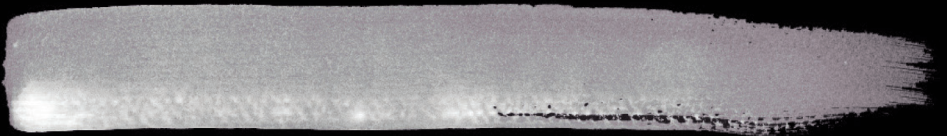


Tang Junyi

Confucian Philosophy and the Challenge of Modernity



Thomas Fröhlich

Tang Junyi

Modern Chinese Philosophy

Edited by

John Makeham (*La Trobe University*)

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By

Thomas Fröhlich



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Preface and Acknowledgments

The present book on Tang Junyi attempts to make his work accessible for contemporary philosophy and intellectual history. Although I have interpreted Tang's works as an intellectual historian, I endeavor here to do more than think about him. I also think *with* Tang and, consequently, at times go beyond him.

It is admittedly not the case that all of Tang's oeuvre equally deserves contemporary philosophy's undivided attention. Indeed, some parts are best left to intellectual historians. Their examination can deepen our historical understanding of modern Confucianism, without necessarily having immediate relevance for current discussions in international philosophy or political theory. Other parts, however, undoubtedly offer stimulating insights with respect to ongoing discourses, for example on modernity, in these disciplines.

The scope of the subject matter covered by Tang's philosophy is vast. Readers can thus follow their own interests by perusing specific chapters. For those with little interest in political ideas and historical thinking, Chapters 8 to 12 are of secondary importance. As regards the first three chapters, and Chapters 5 and 6, they offer an examination of the historical and intellectual contexts of Tang's Confucianism, as well as an analysis of the civil-theological framework, which is crucial for understanding his philosophical undertaking. Chapter 7 should also be of interest for those readers who do not normally study political philosophy. It shows how profoundly Tang's thought differs from common, often uninspiring interpretations of Confucianism and its idea of man. In the same vein, Chapter 4 is meant to correct the impression that Confucians of the 20th century mostly contented themselves with defending "Chinese culture" and fighting cultural battles against Western influence. The fact that Tang was more concerned with general problems of modern life and exile is one of the reasons why his work rewards careful study.

Finally, it is not my aim to reconstruct Tang Junyi's philosophy as a closed system free from inner contradictions. This would inevitably lead to omissions and misrepresentations of certain parts of his work. Nor do I wish to present a hermetic exegesis of his writings that would have little more to offer than a straightforward reading of his texts.

Research on the present work began more than fifteen years ago. Some parts have been published, in earlier versions, as articles in journals and collective volumes. Chapter 4 is based on my "The Exilic Prism of Modernity: New Perspectives on the Post-War Philosophy of Tang Junyi;" Chapters 7 and 8 contain some revised passages from "Tang Junyi, Max Weber und die Mächte des Dämonischen. Zum Politikverständnis eines modernen Konfuzianers," and

“Tang Junyi und die konfuzianische Erneuerung des chinesischen Staates;” Chapter 9 entails revised passages of “‘Confucian Democracy’ and its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism;” Chapters 11 and 12 contain parts of “The Challenge of Totalitarianism: Lessons from Tang Junyi’s Political Philosophy.”

I wish to thank the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research for funding the *International Consortium for the Research in the Humanities: Fate, Freedom, and Prognostication. Strategies of Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe* (at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg). This research project gave me the opportunity, as one of its directors, to work on this book in an inspiring intellectual environment. The same applies to the visiting professorship at the University of Hamburg, where I finished the manuscript. I am sincerely grateful to the colleagues from Sinology at the University of Hamburg for inviting me to their institute.

I am indebted to many colleagues for their support over the years. Professors Sébastien Billioud (Paris Diderot), Stéphane Feuillas (Paris Diderot), Michael Friedrich (Hamburg), Hon Tze-ki (SUNY Geneseo), Huang Kuan-min (Academia Sinica, Taiwan), Lionel Jensen (Notre Dame, Colorado), Kai Marchal (Soochow University, Taiwan), Peng Guoxiang (Zhejiang University), Axel Schneider (Göttingen), Takahiro Nakajima (Tokyo University), Kai Vogelsang (Hamburg), and Ralph Weber (Basel) have either read earlier articles, parts of this book, or discussed its subject matter. Their comments and suggestions were very helpful. Tu Wei-ming (IHAS Beijing) kindly invited me along to visit the Fazhu Institute in Hong Kong, whose chairperson Huo Taohui is a former student of Tang Junyi. Other colleagues offered insightful comments on the occasion of numerous talks and at conferences where I have presented my research on Tang in recent years. I am also indebted to the book’s two reviewers, Professor Jason Clower (California State University) and an anonymous reader. Their critical comments and questions were invaluable in improving the manuscript. Finally, Dr. Christopher Reid was a very reliable, but also inspiring proofreader.

Tang Junyi's Intellectual Endeavor

A Journey into a Broken World

Tang Junyi conveyed a vivid impression of the huge distance between the Sichuan of his youth and the modernizing Hong Kong of the late 1960s in an interview that he gave to a student journal two decades after his emigration to Hong Kong in 1949. He revealed that his interest had been piqued by the American hippie movement after watching a documentary about Woodstock in a movie theater in Hong Kong. His comments are particularly illuminating not only because they highlight his extensive intellectual journey, but also his liberal mindset. For instance, he indicated his fascination with the fact that the hippies practiced a passive form of social protest, albeit without a clear objective. While he sympathized with the hippies, he critically observed that they had no adequate form of expressing their opinions or their longing for individuality. They also had no real idea of how to proceed. At most, they seemed only able to engage in a form of protest that was specifically linked to their clothing and hair style. Tang believed that they ultimately did not know how to positively change the external world and thus resorted to transforming their own internal realities—their feelings—through another form of protest, namely, by taking drugs. While he was convinced that hippies lacked “inner peace” and individual strength, he also recognized that their music appealed to audiences despite its sense of despair and restlessness. What is more, even though he disclosed his conservative sexual morality in diagnosing an “indulgence in sexual life” in Europe and America (believing it to be a sign of the “degeneration of Western culture”¹), he still refrained from condemning the hippie movement altogether.²

Woodstock might seem far removed for a Chinese philosopher who was born in suburban Southwestern Sichuan on January 17, 1909, four days before the reign of the second to last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, the Guangxu-Emperor,

1 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 325 (interview in the *Mingbao* 明報 from 1974).

2 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 385, 393–394. The interview was published on August 7, 1970 in *Zhongguo Xuesheng Zhoubao*, No. 42.

had officially ended.³ At that time, the Chinese state was rapidly disintegrating and many parts of the country were caught in the grip of tumultuous political, social, and intellectual change. Tang not only lived through these events and the upheavals of the following decades, but he felt compelled to make sense of them. His philosophical oeuvre, which reflects this endeavor, is marked by many achievements and failures, along with some surprises. Tang was one of modern China's most prolific thinkers. He relentlessly produced his lifework, which spans a remarkable range of intellectual concerns, over the course of half a century.⁴ His life indeed seems to be characterized by a persistent effort to keep pace intellectually with an age of unprecedented cataclysms and recurrent political and social turmoil in China and the world.

Tang's statements about the hippie movement are also remarkable because they reveal his open-mindedness toward social phenomena that must have been unsettling to a tradition-conscious thinker. Tang himself would have referred to his intellectual and personal attitude as "humanistic," but it might also be called "liberal." Liu Shu-hsien aptly sums up this attitude when he writes that "[f]or Tang everyone has to find the best for himself in the context given."⁵ This liberal mindset was certainly prone to ambiguity, for while Tang upheld a culturally conservative world view, he was also convinced that a rigid insistence on traditional orders of political and moral values was untenable for modernizing societies. As a result, his reflection on modernity was largely free from schematic distinctions between (Chinese) tradition and (Western) modernity.

Tang maintained his liberal outlook in the face of hostile political tendencies and historical turmoil. The most severe disruption in his life came in 1949, when he left the Chinese Mainland for good. At the time he immigrated to Hong Kong, his life had probably not been in immediate danger, nor did Chinese communism likely pose a personal threat to him. Indeed, he had never publicly criticized the communists before his years in exile.⁶ This would

3 For a brief biographical summary of Tang's life, see the *Biographical Survey* at the end of this book. A major source for Tang's biography, apart from Tang's diaries, is Tang Duanzheng's *Chronicle of the life and work of Tang Junyi*, see Tang, *Nianpu*; see also Tang Duanzheng's *Tang Junyi zhuanlüe*.

4 In Tang's thirty volumes of collected writings there are over 450 publications, including 20 books; an index of these works can be found in Tang, *Zhushu nianbiao*, pp. 3–71; cf. also Feng, *Tang Junyi xiansheng jinian ji*, pp. 29–117.

5 Liu, *Essentials of Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, p. 103.

6 Tang, *Tang Junyi zhuanlüe*, p. 50. Perhaps it was due to Tang's reticence that Liang Shuming decided to write him a letter in December 1951 suggesting that Tang return to the Mainland. Li Yuandeng 李源澄 and Qian Ziyuan 錢子原 also wrote letters to the same effect. In a letter

change almost immediately after his arrival in Hong Kong. In the context of the Cold War period, he began to equate communist rule on the Chinese Mainland with totalitarianism, which, for him, was inextricably linked to modernity (see Chap. 12). Other aspects of modernity appeared on Tang's philosophical agenda as well which were no less threatening to him. His reflection on the exilic experience was, above all, closely intertwined with a perceptive observation of modernity's downsides. These included the experience of the individual's cultural alienation, social isolation, and intellectual marginalization. Tang once remarked that the contemporary situation of the exiled Chinese is characterized by the fact that their "motherland has been destroyed and [their] home lost"⁷—that their hopes for their lives and educational ideals now "loom in the emptiness," and they therefore "roam around" and are "carried by the wind."⁸ In fact, Tang conceptualized the exilic experience as a sort of prism through which one could not only grasp the nature of modernity, but also conceive of ways to cope with it. This interweaving of exile and modernity informs his reflection on the identity and stability of the individual self in modern society (see Chap. 4).

At the interface between exile and modernity, Tang also pondered the aggressive colonization of human societies by hegemonic forms of instrumental rationality and an ensuing reification of social and cultural relations. This led to his diagnosis of the global unfolding of an instrumental type of modernization that was posing a lethal threat to the remnants of intellectual traditions and established ways of life. In the wake of the communist takeover on the Chinese Mainland, he described this threat at times in a dramatic way, detecting initial signs of a withering away of China's humanistic culture. However, he insisted that a wholesale rejection of modernity was not feasible, and he was keenly aware of the dangerous implications of ideologies that promised fundamental solutions to the modern malaise. He also did not opt for a "Chinese" solution, for he knew that many emancipatory facets of political modernity—among them constitutional government, human rights, the rule of law, and democracy—had Western, not Chinese origins. The same could be said, by and large, of the dynamic process of industrialization and scientific-technological development. Significantly, Tang never subscribed to the type of historical speculation that predicted the emergence of a superior, predominantly "Chinese" form of modernity. Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) had

from January 1952, Tang reaffirmed to Liang his decision to stay in Hong Kong: Li, "Tang Junyi shujian xi nian xianyi bu ding," pp. 119–120.

7 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, p. 470.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 478.

done this in his widely popular book *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (*Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhhexue*) from 1921.⁹ On the contrary, Tang was convinced that modern societies were irremediably broken to the point where no single, comprehensive doctrine could adequately respond to their inherently ambiguous life-worlds.

Yet Tang was still convinced that members of modern societies needed to maintain, at least in some measure, an affirmative identification with cultural life in order to instill meaning into their own ways of life—even if existing conditions were in turmoil and the given cultural contexts on the brink of disintegration. Otherwise, neither individuals nor collectivities would be able to uphold an authentic self-reassurance. Indeed, authenticity was one of Tang's major concerns. Under the condition of an irretrievably alienating modernization, an effort of normative "reconstruction" was necessary since authenticity could no longer be understood as a historically given condition. Yet he disagreed with the reactionary forces that propagated a return to imperial political and cultural traditions, a tendency which culminated under the dictatorial rule of Yuan Shikai in the mid-1910s. Tang's stance was also critical toward the so-called movement for a "New Culture," which began at around the same time. He was highly skeptical about the tendency of "New Culture" proponents to subject the modern plurality of Chinese life-worlds to totalistic forms of scientism. Despite these misgivings, his opposition to the movement remained limited to the intellectual sphere. The political goal of democracy, on the other hand, was not contested by the New Culture Movement or Tang's modern Confucianism, nor was the basic understanding that the introduction of modern science to China was indispensable.

Overall, Tang's diagnosis of Chinese modernity was bleak. This was especially true with regard to China's prolonged failure in catching up with Western nation-states economically, and its inability to establish a robust democratic republic after 1911. Reflecting on China's historical course, Tang faced

9 While studying at Peking University from 1925 to 1927, Tang attended Liang Shuming's lectures on the eight stages of pursuing philosophy. After Liang was openly criticized by leftists when he delivered his public lectures, Tang, apparently sharing this criticism, stopped listening to Liang's talks. What is more, Tang deemed Liang's intuitionist philosophy too "subjective" and hence unreliable; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 19, 23. Li Yufang and Zhang Yunjiang indicate that Tang also attended lectures by Liang Shuming on the "Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies," but they do not substantiate this finding; see Li et al., "Tang Junyi qi fo gui ru zhi yuanyin chutan," p. 21. According to the *Nianpu*, Tang had read Liang's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* in 1923; see Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 15.

the uneasy reality that, except for the communist revolution of 1949, every other political revolution and use of military force had largely failed to produce any political and social stability. He thus drew the following fundamental lesson from China's continuous failure to establish a new and stable type of political order: Any attempt to implement a totalistic, substantial reintegration of modern society would inevitably come at the cost of traditionalism, dogmatism, authoritarianism, or even totalitarianism. What had to be acknowledged instead was the insight that the justification of institutions, procedures and norms of collective life could no longer rest on claims to a higher, "sacred" truth. Tang was thus well aware of the fact that in global modernity there were both emancipative currents and an ever-looming tendency toward the opposite, namely the totalistic reification of the human beings and their life-worlds. In Tang's view, modern subjects were indeed in danger of falling victim to their own rebellion against the fetters of traditional societies and ideas. This paradox marks the point of departure for his project to reconstruct Confucianism. It is therefore more to the point to address this reconstruction as "modern" rather than simply as "new." In fact, Tang hardly ever used the now common label of "new Confucianism" (*xin ruxue* 新儒學 / *xin rujia* 新儒家). The designation "modern" is also apt because Tang's project is consistent with key ideas of the Western philosophical criticism of modernity raised during the 20th century—whether in the context of philosophies of life, existentialism, philosophical anthropology, or political philosophy.

Tang occasionally termed his philosophical project "humanistic" (*renwen* 人文) and contended that Chinese humanism would need to "expand" in the future to attain the position of a "world humanism."¹⁰ The humanistic concern of thinking through modernity entails, first of all, the quest for a "moral self," i.e. a realization of man's "moral nature." Here, Tang harkened back to Confucian speculations about the individual's access to the inner moral truth of human nature. In the 20th century, these speculations had to be critically reassessed under specifically modern conditions. Tang consequently eliminated from his Confucian agenda the vain hope of overcoming the downsides of modernity by making an appeal to individuals to engage in ethical "self-cultivation." An uncritical belief in self-cultivation would make the individual highly susceptible to *Weltanschauungen* (world views) and political ideologies that proclaim the omnipotence of an ethical will in the realm of politics. Yet

10 See e.g. Tang's essay entitled "World humanism and Chinese humanism (Shijie renwenzhuyi yu Zhongguo renwenzhuyi 世界人文主義與中國人文主義)" from 1959; reprinted in Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 44.

the historical course of modernity, according to Tang, is not to be misunderstood as a process of inner-worldly salvation leading to the ethical realization of the good in human society.

Tang was equally skeptical towards reflections on modernity that simply adopt the “Western” perspective, no matter whether they are presented in the fields of social science, philosophy, or social criticism. But his skepticism did not prevent him from conceptualizing modernization as a globally ongoing process characterized by the gradual evolution of traits typically associated with contemporary Western societies. He assumed that over the long run functional and institutional differentiations of spheres of action which were observable in Western societies would emerge on a global scale. This pertained, in particular, to the division of labor in industrial society, and, above all, to the division of spheres of law and morality. Indeed, this assumption is critical to Tang’s universalistic concept of modernity-as-modernization. It forms the basis for his claim that modernization will produce the political form of a constitutional democracy, together with an industrial society. Yet Tang did not ignore particular historical conditions and intellectual traditions—such as those in China—which could shape modernity in different parts of the world. On the contrary, in reconsidering China’s intellectual traditions in the broad sense, he fought against what he perceived to be manifestations of a “Western” colonial hegemony or even cultural imperialism in the spheres of education, science, the liberal arts, and public debate. A number of Tang’s writings from the exile period bear witness to his crusade, as does his affirmative, pan-Asian depiction of post-war Japan as a model for preserving indigenous intellectual and material culture under conditions of rapid modernization (see Chap. 4).

Since the early decades of the 20th century, there have been debates both inside and outside of China about Confucian alternatives to Western models of modernization. In many respects, however, the discussions have reached an impasse: Whereas some observers tend to depict Confucianism as a panacea for all kinds of political and social ills in East Asian and Western societies, others consider it to be a mere vestige of imperial China that lacks any relevance for contemporary discourse on modernity. Tang Junyi’s modern Confucianism proposes a way to overcome this impasse by combining a critical reinterpretation of Confucian thought with a careful assessment of achievements and failures in modern societies. Not only does an in-depth analysis of his project inspire a critical reexamination of key issues in contemporary Confucian discourse such as “Confucian democracy,” but it is also highly conducive for the discussion of issues that are critical to our understanding of modern China and Confucianism. Among these we find an ever-present concern in modern

Chinese philosophy and politics, namely the question of how to conceptualize the relationship between new “Western” types of political order and indigenous intellectual traditions. Equally significant, Tang’s philosophy yields a thought-provoking approach to understanding the individual’s vulnerability in the context of rapidly modernizing East Asian societies. What is more, by reflecting on exile—an experience with which he was intimately familiar and which marked the lives of many people worldwide in the 20th century—Tang presents a novel perspective on the modern malaise. Here, as well as in other respects, Tang’s own refusal to “Orientalize” his thinking is crucial, because it opens it up to broader philosophical debates.

The Vantage Point of Modern Confucianism

To grasp the originality, but also the ambivalence of Tang’s modern Confucianism, discussion should not be limited to his moral reflection, religious thought, and academic philosophy.¹¹ In the framework of Tang’s thought, it is indispensable to uncover the relation between moral, political, and religious concerns. Toward this end, one may discern three major stages in his

11 For a compilation of Chinese and English research on Tang Junyi until 2008, see Chen, “Tang Junyi yanjiu gaikuang ji shumu wenxian suoyin.” So far, research on Tang’s philosophy has focused on his metaphysical speculation about human nature and the human spirit’s access to the higher, transcendent realm of “Heaven.” This is somewhat surprising given the fact that, in international philosophical anthropology, the identification of the human being as an *animal metaphysicum* was by and large abandoned by the mid-20th century. Tang’s moral philosophy and his religious studies on the Confucian tradition also received considerable attention (for a monographic study see e.g. Kevin Shun Kai Cheng’s thesis: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study* from 1995; in a Chinese version: Zheng, *Tang Junyi yu Bate. Yi ge lunlixue de bijiao* from 2002). A number of studies have been published on Tang’s final two-volume monograph *Life, Existence and the Horizons of the Mind* (*Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*); see e.g. Liang, *Xinling jiu jing yu rensheng zhexue: Tang Junyi xiansheng “Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie” dao du* (2006); Shan, *Xin tong jiu jing: Tang Junyi zhexue de jingshen kongjian* (2001); Steinbauer, *Tang Junyi’s System der neun Horizonte des Geistes* (2005); for a recent in-depth article on this topic, see Huang, “Tang Junyi de jingjie gantong lun: Yi ge changsuo lun de xiansuo” (2011). Several monographic studies on Tang that were published in Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan provide general surveys of his thought, with Li Du’s *Tang Junyi xiansheng de zhexue* from 1982 being a pioneering study.

philosophical lifework, which spanned a period of almost five decades.¹² Prior to his years in exile, which began in 1949, he wrote two monographs dealing with topics of moral philosophy and philosophy of life. He also published a considerable number of articles on Chinese philosophy, art and literature, Western philosophy, and contemporary political and social issues.¹³ In the second stage, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Tang concentrated on political philosophy, moral philosophy, philosophy of history, and Chinese humanism, while also developing the theological-metaphysical framework of his Confucianism.¹⁴ In addition, he addressed a wide range of issues in politics, society, and cultural life. Though he did not comment on contemporary issues as much as Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982) or Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1886–1969), he continuously engaged in current affairs well into the 1970s by writing articles and giving interviews. The third stage can be roughly dated from the mid-1960s onwards until the end of Tang's life, when he devoted most of his time to an extensive academic study of Chinese philosophy and a comprehensive metaphysical speculation about the spiritual and moral dimensions of human life.¹⁵

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- 12 This division roughly corresponds to the one presented by Kevin Shun Kai Cheng, with the exception that I place Tang's seminal study *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing* in the second phase as the major work of his political philosophy. However, Cheng seems to overlook the importance of the middle period; see Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, pp. 487–497. Tang's own review of stages in his intellectual development appears to be somewhat haphazard. On the one hand, he applied a rationale of personal “spiritual” development; on the other, his evaluative criteria are more academic in nature; see *ibid.*, pp. 500–501.
- 13 These two monographs are *The Establishment of the Moral Self (Daode ziwu zhi jianli)* and *The Realization of Human Life (Rensheng zhi tian)*, both published in 1944. For research on the early phase of Tang's work, see e.g. Fan, *Tang Junyi's Synthese chinesischer und westlicher Philosophie*; Lai, *Ti yong yu xin xing: dangdai xin ruxue zhaxue xin lun*, pp. 45–110. For a brief overview, see Huo, “Tang Junyi xiansheng de wenhua zhaxue tixi—yi ‘Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing’ yi shu wei zhongxin,” pp. 97–111.
- 14 His major works from his middle period include the two-volume monograph *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason (Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing)*; the manuscript was written between 1947 and 1952; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 67, 69, 119) and several volumes of collected essays and articles: *The Reconstruction of the Humanistic Spirit (Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian)* and *The Development of the Chinese Humanistic Spirit (Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan)* are particularly significant. At the beginning of his exile, Tang published *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture (Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi)*, a monograph that marks the transition from the first to the second period.
- 15 These are the monograph series *On the Sources of Chinese Philosophy (Zhongguo zhaxue yuan lun)* and the two-volume monograph *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*.

