theoretical and practical distinction:

> The comparative philosopher, at least as much as the intracultural thinker, must be aware that the important questions do not so much involve the translation of a term from one semantic context to another, but its translation into (or from) practice. . . . We must be at

[3] Lau Kwok-ying summarizes the sequencing of Lao's internalization and externalization dynamic in some detail with the process of transitioning from belief to thought being the internal dimension and from custom to institutionalization being the external dimension. See Lau (2003, 3-4, ft. 1).

> least as concerned with the rationalization of practices and their illustration of ideas and beliefs as we are with "defining our terms." (1995, 173)

Again, our focus-field theory of philosophy of culture like Lao's "double-structured theory" can also be explained in the holographic and aspectual vocabulary of "forming and functioning" (*tiyong* 體用) and Tang Junyi's postulate, "the inseparability of the one and the many" (*yiduobufen* 一多不分):

> A productively vague model of cultures would construe them as local distortions of a general field which is itself without specifiable boundary conditions. This focus/field model contrasts readily with both positivist and idealist models by offering an alternative sense of abstraction. . . . Any "part" abstracted from the whole adumbrates the whole. As a consequence, the partiality of the elements of a cultural field advertises the complexity of the field. (1995, 178)

We in our own work like Lao have aspired to be "*intra*-cultural" philosophers for whom the subject of philosophy itself, far from being fragmented by focusing on the comparison among, or the conjoining of erstwhile discrete elements, is one complex thing. For us too, philosophy having no outside, can be reconnoitered only from within. Philosophizing so conceived is a kind of Wittgensteinian "criss-crossing": the selecting and correlating of some episodes of insight from among the boundless many within the wholeness and continuity of our ever-evolving personal and philosophical narrative.

Hegel in positing his strongly teleological philosophy of culture is in many ways making explicit (if not overdetermining) what is implicit in the traditional understanding of the term "culture" itself—that is, the traditional understanding of culture as it has evolved under the influence of Western cultural metaphors in the European languages. We might begin from first acknowledging that it is our horticulture and husbanding occupations with their strong teleological presuppositions that serve as the metaphors underlying our term "culture." Such assumptions are wont to persuade us uncritically that the "cultivation" of "culture" has to do with conserving, nurturing, and

actualizing a specific set of inborn potentialities that are driven by a given *telos* or inherent design. As I observed above, Hegel's strong teleology with its seemingly theological implications brings logic and history together by conceptualizing both nature and history as having an inherent logical necessity. Simply put, calves are raised to become cows and seed corn is cultivated to become cornfields, and clearly seed corn cannot grow into pigs nor can pigs grow into wheat fields.[4] I want to suggest that it is because we are influenced by, if not default to, these same kind of generic, teleological assumptions in how we are given to think about the actualization of human culture broadly that we stand in danger of uncritically projecting just such an understanding onto the Chinese tradition when in fact "culture" as *wenhua* 文化 within this alternative context seems to be grounded in a much more open-ended, aesthetic and hence particularistic metaphor for the evolution of culture.

In his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams (1976) famously describes "culture" as one of the two or three most complicated terms in the English language. He attributes this complexity in part to the relative recency with which the meaning of "culture" has been metaphorically extended from its original sense of the physical processes of nurturing and cultivation—that is, the perhaps mundane yet vital practices of horticulture and husbandry—to point toward a characteristic mode of human material, intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development. Just as our commonsense would dictate, we tend to see these horticultural and husbanding practices as teleologically motivated and determined in bringing to fruition characteristic forms inherent in the objects of cultivation, where human intervention serves as both a source of discipline and control, and as an external facilitation. The assumption is that the plant or animal will flourish if it is protected, unimpeded, and properly nourished.

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4 Of course, our various and complex ecologies challenge such severe distinctions. Maize, cracked corn, cobs, and husks too can be an integral part of good pig feed, and deep-pit swine finishing manure can serve as an ideal top-dress fertilizer for the wheat fields early in the spring growing season. There is much room to argue that corn does become pigs, and pigs do become fields of wheat.

