Selected Papers from the 2nd World Forum on China Studies

(Abstracts)

Panel 4

The Tradition of Harmony in Chinese Cultures

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Panel 4

The Tradition of Harmony in Chinese Cultures

1) Giving up Dominance of Huaxia: Shaping of a Dynamic China

------ By Fongching Chen (Hongkong, China)

Abstracts:
A big contrast between China and Europe in terms of modern politics and culture is, the former had a stable and highly continuous process while the later witnessed a changing, or even broken course. The difference was not totally originated from the difference between their different ideologies. Actually, European countries in mediaeval times aimed at a peaceful society, just like Chinese nation did towards a prosperous and strong country. The difference, in my opinion, owes to the fact that Chinese government in Han Dynasty successfully bonded together politics and culture, hence, led to an overwhelming identical thoughts and culture consciousness spreading across the nation. Imperial examinations system adopted by following dynasties consolidated such cultural homogeneity. On the other hand, with law its base of governance, the Roman empire allowed the existence of heterogeneous cultures, religions and races. The governors thereafter, including the Charlemagne Empire, the Holy Roman Empire as well as Roman Curia all failed in taking Christianism its dominant culture in Europe. The failure was resulted from its heterogeneity in terms of race and ideology. For this reason, western church was heavily defeated in the culture governance, which gave birth to the Enlightenment. Although China was repeatedly defeated by the western since mid 18 century, it failed to change itself efficiently, due to its continuity as a whole and its ideological stability. Therefore, it could not adapt itself to the quick developments resulted from changes of science and technology and other modern political concepts. In accordance, the successful reform in 1980s emphasized opening to the outside world and allowed some people to get rich first, which decreased the continuity and wholeness of the nation. This marked the beginning of so-called dynamic society. A dynamic society in the west is built in a country which has only a scale of a province in China. So, this issue of wholeness and continuity are greatly relaxed as they are translated into issues of international relations. Owing to its large scale, China is faced with more difficulties when balancing between releasing its social dynamics and keeping its social stability. In this context, it is a political philosophy problem, rather than a technology-related or policy-related issue to overcome these difficulties. China needs badly to study on this problem first, for the building of a harmonious dynamic society and to contribute to world peace. A big contrast between China and Europe in terms of modern politics and culture is, the former had a stable and highly continuous process while the later witnessed a changing, or even broken course. The difference was not totally originated from the difference between their different ideologies. Actually, European
countries in mediaeval times aimed at a peaceful society, just like Chinese nation did towards a prosperous and strong country. The difference, in my opinion, owes to the fact that Chinese government in Han Dynasty successfully bonded together politics and culture, hence, led to an overwhelming identical thoughts and culture consciousness spreading across the nation. Imperial examinations system adopted by following dynasties consolidated such cultural homogeneity. On the other hand, with law its base of governance, the Roman empire allowed the existence of heterogeneous cultures, religions and races. The governors thereafter, including the Charlemagne Empire, the Holy Roman Empire as well as Roman Curia all failed in taking Christianism its dominant culture in Europe. The failure was resulted from its heterogeneity in terms of race and ideology. For this reason, western church was heavily defeated in the culture governance, which gave birth to the Enlightenment. Although China was repeatedly defeated by the western since mid 18 century, it failed to change itself efficiently, due to its continuity as a whole and its ideological stability. Therefore, it could not adapt itself to the quick developments resulted from changes of science and technology and other modern political concepts. In accordance, the successful reform in 1980s emphasized opening to the outside world and allowed some people to get rich first, which decreased the continuity and wholeness of the nation. This marked the beginning of so-called dynamic society. A dynamic society in the west is built in a country which has only a scale of a province in China. So, this issue of wholeness and continuity are greatly relaxed as they are translated into issues of international relations. Owing to its large scale, China is faced with more difficulties when balancing between releasing its social dynamics and keeping its social stability. In this context, it is a political philosophy problem, rather than a technology-related or policy-related issue to overcome these difficulties. China needs badly to study on this problem first, for the building of a harmonious dynamic society and to contribute to world peace.