It was during the middle period that Tang developed his understanding of modern Confucianism in terms of political thought. This effort rested on his conviction that the course of modernity might be influenced by those afflicted by it, even though modern societies appeared to organize collective life hermetically. For Tang, there was still room for normative reflection and practical interventions in the modern world, provided that individuals were able to attain a thorough understanding of the process of modernity. The modern world, in other words, was still a *political* reality.

Most interpreters exclusively apply the label “philosophy” to Tang’s work, without addressing its framework as “theological.” However, Tang systematically developed the notions of “Confucian religiosity” to a degree that justifies the use of the label “theological” in this context. Some scholars actually qualify Tang’s “philosophy” by highlighting the religious aspects of his thought. Shun Kai Kevin Cheng, for example, concludes that “[t]his (i.e. Tang’s philosophy—TF) can be considered as a fully incarnational philosophy where the decree of Heaven is fully incarnated within the nature of each and every human being.” It goes without saying that the word “theology” is used in the present study in the broad sense of the word. This is common nowadays in encyclopedias of theology, with “theology” in the narrow sense denoting the monotheistic religions. When Tang outlined the theological framework of modern Confucianism in the late 1940s and 1950s, he may have felt that the term “theology” (*shenxue* 神學) was linked too closely to Christian theology. Be that as it may, he conceived of an inclusive concept of philosophy to absorb theological-metaphysical elements, referring to this framework variously as “philosophical,” “metaphysical,” or “religious.”

Tang summarized the far-reaching infusion of modern Confucianism with theological elements as a “philosophical faith” (*zhexue de xinyang* 哲學的信仰) (see Chap. 5). His project is therefore “modern,” not only in the sense of a philosophical reaction to the global impact of modernity, but also in a much more ambitious sense insofar as it aims to delineate a philosophical-theological foundation of social modernity in (a future) China. To be sure, Tang recognized the secularized, “disenchanted” form of modernity. Nonetheless, he still identified modernity as the historical stage at which Confucian ideas of individual self-fulfillment, and hence freedom, can be realized to an unprecedented degree. In effect, he maintained that modern forms of collective life are to be understood as preconditions for the individual’s striving for self-realization. Faced with socioeconomic, political, and cultural alienation, individuals can, according to a Hegelian figure in Tang’s thought, overcome (*aufheben*) the antithesis between their goal of self-fulfillment and the “outer” forms of alienation. In order to come to terms with the modern experience of

alienation, they must analyze its historical formation and then discern how alienation and emancipation are interrelated. This very reflection is to be seen as an endeavor that actually befits the individual's self-fulfillment. The latter does not require, if we are to follow Tang, a comprehensive remediation of alienation in modernity, nor should it be understood as a purely theoretical endeavor. Rather, Tang proposes to closely interweave normative reflection on the modern world and the quest for individual self-fulfillment. In this vein, Tang conceptualizes "inner sagehood" as the human being's immediate realization of the absolute or "Heaven" (*tian* 天). As Tang claims, the communion with "Heaven" instantaneously lifts the individual's mind above its own limits. This ephemeral state of mind involves the cognitive act of "innate knowing" (*liang zhi* 良知), whereby the human mind gains intuitive access to the highest truth or principle. This is the broad perspective of Tang's tenacious effort to reconstruct modern subjectivity on the basis of a Confucian civil theology.¹⁶ He accordingly linked the notion of self-fulfillment with certain Confucian traditions and categorized it as a Confucian type of "religiosity" (*zongjiaoxing* 宗教性) (see Chap. 5). Besides, Tang's civil-theological understanding of "innate knowing" is clearly set apart from reinterpretations of "innate knowing" from the Republican period. He indeed refrained from harkening back to these earlier reinterpretations and their critics.¹⁷

With the new conceptualization of Confucian religiosity, Tang's civil theology dissociates itself from the politico-religious tradition of Confucian cults in

16 "Civil theology" will be used in the present study as a technical term for the analysis of Tang's modern Confucianism. Even though he did not use the term "civil theology" to designate his brand of Confucianism, it is nonetheless useful for our purposes. On the different uses of the term as a self-referential marker and as an analytical concept in the Western context, see Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors," p. 2.

17 In an article on the philosophy of Dai Zhen 戴震 (Dai Dongyuan 戴東原; 1723–1777) from 1927, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) deplored the "recent" tendency in China to return to the philosophy of Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (Lu Xiangshan 陸象山; 1139–1192) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and their "philosophy of *liang zhi*." Hu's criticism was clearly leveled against Zhang Junmai and Liang Shuming; see Hu, *Dai Dongyuan de zhexue*, p. 140; on Liang Shuming's interest in intuitionist philosophy (in Confucianism and in Henri Bergson's vitalist philosophy), see Alitto, *The Last Confucian. Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, pp. 98–101. Before Hu Shi, it was Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853–1921) who had sharply criticized Chinese intuitionist philosophy, and Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming in particular, as an obstacle to scientific progress in China; see Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*, pp. 155–156. After 1949, Zhang Junmai attempted to interpret *liang zhi* in terms of philosophical rationalism; see e.g. Chang (Zhang Junmai), "Is there no Epistemological Background for the Chinese Philosophy of Reason?" pp. 130, 136–137.

the late imperial period and from ill-fated attempts to install a Confucian state religion in early republican China. What it shares with the ideas of proponents of a Confucian state religion, such as Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1880–1933), Yan Fu, or Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) who were active in the years 1912 and 1913, is the intention to tie “Confucianism” to the normative foundations of the republic. Yet Tang’s notion of Confucian religiosity did not lend itself to a concept of republican “state religion” (*guo jiao* 國教) that tended to contradict the constitutional principle of religious freedom. It also was neither amenable to a religious reverence of the figure of Confucius (as in “*Kong jiao*” 孔教), nor, finally, to a dogmatism that hypostatized Confucianism as an authoritative religious teaching (as in “*Ru jiao*” 儒教).¹⁸

In fact, Tang did not assume that the truth of moral intuition (*liang zhi*) could be institutionalized, either in terms of religion or politics. He instead endorsed a view that highlights the religious and political elusiveness of absolute truth claims based on intuition. Due to this rejection of dogmatism, Tang’s civil theology accords with the transcendental type of civil theology.¹⁹ “Transcendental” refers to the conviction that “secular ends can never really become sacred.”²⁰ The sacred, accordingly, is not considered to be substantially immanent to particular politico-religious institutions and practices. David Apter’s observation that “what there is of the sacred in Western secular government is the framework itself”²¹ also pertains to Tang’s civil theology. The latter can thus be distinguished from the immanent type of civil theology, which “in its more archaic forms,” seems closely related to what David Apter calls the theocratic system.²² Unsurprisingly, Tang rejected the idea that the government should implement a civil theology through direct legal means. The enforcement of the Confucian-based civil theology by the government would have to be restricted to the institutionalization of religious tolerance. This orientation towards constitutional provisions for religious freedom shows that Tang’s Confucian civil theology concurs with liberal forms of civil or political theology. Specifically, it fundamentally accepts two major shifts in the history of Western political thought:

18 For a concise overview of the different stages of controversies in China about Confucianism as a state religion during the first two decades of the 20th century, see: Kobayashi, “Some Political Aspects of the Problem of Confucian State Religion.”

19 For a definition of this type of civil theology, see Davis, “The Civil Theology of Inou Tetsujirō,” p. 3.

20 This is David Apter’s phrase (see his “Political Religion in the New States,” p. 67; here quoted from Davis, *ibid.*).

21 Apter, *ibid.*, p. 76; quoted from Davis, *ibid.*

22 Apter, *ibid.*

the emphasis on a notion of political reason, which allows room for the separation of ethics/religion and politics; and an acceptance of secularizing societies and the related repercussions in politics and law. Tang's version therefore sets itself apart from imperial China's civil theology²³ by emphatically approving the introduction of modern rights and its accompanying institutions based on the rule of law.

The major political concern of Tang's civil theology is therefore not to re-sacralize the political and social institutions and customs, but to bolster the normative foundation of the republic's democratic order. The aim of his civil theology is to foster the individual's loyalty to the republican state and its liberal constitution, while at the same time providing him or her with a new self-image as a republican citizen. Toward this end, core concepts of the Confucian civil theology such as "innate knowing" and "inner sagehood" function as positive limit-concepts. They serve as a normative measuring stick and a spiritual vision for the modern subject in social and political life. There is, however, no promise of creating an ideal social life form or substantially reconciling the subject with the disenchanting modern world. The kind of reconciliation offered here requires that individuals perceive the modern forms of alienated social life as the necessary condition for their efforts to attain "inner sagehood."

Consistent with this interest in the individual's ability to cope with alienation, Tang's Confucian civil theology frames and unites his intellectual endeavors in the fields of political philosophy, ethics, religious metaphysics, cultural philosophy, and the philosophy of history. Even though his writings in specific fields might be studied as isolated parts of his oeuvre, a sound understanding of his project of modern Confucianism requires the close examination of the civil-theological axis. His modern Confucianism cannot, in other words, be detached from its theological underpinnings. A selective, post-metaphysical dissection of his work which disregards its civil-theological dimension would result in distortions and simplifications.

Tang's civil theology cannot be productively compared with particular features of Western civil theology without considering the question of how his civil theology relates to political philosophy. Even though he did not explicitly

23 For an analysis of early imperial Chinese civil theology and its pre-imperial roots, see Weber-Schäfer, *Oikumene und Imperium*, pp. 17–22. Tang's concept of civil theology is obviously also fundamentally different from what Max Weber had in mind when he described Confucianism as a civil theology which systematized and institutionalized political and social ethics of the Confucian elite in the context of late imperial China. On Weber, see Schluchter, "Einleitung," p. 26.

discuss this issue, Tang tried to reconnect political thought with a Confucian anthropological vision of human existence. It is, indeed, no exaggeration to say that Tang's own political thinking finds its guiding principles in the civil-theological limit-concepts of "innate knowing" (*liang zhi*) and the "sage" (*sheng ren*). His political philosophy hence relates these limit-concepts to political reality. Tang measures, as it were, political reality, its development, actions, institutional and symbolic orders, and structures against these guiding principles. The civil theology thus forms the normative reference point for his political philosophy. In turn, the political philosophy serves the purpose of exploring, within the time frame of the modern world, the realization and temporalization of civil-theological principles. Tang's thoughts on such issues as the human will to political power, the relation of statehood and individual self-fulfillment, the distinction of state and society, the world order of "ecumenical states," the justification of democracy, the meaning and function of "humanistic culture," and civil religion in democracy, are thus closely intertwined with his civil-theological limit-concepts (see Chap. 5).

The range of issues covered by Tang's political thought indicates that his civil theology is not to be understood solely as a reaction to the modern subject's experience of alienation, but also as a reaction to political and religious violence in modern China. Tang's outlook on China's political history since the mid-19th century highlights such violent events as the rebellion of the Taiping, the Boxer Rebellion, the revolution of 1911, the Second Revolution that toppled Yuan Shikai, the rise of warlords, the Northern Expedition, the struggle between nationalists and communists in the 1920s and 1930s, and, of course, the communist victory in 1949.²⁴ What has been said of John Locke as well as Hobbes and Spinoza may thus, *mutatis mutandis*, also be said with respect to Tang' interest in civil theology, namely that ". . . his chief purposes were . . . to foster civic peace in the face of political and religious enthusiasm and violence." Proponents of civil theology consequently acknowledged the "political necessity for a generally accepted account of the ultimate reality."²⁵ Whereas Hobbes and Spinoza sought to secure public peace through the enforcement of a broadly acceptable, doctrinally minimized form of religious belief, Tang, like Locke, viewed the idea of institutionally guaranteeing religious tolerance as

24 See for example Tang's article from 1955 "The Logic of the Development of the Chinese Nation's Political Consciousness in the Past One Hundred Years" reprinted in: Tang, *Zhongguo renwen zhi jingshen fazhan*, pp. 155–176.

25 Sandoz, "The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors," p. 3.

an integral element of civil theology.²⁶ Civil theology itself, therefore, “was not a dogma; rather it marked the parameters of a conversation or debate which rested on the shared assumption that there was some correlation between a society’s religion and its government.”²⁷

An essential distinction made by Western civil theologies concerns the public cult and the “life of reason.” Whereas the former is a matter of faith and entails the representation of the “minimum dogma,” the latter pertains to the search for truth in philosophy and the sciences. This contrast became starker during the age of Enlightenment.²⁸ Tang Junyi’s civil theology draws a similar distinction, even though he did not prescribe which parts of the Confucian rituals, if any, were to be “public” in character. Yet Tang’s delineation between the realms of Confucian religiosity, scientific truth-seeking, and politics corresponds to their modern differentiation in functional and institutional spheres. The conflation of faith and knowledge was, according to Tang, to be achieved only in the individual’s inwardness. The public representation of Confucian religiosity was hence characterized by the absence of clerical institutions (see Chap. 10). Still, the Confucian-based civil religion was to produce a “fundamental consensus beyond public debate,”²⁹ even though its symbolic representation in the public sphere was much more subtle than in the case of its Christian counterparts.

As regards doctrinal aspects, there are further differences between Tang’s civil theology and both ancient and modern Western forms of civil theology.³⁰ For one, Tang neither referred to a comprehensive theological system, nor

26 On Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke see *Ibid.*, p. 31.

27 Kidd, “Civil Theology and Church Establishments in Revolutionary America,” p. 1010; Sandoz traces the history of civil theology back to Plato, stating that Plato’s “analysis of the order of being, in relation to the true and political order as given in the *Republic*” entailed the assumption that “only after the true theology has been expounded . . . the truth of man can become thematic to the *Republic*.” See Sandoz, “The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors,” pp. 4–5.

28 See Sandoz, “The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors,” pp. 6–8; Sandoz refers in this context to the distinction between the “public system of divine worship” and “private worship” in the thought of Hobbes and Spinoza.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30 Concise overviews of the conceptual development of civil theology in the Western context can be found in Wacker and Manemann’s “‘Politische Theologie’. Eine Skizze zur Geschichte und aktuellen Diskussion des Begriffs,” pp. 28–65; Sandoz, “The Civil Theology of Liberal Democracy: Locke and His Predecessors,” pp. 2–10. In current usage, “civil theology” and “political theology” have become interchangeable, especially once “political theology” lost the negative meaning it had acquired in the 19th century.

prescribed a religious faith based on divine revelation.³¹ What is more, when considering the question of how to arrange the relations between religious and political institutions, Tang hardly referred to extant clerical systems in China, such as Buddhist or Daoist churches. Nor did he contemplate a Confucian state cult. His Confucian civil theology, therefore, did not center on problems pertaining to the relation between the church and the state, as was the case in the Western context.

Finally, Tang's concept of civil theology differs from political theologies based on Christianity, Judaism or Islam, but also from China's imperial civil theology, insofar as it does not serve to vindicate an existing political order. On the contrary, modern Confucian civil theology questions the legitimacy of the existing Chinese political regimes of the 20th century (both on the Mainland and in Taiwan). At the same time, it anticipates the future, "authentic" political form of Confucianism: liberal democracy. Tang consequently invests the intellectual foundations of liberal democracy with a belief that is consistent with Confucian religiosity:

He [who shares the Confucian faith that all human beings are naturally endowed with humaneness—TF] can truly believe that everybody can become a Yao or Shun and that all human beings can ascend to the Heavenly kingdom. This is the Chinese Confucians' great spirit of equality. (...) At the same time, this is also the last and only foundation of the comprehensive spirit of democracy as a whole. If you cannot attain this in [your] faith, you will certainly in the last resort be unable to truly believe in democracy, and one day you will not take others as [your] equal. By the time you wield political power, you will definitely not let those who are not equal to you in their personality have an equal share of political power. As a matter of fact, those in the early modern Western [world] who sincerely believed in democracy also often had this faith. In the end, the teachings of Jesus as well as those of early modern Western idealism can also share this [faith]. But those who usually discuss the theoretical foundation of democracy and freedom are not necessarily able to truly recognize that they will ultimately have to erect this faith and may be able to reach a high level thereafter.³²

31 This is not to say that there are no systematic aspects at all in Tang's theology which does include the outlines of a classification of religious doctrines; see below Chap. 5 and 10.

32 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 418–419.

Obviously, the civil-theological outlook was not intended to evoke a passive attitude towards the modern world and its vicissitudes. On the contrary, the renewal of Confucian intellectual traditions was meant to foster an activist form of inwardness in individuals which conformed to what Tang considered the preferable outer forms of modernity—i.e. a constitutional democracy and a pluralistic, industrialized society. These outer forms were to be vindicated, albeit not exclusively, in the language of China's indigenous intellectual traditions (see Chap. 9).

Tang was not the only one to turn to Confucianism with such a liberal agenda in mind, even though his civil theology clearly stands out in terms of its complexity and scope. Apart from Zhang Junmai, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995), and Xu Fuguan, liberal intellectuals like Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權 (1897–1981) and Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886–1973) also took recourse to Confucianism in order to foster acceptance of constitutional democracy in the period of civil war after 1945. Like Tang, both Xiao and Zhang did not interpret the concept of political freedom primarily from the “negative” perspective of the individual embracing his or her fundamental rights as means of a defense against the state. They did so from a Confucian (as well as Greek/republican) position that highlighted the aspect of freedom as expressed in the individual's right to participate in political life. This, in turn, would provide him or her with opportunities to actualize the natural dispositions, or “nature” (*xing* 性), of the human being.³³ Xiao explicitly linked this interpretation of participation in political life with the teachings of Confucius.³⁴ In a similar way, Zhang Dongsun discussed the notion of personal “self-attainment” (*zi de* 自得) from the *Mencius* in order to demonstrate that there had existed a positive concept of freedom in ancient China. He added that this concept indeed constituted one of the strong points of Confucian thought.³⁵

This approach to a vindication of constitutional democracy in Confucian thought and language did not exclude criticism of extant types of Western democracy. The critique, however, like the description and analysis of democracy, had to take a proleptic form. After all, Xiao and Zhang, as well as Tang after 1949, faced a Chinese reality that was unfamiliar with liberal-democratic institutions and values. Indeed democracy for Tang was one of the unrealized

33 For Xiao's concept, see his article “On the Freedom of Speech” (*Shuo yan lun ziyou* 說言論自由) from 1940 in: Xiao, *Xianzheng yu minzhu. Xiao Gongquan xiansheng quanji zhi ba*, p. 29 and his *Ziyou de lilun yu shiji*, pp. 33, 59.

34 Xiao, “Kongzi zhengzhi xueshuo de xiandai yiyi,” p. 74; see also *ibid.*, p. 69.

35 Zhang, *Lixing yu minzhu*, pp. 118–119, 123.

goals of “modernization.” The objective, then, was to establish the normative and factual preconditions for the development of modern statehood, which would include constitutional government, the rule of law, and democracy. What was at stake, therefore, was not solely a justification of liberal democracy, but equally the mobilization of intellectual resources to spur its formation. Henceforth, the Chinese should be able to describe themselves at once as Confucians and as the democratic authors of the laws that bind them as citizens. Under the condition of the state’s neutrality vis-à-vis the religious preferences of the citizens, China’s future political culture was to embrace a Confucian-based humanistic culture which could be made the object of cultural patriotism. The latter would, moreover, promote commonplace attitudes of mutual respect for rights and religious tolerance in a Chinese democracy.

To be sure, Tang’s political thought is unmistakably marked by elitist elements. This should not be taken, however, as a contradiction within the liberal-democratic outlook of his modern Confucianism. After all, “classical” European liberalism, as represented for example by John Stuart Mill, also abounded with elitist ideas, not all of which have disappeared in the many revisions of political liberalism of the 20th century. It is therefore appropriate to call Tang’s position generally “liberal,” especially given the persistent vagueness of the term “liberal.” Most problematic in this regard is without doubt the assessment of how Tang might have supported a “liberal” model for the economic order of modern societies. Since he neither discussed theories of capitalism or market economy, nor devised an elaborate criticism of socialist economic models, his economic liberalism is much more a matter of uncertainty than his political liberalism.

The picture is clearer with respect to the ethical dimension of his liberal thought. The civil-theological conception of man and the notion of an immediate, non-discursive access to the highest truth constitute elements of a political anthropology with ethically “pluralistic” implications. The intuitive access to truth is only open to the individual’s subjective mind in a moment of immediate enlightenment. Accordingly, discursive truth claims can neither be justified with absolute moral certainty, nor attain uncontested political validity. Any deliberative or otherwise symbolically represented truth claim has to be seen as provisional and should be made with an awareness of its tentative nature. By implication, this means that there cannot exist a human collectivity that truly commands an access to absolute truth *as collectivity*, i.e. as a group that identically acts as an enlightened collective agent. Given Tang’s conviction that the absolute truth can only be grasped in an ephemeral intuition *in actu*, which is non-linguistic in nature, no such truth possession can be objectified or permanently incorporated into ideologies or other systems

of thought. Neither can any political order as such be regarded as an *immediate* manifestation of an intuitively accessible, ultimate truth.