According to Williams, it was only in the eighteenth century that "culture" was first used consistently to denote the entire "way of life" of a people, and only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that it was identified with specific civilization-distinguishing patterns of practices and values. In this latter case, it was used in the context of theories of progressive "social evolution" as something that sets apart and divides societies, making one "culture" more advanced than another. One contemporary vestige of this sense of contest among evolving populations is the contemporary media's frequent characterization of multicultural tensions in the curricula of our educational institutions as "culture wars."

As in Europe, there was no single term in the languages of the premodern Sinitic cultures—Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese—that had a conceptual reach comparable to that of our modern, extended uses of the word "culture." But the term that emerged to be used throughout this geographical region in the nineteenth century to translate and appropriate this modern Western concept differs markedly in its metaphorical implications from those assumed with the English word "culture." While the languages of the traditionally agrarian Asian societies abound with terms that, like "culture," are rooted in instrumental physical processes of cultivation and nourishing (for example, *yang* 養, *xu/chu* 畜, *pei* 培, *xiu* 修, *yu* 育, *zai* 栽 and so many more), these terms are bypassed as points of metaphorical departure in favor of *wenhua* 文化—a compound expression that combines the characters for the "transforming" (*hua* 化) effected by "the inscribing and embellishing processes undertaken by literary, civil, and artistic traditions" (*wen* 文). Whereas metaphorically rooting "culture" in practices of plant and animal domestication invites us to see cultural norms as having a transcendent disciplinary force with respect to that which is being "cultured," *wen* was understood (with significant political implications) as the disclosing processes of civilization: that is, of *collaborating* with nature's beauty, *elaborating* upon it, *elevating* it, and *achieving* a decidedly aesthetic if not spiritual product, rather than as merely regulating its spontaneous growth.

As is demonstrated by its provenance in texts dating to the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), the term *wenhua* itself is an ancient one.

Wenhua as a modern Japanese kanji term that translates "culture" is a term derived from classical Chinese that first appears explicitly as early as the court bibliographer Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Garden of Stories): "It is only when civilizing efforts do not bring the people up to the appropriate standards that punishments are to be imposed."[5] And, by at least the fifth century, Chinese literary theorists such as Liu Xie 劉勰 (465?–522?) associated human *wen* practices explicitly with the self-arising (*ziran* 自然) and ceaselessly creative dynamics (*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息) of the natural world (*dao* 道), affirming that nature and nurture far from being in opposition, were rather a co-evolving, contrapuntal process understood to be at the heart of realizing a symbiotic and mutually entailing, natural, and societal harmony.

This disparity between European and Asian languages in the cultural metaphors in which "culture" is embedded—teleologically informed versus fundamentally open-ended, aesthetic sensibilities—is certainly related to a persistent, skewed understanding and application of "creativity" in the Abrahamic traditions in which an *ex nihilo* creativity properly belongs to a self-sufficient Creator God.[6] Indeed, such ex nihilo creativity when exercised by the idiosyncratic and audacious human genius—Goethe's Faust, Shelley's Frankenstein, Milton's Satan, Nietzsche's Uebermensch—is dark, dangerous, and deliciously depraved—a promethean offense against God's natural and moral order. Even in our contemporary times of radical innovations, we do not usually associate the word "creativity" with the core human occupations of religion, morality, science, and philosophy that have a strong teleological cast. Instead, this term "creativity" prompts the more marginal aesthetic interests such as the creative arts and the writing of "fiction." While we might be inclined (although probably at a safe distance) to admire the rakish charms of someone deemed "morally creative" or be intrigued by the intensity of devotees in the performance of the colorful rituals of some "new" or exotic

5 文化不改, 然後加誅.

6 As *Psalms* 24 insists: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, it is He that has made us and not we ourselves."

religion, we find that in Confucian role ethics singular value is invested in the moral imagination needed to inspire real artistry in our moral lives and our human-centered religiousness. Indeed, in the classical Chinese tradition, the Confucian project as it is defined in the cosmology of the core canonical texts such as the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) or *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Focusing the Familiar) requires of human beings as the heart-and-mind of the cosmos (*tiandizhixin* 天地之心) nothing less than both the imagination and the refinement to stand together with the heavens and the earth as co-creators of the cosmos.

