

Between the earth and heaven: conceptions of the self in China

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*To what shall I compare myself, so blown by the winds?
To a lone sand-gull between the Earth and Heaven.
Duh Fuu (eighth century A.D.)*

Mauss puts forward two main arguments in his famous essay. The first is that the human actor as a carrier of roles, rights, and responsibilities is not an innate idea but a social creation, and hence subject to variation. The second presents as a historical process, distinctively unique to Western Europe, the gradual internalisation from 'person' to 'self', the latter becoming the 'individual' as a category of law, religion, philosophy, and perhaps indeed also of experience. My concern here is only with the second of these arguments, and only in so far as it concerns China. It can, I think, be shown to be substantially mistaken.

To imply that the Chinese in classical and medieval times did not make the human actor (*personne*) "a complete entity independent of any other except God" does not do justice either to the radical individualism of Yang Ju, or to the sense of personal isolation expressed by the poet Chiu Yuan, extreme but revealing cases discussed below. Likewise, to argue that "an Orient that has not attained to our understandings" has never made the self – as the West has – into "a sacred entity . . . a fundamental form of thought and action" is to ignore one of the two main traditions of Neo-Confucianism, that of 'mind' (*shin*). For thinkers like Luh Shianqshan (thirteenth century) and Wang Yangming (sixteenth century), the mind of the individual was not unlike Mauss's conception of the self in the Western Enlightenment. It was the carrier of conscious awareness,

knowledge, and reason, as well as being the source of moral judgement and even, in a Berkeleyan sort of way, of the world's existence.

Mauss also denies China any historical development. Its culture, he says, "conserved the notions of archaic times." On the contrary, as in the West, older strata were constantly being overlaid and metamorphosed, even destroyed altogether. To take a small, specific example: Mauss alludes to the archaic re-use of personal names by descendants. By imperial times (the third century B.C.) this practice had died out; and its earlier extent is uncertain. What Mauss does not mention is that, ever since, Chinese personal names have been almost unique to the individual, a stock of perhaps several million appellations.¹ By comparison, our limited repertoire of 'Johns' and 'Marys' is meagre.

Mauss's one-sentence encapsulation of China, namely that "nowhere is the individual more taken into account, in particular as a social being, and nowhere is he more subject to classification," does neatly evoke the Confucian feeling that a person was what he or she was as the node of a multiplicity of specifically defined social relationships. But there were other, equally compelling, ways of thinking about the self in China. It is a mistake to equate 'Chinese' with 'Confucian'.

In what follows I shall make little further reference to Mauss directly, though I shall have his concerns in mind. My purpose is to build up for the reader a preliminary sense of the Chinese reality so that he may make whatever modifications to Mauss's thesis seem appropriate.

The image of the self in ancient poetry

Let us begin with a commonplace. The ancient Chinese everyday view of the self, when it first becomes clear to us during the second quarter of the first millennium B.C., is neither strange nor inaccessible to the modern Western imagination. Consider, as an illustration, this autobiography in verse from the *Scripture of Poetry* (Karlgren, *Odes*, no. 58, retranslated). It was written by a woman, and tells the story of her marriage to a husband who was her social inferior:

Man of the people! How you kept me laughing,
Hemp-cloth in your arms, come to barter for silk.
But skeins of silk were not what you were after.
– You were there with schemes to make me come with you.

And so – I went with you. Across the Chyi River,
To the Mounds of Duenn, we went together.
Don't tell me it was I put off our day for marriage;
You'd found us no one to serve as a go-between.

Then, when I urged you to put away your anger,
We fixed the date for a day in autumn.

I climbed the crumbling wall.
I watched the toll-barrier for you to come back to me.
I watched the toll-barrier, but could not see you.
My tears fell and fell.

Once I had seen you return to the barrier,
We laughed, then we talked.
You burnt cracks in tortoise-shell, cast stalks of milfoil –
No word of ill-luck.

Before leaves fall from the mulberry tree
They are glossy and green.
Doves! Don't eat of the mulberry fruits!
Girls! Don't pleasure with gentlemen!
If a man has his way, he'll be excused.
If a girl has hers, there's no excuse.

When leaves drop off from the mulberry tree,
They lie brown and discoloured.
In three years with you,
I have eaten poor food.

Chyi's water swell and flood.
Our carriage hangings are wet.
Nothing I've done has not been straight,
Nothing of yours but bent.
You set no limits to what you did
– Man of too many inner selves.

Three years a wife!
Effort no effort,
Getting up early, late to bed,
No day for myself.
– It is finished now.
My brothers ignore me
With biting laughter.
I think in silence,
Sad for myself.

I came to you to grow old with you.
We grew older. You made me resent you.
Chyi at least has its shorelines,
Marshes their edges.
– When my hair was still up, as a girl's is,
How we talked, how we laughed our contentment,
Vowed good faith so intently,
Not thinking it all might be altered,
The change that was not to be thought of,
This change that has happened.

So far as we can judge across the millennia, these lines show a feeling for the individual self not far removed from that which we have today in the non-philosophical and non-devotional parts of our lives.² The speaker has a clear inward vision of herself as a relatively coherent, enduring, and self-contained entity that makes decisions, carries responsibilities, is possessed by feelings, and in general has a fate, a fortune, and a history.

What may be the earliest example of critical self-evaluation in Chinese prose literature refers to the middle of the sixth century B.C., and comes from the somewhat later *Records of Tzuoo* (first year of Shiang-gong). Muh Jiang, the mother of a former ruler of the state of Luu, has consulted a divining-manual to see whether she will ever leave a palace where she seems to have been under some form of house-arrest. The diviner has put a favourable gloss on the outcome, but she rejects his views, concluding:

However, [the good qualities that you impute to me] must be authentic and not simulated. For this reason, although *swei* [the hexagram obtained through the divination] signifies 'without blame', in this case I am a woman and have played a part in [the creation of] disorder. The fact of the matter is that I occupy an inferior status and, having no sensitive concern for others, cannot be called 'good'. I have not brought peace to the state, or to the [ruling] family, and cannot be said to have 'exerted a [beneficial] influence'. In my actions I have been hurtful to myself, and cannot be deemed to have 'brought advantage' [to myself or others]. I have abandoned [the conduct proper to] my status and acted immorally, and so cannot be called 'constant' [in virtue]. Those who [really] have these four virtues are *swei* and without blame. I have none of them. How could I be *swei*? I have chosen evil. How could I be 'without blame'? I am certain to die here. I shall not be able to leave.

The individual is conceived of here as a distinct locus of decision-making, and experiencing a life that is partly pre-determined and partly the consequence of her own choices. Whether or not it is an accident that both these early examples refer to women, I do not know.

By the end of the classical age, in the fourth and third centuries B.C., we can see a conscious tension between the individual and society, between ideals and an inadequate reality.³ Once again the clearest expression is in poetry. Chiu Yuan's "Inescapable Sorrow" (*Li sau*) is a psychological self-portrait. Liberally sprinkled with the word 'I', unlike much later Chinese verse, it evokes the isolation felt by the egoistic type of suicidal personality. The poem is too long to quote in full, or even summarise, here. We can only consider those parts that relate to our theme.

He starts with self-praise, describing his "inner beauty." The passing of time haunts him. He fears he will be unable to put right his ruler's

faulty understanding of affairs. He denounces the corruption of the court in his native state of Chuu:

Factions thief pleasure for themselves.
Dark are their paths. They take dangerous ways.
What matter that I am in dread and peril?
I fear the overthrow of the Chariot of State.

His efforts to follow the good rulers of antiquity have been misunderstood by the king:

The Fragrant One could not see my motives.
He listened to slander, hot his anger against me.

