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*SPECIAL ISSUE:*  
*CONFUCIANISM IN VIETNAM*

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## Editor's Foreword

# A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Step:<sup>1</sup> *Asian Studies* and Vietnamese Confucianism

Ngoc Tho NGUYEN and Jana S. ROŠKER

This special issue of *Asian Studies* is dedicated to Confucianism in Vietnam. The idea of this topic has a rather long history. It can be traced back to the second biennial conference of the World Consortium for Research on Confucian Cultures (WCRCC),<sup>2</sup> which took place in Vietnam in 2016 and was hosted by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University—Ho Chi Minh City under the theme “Confucianism as a Philosophy of Education for the Contemporary World”.

After this conference, the journal *Asian Studies* published a special issue on *Confucianism and Education*, containing several articles written by scholars who attended this important academic meeting in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> However, at that time we only managed to publish one paper written by a Vietnamese author, namely Nguyen Nam's article entitled “A Vietnamese Reading of the Master's Classic: Phạm Nguyễn Du's *Humble Comments on the Analects* as an Example of Transformative Learning” (see Nguyen 2017, 167–99). Although usually, a single swallow does not make the summer, in this case the old proverb proved itself to be wrong.

Fascinated by the importance of this exciting topic, the editorial board started to think about collecting and publishing more papers from scholars who have

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- 1 Although this saying is often erroneously ascribed to Confucius, it is actually from Chapter 64 of Laozi's *Dao De Jing*. However, since we understand the Confucian culture as a broader discourse, and not merely a discourse directly pertaining and being limited to the teachings of Confucius, we still believe it makes a good point when speaking about the beginning of the research on Vietnamese Confucianism.
  - 2 The World Consortium for Research on Confucian Cultures (WCRCC) is a scholarly platform dedicated to fostering collaboration among international scholars on Confucian cultures and their application to contemporary social issues.
  - 3 Many of the papers published in that special issue (i.e. Thompson 2017; Rošker 2017; Bartosch 2017; Ott 2017; Ambrogio 2017; Ogrizek 2017; Hmeljak Sangawa 2017) were presented at the WCRCC conference in Vietnam, even though none of them deals directly with Confucian education in Vietnam.

contributed to the awakening of Confucian research in Vietnam. The reasons for this idea were numerous and varied.

First of all, Vietnamese Confucianism is a topic that is anything but well known in Western academia. While in recent decades, the subject has been increasingly often investigated by researchers from China and Taiwan, and has also obtained some attention in other East Asian areas, there exist—with few exceptions<sup>4</sup>—almost no works on Vietnamese Confucianism in Western languages. Even though Confucianism in general has become a very important research topic, its manifold Vietnamese variations and its impact on past and present Vietnamese culture are still widely unknown.

Therefore, the editorial board of *Asian Studies* was increasingly enthusiastic with regard to publishing this special issue. We are very glad that back in 2016, at the abovementioned WCRCC conference in Vietnam, we managed to meet Professor Tho Ngoc Nguyen, who was one of its chief organizers. Professor Nguyen is an Associate Professor at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University—Ho Chi Minh City, and is currently a visiting research scholar at the Department of Anthropology at Boston University. He is doubtless among the currently most prolific researchers in the field of Vietnamese Confucianism (see for instance Nguyen, N. T. 2014, 2016, and 2017). Hence, in spite of his busy schedule, Professor Nguyen showed a vivid interest in the topic and offered his help and support in the function of the guest editor of this special issue, which has now been able to see the light of day as a product of an active and fruitful collaboration between us.

The special issue consists of eight original academic articles on Vietnamese Confucianism. They are divided into three scopes of content, namely (1) “Religion and Philosophy”, (2) “Tradition and Modernity”, and (3) “National and Cultural History”. Even though all the papers in these three scopes are inadequate to cover the core aspects of Vietnamese Confucianism, they can carefully depict some important dimensions, helping to partially outline the portrait of Confucianism in this Southeast Asian country.

The first scope is entitled “Religion and Philosophy”, and consists of three single papers mainly dealing with the transmission, cultivation, and evolution of Confucianism in Vietnam in both philosophical and religious domains. Tho Ngoc Nguyen, the author of the first article, entitled “When the Sage Becomes a ‘God’:

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4 See, for instance Dutton and Whitmore 2012; Young 1998; Huy 1998; Kelley 2006; Nguyễn Q. 2002; Phan 2000; Nguyễn K. S. 2017; Pham, 2002; Tuan 2015; Tran 2003, etc. If we take a closer look to these sources, we will discover that even though these texts were written and published in English, their authors are mostly Vietnamese.



The Spiritualized Confucian Sect of Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo in Southern Vietnam”, argues that Confucianism was adopted and “localized” in pre-modern Vietnam, and strongly refracted on the process of “Marching to the South”, as the Vietnamese expanded to the South from the seventeenth century on. In the South, and with the interaction of the specific local historical context (the Late Nguyen Dynasty, 1802–1945; French colonialism, 1858–1954, etc.), Confucianism penetrated into the masses and crept into every corner of the village. It was strongly influenced by existing religions such as Buddhism, Caodaism<sup>5</sup> and popular forms of belief. Against such a background, “popular” Confucianism has been transformed into a special form of the religious movement, the Minh Đức Nho giáo đại đạo, where Confucius is seen as both sage and god. The article highlights that the non-elite community easily transforms and applies Confucian ethics in a spiritualized way even without the state’s engagement or intellectual leadership. The second paper, “Lê Quý Đôn’s Theory of *li-qi*” by Yueh-hui Lin, focuses on Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784)—a famous Vietnamese scholar of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, and his ideology via the work *Vân đài loại ngữ* (*Yuntai leiyu* 芸臺類語). The author argues that Lê’s concept of *li-qi* (*lý-khi*) ultimately originated in Han Dynasty *qi*-transformative cosmology and was strongly influenced by Zhu Xi’s theory of an inseparable *li-qi* and the Vietnamese tradition of Three Teachings syncretism. Through Lê’s thought, readers can somewhat grasp the history of the adoption, evolution, and nature of traditional Vietnamese Confucianism in comparison with other traditions in East Asia. The third article, entitled “Philosophical Transmission and Contestation: The Impact of Qing Confucianism in Southern Vietnam” by Tho Ngoc Nguyen and Phong Thanh Nguyen, further discuss the transmission, contestation, transformation, and manipulation of late Qing Confucianism in Southern Vietnam. Accordingly, the practical learning of Qing Confucianism was introduced by migrant Chinese elites from Southern China to Vietnam during the late seventeenth century, and once it had entered the ways of thinking and acting of local elites it went on to affect the ideological, educational, cultural and socio-economic domains of local society. However, the impact of the predominant classical Confucian orthodoxy, the weakness of state control, and the influence of French colonialism seriously challenged and downgraded the impact of Qing Confucianism in Vietnam. As a result, Yangming studies (Đương Minh học 陽明學) had limited influence on Vietnamese scholarship.

5 A twentieth-century-born synthetic religion in Southern Vietnam with a synthesized and restructured teaching from the philosophical backgrounds of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Catholicism and other forms of Vietnamese folk beliefs (see Ho Tai 1983, 77–80; Dutton, Werner and Whitmore 2012, 429–30).

The second scope of content concentrates on “Tradition and Modernity”. It includes two articles. The first article, entitled “The Origins of Contemporary Moral Education and Political Ideology in Confucian-Marxist Hồ Chí Minh’s Vietnam” by Forkan Ali, discusses how Confucianism continued to function despite the influences of Marxism and European colonialism in the Confucianist-Marxist Hồ Chí Minh’s Vietnam, and how it contributed to shaping contemporary Vietnamese society. The author asserts that the current Communist ideology and Western manner of thought consider Confucian values as “something outdated and irrational”<sup>6</sup>; however, Confucian values and traditions are popularly maintained and implemented through various religious, institutional and personal arrangements in today’s Vietnam. In the current situation of increasing social challenges during the process of industrialization, the author suggests that Confucian values and teachings should be re-considered and promoted. In the second paper, entitled “Vietnamese and Chinese Movies about Royalty: From Confucian Cosmology to Ecological Politics”, the author Cam-Giang Hoang clarifies the similarities and differences in how modern Vietnamese and Chinese films portray royal subjects and court life, how they express the concepts of “the Unity of Heaven and Man” (*Thiên nhân hợp nhất, tianren heyi* 天人合一) and “Rectification of Names” (*Chính danh, zhengming* 正名) in their modern political discourses. The article aims to draw a possible link between the past and present by further discussing the influence of orthodox Confucianism on contemporary forms of cultural and political practices in both countries.

The third scope is named “National and Cultural History”, comprising three articles. The author Trong Duong Tran, in his article entitled “From Confucianism to Nationalism: Fictive Kinship and the Making of the Vietnamese”, investigates the transformations and hidden political discourses in the long-lasting debate regarding the origins of the Vietnamese people during the pre-modern and modern periods. Accordingly, pre-modern Confucian scholars tended to associate Vietnamese cultural origins and traditions with Confucian thought and consider it a successor of Confucian civilization, while authors from the later French period began to apply theories and Western approaches, having studied and interpreted their findings in a different way. He discovers that the process of changing paradigms in Confucian thought through colonialism lead to the formation of fictive kinship and the spread of nationalism in Vietnam. However, today’s Vietnamese people still look for a greater contribution of Confucian values in specific situations. In a study entitled “The Last Confucians of Mid-20th Century Vietnam: A Cultural History of the Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies”, Tuan Cuong Nguyen examines the formation and operational agendas of the Vietnam

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6 See Forkan Ali’s article in this issue.

Association of Traditional Studies (VATS) in promoting Confucian cultural practices in South Vietnam during the period 1955–1975. The research shows that this organization attempted to popularize Confucianism and make it compatible with ideas and practices introduced by modernization and Westernization in the middle of the twentieth century. However, the lack of research materials and, especially, the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the reunification of Vietnam, put an end to this movement, even though its aftermath remains in the research community. In the third article, entitled “The Vietnamese Confucian Diplomatic Tradition and the Last Nguyễn Precolonial Envoys’ Textual Communication with Li Hongzhang”, two authors Gabriel F. Y. Tsang and Hoang Yen Nguyen draw on an illustration of the diplomatic norms of Vietnam in a time of peace to specify the superficial practices of Confucian discourses in the final negotiation in 1883 between the states of the Nguyễn Vietnam and the Qing China, both of which encountered the military threat from the West. The research genealogically clarifies the diplomatic dilemma between two Confucian states in early modern history, and prioritizes the concerns about ethics that especially annoyed the pre-colonial Nguyễn politicians in the late nineteenth century. The article analyzes the case of the last Nguyễn pre-colonial envoy to China, Lý Văn Phức (李文馥, 1785–1849), and his meeting with Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823–1901), the diplomatic representative of the Qing government in 1883 in Southern China. The authors discover that the determinate factor of pre-colonial political negotiation between China and Vietnam within the East Asian Confucian cultural sphere was the power relation that prioritized national interests from the center to peripheries, not morality. The study concludes that Confucianism, in this case, has been misused, since it plays the role of a degrading prerequisite for maintaining political validity.

Although the collection of eight articles in this volume is obviously inadequate to display and represent all aspects of Vietnamese Confucianism, each of them covers a certain facet and is based upon the concrete specialized expertise of their respective authors. In this way, the collection as a whole discloses several prominent issues from the history and evolution of Vietnamese Confucianism, as well as the essence and application of its values in Vietnamese society. We are strongly convinced that the topic deserves the attention of a broader academic public, and hope therefore that this issue will become one of the first small, but important steps on our way to reveal the hidden images of Vietnamese Confucianism.

Ngoc Tho NGUYEN, guest editor  
Jana S. ROŠKER, chief editor

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*SPECIAL ISSUE:*  
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*Religion and Philosophy*

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# When the Sage Becomes a “God”: The Spiritualized Confucian Sect of Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo in Southern Vietnam

*Tho Ngoc NGUYEN\**

## Abstract

Southern Vietnam’s tradition has been mainly built on Confucian ideology, although it is a transformed one. There have been two types of Confucianism in the region: state-sponsored and mass Confucianism. During the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under harsh colonial rule, a number of messianic religious movements emerged. The Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo sect (MĐNGĐĐ, founded in 1932 in Trà Vinh province) is one such movement. The sect takes Confucian norms and values as its basic platform and further acculturates and transforms the philosophical values and rituals of Buddhism, Daoism, and Caodaism, as well as popular religions, to consolidate its settings.

This article uses fieldwork—survey data and written documents—and applies historical particularism and acculturation theories, as well as the concepts of “standardization” and “de-standardization” by Watson (1985), to generalize the birth and features of MĐNGĐĐ in the local context. The study provides a comprehensive means to access the history of social thought in pre-modern Vietnam and possible principles of Confucian propagation and transformation in the country. The study finds that Confucianism may easily transform into a religious institution if the civilizing missions of local elites are missing.

**Keywords:** Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo, Southern Vietnam, spiritualize, sage, god

## Ko modrec postane »božanstvo«: Poduhovljena konfucijanska sekta Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo iz Južnega Vietnama

### Izvilleček

Tradicija Južnega Vietnama je bila osnovana predvsem na konfucijanski ideologiji, pa čeprav v njeni dokaj prirejeni obliki. V regiji sta obstajali dve vrsti konfucijanstva: konfucijanstvo pod pokroviteljstvom države in konfucijanstvo množic. V času med poznim

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devetnajstim in zgodnjim dvajsetim stoletjem so pod jarmom trde kolonialne oblasti vzniknila številna mesijanska verska gibanja, med katerimi je bila tudi sekta Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo (MĐNGĐĐ, osnovana leta 1932 v provinci Trà Vinh). Osnova sekte so konfucijanske norme in vrednote. Da bi utrdila svoj položaj, sekta v svojo osnovo prav tako akulturira in preobraža nekatere filozofske vrednote in obrede iz budizma, daoizma, caodaizma in popularnih religij.

Članek umešča nastanek in značilnosti MĐNGĐĐ v njen lokalni kontekst, pri čemer uporablja terenske raziskave – podatke anketiranja in pisne vire –, teoriji zgodovinskega partikularizma in akulturacije ter Watsonova (1985) koncepta »standardizacije« in »de-standardizacije«. Ta študija tako ponuja sredstvo, s katerim je mogoče izčrpno dostopati tako do zgodovine družbene misli v predmodernem Vietnamu kakor tudi do možnih načel širjenja in preobrazbe konfucijanstva v državi. Študija razkriva, kako se, kadar pri lokalni eliti primanjkuje pobude za civiliziranje, lahko konfucijanstvo enostavno preobrazi v versko ustanovo.

**Ključne besede:** Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo, Južni Vietnam, poduhovljenje, modrec, božanstvo

## Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo— The Elements and Characteristics

In 2015, during field studies in coastal districts of Trà Vinh province, the author experienced the pluralism and harmony of the local cultures established by the Viet (Vietnamese), Khmer, and Hoa (Chinese) ethnic groups in the region. In this remote land, a religious form of Confucianism “penetrated”, “mutated” and “fossilized”: the Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo ((明德儒教大道), or MĐNGĐĐ in short).

Research on MĐNGĐĐ has been terribly limited. There have been three articles in total relating to the sect published so far: Emi Nogami’s (2015) “A Case Study of Khổng Tử Thánh Điện (Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo) in Cầu Ngang County, Trà Vinh Province, Vietnam”, Trần Hồng Liên and Lâm Thị Thu Hiền’s (2016) “Confucian Imprints in Minh Đức Nho giáo đại đạo”, and Nguyen Ngoc Tho’s (2017) “The Confucian Transformation in Southern Vietnam: Minh Đức Nho giáo đại đạo in Trà Vinh”. All three articles mainly describe the inherent features and absorption of Confucianism in MĐNGĐĐ; however, there has not been much discussion on the position of this sect in the systematic picture of Vietnamese and East Asian Confucianism. The aim of this article is thus to address this gap in the literature.

MĐNGĐĐ is a religious sect that is said to be the “descendant” of the Tiên Thiên Đạo (*Xiantiandao* 先天道)<sup>1</sup> and the Ngũ Chi Minh Đạo (*Wuzhi Mingdao* 五支明道)<sup>2</sup>, both of which have close relationships with Caodaism (高台教)<sup>3</sup>, although it is designated a Confucian Sect. Ignoring the diversity and syncretic nature of its origin, as well as its intimate relationships with Buddhism, Daoism, Caodaism, and others, MĐNGĐĐ is, above all, an extension and transformation of Confucianism, as seen vividly in its name.

MĐNGĐĐ was founded by Mr. Lư Cườg Cắg<sup>4</sup> in the coastal area of Ba Đốg village, Trà Vinh province in 1932 with the principle of using the essence of Confucian ideology as norms and values to educate people and restore morality and social order (see further Nogami 2015; Trần and Lâm 2016). After becoming “enlightened”, Lư Cườg Cắg was honoured as the Lord Thánh Đức Thiên Quân (聖德天君), the founder of MĐNGĐĐ. This primary religious establishment in Ba Đốg is called Chí Thiện Đầ (至善壇).

MĐNGĐĐ’s believers show their basic faith in the Jade Emperor of Heaven, called “the Supreme God” (*Đắg Tỏi cao*). MĐNGĐĐ focused on the Confucian philosophy in the book *Daxue* (大學, *The Great Learning*), which considers the principle of Three Bonds as the core foundation. The main teachings uphold three Confucian values: *minh đức*, *tân dân*, and *chí thiện*. The concept of *minh đức* (明德) means “to illustrate illustrious virtue”, *tân dân* (親(新)民) means “to renovate the people”, and *chí thiện* (至善) means “to rest in the highest excellence”. All three norms imply the positive renunciation of bad habits, the promotion of self-realization,

- 1 Xiantiandao 先天道 is the syncretic popular religion made from the combination of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism by Huang Dehui (黃德輝) in China at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing Dynasties (see Nogami 2015).
- 2 Wuzhimingdao 五支明道 comprises five denominations established during the Ming Dynasty in China, namely Mingshi (Ming Sư 明師), Mingtang (Minh Đường 明堂), Mingli (Minh Lý 明理), Mingshan (Minh Thiện 明善), and Mingxin (Minh Tân 明新). The deities in Wuzhimingdao include the Eternal Mother Goddess (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu 瑶池金母), Jade Emperor of Heaven (Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế 玉皇大帝), various Buddhas, and various hermits (Takatsu 2012, 28; Nogami 2015).
- 3 Caodaism, fully called *Đại Đạo Nam Kỳ Phổ Độ* (Great Way of the Third Period of Salvation), is a syncretic religion founded by Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878–1932) in 1926 in Tây Ninh, 100 kilometers northwest from Ho Chi Minh City in Southern Vietnam. Caodaism was constructed on the foundation of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, ancestor worship, Catholicism, and other religions. There are around five million followers living in the Central and Southern Vietnam (see Ho Tai 1983, 77–78, 100; Takatsu 2012; Dutton, Werner and Whitmore 2012, 429–30). MĐNGĐĐ classics sometimes mention Caodaism’s Three periods of Salvation (Tam kỳ phổ độ), Goddess of Three Palaces (Tam tòa Thánh mẫu), Celestial Coordination Pavilion (Hiệp Thiên Đài), Nine Layers Pavilion (Cửu Trùng Đài), etc. (see MĐNGĐĐ 1977; 2002).
- 4 Also called Lư Văn Cắg, or Mườì Cắg, a local farmer, born in Nha Roi village, Thạnh Trị District, Sóc Trăng province.

self-improvement and mutual assistance of the people in their process of “renovation”.<sup>5</sup> MĐNGĐĐ currently possesses three establishments in Trà Vinh with the names focusing on the great Confucian virtues: Tân Dân Đền (新民壇, Human Renovation Shrine),<sup>6</sup> Chí Thiện Đền (至善壇, Highest Excellence Shrine), and Chí Thiện Minh (至善明, Shining Excellence Shrine). By conveying these basic philosophies, MĐNGĐĐ is consistent with the judgment of the author Ngo Duc Tinh (1984) that popular belief is an indispensable part of traditional culture, a place of production, integration, conservation, and transmission of many cultural values. MĐNGĐĐ is a spiritualized form of Confucianism, a religious sect.

Despite the fact that the three shrines have three different names (Tân Dân Đền, Chí Thiện Đền, and Chí Thiện Minh), they commonly share the same title, “Confucius God Temple” (Khổng Tử Thánh Điện 孔子聖殿). This title is obviously unorthodox compared with state-sponsored Confucius temples (Khổng Miếu 孔廟, or Văn Miếu 文廟)<sup>7</sup> in late feudal Vietnam. When addressing a proper shrine, academicians generally take the full name, such as Khổng Tử Thánh Điện—Chí Thiện Đền, Khổng Tử Thánh Điện—Tân Dân Đền, in order to differentiate it from the state-sponsored ones. In this article, we prefer the Vietnamese name of Khổng Tử Thánh Điện since it maintains the original implication. While Trần Hồng Liên, a current ethnological writer, calls it a temple (廟) (Trần and Lâm 2006), the local people also address it as “miếu Khổng Tử (孔子廟, Confucius Temple)”. After the first shrine was built by Mr. Lưu Văn Cáng in Ba Động village, in 1961, another shrine, Khổng Tử Thánh Điện—Chí Thiện Minh, was built by a wealthy follower, Mr. Lâm Văn Thương—a local Chinese man—in the town Cầu Ngang of Trà Vinh province<sup>8</sup>. This shrine allows over 100 devotees to gather and perform rituals in each session. According to Mr. Chon Minh Kíu, the 64-year-old priest of the temple in Cầu Ngang, every weekend the ritual attracts around 30 to 50 people, since many others are busy in farming or doing business out of town (see also Nogami 2015). Mr. Kíu further

5 See <https://ccontext.org/liji/da-xue>. Wang Yangming once discussed this point, saying: “The theory of beginnings and ends is in general right. Even if we read “renovating the people” as “loving the people” and say that manifesting the character is the root and loving the people is the branches, it is not incorrect. The main thing is that root and branches should not be distinguished as two different things” (in Chan 1963, 663).

6 Besides these three temples in Trà Vinh, there is another one built in Đông Hồ Street, Ho Chi Minh City.

7 There are dozens of state-sponsored temples that are currently being preserved. In Southern Vietnam, one can see such institutions in Đồng Nai (Văn miếu Trần Biên), Vĩnh Long (Văn miếu Vĩnh Long), and Gò Công (Văn miếu Gò Công).

8 The current administrative owner of this establishment is Ms. Lâm Thị Lệ, daughter of Mr. Lâm Văn Thương.

claims that his shrine is the most popular among three establishments in Trà Vinh province, even though the Liturgical Board is currently directed and operated by himself alone. In 1966, Mr. Ngô Nghiêm Sanh built one more facility in Trà Vinh City: the Khổng Tử Thánh Điện—Chí Thiện Đàn, after successfully practicing divination.<sup>9</sup>

The structure of worship in each Khổng Tử Thánh Điện may have shifted, but still expresses a sense of pluralism, in which the key figures are Confucius, Amitabha Buddha, the Jade Emperor of Heaven, the Eternal Mother Goddess, Laozi, Guandi (Chinese God of War), Avalokiteśvara (Goddess of Mercy), and others. In Chí Thiện Đàn (at Ba Động village), the main altar consists of the Jade Emperor of Heaven, Amitabha Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi (太上老君). In addition, one can see the statue of the Eternal Mother Goddess (*Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu* 瑶池金母), the unnamed tablets of generic “ancestors” as well as early village pioneers who made a significant contribution to the founding of the sect (Trần and Lâm 2016). In Chí Thiện Minh in the town of Cầu Ngang, the main hall is dedicated to three main gods: the Goddess of Mercy (left), Confucius (centre), and Guandi (right). The subordinate hall opposite to the main hall is used to worship the local “earth gods”, including Nguyễn Kim Chi (called Thổ địa Ngũ phương (五方土地爺, the General Landlord)), and Trần Thái Độ (Thổ địa Nam phương (南方土地爺, the Lord of the South)) (fieldwork data, 2016). To a certain extent, MĐNGĐĐ has a point of similarity with Caodaism: the worship of the Supreme God and the Jade Emperor of Heaven. Khổng Tử Thánh Điện—Chí Thiện Minh in Cầu Ngang is located about 100 meters from a vibrant Caodai temple; its faith and religious practices are consequently somewhat influenced by this religion, and some of the followers participate in rituals in both the Caodai temple and MĐNGĐĐ shrine (fieldwork data, 2016). Informants in Cầu Ngang and Trà Vinh City report that MĐNGĐĐ comprises one fundamental philosophical basis of *Minh đức—Chí thiện—Tân dân* and three core component structures of *Tam giáo đạo* (三教道, Three Teachings Way),

9 Divination is very popular in MĐNGĐĐ. It is normally practiced by member(s) of the liturgical board when they hold festivals or encounter a serious issue that they need to ask Confucius and other supernatural powers about for “guidance” and “teaching”. Beside Confucius, other supernatural powers include Dīpaṃkara (Nhiên Đăng Cổ Phật 燃燈佛), Amitābha Buddha (A-di-đà 阿彌陀佛), Avalokiteśvara (Quan Âm Bồ tát 觀音菩薩), Cundhi bodhisattva (Chuẩn Đề Bồ tát 準提菩薩), Three Daoist Celestial Masters (Tam Thanh Thượng Phu 三清尚夫), Jade Emperor of Heaven (Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế 玉皇大帝), Celestial Communication Lord (Thông Thiên giáo chủ 通天教主), Caodaism Masters (Cao Đài Thượng Phu 高台尚夫), Eternal Mother Goddess (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu 瑶池金母), Le Sơn Mother Goddess (Lê Sơn Thánh Mẫu 黎山聖母), Monkey King (Tề Thiên Đại Thánh 齊天大聖), Li Jing protector (Lý Tĩnh 李靜), Dongfang Shuo (Đông Phương Sóc 東方朔) (see MĐNGĐĐ 2005).

*Tam giáo tòa* (三教座, Three Teachings Seats),<sup>10</sup> and *Giáo tông Nho giáo* (儒家教宗, Confucian Lords)<sup>11</sup> (see also MĐNGĐĐ 2002).

In the institutional structure, the highest unit of MĐNGĐĐ is the liturgical board. At the Khổng Tử Thánh Điện in Ba Động the board consists of four men—the First Master, Mr. Ngô Minh Bé; the Second, Mr. Ngô Nghiêm Sanh; the Third, Mr. Võ Văn Dân; and the Fourth, Mr. Lâm Văn Thương—while at the temple in Cầu Ngang it consists of only one man, Mr. Chơn Minh Kíu. The texts are all recorded from divination, called *The Holy Classics* (聖教經). Divination in the early period was performed in Chinese characters, but it is currently performed in the Vietnamese Romanized script—*chữ Quốc ngữ*.

MĐNGĐĐ advocates polytheism. Its believers trust in karma—samsara transferability, in the dichotomy of heaven and hell, and in the transferability of the good and the bad. According to this faith, the jobs people do and the status they have are due to God’s arrangement based on their karma. This feature has made MĐNGĐĐ closer to Buddhism and Indian philosophy. Accordingly, people who want to get released from the misery of samsara have to comply with the Three Bonds and Five Virtues. They are advised to practice vegetarianism regularly or permanently. Believers voluntarily enter the sect, regardless of their age and social position. They must partake in an initiation ceremony, in which they have to swear their loyalty to the supreme God. After the ceremony, they do not have to stay at the temple, even though they have gained full membership. Instead, they stay at home and perform rituals at the shrine regularly. Members of MĐNGĐĐ call each other “brother” and “sister”, depending on their gender and age. Every day, the liturgical board organizes prayers four times at the hours of the Rat (00:00), Rabbit (07:00), Horse (12:00), and Rooster (19:00 pm). Liturgical activities are quite simple, and mainly include chanting/reading texts and giving offerings (fruits and cakes) to Confucius and other gods. They burn incense sticks when they organize the ritual. The number of daily prayers aligns MĐNGĐĐ with Caodaism, while the incense-burning attaches it with Mahayana Buddhism. On the fifteenth and thirtieth days of every lunar month the liturgical masters and believers conduct larger collective rituals, and chant *Huyền Đinh sutras* to pray for peace and blessings. The main annual festivals of MĐNGĐĐ include the Founding Day (the Double-Fifth of the lunar calendar), and Confucius’s Anniversary Day (August 27), while secondary activities are more diverse,

10 Three Teachings Seats are for Thái Thượng Lão Quân (太上老君, The Grand Supreme Elderly Lord), Nguyên Thi Thiên Tôn (元始天尊, the Primeval Lord of Heaven) and Thông Thiên giáo chủ (通天教主, Celestial Communication Lord).

11 *Giáo tông Nho giáo* includes Li Jing the protector (Lý Tịnh 李靜), Guandi (Quan Thánh Đế Quân 關聖帝君) and the Middle Celestial Lord (Trung Thiên Thánh giáo 中天聖教).



including the Day of Thiên Tôn Di Lặc (the first day of Lunar New Year), Day of Trung Thiên Thánh Giáo (January 9), Day of Guandi (January 13), Day of the Goddess of Mercy (February 19), Day of Shakyamuni Buddha (April 8), Day of Laozi (July 1), and so on. Throughout the seventh lunar month, members come to the shrine every day to read the prayers for dead spirits. These activities bring MĐNGĐĐ closer to popular religions which actively practice Universal Salvation Rites<sup>12</sup> for lonely ghosts in the seventh full moon of the lunar year. The establishments in Cầu Ngang town and Trà Vinh city organize annual almsgiving to the poor (mainly rice), and sometimes hold charity trips to other places. In terms of costumes, members have to wear white long dresses with black fringes when performing the ritual. Men wear a black hat while women wear a white sharp cowl down to their back. The most prestigious members of the community wear yellow belts while the general members use green ones.<sup>13</sup> When practicing the ritual, all have to bow to four times to Confucius and other gods.<sup>14</sup>

Being a religious sect associated with the masses (mainly peasants), MĐNGĐĐ, like Zhengyi (正義) Daoist tradition, advocates for the association of its religious activities with local customs and the daily practices of local farmers. Important rites of passage, such as maturity, weddings, funerals, and sacrifice, are of particular concern for believers and their relatives. Perhaps the most noticeable are funerals. When a member of a family is about to die, all liturgical members come to attend the ceremony, aiming to guide “the soul” of the dying to return to “the Holy Land”. During the funeral, the priests are in charge of praying for the dead, while the others comply with his guidance and leadership. MĐNGĐĐ followers strictly organize nine ritual performances after the death (performed once every nine days), which they call *Tuần Cửu* rituals (循九). Members participate in the funeral rituals with sincerity, considering it good karma to accumulate their virtues. While this activity has somewhat faded nowadays due to the impact of modernization, the priests and most loyal members are always willing to partake in the voluntary chanting ceremonies for the deceased. MĐNGĐĐ does not clearly define the incarnation of gods or the self-transcendence and rebirth of the priests and believers; therefore, MĐNGĐĐ can be considered somewhere between the worldly institutional Confucianism and a transcendental religion.

MĐNGĐĐ is registered with the local authorities as a religious sect. Although MĐNGĐĐ has its own texts and canon, the mode of propagation of religious

12 In Vietnamese language: *lễ cúng cô hồn* or *Trung nguyên phổ độ*. In Chinese language: 中元普渡 (*zhongyuan pudu*).

13 A similar description is found in Trần and Lâm 2016.

14 In many parts of East Asia, such as China and Vietnam, people bow three times if they worship ancestors, four times if they worship a god or Buddha (see further Weller 1987).

education is mainly oral, through folk poetry. During the fieldwork surveys at Cầu Ngang in 2016, interesting teachings came to light which help show the essential nature of the Sect:

Living and acting simply and normally, you do not pursue and have a luxurious life,

You who understand my Way know that it is not necessarily widespread,

Living and acting simply and normally, you cultivate yourself effectively

Laymen do not wear robes, do not shave your hair and do not leave your home,

You ought to take care of your parents and fulfil the virtue of filial piety,

Husband and wife ought to preserve their faithful heart, and be as pure as the lotus rising up from a muddy pond

You ought to feign ignorance, do not let others know that you are laymen ...<sup>15</sup>

### **The Generic Source of MĐNGĐĐ: The Classical Vietnamese Confucianism**

Culture is an ongoing tradition. It is not something given but something to be gradually discovered and preserved by members of society. People always try to live together even though the world is very diverse, and culture is diverse if one focuses on components of the whole society, while unified if one observes society as a whole. Culture is born in a specific context; therefore, when the context changes, there may be some parts of the culture that transform. According to Robert Weller (1987, 5, 172), people create and deploy culture as part of daily life within a system of social relations. Therefore, the analysis and generalization of MĐNGĐĐ's features greatly depend on its temporary settings. MĐNGĐĐ was born as a special form of religious movement in the early twentieth century in Vietnam, so it conveys the historic imprints of the local society in its doctrine and liturgical practice. Being an extended region of Vietnam reclaimed in the last three centuries, Southern Vietnam has witnessed the fading out of orthodox Confucianism and state-sponsored traditions. Instead, ground-level dynamics have

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15 Orally told by Mr. Lê Văn Kíu, the liturgical priest at Không Tử Thánh Điện – Chí Thiện Đàn (Cầu Ngang town).



been popularized due to various transcultural encounters and multi-cultural acculturation in the region.

Classical orthodox Confucianism in Vietnam has been reluctantly acknowledged by many Western writers. It is far more tenuous to claim that Vietnam truly belongs to Confucian civilization.<sup>16</sup> Stephen O’Harrow explained that even though traditional Vietnam shared the same source of social ideology and political institution, its fate has been different to that of China (O’Harrow 1979, 170), for the Vietnamese were “always disregarding the totality of the norms of civilized conduct in China, chose to take into account specific instances of such experience” (Wolters 1988, 6). Instead, the Vietnamese localized the Confucianist system by fragmenting it and cutting passages, removing their original contextual meaning, and amending some of the content to serve their domestic political and social activities. The indigenous tradition of Southeast Asia in Vietnam has limited the actions of the state and people with regard to adopting and adapting to the whole package of Confucian orthodoxy from China. In the case of MÔNG ĐỒ, the founders and followers adopted only the basic concepts of *Minh đức*, *Chí thiên* and *Tân dân* in the *Daxue*, without accepting the interpretative contexts in which the discursive implications of these concepts are generated. Instead, MÔNG ĐỒ puts *Minh đức*, *Chí thiên* and *Tân dân* as well as other Confucian virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, respect, righteousness, and so on in the mystical explanatory paradigm close to Buddhist and Daoist philosophies. MÔNG ĐỒ followers understand that they can attain *Minh đức*, *Chí thiên* and *Tân dân* by continuously cultivating their heart-mind (good deeds, good karma), so that “gods” like Confucius, the Jade Emperor of Heaven, Laozi and Buddhas will “save” them from suffering (samsara). There is almost no logical explanation or interpretation within the classical Confucian framework. For example, in *The Confucian Classics 1932–2005* (2005), MÔNG ĐỒ alleges:

Praying to the Antarctic Lord to promulgate students’ merits of *Minh đức*, *Tân dân* (...),

The golden bell’s ringing sounds, like compassions, are pushing the Confucian students,

All insist on practice so they later can be able to return to the Penglai Wonderlands for the sake of saving all beings. (MÔNG ĐỒ 2005, 30)<sup>17</sup>

16 This idea has early been confirmed by many writers, such as Rozman 2014, 6–7; FitzGerald 1972, 22; Woodside 2002, 116–17; and Duong 2004, 289–318.

17 Original text: “Đầu vọng bái Tiên Ông Nam Cực; giúp các trò Minh đức, Tân dân.... Tiếng chuông vàng càng kêu vang đội; lòng từ bi hồi thúc quần Nhu. Chúng con quyết chí lo tu; trở về Bồng Đào mở tù chúng sanh.” (MÔNG ĐỒ 2005, 30)

Students obtaining *Tân dân, Minh đức* virtues will be secure since they are protected by the masters, lords, goddesses, and saints. (MĐNGĐĐ 2005, 37)<sup>18</sup>

In MĐNGĐĐ, “heart-mind” stands at the core position; however, it has been explained in terms of Buddhist cause-effect transferability. In a part of *The Confucian Classics 1932–2005*, it says: “Leaving the Confucian shrine after a prayer session, you need to consistently self-cultivate your heart-mind; such good deeds will set you free from plagues, suffering and always keep you in a peaceful, noble-minded status.”<sup>19</sup> (MĐNGĐĐ 1977, 2–3)

The concept of loyalty shares a similar feature. *The Confucian Classics 1932–2005* continues: “Confucian students firmly persevere, keeping in mind the virtue of loyalty, patience, unity, and scholarly spirit; they silently look for good companions and stay in harmony under the Buddhas’ and celestial gods’ sanctity.” (MĐNGĐĐ 1977, 40)<sup>20</sup>

In terms of ethnicity, the indigenous Vietnamese are mainly descendants of both Mon-Khmer and Thai speakers, called the *Lạc Việt* (*Luo-Yue* 駱越). The early Vietnamese tattooed their bodies and practiced chewing betel nuts, which they long shared with all Southeast Asian peoples. Confucianism was brought into Vietnam in the early days of the Chinese occupation in the second century BC; however, it did not motivate social transformation until the era of Tang rule (the seventh century). Jennifer Holmgren stated that the first six centuries of Chinese rule in Northern Vietnam “saw more ‘Vietnamization’ of local Chinese than Sinoicization of the indigenous Viets”. Many Chinese clans who were “Vietnamized Chinese groups” settled into, helped modify, and were finally absorbed into the social, economic and political environment in Northern Vietnam (see Holmgren 1980, 61, 115–30).<sup>21</sup> C. P. FitzGerald concluded similarly after showing various evidence that the Chinese troops and migrants became absorbed into and assimilated with the native people in Vietnam (FitzGerald 1972, 214). The strength of localization in ancient Vietnam has thus been widely noted.

18 Original text: “Tân Dân Minh Đức Quy về; Có Thầy có Mẹ dựa kẻ trường Tiên.” (MĐNGĐĐ 2005, 37)

19 Original text: “Giã từ Chí Thiện Nho đàn; trau dồi tâm tốt phụ hoàng mến thương. Lướt qua những cảnh tai ương; siêu siêu minh yếu an bường thanh cao.” (MĐNGĐĐ 1977, 2–3)

20 Original text: “Đạo Nho sĩ từ quyết lòng trung; Đại nhẫn đại hòa thêm sĩ hùng; Ân nhân canh thân tìm bạn lữ; Thịnh Tiên rước Phật để chung cùng.” (MĐNGĐĐ 1977, 40)

21 See also Wang 1958, 35, 37, 41, 48, 70, 120; Miyakawa 1960, 27–29; Buttinger 1972, 36; Taylor 1983, 130; Zhang 1995, 40–43, 127–50; and Sun 2010, 47.

Northern Vietnam adopted Confucian norms and values from the Chinese Tang Dynasty, due to the tight control of the Tang rulers. In particular, orthodox Confucian institutions were set up at the provincial level, which motivated Confucian education among the Vietnamese villagers (see further Taylor 1983, 174).

In 938, Ngô Quyền declared Vietnamese independence after defeating the Southern Han troops in the Red River Delta. After the short-term dynasties of Đinh and Tiền Lê, Vietnam entered a long era of Buddhist-driven social evolution under the Lý (1009–1225) and Trần (1225–1400) Dynasties, even though Confucian ideology was still adopted and promoted by the royal families and bureaucratic elites (see Wolters 1988). As shown by many writers, the Lý and Trần rulers pursued forms of legitimation other than Confucianism (see Taylor, 1987). John Whitmore clarified that while it was correct to confirm Chinese influence in Vietnam, one had to re-examine the extent of its penetration. He asserted that while dealing with Confucianism the Vietnamese did not hide their non-Confucian nature (Whitmore 1976, 200).

Confucian dominance was at its peak during the fifteenth century, under the Lê Dynasty (1428–1527).<sup>22</sup> However, Confucian classical learning was often mixed with Daoism and Buddhism. Before the Lê Dynasty, Hồ Quý Ly's (1336–1407) reforms were said to bring Vietnam closer to the Chinese Confucian trajectory (Whitmore 1985) even though there was a “big gulf” between Vietnamese and Chinese Confucianism (Nguyen 2016). To a certain extent, these reforms would become threatened under the Chinese Ming Emperors,<sup>23</sup> which finally led to the Ming invasion and rule of Vietnam during the period 1407–1428. During this short period, the Ming rulers promoted exporting Chinese ideology and technology to Vietnam (de Bary 1988; Whitmore 2010, 107). Moreover, the practice of book-burning by the Ming troops in Vietnam did significant damage to local non-Confucian texts, thus affecting the indigenous culture (Alexander 2010, 162). This policy strengthened the nationalist sentiments of the local Vietnamese and thus sharpened the sense of independence at any cost (Buttinger 1972, 45). After defeating the Ming rulers, Vietnam's Lê kings decided to use orthodox Confucianism to rebuild and revitalize the state, making the fifteenth century the first peak of Vietnamese Confucianism. However, Vietnamese Confucianism declined in the mid-sixteenth century because the territory was split into two components (Tonking and Cochinchina) which lasted until the late eighteenth

22 See McHale 2002, 398; 2004, 70; and Whitmore 2010.

23 The author owes gratitude to Kathlene Baldanza for this idea (see Baldanza 2013, 60).

century. The rise of Nôm script<sup>24</sup> literature during the seventeenth century further promoted “de-emphasizing Confucian orthodoxy and official views in favor of more ‘popular’ themes” (Ostrowski 2010, 21). The Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945) tried to recover orthodox Confucianism; however, Western intervention in Vietnamese politics prevented the movement. After 1858, French colonialism in Vietnam nearly put an end to the long-standing orthopraxy of Confucianism in the country, even though they were said to be supportive of the slight revitalization of Vietnamese Confucianism in the 1920–1930 period.

Regardless of the ups and downs of the history of Vietnamese Confucianism, it remained the intellectual and ideological backbone of Vietnam for almost the last ten centuries (see Nguyễn 1974, 17). However, state Confucianism has been weak in Vietnam (as compared with East Asian states such as China or Korea), because the Vietnamese adopted shallow versions of Confucianism rather than internalizing it (McHale 2002, 409–10). Instead of adopting and developing the Confucian ideology further, the Vietnamese have been “loyal” to the pre-imperial (Zhou dynasty) Confucianism<sup>25</sup> even though they also adopted post-Zhou imperial innovations (such as Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty). Such primary norms are vividly found in MÔNGĐỒ in Trà Vinh. Under their specific circumstances, the feudal elites of Vietnam did not have a strong demand for any metaphysical counterattraction to Buddhism, as was present among the Chinese upper class (Woodside 2002, 117); instead, they tended to enforce the de-civilizing mission to draw a clear line between Vietnam and China (see Baldanza 2013, 56). A similar feature can be found in Vietnamese literature in the same period (Richey 2013, 64–65). Phan Ngọc (1998) concluded that Vietnamese elites effectively utilized four remarkable prisms (motherland (祖國論), identity (身份論), village-based cultural tradition (村莊文化傳統), and Southeast Asian paddy-rice agriculture (東南亞稻作文化)) to deal with Chinese Confucianism, thus creating changes in local Confucian evolution. In the first half of the twentieth century, Ho Chi Minh changed the five cardinal Confucian virtues into humanness, righteousness, knowledge, bravery, and honesty to be well-adapted to the Vietnamese tradition.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, to a certain extent, the Vietnamese are of two varieties, one

24 The Nôm script, or chữ Nôm (字喃): the Vietnamese pre-modern script system originated from Han scripture but transformed to signify the local vocabulary. Chữ Nôm appeared early; however, it was used popularly in parallel with Han script from the fifteenth century until the early twentieth century.

25 The author agrees with Alexander Woodside that feudal Vietnam focused more on primordial texts, which limited the development of Neo-Confucianism and Confucian universality as they were in China, Korea, and Japan (Woodside 2002, 140).

26 More descriptive discussion can be found in Duong 2004, 295.

similar to other Southeast Asian communities and the other Chinese or Korean (see further Reid 1988, 199).

Even though Vietnamese state Confucianism was much-localized, the reform made by Lê Thánh Tông (1442–1497) consolidated the state’s centralized power, causing the Vietnamese conquest over the Kingdom of Champa (present-day Central Vietnam) and the mass migration to Southern Vietnam during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Westerners introduced the Romanized writing system and Western ideology. Chữ Quốc Ngữ spread quickly in the late nineteenth century, far beyond expectations. Quốc Ngữ texts and Western education signified an alarming threat to the Confucian-educated officials and landowning class (FitzGerald 1972, 32–3), thus seriously damaging orthodox Confucianism. MÔNGĐỒ quickly transformed its divination texts from Chinese characters into Chữ Quốc Ngữ to fulfill the pragmatic demands of the rural population. The confrontation between state Confucianism and Western ideology as well as the practical encounters between the Vietnamese migrants, the indigenous Khmer, and the Chinese from overseas in the South gave way to the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, even though Confucianism and Daoism were still universally practiced.<sup>28</sup> This is also one of the prerequisites for the birth of MÔNGĐỒ.

As a matter of fact, during the middle and late feudal dynasties, Vietnamese kings and elites learned to organize commoners through harmonizing Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—each inclusively intertwined with the others (see Ho Tai 1983, 20). As analysed by Rodney Taylor (1990, 2), Confucianism has a “single thread” that runs throughout the tradition: its religious nature. This primary attribute has laid the basic foundation for the conflation of the Three Teachings. Indeed, the Three Teachings formed a syncretic belief system that integrates Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist tenets that could be found at all levels of Vietnamese society.<sup>29</sup> Typical of the total absence of religious dogmatism among the Vietnamese is Caodaism and Hoahaoism. Caodaism “consists of a mixture of Confucian, Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist creeds combined with odd practices of spiritualism”, while Hoahaoism “has modified Buddhism for the poor peasants by eliminating anything costly from the religious ritual” (Buttinger 1972, 15).<sup>30</sup> As shown in MÔNGĐỒ texts, almost all sages, Buddhas, supreme gods, celestial

27 See Li 1998; Cao 1996; Sun 2010, 65–66; and Nguyen 2014.

28 See also Giran 1904, 200; Buttinger 1972, 15; and Woodside 2002, 140.

29 See Dutton, Werner and Whitmore 2012, 114; and Duong 2004, 289–318.

30 More details can be found in Buttinger 1972, 15; Ho Tai 1983; and Dutton, Werner and Whitmore 2012, 429.

lords, and various hermits<sup>31</sup> are mentioned as supernatural powers who are always ready to “save” those who cultivate the core merits of *Minh đức*, *Chí thiện* and *Tân dân*.

MÔNGĐỒ was born in such a broad background; hence it deploys no more than an ordinary Vietnamese Confucian institution. As a non-elite religious sect, MÔNGĐỒ absorbs no more than a “shallow” and “broken” theoretical framework of Confucianism (presented mainly by the three essential values, *Minh đức*, *Chí thiện* and *Tân dân*) and deploys its main functions in the personal and family domains (self-realization, self-cultivation, and filial piety education). Community services, such as assisting others to “realize” and transform, funeral praying and chanting, etc., are not excluded in the working sphere of the virtue of filial piety.

### MÔNGĐỒ: A “Reflective Mirror” of Local Background in Southern Vietnam

MÔNGĐỒ was born in a special context. Departing from the Vietnamese classical Confucian platform, MÔNGĐỒ embodies the historic multi-ethnicity and cultural pluralism of Southern Vietnam.

In the South, the so-called “Confucianism” is not the actual state Confucianism (Cao 1996, 147).<sup>32</sup> Most of the people primarily observe Buddhism, instead. They may practice Confucian norms and rules daily but many don’t care (or don’t need to know) who Confucius is. In the region, the classics and ideological canons are used in an adaptable way. It is in the Mekong River Delta where Mahayana Buddhism reunites with its Buddhist counterpart, Theravada Buddhism, through the ethnic Khmers, making Buddhism the core philosophy for almost all reconstructive processes that shape new religious movements in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. MÔNGĐỒ has no specific denomination but has embodied Buddhist values in its doctrine. MÔNGĐỒ texts are full of Buddhist concepts and terms such as *hội Long Hoa* (Longhua final meeting, 龍華會), *cứu khổ* (salvation), *cát hung* (good or bad samsara), *tránh nạn* (avoiding suffering), and so on. (MÔNGĐỒ 1977; 2005). Vietnamese Buddhism, by comparison to state-governed Confucianism, is found in each family’s tradition. In the particular situation of Southern Vietnam, the family functions as the fundamental core of social and cultural activities (see Brocheux 1995, 209).

31 See part “Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo—The Elements and Characteristics” of this article.

32 The Vietnamese translation is “*Nho mà không Nho, không Nho mà Nho*” (Chinese translation: 儒而不儒, 不儒而儒).



Since the fifteenth century, Vietnamized Confucianism propagated its norms and values throughout the state, but Southern Vietnam still retained Southeast Asian cultural patterns until the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup> Confucian ethics were penetrating to the village level no earlier than the mid-seventeenth century (see also Takatsu 2012). Cochinchina's (Central and South Vietnam's) Confucianism was spread during the period of the Nguyen Lords (the mid-sixteenth–eighteenth centuries) and was revived in the early period of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945). Along with the process of “whole-packaged” emigration<sup>34</sup> from Northern Vietnam to the northern part of the Central Region, classical Confucian institutions followed in their entirety despite being affected by the new environments. However, in the later period the Vietnamese migrated to the South in an individualistic way. Confucianism became partially “broken”, since various families from different backgrounds gathered together to build villages in the South. Confucianism had to be absorbed into Mahayana Buddhism and transform for survival. Cao Tữ Thanh called it “the unlikely Confucianism” (Cao 1996), while FitzGerald (1972) and Brocheux (1995) affirmed that the historic multi-ethnicity in the South drove the transformation of almost all aspects of life, including ideology, norms and the value system, communal and family life, rites of passage, rituals, and so on. The Vietnamese writer Trần Văn Giàu (1982) asserted that a village in the South was not similar to those in the North. It was “entrenched behind (its inhabitants') bamboo hedges”, and “its peasants were far less prone to bow to feudal authority or be bound by Confucian ethics”. Instead, Buddhism, which incorporates Daoism and local traditions, has been a much stronger influence. Such a trend is vividly shown in local religious movements such as Caodaism, Ngũ chi Minh đạo, MĐNGĐĐ, and others. At a certain level, Northern Vietnam remained more rigidly committed to Confucian social hierarchies, while the downfall of Confucian orthodoxy in the South enabled the development of a newfound social mobility there, and northern Confucian scholars considered Southern Confucianism to be not truly Vietnamese, even though the core values embraced in the North actually were Chinese in origin (see Richey 2013, 68–9).

Basic Confucian values continued running as an undercurrent to family and social practices. The Vietnamese successfully expanded to the South (from Northern Vietnam), thanks to both the farming migration and the power of “a Confucian state” (Evans and Rowley 1990, 6). Nguyễn Văn Trung emphasized the idea that Southern Vietnam got modernized through the process of Westernization; however, this modernization process did not limit or break up the local tradition, which was

33 This point has also been discussed in Yu 1978, 92–96; and cited in Reid 1988, 146.

34 The emigration of villages was as a whole, including ideology, communal and family traditions, social structures, and practices.

significantly based on Confucian values (Nguyễn 2014, 551–58). Southern elites and commoners actively adopted and acculturated Western values to reshape their worldview and ideology since the late nineteenth century. In addition, Southern Vietnamese Confucianism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was radically refreshed by the Yangming School brought by the Chinese from overseas, and developed by a group of Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese Confucians such as Võ Trường Toản (武長纘) (?–1792) and his students in the late eighteenth century (Ngô Nhơn Tĩnh 吳仁靜 (1761–1813), Trịnh Hoài Đức 鄭懷德 (1765–1825)). Consequently, Southern Vietnamese Confucianism, by comparison to its Northern counterpart, is vividly practical and closely associated with the breath of life.

The emigrant Vietnamese community quickly became the majority group in the South thanks to their capacity of connecting multi-ethnic traditions and rebuilding a commonly shared environment. Nguyễn Công Bình (1998) stressed that the Vietnamese had to learn to integrate all sources of traditions to become stable and progressive, and this community proved to be able to subjugate and control all communities in these new lands by using Confucianism and Buddhism or something made by the combination of both. In the context of a Vietnamese community where orthodox Confucianism partially declined, the Government of Cochinchina (1558–1778) built Trần Biên Confucius Temple in Dong Nai in 1715<sup>35</sup> to affirm the role of this ideology in the new lands and educate an intellectual force to cultivate state Confucianism in the region. Mạc Thiên Tứ 莫天賜, a Governor-General of Hà Tiên (河仙) in the early eighteenth century, built a Confucius Temple and established the Confucian Academy of Chiêu Anh Các to cultivate and develop Confucianism in the region. Unluckily, the temple and the academy were then destroyed due to warfare and the decline of Hà Tiên polity. Later, the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945) ordered local authorities to build Cao Lãnh Confucius Temple in 1857<sup>36</sup> and Vĩnh Long Confucius Temple in the period 1864–1866.<sup>37</sup> In 1972, the Saigonese Government sponsored local elites in Gò Công to build a Confucius Temple in the town.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the ethnic Hoa community in Châu Đốc city (An Giang province) also set up a hall dedicated to Confucius in a Guandi (關帝) temple in the mid-nineteenth century. While Southern scholars were not many in number, many of them became well-known for their intellectual dedication, such as Võ Trường Toản (?–1792), Lê Quang Định (1759–?), Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765–1825), Ngô Nhơn Tĩnh (1761–1813), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822–1888), Nguyễn Thông (1827–1884), and so on.

35 French colonialists largely destroyed it in 1861, later being rebuilt in the period 1998–2002.

36 This temple was first built in present-day Ward 3, and moved to Ward 1 in 1978.

37 This temple is located in present-day Ward 4, Vĩnh Long city.

38 This temple is located in present-day Ward 1, Gò Công town, Tiền Giang province.



One may ask why MĐNGĐĐ was formed in Trà Vinh and not another place in Southern Vietnam? It is in Trà Vinh, Sóc Trăng and An Giang provinces where multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity are found, as is typical in the whole Mekong River Delta. Sóc Trăng has been shown to be of overwhelming Chaozhou Chinese influence, while An Giang (next to Cambodia) was already home to many other locally-born religions since the late nineteenth century, such as Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, and Hoahaoism. It is the coastal dunes of Trà Vinh province where the acculturation of traditions among the Viet, Hoa (Chinese) and Khmer has taken place strongly. The remoteness of Trà Vinh province in general, and Ba Động village in particular, created relative safety for MĐNGĐĐ from being interfered with by the French colonialists or other forces. On the other hand, the proximity of Trà Vinh province to Vĩnh Long city, where the state-sponsored Confucius Temple was built in 1864 by the orthodox scholars and state elites,<sup>39</sup> allowed for the transmission of Confucian values among the local communities while the agrarian nature of MĐNGĐĐ helped retain its separation from being incorporated into orthodox Confucianism. Besides the universal and local religions stated above, popular religions are, of course, closely associated with the birth of MĐNGĐĐ. For instance, according to Takatsu (2012, 41), at the beginning period, a group of MĐNGĐĐ laypersons came together at Guandi Temple (關帝廟) in Thủ Dầu Một City (Bình Dương province) to preach, deliver herbs and translate Chinese texts for a while. This historical fact showed that MĐNGĐĐ bore a close relationship with Chinese secret societies<sup>40</sup> in its early years.

In general, the populace of Southern Vietnam was less heavily affected and controlled by the educated-Confucian elites than those in the North. This fact is vividly demonstrated by the point that MĐNGĐĐ was shaped and operated by non-elite members. Despite many revival efforts, Southern Confucianism has changed compared to the Northern tradition, and it was this transformation that underlay the formation of MĐNGĐĐ. Cultural change is objective, and national culture is an on-going tradition. Trần Quốc Vượng, the late cultural expert of Vietnam, emphasized the cultural acculturation which he dubbed “the specific feature of Vietnamese culture” (Trần 2008, 48). Therefore, adaptation and change are two successive and parallel processes of the Vietnamese people, who have a strong sense of “tolerance”. J. Feray (cited by Trần 2008, 48) once described Vietnamese culture as never rejecting the opportunity to absorb exogenous factors. To a certain extent, it is also an expression of flexibility in the Vietnamese

39 Such as Phan Thanh Giản (1796–1867), and Nguyễn Thông (1827–1884).

40 Chinese secret societies were relatively popular in Southern Vietnam at the junction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Guandi Temple in Thủ Dầu Một city was one of the most popular “headquarters” of these societies.

cultural character. A couplet placed on the front of Thới Sơn Communal House in Tịnh Biên district, An Giang province, states: “The king and his people all join the common excitement; father and his son in harmonization can share common happiness”<sup>41</sup> (fieldwork note, 2016). The Southern Vietnamese villagers are mainly taught to comply with Three Bonds and Five Virtues (male) or Three Compliances and Four Virtues (female), but barely know exactly who Confucius and Mencius are or where these norms come from. These doctrines are accepted and applied in flexible ways, many of which, like MĐNGĐĐ, are embedded in religious colours. In a discussion of Confucian patriarchy in marriage, Yu Insun discovered that as late as the seventeenth century the Southern Vietnamese still preserved an older Southeast Asian pattern—they practiced the giving of bride-wealth at marriage, and in many cases the grooms came to live with the families of their brides (Yu 1978, 92–6). This de-centralizing Confucian feature greatly sharpened the simplicity and religiosity of MĐNGĐĐ.

### Confucius as Both a “Sage” and a “God”

MĐNGĐĐ is a result of many cultural processes, in which the first step must be the transformations—the de-orthopraxy and the spiritualization of classical Vietnamese Confucianism. The case of MĐNGĐĐ as a circumstance of Confucian transformation in Southeast Asia is not new, since the locally born Chinese in Java in (Indonesia) established “Confucian churches” on the island to compete with Christian churches and Islamic mosques as well as to promote Chinese-style education among the young Chinese residents.<sup>42</sup> However, MĐNGĐĐ manifests some specific features developed by non-elite laypersons.

MĐNGĐĐ largely ignores the standardized forms and narratives of the earlier dynasties, as well as the orthopractic movements by local Confucian scholars. After such a deconstruction process, the local commoners and rural elites in the South only preserve the primordial norms and core values, such as pre-imperial concepts of *minh đức*, *tân dân*, and *chí thiện*, etc. MĐNGĐĐ focuses more on family life and personal self-cultivation than social interaction.<sup>43</sup> Regarding the “connection” between Confucius and Mr. Lưu Cường Cánh (the founder of MĐNGĐĐ), *The Confucian Classics* of MĐNGĐĐ writes: “The Sage Confucius

41 It is written in Chinese script: 君非君臣非臣君臣皆共樂，父不父子不子父子是同歡。

42 This statement can be found in Coppel 1981, 186, 195; Chambert-Loir 2015, 67–107; and McKeown 2017, 324.

43 This motto is actually derived from the concept “self-cultivation as the root” in *The Great Learning* (chapter 1).

handed the Confucian Way to our Master; (so that people of later generations could) implement his wish of Great Harmony”<sup>44</sup> (MĐNGĐĐ 2005, 19).

MĐNGĐĐ followers are strongly motivated with regard to self-realization and self-cultivation as the good deeds that will help them avoid bad samsara and as fundamental conditions to get saved by Confucius and other supernatural powers. In Ba Động Temple, visitors can easily find the Confucian *Seven commandments* on the wall of the main hall, including

Mind is not good, *feng shui* is useless; Parental disrespect leads to useless ancestor-worship; Brotherhood is not respected, friendship is useless; Reading is useless to those who commit unrighteous work; The smartest person has no real virtues if he makes others disappointed; One fails to preserve his pneuma can't find any sustenance useful; Inappropriate fortune doesn't bring success.

Neo- and New Confucianism both strongly appreciate the “self-realization” (and after that, the “self-cultivation”) of the superior man, MĐNGĐĐ puts both “self-realization” and “interactive realization” in their spectacular interpretation of the core virtues written in the *Daxue* (the Great Learning). “*Tân dân*” (to renovate the people) has been emphasized with two significant missions for lay-people: “self-realization” and “self-cultivation”, and assisting others in realization and transformation under the supernatural powers’ sanctity, even though the doctrine doesn't assert the goal of being a “superior man”. As Tu Weiming once stated, “self-realization” is “not a lonely quest for one’s inner spirituality but a communicative act empowering one to become a responsible householder” (Tu 1994, 182). MĐNGĐĐ looks to person-to-person interaction and transformation with a religious approach.

As a virtue-based religious sect, MĐNGĐĐ only adopts a halfway practice of classical Confucianism. MĐNGĐĐ’s founders and supporters did not get in touch with the original version of the *Daxue* or other texts of *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. Instead, they extracted and composed their philosophical foundation from secondary texts such as *Tứ thư thể chú* (四書體注, *Ontological Notes of Four Books*), *Tứ Thư địa toàn tiết yếu* (四書大全節要, *The Brief Interpretation of Encyclopaedia of the Four Books*), *Minh tâm bửu giám* (明心寶鑑, *Precious Mirror of the Clear Heart*) which were relatively popular in Southern Vietnam during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Texts on family life and family education mainly include *Nhị thập tứ hiếu* (二十四孝, *Twenty-four Stories*

44 Original text: “Giữa trường Tiên ân ần nhắc nhở, phụ cùng con rặng rờ yên lòng; Thầy giao mỗi đạo Nho tông, để Ngài gìn giữ Đại đồng tròn xong.”

about Filial Piety), *Trị gia cách ngôn khuyên hiếu ca* (治家格言勸孝歌, *Family Instructions and A Song to Persuade People to be Filial*), and *Gia huấn ca* (家訓歌, *The Family Training Ode*).<sup>45</sup> Like orthodox state-sponsored Confucian elites, MĐNGĐĐ elites and laypersons did not read Chinese orthodox classics directly. Secondly, in the primary poetic verse transmitted orally, laypersons insist that “You ought to feign ignorance, do not let others know that you are laymen” (see above), showing that the ultimate goal of MĐNGĐĐ is not to revivify the state but to transform (renovate) oneself and others around one by cultivating good deeds. As a matter of fact, MĐHGĐĐ focuses on the first two goals of a classical Confucian student (“practicing self-cultivation” (修身, *tu thân*), and “regulating the family” (齊家, *tề gia*)) yet puts them in a Buddhist paradigm of cause-effect transferability and a Taoist cornerstone of celestial support. The deeply-rooted concepts of “Hell” and “Salvation” have differentiated MĐNGĐĐ from state-sponsored Confucian institutions. MĐNGĐĐ founders and laypersons realize that an ordinary person, due to his lack of wisdom and all means of scholarly life, needs external support from the unseen forces to “save” and “transcend” himself. MĐNGĐĐ, unlike Neo-Confucianism, encourages self-realization and self-cultivation but does not generate the native relationship between self-cultivation and wisdom. Instead, the sect stresses that self-realization and self-cultivation enable a person to realize the frontiers of good and bad karma, to realize and fulfil his ordinary duties in life and to meet the requirements of posthuman salvation. Accordingly, a successful MĐNGĐĐ layperson bears both self-cultivation and transcendent salvation from supernatural powers. He puts “virtue” and “hell” in sharp opposition. In a divination session dedicated to Confucius, a spirit-medium incanted:

Today’s disciples pray for the sage Confucius to descend to earth and instruct the spirit-medium,

How sacred you are and how miraculous the Confucian teachings are,

We wish you take the benevolence chariot rapidly to descend to save sentient beings

Yan, Zeng, Si, Meng, Zhu, Cheng all sincere masters and holy sages please land on this profane world,

Having you by our side, we are enabled to overcome mountains of hardship,

45 This is a 976-line Vietnamese verse text written by the Confucian scholar Nguyễn Trãi (阮鵬, 1380–1442) in Chinese.

By honest heart-mind, we pray for Confucius and the heroic spirits!<sup>46</sup>  
(MĐNGĐ 2005, 26)

Furthermore, unlike state-sponsored Confucianism, MĐNGĐĐ does not aim to attain the further virtues of “governing the state” (治國, *trị quốc*), and “making the whole world peaceful and happy” (平天下, *bình thiên hạ*) or to show signs of upward mobility in the socio-political life of the laypersons. At a certain level, especially under a non-religious viewpoint, MĐNGĐĐ stays in line with the Neo-Confucian concept of human cultivation of the heart-mind even though their goal and approach may be different. By embedding basic social norms and virtues, MĐNGĐĐ remains partially as a socio-cultural institution in a loosely-defined terms. Thus, Confucius is still a “sage” in a broader sense.

MĐNGĐĐ was founded on a religious platform; therefore, its essential notation and rituals are in line with other popular religions in the region. The Southern Vietnamese started constructing new religions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by absorbing the attractive qualities of all religions and philosophies together and rebuilding them under a new ideological framework. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1983) stood on the perspective of political history to call this “the millenarian movement”. Several millenarian sects were founded during this period, among which include Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương,<sup>47</sup> Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa,<sup>48</sup> and Hoahaoism<sup>49</sup> in An Giang province, Caodaism in Tây Ninh, and other popular

46 Original text: “Kim đồ đệ bái kỳ Khổng Thánh, giảng đàn tiền xuất tánh cơ đồng;  
Anh linh hiển hiện bành thông, huyền vi yếu lý Nho tông chỉ truyền  
Nguyễn Từ Bi xa Tiên cấp giá, giảng phàm trần giáo hóa chúng sanh;  
Nhan, Tăng, Tư, Mạnh, Châu, Trinh, chí thành chí thánh chí linh độ trần  
Kính như tại thánh như tại, cảm ư tư mạc nại trùng san;  
Vọng kỳ Khổng thánh giảng cơ, anh linh hiển hích chơn tiên lai đàn.”  
(Chinese transcription: 今徒弟拜祈孔聖, 降壇前出性乩童,  
英靈顯現彭通, 玄微要理儒宗指傳,  
願慈悲車仙急駕, 降凡塵教化眾生,  
顏、曾、思、孟、朱、程, 至誠至聖至靈渡塵  
愍如在聖如在, 感於思膜奈重山  
望祈孔聖降乩, 英靈顯赫真仙來壇.)

47 Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương is a syncretic religion founded by Đoàn Minh Huyền (1807–1856) in 1849 in Châu Đốc, An Giang province. Currently, there are around 15,000 followers in the Mekong River Delta (see more Ho Tai 1983, 20–27).

48 Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa is a syncretic religion under a branch of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương that combines Mahayana Buddhism, Linji zong 臨濟宗, Tiantai zong 天台宗, Confucianism, Daoism, ancestor worship, and patriotism. It was founded by Ngô Lợi (1831–1890) in Ốc Eo village, Tịnh Biên District, An Giang province. There are around 80,000 followers living in Southern Vietnam nowadays (see more Ho Tai 1983, 3, 12, 66, 146, 177).

49 Also called Hoahao Buddhism, Hoahaoism was founded in 1939 by Huỳnh Phú Sổ (1919–1947) in Hòa Hảo village, Tân Châu district, An Giang province. Hoahaoism continued Bửu Sơn Kỳ

religious movements. Research by Truong Van Chung in 2016 shows that more new religions, such as Yiguandao (一貫道, *Nhất Quán đạo*),<sup>50</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses,<sup>51</sup> Minh Sư,<sup>52</sup> and Hà Môn,<sup>53</sup> have been disseminated or founded recently in Vietnam (Truong 2016, 450–595). In his analysis, Truong Van Chung stated that new religions are built and operated by the shift from belief to brainstorming, capacity for self-experience, secularism (changeability and adaptation), pragmatism (reality-based practices) and religious benefit-based nature (ibid., 674–77). Many millenarian leaders, as well as newly-emerging sect organizers, have taken advantage of an obvious feature of the Vietnamese personality to form their religious foundation—religious harmonization and tolerance. Such a feature was first shaped by the former state leaders and elites and sharpened under the continuous challenges due to state-building and external confrontation. Spirit possession and divination have long been proven to be the actual needs of people in different cultures.<sup>54</sup> Sacredness does not need to exist in reality, because “people ascribe sanctity to a place, then define and characterize it following their culture, experience, and purpose” (Jackson and Henrie 1983, 94–107; Phạm 2009, 43). Like devotees of other religions and their gods, MÔNGĐỒ laypersons worship Confucius because he provides “efficacy”. In their eyes, Confucius is a “god”.

However, unlike those religious movements, MÔNGĐỒ was formed by a process of multicultural integration based on Confucian ethics; therefore it is a unilinear acculturation process rather than general acculturation (see Berry 2003, 22). During the formation process, MÔNGĐỒ absorbed Buddhist and Daoist philosophies (cause-effect transferability, the *wuwei* concept, etc.), and got partially affected by Caodaism’s cosmological structure and liturgical activities; however, its Confucian core values remain vividly presented, making MÔNGĐỒ a special spiritualized form of Confucianism at the village level. Research by Huỳnh Ngọc Thu (2017) shows that Caodaism, an indigenous religion which was founded in the same period

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Huong’s philosophy; however, it adjusted the structure. Hoahaoism took Mahayana Buddhist philosophy as the foundation and added ancestor worship (see Ho Tai 1983, 17–19, 26–37, 125, 170; also Trần 2001, 472–75).

- 50 Yiguandao is a Chinese syncretic religion that was transmitted to Vietnam by Chinese from overseas during the 1980s (Truong 2016, 451).
- 51 The Jehovah’s Witnesses are a Western religion that was transmitted to Vietnam in 1935 by a French priest, Frank Rice, from Australia (Truong 2016, 525).
- 52 Minh Sư, one branch of Ngũ chi Minh đạo that originated in China, was disseminated to Vietnam in the middle of the 19th century, and officially acknowledged by Vietnamese Government in 2007 (Truong 2016, 564).
- 53 Hà Môn is an expanded and localized religion of Catholicism in Kon Tum (Central Highlands) that was founded at the end of the twentieth century.
- 54 See Lewis 1971; Kendall 1985; Brown 1991; Sharp 1993; Turner 2006; and Phạm 2009.



and from the same social background as MĐNGĐĐ, was mainly formed on the equally integral acculturation of Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and local popular religions, thus its main god has no proper name, it is simply the Supreme God (*Đấng Chí tôn*). MĐNGĐĐ is said to have a close relationship with Caodaism; it focuses mainly on Confucian ethics. Therefore, Confucius has been the main god. MĐNGĐĐ's core values—good virtue, goodness/perfection, and new people—are not the integral concepts of multiculturalism, they are Confucian virtues. A similar situation can be found among different popular religions or Daoism in Southern Vietnam, such as La Hán Đền (羅漢壇) in Sóc Trăng and Thiên Hòa Temple (天和寺) in Cần Thơ (a Daoist sect which absorbs Buddhist influences), Tam Vị Temple (三位廟) in Cái Nước district, Cà Mau province and Thiên Ý Đền (天懿壇) in District 6, Ho Chi Minh City (traditional gods/hero-worship which absorbs Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), and so on (fieldwork data 2015; 2016). Being instituted as a virtue-based system, MĐNGĐĐ ritualizes its liturgical practices and stays in line with other religions; consequently, it lies somewhere between orthodox Confucianism and popular religions.

Many writers have noted and appreciated the role of local elites in building and transforming local culture. According to Gramsci (1971), culture is not something that “persists through time, handed down from one generation to another”. It is also partly made by intellectuals who have transformed the “incoherent and fragmentary feelings” of others into “a coherent and reasoned account of the world” (Gramsci in Crehan 2002, 129–30). Michel Foucault (1980) also valued the intellectual knowledge which crucially produces and maintains both state power and popular discourse (see Pham 2009, 176). Arthur Wolf emphasized that there was a big difference between the religion of the elite and that of the peasantry (Wolf 1974, 9), and therefore the latter are less active in building and controlling the local agenda of development. However, this is not correct in the case of MĐNGĐĐ: local farmers and popular laypersons were able to establish their way of life without too much contact with the administrators (either earlier colonists or and today's authorities) and elite communities. This is in closer agreement with the Japanese researcher, Masao Tominaga, who defined MĐNGĐĐ a “grass-roots” Confucianism sect at the village level (Tominaga 2009; see further Nogami 2015); however, the current study shows that it is merely a religiously transformed Confucianism.

Culture, especially in the local traditions, is always the product of long-standing struggles of different classes in their local context. Culture has been “continually imagined, invented, contested, and transformed” both by the state and the agency of individuals (Foster 1991, 252). Among the various social classes, the elites tended to develop more ideologized and rationalized religious interpretations (Weller 1987, 10, 53), while the commoners largely depended on their local elites'

agenda. However, under special circumstances, the local commoners did and still do have enough capacity to create and operate their traditions. In the case of the Vietnamese, Hue-Tam Ho Tai pointed out that Confucian values were largely applied in governmental operations by the scholar-officials, while Buddhism and Daoism had more effects in the daily life of the Vietnamese commoners (Ho 1983, 20). The local farmers in Trà Vinh in the early twentieth century, being significantly affected by the harsh colonial rule of the French, actively rebuilt state-sponsored Confucianism into MĐNGĐĐ in a simplified and spiritualized way. Having adopted the idea that the French took advantage of Confucian hierarchy to ensure their control over the Vietnamese (Elman et al. 2002, 8), Mr. Lư Cường Cánh and his fellows did not violate the colonial principles when promoting Confucian virtues in family-based education and personal self-cultivation under a rather mystical approach. As Keith Taylor emphasized, in general Vietnamese Confucianism does not exemplify a social role or a national identity, but rather produces “a sense of self that entertains the anxiety of occupying a heterogeneous space of fragments and encounters and of living” (Taylor 2002, 369), they know when and how to break the rules and pursued “an experience of self”, as well as knowing when and how to transform and re-invent new sources of culture.

After a long period of establishment and evolution, MĐNGĐĐ has become different from orthodox Confucianism in a number of specific ways, such as:

Table 1: Comparing specific features between orthodox Vietnamese Confucianism and MĐNGĐĐ.

Item	Orthodox Confucianism in Vietnam	Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo
<b>Temple</b>	Temple of Literature (文廟/文聖廟), Confucius Temple (孔廟)	Confucius Temple (孔子聖殿)
<b>Concept of Three Bonds</b>	Loyalty (忠), filial piety (孝), and righteousness (義)	Mainly filial piety (孝); righteousness (義) is subordinate.
<b>Concept of Five Virtues</b>	Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity	Mainly benevolence and righteousness.
<b>Institutional essence</b>	Social-ideological institution	Spiritual-religious institution
<b>Classes</b>	Intellectuals, elites, and rural Confucians	Farmers and a few rural elites
<b>Attribute</b>	Sociality, worldliness	Somewhere between sociality and spirituality, between worldliness and transcendence



While Orthodox Confucianism looks for social engagement and educational improvement, MĐNGĐĐ tends to combine both the salvation of mystical “divines” (spiritualized Confucius, Buddha, celestial lords, etc.) and moral self-cultivation. The tendency to “sanctify” philosophical theories to form a part of the local tradition is not unique in the case of MĐNGĐĐ. Trần Văn Giàu (1993), in his discussion of the formation of Caodaism in the early twentieth century, once stressed that the commoners intentionally look at liberation in the next life, and easily step onto the religious pathway. Truthfully, under the harsh policies of the French colonists, the Vietnamese peasants and part of the patriotic elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to choose this mysterious way to deal with the socio-political pressures as well as to solve problems within themselves.

In comparison with East Asian communities, the traditional Vietnamese emphasize “righteousness” (義), which is composed of the merits of righteousness, patriotism, loyalty and filial piety (see Nguyen 2016, 645–71). They clarified the concept of righteousness into two categories, great righteousness (大義) and regular righteousness. Great righteousness undoubtedly means patriotism (愛國). Similarly, the concept of filial piety has also been divided into two sub-concepts, great filial piety (大孝) and regular filial piety (小孝). Great filial piety is a metaphor for patriotism while regular filial piety is understood as the regular respect and care of the younger generation towards their parents. Similarly, the ultimate loyalty in Vietnam is that to the country and people, yet not to the king. Therefore, the Vietnamese have developed the concept of righteousness into a figurative category, covering a wide range of meaning, including patriotism, loyalty, filial piety and righteousness itself. Being a part of this tradition, MĐNGĐĐ emphasizes this modification. In a part explaining the concept of great righteousness (patriotism), the classics *Thánh giáo (Teachings of the Sage)* cited the patriotic story of Two Trung Kings<sup>55</sup> and highlighted the following: “Heaven’s gate is wide open to the heroes and heroines, feminine power is as great as a good man’s; National history always shines the merits of Two Trung Kings, so today we follow to cultivate and complete ourselves”<sup>56</sup> (MĐNGĐĐ 1977, 23). Similar ideas can be also found in other religious movements in South Vietnam at the same time, such as Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, and Ông Đạo Trần.<sup>57</sup>

55 Two female heroines, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị, played key roles in the great revolt against the Chinese Han’s invasion and rule in the Red River Delta Region (present-day North Vietnam) during the period of 39 AD–43 AD.

56 Original text: “Môn Thiên mở rộng rước anh tài, nữ liệt anh thư mưa chó sai; Xán lạn Nhị Trưng còn sử tạc, hôm nay Chí Thiện để thi tài.”

57 Also called Ông Nhà Lớn Sect, a separation of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa in Long Sơn island, Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu province, founded in the early twentieth century.

Noticeably, the above-mentioned merits of MĐNGĐĐ are usually associated with the efficacy of relating to supernatural powers. For instance, *The Confucian Classics 1932–2005* says:

Confucian students firmly preserve in mind the virtues of loyalty, patience, unity, and scholarly spirit; they silently look for good companions and stay in harmony under the Buddhas’ and Celestial lords’ sanctity.<sup>58</sup> (MĐNGĐĐ 2005, 40)

For indigenous religions in Southern Vietnam, the faith strongly reflects the practical economic, cultural, and social life of residents; therefore, once the socio-economic background has changed (especially after the 1986 Reform policy), the inherent social cohesion of MĐNGĐĐ also changes. MĐNGĐĐ is the enlightened pathway of the spontaneous folk community. It lacks a scientific organizing structure and a concrete mechanism to evolve. There are signs of a gradual decline in MĐNGĐĐ, especially in its radial attraction and social impact. The administrative means of local authorities may produce some sort of challenge; however, the most serious challenge is the institutional structure of MĐNGĐĐ itself. Rob Weller once concluded that “religious unity or diversity depends in large part on how much intellectuals (who develop the ideologies), their backers, and their institutions succeed in influencing the conceptual system of other groups in the society” (Weller 1987, 170–71). James Watson (1985) claimed that the state created a system of symbols and overall value systems, and the intellectual and local elites, in turn, conveyed those values to the grassroots level through the process of cultural standardization. Similar conclusions can be found in the works of Donald S. Sutton (2007), Michael Szonyi (2007), Paul Katz (2007), Guo Qitao (2003), and others. Elites are generally willing to cooperate with the state (both to show loyalty and to achieve the goal of cultural unification of the state).

The state in Vietnam in the early twentieth century was controlled by French colonialists; therefore, Vietnamese elites did not support their civilizing mission in local areas. Instead, many of them decided to live quietly, while others joined the Liberation Front of Việt Minh. MĐNGĐĐ currently lacks the intellectual leadership often provided by professional elites (or priests), and the inherent relationship between faith and liturgical practices is getting weaker. It seems that the birth and operation of MĐNGĐĐ convey a contemporary value system. They reflect the actual consciousness and practices of some of the local farmers in Southern Vietnam under colonial control. The farmers concealed their patriotism

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58 Original text: “Đạo Nho sĩ từ quyết lòng trung, đại nhẫn đại hòa thêm sĩ hùng; Ân nhân canh thân tim bạn lữ, Thịnh Tiên rước Phật đê chung cùng.”

and progressive aspirations in Confucian ethics; however, the absence of elite participation limits MĐNGĐĐ from building a strong institutionalized establishment. Instead, they built their own “cultural nexus of power”.<sup>59</sup>

If Confucian core values (*minh đức, tân dân, and chí thiện*) can be grouped as “the notation” of MĐNGĐĐ, and regular liturgical practices and other forms of ceremony are defined as “ritual”, then, in applying Seligman and Weller’s (2012) point of view, the founders and local devotees of MĐNGĐĐ in Trà Vinh have directly created and promoted a common “shared experience”. As Mary E. Tucker said, “the rituals reflect the patterned structures of the natural world and bind humans to one another, to the ancestral world, and to the cosmos at large” (Tucker 2004, 25). In the notational domain of MĐNGĐĐ, Confucius is a “sage”; however, in religious faith and liturgical aspects, he is a “god”. By having the notion, the ritual, and shared experience installed, MĐNGĐĐ has brought people together, at least within their religious space.

## Conclusion

As Jeffrey L. Richey once remarked, Vietnamese Confucianism is a native expression of Vietnamese values rather than an ongoing flow of East Asian tradition (see Richey 2013, 60). Confucianism has transformed so greatly (in both content and form) that O.W. Wolters suggested one should “think twice” before using the term “Confucianism” in Vietnamese cultural history (Wolters 1976, 203–26). It is not Confucianism as a whole package of Chinese imperial ideology that has been applied in Vietnam; instead, the Vietnamese actively adopted the norms and values needed to localize and develop further to serve their own national and family interests. No one has given a particular name to this synthetic “Confucian tradition” of Vietnam so far, except the generic term “Vietnamese Confucianism”; however, appropriate regard and consideration are reasonably emphasized. MĐNGĐĐ is a part of this pattern, and if it needs a proper interpretive name, can be dubbed “the village-based spiritualized Confucianism Sect”.

Along with the colonial socio-historical processes in Southern Vietnam during the first half of the twentieth century, Confucianism—the orthodox socio-ideological system in feudal Vietnam—has, in turn, experienced de-standardization and de-orthopraxy, leaving behind the pre-imperial Confucian norms and values among the commoners. Local farmers in remote areas in Trà Vinh actively transformed Confucian ethics into a form of religious sect by adding mystical

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59 The concept was suggested by Prasenjit Duara 2010.

metaphysics and liturgical practices into the broken and simplified Confucian philosophical structure to generalize faith and trust. This denomination is a concrete representation of the new religious movements that arose throughout Southern Vietnam during the period of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, vividly reflecting the spontaneous reaction, flexibility, and multicultural integration of the residents and their traditions. The formation and maintenance of this sect through historical periods shows the diversity of the cultural needs, cultural psychology, and lifestyle on the part of Vietnamese commoners, especially during the time of colonial rule. The nature of MẶNGĐỒ represents a core principle that, even without the orientation and leadership of state agents (the bureaucracy and the elites), the peasants in Southern Vietnam were able to create their worldview and way of life which maintain a certain level of difference from the orthodox tradition. Confucianism, with its ontological spirituality (“immanent transcendence”, “heavenly virtue”, and “anthropocosmic vision”),<sup>60</sup> always provides a way for all classes as long as they learn the values of Confucian norms and practices. Without the state’s engagement and intellectual leadership, the non-elite community easily transforms and applies Confucian ethics in a spiritualized way.

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60 See Tu 2004, 480–508; and Tucker 2004, 1–27.