One of the major problems posed by the civil-theological foundation of Tang's political thought is shared by many other schools, currents, and theories in the history of political thought—namely, the imposition that one is called on to *believe* in the notion of man and human nature as part of an underlying political anthropology. For the non-believer it is challenging, to say the least, to follow Tang when he maintains, on the one hand, that “innate knowing” entails a moment of sudden awareness *free* from any form of intersubjectivity, and on the other, that individual self-cultivation which is clearly dominated by *intersubjective* elements (e.g. moral practice) leads to “innate knowing.” At this point, Tang's project of reconstructing Confucianism as a civil theology begins to break down—at least from the perspective of a political philosophy grounded in intersubjectivity. This does not mean, however, that it is a complete failure. On the contrary, Tang's civil theology encourages deliberation about central issues to political thought. This includes questions pertaining to the formation of political reason, the normative potential of Confucian traditions, and the secularization of pre-modern Chinese speculation in the transnational context of accommodating Western political ideas.

The Watershed of 1949

Between 1934 and 1948, just five out of the considerable number of articles that Tang published during those years addressed political issues. They specifically dealt with Chinese nationalism and national consciousness and China's national salvation movement. Two other articles from 1938 concerned China's war of resistance against Japan.³⁶ Tang appears to have taken very little interest in political issues at this time. The immediate inducement for turning his attention in this direction was the communist takeover on the Mainland. In an article published in 1955, he explained that prior to 1949 he had been generally confident with respect to China's political prospects and had thus felt free to indulge in purely academic work, oblivious to the rising communist threat.³⁷

After 1949, Tang was much more concerned with the fragility of individual subjectivity in times of revolutionary turmoil, ideological contestations, rapid modernization and, last but not least, exilic isolation. His Confucian philosophy now took the form of an intellectual engagement that extended beyond

36 Tang, *Zhushu nianbiao*, pp. 6, 9, 13–14.

37 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, p. 172.

purely academic concerns. Significantly, at around the time he immigrated to Hong Kong and was developing his political ideas, he began to conceptualize his Confucian civil-theology. This endeavor was intimately linked to the events of 1949 and the new political constellation that emerged during that fateful period. Starting in the 1950s he indeed hardly addressed controversies about Confucian traditions or the historical reliability of Confucian scriptures from the Republican period. By all appearances, he was convinced that the cataclysmic events of 1949, the continuing process of global modernization, and the disruptions of the Cold War period represented challenges to the “humanistic tradition” of Confucianism which greatly transcended those that had been previously raised in China. One can surmise that this was the reason why Tang very rarely mentioned earlier works by such prominent figures as Liang Shuming, Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) and Zhang Junmai.

While the historical contexts of Tang's initiation to political thought are fairly easy to discern, the same cannot be said regarding the circumstances surrounding the eventually drastic decline in his production of political writings. For reasons that remain unclear, Tang turned away from political philosophy after the mid-1960s. This may have been due to the beginning of the so-called Cultural Revolution, with its crude anti-Confucian propaganda. During the 1970s, his rejection of the “Cultural Revolution” might have brought him somewhat closer to the anti-communist regime of the Nationalist Party (Guomindang; GMD) in Taiwan. Indeed, he gave an interview in 1974 that gives a glimpse of the enormous impact that the victory of Chinese communism and the subsequent events of the “Cultural Revolution” had on the intellectuals in exile.³⁸ Tang further noted how strongly he reacted to film footage of the mass movements of the “Cultural Revolution” that was shown in movie theaters in Hong Kong around 1972, comparing such slogan shouting masses of people to the mass rallies that had taken place in Nazi Germany.³⁹

During his years in exile, Tang's judgments about the communist regime on the Mainland were consistently negative. In contrast, his attitude towards the regime of the GMD was much more ambivalent. This may be explained by the fact that, to begin with, Tang had been briefly employed by the bureaucracy of the GMD government during the Second World War. In 1939, he had accepted an offer to work as an editor on special assignment in the Ministry of Education in the war-time capital of Chongqing. At that time, he was assisting Chen Lifu 陳立夫, the Minister of Education, with a book project. Chen had been one of the chief theoreticians of the party's right wing and an eminent

38 See Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 311–333.

39 Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 183–184.

figure in the fascist-inspired “New Life Movement” instigated in 1934.⁴⁰ Tang quit his position in the Ministry of Education after little over a year to teach philosophy at Central University (*Zhongyang Daxue* 中央大學) in October 1940, which by then had been moved from Nanjing to Chongqing. In 1941, at age 32, he was listed by the Ministry of Education as being qualified for a position as full professor.⁴¹ In the same year, he became the editor of the journal *Ideal and Culture* (*Lixiang yu Wenhua* 理想與文化), which headed up the government’s wartime effort to refute the Japanese militarist spirit and promote the general awareness of the superiority of China’s spiritual culture.⁴²

During the post-war period, Tang’s view on the GMD vacillated between tacit acceptance, explicit praise of its success in economic and technological modernization, and open criticism of its post-war failure to establish a democratic government in Taiwan (see Chap. 9). His criticism culminated in an article from 1954 in which he called on Chiang Kai-shek to reaffirm that the presidency represented the whole population and step down as chairman of the GMD.⁴³ Besides, looking back at the GMD’s political record prior to 1949, Tang criticized the GMD’s “fascism” after the dissolution of its first united front with the Communist Party of China (CCP) and during the war against Japan, when the fascist tendencies included a blind adoration for a spirit of war. He also condemned the fact that the GMD was still unable to attain a clear understanding of the (ethical) nature of the state and had thus failed to establish a modern nation-state.⁴⁴ Moreover, he occasionally distanced himself in private from the regime of the GMD. For example, during a trip to Taiwan in August 1956, he tellingly commented in a letter to his wife Xie Tingguang 謝廷光 (1916–2000) that politics was not as progressive in Taiwan as industry, agriculture, or the military.⁴⁵ Without doubt, Tang was neither in favor of a one-party state, nor did he sympathize with earlier efforts of the GMD to create mass movements.⁴⁶

40 Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 37. According to Chen’s memoir, Tang had spent a half hour each day at Chen’s home to take notes; see Chang, *The Storm Clouds Clear Over China: the Memoir of Ch’en Li-fu, 1900–1993*, p. 248.

41 Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 46.

42 Ibid., p. 47. Tang wrote the initial editorial of the journal; among its contributors were Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming and Zhang Junmai.

43 See Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 257–258 (the article is entitled “Placing Hopes in the New Government” [Dui xin zhengfu zhi xiwang 對新政府之希望]; *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 5, No. 13; July 1954).

44 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 157–158.

45 Tang, *Zhi Tingguang shu*, p. 315 (letter from August 16, 1956).

46 Tang explicitly criticized the GMD for its mass campaigns, including the mass wedding ceremonies of the Republican period; see an interview from 1974 reprinted in: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 329.

Tang's judgments about the GMD government between the 1940s and the 1970s must be seen in relation to the major changes that resulted from the GMD's retreat to Taiwan in 1949. This included the implementation of martial law, the thorough reorganization of the party in 1952 that solidified its one-party rule, and, eventually, the GMD's gradual departure from harsh authoritarianism during the 1960s. That said, the course of events on the Mainland after 1949 also seems to have profoundly influenced Tang's attitude towards the regime of the GMD. In comparison to the communist efforts that were made to dismantle China's cultural tradition and eliminate alleged enemies of the revolution, the GMD regime of the late 1960s appeared to be the lesser of two evils. For one, the GMD had reacted against the "Cultural Revolution" by instigating a large-scale, prolonged movement for the "Revival of Chinese Culture" (*Zhonghuo a wenhua fuxing yundong* 中華文化復興運動) in 1966.⁴⁷ Tang, however, was still far from being enthusiastic about the GMD. He declined, for example, an invitation to contribute an article to the *Zhongyang Monthly* (*Zhongyang Yuekan*) on the occasion of the GMD's celebration of the 80th anniversary of the founding of Sun Yat-sen's "Revive China Society" (*Xing Zhong Hui* 興中會, 1894) in August 1974.⁴⁸ Even though he explicitly recognized the GMD government as the government of China and annually attended the national day celebration of the Republic of China, he neither attended official celebrations of president Chiang Kai-shek's birthday, nor referred to Sun Yat-sen as the "father of the nation" (*guofu* 國父).⁴⁹

Overall, Tang was a more outspoken critic of the GMD regime before the outbreak of the "Cultural Revolution" than he was afterwards. Although he travelled to Taiwan on two separate occasions during the 1950s and 1960s, meeting with Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo 蔣經國,⁵⁰ he repeatedly voiced his skepticism about the GMD's political agenda and its refusal to establish a democratic government. He thus deplored that the advances the GMD

47 The campaign was officially launched by Chiang Kai-shek, who declared November 11, 1966 to be the day of the "Revival of Chinese Culture"—a date that significantly coincided with Sun Yat-sen's 101st birthday; see Tu, "Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong de shixian yu zhanwang," p. 301.

48 Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 196.

49 Ibid., p. 196. Tang's criticism of the indigenous Taiwanese movement (*bentu* 本土) in the mid-1970s should be seen against the backdrop of his endorsement of the Republic of China; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 522–529.

50 In September 1961, while on a lecture tour in Taiwan, Tang visited the Central Party Committee of the GMD together with Xu Fuguan and allegedly discussed with Chiang Ching-kuo the idea that politics and culture should be relatively independent of each other; see Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 136. On the trips to Taiwan in 1956 and 1961 (five more trips followed in the 1970s), see Li, "Tang Junyi xiansheng yu Taiwan ruxue," p. 719.

had made towards “democratic, constitutional politics” and its democratic convictions were “questionable,” marking at most only a “beginning.”⁵¹ When reconsidering China’s political development in the 20th century in a three-part article published in the *Homeland Weekly* (*Zuguo Zhoukan* 祖國周刊) in 1958, he was also clear that the GMD had failed to establish true democracy in China.⁵² The GMD, for its part, leveled severe criticism against “overseas personalities” who were openly accused in a party journal in 1958 of playing into the hands of the Chinese communists. They were blamed for criticizing the political situation in Taiwan, even though they actually held anti-communist convictions. This criticism was openly refuted by Zhang Junmai.⁵³ It is no exaggeration to say that after 1949 an intellectual-political battle unfolded outside the People’s Republic of China (PRC) over the interpretation and implications of “Free China.” Confucian intellectuals like Tang Junyi, Zhang Junmai, Mou Zongsan, and Xu Fuguan were unwilling to subscribe to the GMD’s definitions of “Free China,” Chinese nationalism, and Chinese culture.

51 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen zhi jingshen fazhan*, pp. 175–177.

52 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 107–109. The article was entitled “The Practice of Democratic Ideals and the Consciousness of Objective Values.”

53 Zhang, *Zhang Junmai yanlun ji. Yijiusijiu nian yihou*, Vol. 1, pp. 123–124.

Critical Issues in Research on Modern Confucianism

Stereotypes and Omissions

One of the reasons it is worth studying Tang's modern Confucianism is because he did not fall into the culturalist trap of juxtaposing a universalistic, rationality-based Western form of modernity with an emergent, and allegedly superior, Eastern one. He thus never maintained that by reconstructing Confucian traditions it was possible to find a cure-all for the downsides of modernity. In most cases, culturalist juxtapositions rely on a static conceptualization of (Western) modernity that rests on makeshift analyses from the social sciences. Furthermore, there is often a strong normativist tendency to hypostatize the value orientations of individuals and groups who are afflicted by modern transformations and the presumed impact they have had on social history. Confucianism has been ascribed eminent importance as a cultural resource for the formation of such value orientations, and hence, for China's course in the modern world. A culturalist outlook on the process of modernity was already common in the earlier critique of modernity in Western philosophies of life, whose representatives, above all Rudolf Eucken and Henri Bergson, had gained considerable influence in China in the early 20th century. Further congruities can be retraced to strands of European romanticism of the 19th century, which expressed skepticism towards scientific-technological world views. That said, it is possible to assert that the juxtaposition of Confucian traditions and Western modernity is actually a byproduct of earlier Western criticisms of modernity, which had been introduced to China alongside the dominant Western models of modernization. As a matter of fact, a considerable number of Confucian positions are, wittingly or not, "Westernized" in this sense.

Tang Junyi's thought on the role of Confucianism in the contemporary world is not consistent with stereotypical Confucian models of modernity. He neither maintained that there are perennially valid ideas in Confucian political and social thought, nor did he anachronistically insist on the unqualified validity of Confucian notions of rule, rituals, or self-cultivation. It is thus ironic that Tang's modern Confucianism, and especially his political thought, are often discussed in an anachronistic way. The kind of anachronism at work here might be labeled an "anachronism due to topical omission." To be precise, the problem is one of *not* addressing topics and questions that actually constitute

key issues in the body of texts under examination. This neglect stems from a reductionist approach that interprets Tang's writings through the lenses of Confucianism's allegedly perennial concerns. Such distorted interpretations seek to reclaim Tang's thought for a historical lineage of neo-Confucianism and, consequently, as a manifestation of "traditional" Confucianism in modern times. The very concerns of Tang's philosophy that clearly distinguished him as a thinker of the 20th century, as compared to his Confucian predecessors, hence tend to be relegated to the background.

More generally, the narrowing of the discussion of contemporary Confucianism to such allegedly enduring Confucian concerns (e.g. the formation of the moral self, the role of rituals and hierarchies in social and political orders, and the transmission of authoritative scriptures) may simply accommodate expectations that a cultural code of "Confucian China" can be deciphered. In its extreme form, this produces the culturalist cliché of a Chinese modernity which is easier to understand than its Western counterparts due to its alleged Confucian identity. Anachronistic approaches based on topical omission bolster this reductionist culturalism and neglect issues in modern Confucian thought that do not coincide with the cliché of Confucianism or comply with the stereotypical dichotomies. This may help explain why those elements of Tang's political thought which are highly critical of traditional Confucian ideas, or simply absent from the tradition, are readily overlooked by interpreters bound by commonplace views of Confucianism.

As a matter of fact, Tang's political thought in general has only attracted scant attention. While such neglect may not be entirely caused by an anachronism due to topical omission, it is nonetheless consistent with a reductionist view of Tang's modern Confucianism. In the Chinese-speaking world, the focus of research has been on Tang's metaphysical speculation, moral philosophy, religious thought and ideas on humanistic culture. Similar tendencies can be observed, for example, in the work being done on Tang's long-time intellectual companion Mou Zongsan.¹ There is no comprehensive study on Tang's

1 Tang had first met with Mou in 1939; see Cai, *Mou Zongsan xiansheng xue si nianpu*, p. 9. The number of studies on Mou Zongsan's philosophy clearly exceeds the number that has been done on Tang's. What is more, there are some signs of an intellectual split among students and followers of Mou and Tang in Hong Kong and Taiwan; for an excellent overview of research about modern Confucianism and the manifold attempts of Chinese scholars to identify intellectual schools and traditional teacher-pupil constellations with respect to 20th-century Confucianism, see Makeham, "The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism" (on evaluations of Tang and Mou: pp. 40–41) and "The New Daotong" (on Liu Shu-hsien's preference for Mou Zongsan in comparison to Tang: p. 66).

political philosophy to date. Tellingly, in a recent collection of Confucian political writings published in China, one finds an extensive collection of political texts by modern Confucian thinkers, but not a single one by Tang.²

Overall, the main body of research on Tang's political thought is still very limited in terms of the quantity, topics, and analytical scope.³ The consequence of this precarious state is exemplified by a recent volume on contemporary Confucian political philosophy. It covers topics from the fields of political ethics to philosophy of law, but mentions Tang only in passing and without reference to any of his writings on political philosophy.⁴ Such neglect of his

2 See Wang (ed.). *Rujia zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu*.

3 Since the publication of the pioneering article by Liu Guoqiang in 1991 entitled "Tang Junyi de zhengzhi zhaxue," little more than a dozen articles on Tang's political philosophy had been published by 2011, about half of them dealing with Tang's concepts of democracy and freedom. Lau Kwok-keung's article also deserves special mention for it offers a concise introduction to other main topics of Tang's political thought (including the concepts of state and power) and briefly discusses Tang's interpretation of Locke, Hume, Bentham, Mill, Rousseau, Marx, and Hegel. In addition, Lau's article discusses the relation between Tang's political thought and his moral-metaphysical speculation. Last but not least, Lau draws the reader's attention to Tang's book *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, a major source for his political philosophy. Thomas Metzger's discussion of Tang's political thought in Chap. 2 and 13 of his *A Cloud across the Pacific. Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today* is pathbreaking in that it (re-)introduces Tang to an English readership outside the small circle of those who were familiar with Tang's philosophy—a task that Metzger had first taken up in his highly influential *Escape from Predicament*. Metzger's conclusions are challenging in many respects and these will be discussed in the course of this book. Unfortunately, the scope of Metzger's analysis is very restricted, for he excludes seminal texts of Tang's political philosophy. *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, for instance, is not discussed by Metzger at all, and the same holds true for some of Tang's key texts from *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* and *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*. It is in those texts that Tang developed his concepts of the will for power, evil and politics, all of which are crucial for an interpretation of his political thought. Zhang Xianghao provides a brief overview of Tang's political ideas, including a criticism of Tang from an explicit Marxist-Leninist perspective; cf. Zhang, *Tang Junyi sixiang yanjiu*, pp. 145–168. According to Zhang's interpretation, Tang failed to distinguish between the normative spheres of politics and morality. This inaccurate interpretation not only overlooks the critical import of Tang's political philosophy, but falsely depicts him as a thinker still steeped in traditional Confucian political thought. As regards Tang's conception of history, which is also relevant for his political thought, the recent monograph by Huang Zhaoqiang provides highly valuable insights; see Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhaxue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*.

4 See Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy*. In his *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Angle speaks of Tang Junyi as "a good example" of an "antidemocratic elitist" among the "believers in sagehood," bolstering this statement with

political thought is deplorable because it means an important voice is absent from the discussion of Chinese political thinkers of the 20th century. Tang's concept of political power, his theory of state, his thoughts on the relation between state and civil society, his concept of politics, his analysis of totalitarianism, and his criticism of pre-modern Confucian political thought fundamentally challenge our common views on Confucian political philosophy.

There are a number of reasons for the silence that has long prevailed on Tang's political thought. For one, his political ideas defy conventional assumptions about Confucian political thought and are thus unsettling for those seeking confirmation of hitherto unchallenged perceptions. This may also be said, incidentally, of Mou Zongsan's political thought of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Tang's and Mou's depiction of the shortcomings of traditional Confucian political thought is one of the most insightful, if not searing, critique of Confucianism put forward in the 20th century.⁵

The reception of Tang's political thought in Mainland China was limited up to the 1990s due to its strong anti-communist and anti-Marxist strains and the

a reference to Metzger's *A Cloud across the Pacific*. One can only guess that this misinterpretation is due to the very limited scope of the analysis of Tang's political writings by Angle and Metzger; see Angle *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, p. 181. Other recent studies that make limited use of Tang's political thought include Joseph Chan's *Confucian Perfectionism. A Political Philosophy for Modern Times*. Chan sets his study in a broader framework of contemporary political theory and makes suggestions for establishing democratic institutions based on Confucian political ideas (such as a "Second Chamber" in parliament which should function as a meritocratic counter-weight). David Elstein's thought-provoking *Democracy in Contemporary Confucian Philosophy* is yet another example of a highly selective overview in the field. In discussing the political thought of what he calls "overseas new Ruism," the author exclusively singles out Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, and Lee Ming-huei. There is also no mention of Tang's political ideas in Lee Seung-hwan's *A Topography of Confucian Discourse. Politico-Philosophical Reflections on Confucian Discourse since Modernity*.

- 5 For a discussion of Mou Zongsan's critique of pre-modern Confucian political thought: Fröhlich, "Confucian Democracy' and its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism," pp. 177–183. An example of such eloquent silence is Cai Renhou. On the one hand, Cai draws attention to Mou Zongsan's critique of Confucian political ideas for having failed to restrain arbitrary rule by emperors; on the other, Cai assumes that Mou favoured the "Confucian" idea of common welfare as embodied in the notion of "people as foundation" (*min ben* 民本). This conclusion is questionable, to say the least. After all, Mou wanted to examine why the foundations of constitutional government had not been conceptualized in Confucian traditions, which centered on the notion of the "people as foundation" (see Fröhlich, *ibid.*); Cai, *Xin rujia yu xin shiji*, pp. 45–46.

pronounced criticism of the CCP. In democratized Taiwan, interest in modern Confucian political thought was generally quite narrow, probably in part due to the insistence of Confucian intellectuals on a depiction of “China” as a unitary cultural nation. According to this conception, the Chinese cultural nation unfortunately exists for the time being in the political form of two nation-states on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. This point of view obviously has little appeal to those who subscribe to the idea of a Taiwanese nation. In addition, even those Taiwanese and overseas proponents of a Chinese cultural nation who identified this notion with the Republic of China might not have been entirely at ease with Tang’s political thought because of his criticism of the GMD and its brand of cultural nationalism.