The poet is unsurprised. He knows that "frank, loyal speaking brings disaster". He describes the plans he has promoted and the subordinates whom he has brought forward as his "flowers," concluding sadly:

Mine are now withered. It matters little.
My grief's the weeds grown over *all* sweet scents.

As for the people at court:

Merely from greed they all fight for preferment.
To be full does not sate them. They want more and more.
Just from feelings they know in themselves they judge others.
And, envy-swollen, their appetites grow.

He knows he is different:

What *they* gallop after in hasty pursuit
And what I yearn for are not the same.
Slow, slow is the coming of age, but will have me soon,
And gone then my hopes of a lasting fame.

He values his inner integrity:

Let what I feel be honest and beautiful,
With nothing in it not essential.
Of what account, then, my shrunken pallor?

He accepts that he is "not in accord with the men of the present day":

Though I love what is good, curb and bridle myself,
Mornings I meet with insult, at nightfall am tossed away.

Even so, he is unrepentant:

I shall never regret what my heart approves of,
Though death for it come to me nine times over.

Already his inclinations are half suicidal:

Heartache. Foreboding. There is no way forward.
Who else cares what happens, here in our world?
I'd rather be dead – done – dissolved in the waters.
To act as *they* do could not be endured.

He makes a last effort. He recalls that

Subduing one's heart, repressing ambitions,
Enduring wrong, keeping free from shame,
Staying inward unstained, so dying upright,
This was in truth what the Sages acclaimed.

But he cannot face being wronged again. His mood turns to dismissive disdain:

That none understand me shall no more concern me,
So long as my feelings are sweet and sincere.

In a passion of self-exaltation he reflects:

Something there is gives each man his delight.
To be pure – mine alone! And to stay so ever.
Tear my body apart! Still I could not alter.
And even so torn, could my mind be hurt?

His elder sister⁴ criticises him. What is the use of trying to stand apart from the weed-filled court? How, she asks, can he go around saying to everyone, "Please look at my inner feelings?"

"Normal people act together. They like to have friends.
Why keep to yourself and not listen to me?"

He ignores her scolding and goes off to make clear his "inner correctness" by stating his case to the long-dead sage-emperor Shuenn at the latter's grave.

At this point the poem changes gear. Chiu departs on two supernatural journeys, perhaps the reflections of his experiences in trance or in meditation. In the first he rises in a phoenix chariot to the walls of Heaven, but his quest ends in frustration:

I told God's porter to unlock the gates,
But he leant on the portals and simply looked at me.

Thus the world of men is hateful and Heaven will not have him. After other unhappy adventures of a supernatural kind he comes back to his original complaint. It is anguish to be unable to make one's views heard:

So deep are the inner palace apartments
That the king of discernment has not yet awoken.

Perfecting had no first moment. Nor did decay.
Instant on instant new things are given existence,
That, once departed, come not forth again.

What sticks, then stays, resembles dust or lees.
Only in now, and now, and now is spirit-power.
Who cannot but regret hopes unachieved?
Dissolve them in the search for Guiding Structure.

And what one is, if words remain, is not cut off.
Clear too the river that nowhere stops.

This universe was not made by an external creator. It was subject only to transformations guided by immanent patterns and forces. Nature embodied an Inner Logic (*lii*, archaic * *lieg*⁶), which may also be translated, as above, as World-Order or Guiding Structure. One achieved understanding by seeing through to the essence of this Inner Logic, surrendering one's will to it, and becoming identified with it.

For the poets, the faculty that put one in touch with nature was *shaangshin*, the 'delighting heart' or 'responsive mind'. It led one to that state of sensitive awareness in which one is, to use Wordsworth's phrase, "alive to all things and forgetting all." The term was coined by Shieh Liingyunn (A.D. 365–433), a poet and lay devotee of Buddhism. As he put it, didactically:

Feelings work through responsive delight to make beauty.
Dark are phenomena. Who can discern them?
Once this is seen, objects no more concern one.
In one instant enlightened, one has what one pursued.

Perhaps this absence of alienation from the world gave the self in China slightly less sharply defined margins than it had in the West. For the Chinese, this life was neither a vale of tears, nor a testing-ground, but a home.

Individual and society in the philosophy of antiquity

When we turn to the philosophers of Chinese antiquity we find concerns different from those of the poets. The crucial conflict that developed here was between those who emphasised the relative autonomy of man's inner being and those who thought that what was significant in a personality was the creation of social forces working on it from outside, especially education and/or rewards and punishments.

A conscious awareness of an inner self was present, at the latest, by the sixth century B.C. Thus Tzzy-chaan, prime minister of the state of Jenq, is said to have observed, "Men's hearts are no more alike than their faces." Confucius, who lived slightly later, was also concerned with the

problem of penetrating beneath the surface. "Discover what brings him content," he said with regard to the problem of evaluating a person, "and can the man's real worth remain hidden from you?" For Confucius the supreme virtue was *ren*. The conventional translations of this term are 'goodness' and 'benevolence', but its meaning is closer to 'a sensitive concern for others'. The sage exemplified this virtue in his own behaviour, for example by not eating his fill when seated next to someone in mourning; and it was in response to a request for a definition of *ren* that he gave the negative form of the Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you would not wish for yourself."

It is in the works attributed to Moh Dyi (later fifth century B.C.) that we first meet the idea that society and the state are – or, perhaps, should be – the creators of the individual's values, giving this term both a moral and a semantic meaning, the latter applying to the very words he uses. Before the formation of government there had been chaos, each person having his own particular morals and his own particular values for words. It was the duty of the head of each family, each community, and each state to unify the values of those beneath him. It was the emperor's duty to do this for the world as a whole. "If superiors and inferiors do not share the same values, rewards and fame will not be enough to encourage people to act well, nor will punishments be adequate to prevent violence." Moh Dyi envisaged a corporatism that was very different from the Western ideal of democracy when he expressed the hope that the members of the state would become united with the ruler to the point that they came to resemble extensions of his organs of perception, communication, and thought.

In the second half of the fourth century B.C. there was a philosophical crisis in China. One aspect of it was the opposition posited by the individualist Yang Ju between human nature and the demands of society. His doctrine was to act "for myself". Personal pleasure was real and fame inane. Social institutions were a form of torture (Legge, *Mencius*, prolegomena, pp. 96–7, retranslated):

There are the things forbidden under pain of punishment, and the things we are urged to do with the promise of rewards. Concern for our reputation drives us on, and the laws hold us back. We fretfully struggle for an hour of empty glory. We calculate the fame that will be left to us after we are dead. With the greatest circumspection we . . . worry about what is right and what is wrong in our conduct and thoughts. In vain we lose the true pleasure that is suited to our years, unable to follow our inclinations for a moment. How is this different from being in a prison with many walls and shackled with irons?

Yang urged men to act "in accordance with their hearts" (*shin*, a term that may also be taken as "minds"), and with their inner natures.

In the later fourth century Mencius (Menqzzy) tried to resolve this crisis by arguing that man's heart (or mind) was innately good. This heart, which he also called "the heart of a child," took pleasure in a sensitive concern for others, and in morality generally, just as the mouth took pleasure in the flavours of food and the eyes in sexually attractive bodies. "There is no greater delight," he said, "than to reflect upon oneself and to be conscious of one's perfect sincerity." Just as all men had the same essential physical constitution, so they all had the same essential moral constitution. The innately good heart-mind could be corrupted in the way that the wooded slopes of a hill could be deforested by the hacking of axes, but this degraded state was not "what is essential to man." As proof, he gave the example of a baby crawling towards an open well. "All men have a heart that cannot bear to see others suffer. Who could be so inhuman as not to rush forward to save it?"