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# Lê Quý Đôn's Theory of *Li-qi*

Yueh-hui LIN\*

## Abstract

This paper discusses the work of Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784), a prominent scholar of Later Lê Vietnam who was deeply influenced by Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. Lê's masterwork, the *Classified Discourses from Yun Terrace* (*Yuntai leiyu* 芸臺類語, *Vân đài loại ngữ*), exemplifies this intellectual heritage. This essay considers the text's first volume in light of Zhu Xi's theory of *li-qi*. While drawing deeply from Zhu Xi's theory of an inseparable *li-qi*, Lê's concept of *li-qi* ultimately originated in Han dynasty *qi*-transformative cosmology. Also influenced by a Vietnamese tradition of Three Teachings syncretism, Lê integrated Neo-Confucianism with Han cosmology to create a unique *li-qi* theory.

**Keywords:** Zhu Xi, Lê Quý Đôn, Vietnamese Confucianism, *li-qi* theory, *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*)

## Lê Quý Đônova teorija *li-qi*

### Izvilleček

Članek obravnava delo priznanega učenjaka Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784) s konca vietnamske dinastije Le, na katerega je močno vplivalo neokonfucijanstvo dinastij Song in Ming. Ta idejna zapuščina se kaže v Lejevem mojstrskem delu *Razvrščene razprave iz terase Vinske rutice* (*Yuntai leiyu* 芸臺類語, *Vân đài loại ngữ*). Članek obravnava prvi zvezek tega dela, in sicer na podlagi Zhu Xijeve teorije o *liju* in *qiju*. Čeprav je Lê Quý Đôn izhajal iz Zhu Xijeve teorije o neločljivosti *lija* in *qija*, Lejev koncept *lija* in *qija* izvira iz transformativne kozmologije, ki se je razvila v dinastiji Han. Le je pod vplivom vietnamske tradicije sinkretizma Treh naukov neokonfucijanstvo povezal s hansko kozmologijo ter ustvaril edinstveno teorijo *lija* in *qija*.

**Ključne besede:** Zhu Xi, Le Quy Don, konfucijanstvo v Vietnamu, teorija *li-qi*, *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*)

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## Introduction

Confucianism has long been important within Chinese culture, exerting a deep influence upon the societies of traditional China. But from the 12th century onward, Neo-Confucianism became not only the intellectual mainstream in China, but also a representative of East Asian civilization as a whole and a common intellectual resource within the Sinograph cultural sphere.<sup>1</sup> Noteworthy here is the process of introducing Zhu Xi's thought into the regions bordering China to the east and south. In the east, Neo-Confucianism was introduced to Korea in the fourteenth century, and exercised a dominant influence on the politics and culture of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Neo-Confucianism was also introduced early on to Japan, and its influence pervaded the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). To the south, Neo-Confucianism spread to Vietnam and profoundly impacted the Later Lê (1428–1784) and Nguyễn Dynasties (1802–1945), leading to what is widely seen as the golden age of Vietnamese Confucianism. The diversity of East Asian Confucianism makes it clear, however, that Neo-Confucianism, expanding eastward and southward, not only planted deep roots in Korea, Japan and Vietnam, but was also indigenized and transformed in all three countries, becoming essential aspects of each society's cultural heritage.

The history of exchange between China and Vietnam began with Qin Shihuang's suppression of Lingnan 嶺南 in 214 BC. Qin Shihuang subsequently established three commanderies in what is now Northern Vietnam and South China: Guilin 桂林, Xiang 象, and Nanhai 南海. The Xiang commandery is thought to be consisted of what are today the northern and central regions of Vietnam. This marked the beginning of a system of commanderies and prefectures that enabled China's subsequent colonization of Vietnam. Subsequently, the Han Dynasty reorganized the territory into the Jiaozhi 交趾部 (Giao Chỉ) region; in the Three Kingdoms period, the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties established Jiaozhou (Giao Châu 交州), while the Tang Dynasty created the Annan 安南 (An Nam) Protectorate General (安南都護府 An Nam Đô Hộ Phủ). For approximately a millennium—from the Qin-Han period to the Late Tang—Vietnam was a commandery of China. Vietnamese today refer to the period as “the Northern colonization” or “the period of domination”.

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1 Tu Weiming, following Mou Zongsan's theory, proposed three periods of Confucianism, writing: “The ‘three periods of Confucianism’ can be summarized as follows. From the pre-Qin era until when Confucianism had developed into one of the main currents of Chinese thought; that is the first period. The second one began when Confucianism progressively became representative of East Asian civilization at large after its renaissance in the Song Dynasty. And the third period was from the First Sino-Japanese War (1895) and the May Fourth Movement (1919) onward.” (Tu 2002, 603) Chen Lai also affirmed that “Neo-Confucianism is the common manifestation of the East Asian civilization” (Chen 2008, 2).

Starting with the Song, Vietnam recovered its independence and established its own feudal royal dynasties, all while nominally an outlying vassal country in relation to China. In reality, Vietnam had largely escaped Chinese domination and achieved independence. The successive dynasties of independent Vietnam were the Đinh Dynasty (968–980), Early Lê Dynasty (980–1009), Lý Dynasty (1010–1225), Trần Dynasty (1225–1440), and Hồ Dynasty (1400–1407). After a short period under Ming Chinese domination (1414–1427), Vietnam again established a new dynasty, the Later Lê (1428–1788), the longest-lasting dynasty in Vietnamese history. In 1788, Nguyễn Huệ came to the throne, establishing the Tây Sơn Dynasty (1788–1802). Subsequently Nguyễn Phúc Ánh became king, establishing the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), the last feudal dynasty in Vietnamese history. In the late years of the Nguyễn, under the coercion of Western powers, Vietnam finally became a protectorate of France in 1885 (Yu and Tan 2005, 40–49).

Vietnamese dynasties were deeply influenced by Chinese, particularly Confucian, administrative and political models. Much like China, Vietnamese dynasties established systems of competitive examinations to select scholar-officials, eventually using the Confucian *Four Books* (四書) and *Five Classics* (五經) as official textbooks. In the Lý Dynasty (1010–1225), a Confucian Temple of Literature, or Wenmiao (文廟, Văn Miếu), was built in the capital Thăng Long in 1070; examinations were organized in 1075; an Imperial College (國子監, Quốc Tử Giám) was founded in 1076; and a Vietnamese Hanlin Academy 翰林院 was established in 1086; but the examination system remained at a preliminary stage until the later years of the dynasty, with examinations held only sporadically. Additionally, under the Lý Dynasty all three major teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) developed together, and among them Buddhism enjoyed the position of dominant ideology at the Lý court and became the main current of cultural life.

Succeeding the throne, the Trần Dynasty (1225–1440) formally chose Confucianism as the official ideology and created a comprehensive education system, with central and local state-run and private schools. In addition, the Trần examination system was reformed, with Confucian classics serving as the exams' base texts. These policies were retained by successive Vietnamese dynasties. Thanks to the development of both state and private education and the examination system, the number of Confucian scholars rapidly increased, and their important roles in the royal court, in turn, promoted the prestige of Confucianism. In 1370, the leadership of the Trần Dynasty took the memorial tablet of Chu Văn An 朱文安 (d. 1370), the master of Vietnamese Confucianism, to the Wenmiao for worship alongside other Confucian sages, indicating the high status Confucianism attained in that period.

The succeeding Lê Dynasty became not only Vietnam's longest-lasting dynasty, but also the most vibrant period for Confucianism, analogous to China's Ming-Qing period. The Later Lê kings revered Confucianism, taking it as their leading statecraft theory, the theoretical basis for their policies, and as an ethical system for kings, mandarins and commoners alike to follow. Confucius was apotheosized and Confucianism elevated to the status of state religion.

The Vietnamese Confucianism of the Later Lê period was deeply influenced by orthodox Confucianism then prevalent in China, taking Zhu Xi's teachings as orthodoxy. Vietnamese Confucianism both maintained a speculative character and also emphasized practical and moral education. Confucianism consequently played an active role in maintaining social stability, receiving support from both the Later Lê rulers and the scholarly class. While Confucianism reigned supreme, Buddhism and Daoism were often restricted. Thanks to this official patronage, the Later Lê Dynasty witnessed a continuous growth of the ranks of the Confucian scholars, among whom Nguyễn Trãi 阮薦 (1380–1442), Nguyễn Bình Khiêm 阮秉謙 (1491–1585), Phan Phu Tiên 潘孚先 (1370–1482), Ngô Sĩ Liên 吳士連 (around 1400–unknown), and the subject of this essay, Lê Quý Đôn 黎貴惇 (1726–1784), are considered the most outstanding figures. Confucianism maintained this position until the early and middle periods of the Nguyễn Dynasty. However, due both to the ideological rigidity of Confucianism and the endogenous deficiencies of the examination system, Vietnam's 800-year old examination system was abolished in 1919. The efforts by French colonial authorities to romanize the writing system, eliminating the Chinese-derived Han and Nôm characters, resulted in it becoming difficult for Vietnamese to access classical Confucian texts. The Vietnamese grew increasingly critical of Confucianism, and opposition to Confucian thought grew in turn. From the late Nguyễn Dynasty onwards, Confucianism fell into decline and gradually disappeared from the mainstream of Vietnamese history (He 2000, 334–80).

The Later Lê Dynasty was thus the zenith of Vietnamese Confucianism, and, crucially, saw special attention paid to the publication of the Confucian classics. Scholars engraved and printed many editions of the Confucian texts, such as new editions of the 1435 *Sishu daquan* 四書大全 (*Great Collection of the Four Books, Tứ Thư Đại Toàn*) and the *Wujing daquan* 五經大全 (*Great Collection of the Five Classics, Ngũ Kinh Đại Toàn*) that were provided to state schools in 1734. The system of examinations also contributed significantly to the improvement in status of the scholar-official class. In addition, Lê Thánh Tông 黎聖宗 (1442–1497; r. 1460–1497), traditionally regarded as one of the greatest Lê Dynasty monarchs, enthusiastically promoted the Confucian virtue of ritual propriety (*liyi* 禮義, *lễ nghĩa*), encouraging “loyalty and faithfulness, filial



piety and fraternal duty” (忠信孝悌, *trung tín hiếu đễ*). Emulating the laws of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, he ordered the compilation of the “Hồng Đức Code” 洪德法典 to promulgate the “Twenty-four Teachings” (二十四條訓, *Nhị thập tứ điều huấn*), thereby allowing Confucian ethics to take deep root in all aspects of Vietnamese social life. Moreover, the practical morality that Neo-Confucianism emphasized was also publicized widely through popular cultivating activities.

Lê Quý Đôn, the Vietnamese Confucian scholar whose thought is the subject of this paper, was one of the most important Confucian figures of that era, and his life and thought reflect the flourishing academic atmosphere of the Late Lê. Lê Quý Đôn (courtesy name: Doãn Hậu 允厚; literary name: Quế Đường 桂堂) was born in Diên Hà 延河 District, Thái Bình Province 太平省. Descended from a scholarly family, by the end of his youth he had read the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* and various works of the *baijia* 百家, or Hundred Schools, and was already renowned for his comprehensive knowledge of Chinese studies. At the age of 27, he passed the imperial examination and was given the title Editor of the Imperial College (國史館纂修) at Vietnam’s Hanlin Academy (翰林院). Subsequently he was designated Lecturer of the Academy (翰林院侍講), Scholar of the Secretariat Council (秘書閣學士), and Governor (參政) of Hải Dương Province 海陽省. Between 1760 and 1762, Lê was sent to China as the King’s envoy. During his time in China Lê travelled and observed widely, focusing his attention on Chinese politics in order “to understand how the politics of the upper nation runs and its people are” (Lê *n. d.*, “Preamble”). In addition, he came into contact with many Chinese scholar-officials, and even met Joseon envoys, including Hong Kyehee 洪啟禧 (1703–1771).<sup>2</sup>

While maintaining an active political career, Lê also endeavoured to read, write, and teach disciples. He ranks among the most prolific authors of traditional Vietnam. His works are concerned with many different subjects, including literature, philosophy, economics, and history.<sup>3</sup> Lê enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, a

2 The preface to Lê Quý Đôn’s *Shengmo xianfan lu* (聖謨賢範錄, *Thánh mô hiền phạm lục*, *Record of Saints’ Models and Sages’ Examples*) was written by Hong Kyehee.

3 Lê Quý Đôn’s prolific output includes: *Sishu lüejie* (四書略解, *Tứ thư ước giải*, *Concise Interpretation of the Four Books*), *Shujing yanyi* (書經衍義, *Thư kinh diễn nghĩa*, *Commentary on the Classic of Documents*), *Yuntai leiyu* (芸臺類語, *Vân đài loại ngữ*, *Classified Discourses from Yun Terrace*), *Qunshu kaobian* (群書考辨, *Quần thư khảo biện*, *Disquisition into Various Books*), *Yin-zhi wenzhu* (陰騭文注, *Âm chất văn chú*, *Annotated Account of Secret Charity*), *Shengmo xianfan lu* (聖謨賢範錄, *Thánh mô hiền phạm lục*, *Record of Saints’ Models and Sages’ Examples*), *Jianwen xiaolu* (見聞小錄, *Kiến văn tiểu lục*, *Scrappy Notes Based on Observation*), *Li chao tongshi* (黎朝通史, *Lê triều thông sử*, *Narrative History of the Lê Dynasty*), *Guoshi xubian* (國史續編, *Quốc sử tục biên*, *National History Sequel*), *Bei shi tonglu* (北使通錄, *Bắc sử thông lục*, *Records of a Diplomatic Trip to the North*), *Queduong shiji* (桂堂詩集, *Quế Đường thi tập*, *Collection of Queduong’s Poems*), *Quanyue shilu* (全越詩錄, *Toàn Việt thi lục*, *Toan Viet Poetry Collection*), and *Huangyue wenhai* (皇越文海, *Hoàng Việt văn hải*, *Literature Collection of Hoang Viet*).

high reputation; his disciple Búi Tồn Am (裴存庵) praised him as “a master of remarkable intelligence and comprehensive knowledge, whose excellent works are popular today and will be handed down to posterity; in our country there is a figure like him only every 200 years” (Bui n. d., 5a). Ngô Thì Sĩ 吳時仕 (1726–1780), a Confucian scholar in the late Lê Dynasty, also admired Lê, noting that “his literature is outstanding; he has passed three times at the first rank in examinations; his fame is widespread in two countries, and is a leader among the Confucians” (in Yu 2000, 199). This paper, as a matter of concision, will focus on the volume “*Li-qi*” (理氣, *lí-khí*) within Lê’s masterwork, the *Yuntai leiyu* (芸臺類語, *Vân đài loại ngữ*, *Classified Discourses from Yun Terrace*), in order to explore Lê Quý Đôn’s thought, especially those aspects that were influenced by Zhu Xi.

### Zhu Xi’s Thought in Lê Quý Đôn’s *Yuntai Leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*)

Within Lê’s vast philosophical output, *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) ranks as the most important. Many Chinese scholars believe that Lê Quý Đôn was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Zhu Xi (1130–1200), one of the preeminent Confucian scholars of the Southern Song Dynasty, citing *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) in support of that opinion (He 2000, 357; Yu 2000, 186–93).

*Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) consists of nine volumes, and in the work’s “Author’s Preface”, there appears the phrase “after the full moon of the first month of autumn, Quý Tỵ year, Cảnh Hưng era” (景興癸巳孟秋既望), meaning that the book was finished in 1773. However, the composition of the book likely lasted many years. Lê’s friends commented on the writing of the text as follows:

Lê Quý Đường of Diên Hà District has read every book, and there is nothing he has not investigated. If he discovers something he will write it down immediately; his writings thus totally fill his desk and cabinet. Among them, *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) is the most excellent. *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) is divided into nine volumes, classified and detailed according to proper principles. Astronomy, geography, and human affairs are all included. Studies based on *gewu* 格物 (investigating things, *cách vật*), *zhizhi* 致知 (extending knowledge to the utmost, *trí tri*), *chengyi* 誠意 (being sincere in one’s thoughts, *thành ý*), and *zhengxin* 正心 (rectifying one’s heart, *chính tâm*); efforts to *xiushen* 修身 (cultivate one’s self, *tu thân*), *qijia* 齊家 (regulate the family, *tề gia*), *zhiguo* 治國 (order well the state, *trị quốc*) and *ping tianxia* 平天下



(pacify the world, *bình thiên hạ*): there is nothing that cannot be found in this book. (Tran 2011, 1–2)<sup>4</sup>

Lê himself described the writing process for *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) in his “Preface”:

I would usually read books of numerous genres, such as biographies and historical records, and then summarize them, sometimes making comments according to my own ideas, sometimes just jotting down the original texts; after a while, those notes gradually accumulated and became a book. I arranged the contents in nine volumes and gave it the title *leiyu* (Classified discourses). (Lê 2011, “Preface”, 5)

Based on the “Preface”, it can be surmised that the so-called “*tai*” 臺 (terrace or stage, *dài*) in *Yuntai* (芸臺, *Vân đài*) is a reference to a *lantai* (蘭臺, *Lan dài*), or “orchid terrace”: that is to say, a room containing many books.<sup>5</sup> It is evident both how many volumes Lê collected, and that the *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) was the result of this research process. Using a large number of anecdotes, quoting liberally from the Classics while adding his own comments, the text of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) resembles an encyclopaedia, with its division into categories, or *lei*; looking more closely, one can see that the book is divided among nine subject areas, which correspond to the nine volumes of the book: *Li-qi* (理氣, *Principle and Material Force*), *Xiangxing* (象形, *Image-Form*), *Quyú* (區宇, *Area- Universe*), *Dianhui* (典彙, *Standard-Class*), *Wenyi* (文藝, *Literature and Art*), *Yinzi* (音字, *Sound and Character*), *Shuji* (書籍, *Written Works*), *Shigui* (仕規, *Official Regulations*), and *Pinwu* (品物, *Objects*). These nine volumes cover many subjects, but can be organized into three general groups: “writings on Heaven”, or *tianwen* (天文, *Thiên văn*); geography or “Earthly principles”, *dili* (地理, *Địa lí*); and “writings on human matters”, or *renwen* (人文, *Nhân văn*). The organization of the book reflects both Lê’s convictions and his broader intellectual orientation.

4 I had the opportunity to read two manuscripts of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*). The first was photocopied from an edition in the possession of the Institute of Philosophy of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, which consists of three parts and volumes. The second was photocopied by National Taiwan University and based on a manuscript in the possession of the Library of the Hán-Nôm Research Institute, Vietnam. There are some differences between those two scripts. The citations in this paper are mainly based on the latter manuscript published by National Taiwan University.

5 *Yunxiang* 芸香 refers to the common rue, a fragrant grass, while the *yuntai*, also known as a *lantai* 蘭臺, refers to a room containing secret books in the Han Dynasty. This word also refers to officials responsible for collecting and managing the books therein. According to Yu Xiangdong, “the so-called *yun* refers to the ‘common rue’. *Yuntai* means a place for the storage of books” (Yu 2000, 182). This opinion deserves further discussion.

It can be observed from Lê's "Preface" that he composed the book according to Zhu Xi's concepts of *gewu* and *zhizhi*. Lê explained this influence, noting:

The ancients said that the investigation of things and extension of knowledge to the utmost, if brought to the effect of "cultivating the person", "regulating the family", "ordering well the state", and "pacifying the world", can be said at that point to be extremely broad. The Dao exists in all things; everything has the Dao. From Heaven and Earth right down to human relations and daily matters, everything has its own principle, has its own meaning. The *junzi* thus cannot remain ignorant of it. Through learning to gain knowledge, asking questions to make distinctions, studying the old and knowing the new, being honest and sincere in one's reverence for ritual, and accumulating knowledge by day and night, one will naturally link the threads (*guantong* 貫通). Studying principles deeply and fulfilling one's nature (窮理盡性) in order to arrive at one's fate; extracting the essence of the meaning and being enthralled in order to apply it; there is nothing that does not originate from this (learning). (Lê 2011, "Preface", 3)

From the outset, Lê regarded Zhu Xi's theory of *gewu zhizhi* as the basis for his book's composition. For Zhu Xi, *gewu zhizhi* was the central element of his theory of cultivation (工夫論). With self-cultivation, one can fully explore the relationship between Heaven and man (*jiu tianren zhiji* 究天人之際), and obtain the effect outlined in the Great Learning of *xiu-qi-zhi-ping* 修齊治平 (self-cultivation, regulating the family, ordering the state, and pacifying the world). The foundation for this practice of cultivation lies in Zhu Xi's *li-qi* theory. According to Zhu Xi, "things in the world must have the causes why they are so, and the standards for what they ought to be; these are called *li* (principles)" (Zhu 2001, 8). Zhu Xi's ontology begins with the concept of *li*, in which *li* is the encompassing principle of the universe and things in the world, the basis for all existence. Hence all things in the world have both "the reasons why they are so" and "the standards by which they ought to be so"; the principle of existence and the principle of what ought to be cannot be separated. Efforts to "investigate things" and "extend knowledge to the utmost" thus, for Zhu Xi, are identical to the process of studying the principle of the existence of all things, as well as the principles of what ought to be. That concept had a major influence on Lê, and became the basic position expressed in *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*). Lê's statement that "the Dao exists in all things; everything has Dao" means that "there is nothing (in the world) that has no principle; there is nothing that has no meaning". In other words, everything in the world is "being" (有), not "nothing" (無). Affirming the existence of that

being, the *junzi* has a duty to manifest the value of things' existence. According to this interpretation, *gewu zhizhi* has a positive function and becomes the necessary direction that one must pursue.

Lê's interpretation of the theory of *gewu zhizhi*, similar to that of Zhu Xi, prioritized the acquisition of external knowledge, emphasizing wide-ranging study (*boxue*) and curiosity. Lê wrote:

The *I Ching* said: "The *junzi* remembers the words and deeds of former men, to serve the accumulation of his virtue". The *Book of Documents* said: "The *junzi* should seek to learn much, with a view to establish his affairs". The *Analects* said: "Why do you not study the *Book of Poetry*? From it you can learn how to serve your fathers, and to serve your rulers, and be well-acquainted with the names of birds, beasts, and plants".<sup>6</sup> All of these are efforts to investigate things. If we can keep the principle and choose the quintessence, then, although things ancient and contemporary may be confused in front of our eyes, we will be able to consider the whole process from beginning to end, to integrate the start with the finish, and gradually recognize that things have different paths but return to the same place, that hundreds of concerns have the same final intention. If this is so, then who can criticize us by claiming that [our understanding is] wide-ranging but has no finesse, that we are diligent without effect? (Lê 2011, "Preface", 3–4)

According to Lê, persistent listening and understanding entail a *zhizhi* effort, and possess positive functions. With such efforts, we can face confused things and come to the right decisions, distinguish where things begin and end, and arrive at the simple from the complex. It is clear from this that, when it came to *gewu zhizhi* efforts, Lê emphasized the positive meanings acquired by an expansive approach to knowledge accumulation, and did not prioritize the moral practice that was closely integrated with *gewu zhizhi* in Zhu Xi's original thought.

Although *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) consists of many different sections concerning the study of Heaven, the study of Earth, and human matters, the effort to achieve *gewu zhizhi* remains constant throughout. Lê wrote:

The sun, the moon, and the stars are phenomena of Heaven (*tianwen* 天文, *Thiên văn*). Though the climate may different here and abroad, take the points in the sky where stars stop, the locations where stars

6 Translated into English by James Legge (*I Ching*, Da Xu, 1; *Shang shu*, Charge to Yue III, 8; *Lunyu*, Yang Huo, 9).

moves: how can any of them not have a constant (principle)? Mountains and rivers, plants and grass are phenomena of the Earth (*diwen* 地文, *Địa văn*). Between them their forms are different, but take the entirety of their vascular systems, whether they be tall or short, fat and thin: how can any of them not have a constant principle? Rites, music, systems of law are all human phenomena (*renshi* 人事, *nhân sự*). The transformations of past and present, the values and pleasures of people inland and abroad are different from one another, but the means by which teaching is established according to the times, by which one understands historical changes in order to suit the people's needs, is unitary. (...) The *junzi* of ancient times practiced it, the *junzi* of current ages follow it; the so-called "investigation of things" is this; the so-called "extension of knowledge to the utmost" is this; the so-called "grasping of all principles to respond to all matters" is also like this. This does not mean hovering about, following only the outside appearance and not considering the interior of things. If we do not make like this, and instead investigate things bit by bit, then it will be just like the proverb in which one "loses the goat amidst the many side-roads". (Lê 2011, "Preface", 4-5)

In Lê's view, the affairs of Heaven, Earth, and man are always in continuous flux, but they have a point of connection: the constant, unchanging *li* (principle, *li*). Through the effort to *gewu zhizhi* that Zhu Xi proposed, we can grasp that flux, and at the same time understand the constant *li* possessed by all things in the world.

For this reason, various aspects of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*), from the material collected, to its different categories, to its compilation of concepts and ideas, draw on Zhu Xi's theory of *gewu zhizhi*. The tendency towards diversity in the kinds of knowledge included is apparent in *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*). As Lê wrote:

I think, if things I mention are too sophisticated, they will be lofty and empty, and if they are the opposite, they will be too superficial. However, if they cover all aspects of things in broad strokes, then they will be useful for studying the three powers (*sancai* 三才, *tam tài*) (Heaven, Earth and man) and dealing with all manner of things. (ibid., 6)

Thus the refined abstractions of *xin* (mind, *tâm*), *xing* (nature, *tính*), *li* (principle, *lì*), and *qi* (material force, *khi*), though they are of universal interest to Song-Ming Neo-Confucians, do not constitute the central elements of what Lê aimed to discuss in *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*).

## Lê Quý Đôn's Theory of *Li-qi*

The first volume of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*), titled “*Li-qi*”, is representative of Lê Quý Đôn's worldview and metaphysical thinking. Based on what Lê wrote in the “Table of Contents” (目錄引), we can understand his intention in compiling the volume:

*Liangyi* 兩儀 (Two polarities) fix the position, *Erqi* 二氣 (that is, Yin and Yang) push and rub up against each other; being human and being a thing means possessing a nature and a fate. *Yi* 醫 (medicine), *bo* 卜 (divination), and *fengshui* 風水 (geomancy) are where the utmost *li* 至理 exists; *Xian* 僊 (Daoist super-being), *Shi* 釋 (Buddha), and *guishen* 鬼神 (ghosts and spirits) are all infinite and cannot be estimated. Standing in the middle of it all, it is necessary to follow only the constancy. Therefore I wrote “*Li-qi yu*” 理氣語 (*Discourses on li-qi*) as my first volume. (Lê 2011, 7)

For Lê, Heaven, Earth, and all things are formed thanks to the movement of “two *qi*”, Yin and Yang, and have the supreme *li* existing within them. This means that within the moving *qi* there must be an unchanging, constant *li* ruling and controlling (主宰). Not restricting himself to Confucian discussions, Lê also displayed an openness to diverse disciplines and modes of thought, including not only medicine, divination, and *fengshui*, but also Daoism, Buddhism, and theories of *guishen*, explaining them all through the *li-qi* theory. Therefore, in the “*Li-qi*” volume, the 54 parts which concern *li* and *qi* also discuss many other topics. Because Lê's theory of *li-qi* is highly complex, I will not attempt a panoramic account but will instead perform a close analysis of typical paragraphs.

### *What Fills Out Heaven and Earth is Qi; Li Exists Within Qi*

Lê's theory of *li-qi* in *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) contains little metaphysics, even as it advances a large number of arguments concerning cosmology. I argue that Lê's heightened attention to *qi*-transformative cosmology (氣化宇宙論), coupled with his observations of Heaven, Earth and the “ten-thousand things” (*wanwu*), took the tradition of *qi*-transformative cosmology that originated in the Han Dynasty as its basis and supplemented it with Zhu Xi's theory of *li-qi*. Lê wrote:

What fills out all between Heaven and Earth is *qi*. *Li* means the real being, not nothing. *Li* does not have figure or leave a trace, and can only

be seen thanks to *qi*. *Li* exists within *qi*. *Yin-yang* 陰陽, *ji-ou* 奇偶 (the odd and the even), *zhi-xing* 知行 (knowledge and activity), *ti-yong* 體用 (substance and function): they can be mentioned separately, but *li* and *qi* cannot. (Lê 2011, vol.1, 13–14)

This typifies the influence of Zhu Xi's thought on Lê Quý Đôn's theory of *li-qi*. We can see in the paragraph the phrase "what fills out all between Heaven and Earth is *qi*", which appeared so often in the Ming-Qing competitive-examinations that it became a cliché in the eight-legged essays (八股文, Bát cổ văn), and was used by numerous thinkers in the Ming-Qing Dynasties. But the important thing here is the deeper implicit meaning of the statement. In Lê's opinion, Heaven and Earth—the universe—is full with the changes of transformative *qi*, which are the very traces left by creation.

However, that transformative *qi* which is operating is not some abstract or unreal existence, but possesses a very real being. Thus Lê's concept can be regarded as a revision of Zhu Xi's theory of *li-qi*. In Zhu Xi's theory of *li-qi*, the connection between *li* and *qi* can be seen from two aspects. From an ontological perspective, *li* is the foundation of *qi*'s existence; as Zhu Xi said, "after there is this *li*, this *qi* is produced" (Zhu 1986, 2). *Li* has the place of precedence here. With respect to cosmology, Zhu Xi writes: "without *qi*, there will be no place for *li* to rely on" (ibid., 3); *qi* possesses the ability to realize *li*. Therefore Lê's statement that "*li* does not have figure or trace", continuing to say that "*li* can only be seen thanks to *qi*, and exists within *qi*", is typical of Zhu Xi's thought. Lê's claim that "*li* does not have figure or trace" means the metaphysical *li* cannot be seen, and that the physical (non-abstract) *qi* must be used in order to substantiate *li*. When Lê stated that "*li* means being, not nothing", and "*li-qi* cannot be mentioned in apposition", it is obvious that he accepted Zhu Xi's line of thought, according to which *li* is the real being, *li* and *qi* are two essential concepts for the study of the universe, and they are not similar to Yin and Yang, or *ti* and *yong* (substance and function), which can exchange between each other. The comment that "*li* and *qi* cannot be mentioned symmetrically" shows that *li* and *qi* cannot exchange between themselves, and that *li* cannot be transformed into an attribute of *qi*. In this sense, the statement that "what fills out Heaven and Earth is *qi*" cannot be an argument for *qi*-monism (唯氣論), but instead emphasizes the inseparable connection between *li* and *qi* that is shown in the phrase "*li* exists within *qi*", much as Zhu Xi, discussing the formation of the universe, stated that "in the world there is no *qi* without *li*, and there is no *li* without *qi*" (ibid., 2). That very concrete form in the world is an expression of the "*li* which exists within *qi*": this is one aspect of Zhu Xi's original theory of *li-qi*. Thus, receiving Zhu Xi's theory of *li-qi*, with his passionate



interest in the *qi*-transformative cosmology, Lê emphasized the positions that “*li* and *qi* have a close connection and cannot be separated” (理氣相即不離), and that “*li* exists within *qi*” (理在氣中).

The notion that “*li* exists within *qi*” can also be expressed in another way: “*li* resides within *qi*” (理寓於氣). This was another of Lê’s takeaways from Zhu Xi’s theory of *li-qi*:

The *I Ching* says: “The benevolent see it and call it benevolence, the wise see it and call it wisdom. The common people, acting daily according to it, yet have no knowledge of it.”<sup>7</sup> The *Yinfu jing* (陰符經) says: “Its resource and device are one; it is invisible and unknown to all under the sky. When the superior man has got them, he strengthens his body by them; when the small man has got them, he makes light of his life.”<sup>8</sup> The statements have the same meaning; the profundity of *li* and *qi* is fully expressed here. The mysterious function of opening and closing, the mystical power of encouragement: they are granted to sages by Heaven, and are used by the sages to follow Heaven’s way, to produce the myriad things, to complete the myriad changes, to stabilize the world’s people and to bring in line all nations. (Lê 2011, vol.1, 32)

Lê continued:

The Dao mentioned in the *I Ching* always changes and is never at a standstill; it flows through all six voids (the sky, the earth and four directions), unceasingly going up and down. Thus it can comprehend the mysteries of *li* and *shu* 數 (number, divination; fate). *Li* resides within *qi*, *shu* is due to *li*. Being born to the mind (心), taking effect upon matters; that is the evidence of *qi*. Being calm and then thinking, thinking and then receiving, that is the accomplishment of *qi*. Receiving things to understand their sources, searching for the passing things to understand their ends, only the *I Ching* can do that. (...) Therefore the important thing for the comprehension of the *I Ching* is the ability to understand whether the Dao full or empty, increased or decreased, good, bad, or regretful, coming or passing; but the essential thing resides in not losing its rectitude. (ibid., 33–34)

7 Translated into English by James Legge (*I Ching*, “Xi ci I,” 5).

8 Translated into English by James Legge (*Yinfu jing*, 7). The original text of the *Yinfu jing* is as follows: “the spring by which the despoilers are moved is invisible and unknown ...” (其盜機也、天下莫能見、莫能知...). Lê Quý Đôn’s quotation is somewhat different.

In the two quotations shown above, it is clear that Lê started from the premise that “*li* resides within *qi*” in order to express the variety of changes undergone by the universe and all things. But he also emphasized the way to grasp the constant *li* within the unceasing changes of *qi*, the true sense of “the profundity of *li* and *qi*” (理氣之奧). In other words, the sages foster all things; the Dao of the *I Ching* is the observation of constancy within change, the understanding of *li* within *qi*; this is the straightforward and simple Dao (*yijian zhi Dao* 易簡之道).

### *The Formation and Generation of Heaven and Earth*

Lê Quý Đôn paid much attention to cosmology, and in the volume “*Li-qi*” there are many arguments concerning *qi*. Here I will focus only on those statements mentioning Heaven and Earth that are directly connected to *qi*. Lê explained the formation of Heaven and Earth as follows:

How great is the originating power of *Qian* (乾)! All things rely on it to begin; that is to say, its *qi*. How supreme is the originating power of *Kun* (坤)! All things rely on it to be born; that is to say, its *xing* 形 (form; shape). To speak with respect to Heaven and Earth, each possesses form (*xing*) and *qi*; to speak with respect to the myriad things, they receive energy from Heaven, and take form thanks to the Earth. (Lê 2011, vol.1, 13)

In Lê's thought, “Heaven and Earth” refer to the basic principles of the creation of the universe, and *Qian* and *Kun* refer to the natural world. The sign *Qian* governs the virtue of Heaven, signifying the principle of creation, providing the basis for the beginning of the myriad things; *Kun* governs the virtue of Earth, signifying the principle of actualization, providing the basis for the birth of all things. But Lê explicates the virtues of *Qian* and *Kun* through the *qi*-transformations of Yin and Yang. Thus the creation of the myriad things is the mixture of the *qi* of *taiji* with the principle existing within *qi*. Analytically speaking, it is the *qi* of Yin and Yang that is used to explicate the composition of the universe and all within it.

All those arguments are meant to explain the formation of Heaven and Earth. Accordingly, Heaven belongs to *yang qi*, the Earth belongs to *yin qi*, or, in other words, Heaven belongs to pure *qi* and the Earth to turbid *qi*. Thus, from the aspect of *Qian*'s originating power, which refers to Heaven, *qi* denotes the invisible *qi*; from the aspect of *Kun*'s originating power, which refers to the Earth, *xing* denotes the visible *qi*. In the movement and interchange between Yin and Yang, Heaven is *qi* and the Earth is *xing*, and thanks to this Heaven and Earth are produced. The following statement explains the production of things: “Things receive *qi*



from Heaven and take form thanks to Earth”. According to this view, Heaven and Earth are both encompassed by the transformations of Yin and Yang. This is the model of traditional *qi*-transformative cosmology. Zhu Xi made a similar argument, writing: “By means of *qi*, Heaven clings to the *xing* of the Earth; by means of *xing*, the Earth clings to *qi* of Heaven” (Zhu 1986, 6). He continued: “At the beginning of Heaven and Earth, there are but Yin and Yang”, and that “the light and pure thing is Heaven, the heavy and turbid thing is the Earth” (ibid.). The *Qi* and *xing* that Lê Quý Đôn mentioned in “the Heaven and Earth” are identical to the *qi* and *zhi* 質 (matter) that Zhu Xi and other Song-Ming theorists of *li* mentioned. *Qi* means the invisible *qi*; the invisible *qi* gathers and thus accomplishes *zhi* (i.e., form, or *xing*); consequently Heaven and Earth are constituted by *xing* (or *zhi*) and *qi*.

What of the formation of Heaven and Earth? Lê explained this based on the concept of *ti-yong* (substance and function):

Viewed from the perspective of distribution, Heaven belongs to Yang, Earth to Yin; Yang maintains activity (主動), and Yin maintains motionlessness (*zhujing* 主靜). However, the function (*yong*) of Heaven is in perpetual motion, though its substance (*ti*) is motionless to some extent; the substance of Earth is perpetually motionless, but its function moves to some extent. If Heaven were not motionless, then how would the Four Directions (四維) be secure and stable? What would the Seven Celestial Bodies (七政) have to rely on? If the Earth were not moving, it would just be a mere thing, with almost no vital energy. Heaven’s form is active and its *qi* is motionless; the Earth’s form is motionless and its *qi* is active. (Lê 2011, vol.1, 14–15)

Maintaining that Heaven and Earth are constituted by means of *xing* and *qi*, Lê extended his discussion to analyse more deeply the Yin and Yang that form *xing* and *qi*’s construction, as well as their interactive functions, which make the universe’s myriad things multiply unceasingly. Lê relied on Zhu Xi’s view of *ti-yong*, pointing out that, although Heaven acts and develops due to *yang qi*, its essence is never not motionless, but is instead the most motionless substance, thereby allowing Heaven’s four corners and the Sun, Moon, and five planets to be stable. Similarly, although the Earth belongs to *yin qi*, it is not an immovable thing. Its essence is motionless, but its function is accomplished by interactions between Yin and Yang. In brief, Lê maintained the position that “Heaven is motionless and the Earth is moving”. In other words, if we consider Heaven and Earth in general, we can divide them by Yin and Yang, motionlessness and movement, substance and function; but when considering the formation of Heaven and

Earth, we see that there is always interaction between Yin and Yang, substance and function, motionlessness and activity: that everything is in a state of unceasing growth and development.

### *Changes of Fengqi*

Lê Quý Đôn explained the formation and transformation of Heaven and Earth through a discussion of interactions between Yin and Yang. Natural phenomena could be observed readily in Lingnan area in southern China, allowing Lê to make observations of the various manifestations of Heavenly *qi* in nature, among them the changes of *fengqi* 風氣 (atmosphere; wind and air). Lê commented:

All below Heaven and above the Earth is *fengqi*. Near places where people live, one does not perceive there being wind, likely because there are many obstacles and life forces (*shengyi* 生意) that combine to make it disappear. In high places, the wind becomes strong; the higher the place is, the stronger and harder the wind becomes. In addition, if we dig a hole of about 2 meters at the foot of a mountain, we can see that the soil brought up is at first soft and wet, and afterwards becomes solid as a rock. Is this not because of contact with the wind? When still being a foetus, an infant is nothing but a clot of blood; after being born it becomes solid, due to the same reason. The Heaven's *qi* comes down, the Earth's *qi* rises up, those *qi* are all vital forces. There is no time in which the *fengqi* circulating in that space does not exist; it is not that it exists when moving and does not when motionless. (ibid., 17)

In Lê's view, there is always circulation and change of *qi* in the space between Heaven and Earth; when it comes to the invisible *qi*, the most concrete aspect of which and that which can be felt directly is the wind (風, *phong*), which he called *fengqi* (風氣, *phong khí*). Through the observation of natural phenomena, he saw that the wind is strong in high places because there are no obstacles, and that at extreme heights there is nothing but the wind. By the same logic, he conjectured that the soil when underground is soft and wet, and when put on the ground becomes solid because of the wind; and the condition of infants in the womb and after birth is also related to changes in the wind. Thus, in Lê's view, the descent of Heaven's *qi* and the ascent of Earth's *qi* naturally form the exchange of Yin and Yang, and is called *fengqi*. The movement of *fengqi* is the vital energy of Heaven and Earth, whether motionless or in motion, *fengqi* is always moving unceasingly. It can be seen from natural phenomena that the "invisible *qi*" is atmosphere or

the air, and the wind that is comprised of and begins to move from *qi* can penetrate all objects and spaces; thus Zhu Xi also stated, based on his observation of nature, that “wind is a thing that can enter every other thing” (Zhu 1986, vol. 39, 2287). However, Lê Quý Đôn wanted to use the wind as a natural phenomenon to understand other natural phenomena, signifying his high level of interest in natural cosmology. From the standpoint of modern natural science, it can be said that although Lê’s explanations are simplistic, they demonstrate that his *qi*-transformative cosmology was based on the observation of nature.

Lê’s attention to *fengqi* can also be seen in his writing on *jufeng* 颶風 (typhoon, hurricane):

In the word *ju* 颶 (typhoon, hurricane), there is the word *ju* 具 (to possess all). That means it consists of all the winds: East, West, South and North. If the typhoon starts to blow in the morning, it will last for three days; if it begins in the afternoon, it will last for seven days. The typhoon starting at noon will last only one day. When the typhoon starts to blow, if it blows in from the northeast, then it will blow from North to West. If it blows in from the northwest, then it will blow from the North to the East. All turn South and cease. This is called “falling onto the West” and “returning to the South”. If they do not fall onto the West or return to the South, then there will be another typhoon one month later. The typhoon is always on time: if it starts in the daytime, it will end the following day after, if it starts in night-time, it will drop the following night. *Jufeng* is an improper wind, with changes that go contrary to *qi*, but it still has a constant principle like that. (Lê 2011, 18–19)

Lê’s explanation of *jufeng* shows that he paid much attention to changes in *fengqi*. For Lê, a *jufeng* was not a “proper wind”, but rules of movement can still be discerned in it. Such an explanation cannot be experimentally verified by modern science, but it is representative of a pre-modern Chinese view of nature which relied on *qi*-transformative cosmology, and also displays Lê’s broad vast knowledge in the field of *gewu* (investigating thing).

Besides his explanation of natural phenomena based on *fengqi*,<sup>9</sup> Lê Quý Đôn also had a positive attitude towards the theory of *fengshui* 風水,<sup>10</sup> writing:

9 As Lê wrote: “Dry *qi* is wind, if the wind scatters then it will be clear; the wet *qi* are clouds, if the clouds gather then it will rain. All of them are the harmonious and fluent *qi*. The dry *qi* and the wet *qi* combine and produce fog; heavy fog produces miasma; that is the foul and constricted *qi*.” (Lê 2011, 18)

10 On the theory of *fengshui*, see Needham 1984, 23–30.

Hengqu 橫渠 (Zhang Dai) did not believe in *fengshui*, but he said: “People in the south trust in the *Qingnang jing* 青囊經, so it must be reliable”. The southerners test the place to bury the dead by putting a silk thread of five colours underground. After a few years, they take it up and examine it. If the colour of the thread does not change, then the soil is good; if the colour fades, then the soil is not good. They also put a small fish into a jar full of water and bury it for a few years. If the fish is still alive, then the soil there is good, if it is dead, then the soil is bad. Thus, we can use the health of plants to understand whether the soil there is good or not. (Lê 2011, vol. 1, 36)

The *qi*-transformative cosmology had been a traditional mode of thinking among the Chinese people ever since the Han, but Song-Ming Confucians pioneered a new concept, in which ethical-rational thinking was seen as the foundation for the study of the world and all it contains. Thus Zhang Dai 張戴 (1020–1077), the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian who discussed *qi* the most, did not believe in *fengshui* theory at all. However, Lê cited Zhang Hengqu’s observation of natural phenomena, suggesting that *fengshui* theory does agree with *qi*-transformative cosmology, and that theories of medicine, divination, and *fengshui*, which consider phenomena based on changes in *fengqi*, have their own principles that should not be disregarded.

### *Tianren Hede and Tianren Ganying*

Lê not only paid attention to *qi*-transformative cosmology but also accepted the Neo-Confucian concept of *Tianren hede* 天人合德 (harmony in virtue of man with Heaven, *Thiên nhân hợp đức*), as well as the idea of *Tianren ganying* 天人感應 (mutual interaction of the Heaven and man, *Thiên nhân cảm ứng*) that had taken deep root in China from the Han Dynasty onward. In the chapter “*Li-qi*”, the opening statement reads as follows:

Heaven regards *xu* 虛 (emptiness) as the Dao, the Earth regards *jing* 靜 (motionlessness; calmness) as the Dao; if man is empty and motionless, he can unite with the Dao of Heaven and Earth. Because if he is empty then he will clarify himself (*ziming* 自明); if he is motionless, then he will be settled by himself (*ziding* 自定). A clarified mind and a settled principle; these are the very effects of participation and assistance. (ibid., vol. 1, 13)

Here Lê did not use Yin and Yang to describe the Dao of Heaven and Earth, but relied on *xu* and *jing* to explain their virtue. Thus man, united in virtue as Heaven and Earth, should use *xu* and *jing* to become harmonious with the Dao of Heaven and Earth, and those who possess clear minds and settled principles can participate and assist in the cultivation of Heaven and Earth. In actuality, the virtue of *xu* and *jing* and the clear mind and settled principle Lê mentioned are the same “motionless mind and clear principle” (心靜理明) that Zhu Xi emphasized, and are in agreement with his theory of *gewu zhizhi*.

The most important thing that allows Heaven and man to share the same virtue is the rectification of man’s mind (*zhengxin* 正心). Therefore, Lê Quý Đôn wrote:

The mind of man is extremely great; it can communicate well with Heaven and Earth, measure *guishen* 鬼神 (ghosts and spirits), and investigate all things. The mystery of *xiang* 象 (appearance) and *shu* 數 (fate, number), scattering over *xing* 形 (form) and *qi*, going out from *wu* 無 (non-being) to *you* 有 (being), entering to *wu* from *you*: within both obscure and clear space, everything is the Dao. If man has a right mind, he can understand the Dao; if he understands the Dao, he can see *ji* 幾 (a tiny thing; an opportunity); if he sees *ji*, he can fulfil his function; if he fulfils his function, he can attain power. Fate is produced by man; it cannot produce man. The principle of *Tianren heyi* 天人合一 (the oneness of Heaven and man, Thiên nhân hợp nhất) is no more than that. (ibid., vol. 1, 31–32)

Lê clearly emphasized the positive, active nature of the rectification of man’s mind; only with a right mind can man understand the Dao and apply the principles of *Tianren hede* and *Tianren heyi*. The rightness that Lê emphasized here typifies the thought of Neo-Confucianism, especially Zhu Xi’s concept of *Tianren hede*.

In spite of this, based on his great interest in *qi*-transformative cosmology, Lê was nonetheless influenced by the Han Dynasty theory of *Tianren ganying* (mutual interaction between Heaven and man, Thiên nhân cảm ứng). Using a solar eclipse as an example, he argued as follows:

Solar eclipses have constant laws of behaviour, but they usually have a connection with changes in human matters. When a man is about to do evil, at that moment the moon enters the eclipse phase, and approaches to covers the sun; it is the *qi* of man that affects Heaven. When Heaven wishes to produce clouds or rain, then a man who was beaten or injured feels a sharp pain; this is how the *qi* of Heaven affects man. Thus Heaven and man share the same *li*. (ibid., vol. 1, 24)

He also considered the interactions between the change of the natural *qi* and the vicissitudes of life:

The actions of *qi*, how mysterious and refined they are! If *qi* is abundant then it will be comfortable; if it is decreased then it will be reduced. This can be seen through the growth and withering of plants. If *qi* is pure then it will be flowing; if it is turbid then it will be obstructed. This can be seen in the brightness and darkness of the human mind. If *qi* is full then it will grow; if it is empty it will disappear. This can be seen in the morning and afternoon tides. If *qi* is harmonious it will be united; if it is irregular it will be separated. This can be seen in the vicissitudes of life (世道之治亂). (ibid., vol. 1, 23–24)

Comparing the changes brought on by eclipses to changes in human matters is typical of the Han *Tianren ganying* concept; and the concept of a principle shared by man and Heaven that is obtained from the empirical observation of natural phenomena, in which man's *qi* affects Heaven and Heaven's *qi* affects man, is an explanation based on a transformative *qi*, not on a vision of the shared virtue of Heaven and man. Similarly, the unceasing changes of *qi*, the interactions between Ying and Yang, purity and turbidity, between brightness and darkness of human mind, between changes of nature and the vicissitudes of life: their relations of inevitability are effected based on the mutual interactions of transforming *qi*, not on the self-consciousness of morality. All of the preceding arguments show connections with the *Tianren ganying* concept and its intellectual connection with *qi*-transformative cosmology.

### *Guishen, Daoism, and Buddhism*

The Song-Ming theory of *Tianren hede* (harmony in virtue of Heaven and man) and the Han concept of *Tianren ganying* are both reflected in Lê Quý Đôn's explanation of *guishen* 鬼神 (ghosts and spirits, *quỷ thần*). In the 54 discourses on *li-qi* contained in Lê's book, one quotes Zhu Xi's theory and then comments as follows:

Zhuzi said: "Bending and extending, going and coming, that is *qi*. The *qi* of man and that of Heaven and Earth connect with one another without interruption. The human mind moves slightly and immediately reaches *qi*, and interacts with that *qi* which bends and extends, goes and comes. Like in divination, all within the mind inherently has this thing, and it



only takes something to come up within the wind; as soon as it moves, it immediately interacts.” He also said: “Man receives the *qi* of the *wuxing* (五行, five elements); that *qi* must pass through the human body. Current people use the *wuxing* to infer man’s fate, much as the geomancer seeks and selects whether something should face or turn its back to the mountain or the forest; all of these things share the same *li*.” I would say: it can be seen in those two statements that Zhuzi not only appreciated divination, but also that he did not neglect discussions on fate (命數) and appearances (形象). People who are fond of disputation usually exclude those two theories, but in the last analysis they have a connection with *li* and *qi* and so cannot be disregarded. (Lê 2011, vol. 1, 34–35)

For Song Dynasty Neo-Confucians of *li* such as Zhang Zai or Zhu Xi, *guishen* are nothing but *qi*, bending and extending, going and coming. Thus Zhu Xi said: “*guishen* are but *qi*”, “nothing but *yin* and *yang*, decreasing and increasing”; adding that “*shen* means extending, *gui* means bending; wind and rain, thunder and lightning: the moment when they start is *shen*, the moment when they stop and pass is *gui*” (Zhu 1986, vol. 3, 34). It can be seen that in Zhu Xi’s discourse on *guishen*, there is no sense of mystery at all. When it came to the mysterious theories of *guishen* circulating among the common people, Zhu Xi regarded them with the traditional negative attitude attributed to Confucius: “While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve *guishen*?” Thus, Zhu Xi said, “Serving *guishen* must be the second thing. Those without form or shadow are very difficult to understand, thus one should not spend time to understand them, but instead devote one’s efforts to daily urgent matters” (ibid., 33). When it came to divination, Zhu Xi also based his position on the idea that “if the mind is sincere, then one may interact with the spirits”. Similarly, much like inferences about human fate drawn from the five elements and the geomancer’s inferential selection of *fengshui*, when it comes to inferences about *qi*, if one has *li*, then they can be followed. In the discourses of Zhu Xi above, it is crucial to note that he mentioned divination and theories of fate and physiognomy to clarify the interactions of *qi*, but Lê quoted them to emphasize that Zhu Xi had an appreciation for divination and *fengshui*. Consequently, in his theory of *li-qi*, Lê had a positive attitude toward the mysterious explanation of *guishen* which was circulating among the common people, as well as their understandings of divination, fate, and *fengshui*, among others.<sup>11</sup>

11 Lê even cited historical figures as examples to justify divination. He wrote: “Chengzi said: ‘The ancients used divination to remove doubts, but later generations did not. They practice divination only to understand their fates and whether they will be successful or not.’ I think sages established their instruction so that people can decide and deal with their doubts, not to teach people to seek profit and success. Thus it is said that ‘the *I Ching* is not for small men to seek profit.’ But when

Similarly, Lê was tolerant toward Daoism and Buddhism, writing:

Daoist theories focus on refining the form, Buddhist theories focus on refining the spirit. Form and spirit are all produced from *qi*; when *qi* gathers, the Dao is completed; when *qi* scatters, the Dao is incomplete. Taking the sun and moon as examples: Daoism is like their substance, Buddhism is like their shadow. The substance is in the heavens on high, but it cannot be said to not be there, while the shadow dissipates in the water, but it cannot be said that it does not exist. (ibid., 47)

For Lê, Daoism emphasized the refinement of form, while Buddhism emphasized the refinement of spirit; form and spirit, when it comes to *qi*, can be encapsulated by the Confucian statement about *qi*-transformative cosmology mentioned previously, namely that “things receive *qi* from Heaven, and take form thanks to Earth”. Even though most Confucian scholars would not have believed in the Buddhist theory of *samsara* (輪迴, *luân hòì*), Lê had a positive attitude toward it.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, he did not use the theory of *li-qi* to reject Daoism and Buddhism, unlike Song-Ming Confucian scholars; by contrast, he regarded the theory of *li-qi* as a common theoretical framework shared by all three teachings.

### *Lê Quý Đôn's Reception of and Appreciation for Western Missionaries and their Natural Scientific Knowledge*

As a prominent Confucian scholar with substantial international perspective, Lê had a considerable interest in the Western theories of nature that had been introduced into China in the 17th and 18th centuries. Lê wrote:

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the gentlemen encounter doubts in their self-management and thus want to consult *guishen*, for example: Bi Wan divining his official career, Zhong Er of Jin divining his return home; although they did for themselves, such deeds did not harm their orthodoxy.” (Lê 2011, vol. 1, 51–52)

- 12 Lê wrote: “There is the theory of *samsara* in the Buddhist classics that Confucian scholars usually do not trust. But things that people have long since seen and heard and then recorded are uncountable, the majority of them cannot but have this *li*. Confucius said: ‘The virtue of *guishen* is much abundant. We look for them, but do not see them, we listen to but do not hear them. They seem to be over the heads, and on the right and left of worshipers’ (Zhongyong, ch.16). The theories of underworld seem to be fabulous. But, generally speaking, it is because of the mystery of creation and the separation between Yin and Yang that people are unable to see and hear. When worshipping, *gui* and *shen* come down to observe; this is the gathering of the spirit although the body has been turned to dust. The Buddhist classics discuss the process of ‘receiving the form and being reincarnated’; this is the same as knowledge of *shen*. The quintessence of the sun and the moon comes down and becomes water and fire; the *qi* of water and fire rises up and becomes wind and thunder. The mystery of Heaven and Earth’s changes cannot be measured, let alone the people.” (ibid., 48–49)



The book by the Westerner, *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 (*Illustrated Explanation of the Entire World, Khôn dư đồ thuyết*), said: “Without *qi*, the interior of Heaven is empty, how can the Earth be suspended by emptiness and reside therein?” It continues: “Birds fly because they are able to manage *qi* (air) with their wings, just as man swims by managing the water with his arms.” It continues: “Man waves hands toward the emptiness (the air), and then there emerges sound. If there is no *qi*, then there is nothing else that can produce sound. The emptiness is still and there is no wind in the air, but we can see the dust moving up and down in the light that gets between the cracks; it must be *qi* that causes this.” I have quoted these phrases to prove that *qi* really exists; it is odd that others are still surprised at it. The book *Tonglun* (*On Penetration*) by Xue Xuan 薛瑄 of the Ming Dynasty writes: “When we wave a fan, we can see the wind blowing; it can be seen that there is nowhere without *qi* between Heaven and Earth.” It continues: “That dust unceasingly flies everywhere between Heaven and Earth, that is the result caused by *qi*.”<sup>13</sup> If we observe sunlight shining through a window, we can understand that this idea agrees with the statements above. The book *Suwen* 素問 (*Simple Questions*) also writes: “In coming up and down, going out and entering, *qi* is never lacking.” (Lê 2011, vol. 1, 16)

Lê went on to write:

The ancients said: “From the Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Western seas there appeared sages whose minds and *li* are the same.” (...) Limadou (Ricci), Nanhuai (Verbiest), Airulüe (Aleni) and others from European countries of the West came to China during the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty; their discussions of Heaven and Earth were extremely profound; their political principles and calendar had many things that previous Confucian scholars had not discovered. Although their language and writing were not similar, in terms of the minds and wills they possessed and the talent and intellect expressed by their depth

13 Lê Quý Đôn referred to Xue Xuan’s text as *Tonglun* (*On Penetration*) in both of the manuscripts I was able to look through, but I suspect that Lê might have misunderstood, and that the text in question was actually the book *Daolun* 道論 (*On the Dao*). There are some slight differences between the statements that Lê quoted and the contents of Xue Xuan’s *Daolun*. Xue Xuan’s *Daolun* writes: “When we wave a fan, we can see the wind blowing; it can be seen that there is nowhere without *qi*.” It continues: “Between Heaven and Earth, dust flies everywhere, never stopping, never interrupting: that is the result caused by *qi*. We can understand this if we see sunlight shining through a window. When we wave a fan, we can see the wind blowing; it can be seen that, between Heaven and Earth, there is nowhere without *qi*.” (Xue 1985, 7)

of knowledge, in what sense are they different from Zhongzhou 中州 (China)?" (ibid., 46–47)

It can be observed from the previous two quotations that Lê Quý Đôn had at least some knowledge of the Western natural philosophy that had been introduced into China prior to the 18th century by Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), and it is apparent that he had read Verbiest's *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 (*Illustrated Explanation of the Entire World*). The interesting thing here is that Lê still relied on a traditional Chinese *qi*-transformative cosmology to explain or come to terms with Western scientific conceptions of nature, a cosmology within which *qi* or *fengqi* still are taken for granted for any comparison with Western natural scientific knowledge, making use, as well, of the traditional notion of “transforming *qi*”. From this starting point, he endorsed the idea of Western and Chinese sages possessing kindred minds and wills, and positively evaluated the scientific knowledge of nature that Western missionaries introduced to China, especially their contributions to the creation of calendars.

## Conclusion

Even though many Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, were influenced by Chinese culture to various extents throughout their histories, it was in Vietnam where the influence of Confucianism ran deepest by far. After its introduction in the early period, Confucianism became an essential part of traditional Vietnamese culture. Taking Lê Quý Đôn's theory of *li-qi* as a representative case study, this essay has shown some of the characteristics of that indigenization of Confucianism. The Later Lê Dynasty (1428–1789) saw Confucianism reach a zenith; Lê Quý Đôn, who lived at the dynasty's end, can be regarded as the great synthesizer of Vietnamese Confucianism. His output was prolific, consisting of discussions of Confucian classical texts and covering astronomy, geography, and social matters; it also reflected his international experience, gained from two diplomatic trips to Qing China. Among his works, *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) typifies his encyclopaedic knowledge and reflects the depth of influence exerted by Confucianism on his thought. Consisting of nine volumes, the “Preface” of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) confirms that basis for the book's compilation stemmed from Zhu Xi's concept of *gewu zhizhi* and his position that Confucian scholars, in their efforts to investigate the *li* in all things, must fully study the constant *li* amidst a always changing world, relying on those efforts in order to cultivate their persons, regulate their families,

order their states and pacify the world. The fact that Lê named the first volume of *Yuntai leiyu* (*Vân đài loại ngữ*) “*Li-qi*” gives further evidence for his attraction to and appreciation for Zhu Xi’s *li-qi* theory.

However, from my analysis of the contents of that same volume, I have found that Lê Quý Đôn’s concept of *li-qi* draws on a traditional *qi*-transformative cosmology which originated in the Han Dynasty, and at the same time was influenced by Zhu Xi’s view that “*li* and *qi* are not separate”. Lê affirmed that “what fills out the Heaven and Earth is *qi*”, showing a deep interest in cosmology. At the same time, he emphasized that “*li* exists within *qi*”, referencing a search for a constant *li* within a transforming *qi*. The viewpoint that “*li* is not mixed with *qi*” and the metaphysical arguments (such as the views that “it is *li* that produces *qi*” or that “*li* comes first, *qi* comes later”) are thus not the main elements of Zhu Xi’s theory of *li-qi* to which Lê paid attention. Additionally, within Lê’s theory of *li-qi*, although Lê regarded the Neo-Confucian viewpoint of *tianren hede* as a central element, he still maintained the position of *tianren ganying* that was typical of Han *qi*-transformative cosmology. Therefore, Lê’s thought is not identical with the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, with its reverence for rational nature as well as its rejection of “irrational” remnant elements of Han *qi*-transformative cosmology.

By contrast, Lê Quý Đôn combined Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism with Han *qi*-transformative cosmology to create his own theory of *li-qi*, and was able to harmonize the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, in so doing perpetuating an extant Vietnamese tradition of syncretism. He also had a positive attitude toward theories of medicine, divination, *fengshui*, and *guishen*, drawing on Vietnamese folk customs. In particular, based on his observations of the transforming *qi* of Heaven and Earth, he emphasized the diversity of *fengqi*, and analysed the differences between foreign and domestic, as well as ancient and contemporary, conditions and customs. Finally, while still relying on the theory of *li-qi*, Lê accepted the Western natural science that had been introduced to China in the 17th and 18th centuries, and maintained an open-minded and positive attitude towards the teachings of Jesuit missionaries.

But the metaphysical viewpoint is not the most important aspect of Lê Quý Đôn’s theory of *li-qi*. When examining the diversity of *fengqi* discussed in his thought, we can see the reciprocal influences of the natural environment, history, and culture of Vietnam, reflecting what the Japanese scholar Tetsuro Watsuji called specific “climatic features”, or *fūdo* 風土. For Watsuji, *fūdo* is generic term referring to the atmosphere, climate, geography, quality of the soil, and landscape of a given area, also called its “natural environment” (水土) (Watsuji 1962, 7). However, for Watsuji, climate is not only explained by natural features, but can also be seen as

a humanistic concept, reflecting a reciprocal influence (ibid., 24–43).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, what Lê Quý Đôn emphasized in his theory of *li-qi* were the reciprocal influences among transformative *qi*, geography, *fengshui*, and *fengqi*, and their impact on customs, cultures, and habits. Likewise, if research on the development of Vietnamese Confucianism is based on a theory of “climactic features”, it will reveal more of the richness of Vietnamese Confucianism than studies narrowly focused on metaphysics or doctrine of heart-mind and human nature, and will allow the characteristics of the localization of Vietnamese Confucianism to be shown more clearly.

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14 According to Watsuji’s typology of *fūdo*, Vietnam can be seen as a typical monsoon area. Tetsuro Watsuji’s theory of *fūdo* emphasizes the inseparable connection between natural and humanistic features; in Watsuji’s conception, Vietnam belongs to the monsoon area. This has encouraged me, in my studies of Vietnamese Confucianism, to pay attention to the role of climate, broadly conceived, and especially to the influence of climate on social factors, rather than focusing exclusively on metaphysical thinking. Thus Vietnamese Confucianism, in contrast to Korean or Japanese Confucianism, does not display factionalism; typical neo-Confucian themes, such as metaphysical thinking and efforts based on *xin-xing* (doctrine of heart-mind and human nature) are also not the main focus of Vietnamese Confucianism. Through a study of the geographic conditions of Vietnam and its ethnic demographics, we may be better able to understand how “climate”, broadly conceived, transformed and indigenized Vietnamese Confucianism. However, this question exceeds the scope of this paper, and I hope to return to the issue in the near future.

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# Philosophical Transmission and Contestation: The Impact of Qing Confucianism in Southern Vietnam

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## Abstract

Southern Vietnam was reclaimed by the Vietnamese in the mid-seventeenth century. They first brought their folk Buddhism and various popular religions to new land; however, the bureaucratic system then forced the Chinese Han–Song Dynasties’ institutionalized and politicalized Confucianism on the population. The arrival of the Chinese from overseas since the late seventeenth century marked the introduction of Qing Confucianism into Southern Vietnam, shaping the pro-Yangming studies among local literati. Many writers claim that Qing Confucianism had no impact on Vietnam. Obviously, however, these writers ignored the diversity of Vietnamese Confucianism in the new frontiers in the South. Qing Confucianism was truly absorbed into many aspects of life among the local gentry, popularizing the so-called pro-Yangming studies.

The article aims to study the transmission, contestation, transformation, and manipulation of Qing Confucianism in Southern Vietnam by penetrating deeper into the life, career, mentality, merits, and influence of local Confucianists and reviving the legacies of practical learning in local scholarship. The research discovers that the practical learning of Qing Confucianism dominated the way of thinking and acting of local elites, affecting ideological, educational, cultural and socio-economic domains of local society. However, the domination of the classical Confucian orthodoxy and the lack of state-sponsored institutionalization in late feudal periods, as well as the later overwhelming imposition of Western civilization under French colonial rule, seriously challenged and downgraded the impacts of Qing Confucianism in Vietnam. Therefore, Yangming studies were once transmitted but had limited impact on Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Qing Confucianism, Southern Vietnam, practical learning, Yangming studies, transmitted and contested

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## Prenos filozofije in nasprotovanja: vpliv qingovskega konfucianizma na Južni Vietnam

### Izvleček

Vietnamci so ozemlje Južnega Vietnama pridobili sredi sedemnajstega stoletja. Na novo pridobljeno ozemlje se je sprva širil ljudski budizem in različne ljudske religije, kasneje pa je birokratski sistem ljudstvu vsilil še institucionaliziran in spolitiziran kitajski konfucianizem, ki se je izoblikoval med dinastijama Han in Song. Kitajski prišleki so v Južni Vietnam od poznega sedemnajstega stoletja naprej prinašali qingovski konfucianizem, pri čemer so se med lokalnimi literati izoblikovale t. i. proyangmingove študije. Številni pisci trdijo, da qingovski konfucianizem ni vplival na razvoj v Vietnamu, a so očitno prezrli raznolikost vietnamskega konfucianizma na novih južnih mejah. Ta je namreč vplival na številne vidike življenja lokalnega plemstva, predvsem pa je populariziral t. i. proyangmingove študije.

Namen članka je z raziskovanjem življenja, karier, mentalitete, zaslug in vplivov lokalnih konfucianistov ter s tem oživljanja dediščine praktičnega učenja v lokalni produkciji znanja prikazati prenos, nasprotovanje, transformacijo in manipulacijo qingovskega konfucianizma v Južnem Vietnamu. Študija je pokazala, da je praktično učenje qingovskega konfucianizma določalo način mišljenja in delovanje lokalnih elit ter s tem vplivalo na ideološka, izobraževalna, kulturna in družbeno-ekonomska področja lokalne družbe. Pri tem pa so prevlada klasične konfucijanske ortodoksosti, pomanjkanje institucionalizacije v poznem fevdalnem obdobju, ki bi jo podpirala država, ter kasnejše uvajanje zahodne civilizacije pod francosko kolonialno vlado postopoma zmanjšali vpliv qingovskega konfucianizma, Yangmingove študije pa so tako v Vietnamu imele zgolj omejen vpliv.

**Ključne besede:** qingovski konfucianizem, Južni Vietnam, praktično učenje, Yangmingove študije, prenos in nasprotovanja

## The Conservativeness of Vietnamese Confucianism from an East Asian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that some Western scholars warn others to be careful when calling Vietnam a Confucian society, Confucianism has been deeply rooted in the Vietnamese mindset for almost two thousand years. This is the result of both imposition by Chinese rulers during the first millennium AD, and voluntary adoption by the Vietnamese bureaucracy during the second. Confucianism has helped

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to advance the frontiers of Vietnam and create a reasonable platform “where the Vietnamese people gained a national identity which made further Chinese intrusion improbable, rare, and finally wholly discontinued” (Fitzgerald 1972, 213).

The Vietnamese in late feudal periods followed both Confucianism and Buddhism (Buttinger 1968, 15), and to some extent the latter surpassed the former. According to Dung N. Duong, under specific circumstances, Confucianism and Daoism had to “accommodate” themselves to Buddhism (Duong 2004, 300) by accepting Buddhist influences on certain Confucian concepts such as filial piety, humane-ness, righteousness, etc., while Nguyen Ngoc Huy claimed that Vietnamese Confucianism has always been challenged by Buddhism (Nguyen 1998, 93). Unlike the case of China and Korea, traditional Confucian elites in Vietnam did not militantly oppose and or attempt to eradicate Buddhist influence, as they did not have a strong demand for building a “metaphysical counter-tradition”<sup>2</sup> to Buddhism (see Woodside 2002, 117, 127, 131).

After several waves of Confucian imposition in Northern Vietnam, the Chinese rulers in the fifth century became so surprised that Vietnamese Buddhism was as advanced as it was in China (Taylor 1976, 171); therefore, the Chinese rulers sometimes utilized Buddhism to calm down tensions in this colony. Jennifer Holmgren confirmed that there was a counterbalanced wave in Vietnam during the first six centuries of Chinese rule, where there was more “Vietnamization” of local Chinese than Sinicization of indigenous tradition (Holmgren 1980, 61: 115–19; also cited in Kiernan 2017). A similar claim can be found in Joseph Buttinger’s work, where Confucianism failed to Sinicize the local Vietnamese. He asserted that “the more they (Vietnamese) absorbed of the skills, customs, and ideas of the Chinese, the smaller grew the likelihood of their ever becoming part of the Chinese people” (Buttinger 1968, 29). Buttinger pointed to several reasons for this, including (1) the long prehistory of the Vietnamese, where the roots of local culture probably reached deeply into their pre-Chinese past, and (2) purely geographic conditions, whereby the Chinese could not control the Vietnamese effectively (*ibid.*). Truong Tũu, a twentieth-century writer, concluded that “... Confucianism was a force in Vietnamese society, but it was one that stimulated a strong cultural reaction” (Trương 1950, 183).

After several unsuccessful uprisings during the previous centuries, Vietnam regained its independence in 938 AD under Ngô Quyền’s (897–944) leadership. The Lý Dynasty (1009–1225) was built mainly on Buddhist ideology, while Confucian scholars were simply in charge of the maintenance of the Confucian cult at

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2 This term is adopted from Woodside (2002, 127), meaning an ideological standpoint that can function as a counterweight to Buddhism.

the Court (see Hall 1976, 15). The Trần Dynasty (1225–1400) largely shared similarities with the Lý, even though in this period Confucian schools were opened in important administrative centres and civic examinations were launched following the Chinese model (officially in 1247). Chu Văn An<sup>3</sup> and Hồ Quý Ly<sup>4</sup> are two significant Confucian scholars who laid the groundwork for Vietnamese Confucianism in this dynasty. Keith Taylor and Oliver Wolters showed that Lý and Trần rulers (1010–1400) pursued forms of legitimation (usually from local spirit cults and Buddhist beliefs) other than Confucianism (Taylor 1986, 139–76; Wolters 1996, 106).

The second period of Chinese rule (1407–1427) during the Ming Dynasty left in Vietnam a stronger form of Neo-Confucianism modelled on that in China (with a system of 126 Confucian schools), which was then adopted by local Vietnamese elites such as Phan Phu Tiên (1370–1462), Ngô Sĩ Liên (1400–?), Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491–1585), Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784), and so on. The *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* (大越史記全書, *Complete Historical Annals of Đại Việt*) recorded that in the seventeenth year of Yongle Reign (1419), the Yongle Emperor of China ordered that Confucian texts, *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* (四書五經, *Tứ Thư Ngũ Kinh*) be taken to Đại Việt (or Annam, as it was called by the Chinese) for the sake of Sinicizing the local education system. These were later used as classical texts for education and civic examinations during the Lê Dynasty (1428–1789). Even though Confucian education was based on the Chinese model, the Vietnamese political philosophy was very different from its Chinese counterpart.

The Vietnamese culture was based mainly on Neo-Confucianism, at least since the beginning of the Lê Dynasty (1428–1789). Many people called the Confucian ideology “cửa Khổng sân Trình” (the gate of Confucius and the yard of two Chengs (i.e., Cheng Hao (程顥, Trình Hạo, 1032–1085) and Cheng Yi (程頤, Trình Di, 1033–1107)). However, Vietnamese Confucians did not engage in Neo-Confucian “metaphysical speculation”, as found in the East Asian states, and did not participate in the dynamic Confucian debates regionally (see Elman et al. 2002, 17). Alexander Woodside called Vietnamese elites “the Methodists of the Confucian world” since they had a strong interest in the quality of direct

3 Chu Văn An (朱文安, 1292–1370) was the first significant Vietnamese scholar who discussed the Confucian classics. His famous work, the *Tứ Thư Thuyết Ước* (四書說約, *The Brief Interpretation of Four Books*) was composed on the ideological framework of Zhu Xi’s the *Sishu Jizhu* (四書集注, *Concise Notes of Four Books*).

4 Hồ Quý Ly (胡季犛, 1336–1407?) was a nobleman of the Trần Dynasty (1225–1400) who took over the throne in 1400 and established the Hồ Dynasty (1400–1407) before the Ming invasion and rule (1407–1428). He was the author of a number of poems that conveyed important Confucian virtues and ideas.

practical experience without a deep concern with doctrine (Woodside 2002, 127, 211; Trần 1973; 1975). McHale was more serious when downgrading Vietnamese Confucianism as “a poor and fragmented understanding of the teaching” (McHale 2004, 67). Phan Đại Doãn, a twentieth-century writer, proposed that ancient Vietnamese elites had “simplified” Confucianism from China, and focused only on its practical applications (Phan 1998). The Vietnamese feudal states and their bureaucrats failed to function as an effective agent of Confucianization.

The Tây Sơn Dynasty (1789–1802) and the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945) once again combined Han Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism by extracting practical experience from all previous generations to serve their social interests. Alexander Woodside concluded that Vietnamese Confucianism reached its height in the 1800s by applying *Zhou's Rituals* (周禮, *Chu Lễ*) into its administrative work rather than using them for philosophical appropriation and philological work (see Woodside 2002, 136). As a result, late feudal Vietnam remained on its own trajectory of Confucian application. *Đại Nam thực lục* (the *Annals of Đại Nam*) states that in the fourth year of the reign of Minh Mạng (1824), Ngô Đình Giá, an educational bureaucrat, asked to use *Tứ thư Ngũ kinh* (四書五經, *The Four Books and Five Classics*), *Tính lý đại toàn* (性理大全, *The Complete Collection of Neo-Confucianism*), *Thông giám cương mục* (通鑑綱目, *Outlines and details of the Comprehensive Mirror*), *Đại học diễn nghĩa* (大學演義, *The Romance of the Great Learning*), *Cổ văn uyên giám* (古文淵鑑, *An Insight into the Ancient Essays*), and so on as official textbooks in Vietnamese schools (see Quốc 2002, 56). In 1823, the work based on Zhu Xi's *lixue* (理學, Neo-Confucianism), the *Luận ngữ ngu án* (論語愚按, *Analysis and Comment on Analects of Confucius*), by Phạm Nguyễn Du (1740–1786) was published. Consequently, *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics*, as edited and interpreted by Zhu Xi, became the most important texts in Vietnam's feudal education regime (see further Đỗ 2018, 23–5).

Vietnamese Confucian elites emphasized the foundational texts of China's Zhou Dynasty even though the state governance and civic examination applied the Neo-Confucian mechanism. Such a shortcoming of uniformity did not allow Vietnam to develop a full appropriation of Neo-Confucianism or access to the Confucian universality, as in China, Korea, and Japan (Woodside 2002, 140). As a result, the people could not engage in debates with them” in the Neo-Confucian world (see further Jamieson 1993).

Indeed, the Vietnamese Confucian elites intentionally shaped a syncretic belief system integrating the tenets of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and local traditions to work as the concrete ideological foundation for all levels of Vietnamese

society (see Dutton and Werner 2012, 114; Duong 2004, 311). The balance among these elements varies in time and location, especially since the Vietnamese started expanding towards the South in the early seventeenth century.

### Vietnamese “Expanding to the South” and the New Face of Southern Confucianism

“Nam tiến” (Expanding to the South) in the seventeenth century enlarged the Vietnamese’s living space and enriched their cultural experience. By spreading to the South, the Vietnamese expanded their “orthodox” Confucianism geographically and encountered non-Confucian challenges. As a result, Confucianism in Southern Vietnam was modified by the Yangming School brought by the Vietnamese Chinese scholars. As a matter of fact, Yangming school significantly restrained the “orthodox” bureaucratic Confucianism and had to share its influence with Buddhism.

“Nam tiến” took place in two steps: from the North to the Central Region, and from the Central Region to the South. In 1600, Nguyễn Hoàng (1525–1613), a bureaucrat of the Lê Dynasty, escaped to Thuận Hóa Region (present-day Huế area), established the Kingdom of Đàng Trong (early Cochinchina) and got in touch with the larger world of Southeast Asia, which “enabled him to establish a new vision of being Vietnamese distinguished by the relative freedom from the Vietnamese past and the authority justified by appeals to that past” (Taylor 1993, 64). Based on a profound Confucian viewpoint, Ngô Sĩ Liên in *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* condemned Nguyễn Hoàng for being an unfilial man by leaving behind his ancestors’ shrines, tombs, and his family’s past, and claimed that he was rejecting the traditional status of being a “good Vietnamese” (see further *ibid.*). In return, Nguyễn Hoàng and his bureaucrats showed that they were eager to shape a new model of “good Vietnamese” by accepting and adopting new resources in the new lands. Fitzgerald (1972, 28) found another reason for “Nam tiến”, he claimed that the crowded peasants and inadequate lands in the North pushed the Vietnamese to explore the new lands in the South. In any case, the formation of Đàng Trong (Cochinchina) opened a new vision of being Vietnamese. Thus Confucianism in this new land was about to transform.

According to Jeffrey Richey, the Đàng Trong government appreciated and used Buddhism more than Đàng Ngoài—the Northern Kingdom (Richey 2013, 68), thus downgrading the importance of Confucian values when the Vietnamese went further south to the Mekong River Delta (see further Li 1998). “Expanding to the South” was, in fact, a two-way process—on one hand the Vietnamese

brought with them Buddhism and “orthodox” Confucianism; on the other hand they had to adopt the existing cultures of the lands where they arrived (see also Reid 1988, 8).

New settlements continued to expand, the land was cleared southwards, and Confucian-styled communal houses were built as a sign of the establishment of the imperial institution and confirmation of territorial/cultural sovereignty. The communal houses where the tutelary gods, sanctioned heroic gods, generals, and soldiers were worshipped functioned as a miniature model of the central imperial court. Furthermore, the system of ordinations and couplets presenting the virtues of the emperors and heroes at the communal house ensured the existence of imperial power and its orthodox civilizing missions in each new village.<sup>5</sup> Its purpose of unifying the new settlers, transmitting the civilizing missions, imposing sovereignty and carrying out other political functions made the communal houses in the South deeply institutionalized and politicalized.

In many parts of the South the concept of loyalty dominated the local Confucianists, thus creating an inherent patriotism in each person. Many Vietnamese officials and Confucian scholars, such as Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh (1650–1700), Nguyễn Cư Trinh (1716–1767), Nguyễn Văn Thoại (1761–1829), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822–1888), considered striving to cultivate and protect feudal institutions as the sacred responsibility of their lives.

Early Nguyễn rulers such as Gia Long (r. 1802–1820) and Minh Mạng (r. 1820–1841) were shown to disfavour Buddhism and Daoism. Such a bias affected Confucian scholars in some ways. A few local scholars adopted a Confucian stance when criticizing Buddhism and Daoism. For example, Nguyễn Cư Trinh, in *Sãi vãi* (Monks and Nuns), called for monastic consolidation and a greater focus on Confucian virtues while stating that Buddhism and Daoism were not of practical use. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu in *Dương Từ-Hà Mậu* (楊慈-何茂)<sup>6</sup> led a strong discussion among the Confucian scholars and concluded that the core merits of a good man are loyalty, patriotism, and righteousness. However, when facing the local ethnocultural diversity, Confucianism failed to function as a single ideology that could incorporate and unify all traditions under its “orthodox” canopy.

5 This metaphoric application was modelled after the Chinese Ming’s art of governing. According to Watson (1985), Duara (1988), Faure (1999) and others, late imperial Chinese states sanctioned the orthodox titles of specific gods (such as Guandi/God of War, Tianhou, etc.) to function as the “prolonged” hand of the emperor in each village.

6 The work *Dương Từ-Hà Mậu* was written by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu in 1854, mainly discussing the negative impacts of Buddhism and Catholicism and the need to revitalize Confucianism through the debates between two Confucianists, Dương Từ and Hà Mậu.



On the other hand, the more the Vietnamese went southwards, the more they strayed from the culture of the “central domain”—northern Vietnam. As early as the 1620s, there were some Vietnamese fishermen arriving at coastal sand-dunes nearby Saigon, from where they dispersed throughout the region of Southern Vietnam. They came to live with the local Khmer and turned the Khmer village of Prei Nokor into the city of Sài Gòn (Saigon) before the Chinese arrived from overseas (in the 1670s–1680s). The Khmers’ Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism, as well as the Chinese’s “Three Teachings”, all impacted the Southern Vietnamese, making them both similar and dissimilar to the northern population. In truth, the people who moved to the South became more independent in their thinking and way of life (see Fitzgerald 1972, 19–38, 29). At the beginning of this period, the Vietnamese migrants were largely poor fishermen, poor farmers, runaway soldiers, bandits, pirates, and prisoners, who were not well-educated or well-prepared to transmit Confucian values. Instead, Buddhism flourished and became a popularly opposing force to the “orthodox” cults. It is evident that the Southern Vietnamese used Buddhism to deal with the Cham and Khmer communities, while adopting Brahmanism (from the Cham) and Theravada Buddhism (from the Khmer) to enrich their traditions. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Nguyễn lords of Đàng Trong officially set up administrative control over these new lands (1698 in Sài Gòn), and a number of Neo-Confucianism-educated bureaucrats were appointed to work there. Văn Thánh miếu, or the Temple of Literature, which functioned as the imperial institution, was built in Biên Hòa in 1715, marking the official cultivation of “orthodox” Confucianism in Southern Vietnam.

Despite these Confucian scholars–bureaucrats expending great efforts to cultivate and promote the Confucian orthodoxy in the South, they failed to transform the local communities. What they introduced and developed in the new lands was a series of segmented and practical Confucian elements rather than a systematic institution. While Northern Vietnam remained tightly engaged with Confucian ideology, the Southern Vietnamese had a looser relationship with Confucian orthodoxy in order to better handle and nurture their newfound social mobility. Such a transformation made Northern scholars doubt the “Vietnamese-ness” and orthodoxy of the new lands. As a matter of fact, the Southern Vietnamese adopted simple forms of Confucian values, such as respect for parents and a studious mindset. However, Olga Dror discovered that this was not to promote Confucianism as an ideological basis for society, but rather the limited application of particular Confucian ideas that could be widely accepted among the population (Dror 2018, 228–29).

The Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945) promoted connections and exchanges between the North and South. Commercial goods produced in the South were moved to the North; in return, many Northern Confucianists were appointed to work in



the South. However, as we noted above, the Chinese from overseas had brought Qing-style Confucianism to the South—probably in the form of Yangming studies—which did not match the Vietnamese “orthodox” Neo-Confucianism, as promoted by the bureaucrats. The former was diffused among the elites and merchants, while the later was applied in the administrative and educational systems. As a result, two schools of Confucianism intertwined to make a new face of Southern society.