One further reason for this general silence is the excessive attention that has been given in recent years to a lengthy manifesto entitled *A Declaration to the World for Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*), compiled by Tang Junyi and signed by Mou Zongsan, Zhang Junmai, and Xu Fuguan. First published in 1958 in *The Democratic Review* (*Minzhu Pinglun* 民主評論), Tang produced the manifesto within two weeks during an extended visit to the United States in June 1957. He discussed its contents either personally or in correspondence with Mou, Zhang, and Xu. A partial translation into Japanese was published in 1959 in the journal *Ajia Zasshi* 亞細亞雜誌 and a complete English translation was made available in 1960 in the Taiwan-based journal *Chinese Culture*. Two condensed translations followed later.⁶ Conveniently, the manifesto, together with its English translation, seems to provide a comprehensive overview of modern Confucianism. Nonetheless, the reception of this text is problematic, for it is often not read for what it is—a manifesto that makes an appeal to its readers—but rather as a carefully argued philosophical text. The latter tendency is no doubt partly due to its considerable length and its academic style. Yet, if the manifesto is read out of context, without reference to the many other texts written by the author in that era, it does not provide a reliable compass to

6 See Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*. The manifesto was first published under the title “Wei Zhongguo wenhua jinggao shijie renshi xuanyan—women dui Zhongguo xueshu yanjiu ji Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie wenhua qiantu zhi gongtong renshi 為中國文化敬告世界人士宣言—我們對中國學術研究及中國文化與世界文化前途之共同認識” in: *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1.1.1958), pp. 2–21. For the Japanese version, see *Ajia Zasshi* 亞細亞雜誌, No. 25 (1959); for the full translation into English, see Chang (Zhang Junmai), “A Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture;” for partial translations into English, see Chang (Zhang Junmai), *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, Vol. 2, pp. 1–29; Kramers, “Confucian Apologetics in Modern Times.” It must be noted that none of these English texts is free of terminological inconsistencies.

Tang's philosophy. A much broader analysis is therefore indispensable if one wants to avoid drawing inaccurate conclusions and missing important topics of Tang's thought.

Discussions about the manifesto show, moreover, that the text has not undermined stereotypes of Confucianism that reduce the spectrum of Confucian political thought to such topics as the self-cultivation of political actors, rule by virtuous or meritorious persons, or the intimate relation between the spheres of the family and the state. Again, these stereotypes are prone to produce anachronisms by topical omission. One such anachronism is evident in the neglect of an issue which figured prominently in Tang's thought: the nature and impact of totalitarianism on the contemporary world and its implications for constitutional democracies. Even though this issue is clearly linked to events and developments that dominated international political thought in the mid-20th century and was hence prevalent during a period in which projects of modern Confucianism evolved, the considerations of Tang Junyi, but also, for example, of Zhang Junmai or Xu Fuguan on totalitarianism have gone largely unnoticed to this day. This neglect has repercussions on recent research on "Confucian democracy." The latter is generally still preoccupied by normativist attempts to link up pre-modern Chinese Confucianism with contemporary theories of democracy or general reflections about democratic societies. Against this backdrop, this study aims to show that a reconsideration of Tang Junyi's political thought can shed light on a critical strain within modern Confucianism that has so far been largely ignored.

Like many contemporary intellectuals, Tang was aware of the fact that "Confucianism," or the adjective "Confucian," is often used as a vague denominator for a wide range of political ideas and practices that can serve to justify democratic, non-democratic, and even anti-democratic thought and institutions. Yet Tang was not content with merely brushing over the entanglement of Confucian ideas and practices with non-democratic forms of government, before and after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. This common tendency is especially unsatisfying when a purportedly novel critique of Western-style democracies—and indeed even a superior concept of a future democracy—is presented in the name of Confucianism. It is not enough, therefore, to simply comb through classical Confucian texts in a highly selective manner in order to detect proto-democratic ideas. Equally unconvincing are arbitrary identifications of long-standing ideas, practices and institutions as ostensible "Confucian" achievements, no matter whether they pertain to the imperial civil service examinations, the political functions of imperial historiography, or the "meritocratic" rules for the promotion and demotion of government officials. The problem here is that many political ideas, practices and

institutions like these evolved over long periods of time, and often without any connection at all to the “classical” works of Confucianism. Apart from the tendency to overstate the impact of Confucian thought at the expense of other political traditions (e.g. Legalism and Mohism) or in less prestigious, but in fact highly influential writings (such as manuals for imperial officials, legal texts etc.), there is a risk of committing stereotypical anachronistic distortions.⁷

Even if we were to concede that one might actually discern core democratic ideas in pre-modern Confucianism, their applicability to the political discourses of the 20th century and beyond would still present a major challenge. Unless time-honored Confucian traditions prove effective not only with respect to critiquing the shortcomings of contemporary democracies, but also, and equally important, those of contemporary non-democratic or anti-democratic rule, they can only remain a dubious fellow-traveler of modern democratic thought. By the same token, it is not sufficient to simply espouse an intellectual “renewal” of Confucianism that contents itself with being able to explain the failure of Confucian traditions to establish democracy in China. If a reconstructed Confucianism is to function as an intellectual resource of democratic theory, it needs to prove that it can address fundamental challenges to democracy. These include, first and foremost, the totalitarian and authoritarian challenges that emerged in the 20th century.⁸ In as much as a renewal of Confucianism remains oblivious to such challenges, its critique (or affirmation) of extant democracies must remain aloof to historical reality. What is more, given that the discourse on Confucianism and democracy is a fairly recent phenomenon that was accompanied throughout the 20th century by competing non-democratic

7 The type of anachronisms at work here are of the kind that Quentin Skinner identified when he warned that “[a] given writer may be ‘discovered’ to have held a view, on the strength of some chance similarity of terminology, about an argument to which they cannot in principle have meant to contribute.” See Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1. Regarding Method*, p. 60 (“Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas”).

8 It is well known that the concept of totalitarianism is highly problematic and gave rise to prolonged controversies in academic circles as well as in public discussions, not the least because it seems to imply a conceptual, functional, or otherwise detectable equation of National Socialism and Stalinism. Comparisons pertaining to the nature and function of death camps, to the ontological status of “class struggle” as compared to “racial struggle,” to the organizational structure of the regimes, and to the “difference between a state that commits genocide and a genocidal state” are still controversial issues. In a review article from 2006, Anson Rabinbach sums up this state of research by noting that “. . . until recently, few systematic comparisons on the current state of historical research have actually been undertaken;” see Rabinbach, “Moments of Totalitarianism,” pp. 77–87 (for the above quotations, see *ibid.*, pp. 77–78, 85).

“Confucian” claims (ranging from calls for a Confucian state religion to vindications of authoritarian rule in terms of Confucian values in Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea), it is even more important to grasp Confucianism’s non-democratic or even anti-democratic undercurrents. This does not necessarily imply that modern Confucianism is inevitably vulnerable to being absorbed by anti-democratic ideologies or that it even contained proto-totalitarian elements.⁹

Just the same, it is regrettable that many contemporary advocates of Confucianism seem to take very little interest in analyzing anti-democratic currents in today’s world. To be sure, many of these advocates completely neglect the legacy of their predecessors, among them Tang Junyi, for whom the authoritarian and totalitarian challenges to democracy in the middle of the 20th century were of serious concern. His political philosophy may thus be considered “practical” in an emphatic sense. What is at stake here is the credibility of Confucianism with respect to liberal democracy. A critical interpretation of Tang’s response to totalitarianism, which has so far received only scant attention, is therefore all the more important (see Chap. 12).

As long as efforts toward Confucian revivals and reconstructions of Confucian humanism continue to neglect the darkest periods of the 20th century, they will continue to evoke uneasiness when it comes to the issue of the historical memory of post-war democracies. The fact that the Confucian revivals are currently flourishing on the Chinese Mainland, where the public memory of foreign and Chinese totalitarianism remains highly constricted by

9 Gan Yang suspects continuities between “traditional societies” and “socialist states” that become manifest in the persistence of totalitarianism and a (totalizing) moral idealism. He ascribes to Confucianism strong moral-idealist tendencies and calls upon modern Confucianism to finally learn its historical lesson; see Gan, “Ruxue yu xiandai—jian lun ruxue yu dangdai Zhongguo,” pp. 607, 613–614. Xu Fuguan raised a similar criticism about Tang Junyi’s and Mou Zongsan’s modern Confucianism in the early 1950s; see Lee, *Xu Fuguan and New Confucianism in Taiwan (1949–1969): A Cultural History of the Exile Generation*, pp. 186–188, 192–204. More recently, Thomas Metzger presupposes with respect to modern China that what he calls “the four ideologies” (i.e. modern Confucian humanism, Chinese Marxism, Chinese liberalism, Sunism) were characterized by an “epistemological optimism.” He then suggests that his thesis “. . . that the structure of authority in China is closely connected to a tradition-rooted, pervasive form of epistemological optimism contrasting with a much more pessimistic epistemology in Western liberal democracies meshes with Charles E. Lindblom’s view regarding the contrast between the epistemology of the latter societies and that of the U.S.S.R.” See Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific. Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today*, pp. 175, 182.

official ideological standards, only adds to this discomfort. The same might be said of the large-scale revival of Confucianism in post-war Taiwan. It began in the 1950s, again under conditions of an ideologically constrained memory culture, and intensified during the movement for the “Revival of Chinese Culture” from the mid-1960s onwards. For those who consider it crucial to maintain a historical awareness of the dangers of totalitarianism in contemporary democratic societies, it is indeed difficult to fully approve the current Confucian revival agendas.

Coherence and Comparison

Even though the present study does not conform to common approaches of comparative philosophy (for reasons that will be elucidated), it nonetheless entails elements of cross-cultural comparison. In order to adequately contextualize the discourses under examination, two aspects deserve special attention:

First, it is necessary to address key aspects of conceptual transfers in modern Confucian philosophical discourses. This is even more critical given that modern Confucianism has deliberately produced an extraordinary blending of philosophical terminologies and intellectual traditions. The philosophical language of modern Confucianism oscillates between modern and pre-modern European, American, Japanese and traditional Chinese philosophical vocabularies, creating a discursive space of extreme permeability across cultural regions and historical periods. The appropriations of philosophical concepts, whether they stemmed from indigenous or exogenous discourses, greatly contributed to the dynamic of modern Confucian thought. While the usage of familiar terms from Chinese sources might give the semblance of continuity, more often than not this was a matter of breaking up long-established conceptual conventions “from within.” There is, for example, the notion of *liang zhi*, which figures prominently in modern Confucianism. From a diachronic perspective, it is noteworthy that in pre-20th century Chinese thought, *liang zhi* was a key term in moral philosophy and metaphysical speculation (e.g. in the school of Wang Yangming). In the case of Tang Junyi’s appropriation of *liang zhi*, the earlier moral-metaphysical meanings were retained, however with a fundamental shift towards an ontotheological dimension that is not to be found in earlier Confucian thought (see Chap. 5). From a synchronic perspective, the term “philosophy of history” (*lishi zhexue* 歷史哲學) that Tang and Mou Zongsan applied in the early 1960s can be taken as exemplifying a certain semantic strategy (see Chap. 11). By presenting their historical

speculation under the Western category of *lishi zhexue*—a term that was not available to Chinese thought prior to the 20th century—they unmistakably underscored that the function of modern Confucian discourse was to break with traditional forms of Chinese historiography. At the same time, *lishi zhexue* served to undermine contemporary currents in Western historical thinking of the 20th century by referring back to a type of historical speculation that had flourished in the 18th and 19th century. In addition to this, the usage of the term *zhexue* (as in *lishi zhexue*) served to put Western and Chinese “philosophy” on par with each other, hence functioning to leverage conventional Western, ethnocentric notions of philosophy in general and those European philosophies of history that excluded non-Western philosophical traditions in particular.

Second, the examination of modern Confucian discourses should obviously entail levels of social and intellectual contextualization, as well as an internal contextualization of ideas (in the broad sense) within an author’s oeuvre. “Levels” here relates, on the one hand, to the distinction between explicit textual references to certain historical or biographical constellations and, on the other, to references that the interpreter brings into play regarding given contexts. Take for instance Tang’s biographical account of his epiphany at age 26 in his *Life, Existence and the Horizons of the Mind* (*Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*), or his mention of contemporary political events, such as the communist takeover on the Mainland. Beyond such explicit references, the interpreter might also find it conducive to consider, for example, the fact that Tang had briefly held a position within the GMD government, even though Tang does not elaborate on his collaboration with GMD right wing theoretician Chen Lifu. Certainly, such “external” contextualization on the part of the interpreter does not have to result in distorting claims about an objectified interpretation, but can help to explore Tang’s political background. As regards the level of internal contextualization of discourses, it is illuminating to compare, for instance, Tang’s conceptualization of a Confucian “main current” in the manifesto of 1958 to other writings from the same period.

The present study neither describes Tang’s personality from a psychological point of view, nor does it strive to detect his allegedly original, inner motivation in producing his works. It is indeed a different matter to discern, as will be done here, Tang’s intentions on the basis of his ascriptions of meaning, purpose, and function to particular discourses in which he participated. Of central importance here is the epistemic status that Tang ascribed to “philosophy” as a discipline, as a discourse, and as a way of life. In so doing, he referred to a particular taxonomy of knowledge which he derived from a civil-theological framework (see Chap. 5). Still, the question remains whether the assumption that Tang’s

modern Confucianism is characterized by a “civil-theological framework” runs the risk of contributing to a so-called “mythology of coherence.” Quentin Skinner identified the latter as a serious flaw in the Western history of ideas that occurs when intellectual historians see it as their “task to supply these texts [under scrutiny—TF] with the coherence they may appear to lack.” Along similar lines, Skinner notes that interpreters ascribe to “the thoughts of the major philosophers a coherence, and an air generally of a closed system, which they may never have attained or even aspired to attain.”¹⁰ Skinner’s criticism of an excessive focus on coherence in historical interpretations is highly instructive, for it also pertains to misguided efforts to disclose the original motivation of a philosopher as a basis for an allegedly “true” interpretation. In its extreme form, this can involve the claim of privileged access to the philosopher’s hidden or latent intentions and self-understanding. From this vantage point, the interpreter assumes a position of analytical superiority, at times even vis-à-vis the philosopher him or herself. This is not to say of course that any attempt to retrace intentions is misguided per se. The writing of intellectual biographies, for example, may produce important psychological insights into the life and work of a philosopher. “Intention” in this case is rightfully understood as a psychologically informed concept in which the interpreter tries to empathize with the author in order to gain a better understanding of his or her subjective intentions. The present study of Tang Junyi’s thought, by contrast, is not an intellectual biography, and references to Tang’s biography are made with a more modest, hermeneutical purpose in mind. They either contribute to a general knowledge of Tang’s path of life, or shed light on certain aspects of the interpretation of his philosophical work on a secondary level. For example, Tang’s messianic zeal or his ambivalent judgments on the GMD may be further contextualized by references to biographical resources.

References to “intentions” in this study are, therefore, unburdened by the psychological task of a subjective analysis of the philosopher’s mind. They are rather understood, in line with Skinner, as intentions to act in the form of “illocutionary acts.” The latter are linguistic “entities with an essentially public character.”¹¹ They can take the form of interventions into ongoing discursive contestations and comprise, for instance, the discussion of certain normative claims. Such interventions are to be examined against the backdrop of respective linguistic conventions, i.e. the “locutionary force,” including common conceptual distinctions, shared identifications of problems, shared

10 Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1. Regarding Method*, pp. 67–68.

11 Ibid., p. 97.

vocabulary, etc. The illocutionary force of these acts is evident from the changes in the philosopher's use of linguistic conventions.¹² Even though this study does not strictly follow Skinner's approach, his conceptualization of "intentions" informs its analysis of Tang Junyi's re-appropriation of traditional Confucian terms and conceptual distinctions, together with Buddhist and Western intellectual traditions, to outline a civil theology in reaction to the failure of democracy in China.

The search for a closed system of thought is arguably even more likely to mislead interpreters of Tang Junyi's work than an examination of supposedly hidden intentions. The voluminous scope of Tang's complete works militates against gaining an overview of parts that seem to be systematically linked and those writings or passages that do not fit into a recognizable "system." The identification of systemic coherence is made even more difficult by the fact that Tang was at times an impatient and digressive thinker. Apart from his more academic works such as the series *On the Sources of Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue yuan lun*), his philosophical writings are often marked by greatly curtailed arguments and conceptual inconsistency. In fact, an interpreter of Tang's work one would likely admit to being occasionally perplexed by his peculiar writing style and his readiness to make obscure allusions to a higher, non-discursive realm of spiritual existence at the cost of theoretical clarity. This lack of intellectual rigor is indeed challenging for anyone trying to follow his thought. These reservations aside, there is no doubt that Tang aimed for and managed to achieve a certain degree of philosophical coherence in his work. His monograph *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason* is a prime example of this. Still, one need not go so far as to suggest that Tang created a "closed system." I will argue instead in the present study that his oeuvre reflects a coherent philosophical/civil-theological framework. This is not to say that all parts of his work can or should be integrated into this framework—the interpretation of Tang has to remain open to the possibility of non-coherence. The distinction between "closed system" and "framework" is admittedly heuristic. However, in response to Skinner's warning against falling victim to the mythology of coherence, one might add that not every effort to pinpoint comprehensive philosophical coherence when interpreting seemingly loosely connected thoughts inevitably leads to distortions. Ultimately, the act of interpretation demands transparency with regard to one's own projections of coherence. Undoubtedly, retracing a framework of coherence in Tang's writings puts the

12 Ibid., pp. 90–102, 91–127.

interpreter at the risk of at least appearing as if he were still trying to uncover Tang's hidden and only true intentions. This study has no such pretense.

It is therefore all the more important to show that the civil-theological framework of Tang's modern Confucianism stands in contrast to the idea of a closed philosophical *system* that identifies conceptual thinking as the only "systematic" approach to truth. Indeed, Tang ascribed to philosophical discourse in general, and conceptual thinking in particular, merely an intermediate function with respect to the highest form of human cognition, i.e. the intuitive, non-reflective "innate knowing" (*liang zhi*) of the absolute (see Chap. 5). Significantly, Tang understood Confucian philosophy itself not as a unitary form of philosophy, but as a very comprehensive set of philosophies containing idealist, materialist, monist, pluralist, rationalist, or empiricist strands.¹³ Overall, his modern Confucianism is only in a very limited sense the result of a specialized *academic* investigation into Western or Eastern philosophical writings and schools. It can be very difficult, if not altogether futile, to try to disentangle the sometimes ambiguous, even contradictory reception of the Western and Eastern philosophical traditions. When looking back at his own intellectual development in the middle of the 1950s, Tang frankly admitted that, while having studied books written by "thinkers of almost all philosophical schools," he had never conducted "specialized research" into any of these philosophical schools. He rather made "choices" according to what he deemed to be true or false.¹⁴ Tang's thought indeed remains elusive if it is interpreted solely from the standpoint of certain philosophical schools or currents. The closest Tang ever came to offering a conventional exposition of philosophical ideas was in those books and articles that were explicitly dedicated to an academic-philosophical readership, most of all *An Outline of Philosophy* (*Zhexue gailun*), an introduction to Eastern and Western philosophy, and the six volumes of the *On the Sources of Chinese Philosophy* series (1966–1975), which dealt exclusively with Chinese philosophy.

Trying to cope with Tang's modern Confucianism by adhering to a strictly comparative approach can turn out to be disappointing, especially if one expects to learn a "method" of philosophizing from studying his work.

13 Tang, "The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia," p. 363.

14 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 571. This admission can be confirmed by Tang's diaries, which shed light on his reading habits. As his detailed listings of his daily philosophical readings show, he rarely studied a particular philosophical work on two or more consecutive days. When he would continue his reading of a text, he usually did so after weeks, sometimes months—just as if he were again seeking further inspiration.

When analyzed from distinctly comparative perspectives in a narrow sense, Tang's writings seem to present a rampant and, at times, confusing array of philosophical inspirations from other sources, defying a clearly demarcated philosophical reception. Yet, it would be a mistake to simply suppose that this is a case of misapprehension or an indication that Tang was an eclectic thinker in the negative sense. As mentioned above, his refusal to expound the modern Confucian project along fixed lines of conventional philosophical research, as well as the "unsystematic" mode of speculation result from the civil-theological taxonomy of "philosophy." This does not mean that an informed discussion of Tang's philosophy can afford to merely ignore his extensive philosophical readings. The present study rather aims to challenge the notion that modern Confucianism can be comprehended as the mere product of specific influences from Western or Chinese sources. Such a reception-based approach not only contradicts Tang's own understanding of how to absorb Western and Chinese philosophy, but can also hardly avoid frustrating or even unsettling results (depending on one's initial expectations). As I will discuss below, this holds also true for Tang's own pursuit of Buddhist thought and German idealism.

Tang familiarized himself with Buddhism in an academic setting during his student days, when attending lectures by Yogācāra-inspired "Confucian" philosopher Xiong Shili.¹⁵ However, he admitted that he was unable to grasp Xiong's famous *A New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* (*Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論) from 1932, and he appears to have kept his distance from Xiong's philosophy, deeming it "too lofty." In the same vein, he rejected Yogācāra Buddhism as a sort of "solipsism." It is, therefore, hardly surprising that he did not subscribe to the teachings of Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943), who taught at the "China Institute for Inner Learning" (*Zhina Neixue Xueyuan* 支那內學學院) where Tang's father and Xiong Shili had studied Buddhism.¹⁶ Even after abandoning the simplistic equation of "philosophy" with modern "Western" philosophy around 1940, he still declined invitations from both

15 Tang first attended lectures by Xiong Shili when he was enrolled at Peking University from 1925 to 1927 and then again when he studied at Southeastern University in Nanjing after 1927; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 16, 21.