Mencius also propounded the ideal of "self-cultivation." One had to study, so as to "seek for the heart that one has abandoned," and to nurture one's "moral vitality" through the steady accumulation of good behaviour. Eventually one's heart could become immovable in its resistance to pressure from outside, but supremely capable of transforming others. Mencius was also the first to see the individual as, in some sense, a microcosm. "All the things in the world," he said, "are already complete in us."

For Juang Jou, the first and greatest of the Dawist philosophers, the self was as real (or unreal) as other objects distinguished by convention, but the artificial divisions created by words prevented us from seeing that "things have neither development nor decay, but return into each other and interpenetrate to form a single whole." Dreams provided evidence that things were constantly turning into other things, a process that he compared to molten bronze taking first one shape then another in the hands of a master-smith. His vision of the self in this flux of continual transformation can be found in the famous anecdote of the butterfly (*Juangtzyy jyishyh*, *chyiwh luenn*):

Once Juang dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly delighted with itself, doing whatever it felt like doing, and unaware it was Juang Jou. Suddenly he woke up, and realized with a shock that he *was* Juang Jou. He had no idea if he was the Juang Jou who had dreamt that he was a butterfly, or the butterfly dreaming he was Juang Jou. There was assuredly a difference between Juang and the butterfly. This is what is meant by 'the transformation of things'.

But there was no necessary continuity of memory or awareness. "When one's body is transformed in death, one's heart goes with it in the same way." The wise man, "unable to know what will come after, submits to the transformations that make him what he is, and so waits for the next unknowable transformation."

Juang also thought that individuals differed, both in what they were capable of understanding and in their ideas of true and false, a position that was at variance with that of Mencius. Thus (*Juangtzyy jyishyh*, *shiauyauyou*):

The blind have no way of joining us in the seeing of patterns. The deaf have no way of joining us in hearing the sounds of drums and bells. Why should there only be bodily blindness and deafness? It is likewise the case with knowledge.

Failure to understand might also be caused by lack of experience. It was pointless to talk about the ocean to a frog who lived in a well, or to summer insects about the winter's ice.

If one could achieve what Juang called "great" or "true" knowledge, one became absorbed into the Daw, or Way, which may be thought of as the pervasive, autonomous, amoral functioning of nature. "Fish," he said, "forget themselves in the lakes and rivers. Men forget themselves in the Way." The ultimate aim was an all-encompassing indifference (*Juangtzyy jyishyh*, *chioushoei*):

There are no limits to the sizes of things, no endpoints to their possible durations, no constancies in the divisions between them. Their ends and their beginnings are not to be forcibly determined. So great knowledge keeps in view both the distant and the close at hand. The small does not seem inadequate, nor the great excessive, since it knows the limitlessness of sizes. It draws its proofs from both present and past. The long-enduring causes it no dull stupor, nor does the transitory make it flustered, since it knows that there are no terminal points to possible duration. It scrutinizes the full and the empty. Gain brings no pleasure and loss no grief, for it understands the inconstancies of divisions. The path of tranquillity is clear to it. Life seems no happiness and death no disaster, since it knows that ends and beginnings cannot be forcibly determined.

This passage hints at one of the paradoxes of later Dawism (a world that I do not have the knowledge adequately to explore⁷). Adepts sought for physical immortality through the practice of both external and internal alchemy, yet this perpetuation of the self seems often to have been conceived as akin to its absorption into the workings of nature.

The most forceful expression of the view that man was the product of social conditioning was put forward by Shyun Ching early in the third century B.C. (*Shyuntzyy jyijie*, *chyuanshyue*):

Children born among the Hann and Yueh people of the south and among the Yi and Moh barbarians of the north cry with the same voice at birth. As they grow older they follow different customs. Indoctrination causes them to be thus.

Man became what he was through acquiring a stock of socially accumulated wisdom. "To attempt to do everything your own way is like a blind man trying to distinguish colours." Morality had to be learnt. "When a man is born, he is certainly an inferior man." Teachers and models were indispensable.

Shyun Ching justified morality on practical, socio-biological grounds (*Shyuntzzy jyijiee*, wangjyh):

When morality effects a differentiation of roles there is a correct proportionality. A correct proportionality makes for unity, and unity for the multiplication of strength. The multiplication of strength means the ability to conquer other beings.

Human emotions had to be conditioned both through "ritual" (a term which had the usual sense and also that of appropriate behavior in specific social situations) and through music. Rituals had two functions: they crystallized and made clear the meaning of various aspects of human life, and they defined what should distinguish people in different positions from each other. Music summoned up feelings of mutual solidarity (like a pipe-band or a rock concert), and overcame the feelings of alienation that could arise from too much differentiation. "The conjunction of rituals and music," said Shyun, "dominates the hearts of men."

Some of the Chinese theorists of statecraft known as 'legalists' or 'realists' went far beyond Shyun Ching in their subordination of the individual to the collectivity. They argued that the welfare of the state, or of society as an organised whole, required standards and values diametrically opposed to those regarded as admirable in individual relationships, and which the Confucianists (such as Mencius and Shyun Ching) saw as also being the natural foundations of a good society and polity. The *Book of Lord Shang* (early third century B.C.) asserted (*Shangjiun shu*, chihuchyang):

A state that uses good people to govern the wicked will always suffer from disorder until it is destroyed. A state that uses the wicked to govern the good will always enjoy order, and so become strong.

It was vital, in their view, that individuals should not be psychologically stronger than the law. "States are thrown into disorder by people having numerous private opinions as to the nature of their duty." This justified the destruction of the culture and learning that were the foundations of

such opinions. It may be doubted if the pre-modern West ever produced so extreme a disregard for the individual as this.

The mainstream view, as it developed towards the end of the first millennium B.C., was very different. It can be found most succinctly expressed in the syncretistic metaphysics of the various commentaries that had gathered around the old core material of the *Scripture of Changes* (*Yihjing*), the divining-manual of the Jou dynasty. At its heart was a science of sequential situations, expressed in terms of the transitions from one to another of sixty-four archetypal situations, the "Great Patterns" of Wang Shijy's poem quoted previously. These archetypes were symbolised as hexagrams of complete and broken lines derived from a multi-dimensional dualism of "bright" and "dark," "hard" and "soft," "male" and "female," and so on. It found its justification in the supposed existence of a vast network of correspondences that linked the aspects of the world into varying degrees of kinship. The oracle was believed to work because of a presumed resonance between the archetypes governing the situation asked about by the enquirer, and his action in casting stalks of milfoil or coins. As one commentary put it, "Similar frequencies will respond in resonance to each other. Similar vital forces will seek each other out." The crucial point for our present purposes is that this scripture (which was perhaps the most revered of all) concerned itself with the practical mediation of the relationship between the individual and the moral-material universe. (An example is Muh Jiang's divination recounted above.)

In this relationship the individual counted for something. The oracle was by no means rigidly deterministic. It offered a real if limited scope for choice. The overall trend of a situation was given by the pattern of the prevailing archetypes, but within this trend one might act wisely or foolishly, and so be effective or impotent. The self could live, through the insights provided by the sages, in a magical rapport with the cosmos (*Jouyih Yaushy-shyue*, shihsyr shanq):

The *Changes* constitutes a model of Heaven and Earth. . . . It is for this reason that we can know the causes of what is obscure and what is visible. . . . We are similar to Heaven and Earth, and thus not in conflict with them. Our knowledge embraces the Ten Thousand Things, guiding and benefiting the world. . . . We are at ease on the Earth, firm in our concern for others, and so able to express love.