2) The International Spread of Confucianism: the Macao Perspective
------ By Gang Gong (Macao, China)

Abstracts:
It is something worthy of note that the aspects of traditional culture attach themselves to multi-angle pattern of modern democratic political environment. The Confucianism plays a very important role in Macao society. It is essential to explore the way to promulgate Confucianism in Macao and thereafter to use Macao as a platform to promulgate Confucianism to the countries or regions having close historical relations with Macao, so as to construct the Macao pattern of spread of Confucianism that results from the special status of Macao. There are different opinions about Confucianism among the Macao society, especially that the lack of understanding of Confucianism among youngsters causes cultural vacuum on Confucianism. The foundation of the Confucianism Institute is a new start-point for Confucianism
spreading in Macao, however, how the traditional value and practice of Confucianism be adapted to the Macao society which is deeply involved in the global fashion culture still remains a question. On the other hand, there are still vigorous common values in the traditional Confucianism, which can not only be the dharma ideals for people to pursue, but also be the standard to build modern system. The Confucianism is not only systematic gnome or wise ethic rule, but also animated living style and life philosophy. The main topics that involved are also questions that people need to answer. The comparative study between the Institute of Confucianism and the Goethe Institute shows that as the typical figure of Chinese culture, Confucius is not only a reliable symbol to export Chinese national culture, but also important sign to revive Chinese traditional culture and Confucianism.

3) Patriotic Cosmopolitanism: Civilization and the Will to Power in the Age of Globalization
------- By Claes Ryn (United States)

Abstracts:
If cordial, respectful relations are to be possible among persons, groups, peoples and cultures, the human desire to dominate others needs to be restrained. In China one source of moral restraint is Confucianism, as reflected in "The Great Learning." In America, the tradition of constitutionalism has been similarly concerned about taming and civilizing the will to power. Conflict can be reduced through moral restraint and humility. What is needed in this era of globalization is neither national cultural self-effacement nor reactionary nationalist aggressiveness, but patriotic cosmopolitanism. Though rooted in the best of national culture and compatible with national pride, patriotic cosmopolitanism is indistinguishable from appreciation for the strengths of other societies and cultures. It is characterized by moral and other restraint. Peaceful at its moral core, patriotic cosmopolitanism is a force for international peace.

4) Chinese Traditional Aesthetics and Humanist Idea
------- By Jix Yuan (China)