16 See Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 568; Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 470–471, 480; Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 23. Even though Tang was not a disciple of Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili, one might still agree with Ruichang Wang who states: "A few Confucian adherents such as Tang Junyi (1909–1978), Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), and Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) fled overseas and managed to develop significantly the conservative line of thought represented by Confucian masters Xiong Shili (1885–1968) and Liang Shuming (1893–1988) . . .;" see Wang, "The Rise of Political Confucianism in Contemporary China," p. 34.

Ouyang Jingwu and Xiong Shili to continue his philosophical studies as their disciple. As the story goes, his suggestion that he would rather pursue broader interests in philosophy caused both Ouyang Jingwu and Xiong Shili to lose their temper.¹⁷

Notwithstanding Tang's reservations about Ouyang Jingwu's Yogācāra philosophy and Xiong Shili's renewal of Confucian philosophy within a Yogācāra-framework, there is only insufficient evidence to support Lao Sze-kwang's contention that Tang's philosophy was actually based on Huayan Buddhism.¹⁸ Lao concedes that Tang's alleged grounding in Huayan Buddhism would have given rise to a fundamental tension in Tang's thought. He recounts how he once personally asked Tang how one might reconcile the fact that Huayan thought did not presume the existence of a factual reality whereas Confucianism indeed allowed for such a presumption. As Lao recalls, Tang did not have an answer to this question. Lao suspects that Tang had not reached a final conclusion about whether or not Confucianism had to assume the existence of a factual reality.¹⁹ To be sure, there is agreement in research that Tang, like Mou Zongsan, held Huayan thought in much higher esteem than Yogācāra. As Jason Clower observes, Tang relegated Yogācāra to the lowest position of Mahāyāna philosophy, treating it as "Huayan philosophy's less perfect antecedent."²⁰ As Clower suggests, both Tang and Mou Zongsan considered Yogācāra thought to be "a dialectical stage in a certain process of philosophical development."²¹ This assumption about a dialectical sequence is consistent with Tang's depiction of the historical formation of Chinese humanism which also takes the form of a historical sequence. Here, Tang concluded that Buddhism in general had only partial access to the humanistic "main current." Buddhism, in other words, was not to be taken as a framework for the reconstruction of China's

17 Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 41–42; see also: Li et al., "Tang Junyi qi fo gui ru zhi yuanyin chutan," p. 21.

18 Lao Siguang (Lao Sze-kwang), "Cong Tang Junyi Zhongguo zhexue de quxiang kan Zhongguo zhexue de weilai," pp. 20–21.

19 Ibid. Be that as it may, there is quite extensive research on Huayan-Buddhism in Tang's *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun—yuan dao pian*, which is one of his six volumes on Chinese philosophy.

20 See Clower, "Chinese *Ressentiment* and Why New Confucians Stopped Caring about Yogācāra," p. 378. Clower refers in this context to Tang's *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun—yuan dao pian* (p. 407). Li Yufang and Zhang Yunjiang assume, too, that Huayan was Tang's favorite Buddhist school, not only in terms of academic research but also more generally; see Li et al., "Tang Junyi qi Fo gui ru zhi yuanyin chutan," pp. 21–22.

21 Clower, "Chinese *Ressentiment* and Why New Confucians Stopped Caring about Yogācāra," p. 388.

humanistic tradition. In this context, one even finds very negative assessments of Buddhism such as the assumption that, by the times of the neo-Confucian revival in the Song period, Buddhism had already turned into an individualistic religion that was unfit to integrate diverging social currents.²² These kinds of critical statements are not unusual in Tang's writings and are in accord with his depiction of the historical "forms of religious consciousness" in his book *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason* (*Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 494–506). Despite expressing great esteem for the Buddhist "religious consciousness," the book leaves no doubt that the (renewed) Confucian religiosity is at a higher level within the "main current." If Huayan thought was really the hidden foundation of Tang's philosophy, as Lao Sze-kwang suspects, it would be odd, to say the least, that Tang downgraded Buddhism, including Huayan, to a lower stage within the historical development of Chinese humanism and also never explained (as he did with respect to Confucianism) how the Huayan tradition would have to be reconstructed under modern conditions.

A similarly complex picture emerges from Tang's encounter with German idealism, which was equally ambiguous. During the 1950s and 1960s, Tang read widely in Western philosophy, paying special attention to German idealism and its British reception. There are indeed multi-layered affinities between the "study of mind and [human] nature" (*xin xing zhi xue* 心性之學) of the modern Confucian project and the thought of Hegel, Fichte and, to a lesser degree, Kant and Schelling. Yet, it is obvious that Tang was neither a Hegelian nor a follower of Fichte—although comparisons with ideas found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Philosophy of Right* and in Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* are clearly helpful for interpreting certain sections of Tang's philosophy (e.g. the concepts of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] and the modern state, or the somewhat Hegelian arrangement of topics in *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason*). It is quite likely that the highly selective assimilation of German idealist philosophy was, to some degree, the result of Tang's interest in Anglo-American Neo-Hegelian philosophy as represented by

22 On this assessment, see Zhang Yunjiang's and Li Yufang's analysis of Tang's evaluation of Buddhism in his *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan* from 1957. Tang stated here that Buddhist thought is "trans-humanistic" (*chao renwen de* 超人文的) and thus departs from China's essentially humanistic tradition. By the time the "aesthetic spirit" blossomed in the Wei-Jin period, the "original religious spirit" of Buddhism had already been lost and during the period of the neo-Confucian revival Buddhism had become a mere "religion of individuals;" see Zhang et al., "Tang Junyi dui Zhongguo Fojiao sixiang de zhengti panshi," pp. 111–112.

Thomas Hill Green, Francis Herbert Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, and Josiah Royce, all of whom were cited in Tang's writings.

Frederic Wakeman Jr. examined traits of Anglo-American Neo-Hegelianism that seemed to reverberate in modern Chinese thought. He highlights, for instance, congruities between Bosanquet's concept of an "omnipotential," yet "empty" principle which becomes manifest in human life and mind, and Wang Yangming's speculation about a "Heavenly principle" (*tian li* 天理) and *liang zhi*. According to Wakeman, the philosophy of Chinese "syncretists of the 1920s" (Zhang Junmai, Xiong Shili and others) came particularly close to English Hegelian thinkers in maintaining "that life expressed a cosmic moral conscience reflecting man's free will." In addition to Wakeman's observations, one can further note the conformity between "the depiction of political society as an instrument of individual realization" in the thought of Tang Junyi and Thomas Hill Green. However, as will be shown, Wakeman's conclusion that the Chinese "syncretists" tended to "blur the singular individual" in their speculation about the spiritual unification of man's consciousness with the "soul of the world" does not apply to Tang's philosophy.²³ In his "absolute idealism" (*juedui de weixin lun* 絕對的唯心論), Tang clearly affirmed the importance of the *individual* effort for enabling the human being to "see" that the "world of phenomena" (or the "objective reality") is in fact a "manifestation" of "the one mind of Heaven" (*yi tian xin* 一天心).²⁴ It should be noted that Tang avoided the term *lixiangzhuyi* 理想主義 (which was commonly used to denote German idealism up to the 1950s²⁵) when referring to his own brand of metaphysics. This is in line with his decision not to categorize Confucianism as

23 Wakeman, *History and Will. Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought*, pp. 285 (on Wang Yangming and Bosanquet), 287 (on the Chinese syncretists), 293 (on Green).

24 In regard to the development of his metaphysical speculation, Tang once expressed his intention to move from absolute idealism to what he called "transcendent realism" (*chao-yue shizai lun* 超越實在論), or a "blending" of these two: Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 363.

25 *Lixiangzhuyi* was a common translation of "idealism" since the mid-1920s; see Shangwu Yinshuguan Bianshen Bu, *Zhexue cidian*, p. 634. In a long manuscript from the early 1950s, Tang used *lixiangzhuyi* in reference to German idealism: see his "The philosophical spirit of modern Western idealism (Xifang jindai lixiangzhuyi zhi zhexue jingshen 西方近代理想主義之哲學精神)" in: Tang, *Zhexue lunji*, pp. 601–751. But Tang's terminology can be confusing, as he variously used *lixiangzhuyi*, *weixin lun* and *guannian lun* 觀念論 to refer to Western "idealism;" see Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, pp. 301–332.

lixiangzhuyi, most likely because it might give the false impression that modern Confucianism was merely a Chinese reinterpretation of German idealism.²⁶

Obviously, Tang did not reconstruct Confucian philosophy as if it were a branch of German idealism. This would have compelled him to react against the devastating criticism that philosophers like Hegel and Kant, but also Herder, leveled against what they perceived as Confucianism and a Confucian China. In his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Hegel had relegated China (as part of the “Oriental world”) to a historiological position that was still outside of the world history that Hegel’s philosophy of history claims to retrace.²⁷ Hegel’s demotion of China certainly did not encourage Chinese philosophers to adopt his philosophical speculation about history. Tang, though, simply disregarded Hegel’s judgment in this regard in his forays into idealist philosophy. What is more, as will be shown, Tang’s modern Confucianism also shares focal concerns, topics, and ideas with philosophical anthropology (e.g. Max Scheler’s)—a philosophical current that rejected significant parts of German idealism, including philosophies of history. The reason for the seemingly contradictory inclusion of elements from German idealism and philosophical anthropology must be sought in Tang’s extensive search for inspiration across the boundaries of philosophical “systems.”

Apart from Buddhism and German idealism other intellectual currents might be illuminating for comparative purposes, even if Tang did not actually study them. Especially promising is a comparative study of texts written by Tang and Nishida Kitaro 西田 幾多郎 (1870–1945) as well as other

26 See e.g. Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 368. The term “*weixin* 唯心,” as in *juedui weixin lun*, indicates an interest in the philosophy of Wang Yangming and his followers. Yet, *weixin* here does not refer to Xiong Shili’s *weixin* philosophy, for Tang used *weixin* broadly, e.g. in references to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, British, and American idealism; see also the use of *weixin* in the translation of “objective idealism” (*keguan weixin lun* 客觀唯心論): *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 1, pp. 443–445, or in reference to the philosophy of Wang Yangming: *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, p. 376.

27 See Hegel’s statement about the lack of “subjectivity” in a historically immobile Chinese empire: “Early do we see China advancing to the condition in which it is found at this day; for as the contrast between objective existence and subjective freedom of movement in it, is still wanting, every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually, takes the place of what we should call the truly historical. China and India lie, as it were, still outside the World’s History, as the mere presupposition of elements whose combination must be waited for to constitute their vital progress. The unity of substantiality and subjective freedom so entirely excludes the distinction and contrast of the two elements, that by this very fact, substance cannot arrive at reflection on itself—at subjectivity.” Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 132–133.

philosophers of the Kyoto School—even though Tang did not explicitly refer to them and, indeed, may never have even read them.²⁸ Nishida and Tang offer equally ambitious readings of Western philosophy, and especially of German idealism, and Buddhist thought, as both attempted to transcend, not only epistemologically, but also ontologically, dichotomies of subject and object, self and absolute, consciousness and reality. James Heisig's observation about Nishida's thought also applies to the work of Tang, namely, that the reader finds there the "crowning argument that all of reality can be grounded in a direct intuition, a 'self-awareness' in which the knower had transcended the subject-object world."²⁹ Equally consistent with Tang's thoughts on intuition (*liang zhi*) is Nishida's statement that "[w]hen we submerge ourselves into the depths of self-awareness in active intuition and take the standpoint of a self whose seeing has negated the seer, all things that exist are transformed into a self-awareness and a self-expression."³⁰ As regards moral philosophy, Tang and Nishida were therefore much more interested in fathoming "morality as a state of awareness"³¹ than in devising a virtue ethic or a deontological type of moral philosophy.

There are further striking similarities between Tang's and Nishida's thought with respect to the epistemological status of philosophical language. When reading Tang, one can readily identify parallels with Heisig's contention "... that in his [Nishida's] philosophical writings . . . allusions to self or true self are little more than metaphor for one's inner nature that is one with the nature of reality itself, or for the ascent of the subject to an awareness where the ordinary self-centered subject gives way to a more profound principle of identity."³² Yet for all its proximity to the Kyoto School, modern Confucianism must be understood as an intellectual enterprise in its own right, and not only because it emphatically addressed *Confucian* thought. In both form and content, its attempt to relate the speculation about the transformative self-realization to a reflection on modernity that entails political thought and ethics as well as cultural and social philosophy is distinct from the Kyoto School.

The scope of large-scale comparisons could be extended until a kind of philosophical mosaic emerges. The heuristic surplus value of such an approach

28 In the following, I draw from James Heisig's superb study *Philosophers of Nothingness. An Essay on the Kyoto School*.

29 Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness. An Essay on the Kyoto School*, p. 47.

30 Quote from: *ibid.*, p. 59.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

would continuously decline, however, and eventually become counterproductive by creating the false impression that Tang's thought is occasionalistic in nature. Such a conclusion would belie the fact that, due to its civil-theological vantage point, his modern Confucian project was neither occasionalistic nor relativistic at its core, but remained oriented toward an emphatic truth claim. This orientation involved an awareness of the limits of discursive thinking with regard to the ultimate, non-discursive "innate knowing" of the "Heavenly principle" and consequently unburdened the discursive practice of philosophy from clinging to an absolute truth claim. At the same time, it encouraged the human being in his quest to attain self-fulfillment in the intuitive act of "knowing Heaven." Thus, in a manner of speaking, the inter-relation of language, time, meaning and truth ultimately defies explanation on this point. The implications are severe. However, to quote Adorno's famous phrase, Tang's philosophy can be absolved from leaping into a mere "jargon of authenticity." Adorno took issue with Heidegger's philosophy, in which he detected a jargon which "obliterates the difference between this 'more' for which language gropes, and the in-itself of this more."³³ In contrast, such a pretension is absent from Tang's thought, for the difference between the "'more' for which language gropes, and the in-itself of this more" is the pivotal point upon which his civil theology and its taxonomy of conceptual knowledge turns. Still, the civil-theological link between reason and intuition is ultimately fragile and it pushes Tang's modern Confucianism to the brink of irrationalizing human self-awareness and the individual's orientation to the world.

33 Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 12.

Common Perspectives on Tang Junyi's Thought

Conservatism

Tang's exilic perspective significantly deepened the "modern" turn in his interpretation of China's intellectual and social traditions. The continuation of traditions was no longer a matter of quasi-natural perpetuation, but based on efforts of renewal, rediscovery, re-appropriation, re-implementation and, most of all, discursive justification. As a private individual, Tang reacted to the exilic threat of a loss of traditional life forms by paying serious attention, apparently for the first time in his life, to the religious-ritual importance of holidays and festivities. He dealt with this topic quite exhaustively in his book *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture*, which he wrote shortly after arriving in Hong Kong.¹ At home, he now worshipped ancestors, and he put up spirit tablets of Heaven and Earth (*tian di* 天地), his ancestors (*zuzong* 祖宗), and saints and worthies (*sheng xian* 聖賢).²

Still, Tang did not advocate an unconsidered, habitual perpetuation of traditional life. He never followed the traditionalist belief that the spheres of politics, economics, and science should be reined in and made directly accountable to a substantial set of values and virtues stemming from China's Confucian past.³ He consequently refrained from embracing the ideal of a thoroughly moralized "humanistic world" covering all social and cultural spheres of modern life. Even when strongly insisting on the need to uphold China's long-standing cultural traditions, he highlighted the aspect of reflexivity, i.e. the importance of a conscious re-appropriation of traditions from a transnational perspective. He thus clearly distinguished his brand of cultural conservatism from blatant traditionalism:

All these matters which have to do with [the notions] that "relatives should not forget their familial ties, nor old acquaintances their friendship," that one "does not forget an old agreement however far back it extends," that one should "not forget what [the old arrangements] were

1 See Chap. 9 of Tang's *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*; see also Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 107.

2 Tang, *Tang Junyi zhuanlüe*, p. 63. Other rituals like the burning of paper money were not practiced at Tang's home (ibid.).

3 See e.g. the manifesto of 1958: Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 4–5, 18, 32–33, 35.

at first” and that one should “not lose one’s roots,” are wrongly deemed by contemporary psychologists, sociologists and specialists of historical culture as mere habits. [In fact,] these are [all issues of] conservation. I can sternly admonish the people of the world that these are certainly not mere habits, but indeed [issues] through which men truly achieve [their] being as humans, [and] through which I truly achieve myself—this is [at once] a factual and also normative principle. (...) The source of this conservation lies indeed in the immediate presence of man, [that is in the fact that he or she] has a strong and at the same time deep self-awareness about the past, the history, and the origins on which one’s life rests and [in which it] is rooted.⁴

In labeling Tang’s thought as conservative, as he did himself (see Chap. 4), it is necessary to differentiate between his culturally conservative position and a political conservatism, which he never advocated. He, indeed, wholeheartedly welcomed the revolution of 1911 and the founding of the republic in 1912. In fact, his modern Confucianism aimed to strengthen the republican order and to reinforce it by means of democratic-constitutional institutions. Tellingly, Tang also refrained from making political arguments against strands of rationalism, except for those totalistic tendencies which he identified with parts of the New Culture Movement. He criticized the latter for the false propagation of “science,” which entailed a dangerously vague use of the label “unscientific” that served to depreciate other cultural values.⁵ Such criticism of New Culture rationalism, however, did not deter Tang from believing that individuals are able to lead their private and public lives in a reasonable and socially responsible way without a need to turn to political or religious authorities.

4 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 16. Tang quoted here passages from *The Analects* and the *Book of Rites*: 1) “that relations should not forget their relationship . . .” *The Book of Rites* 11.2 section 3.24 (Legge, *The Li Ki, Books I–X*, p. 199); 2) “does not forget an old agreement . . .” *Lunyu* XIV.13 (Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Works of Mencius*, p. 280); the full passage reads: “The man, who in the view of gain thinks of righteousness; who in the view of danger is prepared to give up his life; and who does not forget an old agreement however far back it extends:—such a man may be reckoned a COMPLETE man.”; 3) “not forgetting what they were at first.” *The Book of Rites* VIII.2 section 2.8 (Legge, *The Li Ki, Books I–X*, p. 408); the passage reads: “In ceremonial usages we should go back to the root of them (in the mind), and maintain the old (arrangements of them), not forgetting what they were at first.”

5 On this criticism by Tang, see Huang, “Lun ruxue zhi zongjiao xing: yi Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan xiansheng weili de sikao,” p. 124.

It is also significant that Tang's "conservative" standpoint embraces the anticipation of a *future* Chinese constitutional democracy, and hence neither defends the current state of affairs nor contemporary political institutions. Not even the events of 1949 caused Tang to contemplate a rapprochement with the GMD state, as Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), his fellow emigrant to Hong Kong, had done. A sound understanding of his conservatism requires that these peculiarities be taken seriously. Regarding typically conservative strains of thought, three stand out in Tang's Confucianism. First, there is the notion of an invariant human nature which is characterized by imperfection, seductiveness, and potentially insatiable desires. For example, in his analysis of the human desire for power Tang presumed that this desire was primordial and insatiable (see Chap. 7). The good in men thus becomes manifest only when they prevail over the subjectively evil and permanently exercise control over desires and instincts, thus reining in their unsociable side. Second, social, political, and economic inequality is interpreted as an inevitable consequence of the freedom of individuals in a society. Social hierarchies are hence to be seen as an appropriate expression of man's natural inequality. Thirdly, social deficiencies and malformations are said to be essentially the result of shortcomings in intellectual attitudes, spiritual outlooks, and distortions of cultural values.⁶

Another important topos of conservatism is absent from Tang's thought: The assumption that there exists a normative primacy of supra-individual orders (such as the state, traditions, the nation, the people, the community) over individuals. Tang refrained from making any claim that the individual obtains his or her correct standing in the world mostly through the workings of such orders. As he saw it, individuals do not actually need to subordinate themselves to such "greater" collectivities in order to overcome their egotism. On the contrary, Tang's civil theology is centered on the individual and posits the notion that the individual's self-fulfillment is the focal point of sound political judgment. Overall, then, Tang's conservatism aims to preserve the intellectual and cultural preconditions that will be needed to achieve the future modernization of China. Given that modernization is an ongoing process of normative, institutional, and functional differentiation, it is little surprising that Tang's "modernizing" conservatism puts forward a concept of Confucianism that anticipates such differentiation.

6 On these three topoi in "classical" German conservatism, see Lenk, *Deutscher Konservatismus*, pp. 37–38 (on the first topos), pp. 66–67 (on the second), pp. 42–46 (on the third).

Neo-Confucianism

Two monographs written by Tang during the 1950s offer a concise overview of his approach to traditional Chinese speculation and Confucian thought in general. These monographs are *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*) from 1953, and *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason* (*Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*) from 1958. *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture* was written shortly after Tang's arrival in Hong Kong and is marked by an emphasis on early Chinese speculative thought, especially in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經).⁷ Although Tang's interest in early Chinese speculation bears the imprint of neo-Confucian traditions of interpretation, he clearly attempted to move beyond neo-Confucianism. This can be seen *prima facie* from his categorization of neo-Confucian speculation under the "Western" label of *xingshangxue* 形上學—a loan word which was coined in Japan for the translation of the term "metaphysics."⁸

What is more, Tang did not conduct research on neo-Confucianism with the traditionalist intention of adopting key concepts and ideas from neo-Confucian thinkers as ready-made elements for contemporary philosophical use. He was convinced instead that the modern perspective required a thorough reinterpretation of neo-Confucian thought. Tang's own research in the field reached its peak with the volumes *On the Sources of Chinese Philosophy—The Sources of Teachings* (*Zhongguo zhexue yuan lun—yuan jiao pian* 中國哲學原論—原教篇, 1973) and *On the Sources of Chinese Philosophy—The Sources of [Human] Nature* (*Zhongguo zhexue yuan lun—yuan xing pian* 中國哲學原論—原性篇, 1974). Here, and in a number of articles and essays about neo-Confucianism, the focus is on notions of enlightenment and on the topic of self-cultivation, whereas less attention is paid to neo-Confucian writings on political issues, rituals, and social practice.⁹

7 Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, pp. 75–173. Tang emphasized the great importance of the *Book of Changes* for the development of speculative thought in China; see *ibid.*, p. 92.