The interaction of Buddhism and the Chinese tradition

The coming of Buddhism from India during the first half of the first millennium A.D. marked a watershed in Chinese thought. For our present

concerns, and these only, perhaps its most important long-term effects were to accentuate the tendency to identify the self with the cosmos in one way or another, and to infuse what might be loosely termed a certain 'democratic' or 'egalitarian' quality into Chinese thought, where it existed in a state of tension with the hierarchicalism congenial to purely Confucian ideas.

This may seem surprising to those only familiar with Indian Buddhism. Part of the explanation lies in the differences between the basic orientations of the Chinese tradition and Indian thought at the time of the Buddha and some centuries after. For the Indian, suffering was an intrinsic property of life. For the Chinese, it was secondary: either accidental or brought unnecessarily by the human actor onto him- or herself. Pain (*dukkha*) is not a basic Chinese philosophical concern. Equally, the Indian believed in a continuous cycle of rebirths among living beings into lives of suffering, the wheel of *samsāra*. The Chinese believed, by and large, in a unique personal existence, no doubt fortified by the concept of a structure of kinship ascendants and descendants, stretching indefinitely back into the past and indefinitely forward into the future, in which the individual occupied his unique place. The Chinese recycled hexagrams, not selves. Likewise, the Indians sought some type of 'salvation', some escape from rebirth into suffering. The Chinese, for whom birth and life were positive goods, felt no such need. They were, until the coming of Buddhism, innocent of soteriology.

The Indians also devalued the impermanent, as being in some sense unreal. The Chinese, on the contrary, celebrated flux. The Daw and the sixty-four archetypes of the *Changes* were, in a sense, outside time, but they expressed themselves through change and were inconceivable apart from it. Similarly, the Indians, or at least their philosophers, distrusted the senses. For the Buddhist, the senses pertained to Māra, the evil one. They were the conduits of illusion. For the Chinese, it was through perception that one apprehended the real, the immanent pattern-principle(s). Hence it is not surprising that Indian Buddhism was pervasively transformed in Chinese hands, and that the reactions to it only responded to certain of its elements.

A key question to be answered about early Buddhism concerns the nature of its concepts of self (*attā*) and non-self (*anattā*). The entities of which the world appears to consist were regarded as composed of aggregates (*khandhas*). A crude analogy is with a television screen, on which changing collections of coloured dots fleetingly call up an illusion of people, animals, and landscapes. Such entities are void (*suñña*) in that they

lack essential reality. The usually accepted view is that this analysis also applied to the self, which thus likewise lacked essential reality. An alternative view is that in its early stages the religion posited a core self that remained after the inessential 'non-self' elements, such as attachments and desires, had been stripped from it. The basis for this latter view is that it makes intelligible the many positive references to the *attā* in early Buddhist writing, and explains what it was that attained to *nibbāna*. This state may be approximately described as a pure, permanent, desireless and painless perfection freed of any of the causal-effectual characteristics resulting from the moral-material consequential chains running through existence after existence, as postulated by the doctrine of *kamma*. Without adjudicating on this dispute (which is outside my abilities), it may be agreed that orthodoxy soon placed a decisive emphasis on the view that there was no permanent ego or self. A typical simile that was offered relating to the sequences that are normally perceived as a personality was the impress of a seal on clay, in which only pattern is transferred.

From early Buddhism, the mainstream of Chinese philosophical tradition took up first and foremost a concern with the theory that (in the words of the Hwayan school) the world of apparent objects is "created by the artist in one's own mind." The *Long Scroll*, written in the late sixth century, is an early Charn (Zen) expression of this view (Jorgenson, pp. 13–14):

It is as if there were a great rock in the front of the courtyard of your house on which you had the habit of sitting or snoozing. You have no fear of it. Suddenly the idea comes into your mind to make it into a statue. So you employ a sculptor to carve it into a statue of the Buddha. Your mind interprets it as being a Buddha, and you no longer dare to sit on it, fearing it to be an offence. . . . How can there be anything that is not constructed in your imagination?

From the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Nāgārjuna the mainstream Chinese tradition acquired a sense that everything is ultimately related to everything else, a view that is derived from the idea of "dependent co-origination" (Sanskrit *pratītya-samutpāda*), but has been given a characteristically Chinese concrete interpretation. According to Faatzanq (643–712), there was a "complete interfusion" (*yuanrong*) and "interpenetration" (*shiangruh*) of all phenomena. In his structuralist-relativist theory of being, each thing, as it flickers instantaneously in and out of existence, is only what it is by virtue of its relationship to every other thing; and it, in its turn, contributes in comparable fashion to making them what they are. The soteriological implication is that, because all beings are affected by

each other's moral qualities, both good and bad, no being can be fully released from suffering and illusion until all are. The Bodhisattva (who stays behind in the world to help others) acts as he does not from choice but necessity.

The Neo-Confucianism that took shape in the eleventh century was a rationalist, secularist reaction to this sort of Buddhism. It was rationalist in that it implicitly accepted that words, arguments, and symbols can adequately grasp reality, and secular in that it maintained the moral worth of the everyday world. Jang Tzay, for example, formulated a metaphysics that, while having obvious Dawist antecedents, was basically a materialist reinterpretation of Buddhism. He says (*Jang Herngchyu jyi*, jenqmeng):

The Great Potentiality [*tayshiu*, literally 'Great Void'] contains no specific shapes. It is the basic state of matter-energy. Its congealing and scattering are no more than transient non-intrinsic shapes subject to transformations. A profound calm unaffected by responses is our nature in its profoundest original state. Knowledge and awareness are no more than transient non-intrinsic responses due to interaction with things.

At the same time he extended the notion of *ren* (a sensitive concern for other people) until it had more the sense of 'a sensitive awareness of all other beings'. The opening lines of his *Western Inscription* read (*Jang Herngchyu jyi*, shiming):

The Creative I designate my Father, and the Receptive I designate my Mother.⁸ Compared to them I am of no significance, but I live intimately together with them in their midst. The all-filling plenum of Heaven and Earth is my body. The commands of Heaven and Earth are my nature. [All] people are my brothers. [All] things are my companions.

Jang's younger contemporary Cherng Mingdaw went even further when he said: "By *ren*, Heaven and Earth and the innumerable things are regarded as one substance, so that nothing is not oneself; and, when this is recognized, there is nothing one will not do for them." The attempt by Jang and Cherng to uphold Confucian values at the same time, for example by describing the sovereign as "the eldest son of our Father and Mother," immediately introduced a conflict between the older sense of hierarchy and this newer feeling for equality, which was to continue to affect later thinkers.

Jang also stressed that the congealing and scattering of matter-energy was "subject to pattern-principle (*lii*)," therefore "obeyed laws" and was "not arbitrary." He disagreed with what he described as "the Buddha's

theory that mountains, rivers, and the great earth itself are a sickness in one's perceptions." Cherng Ichuan, Mingdaw's younger brother, extended the function of pattern-principle still further, making it both natural *and* normative, both descriptive *and* prescriptive. "A thing," he said, "must have a reason why it is as it is, and a rule to which it should conform." *Lii* determined both why fire was hot and how a son should behave towards his father.

This attempt to define morality in terms of what was 'natural' brought predictable problems. It was possible, to a certain extent, to finesse the dilemma of unnatural behaviour by arguing that if an entity has to have a given property to be a proper something, then, if it does not have this property, it is simply not that something (and hence not behaving unnaturally). Beyond this, the question of evil was resolved (in so far as it could be) by adopting Mencius's position that human nature was intrinsically good, but adding that its *lii* could be obscured by turbid matter-energy. The simile used was of a pearl lying in muddy water. This implied dualism between principle and matter tended to push the former in the direction of a transcendental realm, and left the strategy of deriving morality from nature in ruins.