Reflecting further on the genealogy of *wen*, dating back more than a millennium earlier than the passage cited above from the *Garden of Stories*, and in a sharp departure from the contemporary use of "culture wars" as a metaphor for cultural tensions, *wen* has consistently been contrasted explicitly with the coercive, destructive, and dehumanizing use of martial force (*wu* 武) as it arises in the human experience. Far from provoking wars, *wen* is its antithesis. *Wen* denotes the expansively civil and civilizing dimension of the human experience that emerges when the life of a community is guided by an aesthetically- and critically-enriching counterpoint between persistent canonical texts and the interlinear commentaries that are continuously being written on them by each generation as they respond to the pressing issues of their day.

In sum, the conceptual genealogy of the term *wenhua* implies that culture emerges through an intrinsic relationship between persistence and change (*biantong* 變通)—a symbiotic relationship described at great length in the *Book of Changes* between a determinate tradition and the ambient forces of transformation. Cultural conservation and prospective change, far from standing in opposition, are complementary and mutually enhancing.

We now know why Lao with his *intra*-cultural approach to philosophy had to abandon Hegel and formulate his own, more capacious theory of philosophy of culture. Hegel's teleological philosophy of culture is ethnocentric and exclusionary, and in its commitment to a strong teleology, is univocal rather than being pluralistic and accommodating. But this further criss-crossing—that is, Lao's transformation of Hegel and Parsons into a holistic theory that is consistent

with the *tiyong* vocabulary of a persistent Chinese cosmology—leads us to ask the second question: Is Lao Sze-Kwang then a Chinese philosopher? Indeed, it is this same complementary, contrapuntal dynamic that seems to be evident in Lao Sze-Kwang's "double-structured theory" of culture that would resist any strong teleological and exclusionary, ethnocentric assumptions that we find in Hegel. To the extent that this *wenhua* understanding of "culture" is open-ended and is "orientative" in its unrelenting pursuit of personal and world transformation, Lao Sze-Kwang posits a philosophy of culture that is congruent with what he takes to be some of the basic and distinctive assumptions of Chinese culture. But it is his profound discomfort with severe or final distinctions among cultures, his theoretical strategy for sustaining a balance between uniqueness and multiplicity, and his inclusive approach to the discipline of philosophy broadly that might dissuade us from categorizing him as a "Chinese" or any other kind of philosopher. That is, Lao Sze-Kwang is a philosopher—enough said.

And this leads us to consider the appropriateness of considering Lao Sze-Kwang to be one more in the pantheon of New Confucians that have had such prominence in the philosophical life and the prestige of the Chinese University of Hong Kong philosophy department. As I have said, I want to advance the claim that Lao Sze-Kwang is first and foremost a *sui generis* philosopher with broad global interests, and thus by definition should not be tailored to fit any existing and necessarily exclusionary category, Chinese or Western. To reflect on the career of Lao Sze-Kwang as a world philosopher ("with Chinese characteristics" perhaps), we will first need some historical and philosophical background to set the interpretive context.

There is a history in the Chinese academy of Western philosophy being presented as "philosophy in China" without reference to its own indigenous traditions of philosophy. And going the other way, the commentarial history of Chinese "thought" (*sixiang* 思想) has often been taught especially in "Chinese" and Chinese literature departments without any perceived need to appeal to or engage Western philosophy. Resisting such exclusions, there has been over time a significant cadre of Chinese philosophers who have been shaped in their

thinking and writing about their own tradition through a conscious appropriation of the Western canons—particularly German idealism and Marxist philosophy. The best among these original and hybridist Chinese "comparative" philosophers who have been using Western philosophy as a resource to philosophize about the Chinese tradition itself have come to be referenced under the rubric "New Confucianists," a term coined in the mid-1980's to describe a philosophical "movement" that began in the early twentieth century and that still continues today. While this continuing New Confucian movement in Chinese philosophy has some relevance to the global philosophizing of Lao Sze-Kwang, he is not only not numbered as one among them, but in fact in many ways, is perhaps best understood as a contrast to them.