8 For example in: Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, Chap. 19 (pp. 359ff.). Sanetō lists *xing'ershanguxue* 形而上學 (identical with *xingshangxue*) as a Japanese loan word: Sanetō, *Zhongguoren luxue Riben shi*, p. 232.

9 Cf. Lin, "Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan de yangming houxue yanjiu," pp. 23–24. Tang concentrated on the following neo-Confucian figures: Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077), Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Lu Jiuyuan, Wang Yangming, Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645) as well as post-Wang Yangming thinkers and figures from the so-called

Neo-Confucianism remained important for Tang's thought throughout the entire middle period of his intellectual development, as well as in his later work. At one point, he identified the *Yijing* and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 as particularly influential texts within the history of Confucian metaphysics. Yet the climax of neo-Confucianism was reached, according to Tang, in the work of Wang Yangming.¹⁰ The philosophy of Wang Yangming and his followers is conventionally referred to as the "study of the mind" (*Xin xue* 心學)—although this label was first introduced by their opponents. Wang Yangming himself called his brand of Confucianism "learning of the sage" (*Sheng ren zhi xue* 聖人之學), or "school of the sage" (*Sheng men* 聖門).¹¹ The latter label is programmatic and clearly indicates the practical aims of Wang's teachings. It can be found in the *Chuan xi lu* 傳習錄, the seminal compilation for the study of Wang Yangming. The *Chuan xi lu* indeed influenced Tang's own philosophical project, which also pertains, to some degree, to the repetitive style of argumentation; the circular arrangement of topics, which are often discussed from different perspectives in different sections of a text; the didactic, if not to say homiletic, rhetoric of appeals; and the tendency to overwhelm readers by leading them again and again along similar lines of thought.¹²

Nevertheless, there are also fundamental differences between Wang's and Tang's philosophy, one of which concerns the former's aim to infuse speculative thought with practical import and describe a related way of living. Whereas Wang Yangming tried to do this in many sections of the *Chuan xi lu* and hence addressed his students in the role of a teacher or even leader of a sectarian group, Tang generally refrained from offering dogmatic prescriptions for individual and collective forms of life. It was his belief that everyone ultimately needed to follow his or her own path to the inner source of "sagehood." Moreover, it is noteworthy that when Tang discussed topics of self-cultivation,

Donglin movement (ibid.). In terms of academic impact, one can still agree with Chan Wing-tsit's statement from 1985 that Tang's (and Mou Zongsan's) seminal studies on neo-Confucianism received only scarce attention in the United States (and in Europe, for that matter); see Chan, "Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy Abroad," p. 11.

10 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, pp. 374, 378.

11 Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, pp. 88 (1.49), 178 (1.124), 295 (11.162). "*Sheng men*" is an old term that was used already by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) in his *Youtongfu* 幽通賦 in reference to followers of Confucius (see *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, Vol. 8, p. 669).

12 This view is in accordance with Thomas Metzger's assumption that Tang had a "Buddhist-Confucian faith" which he "used to structure his whole philosophy" and that his writings were, thus, "fairly redundant, reflecting the religious impulse to return repeatedly to the same healing message:" see Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific*, p. 185.

he mostly used newly coined terms like “spirit” (*jingshen* 精神) and “values” (*jiazhi* 價值). These terms lend themselves to such differentiating concepts as “cultural spirit,” “religious spirit,” “humanistic spirit,” “philosophical spirit,” “cultural values,” “spiritual values,” and “political values.” They are consistent with modern differentiations into spheres of law (politics), morality (humanism, religion), science (philosophy), and aesthetics (culture). The implications of these normative, functional, and institutional differentiations with respect to concepts of culture and value would have been incomprehensible to Wang Yangming. Consequently, he would have missed the irony of using distinctly modern terms such as “*jingshen*” and “*jiazhi*” in order to affirm the continuity of China’s cultural traditions and, simultaneously, to deflect the compulsory nature of modernity.

Humanism and Religiosity

The differences between Tang and pre-modern Confucian thinkers do not end here, however. Tang remained skeptical towards the *political* legacy of Confucianism throughout the middle period of his philosophical development. Given that his immersion in Confucian thought did not take place prior to the 1940s, it is likely that he was critical of political ideas from Confucian traditions right from the outset.¹³ Unfortunately, the intellectual circumstances that prompted Tang’s turn to Confucianism, which occurred at around the time when he wrote the book *The Establishment of the Moral Self* (*Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, 1944), remain obscure.¹⁴ He briefly stated in this regard:

... around 30, I took a liking to Western idealism. This was indeed not to be expected. From here, I again turned to reading Chinese Confucianism from the pre-Qin period, Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism, finally realizing [in what respect] pre-Qin Confucianism, neo-Confucianism and Buddhism for their part surpassed Western idealism. It was, however, not until the 37th year of the Republic [= 1948; TF], that is around five or six

13 Liu Guoqiang applies a different periodization when concluding that Tang had turned to Confucianism at around the age of 30; see Liu, “Tang Junyi cong xin wu dao xin jing de sikao,” p. 246. This assumption is difficult to substantiate.

14 However, in that book he also professed his general agreement with Hinayana-Buddhism as regards the view that the world itself was only a transitional state of existence and human life was bitter and, ultimately, illusory; see Li et al., “Tang Junyi qi fo gui ru zhi yuanyin chutan,” p. 21.

years [ago], when writing the article about the original nature of religious consciousness, that I finally acknowledged the value of religions, and at the same time recognized the religious spirit within Confucianism.¹⁵

Prior to 1948, Tang had in fact only published eight articles on topics related to Confucianism, some of which were written when he was very young.¹⁶ When he studied philosophy, first at Peking University and then at Southeastern University (*Dongnan Daxue* 東南大學) in Nanjing, he had taken an outspokenly critical stance towards contemporary Confucian thinkers like Liang Shuming, Xiong Shili, or Fang Dongmei 方東美 (Thomé H. Fang; 1899–1977), whom he had personally met in classrooms and at lectures.¹⁷ Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that he absorbed ideas at this formative stage of his intellectual development that would contribute to his immersion in Confucian thought later in his life. Although he did not subscribe to any particular school or philosopher at that time, it seems likely that those intellectual currents of the 1920s which advocated a renewed interest in China's Confucian past and a reinterpretation of Confucianism as a humanistic tradition had made an impression. Southeastern University was a hotbed for intellectuals who were critical of the New Culture Movement's totalistic tendencies. Some of them gained prominence by participating in a loose network of scholars who published essays and translations of Western scholarship in the journal *Xueheng* (學衡; *The Critical Review*), founded in 1922. Contributors include the literary scholar and philologist Wu Mi 吳宓 (1894–1978), the literary scholar Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890–1945), the biologist and educator Hu Xiansu

15 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 571 (this passage is from Tang's account "Wo duiyu zhexue yu zongjiao zhe jueze 我對於哲學與宗教之抉擇"). Tang's own reference to his article on the religious consciousness is unclear. According to the *Chronological Table of [Tang Junyi's] Writings*, he published an article entitled "On the Original Religious Faith and Confucianism in China" in the March 1948 issue of the journal *Ideal, History and Culture* (*Lixiang, Lishi yu Wenhua* 理想, 歷史與文化). In 1950, an article about the "original nature of religious consciousness" appeared in the May issue of the journal *Ideal and Culture* (*Lixiang yu Wenhua*); see Tang, *Zhushu nianbiao*, pp. 15, 17.

16 See Tang, *Zhushu nianbiao*, pp. 3–15. Tang discussed in these articles the *Xunzi*, the *Mencius*, Confucius and Goethe, the *Book of Changes* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Zhu Xi, and neo-Confucianism in general.

17 Tang attended lectures and courses taught by Xiong Shili, Fang Dongmei, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893–1964) and others while studying philosophy as a major and literature as a minor at Southeastern University. Nevertheless, as Tang Duanzheng put it in the *Nianpu*, he was still convinced that the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages were of little if any use to the contemporary world; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 21, 23–24.

胡先驕 (1894–1968), the philosopher Liu Boming 劉伯明 (1887–1923), and the historians and philologists Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵 (1880–1956), Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), and Tang Yongtong.

None of these scholars figure prominently in Tang's work, nor does the American classical scholar and Harvard professor of French literature Irving Babbitt (1865–1933), who was the academic teacher of Wu Mi and the central figure of the so-called New Humanism in America. All the same, it is likely that ideas and positions from *Xueheng* and its introduction of Babbitt's "New Humanism" to a Chinese readership helped stimulate the common interest in a modern renewal of Confucianism. The influence of *Xueheng* intellectuals on modern Confucianism is much more obvious with regard to the selection of topics and a generally critical outlook on the contemporary world than particular analyses and interpretations of scholarly works. There was, above all, a cosmopolitan culture, purportedly on the rise worldwide, that was fostered by Western and Eastern strands of humanism and also included religious traditions.¹⁸ This burgeoning humanistic culture was expected to counteract some of the worst side effects of social modernity. The latter were addressed under such topics as rampant materialism, consumerism and urbanization, the decay of the "republican spirit," the upsurge of a misguided scientism in education and scholarship, and the triumph of Marxism and communism. Besides, *Xueheng* joined in Babbitt's call for an "aristocracy of character and intelligence." Its members were to receive their formation in a broadly humanistic, liberal and moral education that predetermined them to take up political

18 See Liu, *Translingual Practice. Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900–1937*, pp. 248, 251, 432. Lydia H. Liu contends that "the idea of new Confucianism was first imported from the West" (p. 432, note 41) and refers to Hu Xiansu's translation of Irving Babbitt's "Humanistic Education in China and the West," which was published in *Xueheng* in 1922 (see Bai, "Bai Bide Zhong Xi renwen jiaoyu shuo"). The fact that the term "*renwen* 人文" ("humanistic"), which was to become a key concept in modern Confucianism, figures prominently in Hu's translation is indeed remarkable (see also Liu, *ibid.*, p. 251). Even though it is problematic to pinpoint, as Liu does, the formation of an intellectual current which is as comprehensive in scope and intrinsically diverse as modern Confucianism, Liu's contention is relevant for a historically sound understanding of how the initial interest in reinterpreting Confucian traditions as "humanistic" took shape. The complexity of this formation in terms of intellectual history can be highlighted by the fact that Hu translated Babbitt's call for a "new" Confucian movement with the term "*xin Kong jiao zhi yundong* 新孔教之運動" (see Bai, "Bai Bide Zhong Xi renwen jiaoyu shuo," p. 48). Years later, Tang and his fellow advocates of modern Confucianism were careful to reject the invocation of a renewed Confucianism as "*Kong jiao*," a term that was closely linked to earlier attempts to establish Confucianism as a state religion.

and educational duties and thus to contribute to the sound foundation of the republican community in civic virtues and values.¹⁹

It is along this spectrum of a critique of modernity that the vestiges of *Xueheng* ideas can be found in Tang's philosophy. The correlations, however, do not cover the whole breadth of Tang's reflections on modernity, neither in terms of the range of topics, nor with regard to the analytical depth. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that Tang departed in many respects from the earlier critics of modernity given that he developed the main body of his philosophical work in exile after 1949. This was not only more than three decades after the *Xueheng*-discourse was at its peak, but also in a vastly different historical context. For one, Tang was no longer concerned with the problems of political mass participation by illiterates. He also did not subscribe to the idea of a political elite serving as role models for citizens or as paragons of the republican spirit. Nonetheless, he still emphatically referred to the need to retrieve a "classical spirit" in modern society to counter rampant materialism. He also described "ideal politicians" as if they belonged to an "aristocracy of character and intelligence" within an otherwise egalitarian society (see Chap. 11). Notwithstanding these *prima facie* affinities with *Xueheng*, there is no evidence that Tang ever shared the conviction that scholar-poets or cultural heroes could actually shape modern society. Nor did he endorse the idea of obtaining politically effective values from classical scholarship and literature. Tang ultimately conceived of the interrelations between the humanistic and the political realm in a much more complex manner. For example, he subscribed, among other things, to the notion that the humanistic sphere in modern societies should be relieved from the burden to produce an immediate political effect, whether in the form of political values and norms or in politically exemplary personalities (see Chap. 9).

Clearly, Tang's account that his intellectual development was characterized by the fact that his interest in Western idealism predated his immersion in Confucianism does not convey the full picture. He had been attracted to a broad range of intellectual currents before he thoroughly familiarized himself with Confucian thought. Apart from German idealist philosophy, New Humanism and readings into the Western canon of classical philosophy, he had read works of Marx and Lenin, Bertrand Russell, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and others. At one point, he also studied contemporary

19 For an excellent overview of the intellectual agenda of *Xueheng*-intellectuals like Wu Mi and Liu Boming, see Hon, "From Babbitt to 'Bai Bide': Interpretations of New Humanism in *Xueheng*," pp. 255–256, 259, 261; see also Schneider, "National Essence and the New Intelligentsia," pp. 73–75.

scientific theory. These readings were probably stimulated by his intellectual development at Peking University, where he was enrolled from 1925 to 1927. While there, he attended lectures and courses taught by Liang Qichao, Zhang Dongsun, Jin Yuelin 金岳霖 (1895–1984), Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), and others.²⁰

Tang's following turn to Confucianism bears the imprint of a religious conversion that befitted his strong sense of mission and messianism (an aspect described in more detail in Chap. 4). By adopting his Confucian agenda with these proclivities, Tang entered the ranks of thinkers who, since the Song Dynasty, had professed experiencing a sort of personal enlightenment in turning to Confucianism (mostly by renouncing Buddhism). In the late 19th and early 20th century, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and Liang Shuming, for instance, displayed a strong world-saving missionary sense in their accounts of their Confucian conversion. As for Tang, he stated that when he experienced his own personal epiphany at the age of 26, he did not believe in Buddhism.²¹ That said, he was almost certainly familiar with Yogācāra Buddhism at that time, especially as his father was deeply impressed by the Buddhist scholar Ouyang Jingwu.²²

In light of his familiarity with Buddhism, it is less surprising that Tang took an immediate interest in the religious dimension of Confucianism. When exploring the possibilities of reinterpreting Confucianism as a form of “religiosity,” he tapped into neo-Confucian currents by applying a terminological strategy of introducing new terms to determine the meaning of traditional notions. References to the notion of “Heaven,” for example, are linked with the philosophical term for the “absolute” (*juedui* 絕對), which is not found in Chinese texts predating the 20th century. Still, Tang's approach to Confucian religiosity drew on neo-Confucianism, including notions of sagehood and speculation

20 On Tang's readings of Western philosophy, see Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 470–473; Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 18, 23–24. Thomas Metzger states that, prior to his interest in German idealism, Tang had criticized it from the perspective of empiricist theory; see Metzger, *Escape From Predicament. Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture*, p. 244). On Tang's attendance of classes and lectures held by Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Zhang Dongsun, Jin Yuelin, and others, see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 16, 18–19.

21 Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, p. 470. Tang's account of his epiphany in *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie* may suggest that he experienced some sort of “Confucian” awakening. However, he was at that time not deeply immersed in Confucian thought.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 480. Tang had received an early education by his parents and was instructed up to the age of 10 by his father, who read to him the *Dao de jing* 道德經, poetry from the Tang period, and other texts outside of the Confucian canon; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 5–7.

about the relation between man and “Heaven.” Rodney L. Taylor highlights “the religious character of the goal of sagehood . . . as an experience of unity of self with Heaven. This provides a basis for the soteriological or transformational character of learning and self-cultivation.”²³ In reference to Tang’s thought, one can agree with Taylor’s conclusion that “[r]eligion thus involves a perception of, knowledge of, or insight into, that which constitutes the Absolute and, in addition, the ability to provide a means for the individual to engage in an ultimate transformation toward that which is regarded as the Absolute, the fulfillment of the relationship between the individual and the Absolute.”²⁴

Dogmatism

Whereas Tang’s turn to the religious dimension of Confucianism is affirmative in character, a different picture emerges with regard to his approach to Confucian traditions of political thought. In the early 1950s, his appraisal was generally still positive, for example in *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture*.²⁵ It then turned negative in his writings from the mid-1950s onwards, as he identified a number of problematic issues in Confucian political thought and practice. While conceding that Confucianism had produced some ideational and mental “roots” of democratic government, he emphasized that neither democratic practices nor constitutional government or the rule of law had evolved out of Confucian political traditions. Even worse, the political heritage of Confucianism as exemplified by Yuan Shikai and, later on, the GMD of the post-1949 period hardly appeared to have been immune to the lure of dogmatism and political authoritarianism. The question at hand, therefore, was whether the political traditions of Confucianism could in any way contribute to the future formation of a democratic Chinese nation-state. Tang’s critical reflection on this question was also motivated by his interest in the problem of evil

23 Taylor, *The Way of Heaven. An Introduction to the Confucian Religious Life*, p. 7. Taylor raises another point which is relevant for Tang’s concept of religiosity, namely that “[n]otions of the Absolute within religion can appear in different forms—transcendent or immanent, theistic or monistic.” See Taylor, “The Religious Character of the Confucian Tradition,” p. 82. With respect to the identification of sagehood as a “religious goal,” Taylor affirms that this is “a question left largely to the interpretation of the individual scholar.” See Taylor, “The Study of Confucianism as a Religious Tradition: Notes on Some Recent Publications,” p. 149.

24 Taylor, “The Religious Character of the Confucian Tradition,” p. 84.

25 See e.g. Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, p. 772.

and power in the political realm—an interest that was perhaps aroused less by his philosophical readings than close observation of particularly violent methods of political rule in the PRC since the 1950s (see Chap. 9 and 12). It seems that the aim of coming to terms with political reality necessitated a reconceptualization of politics and power, and yet traditional Confucian thought had little to offer in this regard. Consequently, Tang's political philosophy greatly differs from pre-modern Confucian political thought due to its sharp conceptual distinction between politics and ethics and its theory of power. Mou Zongsan is perhaps the only other philosopher of modern Confucianism to follow a similar path in criticizing traditional notions of a politico-ethical continuum.

Current discussions of Tang's ideas, however, are often burdened by inadequate depictions of his philosophy as a thoroughly traditionalist brand of Confucianism or as a lofty metaphysical effort prone to lead to an estrangement of philosophy from the historical world. Yu Yingshi 余英時, for example, assumes that Tang, like Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan, was a follower of Xiong Shili's philosophy and thus belonged to a philosophical school which produced arbitrary ("subjectivist"), quasi-religious interpretations, or even distortions, of Confucianism. These interpretations, if we are to follow Yu's critique, rest on a sectarian-like "arrogance of *liang zhi*" that in effect endorses a dangerous irrationalizing of social and political life. Yu wants to counter such aberrations, while also emphatically excluding his teacher Qian Mu from any culpability in this regard. He thus offers a reinterpretation of Confucianism that contents itself with questions pertaining to the individual's everyday life, rather than clinging to vain hopes of inscribing Confucianism into political institutions.²⁶ But, Tang was not a "disciple" of Xiong, at least not in the traditional sense of a master-disciple relationship. He also would not have welcomed the establishment of a sectarian Confucian school, let alone the founding of such a school within political or religious institutions. Yu is certainly correct to raise the issue of irrationalizing tendencies in Tang's (and Mou Zongsan's) Confucian philosophy. Yet contrary to what Yu observes, the problem is not with a hypostasis of intuitive enlightenment (through *liang zhi*) at the expense of discursive forms of practical reason. After all, Tang did not simply negate reason with an irrational belief in intuition. He rather attempted to link practical reason to the spiritual realm of *liang zhi*.

The issues Yu addressed were also raised by contemporary critics of Tang from the Mainland. However, their criticism has been challenged. In a

26 Yu, *Xiandai ruxue lun*, pp. 125 (on Xiong Shili as a founding figure), 155 (on the critique of *liang zhi*-thought), 171–179 (on the reinterpretation of Confucianism).

trenchant refutation, Lee Ming-huei rejects Liu Xiao's generalizing assessment that modern Confucian philosophers systematically confounded politics and ethics, as well as the subjective will and objective social relations. Liu's misjudgement seems to be due, as Lee points out, to a lack of familiarity with the writings of Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan.²⁷ Like Liu Xiao, Jiang Qing depicts modern Confucianism or what he calls in English "mind Confucianism" (*xinxing ruxue* 心性儒學) as a philosophy that deals exclusively with questions of "life" (*shengming* 生命), ethics, and metaphysics, while completely neglecting political aspects.²⁸ Similar criticism had been levelled earlier against modern Confucianism by Yin Haiguang 殷海光, Zhang Foquan 張佛泉, Wei Zhengtong 韋政通, Lin Yusheng 林毓生 and Zhang Hao 張灝. They all deplored that modern Confucianism was too abstract in thought, too "metaphysical," and unduly inclined to the belief that complex problems of modern societies could be solved altogether in the sphere of "culture."²⁹ One may also include here Lao Sze-kwang 勞思光, who wrote an essay suggesting that a "Chinese cultural movement" needed a "fundamental" concept to overcome the "deficiencies of traditional culture." Lao clearly implied that Tang's modern Confucianism lacked such a concept and was therefore essentially apologetic.³⁰

Wei Zhengtong and Lin Yusheng, both of whom had been close intellectually to Yin Haiguang for some time, were particularly critical of Tang's allegedly apologetic stance towards Chinese traditional culture, and, most of all,

27 See Li Minghui (Lee Ming-huei), *Rujia shiye xia de zhengzhi sixiang*, pp. 271–272; for Liu Xiao's critique, see Liu, *Xiandai xin rujia zhengzhi zhixue*, p. 328.