An alternative approach was the moral intuitionism developed by Luh Shianqshan in the twelfth century. He identified pattern-principle (*lii*) with mind (*shin*), and avoided arbitrariness of intuition by positing a universal mind, of which the individual's was a part, gaining access to the whole by the faculty of intuitive moral knowledge (*liangjy*) except when contaminated by selfishness, which explained the occurrence of immoral actions by some individuals. Wang Yangming (1472–1529), who extended Luh's ideas, asserted that "outside the mind, there are no pattern-principles. Outside the mind there are no phenomena." He was not quite a solipsist, as he thought that mind had to have, so to speak, something to work on. "If my intelligence were separated from the universe, the spirits, and the manifold things, it too would lose its existence."

The radical, not too say revolutionary, aspects latent in this manner of thinking, and due in great measure to an interaction with Buddhist ideas, came to the surface in some of the more heterodox thinkers of the sixteenth century. Perhaps a belief in universal mind had made it safe for Wang Yangming to say, "I will not hold to be true a principle that my mind judges to be false, even if this principle has been enunciated by Confucius," since divergence was unlikely. But Lii Jyh (1527–1602) saw no valid grounds for supposing that all individuals would necessarily intuit the same values, and found the established social morality philosoph-

ically arbitrary. Her Shinyiin (1517–1579) thought friendship the only fully morally satisfactory relationship, and hoped that even if the relationships of ruler and minister and of father and son continued to have a formal existence, they would lose any substantive content, transformed by a feeling of amity. He also dreamed of a universal psychic intercommunication, an interlinking of all minds. These subversive notions, and others, were largely suppressed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were to be woken into life again by contact with the modern West.

If we had to sum up in a very general way the self as conceived of by the mainstream Neo-Confucian thinkers, we might say that it had the status of a microcosm reflecting a macrocosm. In the words of Ju Shi, the synthesizer of orthodoxy in the twelfth century, “Heaven . . . is totally immanent in nature.” While this gave the self an irremovable centrality as the carrier of moral action, it also meant that any distinctive individuality (which would usually be associated with impure matter-energy or selfishness) was for the same reason morally somewhat suspect.

The self in modern Chinese thought

When we come to the philosophers of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we meet a paradox that is partly the result of a resurgence of traditional heterodox ideas and partly of Western influence. They begin with a search for the liberation of the self, but end with the desire for its extinction: for its absorption into a collective consciousness, the homogenization of its individuality, its perpetuation as a fragment of a greater Social Self, or its assimilation into the flow of a progressing human history.⁹

Tarn Syhtorng (1865–98) exemplifies this more clearly than anyone else. His *Study of Sensitive Concern for Others* reveals his hatred for the constraints imposed on the individual by accepted values (*Renshyue*, p. 2):

From the time I was young until the time I was grown up, I everywhere encountered the afflictions of the bonds and relationships [of conventional morality]. I swam deep in their bitterness. It was almost something a living person could not endure. The burden was deadly, yet one did not die.

The old relationships had to be destroyed (*Renshyue*, p. 3):

First we must break through the net of profits and remuneration. Then we must break through the net of conventional scholarship. . . . Then we must break through the net of having rulers. Then we must break through the net of moral norms. Then through the net of [believing in] Heaven. Then through the net of the world's religions. Last of all, we must break through the net of Buddhism.

He attacked the Confucian doctrine of ‘names’, or what we should call ‘prescriptive definitions’. Their chief use was to define the roles that each person should act in social life.

Names [wrote Tarn] are created by men. Superiors use them to control their inferiors, so that they are obliged to accord them respect. . . . Rulers use names to hobble ministers. Officials use names to keep the people on the [desired] track. Fathers use names to oppress their sons. Husbands use names to keep their wives in bondage. . . . How can the slightest feeling of sensitive concern for others survive in them? (*Renshyue*, pp. 11–12)

Equally abhorrent was ritual, the moralised manners that governed interpersonal relations. The old moral code graded one's obligations, and the intensity of the appropriate accompanying feelings, according to the proximity of the relatives concerned. Tarn would have none of this (*Renshyue*, p. 24):

If a distinction is made between ‘closeness’ and ‘remoteness’, there come into being the prescriptive definitions on which ritual is based. . . . The heart is forced into that in which it takes no delight. The body is bound to do that which incommodes it.

In the utopia of the future, he maintained, there will be “no ‘fathers’ and no ‘sons’”. How much less will there be ‘rulers’ and ‘ministers’! None of the prescriptive definitions with which despots, those robbers of the people, have coerced and bound them will any longer exist.”

The ideals in whose name Tarn was demanding the demolition of Confucian values were equality and personal freedom. This is evident from his praise of friendship (*Renshyue*, p. 59):

The least harmful to human life of the Five Relationships, and the most beneficial, with no trace of bitterness and a delight like that of fresh water, is friendship. . . . Why is this so? First, it is equal. Second, it is free. Third, its only object is [mutual] development. To summarise what this means, it is simply that the right to personal autonomy is not lost.

In politics, these new values led him to an anarchism modified only by a hint of the old concept of an all-embracing world-order (*Renshyue*, p. 76):

In the government of the world, there should be an All-Under-Heaven but no nation-state. . . . Since everyone is free, no one should be the citizen of any particular state. If there are no states, then boundaries will dissolve, wars cease, suspicions end, distinctions between self and others vanish, and equality appear.

Thus far, the category of an independent self is central to Tarn's argument. But the context is missing. When supplied, it alters the perspective

dramatically. Everything in Tarn's thinking found its reason for being, and its proper place, in what might be called a 'materialist mysticism'. Consider the following (*Renshyue*, pp. 7–8):

Throughout the world of laws, the world of space, and the world of all that lives, from the vast to the microscopic, there is something that fills them all, everywhere holds them together, coordinates them, and weaves them into one. It cannot be seen, or heard, or tasted, and there is no way to give it a name, but I designate it 'the ether'. Confucius termed its manifestation in actions 'sensitivity to other individuals', the 'primal', and the 'basic nature'. Moh Dyi called it 'loving [mankind] as a whole', the Buddha the 'sea of the true nature' and 'compassionate sorrow'. Jesus spoke of it as the 'spiritual soul', 'loving others like oneself', and 'regarding enemies as friends'. Scientists name it 'chemical affinity' and the 'force of attraction'. This entity is all of these. . . . It is the ether that lets the eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smell, the tongue taste, and the body touch. . . . If you were to split an atom down to nothing, and to observe what it is that holds it together, that would be the ether. . . . The moon and the earth attract each other and do not fly apart. The eight planets . . . and the countless asteroids and comets all attract each other and do not scatter. . . . The starry clusters of the Milky Way, whose number is as the sands of the River Ganges, attract each other and do not scatter. . . . All this attraction is what I call the ether. . . . Only when scholars have clearly recognized its substance and function may they go on to talk about a sensitive concern for others.

We are all part of a flux of forces (*Renshyue*, p. 8):

Just as people know that the nerves carrying the forces of the brain join the five sense-organs and the skeleton into a single body, so they ought to know that electrical forces join Heaven and Earth, all creatures, others and ourselves, into a single body. . . . My mind has the power to affect others, so that they share my thoughts. . . . In the last analysis, there is no barrier between others and one's self, for which reason the innermost feelings are as if open to view. Scholars should also recognize clearly that electricity is the same as brain. Since electricity is present everywhere, one's self is present everywhere. When foolish divisions are made between others and one's self, sensitive concern for others disappears.