Confucianism started to decline right after the French imposed their rule on the South during the 1860s. The civic examination was abandoned in the South at the end of the nineteenth century, while it did remain in the North until 1914 and in the Central region until 1919. In 1924, the French Governor agreed to include the study of traditional Vietnamese morality at the primary level; however, as Shawn McHale put it, “this was a hybrid moral instruction, combining elements of French moral teachings with Vietnamese ones, it could not be called purely Confucian” (McHale 2004, 74). There was a wave of Confucian renaissance during 1920–1940 in Vietnam motivated by a group of French-educated scholars such as Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940), Trần Trọng Kim (1883–1953), Phan Khôi (1887–1959), Phạm Quỳnh (1892–1945), Ngô Tất Tố (1894–1954), Đào Duy Anh (1904–1988), Trương Tửu (1913–1999), etc. (see McHale 2004, 71). However, it did not help to stop the downgrading of Confucianism nationwide after a long period of being ruled by the French.

After 1954, Northern Vietnam pursued socialism while South Vietnam was still at war. The administrators in Saigon encouraged moral education, for which some Confucian virtues were selected. However, this was, again, not a systematic Confucian institution. Instead, they absorbed some practical virtues to serve their temporary practical demands, such as filial piety, modesty, humility, and so on. For example, Saigon textbooks recounted the story of Lê Văn Khôi, praising his filial piety to his adept father, Governor Lê Văn Duyệt (1763–1832) (Dror 2018, 230–31) rather than narrating the whole historical fact of Lê Văn Khôi’s (?–1834) rebellion during the period of 1833–1835.

In short, the early Vietnamese migrants did not bring systematic Confucianism but instead Buddhism to set up a new “home” in Southern Vietnam. The Nguyễn lords period (1600–1789) and, later, the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), promoted the Confucian orthodoxy and used it as a means of territorializing and civilizing the new lands. However, this wave of Confucian orthodoxy was challenged by the Qing Confucianism introduced by the Chinese from overseas. One interacted and restrained the other, but both were absorbed into the mindset of the Southern population.

## The Introduction of Qing Confucianism into Southern Vietnam by the Chinese from Overseas

The Hoa (ethnic Chinese) merchants and migrants arrived in Northern and Central Vietnam much earlier than in the South. In the North, the Chinese were present since the Western Han Dynasty started ruling the land. In the Central region, Hoi An, a well-known entrepôt, became one of the destinations of Chinese merchants and workers from the first half of the seventeenth century on. However, the Chinese mainly migrated to Southern Vietnam at the end of the seventeenth century, after the fall of Zheng Chenggong's (鄭成功, Koxinga, 1624–1662) army in the Taiwan Straits. Furthermore, included in this first generation Hoa migration to Southern Vietnam were political refugees, but not merchants or free workers.<sup>7</sup> In 1679, Dương Ngạn Địch (楊彥迪, ?–1688)—the Long Môn (龍門) Military Governor, with 200 ships and 40,000 men under his possession, fled from the pursuit of the new Qing authority that was attempting to attack. After a month there was a storm and nearly 50 ships in the Long Môn fleet sank; the around 3,000 remaining people had to “drink dewdrops and raindrops” and “eat shoe soles” to survive and to find a way to Cochinchina.<sup>8</sup> Finally, they settled in the land which is now the south of Vietnam (Wheeler 2015, 152).

Dương Ngạn Địch settled in My Tho on the banks of the Mekong River Delta. Trần Thượng Xuyên (1626–1720), another general, and his followers established Thanh Hà village in Biên Hòa and Minh Hương village in the Sài Gòn-Chợ Lớn area (recorded in *Đại Nam Thực Lục* (大南實錄, *Veritable Records of the Great South*)). During this time, Mạc Cửu from the Leizhou peninsular (Guangdong, China) came to build Hà Tiên,<sup>9</sup> an estate for Chinese immigrants, and then gave it to the Nguyen lords. Under Hà Tiên's development policy, and due to the fact that the Siamese King, Phraya Taksin (1734–1782), attacked Hà Tiên on and off from 1771–1772, many ethnic Chinese took refuge throughout the lower Mekong River Delta. The Nguyễn lords bestowed many privileges on Chinese communities, such as free trade and monetization, high-ranking positions at both the state and provincial levels, and so on (Borri 1998, 92; Nguyen 2010, 82). In 1669, a Qing mandarin named Yu Jin reported to the Chinese Emperor Kangxi that millions of Chinese had moved to Southeast Asia, many of whom worked as “traitors” or were appointed to some mandarin positions in the Vietnamese court (see Sun 2014, 327). The younger generations of mixed parentage between the Hoa and Vietnamese are called “the Minh Hương”.

7 See further Tsai 1968; Amer 1991; Engelbert 2011; Li 2004; Chí 2010; Barrett 2012.

8 French-given name for South Vietnam during the colonial period, 1858–1945.

9 Transbassac Region, or the lower Mekong River Delta of Vietnam.

From the eighteenth century onwards, the Hoa migrants arriving in Vietnam and Southeast Asia were no longer political refugees but workers and other economic immigrants (Cheung 2002, 33). They were treated as potential trading partners in many parts of the country. They participated in the state’s mining, coin casting, and metal import-export activities (Li 2011). The history of the ethnic Hoa in Southern Vietnam is briefly described below.



Figure 1: Short summary of the history of the ethnic Hoa in Southern Vietnam

With specific historical experiences in hand, the Hoa people, led by their elites, learned to “handle and preserve their own interests to ensure their position as Vietnamese society changed and their economic status eroded” (see Wheeler 2015, 143). As a matter of fact, the Hoa and the Minh Huong played an important role in the economic development of Southern Vietnam, within which the Yangming School of Confucianism (or Yangming Studies) has been noted as a significant philosophical contribution.

Wang Yangming (王陽明, 1472–1529), an important Neo-Confucian scholar of the Chinese Ming Dynasty, stood on the core principles of Neo-Confucianism to discuss and develop further the philosophical concepts of the self-realization, self-reflection, and self-cultivation of each individual with the highest goal of attaining the ultimate unity of Heaven and Humanity (*Tianren heyi* 天人合一).<sup>10</sup> According to Wang Yangming, sincerity of the will comes before the process of correcting the original substance of the mind, the so-called *gewu* 格物 (Chan 1963, 655), the principle and the heart-and-mind are unified in one, and all myriad things exist in the heart-and-mind of human beings. If one possesses a good heart-and-mind, he becomes a person of good *liangzhi* (良知, intuitive knowledge); consequently, he will be able to self-realize ways to attain *Tianren heyi*. Compared with previous Neo-Confucianists (i.e., Zhu Xi), Wang Yangming emphasized practical logic epistemology and its deployment in living reality rather

<sup>10</sup> See Chan 1963, 658; Bary 1981, Xiii; Taylor and Rodney 1990, 5.

than purely diving within the theoretical ocean. Tang Junyi (唐君毅), a twentieth-century Confucian scholar in Hong Kong, thus called Wang Yangming's main approach to Confucianism "a heuristic language" (see Chen et al. 2014, 76).

The most notable point of Wang Yangming's philosophy is the unity of knowledge and action (知行合一, *tri hành hợp nhất*). Accordingly, knowledge is the original source of practice, and practice is the actual end of knowledge (Chan 1963, 656). By appreciating the unity of knowledge and action, Wang Yangming focused on the self-realization and self-cultivation of each person. Yangming Studies was introduced to both Korea and Japan. In Carter Eckert's words, Korean capitalism was imported by the Confucian literati in the state.

They resolved the apparent conflict between Confucian attitudes of disapproval regarding the pursuit of individual gain and the profit motive inherent in capitalism by claiming that the central purpose of profit was to improve the general quality of life and ensure the nation's independence. (in Tu, Hejtmanek and Wachman 1992, 9)

In Japan, disciples of Yangming Studies established the Yomeigaku (Yangming Studies) of Japanese Confucianism, a rival of the Shushigaku (朱熹學) during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, Yangming Studies laid a significant philosophical foundation for the Meiji Revolution in 1868 (Chan 1963, 658), turning Japan into a world-leading economy. Similarly, the concept of the unity of knowledge and action deeply influenced Chinese revolutionaries (i.e., Sun Yat-sen, 1866–1925) and New Confucianists (i.e., Xiong Shili, 1885–1968, Mou Zongsan, 1909–1995, and so on.). The Chinese migrants to Vietnam mainly originated from Fujian and Guangdong, where Confucian values absorbed and enriched the trading traditions, forming an open-minded, dynamic, pragmatic and innovative form of Confucianism among the bureaucrats, elites, merchants, and some commoners.

The traditional Vietnamese state did not adopt Yangming Studies (see Elman et al. 2002, 15; Tran 2003, 735; McHale 2004, 81). Benjamin Elman and his fellows found that the traditional Vietnamese rural elites and commoners were satisfied with rice-fields, sumptuary laws about Confucian sacrifice and archaic forms of Confucianism (Elman et al. 2002, 17). Chu Thuán Thủy (朱舜水, 1600–1682), a late Ming–early Qing elite from Southern China, took refuge in Hối An for a while and found it disappointing that most of the local people came to him to ask for geomancy and other practical issues but not to discuss theoretical ones. He left for Japan where his interests were then fulfilled in the Yomeigaku school of Confucianism (Ba Xuyen cited in McHale 2002, 408). In our view, this

reasoning set out here makes sense, but there are also more causes to list. The Vietnamese Confucianists tried to compose a discourse on Confucianism with a nationalist and anti-colonial narrative of resistance to foreign aggression. David Kelly once stated that Vietnam, together with Korea, focused more on the ideological constructions of freedom and liberation (Kelly 1998, 3). The Koreans, in Alexander Woodside's research, intentionally differentiated themselves from China by emphasizing or prioritizing certain aspects of Confucian values and practices. For example, in family life, they further sharpened the family hierarchy and orthodox tradition by stressing "more clearly the distinction between sons of primary and secondary wives in descent groups" (compared to Chinese tradition) (Woodside 1998a, 197). On their side, the Vietnamese elites controlled the state-sanctioned writing of history and asserted a major form of oppositional boundary maintenance on external communication with China. Last but not least, the profound combination of the Three Teachings in Vietnamese Confucian orthodoxy did not give much space to change, or accept innovations. Consequently, Vietnamese Confucianism remains a special domain as compared with its East Asian counterparts.

However, Southern Vietnam enjoyed a more dynamic form of Confucianism, mainly shaped by the relaxation of Vietnamese Confucian orthodoxy and the introduction of Yangming Studies by the Hoa elites. The Nguyen lords in the South during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular offered the Chinese and Minh Huong elites good treatment if they proved to be loyal to the Vietnamese state (see Riichiro 1974, 140–75). Mạc Cửu (鄭玖, 1655–1735) and his son, Mạc Thiên Tứ (鄭天賜, 1718–1780), were appointed as the General Governors of Hà Tiên<sup>11</sup> who were able to mint coins, build fortresses, lay out markets, and conduct an independent foreign policy (see Chen 1960, 15, 41–63; Reid 1988, 44). In order to "Confucianize" his people, Mạc Thiên Tứ built Chiêu Anh Các (招英閣, Elites Attracting Pavilion) in Hà Tiên in 1736 where Confucius was worshipped and Confucian ideas were discussed and spread. Notably, Robert Kirsop, a member of staff of the East Indies Company, once described the form of Đàng Trong (Cochinchina) as similar to that of China, as many Chinese elites and merchants were recruited to work in the administrative system (see further Chen 1960; Fitzgerald 1972, 30). These men really applied a Qing style of Confucianism in their daily work.

Hà Tiên tells a significant story of pro-Yangming Studies in Southern Vietnam. Hà Tiên's Confucian studies were closely associated with the second General

11 Hà Tiên (河仙) was once known under different names, such as Can Cao, Cancar, Ponthiamas, and Po-Taimat.

Governor of the polity, Mạc Thiên Tứ. Cao Tự Thanh, a modern Vietnamese scholar, went so far as to claim that “a recognizable stratum of Confucian intellectuals could only be found in the Chinese enclave of Hà Tiên” (Cao 1996, 28). With the establishment of Chiêu Anh Các, Mạc Thiên Tứ gathered many prominent Confucianists from different regions of Vietnam and Southern China to deploy, discuss, and debate issues of Qing Confucianism as well as to compose poetry.<sup>12</sup> Mạc Thiên Tứ ordered the compilation of the poetic verses of the scholars and carved into stone steles two works, *Hà Tiên Thập Vịnh* (河仙十詠, *Ten Songs on the Beauty of Hà Tiên*) and *Minh Bật Di Ngư* (明勃遺漁, *The Last Fisherman in Minh Bật Region*) (see Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765–1825)’s *Gia Định Thành Thông Chí* (嘉定城通志, *Gazetteer of Gia Định Citadel*)). Similar to many Qing Chinese Confucianists at this time, Mạc Thiên Tứ and his colleagues’ poetry signified the ultimate “Way” of human beings by stressing the self-realization and self-cultivation of the heart-and-mind.

From the eighteenth century to the first half of the twentieth, a large number of Chinese books from South-Eastern China followed the Chinese merchant boats to Southern Vietnam (see Li 2011, 167–82). Initially, the main beneficiaries were almost exclusively the Chinese immigrants, gradually expanding to Vietnamese Confucianists and commoners. This spread the Qing’s academic ideology and Confucianism extensively in the southern region, thus contesting the Vietnamese Confucian orthodoxy. In addition to the Qing Confucian classics, books on geomancy, medicine, and pharmacy, religions, Confucian stories, and others were also imported and circulated in large numbers. Many Vietnamese envoys of the Nguyễn Dynasty to China were the Hoa or Minh Hương elites who played a significant role in introducing the Yangming School of the Qing Dynasty into Southern Vietnam. For example, *Đại Nam Thực Lục* recorded the case of Lý Văn Phúc (李文馥, 1785–1849), a member of the Minh Hương elite of Fujian origin,

12 They were Trịnh Liên Sơn, Lê Bá Bình (from the Saigon- Gia Định region), Phan Đại Quảng, Nguyễn Nghi, Trần Ngoan, Đặng Minh Bôn, Trần Minh Hạ, Đặng Minh Bản, Tôn Thiên Trân, Mạc Triều Đán, Trịnh Liên Sơn (from North Vietnam), Hoàng Long (from Quy Nhơn), Phan Thiên Quảng (from Cẩm Giang), as well as dozens of Chinese Confucianists including Zhu Pu (Châu Phác 朱璞), Wu Zhihan (Ngô Chi Hân 吳之翰), Li Renchang (Lý Nhân Trường 李仁長), Dan Bingyu (Đan Bình Ngự 單秉馭), Tang Yuchong (Thang Ngọc Sùng 湯玉崇), Chen Yansi (Trần Diễn Tứ 陳演泗), and Wang Chang (Vương Sương 王昶) from Guangdong province; Chen Yueyuan (Trần Dược Uyên 陳躍淵), Chen Zilan (Trần Tự Lan 陳自蘭), Xu Ta (Tù Tha 徐鈞), Lin Weize (Lâm Duy Tắc 林維則), Xu Dengji (Tù Đăng Cơ 徐登基), Lin Qiran (Lâm Kỳ Nhiên 林其然), Sun Tianrui (Tôn Thiên Thoại 孫天瑞), Huang Jizhen (Hoàng Ký Trân 黃寄珍), Chen Xufa (Trần Tự Phát 陳緒發), Fang Ming (Phương Minh 方銘), and Sun Jimao (Tôn Quý Mậu 孫季茂) from Fujian province; Lu Fengji (Lộ Phùng Cát 路逢吉) and Zhou Jingyang (Châu Cảnh Dương 周景揚) from Jiangsu province; Xu Yewen (Tù Diệp Văn 徐葉雯), Chen Weide (Trần Duy Đức 陳維德), and Chen Ruifeng (Trần Thoại Phụng 陳瑞鳳) from Jiangxi province, and so on (see Chen 1967, 149).



who was appointed to be an envoy to the Qing court in 1833. On his way back home to Vietnam, he stopped in Fujian to pay a visit to the ancestral halls and in Guangdong to purchase books on behalf of the Minh Mạng Emperor. We discovered recently that many books published in Foshan (Guangdong) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were widely circulated and used as important textbooks among Southern Vietnamese scholars and students.<sup>13</sup> For example, the *Minh tâm bửu giám* (明心寶鑑) became a truly popular handbook among Confucianists of many generations in the South, even though it was never used in state-sponsored Confucian schools or civic examinations. *Minh tâm bửu giám* combined the Three Teachings within a Confucian framework which strongly encouraged self-realization and self-cultivation among individuals. Besides, *Tứ thư thể chú* (四書體注), a Zhu Xi-based interpretative work by the Qing scholar Fan Chang (Zi Deng), was beloved for its conciliation and simplification of *The Four Books* in classical Confucianism. Similarly, *Tứ thư đại toàn tiết yếu* (四書大全節要), composed in 1414 under the order of the Ming Emperor, Chengzu, and reprinted in Foshan during the Qing Dynasty, was also commonly found in Southern Vietnam.

Our recent research shows that Võ Trường Toản (?–1792), Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765–1825), and Nguyễn Thông (1827–1884) were typical Vietnamese Confucian scholars who made Yangming studies part of their philosophical outlooks, especially the concept of “knowing speech and cultivating *qi*” (知言養氣) by Mencius and later Wang Yangming (see Ngạc Xuyên 1943). Unfortunately, this group of elites was not provided with a concrete environment to facilitate and develop such a new wave of Confucianism, since they encountered the imposition of the Vietnamese Confucian orthodoxy from the North. The disconnection

13 Popular texts include *Tam tự kinh* (三字經, *Three-Character Classic*), *Tam Tự kinh chú giải bệ yếu* (三字經註解備要, *The Brief Notes of the Three Characters Classic*), *Tam thiên tự* (三千字, *Three-Thousand-Word Cannon*), *Minh tâm bửu giám* (明心寶鑑, *Precious Mirror of the Clear Heart*), *Tứ thư thể chú* (四書體注, *Ontological Notes of Four Books*), *Tứ Thư đại toàn tiết yếu* (四書大全節要, *The Brief Interpretation of Encyclopedia of the Four Books*), *Kinh thi* (詩經, *The Book of Songs*), *Kinh Xuân thu* (春秋經, *Spring and Autumn Annals*), *Ngũ Kinh tiết yếu* (五經節要, *The Brief Interpretation of Five Classics*), *Ấu học cổ sự quỳnh lâm* (幼學故事瓊林, *Book of Collecting Stories for Children's Learning*), *Ấu học thái nạp tập* (幼學採納集, *Book of Collecting Knowledges for Children*), *Trị gia cách ngôn khuyến hiếu ca* (治家格言勸孝歌, *Family Instructions and A Song to Persuade People to be Filial*), *Tiểu học gia ngôn diễn nghĩa* (小學家言演義, *The Romance of Family Instructions*), *Nhị thập tứ hiếu* (二十四孝, *Twenty-four Stories about Filial Piety*), *Gia lễ* (家禮, *Family Rituals*), *Ngọc thu lễ bộ* (玉秋禮部, *Collection of Rituals*), *Vạn bửu toàn thư* (萬寶全書, *Complete Collection of Confucian Treasures*), *Tiên thiên dịch số* (先天易數, *Book of Changes*), *Tân Quốc văn* (新國文, *New Chinese Textbooks*), etc. We did an in-depth survey at Thốt Nốt District of Cần Thơ city and got to know that rural elites such as Mr. Phạm Tôn Long (?–?) and Mr. Cao Văn Hân (1924–1999) owned many of these texts before their descendants donated them to the provincial library of An Giang in 2016.



between Vietnam and the East Asian Confucian world really limited the continuity of scholarly exchanges between the local Chinese elites in Vietnam and their partners in South China, thus affecting the spread and impact of Yangming studies of later periods. The pro-Yangming studies group in Southern Vietnam quickly died out when the French took over Saigon and forcibly applied Western educational policies. During Western colonialism, the French first put the Chinese community on the periphery, eliminating their intermediary role between Vietnam and China. Thus, unlike other colonies in Southeast Asia, where empires made full use of Chinese communities for business and relationships with the Qing Dynasty, the French reduced their influence in Vietnam (Wheeler 2015, 158; Hooker 2002, 20; Sun 2014, 333). Many Confucianists left Saigon for the Mekong River Delta where they built another Temple of Literature in Vĩnh Long in 1866 to maintain their studies. A decade later, the French took over the whole Lower Mekong River Delta, creating a dead-end for Confucian education in the South. Even so, Yangming studies still remained implicitly among the local scholars. Many Western-educated elites such as Trương Vĩnh Ký (Petrus Ký 1837–1898), Trương Minh Ký (1855–1900), Huỳnh Tịnh Của (Paulus Của, 1830–1908), and so on, thanks to their deep understanding of Confucianism, started translating a number of Confucian texts into the Romanized script system (*chữ Quốc ngữ*). This strongly accelerated Ming-Qing Confucian studies among the academicians and Confucian elites in Southern Vietnam.

During the 1920s–1940s, while many Northern and Central scholars were busy with the debates on Vietnamese traditional Confucianism and national identity building (as mentioned above), the local elites in the South were quiet since they did not find the same interest in archaic forms of Confucianism. Instead, some elites in Saigon published a number of books on Wang Yangming’s philosophy. Đào Trinh Nhất was often mentioned for his publication entitled *Wang Yangming: The Promoter of the Theory of Attaining the Supreme Conscience* (致良知) and *the Unity of Knowledge and Action* (*Vương Dương Minh: người xướng ra học-thuyết tri lương-tri và tri-hành hợp nhất*, unknown publication year), followed by Phan Văn Hùm with the work *Wang Yangming: Life and Theory* (*Vương Dương Minh: thân thế và học thuyết*, reprinted 2016), Ba Xuyên with the article “Critics on Phan Văn Hùm’s book of Wang Yangming” (1949), Trần Trọng Kim with the book *Wang Yangming and the Studies of Supreme Conscience* (*Vương Dương Minh và cái học trí lương tri*, 1960), and so on. These scholars were strongly supported by a few publications and societies such as Sài Gòn Tân Việt (New Viet of Saigon) and Hội Khuyến học (Educational Promotion Society), among others. Unfortunately, Yangming studies were neglected during the Third Indochina War (1954–1975) and then the post-war period. Notably, while Confucianism was

overthrown in North Vietnam at this time, two Confucius temples were built in the South, one in Châu Đốc (An Giang province) in 1970, and another in Gò Công (Tiền Giang province) in 1974.<sup>14</sup>

In the early twenty-first century, a number of new scholars became interested in learning Yangming studies; however, what they are really investigating is New Confucianism with a significant contribution of Yangming studies in its core philosophical foundation. The Harvard-Yenching Institute plays an important role in creating and providing opportunities and academic resources to connect contemporary Confucian studies scholars in Vietnam with the world. Recently, Trần Nhân Tông Institute was established in Hanoi, which strongly encourages the new wave of Confucian studies in Vietnam.

### Multi-Directional Interactions and the Evolution of Southern Vietnamese Confucianism

It is reasonable to say that the Yangming school of Confucianism was formed and evolved through the debates that occurred among the Neo-Confucianists during Ming-Qing periods. In 1313 Zhu Xi interpreted Confucianism as an orthodox ideology, and made it the basis of civil service examinations (see Chan 1963, 654) while Wang Yangming emphasized the doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action, and “stressed the correspondence and equal importance of knowledge and action” (ibid., 656). Both these rival schools of thought have long existed among Southern Vietnamese Confucianists.

Since the 1500s, practical learning in the Yangming school of Confucianism directly generated the rise of a new literature in China and other East Asian states that transmitted the possible relationship with economic management concisely presented in the formula “order the state and save the world” (經國濟世); therefore, the Yangming spirit in economic innovation was acknowledged as a kind of “statecraft” (see further Woodside 1998b, 200). In Japan, such statecraft strongly energized the emergence of an industrializing Japan after the Meiji Revolution in 1868 (see Elman et al. 2002, 8). In Southern Vietnam, the rise of domestic market-based production and maritime trading since the early eighteenth century was an advantage for the cultivation and development of epistemological Yangming studies, but, unluckily, this wave was contested and gradually faded. Many early Minh Hương and Vietnamese scholars in Saigon-Chợ Lớn were

14 We discovered another small-scaled Temple of Literature was built in Cao Lãnh city of Đồng Tháp province; however, the history of this establishment was not recorded. Furthermore, this temple is currently abandoned.

both Confucianists and merchants. They joined the South Chinese and Southeast Asian spectrum of *rushang* (儒商, Confucian merchants), such as Chu Thuần Thủy (朱舜水, 1600–1682), Mạc Thiên Tứ (鄭天賜, 1718–1780), Trịnh Hoài Đức (鄭懷德, 1765–1825), Lý Tường Quang (李祥光, also called Bá hộ Xường, 1842–1896), Huỳnh Văn Hoa (黃文華, 1845–1901, also called Hứa Bồn Hòa), and so on. However, with the exception of Mạc Thiên Tứ, these merchants-Confucian bureaucrats did not hold high-ranking positions; they had to follow the imperial rules in facilitating the “orthodox” Vietnamese Confucianism. Furthermore, as Alexander Woodside pointed out, the Vietnamese “practical learning”, like that in China in some domains, “was under great pressure to abbreviate space in order to reconcile expanding, heterogeneous frontiers with the central metropolitan domain—whose legitimizing myth belonged to a smaller, less mobile, pre-commercial age” (Woodside 1998b, 201). Serving as bureaucrats, these men were obliged to follow the mainstream.

Since the French colonists imposed a full Western educational system in Vietnam during the second half of the nineteenth century, Confucian studies were severely damaged, especially after the fall of civic examinations (1919), when the imperial court lost its power. Discussions on the divide of national studies took place with the participation of many Confucian scholars of the early Nguyễn Dynasty, such as Nguyễn Trường Tộ (阮長祚, 1830?–1871), Phạm Phú Thứ (范富恕, 1821–1882), Đặng Huy Trứ (鄧輝著, 1825–1874), Nguyễn Lộ Trạch (阮露澤, 1853?–1895), and so on. They talked about whether the Vietnamese elites should continue with traditional Confucianism or transform themselves to facilitate Western education, and whether the Vietnamese should follow the colonial policies or rise up to assert themselves. Almost all of them shared a commonality: they acknowledged the backwardness of Vietnamese Confucianism as well as the long-lasting disharmony between knowledge and action, and suggested the new motto of “Confucianism as the substance, Western studies as the function” (東體西用). Unfortunately, Emperor Tự Đức (1829–1883, reigned 1847–1883) declined to implement this innovative initiative.

However, this rejection did not have much of an effect on Southern scholars. They, being deeply influenced by Yangming studies, did not pursue engagement in civic examinations and bureaucratic appointments. Instead, they followed the concept of “self-cultivation as the root” in the *Daxue* (chapter 1) by focusing on self-cultivation and practical participation, especially in the mainstream of local economic dynamism. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, according to Li Tana, Vietnamese commodities were mostly purchased (by international merchants) from the South, which clearly reveals that the commodity production and commercial activities were mainly based in the southern part of the country

(see Li 2010, 96). Trịnh Hoài Đức, a prominent Minh Hương scholar, went on his business to Phnom Penh (the present-day Cambodian capital city). Mạc Thiên Tứ was known as an outstanding ruler, a Confucian scholar, and a talented trader. He organized many maritime trading fleets to sail to Japan, China, and Batavia to do business, thus making Hà Tiên a significant trading port in the eighteenth century (see Chen 2008; Li 2013). Võ Trường Toản (武長纘) and other pro-Yangming Confucianists highly appreciated the *Daxue* and the theory of knowing speech and cultivating “*qi*” (知言養氣, Tri ngôn dưỡng khí), actively bringing Confucian ideology into the reality of education and the social renaissance. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (阮廷炤, 1822–1888), another southern scholar during the early period of French colonialism, built up the character Ông Quán in his notable work *Lục Vân Tiên* in a similar way. Ông Quán, a member of the Confucian elite, did not participate in the civic examinations since he was disappointed with the Vietnamese state governance; therefore, he lived as an anchorite and opened a store to earn a living. Ông Quán was a typical Southern Confucianist who adopted and absorbed both Confucian ideology and the principles of a commodity-based economy, and struggled with economic growth and attempted to come up with justifications for profit. The local writer Ngạc Xuyên Ca Văn Thịnh found on a stone stele at Vĩnh Long Temple of Literature the fact that the term “practicality 切實” was repeatedly used in an essay dedicated to the former scholar Nguyễn Thông (阮通, 1827–1884).

This innovative idea, of “Confucianism as the substance, Western studies as the function”, remained among scholars in the early twentieth century. Kang Youwei (1858–1927), Liang Qichao (1873–1929), and later, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) inspired local elites to get in touch with Western rationalism from the traditional Confucian standpoint. In particular, the success of the Japanese Meiji Revolution attracted many Vietnamese reformers, many of whom studied in Japan in the early twentieth century (see Woodside 1998b, 211). Phan Bội Châu (潘佩珠, 1867–1940) and Cường Đễ (彊樞, 1882–1951) organized the famous Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục Movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, sending a number of reformers to Tokyo. These scholars later established the Duy Tân Association (維新會) which advocated the study of the Japanese experience (especially the Meiji Revolution). These reformers went so far as to plan to replace the current young king Duy Tân (1900–1945, reigned 1907–1916) with Mr. Cường Đễ, another member of the royal family who had studied in Japan during the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục period. In Southern Vietnam, Gilbert Trần Chánh Chiếu (1868–1919) and his colleagues launched the Minh Tân Movement (明新運動) and tried to connect with the Duy Tân reformers. On the other hand, some local millenarian religions, such as Bửu Sơn

Kỳ Hương,<sup>15</sup> Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa,<sup>16</sup> and Hoahaoism<sup>17</sup> in An Giang province, Caodaism<sup>18</sup> in Tay Ninh, and other popular religious movements (e.g., the Bình Xuyên group) were formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these set up close relationships with secret societies in both Vietnam and South China (e.g., the Thiên Địa Hội (天地會, Heaven and Earth Society)). Unfortunately, the French rulers, with the support of the Japanese Government, extinguished these movements in the second decade of the twentieth century. As a result, the initiative of transforming the Vietnamese state by applying the Japanese experience came to an end. The French government in Vietnam recognized the existing risks of progressive Japanese-Chinese philosophical thought that were being transmitted into Vietnam, so they tried to control the press and publishing industry to avoid the spread of such ideas into the political domain. This policy of the French rulers broke the traditional connection to East Asian politics and scholarly ideology, giving way for Marxism to enter Vietnam.

The pro-Yangming studies group in Southern Vietnam mainly applied some aspects of this philosophy into practical life, yet did not go further in realizing it. While Confucian scholars in China, Korea, and Japan were busy writing commentaries on Confucian classics, most of the Vietnamese Confucians dedicated their intellectual energy to the articulation of their innermost spirituality in poetic language (Duong 2004, 293), or to their socio-economic activities. Mạc Thiên Tứ's Chiêu Anh Các in Hà Tiên was not an exception to this. All the Confucianists emphasized composing poems that vividly transmitted their philosophical interest in self-cultivation of the heart-and-mind, but did not engage in developing

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- 15 Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương is a synthetic religion founded by Đoàn Minh Huyền (1807–1856) in 1849 in Châu Đốc, An Giang province. Currently, there are around 15,000 followers in the Mekong River Delta (see more Ho Tai 1983, 20–7).
- 16 Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa is a synthetic religion under a branch of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương that combines Mahayana Buddhism, Linji zong (臨濟宗), Tiantai zong (天台宗), Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor worship, and patriotism. It was founded by Ngô Lợi (1831–1890) in Ba Chúc village, Tịnh Biên District, An Giang province. There are now about 80,000 followers in Southern Vietnam (see more Ho Tai 1983, 3, 12, 66).
- 17 Called đạo Hòa Hảo in Vietnamese and 和好教 in Chinese language, Hoahaoism was founded in 1939 by Huỳnh Phú Sổ (1919–1947) in Hòa Hảo village of An Giang province. Hoahaoism continued Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương's philosophy; however, it adjusted the structure by taking Mahayana Buddhist philosophy as the foundation and adding ancestor worship (see Ho Tai 1983, 17–19, 26–7, 125, 170).
- 18 Called đạo Cao Đài in Vietnamese and 高台教 in Chinese, Caodaism is a synthetic religion with five million followers founded by Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878–1932) in Tây Ninh province. Caodaism was constructed on the foundation of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor worship, Catholicism, and others (see Trần 2006; see more Ho Tai 1983, 77–8, 100; Dutton and Werner 2012, 429–30).

logical metaphysics of Confucian concepts or theories. The ending of the twentieth century witnessed many significant transformations in Vietnam (i.e., the Vietnam War 1954–1975, the Economic Collectivism Movement 1975–1986, the Reform since 1986), which did not create any space for the revitalization of Confucian studies. It is in the early twenty-first century, when Vietnamese education connected to the rest of East Asia and the Western world, that New Confucianism found its way to penetrate into Vietnamese scholarship, thanks to the connections between Vietnamese academicians and prominent scholars in East Asia and the US. As Tu Wei-ming put it, Confucian humanism has been revitalized and re-signified extraordinarily over the last few decades (Tu 1986, 3–21), and the recent introduction of New Confucianism in Vietnam shows positive signs of the scholarly incorporation of Vietnam into the world at large.

### Prominent Legacies of Qing Confucianism in Southern Vietnamese Tradition

Southern Vietnamese Confucianism possesses a number of prominent features in comparison to the classical Confucian tradition (in the North). Previously, pre-modern Vietnam was known by global researchers as a shallow and segmented Confucian state with an overwhelming emphasis on practical application and less theoretical appropriation; however, scholarship on the features of Southern Vietnamese Confucianism has been limited due to the lack of in-depth research projects focusing on this issue. Within the framework of this work we initially point out the following three prominent features.

#### (1) *Taking spiritualized Confucianism to convey Confucian studies* (Đĩ giáo bảo học, 以(儒)教保(儒)學)

The first notable feature of Southern Vietnamese Confucianism is the trend of *taking spiritualized Confucianism to convey Confucian studies*. In North and Central Vietnam, spiritualized Confucianism existed in parallel with the state-sponsored politicalized Confucianism; however, it was in Southern Vietnam that Confucian studies of all kinds came together (i.e., “orthodox” Vietnamese Confucianism, pro-Yangming studies, and Confucian ideology absorbed in local religious movements), yet none of them became the leading system, and all Confucian flows had to “take refuge” under religious domains (i.e., popular religions, newly-emerging religious movements). In other words, local religious systems were built or consolidated on the ideological foundation of Confucianism as well as of Buddhism



and Daoism. For example, the cult of Guandi (關帝, Quan Đế), the Chinese God of War (see Duara 1988, 778–95), was introduced from China a long time ago. It existed under the form of a singular public cult in North and Central Vietnam during feudal dynasties. However, in Southern Vietnam, this Vietnamese tradition of Guandi worship has not been as strong as the Guandi cult following the footsteps of Chinese immigrants from South-Eastern China. Guandi has been proclaimed to be the Martial God who stays in line with Confucius (the Literary Sage).<sup>19</sup> Guandi has been praised as a symbol of absolute loyalty, bravery, and righteousness for he conveys mostly Confucian virtues, even though Daoism and Buddhism adopted and resettled his symbolic associations.

Folk religions in Southern Vietnam, especially the endogenous religions that are constituted on the basis of combining the ideology of the Three Teachings, still occupy an important part of Confucian ideology. While the above-mentioned Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, and Hoahaoism place a strong emphasis on Buddhism, Caodaism stresses Daoism, and the Minh Đức Nho giáo Đại đạo<sup>20</sup> focuses largely on Confucianism. Often in those religions, Confucian morality calls for humanitarian cultivation because “if there is no humanitarian cultivation, there is no approach to the Heavenly Way”.<sup>21</sup> It can be seen that Confucian ideology functions as a means to associate the endogenous religions with the reality of life and practical situation in the country.

## (2) *Taking practical learning to restrain virtual learning* (Dĩ thực chế hư, 以實(學)制(約)虛(學))

The Qing practical learning that followed the Chinese immigrants into Southern Vietnam largely satisfied the local elites and commoners, since it, on the one hand, highly valued “the universally practical use” (*kinh thế chí dụng*, 經世致用), “maximizing resources to gain public welfare” (*lợi dụng hậu sinh*, 利用

19 During different field-trips to the Mekong River Delta in 2015–2017, we discovered that there were around 30 temples of popular gods/goddesses reserving a notable place for the worship of Confucius (i.e., Tianhou temple in Bạc Liêu city, Tianhou temple in Giồng Trôm district of Bến Tre province). These temples were erected by the local Chinese, while the religious communities in these places include both the Vietnamese and the ethnic Chinese.

20 It is a synthetic spiritualized sect of Confucianism founded by Lưu Cường Cáng in 1932 in Ba Động, Trà Vinh province. Its philosophy mainly revolves the Confucian concepts of “Mình đức” (明德, “to illustrate illustrious virtue”), “Tân dân” (親(新)民, “to renovate the people”), and “Chí thiện” (至善, “to rest in the highest excellence”) with a wide range of liturgical combination of Buddhism, Daoism, Caodaism, and others.

21 This verse is originally derived from the Taoist scriptures, which have been used by many sects in Vietnam to educate believers (欲修仙道, 先修人道; 人道不修, 仙道遠矣).



厚生), “learning for practical use” (*học dĩ trí dụng*, 學以致用), “seeking truth from facts” (*thực sự cầu thị*, 實事求是), and “saving the state and supporting the people” (*cứu quốc tế dân*, 救國濟民). On the other hand, it seriously criticized the Song-Ming’s Neo-Confucianism which pursued a deep structure of theoretical wisdom yet went beyond reality. They shared a common vision of bringing the Confucian ideology closer to the state’s and people’s practical interests. As a matter of fact, the Confucian elites and students in Southern Vietnam did not show any interest in participating in the civic examinations and working in the bureaucratic system.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the Nguyễn emperors had to recruit a large number of officers from the North and Central regions to work in the South. They brought with them the classical state Confucianism, and the more of these mandarins that were appointed, the more pressure local practical learning had to cope with. The gap between the state-sponsored Confucianism and practical learning thus grew larger.

In fact, the study of *statecraft* (經世之學) used to promote the state’s governing capacity might have been largely absorbed by the first emperor of the Nguyễn Dynasty, Gia Long, during his journey-in-exile in the South at the end of the eighteenth century. He came to power in 1802 when he strongly supported the dynamism of commodity production and commercial activities in the South. His son, Minh Mạng (1820–1941), facilitated similar interests by implementing the policies of developing irrigation systems, trade, military innovation, national defence, science-based education, and law. The concept of *statecraft* was then spread to Confucianists, creating an atmosphere of political discussion which strongly motivated the idea of reform in Vietnam during the French colonial period.

Practical learning rejects the concept of “Mandate of Heaven”; instead, it advocates Mencius’s “theory of original goodness of human nature”. It is reasonable to conclude that the practical learning of this period aimed to encourage sainthood, advocate the learning of ancient wisdom, and appreciate the philosophies of Confucius and Mencius. This is evident in the working spirit of the Southern Vietnamese Confucianists, who loved to discuss only the practical knowledge and skills to attain morality and political ideology rather than getting engaged in deeper metaphysical generalizations and theoretical debates. It is notable that Southern Vietnamese Confucianists were interested in extracting the core ideas of the ancient sages but not the interpretation and explanations of Confucian scholars of later generations. As a result, Yangming studies were, in fact, limited due

22 Even though practical learning was introduced in both Korea and Vietnam, the two states reacted and applied in different ways. The Chinese writer Xu Yiling (2018) found that the Koreans deployed a Confucianism based on heart-and-mind, while the Vietnamese emphasized practical learning.

their pro-Yangming status in Southern Vietnam. The whole package of studies conceptualized and generalized by East Asian scholars of different periods was, again, not totally adopted.

Practical learning among Vietnamese Chinese scholars during the early periods was somehow more dramatic than that seen among the local Vietnamese elites. Yangming studies are said to be one of the core philosophical foundations for the opening and the rise of medieval trading ports such as Hội An, Cù lao Phố, Hà Tiên, and later, Sài Gòn – Chợ Lớn. Mạc Thiên Tứ, who was supported by many Qing Chinese scholars, was energetic with regard to reclaiming lands and opening commercial activities rather than making any real investments in building a metaphysical form of Confucian education under his leadership.

### (3) *Respecting the Way and ignoring fame and benefit* (Trọng đạo khinh danh, 重道輕名)

It is reasonable to conclude that the practical learning of Southern Vietnamese Confucianists formed the spirit of “disregarding bureaucratic Confucianism and imperial examinations of local elites” (see Cao 1996, 42). Instead, the Southern literati highly appreciated the capacity for self-cultivation and the individualistic merits of each Confucian scholar.

Here we come back to the case of Võ Trường Toản, a local Chinese Confucianist. He was well-known throughout the South for his virtues and aspirations as a Confucian scholar. He was not interested in the political domain, even though Emperor Gia Long invited him (many times) to work at the court. Phạm Việt Tuyền, in his notable work on Southern Vietnamese literature, considered him to be one of the two greatest Confucianists of the South, along with Mạc Thiên Tứ, who opened schools and set up Confucian institutions to educate many generations of Southern Confucian scholars (Pham 1965). Võ Trường Toản’s students followed his virtues. For instance, Ngô Tùng Châu (吳從周, 1752–1801) committed suicide by poison but did not surrender and hand over Quy Nhơn citadel to the forces of the Tây Sơn uprising. Phan Thanh Giản (潘清簡, 1796–1867) also killed himself when forced to hand over the Mekong River Delta to the French in 1867. Several Confucianists of later generations, e.g., Bùi Hữu Nghĩa (1807–1872), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822–1888), and Phan Văn Trị (1830–1910), were also said to inherit Võ Trường Toản’s virtues. As the French completely controlled the Saigon region in 1862, all Confucianists moved to the Mekong River Delta and continued their scholarly careers there. Five years later, in 1867, the French forcibly took over the delta, so those Confucianists once again moved, this time to the

southern part of Central Vietnam. Having no bureaucratic title and no significant property in hand, they sacrificed their connections to their homeland and ancestral halls in order to keep their Confucian virtues and patriotism.

Many Confucianists participated in anti-French movements in Southern Vietnam. For instance, they joined Trương Định's (1820–1864) revolt in Gò Công, Nguyễn Trung Trực's (1838–1868) in Rạch Giá, Võ Duy Dương's (1827–1866) in Đồng Tháp, Trần Văn Thành's (?–1873) in An Giang, and so on. Notably, many members of the South Chinese elites and secret societies (e.g., the Heaven and Earth Society) joined the revolts since they found similar ideas and attitudes among local Confucianists. Unfortunately, the revolts were finally suppressed by the French, and the leaders and significant Confucianists were killed. However, their virtues and devotions were long-lasting in the local traditions, since students of later generations continue to learn from them in textbooks, in literary works or in artistic performances, and the people who live in their local communities are always inspired by their spirits when they participate in various memorial activities dedicated to these elites.

In sum, in comparison to the Northern Vietnamese Confucianists who pursued bureaucratic Confucianism and civic examinations, the local literati in the South were more interested in bringing practical learning to life. Having no important political positions or bureaucratic titles, their devotions have been dramatically recorded in people's heart-and-mind rather than state-sponsored history. Various forms of studies made up the pre-modern Vietnamese society and ideological education; therefore, it would be inaccurate to generalize a set of common features for Vietnamese Confucianism in all regions. Similarly, it would be wrong to claim that Southern Confucianism was “not truly Vietnamese” (as considered by some Northern Confucian scholars—see Richey 2013, 68–9). Confucianism was transmitted and adopted differently in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Similarly, Confucianism was adopted and adapted differently in North/Central and Southern Vietnam. Therefore, only a multi-dimensional and multicultural prism can function accurately and effectively when looking at Confucianism from different backgrounds.

## Conclusion

The Confucian contacts between Vietnam and China and the rest of East Asia varied in time and space. Due to the importance of the building of oppositional “boundary maintenance” by the state rulers and elites against Chinese hegemony, the Northern and then the Central Vietnamese adopted Han-Song Confucianism

from China and maintained the philosophical axis over time, thus becoming “an island” of old Confucianism compared with their East Asian counterparts. The overwhelming emphasis on the application of knowledge and the disharmony between knowledge and action did not allow the classical Vietnamese Confucian scholars to transform and develop Confucian scholarship.

Since the late seventeenth century onwards, the Chinese elites from overseas introduced into Southern Vietnam a new facet of Confucianism, Qing Confucianism, and this had remarkable impacts on the ideological foundations of the local literati. Consequently, pro-Yangming practical learning was shaped and spread locally until the beginning of Western colonialism. Unfortunately, the domination of “orthodox” classical Confucianism promoted by the bureaucrats, as well as the disregard of the state rulers, did not facilitate the circulation and evolution of Yangming studies in Vietnam.

In comparison with other non-Chinese East Asian Confucian states, Vietnam adopted and used Confucianism in its own way, one that best served the state’s practical interests and strategy. Many layers of Confucianism, different in categories, thus stacked up together, and while one may dominate it cannot completely extinguish the others. Vietnamese Confucianism has been formed by various single insertions rather than being a systematic structure as a whole, among which the moral ideology and ideology of national security are the most prominent factors. By absorbing pro-Yangming studies, Southern Vietnamese Confucianism clearly manifests such a feature, especially the fact that local Confucian scholars emphasized self-realization and self-cultivation rather than getting engaged in state-sponsored Confucianism and civic examinations.

The statement “Yangming studies have had no impact in Vietnam”, as made by certain scholars, is both accurate to some extent and inaccurate in the others. It is the truth that Yangming studies did not cultivate a state-level spectrum of influence, even though they deeply affected the ideological mentality of the local gentry and certain aspects of life in the local community in the South. The transmission, spread, contestation, and then decline of Qing Confucianism in Vietnam over the last three hundred years can function as a test case with regard to the reform-free Confucian orthodoxy in pre-modern Vietnam.

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# The Origins of Contemporary Moral Education and Political Ideology in Confucian-Marxist Hồ Chí Minh's Vietnam

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## Abstract

As an emerging East-Asian country, Vietnam has been influenced by the forces of communism, colonialism and predominantly Confucianism. Though Confucianism has an enduring operational history in Vietnam, Singapore, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan, after the nineteenth century it takes a different turn and plays an effective role in contemporary social, political and cultural milieus in this emerging part of the world. In the context of the genealogical ups and downs of Confucianism in East Asian countries like Vietnam, this critical analytical essay discusses Confucianism as trans-national phenomena and a certain way of thinking which has been transformed historically across generations and influenced moral educational and political ideologies of the peoples of Asia. Confucian values have strong practical implications with regard to Asian societies, politics, cultures, religions and education systems. In particular, this article attempts to demonstrate how Confucianism continues to function despite the influences of Marxism and European colonialism in Vietnam, and how it contributed to shaping the present-day country.

**Keywords:** contemporary Confucianism, Vietnamese Confucianism, Confucianism and East Asian Countries, transnational phenomena, political, moral and educational ideology

## Izvori sodobne moralne vzgoje in politične ideologije v konfucijansko-marksističnem Hošiminhovem Vietnamu

### Izvilleček

Na Vietnam kot nastajajočo vzhodnoazijsko državo sta vplivala komunizem in kolonializem, v največji meri pa konfucianizem. Čeprav ima konfucianizem v Vietnamu, Singapurju, Koreji, na Japonskem, v Hong Kongu in Tajvanu dolgo zgodovino, je po devetnajstem stoletju prišlo do obrata, ki je odločilno vplival na sodobno družbo, politiko in kulturo v tem delu sveta. V okviru genealoških vzponov in padcev konfucianizma v vzhodnoazijskih državah, vključno z Vietnamom, članek obravnava konfucianizem kot transnacionalni pojav in specifičen način razmišljanja, ki se je skozi generacije

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zgodovinsko spreminjal ter vplival na moralno vzgojo in politične ideologije azijskih narodov. Konfucijanske vrednote močno vplivajo na azijske družbe, njihove politike, kulture, religije in izobraževalne sisteme. Članek poskuša pokazati, kako konfucianizem kljub vplivom marksizma in evropskega kolonializma v Vietnamu še naprej bistveno vpliva na oblikovanje današnje države.

**Ključne besede:** sodobno konfucijanstvo, vietnamsko konfucijanstvo, konfucijanstvo in vzhodnoazijske države, transnacionalni pojavi, politična, moralna in izobraževalna ideologija

## Introduction—Inception of Confucianism in Vietnam

Though it has had to compete with several dissimilar schools of thought, Confucianism<sup>1</sup> has never lost its appeal. Ideas derived from Confucius's philosophy<sup>2</sup> are universal, modern and always relevant, and thus Confucianism is contemporary. Confucianism has influenced Asian culture, society and politics in a significant manner, and thus contributed to shaping global history. While Confucianism originated in China, its long-lasting cultural, historical and political developments and features have heavily influenced Asian intellectuals and spread across East Asian societies. Though there are some theoretical underpinnings regarding Confucianism's internal and external implications and features in countries like China, Japan and Korea (Lai 2018), in Vietnam it takes interesting turns before the nineteenth century and after, and dominated 20th-century socio-culture and political organization of Vietnam (Whitmore 1984).

Being the easternmost country in the Indochina basin, Vietnam shares borders with China, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. The Vietnamese have strong affinities with Indonesian and Thai ethnic groups, but it was the Viet Tribes who established the Kingdom of Van Lang near the Red Delta Sea and in the northern part of the country during the seventh century BC (Buttinger 1972, 22; Slotte and

1 Confucianism is designated as a school of thought, a philosophical movement, a religion, a set of principles and teachings on life (Cua 2013; Yao and Yao 2000). Confucianism derived from the Hundred School of Thought, a school of philosophical thought that arose in the 6th to 3rd centuries BC (usually understood as a period in which a hundred (diverse) schools of thought arose, not as a single school of thought lasting for a particular period). The philosophers of Spring Autumn Period (771 BC–476 BC), Confucius' (551 BC–479 BC) and Mencius' (385 BC–303 BC) teachings and concepts are popularly known as Ruism or Confucianism (usually Confucianism is broader than just the teachings of Confucius and Mencius).

2 The thoughts and teachings of Confucius, who has long been worshiped by the Chinese people as the leading sage and greatest Chinese philosopher, are called Confucianism (Cua 2013; Yao and Yao 2000).

De Vos 1998, Chapter 2). The Kingdom of Van Lang was conquered by other tribes from North Vietnam and the Southern part of a Chinese province named Guangxi in late third century BC, and they created a new kingdom called Au Lac (Slote and De Vos 1998). Late in the second century BC Au Lac was invaded and named Nam Viet by the Qin general Trieu Da, a high-ranking officer from the Chinese Dynasty during the second and third centuries BC. Nam Viet was again conquered during the Han Dynasty in the early second century BC and ruled till 938 (AD) (Mok 2014). During this long period of military rule, Confucianism was introduced in Nam Viet.

The Chinese rulers generally did not impose their traditions, customs and cultures on the Vietnamese. They only controlled territorial issues related to the military and the allocation of administrative posts. It was the Han Dynasty which divided Nam Viet into prefectures (*jun*) and then into districts (*xian*), and then the feudal lords were appointed as the chiefs of the prefects (*ibid.*). The organization of people and their lifestyles were highly influenced and managed by the Viet tribal lords and Viet tribes maintained their own cultures and traditions.

It was the Chinese officials, settlers and their families who followed and exercised Confucius principles in their way of life and moral teachings. Later, the Chinese administration adopted the policy of assimilation and spread Confucius' ideology among the Vietnamese people at the dawn of the Christian calendar, especially when prefects like Xi Guang and Ren Yan instituted Confucian principles in their moral teachings and marriage rituals. Moreover, the Viet people who adopted the Chinese customs received financial and social benefits within their districts (Slote and De Vos 1998). However, some prefects like To Dinh took strict measures to assimilate people to Confucius' teachings and faced fierce protests, especially by female leaders, as Viet tribes were a matriarchal society. Because of such protests, the Han government replaced the prefect chiefs with Chinese officials and instituted an official Chinese assimilation policy in Vietnam, and Confucian principles were also imposed on Viet society, particularly regarding family teachings, where women played a very crucial role (Wilson 1995).

### **Early Transformation of Vietnamese Society and Confucianism**

With the transformation of social organization in Vietnam, Confucianism also transformed. In Viet tribes, women were the heads of families and therefore there were many occasions where women protested against the Chinese government, particularly in between the second to sixth centuries. After many unsuccessful attempts, the revolution was taken over by the males in the society, and since by

then the traditional matriarchal Viet society was transformed into a patriarchal one (Mok 2014; Slote and De Vos 1998). Family teachings, family names, and customs were governed by the males, where Confucian principles already played a role. In the tenth century, Vietnam achieved independence from Chinese domination, but Confucianism remained embedded in Viet society and was exercised following the principles of male control. What is interesting is that Confucianism was not the dominant school of thought in Vietnam during this time. Traditional Viet customs and cultures were always maintained. Moreover, along with Confucianism, Chinese officials also instituted Buddhism and Taoism (*ibid.*).

Vietnamese Confucians scholars served the Chinese government in many parts of China, and were also followers of Buddhism. After the independence of Vietnam, these officials returned to Vietnam and were given important positions, although they were reluctant to engage in political affairs and instead pursued moral teachings (*ibid.*). They thus influenced Vietnamese moral, educational and legal affairs and also taught Buddhism and Confucianism to the educated government officials and spread the philosophy of Confucianism amongst a new generation.

Between the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, and especially during the Ly Dynasty (1054–1072), the influence of Confucianism was increasing, and Buddhism was becoming less significant. Under the rule of the Emperors Ly Thanh Tong, Ly Nanh Tong and Ly Cao Tong, various initiatives were taken to institutionalize Confucian principles, and Confucius temples, Confucius examination systems, and educational policies were established. Though Buddhism attempted to be influential under Tran and Ly rule, Confucianism remained predominant within Vietnamese society (Slote and De Vos 1998). People felt more comfortable with traditional Confucian teachings and ways of life, where family ties are given high value.

The Confucian scholars were able to convince rulers like Tran Du Tong about the superstitions and limitations of Buddhism and Taoism, and encouraged them to adopt the Chinese institutional practice of Confucianism (Mok 2014). They not only rejected the mystical and superstitious features of Buddhism and Taoism, but also called for more vigorous moral educational and a better understanding of metaphysical principles. Among these scholars, Han Yu and Li Ao were famous for bringing something like Neo-Confucianism, which became prominent in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Although Taoism and Buddhism influenced Confucianism during and after the Han Dynasty, by rejecting their superstitious elements Neo-Confucianism could offer a more secular form of Confucianism (Blocker and Starling 2010, 64). Neo-Confucianism borrowed its framework from Taoism and its core philosophy can be seen as rational

and humanistic: the whole universe can be known through reason, and it is possible to build harmonious relationship between the individual and the universe (Craig 1998, 552). However, unlike Buddhism and Taoism, Neo-Confucianism emphasized metaphysics as a method of generating a logical ethical philosophy, where Buddhists and Taoists used metaphysics as a tool for religious progress, enlightenment and morality (de Bary 1989, 94–5).

There were many ups and downs with social and political issues, but Confucianism continued to be one of the most influential ideologies among the Vietnamese. The people from Northern Vietnam, compared to those from Southern Vietnam, were more influenced by the practices of Confucian principles and there were some problems regarding this until the Nguyen Dynasty reunited the country and established a new order in the eighteenth century. During this time Confucianism received a new motivation. The rulers of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945) modelled Confucianism on the Chinese model, and followed the Chinese institutional and legal codes. For example, in the early nineteenth century the Emperors Gia Long and Minh Mang constructed their forms of government as per the Chinese system. In order to reinforce Confucian morality, Minh Mang instituted ten articles of moral conduct to be followed by the entire nation (Woodside 1971). Before the French arrived to establish their colony in Vietnam, the people experienced a very concentrated form of Confucianism in many aspects of their private and public lives. Though not completely, over hundreds of years of domination Chinese cultural, moral, political and social influence introduced to the Vietnamese people Confucian principles and ways of life, and for most of the time Confucianism also remained as a form of a state ideology (ibid.).

Near the end of the nineteenth century the French colonized Vietnam and started to reform the socio-political atmosphere of society. Therefore, Confucianism did not work as the state ideology anymore, but was still practiced through people's daily lives. Confucian philosophy continued to be the moral foundation for Vietnamese people in many villages, where Confucian scholars worked as mentors in areas such as moral education, marriage and death (Marr 1980). During this period of Western influence, particularly in the early twentieth century, a new generation of Confucian scholars emerged who challenged the traditional way of practicing Confucianism and formed a club named the Self Reliance Pen Club (*Tu Luc Van Doan*). One of the major issues of Confucianism, as practiced traditionally, is the influence of parents as well as obedience to elders who dominate the young. Though they never denied the respect for and importance of parents, these young reformers called for more liberty and choice in their personal lives, especially in choosing their spouses (Marr 1980; Slote and De Vos 1998). From World War I to World War II, Confucianism went through a dramatic change, but

the Vietnamese people never left the core values of Confucius teachings until a new ideology, Communism, was introduced (Cooke 1994).

### **Introduction of Marxism in Vietnam**

After World War II, the global political and social phenomena impacted Vietnamese society, and eventually after the division of Vietnam in 1954 there were moves to form a new society based on Marxism. Studies show that the Vietnamese people who established the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930 were introduced to Marxism through Lenin's "Theses on National and Colonial Questions":

They were much more attracted by the pragmatic response to colonial subjugation that Lenin's theses and Comintern affiliation provided by than by the theorems of dialectical materialism. As member of dissident elite of a colonized country steeped in a mythology of resistance to foreign rule, they could not help but focus on those aspects of doctrine which pointed out a road to national liberation and personal power. Flexibility and pragmatism in the choice of means have been hallmarks of Vietnamese communism ever since. (Turley 2019, 5–6)

However, to install a revolutionary ideology like Communism into the Vietnamese collective mind, the Communists needed to suppress the dominant Confucian principles and scholars who advocated them.<sup>3</sup> The Communists first concentrated on the family ties that were based on Confucian principles and had been practiced over generations. During this period there was an historical process in which the Vietnamese fashioned responses out of their own past. The Communist Party first undertook this process in their "Vietnamese Communist views of nation's history and of the party's role ... and they have acknowledged local expectations and emphasized continuity ... and declared that nation and socialism are one" (ibid). Once they had introduced communism, the Communist leaders pulled the younger generation into their revolution and made them look again at their family relations by claiming that Confucianism was a feudal system which was dragging the progressive Vietnamese people backward (Huỳnh 1986). The Confucianists then started to feel that under the grip of communism they had no future in Vietnam. This atmosphere continued until the revolutionary leader, Hồ Chí Minh, came to power.

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3 For more about the long history of Confucian ideology and the inception of Marxism in Vietnam see Nguyen Quoc Pham's "Marxism and Socialist Orientation in Vietnam" (2006, 205–6).



## Hồ Chí Minh's Embrace of Confucianism and Marxism

Hồ Chí Minh (1890–1969), also known as Nguyễn Tất Thành or Uncle Hồ, was a Vietnamese revolutionary who is often called a man of “cultural personality” (Brocheux 2007). This section of the essay briefly highlights Hồ Chí Minh's embrace of Confucian values and their influence on the version of communism he promoted. Hồ not only ended the rivalry between communism and Confucianism, but also transformed Confucian values into his nation's revolutionary zeal for independence. He considered Confucian moral virtues as indispensable for the Vietnamese people, and re-instituted those virtues necessary for the revolution and the revolutionary context of his country. In his book *Let's Change Our Method of Work*, written under a pen name XYZ in 1947, he showed how Confucius' idea of the nobleman truly can turn into a revolutionary one (Nam 2018).

Minh grew up in an environment where Confucian values were given high importance. Though Vietnamese society went through an extensive transformation during French colonialism, this was mostly limited to the cities. Villages were not completely free from colonial exploitation, but did not relinquish their insights regarding social relationships and organized communities (Lê 1989, 259–60; Duiker 2018). Minh passed his early life in this atmosphere, where he closely experienced the cultural practices of Vietnamese rural areas that he maintained throughout his life, even while he was abroad for a long time and exposed to Marxism. On one side he was learning and understanding the ideologies of Marx and Lenin, while on the other he was following Confucian values, including those of humaneness, knowledge, righteousness and integrity. What is important to note here is that the village where Minh grew up, named Kim Lien, was a significant place for Confucian studies and popularly known as the “civilized land and the place of *Shi* and *Shu*” (Lê 1989, 261). *Shi* and *Shu* refer to two works called *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*) and *Shujing* (*Book of Historical Documents*) by Confucius. This place became a centre for many Confucian scholars who influenced Minh's growing mind and become the backbone of his cultural and intellectual background. His family also contributed to this process of development, as his father Ngyen Sinh was a Confucian scholar. Moreover, before he left for the West, Minh actively studied Confucianism for ten years (*ibid.*).

While he was in the West, Minh always introduced himself as a Confucian admirer, and the values he learned never disappear during his long introduction to the modern West and to Marxism. Rather, he received new ideology (Marxism) and used it to help develop his own ideas (Son 2013, 39), as it helped him “objectively appraise his own *raison d'être* in the new social and political circumstance” of his country (Lê 1989, 14). He not only integrated his knowledge of Confucian values



and Marxist ideology in his political practice in Vietnam, but also promoted them explicitly through his writings and speeches. When later the Chinese Nationalists in Guangxi imprisoned him from 1924 to 1943, Minh wrote extensively in Chinese about his Confucian philosophy, reflecting his knowledge of intrinsic values regardless of physical constraint, which is similar to the understanding of ancient Chinese and Vietnamese scholars (*ibid.*, 280).

Minh did not confine his knowledge within a certain boundary. Though there might be some similarities, Ho did not follow Confucianism like Neo-Confucians, nor did he take it as a politicized Imperial dogma. Instead, he understood “Confucianism as a tradition of Philosophy” (Son 2013, 40), and not a religion but a school of thought. Always considering Classical Confucianism as the basis of his knowledge, Minh saw the fundamental values of Confucianism as a universal form of knowledge which, for him, appeared to be continuously meaningful for modern Vietnam. The basis of this understanding became even stronger on two grounds, especially when he was introduced to Marxist ideology. Initially, he understood the essence of Marxist ideology for social harmony and considered Confucianism to offer directions for moral cultivation and appropriate inter-personal relations with an aim of establishing social harmony (*ibid.*).

Secondly, communism as a science of ethical experience and rules of conduct celebrates the idea of *datong*, “Great Unity”. The idea of *datong*, which was introduced by Confucius and promoted by his disciples like Mencius, appeared to be a useful condition for appreciating Communist internationalism, and therefore to Minh Confucianism was compatible with communism (Lê 1989, 233–34). Minh applied both communism and Confucianism in his specific political vision. If Marx’s ideas can be based on the history of philosophy of Europe, Minh revised them in reference to the history of philosophy of Asia. He considered the basis of Confucian tradition in East Asian history, specifically in China and Vietnam. This allowed him to find the relevance of classical Confucian values to review and reinforce Marxism in the contemporary context of Vietnam. Therefore, more dialogues could be initiated to examine the obvious relation between Confucian and Marxist institutions and principles.

### Marxist Hồ Chí Minh and Confucius Moral Virtues

Soon after WWII, the people of Vietnam fought for their liberty, to free themselves from French and Japanese colonialism. Eventually, with the surrender of Japan at the end of WWII, Hồ was the leader of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh), and under his guidance in 1945 the League announced

a new country, called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DVR). On 2 September 1945 in Hanoi, Hồ declared independence for Vietnam, including in his speech Jefferson’s proclamation: “all men are created equal” (ibid., 133). Later in 1946, Hồ’s DVR were involved in direct clashes with the French colonial powers that put all its strength into holding its colony in Vietnam and demanded the DVR forces surrender their arms. Hồ rejected the French demand and called for national resistance against colonial rule, and fought against the French army and a secret mission called Lea Campaign that was initiated to destroy DVR forces. This mission failed, and thus Hồ established the basis for a new philosophy—mixing Confucian and modernist values together (Brocheux 2007; Nam 2018).

In the book *Let’s Change Our Method of Work*, Hồ has a chapter called “Revolutionary Virtues”, where he presented a brief description of the moral values that a Party member or cadre should have in order to be a revolutionary person. Hồ mentioned five good virtues:

It is not difficult for a cadre to become a real revolutionary if he wants to. Everything depends on his *heart-and-mind* (*lòng mình*). If his sole interest is the Party, the country, and his compatriots, he will gradually become *just and selfless* (*chí công vô tư* 至公無私). As he has been just and selfless, his faults will progressively decrease, and his virtues described below will become increasingly apparent each day. In brief, the good virtues are five in all: *humanity* (仁), *righteousness* (義), *knowledge* (智), *courage* (勇), and *integrity* (廉). (Hồ in Nam 2018, 138)

The phrase “totally just and selfless” later became one of the basic moral values for a revolutionary as a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and these moral virtues are the same as the Confucius virtues needed to be a nobleman. Moreover, in the first chapter of the book, called “Classic of Loyalty”, Hồ discusses what he means by loyalty. For him, loyalty is to be “totally just and fair”, and also “being whole-hearted” (ibid.). Hồ’s ideas regarding revolutionary virtues are central to being loyal to the country, the Party and the people, and also being able to distinguish right from the wrong.

## Hồ Chí Minh’s Forms of Government and Confucianism

Near the end of the twentieth century Hồ Chí Minh became the subject of scholarly attention in relation to Confucianism. Scholars divided into two sides: Hồ is a critic of Confucius, or Hồ is a person who practiced Confucianism all his life and applied many of classical Confucian principles in his forms of government

(Nguyễn 1974; Brocheux 2007; Son 2013, Nam 2018). Hồ's idea of good government is an amalgamation of institutional and legal management with moral virtues. The French colonialists made every attempt to break the cultural heritage of the Vietnamese people, while the Communists tried to suppress the Confucian zeal present amongst the people in the towns and villages. As a leader, Hồ Chí Minh, in this case, was quite pragmatic and did not make the same mistakes. Rather he combined some classical Confucian principles into his vision of government and institutions.

Vietnamese urban society during Hồ Chí Minh's time was heavily influenced by French colonialism, and Confucianism went through a radical transformation. But people from the rural areas were practicing Confucian ideology in their daily lives. As mentioned before, Hồ grew up in this rural environment and absorbed Confucianism in his young mind, as reflected later in his life, as the values embedded in Vietnamese society for centuries shaped his adult personality (Brocheux 2007). Hồ was introduced to Confucius studies and philosophy by scholars who frequently gathered to discuss the teachings of Confucian virtues. This environment enlightened Hồ culturally and intellectually. Being exposed to the traditional philosophical teachings of Confucianism from works like the *Analecets of Confucius*, which was achieved in its ultimate form during the Han Dynasty, and the *Works of Mencius*, Hồ was not influenced by the dialects that politicized the doctrines of Confucian principles. Therefore, he supported the fundamental virtues and teaching of Confucianism, which he incorporated for the making of modern Vietnam. In a discussion with the Russian literary scholar Osip Mandelstam, held in 1923, Hồ stated:

I was born into a Vietnamese Confucian family. ... The youth from those families often studied Confucianism. Comrade, you must know that Confucianism is not a religion but a science of moral experience and conduct. Based on this foundation, one puts forward the notion of the "Great Unity". (Nam 2018, 135)

As we can see, for Hồ Confucianism was not a religion but a school of philosophical thought which accommodates principles and teachings of moral virtues, as well as the way of creating unity and social cohesion. He also revised Marxism in relation to its historical basis, incorporating not only European history but also that of Asia, where he finds Confucian customs with a basis on East Asian history, particularly in respect to China and Vietnam. In this way of consolidating East Asian history, Hồ always considered the people as the core of power. He believed there is nothing more powerful than the people. Therefore, they should be at the centre of any government (ibid.):

In the Communist Review of the Third International in May 1921, Nguyen Ài Quốc introduced to the West the Confucian concept of *minben* by restating Mencius' famous restatement:<sup>4</sup> “the people are the most important element in a nation, the spirits of the land, and grain are the next; the sovereign is the lightest”. With that Mencian inspiration, one year later Nguyen Ài Quốc chastised Emperor Khải Định during the imperial visit to the Marseille Exposition in the article entitled “The Laments of Trung Trac” published in the *L'Humanite* on 1 June 1922. (Son 2013, 43)

He considered the people as water and the government as fish in it. Hồ advocated the Confucian concept of *minben*, where the people are considered to be the basis of everything. The concept of *minben* was practiced in ancient Vietnam, when people considered that “a legitimate government must be responsible for the happiness of the people” (Son 2013, 43). The Confucian concept of *minben* is in the centre of Hồ's vision of government. He respected democracy but his vision is more about “for the people” rather than “of the people”. In an article in 1949 on “Public Relations”, he states that: “our country is a democratic country. All benefit is for the people. All power is of the people. Renovation and construction are the business of the people” (ibid., 44). For him, independence is meaningless without the absolute freedom and happiness of the people. For this to happen, Hồ advocated the practice of moral virtue not only in personal life, but also in the government. Self-cultivation of individual morality should make a political man (Waley 2012). As in Confucius' *Great Learning (Daxue)*, which is one of the four texts of Confucian learning,<sup>5</sup> good government is the product of the moral cultivation of the political men (Watson 2007). Similar ideas about the learning of good government and the morals of the rulers is also present in *Spring and Autumn Annals*, another of the four texts of Confucius (Miller 2015; Milburn 2016). Hồ also takes this positive view of government, and re-educates the people of his government with these moral virtues in which the external arrangements of the institutions are less important than the internal moral arrangements of the people in the institutions. To re-establish the self-cultivation of the morality of the members of the new republic for the people, Hồ advocated following the essential Confucian values.

4 For more about Mencius' statements see James Legge (1960, 483).

5 Technically, it is one of the *Four Books* canonized in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism (and not the earlier Confucian tradition), to form the core subject matter of the Imperial examination system.

## Confucian Values and Moral Education in Contemporary East Asia

The legacy of Confucian thought is active in East Asian countries. Confucian influences on East Asian socio-cultural and economic modernization and nation-building are especially noteworthy. Countries like Japan consciously employed traditional Confucian ideology for nation-building and industrialization. The Japanese also strongly maintain religious teachings in relation to the *Analects of Confucius* (Kizo 2018). Therefore, Confucianism turns out to be a pan-Asian phenomenon that can accommodate inter-related cultures. In the introduction to their edited volume, Roger Ames and Peter Hershock write:

Over time, this intergenerational embodiment and transmission of an aggregating Confucian culture spread throughout the East Asian world of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam to become a pan-Asian phenomenon that over the centuries has shaped and been shaped by this family of distinctive and yet inter-related cultures. And, the evidence today is that many in Asia feel that Confucian culture can make valuable contributions to the articulation of a new world cultural order. Enormous resources are being invested in China and other Asian cultural spheres to renew traditional Confucian learning as a repository of values and conceptual resources that can be drawn upon to shape their responses to contemporary dynamics. (Ames and Hershock 2018, 5)

Taking Confucianism as a long-lasting, cross-cultural set of values, and seeing the efficacy of (some) Confucian teachings and practices, countries like Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore were able to achieve both economic and social development. These countries have re-studied and adapted the traditional values to make them suitable to serve their purposes to build new nations. Japan, particularly during the Meiji Reformation and WWII, has used Confucian ideas in its educational curriculum and official documents with a view to combining industrialization with the traditional Confucian Japanese devotion to the family and customs (Du 1996). In much the same way, the Singaporean government has used Confucian ideas as a way of bringing modernization and political power, in which the importance of family harmony and admiration for authority were tactically maintained to achieve consistent social and economic stability (ibid.). Using the family as the basic unit of the social structure, like Japan and Singapore, Taiwan also connected Confucian ideas to developmental strategies and political locality, and proved that maintaining long-term traditional family structures brings economic and political success. Ethnic Chinese people in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have also sustained this ideological ground.

The commitment to Confucian values and family ties has been strengthened in order for them to be able to survive in challenging atmospheres like Hong Kong and South Korea. Along with other East Asian countries, these two societies also reinterpreted traditional Confucian ideas and adapted them their modern economic and social systems. From education to personal lifestyles, Confucianism has evolved as a new way of looking at the political and social organization and arrangement of institutions (Wang 2008). Perhaps, it is the Confucius zeal that leads such countries to combine a democratic educational system with traditional values, and allows them to adjust to new political and economic difficulties.

### **Ideological Dynamics in the Contemporary Vietnamese Educational System**

From the above discussion, it is evident that the people of Vietnam have experienced the dissimilar forms of social organization and principles of both Confucianism and communism. The people have also experienced different religions, including Buddhism, Taoism and Catholicism. Therefore, the educational principles in contemporary Vietnam have different forms of ideological understanding. Moral education is consolidated in the formal education system, which is based on personal moral principles, political and citizenship teachings. In all of these educational processes not only are Marxist ideology and the thoughts of Hồ Chí Minh present, but also Confucian philosophy, although mostly at the primary level. Most of these ideologies come under a broad term called moral education—traditional Confucian moral education, which mostly developed through both an informal method of education, like family or religious education, as well as a formal method like Marxist socialist moral education through the national curriculum (Nguyen 2004). For example, according to the Ministry of Education and Training, primary level students are taught about two different system of morality in Vietnamese society, that is traditional and socialist morality.<sup>6</sup> At the secondary level there is no subject like morality taught, but instead civics, where Marxist-Leninist philosophy is predominant. In 2018 the Ministry of Education and Training implemented a new national curriculum where morality and civics were challenged, although they remain in the system (Viet Nam News 2018). However, how moral education is objectively arranged within the emerging and changing Vietnamese society is still a matter of contest, especially since the society has experienced a long history with the values of Confucianism, Buddhism and communism.

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6 See more at the Ministry of Education and Training (Thai 2006).



The formal and informal educational journey for the people of Vietnam has gone through different stages, which are directly or indirectly related to national socio-cultural and political history. As mentioned above, Vietnam was under Chinese domination for about a millennium, particularly from the first century BC to the tenth century AD. Therefore, the earliest stage of the traditional Vietnamese educational system has a Chinese cultural influence. The intellectual and cultural organization of Vietnamese society was heavily influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and most importantly Confucianism. Therefore, the initial stage of the educational system was grounded on the principles and teachings of Confucian philosophies, the self-cultivation of morality, social harmony and political virtues. The next stage of the educational system, which was during the time of nineteenth and twentieth centuries was influenced by French colonial policy which was administered through Western Catholic missionaries (Thanh 2010). Though this Catholic, Western form of educational management influenced the Vietnamese language and culture, the traditional Vietnamese cultural characteristics and Confucian educational zeal continued to be a significant way of learning about morality and political ideology. In the twentieth century the educational system experienced a new turn, especially under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, when the whole country was fighting for independence from Japanese and then French occupation (Nguyen 2004).

After the separation of the country into two separate parts, North and South Vietnam, the educational policy was also separated into two policies. The socialist model of education was implemented in North Vietnam, and a Westernized in South Vietnam, under French colonial rule. With the unification of the country the educational system was centralized under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. With the economic reforms that began in 1986, the *Đổi Mới* (revolution) was implemented to serve the country's developmental needs, and the educational system changed into a socialist-oriented market economy (ibid.). *Đổi Mới* brought a radical change in the social, cultural and economic sectors of Vietnam, one that required huge public participation from all sphere of life. Therefore, the educational system was formally reorganized into five stages: pre-school, primary, secondary, higher and postgraduate education. Moral education was incorporated as one of the fundamental subjects in every stage of formal education.

### **Forms of Moral-Political Education in Vietnam**

The Educational Law of 1998 formally adopted moral education in the curriculum at every stage of national learning. In this moral educational curriculum,



issues like socialism, loyalty, good citizenship, cultivation of virtues, the natural environment, understanding foreign countries, inter-personal relations, appreciation of soldiers and national defenders, and nationality are included but mixed in an illogic fashion, which not only hints at the Marxist-Confucianist way of teaching, but also incorporates moral and political education. From pre-school to postgraduate studies, the aim is to create the next generation of fully developed Vietnamese citizens, but knowledge of politics and moral virtues remains inadequate (Doan 2005), and little interest in either politics or morality are observed by researchers (*ibid.*). Though the educational system of Vietnam never clarifies what it means by moral education (which often seems moral-political education), political education is highly emphasized in the forms of moral education where not only Marxist-Leninist political objectives are highlighted, but also some Confucianist traditional teachings are carried out.

Vietnam is modernizing and the sense of materiality amongst people is increasing. Due to social media and the growth of technology, Western notions of lifestyle are having an ever greater impact. Moreover, scholars claim that traditional social values seem to be fading away, as there are no definite moral educational aims as in the earlier stage of the educational system. The morality of a person and character building are less emphasized in the vague forms of moral-political education that now exist. Traditional Vietnamese moral education and virtues, which respect harmony and care, are disappearing in contemporary society (Nguyen 2004), with younger people preferring personal benefits over social and communal ones.

There are two forms of moral education prevailing in the Vietnamese educational system: traditional morality which has its roots in Confucian philosophy, and socialist morality which is based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy (Huong 2004). Confucianism advocates human relations, the happiness of people, personal moral cultivation, social order, humaneness, integrity and political virtues. Moreover, Confucian ideology emphasizes respect for elders, obedience to parents, and dedication to the development of the community. Though Confucian values, like the superiority of elders and men over subjects, juniors and women, have seen some revisions in contemporary Vietnam, due to the sense of freedom and personal choice that have come into play, younger generations also seek social harmony and happiness along with economic growth and career development. Yet these young people also have a clear understanding that without family harmony and respect there would be an imbalance in life, which would result in dissatisfaction. Though religious education is not officially included in the educational system of Vietnam, moral values and spiritual lessons are taught through families and religious institutions. Scholars claim that traditional Confucian values are more

emphasized and learned through families than schools, as family education had worked as the dominant form of learning for a child since the very early in Vietnam. There are, however, instances where family relations and teaching are less emphasized, especially for the children of nuclear families and in cities, where maintaining traditional values is difficult.

The socialist educational system came into effect with the inception of communism in Vietnam, and continued to be one of the major forces of moral education (Wang and Namh 2019). Socialist moral education puts importance on socialist principles and respect for the workers, and highlights individual and collective duties towards the state, where the accomplishment of socialism is the prime concern. Unlike Confucian values, socialist values are exercised through institutions and formal education, which is mandatory. This obligation sometimes allows the younger generation to think of personal choices and perspectives, where career growth and economic stability have come to play a crucial role. In socialist values achievement is collective, which is contrasted with the market economy that emphasizes individual choice and satisfaction.

## Conclusion—Contemporary Confucianism and Contemporary Vietnam

Confucianism is rational, contemporary and relevant to present-day social, political and moral studies. Ideologies like communism, Catholicism and European colonialism looks at Confucian values as something outdated and irrational. Confucian ideas emphasize affirmative thinking in relation to established norms and values, and connected with institutional arrangements. However, Confucianism is also critical, since many scholars argue for an interpretation of Confucianism that is *opposed to* Western philosophies and moralities that place “rationality” in the central role.<sup>7</sup> For example, in the *Analects*, in the discussion regarding benevolence (*ren*) which indicates cultivating self through helping others, cultivating themselves through learning (*xue*), Confucius emphasizes:

To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness (and that) learn widely and be steadfast in your purpose, inquire earnestly and reflect on what is at hand and there is no need for you to look for benevolence elsewhere. (Confucius 1979, “Benevolence” IV)

<sup>7</sup> Being influenced by Neo-Confucianism, New Confucianists in contemporary times take a neo-conservative approach to Confucianism and use traditional Confucian ideas like social and political harmony for a comparative study with Western ideas like rationalism and humanism (Makeham 2003).

Confucius often engages in critical discussions, his way of learning (*xue*) requires involvement in critical conversation that often looks for suggestions from others and motivates criticism: “words to gentle advice” (*ibid.*).

The importance of Confucian thought today has been demonstrated by the employment and reinvention of Confucian ideas in relation to current socio-economic and political developments. East Asian countries have been maintaining the Confucian philosophical ideology in their collective and personal life, and have now institutionalized Confucian ideas in their national interest and to encourage social empathy (Jang 2019). In these societies, the teaching of Confucius is exercised through informal institutions like family, as well as formal schooling through the national educational curriculum.

From the second century to present-day Vietnam, Confucian values and traditions are maintained through various religious, institutional and personal arrangements. Like other developing societies, Vietnam is also facing new challenges with regard to reaping the benefits of industrialization and political stability. At this particular moment, the national educational system requires a holistic transformation to meet the new challenges. Moreover, with the growing tensions of social and personal problems, like various abuses, divorces, corruption, addiction, and moral degradation, people in Vietnam are rethinking the foundation of the formal educational system. People are also concerned about declining traditional values, virtues and harmony in social relations. There is a growing demand for the reconstruction of a moral educational system and clearer moral teaching in order to help the development of the Vietnamese people, and Confucian values and teachings can play a vital role in this.

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# Vietnamese and Chinese Movies about Royalty: From Confucian Cosmology to Ecological Politics

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## Abstract

Since 2002, with the enormously successful release of the movie *Hero* by Zhang Yimou, we have been witnessing the resurrection of the royal theme in contemporary East Asian cinema, and the return of Confucian cosmology as its philosophical foundation. In this paper, I focus on Vietnamese films which represent royal subjects and court life, like *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty* (*Tây Sơn hào kiệt*; Lý Hùng, Lý Huỳnh, and Phụng Hoàng; 2010), *Blood Letter* (*Thiên mệnh anh hùng*, Victor Vũ, 2012), and *Tam Cam The Untold Story* (*Tám Cám chuyện chưa kể*, Ngô Thanh Vân, 2016); and Chinese films, like *Hero* (英雄, Zhang Yimou, 2002), *The Banquet* (夜宴, Feng Xiaogang, 2006), and *Red Cliff* (赤壁, John Woo, 2008). Firstly and most importantly, my essay examines how the cosmic and environmental elements in such movies are manipulated to advocate some particular political discourse as a kind of ecological politics. From this analysis, I analyse and explain the similarities in how the filmmakers in Vietnam and China establish the stereotypes of power and legitimacy of authority utilizing and transforming the Confucian spiritual cosmology. I also try to clarify the difference between the two cinemas in how they express the concepts “the Unity of Heaven and Man” (*tianren heyi*), “Rectification of Names” (*zhengming*), and “Virtue of Loving Life” (*haosheng*) in their political implications. Finally, I will discuss the layers of meaning and visual narratives by analysing the characters and social contexts of the films to reaffirm the varying degrees of influence of Confucian tradition on contemporary forms of cultural and political practices.