Abstracts:
Chinese traditional aesthetics is an important component of Chinese traditional culture and the deep foundation of Chinese national spirit, integrating philosophical, literary and artistic thoughts into an organic whole and reflecting all aspects of our national soul with rich and various forms. Humanist idea in Chinese traditional aesthetics has very deep foundation, directly promoted by Chinese nation’s living situation and human environment. Starting from the living consciousness of “man is an integral part
of the nature”, our ancient people engendered the way to think: combining objective thing and subjective human being, which was engraved on the theory of yin-yang and eight diagrams in Book of Changes and the theory of yin-yang and five elements. Its influence on people’s aesthetic conception is unified grand cultural idea, which made virtually our ancient people view aesthetic activities, natural laws and harmonious life as a unified thing. This made Chinese traditional aesthetic thought different from the Western aesthetics, which cognitive idea is good at observing details since ancient Greece. The humanist foundation of Chinese traditional aesthetics first reflects in seeking life’s emancipation and life’s significance. Chinese nation is a nation loving life and taking harmony as beauty. As an explosion of individual life, aesthetic activities often showed directly in some special times. Comparing with philosophical rational thinking and ethical practice, aesthetical activities made human life’s impulse sublime in the kingdom of beauty, spirit free and life’s significance transcendent, through “reciting and singing with feeling and love”, this function outstood mostly in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. Since the East Han and Wei Dynasties, Chinese society run into an unprecedented trouble and separation, but the people did not give up fighting against the darkness and seeking ideal personality. At that time, while various philosophical thoughts developed to rethink natural laws and human affairs, aesthetical activity became a creative activity to recast spiritual personality. As a crystal of this human consciousness and cultural spirit, aesthetic writings at that time were brilliant and spread all-round benefits to later generations. Another main manifestation of Chinese traditional aesthetics’ humanist foundation is to substitute religionary human care and to bear national cultural mentality independently. In her long-term existence and struggle, Chinese nation has formed an optimistic and active philosophy, which mental manifestation is “living and growing in nature”, “optimist, and knowing fate but not anxious”. In spite of many negative elements in this cultural mentality, it made Chinese people extricated from doom and pain through aesthetic activities. In his article “Poem can express complaint”, Mr. Qian Zhongshu pointed out, and the people in the Six Dynasties considered that aesthetics played a role of stopping pain and soothing the nerves. “Roaring out somber songs instead of crying and looking far into the distance instead of return home”, is the basic value with which Chinese traditional aesthetics viewed the relationship between life and aesthetics. Chinese traditional aesthetics embodied Chinese nation’s taste of nature and life, which integrated feeling and cognition into an organic whole, different from religion but with a religion-like transcendent conception and rich aesthetical meaning. Both Taoist and Confucian philosophies defined the highest ideal of personality in a realm of combining objective thing and subjective human being in an organic whole beyond utilitarianism. Western philosophy or takes cognition as its character, or takes transcendent religion world as its end, but these two realms are characterized by separation of subject from object. Nevertheless, Chinese ancient philosophy and aesthetics claimed to set up human value on the base of unification of nature and humankind, which agency is aesthetic experience. This feature determines that Chinese culture can resolve problems of spiritual believes without religion and makes people get an aesthetic transcendence. In modern China, Mr. Cai Yuanpei put forward
that aesthetic education can substitute religion, his reason originated from Chinese nation’s cultural characteristics. The humanist foundation of Chinese traditional aesthetics also manifests in its conception of self-education. In very early ages, Book of Changes pointed out, interlace of hardness and softness and co-existence of culture and materials are natural phenomenon, but human civilization must adopt a golden mean in appropriate measure. It shows that human civilization not only coincides with nature and astronomy but also markedly different from them. The essence is to outstand the linkage between humankind and nature and enhances that humankind must conduct education according with natural laws and civilizes the world actively. This shows that in very early times, Chinese culture set up a humanist spirit that put humankind in a universal context to research and civilized the world with self-education. The deep humanist foundation of Chinese traditional aesthetics is an outstanding manifestation of Chinese nation’s spiritual world and cultural mentality. It has two elements both of eternality and temporality in its formation, indicated by Hegel in his book Aesthetics. In the process of metabolism in modern Chinese society, this old culture system was inevitably retreated and re-explained by the people, along with the entrance of Western capitalist culture and sciences in large scale. In this meaning, the history of Chinese traditional aesthetics as a whole has gone to its end, but as a crystal of human spirit, especially as a tie with which a nation maintaining his spiritual world, the culture has eternality and transcendence. Its eternality will never disappear nor be assimilated by foreign cultures in the course of economic and political changes. After the Movement of May Forth, the vitality of Chinese traditional aesthetics did not disappear but was inherited and developed in some aestheticians. Accompanied by modern China’s enlightenment thoughts, the rise and evolution of Chinese modern aesthetics were influenced both by Western enlightenment thoughts and inherited and transformed the spiritual value of Chinese traditional aesthetics. Liang Qichao, Lu Xun, Wang Guowei, Zong Baihua and Zhu Guangqian were aesthetic masters emerged in this course. They combined the construction of aesthetics with transformation of national nature and creation of healthy personality devoted them to fuse Chinese and Western cultures and to integrate cultivation of people and aesthetic theory into an organic whole. Their successful practice proved that the vitality of Chinese traditional aesthetics was not exhausted and through activation its human implication and spiritual value can play great role even in modern society. With these basic values of Chinese culture, Chinese nation has kept her national spirit, lived and grew toughly, gone out of darkness and recreated a new life in the front of various tremendous natural and man-made disasters.