The structure of human relationships should be dissolved (*Renshyue*, pp. 60–61):

According to Buddhist teaching, all alike – regardless of whether they are rulers or ministers, husbands and fathers or wives and mothers, or sons, or elder or younger brothers – should leave the family and take vows, becoming members of the monastic community. . . . There is nothing that can be called a state. It is as if all were one family. There is nothing that can be called a body. It is as if all were one body.

It is at this point in Tarn's thinking that the self, after being liberated, begins to disappear again. The better to understand its extinction, we must leave the mysticism for a moment and look at the materialism. Tarn's study of Western science had taught him that the difference between "sweet smells and stinking odours" was no more than "a slight difference in the arrangement of the atoms." Hence it was a mistake to think of anything as having "a fixed and unchanging nature." The conservation of matter in chemical reactions seemed to him to prove that, much as Jang Tzay had argued earlier, "existence and non-existence are concentration and dispersion. There is no creation and destruction [of matter]." Why then should we fear death?

To love life [he wrote] may be called a great delusion and a lack of understanding. It results from being blind to non-creation and non-destruction. . . . If people cannot overcome their fear of death, and are shrinking, confused, and without the courage to act, they will be even less fit to deal with the human predicament. They will more and more abandon themselves to evil, pay unceasing attention to making a favourable impression, but be ill-at-ease everywhere and think of nothing but their own pleasure and peace of mind. How can All-Under-Heaven be brought under good government again? . . . If they think only of their lives or, as one might say, of those few decades so swiftly gone, their minds will remain fixed on eating, drinking, copulating, possessions, income, reputation, and status. . . . Did Heaven give birth to men merely to furnish them with amusement and then forthwith to destroy them? (*Renshyue*, p. 20)

After setting forth a theory of the chemical reincarnation of the body, in which the atoms of a corpse reassemble to "become new people and new things," Tarn declares "how much less does the essence that is in the bodily soul pay regard to birth and destruction!" And he cites with approval the opinion of the seventeenth-century philosopher Wang Fuyi that "when a sage dies, his vital essence divides and becomes a multitude of men of worth."¹⁰

Tarn's goal was a collective enlightenment, to achieve which every self had to be extinguished in a totality. Consider these words from his closing pages (*Renshyue*, pp. 73–4):

The fundamental reason why others and the self cannot intercommunicate is that the way in which the ethers of the brain move are different for each of us. Whenever I am in a state of peaceful introspection, I can see the movements of the ethers of my brain. Their colour is a pure white, their light clear and sparkling. They are as fine as silken threads, their shapes sinuous and twisting. This is how they move: they alter all the time in an undetermined way between long and short, plentiful and sparse, existent

and non-existent, with a swiftness for which no words are adequate, like flashes of lightning among the clouds, free from the least imperfection.

It is my belief that the brain is electricity. At first I thought that it moved at random. Later I perceived that this is not so. When the multitude of thoughts is transparent, they are hidden in their tranquillity and not visible to the eye. If, by some chance, a thought emerges, patterns of electricity appear, and thought tirelessly follows thought, their movements never ceasing. When thoughts change, the movements are likewise very different; and the more thoughts, the more differences. They accumulate in so much complexity, and so intermingle, that they no longer form patterns. One can deduce from the different movements that accompany different thoughts that the manner of movement is determined by the thoughts, and is of a specific type. . . .

The movements of the ethers of the brain constitute consciousness. Since the ways in which the ethers of the brain move have countless dissimilarities, and consciousness is borne along upon them, confusion arises. As every person, every place, every time, and every phenomenon is different, how can there be a means whereby others and the self can communicate? The fault lies in the mutual incompatibility or, in other words, in consciousness. If we now seek intercommunication between them, we must *extinguish consciousness*. If we want to extinguish consciousness, we must change the way in which the ethers of our brain move. Contact with the outside must be cut off. Internally, we must return to simplicity. We must become simpler and simpler until nothingness is reached, at which point consciousness will have been destroyed. When consciousness has been destroyed, the self will have been removed along with it. When the self has been removed, differences will have been annihilated. When differences have been annihilated, equality appears. When equality has been attained, every entity will be penetrated by an awareness of every other entity, with not the least barrier between them. This is the culmination of the intercommunication of self and others. . . . This is a sensitive concern for others!

The goals of Confucianism and Buddhism, *ren* and *nibbāna*, have been identified, through a materialism based on Western science.

The legatees of the self: society, culture, and the future

Tarn Syhtorng was unusual in the ruthlessness of his conclusions, but elements of the ideas just discussed can be found in most modern Chinese philosophers, with an important exception. The objective of a psychological simplification of the self to a totally undifferentiated state vanishes. Instead the self tends to find its ultimate meaning as a distinctive component of a vaster structure that extends across space and time: a society, a culture, or a future. Let us look at a few cases.

Kang Yeouwei (1858–1927) was best known in his life as a political reformer, but is mainly remembered today as the author of *The Great*

Uniformity,¹¹ a blueprint for utopia, partly drafted in the 1880s but only published in full in 1935. Kang believed that Heaven had given him his talents in order to cure the agonies of mankind. His emotional orientation was that of a bodhisattva who had become a Benthamite. The cruelty of life haunted him. “The azure Heaven and the round earth are nothing but a great slaughter-yard, a great prison.” Progress was to “reduce men’s pain and to increase their pleasure.”

Avoidable or remediable unhappiness, thought Kang, was due to inequalities created by nature and by man. Thus having different states caused wars, and as a cure Kang advocated a world government and a world language. Having social classes bred bitterness and hindered the development of the talents of those in the less privileged groups. So – no more classes. Complete physical and mental uniformity was essential to happiness. Therefore different ethnic groups had to be homogenized by means of population transfers and mixed marriages. Eventually everyone was to be of the same colour, the same shape, and the same intelligence.

Women had suffered from the subservience they were expected to show towards men on no better grounds than sexual difference. Except in matters relating to the bearing of children, men and women were therefore to be treated as equals. On all formal occasions they were to wear unisex clothing. The family was a source of small-scale collective selfishness, and was to be abolished. Children could then be brought up in identical fashion in institutions. “Otherwise,” he said, “people’s characters will not be of the same kind.” Men had varying dispositions and had to be “smelted and forged,” a process most easily effected when they were young. In this way, he concluded, “morality may easily be unified and behaviour made identical.” The economy was to be run by the state, to prevent the re-emergence of rich and poor. Kang remained beset by the fear that exceptional and charismatic personalities might reappear. So he ordained that such people were to be thrown into prison.

The wilderness was to be municipalised and homogenised. All animals harmful to man were to be exterminated. The others were to be domesticated, kept in zoos, or employed as servants. Birds would perform as choristers. Universal economic development – the irrigation of deserts, the levelling of mountain ranges, and the building of artificial islands on the seas – would create a global parkland with every consumer amenity. The human spirit would be kept alive (he hoped) by a modest emulation between administrative units in productive output, the advancement of knowledge, and the practice of altruism.

Kang repeatedly affirmed that “all men have a right to freedom con-

ferred on them by Heaven." Yet his recipe for general happiness was the destruction of all that makes an individual individual.

In Ferng Yeoulan's *A New Examination of Man* (1943), the drama is psychological rather than social. For Ferng, man's most distinctive characteristic is conscious awareness. Personal development consists in the enhancement of this conscious awareness. According to its level, a man lives in one of four spiritual realms: the Realm of Nature, the Realm of Utility, the Realm of Morality, and the Realm of the Universal. Each corresponds to a mental state (*Shin yuan ren*, p. 37):

In the Realm of Nature, men do not know that there is a self. . . . In the Realm of Utility, men have a self. In this realm, all a man's actions are selfish. . . . In the Realm of Morality, man is without self. He acts morally, for the sake of morality. . . . In the Realm of the Universal, man is likewise without the self, but this selflessness must be called the 'Great Selflessness'.