For the century and a half that led up to the founding of Communist China in 1949, China had been a hapless victim of Western imperialism. Before the ideas of first Charles Darwin and then later Karl Marx arrived in China, these transitional Western thinkers were already spawning revolutionary movements in Europe that challenged at the most primary level those persistent presuppositions grounding the full spectrum of disciplines within the European academy itself. In China, the popularity of evolutionary ethics like the later appropriation of Marxist socialism, was driven in important measure by practical social concerns of which professional academic philosophy was only a minor part. Still, the resonances that reformist thinkers found between these explicitly revolutionary foreign movements and philosophical sensibilities within their own tradition promised a way of renovating Chinese philosophy to respond effectively to the unrelenting Western aggression that was perceived as threatening the integrity if not the very survival of Chinese culture. At the end of the day, what allows contemporary historians of Chinese philosophy to collect a truly disparate range of Chinese thinkers under the single category of "New Confucians" is their shared commitment to rehabilitate and apply their many fortified revisions of traditional Chinese philosophy as a tourniquet to control the hemorrhaging of what was a culture bleeding out as it was assailed from all sides. What is fundamental to the identity of these New Confucians is their own self-

understanding that they are Chinese philosophers operating within the intergenerational transmission of the traditional lineage (*daotong* 道統) of Chinese philosophy itself.

Given the porousness and synchronicity that has been the persistent signature of the Chinese philosophical tradition over the centuries, twentieth-century Chinese philosophy with all the hybridity it entails should not be construed as a disjunction in kind from its earlier narrative. In fact, this aggregating philosophical amalgam can be seen as a continuing fusion of foreign elements that complement, enrich, and ultimately strengthen its own persisting philosophical sensibilities. It is for this reason that the term "Confucianism" (*ruxue* 儒學) that can be traced back more than three millennia to an "aestheticizing" social class in the Shang dynasty history can continue to be invoked as a name for an ostensibly new and yet still familiar current in the always changing yet persistent identity (*biantong* 變通) of Chinese philosophy.

Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) is often and quite properly identified as the first of the New Confucians. In his earliest writings Liang rehearses a kind of "reverse Hegelian narrative" of the phasal development of philosophy that is then refined and amplified over his long professional career. That is, the first stage in philosophy is its Western phase in which the human will is able to satisfy the basic needs of the human experience by disciplining the environment in which our lives are lived. The second Chinese phase entails a harmonizing of this human will with its natural environment, with all of the joyful wisdom and satisfaction that such a reconciliation brings with it. The third and final phase is Buddhist philosophy that provides an intuitive negation of the self-other dichotomy, and a true spiritual realization through a regimen of self-cultivation.

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that the most prominent and indeed promising lineage among the New Confucians is that of the teacher and founder of New Confucianism, Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968), and his two prominent disciples, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978). The greatest foreign influence on the development of Xiong Shili's own philosophy was the first wave of Western learning—Buddhist philosophy—

with only a passing ripple of the European canons of philosophy. And probably the source of his own most profound insights into the nature of the human experience was the *Book of Changes*, the first among the classics generally considered to be the cosmological ground of both Confucian and Daoist philosophical sensibilities.

One way of focusing Xiong Shili's lasting influence on New Confucianism is to recount briefly his core doctrine of "the inseparability of forming and functioning" (*tiyongbuer* 體用不二) that we have referenced above. His basic point is that "forming" and "functioning" are an explanatory, nonanalytical vocabulary for describing the dramatic and ceaseless unfolding of our experience. Given the wholeness of experience that includes both the human mind and the experience of the world, Xiong Shili took the *Book of Changes* natural cosmology to be a model for human self-cultivation. That is, human creativity and the advancement of cosmic meaning are inseparable aspects of the same reality.

Xiong Shili's two most prominent protégées, Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi, continued this New Confucian lineage by translating, and in fact, transforming the foreign rivals they admired most into a vocabulary consistent with their own premises. For Mou Zongsan, Kant is the Western philosopher who began to understand the real nature of morality. Indeed, Mou Zongsan is so smitten by Kant that he appeals to his transcendental language to explain what is unique and distinctive about Chinese philosophy. But Mou Zongsan as a Chinese philosopher makes it clear that whatever might be construed as "transcendent" in classical Chinese thought is neither independent of the natural world nor theistic. Far from appealing to a "two-world" cosmology and grounding the dualism that emerged out of Western models of transcendence, classical China's world order, according to Mou, is altogether "this worldly."