**Keywords:** Confucian cosmology, historical movies on royalty, ecological politics, “the Unity of Heaven and Man”, “Rectification of Names”, “Virtue of Loving Life”

## Vietnamski in kitajski filmi o kraljevih družinah: od konfucijanske kozmologije do okoljevarstvenih politik

### Izvilleček

Od leta 2002, ko je bil prvič predvajan izjemno uspešen film *Junak* (英雄, *Hero*) v režiji Zhang Yimouja, smo bili priča ponovnega vstajenja kraljevske tematike v sodobnem vzhodnoazijskem filmu in vrnitvi konfucijanske kozmologije kot njegovega filozofskega

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temelja. V tem članku se osredotočam na vietnamske filme, ki uprizarjajo člane kraljevih družin in življenje na dvoru, kot na primer *Junaki dinastije Tay Son* (*Tây Sơn hào kiệt*; Lý Hùng, Lý Huỳnh in Phụng Hoàng; 2010), *Krvavo pismo* (*Thiên mệnh anh hùng*, Victor Vũ, 2012) in *Tam Cam: Zamolčana zgodba* (*Tám Cám chuyện chưa kể*, Ngô Thanh Vân, 2016), ter kitajske filme, kot so *Junak* (英雄, Zhang Yimou, 2002), *Gostija* (夜宴, Feng Xiaogang, 2006) in *Rdeča pečina* (赤壁, John Woo, 2008). Najprej in najpomembneje, moj esej preučuje, na kakšen način tovrstni filmi ravnajo s kozmičnimi in okoljskimi elementi, da bi tako zagovarjali določen politični diskurz kot vrsto okoljevarstvene politike. V okviru te analize želim preučiti in razložiti podobnosti, kako z uporabo ter preobrazbo konfucijanske duhovne kozmologije kitajski in vietnamski filmarji ustvarjajo stereotype moči in legitimnosti. V članku bom prav tako poskusil pojasniti razliko, kako s sporočanjem političnih implikacij obravnavani filmski industriji izražata »enotnost Neba in Človeka« (*tianren heyi*), »pravilnost imen« (*zhengming*) in »vrednoto ljubezni do življenja« (*haosheng*). Nazadnje bom z analizo likov in družbenih kontekstov v filmih obravnaval še njihove pomenske sloje ter vizualno narativo, da bi tako ponovno potrdil spreminjanje se stopnje vpliva konfucijanske tradicije na oblike sodobnih kulturnih in političnih običajev.

**Ključne besede:** konfucijanska kozmologija, zgodovinski filmi o kraljevih družinah, okoljevarstvena politika, »enotnost Neba in Človeka«, »pravilna imena«, »vrednosta ljubezni do življenja«

## Introduction

### *Hero and the Rise of Historical Movies on Royalty in East Asia*

As socialist countries that share a long tradition of Confucianism, Vietnam and China have many cultural, ideological, and political similarities. In the last two decades, their intense contact with capitalism has significantly changed their entertainment and film industries. Contrary to previous periods in the 20th century, especially since China joined the WTO in 2001 and Vietnam in 2007, the government-planned films produced by state-owned studios have decreased and only carry symbolic value, while commercial cinema (according to the Hollywood model) is encouraged in order to maximize foreign investment and strengthen domestic private companies. At the same time, the independent cinema (art-house style) peripherally developed its own path. The state has increasingly coordinated with private companies to produce or distribute commercial films, especially in China. Now, the monopolized production of state-owned studios has almost ended in the era of global integration in both Vietnam and China (Aranburu 2017, 12; Nguyệt 2018).

In this context, Zhang Yimou's movie, *Hero*, released in 2002 created quite a stir in the Chinese-language film market and the wider world for combining state-owned film studios, domestic private film studios, and studios abroad. After *Ju Dou* (1990), *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1992), *To Live* (1994), and *The Road Home* (1999), and thus after a long period of examining the topic of the “bottom people” of society using the style of neorealism and the art-house system, the veteran fifth-generation Chinese director Zhang Yimou seemed to have chosen a new career direction. *Hero* marked the first time that Zhang made a historical *wuxia*<sup>1</sup> movie, the first time expensive digital effects were used in Asian cinema history, and the first Mainland film to gross more than \$100 million worldwide.

*Hero*'s substantial financial success quickly made making blockbuster historical films a trend, primarily focusing on the grand and lavish context of the great dynasties in Chinese history, such as *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang 2006); *The Banquet* (Feng 2006); *Red Cliff 1, 2* (Woo 2008; 2009); *The Great Wall* (Zhang 2016); etc.<sup>2</sup>

It was not only a turning point in Zhang Yimou's career but also of Chinese cinema after China joined the WTO, when the “the state acknowledged the important strategic function of the cultural industries in statecraft and declared it would invest in these in order to strengthen its national power”, and this led to the emergence of the “discussion around the concept of soft power” (Zhang 2012, 25). A mixture of long-traditional socialist propaganda films (*zhuxuanlu*) and Hollywood-like blockbusters (*dapian*) helped materialize this soft power (Davis 2010, 125; Aranburu 2017, 12).<sup>3</sup> With this, expensive commercial films produced by private companies are under the control of and co-participate with state corporations (especially large-scale historical films, like *Hero*) to reproduce nationalism in the popular supranational film industry.

In Vietnam, critics highly recommend this Chinese historical film production model for domestic filmmakers to refer to in the new millennium. In Vietnamese

1 “*Wuxia*” which means “martial heroes”, is a popular-genre of Chinese-language cinema that developed from the kind of Chinese fiction concerning the adventures of martial artists in ancient China (Teo 2009, 2–3).

2 These films later significantly affected Korean and Vietnamese cinema, with *The King and the Clown* (Lee 2005), *Masquerade* (Choo 2012), *The King's Face* (Yoon and Cha 2014), *The Fatal Encounter* (Lee 2014), *Rampant* (Kim 2018) (South Korea) and *The Prince and the Pagoda Boy* (Luu 2010), *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty* (Lý 2010), *Ly Cong Uan: The Road to Thang Long Citadel* (Cận and Tạ 2011), *Blood Letter* (Vũ 2012), *The Nymph* (Đinh 2015), *Tam Cam: The Untold Story* (Ngô 2016) (Vietnam).

3 “*Zhuxuanlu*” or “main melody” movies are the Chinese state-sponsored and propaganda works “glorifying the lives of Party officials, celebrating heroic incidents, or portraying war stories and patriotic melodramas” (Davis 2010, 125).

media channels, crucial formulas drawn from Chinese historical films have created an “effective way of ‘splashing money’ by filmmakers” in order to make “blockbuster works” to “please audiences with grandiose scenery, beautiful techniques, (and) popular stars”, “content that catches up to the trendy entertainment”, “offering many benefits for domestic businesses”, with filmmakers feeling “less pressured to stick to the truth” (Tuyết 2014; Phong 2018; VTV News 2018). However, it was after the 1000th anniversary of Thăng Long-Dong Do-Hanoi (2010) that a series of historical films about Vietnamese royalty was born. Afterward, private filmmakers also started producing historical films, a trend that continued from 2010 to the present.

### *The Ideal Personality Models and the Return of Confucian Tradition*

Going back to *Hero*, besides the recognition of film critics in Vietnam and other countries around the world about the supranational scale of filmmaking, this movie represents a model of the hero in relation to authority as an ideal ruler of society, which has a specific power to unite the whole world. The return of the “ideal ruler of society” reminds us of core Confucian ethics, especially those of primitive Confucianism. The models of certain cultural characters, such as the emperor (*huangdi*), hero (*yingxiong*), Confucian gentleman/superior person (*junzi*), Confucian scholar (*Ruzhe*), etc. are associated with the knowledge base in the Confucian feudal period, and are emphasized and restructured to focus on the theme of royal life based on Confucian ethics and cosmology.

Many scholars in the last decade have acknowledged a Confucian revival in China in the twenty-first century, in parallel with the country’s economic growth, the increase in national soft power and the need to face global challenges such as environmental degradation and the immigration crisis (Tu 2000; Yang, Fenggang 2011; Tan 2012; Hammond and Richey 2015; Hon 2017; Pang 2018; Deng and Smith 2018). In Vietnam, Confucian ideology and Confucian research have also been revived, with many different levels and forms (Phan 1994; Quang 1994; Nguyễn, Kim Sơn 2003; Minh 2005; Vũ 2009; Lý 2015; Cao 2017). The connection between the explosion of movies on royal themes (with feudal historical figures) and the spectacular return of Confucianism in the last two decades, after being rejected during the Cultural Revolution in China and the Land Reform in Vietnam, needs an explanation.

To achieve this, my article will examine what is happening with the rise of the royal court theme in contemporary Chinese and Vietnamese cinema. Why do the products of the modern cultural industry reproduce the values once considered

obsolete? Why are these films focused on the relationship between certain typical personality types in society and the power of the universe/nature, and how do these relationships relate to the power discourses of the current communist rulers in China and Vietnam? Moreover, based on the growing ecological crisis in both countries, do these films, with their return to the typical feudal contexts, lead viewers to an environmental discourse that praises and respects nature and promotes the harmonious resonance between people and the universe? The article not only analyses how Vietnamese films, like *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty* (Lý 2010), *Blood Letter* (Vũ 2012), and *Tam Cam The Untold Story* (Ngô 2016), and Chinese films, like *Hero* (Zhang 2002), *The Banquet* (Feng 2006), and *Red Cliff* (Woo 2008),<sup>4</sup> share similar ideologies, but also explains the differences between Vietnamese and Chinese movies about court life related to reproducing the Confucian cosmology and ecological/biological injustice in the context of contemporary politics. This is because through Confucian cosmology the filmmakers have clearly presented a discourse on the “support of the universe” for the current political regime, expressed through signals from the vast and mysterious nature. These are the inherent forces that are highly revered by East Asian people.

From discourse theory, as well as cultural anthropology and ecocriticism, I will analyse the expression and functioning of the discourse of the rulers—universe/nature—people relations in the films listed above; as well as the way natural/cosmic elements are applied to justify the legitimacy and ethics of contemporary authorities. The concepts and ideas of various Confucian schools throughout history will be used to compare with the cinematic texts, especially Confucius cosmology, the theory of the “rectification of names” and “virtue of loving life”; and the philosophy of “Heaven’s Mandate”, “The Unity of Heaven and Humanity” by Dong Zhongshu.

### “The Unity of Heaven and Humanity”: Confucian Cosmology as the Foundational Ethical Discourse

With a deep philosophical foundation based on the relationship between man and Heaven and the issue of human nature, Confucianism is essentially a theory of

4 These particular movies are also prominent commercial products on the subject of royalty and power, have had high box office sales, and received significant attention from domestic and foreign media. In these films, the striking natural images are also always associated with the theme of kingship and emperors/rulers, which I will investigate in this article.

From here on, sometimes these six movies will be replaced by HMOR (“historical movies on royalty”); *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty* is shortened to *Heroes*; *Tam Cam The Untold Story* is shortened to *Tam Cam*.

moral cultivation aimed at creating ideal individuals and ideal societies. Considering the interrelatedness between the self, family, community, and the universe as concentric circles, Mary E. Tucker writes:

The moral cultivation of the individual influences the larger circles of society and politics, as is evident in the text of the Great Learning, and that influence extends to nature, as is clear in the Doctrine of the Mean. All of these interacting circles are contained within the vast cosmos itself. (Tucker 2005, 2631)

Rodney L. Taylor and Howard Choy also point out this resonant connection, defining Confucianism as

an in-depth analysis of the nature of the self and its relation to the world at large (...which seeks...) a method of learning that would allow for the cultivation of a self that bore the capacity for the unfoldment of its true nature. (Taylor and Choy 2005, 126)

They also emphasize how Confucianism connects humanity and Heaven and helps in the establishment of social order:

Ultimately, such order within human society is a reflection of the structure and order of the cosmos itself. Heaven, earth, and humankind each has its duties; each has its responsibilities. Duties are manifest in ritual within such distinctions between things. The result is order. (ibid., 117)

In general, the ultimate purpose of the elements of Confucian ethics and cosmology is to propose methods of operation so that society can reach stability (Yao and Shun).<sup>5</sup> In other words, Confucianism is a doctrine of social management through self-cultivation and adjustment, stabilizing human lives/spirituality among the cosmic factors as well.

From that starting point, the Confucian classics often refer to the essential characteristic of the Confucian world view as “Heaven and Humankind as One”

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5 Regarding the motif of the legendary emperors Yao and Shun, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2019a; 2019b) states that: “Shun, formally Yudi Shun, in Chinese mythology, a legendary emperor (c. 23rd century BC) of the golden age of antiquity, singled out by Confucius as a model of integrity and resplendent virtue. His name is invariably associated with that of Yao, his legendary predecessor”; “Yao, formally Tangdi Yao, in Chinese mythology, a legendary emperor (c. 24th century BC) of the golden age of antiquity, exalted by Confucius as an inspiration and perennial model of virtue, righteousness, and unselfish devotion.”

(*tianren heyi*) where the *Ch'i* (*Qi*) or vital force infuses everything.<sup>6</sup> The Confucian tradition advises people to cultivate their *Ch'i* through the practice of *Li* (ritual/propriety) and *Yue* (music), completing the cycle of cosmic resonance: “Rite is the order of Heaven and Earth; Music is the harmonization of Heaven and Earth” (Confucius 1999, 174).<sup>7</sup> Human moral and emotional transformation both affect the universe, and *vice versa*, combined in an inseparable unity. When social order turns into chaos by the degeneration of morality, it will also cause disorder in the flow of *Ch'i* and result in disasters in the universe, according to a famous Han Dynasty scholar named Dong Zhongshu:

When he is orderly, salutary *qi* blends with the transformation of Heaven and Earth. When he is disorderly, noxious *qi* blends with the transformation of Heaven and Earth (...) When he identifies with Heaven, there is mutual benefit. When he differs from Heaven, there is mutual harm.  
(Dong 2016, 606)

From Dong’s notion, we can see the ideal order of the world through the relation between Heaven and humankind through the “Son of Heaven” (*Tianzi*) or the Emperor: “One who may be called a king forms a triad with Heaven and Earth (...) Heaven establishes kings not on behalf of rulers but on behalf of the people” (ibid., 232, 606). The Emperor is the only one who has “Heaven’s mandate” (*tianming*) and the “Rectification of Names” (*zhengming*) to rule the “under the Heaven” or “the people”.<sup>8</sup>

In the central part of this article, I analyse pairs of Vietnamese and Chinese films that have many similarities and differences in how they display issues of

6 Tu Weiming defines the concept of *Ch'i* as the “vital force” that infuses the spontaneously self-generating and constantly transforming world (Tu 2004, 27). Connecting the “cosmic process” and “*Chi'i*”, Tu Weiming argues that: “Forming one body with the universe can literally mean that since all modalities of being are made of *ch'i*, human life is part of a continuous flow of the blood and breath that constitutes the cosmic process. Human beings are thus organically connected with rocks, trees, and animals.” (ibid., 34)

7 Robert Weller analysed this idea of Confucius: “Musical resonance of this type was cited time and again as a prototypical example of cosmic resonance, and this image of two lute strings attuned to one another, vibrating in sympathy, is central to all models of cosmic resonance theory.” (Weller in Tucker and Berthrong 1998, 317)

8 “Rectification of Names” (*zhengming*) is one of the most critical concepts of Confucius thought. In *Analects*, Confucius argues that: “Only when names are rectified, will language be used correctly, and only with the correct use of language, can undertakings be completed. If undertakings are not completed, then rites, music, law, and punishment will also fail and with them the order of society.” (Confucius 2003, 423–24) According to *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, “Confucius suggests that the *chün-tzu* (noble person) should use appropriate names so that he can speak and act appropriately” (Taylor 2005, 48).



Confucian ethics and cosmology. There, the way Vietnamese and Chinese filmmakers promote, strengthen, or question the notion of “*tianren heyi*”<sup>9</sup> will also be examined.

### *Hero and Blood Letter: The Despot Who Carries the Mandate of Heaven and the Converting of Heaven’s Yi*<sup>10</sup>

A key point in the historical movies on royalty (HMOR) from 2000 to the present is the expression of the interoperability and resonance between people and the universe, in the direction of spiritualization. It is because these films focus on portraits of feudal dynasties that we always see a kind of “chosen man”, a hero model that incorporates many typical medieval patterns: kings, knights, nobles, Confucian scholars. This type of character is the only person who is destined from Heaven to lead and teach people according to “the Way” (Dao).<sup>11</sup> These characters have the “mandate of Heaven” and will always have mysterious interrelations with the supernatural forces.

Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* built a strong story to affirm this principle founded on Confucian spiritual cosmology.<sup>12</sup> In the film, Qin Wang is a person who bears a “noble mission” to dominate all realms, unifying China into a single nation. The four great knights, Wuming, Changkong, Canjian, and Feixue, sought to assassinate Qin Wang but eventually gave up that goal because they understood that, despite Qin Wang’s cruelty and violence, “the people” needed him to avoid bloody territorial disputes and disorder. The pain of personal hatred is the price they paid to achieve the “unity of the world” and to follow the “Heaven’s mandate” of the tyrant king. Similarly, in Vietnamese movie entitled *Blood Letter*, Nguyễn Vũ (the grandson of Nguyễn Trãi who survived the Lê Chi Viên tragedy) eventually

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9 From here, sometimes this phrase (“Heaven and Humankind as One”) will be replaced by “*tianren heyi*”.

10 *Yi* (义, Righteousness) is one of the essential concepts of Confucian doctrine. *Yi* is the “fundamental principle of morality”, and “represents this ideal of totality as well as a decision-generating ability to apply a virtue properly and appropriately in a situation” (Cheng 1972, 269, 271).

11 The term means a sort of ethical system for human behavior.

12 The aspects of Confucian cosmology here are profoundly spiritual, as it indicates that every movement of man and the creatures in the universe directly affect Heaven through the vital essence, and *vice versa*, as in Weller’s analysis: “The author (Hoai-nan Tzu) intends us to understand the ‘report’ of the Spirit to be an instance of cosmic resonance. The Spirit, being itself made of quintessential *ch’i*, receives and respond to vibrations arising from other objects or people and carried by the Vital Essence (...) Human consciousness is thus implicit in and susceptible to the same processes of cosmic resonance that affect trees, iron, magnets, and lute strings.” (Weller in Tucker and Berthrong 1998, 318, 321)



dropped his mission to assassinate the Empress to take revenge on the whole family. Like Wuming, Changkong, Canjian, and Feixue, he also did not want the people to suffer from wars and instead recognized their need for a leader with the Mandate of Heaven.

Of course, the heroes/assassins in these movies do not give up their revenge easily. The problem is that they always receive sacred signs from the universe and the natural world to guide their actions and show them who is carrying the “Mandate”. They need to dismiss their sentiment for the benefit of the nation and community. In *Hero*, Qin Wang suddenly discovers the lies of Wuming. The wind blowing the flickering candles in front of the king causes him to figure out Wuming’s mental uncertainty and his false narrative. Similarly, in *Blood Letter*, the night before he planned to kill the Empress, Nguyễn Vũ had a bloody nightmare where his grandfather came back to prevent him from taking revenge. In that dream, Nguyễn Vũ stabbed the Empress, and a monster appeared on the throne wearing the crown, resulting in the whole world being immersed in the blood, smoke, and faces of beasts. That dream led him to give up the mission that he had devoted himself to complete.

The universe and supernatural forces intervened in the governance of rulers, such as Qin Wang in *Hero* or the Empress in *Blood Letter*, so that those who wanted to assassinate them had to be converted by “*Tian Yi*” (Heaven’s righteousness). It is a predestined morality established by Heaven. Thus, the interdependence between man and Heaven is presented as the harmony between Heaven and the “Son of Heaven”, who represents the people. From that, the discourse on “Son of Heaven” joins two other fundamental moral concepts of Confucianism, namely “the right man” (*junzi*) and the “hero” (*yingxiong*) who are holding, decoding, and using the whole mystical energy of the universe effectively. Also, in these two movies, the directors shift the focus of building the ideal Emperor model from the moral aspect (with his great benevolence and virtue) to the spiritual and cosmological aspect (with his Mandate of Heaven).

### **The Banquet and Tam Cam The Untold Story: *The Return of Crowned Prince, the Rectification of Names And The “Cosmic Judge”***

With the second pair of movies, *The Banquet* and *Tam Cam The Untold Story*, the “*tianren heyi*” primarily aims at rigorous deterrence and education at a universe level, especially for those who violate the Mandate of Heaven and are disloyal to the Son of Heaven. Here, the “natural world as a judge” or “cosmic judge” discourse is closely attached to the theme of revenge and the legitimacy of royal

figures. There are some common themes in the two films: the betrayal of the most influential and most trusted mandarin in the court, the death of the king, the escape of the crowned prince, and so on.

Firstly, in this kind of story the biggest issue is the usurper's "rectification of names". For example, in *The Banquet*, when the new king (who was assassinated by his brother) and the courtiers discuss the biological features of the snow leopard, the king also implies satisfaction with the flexible adaptation of the courtiers when the political situation changes: "When the snow flow down, this animal hides in the cave to take care of his fur. On a sunny day, he appears brightly. He knows the weather. He is a mascot." (*The Banquet* 2006, 36: 33). However, Pei Hong (a faithful governor of the former dynasty) says that the new king should give a snow leopard carved of stone to Yin Taichang, who was a Minister of the old king and now follows the new king, because "Taichang is as changeable as a snow leopard." (ibid., 37: 27). After that, General Yin Sun (Taichang's son) gets angry and wants to kill Pei Hong because this is an insult to Taichang, indicating his father's disloyalty. Only after a short discussion about the legendary animal can we see the story in *The Banquet* interpreted not only from the perspective of tragedy and personal revenge, as in *Hamlet*, but it also as the story of the violation of "heavenly law" or the final rituals and morals of Confucianism.<sup>13</sup>

In *Tam Cam*, the Minister Tào Khắc could kill both the king and prince because he avoided becoming a "usurper" but wanted to be a legitimate successor: "If the neighbouring state invades, the king and the prince would be killed by their enemy according to my plan; then as the minister, I would stand up to quell a revolt, so that I have the 'rectification of names' sitting on the throne." (*Tam Cam* 2016, 55: 10).

In both films, the "rewards and punishments" through nature and supernatural forces are based on the "rectification of names" criterion. Here, the discourse "nature as a judge", always tied to revenge against the royal character, turns into the "ecophobia" that marks the atmosphere of both stories. In *The Banquet*, solitary nature is a refuge that comforts the shattered heart of Prince Vo Loan. When his uncle's army came to assassinate him, the lake protected him. Unlike Shakespeare's play, the uncle's betrayal is not the central crime in Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*. Finally, Empress Wan seems to be the most unethical Confucian, since she has an affair with three men in the same family, so she must suffer the most severe consequences. Wan must witness the death of all the men who loved her and those she loved, and then she is killed by an unknown knife falling from

13 *The Banquet* is a loose adaption of the tragedy *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's play depicts prince Hamlet and his revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother.

Heaven. The knife sinks to the bottom of the water, and the fish swim around, licking the blood to show the punishment coming from the universe, and the wrath of creation when moral orders are overturned.

Similarly, in *Tam Cam*, when the king, prince and his wife (Tấm) were in distress, thunder and lightning appeared in the sky (like the night the traitors assassinated the king, and the minister deceived the prince, Cám, and her mother killed Tấm, etc.) When Cám (the beautiful and evil half-sister of Tấm) seeks to enter the palace to become the new queen replacing her lost sister and join Tào Khắc to gain power from the court, a series of strange natural phenomena acted against her. (For example: the yellow oriole prevents the prince from escaping the dangerous charm of the Cám, the tree branch falls to block the arrow shot at him by a hidden assassin, the tree meshes reach out to lift him when he is pushed down into the abyss, his wife is also reborn from a miraculous gold apple, and so on.) In an extraordinary series of events, he transforms into a monster kills the beast, Tào Khắc, and finally change back to his human form. The folk philosophy “one good turn deserves another” (*ở hiền gặp lành*) fits with Confucian ethics. For example, after acting with inhuman strength, he could still return entirely back to his original human state because the most significant difference between the prince and Tào Khắc is not his strength, but Heaven’s mandate. The mandate is attached to “benevolence” and the “rectification of names”, which are the two core moral standards of the ideal rulers.

### **Red Cliff and Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty: *The Virtue of Rulers, “Righteous Substitute” and the Flexibility of “Heaven’s Mandate”***

The idiom, “Heaven and Men as Oneness”, manifests in a more complex aspect, through the flow of *Ch’i* circulating between the cosmos and humanity, in *Red Cliff* and *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty*. Here, the challenge with Confucian ethics displays itself in the relationship between a knightly assassin and a mandated tyrant (as in *Hero* and *Blood Letter*), or between a “son of Heaven” and a usurper (as in *The Banquet* and *Tam Cam*). Both *Red Cliff* and *Heroes* propose a “righteous surrogate royal force” who is strong enough to defeat the old dynasty’s usurpers.

*Red Cliff* begins with a small bird flying into the palace and landing on the hand of King Han. Later, when General Cao Cao threatens and forces the king to let his soldiers go to battle, the small bird leaves in a panic. This opening will explain the entire later part of the film, when Cao Cao betrays Heaven’s mandate, violates the “rectification of names”, and joins the unrighteous side in the war against the

three Liu Bei brothers (originally from the Han family that has the pure royal blood). Thus, Cao still suffers a heavy defeat by the Liu Bei—Sun Quan alliance because the unexpected change in the direction of the wind made the fire turn back suddenly and destroy Cao’s army. At this time, the Liu-Sun alliance could be considered as a new representative of the Mandate of Heaven transferred from an old force (King Han) who could not shoulder the sacred mission anymore.

In *Heroes*, despite having the superior force Nguyễn Huệ always respected the Le dynasty. During his first time leading the troops into the capital of Thăng Long, Nguyễn Huệ takes the title of “advocating Le to exterminate Trinh” helping the orthodox “Heaven’s son” (Le) and ending the Trinh encroachment with Le’s authority. Not only that, Nguyễn Huệ cements his power by marrying Ngọc Hân, Lê Hiển Tông’s daughter, to enter the royal bloodline as the King’s son-in-law. He also retreats to Central Vietnam, not to Thăng Long to run the court. Only when Lê Hiển Tông dies does the new king, Le Chieu Thong, bring the Qing army from China into the capital. Nguyễn Huệ officially accedes to the throne and proceeds to Thăng Long to overthrow the foreign enemy and establish the Tây Sơn dynasty. In this sequence, the narrator’s voice shown over a scene of moving soldiers implies the commitment to protect the nation’s beauty: “Following heavenly will and the people’s aspiration, on November 22, 1788, Nguyễn Huệ was crowned as an Emperor. It was the first year of Quang Trung dynasty.” (*Heroes* 2010, 52: 34).

Similarly, the two heroes (Quang Trung and Liu Bei) both support their suffering people by caring for their welfare. Their ability to show compassion indicates their leadership skills. I suppose that, in Vietnam, the story of the “hero in plain clothing”, the “farmer hero” or hero attached to the working class is a popular stereotype in contemporary literature, cinema, painting, and other forms of pop culture, because of its concordance with the Communist ideology.<sup>14</sup> Liu Bei in *Red Cliff* also appears as a rustic leader who stands up and gathers poor labourers to fight for a just cause.

14 In recent years, the following movies have all praised the figure of King Quang Trung based on the discourse of a “farmer hero”: *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty* (Lý, Lý and Phụng 2010); *Quang Trung – Nguyễn Huệ Dynasty* (Nguyễn 2016); *The Hero in Plain Clothing* (Phùng 2017); *Emperor Quang Trung from History* (Nguyễn 2018).

Also, in the historical documents, anecdotes, and literature, the image of King Quang Trung, primarily when written by northern writers (before 1975) and orthodox historians, is honored and recognized by the state, according to the above trend. See Phan Huy Lê, Hoàng Xuân Hãn, and Trần Văn Giàu (2006), and Nguyễn Văn Lục (2014). Nguyen Quang Vinh also had a talk entitled “Emperor Quang Trung Nguyễn Huệ and the Tây Sơn period (1771–1802) in the Historical Consciousness and Commemorative Practices of Modern Vietnam” at Institute of Literature, Hanoi, on March 24, 2011, and discussed more detailed on that issue; see the talk’s outline:

[http://www.khoavanhoc.edu.vn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=885:ncs-nguyen-quc-vinh-h-harvard&catid=43:thong-tin-khoa-hc&Itemid=102](http://www.khoavanhoc.edu.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=885:ncs-nguyen-quc-vinh-h-harvard&catid=43:thong-tin-khoa-hc&Itemid=102).

It is worth noting that both the “new righteous forces” (Quang Trung and Liu Bei) took the title of pursuing social justice, punishing those who seized the power of Heaven’s son illegitimately. Liu Bei or Quang Trung *do not take the throne directly* from the old king; the throne comes to them after they find justice and protect the former Emperor. The Mandate is thus rightfully handed over to them. These characters often show their self-cultivation and their strict obedience to “Li”, while also demonstrating the virtue of a hero (*yingxiong*) and superior person (*junzi*). Typical examples of these virtues include the scene when Liu Bei plans to throw his child, Liu Shan, away because Zhao Yun (a very loyal general under Liu) nearly died when trying to save him and the scene when Quang Trung leads his troops to hold a service for Heaven and Earth before going to the North.

From all of this, we see that the film’s discourse is very sophisticated in explaining why a new force could become the “righteous substitute” of an old dynasty (which was once “*zhengming*” in the past). The key point here is the issue of “national interests” and “the original class of the new hero”. The common scenario between the two films is as follows: to fight foreign invaders, a working-class hero must stand up to gather forces to fight enemies, protect the nation (when the old dynasty has weakened and cannot do this). After that, the new hero becomes the new king in a righteous manner. This scenario has a great similarity with regard to the path of “overthrowing colonialism and feudalism, leading the people to regain the government” in the two communist states of Vietnam and China.

## **Below the Confucian Ethical Discourse: Utilitarianism, Paradoxes, and Ecological Injustice**

### *Unfolding “the Virtue of Loving Life” of the Emperor and the Challenge of Environmental Justice*

The films on the royal court that I am analysing in this paper seem to include a logical expression of the discourse on harmony between humans and nature from the perspective of East Asian cultural traditions. However, underneath that harmony and cosmic resonance, many contradictions and paradoxes also need to be explained.

In the movies, *Hero* and *Blood Letter*, we need to return to the concept of a “son of Heaven” and also a great Emperor. In the feudal period, the king’s virtue is “loving life” (*haosheng*): “Whether it is a person, an animal, or a plant, just having a life, all of them have the right to survive, so with those who have the ability

to give birth and nourish all things is called a person of virtue” (Trần 2013).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the “Emperor used his power to extend the protection of sentient beings in his dominion, which could be called a substitute for Heaven’s power. It also implies the equality between the virtue of emperor and the virtue of Heaven and Earth” (ibid., 32). In *Hero*, the journey of the king of Qin conquering the states displayed as a kind of divine mandate to bring unity, stability, and peace to all “under of Heaven” (*tianxia*). However, in the process of carrying out the mission of “protecting sentient beings”, Qin Wang killed countless lives, with their destruction necessary for the existence of the Han people and a supreme Emperor. In *Blood Letter*, the one who caused the terrible catastrophe to befall the Nguyen family is not punished at all, because Nguyễn Vũ decides to give up his revenge to protect “all people from the bloody wars”. But the hidden part of the story is that no one can guarantee, under the power of the Empress, that there are no further tragedies, like those that happen to the Hoa Xuân family or Nguyễn family. Both films pursue the direction of reconciliation and neutrality, the ending of individual oppositions, pushing the political focus to loyalty, and justifying the necessary existence of rulers who have a considerable responsibility and need to be kept from harm.

With *The Red Cliff* and *Heroes of Tay Son Dynasty*, we once again see two categories: *righteousness* and *unrighteousness*. People can only belong to one type or the other. Of course, if they are on the unrighteous side, their death is reasonable and undisputed. The contradiction here is when the “righteous leader” declares his virtue of “Loving Life” he is ready to kill his enemies. What I have called *ecological/ biological injustice* also arises from here. In *Red Cliff*, Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang express their respect for living creature through a very romantic and emotional scene when they help a horse to give birth. But soon after this we see a series of opposing sequences when they burn thousands of Cao troops. They were extremely excited when they saved Zhou Yu’s pregnant wife, while around them there were countless corpses of young soldiers’ piled on the ground. Similarly, *Heroes* shows a close-up of a river full of dead bodies floating in the presence of the Emperor. The meeting points between the two films are that they both show epic scenes of battle in which thousands of people die because of two elements: water and fire (for instance, the fire burning on the river in *Red Cliff*, the fiery dragon in Fort Ngoc Hoi, and the bloody river in *Heroes*). These two factors are the result of the continuous transformation of *Ch’i*, but with the aim of killing

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15 “The Chinese word *Haosheng*, as quoted from the *Yi Jing (I Ching)*, means ‘heaven has the virtue of loving and promoting life.’ The Confucians added their own interpretation to this sacred concept, broadening it to encompass the human soul. They believed that the virtue of loving and promoting life is the ultimate desire in people’s hearts.” (Natural Medicine Clinic 2019)



people, not leaders. Cosmology in these films, along with Confucian morality, is utilized and manipulated as a tool to restrain personal thoughts and the right to life of every living being. It also classifies people into righteous or unrighteous groups to justify the ruling discourse and the wars for power, which are the leading causes of the destruction of human and non-human creatures, as well as the natural environment.

In *The Banquet* and *Tam Cam The Untold Story*, the natural forces become a kind of symbolic tool to prove moral lessons and warn people, rather than to manifest the environmental issue itself. The ecological ambiguity is revealed in that even though these narratives seem to honour and praise natural beauty, the narrators and the characters almost forget the existence and fate of nature. Epistemologically, people become the metaphysical vehicle carrying moral propositions. Ontologically, they turn into extraordinary creatures surpassing human influence with an infinite elasticity. In both aspects, nature is very distant from its ecological interrelations in the context of the medieval period from the perspective of modern people.

So, are there any joint and separate issues which challenge the manifestations of contemporary Chinese and Vietnamese films on royalty in close connection with Confucian cosmology?

Firstly, we can see the implications of the Confucian cosmology that is reproduced in these films. All the Emperors in the movies talk about Heaven's mandate and cultivation as the only ways to connect with the universe. Natural elements are mystified and become an "omnipotent judge" that protects or punishes people based on whether or not they are cultivated according to pre-established moral principles. On the one hand, the filmmakers advocate respect for all living beings (including those in the lower classes or animals), but on the other hand, through the classification of ethics they also rationalize the process in which rulers could kill countless civilians and other living creatures. There are many extreme long shots of sky-high smoke, bodies on the ground, and broken plant life.

Secondly, utilitarianism<sup>16</sup> is combined with the principle of "Heaven's mandate" and "rectification of names" to create a political discourse about the top leaders of countries and institutions. In the Chinese films (*Hero*, *Red Cliff*, *The Banquet*), the institution or the representative is always identified with the "nation", so obedience to the Emperor means faithfulness to the country. In contrast, in the Vietnamese movies (*Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty*, *Blood Letter*, *Tam Cam The*

16 According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2019), utilitarianism is "the system of thought that states that the best action or decision in a particular situation is the one that brings most advantages to the most people".



*Untold Story*), fidelity to the country will default to the voluntary duty of loyalty to the top leaders who represent the country. What these stories have in common is that they care about people from the perspective of maximizing the benefits that their actions can bring to the “community”. This logic also leads to another point: by keeping the current state and social order stable and not rebelling or opposing the superstructure, humans and other living things will not fall into chaos.

The third concern which is directly related to the two ideas presented above is that the personal identities and lives in these movies have been dissipated or blurred, giving way to the issues of territory and country. Constructing a world house under the roof of Confucian ethics coloured by the mystically spiritual cosmology, the “great narratives” mentioned here are stories of and about the Emperor, not the story of the common folk, whose lives are not worth much. Regarding this, Tu Weiming affirmed,

The strong belief in the inseparability of morality and politics and the correlation between the self-cultivation of the ruler and the governability of the people makes it difficult to conceive of politics as a mechanism of control independent of personal ethics. (Tu 1993, 6)

I argue that this non-individual feature is a particular intersection between Confucian moral discourse (here mainly Han Confucianism) and the philosophy of socialism, such as the ideas of “be loyal to the country, be filial to the people”, “collective spirit”, “one for everyone”, and so on. They are the necessary foundations for the current socio-cultural management in both Vietnam and China (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2006; Yu 2008; Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training 2018).

### *Uncovering the Cinematic Framing of Landscape Beauty and the Commercializing Process of Natural Images*

Utilizing and visualizing the so-called “*tianren heyi*” to produce propaganda to support the legitimacy of the current governments is also manifested in the aesthetic aspect of creating a series of picturesque frames. The beauty and tranquillity of natural landscapes signify the consonance between the “will of heaven” and “the rightful ruler”, even when this world had to experience many bloody battles. In other words, in the films discussed in this paper, the association of the authorities/rulers with beautiful nature clearly shows that Heaven’s will supports them. When an usurper takes over the throne, the universe is disturbed, and Heaven sends down angry messages through unprecedented natural disasters. When the

legitimate successor takes his position, the natural landscape returns to its original state of complete beauty as if nothing had happened. This is the logic that is repeated stereotypically throughout all these movies. We realize the spectacular appearance of the lush bamboo forests in *The Banquet*, the glistening wharf and majestic mountains in *Red Cliff*, the pristine lake and dreamlike red leaves in *Hero*, the immense and splendid landscape in *Blood Letter*, the pure grassland and fields in *Tam Cam*, and the vast, stunning beach in *Heroes*. This *mise-en-scene* uses drone cameras and extreme long shots to create flawless portraits of nature in the medieval era. It is a refined, vivid, and recoverable world, despite devastating wars.

We need to remember that all these movies belong to commercial cinema, and with that, the framing of image aesthetics of feudal royal family is the most visible expression of the so-called “cultural industry”, whose technologies were summed up in two terms by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno: “standardization” and “mass production” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2012, 47). Here, creating a picturesque landscape as a common denominator will help attract domestic and foreign audiences to the exoticization of the natural and social scenes in East Asia. However, this exoticization, the featuring of feudal society, and the Confucian spirit are not synonymous with Western romanticism or the search for an uncontaminated and pastoral scenery without industrial machinery. In these films nature is only a platform for expressing moral discourses (and then political discourse) when adhering to spiritual cosmology as an appropriate way for the self-regulation of the people’s attitude towards the leaders. In addition to creating a refined green world utterly different to the state of severe environmental crisis seen in contemporary society, the directors also nationalized such scenes, considering the natural landscapes in the past *as* the unchangingly national identity in the present. In other words, they are “coding national identity” through famous and clichéd landscapes like “photography, postcards and posters”, thus representing images of the nation which are commercialized, mass-produced and sold everywhere for tourists (Thiesse and Norris 2003, 31).

So here, what is contradictory when the filmmakers borrow Confucian morality to express a discourse of power following the socialist ideology, while the capitalist spirit is behind the production and promotion of these movies? In fact, due to the desire to increase soft power internationally, both China and Vietnam still maintain strict censorship of cultural products, whether domestic or imported (Yang 2016, 73).<sup>17</sup> Not only that, but because commercial films occupy a signif-

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17 See more in *China Film Industry Promotion Law* (中华人民共和国电影产业促进法) (2016) and *The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam* (2010).

icant market share in both countries, their impact on people is much faster and broader than that of independent art films. The cultural management agency of both countries has many policies on controlling and using commercial cinema as a sophisticated propaganda machine. This is the way that non-state studios can survive and remain profitable under the strict control of the socialist governments—by attracting an audience, “meeting the demands of the digital era” and satisfying the government’s requirements. In more concrete terms,

non-state firms have been churning out works that have the kind of impact the party craves. The goal of such businesses is to make money, not to create propaganda for its own sake. But to survive, they need to stay in the party’s good books. So they have found ways of producing pro-party entertainment that is popular. A common technique is appealing to youthful patriotism. (The Economist 2017)

Another remarkable issue is that the independent art movies (IAM) of both countries do not focus on production centred on royal court life, as the commercial cinema does. Firstly, this may point to one direction for a new study on how the discourse of Confucian cosmology relates to mass audiences (which account for 90% of the film consumption market in both countries) and popular culture (which is not the target of the IAM), as part of a strategy to build soft power with regard to governing people. In a broader context, both Chinese and Vietnamese IAM have paid attention to Confucianism in contemporary spiritual life, but this “attention” is aimed to question, challenge, and reconstruct Confucianism, rather than mass-produce the same type of movies. For example, Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006) and Phan Dang Di’s *Bi, Don’t Be Afraid!* (2010), which are two typical films of two prominent directors of IAM in both countries, showed critical aspects of Confucian ethics in contemporary society, especially the breakdown of ceremonial practices and spiritual weakness with regard to social beliefs in the attachment between humanity and natural forces. Instead of seeing homogeneous and flawless “utopias”, we only see the heterogeneous and imperfect “dystopias”, a broken world, degraded environment and exhausted cities like Hanoi in *Bi, Don’t Be Afraid!* or Chongqing in *Still Life*.

It can be seen that the making of *picturesque* aesthetics in these commercial movies, the invention of a “safe”, “pure”, “permanent”, and “inviolable” reality co-ordinating with the discourses on “*tianren heyi*”, cosmic balance, and social order, play an important part in reproducing “the dominant corporate and commercial culture, excluding discourses and images that contest the established social system” (Durham and Kellner 2012, xii). Thus, there is no contradiction in the way the cultural industry in these two socialist countries manipulates the

masses through an implicit political discourse, which is based on Hollywood capitalism and a socialist orientation at the same time. This particular policy shows its effectiveness within the current popular culture of China and Vietnam, in particular through the commercial success of most such films as well as the positive responses of the governments to them.<sup>18</sup>

Does this specific form of co-production exist in Korea and Japan, which are two capitalist countries that have the same Confucian foundations as China and Vietnam? In Korea, all recent movies on the royal court have chosen the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) as a shared historical memory between South and North Korea. They have not romanticized or deified the king-servant relationship, and most of them follow a modernist style in exploring the limits and contradictions in the personal inner lives of the characters, as seen in *Masquerade* (Choo 2012), *The Fatal Encounter* (Lee 2014), *The King and the Clown* (Lee 2015), *Rampant* (Kim 2018), etc. Meanwhile, Japan is a very specific East Asian case, since from the beginning of the twenty-first century up to now there has not been a film that directly mentions the “Emperor of Japan” (*Tennō*), or the issues of a power struggle in Tennō’s reign. *Genji Monogatari: Sennen no Nazo* (Yasuo 2011, adapted from Murasaki Shikibu’s classic literary work) is considered to be the only film set in “the Tennō’s reign”, but mainly focuses on the personal and emotional life of Prince Genji and not the political side of things. Other historical period films (*Jidaigeki*) often emphasize the figures of Japanese samurai and nobles as the central characters, especially in Akira Kurosawa’s most well-known movies. Both Korean and Japanese films often seek to express the indeterminacy and difficulty of court life through the look of realism, not through perfect, beautiful, and romantic frames which are the basis for Vietnamese and Chinese cinema on royalty.

### *Top-down Direction and Bottom-up Direction: Two Ways of Discourse on Power in Chinese and Vietnamese Films*

Despite sharing the ideas of utilitarianism, paradoxes, and ecological injustice hidden below Confucian moral discourse in both content and cinematic language,

18 Almost all of the above films have high box office returns compared to the regional (Chinese ones) and with domestic movies (Vietnamese ones), winning some state and international awards, such as *Hero* (177,394,432 USD; Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction in Hong Kong Film Awards 2002); *Red Cliff 1,2* (250,100,000 USD; Best Visual Effects in 3rd Asian Film Awards, Best Art Direction in 28th Hong Kong Film Awards); *Blood Letter* (740,000 USD; Jury Prize for Feature-length film in Hanoi International Film Festival 2012, Vietnam Film Festival Award for Best Feature Film 2013); *Tam Cam* (3,000,000 USD; 2017 Silver Kite Award for Feature Film), and so on.

the approaches of the Vietnamese and Chinese directors still have distinct differences.

In the Chinese films, the concept of “Heaven’s will” is often downward. The discourse direction of power comes from top to bottom, from higher to lower levels on the social ladder, and often from the view and the value of the Emperors (like Qin Wang in *Hero* or Han Wang and Liu Bei in *Red Cliff*). Chinese directors are interested in the expression of the Emperor’s virtue and legitimacy, which let “the bottom people” be totally persuaded by their power and legitimacy. For example, Qin Shihuang receives sympathy from the assassins in *Hero*; Liu Bei is initially misunderstood by his followers, but finally, his wisdom is confirmed in *Red Cliff*; Prince Wu in *The Banquet* even has to make a sacrifice for “big karma”, but also shows his integrity when he gets revenge for his father’s death. The good qualities of “subordinates” through the eyes and expectations of their “superiors” are faithfulness, respect for “Heaven’s mandate”, obedience to cosmological law, and a willingness to sacrifice one’s life for those moral beliefs. Also, in Chinese films the concept of “under Heaven” is respected and emphasized in imperial characters in order to justify their actions.

In general, the Chinese films closely follow the dominant conception of Han Confucianism (especially of Dong Zhongshu), which is the “doctrine to the need for the Empire” (Yao and Yao 2000, 8). Through the main ideas of the “theological and metaphysical doctrine of interaction between Heaven and humans”, these movies tend to promote the ruling class and the idea that the Emperor is a superior being who carries the sacred mission of unifying the world and ruling the people (ibid.). Those films also focus on the Mandate of Heaven, duties of subordinates, stories of fidelity and infidelity, and the inviolably hierarchical order of society, as well as of the universe. The direction of building Confucian spirit in cinema as well as in other cultural industries in the new Chinese era is becoming one of the essential spearheads of political discourse, a way to expand international influence and strengthen the stability of the regime domestically (Tu 2000; Li and Witteborn 2012).

In contrast, the direction of the power discourse in the Vietnamese films on royalty is mostly upwards in terms of how the lower people express their observations and expectations to the Emperors. Most of the main characters in the narratives are “subordinates” under the dynasties: Nguyễn Vũ in *Blood Letter*, Tấm in *Tam Cam the Untold Story*, General Nguyễn Huệ in *Heroes of the Tay Son Dynasty*, and so on. These characters all bear unhappiness, pain, or other challenges that are sent by destiny. Thanks to their self-cultivation and education, they are able to surpass their suffering and receive signs from Heaven to liberate their lives:

“Heaven already has let you know, you have to find justice for your family”, “if the blood letter is true, it is Heaven’s ideal” (*Blood Letter*); “following Heaven’s will and the people’s aspiration”, “standing in front of Heaven and Earth” (*Heroes*); “obey Heaven’s order” (*Tam Cam*), etc. The majority of stories are directed to the process of self-cultivation to become a superior person (*junzi*) and a loyal servant. From the upward point of view, an ideal leader is one who combines good governance (*dezhi*) with the law (*fazhi*) to establish cosmological order. Of course, he or she must receive the mandate of Heaven (like the Empress Dowager in *Blood Letter*, King Le Hien Tong in *Heroes*, King and Crown Prince in *Tam Cam*). The common people seem ready to help and support the monarchs unconditionally, based on their mystical and boundless power of the universe.

The Vietnamese films primarily carry the original Vietnamized Confucian elements that combine indigenous beliefs, Taoism, and Buddhism. In explaining the uniqueness of Confucianism in today’s Vietnam, Nguyen Kim Son argues that

the revival of Confucianism in the 21st century is not the rebirth of the general Confucianism, but the rebirth of a Confucian division which is profoundly Vietnamized, the rebirth of Vietnamese Confucianism with all the advantages and drawbacks that it has ever shown. (Nguyễn 2003, 56)

Based on this, Nguyễn Kim Son makes an important observation: “The position of Confucianism and Confucius is also improving, but for the Vietnamese it is still a process to honour Vietnamese tradition, but not to honour Confucianism and Confucius, although those two are closely related”. (ibid.) The ultimate goal is to praise the “plentiful cultural tradition” and nationalism in which the Vietnamese nation always presents itself as a righteous subject, protecting itself from the invasion of foreign powers.

## Conclusion

In East Asian Confucian countries, the royal and imperial court is part of the regional co-cultural memory. As I pointed out above, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century the breakthrough blockbuster movie *Hero*, as well as the globalization of the entertainment and film industries, have helped historical period movies about royal court life to become very popular in East Asia and beyond.

In a series of films about royalty released from 2002 to the present, both Chinese and Vietnamese movies have many similarities in how they feature Confucian



ethics and cosmology in contemporary society, in contrast to Japan and South Korea, the two other East Asian countries that share these traditions. Moreover, although these Chinese and Vietnamese movies are focused on depicting the beauty and power of natural forces, and the metaphysical phenomena of the universe beyond humanity, the central discourse platform is not directed towards an ecological/environmental message. It is instead done through seemingly non-modern and eye-catching frames, which are, in fact, expressing a strict and fierce socio-political philosophy. Through the return to Confucian tradition which is deeply rooted in the consciousness of East Asians, and through one of the most beloved products of the cultural industries—cinema—the authorities in China and Vietnam have found a suitable way to approach and influence the mass audience, directing them to appropriate thoughts and actions to benefit the current institutions. Here, the boundaries between Confucian ethics (in constructing the model of an ideal governor as a representative for the collective, community and whole nation), socialist ideology (in putting the rights and powers of “collectives” and the “community” above those of individuals), and the capitalist spirit (in focusing on mass production to meet demands of popular culture and get the most profit) have become subtly and skilfully harmonized in the form of a commercial entertainment product. These three aspects seem to be far away from each other, but are more connected than ever with state management and orthodox thought, especially in today’s China and Vietnam, where the leaders are interested in the use of soft power in guiding the people to follow their socialist-oriented market economies.

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# From Confucianism to Nationalism: Fictive Kinship and the Making of the Vietnamese<sup>1</sup>

*Trong Duong TRAN\**

## Abstract

This paper examines how political discourses have changed as scholars seek answers regarding the origins of the Vietnamese people. The origin(s) of the Vietnamese people has long been a subject of debate. Confucian scholars from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries claimed themselves to be descendants of Han people, the successors of the Han civilization. The colonial scholars (from 1860 to 1945), when using the theory of race, anthropology, and social evolution theory, thought that the Annam people were a hybrid breed, still in the process of evolution, and needed to be enlightened and civilized. Indigenous scholars combined the Han ideology of Confucianism and the ideology of the French to claim that the Vietnamese were the descendants of the Hùng Vương. This ideological transformation was aimed at calling for patriotism, fighting against the French, and defending the nation from colonial domination. The results reveal that the process of changing paradigms in Confucian thought through colonialism led to the formation of fictive kinship and the spread of nationalism in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, race, fictive kinship, nationalism, invented tradition

## Od konfucijanizma do nacionalizma: izmišljeno sorodstvo in oblikovanje Vietnamcev

### Izvilleček

Članek raziskuje, kako so se na podlagi znanstvenih raziskovanj porekla Vietnamcev spremenili politični diskurzi. Izvor(i) Vietnamcev je tako že dolgo predmet razprave. Konfucijanski učenjaki so med petnajstim in devetnajstim. stoletjem trdili, da so potomci Hanov in nasledniki hanske civilizacije. Kolonialni učenjaki (med letoma 1860 in 1945) so ob uporabi rasne teorije, antropologije in teorije družbene evolucije menili, da so ljudje Annam hibridna rasa, ki je še vedno v procesu evolucije, zaradi česar jo je treba civilizirano razsvetljevati. Domači učenjaki so združili hansko ideologijo konfucianizma in ideologijo Francozov; tako so lahko zatrjevali, da so Vietnamci potomci Hunga

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Vuonga. Ta ideološka preobrazba je bila usmerjena k pozivanju k domoljubju, boju proti Francozom in obrambi naroda pred kolonialno prevlado. Izsledki raziskave razkrivajo, da je proces spreminjanja paradigem v konfucijanski misli skozi kolonializem privedel do oblikovanja izmišljenega sorodstva in širjenja nacionalizma v Vietnamu.

**Ključne besede:** konfucianizem, rasa, izmišljeno sorodstvo, nacionalizem, izumljena tradicija

### “Người Việt”: Research on the Archaeology of Knowledge

“Người Việt” (lit. “Việt people”) is a concept that has been commonly used in Vietnam for years. It is used in tandem with the words “Việt tộc”, “Kinh tộc”, or “dân tộc Kinh” (ethnographic terms). All of these terms should be distinguished from the concepts of “dân tộc Việt Nam” (“the nation of Vietnam”, “người Việt Nam” (i.e. “the people of Vietnam”) as political and social concepts. These terms represent a political discourse which intends to homogenize distinct groups of peoples into a single historical construct that aims to obscure multidimensional differences (hidden within various contradictions which people must then cover—from issues of culture and history to political authority). We can find countless ways in which these concepts are hazily expressed, from popular newspaper articles to scholarly research. This shows that the Vietnamese-speaking community has always used the concept of “người Việt” in different intellectual contexts, despite the fact that “người Việt” have many different origins, such as groups of Chinese, Chăm residents, and so on. They have been Vietnamized to receive a co-origin and new privileges from the dominant ethnic group. The community of “Vietnamese”, which accounts for over 80% of the population, worked to create a single identical voice regarding its roots in accordance with the ideology of the times, based on both science and pure faith. They thus held a belief that all “Vietnamese” share the same blood, all belong to the race of the Dragon and Fairy (con Rồng cháu Tiên, i.e. Vietnamese), and all are descendants of the Hùng Kings.<sup>2</sup>

When researching history, people often only pay attention to the events that they wish to find, and leave out the “historical concepts” which reveal what

2 The “Dragon” means Lạc Long Quân (貉龍君), while the “Fairy” is Âu Cơ (媪姬). Lạc Long Quân was a dragon king, living under the sea. Âu Cơ is a fairy, living on a mountain. Lạc Long Quân married Âu Cơ and gave birth to Hùng Vương. See *Huaxia* lineage in Đại Việt (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 1; Kelley 2012, 96; 2015b, 165). Hùng Vương now is considered by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to be the national ancestor, and the Vietnamese claim to be the race of Dragon and Fairy.

contemporary people thought and which tools they used for thinking. A basic operation of historiography and intellectual archaeology is to use linguistic remnants to recognize ideological and political context; language and script are historical sources which make explicit that which the ancients thought. We know that language is the point at which human thinking exists and is constructed. Hence when studying history people are forced to use language traces to analyse the subject's discourse, knowledge and power, as well as the channels it uses (Foucault 1972).

In particular, what concepts have Confucian and colonial historiographies used to refer to the community of people we now call “Vietnamese”? In the first example, Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940)<sup>3</sup> in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (1909) called the Vietnamese “people of our country” in opposition to “European people” and “Japanese people”. In a second example, historiographies of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945) self-identify those who speak the Vietnamese language and write literary Sinitic as “Han people”, whereas the Chinese of the time were called “Qing people”, and those Chinese who fled to and lived in Vietnam called “Ming people” (Choi 2004, 136–38). In the third example, Ngô Sĩ Liên (1479) uses the paired concepts of “Our Việt's Talented People” and “Han people”. The change of vocabulary/terminology is an expression of ideological change. This is the product of a process of cultural exposure or epistemological mutation, which may also be the result of a forced political push. The unseen coordinators behind these surface disturbances are various ideologies, political discourses, and anonymous agents.

The results show that, from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, Confucian scholars with the view of “no inferiority to *Zhonghua*” (無遜中華, *Vô tổn Trung Hoa*) thought that they were the descendants of Thần Nông, and of the same blood lineage as “Han people”. The political model (envisioned according to a family model) is based on an intellectual foundation of orthodoxy (which is, in turn, based on blood lineage). They believed that they had blood ties with an ancestor who had existed for centuries. When exposed to fields of scientific colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of ideological fictive kinship continued to flourish in the intellectual contexts of racism, Social Darwinism, and colonialism, and become part of the native intellectuals' concept of “nation”. They used the fictive kinship and nationalism ideology in combination with other ideas (for example, Marxism) to serve the ends of anti-colonialism, anti-feudalism and national independence.

3 Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) was a famous Confucianist, and a Doctor of the Nguyễn Dynasty. He advocated Japanese aid to help with expelling France, he thought that the Japanese were Asians with “red blood-yellow skin”, who had the same enemy as the Europeans with “white skin-yellow hair”.

## Fictive Kinship in Confucian Historiography

Here, I will analyse the Confucian historiographical discourse by exploiting the linguistic evidence in *Nam Việt Dư Địa Chí* by Nguyễn Trãi (1435) and *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* by Ngô Sĩ Liên (1479), the first two “standard books” to mention the origin of “Việt” (越). The relevant content is summarized as follows: Kinh Dương Vương (4th generation descendant of Thần Nông, Đế Minh’s son) was king in Vietnam (粵南) and the primordial ancestor of the Hundred Yue (百 粵, Bách Việt).<sup>4</sup> Kinh Dương Vương married Vụ Tiên and gave birth to Lạc Long Quân. Lạc Long Quân married Âu Cơ and gave birth to Hùng Vương. Hùng Vương was the king of Văn Lang and passed on the rulership for eighteen generations of descendants, all of whom took the same title of “Hung King” (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 1). The first text only uses concepts such as “Việt kingdom” (越國) or “Our Việt” (我越). The following text uses concepts such as “Talented men of Our Việt” (我越人才) and “Our Việt Kingdom” (我越國) in opposition to “Han people” (漢人).<sup>5</sup> A political pedigree in *Đại Việt* was established to reinforce the Confucian government in a period of strong growth. The mandate of writing history came from the emperors, while the Confucianists were the historians responsible for writing the political and orthodox history of the ruling group. Ngô Sĩ Liên constructed a Han genealogy within the Confucian historiographical genre. The Confucian view considers that political history is the history of the ruling clans, and the first clans to rule the Vietnamese land was the Hồng Bàng. The Hồng Bàng chronicle is an historical invention, an invented tradition (Kelley 2012; Kelley 2015b). This work is a collection of myths regarding the national founder(s) of the political institutions of Han Confucianism combined with folklore and legends from the Tang era. This created tradition on the one hand creates the legitimacy and blood relation, the cultural link of *Đại Việt* in face of the Ming Dynasty, while at the same time creating *Đại Việt*’s authority to invade Champa to the south.<sup>6</sup>

4 “Hundred Yue (Baiyue, BáchViệt) is a term that Chinese scribes used in antiquity to refer collectively to the many diverse peoples who inhabited the region to the south of the Yangzi River.” (Kelley 2012, 126)

5 後李琴仕至司隸校尉，張重為金城太守。則我越人才得與漢人同選者，李琴、李進有以開之也。(Ngô 1497, vol. 3 (卷之三), 6)

6 Thanks go to Prof. Ho Tai Hue Tam (Harvard University) for putting the idea of Champa into my head. Champa was an ancient kingdom ruled by the Cham, but gradually conquered by the Vietnamese. Today the Cham are one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam.

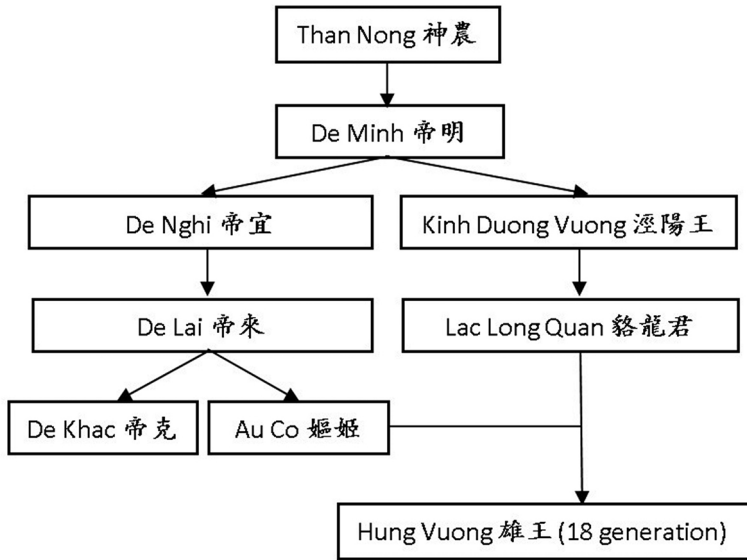


Table 1: Han lineage in Đại Việt (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 2)

The conception of the Vietnamese people having Han origins is a historical concept dating to the fifteenth century. Ngô Sĩ Liên’s method was “using history to prove the Confucian canons” (以史證經) and, conversely, the content of Confucian classics (like *Shujing*) were recycled in order to continue and extend orthodox histories of Đại Việt. Ngô Sĩ Liên was of the opinion that the origin of Đại Việt’s political regime in his time was derived from the political model in Confucian classics. Therefore, we see that several legendary ancient emperors of Huaxia were incorporated into Đại Việt’s political lineage. Seeming to understand the fragility of this construction of invented tradition, Ngô Sĩ Liên commented that: “Putting full faith in historical books would rather be without books. I just transcribe the old story to pass on this point of doubt to future generations 信書不如無書，姑述其舊，以傳疑焉” (Ngô 1479, 3). Thus, Confucian ideology forced Ngô Sĩ Liên to create a table “Han lineage” for Đại Việt. However long the political history of Huaxia extended, the history of Đại Việt would also be of equal length. This was a Confucian political tradition constructed in order to consolidate the political authority of Đại Việt.

The consequence of imitating political models and Confucian ideology was this eventual historical identification and blood lineage identification. The people of Đại Việt were seen as a migrant branch of the Han people; the ancestors of Đại Việt were Han and the length of Han history was shared by Đại Việt. The heart

of this political lineage table (according to this family/clan model) is the concept of “orthodox lineage”. Orthodox lineage or legitimacy is established by blood lineage, historical traditions, authority traditions, state models, and Confucian ideology. Around these two nuclear concepts, many generations of Confucians have used a set of related ideas such as “Han civilization” – “Han music and Han rites” – “Tang regulations” – “Domain of Manifest Civility” (Kelley 2003; Trần 2013). The imitation of the state model of feudal dynasties in Đại Việt entailed the acceptance of blood relation. The literary Sinitic historical records from the twelfth century onwards show that, from the perspective that wherever manifest civility and ritual transformation was to be found, there too was the political centre, the royal dynasties from Lê to Nguyễn considered their kingdom to be a “central kingdom” with various self-appellations such as “central efflorescence” (中華), “central plains” (中州), and “central kingdom” (中國) (Trần 2013, 25–28). On the basis of the Confucian canon, these words can be used to describe any country so long as it uses the Sinitic language, Sinitic characters and Confucian classics (Woodside 1970, 1819).

	Confucian ideology 儒教		
Han music - rites 漢禮樂	Domain of Manifest Civility 文獻之邦		Tang regulations 唐制度
	Country 國家	Clan 家族	
	Orthodoxy 正統	Blood 血統	
	Han Civilization 漢文明		

Table 2: The Relation between orthodoxy and Blood in Confucian Ideology.

This self-identification culminated in the Nguyễn Dynasty (19th century), when the emperors such as Gia Long (1802–1820), Minh Mạng (1820–1841), Thiệu Trị (1841–1847), and Tự Đức (1847–1883), along with Confucian historians, considered themselves as the legitimate descendants of the Han people and the worthiest successors of Confucian governance. The concept of “Viet people” was no longer useful. The documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty (such as *Đại Nam nhất thống chí*, *Đại Nam thực lục*) all self-identify the “Vietnamese” as “Han people”, while groups of people from China are called by the names of the current dynasty, for example “Qing people”. What happened in the minds of the Confucianists of this period?



From the perspective of the *Hua-Yi* (華夷)<sup>7</sup> paradigm, the Nguyễn dynasty viewed the Qing as being of barbarian origin, having invaded and conquered the Han peoples from the north. The Qing Dynasty implemented various regulations which differed from the Confucian tradition in China, such as the music and rites or “caps and robes”. The Qing dynasty forced people to cut their hair and change their clothing according to the Manchurian customs. Hence, in the Nguyễn dynasty’s view, the Qing no longer preserved the inner essence of Huaxia. The Minh Mạng emperor (1820–1841) once explicitly stated that: “The ancestors of the Great Qing were Manchu ... Manchus are Yi ... Moreover, our kingdom of Nam Ha is a land of civilization, it can’t be compared to those (Manchu) people. 大清、其先滿人、... 夫滿、夷也、... 況我國南河文物之地非此之比。” (Quốc 1844, vol. 26, 23; Trần 2013, 29) Double criteria have been used to distinguish culture and people (*Hua-Yi*). The Qing dynasty was regarded as a court ruled by the Yi. Hence China was no longer regarded as the “central kingdom” but rather simply *Yi*, or barbarians. Meanwhile, according to the genealogy arranged by Ngô Sĩ Liên with its regulations of ritual transformation, caps and gowns, and Confucian classics, the Nguyễn Dynasty asserted itself as the legitimate successor of the Han people (both in terms of bloodline and culture/politics). This is the reason why Confucian scholars of the Nguyễn Dynasty (from kings to mandarins) all claimed to be Han. The centre of the civilized world had thus moved to Vietnam. Vietnam was the only place at that time to simultaneously preserve the bloodline of the Han as descendants of the Holy Emperor Thần Nông, study Confucian, Mencian, and Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, and follow the regulations of the Zhou, Han, Tang, and Song Dynasties (Kelley 2006, 317). The apparel of the Vietnamese ambassador’s delegation in 1841 and the *Yi bian* (夷辯) of Lý Văn Phức (1785–1849) in Minnan caused a great number of Qing scholars to weep at the sight of long vanished Han culture. On this particular occasion, there was even a local mandarin who cast his cap to the ground upon the realization that he had become a barbarian (Lý 1841, 18). The interesting point is that Lý Văn Phức was originally from Min and had emigrated to Vietnam, after which he became an official of the Nguyễn Dynasty. His delegation trip was very much a return home, and his treatise demonstrated a strong political authority through its discourses of Confucian learning and blood lineage origins.

7 *Hua-Yi* (華夷) are two concepts used in classical Chinese documents. The Chinese identify themselves as *Hua* (Efflorescents), who is at the center of the world. And the other peoples living around them are called four *Yi* (i.e. barbarians four types live in four sides of the world). “Efflorescents were people who maintained what they believed was a sophisticated and interrelated system of ritual and governance that had first taken form in distant antiquity, a system that Confucius later looked back to as a model for the people of his day to follow. The Efflorescents judged the sophistication of their system to be superior to the practices of both the peoples on the peripheries of the Efflorescent culturo-ritual sphere and those within the Efflorescent realm who did not follow these practices, called ‘Barbarians’.” (Kelley 2006, 316)

The remarks of Minh Mạng and Lý Văn Phức are a clear stage for ideologies regarding the origins of the Viet people (i.e. the Han), and were used in the political arena. The discourse on *Hua-Yi* became the core tool for Vietnam to implement policies for ruling ethnic groups (within its territorial boundaries), as well as for relations with neighbouring countries (Champa, Siam, Laos, Java, ...). “Han people” were said to be located in the political centre of the region, while other groups were considered to be barbarians. Even Westerners (i.e., people from France, the Netherlands, Britain, Portugal, and so on) were, in the eyes of the Nguyễn Dynasty “foreign barbarians” 洋夷, or were identified by racist terms describing physical characteristics such as “red hair” 紅毛, and were seen as peoples who were not exposed to transformative civilization. However, this ideology of Han origin came with a price when Vietnam came face-to-face with a non-Han civilization: that of the West. Once again, the perception of ethnic origins would totally transform within the context of East-West cultural clashes from the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries.

### **Race and Fictive Kinship: The Making of Nationalism**

At the end of the nineteenth century, France gradually used Western military and civilizational power to establish a ruling regime in Vietnam. This great political shock caused changes to the whole society and ideological life. After thousand years of knowing only Han culture, Vietnam has first clashed with a new civilization, a new scientific tradition and ideology which had displayed its authority. The Nguyễn Dynasty, from the position of a Đại-Việt-Nam centre of Huaxia, followed the trail of the Qing Dynasty when it was conquered and ruled by people they called “foreign barbarians”. The reality of being conquered was a severe challenge to a mindset which had been hardening for nearly two millennia. The Vietnamese were forced to think differently in accordance with the times, even though the old ideology remained. The Confucian concept of moral rule was gradually replaced by technocracy. Machines and trains would replace literary Sinitic literature and civil examinations. The concept of “Han people” would be replaced by new categories such as “*nation Annamite*” and “*peuple Vietnam*”. The outdated *Hua-Yi* theory would be replaced by anthropology. The ideology of orthodoxy and blood lineage would be interwoven in a complex combination with racism and Social Darwinism to form the idea of “nation”. Nationalism was created in many ways, from the prison system, the French Vietnamese school system, linguistic/cultural policy, the colonial museum system, the press system, and the doctrine of private printing, leading to the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục school of patriotic Confucianists, the source of new books from China and Japan

(Nguyễn and Lương 2017). Confucianists who were aware of the concept of “nation” re-confirmed their ethnic origins and began to cherish the dream of overthrowing the colonialists to gain national independence (Motyl 2001, 572). Before 1870, Théophile Marie Legrand de la Liraye had already published the book *Notes Historiques sur la Nation Annamite*. Legrand de la Liraye was the first scholar known to have used the term “nation Annamite” meaning the “people from Annam” and “peuple An-Nam”. He reused the word “An Nam”—a noun used by Chinese dynasties with the meaning “(the ruler) made the Southern people peaceful”, that is to say, latter day colonialists borrowed the term of the previous ones. After Legrand de la Liraye, many scholars published studies to contribute to creating new knowledge about writing about Vietnamese history and Vietnamese origins, including Trương Vĩnh Ký with the book *Cours d'histoire Annamite a l'usage des écoles de la Basse-Cochinchine* (1875), Louis-Alfred Schreiner with *Abrégé de l'histoire Annamite* (1906), and Pierre Marie Antoine Pasquier with *L'Annam d'autrefois* (1907). These authors use the concept of “Jiaozhi people”<sup>8</sup> to describe two intersecting big toes and regard it as an ethnic marker. These anthropological theories only helped the authors to propose new concepts recognizing the origins of the Vietnamese; in research however, they had no other option aside from quoting again the invented traditions which Ngô Sĩ Liên proposed from Thần Nông to the Hùng Kings. All these historical books are basically histories of ruling clans who exercised authority over “*le royaume d'Annam*” (from the “*Première Dynastie Hồng Bàng*” to the “*Dynastie des Nguyen*”). They followed the “stream of history” and admitted that the Vietnamese people were originally a group of Han migrants who underwent many phases of intermarriage with various indigenous groups.

In 1904, Paul Giran published his work *Psychologie du peuple Annamite: le caractere national- l'Évolution historique – intellectuelle, sociale et politique*. From an anthropological perspective, the author dedicated chapter one to write about the origin of the Annamite people in comparison with their predecessors—“Jiaozhi”, “Hua”, and “Malay”. He considered race to be a unique trait in the formation of a “nation”, and described the Annamese as a group belonging to the yellow race of *Mongoloides*, located somewhere between Turk and Han Chinese. The Annamese were a branch which migrated along the Red River towards the southeast. Their direct blood lineage was close to that of the Southern Chinese, manifested through language, character traits, and habits. On the one hand, the Annam shared many characteristics with the Han Chinese race through direct and continual interaction with this dominant group. On the other hand, contact

8 The term *Giao Chi*/ *Jiaozhi* (交趾 or 交趾) was used to refer to the Red River Delta region and the people who lived there in early Chinese texts.

with the Malay race gave them characteristics that gradually differentiated them from the Han Chinese. The central thesis of the author is that the people of Annam were the product of migration from central continental Asia which swept southeast, mixing blood with various indigenous peoples, Southern Chinese, and Malays. The most basic factor which led to the creation of the Annamese was Chinese conquest (Giran 2019, 51). The hybridization between ruler and ruled was a two-way process of assimilation. Jiaozhi had such strong assimilation skills in the process of immersion in Chinese civilization that it was impossible to distinguish between those who were assimilated and those who did the assimilating. This assimilation/hybridization created a new people—the Annamites: stronger, better organized, more civilized, and hungrier for independence (ibid., 53). Giran’s research was a breath of fresh air at the time of the book’s introduction. He simultaneously used methods from biology, anthropology, migration theory, and Social Darwinism, thereby making hypotheses about the origin and evolution of Annamites. If we pay attention, we realize that the author did not mention the Hồng Bàng and Hùng Vương chronicles, but was only concerned with Jiaozhi as a precursor to modern day Annam.

The point of Social Darwinism is that the civilized peoples (superior) have a mission of civilizing barbarian ones (inferior peoples, those in need of civilizing). The French at that time thought that they were the “Greeks of the world”, and at the highest peak in the evolution of mankind (Nguyễn 2019). The task of the French was thus to meet the needs of mankind all over the world. Saviour theory was both a theoretical basis and a guideline of action for the French (Salon 1983, 32). The determination of “Annamese origin” was done in order to put the Vietnamese under the new colonial regime of the French. Discourses on the origin of the Annamese were essentially sophistries white-washed with science which manifested the racism that allowed the French to justify invading the lands of other peoples under the pretext of a civilizing mission. Thus, Social Darwinism, French saviour theory, and civilization theory were used by the French to dominate both ideology and politics in relation to Vietnam.

In 1907, following the education model of Keiō Gijuku (慶應義塾) in Japan, many Confucian intellectuals (who identified themselves as new intellectuals) established the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc School, compiled and published many history textbooks aimed at popular education, cultivation, and renewal (Nguyễn 2013, 65, 160). The book *Cải lương nông học quốc sử giáo khoa thư* (1906) continued to record the Hồng Bàng clan (from Kinh Dương Vương to Hùng Vương, 2622 years) and placed in the first section “The First Prosperity of Our Nation” under “Ancient History” (Đông 1906, 7). In 1909, Phan Bội Châu published *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (*A Study on Vietnam History*) (Literary Sinitic). This is a book

which was compiled by the author, however he declared that it was titled “national history” because “everyone in the country is in this book” (Phan 2015, 1). Clearly, Phan Bội Châu and the Confucian scholars in Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục assimilated the concept of the nation from the West to compose a work that dealt with the history of all members of the nation’s national community, which readers (national citizens) were responsible for reading and understanding. “National history” (in “Quốc sử” of the Nguyễn Dynasty), was originally the history of the state as constructed by the court historians (equivalent to “standard history”). Phan Bội Châu rejected this Confucianist content, and reinforced the meaning as the “history of people in the same country of Vietnam”. This is an important indicator of the change in the historical paradigm: the abolition of the written history of the ruling lineage and the shift to historiography for “national people”. It is from here that Phan Bội Châu implemented a “revolutionary ideological history” in Vietnam (Trần 2019, 39–44).

The Confucians continued to imagine the nation based on blood lineage modelled after a family/clan. Phan Bội Châu wrote: “Wherever the parents came from, whatever we children and grandchildren relied upon, thinking again and again, isn’t that *our country* (emphasis by the author).” (Phan 2015, 33) In the following sections, he uses the words “our fatherland” in conjunction with the primordial patriarch Hùng Vương. 1909 is the earliest date at which the words “Fatherland” (祖國) appear in Vietnam. “Fatherland” is understood as “the country of our ancestors” corresponding to the word “*patrie*” in French (Đào 1932, 303; Hue 1937, 922).<sup>9</sup> The ideological structure of “fatherland” includes a series of neologisms such as “race” (人種), “demographic” (人口), “geography (of our country)” (地理), “state” (國家), and “national rights” (sovereignty of our country, 國權), “national citizen” (國民), “civil rights” (民權), and “independence” (獨立) (Hoàng 1906; Liu 1995; Kelley 2015a; Trần, 2019). Phan absorbed Western ideas (those of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Darwin) through the flow of new books from Japan and China (Nguyễn 1917, 5–18; Luo 2011). He was re-interpreting the history and origin of his country by way of combining the concept of “race” and Hùng Vương—“the primordial ancestor of our country”. Phan Bội Châu removed the Thần Nông lineage (the Han lineage from the Confucian viewpoint) from the genealogy of Vietnam, and placed Hùng Vương as the first ancestor of the Vietnamese race. He argued that his racial elements were like those of various barbarians south of China (Phan 2015, 53). In the process of interracial mixing with the Han, the Jiaozhi peoples—originally “stupid, simple, and honest” gradually turned into “beautiful, civilized people with proper caps and robes” (ibid., 56).

9 See more on the etymology of “*patrie*”: “erre des ancêtres, pays natal. Pourquoi le prononcer ce nom de la patrie? Dans son brillant exil mon coeur en a frémi.” (CNRTL n. d.)

Although being of northern origin and the product of a long process of interracial mixing, according to him, anyone “who was born and raised in the same parents’ country, that is, have been in one country, are siblings of one family”. The concept of “*tong bao*” (同胞: same bloodline, same foetus) of Confucianism from Nguyễn Trãi’s time (1380–1442)<sup>10</sup> was combined with that of “compatriot” by Phan Bội Châu to create a new concept of “*đồng chủng*” (同種, co-race). This is how fictive kinship forms in parallel with nationalism, and becomes a core part of nationalism. All of this racial reasoning is directed to a purpose throughout the book, which he explicitly states: “only if those of the same race love one another can they be called human ... within to protect those of the same foetal sac, without to compete with alien races” (ibid., 52). The formulae of “same race + same blood

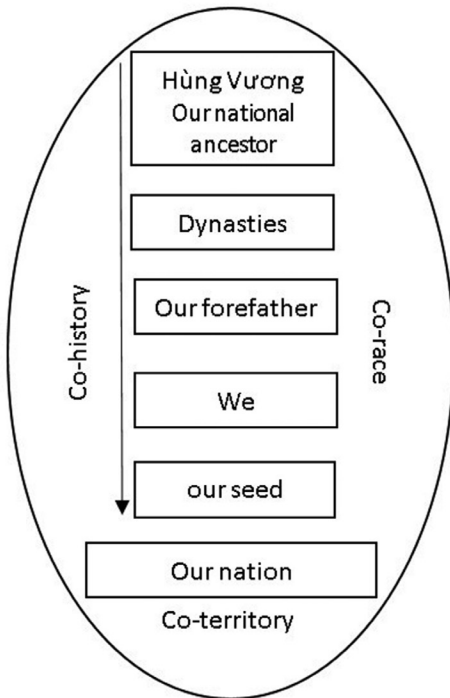


Figure 1: Mixing the Confucian concept with racism and nationalism.

10 In the fifteenth century, Nguyễn Trãi wrote a couplet in Vietnamese: “*đồng bào cốt nhục nghĩa càng bền, cảnh bắc cảnh nam một cội nèn*” (Trần 2018, 129). “*Đồng bào*” is a term of literary Sinitic origin 同胞, originally meaning siblings born to the same mother, and only afterwards used to describe a community of peoples. *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* records the myth of Lạc Long Quân marrying Âu Cơ, after which she gives birth to an egg sac from which are born 100 male children, the oldest of which was Hùng Vương. This is proof that for many centuries Vietnamese believed they share a blood relation to each other.



lineage + same history” is regarded by Phan as a political weapon which can serve the purpose to which he committed his entire life: using force to expel the enemy, establish independence, and regain national power for Vietnam. Phan’s fictive kinship ideology can be seen as a pre-war expression of nationalism in Vietnam (Duiker 1971, 77). The East-West collision caused him to change from “loyal-to-the-ruler” to “loving-the-nation” and become the leading proponent of patriotism in the early twentieth century. Mixing the Western idea of ethnicity with the Confucian concept of Hùng Vương as primordial ancestor, fictive kinship is a concrete manifestation of the phenomenon of glocalization, that is, the simultaneity of the global and local dimensions of transcultural flows (Berg and Wendt 2011, 12, 213–35; Robertson 1995, 28, 2; see Scheme on the previous page).

In his *Brief History of Vietnam* (1920), Trần Trọng Kim inherited the French view of national origin. Remarkably, he was the first to use the concepts “Vietnamese” and “Vietnamese people” in parallel with the word “people” (Thái people, Man people, Mọi people, and so on) and “seed” (like Han seed, Tam Miêu seed), “species” (Tam Miêu species). Although it is contained in two brief pages, Trần’s research is strewn with concepts which were coming into formation:

Vietnamese people have many ethnic groups, such in northern highlands with the Thai peoples (i.e., Thổ people), Mường, Mán, and Cát; in Central Vietnam, there are Mọi and Chăm (from Hôi); in the South, there were the Mọi, Chăm, Chà Và, and Khách. The populations of these people from these three regions total less than one million, whereas the Vietnamese people make up the remainder. (Trần 2005, 13)

This passage shows that the author considered “people” to mean “nation” and that the different assemblies of ethnic groups (Việt people, Thái people, Mọi people, etc.) on the Vietnamese territory cumulatively created the “Vietnamese people”. Trần Trọng Kim was the first person known to use “Vietnam”, the official title of the Nguyễn Dynasty, to construct the concepts of “Vietnamese race”, “Vietnamese nation”, and “Vietnamese people”. According to his view, the term used to mean “people” or “race” is a translation of “ethno” (now “ethnicity”) and “Vietnamese” (carrying connotations of citizenship, nationality) is an aggregation of all peoples/ethnicities who lived on the territory of Vietnam at that time. It can be expressed by the following formula: {Vietnam people + Thái people + Mường people + Mán people + Mèo people + Mọi people + Chăm people + Chà Và + Khách ... = VIETNAMESE}.

Hence, from Phan Bội Châu to Trần Trọng Kim, we see the emergence of European nationalism into early twentieth century Vietnamese scholarship. The French



brought this ideology to Vietnam, using it as a tool to rule and exploit the colony, and at the same time its seeds sprouted on colonial fragments. The Vietnamese intellectuals then reused nationalism as an instrument for thinking and reflecting on themselves and those around them with a new perspective in relation to those who ruled them. Eventually they even used it as a political tool to combat the discourses and authorities that had moulded it in the first place. The ideology of nation in the works of intellectuals would spread to the minds of ordinary people in society, shaping their affections, consciousness, responsibilities, and closely related political desires to individual and community interests. This explains why the historical writings of the Phan Bội Châu and Trần Trọng Kim (typical elites of their time) were widely reprinted in the twentieth century, even up to the present day. It can be said that these intellectuals created a new paradigm seen through the eyes of Westerners (or rather, a new a paradigm that drew on European nationalism, and also colonialism). In particular, and most importantly, they created and spread the concepts of “Vietnamese people”, “Vietnamese ethnicity”, etc. into the minds of millions. Vietnamese people happily removed the concept of “Han descent”, focusing more on the national symbol of Hùng Vương (Smith 2009). Hùng Vương is an endemic product of fictive kinship in Vietnam, and this “political product” contributed to the revolution of national liberation for independence under the leadership of another ideology: Marxism.

The transformation of the thinking system was not only expressed in historical works but also spread widely and strongly in the press. In *Nam Phong Tạp Chí* (1931) Phạm Quỳnh made statements about what Vietnamese people were thinking about their ethnic origins. In the article “Tourism of Laos”, he described the eastern side of Trường Sơn as

a pure race of Annamite ethnicity, its culture imported and received from China, outstandingly belonging to the Chinese world ... The people of Jiaozi, apart from thousands of years being casted in the mould of Chinese music and rituals, became increasingly fertile and populous, filling the entire Red River basin to the point of being cramped and needing to expand southward past Đèo Ngang, flooding into Champa. (Pham 1931, 5)

In addition to the terms “race of Annamites” and “Jiaozi” (used to refer to historical entities in history), Phạm Quỳnh also uses “Vietnamese race”. Take for example this passage which he wrote: “The vocation of our Vietnamese race is to colonize this whole Indochina, to bring the flag of China to fight against India, turning this Indochinese land into a Chinese pure land.” (ibid. 1931, 6)

This is a very clear statement of Phạm Quỳnh on the issue of “racial destiny”. He argued that the Vietnamese ethnicity is a race which belonged to Chinese culture and the Chinese world. This race had a heaven-appointed destiny to expand and colonize the whole of Indochina. This is to say, Phạm Quỳnh’s ideology is a mixture of Đại Hán expansionism and French colonialism. This desire for political power is a reflection of both a subconscious self-esteem, as well as an inferiority complex when confronting the reality of the French colonialists in Indochina. That is, the weak/conquered one is at the same time nurturing dreams of ruling over other weaker nations than himself, while he himself is powerless against the French. This is the complex mentality of Phạm Quỳnh, a victim of colonial thinking that the “Vietnamese race” has a divinely mandated colonial vocation which was proven by the traditional Southern expansion of the Vietnamese before the Cham and Khmer. But the dream of this type of thinking was immediately awakened by reality, when he shyly realized that Siam had become an independent country, and that Cambodia and Ai Lao were also protected by France. Phạm Quỳnh’s expansionist dreams also flourished in many other political groups, to the extent that some later political parties would have in their name the term “Indochina”, such as the Indochinese Communist Party and the Indochina Communist Federation. The political discourse of Phạm Quỳnh basically takes the “Vietnamese race” as a nucleus, and combines historical knowledge of Confucianism with Social Darwinism. But Phạm Quỳnh’s “reformed” nature of political activity made him quickly fall into the past, when a new wave of enthusiasm emerged: Marxism.