28 Jiang, *Zhengzhi ruxue*, pp. 20–23, 25. Jiang Qing reiterates this statement about "mind Confucianism"—a label that includes the philosophy of Tang Junyi as well as Mou Zongsan—when identifying as its "main concern . . . the existential life of human individuals and their minds, rather than socio-political institutions." See Jiang, "From Mind Confucianism to Political Confucianism," p. 18. Perhaps such distortions are not just a matter of limitations in the reception of Tang's philosophy, but rather a case of keeping silent about a critical strand of Confucian political thought that does not fit certain political agendas.

29 For an overview of this criticism, see Chen, "Tang Junyi de ziyou renquan guannian," p. 46.

30 Lao's essay appeared shortly after Tang's death in 1978, when close to one hundred commemorative texts were published in Hong Kong and Taiwan; see Lao Siguang (Lao Sze-kwang), "Chengbai zhi wai yu chengbai zhi jian—yi Tang Junyi xiansheng bing tan 'Zhongguo wenhua' yundong," p. 78; Fang Keli agrees with Lao's assumption and maintains that it pinpoints the crucial reason why the "movement" of modern Confucianism did not succeed; see Fang, *Xiandai xin rujia xue an*, Vol. 1, p. 37.

Confucianism.³¹ In an extensive academic interview on Tang Junyi from May 1978, Wei suggested that Tang had never abandoned “traditional values” and had simply neglected the need to comprehensively reflect on modernity. Tang was allegedly content to dissect some weaknesses in modern man and consequently never directly dealt with modernity, either psychologically or intellectually. In the same vein, Wei assumed that in the context of the anti-Confucian tendencies from the Republican period, there were personal and psychological factors at work which fueled Tang’s “missionary” zeal to propagate Confucianism. Wei even mockingly referred to Tang as the “shepherd of the Confucians,” who was driven by strong religious “feelings.”³² Lin Yusheng, too, found fault with the alleged absence in Tang’s work of a critical approach to “China’s traditional culture” and ascribed this deficiency to Tang’s supposed assumption that “all the things past” were “reasonable.” This has the familiar ring of similar criticisms of Hegelian philosophy, and Lin indeed depicts Tang’s philosophy as an ill-conceived, even “chaotic” *mélange* of Huayan Buddhism and Hegel’s philosophy of history. To make things worse, Tang ostensibly failed to thoroughly criticize Hegel’s philosophy for its complex but, according to Lin, close connection to the later rise of fascism. Tang is also said to have had a “state of mind” that kept him from voicing profound criticism of “traditional Chinese culture.” As a consequence, instead of adequately reacting to the problem of intertwining a complex cultural tradition (i.e. Confucianism) with an equally complex modernity, Tang merely resorted to an escapist attitude.³³

Both Wei Zhengtong and Lin Yusheng argue at times *ad hominem* and, as Lin’s generalizing remark on Hegelian philosophy and fascism exemplifies, they do not shy away from polemics. Still, the problem with their criticisms is

31 In his account of his own intellectual background and development, Wei refers to Lin Yusheng as a “disciple” of Yin Haiguang; see Wei, *Sixiang de tanxian*, p. 93. Wei also recounts how he and Yin Haiguang had first met in Taipei in May 1965 when Yin invited him to deliver a lecture at National Taiwan University. Thereafter, Wei and Yin met regularly and remained in close intellectual exchange until Yin’s death in 1969; *ibid.*, p. 74. According to Wei, Yin Haiguang had made “new Confucianism” (*xin rujia* 新儒家) his prime intellectual foe. Wei and Yin agreed that modern Confucianism should not be considered representative of the Confucian tradition; see Wei, *Chuantong de gengxin*, pp. 270–271.

32 Wei, *Chuantong de gengxin*, pp. 205–207, 221–227.

33 Lin, *Sixiang yu renwu*, pp. 413–416 (reprinted from *Zhongguo luntan* 中國論壇, Vol. 15, No. 1 [Oct. 10, 1982], pp. 21–24.) Li Zhifu’s judgment is diametrically opposed: He praises Tang for his apologetic attitude towards China’s national culture and the thought of Confucius; see Li, “Tang Junyi sixiang zhi minzu wenhua guan ji qi aiguo zhuyi jingshen zhi tantao,” pp. 221, 227.

not that they were completely off the mark. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are indeed parts of Tang's work where he was prone to a highly declamatory writing style. He also occasionally shows a tendency to cling to China's spiritual culture that has a chauvinistic ring to it. Yet his thought is ambiguous in this regard. There is in fact a strong tendency in this work to criticize the political tradition of Confucianism for its alleged dogmatism and its failure to clearly distinguish between the spheres of politics and ethics. Overall, the above criticism of Tang's supposed apologetic approach to China's intellectual traditions does not withstand scrutiny. What is more, the critics convey a rather one-sided view of Tang Junyi's reflections on modernity. While he may certainly be criticized for making particular assumptions, it simply does not do justice to Tang's philosophical endeavor to say that he never engaged in a comprehensive reflection on modernity. It should be noted here that Lin Yusheng himself remarked that he had not engaged in "systematic research" on the works of modern Confucian thinkers.³⁴ It is also ultimately not clear which of the works by Tang formed the basis of Wei Zhengtong's and Lin Yusheng's interpretations.³⁵

A more extensive reading into Tang's work would have shown that Tang was keenly aware of the ideological dangers lurking around an apologetic approach to Confucianism under modern conditions. Tang warned against the reduction of Confucianism to a "profane utilitarianism and positivism,"³⁶ for it could then be easily turned into a means to bolster political dogmatism. His restraint in presenting ready-made "Confucianized" political solutions when it came to problems occurring in social modernity was due to this anti-dogmatic outlook. Not only was he highly critical of Confucian political traditions in general, but he also took issue with a self-contained intellectual attitude in which conventions and traditions are upheld without prior reflection. He even contended that such an attitude might represent a breaking point for totalitarianism:

34 Lin, *Sixiang yu renwu*, p. 411.

35 Lin Yusheng's detailed and insightful analysis of the manifesto of 1958 must hence be considered to be exceptional. Lin takes issue with the manifesto's assumption that there are intellectual resources in Confucianism (among them the notion of moral subjectivity) that initiate *by necessity* the formation of a liberal democracy in Chinese modernity. Lin also critically notes the modern Confucians' conviction that the triggers of historical development were in essence ideational forces. He calls this a "cultural-intellectualistic approach," which is also observable in May Fourth anti-traditionalism; Lin, *Zhengzhi zhixu yu duoyuan shehui*, pp. 341–345.

36 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 370. The critics of such profane Confucianism would be compelled, according to Tang, to take up the unworldly role of monks; *ibid.*, pp. 366–367.

Finally, [as regards whether] I comply with my common perceptions which naturally evolved, or [whether I] think according to prevalent perceptions, or follow what I discovered in my own true cognition (*zhen zhi* 真知), this is what we must decide first. If we think solely by complying with our own, [naturally evolved] perceptions or the prevalent perceptions, then . . . [we] are at any time prone to be misled by all [kinds] of political, religious, and social propaganda . . . People of this kind are most suited as subalterns and slaves in a totalitarian system. (. . .) In fact, the great majority of people [remain] in everyday life most of the time in a passive state of mind, lastingly tied down by [such] perceptions. This is indeed a hopeless situation. However, the beginning of the decision to think should [be marked by] the resolution to strive for transcending this [passive] state of mind . . . and to strive, in all respects, to follow what [we] have reached by [our] own true cognition. (. . .) At different times, men can pursue various kinds of true cognition. According to their respective dispositions, they are likely to pay special attention to pursue a particular kind of true cognition throughout their lives. In so doing, they turn into different types of entrepreneurs, scholars, or exponents of religions. [But] no matter what kind of true cognition they are striving for, autonomous and sovereign judgments are equally indispensable.³⁷

Tang's warning against misinterpretations of Confucianism might also have been readily applied to the GMD's efforts at a grassroots level to foster Confucian values among the Taiwanese population during its campaigns for the "Revival of Chinese Culture" in the late 1960s and for a "Cultural Reconstruction (*wen-hua jianshe* 文化建設)" in the 1970s. In terms of civic consciousness, these campaigns attempted to establish the claim that in order to become a good citizen, one had to adopt "Confucian" values.³⁸ This conviction fundamentally contradicted Tang's assumption that the course of modernization necessitated a conceptual distinction between the good citizen and the good person.

In light of more recent claims that Confucianism should be viewed as an integral element of the modernization effort in post-Deng China, Tang's cautioning against a misrepresentation of Confucianism has not lost its relevance. To be sure, Tang himself had to cope with the propaganda efforts of

37 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 572–573 (this passage is taken from Tang's account "Wo duiyu zhexue yu zongjiao zhe jueze").

38 Tu, "Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong de shixian yu zhanwang," p. 304 (on campaign measures of the GMD, such as presenting model citizens with official rewards).

the GMD regime, and not the CCP. Already in the “New Life Movement,” the GMD contended that political, economic, and cultural sectors of society could be unified by its one-party rule and claimed that the movement would foster cultural and ideological unity by infusing Confucian values into Chinese society.³⁹ Even though the GMD’s campaign met with little success, the party, and Chiang Kai-shek personally, continued in the decades that followed to lay claim to a “traditional culture,” which they identified with “Confucianism” and declared essential for the advancement of modernization.⁴⁰ After its retreat to Taiwan, the GMD redoubled its efforts to lay claim to “Confucianism” for the nationalist conquest of (Taiwanese) society. Chiang Kai-shek explicitly called Sun Yat-sen’s *Three Principles of the People* an eminent expression of China’s age-old Confucian heritage.⁴¹

In further propaganda efforts instigated in post-war Taiwan, “Confucianism” was said to catalyze the GMD’s “revolution” and to serve as a bulwark against “heretical” ideas—i.e. communism.⁴² Chiang Kai-shek took special interest in Wang Yangming’s *liang zhi* thought, interpreting it in highly voluntaristic fashion as a philosophy of action. According to Chiang, this entailed an ethics of conviction and the belief that if one’s intentions were truly good and upright, one would certainly succeed in realizing them in practice.⁴³ Obviously, the GMD’s modernizing efforts to reinvigorate (and reinvent) “traditional culture” and “Confucianism” were opposed to genuinely traditionalist convictions. The GMD advocated a constructivist approach to the past, which was depicted as a reservoir of “progressive” cultural elements that could bolster the GMD’s claims to a scientifically and ethically sound modernization program. In contrast, Tang

39 De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Volume Two. From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, pp. 339–346.

40 See Chiang Kai-shek’s address to the “Society for the Study of Confucius and Mencius” from 1963, in: Zhongguo wenhua xiehui (ed.). *Zhonghua wenhua fixing yundong. Cankao ziliao*, pp. 6–7.

41 See Chiang’s address from 1961: *Ibid.*, p. 6; in 1963: *Ibid.*, p. 7; and from 1966: *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5; see also Tu, “Zhonghua wenhua fixing yundong de shixian yu zhanwang,” p. 301.

42 See Chiang’s address from 1960 on Confucianism as a bulwark against heretic ideas, in: Zhongguo wenhua xiehui (ed.). *Zhonghua wenhua fixing yundong. Cankao ziliao*, pp. 5–6; and his address from 1962 on Confucianism as a means in the fight against communism and as a basis for the GMD’s revolution; *ibid.*, p. 6.

43 Munro, *The Imperial Style of Inquiry in Twentieth-Century China. The Emergence of New Approaches*, p. 39. On Chiang Kai-shek’s interest in Wang Yangming, see e.g. Chiang, *China’s Destiny & Chinese Economic Theory*, p. 188; see also Brière, *Fifty Years in Chinese Philosophy 1898–1950*, pp. 59–60.

favoured a hermeneutical approach to “Chinese culture” and its Confucian humanistic “main current” which rejected claims to the positivistic identification of allegedly progressive cultural elements. He maintained that interpretations of the past were inevitably shaped by historical contexts—i.e. the process of modernity in which the interpreter was encapsulated—and would never yield guiding principles or values of “objective” validity (see Chap. 4, 11).

Significantly, Tang never joined the chorus of those modernizers who declared that the need for national self-assertion justified violating the institutions of individual rights since it was in the name of a higher interest. Since the 1920s, considerable enthusiasm for Fichte’s *Reden an die deutsche Nation*⁴⁴ had helped to corroborate such a nationalist stance in Chinese intellectual circles. Tang, however, and in spite of his philosophical interest in Fichte, remained aloof from this discussion. His concept of China’s national culture, as flawed and outdated as it may appear today, is not in accord with cultural nationalism, let alone the GMD’s self-serving conflation of national culture and Confucianism.

44 On the Chinese reception of Fichte; see Kurtz, “Selbstbehauptung mit geliehener Stimme,” pp. 221–223.

Exile, Modernity, and Cultural Patriotism

The Convergence between Exile and Modernity

Coming to terms with the modern world was for Tang Junyi not simply a matter of emulating or criticizing the West or appraising the relevance of Chinese intellectual, social, and cultural traditions for contemporary societies. Nor is Tang's thought confined to juxtapositions of Chinese culture and Western civilization, of traditional and modern world-views, or of urban life styles in industrialized countries and the remnants of traditional life patterns in modernizing countries. Tang's philosophical reflection on social modernity goes beyond such schematism and entails a much more ambitious agenda which comprises a cosmopolitan notion of cultural patriotism that is set within a post-colonial "East Asian" context. But above all, there is a bold attempt to fathom the significance of the exilic condition in relation to the process of modernity as he perceived it in the mid-20th century. The post-1949 exile thus acquired a new meaning as a specifically *modern* experience. In his writings on the condition of exile, Tang often described the hardships of emigration in a manner that is similar to the way he depicted the fate of modern man, whom he found to be displaced, deracinated, and socially isolated. As will be discussed, Hong Kong for him was just as much a symbol of exile as it was a representation of the disenchanting, reified world of modernity. The exilic experience coincides here with and even reinforces the downsides of "modernization" (*xiandaihua* 現代化).¹ It is hence no exaggeration to say that this perception of the modern world is shaped by his profound experience of exilic life in Hong Kong after 1949. In order to explore this relation between exile and modernity, and especially the intersecting descriptions of their downsides, Tang's perception of social modernity will be taken as a point of departure.

What has been called elsewhere "*the dual character* of the fundamental experience of the modern"² is clearly evident in Tang's discussion of modernity. This dual character encompasses two intertwined aspects of the individuals' lives in modern societies: on the one hand, their experience of liberation from religious and traditional restraints leading to social, political, and intellectual

1 The term "*xiandaihua*" is used rather seldom by Tang; see e.g. Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 33.

2 Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis*, pp. 17, 308–309.

emancipation, and, on the other, the dissolution of communal ties and the disintegration of traditional social and political values, triggering feelings of intellectual isolation and social alienation. Tang made a number of observations about modern life consistent with this diagnosis while travelling in the United States in 1957: Individuals, while enjoying increasing freedom in joining diverse social, economic and cultural associations, also face the peril of such forms of particularity. To use Tang's expression, they can lose sight of and become indifferent toward "universal ideals of humanity." If this tendency continues unabated in America and elsewhere, the outcome would be a global degeneration of freedom. The "transcending, comprehensive spirit" of humanity might then decrease on a daily basis and with it, the desire for establishing the freedom of humanity. In spite of his sometimes very blunt criticism of what he perceived as the detrimental social impact of rampant egotism in the United States and Western societies in general, Tang did not qualify these tendencies as a specifically Western phenomenon. It is rather a case of a global, but also inevitable consequence of the progressive division of labor and specialization in production, science, technology, and education. This might lead to the gradual replacement of an "objective consciousness of values" by "outer values of efficiency" which would leave individuals unable to grasp the "inner value" of their work. What is at stake, in other words, is nothing less than the increasing "reification" (*wuhua* 物化) of the human being.³

Tang restated his dire diagnosis of modern man's reification in various texts from the 1950s to the 1970s. In a particularly succinct passage from an article on "World Humanism and Chinese Humanism" from 1959, he maintained that since humanity has lost control over the things it produces in affluent societies, a severe threat has emerged for Eastern and Western humanism, and even for humanity itself. This threat entails a surfeit of science and technology resulting in the production of weapons of mass destruction, as well as a severe spiritual crisis among urban citizens who live isolated, empty lives. Finally, a "hitherto unknown" "scientification" of modern political organizations might occur and lead to the establishment of highly rigid organizations in which the individual merely figures as a statistical number, unable to exert the "freedom of a spiritual life." Tang depicted two types of materialism from a global perspective that have emerged in this context: first, Soviet-style communism, which produced a

3 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 111–112. Tang did not elaborate on his use of the old expression "*wuhua*," which can be found for example in *Zhuangzi*, Chap. 2. For an example of Tang's attack on selfish individualism in the United States, see one of his articles in the *Mingbao* from 1974: *Ibid.*, pp. 425–426.

“conceptual materialism” that locks human beings in an “intellectual cage” and triggers a “comprehensive reification of man;” second, the materialism found in the large cities of America and Europe, where a “behavioral materialism” effectuates the calculation of all human values against monetary standards. Both types of materialism coincide in their negative effect of depriving human beings of their subjectivity. Any solution to this crisis must therefore consist of enabling the human beings to “magnify themselves” and to spiritually rise above the sphere of material production.⁴

Tang’s concept and diagnosis of modernity do not lend themselves to the romantic idea of a swift return to pre-modern humanistic traditions as an escape from the reifying tendencies of the modern world. This is also evident from his reflection on the basic structure of modern society: According to Tang, it is characterized by an increasing differentiation of institutional and ideational/value-based spheres (i.e. law, art, morality, science). The “principles of societal organization” are hence such that the integration of and within these spheres is not realized through substantial traditions anymore, but contracts and laws.⁵ By taking the stratified, functionally differentiated societal structure as constitutive of social modernity, this conception is reminiscent of Max Weber’s discussion of the “rationalization” of “occidental” culture leading to a functional “differentiation of ‘spheres of values’ (science, law, morality, art) that held their own particular ‘logic of judgments about facts, justice or taste.’”⁶ Tang and the co-authors of the manifesto of 1958 found China lacking in this regard and consequently proposed that a modern Chinese society would need a firm institutional differentiation of spheres of values. The manifesto stated accordingly that an individual’s self-awareness and actions should not be solely related to the sphere of moral demands:

We say that Chinese culture, in accordance with its own demands, should deploy a cultural ideal of driving the Chinese not only to self-consciously [recognize] their self as a “subject of moral practice” on the basis of the [Confucian] study of mind and [human] nature (*xin xing zhi xue*

4 Ibid., pp. 55–56.

5 Ibid., p. 136.

6 For the quotations: see Habermas on Weber in: Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, p. 206. Tang might have been familiar with Weber through the work of Talcott Parsons; on the significance of Parsons for the Chinese reception of Weber in the 1950s: see Gransow, “Die chinesische Rezeption des Werkes von Max Weber oder Fremdverstehen and Selbstverstehen als Kategorien der Chinaforschung,” p. 63.

心性之學). [The Chinese] should, at the same time, in politics strive to attain the ability to self-consciously [recognize their self] as a “political subject,” and in the realms of nature and knowledge, [they should strive to] become an “epistemological subject” and a “subject of the activities of applied technologies.” This is also to say that China needs a truly democratic national reconstruction as well as science and applied technologies. In Chinese culture, [we] must accept Western, or global cultures. (...) [This] will drive the personalities of the Chinese to attain an even higher perfection. The objective spiritual life of the Chinese nation [will thus] attain an even higher development.⁷

Against this backdrop, the manifesto leaves no doubt that a modernizing China needs to conform to the ostensibly global structural outline of social modernity, even at the cost of abolishing traditional patterns of social and moral thought:

If the Chinese want to possess this Western spirit of the theoretical sciences, then it is, in turn, indispensable that the Chinese are able to temporarily restrain their practical activities and moral goals. But since the end of the Ming Dynasty, this point was never clearly grasped by [Chinese] thinkers.⁸

Overall, one may conclude that the concept of a functional and institutional differentiation of spheres of values in modern society is indeed a normative reference for the whole modern Confucian project of China’s humanistic “reconstruction.”