It is Tang Junyi's foremost contribution to world philosophy—his synoptic philosophy of culture—that has led some scholars to associate him explicitly with a Hegelian idealism, Lao Sze-Kwang prominent among them. But on closer examination, we see that in the specific range of uncommon assumptions that Tang Junyi argues for as the ground of Chinese cultural uniqueness, he at least in some important

degree tries to distance himself from the homogenizing closure of Enlightenment teleology and universalism.

In rehearsing the development of New Confucianism philosophy in this past century, three other prominent figures belong largely to the more traditional historical and exegetical stream of Confucian philosophy: Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1889–1990), Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1991), and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904–1982), with the latter two, along with Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi, being closely associated with the history and the prestige of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

When I was a student at National Taiwan University in the early 1970's, I had the good fortune to study with Fang Dongmei 方東美, another contemporary philosopher who is usually included among the ranks of the New Confucians. Certainly, Fang had a comprehensive knowledge of the Chinese philosophical tradition in all of its parts, from the classical period through to modern times. And at different phases in his own intellectual development, he focused on different aspects and different periods within the tradition, coming to a keen interest in Huayan Buddhism in his later years. But Fang was fundamentally holistic and aesthetic in his philosophical orientation, was deeply steeped in the history of Western philosophy, and was skeptical about all reductionistic rationalizations. I think those students who have acquiesced in the New Confucian rubric for Fang do so because they want to assert his stature among his contemporaries, but I have always had serious doubts about the appropriateness of this label, and am not sure that Fang himself, if he had lived long enough, would have accepted it.

With this historical context in mind, it can be simply stated that the contemporary thinker, Lao Sze-Kwang, who did live to witness the emergence of the "New Confucian" classification, on his own reckoning, does not belong to this New Confucian lineage. On the contrary, he both understood himself and is seen broadly by his students and contemporaries as a world philosopher who, self-consciously and critically applying a rigorous methodology, draws upon philosophy in its broadest compass as a resource for his own philosophizing. Following the death of Mou Zongsan in 1995, Lao Sze-Kwang had the stature of being one of China's leading contemporary

philosophers, and as such, would often be introduced with the "New Confucian" rubric that he would then, each time, adamantly reject. Among his reasons for this strong response was his antipathy toward the kind of metaphysics his contemporaries, Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi, found necessary to incorporate into their very different attempts at systematic philosophy. Indeed, it seems that the spell of German idealism in this respect was so strong that it affected the very language and sentence structure used by both Mou and Tang, turning their later writings into a kind of ponderous Hegelian Chinese. Again, given the explicit mission of the New Confucians to defend the Chinese cultural tradition captured in the "New Confucian Manifesto" (1958) drawn up by Zhang Junmai 張君勱, and signed by both Mou and Tang, Lao Sze-Kwang saw them as promoting a kind of cultural and philosophical nationalism that he could not endorse.

Like many if not most of these contemporaries, Lao Sze-Kwang was a public intellectual of the first order, commenting upon the pressing social and political issues of his time, and wading into the vortex of political controversy whenever he deemed it necessary and productive. And while Lao in his philosophizing is certainly inclined to draw heavily upon Confucianism, Kant, and Hegel as well, he does so as "philosopher Lao Sze-Kwang" rather than as an erstwhile Confucian, Kantian, or Hegelian. We have seen this above in his critical rejection of a Hegelian philosophy of culture, and his creative formulation of his own alternative. Of course, we must also allow that Lao in trying to be a global philosopher in a world where he was not recognized as such by a "mainstream" professional discipline that has defined itself in decidedly Western terms paid the price of being largely ignored. On the other hand, respecting and accepting Lao Sze-Kwang's own resistance to being labelled with partisan categories such as "Chinese philosopher" and "New Confucian" that might call his philosophical objectivity and rigor into question, Cheng Chung-yi quite properly raises an important caveat. We should not allow Lao's antipathy to being categorized in such terms to diminish the appreciation of the singular contribution that Lao has made to Chinese philosophy broadly, and to Confucianism in particular (Cheng 2003, 58ff).