In 1941, Nguyễn Ái Quốc in the *History of Our Country* wrote: “Over five thousand years, our brilliant ancestors have been in harmony. Hồng Bàng was our country’s ancestor, our country was then called Văn Lang, ... An Dương Vương was replaced by Hùng King; the national name Âu Lạc” (in Ho 2000, 221). This is a poem about 4,000 years of Vietnamese history in 210 six-eight verses. This historical text was used to propagate the national spirit, foster patriotism, and encourage the people to unify and join the Việt Minh Front in service of the struggle for independence. Nguyen inherited most of what Ngô Sĩ Liên wrote about the origins of the Vietnamese, but he deliberately cut out Thần Nông and the idea of Han origin. He wrote about the history of Vietnam as a history of the indigenous people—“pure Vietnamese”—struggling against the aggressors of generations of Vietnamese people over thousands of years. This poem represents an attempt to use historical knowledge for political purposes. Since 1945 onwards, when the Communists gained power, this poem has continued to exert its effects on a vast scale with unprecedented effectiveness. It has become a political authority for Marxist historians to continue in creating new constructs about the history and origin of the Vietnamese. Hùng Vương thus became a symbol of the origin of the nation (Smith 2009), and nationalism

mingled with Marxist thought and saturated the minds of tens of millions of people in Vietnam, a process that continues until the present day (Nguyễn 2014).

## Conclusion

The issue of “Vietnamese origins” has always been answered in various ways under the influence of ideology and political power. The participation of politicians in the process of writing history has made such hypotheses carry within themselves the political discourse and ideology of their times. The origin of Viet people in Vietnam was initially a problem for the Confucian historiographical tradition. Under the cultural discourse of fictive kinship, Han genealogies (from Thần Nông to the Hùng Kings) were constructed by Confucian scholars in fifteenth century. This was an invented tradition and bloodline included in the efforts of the Vietnamese court to connect with politics in China. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Vietnam was colonized by the French, French scholars used new ideas about race and nation to explain the origins of the Vietnamese. They believed that Annamite were formed during a long process of bloodline mixing. From the perspective of evolution and colonialism, they believed that the Vietnamese people were an object in need of civilizing and racial improvement. This explanation served the purposes of French dominion. Under these ideological changes, native intellectuals both retained the idea of Confucian kinship and acquired racist ideologies to form a fictive kinship through the symbol of the patriarchal Hùng Kings. Fictive kinship became the core of nationalism. Finally, it combined with Marxism into a hybrid ideology in order for serve the Communist independence movements.

(The article was translated by Dan Nguyen of Columbia University)

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# The Last Confucians of Mid-20th Century Vietnam: A Cultural History of the Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies

*Tuan-Cuong NGUYEN\**

## Abstract

The Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies (VATS) took the initiative in promoting Confucian cultural practices in South Vietnam from 1955–1975. The association strove towards collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sino-graphic documents in order to preserve traditional East Asian culture in relation to up-to-date moral education and practical science. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research material related to the organization during the period after the two halves of Vietnam were reunited in 1975. Thus, the Association's activities after 1975 cannot be discussed. To bridge the gap, this article is based on rare documents mostly collected by the author, describing the history and activities of this Confucian organization, including its establishment (1954), regulations, organizational structure, and membership. This article will also focus on the VATS's Confucian cultural practices, such as (i) publishing as a way to promote Confucianism and traditional morality, (ii) Confucianism and Literary Sinitic education, (iii) public speeches, (iv) organizing the annual commemoration of Confucius' birthday on September 28th, (v) and promoting international cooperation related to Confucianism. These activities demonstrate the organization's attempt at popularizing Confucianism and making it compatible with ideas and practices introduced by modernization and Westernization in the middle of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies (VATS), South Vietnam (SVN), tradition, cultural practice

## Zadnji konfucijanci v Vietnamu iz sredine 20. stoletja: kulturna zgodovina Vietnamskega združenja tradicionalnih študij

### Izvleček

Vietnamsko združenje tradicionalnih študij (VATS) je v obdobju 1955–1975 sprožilo pobudo za promocijo konfucijanskih kulturnih praks v Južnem Vietnamu. Združenje si je prizadevalo, da bi zbirali, raziskovali, prevajali, tolmačili in širili klasične sinografske dokumente z namenom ohranjanja tradicionalne vzhodnoazijske kulture, pomembne za

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posodobljeno moralno vzgojo in praktično znanost. Žal je raziskovalno gradivo o tej organizaciji za čas po ponovni združitvi obeh Vietnamov leta 1975 zelo pomanjkljivo. Tako o dejavnostih združenja po letu 1975 ni mogoče razpravljati. Da bi zapolnili vrzeli o tej temi, članek temelji na redkih dokumentih, ki jih je večinoma zbral avtor ter opisujejo zgodovino in dejavnosti konfucijske organizacije, vključno z njeno ustanovitvijo (1954), predpisi, organizacijsko strukturo in članstvom. Ta prispevek se osredotoča tudi na konfucijske kulturne prakse VATS, kot so (I) objave kot način spodbujanja konfucianizma in tradicionalne morale, (II) konfucianizem in literarno sinitsko izobraževanje, (III) javni govori, (IV) vsakoletno organiziranje spominjanja Konfucijevega rojstnega dne 28. septembra in (V) spodbujanje mednarodnega sodelovanja, povezanega s konfucianizmom. Te dejavnosti kažejo na poskus organiziranja popularizacije konfucianizma ter na njegovo združljivost z idejami in praksami, ki sta jih modernizacija in približevanje Zahodu uvedla sredi dvajsetega stoletja.

**Ključne besede:** konfucianizem, Vietnamsko združenje tradicionalnih študij (VATS), Južni Vietnam (SVN), tradicija, kulturna praksa

## Abbreviations:

- ACB: Anniversary of Confucius' Birthday (Lễ Thánh đản)  
CHQS: *Cổ Học Quý San* (Traditional Studies Quarterly, periodical of the VATS)  
NGVNS: *Niên giám văn nghệ sĩ và hiệp hội văn hóa Việt Nam 1969–1970* (Yearbook of Artists and Cultural Associations of Vietnam 1969–1970). Saigon: Nha Văn hóa xuất bản, 1970.  
SVN: South Vietnam  
VAC: Vietnamese Association of Confucianism (Hội Khổng học Việt Nam)  
VATS: Vietnamese Association of Traditional Studies (Hội Cổ học Việt Nam)

## Introduction

Many considerable social changes occurred in Vietnam during the middle of the twentieth century. After overcoming the feudalist Nguyễn Dynasty and French colonialists to gain independence in 1945, Vietnam again had to carry out a nine-year war of resistance against the French (1946–1954). Immediately thereafter, in the middle of 1954, the country was divided into two halves: the communist North Vietnam and the capitalist South Vietnam (hereafter SVN). An ongoing war between the two Vietnams turned into a “hot spot” in the context of the existing global Cold War after World War II (1939–1945), with support from the

Soviet Union and China going to North Vietnam, and that from the US and its allies going to SVN. The twenty-year war ended on April 30, 1975, when the SVN President surrendered to North Vietnam's Liberation Army, beginning a period of unification and independence for the entire country of Vietnam. Despite all of the political changes in from the 1950s to 1970s, Vietnam was still able to achieve many advances in terms of cultural and social modernization. This was particularly evident in SVN, where cultural exchanges with Europe and the US became much more frequent. New foreign and local theories and ideologies, such as communism, socialism, capitalism, Catholicism, Caodaiism, Hoahaoism,<sup>1</sup> and personalism, emerged in the social and political lives of the Vietnamese. These new theories and ideologies shared the same sphere of activity with traditional ones such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, which were becoming less and less relevant in society. This was especially true for Confucianism.

In such a context, the existence of the Association of Traditional Studies (VATS)—a Confucian organization in the city of Huế in central Vietnam—was a re-affirmation of Confucianism in contemporary culture and society.<sup>2</sup> The VATS was at the forefront of Sino-Confucian cultural organizations in Vietnam from 1945 onwards. Based on rare documents related to the VATS collected by the author, this article attempts to sketch an outline of the history of the VATS, concentrating on its establishment, organization, and cultural-academic activities.

## Establishment of the VATS

The VATS was given permission to establish in 1954 by the government of the State of Vietnam (1949–1955).<sup>3</sup> Initially, the association was only able to operate in central Vietnam, centered in Huế, the main city in this region; after 1958, it would operate nationwide.<sup>4</sup> President Ngô Đình Diệm accepted an invitation to be the honorary chairman of the VATS.<sup>5</sup> A ceremony celebrating the VATS's establishment was held in Huế on January 13th, 1955, with 150 attendees from

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- 1 Caodaiism is a monotheistic syncretic religion. Hoahaoism is a quasi-Buddhist religion. They were founded in the 1920s and 1930s in southern Vietnam and continue to exist, mostly in the south of Vietnam.
  - 2 On movements to promote Confucianism in South Vietnam 1955–1975, see the first half in Nguyễn 2015a, 30–81.
  - 3 Pursuant to the Decree No. 831-NĐ/CP dated April 28th, 1954 signed by Governor Office of Central Vietnam. Unfortunately this Decree has not yet been found.
  - 4 Due to the Decree No. 471-BNV/NA/P5 dated August 27th, 1958 signed by Minister of Home Affairs Lâm Lễ Trinh under the government of President Ngô Đình Diệm, see NGVNS 1970, 699.
  - 5 Document No. 589-TTP/ĐL dated May 16th, 1956, see CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 11.

various circles agreeing to join as members, including many Chinese residents (La 1956, 155). Its headquarters was located in the Di Luân hall (彝倫堂 Di Luân đường) within the Citadel of Huế, which also later housed the Institute of Sinology (Viện Hán học, under the University of Huế). The Institute of Sinology shared headquarters and staff with the VATS starting in 1959. The official Vietnamese title of the VATS was “Hội Việt Nam Cổ học” (the Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies), and in Chinese it was called “越南古學會”; however, it was often referred to as “Hội Cổ học” (the Association of Traditional Studies) or “Hội Cổ học Huế” (the Huế Association of Traditional Studies). This was until 1969, when its official title was changed to “Tổng Hội Việt Nam Cổ học” (the Vietnam General Association of Traditional Studies),<sup>6</sup> in order to distinguish it from several local branches.

There were 16 members included on the list of founders of the VATS (NGVNS 1970, 713), mostly officials who had already retired or were still serving in the Nguyễn Court or government of the State of Vietnam. They were virtually all educated in the imperial civil service examination system before 1919 or worked for the Nguyễn Court before 1945. They also lived in the former capital of Huế, which was the centre of culture and learning during the Nguyễn Dynasty. As such, in Huế there already existed attachments to traditional culture, Sinology, and the Confucianism of the former dynasty. Speaking of the plight of Confucianism in the mid-twentieth century, VATS Chairman Nguyễn Huy Nhu observed that “with the expansion of Europeanization, Confucianism has almost faded away” (Nguyễn 1958, 83–86). Despite their old age, these last Confucian intellectuals stood up and campaigned for the founding of a cultural organization with the aim of “collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sinographic documents, in order to preserve East Asian traditional culture that was relevant to up-to-date practical science and moral education”, as written in the *Regulations* of the VATS.

## Organization of the VATS

### *Regulations and Rules*

Like other associations in SVN, in order to gain permission for its establishment the VATS had to have a document of *Regulations and Rules*. This was in accord with “Royal Decree No. 10” on the requirements of founding associations, dated

6 Pursuant to the Decree No. 162/BNV/KS/14 dated March 3rd, 1969 signed by Minister of Home Affairs, General Trần Thiện Khiêm, see NGVNS 1970, 700.

August 6th, 1950, signed by Head of State Bảo Đại (Công báo Việt Nam 1950, 434–37). The VATS’s revised *Regulations*<sup>7</sup> (*Điều lệ*) were approved in 1958, including eight chapters and 34 articles. The contents of the regulations were as follows. Chapter 1: “Purpose, Title, and Headquarters” (three articles). Chapter 2: “Time-Limit, Range, and Conventions” (four articles). Chapter 3: “Requirements for Joining, Leaving, and being Expelled from the Association” (three articles). Chapter 4: “Obligations and Interests of Members” (four articles). Chapter 5: “Regulations on Movable and Immovable Property” (three articles). Chapter 6: “Regulations on the Election and Dismissal of Leaders and their Authority” (14 articles). Chapter 7: “Reasons for Disbandment, Regulations on Disbanded Property” (two articles). Chapter 8: “Subordinate Content” (one article).

The *Rules*<sup>8</sup> (*Nội quy*) of the VATS were approved on August 10th, 1959, including 12 articles on issues such as the title of the VATS, the central and branch organizational systems, working subcommittees, and membership fees.

### *Board of Directors*

During the first term of 1954–1955, the Board of Directors included 16 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu as chairman (La 1956, 155–56). The next term, 1955–1956, maintained the previous board with three advisors and three controllers (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 74–75). The board during the third term (1956–1957) included 22 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu still serving as chairman (*ibid.*, 7–8). During the fourth term, the board included 19 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu continuing as chairman. During the fifth term, there were 17 members, and once again Nguyễn Huy Nhu was chairman (CHQS 1958, vol. 5, 88–89, 90–98). No detailed information on the boards from 1960–1962 has been found, but we know that the chairman was Hồ Đắc Hàm (*ibid.* 1964, vol. 11, 163). At the end of 1963, an irregularly timed General Assembly selected 23 members to be on the board, with Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh as chairman (*ibid.*, 7). In 1969, the board had 19 members, with Phạm Lương Hàn serving as chairman (NGVNS 1970, 714).

The above is an outline of the members of VATS’s Boards of Directors, as found in collected materials. The state of the board during the years 1960–1962, 1965–1968, and after 1970 remains unknown. The abovementioned lists show that there were at least four chairmen: Nguyễn Huy Nhu (1887–1962), a metropolitan laureate (Doctor, *Tiến sĩ*); Hồ Đắc Hàm (1879–1963), a local laureate (Bachelor,

7 For the full text of *Regulations*, see NGVNS 1970, 701–8.

8 For the full text of *Rules*, see NGVNS 1970, 709–12.

*Cử nhân*); Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh (?–?), a junior metropolitan laureate (*Phó bảng*); and Phạm Lương Hàn (?–1970), a baccalaureate. All four of these are on the list of the last laureates in the imperial civil service examinations of the Nguyễn Dynasty. As such, they were undoubtedly qualified to head a Sinological–Confucian organization like the VATS during the “epilogue” of traditional Sinology in Vietnam.

### *Members*

Article 11 in the abovementioned *Regulations* listed six kinds of member, each with different roles: (1) Honorary chairman (*Hội trưởng danh dự*): a special category for the President of the Republic of Vietnam. (2) Honorary member (*Hội viên danh dự*): those with a high level of prestige, reputation, morality, and scholarship and are invited by the VATS to join as members. (3) Active member (*Hội viên hoạt động*): those who have made contributions towards the VATS’s organization, operation, and cultural activities. (4) Practical member (*Hội viên thực hành*): those who pay membership fees. (5) Financial member (*Hội viên tài trợ*): those who contribute 1,000 VND (current SVN currency). (6) Generous member (*Hội viên ân nghĩa*): those who contribute 2,000 VND.

According to a member list in CHQS (1956, vol. 1), when it was established in 1954 the VATS had nearly 200 members. In 1958, it had 654, including one honorary chairman, seven honorary members, six financial members, 27 active members, and 613 practical members. The actual number must have been higher, since these were only the number of members recorded in the incomplete seven volumes of CHQS collected by the author. In 1969, the total number of members had reached around 4,000 (NGVNS 1970, 715). Obviously, from 1954 to 1969, the VATS had made impressive strides in increasing the number of members in the central unit in Huế and other local branches.

### *Local branches*

On local branches, Article 31 in the *Regulations* states:

Any province, city, town, or district that has 50 members or more will be allowed to establish a Board of Directors including one chairman, one vice-chairman, one secretary, one vice-secretary, one treasurer, one vice-treasurer, and three to five advisors and controllers. Regulations on the election and dismissal of leaders and their authority are the same as

mentioned above. After establishing the Board of Directors in a province, city, town, or district, request that the chief of that local unit be made honorary chairman in order to represent and support the association. (NGVNS 1970)

Article 31 also states:

One term for each central, provincial, city, town, or district Board of Director lasts one year. The members of the board can be re-elected if agreed to by the General Assembly. (ibid.)

After founding the central unit in Huế, the VATS gradually spread its range of activities by establishing local branches in provinces, cities, towns, and districts in central Vietnam. According to the known materials, besides the general assembly in Huế there were provincial branches in Quảng Trị, Quảng Tín, and Quảng Nam, a city branch in Đà Nẵng, district branches in Phú Lộc, Phong Điền, Vinh Lộc, Quảng Điền, Quế Sơn, Đại Lộc, Duy Xuyên, Tam Kỳ, Hiếu Đức, Thăng Bình, and Điện Bàn, and a ward branch in Cẩm An. These branches were all founded during the period of 1956–1960, under the guidance of the central unit in Huế and complying with the VATS's *Rules and Regulations*.

## Cultural and Academic Activities of the VATS

### *Research and Publications*

The official periodical by the VNTS, *Cổ Học Quý San* 古學季刊 (CHQS, *Traditional Studies Quarterly*), was published by the Central unit in Huế. According to the *Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965* (*A Bibliography of Vietnamese Magazines 1865–1965*), the CHQS was active from 1956 to 1962, in total publishing ten volumes (*Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965* 1966, 50). Although titled “quarterly”, this periodical was usually published every six months, indicating that difficulties were encountered during the publishing process. I have only found seven volumes: volume 1 and 2 (1956), volume 3 (1957), volume 5 and 6 (1958), volume 7 (1959), and volume 11 (1964).<sup>9</sup> Most volumes have 90–100 pages, while volume 6 includes 120 pages and volume 11 has 194 pages. We can determine that the the *Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965* failed to record all of the CHQS's published volumes up until 1964 because volume 11 was

<sup>9</sup> Volume 1 (1956) is now archived in the UC Berkeley library, code “DS556.4.C72 1958 v.1 MAIN”; the other six volumes were all personally collected by the author.



not included on its list. The total number of published CHQS volumes remains unknown. Hereafter, this article uses the seven known volumes to analyze the periodical.

The purpose of this periodical is to “Promote Confucianism and develop Vietnamese traditional culture”<sup>10</sup> as written in the declaration on every cover. Chairman Nhu worked as the editor-in-chief while Vice-chairman Nguyễn Hy Thích was periodical director. In volume 11 it was written that the new Chairman Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh filled both of these key roles. A portrait of Confucius was printed on the first page of every volume, showing the reverence of the VATS towards the founder of Confucianism.

The CHQS was a bilingual periodical written in both Vietnamese and Chinese. Volume 1 is divided into two separate parts, the first part being written in Vietnamese and the second in Chinese. This layout “is very inconvenient for readers when they want to compare original Chinese texts with the Vietnamese translations.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, from volume 2 onwards, these two parts were combined together for each item published.

One of the sources of funding for the periodical came from subscriptions. Volume 1 includes a list of 18 subscribers, with three people contributing 1,000 VND (Trương Như Đĩnh, Nguyễn Kỳ, Nguyễn Văn Thích), four contributing 500 VND (Phạm Đạt, La Hoài, Phạm Lương Hàn, Tôn Thất Đình), and the rest contributing 100–300 VND each (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 8).

The CHQS includes six columns: Ethics, Philosophy, History, Literary Writings, Miscellaneous, and Appendix. However, not every volume includes all six columns. It is possible to re-classify the content of CHQS into four sections: (1) research and introduction, (2) translation, (3) literary writings, and (4) news.

In section (1), VATS’s authors conduct research and provide introductions to: Confucian theory, the Chinese Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家, *bách gia chư tử*), and the history of Vietnam and China. More specifically, the articles focus on: the Confucian Five Constant Virtues, Confucius’ politics, Confucian equalitarianism, Confucius and modernity, the theory of the good nature of humans (volume 1); Mozi’s (墨子) theory of Universal Love (兼愛, *kiêm ái*), Eastern punishments based on rites and education, the Theory of Human Spirit (人靈, *nhân linh*), the Trần Dynasty’s defeat of Mongol invaders (volume 2); personalism in Confucianism (volume 3); the political thought of Confucius, the

10 Original text in both Vietnamese and Chinese: “Cơ quan chấn hưng Khổng giáo và phát triển văn hoá cổ truyền của Việt Nam”, “這季刊為振興孔教傳播越南古傳文化之機關。”

11 “Lời khai sự của bản hội”, (VATS’s Notice in CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 7).

principles of *The Classic of Changes*, the Eight Trigrams, King Lê Thái Tổ's defeat of Ming invaders, the meaning of love (volume 5); the political thought of Confucius (continued), loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity, and righteousness in the past and present, Lu Jia's (呂嘉) reaction to the Han Dynasty (volume 6); a comparison of ethics and morality in the East and the West in the past and present, theories of the Hundred Schools of Thought based on the Six Arts (六藝, including Rites, Music, Archery, Riding, Writing, and Arithmetic, or 禮, 樂, 射, 御, 書 and 數 in Chinese), Emperor Lí Nam Đế and King Triệu Việt Vương resisting the Liang Dynasty (volume 7); Confucius' teachings, principles and theory of Mencius, Confucians' urge to improve, a brief survey of Eastern philosophy, and the gentleman's (君子) viewpoint of prerequisite and position (volume 11). The authors of these articles were key members of the VATS in Huế or at other branches. This included Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Hi Thích, Trần Văn Kiểm, Tạ Thúc Khái, La Hoài, Phan Ngọc Hoàn, Phạm Mạnh Tô, and Nguyễn Hữu Hiệt. Most of these authors had been trained for the civil service examinations.

Section (2) includes several translations meant to introduce the Four Books, the Five Classics, and Vietnamese and Chinese Sinographic writing. Chairman Nhu wrote a translation of the lengthy article "Theories of Yan and Li" (顏李學說) by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1927) which was published in volume 2 through volume 7.

For section (3), each volume contains 10–20 works of writing, mostly short poems about topics such as praising Confucianism, Confucius, well-known Chinese and Vietnamese Confucians, the beauty of Vietnam, and the important role of the VATS. Most of these works are written in the form of Literary Sinitic Tang-style poetry with Vietnamese translations; several of them are also written in Vietnamese. Section (4) contains information on the internal activities of the VATS and brief news on culture, politics, Vietnamese society, East Asia, Europe, and the US.

Beside the CHQS by the Central unit in Huế, there was another periodical titled *Cổ học tinh hoa văn tập* (*Selected Writings of Traditional Quintessences*) published by the Quảng Nam Provincial branch. The only known copy of this periodical is now kept in the library of Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. This special issue was meant to commemorate the inauguration of the Confucius Temple in Quảng Nam province in 1962. The Letter from the Editorial Office in this issue tells us that this branch had published seven volumes before 1962, with two volumes coming out each year. The editorial board included Editor-in-chief Hồ Ngân and Editorial General Secretary Ngô Tấn Huệ, who alternately served as Vice-chairman and General Secretary of the Quảng Nam branch of the VATS. The periodical received the regular cooperation of authors such as Di Lão, Nguyễn Văn Thọ, Huỳnh Như Văn, Phạm Trung Côn, Ngô Tấn Huệ, Thái Can, Phạm Phú

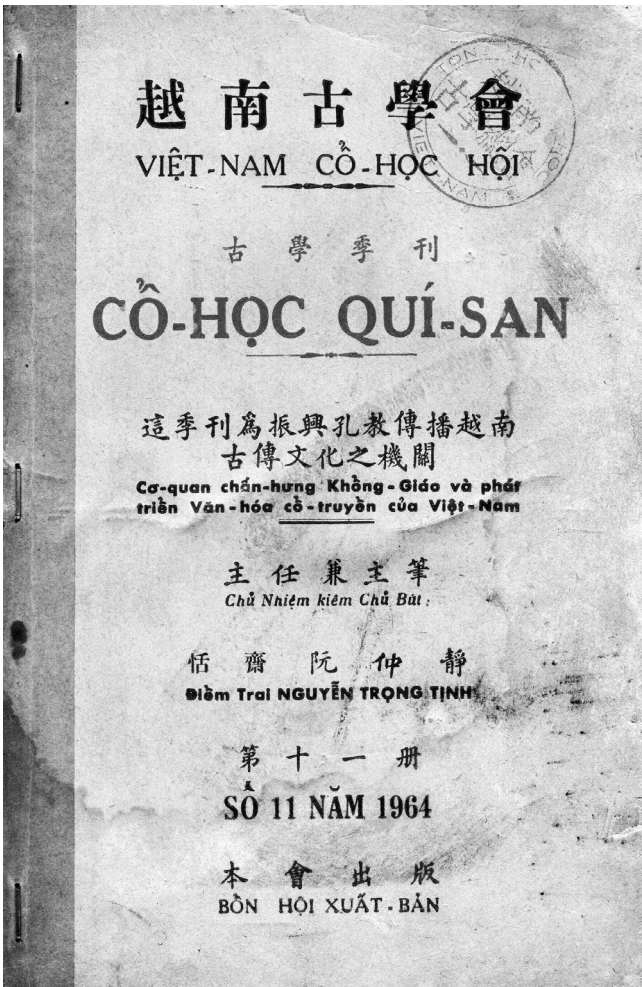


Photo 1: *Cổ Học Quý San* (*Traditional Studies Quarterly*) volume 11, 1964, cover. On the upper right is the round red seal of the VATS written in both Chinese “越南古學總會” and Vietnamese “Tổng-hội Cổ-học Việt-Nam” (Vietnam General Association of Traditional Studies).

Huu, Lam Kiều, Phan Khôi,<sup>12</sup> and Hoài Mai. Among these authors, Nguyễn Văn Thọ (1921–2014) stands out as an eminent researcher in the fields of Sinology and Confucianism. His work includes a book entitled *Khảo luận và phê bình học thuyết Khổng tử* (*Researching and Criticizing Confucius' Theory*) published by the Đà Nẵng City branch of the VATS in 1960.

12 This Phan Khôi has the same name as the well-known scholar Phan Khôi (1887–1959) who lived in Hanoi after 1954.

### *Translation and Cataloguing the Nguyễn Dynasty's Official Documents*

The Committee of Historical Document Translation of Vietnam (Ủy Ban Phiên Dịch Sử Liệu Việt Nam, belonging to the University of Huế) was in charge of translating historical documents from Literary Sinitic into Vietnamese. The main translators were mostly from the Institute of Sinology and the VATS, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu serving as committee chief. The committee collaborated with the well-known scholar Professor Chen Ching-ho (陳荆和, Chen Jinghe, 1917–1995) to collect and translate a number of important historical documents. Some of these translations have already been published, including in 1961 *An Nam Chí Lược* (安南志略, *A Brief History of Annam*) by Lê Tấn (黎崱, 13th–14th century)—a Vietnamese scholar who migrated to China, and in 1963 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự* (海外紀事, *Records of Overseas Events*) by the Buddhist monk Shi Dashan (釋大汕, 1637–1705). The committee's most significant translated work is a huge set of books entitled *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn* (*Catalogue of the Official Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty*, or 阮朝硃本目錄 in Chinese), of which just the two first volumes were published in 1960 and 1962. According to Nguyễn Văn Đăng's new research, by July 7, 1959, the University of Huế had gotten permission to receive and store the entire collection of the Nguyễn Dynasty's "Official Documents"<sup>13</sup> which had been archived under suboptimal conditions in the Central Vietnam Institute of Culture (Viện Văn Hoá Trung Kỳ). At that time, the committee was established and Chen Ching-ho was appointed as General Secretary. The first thing that the committee focused on was the arrangement and compilation of a catalogue of the Official Documents. Within two months, the committee was able to inventory 611 volumes belonging to 10 reigns from Gia Long (reigned 1802–1819) to Bảo Đại (reigned 1926–1945). Starting in September 1959, the committee began to catalogue these documents in a unified fashion based on factors including: reign, day, month, year, volume, page, type, origin, abstract, subject, annotation, in both Vietnamese and Literary Sinitic (Nguyễn 2012, 107–18). At present a number of the Official Documents have been lost; the handwritten pages of the catalogue of the committee have been stored in the library of the College of Science in Huế. Compiling the series of books *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn* (*Catalogue of the Official Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty*) was obviously a massive undertaking carried out by the Committee of Historical Document Translation of Vietnam. It is notable that the staff of the Institute of Sinology and the VATS played a key role in the work. The vast documentary heritage they left, because of a lack of conditions

13 Official documents, or literally "red-colored texts" (硃本): the administrative texts of the imperial administration formed in the process of state management and operation, these documents are directly commented on by Emperors in red-ink brush.

for printing and publishing at the time, is still now being reviewed and edited for publication.

### *Literary Sinitic and Confucian Education*

Education was one of the key goals of the VATS. A brief report on its activities published in NGVNS (1970) indicates that the VATS frequently held free classes on teaching the *Five Classics* and *Four Books*, the theories of Confucius and Mencius, and teaching Sinographs and Literary Sinitic to pupils, students, and members (NGVNS 1970, 715). According to Advisor La Hoài, the VATS appointed its Vice-chairman, Priest Nguyễn Văn Thích, to be responsible for running these classes. The ceremony to celebrate the start of these classes was held in Di Luân hall on August 20th, 1955 (La 1956, 156). Unfortunately, I failed to find more extensive, detailed records on these educational activities. However, when the SVN government established the Institute of Sinology, a university-level educational and research unit under the University of Huế, in 1959, several key members of the VATS, such as Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Văn Thích, Lương Trọng Hối, Nguyễn Duy Bột, La Hoài, Phan Chí Chương, Hà Ngại, and Phạm Lương Hàn played important roles in teaching Literary Sinitic, Sinology, and Confucianism in the institute.

Besides holding in-person classes, the VATS also organized several educational activities through their periodical. Starting from volume 2, CHQS included a column titled “Việt, Hoa thông-dụng từ-ngữ” (Frequently Used Chinese and Vietnamese Words and Phrases). This column provided explanations of Sino-Vietnamese words, accompanied by their associated Sinographs, readings, and meanings. Volume 2 includes all of “Letter A” of this Sino-Vietnamese word-list (CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 86–95), with “Letter B” included in volume 7 (ibid. 1959, vol. 7, 83–97). Volume 7 also tells us that the author of this column is Chairman Nhu. The last section of CHQS volume 11 is “Ấu học Hán tự giáo khoa thơ – Sách dạy trẻ học chữ Hán” (A Textbook of Sinographs for Children) which notes that this section “starts from volume 10.” Through reading the content of this section, I discovered that it is based on a Chinese character textbook well-known during the first decades of the twentieth century in Vietnam, entitled *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* 幼學漢字新書 (*A New Textbook of Sinographs for Children*). The *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* is a Sinographic textbook which was part of the Vietnamese Civil Service Examination Educational Reform Program (chương trình cải lương giáo dục khoa cử Việt Nam) which lasted from 1906 to 1919, when the Civil Service Examination was officially abolished. This woodblock-printed textbook



may have been published in 1908,<sup>14</sup> including four volumes totalling 372 pages. It included lessons on nature, plants, birds, weather (volume 1), ethics, morality (volume 2), Vietnamese geography and politics (volume 3), and Vietnamese history from the time of King Kinh Dương to the Trịnh Lords (volume 4). The difference between the *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* and the CHQS version is that the *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* is only written in Sinographs in the form of rhymed lines, while the CHQS adds the reading and meaning of each Sinograph, the meaning of each line, and annotations for rare Sinographs. In summary, the CHQS is based on a Vietnamese textbook of Sinographs published nearly 60 years prior, adding phonetic transcriptions, translations, and annotations to provide readers with a new and up-to-date Sinograph textbook for children.

### *Public Speeches on Confucianism and Traditional Morality*

Giving public speeches on Confucianism and traditional morality was another important function of the VATS. The brief report of its activities published in NGVNS (1970) indicates that the VATS organized public talks on the teachings of Confucian deities in districts, communes, and hamlets. At the headquarters in Huế, they organized large-scale presentations by celebrated foreign and domestic speakers (NGVNS 1970, 715). Based on extant materials, we still know of the following six public speeches (excluding speeches on all anniversaries of Confucius' birthday which will be mentioned below):

On June 15th, 1957, during the ceremony celebrating the founding of the VATS Quảng Nam Provincial branch, Doctor Thái Can, a modern scholar and Vice-chairman of the Quảng Nam Provincial branch, gave a speech on the relationship between tradition and modernity in which he emphasized the importance of traditional knowledge in modern times (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 78–85).

On March 30th, 1958, Chairman Nhu gave a speech at the VATS General Assembly on the issue of Mencius' theory of good nature and Xunzi's theory of bad nature (CHQS 1958, vol. 5, 90–98).

In 1958 (date unclear), Mr. Phạm Mạnh Tô gave a speech at the VATS's City branch in Đà Nẵng about loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity, and righteousness in the past and the present (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 35–59).

On September 25th, 1959, the University of Huế hosted a speech at its lecture hall by Priest Nguyễn Văn Thích, VATS Vice-chairman, on the moral philosophy of

14 See *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* 幼學漢字新書, library call number VHv.1485, in the archives of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam.

*The Doctrine of the Mean*. This presentation attracted a large audience, mostly intellectuals living in the former capital (*Văn Hoá Nguyệt San* 1959, vol. 44, 1202).

On May 5th, 1963, two guests from Taiwan, Ngô Tử Tâm and Ngô Thiệu Tâm arrived in Huế and were warmly welcomed. They gave a talk at the Di Luân hall on various aspects of Confucianism (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 163–70). The full text of this talk and the Chinese names of the two guests remain unknown.

On February 3rd, 1964, during the occasion of the VATS's delegation's visit to the district branch in Phú Vang, Vice-chairman Hà Ngại spoke about the meaning of the words "revolution, freedom, and equality" through interpretations of pre-modern Chinese Confucians (*ibid.*, 175–80).

The abovementioned educational activities and speeches were aimed towards re-invigorating the influence of Confucianism on the public, for both children and adults, at events and through publications. These activities demonstrate the VATS's attempts to popularize Confucian cultural and academic practices in society.

### *Organizing the Commemoration of Confucius' Birthday (ACB)*

Sixteen months after being appointed Prime Minister of The State of Vietnam (Quốc Gia Việt Nam, 1949–1955), Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963) became the first president of the Republic of Vietnam on October 26th, 1955. Only three months later, on January 9th, 1956, the new president signed *Decree No. 4*, designating fifteen national holidays for the new republic.<sup>15</sup> According to Nguyễn Bá Nghị, Confucian scholars living in the SVN's capital in Saigon proposed that the solar birthday of Confucius be made into a national holiday. President Diệm swiftly approved their proposal by including it in *Decree No. 4* (*Minh Tân* 1964, 12–15). As they did on other significant holidays, citizens of South Vietnam enjoyed an entire day off of work for Confucius' birthday (on less important holidays they only had a half-day off). This was the first time since 1945 that a national holiday was established for Confucius' birthday on September 28th of the solar calendar. Although the official title of the holiday was the "Commemoration of Confucius" ("Kỷ niệm Đức Khổng tử"), people most called it the "Festival of Confucius' Birthday" ("Lễ Thánh đản", literally the "Festival of the Sage's Birthday" in English, "聖誕禮" in Chinese). According to extant documents, the ACB was organized into central and local administrative units, which functioned continuously from 1956 to 1974 until the fall of Saigon in April 1975. The National Ministry of

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15 See *Decree No. 4* and its supplementary content in *Decree No. 59-a* in *Công Báo Việt Nam Cộng hoà* (*Gazettes of the Republic of Vietnam*), (1956, 142, 2724).



Education and the Vietnamese Association of Confucianism (VAC) were responsible for organizing the ACB countrywide, but in the city of Huế and certain other central provinces the VATS was also responsible for its organization.

The organization of the ACB was one of the most significant yearly events held by the VATS. The association requested permission from the local government to take the Di Luân hall as its headquarters and brought the tablets of Confucius and his disciples, including the Four Correlates (四配, *tứ phối*) and Twelve Philosophers (十二哲, *thập nhị triết*), there for worship. Prior to the ratification of the *Decree No. 4* on October 13th 1955, (August 28th in the lunar calendar), the VATS organized a “Commemoration of Confucius’ birthday” in the Di Luân hall in the city of Huế, the former capital of Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945). The ceremony welcomed more than 500 attendees, including the Government Representative in Central Vietnam, the Commander of Military Zone II, the Director of Central Vietnam’s Department of Justice, the Consul of the Republic of China in Huế, various political, military, and academic elites, students, Chinese residents in Huế, and members of the VATS. The ceremony included: (1) a salute to the flag, (2) an honouring of Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm accompanied by military music and the national anthem, (3) Vice-Chairman Hà Ngại’s opening speech, (4) Chairman Nhu’s presentation of incense to the Altar of Confucius followed by four kowtows while an octet (八音) played, (5) three ritual kowtows (三叩) by all participants, (6) Advisor Phạm Lương Hàn’s recitation of Confucius’ biography, (7) the Chairman’s address about the organization of the VATS, and (8) Vice-Chairman and Catholic priest Nguyễn Văn Thích’s explications on the word “culture” (文化) and lecture on Confucianism in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> This was the first celebration of Confucius’ birthday observed in the country since 1945. For the event, the lunar date of Confucius’ birthday was used, adhering to the Confucian tradition of East Asia. This celebration was a special activity organized by the VATS in Central Vietnam, because in 1955 the ACB had not yet been designated as a national holiday.

Starting in 1965, when the ACB became a national holiday, the VATS cooperated with local government to organize this celebration, most often held in the city of Huế. The date of the celebration also became based on the solar calendar, as is recorded in *Decree No. 4*. Extant materials give evidence of only three ACB events held in 1956 (CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 71), 1958 (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 101–2), and 1963 (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 158), during which the ceremony was roughly the same as that of 1955.

16 “Trường thuật Lễ Ki-niệm ngày Thánh-Đản Đức Khổng-Phu-Từ do Hội Cổ-học tổ chức (Relating the ACB Organized by VATS)” (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 69; also see VATS Chairman’s address (*ibid.*, 70–73)).

### *International Relations on Confucianism*

International relations was a feature which reflected the modernization of the Confucian cultural activities of the VATS. They maintained frequent contact with Taiwan and sometimes with Switzerland.

CHQS (volume 3) included a letter written to the VATS in Sinographs by Mr. Feng Gao (馮鎬), who was Manager of the Overseas Archives Publishing House (海外文庫出版社社長) in Taiwan. This was a letter of thanks for books (possibly volumes of CHQS) given by the VATS's Chairman. Mr. Feng Gao reiterated the important role of Confucianism in the history of China, and asserted that "China and Vietnam are one family and race, share the same language, both followed Confucius and Mencius, and were both descendants of Confucian deities" (中越一家, 兄弟之國, 同文同種, 宗孔宗孟, 均為列聖列賢之裔). He also applauded the foundation of the VATS, and at the end of his speech noted that he was providing the VATS with 20 copies of a brief biography of Confucius, and 20 copies of a book on the "Father of the Nation" Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 87).

At the end of 1958, accepting the invitation of VAC, Professor Kong Decheng 孔德成 (1920–2008), a 77th-generation descendant of Confucius who held the position of "Confucian Sacrificial Official" (奉祀官) responsible for worshipping Confucius in Taiwan, visited SVN for 15 days from September 22 to October 6, 1958. He participated in several cultural activities including attending the ACB in Saigon, visiting four cities/provinces (Saigon, Vĩnh Long, Huế, Quy Nhon), lecturing on Confucian topics seven times in these locations, holding a press conference, communicating with Confucian associations in Saigon and the other three provinces, communicating with Chinese resident societies, and visiting historic sites in the provinces. In the entire history of Confucianism in Vietnam, this was the first time that there was an official visit by a Confucian Sacrificial Official as a "state visitor" (Nguyễn 2015b). During his trip, Kong Decheng visited Huế from the afternoon of October 1st to the morning of October 3rd. The VATS organized a delegation of over 100 members together with a number of government representatives and Chinese residents to welcome him at Phú Bài airport. After visiting the VATS's Central Vietnam headquarters in Huế, he went to the VATS's headquarters at their Quảng Tri club-house (the Di Luân hall was currently under renovation). In order to welcome Kong Decheng, Chairman Nhu read an address in Sino-Vietnamese. The Secretary General of the Consulate of the Republic of China in Huế then read it in Chinese and the VATS Advisor Nguyễn Dự read it in Vietnamese.<sup>17</sup> The address emphasized the significance of

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17 The full text of Nguyễn Huy Nhu's address is found in CHQS (1958, vol. 6, 109–11); for Sinographic part, with a responding poem by Kong Decheng after this trip, see *ibid.*, 112–13 (Vietnamese).

Confucianism to the history and culture of both China and Vietnam, and re-affirmed that the founding of the VATS was meant to re-establish the connection between human nature and social morality. The Chairman expressed his great appreciation for Kong's visit and emphasized the friendly relations between China and Vietnam. Kong then "praised the VATS's enthusiasm for traditional culture which led to its foundation and thanked them for such a warm welcome." Next, the VATS presented Kong with a gift of Sinographic calligraphy and they all cordially had tea together. On the next day, October 2nd, 1958, the VATS sent some of their men together with the Office of Information to lead Kong Decheng to visit historic monuments in Huế. On the same day at 6pm, there was a dinner banquet which included the attendance of the Chief of Thừa Thiên province, the Consul of the Republic of China in Huế, a number of Chinese residents, VAC members, and VATS members.<sup>18</sup>

From January 14–19, 1960, a "Cultural Delegation" accompanied President Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963) during his official visit to the Republic of China (Taiwan). This delegation included Trương Công Cừu, Cao Văn Luận, Nguyễn Đăng Thục, Nguyễn Trác, and three key members of the VATS: Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Văn Thích, and Lương Trọng Hối. They visited the Temple of Confucius in Taipei on January 16, where they met and talked with Kong Decheng, the 77th generation descendant of Confucius who had already made a 15-day trip to SVN in 1958 at the invitation of President Ngô Đình Diệm and the VAC. On the next day, they visited the Academia Sinica (中央研究院, Central Research Academy) in Nangang District of Taipei, where they met and talked with Academia Sinica President Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962), a leading scholar, and participated in a seminar on education chaired by the Minister of Education of Taiwan. On January 18, the delegation flew to Taichong Province (台中) to visit National Chung Hsing University (國立中興大學) and the National Palace Museum (故宮博物院), accompanied by Kong Decheng and the Province chief (Nguyễn 1960, 2–4, 16).

When Taiwanese Vice President Chen Cheng 陳誠 (1898–1965) made an official visit to SVN in early March 1963, VATS Chairman Nhu wrote him a brief letter in Chinese with a Vietnamese translation, dated March 5th. This letter spoke of book exchanges between Taiwan and the VATS: "Thanks to your nation's cultural organizations, particularly the Foreign Resident Department, we often receive books and newspapers which provide us with reference materials for promoting Confucianism." The end of the letter stressed the need to strengthen diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Vietnam, and mentioned that the VATS gave the

18 "Không-Đức-Thành Tiên-Sinh đến Huế (Mr. Kong Decheng's Visit to Huế)" (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 108).

Vice President ten copies of CHQS volume 10, which had just been published (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 171–72).

In early May, 1963, the SVN government sent invitations to visit SVN to two guests from Taiwan: Ngô Tử Tâm, who was both a famous Confucian scholar and painter, and Ngô Thiệu Tâm, who was an acupuncturist. They were also invited by the Institute of Sinology and the VATS to visit the former capital of Huế from May 2nd to May 5th, 1963, to give lectures on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. After being welcomed at Phú Bài airport on May 2nd, the two guests visited the VATS's headquarters on May 4th. The next day, they gave a lecture on Confucianism at the Di Luân hall. The visit ended with a dinner banquet held by the VATS at its headquarters. The CHQS published eight poetic exchanges (唱和詩) written in Sinographs between the two guests and members of the VATS, following the customs of traditional literati (ibid., 163–70).

In addition to the exchanges with Taiwan mentioned above, the VATS also had some contact with Switzerland's Association of Confucianism. CHQS volume 1 includes a note from the Swiss organization to the VATS Chairman. “[We are] the sole association in the West that explains the beauty of Confucian teachings and applies these teachings in the present day. A copy of our monthly periodical will be sent for free to anyone who needs one. We require no meeting or membership fees. Please join in to help us.” At the end of the note the VATS wrote: “This association sent us four issues of their monthly periodical which we will publish in the next volume (of CHQS)” (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 76). However, I failed to find any reference to the Swiss journal in volume 2 and 3 of CHQS.

## Comments on the VATS

### *Relationship with Government*

Article 11 in the abovementioned *Regulations* defined an honorary member (Hội viên danh dự) as follows:

This group includes those who have prestige, reputation, morality, and erudition, and are invited by the VATS to provide support in the spiritual sphere, support fine initiatives, or assist the association by means which promote strong development. (NGVNS 1970, 703)

Among the five honorary members inducted in 1956, there were three Vietnamese inductees, the government representative in Central Vietnam Nguyễn Đôn Duyên, Commander of Military Zone II Major-general Lê Văn Nghiêm, and the

Attorney of the Director of the Bureau of Justice in Central Vietnam Ngô Khánh Thực. There also were two Taiwanese inductees, Envoy Jiang Enqi 蔣恩起 and Consul Chen Zhongjun 陳忠君. In 1957, the first two Vietnamese honorary members were replaced by Hồ Đắc Khương and Lieutenant-general Thái Quang Hoàng (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 5). It is also worth mentioning again that the VATS invited President Ngô Đình Diệm to be Honorary Chairman in early 1956.

A similar phenomenon occurred at the VATS's branches. Article 31 in the *Regulations* states that: "After setting up a branch's Board of Directors in each province, city, town, or district, invite the Chief of the province, city, town, or district to be the branch's Honorary Chairman, representative, and supporter" (NGVNS 1970, 707). Looking at the list of Board of Directors of the Quảng Nam provincial branch, one can find the names of provincial government officers. The Honorary Chairmen were two Provincial Chiefs, Nguyễn Hoà Phẩm and Võ Hữu Thu. Three Provincial Lieutenant Governors Nguyễn Tự, Nguyễn Xuân Ba, Hồ Liêm, and Lieutenant-colonel Nguyễn Đạm were four advisors of the branch. The chairman of the branch was Local Laureate Lương Trọng Hối, who served as a congressman from 1959, whereas the vice-chairman was Chief Justice of the Conciliation Court of the City of Hội An in Quảng Nam province (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 77–85). District Chief Tôn Thất Chi was also invited and subsequently agreed to serve as Honorary Chairman of the Vinh Lộc district branch of the VATS (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 114–15).

The above evidence demonstrates that in both the central association in Huế and at other local branches, the VATS attempted to establish strong connections with the government by inviting local political and military leaders to join as honorary members. They also used enthusiastic local officers to contribute to the VATS's operations. This connection existed in both the *Regulations* and in the actual activities of the VATS.

CHQS occasionally published pro-government articles. For example, an article written by Phan Ngọc Hoàn analyzed Confucian quotes associated with "person" (人, *nhân* in Vietnamese) and "position" (位, *vị*) to interpret the word "nhân vị" (人位) in Vietnamese in order to "provide readers with several references that could be of help regarding today's essential subject matter". His interpretations were used in SVN to translate Emmanuel Mounier's "personalism" (*chủ nghĩa nhân vị*), the leading political theory of the SVN government from 1955 to 1963. In his conclusion, Phan expressed his strong belief in the link between the fate of Confucianism and contemporary politics:

These days, the foundation of parliament and the promulgation of the constitution has opened up a new era for the Republic of Vietnam. We

feel optimistic when the words “respecting personalism” are stated in the first paragraph of the constitution. We believe that the Confucian theory of “illustrating virtue and renovating the people” (明德新民) will shine in the world. Let us prepare to toast that day soon to come. (Phan 1957, 48–53)

The policy of attaching the VATS to the government of SVN the Taiwanese Consulate shows that the VATS wanted to take full advantage of support from the SVN government and Taiwanese Consulate in Huế. At the same time, they maintained a close relationship with the local government in every province, city, town, and district. However, compared to the VAC, which was founded later in 1956 in Saigon, the VATS paid less attention to politics. The CHQS published fewer political articles than the *Minh Tân* (Bright and New) and *Sinh Lực* (Vitality), the voices of the VAC.

### *Relationship with National Sinological Education*

Most of the imperial civil service examination laureates who were key members of the VATS were also active lecturers at the Institute of Sinology which was part of the University of Huế. Notable examples include Chairman Nhu, Vice-Chairmen Nguyễn Văn Thích, Võ Như Nguyễn, Hà Ngại, Advisors Phạm Lương Hàn, La Hoài, and Quảng Nam provincial branch Chairman Lương Trọng Hối. The Di Luân hall was headquarters of both the VATS and Institute of Sinology. They also both contributed to the translation of Vietnamese historical documents led by the Commission of Vietnamese Historical Document Translation. The relationship between the VATS and the Institute of Sinology represents a close connection between state institutions and cultural organizations focused on Sinology and Confucianism. A similar situation can be seen in the relationship between the VAC and the Department of Literary Sinitic (Ban Hán văn) of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Saigon. Such close connections may have been a common occurrence in the field of Sinology in SVN from 1955–1975.

### *The Role of Traditional Confucian Scholars*

There are a number of Sinological laureates on the list of the 16 founders of the VATS. Chairman Nguyễn Huy Nhu (1887–1962) was a member of the famous Nguyễn Huy family in Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An province. He was a Local Laureate in 1909, and a Metropolitan Laureate during the reign of Emperor Khải Định



in 1916 (Ngô 2006, 809). There were only seven Metropolitan Laureates that year (Phạm 2000, 406–11). During his entire lengthy career as a mandarin, he held Sino-logical educational positions such as Prefectural Education Officer (Giáo thụ), District Education Officer (Huấn đạo), and Provincial Education Officer. All of these positions were in Quảng Ninh province. He was also a member of the Imperial Academy. When the Institute of Sinology was founded under the University of Huế in 1959, he was appointed Professor in Literary Sinitic and Director of the Commission of Vietnamese Historical Document Translation. Another founder was Phan Ngọc Hoàn (1893–?), a Local Laureate in 1915 during the reign of Emperor Duy Tân (Cao 2011, 660). Though I failed to find the names of the other founders in the records of laureates, they must have experienced a traditional Literary Sinitic education. Three members at the end of the list, Trần Trọng Ngân, Ngô Đình Sung, Hoàng Đình Khải, were members of the Imperial Academy. At the provincial branch of Quảng Nam, Chairman Lương Trọng Hối (1888–1969) was a Local Laureate in 1918 during the last imperial civil service examination in Vietnam. He worked as a mandarin in several positions for the Nguyễn Dynasty for a long period of time before the dynasty came to the end in 1945. Starting in 1959, he served as a congressman in the government of President Ngô Đình Diệm and as Deputy Director of the Institute of Sinology. He was a famous Confucian scholar, politician, poet, and traditional physician in central Vietnam.

There are also many traditional Confucian scholars on the member list of the VATS, such as Ứng Trình, Ứng Bình Thúc Giạ Thị, Bửu Cầm, Hồ Đắc Hàm, Nguyễn Văn Thích, Trần Văn Kiểm, Tạ Thúc Khải, and La Hoài, who together produced a large number of academic and artistic works.

With contributions from traditional scholars with extensive backgrounds in Literary Sinitic, the CHQS periodical often released articles in both Literary Sinitic and Vietnamese. They wrote in a style of Chinese similar to the Confucian classics, not modern Chinese. Diplomatic documents from the VATS written to Taiwan were also written in classical Chinese (Literary Sinitic). Just like premodern intellectuals who came before them, members of the VATS regularly engaged in poetic exchanges with foreign scholars.

### *Diverse Membership: Royals, Women, Buddhists, and Catholics*

Looking at the list of members of the VATS, besides the significant presence of traditional Confucian scholars, there exist four other groups which hold a significant place on the list: members of the royal family, women, Buddhists, and Catholics.



In accordance with naming conventions, members of the Nguyễn royal often have names beginning with Ứng, Bửu, and Tôn Thất. Looking at the membership lists in CHQS volumes 1, 2, 3, and 5, there are 26 individuals with such names. The list includes numerous individuals who were famous scholars in the history of Vietnam. One of these scholars was Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Trình 阮福膺脞, the author of *Luận ngữ tinh hoa ấu học* (論語菁華幼學, *The Quintessences of Confucius Analects for Primary Education*), which was written in Literary Sinitic and printed by woodblock in 1914. Four copies of this work are now archived in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies in Hanoi (call numbers A.906, VHv.501, VHv.775, VHv.776). He is also the author of *Việt Nam ngoại giao sử cận đại* (*The History of Modern Vietnam's Diplomacy*), written in 1970 and published in Sài Gòn. Another example is Ứng Bình Thúc Giả Thị (1877–1961), whose real name is Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Bình 阮福膺莘. He was a famous poet with a collection of poems entitled *Lộc Minh đình thi thảo* (鹿鳴亭詩草, *Poetic Manuscript of the Hall of Lộc Minh*) (Ứng 2008; Triệu 2008). The collection includes over 200 Sinographic poems and other works written in the Romanized script. Finally, Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Cầm (1920–2010) was a well-known scholar in Sino-Nom studies who made remarkable contributions in education, translation, and research, with around 20 books and 50 research articles to his name. He was a Professor of Literary Sinitic in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Saigon before 1975, after which he moved to the University of Hồ Chí Minh City.

The member list also includes a number of women such as Nguyễn Thị Khanh, Hoàng Nguyệt Quế, and Trần Xuân Huệ Phương. One of the two vice-treasurers in 1969 was Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Túy. The Phú Lộc District branch also included female member whose name remains unclear (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 86). CHQS (1957, vol. 2, 57) includes a poem by a Mrs. Lê Thị Bằng entitled “Lấy chồng thời lấy, năm chung chẳng năm” (Agreeing to Get Married to a Man but Disagreeing to Sleep with Him).

From 1955–1975 in SVN, though Confucianism was often treated as a religion, the VATS Confucian organization still welcomed members from Buddhism and Catholicism. The Catholic priest Nguyễn Văn Thích (also Nguyễn Hy Thích) was a founding member, Vice-chairman of the VATS, and one of the most active members in its history. Thích Trí Thủ (1909–1984) was a famous Buddhist monk in central Vietnam and an active member of the the association from the beginning. Priest Trương was an advisor at the Quảng Nam provincial branch, while Priest Nguyễn Văn Tiếp was an advisor at the Phong Điền district branch. This list of members associated with other religions might in fact be longer than the examples mentioned above. This phenomenon of Buddhists and Catholics being

members of the VATS demonstrates a high level of religious acceptance and harmony in the cultural activities of the organization.

## Conclusion

The VATS was established as a bastion for the last Confucians in the history of Vietnam in the former capital of Huế, the centre of the Nguyễn Dynasty's cultural and academic activities. During the middle of the 1950's, observing the expansion of Westernization and the decreased influence of Confucianism, they decided to stand up and campaign for the founding of a cultural association with the goal of collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sinographic documents. This was in order to preserve traditional East Asian culture and connect it with up-to-date moral education and practical science. The association followed the guidelines set forth in "Royal Decree No. 10", dated August 6th, 1950, on the requirements of founding associations. The VATS tried to expand its range of activities from Huế out to many other provinces, cities, towns, and districts. It welcomed all classes of people to join as members, including traditional Confucian scholars, local political and military leaders, members of the royal family, women, Buddhist monks, and Catholic priests. This indicates that the VATS had an open-minded view regarding politics, gender, and religion. No evidence for the existence of the VATS after the unification of Vietnam on April 30th, 1975 was found, so it is possible to provisionally assert that it lasted from 1954 to 1975.

The VATS focused its efforts towards research, publishing, education, giving public speeches, organizing the annual event for the national holiday of the anniversary of Confucius' birthday, and promoting international cooperation in the fields of Confucianism and traditional morality. According to evidence found in the CHQS periodical, the VATS's cultural and academic activities were quite traditional. In terms of how the active members thought, wrote, and acted, they followed the example set by premodern Confucian scholars. The Confucian knowledge they shared with the public was traditional, introductory, and brief in order to be easy to popularize. This indicates that these Confucians stayed far from the New Confucianism movement that developed in East Asia in the 1950s–1970s.

Among the various Confucian organizations in SVN from 1955–1975, the VATS was the first one founded, and together with the VAC played the most significant role of all the groups. Since their goals were largely aligned, these two organizations tried to unify in 1957–1960, but the attempt ultimately failed.<sup>19</sup> In com-

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19 On the efforts to unify the VATS and the VAC, see *Sinh Lực* (1957, vol. 17, 104), and *Minh Tân* (1960, vol. 71, 12).

parison, the VAC had more members (around 20,000), a larger range of activity, and more varied publications (periodicals and books). They maintained a closer relationship with the government and organized many more cultural activities. The Confucian knowledge that they published remained closer to the contemporary situation in East Asia and the wider world. In general, the activities of VAC were thus more contemporary than those of the VATS. Meanwhile, the VATS appeared to be much more traditional, carrying out many of the same practices as premodern Confucian scholars, such as explicating Confucian classics, praising examples of morality, engaging in poetic exchanges with friends, and teaching Literary Sinitic and Confucian thought. The VATS often repeated their guiding principle of “reviewing the past and understanding the present” (溫故知新, *ôn cố tri tân*); though they may have succeeded in “reviewing the past”, it is hard to say that they succeeded in “understanding the present”.

In the wider context of East Asia in the 1950s–1970s, there existed numerous Confucian organizations, most of which were active in Taiwan, which also existed in a divided-state situation similar to that seen in Vietnam. The Association of Confucius and Mencius (孔孟學會), founded in 1961, was the most illustrious such association in Taiwan, with a large number of branches. There also existed other organizations like the Chinese Association of the Way of the Sage (中華聖道會), founded by Mao Songnian 毛松年 in 1949, the China Association of Confucianism (中國孔學會), officially established in 1959, the Danshui Association of Confucianism (淡水孔學會), founded in 1948, and Juexiu Palace (覺修宮), founded in 1910 in Taipei but only becoming active starting in 1954. All of these organizations focused on four primary activities: organizing the annual commemoration of Confucius’ birthday on September 28th, publishing periodicals, giving speeches on Confucian theory, and participating in social education (Li 2011). These activities are quite similar to those of the VATS and VAC in Vietnam during the same period of time. In the 1950s–1970s, because SVN and Taiwan shared an anti-communist perspective, they maintained a close relationship in terms of both politics and culture. In the fields of Confucianism and Sinology, the VATS and the VAC in SVN echoed the sentiments of their counterparts in Taiwan. Taiwanese people continued to use Sinographs and Chinese as their script and spoken language, which helped them regard Confucianism as part of their own tradition. On the other hand, SVN shifted to a modern Romanized script, which day by day increased the people’s unfamiliarity with and feeling of strangeness towards Sinographs and Confucian culture. Therefore, compared to organizations in Taiwan, both the VATS and the VAC failed to attract as much attention from society at large.

The existence of the VATS can be regarded as the last flashes of an oil lamp before fading away, as the people gradually shift to using electric lamps. Their

activities were evidence of a continuance of the old more than a rising of the new in Confucian thought. In this way, the VATS was unlike the New Confucianism movement that existed at the same time in East Asia. Nonetheless, the group's activities indicate its valiant, but fruitless attempt at popularizing Confucianism, by bringing it in harmony with the ideas and practices introduced by modernization and Westernization in the middle of the 20th century. However, despite failing to achieve their ultimate goal, the VATS did amplify the voices of the last “pure Confucians” of Vietnam.<sup>20</sup>

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# The Vietnamese Confucian Diplomatic Tradition and the Last Nguyễn Precolonial Envoys' Textual Communication with Li Hongzhang

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## Abstract

The Vietnamese envoys' records during their diplomatic journeys to Beijing, especially poems and prose, have attracted increasing academic attention, from both international and local scholars. Some studies have comprehensively examined the Vietnamese envoys' routes when visiting China, literary works, diplomatic strategies, and Confucian beliefs, such as the Taiwanese scholar Chen Yiyuan's (陳益源) journal paper, which specifically problematizes the absence of filial expression related to the envoys' journey in Xiaogan (孝感), Hubei Province. The systematic works of Liam C. Kelley and Peng Qian (彭茜) chiefly delineate the harmonious and normal communication based upon the long-developed cultural congruity between Vietnam and China. Their studies and other relevant research show the sophisticated impact of Chinese Confucianism on the Vietnamese envoys. However, there is so far insufficient investigation into the official representatives' transformation and violation of Confucian manners and thoughts at specific historical moments. Hence, this paper intends to specify the practices of Confucian discourses in the final negotiation between the states of the Nguyễn and the Qing in 1883, both of which encountered the military threat from France and other Western countries. Our findings suggest that although those last envoys, including Phạm Thiện Duật and Nguyễn Thuật, utilised a Sinocentric and Confucian manner to bargain with the Chinese for military aid, overall the Nguyễn adopted a Machiavellian approach instead. This means there was a division between political utility and ritual ethics, and the Vietnamese envoys, as pragmatic politicians, prioritized national security while discussing military aid in terms of Confucian rhetoric and values.

**Keyword:** Vietnamese Confucian Diplomatic Tradition, Last Nguyễn Precolonial Envoys, Sinocentrism, Nguyễn Thuật, Phạm Thiện Duật, Li Hongzhang

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## Vietnamska konfucijanska diplomatska tradicija ter dopisovanje med zadnjimi predkolonialnimi odposlanci vladavine Nguyễn in Li Hongzhangom

### Izvleček

Mednarodna in domača akademska skupnost čedalje večjo pozornost posvečata zapisom vietnamskih odposlancev, še posebej poeziji in prozi, ki so nastajali med njihovimi diplomatskimi potovanji v Peking. Avtorji so se v posameznih študijah osredotočili na poti, po katerih so potovali vietnamski odposlanci po kitajskem ozemlju, različna literarna dela, diplomatske strategije in konfucijanske ideje. Te še posebej izpostavi tajvanski učenjak Chen Yiyuan (陳益源), ki v svoji razpravi problematizira odsotnost poslušnosti in spoštovanja starejših na potovanju odposlancev v Xiaogan (孝感) v provinci Hubei. Liam C. Kelley in Peng Qiang (彭茜) sistematično prikažeta običajno harmonično komunikacijo, temelječo na kulturni skladnosti med Vietnamom in Kitajsko, ki se je oblikovala v daljšem zgodovinskem obdobju. Tovrstne študije sicer podrobno prikažejo sofisticiran vpliv kitajskega konfucianizma na vietnamske odposlance, a hkrati je še vedno premalo raziskav o uradnih predstavnikih in njihovih transformacijah ter kršenju konfucijanskih načel in idej v specifičnih zgodovinskih trenutkih. Članek zato poskuša prikazati prakse konfucijanskega diskurza v zadnjih pogajanjih med vladavino Nguyễn in dinastijo Qing leta 1883, ko sta se obe državi soočali z vojaškimi grožnjami Francije in drugih zahodnih dežel. Kljub temu da so zadnji odposlanci, kot na primer Phạm Thận Duật in Nguyễn Thuật, sinocentrična in konfucijanska načela uporabili kot metodo za uspešno pogajanje s kitajsko stranjo za vojaško pomoč, je Nguyễn namesto tega raje prevzel machiavellistični pristop. To kaže na razcep med politično koristjo in ritualno etiko, pri čemer so vietnamski odposlanci kot pragmatični politiki v kontekstu konfucijanske retorike in vrednot pri pogajanjih o vojaški pomoči prednostno obravnavali nacionalno varnost.

**Ključne besede:** vietnamska konfucijanska diplomatska tradicija, zadnji predkolonialni odposlanci vladavine Nguyễn, sinocentrizem, Nguyễn Thuật, Phạm Thận Duật, Li Hongzhang

The Vietnamese envoys' records during their diplomatic journeys to Beijing, especially poems and prose, have attracted increasing academic attention, from both international and local scholars. There has been scholarship that comprehensively examines the Vietnamese envoys' routes when visiting in China, literary works, diplomatic strategies, and Confucian beliefs, such as the Taiwanese scholar Chen Yiyuan's (陳益源) journal paper *Vietnamese Envoys and Xiaogan* (*Qindai Yuenan shijie yu Xiaogan* 清代越南使節與孝感) (2015), which specifically problematizes the absence of filial expression related to the envoys' journey in Xiaogan 孝感, Hubei Province. Other systematic works, such as Liam C. Kelley's monograph *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (2005) and Peng Qian's (彭茜) master's thesis "Tribute

and Literary Exchange: The Study of Vietnamese Envoys to China in the Qing dynasty and Guangxi” (“Chaogong guanxi yu wenxue jiaoliu: Qingdai Yuenan yu Guangxi yanjiu 朝貢關係與文學交流：清代越南來華使臣與廣西研究”) (2014) chiefly delineated the harmonious and normal communication based upon the long-developed cultural congruity between Vietnam and China. Their studies and other relevant research show the sophisticated impact of Chinese Confucianism on the Vietnamese envoys. However, there have been insufficient investigations into the official representatives’ transformation and violation of Confucian manners and thoughts at specific historical moments.

This paper, based on an illustration of the diplomatic norms of Vietnam in peace, thus intends to specify the superficial practices of Confucian discourses in the final negotiation in 1883 between the states of the Nguyễn and the Qing, both of which encountered the military threat from France and other Western countries. It genealogically clarifies the diplomatic dilemma between subordinating to the sovereign state and prioritizing unethical concerns that especially annoyed the pre-colonial Nguyễn politicians in the late nineteenth century. The following sections of this study will examine the Sinocentrism of Lý Văn Phức’s (李文馥) (1785–1849), the most studied Vietnamese envoy, as an introduction to tracing the multifarious sources of Nguyễn diplomatic approaches, and then turn to the written records related to the last Nguyễn precolonial envoys’ mission and meeting with Li Hongzhang (李鴻章) (1823–1901), the then diplomatic representative of the Qing government. A contextual investigation of the diplomatic tensions among France, China, and Vietnam will assist in the exploration of individual concerns under the Confucian diplomatic tradition.

### Lý Văn Phức, and the Confucian Diplomatic Tradition of Vietnam

Lý Văn Phức argued against Qing local officers who claimed that Vietnam should belong to the civilizational system of China (*Hua* 華), instead of following the ways of barbarian and backward others (*Yi* 夷). As he wrote in *Miscellaneous Lyrics of the Fujian Journey* (*Minxing zayong* 閩行雜詠),

In 1831, there was an envoy from Vietnam (Lý Văn Phức himself). He received orders such as escorting lost officers due to typhoon, and hence had to visit Fujian. On 20 August, he arrived at the front door of the official mansion of the provincial capital, and saw a title “The Vietnamese Official Mansion for the Barbarian Envoys” (Yuenan Yishi Gongguan 粵南夷使公館). The mansion was next to the Fujian County office, so the title was given by the County Head Huang Zhaizhong (黃宅中).

I came, and said “I am not a barbarian, so I would not enter this mansion for barbarians.” The accompanying officer cut up the sign, and then we entered. The Head Huang heard this, came immediately, and informed the accompanying officer of his coming. Head Huang is a second-grade imperial scholars.<sup>1</sup> He initially did not know this, but then earnestly thanked us and corrected the title to “The Vietnamese Official Mansion for the National Envoys” (Yuenan Guoshiguan Gongguan 粵南國使官公館). The envoy worried that the people did not have a full understanding, so he wrote “Argument against *Yi*” (Bian Yi 辯夷) and showed it in the mansion. (Lý 2010, 257–58)

The title of the mansion reveals two binary and opposing perspectives of identifying Vietnam. Lý Văn Phức complained about Qing officers’ mis-recognition of Vietnam as *Yi*, and in his nearly 800-word essay “Argument against *Yi*” (1831), he attempted to assimilate Vietnam with China through genealogically illustrating its Confucian tradition with the key features of each Chinese dynasty (Lý 2010, 258–62).<sup>2</sup> In a modern theoretical understanding, he consolidated a hierarchical binary opposition and assigned subaltern Vietnam to the more powerful side. His reverse use of, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010, 2115) terms, “epistemic violence”, which is originally used to illustrate the West’s hegemonic constitution of the colonial subject as Other, validated the authority and superiority of the Vietnamese regime in Southeast Asia. This corresponds to Lý Văn Phức’s personal background and the development of the “Small China” concept in Vietnam.

In his journal paper “Between Fujian and Vietnam—Taking the Vietnamese Envoy Lý Văn Phức as an example” (*Zai Minnan yu Yuenan zhijian – Yi Yuenan shijie Li Wenfu jiazuo wei li* 在閩南與越南之間 – 以越南使節李文馥家族為例), Chen Yiyuan derives Lý Văn Phức’s Chinese origin from his genealogy. He found

1 The original term is “*erjia jinshi*” 二甲進士. According to Iona Man-Cheong’s summary of the grading of the palace examination for selecting civil servants, the cohort of metropolitan degree holders was divided into three grades. “The top grade (*yi jia*, also called *jinshi jidi*; meaning ‘ranking presented scholar’) contained only three graduates. The second grade (*er jia*, also called *jinshi chushen*; ‘of presented scholar background’) was of no fixed number, and usually contained many more graduates than the first grade but fewer than the third grade (*san jia*, also *tong jinshi chushen*; ‘equal to presented scholar background’), which contained the highest number of graduates.” (Iona 2004, 245)

2 In “Argument against *Yi*”, Lý Văn Phức wrote about Vietnam: “Using words to manage the legal system is based on two emperors and three kings. Using words to establish traditions is based on six classical works and four philosophical works (of Confucianism). It dwells in Confucius and Mencius, and settles in the Cheng-Zhu school. Its origin of scholarship is *The Commentary of Zuo* and *The Annals of the Warring States*, and then Ban Gu and Sima Qian.” (Lý 2010, 258–62) And then from the Han dynasty to the Ming dynasty, he listed out Vietnam’s compliance with Chinese writing, calligraphy, painting, civil servant examination system, clothing, and so on (ibid.).

that Lý was a sixth-generation Vietnamese Chinese, whose ancestor Lý Khắc Liêm 李克廉 was Viceroy of Yunnan in the Ming Dynasty but, due to the rise of the Qing Empire, turned to serve the Lê Dynasty of Vietnam with a hereditary title (Chen 2016, 4–5). Although most of the married wives of the Hanoi Lý family were not Chinese (nor ethnic Chinese settled in Vietnam) (ibid., 6) the family members kept a Confucian tradition, which the high culture Vietnamese governors had long adopted to maintain ethical stability. Their transitional compliance with Vietnam’s local Confucianism was welcome and, meanwhile, consolidated the national sense of being a “little China”, recognized as superior to the vassal others, and also to the Western nations who arrived later on. As Liam C. Kelly explains, the “little China” theory

argues that during the millennium that Vietnam was part of various Chinese empires (the conventional dating being 111 BC–939 AD), it became a miniature replica of China, and that it was precisely through its contact with the larger kingdom, and by adopting many of its customs and political institutions, that Vietnam was subsequently able to maintain its autonomy for the next thousand years until the advent of French colonization in the nineteenth century. (Kelly 2005, 9)

This theory supposes that the geopolitical connection to an Asian superpower and relevant ritual inertia granted Vietnam specific political authority. Yu Ping 禹平 and Xiao Keyi 肖可意 more concretely illustrate the idea of “little China” in the Qing context. They note that Vietnam had never claimed itself to be “little China”, and this concept was first suggested by Korea with the intention to “distinguish Korea, which followed Confucian philosophy and the Chinese ritual system (*Hua*), from the ‘barbarian’ (*Yi*) Qing regime” (Yu and Xiao 2018, 137). For instance, the Vietnamese emperor Minh Mạng (1791–1841) regarded the Qing polity as transforming *Yi* into *Hua*, and its ritual establishment as inferior to Vietnam, the self-identified Southern counterpart of China (ibid., 137–38).<sup>3</sup> He implicitly despised Qing’s *Hua* and deemed his *Hua* a more valid and representative entity that could re-educate the Qing state and subjugate other Southeast Asian states (ibid., 134, 138).

Migrating from China to “little China”, Lý Văn Phức’s ancestor held an ambiguous cultural belonging to the already collapsed Ming China and to similarly feudal Lê Vietnam. Lý Khắc Liêm preferred Kinh’s *Hua* to the Manchurian *Hua*.

3 As Yu Ping and Xiao Keyi states, “in the history, Vietnam generally called China the ‘Northern Dynasty (*beichao* 北朝)’ and itself the ‘Southern Dynasty (*nanchao* 南朝)’” (Yu and Xiao 2018, 137). Vietnam was sharing an ambiguous belonging to China with the China of the sovereign regimes.

As the descendant of Vietnam's sovereign state, which was later regarded as an inferior political successor of Confucian etiquette, Lý Văn Phức held and advocated a belief in the centrality of Vietnamese *Hua*, against the peripheral *Yi*. This imaginatively supported the validity of Vietnamese civilization regardless of the ethnic differences between Chinese, Vietnamese, and Vietnamese Chinese / Chinese Vietnamese. Lý's Sinocentrism beyond personal identity is transnational, but not necessarily trans-dynastic and trans-ethnic. It suggests that Ming's *Han* rulers and Nguyễn's Kinh rulers inherited the same cultural heritage from the ideally imagined past, whereas Qing's Manchurian rulers failed. Lý only represented the side of Nguyễn's successful inheritance in "Argument against *Yi*", hiding the potential disagreement with Qing civilization.

In 1868, 37 years after Lý Văn Phức wrote "Argument against *Yi*", the Vietnamese envoy Nguyễn Tư Giản 阮思儻 read *The Atlas of Guangxi (Yuexi diyu tushuo 粵西地輿圖說)*, published in Guangxi, while visiting Qing China. He found the marking of Vietnam as *Yi* in it, and hence wrote "On identifying *Yi*" (*Bian Yi shuo 辨夷說*) with regard to his hope: "Concerning the word '*Yi*', I hope those who mention it shall promptly make a change, so that fairness can be openly achieved and we can regain a good relationship." (Nguyễn 2010, 234) It was the time after the diplomatic failure of Lý Văn Phức in negotiating with France, the inferior Other in his gaze, had led to the insistence of the Emperors Minh Mạng, Thiệu Trị and Tự Đức on taking measures to protect their *Hua* culture from French intervention, such as executing control over the growing Catholic communities and imprisoning Western missionaries. However, those measures only accelerated French occupation of Indochina. The political and diplomatic weakness of Vietnam did not undermine its harmonious approach in arguing for its cultural supremacy. The writing of Lý Văn Phức and Nguyễn Tư Giản, as a formal, polite and appropriate approach to conceptually negotiate with the Confucian intellectuals of other states, echoes the Confucian diplomatic tradition of feudal Vietnam that contemporary Vietnamese scholars have described positively.

Trần Ngọc Thêm (2001, 544–22) argues that diplomatic policies are closely related to the core national culture. Hence, the agricultural nature of Vietnam, which formed a collectivist and sentimental lifestyle, would tend to take a friendly approach towards other nations, and to avoid confrontation and wars. Trần Trọng Phiên (2011, 26–27) suggested that the Vietnamese people had been actively developing diplomatic relations with other groups for a long time. In 2357 BC it had the first recorded diplomatic connection with China: the Duke of Zhou 周公 giving the Vietnamese a south-pointing carriage. Then, whenever there was foundation of a new dynasty, the new Vietnamese ruler would initiate a connection with the neighbouring nations, especially China, such as Lý Thái Tổ's 李太祖



assignment of envoys to the Song court for diplomatic acceptance in 1010 AD, soon after his enthronement.

There was a flexible Confucian way that Vietnamese rulers had long followed to sustain their political and ideological validity. Phan Ngọc (潘玉) (2013) explains that Vietnam regarded itself internally an empire and externally as a kingdom, complying with the hierarchical order of its vassal-sovereign relation with China. Its national spirit was patriotic, independent and autonomous, with an emphasis on *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義, denoting a righteous respect even to its military enemies. Towards China, its sovereign state, Vietnam declared and practiced its subordination in response to the Confucian principle that grants the senior an absolute power over the junior. Towards the vassal states of Vietnam, such as Lao and Cambodia, Vietnam used constant conciliation, instead of military intimidation, as the key approach to keeping peace (Phạm 2015, 15; Lê 2015, 33–34). In the view of Đinh Xuân Lâm and Vũ Trường Giang (2014, 3–10), Vietnam shared the same ideological centre as China, regarding the surrounding nations as uncivilized and barbarian, and applied a friendly attitude and strict courtesy to both its sovereign and vassal states. As the details provided by Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Hạnh (2016) show, the Vietnamese rulers of all dynasties were very careful about sending envoys to other nations in order to build and maintain harmonious relations. The selected envoys needed to have passed the civil service examination, with the syllabus based on the Confucian classics, such as the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Analects*.<sup>4</sup> They had to present certain aspects of the Confucian ethos, through creative writing and interpersonal communication, on behalf of the Vietnamese court (Nguyễn 2016, 58).

From the perspective of Vietnamese scholars, even if there were wars, ancient Vietnamese decision-makers would prioritize amity despite the possibility of taking military offense, as Confucianism permits (Yu 2010, 97).<sup>5</sup> This approach could

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4 Doh Chull Shin, To-ch'ol Sin, and To-ch'ol Sin (2012) illustrate the spread of Confucianism in ancient Vietnam, during which the civil service examinations, introduced from China, significantly functioned: “After Vietnam became independent from China in 939 AD, the influence of Confucianism grew. As Vietnamese kings and aristocrats struggled to bring order to their unruly kingdom, they embraced the Confucian philosophy emphasizing social harmony and political order. (...) (In 1075, civil service examinations in the Confucian classics were introduced. In 1076, the first Vietnamese University was established next to the Temple of Confucius. For the first time in the history of Vietnam, Confucianism began to share a place at the royal court with Buddhism.” (Shin, Sin and Sin 2018, 35)

5 Yu Kam-por’s journal paper “Confucian Views on War as Seen in the Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals” suggests that Confucianism “sheds light on war against enemies of civilization, conditions for waging a preemptive war, punitive expedition, as well as the use of weapons of mass destruction.” It summarized Confucian understanding of war as realistic, pragmatic, but humanistic (Yu 2010, 97).



maintain peace between states, and meanwhile minimize the casualties of both sides and the disturbance to the public. Trần Trọng Kim (2018) notes that, in 982, the Lê army defeated the Song army, but soon initiated reconciliation with the Song court. Besides, in 1479, the Lao army harassed the Vietnamese at the border between Lao and Vietnam. Lê sent some troops and chased the Lao army back to the border of Myanmar. Despite winning an absolute victory, the Lê army did not take that chance to occupy Lao, but instead retreated in order to repair the relationship with Lao (Trần 2018, 272). Moreover, Trần Trọng Phiến (2011) argues that, no matter whether in the wars for independence or for protecting national sovereignty, the Vietnamese rulers would focus on expelling the enemies from their land, rather than killing them. For example, in 1077, after the Lý army defeated the Song army, the general Lý Thường Kiệt (李常傑) did not insist on annihilating them. Instead he chose to use diplomatic methods to persuade them to unarm (*ibid.*, 28).

In the views of contemporary Vietnamese scholars, Vietnamese diplomacy was Confucian at this time in the sense that it submissively guaranteed the structural stability of the hierarchical power orders of Asia, with a ritual appropriation of communication and a humanitarian concern about civilian life. However, such views only reflect the optimistic and ideal aspects of Confucian practices. As many scholars have noted, Confucianism is too rigid to mediate between inner desire and formal etiquette. For instance, Wu Sen (吳森) complains that over-ritualization in the Confucian culture had repressed genuine expression of feeling and led to insincere communication (Wu 1995, 55–98). Therefore, both the historical records and scholarly discourse that arose under the influence of Confucianism might not show the potential duality of political decisions. The discursive rhetoric used to safeguard the individual and collective dignity would overshadow the pragmatic concerns and methods that conflict with Confucian discipline.

Another issue that deserves attention is the interior compatibility and practical constraints of Confucian philosophy. As Li Chenyang asks, “If Confucianism promotes both harmony and ritual propriety, how does it bring them in tune?” (Li 2013, 128). He answers that classic Confucians had flexibility to resolve the incompatibilities between maintaining ritual correctness and sustaining peaceful situations through stressing the idea of “weighting”.<sup>6</sup> However, although it

6 Li Chenyang illustrated that “One way to see such flexibility is to examine the notion of *quan* (權), or discretionary action. The word originally means a weighing instrument (*cheng* 秤) or the weight used in such an instrument (*cheng tuo* 秤鉞). By extension, it also means the act of weighing. From this sense of weighing comes the meaning of *quan* as discretion. *Quan* as discretionary action is a skill of making appropriate decisions with considered flexibility to suit specific situations. As such, it means situational decisions with discretion. The notion of *quan* is important in Confu-

is correct, as Li would agree, that discretionary action can flexibly apply general Confucian rules in specific situations for the best outcome, the practical needs (or at least temptations) of taking contingency plans out of Confucian acceptance should not be underestimated. Moreover, the idea of weighting could encounter challenges when applied in actual political dilemmas. Self-established as an orthodox Confucian regime, the Nguyễn court regarded the rulers of both Qing and France as barbarians. It did not share the same high-cultural value system as the Qing Dynasty, the failed successor of Confucianism, or the French, the uncivilized invaders. In the final negotiation between the Nguyễn and Qing to safeguard the autonomy of Vietnam from the French military actions, Nguyễn officers did not show a belief in the Qing court's willingness to fulfil Confucian requirements, such as protecting vassal states. Simultaneously, they were not faithful to their sovereign state, keeping their national plight a secret until the country needed Qing aid. The following sections will first provide some details about the last Nguyễn envoys' visits to Tianjin before the French colonization of Vietnam, and then connect the patriotic personal statement of a representative envoy, Nguyễn Thuật (阮述) (1842–1911), to the textual communication<sup>7</sup> with a Confucian attitude between the Vietnamese envoys and Li Hongzhang. There is thus the intention to explore the practical discordance between the ideal Confucian diplomatic tradition and the pragmatic use of Confucian rhetoric for certain political purposes.