In his view, morality derives from man's being a member of society. Moral actions are defined as those consciously directed to seeking the happiness of others, without any thought of personal advantage therefrom. "A man," he says, "must sacrifice himself in order to seek the benefit of others."

As awareness advances, one realises that one is not just a part of society, but also of the Universe. "Man," he says, "must contribute not only to society but also to the Universe." The enlightened person sees his own life and all phenomena as "parts of the embodiment of the Way." This term, he says is "a general name for all transformations," or the "Great Phenomenon that has no beginning and no end," or even "the flux of operational effects." Such a man is not only aware that he is part of the Great Totality, he actually becomes identified with it, even identical to it. "When a man has become identified with the Great Totality," says Ferng, "for him the distinction between self and non-self no longer exists."

He then imagines a sceptic asking how a part, that is to say, man, can be identified with a whole, that is to say the Universe. The answer is "mind." He quotes Wang Yangming's view that intelligence pervades the Universe, so that there are no divisions between the self and other entities. "Man's mind," says Ferng, "may likewise be a part of the Cosmos, but the range of its thoughts is not restricted to part of the Cosmos." To materialists who argue that the mind is no more than the movements of the brain, he retorts that the mind depends on the brain but only in the way that a picture depends on paints and paper for its existence. Furthermore, "when one becomes identified with the Great Totality, the self is by no means entirely extinguished." What happens is, rather, "an

unlimited expansion of the self." "In this unlimited expansion the self is in fact the ruler of the Great Totality." Finally, "religions consider God to be the ruler of the Universe, but the man who is in the realm of the universal is aware that his self is the ruler of the Universe. If the ruler of the Universe is God, then his self is God."

The man in the realm of Utility is ruled by the pursuit of pleasure, income, and publicity. His life is "the continuation of the existence of the self," and his death "the destruction of its existence." For the man in the realm of Morality, death is merely the end of his obligations. His acts have an exclusively social significance, so personal extinction is of no great importance. The man in the realm of the universal is "one with the Creative Force" (in the words of Guo Shianq, a fourth-century commentator on the Dawist scriptures). He is "without beginning and without end." The self, identified with the Great Totality, exists across all space and time.

Freedom is not a matter of one's actions. "The man in the realm of the universal," says Ferng, "has in no sense to act differently from the mass of the ordinary people." Indeed, "it is the special characteristic of the Neo-Confucian to seek the realm of the universal in the actions of his everyday life." One's obligation is only "to fulfil the duties arising from one's personal relations and one's job." Like an actor who has been assigned a part in a play, one must accept one's role and play it to the best of one's ability. He does not consider that one might question the casting and the script.

Just as Kang's brave new world is in some respects an update of Moh Dyi (probably but not provably inspired by the Western utopian socialists of the nineteenth century), so Ferng's vision is a fusion of the ideas of the 'mind' school of Neo-Confucianism with elements of Dawism, transformed by an internalization of significance that seems to derive from German idealism.

Quite different is the doctrine of social immortality espoused by Hwu Shyh (1891–1962). It is summed up in his reflections on the death of his mother (Kwok, pp. 103–104):

As I reviewed the life of my dead mother, whose activities had never gone beyond the trivial details of the home but whose influence could be clearly seen on the faces of those men and women who came to mourn her death . . . I came to the conclusion that everything is immortal. This line of reasoning led me to what may be called the religion of social immortality, because it is essentially based on the idea that the individual self, which is a product of the accumulated effects of the social self, leaves an indelible

mark of everything it is and everything it does upon that larger Self which may be termed Society, or Humanity, or the Greater Being. . . . This Great Self lives forever as the everlasting testimony of the triumphs and failures of the numberless individual selves.

He distinguished this theory from the traditional idea that a select few survive through the memory of their virtues, achievements, and writings. He ascribed social imperishability to every action of every person, trivial as well as exceptional, evil as well as good. He argued that this was not "revering Society and annihilating the individual" since, though "the world of today is what it is through the accumulated virtues and sins of our predecessors, the world of the future depends entirely on the virtues and sins that we ourselves accumulate." This is a secular, collectivist version of the doctrine of *kamma*.

With Jang Dongsun (1886–1965) we find Culture replacing Society and the appearance of the Future as the supreme validating principle of morality and meaningfulness. In his *Fledgling Philosophy* (1929) Jang describes the universe as a spatial structure, composed of the "interweaving of countless structures," that evolves through time. The distinguishing feature of this "evolutionary process" is an "increased intercooperation throughout the entire entity." From this he argues that "if a man's life has any value, that is because man's life in the universe has a relatively . . . progressive place. . . . If it does not . . . then one can deduce that that man's life is valueless." Strictly speaking, he adds, value is relative and man's life lacks any absolute value or purpose. In a sense one can regard its purpose as the immanent one of the self-completion of the personality.

In *The Philosophy of Morals* (1931) Jang says that the goal of each individual's life is to break free from immediate existence in the here and now. Culture and civilisation represent a collective effort by humanity to achieve this objective for their members. "What is noble in man," Jang says, "is that he can mark out a domain independent of the natural world in which the laws of nature reign, a domain in which he can put into effect laws at variance with the laws of nature."

Knowledge and awareness are what permit civilised man to take part in this process of collective self-realisation. Jang uses the metaphor of two lamps in a dark room. "The lamps," he says, "cannot have their existence in common, but their light can." People are like lamps, irreducibly individual, but knowledge, which is "the value of life" as opposed to its mere existence, is like the light, and belongs to a shared, objective

domain, that of culture. He concludes: "The reason I say that human life has a purpose is because there is knowledge; and it is possible for it to change a purposeless natural existence into a purposeful idealistic existence." Underpinning this faith is Jang's conviction that the advance of knowledge is "absolutely irreversible."

Jang's starting-point is the individual. "If," he says, "the spirit of an individual can create something that will add to the existing general stock of culture, this creation represents the forward march of culture." But, he warns, if it is too individualistic then it will have no value. What he calls the "lesser self" or the "false self" can only attain any value if its sublimation of selfish desires can lead it to an awareness of the "greater" or "true" self. What is society, then? Is it a super-being in its own right, or just an association for the benefit of individuals? Jang says he is a follower of Wundt here: the social mind is more than an agglomeration of individual minds.¹² The appearance of an inherited tendency to moral behaviour he explains on the socio-biological grounds of its survival value for the group.

The individual attains immortality only in terms of his actions. In *A Fledgling Philosophy* Jang wrote (*Shin jershyue luenntsorng*, p. 63):

[If there is no undying soul] does that not mean that once we are dead we are finished? No. It does not. If, indeed, our universe is a complex, living structure, then every one of our actions has consequences in its remotest parts.

In the *Philosophy of Morals* he elaborated (*Dawder jershyue*, pp. 614–15):

Since mankind came into being, all creations of the spirit . . . have been a struggle to find immortality. . . . The individual seeks to extend the domain of his life so that he may exist for ever. The accumulation of [such] endeavours is culture. . . . Every individual dies, but the culture that he has produced is comparatively immortal.

Subject to the proviso that it is progressive. "If," says Jang, "a person is stationary with respect to the advance of human life in the universe . . . or even goes against the current, then – even if his person and actions are known to a great number of people – he does not merit the designation 'imperishable'."

Here are the structuralist metaphysics of Faatzanq (see earlier discussion of "complete interfusion" and "interpenetration") set in motion by a future-worship inspired by German idealism.