5) The Influence of Mi Fu and Chinese Aesthetics on Colette Brunschwig's Art of Witnessing
------ By Steven Shankman (United States)
Abstracts:
This talk will explore a particular instance of the dialogue between Chinese art and European modernism. Colette Brunschwig (b. 1927) is a renowned painter currently living in Paris who was deeply influenced by the traditional art of China. Brunschwig is a Jew who was hidden, during the Nazi occupation, by a Catholic friend who introduced her to the art of China. Brunschwig conceived of her art as bearing witness to the Holocaust, including the loss of her own family members in the catastrophe. After the war, Brunschwig became friends with the great Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (d. 1995), who argues that a witness "does not thematize what it bears witness of, and whose truth is not the truth of representation" (Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence, trans. A. Lingis [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998], p. 146; originally published in French in 1974). In order to bear witness, through her art, to the trauma of the Holocaust, Brunschwig turns away from representation, from the notion of mimesis that dominates Western art from its beginnings through early modernism. Part of the appeal of Chinese art, for Brunschwig, is that it never was under the sway of the theory of imitation. In the Book of Documents, for example, we read: shi yan zhi ("poetry articulates what is on the mind intently"). We hear nothing, in this definition, that resembles the Western/Aristotelian idea that poetry is a representation of reality. What poetry does, rather, is to put into words a welling up of sincere, preverbalized emotion. What the words articulate is similar to what Levinas calls the "droiture" or straightforwardness of the "saying" (le dire) which is a response to the other that precedes language in the mode of representation and the matization. In order to bear witness in her work, Colette Brunschwig turns to the art of traditional China, and particularly to Mi Fu (1052-1107), the Northern Song dynasty calligrapher and painter who was brought up in Kaifeng, then the capital city and a town later known for its magnificent synagogue, as Matteo Ricci later noted, where several hundred descendents of Kaifeng's "Israelites" still live. Mi Fu's radically impressionistic "Mi-dot" technique has much in common with the radical impressionism of Brunschwig's European master, Claude Monet (1840-1926).

6) Transcultural Strategies for a Multipolar Cultural World: The Principle of Reciprocal Knowledge
------- By Alain Pichon (France)

Abstracts:
This presentation will refer to research field experiences through the programmes, which have been developed in Transcultura network together with West African and Chinese scholars. Even if deeply rooted in ancient Greek epistemological tradition, and notably in Aristotelician philosophy (Nicomacos Ethics), principle of reciprocity, and, consequently, reciprocal knowledge concept, has been progressively forgotten, inside western societies. And this happened, along with the very process of western
cultures history, as, in the same time, science was developing a behaviour based on the exactly opposite principles of autopsy and dissection. This paper is based on the main idea that, today, due to the process of globalisation, globalisation of cultures and globalisation of knowledge, returning to the principle of reciprocity, to be applied and considered on the both ethical and epistemological point of views, could be the milestone for the management of intercultural relations, in producing and using real transcultural methodologies. In a tentative for participating in this necessary refunding process of human knowledge, Transcultura has developed an experience, together with a team of Chinese scholars, and developing an academic transcultural network. This network is organised, according to the very principle of reciprocal knowledge, in an observatory triangle working, through couples of different cultures observers, between different Asian, European and African cultures. We’ll try and present some aspects of this approach, as a preparatory and experimental phase, to develop transcultural methodologies, or, rather, meta-methodologies, and progressively building new patterns of the anthropological relation, which could be used to improve intercultural relations in international cooperation. We’ll first see a few figures, or diagram’s, representing some of the main possible configurations in observers’ reciprocal situations, considering as evidence, this assertion of Ludwig Wittgenstein, “the eye cannot see himself”, and the subsequent evidence that there should be no anthropological knowledge if not based on reciprocal observation and mutual recognition. This reciprocal knowledge should include a reciprocal evaluation of the different distortions due to the conditions of observation, that cannot be detected but from the position of an outside observer. But this outside observer should himself be submitted to the same rule, in a reciprocal process. The optical game, known under the name of “anamorphosis”, using the reciprocal reflection of a genuine object, according to the different optical distortions of different mirrors, to reproduce in the end the right and corrected image of it, can offer an interesting pattern of this process. As a consequence of these considerations, we can observe the difference which is existing between a transcultural and an intercultural relation, as well between intercultural and transcultural analytic, or critic, methodologies. The different patterns of knowledge, due particularly to the different patterns, or “games of languages” (Wittgenstein) are playing here the role of the mirrors’ distorting curves. Because of its proper history, anthropology as a specific discipline, as well as other human sciences, is deeply rooted in the context of western cultures history, including especially the question of their relations with non western cultures. In this context, and for these reasons, reciprocal knowledge has not been considered, nor practiced, in the different fields of human sciences. Considered in its possible, even if unpredictable, issue of a multi-polar and multicultural world, the process of globalisation should include a radical change and pave the way for renewed practices in international relations, in the cultural, economic and scientific fields.

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