## The Final Diplomatic Trip of Nguyễn Envoys to China

The *Annals* No. 4 Vol. 68 of *The Principal Veritable Records of the Great South* (*Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên* 大南寔錄正編) documented that, in December 1882, the last precolonial emperor Tự Đức 嗣德 (1829–1883)

assigned Phạm Thận Duật 范慎燾 (1825–1885), the Minister of Justice (*Xingbu Shangshu* 刑部尚書), as Imperial Envoy (*Qinchai Dachen* 欽差大臣) and Nguyễn Thuật, the Deputy Minister with the title of Assistant

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cian philosophy. Mencius said, for instance, ‘quan first, then one knows the light and the heavy; measure first, then one knows the long and the short’ (*Mencius* 1A7; TTC 2670–1). For matters of importance, we should ‘weigh’ the situation before action and then act accordingly. In Confucian texts, this word implies maintaining a flexible attitude toward existing rules in performing particular actions.” (Li 2013, 128)

7 Liu Yujun 劉玉珺 stated that “Han text is only the official written language of Vietnam. It cannot penetrate daily communication. Therefore, Vietnamese intellectuals all know Han text, but most of them could not use Han language to directly exchange ideas. They can only communicate through textual chats.” (Liu 2007, 362)

Administrator (*Shilang jia Can Zhi Xian* 侍郎加參知銜), as Deputy Imperial Envoy (*Fushi* 副使), sending them to Tianjin of the Qing Empire for an official mission. (Xu and Xie 2000, 459)

This was a response to the request of Li Hongzhang, the then Northern Commissioner of Trade (*Beiyang dachen* 北洋大臣),<sup>8</sup> to consult two to three Nguyễn officers about affairs between Vietnam and France. After signing the Treaty of Saigon (1862) and the Second Treaty of Saigon (1874)<sup>9</sup> with France, the Nguyễn government had lost its sovereignty over Cochinchina. On the Qing side, Li Hongzhang would hope to prepare for Chinese-French-Vietnamese tripartite talks with Albert Bourée (the French ambassador in China from 1880 to 1883), in which the Vietnamese envoys might act as an information provider (Wang 2013, 67).<sup>10</sup> On the Nguyễn side, the two envoys expected the Qing government to mediate between France and Vietnam,<sup>11</sup> and to offer naval aid for their coastal defence against the French military.<sup>12</sup> As Nguyễn Thuật recorded in *A Diary of Visiting Tianjin* (*Wang Jin riji* 往津日記), which noted his thoughts on setting out for Hong Kong and Guangdong with Lê Đăng Trinh (黎登貞), Nguyễn Tịch (阮藉), and Đỗ Phú Túc (杜富肅), and the Qing officers Tang Jingsong (唐景崧) and Ma Fuyu (馬復賁) on 16 January 1883 (Nguyễn 1980, 19) to arriving at the Hòa Khiêm Hall (和謙殿) on 26 January 1884 (*ibid.*, 64), the final

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- 8 There were two superintendents of trade under the Foreign Affairs Office (Zongli Yamen 總理衙門), the official organization (set up in 1861) in charge of all the foreign issues of the Qing Empire: one for the Northern Ports as Northern Commissioner of Trade and the other for the Southern Ports as Southern Commissioner of Trade. They both “shared the responsibility over foreign and trade affairs of the northern and southern coastal areas.” (Li 2018, 144) The Northern one, held by Li Hongzhang from 1870 to 1901, overpowered the Southern one, intervening in the Vietnamese affairs.
- 9 John Kleinen summarizes that the Second Treaty of Saigon was a revision of the first one. “This time the Court had to cede the whole of Cochinchina in the South to the French, opening the Red River to commerce and allowing the French to open consulates in Hanoi, Ninh Hai (near present day Haiphong) and Thi Nai (in the central province of Binh Dinh).” (Brocheux and Hemery in Kleinen 1999, 47)
- 10 Wang argued that Li Hongzhang flexibly turned the role of Vietnam as “participating in the negotiation” to “auditing for consultation”, so that France would accept the presence of Vietnamese delegates in the talk (Wang 2013, 67).
- 11 Nguyễn Thuật wrote during his Tianjin visit, “The Chinese court originally sent a document to assure its willingness to mediate for the affairs between my nation and France.” (Nguyễn 1980, 49) It turned out a disappointment as Nguyễn blamed that the Qing state could not fulfill the responsibility of protecting his vassal state.
- 12 As recorded in *On Sino-French Vietnamese Negotiations 1875–1911* (Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe Dang 1875–1911 中法越南交涉檔 1875–1911), Phạm Thân Duật told Li Hongzhang, as an implicit request, “Only if the heavenly court (pointing to the Qing court) could send out battleships to help defend the pass, there could be no obstacles” (Guo 1962, 716).

hope of a nearly re-colonialized state failed due to Li Hongzhang's ambiguous attitude. The interior weakness of China after the two Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) led to Li's discreet maintenance of a sovereign-vassal connection. His tardiness in dealing with the sovereignty of Vietnam finally triggered France's prompt military occupation of Huế, the capital of the Nguyễn Dynasty from 1802 to 1945 (Zhang 2002, 534). The French victory, upon the death of Emperor Tự Đức on 19 July 1883, compelled the Vietnamese government to sign the Treaty of Huế on 25 August 1883, which recognized the French protectorate over Annam and Tonkin. On 4 September 1883, the Vietnamese envoys had the second and also the last meeting with Li Hongzhang, explaining their especially difficult situation concerning the newly signed treaty (Nguyễn 1980, 50). On 12 November 1883, Li Hongzhang finally approved the Vietnamese envoys' request to return to Vietnam, and ended their failed mission (*ibid.*, 56). This marked a disconnection between two culturally Confucian entities.

From the beginning to the end of the Tianjin journey, despite its failure, the Vietnamese envoys maintained a Sinocentric and Confucian manner to bargain with the diplomatic representative of their most superior monarch. To a certain extent, they adopted a Machiavellian approach, here signifying a methodological division between political utility and ritual ethics, the former of which was given highest priority. There is no intention to justify the reception and potential influence of Machiavellian thoughts in Nguyễn Vietnam, but merely to capture a corresponding key feature for elaboration instead. As Steven Forde summarizes,

Machiavelli develops the realist argument in its purest form, arguing that the nature of international politics absolves states of any moral duties whatsoever. He endorses imperialism, the unprovoked subjugation of weaker nations by stronger without reservation and without limit. He develops a new and amoral basis for the political community, to conform with the necessities of international politics as he sees them, and to reflect his negative assessment of the status of moral principle altogether. (Forde 1992, 64)

Vietnam was a vassal state, only imperialistic to its sub-vassal states, such as Lao, Cambodia, Thủy Xá and Hòa Xá. However, toward its sovereign state it would also apply the Machiavellian mindset to bargain for maximal benefits, rather than absolutely obeying the “monarch”, as Confucian hierarchical ethics advocates. In the realm of international politics, rigid compliance with the rites and commands of the superior might restrict national authority. Hence, amorality with greater flexibility to make decisions is more preferable than ideological correctness. As

a real case, despite not necessarily disregarding morality, the Vietnamese envoys, as pragmatic politicians, would prioritize national security while utilizing Confucian rhetoric and values to negotiate with Li Hongzhang. Their twofold representation of political intention and discursive appropriation deserves much attention, as it reveals that the diplomatic tradition of a vassal state is not a homogeneously obedient unity in the context of global colonization. The cultural inertia originated from an ambiguous geographical understanding of *Hua*, a then currently disintegrating superpower, was simultaneously forming ideological sublimation and political dissidence.

### Nguyễn Thuật, Phạm Thận Duật and the Textual Negotiation with Li Hongzhang

As one of the core Vietnamese representatives, Nguyễn Thuật expressed his deep patriotism and sentimental attachment to Vietnam through poetry. In his collection of poems *Whenever Missing and Chanting the Grass* (*Meihuai yincao* 每懷吟草), there are verses written during his first journey to China, such as “Calculating the date of return / Desiring to exhaustively reward my nation in turn” and “Not tired of lingering for mornings and dusks / The leaving yachts long carried tomorrow’s missing” (Hò 2017, 103).<sup>13</sup> He utilized a literary form originating from *Hua* China to deliver proper utterances that suited his identity as an envoy. Examining his views shown in poems can reveal his perceptions of Vietnam-China relations and provide a reference to his later compliance with a “barbarian” regime.

In a nationalist sense, Nguyễn Thuật understood that Vietnam shared the same source and sustenance of civilization as the geographically identified China, but implicitly differentiated Qing China from the China of *Han* regimes. He knew that his visit required proper neighbourhood etiquette, so he “hope(d) to emphasize the *Han* official rite” (ibid., 107–8).<sup>14</sup> As a key word usually used to signify

13 Two verses were quoted from the poems “Granted another annually promoted position as Assistant Minister of Rites and Envoy in 1881 (Xinsi sui gong meng gaishou Li Bu Zuoshilang chong Zhengshi 辛巳歲貢蒙改授禮部左侍郎充正使)” and “Recently following a royal commend to create four poems with gonghe rhyme and the same rhyme that thanks Assistant Provincial Head of Ningming Luo Jinchi (Jinxing feng yuzhi si shi gonghe yuan yun ciyun chou Ningming Zhizhou Luo Jinchi 近行奉御制四詩恭和原韻 次韻酬寧明知州羅晉池)”, respectively.

14 Quoted from the poem “Answering to the five-word poem granted by Du Ciqing from the Ministry of Rites who walked me to the end of Royal River in the set-off day (Qixing ri Li Bu Du Ciqing songzhi Yu He kou zhan wuyan yi zeng, fu ci fengda 啟行日禮部杜次卿送至禦河口佔五言以贈，夫此奉答)”.

China, also in the verses such as “Thereafter, lyingly travelling across *Han* river islets thoroughly”, (ibid., 128–29)<sup>15</sup> Han could have two meanings, related to the previously prosperous Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) and the Han people. This was a long overthrown regime and not a ruling class in Nguyễn Thuật’s era. However, he, in the poems responding to other officers, accented Vietnam’s pre-Qing inheritance of *Han* civilization: “The South of Yunnan (Vietnam) long using the same standards for roads and words” and “Situated as the same archived states” (ibid., 134–38).<sup>16</sup> The far-reaching imagination of the regressionist ideal of Han was ambiguously denying the Qing Manchurian regime, which he regarded as failing to take its responsibility to save Vietnam, the culturally, but not ethnically nor geographically, valid descendant of Han.

As an officer who later served the Nguyễn puppet government under French control until his death in 1911, Nguyễn Thuật’s Confucian manner could not be as straightforward as Lý Văn Phúc presented. In Lý’s era, national power enabled the government, despite being subordinated to the Qing, to repress and expel the Westerners, whose nations were not authorized as valid by Confucian ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> However, due to the weakening diplomatic power of Vietnam, Nguyễn Thuật had to make concessions in response to the changing international dynamics, accepting the absolute reign of an uncivilized and barbarian power.

From the precolonial Vietnamese envoys’ final voyage to China, there can be found the ambivalent attitude of Vietnamese politicians to experiencing the inefficiency of Confucianism with regard to sustaining the long established hierarchical order of Far East powers. On the one hand, they could only privately complain about the Qing’s reluctance to righteously protect its vassal state. On the other hand, they had to publicly communicate with Qing officers with courtesy. In *A Diary of Visiting Tianjin* (1980),<sup>18</sup> Nguyễn Thuật wrote on 31 August 1883 after

15 Quoted from the poem “In a boat of Ming River (Ming Jiang chuan zhong 明江船中)”.

16 Quoted from the poems “Same Rhyme for Thanking Central Secretary Zhang Tangyin (Ciyun chou Zhongshu Zhang Tangyin 次韻酬中書張棠蔭)”, and “Same Rhyme for Thanking Li Bichang (Ciyun chou Li Bichang 次韻酬李必昌)”, respectively. As Yu Ping and Xiao Keyi (2018, 134) found, the Nguyễn court would regard an archived state, which could succeed Han cultural traditions, such as Korea, as superior to other states, such as Thailand.

17 Both Đinh Dung (1997, 73–78) and Phạm Thị Lan (2017, 104–9) recognize this kind of authorization as a key Confucian tradition that Vietnam adopted to value itself and other nations. An unauthorized condition is the reason why Vietnam diplomatically refused to communicate with the Western Yi countries.

18 As Wang Zhiqiang differentiates, *A Diary of Visiting Tianjin* is a private record of the Tianjin journey, unlike *The Daily Record of the Qing Journey in Kiến Phúc First Year (Jianfu Yuannian Ru Qing Richeng 建福元年如清日程)*, which is an official record of the same journey that Nguyễn Thuật and Phạm Thận Duật cowrote for the Vietnamese emperor (Wang 2013, 57).



learning of Emperor Tự Đức's death and the fall of cửa Thuận An (順安汛) under French attack:

We are all furious. The Chinese court originally sent a document to assure its willingness to mediate for the affairs between my nation and France. They call us to Tianjin for consultation, but have not yet held a talk, and also worry and hesitate about assisting us with battleships. As a result, France forced us to surrender while there was an incident. My nation is at the convergence of many changes and problems. It cannot but obey. How can the Chinese court that cannot protect its vessel states explain itself eloquently to the world? (Nguyễn 1980, 49)

Nguyễn Thuật explicitly expressed his discontent with the Qing court, which was not loyal to the Confucian ethical regulations. In fact, as recorded in *On Sino-French Vietnamese Negotiations 1875–1911* (*Zhong Fa Yuenan jiaoshe dang 1875–1911* 中法越南交涉檔 1875–1911), Li Hongzhang was personally conscious of the military limitations of China: “The Southern and Northern navy has not been trained up yet, and hence definitely cannot be sent far away. Moreover, France is good at naval battles, which Chinese battleships could not win actually” (Guo and Wang 1962, 713). He prioritized the probability of victory and the ability of the Qing government to pay, instead of traditional obligation. However, despite failure in achieving consensus, both the Vietnamese envoys and Li Hongzhang held a friendly attitude towards each other in their recorded communication.

In their first and most significant meeting, Li Hongzhang first asked about the physical conditions of Phạm Thận Duật and his “king”:

Li: Have you recovered?

Phạm: Your subordinate has luckily 70% recovered from the poor disease.

Li: How is your king? There was a document that mentioned his sickness. What kind of sickness is it?

Phạm: Depending on the good fortune of the heavenly court, the king of the subordinate nation is good. However, as many incidents happened in recent years, worries caused his illness, such as coughing and feeling dizzy. (Guo and Wang 1962, 713–14)

This kind of warm-up conversation properly delivered intimacy and minimized any utilitarian perception. It also foregrounded the power-relation between China



and Vietnam, because Li, instead of Phạm, initiated a consolation and Phạm could only answer with emphasis on the inferior position of himself and his nation.

Then they discussed two main issues: Vietnam's secret signing of treaties with France and its naval defence against France's further invasion. Concerning the first issue, Li Hongzhang first asked how many treaties Vietnam had signed and when they were signed. After Phạm Thận Duật answered that the first treaty was signed in 1862 and a renewal signed in 1874, Li stated:

The treaties between vassal states and other states, such as those of Korea and Japan, must be reported to the heavenly court. The original text of the treaties shall be submitted to the Ministry of Rites (*Libu* 禮部) for passing. Now all the treaties with America, Britain, and Germany have to be approved by the Chinese court. I, as a senior officer, would send staff to the conferences, so that the conditions of the treaties would be only beneficial and not disadvantageous. Your nation signed the treaties with France without permission, not clarifying this issue for the heavenly court but later sending delegates to report it. This apparently violates the regulation of vassal states. Ten years had passed. What is the use of now submitting the manuscript of the treaties? (Guo and Wang 1962, 714)

Li, as the representative of the sovereign state, blamed the Nguyễn court for late notification. He managed the proper diplomatic procedure of resolving international risks, and controlled the power of negotiating with the Western powers on behalf of the vassal states. In response, Phạm could only politely apologize for the mistake, which was based on the Nguyễn's doubts about the Qing's military strength after two Opium Wars, in order to bargain for naval support:

In those years, France was powerful and hence bullied your subordinate state. We urgently sought for peace and did not understand the rules for this new kind of incident, so we had such a violation. There is no way to get rid of our crime, but a hope that the heavenly court might understand the urgent situations, hence forgive our mistakes and emphasize our later goodness. If your subordinate state can be long blessed by your protection. It is the good fortune of your subordinate state. (ibid.)

Beyond the outcome of the negotiation (Li's implicit rejection of offering diplomatic and defensive aids) and the factual development of Vietnamese-Chinese-French relations, which many historians have examined in depth, the manner applied in the process reveals a different kind of tension. Phạm meticulously

set out the ignorance, reluctance, and guilt of Vietnam, repeatedly pleasing Qing's officers through stressing the superiority of the Qing and the inferiority of the Nguyễn with binary-opposite identification, such as "heavenly court" (*tianchao* 天朝) and "subordinate state" (*xiaguo* 下國). This corresponds to the discourse of his Emperor, who repeatedly mentioned how the Qing court had protected Korea, a vassal state like Vietnam, against Japan and the West, and intentionally used words like "sympathize" (恤及), "protect (subordinate state)" (柔遠), "perceive morality/virtue" (感德), "benevolence" (恩德), "understand with forgiveness" (諒解), "great state" (大國), "vassal state" (藩屬國), "long looking-up" (久仰之情), etc. The subordinated imperial speech held hope of recalling the legitimate responsibility of the Qing regime to protect Vietnam as a truly superior court, according to the Confucian moral hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> In such a rhetorical context, the Qing representative with absolute authority was supposed to bestow good fortune on the poor Nguyễn through practical actions. However, the discussion ended up with Li Hongzhang claiming, "We can now only follow France, as the French do not want to discuss Vietnamese affairs with China" (Guo and Wang 1962, 717). Phạm could only choose between discussing the matter with Li again, after Li's time away for a funeral, returning to Vietnam, or talking to Zhang Gongbao 張宮保, who was Li's delegate.

## Conclusion

The Vietnamese envoy's proper but implicit reminder of Confucian norms did not result in any substantial achievements and promises. The reason is not simply that Li could find a counterargument to imply that Vietnam's prior violation of the norms led to the Qing not fulfilling its responsibility. More significantly, the habitual use of Confucian ethical discourse could not effectively change the stance of Li, who merely sought information, not opinions. Li aimed to maximize the benefits of the Qing, just as the Nguyễn court did during the French military intimidation. Both sides disregarded the Confucian requirement of faithfulness and righteousness but demanded that the other comply with it. Therefore, the determinate factor of this kind of negotiation between the sovereign state and vassal state, and even of the politics of the entire Far East Confucian cultural sphere, is the power relation that prioritized national interests from the centre to the peripheries, not morality. Confucianism malfunctioned, except as a degrading prerequisite for maintaining political validity. As a subordinate regime and a

19 Refer to the letter that the Nguyễn Emperor wrote to the Qing Emperor recorded in On Sino-French Vietnamese Negotiations 1875–1911 (Guo and Wang 1962, 710).

self-recognized Confucian successor, the House of Nguyễn could only passively safeguard its ritual dignity, which gave no significant help to its political and diplomatic plight, until its end in 1945.

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*OTHER TOPICS*

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# Five Visions of Yang Zhu: Before He Became a Philosopher

Carine M. G. DEFOORT\*

## Abstract

This paper traces the consecutive emergence of five important portrayals of Yang Zhu before he became a philosopher in the Republic. In the late Zhou, he was portrayed as a rival in debate and a defender of physical or personal integrity. From the Han onward, he became part of a rhetorical trope based on Mencius' portrayal. In the Wei Jin he was a prominent figure in his own right. The fourth portrayal, from the Song onward, contained reflections on his thought in the shadow of Mozi and Confucian orthodoxy. Finally, in the late Qing, Kang Youwei presented him as a minor political reformer responding to Confucius' reform plans. These layers contributed in various ways to the nowadays almost exclusive presentation of Yang Zhu as a philosopher, a defender of social tolerance, autonomy, or individual freedom. The rich variety of the portrayals has too often been sacrificed for this relatively homogeneous portrayal.

**Keywords:** Yang Zhu, Mencius, Succession of the Way, *Liezi*, Neo-Confucianism, Kang Youwei

## Pet pogledov na Yang Zhuja preden je postal filozof

### Izvilleček

Članek sledi nastanku petih zaporednih pomembnih upodobitev Yang Zhuja, preden je v času republike postal filozof. V poznem obdobju dinastije Zhou so ga v razpravi upodabljali kot nasprotnika ter zaščitnika telesne in osebne integritete. Od dinastije Han naprej je postal del retorične figure, utemeljene na Mencijevi upodobitvi. V času dinastij Wei in Jin je veljal za pomembno zgodovinsko osebnost. Četrta upodobitev, od dinastije Song naprej, je vsebovala razmisleke o njegovi misli v senci Mozija in konfucijanske ortodoksije. Končno ga je ob koncu dinastije Qing Kang Youwei opredelil kot manj pomembnega političnega reformatorja, ki se je odzval na Konfucijeve reformne načrte. Vse te plasti so na različne načine prispevale k danes tako rekoč ekskluzivni predstavitvi Yang Zhuja kot filozofa, zagovornika družbene strpnosti, avtonomije in osebnih svoboščin. Bogata raznolikost upodobitev je bila prepogosto žrtev te, razmeroma homogene upodobitve.

**Ključne besede:** Yang Zhu, Mencij, napredovanje Poti, *Liezi*, neokonfucianizem, Kang Youwei

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## Yang Zhu Portrayals: Gaze from Nowhere; Visions from Somewhere

Yang Zhu 楊/陽朱 (Mr. Yang 楊生, Master Yang 楊子, fl. ca. 350 BC) figures as one of the earliest Chinese philosophers. Current scholarship tends to describe him as the founder of Yangism (*Yang Zhu xuepai* 楊朱學派), the influential leader of those who would not sacrifice their physical integrity or individual freedom for anything, least of all for a ruler or a state. His motto was “for oneself 為我/己”. Egoism, individualism, Epicureanism, or hedonism are modern labels for his philosophy (see e.g. Hu 1995, 155–62; Feng 2015, I, 147–56; Graham 1989, 53–64). The textual evidence for his existence, thought, and influence is, however, extremely meagre. There exists no early book under his name. “Of course Yang Zhu did not write one 楊子就一定不著”, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) once joked, “because if he had written a book for others to read, that would have made him act ‘for others’ 因為若做出書來給別人看, 便變成‘為人’了” (Lu 2005, vol. 3, 538). A few statements about Yang are dispersed in some early sources such as the *Mengzi* 孟子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and—for those who consider this an early source—the *Liezi* 列子. During the twentieth century, there has been a spectacular Yang Zhu revival in the field of Chinese philosophy, accompanied by a strong tendency to take these scraps of information at face value, knead them into a coherent portrayal, and enhance this with other textual material that contains no reference to Yang Zhu at all. This modern portrayal is nowadays so current that we tend to overlook its recent emergence and downplay the wide variety of the pre-twentieth century portrayals.

The Fudan historian and Yang Zhu scholar He Aiguo has argued that the Republican Yang Zhu portrayal, even though dependent on the same ancient fragmentary sources, substantially differed from the earlier ones and responded to the needs of its own time. But he is still convinced that during the pre-Qin period a clearly identifiable Yang Zhu lineage thrived; between the Han and the twentieth century, this lineage was weakened and absorbed by Taoism (He 2015, 2–41, 87–160). The young scholar Li Yucheng is more reticent about the pre-Qin influence of Yang Zhu, but he nevertheless sees it confirmed in some early passages. He believes, however, that already after the Han “most Yang Zhu portrayals were created on the basis of needs of the times” (Li 2017, 51–60). Taking these arguments one step further, I argue that every vision of Yang Zhu, also that from the pre-Qin period, is a construction. To some extent this is the case for every master or philosopher, but with a figure who has left no written trace, the historicity of his portrayals, including the currently

dominant one, is all the more obvious. The striking dearth of textual evidence therefore makes Yang Zhu a fascinating case study of intellectual history and the layered construction of important figures. Unravelling these layers adds more to the figure of Yang Zhu than his exclusive evaluation in terms of philosophical stances.

This paper assembles “visions” of Yang Zhu preceding the current philosophical “gaze”. Donna Haraway identified as a “conquering gaze” the view that claims to be “from nowhere”, a neutral, transparent, or objective description of the facts. Her alternative is a variety of visions that are “from somewhere”, an ever growing collection of “situated knowledges”, concrete embodiments, all “ruled by partial sight and limited voice”. This alternative does not amount to a strong relativism dethroning any claim to knowledge. On the contrary, such strong relativism is itself “the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well” (Haraway 1988, 590, 584).

Philosophy that claims a view from nowhere tends to be oblivious of its own historicity. Yang Zhu as philosopher is then presented as an identifiable pre-Qin figure, with his thought reconstructed on the basis of a selective collection of textual sources. The variety of the used sources and the unselected passages are downplayed in the service of the philosophically most convincing reconstruction. This endeavour is legitimate as one possible approach to the topic, but its current dominance over all other visions of Yang Zhu is problematic. Inspired by Haraway, this paper tries to “see” the pre-philosophical Yang Zhu “well” by describing some important portrayals of this figure preceding the current academic default. Emerging in chronological order, they all evolved and contributed to the current portrayal. The paper traces the consecutive emergence of five layers: namely Yang Zhu as a rival in argumentation (late Zhou), a heretic (Han), a prominent figure in the *Liezi* (Wei Jin), a master with deficient thoughts (Song), and a political reformer (late Qing).<sup>1</sup> Even though each portrayal has lived on into the later stages and got entangled with other portrayals, I believe that an initial attempt to disentangle them sheds new light on the figure of Yang Zhu. The twentieth century philosophical portrayal itself, with all its complexities and

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1 These topics were discussed at the KU Leuven Workshop “How to Become a Philosopher: The Many Lives of Yang Zhu” (May 30–June 1, 2019), where an early version of this paper was also presented. I thank the discussant Paul Goldin and the participants for their comments. This research was supported by the FWO project G060817N: “Mozi and Yang Zhu from Heretics to Philosophers: Caught in Another Web? The Genealogy of ‘Chinese Philosophy’ in Three Major Steps”.

variations, falls beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> So do the early anecdotes about Yang Zhu, with their limited role in the current portrayal.<sup>3</sup>

### Yang Zhu as a Rival

If we collect the scraps of evidence that probably date from the Warring States era (475–221), the most striking Yang Zhu portrayal is that of an opponent or rival: the fact *that* Yang Zhu disagreed is better attested than *what* he argued for. Roughly simultaneously, the defence of self-preservation and resistance to any type of physical or personal sacrifice—the core of the current philosophical portrayal—became increasingly associated with him.

First, Yang as a rival is most well-known from the book *Mencius*, in which he appears three times. The shortest of these passages begins as follows:

When deserting Mo, they invariably turn to Yang; when deserting Yang, they invariably turn to the Ru.

逃墨必歸於楊;逃楊必歸於儒. (*Mencius* 7B26)

This statement suggests that the followers of Mo, Yang, and the Ru were more or less identified as groups that one could join or desert. It does not say how they were organized nor what was at stake, but adherents were clearly wanted. What follows is probably a piece of advice to his fellow Ru:

When they turn to (us), then we simply accept them.

歸斯受之而已矣. (*ibid.*)

*Mencius* criticizes the argumentative strategies used by some Ru:

Those who nowadays argue with Yang and Mo, are like chasing strayed pigs: having led them into the sty, they then also tie them up.

今之與楊墨辯者如追放豚: 既入其豎, 又從而招之. (*ibid.*)<sup>4</sup>

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2 For the construction of Yang Zhu as a philosopher in Japanese sources, see Sato 2019.

3 For example, “lodging in the inn with a pretty and ugly lady” (e.g. *Zhuangzi*, *Han Feizi*), “lamenting at a crossroads” (e.g. *Xunzi*, *Huainanzi*, *Lunheng*), as “the brother of Yang Bu who hit a dog” (e.g. *Han Feizi*), and the “cold belly 冷腸” versus the Mohist “hot intestines 熱腹” (e.g. *Yanshi jiaxun*) (Li 2017, 57).

4 I follow the dominant interpretation of *zhao* 招 (recruit) as *juan* 罾 (tie up) (Jiao 1991, 997–99).

Short and unconnected as it stands, like every passage in book 7, this fragment leaves many questions open. While the statement may reliably express the view of Mencius or of those who attributed it to him, we do not know how representative it was in his time. Its content is even less clear: What sort of people were seen as turning from Mo to Yang, and then eventually to Ru? Did Mencius insist on this specific sequence of changing allegiances, or did he merely portray a situation of continuous switches in various directions? What precisely did “turn to” mean? What was at stake? How conscious were these people of their changing alliance: did they actively choose a new label or was it attributed to them? These are some of the questions that can be asked about the alliance with Yang discussed in this passage.

The passage does contain a clue that resonates in other early mentions of Yang Zhu, namely the use of argumentation or debate (*bian* 辯). Mencius seems to agree with the policy of accepting adherents into the sty of Confucianism, but he objects to keeping them there with arguments. We know from another *Mencius* passage that he was struggling with this issue, and that he claimed to only reluctantly use *bian* as the last resort. When a disciple confronted him with his reputation of being fond of arguing, Mencius responded:

The statements of Yang Zhu and Mo Di fill the world. All statements in the world either join Yang or to Mo. (...) If the ways of Yang and Mo do not stop, Confucius' Way will not be visible. This means that wrong theories mislead the people and totally block humaneness and righteousness. When this happens, it causes beasts to eat people, and people will end up eating each other. I fear this. (...) Why would I be fond of arguing? I simply have no choice. One who is able to stop Yang and Mo with words is the follower of the sages.

楊朱墨翟之言盈天下。天下之言不歸楊，則歸墨。[...] 楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著。是邪說誣民，充塞仁義也。仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食。吾為此懼 [...] 豈好辯哉？予不得已也。能言距楊墨者，聖人之徒也。 (*Mencius* 3B9)

Other early sources also present Yang as one among the rivals associated with this contested notion of *bian*. This portrayal occurs in the *Han Feizi* (“Eight Theories 八說”) and the *Zhuangzi*, where Yang and Mo are criticized as debaters (“Ghostless Xu 徐無鬼”), whose mouths should be shut with clamps (“Ransacking Coffers 胠篋”), and who parade with useless debates on hard and white, same and different, or right and wrong (“Webbed Toes 駢拇”). What Yang Zhu argued for is unclear and seems irrelevant. Along with others, he was more criticized for

his self-confident reliance on argumentation than for the specific views that he defended.

Secondly, as for Yang Zhu's convictions, the *Mencius* attributed views to him that also appear in slightly later texts, albeit in a milder version. Two *Mencius* passages identify Yang with the motto "for oneself" (*wei wo* 為我) opposed to Mozi's promotion of "inclusive care" (*jian ai* 兼愛). In the dialogue partly quoted above, Mencius accuses them of, respectively, not respecting their lord (*wu jun* 無君) or father (*wu fu* 無父), which is something for "birds and beasts 是禽獸也", resulting in a terrifying dehumanization and a risk of cannibalism (*Mencius* 3B9). In the other passage, Mencius claims that if Yang Zhu "could have benefited the world by pulling out one hair, he would not have done it 拔一毛而利天下, 不為也", while Mozi would have sacrificed anything at all to benefit the world (*ibid.* 7A26).

These three mentions of Yang Zhu in the book *Mencius*, or perhaps in its latest layers,<sup>5</sup> thus combine the two major characteristics, namely *that* he argued and *what* he argued for. He is perceived as a rival promoting ideas that threatened Confucius' Way. The three passages attest to the emergence of rival alliances in pre-imperial China, but not quite to an intellectual scene teeming with fully fledged lineages (*jia* 家), nor to a clear division between Confucian orthodoxy and its opposition. It was the beginning of something that would gain importance over time: Yang's affiliation.

The gradual emergence of lineages was messy and is difficult to reconstruct on the basis of the extant sources. Some textual evidence suggests that there was no awareness of any lineage associated with Yang Zhu during the last centuries before the beginning of the Common Era. He is not mentioned even once in chapters that nowadays are often identified as Yangist: e.g. in *Lü shi chungiu* "Taking Life as Basic 本生", "Valuing the Self 重己", "Honouring Life 貴生", "Being Attentive to Aims 審為"; nor in *Zhuangzi*, "Abdicating the Throne 讓王", "Robber Footpad 盜跖", "Discoursing on Swords 說劍", and "A Fisherman 漁父".<sup>6</sup> Equally remarkable is his absence from early overviews of the intellectual scene such as *Xunzi* "Against the Twelve Masters 非十二子" and "Dispelling Blindness 解蔽", *Han Feizi* "Eminent Learnings 顯學", *Zhuangzi* "The World 天下", *Huainanzi* "Overview of the Essentials

5 This is argued by Bruce and Taeko Brooks. The three explicit mentions of Yang in the *Mencius* exclusively occur in books 3 and 7, as does Mencius' explicit self-designation as Ru. Brooks and Brooks (2002, 242–43) suggest that the sharp awareness of rivaling allegiances belongs to the latest layer of the book, just before the final conquest of Lu in 249 BC. Most scholars, however, read them as representative of Mencius' thought in general.

6 For this identification, see Graham 1989, 55.



要略”, *Shiji* “Preface of the Grand Scribe 太史公自序”, and *Hanshu* “Treatise on Art and Literature 藝文志”.

But lineages were taking shape: Yang Zhu valuing himself got included in some early imperial sets of rival views. The *Lü shi chunqiu*, for instance, contains a list of ten personalities along with their priorities. Among them figures Mr. Yang 陽生 valuing the self 貴己 (“No Duality 不二”).<sup>7</sup> The *Huainanzi* describes an even more elaborate scene in which four masters—Kongzi, Mozi, Yangzi, and Mengzi—promote some values and attack each other. In this Han description of the intellectual past, Master Yang is said to have rejected Mozi’s “inclusive care”, “elevating the worthy 尚賢”, “supporting ghosts 右鬼”, and “rejecting fate 非命”. He is in turn attacked by Mencius for promoting “keeping one’s nature intact 全性”, “preserving the genuine 保真”, and “not allowing things to entangle one’s body 不以物累形” (“Boundless Discourses 汎論”). In another *Huainanzi* chapter, Yang occurs in a list of four who all preach just one part of the total solution seen from their particular background (“Activating the Genuine 俶真”). And when Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD) criticizes a list of seven figures, he puts Zhuang(zi) and Yang(zi) together as “wild and without rules 蕩而不法” (“Five Hundred (Years) 五百”).

The trend of associating Yang Zhu with lineages and allies continued after the Han dynasty. The strongest association—and the one that has survived the ages—was with Taoism 道家/流, whether Laozi, Liezi, Zhuangzi, Taoism, pure conversations 清談, or longevity practices 修煉. This is the case in *Liezi*’s “Yang Zhu” chapter, discussed below. The Song dynasty (960–1279) further confirmed the Taoist connection. In a response to the question as to why Mencius had not opposed Laozi, who presumably preceded the hardly known Yang Zhu and whose followers were perceived as more threatening, the standard answer was that “Yang Zhu’s learning came from Laozi 楊朱之學出於老子” and that “in refuting Yang Zhu, Mencius actually refuted Zhuangzi and Laozi 孟子闢楊朱, 便是闢莊老了” (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3900). Other alliances were sometimes suggested, none of which has made it into the currently dominant portrayal. Among these was the association of Mozi with the Taoists and Yang Zhu with the Confucians.<sup>8</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) also put forward an alliance with two types of Buddhism, namely Zen learning 禪學 and mendicant orders 行布施, evolving from Yang Zhu and Mo Di, respectively (Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3924). He, moreover, rejected Cheng Yi’s suggestion that Yang and Mo derived from sub-lineages within Confucianism, from Zixia 子夏 (卜商, Shang 商) and Zizhang 子張, respectively

7 Unlike the *Lü shi chunqiu* itself, the Eastern Han scholar Gao You 高誘 (168–212) connects this in his commentary to the claim in *Mencius* (7A26) that “Yangzi would not pull out one hair to save the world” (Chen 1984, vol. 2, 1127).

8 Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) e.g. was inspired by *Lunyu* 14.24 (Li 2017, 59).

(顓孫師, Shi 師).<sup>9</sup> Yet another association was of Yang Zhu with Yanzi 顏子 (= Yan Yuan/Hui 顏淵/回) living in a small alley 居陋巷 versus Mozi with Yu 禹 (and sometimes Hou Ji 后稷) passing his home three times without entering, while labouring for the people of the world. Zhu Xi considered the association of Mozi with the Great Yu partly acceptable, but not the comparison of Confucius' beloved disciple with Yang Zhu (Zhu 2010, vol. 16, 1963).<sup>10</sup>

Following the Zhou dynasty, statements about Yang Zhu's belonging to the Taoist lineage thus became increasingly elaborate. But even occasional challenges to this view shared the urge to locate him in one of the rival lineages and to take his stance "for oneself" seriously. The fact that he argued and what he argued for have become two important characteristics of the reconstructed Yangist philosophy.

### Yang Zhu as Heretic

When, in the Han dynasty, authors began to cite Mencius' portrayal of Yang and Mo, they picked up Yang Zhu's oppositional dimension rather than his ideas. They did not particularly engage in reflection about self-preservation versus political devotion. The combined threat of Yangzi and Mozi became a rhetorical trope used to construe the model of a courageous worthy person versus his dangerous and wicked enemies. Mencius stood for the former; Yang and Mo for the latter. Content wise, this portrayal was very meagre and negative.

The initial building blocks of the trope came from the *Mencius*: with Yang and Mo "totally blocking humaneness and righteousness 充塞仁義" and "Confucius' way not being visible 孔子之道不著", so that Mencius "simply had no choice 不得已". The true "follower of the sages 聖人之徒" had to continue their civilizing mission by his "ability to stop Yang and Mo with words 能言距楊墨". Hence, he claimed:

I also wish to correct the hearts of others, to end incorrect theories, stop biased behaviour, and banish lewd expressions, in order to carry on the work of the three sages.

我亦欲正人心, 息邪說, 距詖行, 放淫辭, 以承三聖. (*Mencius* 3B9)

The three exemplary figures that Mencius singled out for emulation had all restored order in the style appropriate for their age: the legendary Great "Yu

9 Inspired by *Lunyu* 11.16 (Zhu 2010, vol. 15, 1411).

10 This association had been suggested by Cheng Yi's student, Yang Shi (see below).

repressing the floods 禹抑洪水”, “the Duke of Zhou embracing the barbarians 周公兼夷狄”, and “Confucius completing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 孔子成春秋” (ibid.).

This portrayal went unheeded until the Han dynasty (Defoort 2014, 354–57). As a trope, it was fixed and enhanced by Yang Xiong, who would later gain an important position in the Succession of the Way (*daotong* 道統).

When in antiquity Yang and Mo blocked the road, Mencius spoke up and refuted them, thus opening up (the road). Since afterwards people have been blocking the road (again), I compare myself with Mencius.

古者揚墨塞路，孟子辭而闢之，廓如也。後之塞路者有矣，竊自比於孟子。 (*Fayan*, “Our Masters 吾子”)<sup>11</sup>

Some portions of this statement also became part of the often repeated stereotype, namely that Yang and Mo blocked the “road 路”, that Mencius “refuted them 闢之”, “thus opening up (the road) 廓如也”,<sup>12</sup> and that he “compared himself with Mencius 竊自比於孟子”. This last line may have been an echo of Confucius’ claim that he did not create but only transmitted, “comparing myself to our Lao Peng 竊比於我老彭” (*Lunyu* 7.1).<sup>13</sup>

Thus emerged Yang Zhu’s second portrayal, namely as a rhetorical trope. While a series of scholars claimed their place in the Confucian line of orthodoxy, Mencius and his two rivals increasingly became empty signifiers. The trope gained momentum in the Tang dynasty (916–907), with Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) as its next architect. In his eyes, Mencius had defended the Way against Yang and Mo, and Yang Xiong had been able to restore it, but then had come disaster. Echoing Mencius’ complaints about changing alliances between Mo, Yang, and Ru (*Mencius* 7B26), Han stated:

Those discussing morality either joined Yang or Mo or Lao or Fo, invariably going from one to the other.

其言道德仁義者不入于楊則入于墨，不入于墨則入于老，不入于老則入于佛。入于彼必出于此。 (Zhou 2011, 4–9)<sup>14</sup>

11 *Fayan*, 2.5/22. See Nylan 2013, 35. All quotes of Chinese masters texts refer to Lau Dim-Cheuk (1993–2002), except in the case of well-established references as for the *Lunyu*, *Mencius* and *Laozi*.

12 For this expression, “lui rendant son ampleur” (L’Haridon 2010, 20), “in this displaying true greatness” (Nylan 2013, 35).

13 Another Han example is Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 AD) in *Lunheng* 論衡 “Responding about Creating (this book) 對作”, but he did not identify with the Ru tradition.

14 See his “Tracing the Way 原道” (of 805 AD).

The addition of Lao and Fo (sometimes Shi 釋) representing Taoism and Buddhism, respectively, was neither casual nor arbitrary, since “the harm of Shi and Lao exceeded that of Yang and Mo 釋老之害過於楊墨” (Zhou 2011, 374–76). For Han Yu, Taoism and Buddhism were the real problem; he was the saviour of his own age.

I am less worthy than Mencius. He could not save [the Confucian Way] before it had become lost. And I now wish to restore it after its destruction. Alas! How poorly did I estimate my force. Now seeing the danger in which I am, nobody can save me from death. But if thanks to me this Way could be more or less transmitted, I would not at all mind to die for it.

韓愈之賢不及孟子。孟子不能救之於未亡之前。而韓愈乃欲全之於已壞之後。嗚呼其亦不量其力，且見其身之危。莫之救以死也。雖然使其道由愈以粗傳，雖滅死萬萬無恨。（“Letter to Minister Meng Jian”, in Zhou 2011, 374–76; Li 2017, 58)

At this stage, the Mencian trope had become the core of Ru orthodoxy, with new building blocks added by Han, such as “How poorly did I estimate my force 其亦不量其力”.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand Han Yu had added himself behind Mencius and Yang Xiong in an increasingly clear defence of Confucian orthodoxy. On the other hand, he had replaced Yang and Mo with worse villains.

From the Song (960–1279) onward, we encounter an increasing variation on both sides of the trope: moral heroes and wicked enemies. New courageous defenders of Confucianism were added, often by their disciples. For instance, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) was paired with Han Yu.<sup>16</sup> Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) “simply had no choice but to speak up 言不得已而云” to refute the “statements of Buddha and Laozi 浮屠老子之言” (Zhang 1985, 5).<sup>17</sup> And the same went for Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), according to Hu 胡宏 (1102–1161) (Hu Hong 1987, 161, 158). The list of opponents also increased. Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193), for instance, gave the label “Yang and Mo” to those opportunistic office seekers who merely repeated Ru classics for the sake of passing

15 See e.g. Wang Yangming in Wang 1992, vol. 1, 78.

16 By e.g. Wang Yangming: “As for the mistakes of those two (Lao and Fo) and Yang and Mo, respectively, Mencius refuted them first, and masters such as Han (Yu) and Ou (Yang Xiu) refuted them later. 若夫二氏與楊、墨之非，則孟子闢之於前，韓、歐諸子闢之於後。” (Wang 1992, vol. 1, 862)

17 See Fan Yu 范育 in his preface to “Rectifying Ignorance 正蒙”.

the exams (Lu 1980, 150).<sup>18</sup> Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) “simply had no choice” but to refute “the current theories that venerate Zhu (Xi) 今日之崇尚朱之說”. (Wang 1992, vol. 1, 77)<sup>19</sup> And so did the critics of Christianity in defence of the indigenous tradition.<sup>20</sup> Their opponents were invariably associated with Yang and Mo, who were increasingly identified as “heretics” (*viduan* 異端),<sup>21</sup> an equally vague label used to identify opponents.<sup>22</sup>

This variety of new enemies was accompanied by the explicit statement that Yang and Mo were actually no longer the problem. They had been threats in the past, courageously and effectively discarded by the Second Sage, but the real problem now lay with Taoists, Buddhists, other Confucians, or Christians. The Cheng brothers, for example, repeatedly pointed out: “harms like those of Yang and Mo no longer exist in the current generation. 如楊墨之害在今世則已無之”. (Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 3) Even “the harm of theories like Taoism is in the end small 如道家之說其害終小”. “Only Buddhist learning 惟佛學” was seen as a threat, because “now everybody discusses it, abundantly and terrifyingly, so that its harm is endless 今則人人談之, 瀾漫滔天, 其害無涯”. (ibid.) The identification of the specific threat was never determined once and for all. Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), for example, was of the opinion that “while the harm of Taoism (immortals) and Buddhism was worse than Yang and Mo, the disaster of the study of the pattern was more disruptive than Taoism and Buddhism 仙佛之害甚於楊墨, 理學之禍烈於仙佛”. (Xiao 2018, 6–8)<sup>23</sup>

This Yang Mo trope does not seem to have survived the introduction of philosophy in China. At least professional academics would no longer use to it today to express their moral stance against social threats. But due to the long dominance of Confucianism, its stereotypical opposition to Yang and Mo has been so deeply entrenched in scholars’ minds that its influence has lingered. The content of Mencius’ negative vision of the two opponents may have softened, but its form has endured. The opposition of Yang, Mo and Ru has therefore continued to shape most narratives of early Chinese thought.

18 For more examples, see Li 2017, 59–60.

19 In his *Instructions for Practical Living* 傳習錄.

20 See e.g. Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (1597–1669) in *Rejecting Heresies* 辟邪論 (1659), collected in his *I Simply Have no Choice* 不得已 (1664). For this and other examples, see Yang 2013, 14–15.

21 Probably inspired by *Lunyu* 2.16. This label had been applied to Yang and Mo by Zhao Qi (趙岐, d. 210 AD) in his *Mencius Questions and Expressions* 孟子題辭. But the label only became prominent later. See Li 2017, 54, 57.

22 For the vagueness of this label, see Xiao and Zhang 2017.

23 Yan also attacks the Cheng-Zhu school and the Lu-Wang schools.

## Prominent Figure in the *Liezi*

By the Song dynasty this rhetorical trope fed into reflections about Yang and Mo. But that was preceded by a remarkable portrayal that seems largely disconnected on both ends: from the rhetorical trope as well as from the Song reflections. It occurs in the book *Liezi* (300 AD). Whether written, forged, collected, or edited and commented upon by Zhang Zhan 张湛 (d. 360 AD), this book in eight chapters gives a surprisingly prominent position to Yang Zhu no less than six centuries after his supposed lifetime.<sup>24</sup> Not only does it contain the sole chapter in the entire Chinese corpus explicitly named after him (chapter 7), it also portrays him in other parts of the book (in chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8). While there is a generally recognized breach between the pre-Qin Yang Zhu and the *Liezi* figure (e.g. Feng 2015, vol. 1, 149, 154), the latter is not easy to pin down. The stories in which he appears within the whole book, and even within the chapter named after him, convey different and sometimes even conflicting messages, so “that it may not make sense to try to fixate on excavating an original or authentic Yang Zhu”, as Erica Brindley puts it (Brindley 2019, 5, n. 4).<sup>25</sup> I therefore consider this the portrayal of “a prominent figure”, refraining from a more specific label in terms of hedonism, anarchism, Taoism, or egoism.

As a rule, the Yang Zhu figure in the *Liezi* is strikingly unconnected to the trope in which he is criticized along with Mozi (the 2nd portrayal). The only exception to this rule is, interestingly, the most often quoted statement attributed to him. It concerns Yang’s unwillingness to sacrifice one hair for the whole world. A tentative translation goes as follows:

Since Bocheng Zigao would not benefit (from?) others (material things?) at the cost of one hair, he renounced his state and retired to plough the fields. Since the Great Yu did not keep even his own person for his own benefit, he worked to drain the flood until his whole body was limping and emaciated. If men from antiquity could have benefited (from?) the world by the loss of one hair, they would not have given it; if the world had been given to them alone, they would not have taken it. If nobody would lose one hair, and nobody would benefit (from?) the world, the world would be well ordered.

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24 I bypass debates on the dates and authenticity of (portions of) the *Liezi*. The *Liezi* editor, Yang Bojun 杨伯峻 considered it a post-Han text, while A. C. Graham identified a mix of pre-Han and post-Han material. See Liu and Li 2018, and Graham 1990, 12.

25 She identifies some degree of consistency in chapter 7’s Yang Zhu figure concerned with life and death, reality versus pretense, the internal versus the external, and between human nature in relation to fate (Brindley 2019, 9).



楊朱曰：伯成子高不以一毫利物，舍國而隱耕。大禹不以一身自利，一體偏枯。古之人損一毫利天下不與也。悉天下奉一身不取也。人人不損一毫，人人不利天下，天下治矣。（*Liezi* 7, 41/18–20; see also Graham 1990, 148–49）

I refrain here from discussion about this statement's date (between late Zhou and Wei Jin), authenticity (whether or not reflecting the historical Yang Zhu's thought), and interpretation ("benefit" versus "benefit from").<sup>26</sup> While echoing the Mencian portrayal, Mencius is not mentioned. Compared to the trope, there are important differences: the author takes Yang Zhu seriously, opposes him to Mo rather than to Ru, provides him with a defence, and locates him in a clear lineage. This is apparent in the immediately following debate between some Yangists and Mohists about the willingness to sacrifice body parts. It concludes with a stalemate between the two views in terms of distinct lines of allies: on the Mohist side, Great Yu 大禹 is a model, Mo Di 墨翟 a master, and Qin Guli 禽滑厘 a disciple and master (Qinzi 禽子). On the other side, Bocheng Zigao 伯成子高 figures as model, Yang Zhu as master, Mengsun Yang 孟孫陽 as disciple, with Lao Dan 老聃 and Guan Yin 關尹 as authorities.<sup>27</sup>

In general, the prominent figure of Yang Zhu in the *Liezi* stands out as rather disconnected from earlier as well as later portrayals. The only exceptions are these passages about sacrificing hair have some connection with both: they echo Mencius' portrayal and are quoted by Song and Ming scholars, although very rarely (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 16, 1962). Whenever the latter happens, it is again in line with the rhetorical trope, not the new content initiated in the "Yang Zhu" chapter. Interest in the *Liezi*'s Yang Zhu figure only emerged in the late Qing evidential research (the 5th portrayal) and moved to the centre stage in the Republican era.

## Yang Zhu as a Master

When the Mencian trope eventually gave rise to a variety of reflections in the Song dynasty, most scholars showed no particular interest in Yang and Mo but used them to defend and refine their interpretation of the Confucian Way.<sup>28</sup> Bud-

26 For this last debate, see Defoort 2008, 173–76. For the former debates, see note Liu and Li 2018.

27 This vision of two elaborate lineages is one of the reasons I tend to agree with a Wei Jin date for at least this portion of the "Yang Zhu" chapter. For another argument in favor of a Wei Jin dating, see Defoort 2018, 175–77.

28 Lyell (1962, 92) considers this the second stage in the Neo-Confucian use of the Yang Mo symbol, namely for the sake of the "systematization of beliefs". He calls the first stage the "assertion of orthodoxy", coinciding with what I identified as the rhetorical trope.



dhism was an important trigger for the emergence of this new portrayal of Yang Zhu; Mohism was a necessary detour. To make a long story short: influenced by Buddhist ideals of supporting the sentient beings, some early Neo-Confucians expressed the notion of humanness (*ren* 仁) in terms that resonated with the Mohist ideal of “inclusive care”.<sup>29</sup> Some believed even that after the decline of Mohism, Mozi’s ideal had survived in the Buddhist notion of “great compassion 大悲” (Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3953). The ensuing debate ended up entailing Mo Di’s twin heretic Yang Zhu.<sup>30</sup>

The twins Yang and Mo did not arouse equal interest. While Yang Zhu was consistently paired with Mozi, the latter sometimes independently triggered reflection and discussion, with the former following suit. The dominant interest in Mozi appeared, for instance, when Yang Shi 楊時 (Guishan 龜山, 1053–1155) expressed his admiration for Mozi who “simply did not want his supplies to be scant 濟不欲寡而已”. Yang Shi argued that this altruistic ambition resembled the generally praised Great Yu and Hou Ji (Lord of Millet), who respectively suppressed the floods and fed the hungry. He then briefly added the less pregnant parallel case of Yang Zhu resembling Yan Hui living a simple life (in Zhu 2010, vol. 7, 743–44; see also Zhu 2010, vol. 14, 635–36). A second example was triggered by Han Yu’s praise for Mozi in his short text “Reading *Mozi* 讀墨子”. More specifically, he had stated that Mozi’s “inclusive care” resembled and supported Confucius’ “all-round care and loving humaneness, acting as a Sage by broadly supplying for the sentient beings 泛愛親仁以博施濟衆為聖” (Zhou 2011, 35–36, 37–38). This was a disturbing statement from the Song Confucians’ hero.<sup>31</sup> Neither totally agreeing nor disagreeing, Cheng Yi pointed out that Mozi was indeed very—perhaps too—dedicated to humaneness 仁, while his heretic counterpart had an equally strong sense of righteousness 義 (e.g. Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231–32). Such examples give the impression that discussion of Yang Zhu was initially somewhat steered by the Neo-Confucian attempt to position themselves in relation to Mohism.

The new portrayal was accompanied by an increase in textual evidence. While Mencius’ three Yang Zhu passages still constituted the major textual material,

29 See his claim in “Sincere and enlightened 誠明” that “knowledge must be all-round, care must be inclusive 知必周知, 愛必兼愛” and his “Western Inscription 西銘” about “The people and I being one family, others and I joined together 民吾同胞, 物吾與也”. See, respectively, Zhang 1985, 21, 62. For the discussion, see Feng 2015, vol. 2, 744–46.

30 For example, between Cheng Yi and Yang Shi. See Lyell 1962, 46–47. Another, secondary Buddhist inspiration may have been the perceived similarities between some types of Buddhism and Yang Zhu’s supposed support for hermits and non-worldliness.

31 This praise was indeed some sort of dissonant in Han Yu’s generally negative and standard mentions of Mozi along with Yang Zhu. For this schizophrenic portrayal, see Defoort 2015, 224–27.

there existed also a *Mozi* edition.<sup>32</sup> Cheng Yi sometimes refers to it, e.g. when pointing out that “the book *Mozi* is not all that much about inclusive care 墨子之書未至大有兼愛之意” (Cheng and Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 171).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, some other passages from the *Mencius* and the *Lunyu* triggered reflections on Yang, even though they did not mention him. There exists one *Mencius* dialogue discussing Mohism independently from Yang Zhu, in which the master accuses the Mohists of using “two roots 二本” rather than one 一本 (*Mencius* 3A5). This dialogue may have inspired the recurrent Neo-Confucian claim that Mencius had attacked Mozi—and Yang Zhu in his tracks—at the roots.<sup>34</sup> Other inspiring *Mencius* passages were his claim to understand the hidden intricacies of four kinds of speech 知言 (ibid. 2A2), and the disdain that he shared with Confucius for the morally mediocre “village worthy 鄉原” (ibid. 7B37). Among the *Lunyu* passages were “To work on *yiduan*, this causes real damage 攻乎異端斯害也已” (*Lunyu* 2.16), “As for Shi, he overshoots the mark and as for Shang, he falls short 師也過商也不及” (ibid. 11.16), “While curbing oneself, return to rituals 克己復禮” (ibid. 12.1), “Learning for oneself 學者為己” versus “learning for (the eyes of) others 學者為人” (ibid. 14.24), “The six statements and six delusions 六言六蔽” (ibid. 17.7), and “The village worthy is virtue’s thief 鄉原德之賊也” for stealing the appearance of worthiness (ibid. 17.11).<sup>35</sup> This cluster of textual references fed reflection on Yang Zhu as a master with his own, even though deficient, ideas.

A detailed study of all the Song-Ming reflections concerning Yang Zhu would lead too far into the intricacies of Neo-Confucian thought. One idea was that Yang and Mo were not as terrible as Mencius had claimed, but that his harsh criticism was nevertheless warranted in order to stop their disastrous influence.<sup>36</sup> Mozi was appreciated for his altruism, goodness or humaneness, while Yang Zhu was consistently—but somewhat less elaborately—attributed a sense of right or righteousness (Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231–32). These similarities to Ru values made them all the more alluring and hence threatening to Confucianism. Wang Yang-ming, for instance, argued that

32 Respect for the Song taboo on *kuang* 匡 (of the first Song emperor, Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (927–979)) suggests that the *Mozi* was included in the now lost Song *Daozang*.

33 He also refers to the book *Mozi* when checking Mencius’ claims. See also Cheng and Cheng (1981, vol. 1, 231), where he slightly misrepresents Mencius, since the latter made his claim Mohist Yi Zhi, not about Mozi.

34 See e.g. Hu Hong about Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), in Hu 1987, 339.

35 I do not go into the long tradition of interpreting and translating all these statements. See also in Li 2017, 59, and Xiao and Zhang 2017.

36 For Hu Hong’s initial puzzlement at Mencius’ criticism, see Hu 1987, 281–82.

the two masters were also worthies of their time. If they had lived in Mencius' days, he certainly would also have considered them worthies. Mozi's "inclusive care" simply overshot the mark in implementing goodness while Yang Zhu's "for oneself" simply overshot the mark when implementing rightness.

二子亦當時之賢者。使與孟子並世而生，未必不以之為賢。墨子兼愛行仁而過耳楊子為我行義而過耳。(Wang 1992, vol. 1, 77)

Echoing *Lunyu* 11.6, some Neo-Confucians argued that while Mozi had overshot the mark, Yang Zhu had fallen short (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 7, 392–93). An implication of this archery metaphor was the conviction that even a minor deviation at the beginning (e.g. in Yang and Mo's own deeds or words) could lead to an increasing and disastrous divergence of paths (their later or unworthy followers).<sup>37</sup> Only Mencius was alert enough to hear the germinating sounds of disaster in what seemed like very attractive variations of his own beliefs (Cheng and Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231). This speculation allowed some Neo-Confucians to avert the major blame from Yang and Mo to their later followers (e.g. *ibid.*, 171).

These are only some hints of the wealth of reflections engendered by one clichéd portrayal. Some Song opinions have shaped the modern views of Yang and Mo, such as their respective association with "humaneness" and "righteousness". But not much of the Song debates have survived in current Yang Zhu research, probably because the Song focus of interest was not Yang Zhu to begin with. Most Song reflections were replaced by the tsunami of Western notions such as individual rights and liberty, and which rescued Yang and Mo from their traditional predicament as mere heretics or deficient masters.

## Yang Zhu as Reformer

The Western reading of Yang Zhu in the Republican era was preceded by one more portrayal shaped by Qing scholars' textual studies or "evidential research" (*kaozheng/ju* 考證/據). I focus here on someone who was influenced by Western thought, but not yet abundantly in the explicitly comparative and borrowing fashion of the Republic, namely Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927). He shaped the last important portrayal of Yang Zhu on the verge of the creation of Chinese philosophy (He 2015, 13; Wei 2017, 40). In his eyes, the Confucian *daotong* corpus of Old Texts was based on the fabrications of Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 BC–23 AD)

37 This metaphor connects nicely with early Yang Zhu passages presenting him weeping at the crossroads because minor decisions can have major results.

in support of the political system of Wang Mang's 王莽 (45 BC–23 AD) short-lived Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 AD). Fortunately, according to Kang, Confucius had hidden a reformist ideal in the original New Texts, waiting to be decoded. His *Confucius as a Reformer* 孔子改制考 (1897), written when Kang was himself also preparing fundamental reforms for China, contained a fleshed out portrayal of Yang Zhu as one of the less important Zhou masters objecting to Confucius' suggestions for political reform and a "doctrine" or "religion" (*jiao* 教).

Kang's novel views reshuffled all the previous Yang Zhu portrayals. Those closely connected with the Succession of the Way—the rhetorical trope and Neo-Confucian reflections—lost their dominance. But Kang's Yang Zhu portrayal preserved traces of the heretic promoting "for oneself" in opposition to "inclusive care", as well as reflections on extreme views that overshoot or fall short in either humaneness or in righteousness. The oldest portrayal of Yang Zhu as an opponent fitted nicely in Kang's argument that all masters responded to Kongzi's reforms. Hence, the lively Zhou debate among masters began to overshadow the age-long opposition between *daotong* and heresy. Finally, thanks to evidential research supplanting Song Ming speculations, an impressive array of textual sources, including the *Liezi*, contributed to this portrayal.<sup>38</sup> Its two major characteristics were Kang's insistence on Yang Zhu's institutional vision and his belonging to an intellectual lineage.

Kang argued that Yang was one of the many reformers who all attributed their projects to the exemplary past. "Yang Zhu made 'for oneself' a core rule; what he said about indulging in desires was the task, as well as not pulling out one hair to benefit of world. He attributed them all to antiquity 楊朱以為我為宗旨; 所言以縱欲為事, 拔一毫利天下不為而皆托之於古." (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 41) Kang's identification of Yang Zhu with "for oneself" and with the unwillingness to sacrifice even one hair was inspired by the *Mencius*, further elaborated upon in the *Liezi*, which is also the source of his supposed hedonism. Examples of "Yang Zhu changing the system 楊子改製" were that "like Mozi he was in favour of frugal burials 與墨子薄葬同" and that "he sang when presiding at a funeral, which did not accord with Confucius' system 臨喪而歌, 必非孔子之製", but rather with Laozi (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 25).<sup>39</sup> Together they

38 Along with its precedent *Study of Xin Learning as Forgeries* 新學偽書考 (1891). *Confucius as a Reformer* contains a remarkable variety of early references to Yang Zhu, weeping at a crossroads, singing at a burial, describing the vagueness of the past, denying the importance of a reputation, etc.

39 He also enhanced older attempts to identify less known figures in relation to Yang Zhu, such as Yang Ziju 陽子居 in the *Zhuangzi*, Yuan Rang 原壤 in the *Lunyu*, Zi Sanghu 子桑戶 in the *Shuoyuan*, or Mengsun Yang 孟孫陽 and Xin Duzi 心都子 in the *Liezi*. See Kang 2007, vol. 3, 72–73.

stood for self-care 為我 (from Yang Zhu) and “inhumaneness 不仁” (from Laozi).<sup>40</sup>

The content of Yang Zhu’s thought was thus closely connected to his belonging to the Taoist lineage against not just Confucianism, but even more against Mohism. Based on *Mencius* 7B26 Kang portrayed Yang and Mo as two legs of a tripod:

Since they saw Confucius as creating and installing a doctrine/religion, Yang and Mo stood in a tripod relation with him. Hence they simply had some followers deserting and others turning to them.

以其為孔子創立之教，楊墨鼎立。故其門下有逃有歸耳。(Kang 2007, vol. 3, 88)

This threefold connection moved away from the Mencian cliché since Kong stood closer to Mo than to Yang. Kang saw “Mozi as coming from Confucius’ followers 墨子本孔子後學”, while “Yang Zhu was a disciple of Laozi 楊子為老子弟子” (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 16). The former two supported “humaneness” and wanted to rescue their age, like Kang in his own days; the latter two promoted the opposite (*ibid.*, 58). “Even though forming three (lineages), they actually were two 則雖三而實為二焉.” While “Ru and Mo had flourished in the Warring States era 在戰國儒墨最盛”, in “the early Han, Laozi was the most flourishing, Confucians did well, and Mohism had disappeared 至於漢初，老氏最盛，儒學駸駸其間，而墨亡矣”. The competition between the two survivors eventually caused Confucianism and Taoism to live on (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 206), as it was “thanks to this after-effect of Yang Zhu that Lao learning could spread over the world 楊朱得此後勁，老學所由遍天下哉” (*ibid.*, 59). For Kang, Yang was not just one of Laozi’s disciples, but the leader of his worst sub-lineage, representing egoistic hedonism leading to social disruption.

Even though inspired by previous portrayals and based on an exceptionally wide variety of extant sources, Kang’s portrayal was again very different. As Wei Yixia points out, Kang was not interested in getting to know Yang Zhu for his own sake, but in establishing a variety of responses to Confucius’ proposal of a state religion 國教. Yang’s thought and affiliation remained both secondary to this aim.

From his specific position and need to establish Confucius’ *jiao* as a state religion, Kang Youwei never discussed Yang Zhu out of interest for Yang Zhu. Placing Yang Zhu in the midst of the pre-Qin masters and schools was secondary to his vision with regard to Chinese and Confucian learning, and served the theoretical

40 See *Laozi* 5 about “Heaven and Earth 天地” as well as the “sage 聖人” being “inhumane 不仁” and using others as “strawdogs 芻狗”.

purpose of establishing Confucius' *jiao* as a state religion (Wei 2017, 45). Indeed, Kang did not even pretend to objectively and coherently interpret Yang Zhu as a philosopher, a portrayal that was soon to be born.

### Envoy: Yang Zhu the Philosopher

The five selected portrayals of Yang Zhu constitute a dense cluster of historical and partial visions. More portrayals could be analysed and connections between them further elucidated. The quantity and diversity of visions of such a minor figure, one with hardly any textual testimony, is truly remarkable. Some of their characteristics have better survived than others. Yang Zhu's label "for oneself", his unwillingness to sacrifice even one hair, and his oppositional stance in debate date from the Zhou dynasty. The rhetorical trope reinforced this opposition, even though it has lost its traditional function of defending a moral stance. Aside from presenting the figure of a hedonist (not discussed in this paper), the *Liezi* defended Yang Zhu in his own right and established him in a respectable lineage. Little new content has been transmitted from the many Song Ming views about Yang. Finally, Kang Youwei's reinvigoration of the pre-Qin layer, his use of much textual evidence, his attempt to knead it into one view, and his further elaboration of Yang's lineage, have also contributed to the booming field of Republican philosophical portrayals.

Aside from Kang, I believe that the *Mencius* and *Liezi* have contributed most to current portrayals of Yang Zhu as a philosopher: the former negatively and heavily supported by a long Confucian tradition; the latter positively by considering and defending Yang Zhu against Mohists. Specialists of Taoism and Yang Zhu's philosophy understandably prefer the latter. From the Republican era date the views that the original Yang Zhu did not resist "benefitting" the world but "taking benefit from" it, that the *Liezi* passages predate Mencius and were misrepresented by him,<sup>41</sup> along with an insistence on the authenticity of the book *Liezi*, the historicity of both Yang Zhu and Liezi as figures of the Taoist lineage, etc.<sup>42</sup> These traits, among others (discussion of which goes beyond the limits of the current paper), characterize much of the current portrayal of Yang Zhu.

If Yang Zhu as philosopher is presented as one more "vision", namely one that fits the twentieth century and feeds from older portrayals, I have nothing to object to. But when it is presented as the only authentic, historical figure, we end up with

41 For these argument by scholars such as Men Qiming 門啟明 and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, see Defoort 2008, 173–76.

42 For an example of this trend, see Liu and Li 2018.



a philosophical “gaze”. One selective mixture is made with various ingredients from different sources and periods. Many insights then become irrelevant, such as the fact that Mencius’ portrayal was unheeded before the Han dynasty, or the initially merely rhetorical use of his view. On the other hand, the pre-Qin dating of the *Liezi*’s “Yang Zhu” chapter has become an almost religiously defended dogma. Even though taken separately, these views are worth considering, their clustering in the philosophy department has led to one flat and exclusive portrayal. It is as if one first takes away all the different tastes from a rich meal by cooking them into one stew, then adding exotic—in this case, Western philosophical—herbs to give it back some flavour.

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# Diversifying Academic Philosophy: The Post-Comparative Turn and Transculturalism

*Vytis SILIUS\**

## Abstract

The article asks why, in Western universities, the success of the academic field of comparative philosophy has so far failed to significantly diversify the curricula of academic philosophy. It suggests that comparative philosophy has mainly relied on the same approaches that have made academic philosophy Eurocentric, namely, on the *history* of philosophy as the main mode of teaching and researching philosophy. Further, post-comparative philosophy and transcultural studies are presented as providing tools to address the foundations of the institutional parochialism of academic philosophy, while preserving one of the most fundamental tenets of philosophy—the quest for universal knowledge that transcends cultural particularities.

**Keywords:** academic philosophy, homogeneity, comparative, post-comparative, transcultural studies

## Diverzifikacija akademske filozofije: postprimerjalni preobrat in transkulturalizem

### Izvleček

Članek postavlja vprašanje, zakaj uspešnost akademskega področja primerjalne filozofije na zahodnih univerzah še ni uspela bistveno diverzificirati študijskih programov akademske filozofije. Ugotovitev je, da se je primerjalna filozofija večinoma opirala na enake pristope, ki so pripeljali do evrocentrizma v akademski filozofiji, namreč na *zgodovino* filozofije kot temeljni način poučevanja in raziskovanja na področju filozofije. Poleg tega postprimerjalna filozofija in transkulturne študije ponujajo orodja za reševanje temeljev institucionalnega parohijalizma akademske filozofije, pri čemer ohranjajo eno temeljnih načel filozofije – iskanje univerzalnega védenja, ki presega kulturne posebnosti.

**Ključne besede:** akademska filozofija, homogenost, primerjalne, postprimerjalne, transkulturne študije

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The debates on what is philosophy, whether or not philosophy is essentially a product of a European way of thinking that starts with Ancient Greece, and whether or not the term “philosophy” is a misnomer when applied to the various ways of thinking that formed and persist outside of the European cultural universe, are certainly not new ones within Western academia (for one particular discussion on this topic see Defoort 2001; Raud 2006; Defoort 2006). One reason for continuing discussion of these and similar questions and the reason for them being raised more pressingly is the context of the institutional structure of the university system, and how it defines the academic discipline of philosophy as taught in Western universities.

Increasingly more vocal and persuasive objections are being raised to the fact that philosophy departments in the West—with only minor exceptions—as of yet do not adequately incorporate topics, texts, thinkers, terms, and even faculty members that originate from areas and traditions that do not fall under the broad umbrella term of “the West” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016; Van Norden 2017; for a good collection of studies on the multiple facets of institutional racism not only in philosophy, but all of the academy, see Arday and Mirza 2018).

This article addresses the problem of “cultural homogeneity” or, what some have called the institutionalized parochialism of Western academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The almost exclusive focus on European thinkers and ideas of European (starting from Ancient Greece) origin in academic philosophy is a well-known, albeit very complicated phenomenon that has been discussed, criticized, but also defended by many (Rorty 1989, 333; Derrida in Defoort 2006, 628; Heidegger 1968, 224). However, recently we have noticed a new and intensified wave of discontent with the perceived lack of diversity in academic philosophy curricula, as well as the lack of diversity among those who teach and study these curricula. I call it a new wave, as this time the discontent has spilled out of inner circles of academia

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2 In this article I will only be talking about the Western academic philosophy, by which I mean philosophy as the discipline taught and studied at European, North American, and Australian universities. Different—or even similar—issues with cultural homogeneity might exist in academic philosophy conducted at African, Indian, Chinese, and other non-Western universities, but that is beyond the scope of the present article.

and is receiving increasingly more attention in both the cultural and mainstream media, thus being presented to an increasingly wider public (Schwitzgebel 2015; Salami 2015; Garfield and Van Norden 2016; Levine 2016). In addition, this time these critical voices are not only coming from professional philosophers (SOAS Students' Union, 2018).

Science popularization, cultural, and even mass media have reported objections both from professional academics and students alike as to the current cultural and geographical scope of academic philosophy. *The Guardian* has run several articles on a widely reported and harshly criticized requirement by the student union of SOAS to diversify philosophy courses by including thinkers from Africa and Asia (Whyman 2017; Malik 2017).<sup>3</sup>

The conference “Minorities and Philosophy”, organized by the graduate students of University of Pennsylvania, has inspired an opinion piece in *The New York Times* by the academics Jay L. Garfield and Bryan W. Van Norden, challenging the departments that only offer courses on Western philosophy to name themselves appropriately: “Department of European and American Philosophy” (Garfield and Van Norden 2016). The opinion piece resulted in a whole book explicating the argument in detail (Van Norden 2017). The *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed by Eric Schwitzgebel (2015) claiming that U.S. college philosophy classes are missing Chinese philosophers for no valid reason. Peter Levine (2016) noted that “philosophy is a remarkably un-diverse discipline”, and argued that this lack of diversity is blocking its progress. Julian Baggini, presenting ten Asian, Middle Eastern, and African schools of philosophy that should be “better known” to Westerners, even argues that “the parochialism of Western intellectual goes far deeper than willful ignorance of non-Western traditions”, pointing out that American pragmatists are largely ignored in Britain (Baggini 2019). In a similar vein, Dag Herbjørnsrud notes that institutionalized philosophy is segregated not only culturally, but also by gender, and claims that, “philosophy departments, journals, and curriculum lists are often as lacking in diversity now as they were in the 1970s” (Herbjørnsrud 2018).

One reason for holding on to the old ways might be that inclusion of new materials, thinkers, traditions, texts into university curricula is also a matter of struggle over very limited institutional resources. These considerations may have created what Chakrabarti and Weber call the “political resistance against comparative philosophy” within academia (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 17). I want to

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3 It seems to be somewhat telling that these requirements have been also reported with misleading headlines, suggesting that the students demanded Kant and Plato be removed from syllabus “because they are white” (as in Turner 2017).

sidestep these political reasons, and, first, look instead if there is something in the way academic philosophy has come to be conducted today, that creates, fosters, and upholds the parochialism of Western philosophy departments.

## Sources of Monoculturality of Academic Philosophy

One position that looks for reasons directly where the problem lies, that is, in the academic discipline of philosophy, is a study by Peter Park (2013) on the racist overtones in the formation of Western philosophical canon. In order to understand how our current dominating philosophical canon has formed, Park suggests that we look at how and when a currently mainstream version of the *history* of philosophy came into being. This is important, because, as Park notes, “by recounting philosophy’s past (what philosophy was), the history of philosophy teaches what philosophy is (the concept of philosophy)” (Park 2013, 1). Moreover, at contemporary universities the dominant mode of teaching philosophy at undergraduate and graduate level takes the history of philosophy as the main framework of teaching the subject. This, of course, is understandable as an introductory step. However, it still means that the academic discipline of philosophy and its curricula are directly linked with the dominant view of the origins and history of philosophy.

Unlike the dominant view in the current curricula of history of philosophy, Park shows that “extremely few early modern historians of philosophy regarded the Greeks as the first philosophers” (*ibid.*, 70). Instead, most of histories of philosophy in the 17th century began with “ancient Asians (Chaldeans, Jews, Persians, Indians, Phoenicians, and Phrygians) and Africans (Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Libyans) before turning to the philosophies of the ancient Europeans (Thracians, Druids, and Greeks)” (*ibid.*, 71). Park goes on to show that the formation of the philosophical canon as we receive it today in most philosophy departments occurred in late eighteenth—early nineteenth centuries, when the targeted exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy started. This was initiated by Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) and was strongly developed by mainly Kantian philosophers (*ibid.*, 76ff).

Meiners directly and falsely attacked the “delusion” of an Oriental origin of science as an alleged forgery by “non-Greek” writers to conform his story of “worldly wisdom” (*Weltweisheit*) with assumptions about the racial superiority of Europe. Thus, even if non-Europeans had anything of intellectual worth, according to Meiners, their ideas needed the cultural touch of the Greeks (i.e. Europeans) in order for these to come out of a “perennial childhood” (Meiners in Park 2013, 79).



Studying both the ethnological work of Meiners and his history of philosophy, Park comes to a conclusion that “racism and Eurocentric history of philosophy go hand in hand” (Park 2013, 82). This particular Eurocentric version of history of philosophy is still a mainstream position and the exclusivist, homogenizing effects of it are further fortified by the virtual substitution of philosophy with *history* of philosophy in contemporary universities.

This explains the charge against the current Eurocentric nature of academic philosophy as a form of “institutional racism” (Garfield in Van Norden 2017, xix). We might take a less confrontational stance and say that the current Eurocentrism of most of Western philosophical programs is more a sign of inertia, rather than of a stubborn racism. However, we still can expect that as long as the *history* of philosophy will be by far the most dominant axis around which the philosophy curricula are structured across Euro-American philosophy departments, the nature of academic philosophy will not only keep its Eurocentric bias, but will also likely stay susceptible to allegations of racism.

Adding to this exclusivist and purist vision of the origins of philosophy, two other aspects of how the discipline of philosophy functions in academia enhance its resistance to calls for diversification. There are: (a) philosophy’s striving for universalism, and (b) philosophy departments’ relative isolation from empirical sciences in today’s departmentalized and highly specialized university system.

One of widely held agreements is that all types of philosophy strive for a universal type of knowledge. Knowledge that defies the ramifications of any one place, time, or culture. Philosophers want to know what the human condition is, and not only what were the conditions for human development and flourishing in Ancient Greece, Enlightenment era Germany, or pre-imperial China. Even if we want to avoid the term “universal” as too unifying and absolute, we may simply say, along with Rein Raud, that philosophy seeks “to clarify the nature of things on the most abstract level” (Raud 2006, 621). This quest for an overarching explanatory system, however, has to arise from the particular details on the ground. That is why the great philosophers of the past were mastering methods and knowledge that in the contemporary university fall within the competence of the departments of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even health and natural sciences. On the other hand, it also has to overcome the various differences and inconsistencies that are present in the concrete details on the ground. The philosophical mind strives for and attains the knowledge that incorporates contingencies into the bigger picture.

This “universalist thrust”, Baggini claims, has many merits and yielded many positive results for philosophy and philosophers (Baggini 2018). But at the same



time, a universalist thrust can lead to a short-sighted and a mistaken view, once it is followed exclusively from within one cultural milieu without any exposure to others. As Wolfgang Welsch noted, the incompleteness of one culture “is not visible from inside the culture itself, since aspiration to the totality induces taking *pars pro toto*” (Welsch 1999, 222).

And this exposure to other (philosophical) cultures in academic philosophy is prevented from the outset by the purist Eurocentric vision of the origins and history of philosophy. In other words, a particularity is taken to be universality, and postcolonial thinkers have talked a lot about how this ends up being “Eurocentric hegemony *posing* as universalism” (Appiah 1992, 58; quoted in Baggini 2018).

Furthermore, the misled and misleading “*posing as universalism*” within academic philosophy does not get challenged and exposed as much as it could, because of philosophy departments’ relative isolation from the empirical sciences in contemporary universities. To be sure, plenty of philosophers in their philosophical practice pay very close attention to empirical data. Sarkissian and Nichols point out that “today, many philosophers working in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, moral philosophy, and applied ethics routinely and systematically draw upon the social, behavioural, and biological sciences to inform their theories” (Sarkissian and Nichols 2016, 354). However, in philosophy as an academic discipline taught at universities, the data is often subordinated to the neat systemic “grand picture”. As Nicholas Rescher stresses in his article on philosophical methodology, we do not start our philosophical quest empty handed, but rather use the data provided by common sense beliefs, the scientific facts of the day, and personal experience (Rescher 2001, 5). However, Rescher further notes, “there is nothing sacred and sacrosanct about the data. (...) For those data are by no means unproblematic. (...) What we owe to these data, in the final analysis, is not *acceptance* but merely *respect*” (ibid., 6; emphasis in the original). While I agree completely with the spirit of Rescher’s claim, but when coupled with philosophy’s universalist thrust, what academic philosophy ends up offering is often only a lip-service of “respect” to the data, without much of obligation to accept it. Field research and empirical data are not altogether discarded, that would be deemed unscientific, but are rarely made a substantial part of discussion and argument in the academic discipline of philosophy. The respect for data is much more binding in other academic disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists are more confined by empirical data, as their *respect* necessarily has to encompass a fair degree of *acceptance* of data.

To be fair, we see a significant attempt to change this situation from within academic philosophy in the form of “experimental philosophy”, or X-Phi for short,

an academic field that has been growing rapidly since early 2000s. Experimental philosophers not only incorporate empirical data in their thinking and arguments, but also design and carry out empirical research where the needed data is lacking or is inadequate. While I strongly believe that further development of X-Phi has great promise to help culturally diversify academic philosophy in the future (see Sarkissian and Nichols 2016 for similar position), so far it has mostly dealt with questions and concepts originating from European philosophical cultures.

Universality might be a *goal* of philosophical activity achieved through rigorous thought and observation by a philosopher who engages philosophical thinking as a way of life. However, the teaching of academic philosophy does not usually start from the same point as the greatest philosophers have started. Universal claims, highly abstract concepts, and overarching categorizations, instead of being arrived at, are mostly the starting point in the philosophical training starting from undergraduates. The introduction to philosophy at university rarely if ever starts with careful observation and detailed description of the particular, the different, the accidental, and contingent. It starts rather with the outcomes of this “universalist thrust”, that is, with the historical recounting of the biggest ideas formulated by the biggest thinkers. It starts from the idealized, the universal, the essential. Prescriptions how we should see humans and their environment overshadow any description of the variety of ways how humans and their environment actually are. All the particularities are left for the other university departments, which makes academic philosophy relatively blind and deaf to cultural diversity, compared to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Hans-Georg Moeller points out the following uniqueness of academic philosophy: “unlike the academic field of Religious Studies, which largely developed as an offshoot of anthropology and related disciplines and thus affirmed a plurality of religions, academic philosophy in the West was hardly open to the notion of philosophies in the plural” (Moeller 2018, 36).<sup>4</sup> Thus, this combination of a deliberately (and relatively recently) distorted story about the Eurocentric origins of philosophy, together with the thrust for universal knowledge and the relative isolation of philosophy departments from other departments in the humanities, social and natural sciences, has put philosophy in a rather unique place of continuing monoculturality.

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4 Rein Raud (2006) suggests six criteria that would enable more flexible definition of the term “philosophy”, which would be inclusive of cultural and geographical diversity and could, in Raud’s opinion, provide the theoretical grounds for, what Moeller later has called, the “notion of philosophies in the plural”. While I agree with Raud and his position contributes a lot, my underlying argument throughout this article is that the biggest incentive for diversification of academic philosophy will not come from discovery or creation of theoretical grounds, but from intensified practice of actual philosophizing that draws ideas and concepts indiscriminately from various cultural sources.

## Failure of Comparative Philosophy to Diversify Academic Philosophy

What makes the issue of “cultural homogeneity” in current Western academia truly surprising is that it persists despite the fact that the research and education on non-Western philosophy in Western universities has never been in a better position. So-called comparative philosophy<sup>5</sup> enjoys great interest both from scholars and the wider public. There are journals devoted to non-European philosophy, established journals of “general” philosophy regularly publish articles of a comparative nature, PhD theses and books on various non-Western philosophical topics are increasing in number, and professional associations help philosophers working with non-Western materials get institutional acknowledgement within Western academia (see also Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 4). What is probably most important of all, new and heavily commented translations of non-Western canon are being printed and reprinted showing a wide, shared demand. These translations often specifically focus on revealing the philosophical significance and uniqueness of these non-Western materials both in comparison with Euro-American or other non-Western tradition(s) of past and present, and also their relevance to the lives of contemporary human beings. This, however, does not mean that charges of Eurocentrism against academic philosophy, especially how it is taught in Western universities, are not factually accurate. On the contrary, they are, and sadly so (for data or links to data see Schwitzgebel 2015; 2019; Van Norden 2017, 2–3; Herbjørnsrud 2018). What deserves attention here is rather a question as to why the obvious success of an academic field of comparative philosophy has not—as of yet—translated into a significant degree of diversification of the academic discipline of philosophy? And this diversity, the data shows, is also lacking in the structure of philosophy departments, faculty, hiring decisions, and the contents of philosophy curricula. I propose that this is because the academic field of *comparative* philosophy has mainly relied on the same attitudes and approaches that made academic *philosophy* Eurocentric in the first place. Specifically, comparative philosophy has formed based on and, to a large degree, has remained overly reliant on, the *history* of philosophy as the main mode of teaching and researching. As Ganeri notes, “the ambition of comparative

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5 Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, 3–5) show that there is no common and satisfactory definition for the term “comparative philosophy”, and maybe there cannot be. Despite these difficulties and for the sake of convenience, in this article I take the term “comparative philosophy” to also encompass all other terms used in Western academia that name non-Western philosophical tradition: Asian philosophy, African philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and so on. In the vast majority of cases, these academic fields in the West seem to involve some explicit or implicit comparison of these philosophies with Western philosophical ideas.

philosophy was not to generate new philosophical insights but to protect thinkers in colonized countries from the peculiar form of intellectual servitude colonialism sought to impose” (Ganeri 2016, 135). This leaves comparative philosophy entangled in the inherently Eurocentric vocabulary and academic framework of academic philosophy, and does not allow comparative philosophy to radically challenge the extant Eurocentric orientation of the discipline. As an illustration I will briefly discuss the academic field of Chinese philosophy at modern universities. Variations among different subfields of non-European philosophies can be important here, but the main story, I believe, would remain valid.