Perhaps the most important lesson that Lao Sze-Kwang taught me personally from his own model of what a philosopher should be, is that I am not a "Western" philosopher. But even more importantly, given the many prejudices and "invisibilities" that still prevail in the professional discipline of philosophy, Lao taught me that I am not someone who pretends to be an erstwhile "philosopher" when such professional colleagues by definition are in fact really much less. Said more clearly, most professional philosophers today naively and uncritically present themselves as "philosophers" when in fact, if they were to acknowledge their own habitual exclusions, would have to call themselves at the very least "Western philosophers," if not better yet, "white, male, Western philosophers."

In our times, the inclusive and deferential position that Lao staked out for himself early on still has profound implications within the professional discipline of philosophy itself. Jay Garfield and Bryan Van Norden published a wonderful, provocative piece in the *New York Times* (May 11, 2016) suggesting that departments of philosophy can certainly continue to ignore non-Western philosophical traditions and philosophical diversity generally—no problem—but in the interests of truth in advertising, Garfield and Van Norden recommend that such departments have the courtesy of renaming themselves as Departments of European and American Philosophy.[7] Excerpting from their op-ed piece entitled "If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is," they observe that:

> The vast majority of philosophy departments in the United States offer courses only on philosophy derived from Europe and the English-speaking world. . . . Given the importance of non-European traditions in both the history of world philosophy and in the contemporary world and given the increasing numbers of students in our colleges and universities from non-European backgrounds, this is astonishing. . . . The present situation is hard to justify morally, politically, epistemically or as good educational and research training

7 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/opinion/if-philosophy-wont-diversify-lets-call-it-what-it-really-is.html.

> practice.… We therefore suggest that any department that regularly offers courses only on Western philosophy should rename itself "Department of European and American Philosophy." This simple change would make the domain and mission of these departments clear and would signal their true intellectual commitments to students and colleagues.

John E. Drabinski quickly posted a response to Garfield and Van Norden. He certainly embraced their motivation in this call for a "rectification of names," but wanted to further refine their argument and take it a step or two further. Indeed, he insists that these same programs are better off acknowledging that they are in fact Departments of White European and White American Philosophy. If Drabinski himself is going to offer courses on "Black Existentialism" as a corrective, those who teach just "Existentialism" ought to acknowledge the pernicious invisibility of "white" when philosophy courses are taught to our increasingly diverse student bodies. Indeed, Drabinski argues the contemporary philosophical canon is precisely that—*a* particular canon that reproduces *a* particular history and more worrisome, *a* particular way of thinking and living that perpetuates the violence of ignoring:

> What happens in those canonical texts is more than just pursuits of truth and the like. They are also texts that reproduce base ideological forms—or revolutionize them—that are key to reproducing certain kinds of societies. In the case of white Western societies, this means slaving, conquering, and subjugating societies. This is why Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, etc. all had theories of race, nation, genesis of human difference, and justifications for all sorts of slavery, conquest, and domination.[8]

And the avalanche of posts responding to Garfield and Van Norden keep coming in, with feminist philosophy too having its say, and requiring that our contemporary departments acknowledge one more

8 http://jdrabinski.com/2016/05/11/diversity-neutrality-philosophy/.

marginalization if not exclusion by calling themselves "Departments of Male, White European and White American Philosophy."[9]

In just such a world then and still now, I sought out a career at the University of Hawai'i with its pluralistic and inclusive curriculum being a sustained challenge to the ethnocentric self-understanding of the professional discipline of philosophy, a discipline that in large measure still perpetuates the assumption that philosophy and philosophers too, are properly male, white, and Euro-American. With my philosophical bearings having been set during my Hong Kong sojourn so long ago, what I learned then from philosopher Lao Sze-Kwang, and what I myself have aspired to be, is just a philosopher—enough said. And perhaps like my mentor Lao, given our times and the continuing self-understanding of professional philosophy, I too must pay the price of being largely ignored.

[9] For links to a variety of responses, see http://pages.vassar.edu/epistemologicallywise/2016/05/16/the-debate-over-the-garfield-van-norden-essay-in-the-stone/.

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