Revolutionary emotion and revolutionary theory

Nowhere does the tension between the desire for ecstatic self-expression and ecstatic self-immolation show itself so clearly as in the early writings of the left-wing poet and scholar Guo Mohruoh. Here he is talking about poetry (Roy, p. 87):

Only a poem which is a pure manifestation of the poetic feelings and images in the mind, a strain flowing from the well of life, a melody played on the lute-strings of the heart, a tremor of life, a cry of the soul, can be a true poem, a good poem, a well-spring of human happiness. . . . Whenever I encounter such a poem . . . I only wish I could swallow it, book, paper, and all.

Here he is on children (Roy, p. 90):

There is not a moment of the day when [a child] does not devote his entire self to the tasks of creation, expression, and enjoyment. The life of a child is the life of a genius in miniature.

Guo wanted to become a superchild.

Little by little, though, he came to feel that self-realisation was an illicit indulgence until it was equally accessible to everyone. In 1923 he declared (Roy, p. 155):

Until the economic systems of the world have been transformed, such things as the manifestations of Brahmā, the dignity of the self and the gospel of love can only be the morphine or cocaine of the propertied and leisured classes, while the members of the proletariat are left to soak themselves in sweat and blood.

Personal freedom had to be renounced, in a mortification of the spirit, so that others might enjoy it later.

Romanticism and revolutionary impulse fused into a cult of action (Roy, p. 135):

If all natural phenomena are manifestations of God, and I also am a manifestation of God, then I am God, and all natural phenomena are manifestations of me. When a man has lost his Self and become one with God, he transcends time and space, and sees life and death as one. . . . Energy is the source from which all things are created; it is the will of the Universe. . . . If one can achieve union with this energy, one will be aware only of life and not death, only of constancy and not change. . . . With the same energy with which a lion strikes its prey, with the whole body and the whole soul, one must seek self-realization in every moment.

So he became a revolutionary writer, hating the beauties of the world as an illusion, raging at songbirds that they should dare to warble in the

gardens of the rich, and seeing his work as the artistic equivalent of the activist's bomb.

This pattern of revolutionary emotion had no counterpart in Chinese revolutionary theory. In the most systematic exposition of Maoist Communism, the *Philosophy of the Masses* by Ay Sychyi (1910–66), there is no commitment to the self-realisation of the individual but, rather, views like the following (*Dahjong jershyue*, pp. 125–126):

We have revolutionary thoughts and actions. We exert ourselves to serve the great people. This is the main side of our character, and an aspect of the path of development of the distant future. But we also often contain dregs of the thought of petty-bourgeois individualism, and even the dregs of the consciousness of the other exploiting classes. We often make calculations for our own private profit, which prevents us from serving the people with whole heart and whole will. This is the reverse side of our character, the rotten side that must be smashed.

Independence of thought or perception is an illusion. Thought has a class character. There are no purely rational grounds, therefore, for deciding the validity of an argument. What proves an idea erroneous is its defeat in practice (by implied analogy with an experiment in a laboratory). Any failure on the part of a revolutionary therefore indicates that his mind is not reflecting reality properly, since knowledge is a reflection of the material world about us.¹³ Only the minds of those who have a working-class standpoint can reflect reality unimpaired by selfishness. (Compare the Neo-Confucian idea that selfishness could block the individual mind from contact with the universal mind.) So Ay says – and this really is what he says – (*Dahjong jershyue*, p. 57):

If you are resolved to become a very good camera, and able to have an accurate knowledge of everything, then you must first resolve a basic question, namely you must take the standpoint of the workers and the broad mass of the people. . . . You must be able to make yourself wholeheartedly, whole-mindedly loyal to the interests of the people, that is, you must resolve that all your work and all your ability shall be used for the task of liberating the broad mass of the people, and that you will sacrifice all, without begrudging it, to the achievement of this goal. . . . If you are able to be like this, without the slightest individual selfishness, and in no degree affected by the influence on thought of the selfishness and vileness of the large landlord or large bourgeois classes, then, when you examine a question, you will have no prejudices, no anxieties, to impede your understanding the true nature of the question to the bottom, and you can obtain a correct knowledge of everything.

The individual remains of significance only as the locus of an ever-renewed moral struggle whose aim is the extinction of individuality.

By taking the working-class point of view, and so escaping from the realm of bourgeois utility, the mind can gain the understanding of the laws that give it freedom and power. According to Ay (*Dahjong jershyue*, p. 202):

If we have not the slightest knowledge of the laws of development of society, then our actions are entirely conditioned by our own class interests. . . . If, on the contrary, we know the laws of the development of society . . . we can escape from blindness and consciously tread the road of inevitable victory.

What is more, "If a man's thinking can be in accord with the laws of reality, and if he can know the laws in appropriate fashion, then he can wield very great strength, and make use of the knowledge of these laws to change the reality of the world." In short, "He can control the world."

Of course reality is always changing. So the truth in the revolutionary's mind must alter in corresponding fashion. This, to cut short a familiar story, is what dialectics is about. Ay Sychyi's vision, then, is of an ever-changing reality and an ever-changing correct theoretical interpretation perfectly attuned and interacting, in which the selfless yet omnipotent revolutionary becomes one with the simultaneous forward march of progress and truth. The assumptions about class and progress are new, but the underlying style of thought, which is predicated on the existence of an exact correspondence between reality and a symbolic system, and the power accruing to those who can comprehend it, has much in common with that of the *Scripture of Changes*.

Final observations

Chinese ideas about the self from late archaic times to the present day were extraordinarily varied. If, however, a broad contrast may be tentatively made with comparable ideas in Europe over the same span of time it is probably best brought out by focussing on the Middle Ages and the early modern period, when it emerges most clearly. In spite of the purgatories and paradises of popular Buddhism, the Chinese were not on the whole obsessed with the personal fate of the soul (which is the crucial aspect of the self in this context) in an afterlife to anything like the same degree as the Europeans. Nor was there in China any condition comparable to the isolation of the European soul, either from other souls or, above all, from an omnipotent, ultimately incomprehensible, transcendent deity.

Notes

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1. One reason for this is presumably the need to compensate for the severely restricted number of Chinese surnames.
2. The only reference that may puzzle the modern reader is that to the doves. They were thought to become intoxicated from eating mulberry leaves, like girls from making love before they married. The literal sense of "man of too many inner selves" is "two and three [i.e., various] your characteristic virtue," where 'virtue' indicates the quality that makes something what it is.
3. For a detailed discussion see M. Elvin, "Was there a transcendental breakthrough in China?", in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Axial Age and Its Diversity* (forthcoming, 1985).
4. If we follow the traditional commentators. Modern scholarship is not so sure.
5. Read *chyn* for *shin* in this line.
6. Hypothetical form.
7. There is an excellent introduction in K. Schipper, *Le corps taoïste* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).
8. The Creative and the Receptive are the first two hexagrams of the *Scripture of Changes*.
9. For a somewhat fuller account, see M. Elvin, *Self-Liberation and Self-Immolation in Modern Chinese Thought*, 39th G. E. Morrison Lecture (Canberra: Australian National University, SocPac Printery, 1978).
10. This is a theme briefly noted by Mauss, namely the tendency of the Chinese to think of the self or soul as in some respects divisible.
11. This non-standard translation is justified by the contents of the book in question. A more conventional rendering would be *The Great Concord*.
12. Much of Jang's later work was to be concerned with the cultural development of the basic concepts of systems of thought, concepts that we recognise as essentially undefinable since, in the last resort, the definable may always be replaced by its definition, and at some point regress must stop.
13. Elsewhere Ay does note that these reflections need to be interpreted by a theory.

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