The initial stages of research into the Chinese intellectual world, as Blitstein notes, grew up in the West from area studies (in this case, Chinese studies), where a geographical area is the prime object and binding focus of a scholarly study and they were further developed as “history of Chinese philosophy” or “history of Chinese thought” (Blitstein 2016, 137). The origins of it can be traced to classical Sinological studies, initiated in the nineteenth century, largely by missionaries and colonial administrative institutions that had a strong emphasis on language (primarily classical Chinese) and texts. As Blitstein notes, although this branch of scholars have also engaged in philosophical (as well, as religious and literary) discussions, especially the ones inherited from the Enlightenment philosophers, their academic identity was much more rooted in philology than philosophy (*ibid.*, 144–45). It means that a significant number of academics who worked with Chinese thought traditions did not identify themselves as philosophers. Such research did not have the “universalistic thrust” characteristic and indispensable for philosophy, and it did not attempt to challenge and change Eurocentric orientation of academic philosophy. Later, some departure from the mainly philological orientation followed, as the generation of scholars in the first part of the twentieth century built their academic identities not only around the study of China, but also around a set of methodologies of other academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, mostly history, archaeology, or sociology, and, eventually, philosophy. But initially, the academic field of Chinese philosophy was started not in Western, but in modern Chinese universities.

Along with introduction of Western style universities into China in the early twentieth century, the Western type of academic philosophy was been introduced. Accordingly, the making of *Chinese* philosophy as an academic discipline started with the writing and publishing of the first *histories* of Chinese philosophy by Hu Shi (1919), and then later by Feng Youlan (1931). Apparently, the Western academic framework of history of philosophy was taken as the form, and “Chinese philosophy” was modelled and framed accordingly. Hu Shi, for example, in his introductory chapter, where he explains the methodology of his trailblazing

*History of Chinese Philosophy*, quotes mostly Western authors, and Cua noted German Windelband was the main influence for Hu (Cua 2003, 10). In this process, traditional categories of Chinese knowledge were translated into modern categories of disciplinary knowledge with a Western “philosophical terminology and historical and systematic framework” (Moeller 2018, 37–38). This locked up the academic field of Chinese philosophy in a vicious circle that Ganeri describes as: “make your use of reason like ours (in which case what extra value does your philosophy bring to the table?), or admit that you are outside reason and not actually engaged in philosophy at all” (Ganeri 2016, 136). And a lot of scholars in comparative philosophy have willingly or not succumbed to this imperative by putting Chinese authors, texts, terminology into a framework of Western concepts, philosophical questions, and ideological rivalries that have formed in particular historical and cultural settings, but are, nevertheless, used as universal reference points and measuring sticks.

Thus Chinese philosophy (or, more generally, comparative philosophy) has only limited resources to impact changes in the (still) Eurocentric departments of philosophy while the *history* of philosophy remains the dominant mode and framework in which comparative philosophy functions. It is difficult to make a case that Chinese philosophers have to be taught within the introductory course into ethics, if we see these Chinese philosophers as simply “similar” to consequentialists, deontologists, or virtue ethicists. Western thinkers who formed the vocabularies and main arguments of these mainstream branches of ethical thought will always be more eloquent, more rounded, more precise in their own game than their Chinese (especially, historical) counterparts who were forming their own vocabularies and their own philosophical arguments. As we saw earlier, Park (2013) showed that the current mainstream understanding of history of philosophy is a product of the intellectual concerns of modernity. Similarly, as Moeller notes, comparative philosophy is also historically connected to modernity (Moeller 2018, 31). Thus, both the parochialism of academic philosophy and inability of comparative philosophy to challenge and shatter it are the fruits of the same tree.

### **What Should Comparative Philosophers Do?**

If my analysis is correct so far, then it follows that diversification of philosophy as an academic discipline would be facilitated by a significant—but, obviously, not a complete—move away from the mode of history of philosophy and history of ideas as the dominating framework of academic and comparative philosophy, and towards the mode of active philosophizing. Historical and cultural

contextualization, which can be adequately achieved only through a rigid study of history of ideas, is a necessary foundation, but it has to be complemented by actual reconstruction, reinvention, and reformulation of the inherited philosophical classifications and technical philosophical terminologies in working our novel ways to address *current* problems surrounding *current* societies of *current* people. I want to suggest that two academic approaches—one from within comparative philosophy and one from outside—are going in this direction and, therefore, have the most promise to shatter and change the present monoculturality of academic philosophy.

As a position from within the so-called “comparative philosophy”, I will present the idea of “fusion philosophy”, recently suggested by Chakrabarti and Weber (2016) and the idea of “post-comparative philosophy” suggested by Moeller (2018). Although these ideas were developed somewhat separately, I argue that there is a common thread running through them, one that pushes for overcoming what I have called an overly concentration on history of ideas *vis-à-vis* actual philosophizing within comparative philosophy. For the sake of convenience, I will hereby combine both these positions under the common name of “postcomparative philosophy”.

Postcomparative philosophy admits that, in Ganeri’s words, comparative philosophy is not “a branch of philosophy nor it is a distinct philosophical method: it is an expedient heuristic introduced at a particular moment in world history” (Ganeri 2016, 135), because comparison cannot be seen as a method unique to so-called comparativists. Comparison is a widely used and one of the main instruments of any philosophy, not limited to those philosophers who work with non-Western materials: “philosophy had always been comparative: Aristotle had already compared himself with Plato and other Greek philosophers he knew of; medieval Christian philosophy had compared itself with the Greeks” (Moeller 2018, 31). Chakrabarti and Weber go further, claiming “that all means of knowledge including direct sense perception are, indeed, at heart forms of comparison” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 3). This means that postcomparative philosophy contends that even in the so-called “comparative philosophy” comparison should only be seen as a means to one’s own creative philosophizing, not as an ultimate goal of academic activity. Thus, as a tool, comparative work in philosophy—and in the academic field of “comparative philosophy”, for that matter—is seen only as a stage or a phase that has to be overstepped and transcended in order for it to come to fruition.

Comparison in philosophy—and “comparative philosophy”—should not be abolished, discarded, or discredited. It simply has to be completed and complimented



with the creation of one's own philosophical position that would be other than the two (or more) positions involved in the previous act of comparing. The second reason why "comparative philosophy" cannot stick with comparison as an ultimate goal of academic research is that there are no static, stable objects that could be "compared", and, more importantly, there is no neutral position from which to compare, just as there is no neutral agent who could compare.

There is always a certain engaged "comparer" who is looking at things from a particular situation, and this situation dictates certain specific conditions. And the *comparanda* (that, which are compared) are always just ahistorical generalizations that are only provisional and should always be remembered as being such.

Chakrabarti and Weber stress we must not to forget that comparison always requires a third member (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 6).<sup>6</sup> That "third" member is, on one hand, an idea or a concept with respect to which we make the comparison, and, on the other hand, the comparer himself. As Chakrabarti and Weber put it, "compare" turns out to be "a four-place predicate: 'From his specific historical cultural context P compares A and B with respect to F'" (ibid.). What is important in this observation, is that if we keep in mind that this "third"—the comparer—can never be neutral, we better embrace that she is rather proactive, that is, that she intentionally directs her research. It means that such a proactive researcher is not "comparing" two external positions with respect to a neutral "third" position, but is really forging her *own* philosophical position. She might be drawing inspiration and insight from the first two (in positive or negative manner), but in the end—and most importantly—the outcome is a new and current (present) philosophical position. Chakrabarti and Weber call this process "fusion", and see it ultimately as an act of forward looking philosophizing, rather than backward looking comparison. Thus, their formula could be alternatively summed up as "from his/her specific historical cultural context P philosophizes about F, drawing inspiration, ideas from A and B".

To give an illustration of this point, we might think—as is often the case in the simplistic understanding of what "comparative philosophy" entails,—that by comparing St. Aquinas' and Mencius' notions of "courage", (Yearley 1990) or Confucius' and Aristotle's notions of "friendship", (He 2007) we will understand better Aquinas' and Mencius' position on "courage" and Confucius' and Aristotle's position on "friendship". Here, as the formula of Chakrabarti and Weber shows, we have to notice the twofold imposition of the "third" onto comparison of past thinkers: a comparer (either author or reader of comparison), who is culturally very different from any of the compared thinkers, and the current

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6 Ralph Weber, University of Basel, has first formulated this idea at some length in Weber (2014).



terminology, that is linguistically very different from any of the compared terms. After all, Aquinas and Mencius didn't use the English term "courage". Thus, the culturally, linguistically, and historically sensitive comparative philosophy would rather set itself a goal of such comparison to understand better, deeper, and more adequately Aquinas' notion of *fortitudo*, or Mencius' notion of *yong*, or Aristotle's notion of *philos*, or Confucius' notion of *you*, *peng*, or *pengyou*. There is hardly deniable theoretical value and academic benefits of such historically oriented scholarly endeavour, especially if we see the understanding—at least in some degree—as a hermeneutical never ending process of cognitive refinement. But, if thus constructed, such scholarly endeavour has only limited practical existential philosophical value. We would only get a more complex, refined, and nuanced understanding of Aquinas', Mencius's, Aristotle's, or Kongzi's centuries old ideas. What would, however, bring a true philosophical importance to this process is a realization that in this way we can develop *our own* conceptions of courage or friendship, make them more consistent and robust. This new understanding would be supported with the ideas we got from contemplating carefully and multidimensionally, maybe even innovatively on *fortitudo*, on *yong*, on *philos*, on *peng*, and on how these terms and philosophical positions they embody relate to our own current needs, conditions, understandings, challenges, and our own lived and experienced present. With such a realization, postcomparative philosophy is all about the active and prospective process of philosophizing, and not about the retrospective process of balancing the books.

Thus, in order not to get caught up in the dominant, that is Western, philosophical framework, the attempt has to be made to try and look for entirely different kind of cultural (philosophical) contexts and cultural (philosophical) vocabularies that various peoples might have used to express similar (but not identical) sensibilities. Burik points out a relevant distinction made by Heidegger between *das Selbe* and *das Gleiche* (Burik 2009, 3). So while looking for this alternative vocabulary that other people (cultures, philosophical systems) might have used in expressing *similar*, but not identical sensibilities, the researcher has to be ready to acknowledge important shifts in those sensibilities, allowing the initial question of interest become an importantly different, that is, *other*—although closely related—question. This is what Henry Rosemont had in mind that in the comparative philosophy we ought to stop asking to what extent other cultures provide different answers to the problems that vex us, and start asking "to what extent do these [non-Western] texts suggest that we should be asking very different philosophical questions?" (Rosemont 1988, 66). In such a fusion, postcomparative project, conclusions can rarely be made in the form of statements about an initial question. Most likely, the initial question would change significantly. Such an investigation

is better seen not as a closed circle of argumentation leading to a conclusion, but as an open spiral of argumentation, where “conclusions” are merely new and different questions for subsequent investigations. In this postcomparative framework, a question, if properly asked before engaging the comparison, is always eluding the researcher, as it lies outside of comparison.

So postcomparative philosophy criticizes “comparative philosophy” only in as much as it holds back and stays only in the historically oriented stage of comparing seemingly static and historically settled philosophical cultures, traditions, thinkers, texts, and concepts. Burik (2009) likens this challenge to the one that Heidegger levelled against philosophy: there is an important task comparative thinking can fulfil, but comparative philosophy must end. As Chakrabarti and Weber point out, comparative philosophy should not focus on “questions of sequence—which came first, which is the original—or questions of influence or direct refutation” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 230). It should not simply make claim of “correct exposition” of philosophical views and positions we already know of. Instead, it should set itself for “solving hitherto unsolved problems possibly raising issues never raised before anywhere” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 22), and to do it in a vocabulary perhaps never formulated anywhere in the past. This is why Moeller picks out the work of Roger Ames and his collaborators David Hall and Henry Rosemont as examples of philosophers who do step beyond comparative philosophy and embody the call for strengthening postcomparative philosophy. Moeller says their most decisive contribution lies in the creation of their own terminology, in the formation of their own philosophical vocabulary that does not evolve solely from within either of already existing philosophical traditions (Moeller 2018, 42). At one instance Rosemont readily admits the possibility that his and Ames’ historically oriented work at adequately presenting early Confucian ethics—as a form of what they call “role ethics”—might turn out to be a “creative misreading”<sup>7</sup> of early Confucians texts, if other, better interpretations are formulated. However, Rosemont does not see this as damaging to his (and Ames’) ultimate task to step over comparisons of the past ideas and formulate a philosophical position that resonates with the challenges we face today. In Rosemont’s own words: “even if we are both interpretively mistaken in attributing an ethics of roles to the early Confucians, it would not alter my basic point about the importance of challenging individualism and advancing an ethics of roles, for I could simply re-title this work ‘Role Ethics: A Different Approach to Moral Philosophy Based on a Creative Misreading of Early Confucian Writings’” (Rosemont 2015, 9). Rosemont’s and Ames’ attempt to “suitably modify” the

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7 For “role ethics” as both an interpretation of early Confucian ethics and “a moral vision for twenty first century” see Ames (2010), Rosemont and Ames (2016), and Rosemont (2015).

historical materials to our modern sensibilities is conscious and explicitly stated, as any comparison is subordinated to the development of their own philosophical point (Rosemont and Ames 2016, 7). This is not to say that philosophical analysis of past ideas can be wilfully manipulated or distorted. On the contrary, both Rosemont and Ames put a lot of effort to reconstruct a cultural context native to early Confucians, in order not to distort their thinking by using our own cultural assumptions, but not theirs (see Ames 2010, 41–85; Rosemont 2015, 89–110; Rosemont and Ames 2016, 17–31). However, this historically oriented work is seen as a groundwork and a catalyst for philosophical work that is future oriented. As Moeller puts it, they “employ comparative philosophy in order to eventually develop a post-comparative philosophy in its own right” (Moeller 2018, 43).

Similarly, Chakrabarti and Weber in their version of postcomparative philosophy emphasize that it “decidedly demands of the comparative philosopher not to be satisfied with the role of the comparatist. The comparative philosopher should aim beyond comparison at a philosophical argument (strictly or loosely understood) that can stand on its own” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 233). The similar call to function more as philosophers, not only as *historians* of ideas, is expressed by Ganeri, who pointed out that the comparative work with philosophical ideas “from distinct geographical regions or linguistic communities should be seen as being itself a creative one, (...) a form of philosophical practice, producing in time new measures, new philosophies, new models for the way individuals conceive of themselves and their place in the world” (Ganeri 2016, 140). In doing this, post-comparative philosophy would overcome the limitations of a comparative philosophy, stemming from its tendency to stay in a fixed set of divisions, philosophical questions and terminologies inherited from the times when philosophical investigations in the West were defined exclusively by the study of the European history of ideas. This is also a reason why I suggest that postcomparative philosophy—in contrast to its earlier comparative phase—has the potential to impact a more substantial and rapid diversification of academic philosophy.

Finally, an important thing to add is that the postcomparative philosophy would by no means seek to annihilate all differences among the various philosophical cultures and traditions by incorporating them all into a single and unitary realm of “world philosophy”. As Moeller notes, the inclusion of non-Western philosophies into the academic field of philosophy “does not necessarily lead to ‘consensus’, a ‘fusion of horizons’, or a ‘future world philosophy’. Modern society is highly complex and not integrated by one underlying rationality or common set of cognitive operations” (Moeller 2018, 41). Far from seeing it as deficiency, post-comparative philosophy takes that lack of a fully integrated, globalized version of “philosophy in the singular” as the means to challenge the current philosophy

internally “by creating a break-away semantics derived from traditions at the fringes of mainstream discourses” (ibid., 42). Moeller has called it an act of “re-barbarizing ourselves”, that is, a process of making us a little less self-evident and transparent to ourselves.

As Chakrabarti and Weber note, this requires us to “ask ‘trans-traditional’ questions that expose philosophers’ own assumptions and vocabulary to the challenge of reformulating it” (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 13). The cultural, historical, and other differences of various philosophies are a driving force for the post-comparative philosopher, because it allows her to “add clarity about the exact problem at hand” (ibid., 19) by exploring it from both within and outside her inherited philosophical culture. This explicit support for the diversity and plurality of (philosophical) cultures in postcomparative philosophy brings me to the academic field of transcultural studies as a natural ally that could contribute towards the attempts to diversify academic discipline of philosophy.

## Input from Transcultural Studies

Transcultural studies is a growing academic field, and, according to some commentators, the term *transcultural* itself “probably constitutes one of the most important and widely discussed conceptual keywords in the humanities and social sciences of recent years” (König and Rakow 2016, 89). However, so far it seems as if there is not much mutual interest or common topics between transcultural studies and academic philosophy. König and Rakow listed a wide range of theoretical fields where “transcultural paradigm” gave a “new impulse” to various topics that are routinely discussed within these fields, but did not mention philosophy (ibid., 92). All the more telling is the fact that transcultural studies and the term *transcultural* (transculturality) is virtually absent from philosophical—including comparative philosophy—discourse.<sup>8</sup> This is completely to be expected, having in mind the monocultural nature of academic philosophy. I suggest, however, that this mutual disinterest is a lost opportunity for academic philosophy. Transcultural studies are often understood as primarily a challenge to the traditional concept of culture (Blitstein 2016, 143; König and Rakow 2106, 91; Cuccioletta 2001/2002, 7; Welsch 1999). However, I see the work in this field in a broader sense as yet another turn of hermeneutical circle in an ongoing attempt

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8 Ralph Weber is the only philosopher I have managed to find talking about transcultural studies in the context of academic research of Western and non-Western philosophies (unpublished conference presentation “(How) Is Sinology about China? On the Paradigm of Transculturality”, Beijing, October 28–29, 2017).

at understanding (*verstehen*) of different cultural systems. And in as much as philosophy is a cultural system, the idea of transculturality is relevant to philosophy.

The academic field of transcultural studies has formed in a time when a range of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (cultural studies, area studies, anthropology, etc.) were in a similar situation as the academic discipline of philosophy is now. Towards the last third of the twentieth century, scholars from Asia and other areas of the Global South started challenging inherited academic terminologies, categorical hierarchies, and institutional structures that proved inadequate to account for the diversity of people and their actual practices, and for the diversity of cultural processes in the real world. As Blitstein sums up, transcultural studies represent “a critical response to the abuses of the concept of culture as a heuristic tool” (Blitstein 2016, 136). The main source of these abuses is the traditional essentialist concept of single cultures. As Welsch points out, this traditional concept was developed by Herder in the late eighteenth century and among its most distinguished features Welsch has indicated the unificatory and separatory characteristics of the concept. The concept is unificatory as it purports homogenization: a culture allegedly makes “every act and every object an unmistakable instance of precisely *this* culture” (Welsch 1999, 194).

The concept is also separatory, as it assumes strong delimitation towards the outside: “every culture is, as the culture of one folk, to be distinguished and to remain separated from other folks’ cultures” (*ibid.*, 195). This I find to be similar to the criticism towards academic philosophy that I have recounted in earlier sections. Mainly, the tendency in academic philosophy of assuming the one and only possible mode of rationality that made it “hardly open to the notion of philosophies in the plural” (Moeller 2018, 36), and the tendency to gloss over cultural borrowings or, at the very best, to depict them as being conducted between “intellectual traditions” that are seen as completely self-contained and separate from each other.

The authorship of the very term *transculturation* (*transculturación*) is attributed to the Cuban cultural anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who in his 1940 article was looking for a term to substitute the at that time widely circulated “acculturation”. As König and Rakow state, “acculturation” in Ortiz’s opinion, “failed to express that processes of interaction between groups of different cultural origin do not only result in processes of transmission, reception, adaptation, and assimilation, but also lead to the transformation and amalgamation of previously distinct cultural elements *within a new cultural synthesis*” (König and Rakow 2016, 90; emphasis added). If we change the term “culture” to the term “philosophy”<sup>9</sup> in this quote, we

9 For four possible definitions of the term *transcultural* and its uses in current academia see König and Rakow (2016, 93–95).

will recognize a similar sentiment expressed by the proponents of postcomparative philosophy. In earlier sections we saw that the ultimate goal in scholarly activity is seen by postcomparative philosophers not as “comparing” head-to-head two seemingly separate, self-contained, and self-sufficient philosophical systems, but in creating a new philosophical fusion, a new philosophical position, a new philosophical identity. And transcultural studies joins in and strengthens the challenge that postcomparative philosophers are mounting towards the monoculturality of institutionalized philosophy by highlighting—as Cuccioletta does—that “one’s identity is not singular but multiple” (Cuccioletta 2001/2002, 6). This hybrid and mosaic nature of any identity is equally stressed by philosophers arguing for the cultural diversification of philosophy. As Ganeri notes, “in this new era every philosophical identity is hybrid and dynamic, criss-crossing multiple localities of geography and epoch, transcending each and again returning” (Ganeri 2016, 137–38). As transcultural studies are built on the attempts to spell out the process of such hybridization concealed by concepts such as “identity”, “culture”, and others, it can provide a useful framework to challenge the supposedly monocultural and homogeneous nature of the concept of “philosophy”.

Looking for the most salient features of such framework, we must note that transcultural studies are resting on a cluster of interrelated ideas and concepts that can be summed up into two main pillars, each partially overlapping with, incorporating, and inviting the other. Transcultural studies (a) focus on the *dynamic* (transitional, transforming) elements of cultures and people. According to Blitstein, transculturality “assumes that everything moves and changes; it posits that stasis is only the momentary interruption of motion, and that the actual flows of persons, things, and ideas across the world prevent the definitive consolidation of any boundaries” (Blitstein 2016, 139). This recognition of a constant and continuous dynamic change requires full attention to the ongoing, the present, the lived and the practised. As Berg noted, transculturality is “a useful and fruitful concept if we approach to cultural items (...) with an empirical interest” (Berg 2011, 8). This aspect of a transcultural approach draws attention to empirical research in a much more natural and inevitable manner than an *a priori* universalistic attitude of much of academic philosophy. Moreover, transcultural studies (b) stress the *relational* nature of all our categories and concepts, thus opposing the unwarranted use of clearly delineated concepts such as “culture”, “society”, “class”, and so on (König and Rakow 2016, 95). These terms make sense only as relational, and not as essential notions, describing fundamentally static and stable phenomena. Of course, these terms can be used in an academic environment (and they surely are and will be used), but only as useful (*if* useful) shorthand terms for very complex phenomena.



Blitstein highlighted an identical structure in what he called “the (not necessarily explicit) social ontology that characterizes transcultural studies” (Blitstein 2016, 138). Blitstein labelled this social ontology as “both relational and kinetic” (ibid., 139). I would claim that this “not necessarily explicit” ontological conviction is more fundamental, encompassing not only the constitution of social groups, but of all existence. Guilherme and Dietz, noting the different connotational implications of closely related terms, like “multiculturalism”, “interculturality”, and “transculturality”, claim that interpretations of what these terms stand for “are eventually deeply rooted in cultural traditions and *ontological standpoints*” (Guilherme and Dietz 2015, 5, emphasis added). It is an ontological position that sees relations as primary, in the sense that they are not reducible to objects involved in the relation. Or as Blitstein puts it, this position assumes that “relations precede isolation” (Blitstein 2016, 139). All existence functions as a totality of fundamentally interrelated entities, were the individuating properties of any “single” entity are provisional, negotiable, and in a constant flux of becoming.<sup>10</sup> This idea directly relates to the philosophical position that some philosophers of the postcomparative bent argue for from the perspective of non-Western philosophical traditions (see Rosemont 2015; Rosemont and Ames 2016 on the relational concept of person).

Finally, transcultural studies not only draws attention to the changing, particular, and contingent, but also keeps up the version of “universal thrust” akin to philosophy, which makes the transcultural approach a fitting framework for philosophers. In the words of Slimbach:

Transcultural development begins with the realization that, amidst the diversity of cultural expression, we share common human potential and experience. From here, we discover the ways that others make sense of their world. In so doing we expand the range of alternative mores and manners, values and visions that are available to us for running our lives. (Slimbach 2005, 209)

The suffix “trans-” in the term “transcultural” suggests transcending not only one’s borders, one’s limits, while enriching, updating oneself. It suggests also the possibility to step beyond the very fragmentation and separateness of various

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10 Ralph Weber first draw my attention to ontological assumptions behind the idea of transculturality. Weber has referenced to metaphysics of relations “distinguishing between the view of ontic structural realists who reject intrinsic natures of objects and the view that proposes seeing all relations as reducible to objects and that rejects the idea of irreducible relational properties” (unpublished conference presentation “(How) Is Sinology about China? On the Paradigm of Transculturality”, Beijing, October 28-29, 2017).



cultures and philosophies. It can give rise to commonality. In this possibility lies, I believe, the potential appeal of the transcultural approach to the professional philosopher with her quest for universality that interweaves together and gives a due account to all observable diversity.

## Conclusions

In this paper I argued that the seeming paradox that the Eurocentric parochialism of academic philosophy in the West persists, despite the very significant success and expansion of academic research on non-Western philosophical traditions, can be traced to and explained by an over reliance on the history of philosophy and history of ideas in teaching and research, in both the academic discipline of philosophy and academic field of so-called comparative philosophy. My suggestion throughout this article was that a new kind of philosophy—one that addresses current issues rather than recounts the ways and concepts by which previous philosophers used to address issues of their times—would necessarily foster and strengthen the move to culturally and linguistically diversify academic philosophy. I presented positions, summed up as postcomparative philosophy, that call on us to go beyond the “comparison” stage of the process of recognizing various different philosophical cultures. As the power to diversify academic philosophy lies primarily in the hands of those who already are working with different cultures, I suggested that this power will be unleashed by comparative scholars becoming more like postcomparative *philosophers*.

Finally, I suggested that the academic field of transcultural studies is a natural ally for philosophers calling for the cultural diversification of philosophy, despite the virtually complete absence of interactions between philosophers and scholars in transcultural studies to date. The concept cluster of transcultural studies—here crudely summed up into binary schema of dynamism and relationality—provides many ways to keep formulating philosophical positions that will remain challenging to the monocultural conception of academic philosophy. Many philosophers have raised and are raising similar points, regardless of their academic and/or philosophical affiliation. Even if transcultural studies do not present a new—as in “never heard before”—idea or concept, nevertheless, as an already well-established academic field with a consistent set of core ideas and methodologies it can provide philosophers with a new impulse and stronger focus to keep reinventing, reformulating, and rearranging various ideas, regardless of the place or language of their origin.

The resistance of academic philosophy to calls for diversification is partly the result of the myopic condition of taking what is close (and, therefore, seems clear)

and making it absolute, while skipping over what is far and appears to be blurry. There's a need for a lens to correct that vision, and postcomparative philosophy and transcultural studies provide just that. Despite my effort to give here a *theoretical* overview of the problem and *theoretical* hypothesis how to deal with it, I am convinced that the diversification of academic philosophy is unavoidable, because it is getting its greatest incentive from the intensifying *practice* of active philosophers in drawing ideas and concepts indiscriminately from various cultural and geographical backgrounds. I believe the same vision is behind Henry Rosemont's dictum, that comparative philosophy has a dubious past, a very bright present, and, hopefully, no future.<sup>11</sup> As this process of philosophising across borders intensifies further, the structure and the content of academic philosophy will change in the manner of a Kuhnian paradigm shift.

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11 Henry Rosemont has expressed this idea multiple times during his various talks and conference presentations. One such occasion is documented in Sigurðsson and Rosemont (2008, 11). I thank Geir Sigurðsson for reminding me of this quote and providing its source.

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# Deleuzian (Re)interpretation of Zhu Xi

Margus OTT\*

## Abstract

I propose an interpretation of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) seen through the ontology of Gilles Deleuze. Zhu Xi is one of the most prominent Chinese philosophers, the figure-head of the so-called Neo-Confucian school, and Deleuze is arguably one of the most important Western philosophers of the twentieth century. Both philosophers presented an ontology of differentiation, whose main aspects or stages I try to analyse in the paper: Deleuze's notions of the virtual, dark precursor, field of individuation, intensities and the actual; and parallel to these, Zhu Xi's notions of the veins (*li* 理), supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太極), energy (*qi* 氣), and things (*wu* 物). It is argued that a Deleuzian (re)interpretation of Zhu Xi is possible and that it may open new tools of analysis for studying Chinese philosophy as well as create a conceptual space that can bring together concepts and practices from different traditions.

**Keywords:** Zhu Xi, Deleuze, comparative philosophy, ontology, virtual, dark precursor, actual, intensities

## Deleuzovska reinterpretacija Zhu Xija

### Izvilleček

Predlagam novo interpretacijo Zhu Xija 朱熹 (1130–1200) skozi optiko ontologije Gillesa Deleuza. Zhu Xi je eden najbolj znanih kitajskih filozofov in osrednji predstavnik tako imenovane neokonfucijanske šole, Deleuze pa je nedvomno eden najpomembnejših zahodnih filozofov dvajsetega stoletja. Oba teoretika sta ustvarila ontologiji, ki temeljita na razlikovanju. Osrednje vidike oziroma stopnje obeh ontologij in ustreznih tipov razlikovanja bom analiziral v pričujočem članku. Pri tem se bom osredotočil na Deleuzove ideje virtualnega, temačnega predhodnika, polja individuacije, intenzivnosti ter aktualnosti. Vzpredno s temi idejami bom obravnaval tudi Zhu Xijeve pojme žil (*li* 理), skrajnega pola (*taiji* 太極), energije (*qi* 氣) in stvari (*wu* 物). Trdim, da je deleuzovska (re)interpretacija Zhu Xija možna, da nam lahko nudi nova orodja analize za študij kitajske filozofije ter da lahko ustvari nov konceptualni prostor, v katerem bo mogoče združevati ideje in prakse različnih tradicij.

**Gljučne besede:** Zhu Xi, Deleuze, primerjalna filozofija, ontologija, virtualnost, temačni predhodnik, aktualnost, intenzivnosti

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) is one of the most eminent Chinese philosophers, the figurehead of the Neo-Confucian school that in the eleventh century, after several centuries of Buddhist and Daoist prominence, tried to revive ancient Confucianism, in a manner somewhat similar to the way the Renaissance in Europe a few centuries later returned to the ideas of Greco-Roman Antiquity. Another similarity to the Renaissance lies in the fact that although Neo-Confucianism promoted Confucianism, it was in fact a strongly syncretistic movement (like its European counterpart), having absorbed important influences from Buddhism and Daoism, both in theory (for instance, interest in cosmological matters) and practice (for instance, “calm sitting” *jingzuo* 靜坐 meditation).

It should first be noted that the term “Neo-Confucianism” is a Western notion that is not used in Chinese and was not the movement’s autonomy. In China, the movement is called “the study of Dao” (*Daoxue* 道學), “the study of the veins”<sup>2</sup> (*lixue* 理學) or by some other term. However, the school did intend to revive Confucius’ teaching, so the term Neo-Confucianism is not misleading (for further discussion, see Makeham 2010, x–xiv).

Zhu Xi is the most prominent representative of Neo-Confucianism, the leading figure of the so-called Cheng-Zhu school (named after the brothers Cheng: Cheng Hao 程顥, 1032–1085, and Cheng Yi 程頤, 1033–1107, and Zhu Xi himself). In place of a previous, more extensive canon of books, he selected a more reduced canon of the “Four Books” (*Analects*, *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Mencius*) which, together with Zhu Xi’s own comments, were to become the basis of Imperial examinations for nearly six hundred years, from 1313 to 1905. So, his influence on Chinese philosophy is hard to overestimate.

In his ontology Zhu Xi synthesized the concepts of veins (*li* 理), energy (*qi* 氣)<sup>3</sup> and supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太極) that had been discussed by his predecessors Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078), and brothers Cheng. Already in Zhu Xi’s lifetime his students and contemporaries were puzzled by how exactly veins and energy were related to each other, or what was the status of the supreme ultimate, and these questions have remained topics of scholarly debate until today. The paper uses Deleuze’s philosophy, and more precisely the philosophy of the actualization of the virtual presented

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1 This project was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant PRG319.

2 For this translation of the term, see below, section “Articulation and Energy”.

3 For the translation of this term, see below, section “Articulation and Energy”.

in the *Difference and Repetition* (1994), to (re)interpret<sup>4</sup> Zhu Xi's notions and their relations.

The aim of the paper is not so much to show that the Deleuzian concepts in question are the “same” as Zhu Xi's, but rather to show that the two thinkers can be brought fruitfully together and that their incongruity due to temporal, spatial and cultural differences need not be an obstacle, but on the contrary that these two disparate “images of thought”<sup>5</sup> might, by their very incongruity, open a sense of depth in thought, just as the perception of depth in the visual field is formed on the basis of two incongruous images from the two eyes (DR<sup>6</sup>, 51). This disparity between the two cannot be fully worked out in a short paper like this, but what's possible in the limited space might serve as a guiding principle in comparative philosophy in general.

### Deleuze's Ontology: Virtual, Intensive, Actual

One of Deleuze's great contributions to the philosophy of difference and differentiation was to get rid of the problem of the one and the many (DR, 182sq). To show that the question is not how one becomes many and how the many are (or are not) one, but that being is always a multiplicity and that differentiation can be described in terms of different types of multiplicity. It is never possible to produce multiplicity from the absolute One; all genetic processes must contain a multiplicity all along.<sup>7</sup>

4 Every interpretation is already a reinterpretation, a new contextualization, so their difference is rather of degree than all-or-nothing.

5 “Image of thought” is Deleuze's notion and refers to what is already presupposed when one starts to think (Lambert 2012, 1). This notion underwent a transformation: while in the earlier books Deleuze wanted to propose a “thought without image”, in his later works he rather wanted to propose a “new image of thought” (see Dronsfield 2012).

6 DR refers to the English translation of *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994).

7 The problem with the “one” and the “many” in the Western tradition is that they are “concepts of the understanding which make up the overly loose mesh of a distorted dialectic which proceeds by opposition” (DR, 182). The main target is Hegel: being, non-being, becoming, etc.: “Can we believe that the concrete is attained when the inadequacy of an abstraction is compensated for by the inadequacy of its opposite?” (ibid.) It applies also to Platonic interpretations: the notion of multiplicity “denounces simultaneously the One and the many, the limitation of the One by the many and the opposition of the many to the One” (DR, 302). Platonic idealism: the One is the “same”, and the many are the “similar”, the many represent and resemble the One. Multiplicity, instead, replaces both the one and the many, “Everywhere the differences between multiplicities and the differences within multiplicities replace schematic and crude oppositions. Instead of the enormous opposition between the one and the many, there is only the variety of multiplicity.” (DR, 182)

Deleuze first worked out the idea of different orders of differences in relation to Bergson, who had made a distinction between a *space*-like multiplicity, the elements of which are juxtaposed with each other, and a *duration*-like multiplicity, the elements of which interpenetrate each other. It is not a distinction between space and time, but between chrono-metric spacetime, whose metric lies outside of the elements involved (e.g. yardstick, a chronometer), and durational-topological spacetime, where the elements contain their metric in themselves. In the first case the distances and intervals are defined by some conventional unit, in the second case what matters is the type of relations between the elements (ordinary and singular points; saddles, nodes; etc.; see also DeLanda 2002). The first is the objectified space-time, the second is an experienced spacetime. It is clear that the elements I perceive in my surroundings or that I can distinguish in the memory of my temporal existence are not outside each other but form a field with an inner articulation whose elements are defined by their relations: every passing moment forms a whole with the rest of my memory (the Bergsonian “memory cone” that involves all my past experience) and every element of my perceptual field has relations to others (for instance, being on the foreground or background, being attractive or repulsive, eliciting certain interactions like a cup on my table, etc.).

Against this Bergsonian background, Deleuze creates a more detailed account of differentiation in the *Difference and Repetition*. The basis of differentiation is a virtual multiplicity that Deleuze describes in terms borrowed from mathematics. The *virtual multiplicity* has differential elements (e.g. phonemically relevant features like voiced/voiceless, labial/dental/guttural, etc.) that are reciprocally determined in differential relations (for example, the structure of all the relevant phonemic relations) that form singularities or attractors (phonemes). Deleuze calls this state of multiplicity (e.g. phonemic differences) *perplication* (for different “plications” see DR, 280–81).

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It might be argued that formally similar occurrences of the One and the Many in the Chinese tradition—for example Laozi §42 (cited below, section “Background in Chinese Tradition: Genesis by Differentiation”): “one begets two, two beget three, three beget the myriad things”—sit in a different context. First of all, the one is not primordial, but itself engendered by Dao. And so it symbolizes everything that appears, is manifest—but which always presupposes the non-apparent, the non-manifest. Second, the one is conceived as full of potentialities: it does not externally create the many, but has the many in itself in an interpenetrating fashion (cf. also below, section “Energy (*qi* 氣) and the Intensities”). Or, better, “one”, “two”, “three” and “myriad things” in Laozi are all multiplicities, different phases of a multiplicity. There was no need to stress the “sameness” of the One; on the contrary, the latter was conceived of as being in a continuous transformation or change (only the fact of changing does not change).

The actualization process of this virtual multiplicity begins with a “dark precursor”<sup>8</sup> (see DR, 119–122). The latter puts into communication two series of differences, two series that are incompatible, incongruous. It is the “differentiator of differences”. It is the reverse of an identity or communality (hence the designation “dark”). And like the stepped leader is followed by a visible lightning, so also the ensuing individuation covers up the dark precursor; the differentiator of differences is buried under similarities and identities, and under the extensive quantities and qualities.

The actualization takes place on a field of individuation. Just as Bergson’s memory cones together form a giant memory of the universe (at least in Deleuze’s interpretation; see, for instance, Deleuze 1991, 100), so also all things and events share the virtuality, but every one of them actualizes only a small portion of it, which it takes as its field of clarity, while the rest is left in obscurity. So, for example, my field of individuation as a human being involves things of a certain scale (usually from millimetres to meters and perhaps some kilometres, from milliseconds to a couple of decades), certain types of objects (that notably include cultural artefacts), etc. Some events in the world might be in very close relation to myself, for example the metabolism in the billions of cells of my body, but they nevertheless form only an obscure background to my existence, an indistinct white noise from which occasionally some clear voices emerge, such as when a sufficient number of cells express their need for nutrients and I experience hunger. The same applies to the “outer” experience. For example, the clear perception of the sound of the sea involves an infinite number of “small perceptions”, the sounds of all the different particles of water which I am normally unable to hear distinctly. It can be said generally that every perception is a contraction of smaller events, like also each body itself is a contraction of certain physiological and biochemical events, and those contractions are made in terms of the field of individuation involved.

What is distributed in a field of individuation are intensities, spatio-temporal dynamisms that unfold the virtual relations. The differences in the case of intensity are not wholly internal and reciprocal as in virtuality, but not yet wholly externalized either, so that its terms still interpenetrate each other. We can take as an example the experience of duration or spatial perception mentioned above. In my perceptual field I certainly distinguish parts as external to each other, but I cannot

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8 Deleuze takes the notion of “dark precursor” from thunder research. In English the corresponding scientific term would be “stepped leader” (“dark precursor” is a literal translation of the French term *précurseur sombre*, and this literal translation is used in the English translation of *Difference and Repetition*). Before the visible lightning strikes, there is an invisible stream of ions from the cloud to the earth, and when it reaches the ground, the visible lightning occurs, following the path drawn beforehand by the stepped leader.

dissect my perceptual experience in the manner I can dissect a thing. The same applies in the case of my duration: it has elements in a relation of before and after, but my whole past experience inheres in every part in such a way that I cannot dissect parts out of it. Or to put it more correctly, in a certain way I can divide my perception and memory, in the sense of taking a closer look, zooming in, but then, by this very act, the whole changes; “no part exists prior to the division and no part retains the same nature after division” (DR, 237), its “metric varies with division” (DR, 238).

Finally, the actual is formed by fully unfolding or explicating the intensities to form extensive quantities and qualities. This process can, by imagination, be extrapolated so that we may conceive of a pure spatiotemporal juxtaposition (complete externality of spaces and moments) whose parts are completely homogeneous, so that division (or duration) is completely indifferent to them. And this step has indeed been taken often in the Western metaphysical tradition, where space is conceived of as a contiguity of parts and time a succession of moments. But real systems always contain some heterogeneity of elements, and the intensities are never completely cancelled out under extensive parts and qualities.

Those different levels are simultaneous; each thing has, as Deleuze says, a “virtual half” and an “actual half”, and the individuation takes place in-between. This, of course, is not only a question of creating differences, but also of unmaking them; there also occurs a destruction and metamorphosis of actual structures. An attitude of counter-actualization is even an important existential technique. But I shall not discuss this topic in the present paper.<sup>9</sup>

### **Background in Chinese Tradition: Genesis by Differentiation**

Genesis-by-differentiation is deeply ingrained in Chinese philosophy. The paradigmatic passage is §42 of *Laozi*: “Dao begets one, one begets two, two beget three, three beget the myriad things (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物).” Compare this to another Daoist classic, *Zhuangzi*, describing the genesis of a human being: “Mingled together in the amorphous, something altered, and there was the energy; by alteration in the energy there was the shape, by alteration of the shape there was the life (雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生)” (Graham 1981, 124). There is the understanding that (1) the genesis proceeds by differentiation, (2) the actualized products do not resemble those interpenetrating phases they are differentiated from.

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9 I have done so in another paper, see Ott 2019.

This seems close enough to some pre-Socratic philosophers who also describe genesis by differentiation, and specifically, as in the case of Empedocles, through two opposing forces like Love and Strife (cf. the Chinese polarity of *yin-yang*). Later, this idea was changed with the introduction of a Demiurge in Plato's *Ti-maeus* and the Christian God, which introduce the notion of entities transcending the process involved and superior to it. Deleuze does away with this supplementary dimension, and his account of actualization by differentiation is closer to traditional Chinese accounts of genetic processes.<sup>10</sup>

The following application of Deleuze to Zhu Xi is thus rather “safe” in the sense that both speak of the same thing. My main goal is to show that the particulars of the respective descriptions can also be fruitfully made to bear on one another.

### Articulation and Energy

Zhu Xi developed a philosophy of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣. Before looking more closely at Zhu Xi's texts, however, let us consider the two terms themselves.

In his translation of Zhang Dainian's *Key Concepts of Chinese Philosophy* (2002), Edmund Ryden provides the following account:

The term *li* originally meant the lines running through a piece of jade. It came to prominence as a philosophical term during the Warring States period. It is then often translated as “pattern”. By the Song dynasty it rose to become the most important metaphysical concept and hence is generally translated as “principle”. (Zhang 2002, 26–27)

In what follows, I would like to keep the older meaning present while interpreting Zhu Xi: *li* as the veins in a jade or (an example more familiar to Westerners) in marble.<sup>11</sup> Philosophically, it denotes the articulations of a thing or an event.

10 It may also be noted that whereas some of the most dominant metaphors in the West come from pottery and herding, the most dominant metaphors in China come from gardening or grain cultivation, from seeds and plants (see Munro 2015, 130–32; Zhang 2002, 83). This also favours thinking in terms of differentiation, as we can observe the latter in the development of a seed into a plant (while the maturation of the foetus of a mammal is more hidden). On the other hand, pottery seems to fit a hylomorphic way of thinking: how to implement a form or an idea to a relatively homogeneous mass.

11 In searching for alternatives for “principle” one could also consider other words, like “pattern” or “structure”. But I would like to reserve the first term for translating *wen* 文 in the old texts, and the latter has connotations of rigidity or abstractness that are both alien to Zhu Xi's thought. Instead, veins are flexible and are naturally meant for something to flow in them.



The second concept, *qi*, is explained by Edmund Ryden as follows:

Perhaps the best translation of the Chinese word *qi* is provided by Einstein's equation  $E = mc^2$ . According to this equation matter and energy are convertible. (...) *Qi* embraces both. (...) In popular parlance *qi* is applied to the air we breathe, steam, smoke, and all gaseous substances. The philosophical use of the term underlines the movement of *qi*. (...) *Qi* is the life principle but is also the stuff of inanimate objects. As a philosophical category *qi* is originally referred to the existence of whatever is of a nature to change. (...) It is energy that has the capacity to become material objects. (Zhang 2002, 45–46).

*Qi* is often left untranslated or sometimes translated as “life-breath”, but as Ryden explains, it is not limited to animate beings. Wing-tsit Chan translates it as “material force” (Chan 1963, 784), which is a rather strange rendition (are there any other forces than material? what matter would correspond to the *yin qi* 陰氣 or *yang qi* 陽氣?). In what follows, I shall translate it simply as “energy”, although it should not be equated with the energy in the physical sense.

It is easy to understand how an ontology can be made around the concepts of veins and energy, because every phenomenon has a certain articulation and a certain energy or movement, and it can be applied both to physical and psychological phenomena. A proton is made up of three quarks, that is, has the articulation of two up-quarks and one down-quark. It also has an energy (that is partially expressed by its mass). Or psychologically: an idea, memory, yearning, etc., all have an articulation and also an inherent striving, movement or *conatus*, that drives them to the next moment, and then to the next, thus securing their duration.

It can also be argued that an energy without articulation could not manifest itself in any way, because all appearing requires that the appearing something must have an inner articulation that also makes it distinct from the rest (the inner differences of an entity and the difference of the entity itself from the outside are strictly simultaneous, with one presupposing the other). On the other hand, an articulation without energy is also inconceivable: because epistemologically speaking even a most abstract structure presupposes a subject that is holding it in her mind, and this holding is a temporal process that implies a certain energy, striving, conatus, etc. Speaking ontologically: an articulation that is not connected to any energy remains a pure virtuality without any actuality.

## Zhu Xi and the Veins

By making a connection between Deleuze's virtuality and Zhu Xi's concept of the veins, I do not mean to say that they are the same, but rather that the concept of the veins could be fruitfully interpreted in Deleuzian terms. There are some considerations that warrant such interpretation.

First, the notion of the veins appears in the context of an account of differentiation. As said above, differentiation is the mainstream ontology in the Chinese tradition, probably first developed in the Daoist context and later accepted by Confucianism and, to some extent, even by Buddhism. The veins play a key role in explaining differentiation, as does the virtual in Deleuze. Zhu Xi explicitly says that the differentiations of the veins are different (其分不同) (*Yulei* 6, 5b; QS 14, 237<sup>12</sup>).

Second, the veins are called “minute” *wei* 微 (“the most minute is called the veins” 至微者理也); this is reminiscent of the Deleuzian virtual which is said to be made of differential relations that are infinitely small. Incidentally, “differential relation” in modern Chinese is translated as *weifen guanxi* 微分關係, with the same word *wei* as for “minute”. Of course, differential calculus did not exist in the 12th century China, but there is an idea of invisible minute differences that through unfolding become macroscopic and visible. This idea can be extrapolated or abstracted even by a naive mind while observing the development of a seed, where in the beginning it is hard or impossible to apprehend any differences with the naked eye, but because we know that distinctions are developed from it, we can infer that there must have been former invisible minute differences in the seed.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the veins are immanent. Like the energy (which is related to the intensities, as discussed below) they “depend on each other and never separate from each other (常相依而未嘗相離也)” (*Yulei* 94, 19b; QS 17, 3128–29), “in the world there is no energy without veins, and no veins without energy<sup>14</sup> (天下未有無理之氣, 亦未有無氣之理。氣以成形, 而理亦賦焉)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114). It is also immanent both to the “images” (*xiang* 象, which denotes an intermediary level of actualization): “inside the images there are the veins, and there is no

12 Two references are given for Zhu Xi citations: (1) from the traditional Qing dynasty *Siku quanshu* edition, with the number of the chapter and page (a or b side), (2) from *Zhuzi quanshu* (Zhu 2002, abbreviated as QS), with the number of the volume and page.

13 Deleuze also relies heavily on embryology in his description of differentiation (DR, 214–19, 237–38, 249–51).

14 The translations from the first *juan* of *Zhuzi yulei* are from Patrick Edwin Moran's draft translation (Zhu 2003), but have been modified somewhat.

distance between them (象中有理，是無間也)” (*Wenji* 40, 41b; QS 22, 1841) and to the “things” (*wu* 物, which denotes the level of the actual): “there is nothing that does not have these veins (莫不各具此理)” (*Yulei* 18, 15b; QS 14, 606).

There is, though, a properly Chinese distinction of “above the forms” (形而上) and “among the forms” (形而下).<sup>15</sup> The veins are said to belong to the former (“the veins are above the forms (理形而上者)” (*Yulei* 1, 3b; QS 14, 115)), while actual things and events (*shiwu* 事物) belong to the latter (“form” here designates all actual things with a form and can be taken more or less simply as a synonym for “thing”). But it would be very misleading to take the “above the forms” in the sense of a Platonic realm of ideas that transcends the sensible things.<sup>16</sup> Both are invisible (“the veins cannot be seen (理不可見)” (*Yulei* 94, 17a; QS 17, 3126)), but the Platonic invisible forms belong to a completely different realm than the sensible and they can only be apperceived with the eye of the mind or reason, whereas the invisible veins in Neo-Confucianism still very much belong to our world. So, the “above” in both cases implies a completely different metaphor: the Platonic ideas are “above” as reason is above the body and the gods are above the humans, while the Neo-Confucian “above” refers to small streams flowing here and there in the hills, and only when they move downward do they acquire a more definite form of a river. Philosophically, they denote the “upstream” and “downstream” levels of a process of actualization.<sup>17</sup>

One of the main obstacles in this comparison is that Zhu Xi refers to the veins as “one”: “the veins are one<sup>18</sup> (*liyi* 理一)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114); it is the first part of the famous phrase “The veins are one and its differentiations are many (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊)”. What are we to make of this? According to Deleuze’s distinction, we could interpret the “one” of the veins as *completeness*, not as *wholeness*: the virtual is complete, but not whole. In the virtual, there is the reciprocal

15 The term originates from the *Xici* 繫辭 (*Appended Statements*) commentary to the *Book of Changes*. The *Xici* commentary or *The Great Commentary* (which is not a systematic commentary, but an independent text compiled from different sources) was composed between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC. It was later considered as an integral part of the *Book of Changes*, making up two of its “Ten Wings”. The *Xici* commentary is the most philosophical part of the *Book of Changes*, and when a philosopher cites the *Book of Changes*, very often the source is the *Xici*.

16 Incidentally, the Western term for “metaphysics” has been translated into Chinese as “the study of the above-the-forms” (形而上學), which is quite misleading (or which involves an important reinterpretation of the term).

17 François Jullien uses the French terms *en amont* (“upstream”) and *en aval* (“downstream”) to explain this Chinese conception and employs them as concepts (Jullien 2004, 42, 116 *et passim*). It should also be noted that Jullien has done pervasive work with Deleuzian inspiration with different aspects of Chinese tradition (although he rather seldom acknowledges the loans or the similarity).

18 There is no grammatical number in Chinese, so the choice of singular or plural in the translation is often arbitrary.

co-determination of differential relations and the complete determination of how singular points are distributed; however, the virtual is just one part of the object, the other part being its actualization (see DR, 46–47, 208–11). In Zhu Xi the movement of the energy depends on the structure of the veins: “If *yin* and *yang*, and five phases intertwine, without losing their sequence, this is the veins (如陰陽五行錯綜不失條緒，便是理)” (*Yulei* 1, 4b; QS 14, 116). So, the complementarity of the different modes of energy (*yin* and *yang*, five phases) could be seen as based on the reciprocal determination in the veins and also on the complete determination of singular points that are folded out in the intensive processes of actualization of the energy.

### Status of the Veins

The relation between the veins and other phases of actualization (first of all, energy), already puzzled Zhu Xi’s own students, who asked their master about it several times, and it has remained a topic of scholarly debate ever since. To begin with, Zhu Xi strongly affirms that they are inseparable: “In the world there is no energy without veins, and also no veins without energy (天下未有無理之氣，亦未有無氣之理)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114), “the veins are never separated from the energy (理未嘗離乎氣)” (*Yulei* 1, 3b; QS 14, 115). But on the other hand, he accords priority to the veins<sup>19</sup>: “the veins are before (先有理)” (*Yulei* 1, 2a; QS 14, 114 and elsewhere); “when there are veins there is immediately also the energy, but the veins are the root (有是理便有是氣，但理是本)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114); “In the final analysis, before there was either heaven or earth there were first these veins (未有天地之先，畢竟是先有此理)” (*Yulei* 1, 1a; QS 14, 113). Still, it should not be considered as a temporal priority: “you cannot say that today there are such-and-such veins and tomorrow there is such-and-such an energy (不可說是今日有是理，明日卻有是氣)” (*Yulei* 1, 5a; QS 14, 116). The veins “are not separate, yet do not mix” (*buli buza* 不離不雜, as says Qing Dynasty scholar Lu Longqi 陸隴其, 1630–1692<sup>20</sup>): they are ontologically distinct, but not separable.

However, when we try to look more closely into their relation, we are met with difficulties. There are passages where Zhu Xi seems to affirm that “the veins produce the energy (理生氣<sup>21</sup>)” or that “the energy is produced by the veins (氣

19 There are other ontologies that stress the priority of the energy, for example Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077), Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474–1549), Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692).

20 See <https://www.kanripo.org/text/KR4f0040/001#1a> (1.6b).

21 See <https://www.kanripo.org/text/KR5i0079/001#txt> (1.6a).

(…)是理之所生)” (*Yulei* 4, 26a; QS 14, 200), thus making the veins prior in a stronger causal sense. In this case the veins (as equivalent to Deleuze’s virtual) would initiate the activity of differentiation.<sup>22</sup> But taking into account certain factors (rarity of appearance, lesser authoritativeness of the texts, the general framework of his philosophy), scholars usually tend to think that it doesn’t refer to production in a chronological or causal sense, but rather means the actualization “according to” the veins, in the sense that the energy unfolds the “minute” and “above-the-forms” differences of the veins (see, for instance, Yang 2015; Chen 2016). In yet another passage, Zhu Xi says that “the veins are above *yin* and *yang* like a man riding a horse (理搭在陰陽上，如人跨馬相似)” (*Yulei* 94, 17; QS 17, 3126), which according to the metaphor would imply that the veins have directive power over the energy.

Still, in another and more developed text, Zhu Xi says that the veins are “without any will or intent, without any ability to plan, without the ability to bring anything into existence (無情意，無計度，無造作)” (*Yulei* 1, 5a; QS 14, 116); are only “a sterile and empty world that does not contain a single trace (則只是箇淨潔空闊底世界，無形跡)” (*ibid.*); (“trace” in the sense of something detectible, already actualized). According to this, the veins by themselves do nothing. Zhu Xi explains that it is the energy that gives a “place” to the veins, an anchoring point, so to say. “Yet the veins are not a separate entity. They exist amid the energy. If there were not this energy, then the veins would have no place to which to hook or from which to hang (然理又非別為一物，即存乎是氣之中：無是氣，則是理亦無掛搭處)” (*Yulei* 4a; QS 14, 115); “when energy does not consolidate, then the veins have no place in which to inhere (若氣不結聚時，理亦無所附著)” (*Yulei* 4b; QS 14, 116).

There is a similar scholarly debate about the relation of the virtual and intensive in Deleuze: which of them should be considered as the preferred ontological level? Some would stress the virtuality (Badiou 1999, 43–54; Ansell-Pearson 2002, 99, 111; Hallward 2006, 28) and see it as the source of activity; others stress the intensities (Hughes 2009, 142; Bowden 2017, 236; Lundy 2017, 183) and say that the virtual is just a structure that by itself does nothing. The quotes from Zhu Xi’s in the previous paragraph are closer to the latter interpretation; however, the passages in which the veins are said to produce the energy could be taken to support the former interpretation.

It might be useful to distinguish between priority by initiation and priority by beginning. The intensities are what initiate actualization because they are the first

22 Deleuze distinguishes between “differentiation” in the virtual itself and its “differenciation” of the virtual into actual forms (DR, 207).

stages of it. But this actualization unfolds virtual differential relations and singular points, which are the beginning of an actualization. In Deleuze's words: "The nucleus and the genes designate only the differentiated matter—in other words, the differential relations which constitute the pre-individual field to be actualised; but their actualisation is determined only by the cytoplasm, with its gradients and its fields of individuation" (DR, 251). So, the actualization of a cell begins from the DNA, but is initiated by the cytoplasm.

## Dark Precursor and the Supreme Ultimate

In Deleuze, the very beginning of actualization is with the dark precursor that brings together different orders of differences and makes them resonate. In Zhu Xi a somewhat similar role is played by the supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太極). The term was made famous by the *Xici* 繫辭 commentary of the *Book of Changes*:

In change there is supreme ultimate, which generates the two modes. The two modes generate the four images, and the four images generate the eight trigrams. (Adler 2015, 39, translation modified)

易有太極，是生兩儀，兩儀生四象，四象生八卦。

The term became popular in Daoist circles and was introduced into the Song Dynasty's Neo-Confucian philosophy by Zhou Dunyi's 周敦頤 short text the *Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate* (*Taijitu shuo* 太極圖說) that opens as follows:

Without ultimate and yet the supreme ultimate! The supreme ultimate through movement generates *yang*. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquillity the supreme ultimate generates *yin*. When tranquillity reaches its limit, activity begins again. So, movement and tranquillity alternate and become the root of each other, giving rise to the distinction of *yin* and *yang*, and the two modes are thus established. (Chan 1963, 463, translation modified)

無極而太極。太極動而生陽，動極而靜，靜而生陰，靜極復動。一動一靜，互為其根。<sup>23</sup>

23 The Chinese original is available at the Chinese text project, see <http://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=g-b&chapter=942058>.



In both cases the supreme ultimate appears in the context of a cosmological and ontological account of differentiation, at the very outset of actualization, in the position before the differentiation of the energies of *yin* and *yang*. As Zhu Xi says: “Supreme ultimate’s cleavage is just *yin* and *yang*, and it comprises all the things under heaven (太極分開只是兩個陰陽，括盡了天下物事)” (*Yulei* 94, 1a; QS 17, 3115).

There is some ambiguity in Zhu Xi. On the one hand, he equates the supreme ultimate with the veins: “The supreme ultimate is just the veins of heaven, earth, and the myriad creatures (太極只是天地萬物之理)” (*Yulei* 1, 1a; QS 14, 113) and even more bluntly, “The supreme ultimate is just the word ‘veins’ (太極只是一箇「理」字)” (*Yulei* 1, 2a; QS 14, 114).

The supreme ultimate is just the veins of heaven, earth, and the myriad things. Speaking with regard to heaven and earth, then within them there is the supreme ultimate. Speaking with regard to the myriad things, then within them there is the supreme ultimate in each of them. Before there was heaven or earth there must have been first the veins. In moving it produces *yang*, and this is also veins. In being still it produces *yin*, and this is also veins.

太極只是天地萬物之理。在天地言，則天地中有太極；在萬物言，則萬物中各有太極。未有天地之先，畢竟是先有此理。動而生陽，亦只是理；靜而生陰，亦只是理。(Yulei 1, 1ab; QS 14, 113)

But in another place, there is a dictum, where Zhu Xi says that the supreme ultimate is energy:<sup>24</sup>

Ten thousand things, four seasons and five phases come just from the supreme ultimate. The supreme ultimate is just one energy. By proceeding it differentiates itself and makes the two energies. Among them the moving (energy) is *yang* and the quiescent (energy) is *yin*. By again differentiating, it creates the five energies and then scattering it becomes the ten thousand things.

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24 In the Qing Dynasty edition of *Master Zhu's Complete Works* (1714) this citation (49.9b) was placed immediately after the previous one, although it certainly comes from a different time and context. *Master Zhu's Complete Works* actually was not the complete works and it should not be confused with the modern edition of complete works that I am usually referring to in this paper. I shall refer to this old edition as *Quanshu*. The electronic version of the chapter is available at <https://www.kanripo.org/ed/KR3a0108/WYG/049>.

萬物四時五行只是從那太極中來。太極只是一個氣，迤邐分做兩個氣。裏面動底是陽，靜底是陰，又分做五氣又散為萬物。(Yulei 3, 14a; QS 14, 163)

Although there are many citations supporting the idea that the supreme ultimate belongs to the veins, it is clear that it cannot be simply identified with them, because the supreme ultimate is creating, generating, “moving”. Explaining Zhou Dunyi, Zhu Xi says:

“By moving it begets *yang* and by being still it begets *yin*”. “Moving” is the supreme ultimate’s moving and “being still” is the supreme ultimate’s being still. When it moves, it then begets *yang* and when it is still, it then begets *yin*, it produces the energy of this *yin-yang*.

‘動而生陽，靜而生陰’，動即太極之動，靜即太極之靜。動而後生陽，靜而後生陰，生此陰陽之氣。(Yulei 94, 4a; QS 94, 3118)

But no such movement can be attributed to the veins. Zhu Xi accepts Zhou Dunyi’s interpretation that the supreme ultimate generates *yin* and *yang*. It constitutes the very first distinctions: “If there were no *taiji*, then heaven and earth would not fold themselves out (若無太極，便不翻了天地!)” (Yulei 1, 2a; QS 14, 114).

So, we might conclude that the supreme ultimate is close to the veins, but already one step towards actualization. Let us now take a closer look at the metaphor involved. The term *taiji* is composed of two parts: *tai* 太 “very big”, “great”, “supreme” (more emphatical than simply *da* 大 “big”) and *ji* 極, which usual meaning is “extreme”, “very”, “utmost”. Rao Lu 饒魯, a student of Zhu Xi’s principal student, explains the term as follows:

The term *taiji* expresses the majesty of the universal pattern (*tianli* 天理, “heavenly veins”). The word *ji* means axis or pivot (*shu* 樞), knot or node (*niu* 紐), root (*gen* 根), or basis (*di* 砥); as we say in common speech, *shuji* 樞極 (axis), or *genji* 根極 (root). (...) The word *tai* 太 means so great that nothing can be added, and expresses the fact that it is the Great Pivot and the Great Basis of the universe. All things, however, which bear this name, such as the North (celestial) Pole, the South (celestial) Pole, the ridge of a house (*wuji* 屋極), the Capital of Shang, or the four compass-point directions, have visible forms and locations to which we can point, but this *ji* alone is without form, and has no relation to space. Master Zhou therefore added the term *wu* 無 (*wuji* 無極), expressing the fact that it is not (confined to) any form such as that of a nodal pivot or a

basic root, yet nonetheless is really the Great Nodal Pivot and the Great Basic Root of the universe. (Needham 1956, 465, slightly modified)

所謂太極者，蓋天理之尊號云爾。極者，至極之義，樞、紐、根、柢之名，世之常言所謂樞極、根極是也。(…)太者，大無以加之稱，言其為天下之大樞紐、大根柢也。然凡謂之極者，如南極、北極、屋極、商邑、四方之極之類，皆有形狀之可見，方所之可指。而此極獨無形狀之方所，故周子復加無極二字以明之。以其無樞紐、根柢之形，而實為天下之大樞紐、大根柢(…)。<sup>25</sup>

According to these different metaphors, *taiji* is the highest tip (like a ridgepole), the deepest or furthest point (tip of a root), the innermost centre (pivot) of every single thing, and also of the universe as a whole. It is the incipient stage or point of a thing, a quasi-nothingness. Indeed, according to a classical Chinese saying from the *Laozi*, the wheel is understood to rotate around a nothingness: “Thirty spokes join one hub. The wheel’s use comes from emptiness (三十輻，共一轂，當其無，有車之用)” (Lao-Tzu 1993, 15). Although the focus of Laozi’s dictum is elsewhere (that you need a hole in the middle of the wheel where to put the axle and thus to make the wheel “usable”), it was also understood more generally that the centre or pivot of the very being is a “nothingness”. Of course, Daoism is something Zhu Xi wants to clearly distance himself from (and therefore also he downgrades the importance of the notion of *wuji*<sup>26</sup> “without ultimate”), but this background of the notion of the supreme ultimate might serve our purpose here to make a connection with Deleuze’s dark precursor, because both refer to the very beginning of individuation. In this sense we might agree with everything Joseph Adler (2015) says in his thorough discussion on the translation of *taiji*—that it is a generating point of a thing/event<sup>27</sup> and that things and events always manifest themselves in polarities (two ends of a thing,<sup>28</sup> two phases—*yin* and *yang*—of a process)—with the exception of Adler’s conclusion that, for that reason, *taiji* should be translated as “Supreme Polarity”. What engenders polarity is itself not polar; every polarity belongs already to the sphere of the energy, intensities. *Taiji* is not a polarity (even a supreme one), but rather the *negative* of a polarity (in

25 The Chinese original is available at <https://www.kanripo.org/text/KR3a0078/001#1a> (1.19ab).

26 According to Zhu Xi, Zhou Dunyi simply wants to stress with this term that the supreme ultimate is not a thing. But historically it seems more plausible that the *wuji* referred to a level of existence before *taiji*, perhaps some kind of primordial chaos.

27 “Like a pivot point, it is dimensionless yet constitutes the central axis of change and differentiation.” (Adler 2015, 62)

28 Indeed, the common word for “thing” in contemporary Mandarin is *dongxi* 東西 that literally means “east-west”, referring to the polar constitution of everything.

the photographic sense of the “negative”), like Deleuze’s invisible dark precursor which draws “in the negative” the path that the visible lightning will take.

This would enable us to finally surpass the fruitless aporias of the one and the many that are present both in Zhu Xi himself and his interpreters, right up until today.<sup>29</sup> It would be better not to consider the supreme ultimate as a somehow condensed duality or polarity, because this would mean that its two parts already belong together and have some similarity, thus imposing on it the fourfold yoke of representation (DR, 34, 264), subjecting the difference to the identity of the relation and the similarity of its parts. It would be better to consider the supreme ultimate as a dark precursor, a non-thing that brings together two different sets of differences, or, to put it in different linguistic terms, the place where two different sets of differences come together and enter into resonance, forming a system that will maintain in itself this paradoxical instance of the dark precursor that serves as the generating point of the system.

## Field of Individuation and the Supreme Ultimate

There is another aspect of the supreme ultimate that draws it nearer to another one of Deleuze’s notions, namely the field of individuation. Zhu Xi distinguishes between two modes of the supreme ultimate that are called *weifa* 未發 and *yifa* 已發. *Fa* 發 literally means “send forth”, “emit”, “release”, “shoot” (e.g. an arrow), “express”, “open”, “expose”. The two expressions thus mean, respectively, “not yet emitted (expressed, exposed, etc.)” and “already emitted”. The first aspect is closer to the veins or the virtual, the latter to the intensities. According to another common Chinese metaphor that sees quiescence, tranquillity or stillness as more primordial than movement, Zhu Xi also relates *weifa* to stillness and *yifa* to activity: “Not-yet expressed is *taiji*’s stillness and already-expressed is *taiji*’s movement (未發者太極之靜, 已發者太極之動)” (*Quanshu* 49, 19b). The actualization is seen as a movement from the not-expressed to the expressed: it “flows and moves in the phase of the already-expressed and is held in reserve at the occasion of the not-yet expressed (流行於已發之際, 斂藏於未發之時)” (*Quanshu* 49, 13b).

29 “Zhu Xi understood *taiji* to be the most fundamental cosmic ordering principle, which is, to be specific, the principle of *yin-yang* polarity. In other words, the simplest, most basic ordering principle in the Chinese cosmos is the differentiation of unity into bipolarity (not duality). *Wuji er taiji* (無極而太極, ‘without ultimate and yet supreme ultimate’), then, means that this most fundamental principle, bipolarity—despite its evident ‘twoness’ and its role as the ultimate source of multiplicity—is itself, as a rational ordering principle, essentially undifferentiated.” (Adler 2015, 68) It does not help if “duality” is simply replaced by “bipolarity”. It is not possible to generate a universe from “one” or from the “undifferentiated”, but only from a virtual multiplicity.

So, while the supreme ultimate's state of not-yet-expressed or emitted might be related to Deleuze's dark precursor (which is exactly the point of starting to emit, express, resonate, individuate), the supreme ultimate's state of already-expressed might be related to Deleuze's field of individuation. If according to one aspect of the metaphor of the supreme ultimate or extreme it can be seen as the genetic starting point of an individual and as the dark precursor, then according to another aspect of the same metaphor it can be seen, by synecdoche of *pars pro toto*, a part standing for the whole of the thing, as the condensation or concentration of an individual. As Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159–1223) says:

The greatest extent of anything is always in its centre. Things from all directions reach their ultimate point here and cannot go any further. Take the ridgepole of a roof. It is called the *wuji* (屋極) (terminus of a building). It is simply the converging point of all building materials from the various directions, reaching their terminus at this centre. (Chen 1986, 117)

蓋極之為物，常在物之中，四面到此都極至，都去不得。如屋脊梁謂之屋極者，亦只是屋之眾材，四面湊合到此處皆極其中。<sup>30</sup>

There is something of a “converging point” also in Deleuze's notion of the field of individuation. In that part of his ontology he relies heavily on Leibniz, who describes individuals in terms of viewpoints:

Just as the same city viewed from different sides appears to be different and to be, as it were, multiplied in perspectives, so the infinite multitude of simple substances, which seem to be so many different universes, are nevertheless only the perspectives of a single universe according to the different points of view of each monad. (Leibniz 1989, *Monadology* §57, 648)

Although the metaphor is not the same (more “physical” in Zhu Xi, and more “epistemological” in Leibniz), they share an order of implication of differences or distinctions: in Chen's citation, the ridgepole implies all its materials, while Leibniz' viewpoint of a monad implies the sensible multiplicity of a city, brought together in a “metaphysical point” and made to interpenetrate there.

What is more, the different fields of individuation in Deleuze/Leibniz, as well as the supreme ultimates of every being/event in Zhu Xi, involve all the other beings and the whole world. Only a portion of the virtual relations is expressed clearly in a field of individuation; the rest remains implied in obscurity. Zhu Xi says:

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30 The Chinese original is available at <https://www.kanripo.org/text/KR3a0107/010#1a> (10.3a).

Fundamentally there is only one supreme ultimate, yet each of the myriad things has been endowed with it and each in itself possesses the supreme ultimate in its entirety. This is similar to the fact that there is only one moon in the sky but when its light is scattered upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere. It cannot be said that the moon has been split. (Chan 1963, 638, translation slightly modified)

本只是一太極，而萬物各有稟受，又自各全具一太極爾。如月在天，只一而已，及散在江湖，則隨處而見，不可謂月分也。(Yulei 94, 71ab; QS 17, 3167–68)

So, all the supreme ultimates imply or involve each other. Supreme ultimates are immanent to each individual, they imply each other and remain differentiated:

The ten thousand things differentiate the reality of the one vein system and take it as their rhizome-body (*ti* 體)<sup>31</sup> and therefore among the ten thousand things, every one has a supreme ultimate, but small and big things all have a certain distinction.

一理之實，而萬物分之以為體，故萬物之中，各有一太極，而小大之物，莫不各有一定之分也。(Yulei 94, 71a; QS 17, 3167)

This way of individuation by differentiation<sup>32</sup> makes it possible to overcome the traditional Western analysis by genus, species and individuals that still hampers

31 *Ti* 體 is one of the key concepts of Chinese philosophy (see Gedalecia 1974). It forms a pair with *yong* 用, “function”, “application”, “use”, and refers to the “above the forms”, while function is “among the forms”. *Ti* has been translated as “essence” or “substance”, but these Western concepts, with a long history and strong connotations, are rather misleading here (in Wang Yangming, Iso Kern tries to distinguish *ti* according to these two notions, i.e., *Wesen* and *Substanz*, but I do not find his analysis particularly convincing, see Kern 2010, 189–94), because it does not form a pair with the inessential or accidental but is formed on the basis of the logic of differentiation, as the virtual level of things and events. Etymologically *ti* means “body”, and Deborah Sommer (2008), who has analysed different Chinese notions of the body, has pointed out that the *ti*-body is a kind of rhizomatic body. Of course, Zhu Xi does not here refer to any notion of Deleuze’s rhizome, and in other places uses traditional tree metaphors. But even in the tree metaphor, the emphasis lies elsewhere: while in the West, it has been mostly used to stress the hierarchic relationship—some things are more basic than the others, like the trunk and the branches—in China the emphasis lies rather on the differentiation—the trunk differentiates itself into branches and branches into leaves (in a “upstream” and “downstream” relation), and if the roots have a certain priority, it is because they come *before* in the order of differentiation.

32 See also *Quanshu* (49, 16a): “The supreme ultimate is like the root that produces what is above, differentiates itself into the trunk and branches, and then again produces flowers and leaves, producing and reproducing (*shengsheng* 生生) without exhausting (太極如一本生上，分為枝幹，又分而生花生葉，生生不窮).”



interpreters.<sup>33</sup> The beings thus actualized are not subject to any requirement of identity in the concept or similarity in realization. It would be better not to see the “one” of the veins or of the supreme ultimate as a reference to identity, but to (re) interpret it as a virtual multiplicity that unfolds into actual beings.

### Energy (*qi* 氣) and the Intensities

Energy stands for the next step in the process of actualization. It belongs to the realm of “among the forms (形而下)” (*Yulei* 1, 4a; QS 14, 115); it is “coarse” (*cu* 粗) and contains sediments, dregs or residue (*zhazi* 渣滓) (*ibid.*). This means that it is capable of accumulating (*ji* 積) and coagulating or condensing (*ningju* 凝聚) into matter or stuff (*zhi* 質).<sup>34</sup> It is this coagulation or condensation that gives veins a “place” (*chu* 處), as we mentioned when discussing them; that is, an anchoring point, so that energy can be channelled into its different branches, specific to every being and event. Without this anchoring point, the veins would remain ineffective; it is energy that gives them the capacity to actualize, and once in contact with the energy, the veins direct their actualization process. Zhu Xi compares the situation to a seed:

It is just in this way that in the entire world in the case of humans, creatures, vegetation, and beasts, there are none that are born without a seed. There is certainly no possibility of a thing or an event being born on a featureless plane from no seed whatsoever. All of this is energy. In the case of the veins there is only a clean and pure, empty and broad world without forms and traces. It cannot produce anything. But energy can ferment, coagulate, and bring forth things. But if there is this energy, there are the veins to be found within it.

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33 For instance, it distorts Kirill Thompson’s otherwise very insightful description of Zhu Xi, when he says: “*Qi* bodies forth an object’s presence and yields specificities of its peculiar tangible traits; *li* is relatively implicit for it gives the inherent patterning that yields the kind of object and its range of typical responses and interactions. *Qi* gives the particular stuff of the object and thus its distinctness and uniqueness *vis-à-vis* other things of the same kind” (Thompson 2015, 153). Here, it seems as if the veins give the specific form to a being, while the energy differentiates between individuals, just as matter has often been held responsible for the individual differences within the same species. This kind of analysis still moves under the fourfold yoke of representation, under the presupposition of the identity within the concept (here, species), and similarity in the physical expression (individuals).

34 “First there are heavenly veins and yet there is also energy. Energy accumulates and becomes stuff, and the nature is concretely present therein (先有箇天理了，卻有氣。氣積為質，而性具焉)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114); the term translated as “nature” *xing* 性 refers to the virtual aspect of a being and belongs to the sphere of the “veins”; “Energy can ferment, coagulate, and bring forth things (氣則能醞釀凝聚生物也)” (*Yulei* 1, 5a; QS 14, 116).

且如天地間人物草木禽獸，其生也，莫不有種，定不會無種子白地生出一箇物事，這箇都是氣。若理，則只是箇淨潔空闊底世界，無形跡，他卻不會造作；氣則能醞釀凝聚生物也。但有此氣，則理便在其中。(Yulei 1, 5a; QS 14, 116)

The two most important characteristics of energy, according to Zhu Xi, are movement and transformation. The movement of energy has two basic aspects, *yin* and *yang*, or rest and movement (so that energy in a deeper sense is the movement of or alternation between rest and movement). Zhu Xi often cites the *Xici* commentary of the *Book of Changes*: “A *yin* and then a *yang* is called the Way, and what gives continuity to it is good (一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也)”, where the “continuity” is “the end of rest and the beginning of movement (靜之終，動之始)” (Yulei 1, 3a; QS 14, 115).<sup>35</sup> Continuation and alternation are two important aspects of energy: “If there were just an opening out followed by a closing in, but no continuation, then (the process) would be stifled (若只一開一闔而無繼，便是闔殺了)” (ibid.). Movement and stillness are equi-primordial: before rest there is movement, and before movement there is rest, endlessly.

(Alternations between) movement and rest are without an end, and (alternations between) *yin* and *yang* are without a beginning; so, it is not possible to distinguish between former and later. For the moment I will address myself to the place of origination to speak of it. Before movement there is, after all, rest (...), before *yang* there is *yin*; yet before (...) rest there is movement. What should be taken as prior and what as posterior? One cannot simply say that today’s movement is taken to be the beginning and neglect to mention the rest that was there yesterday. Take breathing for instance, if we say *huxi* (exhale-inhale) then it sounds right; we cannot say *xihu* (inhale-exhale).<sup>36</sup> But before exhalation there is, after all, inhalation and before inhalation there is exhalation.

動靜無端，陰陽無始，不可分先後。今只就起處言之，畢竟動前又是靜，[...] 陽前又是陰，而[...]靜前又是動，將何者為先後？不可只道今日動便為始，而昨日靜更不說也。如鼻息，言呼吸則辭順，不可道吸呼。畢竟呼前又是吸，吸前又是呼。(Yulei 1, 1b; QS 14, 113–14)

35 The idea of a differential between rest and movement is later developed by Tan Sitong (Tan 1984, chap. 15).

36 That is, the word for “respiration” in Chinese is a compound word where by convention the exhalation is mentioned first; to say it in reverse order is incorrect linguistically but would be equally correct with regards to the phenomenon referred to.

It is also important that Zhu Xi rejects any easy identification of the veins with the “one” and energy with “many”:

When we discuss the one origin of ten thousand things, then the veins is the same and the energy differs; if we look at the different rhizome-bodies of the ten thousand things, then they are close according to their energy, whereas the veins are definitely not the same. Energy can be different in its purity or admixture; the veins can be different in their partiality or wholeness.

論萬物之一原，則理同而氣異；觀萬物之異體，則氣猶相近，而理絕不同也。氣之異者，粹駁之不齊；理之異者，偏全之或異。(Wenji 46, 12b; QS 22, 2130).

Differences in the energy and in the veins have consequences on both the moral and ethical plane: for instance, a sage’s energy is purer than that of a “small person” (*xiaoren* 小人). This also explains man’s superiority over animals: it is not a difference of nature, but of degree (in purity and wholeness).<sup>37</sup> However, a more detailed discussion of Zhu Xi’s moral psychology lies outside the scope of this paper.

Although the description of intensities by Deleuze and that of energy by Zhu Xi are certainly not identical, it still holds that both refer to the creation of spatiotemporal structures, and that during this process the mutual interpenetration of different individualizing factors decreases and spatiotemporal juxtaposition increases, so that, indeed, the beings (coagulate). Zhu Xi distinguishes a separate phase here, one that precedes the completely actualized things, namely the “five phases”<sup>38</sup> (*wuxing* 五行): wood (*mu* 木), fire (*huo* 火), earth (*tu* 土), metal (*jin* 金), and water (*shui* 水). Usually, the term *qi*, or “energy”, is applied both to *yin-yang* and to five phases, but Zhu Xi sometimes makes the distinction where he reserves the

37 The Brothers Cheng, whom Zhu Xi often cites, use the metaphor of river to explain the purity of energy or lack of it: a river is pure when it comes from the fountain, but some rivers soon become muddy, while others remain pure until they reach the sea. Zhu Xi also uses another metaphor: “The activity of production by transformation is like a grindstone wheel which rotates on and on without stopping. The production of the myriad creatures is like things being thrown off from the wheel, some things are coarse, and some things are fine, and (the process) is naturally uneven (造化之運如磨，上面常轉而不止。萬物之生，似磨中撒出，有粗有細，自是不齊)” (*Yulei* 1, 11b–12a; QS 14, 121). While there is a normativity here, which is alien to Deleuze, the intensive processes are described as naturally different, which is a common trait with him.

38 They used to be translated as “five elements”, due to some similarity to Greek four elements, but these systems are very different. The Chinese *wuxing* 五行 comprises the word *xing* 行 “to move”, “to walk”. And those five “movements” are seen in a dynamic relation of production and overcoming (which is why they can be seen as “phases” of a process).

term *qi* only for *yin-yang* and terms the five phases as *zhi* 質 “stuff”, “matter”.<sup>39</sup> In any case it is clear that they represent a further step of actualization by their greater number (five instead of two) and by their more concrete content (wood, fire, etc.; although, of course, these terms do not refer only to the empirical wood or fire, but to a certain quality of processes and things).

We could take the *yin-yang* as a symbol of the heterogeneity of the series of differences brought together by the dark precursor or not-yet-emitted *taiji*. It is easy to construe the *yin-yang* in terms of oppositions: submissive-dominant, cold-hot, dark-light, etc. But through Deleuze’s lens we could consider these oppositions as the covering over of a deeper disparity. Those opposites or complementary aspects should be regarded not as primordial, but as derived, that is, produced in the process of actualization and of the cancellation of difference under qualities and quantities.

It may also be repeated here that, at every step, Zhu Xi stresses the mutual immanence of different levels of actualization: “in the world there is no energy without veins, and no veins without energy (天下未有無理之氣，亦未有無氣之理。氣以成形，而理亦賦焉)” (*Yulei* 1, 2b; QS 14, 114); “in moving, energy relies on these veins, and when energy coagulates, then veins are also in it (此氣是依傍這理行，及此氣之聚，則理亦在焉)” (*Yulei* 1, 4b–5a; QS 14, 116). Energy is the impetus of a thing or a process and the veins are its articulations.

## Actualized Things

The final stage of an actualization process is the actual things and events. There are different terms for this in Chinese: *wu* 物 “thing”, *wanwu* 萬物 “ten thousand things” (that is, all things), *shiwu* 事物 “events and things”, *xing* 形 “form”, *qi* 器 “utensils” (considered in a very broad sense that every being is a “utensil” of the Dao), and others. As we saw above, already the energies belong to the “among the forms” (*xingerxia* 形而下); this holds even more true for the actualized things. Here, the word “form” refers to a *metrical* form, a being that has become

39 “*Yin* and *yang* are energies. The five phases are stuff. It is necessary to have stuff to bring out things and events. Although the five phases are stuff, they also (each) have their own energies, by means of which they make these things and events. But it is the two energies of *yin* and *yang* themselves that differentiate and produce the five phases. It is not the case that outside of *yin* and *yang* there are five phases that have a separate existence (陰陽是氣，五行是質。有這質，所以做得物事出來。五行雖是質，他又有五行之氣做這物事，方得。然卻是陰陽二氣截做這五箇，不是陰陽外別有五行)” (*Yulei* 1, 13b; QS 14, 123). Zhu Xi also says that *yin* and *yang* take each other as a substrate or stuff: “*Yin* takes *yang* as its stuff, and *yang* takes *yin* as its stuff (陰以陽為質，陽以陰為質)” (*Yulei* 1, 16a; QS 14, 125).

spatio-temporally juxtaposed to others and temporarily stabilized; it should not be taken in the sense of form as opposed to matter.

At this final stage of actualization, the interpenetration ceases, and self-identity is formed:

“A thing is something that if it moves, then it is not still, and if it is still, then it does not move”. It is called an implement among-the-forms. It is among the forms and therefore cannot interpenetrate, so that when it moves, then its stillness disappears, and when it is still, its movement disappears. Like water is just water and fire is just fire. Or in case of people, when she speaks, she is not silent, and when she is silent, she does not speak. Or in case of things, if it flies, it is not a plant, and if it is a plant, it does not fly.

‘動而無靜，靜而無動者，物也。’此言形而下之器也。形而下者，則不能通，故方其動時，則無了那靜；方其靜時，則無了那動。如水只是水，火只是火。就人言之，語則不默，默則不語；以物言之，飛則不植，植則不飛是也。(Yulei 94, 61a; QS 17, 3160)

We see that, far from being a grounding and starting principle, self-identity is the very last “thing” to form, concealing the virtual multiplicity and putting a stop to mutual interpenetration. It is only now that water is just water,  $A=A$ , a naked repetition. Of course, this is only partially or relatively true, because there are always some processes of counter-actualization.

A person certainly has movement inside stillness and stillness inside movement; it is also called a thing. When we talk about things we refer to the fact that the form and implement has a certain rhizome-body, but it has inside itself a change and interpenetration. It must be kept in mind that an implement is also the Way and the Way is also the implement,<sup>40</sup> no implement can be taken separately from the Way. This is the rule for all things. Like this bamboo chair here is certainly an implement, and when we make use of it, it certainly has a Way inside itself.

人固是靜中動，動中靜，亦謂之物。凡言物者，指形器有定體而言，然自有一個變通底在其中。須知器即道，道即器，莫離道而言器可也。凡物皆有此理。且如這竹椅，固是一器，到適用處，便有個道在其中。(Yulei 94, 63a; QS 17, 3161–62).

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40 This echoes the famous Buddhist saying from the *Heart sutra* that form is emptiness and emptiness is form.

From the Western tradition, Deleuze's ontology seems to be well suited to describe the different Chinese notions for actualized things. It shows how each one of them has its supreme ultimate and veins immanent to them, as a singular entity, and also how they, to a certain extent, still interpenetrate each other. The identity of a form or of an idea is not presupposed, but forms during the process of actualization.

## Mutual Aid

The Deleuzian interpretation of Zhu Xi presented in this paper can be beneficial to the research into both philosophers, and it may be useful not only in the realm of philosophy, but also as in a wider realm of cultural communication.

First, this interpretation could help to explain some classical problems in the exegesis of Zhu Xi (for instance, the relation between veins and energy, or between the supreme ultimate and veins or energy). This analysis can also be broadened to other domains of Zhu Xi's thinking, like his analysis of heart/mind (*xin* 心), nature (*xing* 性) and feelings (*qing* 情) that are related to his ontology of veins and energy,<sup>41</sup> or to his methods of counter-actualization, like enlargement of knowledge (*zhizhi* 致知), investigation of things (*gewu* 格物), quiet sitting (*jingzuo* 靜坐), seriousness (*jing* 敬), and others. Furthermore, a similar analysis could be applied to other Chinese philosophers that have a philosophy of differentiation as their background (that is, to most Chinese philosophers).

Deleuze's philosophy, on the other hand, would gain through this comparison new areas of relevance and at least some scholarly debates (for instance, the debate of the primacy of the virtual versus that of the intensities, mentioned in section "Status of the Veins") in Deleuzian studies could be related to debates in the Zhu Xi studies. Deleuze has already had great influence in the research into affect, embodiment and art (e.g. Sauvagnargès 2013). The new areas of relevance, opened by the connection with the Chinese tradition (e.g. intensities and *qi* 氣), could also help to elucidate certain Deleuzian concepts (e.g. the Body-without-Organs).

Second, it can be useful for more general cultural communication and the creation of a new self-understanding. Let me provide an example. The topic of mind and body continues to be an object of heated discussions, and although it is both philosophically and scientifically clear that a strong dualism of mind and body is not a viable theory, this dichotomy still strongly influences our attitude towards

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41 So that the nature corresponds to the veins, feelings to the energy and the heart/mind is an intermediary notion. This introduces the topic of subjectivity and adds further details to the scheme.



ourselves and our bodies, towards medicine and the ways of and reasons for doing sports, yoga or tai chi, etc. As I have often found with my students, if a Westerner is pushed to make explicit her folk theories, she still tends to present some form of Platonism, with clear dichotomies of mind and body, inextensive and extensive, one and many, etc. However, upon closer scrutiny, these views turn out to be both philosophically and scientifically untenable.<sup>42</sup>

Instead, it would be more fruitful to consider our psychophysical being as a multiplicity that is simultaneously played out on different levels: virtual, intensive, actual. And if we adopt this kind of Deleuzian ontological framework we can also, with the help of the interface presented here,<sup>43</sup> make a fruitful connection to Chinese concepts and practices. In the present paper, a bridge was built to Zhu Xi's ontology, but it may also be connected to certain practices, like *wushu* 武術 or *qigong* 氣功, which, among other notions, make use of the concept of *qi* 氣. As already hinted above, this notion has posed serious problems to Western understanding. What is it? Is it psychological or material? This (false) dichotomy has several negative consequences. For example, if it is conceived as something material, it may give occasion to futile efforts to detect it with some apparatus. And if the apparatus fails to detect it, then it may be pronounced unreal and inexistent. On the other hand, *qi* may be considered as something mystical, a completely unexplainable power, which can lead to an unscientific and even anti-scientific worldview.

Instead, within the framework of a Deleuzian ontology this kind of dichotomy of mind and body disappears. There is a psychophysical multiplicity on different levels of interpenetration/juxtaposition, and *qi* can be considered the "energy" with which one's psychophysical reality or "veins" are actualized. It is *neither* physical *nor* psychic, nor is it psychophysical without differentiation; instead, it is *both* physical *and* psychic, *yet* simultaneously unfolds on different levels of interpenetration, and with varying power of actualization. In this way, for instance, *taijiquan* 太極拳 or *qigong* may help the practitioner to enhance her power of actualization, without the need to become a reductionist materialist or a reductionist mysticist.

In practical terms, it may help to overcome, on the "somatic" level, both the "cult of body", in the sense of fetishizing a certain (actualized) form of the body, and

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42 Philosophically, the Cartesian dualism was immediately overcome by Spinoza's monism and has since never ceased to be overcome in various different ways (Deleuze's work may be counted among them). Scientifically let me just mention the Embodiment Theory (see Shapiro 2014) and the work of Antonio Damasio (1994), among numerous others.

43 And elsewhere, like in the work of F. Jullien (2004) mentioned above.

the contrary “neglect of body” (cf. Wang 2010), and, on the “intellectual” level, both the “cult of knowledge”, in the sense of idolatrizing knowledge for knowledge’s sake, and the “despising of knowledge”, which has spread recently in the post-factual world. What is central, are not the actualized bodily or intellectual forms (or empty and simply nihilistic reactions against them), but the “energy” to produce forms and the “veins” that are implied in them. Our main attention in self-cultivation and social practices should take place on those two ontological levels, in order to be able to create better personal and social forms. This is also related to the topic of counter-actualisation (undoing existing actual forms in order to make new ones, cf. Sholtz 2016) that I have discussed elsewhere (Ott 2019).

In order to achieve this fruitful resonance between traditions, proper philosophical work is needed, because there is no common ground between modern science and Chinese self-cultivation techniques. It is necessary to search for their ontological underpinnings, so that through their incongruity or disparity an ontological depth would open, as mentioned at the beginning of the article. With the help of this conceptual space, philosophies and practices from different traditions can be utilized.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I analysed some key concepts of Zhu Xi’s ontology in terms of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy. In particular, I interpreted the veins (*li* 理) in terms of the virtual; the supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太極) in the state of “not yet emitted” (*weifa* 未發) in terms of the dark precursor and in the state of “already emitted” (*yifa* 已發) in terms of the field of individuation; the energy (*qi* 氣) in terms of the intensities or spatio-temporal dynamisms; and the various terms for things (*wu* 物 “thing”, *xing* 形 “form” or *qi* 器 “utensils”) in terms of actualized things. There are some distinctions between stages of actualization (for example, between *yin-yang* 陰陽 and the “five phases” *wuxing* 五行) that do not appear in Deleuze, and the correspondences are certainly not exact, but there is a general homology in their descriptions due to the subject matter itself, namely the logic of differentiation.

I describe Zhu Xi’s account of differentiation on its different levels and aspects: (1) the veins being enveloped into (2) a supreme ultimate and unfolded from (3) the stage of not-emitted to already-emitted, (4) through the bipolar action of *yin-yang* and (5) fivefold interaction of the five phases to (6) the ten thousand ‘coagulated’ things. I then argue that it can be (re)described in Deleuzian terms of the actualization of (1) a virtual multiplicity, (2) the unfolding of differential relations and singular points, through (3) the action of a dark precursor, on (4)

fields of individuation, through (5) spatio-temporal dynamisms to (6) actualized beings and events. Of course, it should be borne in mind that these phases are not (only) successive, but that the virtual and actual are two halves of a thing and that there are no veins or energy separated from things, and vice versa.

Finally, the potential mutual support between Deleuze and Zhu Xi was briefly laid out, both in the sphere of philosophy and in that of intercultural communication. A philosophical conceptual work can create a “space” in which one can inscribe elements from different traditions that otherwise have no common ground, and hence no relevance to each other.

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# Chinese Philosophy and Universal Values in Contemporary China<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Consistent with its growing economic, political and military might, China wants due recognition by and engagement with the global community of nations. This aspiration is complicated by the fact that Chinese political leaders and intellectuals continue to struggle with how “Chinese values” fit with “universal values”, and whether there is a single global modernity or whether there are multiple modernities and multiple—perhaps competing—universal values. In this paper I examine how some prominent Chinese philosophers are engaging with these issues, despite the fact that in 2013 the topic of “universal values” was prohibited as a discussion topic in universities on the mainland.

**Keywords:** universal values, *tianxia*, Chen Lai, Xu Jilin, Ge Zhaoguang

## Kitajska filozofija in univerzalne vrednote v sodobni Kitajski

### Izvelek

Kitajska si v skladu s svojo naraščajočo gospodarsko, politično in vojaško močjo želi ustreznega priznanja in sodelovanja z globalno skupnostjo narodov. Zaplete pri tem prizadevanju povzroča dejstvo, da se kitajski politični voditelji in intelektualci še vedno spopadajo z vprašanjem, kako se »kitajske vrednote« ujemajo z »univerzalnimi vrednotami« in ali obstaja enotna svetovna modernost, ali pa je nemara več modernosti in več – morda v medsebojnem tekmovanju – univerzalnih vrednot. V tem članku proučujem, kako se nekateri vidni kitajski filozofi soočajo s temi vprašanji, čeprav je bila leta 2013 na univerzah na celini tema »univerzalnih vrednot« kot razpravna tema prepovedana.

**Ključne besede:** univerzalne vrednote, *tianxia*, Chen Lai, Xu Jilin, Ge Zhaoguang

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Consistent with its growing economic, political and military might, China wants due recognition by and engagement with the global community of nations. This aspiration is complicated by the fact that Chinese political leaders and intellectuals continue to struggle with how “Chinese values” fit with “universal values”, and whether there is a single global modernity or whether there are multiple modernities and multiple—perhaps competing—universal values. This essay examines how some prominent Chinese philosophers and intellectuals are engaging with these issues, despite the fact that in 2013 the topic of “universal values” was prohibited as a discussion topic in universities on the mainland. Key Chinese intellectuals introduced include Chen Lai, Zhao Tingyang, Xu Jilin, Ge Zhaoguang, Guo Qiyong and a range of younger academics associated with the Kang Clique (*Kang dang*), as well as Confucian revivalists who self-consciously identify as so-called “Mainland New Confucians”. Attention is also paid to both advocates and critics of attempts to revive the idea of *tianxia*, “All under Heaven”. The essay concludes with a short reflection on whether a new sort of *tianxia* world order might already be with us.

## Background

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed the growth of an influential movement in Taiwan and Hong Kong to “Sinicize” (*Zhongguohua* 中國化) or “indigenize” (*bentuhua* 本土化) the social sciences, in particular social psychology, anthropology and sociology (Chang 2005). The movement promoted a return to the cultural roots of “being Chinese” and the development of “Sinicized” social and behavioural science approaches to research. In Taiwan, the indigenization process began under the name of “*Zhongguohua*” (Sinicization) because, in the social sciences, China was regarded as the “local” during the 1980s. The term *bentuhua* was also adopted to refer to this same idea. By and large, the term *Zhongguohua* represented the claim that the social sciences (or particular social science disciplines) should be grounded in local/regional culture, experience, and perspectives, where “local/regional” variously refers to a somewhat vague notion of “China” or Chinese society (including Taiwan), or to particular “*Huaren* 華人” (Sinitic) societies, or to Taiwan. The basic theme of the movement was that Chinese social scientists should be self-conscious, self-critical, and independent (that is, not subordinated to the West) so as to contribute to making the world’s social science disciplines more cosmopolitan and globalized through proper acknowledgement being afforded to national and cultural particularities.

By the mid-1980s, however, the term “indigenization” as used in Taiwan came to refer to the process of “Taiwanization” in the cultural and political arenas.

With the end of martial rule and removal of press restrictions in 1987, and the emergence of Taiwanese cultural nationalism that same decade, renewed interest in Taiwanese history and culture began to consolidate and assert itself in both intellectual and popular discourses. The Kuomintang's 1991 abandonment of its claim to be the legitimate government of all China and the implementation of a democratic electoral system at the national level legitimized political and intellectual interest in a Taiwanese identity. Sinicization gradually lost favour in Taiwan during the 1990s as a consequence of the changing political landscape,<sup>2</sup> but during the same period the terms "Sinicization" and "indigenization" both found support among anthropologists and psychologists on the mainland (*ibid.*, 245; Qiao 2001; Xu 2001).

It was also in the 1990s that a similar trend gradually became embedded in the field of Chinese philosophy, particularly on the mainland. However, unlike the Sinicization movement in 1970s and 1980s Taiwan, here the goal of recognizing the local was not subordinated to that of introducing a Chinese voice into the discipline of philosophy in order to make the discipline more global and more cosmopolitan and thereby reinforce the discipline's universalist claims. Rather, the case of Chinese philosophy emerged as a response to the perceived threat that the universalist claims of theory posed to the particularity of local cultural identity.

A watershed in this process of development occurred in the early years of the new millennium with the so-called legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate (*Zhongguo zhexue de hefaxing* 中國哲學的合法性) (Defoort 2001; Defoort and Ge 2006). Many Chinese academics argued that "Western philosophy" had yet to acknowledge "the legitimacy" of Chinese philosophy and to engage it as an equal partner in dialogue. Others further insisted that the articulation and development of China's philosophical heritage must draw exclusively on the paradigms and norms of China's indigenous traditions, and that paradigms and norms derived from the West, in particular, are not only inappropriate but hegemonic and/or

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2 The Democratic Progress Party, formed in 1986, won the presidential elections for the first time in 2000. The ascendancy of the Democratic Progressive Party was accompanied by a deepening movement to "indigenize" political, social, and cultural institutions on the island, in which indigenization (*bentuhua*) came to function as a type of nationalism that championed the legitimacy of a distinct Taiwanese identity, the character and content of which should be determined by the Taiwanese people. Many proponents of indigenization in Taiwan regard it quite specifically as a project of desinicization: an attempt to remove the yoke of "Chinese" colonial hegemony so that Taiwan's putative native (*bentu*) identity could be recognized and further nurtured. For these proponents, the role of the Other in the indigenization paradigm is identified with a monolithic conception of China and Chineseness, which is typically portrayed as inimical to the integrity of Taiwanese identity.

ill-suited to China's national "conditions". For example, writing in 2009, the Hong Kong philosopher Shun Kwong-loi 信廣來 insisted that: "It is by studying Chinese ethical thought on its own terms that we can bring out its more distinctive ideas, which can then be fleshed out and developed without being shaped by agendas set by Western philosophical discussions" (Shun 2009, 476). Shun drew attention to the consequences of the modern default practice of using Western concepts and frameworks for doing comparative work between Chinese and Western philosophies, noting that, "while we see frequent deployment of Western philosophical frameworks in the study of Chinese thought, we rarely encounter the reverse phenomenon, namely, the deployment of Chinese philosophical frameworks in the study of Western thought". He continues:

... We see engaged discussions of such questions as whether Mozi is a utilitarian, but not whether John Stuart Mill is a Moist or endorses *jianai* 兼愛. We find debates about whether traditional Chinese thought has a conception of rights but not whether Western traditions have a conception of *li* 理. And, more recently, we see debates about whether Confucian ethics is a form of virtue ethics but not about whether Aristotelian ethics is a form of *lixue* 理學. (ibid., 456–57, 472)

Support for these kinds of concerns was, in turn, bolstered by a robust Confucian-centred Chinese cultural nationalism: a movement based on the ideological conviction that Confucianism is a cultural formation integral to the identity consciousness of the Chinese (*Zhonghua* 中華) nation.

### Universal Values and their Discontents

Similar views were also raised in the context of *guoxue re* 國學熱 or National Learning fad that also peaked at the end of the first decade of the new millennium (Makeham 2011). Although definitions of *guoxue* vary, often considerably, most Chinese scholars seem to favour a broad definition, usually along the lines of "a general collective term for traditional Chinese culture", "traditional Chinese scholarship" or "research on Chinese culture". A major figure in instigating both the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate and reviving *guoxue* is Chen Lai 陳來. He is currently Professor of Philosophy at Tsinghua University and the Dean of Tsinghua University's Guoxue yuan 國學院, which goes by the English name of the Academy of Chinese Learning. In a notable article published in the *Guangming ribao* in 2010 he wrote:

Historians long ago pointed out that China's several thousand years of unbroken historical record is unique in the world. The principles informing all social sciences must be subjected to and validated by the test of China's historical experience before their veracity can be proven. The National Learning fever helps people to reflect critically upon the standpoint from which Western culture takes the particular to be the universal; to reflect critically upon the importation or transplantation of Western systems of learning; and, by taking due account of China's experience and China's wisdom, establish a subjectivity for Chinese culture, and promote the equal exchange of the world's many cultures. (Chen 2010)

Other protagonists at the time also expressed concerns about the effects of Western systems of learning in China. For example, some worried that because classical studies—an inalienable part of National Learning—has been reduced to philosophy, philology, history, or anthropology, this had led to methodological confusion and impeded true understanding (Chen 2009, 178). Others despaired that:

The Western system of academic disciplines has led to the breaking up and fragmentation of China's traditional learning. Because of this, *guoxue* cannot exist and develop as an organic whole. Consequently, it is difficult to guarantee that China's traditional learning and culture can exert a strong influence among the national cultures of the world. (Jiao 2010)

Still others similarly complained that traditional bodies of learning associated with the bibliographic taxonomy of the Four Divisions, the *Sibu* 四部—classics, histories, masters and collected writings—had not only each been subjected to dislocation, but that the knowledge contained in each had become mere “material” for disciplines introduced from the West (Zhu 2009).

Since then, complaints about Western cultural imperialism have not been the concern of academics alone; concerns about the cultural particularly of so-called universal values have also become a major issue for China's leaders. Consistent with its growing economic, political and military might, China wants due recognition by and engagement with the global community of nations. This aspiration is complicated by the fact that Chinese political leaders and intellectuals continue to struggle with how “Chinese values” fit with “universal values” and global institutions, and whether there is a single global modernity—one perhaps China can shape—or whether there are multiple modernities and multiple—perhaps competing—universal values.<sup>3</sup>

3 To belabour the obvious, the presumption that “multiple modernities” implies “multiple universal values”, is problematic, not least because of the implication that universality can be multiple.

In the wake of the PRC leadership transition to President Xi Jinping in mid-November, 2012, the party-state's hostility to universal values increased notably.

This shift was most evident when Liu Qibao 劉奇葆 became the head of the Publicity Department, which oversees propaganda. Early in 2013, a notice was sent to universities about "seven prohibited topics of discussions" (*qi bu jiang* 七不講). Universal values topped the list of prohibited topics, and there remains significant reticence about discussing this topic openly.

President Xi Jinping's most important speech on universal values was given at the Central Party School at the end of 2015, in which he berated foreign powers for using Western "universal values" to subvert China's socialist ideology:

Within and beyond the nation, various antagonistic powers are always trying to undermine what our Party stands for. Most damagingly, they plot to get us to cast aside our faith in Marxism and discard our belief in Socialism and Communism. And even some of our comrades within the Party, who haven't clearly perceived the hidden agenda therein, think that since Western "universal values" have endured for several centuries, why shouldn't we identify with them? What's wrong with borrowing some Western political discourse? It won't bring any great harm ... These people thus unwittingly become a cheer squad for Capitalist ideology. (Xi 2016)

In going on to address the topic of strengthening the Party's work on theoretical education, Xi Jinping stressed the need for Party educators to provide clear guidance to students in the Central Party School about the proper way to understand issues such as:

- the scientific nature of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics";
- strengthening and improving Party leadership;
- the scientific content of the values of freedom, democracy and equality; and
- what in the West are called universal values.

Now, it might seem incongruous that values such as freedom, democracy and equality are distinguished from what Xi Jinping refers to as "what in the West are called universal values". Here we need to bear in mind that, already early in 2012, the Party's ideological authorities had proclaimed a set of "core socialist values" (社會主義核心價值), as follows:

#### **National values**

- Prosperity (富強)
- Democracy (民主)

- Civility (文明)
- Harmony (和諧)

### **Social values**

- Freedom (自由)
- Equality (平等)
- Justice (公正)
- Rule of law (法治)

### **Individual values**

- Patriotism (愛國)
- Dedication (敬業)
- Integrity (誠信)
- Friendship (友善)

Collectively, the twelve values are obviously an amalgam of past and present, local and global conceptual ingredients. Oddly, however, there is no hint of just what foundation this motley set of values is rooted in. What is clear from Xi Jinping's comments, however, is that freedom, democracy and equality are not to be identified with their Western namesakes.

## **Chen Lai**

Despite the explicit criticisms of universal values and the championing of core socialist values, some prominent Chinese academics have not only managed to navigate these dangerous political waters, but have also accrued significant political capital in the process. Chen Lai is perhaps the most prominent example. As noted above, Chen is Professor of Philosophy at Tsinghua University and the Dean of Tsinghua University's Guoxue yuan. He is widely regarded as the foremost specialist of Confucian philosophy in China. In 2018, he was also appointed as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中國人民政治協商會議), a national legislative advisory body in the People's Republic of China. This appointment is a strong endorsement by the Party of Chen Lai, and of his approach to the issue of universal and particular values.

In an insightful recent article, intellectual historian Hoyt Cleveland Tillman writes:

In the current political environment, where Chinese particularistic values are lauded and universals are highly suspect, it is impressive that Chen Lai has set forth a synthesis of Confucianism and Marxism in terms



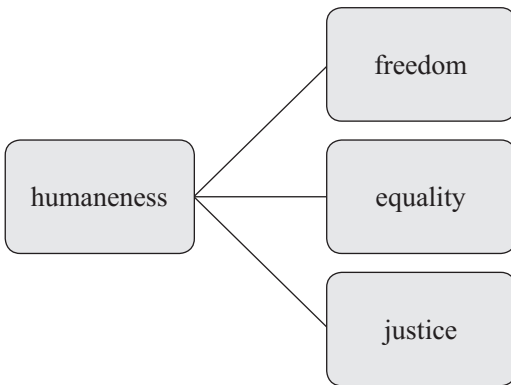
of their projected universalities. For example, his portrayal of freedom, equality and justice as universally desired goals or values, is grounded in his own account of Confucian moral values; therefore, he is able to propose his case for linking these three values to the political ends of Chinese Socialism and the common good of society, rather than through a Liberal Western discourse on rights. (Tillman 2018, 1276)

Besides approving of Chen Lai's 2014 book, *Renxue bentu lun* 仁學本體論 (*Humaneness-based Ontology*), the authorities have reportedly praised Chen Lai's approach to discussing universal values. According to Tillman:

The Party-controlled media's embrace of his recent books and articles reinforces the impression that despite its sensitivity to, and policies against, universal values, the Chinese Communist Party still includes members who are not totally opposed to the universal significance of values, but are anxious to re-define those values to accord not only with Chinese tradition (as Chen has done) but also to be compatible to the conditions deemed necessary for continued political control. (ibid., 1284)

Chen Lai is an expert on Neo-Confucian philosophy of the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) periods. His self-styled “humaneness-based ontology” is a sophisticated attempt to develop a new ontology, drawing inspiration from a range of thinkers, including the great Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). One of Chen's more creative appropriations of Zhu Xi's thought concerns Zhu Xi's account of the unity of the virtues, in which one cardinal virtue, that of humaneness, is foundational for a group of other cardinal virtues. Specifically, these cardinal virtues are the four that the classical Confucian philosopher Mencius (fourth century BC) first clustered as a group: humaneness (*ren* 仁); doing what is just and one's duty (*yi* 義); behaving with decorum (*li* 禮); and wisdom (*zhi* 智). What is distinctive in Zhu Xi's account of the unity of these virtues is that humaneness is presented as sustaining and giving rise to the other three virtues.

Chen Lai's creative appropriation was to adapt Zhu Xi's strategy and make humaneness the foundation not only of other Confucian virtues, but also of the universal values of freedom (*ziyou* 自由), equality (*pingdeng* 平等), and justice (*gongzheng* 公正) (Chen 2014, 429).



Credit: John Makeham

Chen further seeks to persuade the reader that these four “universal values” are a legacy of the Chinese Confucian tradition, and thus not simply an import from the West. As Tillman notes, this resulting synthesis of values is presented as having advantages over Western programmes of universal values. On the one hand, Chen Lai wants to insist that China’s concept of humaneness can embrace the global, because the Chinese concept of humaneness is the essential foundation of all values. On the other hand, he seeks to reject claims that the Western universalistic value of democracy should apply to China (Tillman 2018, 1278).

In a 2015 *Renmin ribao* article, Chen Lai wrote:

In discussing the particular characteristics of the values of “Chinese” civilization (*Zhonghua wenming* 中華文明), we cannot attend only to the moral concepts of Chinese culture but must take Western culture as a comparator—in particular the values of modern Western culture—in order to discern the particular characteristics of the values of Chinese civilization. When compared to modern Western values, there are four particular characteristics of the values of Chinese civilization:

- responsibility comes before freedom;
- duty comes before rights;
- the social group comes before the individual person; and
- harmony is esteemed over conflict.

In Western culture and Western values there is a conflict mentality that always seeks to use its own power, and take a self-centred stance to overcome, control and dominate others. Because of this, religious wars throughout Western history are extremely brutal; in contrast, China has never experienced such religious wars. It can indeed be said that the

cultural origins of the twentieth century's two world wars do no lie in the East. Overall, it can be said that when compared to Western culture and Western values, Chinese culture and Chinese values emphasize harmony over conflict. (Chen 2015a, 7)

Instead of demonstrating how such values of liberty, equality, and justice are actualized or evident in the policies and institutions of the PRC, Chen Lai uses the Singapore model of "Asian values" to implicitly support his case that the Chinese value system can encompass such modern values. He further insists that the core of Asian values is Confucian. In 2015 Chen Lai published the volume, *Zhonghua wenming de hexin jiazhi* 中華文明的核心價值 (*The Core Values of Chinese Civilization*). In an appendix to that volume, Chen writes:

Are there new universal values that have been brought forth out of Confucianism itself, values that differ from liberal democratic ones? I think there are. In today's world the most influential ones are undoubtedly what Singapore has called Asian values. Asian values include five main values:

- first the social state is more important than the individual;
- second, the roots of the state are in the family;
- third, the state must respect the individual;
- fourth, harmony is better than conflict at maintaining social order; and
- fifth, there must be peaceful coexistence and complementarity between religions.

I think that if I were to look at this topic of "new universal values" I would naturally think of the example of Singapore. These five principles not only include traditional East Asian values; they also include the new values that have been absorbed from Western civilization over the past century, such as the one stipulating that the state must respect the individual. Actually, Singapore's set of Asian values is a systematic set of values that does not give priority to individualism. This is Singapore's version of modern Asian values, and I think that this is also Singapore's version of the values of modern Confucian civilization, the core of which is not the priority of the individual's right of freedom, but the good of society and the community. (ibid. 2015b, 199–200)

I note in passing that Chen Lai made almost exactly the same comments about Asian values as early as 1998 (ibid. 1998, 12).

## Critiques of the Individual

Asian values, of course, refers to the cultural relativist claim that many of the political, social and cultural norms of the late twentieth century are Western, and are not universal norms. As such, these Western norms are not more legitimate than alternative norms that could be considered “Asian”. Asian values are particularly associated with the communitarian position which advocates that the rights of the community—be it the family or the state—take precedence over those of the individual.

In the Asian values debate in Singapore in the 1990s, the role of the family created a dilemma for Lee Kuan Yew, as it did for many other advocates of “Asian values” at the time. Writing at the end of the 1990s, historian Michael Barr noted that this is because the family is expected to fulfil two contradictory roles:

It needs to be the building block of society and to provide the rationale for the paternalistic state, but it is also expected to be completely—and often humiliatingly—subservient to the needs of the state and the needs of the capitalist economy ... Family-based communitarianism can be and is being used as a tool to support state-focused communitarianism, but this is not its natural function. In their purest forms the two are rivals. In its most extreme form, state-focused communitarianism is a form of totalitarianism that cannot allow any alternative sources of authority or power in society. (Barr 2000, 326, 328)

As it happens, a similar tension has been playing itself out in China over the past decade in a series of ongoing debates between two prominent Chinese philosophers, Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇 and Liu Qingping 劉清平, and their respective supporters (Huang 2017). The debate focuses on the concept of filial piety. Liu Qingping has argued that Confucian philosophy rests on a fundamental paradox: on the one hand, it privileges consanguineous affection, love for family members, and yet on the other hand, it promotes loving concern for all<sup>4</sup> (Liu 2003, 236–37). As summarized by Hagop Sarkissian, “Liu argues that Confucianism ought to put a more universal ethic at its core and jettison its emphasis on kin relations, paving the way for a new Post-Confucianism, which would value universal care or concern well ahead of filial piety” (Sarkissian 2010, 731).

In response to Liu, Guo Qiyong defended the idea of the mutual non-disclosure of wrongdoings among family members, based on early texts such as the *Analects* and *Mencius*. He maintained that this moral principle is grounded in human

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4 Liu first developed these views in Liu 2000; 2002.

nature, and to be found both in the East and West (Guo 2002). In turn, his critics saw this position as supporting the obstruction of justice, in which law-breaking family members are protected from state retribution.<sup>5</sup> Although Liu and Guo both appeal to the principle of universal values, Guo's position is of particular interest in that it prioritizes the family over the state. Despite this stance, it seems to have had no negative impact on Guo's prominent role in promoting both Confucian philosophy and National Learning in China.<sup>6</sup>

As with Guo Qiyong and Chen Lai, a number of prominent Western scholars who work in the field of Chinese philosophy have also been critical of values that are based on the notion of the atomic individual. In particular, the positions taken by North American comparative philosophers Roger Ames, Henry Rosemont, and Daniel Bell, have lent considerable ballast to the agenda of philosophers such as Chen Lai. I note also that both Ames and Bell now both work at universities in China. Ames and Rosemont object to forms of Western ethical theorizing, such as virtue ethics, in which the individual is the focus. Ames argues that

the language of virtue ethics, in appealing as it does to the vocabulary of agents, acts, generic virtues, character traits, autonomy, motivation, reasons, choice, freedom, principles, consequences, and so on, introduces distinctions that assume a foundational individualism as its starting point. (Ames 2016, 142)

With its deep roots in the classical Greek philosophical narrative, he insists that individualism has become a default, common-sense assumption, if not an ideology. He describes it as having “garnered a monopoly on human consciousness without any serious alternative to challenge it”. Instead, he proposes what he calls Confucian role ethics, arguing that it provides a better ethical model<sup>7</sup> (ibid.). At the heart of Confucian role ethics is “a specific vision of human beings as relational persons constituted by the roles they live rather than as individual selves” (Rosemont and Ames 2016). Rosemont and Ames provide the following illustration:

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5 Essays by early participants on both sides of the debate are collected in Guo 2004.

6 It is also worth noting one of the practical outcomes of Guo's “activism”. In August 2011, at the twenty-second session of the 11th National People's Congress (NPC), Guo's proposal to restore the system of “mutual concealment” was incorporated into a draft amendment to the Criminal Procedure Law of the People's Republic of China and was approved in March the following year. See Amendment #188 listed at [http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/dbdhhy/11\\_5/2012-03/19/content\\_1715305\\_9.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/dbdhhy/11_5/2012-03/19/content_1715305_9.htm).

7 See also Ames 2010. For a series of essays on “Confucian Role Ethics”, see Rosemont and Ames 2016.

Confucian normativity is defined by living one's family roles to maximum effect ... Lived family roles—mothering, brothering, granddaughtering—are themselves normative standards that, informed as they are by existential embodiment, are much clearer and more concrete than putative moral principles. (ibid.)

This critique of ethical models in which the individual is the foundational unit, is also a key element in the utopian political order proposed by Chinese IR theorist, Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽. I am, of course, referring to his *Tianxia* 天下 or “All-under-Heaven” model. Historian Wang Gengwu 王賡武 (Gungwu Wang) describes *tianxia* as “an abstract notion embodying the idea of a superior moral authority that guided behaviour in a civilized world ... (It) depicts an enlightened realm that Confucian thinkers and mandarins raised to one of universal values, used to determine who was civilized and who was not” (Wang 2013, 133). In his own vision of *tianxia*, Zhao Tingyang describes the place of the individual as follows:

All-under-Heaven takes the whole world as a single political system that is much greater and higher than a single country or nation/state ... The Chinese system of families, states, and All-under-Heaven—which differs fundamentally from the Western system of individuals, nations and internationals—is often criticized for its neglect of the individual as well as individual rights, but this is a misunderstanding ... There is no Chinese denial of the value of the individual, but rather a denial of the individual to be a political foundation or starting point, because the political makes sense only when it deals with “relations” rather than “individuals”, and the political is meant to speak for co-existence rather than a single existence. (Zhao 2006, 34, 33)

Another influential political theorist who takes a similar stance to Ames, Rosemont and Zhao on the status of the individual is Daniel A. Bell. Bell is Dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University. In his earlier work, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (2006), he criticized liberal democracy and the shortcomings of liberal individualism. In his recent and more widely discussed book, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (2015), Bell's target is electoral democracy and what he calls the tyranny of the majority.

For Bell, the danger of electoral democracy is that irrational and self-interested majorities acting through the democratic process can use their power to oppress minorities and enact bad policies. Sound familiar? In contrast, he argues, the virtue of political meritocracy is that examinations that test for voter competence

can help to remedy this flaw. As with Chen Lai, Bell also touts Singapore's political meritocracy as a viable alternative to electoral democracy. As for China, he writes:

The leading political idea in China—widely shared by government officials, reformers, intellectuals, and the people at large—is what I call “vertical democratic meritocracy”, meaning democracy at lower levels of government, with the political system becoming progressively more meritocratic at higher levels of government. (Bell 2015, xiii)

Bell, of course, has no shortage of detractors. He has been criticized for offering little evidence of meritocracy at work, and no more than a theoretical argument in its defence. Others attack him for presenting a fictional China as a rhetorical platform from which to continue a long-standing debate internal to Western political thought—the debate between communitarianism and liberal democracy. Despite these and many other criticisms, his status as a public intellectual of some note in China has in no way been tarnished.

Mention should also be made of the Chinese philosophy specialist Stephen C. Angle's self-styled “Progressive Confucianism”. The case of Angle provides a counterpoint to the anti-individualist stance of Chen Lai, Ames, Rosemont, Zhao, and Bell. According to Angle's Progressive Confucianism

ethical insight leads to progressive political change, which in turn leads to greater realization of our potential for virtue ... The institutions advocated by Progressive Confucians are valued not because of their ancient pedigree but because of their capacity to assist in the realization of the fundamental human virtues that Confucians have valued since ancient times. Social structures that set barriers to the realization of virtue, therefore, need to be critiqued and changed. (Angle 2012, 18, 17)

Despite the fundamental differences with Ames, Rosemont and Zhao on the issue of atomic individuals, Angle is sympathetic to Zhao's normative concept of “All-under-Heaven”, because it requires us to “view the world from the perspective of the world”. This perspective, Angle argues, “requires us to arrive at the universal world perspective through an inclusive process, rather than universalizing a single perspective” (ibid., 89). Thus human rights and other principles of modern liberal philosophy can be figured as relevant in Confucian philosophy, even if they did not derive from prior Confucian values. Angle's critics, however, argue that on his analysis, Confucianism is “relevant” and “‘modern’ only to the extent that it can accommodate the values of some form of liberal democracy”. In other words,



Angle continues “to articulate the validity of Confucian ideas in terms shaped almost exclusively by modern European thought and experience” (Jenco, 2017, 6).

## Kang Clique

Over the past decade, a group of younger academics based at various universities in China has also been arguing for the priority of the nation over the individual. This group has become known informally as the Kang Clique (*Kang dang* 康黨). Several prominent figures associated with the Kang Clique were also participants in a workshop held at East China Normal University in Shanghai in 2011. The transcripts of discussions from the workshop was published two years later under the title, *He wei pushi? Shei zhi jiazhi? Dangdai Rujia pushi jiazhi* 何謂普世？誰之價值？當代儒家論普世價值 (*What is Universal? Whose Values? Contemporary Confucians Discuss Universal Values*) (Zeng and Guo 2014).

The name “Kang Clique” derives from the call by some of its more prominent “members” such as Chen Ming 陳明 and Gan Chunsong 干春松 to “return to Kang Youwei”. Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) was a major intellectual and reformer active in the transition between the Qing Empire and the establishment of Republican China. For many Confucian revivalists today, particularly those who self-consciously identify as so-called “Mainland New Confucians” (*Dalu xin Rujia* 大陸新儒家), Kang had proposed a superior blueprint for nation-building and state-building, at a critical juncture in China’s history, as it moved from being an empire to being a nation-state.

Chen Ming, for example, writes that in Kang Youwei’s blueprint, “the integrity of the nation and maintenance of the people’s livelihood took historical priority over individual rights, constitutional democracy, freedom of belief and other value priorities of the Enlightenment project” (Gan et al. 2104, 25). Here the Enlightenment project refers to the liberal intellectual tradition in modern China. Chen laments that ultimately Kang’s vision was hijacked by the agenda set by liberal intellectuals. He continues: “The Enlightenment project and its utopian narrative should only have been chosen if they could have served as a program for salvation; we should not and cannot allow theory to swallow up facts, or means to become ends, but, most unfortunately this where our biggest problems are today” (ibid.). In other words, the utopian visions of Chinese liberals continue to block Kang’s blueprint from being realized. For Confucian revivalists such as Chen Ming, a key element in Kang’s blueprint was a proposal to make Confucianism the state religion, and this is something that Chen Ming and his colleagues continue to argue for today.

Kang Youwei is also relevant to the topic of *tianxia* or “All-under-Heaven”. Kang was associated with a lineage of Confucian scholarship known as New Text Confucianism. New Text Confucianism has its origins in the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), but was revived and creatively reinterpreted in the nineteenth century. One of the key features of New Text Confucianism is its emphasis on a cyclical view of history, characterized by a three-stage periodization. Kang Youwei transformed this cyclical model into a teleological model of three-stage progress, which culminates in the utopian vision of an “age of universal peace” (*taiping shi* 太平世) or “great unity” (*datong* 大同).

As with Chen Lai, Kang attached a particularly high importance to the moral ideal of *ren* (humaneness). For Kang, *ren* represents a metaphysical world view; “a moral ideal or value pattern built into the structure of reality” (Chang 1987, 37). Furthermore, Kang’s understanding of the moral ideal of *ren* was teleological. He projected the full realization of *ren* to a distant but definite point in the future: the “age of universal peace” or “great unity”. His vision of this “great unity” amounted to an “all-inclusive universal society, with no room place for the territorial state” (ibid., 62).

### Xu Jinlin’s New *Tianxia*

Another prominent Chinese public intellectual who has also been active in promoting the concept of *tianxia* as an inclusive political institution that transcends nation-states and nationalism is the Shanghai-based academic, Xu Jilin 許紀霖. In sharp contrast to the “Kang Clique”, Xu is strongly opposed to nationalism. Xu maintains that nationalism can lead to horrific large-scale violence, such as the two world wars. His antidote to nationalism is what he calls the “new *tianxia*”. He describes *tianxia* in traditional China as “a world spatial imaginary with China’s central plains at the core”, and claims that the values of this civilizational tradition were universal and humanistic rather than particular and unique to one civilization or culture:

Behind the traditional Chinese empire was a *tianxia* consciousness for all humanity, a set of universal values that transcended the particular interests of any given dynasty. Their source was the moral way of heaven. These values served as the standard for determining right and wrong throughout All Under Heaven, constrained the behaviour of rulers, and determined the legitimacy of a given dynasty’s rule. (Xu 2015)

He then makes the following comments about post-*tianxia* China, that is, China of the last one hundred years: “An empire without *tianxia* consciousness means that the imperial body no longer possesses a soul with universal values and a civilization that puts people at ease. In its place, there is nothing but calculation of the nation-state’s self-interest.” (ibid.)

Yet if traditional *tianxia* was so cosmopolitan and universal, how does Xu explain the age-old distinction between barbarians (*yi* 夷) and Chinese (*xia* 夏), a distinction that has been a consistent hallmark of the notion of *tianxia*? While acknowledging that people in pre-modern China spoke not just of *tianxia* but also of the difference between barbarians and Chinese, Xu insists:

In early China, (notions of) “Chinese and barbarian” were completely different from the dichotomies of “China and the West” and “us and them” that today’s extreme nationalists are always talking about ... That which determined the distinction between barbarian and Chinese was solely whether or not a civilization was associated with the values of *tianxia*. Whereas *tianxia* was absolute, the (categories of) barbarian and Chinese were relative. Whereas blood and race were innate and unchangeable, civilization could be studied and emulated. (ibid.)

He further claims that in traditional China, “*tianxia* did not belong to one particular race or country” (ibid.).

Despite Xu Jilin’s reputation as a liberal public intellectual strongly opposed to nationalism, some of his discussion of China as a civilizational power invites questions about his vision for a so-called “new *tianxia*”:

If China’s goal is not to stop with the construction of the nation-state, but rather to re-establish itself as a civilizational power with great influence in global affairs, then its every word and deed must take universal civilization as its point of departure, and in global dialogue it must have its own unique understanding of universal civilization ... As a great power with global influence, what China must now realize is not just the dream of rejuvenating the nation and the state, but also the re-orientation of its national spirit toward the world. What China needs to reconstruct is not a particularistic culture suited to one country and one people, but rather a civilization that has universal value for all humanity. Values that are “good” for China, particularly the core values that concern our shared human nature, should in the same way be “good” for all humanity. (ibid.)

The message here is decidedly mixed. On the one hand, Xu calls for the reconstruction of values that have universal significance for all humanity and not just one culture or society. On the other hand, this aspiration seems to be fundamentally compromised by his other claim that due to China's "own unique understanding of universal civilization", which in turn is grounded in China's pre-modern tradition of *tianxia*, then China should seek to "re-establish itself as a civilizational power with great influence in global affairs" and reconstruct "a civilization that has universal value for all humanity".

Xu supports his claim that China is well prepared to "re-establish itself as a civilizational power" by invoking American political scientist Lucian Pye's famous aphorism that "China is a civilization pretending to be a nation-state" (Pye 1992, 232). Xu reinforces this sense of historical destiny by further claiming that "China is a world power. As a nation of the world that bears Hegel's 'world spirit' (*Weltgeist*) it is only proper that it take responsibility for the world and for the 'world spirit' it has inherited. This 'world spirit' is the new *tianxia* that will emerge in the form of universal values." (Xu, 15)

As for his assertion that "Values that are 'good' for China, particularly the core values that concern our shared human nature, should in the same way be 'good' for all humanity", is its import really much different from that conveyed by Chen Lai's assertion that humaneness is the foundation not only of Confucian values, but also of the universal values of freedom, equality, and justice? After all, from a Confucian perspective, humaneness is an innate quality of our human nature, and so must be good for all humanity.

Indeed, despite the appeal to universal values, in Xu Jilin's notion of new *tianxia* it seems it is Confucianism that is presented as the authority for determining which values constitute "core values". He explains that, historically, the greatness of Confucianism came from its capacity to transcend the interests of the individual and the dynasty. Today, being above the state, Confucianism "possesses the universal values of *tianxia*". By insisting that "values that are 'good' for China ... should in the same way be 'good' for all humanity", Xu is making a case for expanding the range of universal values, but in a way that privileges Confucian values.

China's proponents of *tianxia* are not without their critics. One of the most important is historian Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 of Fudan University:

In recent years, some Chinese scholars have felt that, as China begins its "rise" after several centuries of a world order led by the West, a "*tianxia* order" or "*tianxia*-ism" that has its origins in traditional China should be

deemed a fresh resource for replacing the world order that has been in place since the early modern period (Ge 2014, 161).

Ge points out that these scholars

argue that, on a philosophical level, the Confucian world is a world without borders, one without the distinctions of inner and outer, us and them. It is a world in which all people are treated equally. Accordingly, this *tianxia* order should be used to replace the current world order.

He warns that if this kind of thinking is not stripped of its core of nationalism (which sees China as the “centre of *tianxia*”) and its attitude of arrogant self-regard, “then it can easily become a new form of chauvinism that claims to have universal relevance under the cover of representations such as ‘equality of the multitude of states’ and ‘all in the four seas are one family’” (ibid., 173).

Ge is also critical of some of the more radical Confucian revivalists in contemporary China, known as political Confucians or “mainland New Confucians”, which includes members of the “Kang clique”, contributors to the publication *He wei pushi? Shei de jiazhi? Dangdai Rujia pushi jiazhi* (discussed above), as well as contributors to a wide range of more recent writings, including the 2016 volume, *Zhongguo bixu zai Ruhua: “Dalu xin Rujia” xin zhuzhang* 中國必須再儒化: “大陸新儒家”新主張 (*China Must Re-Confucianize: New Proposals by ‘Mainland New Confucians’*). The fact that a scholar of Ge Zhaoguang’s standing in the academic community should devote a 33,000 Chinese character essay (Ge 2017) to critiquing their views, underscores the growing influence of this conservative, and extremely nationalistic, group of ideologues.

In the essay he describes how the Mainland New Confucians feel that to acknowledge universal values is to succumb to “Westernization”, and amounts to “self-barbarization” (自我夷狄化). He points out that the idea of “barbarization” is an extremely strong accusation, because it elevates the distinction between Chinese and barbarian from that of a difference in values to that of a clash between the civilized and uncivilized, or even places races and cultures in absolute opposition. I would again note that the distinction between Chinese (華) and barbarian (夷) is very much central to traditional *tianxia* discourse.

## Concluding Remarks

Chen Lai’s creative appropriation of Zhu Xi’s philosophy to make humaneness (*ren*) the foundation not only of Confucian virtues, but also of the universal values

of freedom, equality, and justice, is without doubt an exercise in hybridization, albeit a highly reductionist and politically calculated hybridization. We will have to wait to see whether an ideological cocktail of Confucian and core socialist values will provide the right formula for a future *tianxia* world order.

Ge Zhaoguang warns of the following scenario if the concept of *tianxia* is brought to life:

When imagined versions of the tribute system are taken to be real, and memories of the Celestial Empire are unearthed, then perhaps Chinese culture and national sentiment will turn into a nationalism (or statism) that opposes both global civilization and regional cooperation. Such a development would truly lead to a “clash of civilizations”. (Ge 2014, 178)

Or is the future already here? In an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, sociologist Salvatore Babones describes what he calls the American Tianxia. Let me conclude with his description of the dystopian, brave new world he conjures up:

Today the United States is at the center of a global *tianxia*. This “American Tianxia” is much more than a state or country, or even an empire. It pervades all areas of life. In today’s connected world, Chinese businesses, Russian universities, and even Iranian revolutions are run on American lines. The Islamic State (ISIS) recommends that its fighters use Android devices whereas North Korea’s ruling Kim family famously prefers Apple. Many people around the world oppose the United States, its policies, and its president, but they still want to send their children to American universities, invest their money in American companies, and express their opinions on American social networks.

This is not some kind of consumerism run amok. Standing at the center of the global order, the United States has, over the last quarter century, reoriented the way the world—and especially the world’s elite—works, plays, and thinks. It has brought them into an international hierarchy in which gaining status requires succeeding within U.S.-centered networks and playing by U.S. rules. And it makes twenty-first century America more powerful than any empire, kingdom, or commonwealth in history. The United States—that is, the country itself—has plenty of hard and soft power. But the United States has limits. The American Tianxia does not. (Balbones 2017)

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*ASIAN STUDIES IN SLOVENIA*

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# Nebeški mandat in dve vrsti resnice: kontrastna analiza Tang Junyijevega in Mou Zongsanovega modela konfucijanske demokracije

Jana S. ROŠKER\*

## Izveleček

Večina modernih teoretičark in teoretikov je menila, da je konfucijanstvo zastarela ideologija, ki ni samo neprimerna za razvoj modernih znanosti in demokratičnih družb, temveč je tudi merodajno odgovorna za globoko družbeno in politično krizo, ki je zaznamovala Kitajsko v zadnjih dvesto letih. Tajvanski moderni konfucijanci pa v tem idejnem sistemu niso videli krivca za ta položaj. Večinoma so menili, da je konfucijanstvo popolnoma združljivo tako z znanostjo kot tudi z demokracijo. Večina jih je pri tem celo zagovarjala stališče, da vzhodnoazijske kulture v okviru svojih družbenih specifik ne bodo mogle razviti demokratičnih ustrojev družbe, če se pri tem ne bodo oprle na ustrezne elemente lastne, torej konfucijanske tradicije. Ta članek kritično analizira Tang Junyijev in Mou Zongsanov teoretski model možnega preporoda konfucijanskih protodemokracij.

**Ključne besede:** konfucijanstvo, tajvanska filozofija, moderno konfucijanstvo, demokracija, znanost

## Mandate of Heaven and Two Kinds of Truth: a Contrastive Analysis of Tang Junyi's and Mou Zongsan's Models of Confucian Democracy

### Abstract

The majority of modern scholars believed that Confucianism was an obsolete and outdated ideology, which is not only inappropriate for the development of modern sciences and democratic societies, but also responsible for a deep social and political crisis that has marked China during the last two centuries. The Taiwanese Modern Confucians, however, have never assumed that the Confucian system was responsible for such a situation. Most of them believed that Confucianism is compatible with science and democracy. Besides, the majority of them assumed that the East Asian cultures will never be able to develop truly democratic structures of their societies unless they take in consideration the appropriate elements of their own, i.e. Confucian traditions. This paper critically analyses Tang Junyi's and Mou Zongsan's theoretical models of a possible revival of Confucian proto-democracies.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, Taiwanese philosophy, Modern Confucianism, Democracy, Science

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## Uvod: kritika instrumentaliziranega razuma in problem moralnega sebstva<sup>1</sup>

Tajvanski pripadniki struje modernega konfucijanstva so večinoma izhajali iz prepričanja, da mora kitajska kultura, če želi stopiti na pot neodvisne modernizacije, v okviru katere bi lahko ohranila svojo kulturno identiteto, okrepiti in razviti tiste elemente lastne tradicije, ki predstavljajo možne zametke znanosti in demokracije (Sernelj 2017, 272). Niti Tang niti Mou pri tem nista bila izjemi, saj sta oba izhajala iz tovrstnih predpostavk.

V okvirih tega načelnega stališča pa ne moremo trditi, da sta bila nekritična do tradicije, ki sta jo zastopala. Zavedala sta se, da obstajajo temeljne razlike med demokratičnimi elementi znotraj konfucijanstva na eni in zahodnimi modeli demokracije na drugi strani; priznavala sta tudi, da so prav te razlike srž problemov, ki so nastajali v procesu kitajske tranzicije v moderno družbo. V ospredju teh problemov je na primer predpostavka, da je kultivirana moralnost, ki je v konfucijanstvu idealno tipski temelj pravične družbe, ponotranjeni koncept, ki od posameznika pri odločitvah zahteva veliko mero individualne odgovornosti.<sup>2</sup> Ta osnova je torej subjektivna in jo je zaradi tega težko posploševati s pomočjo formalnih oziroma normativnih kriterijev. Jedra takšnega tradicionalnega moralnega sebstva (*daode benxin*) torej ne moremo objektivno definirati, saj deluje v različnih družbeno-političnih kontekstih na različen način in je torej situacijsko pogojeno.

Po drugi strani pa sta oba filozofa poudarjala, da je tudi zahodni, na instrumentaliziranem razumu temelječi koncept posameznika kot racionalnega, avtonomnega bitja z neodtujljivimi pravicami vse prej kot idealen ali realističen. Gre namreč za abstrakcijo, ki je na ravni stvarnosti oddaljena od konkretnih oseb in družbenih razmerij, v katera so te vpete, pa tudi od različnih vrednostnih kontekstov, ki

1 Pričujoči članek je nastal s podporo Javne agencije za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenij (ARRS) v okviru programske skupine P6-0243 *Azijski jeziki in kulture*, ter s podporo Fundacije za mednarodno akademsko zamenjavo Chiang Ching-kuo v okviru projekta Moderna in sodobna tajvanska filozofija (RG004U-17).

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2 Zanimivo je, da so celo številni evropski misijonarji, ki so na Kitajskem dlje časa živeli pod vplivom neokonfucijanske ideologije, torej ideologije tiste struje, katere nasledniki so predstavniki modernega konfucijanstva, pogosto trdno verjeli v očiščujočo moč tovrstne notranje avtonomije. Tako je tudi slovenski misijonar F. A. Hallerstein proti koncu življenja zapisal, da občuduje kitajsko sposobnost miroljubnosti, medtem ko naj bi bili Evropejci po naravi nagnjeni k militarizmu in destrukciji (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2015, 43).



nanje vplivajo. Zato tovrstna konceptualizacija razmerja med posameznikom in družbo pogosto vodi do dilem in konfliktov, povezanih z načelno neenakostjo izhodiščnih položajev posameznikov, ki jih zakoni, ki naj bi bili »za vse enaki«, nikakor ne morejo v celoti upoštevati.

Obema filozofoma je poleg tega skupen tudi načelni dvom o zahodnih modelih znanosti in demokracije, pri katerih izpostavljata negativne elemente pretirane normativnosti, prevlade mehanistične racionalnosti in nereflektiranega scientizma, saj v slednjem vidita nevarnost izgube temeljnih načel humanistične družbene etike.

Kljub navedenim podobnostim oziroma skupnim točkam, ki se v glavnem nanašajo na primerjalne vidike evropskih in konfucijanskih modelov, pa se politični teoriji obeh tukaj obravnavanih teoretikov v marsikaterem pogledu razlikujeta. Kot bomo videli v naslednjih odstavkih, se te razlike jasno pokažejo že v samih izhodiščih njunih teorij.

### Nebeški mandat in analiza na temelju integracije

Tang Junyijev recept za modernizacijo Kitajske je popolnoma drugačen od znanega Zhang Zhidongovega predloga, po katerem bi morala Kitajska »ohraniti lastno esenco« (tj. tradicionalno miselnost) in »prevzeti zahodne funkcije« (tj. zahodno tehnologijo) (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*). Tang je to stališče ostro kritiziral in poudaril, da za modernizacijo Kitajske prevzemanje zahodnih tehnologij nikakor ni dovolj (Tang 1986, 22–28). Te tehnologije namreč temeljijo na večplastnih in zelo kompleksnih idejah, ki so v teku dolgega zgodovinskega razvoja sooblikovale dominantne struje zahodnih kultur. Kljub temu pa to ne pomeni, da bi bilo treba kitajsko kulturo popolnoma zavreči in nadomestiti z zahodno, kot so predlagali radikalno ikonoklastični misleci zgodnjega kitajskega liberalizma (Sin 2002, 321).

Specifično kitajska modernizacija je zanj možna zato, ker naj bi kitajska kultura vsebovala lastne, torej avtohtone zametke znanosti in demokracije. V tem je Tang Junyijevo stališče načeloma podobno idejam drugih pripadnikov druge generacije modernega konfucijanstva. Z njimi ga družijo tudi to, da svoje teoretske predpostavke pogosto izgrajuje na površnih in posplošujočih primerjavah oziroma razlikovanjih med kitajsko in zahodno kulturo (*ibid.*, 318).

Ker je zahodni model znanosti po njegovem mnenju opredeljen z razlikovanjem med subjektom in objektom spoznanja, bi bilo treba za potrebe idejne modernizacije v estetsko in duhovno usmerjeno kitajsko tradicijo vnesti duh objektivnosti

in analize (Tang 1985, 34). Kar se tiče znanosti kot take, pa je po drugi strani poudarjal, da je bila – v določenih oblikah – prisotna tudi v kitajski tradiciji (ibid., 87). Poudaril je, da so ljudje na Kitajskem že razmeroma zgodaj razvili tehnološko precej izpopolnjena sredstva, ki so izboljšala njihovo življenje. Vendar se te tehnologije nikoli niso razvijale v takšni meri, ki bi omogočala dejanski napredek znanosti. Razlog za to je videl v dejstvu, da je kitajska kultura težila k reduciranju epistemoloških raziskav, ker je bila osredotočena na moralno izpopolnjevanje posameznika v okviru sistema formalizirane družbene etike.<sup>3</sup> Tang je poudaril, da so se tega problema do določene mere zavedali tudi tradicionalni kitajski izobraženci.<sup>4</sup> Mnogi med njimi so si namreč prizadevali za razširitev epistemoloških metod na vidike zunanjega, materialnega sveta, četudi so ta njihova prizadevanja večinoma ostala omejena na filološke raziskave in besedilne analize. A tudi konfucijanci dinastij Ming in Qing so pogosto poudarjali pomen namakalnih sistemov in drugih agrarnih tehnologij, medicine in astronomije. Vse to naj bi pričalo o želji po boljšem spoznavanju narave z namenom razvoja splošnega blagostanja. Vendar pa Sin Yee Chan (2002, 323) v tem kontekstu opozarja, da vsi primeri, ki jih je Tang navedel kot dokaze za tradicionalni kitajski interes za odkrivanje zunanjega sveta, razkrivajo zgolj instrumentalni odnos do narave. Pri tem je torej v glavnem šlo za njeno uporabnost in ne za radovednost o tem, kako narava »deluje«. Poleg tega je vprašljivo, ali bi na Kitajskem resnično lahko prišlo do razvoja znanosti, če naj verjamemo splošni Tang Junyijevi teoriji kulture (gl. Tang 1986). To je namreč videl kot izraz določene zavesti, ki je usmerjena v določene vidike stvarnosti. Vendar pa zavest, ki poudarja integracijo, ni nekaj drugega kot zavest, ki poudarja razlikovanje oziroma analizo. Kot izpostavi Sin Yee Chan (ibid.), sta obe obliki zavesti v vzajemnem protislovju. Če naj bi bila torej znanost rezultat zavesti, ki je osredotočena na distinkcije, in če naj bi Kitajci za potrebe modernizacije razvijali to obliko zavesti, ni povsem jasno, kako naj bi ta zavest delovala hkrati s »tradicionalno kitajsko zavestjo«, ki išče integracijo. Tang je sicer verjel, da lahko ljudje, kadar pričnemo razmišljati znanstveno, začasno prenehamo z integrativnim mišljenjem oziroma ga potisnemo v ozadje. A Sin Yee Chan je tudi glede te rešitve skeptična, saj opozarja, da bi kitajska kultura v tem primeru morala za razvoj znanosti plačati visoko ceno erozije in oslabitve lastnega duhovnega jedra.

3 Tang se pri tem omejuje zgolj na kulturne oziroma idejne dejavnike, ki so pogojevali to problematiko, ter se ne ukvarja z njenimi materialnimi in politično-sistemskimi elementi, ki tvorijo jedro pomembne akademske razprave o »zametkih kapitalizma« (*zibenzhuyi mengya*) v okviru kitajske tradicije.

4 Pri tem velja omeniti predvsem predstavnike t. i. novih metodologij in člane akademije Vzhodnega gozda (*Donglin shuyuan*); prim. Rošker 2008, 206.

Seveda pa razumni pristop do vprašanja modernizacije zahteva celostno upoštevanje njenih posledic in možnih negativnih stranskih učinkov; zato je bil Tang v svoji trditvi, da naj bi bilo moderno znanost mogoče vzpostaviti na temelju tradicionalnih kitajskih vrednot, morda vendarle »preveč optimističen« (ibid., 324). Z vzporednimi argumenti je Tang utemeljeval svojo drugače prepričanja, da je kitajska idejna tradicija vsebovala zametke demokratičnega sistema. Pri demokratičnih reformah moderne Kitajske bi se zato po njegovem mnenju veljalo zavzeti za tak sistem demokracije, ki bi temeljil tudi na morali ter etičnem osveščanju državljanov in državljanek (Tang 1986, 283). Kot pravi konfucijanec je prepričan, da bi bilo takšno reformo, ki bi tranzicijo kitajske družbe povedla v sistem zrele demokracije, mogoče izvesti samo s pomočjo moralne vzgoje državljanov in državljanek, zasnovane na ustrezni (torej moralni) kulturi (ibid., 285).

Tang Junyi se v tem kontekstu sploh ne ukvarja z vprašanjem, kdo naj bi določal aksiološke kriterije te »kulturne vzgoje in izobraževanja«. Zanj je pomembno predvsem to, da bi takšna demokracija dejansko temeljila na konfucijanskih osnovah in vsebovala vse osrednje elemente tradicionalne ideje moralne vladavine (oziroma moralnega vodenja in urejanja družbe) (ibid., 289). Kot osnovo za takšno novo demokracijo je izpostavil konfucijanski koncept nebeškega mandata (*tian ming*); po njegovi interpretaciji naj bi volja neba izražala mnenje ljudstva. Poudarjal je tudi, da sta mitološka vladarja Yao in Shun, ki sta v konfucijanstvu najvišja vzornika moralne vladavine, svoj prestol zapustila nasledniku, ki sta ga izbrala med najsposobnejšimi ljudmi (ki so bili seveda vsi moškega spola), namesto da bi ga po zakonu dedovanja prepustila svojima sinovoma.<sup>5</sup> Tudi znani konfucijanski citat, ki pravi, da je »vse pod nebom skupno« (天下為公) (*Li ji* 2012, Li yun, 1), je Tang Junyi interpretiral kot osnovo »kitajskega tipa« demokratične ureditve. V tem okviru je izpostavil tudi konfucijansko načelo moralne enakovrednosti vseh ljudi, po katerem ima vsak človek možnost postati modrec (*sheng ren*). Zametke demokratične ureditve je videl celo v nekaterih obstoječih konfucijanskih institucijah in praksah, ki naj bi služile seznanjanju cesarja s stališči podložnikov.

Seveda je treba tudi Tangova stališča o zametkih demokracije znotraj konfucijanskega nauka jemati z določeno rezervo, saj interes vladarja za to, da je seznanjen z voljo ljudstva, še zdaleč ne pomeni politične suverenosti ljudstva. Sin Yee Chan (2002, 322) pri tem opozarja, da je prav ideja politične suverenosti tista, na kateri sloni celotna ideja demokracije. V konfucijanstvu pa naj bi koncept nebeškega mandata ljudstvu odrekal vsakršno možnost politične aktivnosti, ki ostaja izključno v domeni nebeškega vladarja. Izvor politične avtoritete je v tem

5 Mitološki vladarji oziroma prakralji, h katerim sodita tudi Yao in Shun, niso samo kulturno-idejna dediščina Kitajske, temveč so pomembni tudi v vseh drugih vzhodnoazijskih regijah, kamor je v kasnejših obdobjih prodrla konfucianistična doktrina (prim. Ogrizek 2017).

kontekstu torej popolnoma drugačen od tiste osnove družbenega sistema, ki je prevladala v zahodnih kulturah in ki temelji na ideji družbene pogodbe, saj naj bi ljudje v takšnem sistemu svojo politično oblast prenesli na vladarja in bili z njim (teoretično) v enakovrednem pogodbenem razmerju.

Tang tudi sam priznava, da je največja pomanjkljivost tradicionalnega kitajskega ideala družbene ureditve prav v tem, da je v njej vsa oblast skoncentrirana v osebi vladarja:

Pri tem je osrednjega pomena, da je bilo uresničevanje tradicionalne kitajske vladavine človeškosti, obrednosti in moralnosti v preteklosti vselej odvisno od subjektivne moralne volje vladarja. (Tang 1986, 289)

其關鍵在中國過去所實現之人治德治禮治，仍是依於治者之主觀之道德意志。

To pomanjkljivost bi bilo po njegovem mnenju mogoče reševati s pomočjo striktnih zakonodaj in pravne države, četudi bi morala biti v takšnem sistemu slednja še vedno podrejena kriterijem tradicionalne morale (ibid.). Njegova predpostavka, po kateri je sistem pravne države temelj moderne družbe, vsekakor drži. Tudi njegova kritika tega sistema je verodostojna. Vendar mu razen tega, da je izpostavil dilemo pomanjkljivosti pravne in moralne ureditve, ki vsaka zase vsebujeta obilico možnosti zlorabe, ni uspelo vzpostaviti teoretskega modela, ki bi omogočal njuno povezavo. Načelnega (in vsekakor zelo aktualnega) vprašanja o temeljnem ustroju razmerja med pravom in moralno v modernih (ali postmodernih) družbah ni razrešil noben predstavnik druge generacije modernega konfucijanstva. A morda je dober začetek reševanja tega problema koncept dveh resnic, ki ga bomo spoznali v nadaljevanju.

## Dve vrsti resnice

Povezava med razumom in intuicijo je bila tisti vezni člen, ki je predstavnikom druge generacije modernega konfucijanstva – na osnovi sorodnih hipotez, ki so jih izdelali že predstavniki prve generacije – služil kot kriterij opredeljevanja razlike med filozofijo in znanostjo, pa tudi razlike med zahodno in kitajsko filozofijo. V svoji oceni Četrto-majskega gibanja in njegovih iztočnic liberalističnega pozahodenja (Han 1994, 247) je Mou Zongsan izpostavil, da je krog teoretikov, ki so se zbirali okrog Hu Shija, v procesu četrto-majske kulturne prenovе izdelal teoretsko, na racionalnosti temelječo nadgradnjo svojega videnja znanosti, ki je pred tem temeljilo zgolj na močno čustveno obarvanem in pogosto celo

iracionalnem občudovanju. Kljub tej navidezno razumni nadgradnji pa se je ta novi uvid progresivnih razumnikov še toliko globlje ukoreninil v območju enodimenzionalnega scientizma in monopolnega položaja znanstvenega diskurza. Ta diskurz je postopoma postal nepogrešljiv del njihovih teoretskih prizadevanj, in sicer ne zgolj v njihovih razpravah o znanosti kot taki, temveč tudi v njihovi splošni dikciji. Mou je ostro kritiziral posledice prevlade tovrstnega diskurza, saj mu je očital »izničenje pomenov in vrednot« ter to, da »vidi zgolj objekte, ne pa tudi človeka« (ibid.). Menil je, da sta se tovrstni enodimenzionalni scientizem in monopolistična prevlada gole racionalnosti v kitajskih akademskih krogih ohranila vse do današnjega dne in da sta sokriva za to, da številni kitajski teoretiki še vedno zviška gledajo na tradicionalno kitajsko kulturo in njene idejne dosežke. To naj bi močno oviralo nadaljnji razvoj pozitivnih elementov teh tradicionalnih diskurzov in njihovo prilagoditev potrebam modernega časa:

Ko postane morala slepa, se ljudje še bolj množično obračajo k omnipotenci znanosti in so prepričani, da bo znanost, ko bo le dovolj razvita, lahko razrešila prav vse probleme. Na tej točki ni več prostora za nikakršno usodo. Tak pogled temelji na nerazumnosti in neumnosti plehkih racionalistov, ki še nikoli niso resnično izkusili, kaj pomeni moralno življenje. (Mou 2010, 157)

道德既成了盲點，如是人們更轉而迷信科學萬能，以為科學知識若達到了某種程度，既可解決一切問題，至此，亦無所命。此為淺薄的理智主義者之愚妄，乃根本無道德生活之體驗者也。

Mou v tem kontekstu pogosto opozarja, da znanost, ki temelji na človeški želji (po spoznanju, blagostanju, materialnem napredku in nadzorovanju narave oziroma zunanjega sveta), sama po sebi ne razpolaga z nikakršnimi mehanizmi nadzora nad to željo. Tudi če bi znanost dejansko lahko razrešila vse probleme tega sveta, kot menijo »plehki racionalisti«, to ne bi bilo mogoče že zaradi tega, ker so svetovne surovine omejene, medtem ko je človeška želja sama po sebi neomejena. Prav v tem pogledu se najjasneje pokažejo prednosti ter specifični prispevki kitajske filozofije in njene osredotočenosti na moralna in etična vprašanja. Če namreč hočemo vzpostaviti harmoničen odnos z naravo, moramo nadzorovati človeške želje (Tang 2002, 343). Drugače od budizma avtohtona kitajska filozofija človeških želja ne negira, temveč vidi svet na način, ki omogoča njihovo transcendenco in zato lahko človeka osvobodi od obsedenosti z njimi (Mou 2010, ii).

Pri opredelitvi temeljnih razlik med kitajsko in zahodno filozofijo je Mou Zong-pan uvedel razlikovanje med dvema vrstama resnice, intencionalno (*neirongde zhengli*) in ekstencionalno (*waiyande zhenli*).

Resnice lahko v grobem razdelimo na dve vrsti: prvo imenujem ekstencionalno, drugo pa intencionalno. Ekstencionalno resnico lahko v grobem označimo kot znanstveno ali matematično resnico. ... Ekstencionalne resnice so ločene od subjektivnosti in so zato lahko objektivno veljavne. Vse resnice, ki ne sodijo v domeno subjektivnega in jih je zato mogoče vzpostaviti kot objektivno veljavne, sodijo k ekstencionalnim resnicam. (Mou 1983, 20–21)

真理大體可分為兩種：一種叫做外延的真理，一種叫做內容的真理。外延的真理大體是指科學的真理或是數學的真理... 外延的知識可以脫離我們主觀的態度。凡是不繫屬於主體而可以客觀的肯定的那一種真理，通通都是外延真理。

Intencionalne resnice imajo obliko intencionalnih propozicij in predstavljajo intencionalne relacije znotraj subjekta. Strogo gledano, takšne resnice ne spadajo k znanstvenim resnicam, temveč prej k resnicam humanistike in kulturoloških ved.<sup>6</sup> Mou se je izrecno zavzemal za priznavanje tega tipa resnic, ki nastopa tudi v budističnih, daoističnih in konfucijanskih diskurzih.

Poleg ekstencionalne moramo priznavati tudi intencionalno resnico. Kako pa se bomo v tem primeru soočili z logičnim pozitivizmom, ki trdi, da je vse, kar vsebuje metafizika, zgolj skupek konceptualnih pesmi, ki lahko v najboljšem primeru zadovoljijo zgolj naša čustva? ... Seveda lahko rečemo, da vse to niso ekstencionalne resnice. A če rečemo, da vse to niso ekstencionalne resnice, to še zdaleč ne pomeni, da niso resnice. Vse to sodi k intencionalnim resnicam, ki jih ne moremo kar tako odpraviti s frazo »konceptualne pesmi«. (ibid., 23)

我們除了外延真理，還得承認有內容真理。如果我們承認有內容真理，那麼我們如何來對付邏輯實證論者那句話，就是說形上學裡面的那些話都只是概念的詩歌，只是滿足我們的情感... 你可以說它不是外延真理，但是它不是外延真理並不能就說它不是真理。這些都是內容真理，這種真理我們不能用 »概念的詩歌« 來打發掉。

Prav zaradi tega Mou Zongsan meni, da je popolnoma napačno in škodljivo, če kitajsko filozofijo, ki temelji na iskanju intencionalnih resnic, označujemo kot znanost in v njej iščemo ekstencionalne resnice. Tudi univerzalnost obeh tipov resnice je različna, kajti ekstencionalne so univerzalne na abstraktni, intencionalne pa na konkretni ravni. Konkretna univerzalnost je zanj namreč fleksibilna

6 Ta problem je hkrati problem ustreznega vrednotenja in razlikovanja med kvalitativnimi in kvantitativnimi metodologijami znanosti.



oziroma »elastična« (ibid.). Zato tudi ni večna v smislu nespremenljivosti. Mou meni, da je zahodna miselnost najbolj razvila ekstencionalno, kitajska pa intencionalno resnico. Prav zaradi univerzalnosti obeh tipov resnice pa se lahko ti kulturi druga od druge marsikaj naučita.

V krizi kitajske miselnosti, v kateri je prišlo do Četrtomajskega gibanja, naj bi kitajski izobraženci prepoznali svoje omejitve pri obravnavanju in iskanju ekstencionalnih resnic. Ravno zaradi tega prej omenjeni Zhang Zhidongov slogan o ohranjanju kitajske kulture ob hkratnem prevzemanju zahodne tehnologije (*zhong ti xi yong*) ni ustrezen; če namreč hočemo pridobiti ustrezno orodje za prepoznavanje ekstencionalnih resnic, ni dovolj, če preprosto nabiramo in akumuliramo znanje, temveč moramo razumeti tudi globlje plasti idejnih in kulturnih diskurzov, ki so omogočili njihov razvoj. Drugače od Kitajcev, ki so se torej že konec devetnajstega in na pragu dvajsetega stoletja pričeli soočati s spoznanjem o nujnosti ekstencionalnih resnic, pa »zahodnjaki« nikoli niso doumeli svojih primanjkljajev pri spoznavanju intencionalnih resnic, saj jim jih sploh ni uspelo videti kot resnice (Tang 2002, 342). Ta primanjkljaj se po Moujevem mnenju jasno kaže tudi v problemih, ki pestijo moderne in postmoderne (zahodne) družbe. Prav ta uvid v potrebo po vzpostavljanju ekstencionalnih resnic je po mnenju Mou Zongsana na Kitajskem privedel do specifičnega razsvetljenjskega gibanja, ki se je odrazilo v četrtomajski kulturni prenovi in novem zanimanju kitajskih izobražencev za znanost in demokracijo.

Tudi Mou Zongsan zagovarja stališče, da je kitajska kultura sicer zelo pozitivna pri razvijanju morale in etike, vendar precej pomanjkljiva pri vzpostavljanju demokratične politike in znanosti. Kot drugi predstavniki modernega konfucijanstva pa tudi on vztraja pri prepričanju, da to še zdaleč ne pomeni, da naj kitajska kultura z znanostjo in demokracijo ne bi bila združljiva. Za inkorporacijo dejavnega subjekta, ki je nujno potreben tako za razvoj znanosti kot tudi za vzpostavitev demokratičnega družbenega sistema, se mora koncept tradicionalnega moralnega sebstva transformirati prek procesa t. i. samonegacije (*ziwo kanxian*; gl. Rošker 2013, 134–46).

Drugače od drugih predstavnikov druge generacije modernega konfucijanstva se je Mou Zongsan, ki je bil v prvi vrsti filozof, precej ukvarjal z vzpostavitvijo ideje tega novega, dejavnega subjekta, ki je potreben za razvoj moderne znanosti in demokracije. Mou poskuša prenovljeni koncept takšnega subjekta izpeljati iz osnovnih predpostavk in tendenc konfucijanske filozofije, kar naj bi mu pomagalo pri zapolnitvi neskladnosti in s tem pri nadgradnji takšnega koncepta subjekta, kakršnega so izdelali predstavniki nemške klasične filozofije. Pri tem se osredotoča predvsem na tri osnovne attribute, s katerimi mora biti tak koncept nujno



»opremljen«. Prvi je razum, ki je pomemben zlasti pri razvoju znanosti. Druga dva je mogoče najti v idejah svobodne volje in avtonomije, torej v tistih elementih, ki so konstitutivni dejavniki demokracije. Za Mouja je svobodna avtonomna volja samozastavljeni kodeks, torej tista, ki razglaša ukaze, oziroma tista, ki določa dolžnosti. Ukaz se pri tem nanaša na ukazovanje človeku, ki mora delovati v skladu z moralnimi zakoni, zato je delovanje v skladu z njimi njegova dolžnost. Ukazi in dolžnosti se pri tem ne nanašajo na svobodno avtonomno voljo. Samozastavljeni kodeks svobodne avtonomne volje je namreč končna meja kapacitete substance prirojene narave (ali prirojenih lastnosti, *xingti*) človeka. Dolžnosti, ki izhajajo iz nje, niso nič drugega kot moja lastna odmera.<sup>7</sup> ... Kapaciteta substance prirojene narave (prirojenih lastnosti) je torej tista, ki določa to odmero (Mou 1975, 76–77).

Če bi bil vsak človek zares po svoje »odmerjen«, kot v svojem sistemu sugerira Mou, bi se celoten sistem nemške klasične (in z njim celotne evro-ameriške) filozofije v hipu sesul. Vendar pa nas vprašanje njegovega morebitnega sesutja tukaj ne zanima, zanima nas predvsem to, kakšen je sistem demokracije, kot si ga je omislil Mou. Lastna, intimna »odmera« (*fen*) posameznika se v konfucijanstvu povezuje z njegovim socialnim položajem in je torej hkrati, kot izpostavi Mou, določena z limitacijo kapacitet (*bu rongyi*) njegovega moralnega sebstva.

Lahko bi se torej tudi vprašali, ali ni človek kot bitje v takšnem sistemu še veliko bolj determiniran kot v sistemih modernih naravoslovnih znanosti. Takšna »odmera« bi namreč morala odločilno vplivati tudi na obstoj in možnosti »stopnje« uresničenja moralnega sebstva. Načelne možnosti zanjo je namreč že izvorno konfucijanstvo načeloma ponujalo vsakemu posamezniku (in teoretično celo vsaki posameznici). Seveda pa ne smemo pozabiti, da gre pri teh možnostih za idejni konstrukt, ki (po vsej verjetnosti) nikjer ni bil uresničen.<sup>8</sup>

7 Pri podrobnejši razlagi te fraze Mou zopet navaja Mencija, ki zapiše: »To, kar je plemenitniku prirojeno, se ne more povečati s še tako velikopoteznim delovanjem, niti zmanjšati s pasivnim mirovanjem, kajti to je določeno z njegovo lastno odmero« (*Mengzi* 2012: Jinxin shang, 21). (君子所性，雖大行不加焉，雖窮居不損焉，分定故也). Pri tem gre torej za individualne predispozicije posameznika, ki so omejene.

8 Moderni konfucijanci so poznali odgovore tudi na takšne očitke. Zasnovali so jih v epistemološkem konceptu *chengxian*, torej v hipnem pojavljanju vsebin človeške notranjosti v minljivi sferi konkretne dejanskosti. Pri tem se večinoma niso pretirano ukvarjali z vprašanjem, na kakšen način naj bi se v sferi konkretne stvarnosti, ki je sestavljena zgolj iz najrazličnejših hipnih oblik bivanja, lahko oblikoval koncept neskončne zavesti, saj mora biti ta opredeljena tudi s kontinuiteto.

## Zaključek

Osrednji razlog, da sem pri analizi političnih teorij modernega konfucijanstva kot paradigmatska primera izbrala zgoraj obravnavana teoretika, je v tem, da gre pri Tangu in Mouju za edina predstavnika druge generacije, ki sta v svojem teoretskem sistemu ustvarila lasten, v sebi zaključen in koherenten sistem. Kljub temu je pričujoči prispevek jasno pokazal, da sta njuni politični filozofiji nedodelani in porozni, četudi drži, da je Moujeva teorija nekoliko bolj koherentna, kar verjetno velja pripisati njegovemu odličnemu poznavanju zahodne filozofije. Ker je predmet pričujočega prispevka teorija kitajske modernizacije in izhodišča moderniziranja protodemokratskih elementov konfucijanstva, je poznavanje zahodnih diskurzov pri tem izjemno pomembno.

Vendar je raziskava jasno pokazala, da vprašanja, na kakšen konkreten način naj bi se vse te moderne inačice konfucijanstva povezale s konkretnimi problemi, ki pestijo sodobne kitajske družbe, Tangu ni uspelo razrešiti, a tudi Moujevi topogledni predlogi so še nedodelani. Nobeden od njiju še ni vzpostavil kritične teorije družbe. Podobno tendenco lahko opazimo tudi pri njunih stališčih o znanosti, saj nista znala izdelati (ali vsaj nakazati) teorije takšne znanosti, ki bi združila, kot zapiše Mou Zongsan, »dve vrsti resnic« oziroma dve ustrezni obliki reprezentacije razuma (gl. Rošker 2013, 149–65). Šele takšna znanost bi namreč lahko preseгла številna partikularna nasprotja, iz katerih je sestavljena, in jih združila v komplementarne odnose znotraj razumne strukture (*li*) človeškega bivanja. Šele takšna znanost ne bi več temeljila niti na izključevanju niti na formalno določenih omejitvah kvantitativne metodologije in bi zato omogočila osmišljanje človeškega življenja.

Vendar pa Mou in Tang poudarjata, da je pomembna razlika med zahodnimi modeli demokracije in konfucijanskimi načeli pravične (demokratske) družbe v tem, da slednji slonijo na prepričanju o moralni enakovrednosti vseh ljudi, medtem ko prvi zagovarjajo predvsem načelo politične enakosti. V tem lahko uzremo nadvse problematično nasprotje; tudi če v konfucijanskih diskurzih upoštevamo razliko med avtokratskimi (Xunzijeve legalistična linija) in demokratičnimi (mencijanske ideje) elementi, je obema strujama vendarle skupno načelo hierarhičnega ustroja družbe, ki predstavlja tudi jedro političnih teorij izvornega konfucijanstva in znotraj katerega hierarhično višji (torej nadrejeni) člen razpolaga z avtoriteto, medtem ko je podrejeni položaj opredeljen z načelno poslušnostjo. Vendar velja pri tem opozoriti, da ta model – zlasti v izvornem konfucijanstvu – temelji na načelu komplementarnosti in recipročne odgovornosti. Tudi če je v kitajski zgodovini prevladal avtokratski model hierarhije, v katerem je postala avtoriteta vladarjev absolutna, načelo njihove odgovornosti do podložnikov pa zgolj še

formalna ideja oziroma simbolna ikona, ne smemo pozabiti, da je bil konfucianizem kot državna doktrina vendarle doktrina oblastnikov, v glavnem opredeljena z legalističnimi elementi, ki v političnih idealih izvirnega konfucijanstva niso bili prisotni (gl. Buljan 2016, 78). Po drugi strani pa ne smemo pozabiti, da je določena oblika hierarhične strukture prisotna tudi v sistemu predstavniških demokracij in da avtoriteta, osnovana na izkušnjah, izobrazbi in sposobnostih, ni nujno nekaj negativnega, kar bi apriorno ogrožalo avtonomijo posameznika v skupnosti.

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