This reconstruction would require a broad range of efforts in modernization. The manifesto of 1958 bluntly states that industrialization in China had not yet reached a sufficient level, and the same is said to hold true for the development of modern science and technology in general. The deficits in democratic politics are also diagnosed as symptoms of failing modernization: Democratic institutions faltered already right after the promulgation of the republic in 1912 when representative government crumbled, leaving the plurality of social interests without a political voice, and denying local autonomy an adequate standing. Apart from these institutional failures, the

7 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 32–33.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 35; on the differentiation of politics, ethics, religion in Western civilization and their conflation in Chinese history see *ibid.*, p. 18.

manifesto deplors the fact that there were only very vague “notions of people’s rights and democracy” among the people.⁹

Yet the crisis that had to be addressed by the Confucian project of reconstruction was even more severe. It had effects that went far beyond the above-mentioned, current deficits in Chinese modernization—effects that were already observable in the West. In order to understand why Tang was convinced that this mattered to China, one needs to recall that he conceptualized modernity as a globally ongoing process of modernization. He elucidated this concept in a paper entitled “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” which he presented in July 1965 in Seoul at the “International Conference on the Problems of Modernization in Asia.” Furthermore, he pointed to what he believed would eventually emerge as the general direction of modernity, namely, the formation of nation-states in the political form of liberal democracies that safeguard fundamental human rights, complete with a scientific-technologically progressive, industrialized society.¹⁰ This anticipation of a global convergence in modernization is clearly in line with the mainstream of modernization theories which had reached their climax in the United States in the 1950s and were prevalent in social sciences well into the 1960s.¹¹ Whether Tang had actually studied such theories in-depth is unclear—after all, his own reflection on modernity has a rather weak footing in social science—but it is still likely that he had acquired some general knowledge of them. Be that as it may, it is this perspective of convergence that allowed him to depict China’s historical development since the mid-19th century not as an aberration or anomaly of modernity, but as an integral, albeit temporally distinct, evolution *within* the modern world. The modern Chinese nation-state, in other words, was, like its Western counterparts, still in the making, albeit with a considerable backlog. Tang, however, did not share the common assumption of American modernization theories that a market-induced type of (originally Western) modernization would by necessity, sooner or later, effect similar political and cultural transformations in societies across the world. He thus also did not expect that cultural particularities would be eliminated or rendered altogether irrelevant in the course of modernization. Even though modernization, according to Tang, entails strong universal tendencies, it still allows, as an incomplete global process, for culturally particular manifestations. Nor did Tang subscribe to the general view that

9 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

10 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 361; see also an interview from 1974: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 312.

11 Knöbl, *Spielräume der Modernisierung*, pp. 11–12, 30–32.

there exists an insurmountable chasm between modernity and tradition. He rather anticipated that Asian societies eventually succeed in securing the co-existence of modernized and tradition-based social subsystems.¹²

In spite of this generally optimistic outlook, Tang did not expect that China would easily escape the dangers of modernity that were already threatening Western societies. It would not be feasible for the Chinese to simply side-step the downsides of Western-type modernization and implement only those selected parts that seemed to have been beneficial to Western societies. The open-ended global process of modernization described by Tang is too dynamic to be reduced to such a scheme. Nor would this scheme be consistent conceptually with Tang's ambition to outline a Confucian reconstruction for addressing global problems of modernization. This ambition is evident, for example, in the manifesto of 1958, which claims that the project of modern Confucianism is significant in terms of a world philosophy.

It is against this backdrop of global concern that Tang turned to the problem of mankind's submission to the instrumental rationality fortified in the capitalist economy and the modern bureaucratic state—a criticism that was also expressed by Max Weber and other Western theoreticians on modernity. Tang warned of the coercive nature of an instrumental modernity and the dangers of mankind's reification, calling attention to the “new bondage” which humanity experiences in “the modern industrialized community” and the “new slavery in the modern social and political systems.” He saw modern man in the figure of an uprooted, socially isolated city dweller and worried that freedom and equality in modern societies are in danger of becoming simple formalities which have no practical repercussions for social relations. In a sober conclusion, he observed that, due to the progressive dissolution of family structures, it will be difficult for the modern individual to develop a moral personality according to the Confucian ideal.¹³ Modern man and the émigré thus share the predicament of having to reconstruct a social context of common values in a situation where considerable parts of their lifeworld, including binding traditions and conventions, have dissolved. When the place of emigration is a rapidly modernizing society like Hong Kong, the disorienting effects of the forceful nature of modern rationalization and emigration

12 This alignment of Tang's concept of modernization is to some extent in accordance with Tu Wei-ming's introduction of the concept of multiple modernities to the Chinese and East-Asian context; see Tu, “Multiple Modernities—Implications of the Rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia.”

13 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” pp. 370–371.

converge and are felt even more keenly. Tang addressed this convergence by conceiving a type of normative reintegration in modern/exilic society that might be achieved without taking a harmful shortcut in traditionalism—that is, without haphazardly proclaiming the ostensibly healing effect of a return to communal life dominated by a substantial ethos, religion or mandatory set of virtues.

The general assumption of Confucianism about modernity is that even though modernity has a forceful nature, it is *not* characterized overall by inevitability. Thus modernity retains, according to modern Confucianism, its optional nature as a *project* of modernization. This project can largely be guided by normative inputs stemming from shared political convictions, moral standards, and cultural conventions.¹⁴ The predominance of structural constraints and instrumental rationality over humanistic cultural resources in modern society is therefore not seen as an inevitable outcome of modernity, but rather as a manageable deficiency. This perception of modernity leaves room for hope—however dwindling it may be—that “culture” can be liberated from the rampant, blind consequences of an all-pervasive socioeconomic professionalization, fragmentation, and reification. To this end, the historical evolution of such negative consequences of modernity must be made intelligible.¹⁵ This expectation is in stark contrast to Weber’s famous diagnosis of an administered society, in which shared values and norms are regularly restricted by the inner workings of instrumental rationality. In depicting modern society as an “iron cage of dependence” that is forged by the modern bureaucratic state and the capitalist economy, and from which no human agent, whether individuals or collectivities, can ever escape, Weber’s outlook is unavoidably pessimistic.¹⁶ His diagnosis of an irreversible disempowerment of historical subjectivity in the course of modernity thoroughly discredits any notion of human agents acting as helmsmen of their own history.

Just the same, Tang’s modern Confucianism is not naively optimistic to the point of proclaiming that the predicaments of modernity may be eradicated as such, once and for all, by concerted human action. Consequently, Tang remained critical of ideas concerning a substantial reconciliation of all inner contradictions in modern societies, as, for instance, Kang Youwei’s notion of a homogeneous world state of “Great Uniformity” would have it (see below).

14 Ibid., pp. 370–371.

15 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 392–393.

16 For a concise analysis of Weber’s modernity theory, see Habermas, “Konzeptionen der Moderne,” pp. 208, 212; and Sandkühler, “Säkularisierung/Modernisierung,” pp. 166–167.

Nor did he propose a model for a traditionalist infusion of modern society with pre-modern, communal forms of collective life. Rather, the modern individuals are to be enlightened to the increasing contradictions between, on the one hand, their subjective inwardness, dispositions and feelings and, on the other, the objective modern world, which is the outcome of an irreversible historical process. Calls to substantially reintegrate the different ethical, political, economic, and cultural roles (or “subjectivity”) of individuals in modern societies would thus be futile. Therefore, a final reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity—of spiritual inwardness and “outer,” “objective” social, economic, legal, political, and intellectual relations—is unattainable in the modern world,¹⁷ as much as exile is an inextricable, fateful state of existence for those who have to emigrate. The very form of modern and exilic life is hence characterized by alienation.

The fundamental, albeit implicit, message of Tang’s reflection about modernity and exile may be summarized as follows: if the individuals can fathom the inner workings of modernity and exile, they might then be able to see through and grasp their own experience of alienation as the historical form of the modern world. This insight would mitigate the experience of alienation somewhat. But Tang did not demand from the individual a complete submission to an alienated form of life. Instead, he assumed that, based on a reflective grasp of modernity and exile, there might emerge, if not a perfect modern society, than at least a society whose members retain the freedom to strive for their own spiritual perfection. Against this backdrop, his modern Confucianism aimed to reconstruct ideational inputs—political, social and ethical ideas, values and norms, religious convictions, and historical consciousness—that are conducive to breaking up the dominance of instrumental rationality in modernizing societies. This endeavor, a crucial part of which involved a critical reconstruction of “humanistic culture,” could just as easily take place in exile.

The exilic setting of this endeavor had far-reaching implications. Tang deemed the Chinese nation-states on the Mainland and on Taiwan both unfit to live up to the democratic promises of their respective republics and, hence, to fulfill an integral requirement of a *modern* nation-state.¹⁸ For all its constraints, the place of exile was well-suited to reconsidering the foundations of modern China. After all, whereas the regimes on both sides of the Taiwan Strait

17 With respect to the concept of modernity, Tang’s thought is here in line with Hegel’s; see Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, p. 215.

18 For Tang, the true “Republic of China” (*Zhonghua Minguo* 中華民國), that is a “democratic Chinese nation-state,” had not been established so far, but is a state in the making; see Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 175–176.

curtailed the social and political deliberation about modernization, the condition of exile, for all its restraints, opened up a discursive space for an undogmatic approach to China's modern problematic. According to the authors of the manifesto, the experience of emigration and exile was the decisive catalyst for their attempt to reconsider "the problems of China" in the modern world (see below). Yet this positive outlook on the exilic situation cannot betray the fact that Tang experienced exile first and foremost as an intellectual and historical void.

Exile as *Horror Vacui*

Tang published two long essays at the beginning of the 1960s in the periodical *Zuguo Zhoukan* which were entitled "On the Fall and Demise of the Flowers and Fruits of the Chinese Nation—on the Meaning and Value of Conservation and a Message for Persons Overseas," and "The Fall and Demise of the Flowers and Fruits and the Planting of a Holy Tree through the Self."¹⁹ Earlier, Tang had spoken only in isolated moments about exile, above all in the second half of the 1950s. Specific examples can be found in his address to students at the beginning of a new term of study at the New Asia College, in shorter articles in journals and in the above-mentioned manifesto of 1958.

From the exilic perspective, Tang depicted Hong Kong as a non-place in the sense of Marc Augé's anthropological theory of supermodernity. The city was an alienating habitat, where individuals no longer recognize themselves because they cannot situate this place in their own historical, biographical, and generational narratives. Following Augé, Hartmut Rosa sees this particular deepening of inter-generational alienation as a sign of the modern transformation of places into non-places.²⁰ Neither Augé nor Rosa considers the condition of exile, however, which indeed may be depicted as a paradigmatic non-place. It is significant that Tang, in contrast to Augé, traced the reasons for the

19 "Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling—jian lun baoshou zhi yi yi yu jiazhi bing jinggao haiwai renshi 說中華民族之花果飄零—兼論保守之意義與價值並敬告海外人士," *Zuguo Zhoukan*, 35, No. 1 (1961); "Hua guo piaoling ji linggen zi zhi 花果飄零及靈根自植," *Zuguo Zhoukan*, 44, No. 4 (1964). Both essays were published in book form in 1974, together with a reprint of the manifesto of 1958 and two sets of lecture notes which had been published earlier in *Mingbao Yuekan* 明報月刊: Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*.

20 Augé, *Non-lieux*, p. 100, cf. also: Rosa, *Identität and kulturelle Praxis*, pp. 205–206.

divisions between generations in daily life not only back to modern phenomena of accelerated social change, but also to exile. Ultimately, the exiles in Hong Kong society experienced isolation in their daily life due to the singular event of their emigration. This was further exacerbated by the experience of intellectual, personal, and biographical isolation, which at least tacitly separated the exiles from the non-exiled generation of their parents and from the succeeding generation of youngsters, who were born in Hong Kong and had not experienced emigration. In other words, the exiles constitute a generation unto themselves. Since their horizon of experience is hallmarked by their experience of emigration, they are separated from the older and the younger generations by a deep gulf. In this insular, exilic present, in which common inter-generational contexts are by and large lost, the emigrants face the danger of being unable to express their own personal identity in the contexts of shared values, lifestyles, and common cultural practices. The exilic self, possibly even more so than the modern self, is required to establish new value horizons and normative links *from within the self*. In the process of doing so, the individual is inevitably confronted with a new, puzzling plurality of horizons of meaning and lifestyles. This, in turn, hampers the stabilization of his or her personal identity within common horizons of cultural meaning.

It is significant therefore that Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan and Zhang Junmai describe the start of their exile as an experience of intellectual and emotional isolation and emptiness, in which they “looked around to all sides and saw only endless distance.”²¹ Tang’s description of the exile is not always lyrical, in some places his language is distinctively declamatory: His vocabulary includes terms such as “native soil,” “homeland” or “motherland,” terms that smack of a lingering nationalist chauvinism. It is important to bear in mind here, however, that such expressions do not have the same historical baggage in the Chinese context as they do in European languages. As will be demonstrated, Tang’s language is not that of a nationalist, but rather of a conservative patriotic thinker. At times, for example when he confessed his yearning for the landscapes he loved when he still lived on the Mainland, there is a coincidental, but all the same illustrative, consistency between his emotional writing style and the way cosmopolitan philosophers of the European Enlightenment expressed their own patriotic fervor. If nothing else, this congruence reminds us that cosmopolitanism and patriotism are not mutually

21 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 4. The wording quoted here comes from a poem attributed to the Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (Koxinga 國姓爺; 1624–1662) who retreated to Taiwan with his remaining forces when the Ming cause was finally lost on the Chinese Mainland after the establishment of the Qing Dynasty in 1644.

exclusive. Lao Sze-kwang was therefore mistaken when he suggested that Tang, in professing his longing for the mountainous landscape of his youth in his later writings, displayed a “national-cultural” consciousness and “love for tradition” together with a “strange” yearning for the reconciliation of human values with the “old society.”²² Rather, Tang expressed here an emotional attachment to the landscape of his youth and an alienation from his place of exile—Hong Kong.

Tang Junyi perceived Hong Kong from an anti-colonial perspective as a “colony of Englishmen” which had, as he explicitly stated, no more significance for him as “our land” than the English had as “our people.”²³ At the same time, he described Hong Kong as a center of business and trade, in which the eminent spheres of “humanistic culture”—ethics, philosophy, art, music, literature and religion—have barely been developed. It was to him, to a certain extent, a historically empty place where neither historical *époques* nor intellectual-historical dimensions of culture could be experienced. He thus posed the following rhetorical question to the students of the New Asia College at the beginning of the new term in September 1959: “What intellectual ties do you have to ‘Hong Kong’?” According to Tang, in Hong Kong there were only ties related to tycoons and businessmen from industry and trade. Hong Kong, in his view, was meaningless, since there were no notable libraries, museums, academic symposia or societies to be found. The only things available were traded goods from all the world’s leading countries.²⁴

Here, Tang painted a picture of a creeping, intellectual, emotional and practical colonialization of the lives of the exiles, a process that went hand-in-hand with their acclimatization to the emptiness of the non-place “Hong Kong.” The historical and cultural awareness of the emigrants as a community of exiles is permanently at risk of becoming gradually dispersed under the colonial conditions of life, until the emigrants finally forget where they have come from and how they came to find themselves suffering from colonial repression. Against this backdrop, Tang assigned the exiles in Hong Kong and Taiwan the task of keeping alive the consciousness of their community—a community that was bound by a common fate in the face of a Chinese populace of Hong Kong, which accepted the colonial situation as an everyday reality. It is out of such concern

22 Lao Siguang (Lao Sze-kwang), “Cong Tang Junyi Zhongguo zhexue de quxiang kan Zhongguo zhexue de weilai,” p. 21.

23 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 29; cf. *ibid.*, p. 43. Tellingly, Tang wanted to be laid to rest in Taiwan, not in Hong Kong, and explained this by stating that Taiwan was native soil; see Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 217.

24 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, pp. 505–506.

that Tang, in 1956, observed that it is not only those students of the New Asia College born in Hong Kong who appear to have no interest in the problems of Chinese statehood, nationhood and humanistic culture. In fact, the “youth” and “high-ranking intellectuals” who are essentially living in “exile” (*liuwang* 流亡) are by now also experiencing noticeable difficulties in recognizing their responsibility in these matters.²⁵ In Tang’s view, this change in mindset had taken place between the mid-1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Not only in Hong Kong, but also in Taiwan, South East Asia, Europe and America, many “compatriots overseas” gradually came to terms with “living far away from home.”²⁶ Such a transformation is also evident in Tang’s conclusion that only a steadily decreasing number of emigrants still experiences exile as an anomaly to be *suffered*.²⁷ Thus, even within the generation of exiles, there are those emigrants who become increasingly oblivious to their status of exile and gradually adapt to a normalized everyday life in spite of the colonial circumstances. Emigrants like Tang consequently felt increasingly isolated as an exiled generation, sharing a particular horizon of experience that is specific to their lifetime. We may assume that the related feelings of social isolation, atomization and marginalization turned exilic space even more into a non-place.

One of the core experiences of exile is undoubtedly the fact that answers to the question of origin within exile circles no longer seem so unambiguous. A wide range of identification with “China” as a place of origin comes to the forefront and, along with it, the possible diversity within such an identification. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tang thus continued to speak consistently of “China” as *Zhongguo* 中國 or—with stronger cultural connotations—*Zhonghua* 中華 as the place of origin of Chinese living outside the Mainland. But, at the same time, he employed a more differentiated terminology. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, there was a “Chinese youth” (*Zhongguo qingnian* 中國青年) and a Chinese society, which he termed *Huaren shehui* 華人社會 (society of Hua people) or *Zhongguoren zhi shehui* 中國人之社會 (society of the Chinese).²⁸

25 Ibid., pp. 428, 431. Origins also play an important, although secondary role here. Tang notably pointed out that Chinese people born in Hong Kong “originally come from the Mainland.” Ibid., p. 432.

26 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 1.

27 This use of the term “generation” follows sociological work in the field of migration research, whereby immigrants are categorized as “first generation”, and those born to immigrants are known as “second generation.” Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, p. 17.

28 In today’s language usage, “*Zhongguoren*” sometimes has connotations of nationality (People’s Republic of China or Republic of China) and “*Huaren*” ethnic and/or cultural links to “China.” Tu, “The Periphery as the Center,” pp. 25–26. In Tang’s writings, the

For Chinese communities in other countries, he used the term “societies of Chinese sojourners” (*Huaqiao shehui* 華僑社會), which clearly has much weaker national-cultural connotations.²⁹ Characteristic of these societies of overseas Chinese is a situation in which old traditions and customs are hardly maintained.³⁰ This situation, however, is not indicative of an emancipatory, gradual dismantling of oppressive traditions, but much more a symptom of increasing repression in places of emigration. In Tang’s view, Chinese communities in the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma continued to be disadvantaged culturally, politically and economically. No less troubling was the fact that the “Chinese youth” from Taiwan and Hong Kong—he was thinking here in the first instance of the educated elite—had been dispersing across the globe for some time and taking on foreign nationalities in “comparatively civilized states” such as the United States of America. His fear, therefore, was that in forty or fifty years, the societies of Chinese sojourners could completely disappear. The “sojourning Chinese” (*Zhongguo qiaomin* 中國僑民) would then not even remain Chinese in name. Tang repeatedly described the Chinese communities in Hong Kong and Taiwan and those in other parts of the world henceforth as “societies of Chinese sojourners” and thus dispensed with the terms “Chinese youth” and “society of *Hua* people,” which would indicate much closer cultural ties with China.³¹ In this way, he made it clear that the progressive assimilation of Chinese communities into immigrant societies constituted a threat to the survival of “Chinese” communities outside the Mainland, not only in terms of sociological evidence, but also from a normative perspective.

According to Tang, the threat to Chinese communities was not in the first instance due to any physical danger facing their members. It was rather the self-conception of the emigrants as belonging to the Chinese nation that was in danger, and even more so since 1949: On the one hand, emigration prompted the question of the desirability of the individual’s continuing identification with the nation, particularly in a colonial situation where the issue involved the choice between assimilation and anti-colonial opposition. On the other

terms “*Zhongguoren*” as well as “*Huaren*” appear to denote ethnic and/or cultural links to “China.”

29 The term “*Huaqiao*” 華僑 dates back to the late 19th century and implies migration outside China. From 1910 until the regulation of its official use in the People’s Republic, the term “*Huaqiao*” suggested belonging to the Chinese *nation*. Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, p. 16.

30 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 5.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3, 39.

hand, emigrants had to weigh the question of how the Chinese nation should be defined and whether there could be to some extent an alternative “China” outside the communist Mainland and beyond a Taiwan ruled by the GMD. In Tang’s opinion, the survival of China as a cultural nation was unquestionably in acute danger. He depicted this danger in 1961 by using the image of a large tree for the Chinese nation: The tree is threatened with extinction; its flowers and fruits are falling off and decaying, and some are gradually carried off by the wind. Only certain seeds continue to survive in the foreign soil of “other men’s gardens,” in shadowy, moist ground, and in the corners where they benefit from the muddy soil.³² As the metaphor implies, the Chinese nation may no longer be able to preserve its territory, history and culture, and, along with this, its morals and ethics, traditions and customs, and language and script.³³

Tang’s metaphor underwent an optimistic change in Tu Wei-ming, whose edited volume on “cultural China” is entitled *The Living Tree*.³⁴ The contrasting metaphors may well be taken as indicators of a fundamental shift from an exilic to a post-exilic perspective. Tu Wei-ming retraces, from a post-exilic perspective, the current situation of Chinese sojourners to its voluntary nature:

Increasingly, overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) have chosen to be Chinese (*huaren*) in their adopted countries. As emigrants, they have voluntarily severed their political ties with their mother country and, as immigrants, they have deliberately opted to settle down in the new land.³⁵

Tu adds an observation that stands in stark contrast with Tang Junyi’s worries about the dissolution of a common orientation toward China’s cultural traditions among intellectuals in exile and overseas communities: “The term ‘cultural China,’ coined in the last decade or so . . . is itself an indication of the emergence of a ‘common awareness’ among Chinese intellectuals throughout the world.”³⁶ Unlike Tu, Tang, in the 1950s and 1960s, was concerned with the allegedly imminent decay of China’s national culture. He felt that this might hinder the (cultural) “merging” and “absorption” within the nation, but also undermine the individual members’ “intellectual determination” to protect

32 Ibid., p. 2.

33 Ibid., p. 22.

34 The contributions by Tu follow Tang’s use of the term “cultural nation.” Tu, “Preface to the Stanford Edition,” p. viii; Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” pp. 25–26.

35 Tu, “Preface to the Stanford Edition,” pp. ix–x.

36 Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” p. 25.

the nation and its culture. In assessing the current situation, Tang found that this determination had diminished among the diasporic communities of Chinese, which was equivalent to the “beginning of the complete collapse of the national spirit” and the imminent “great tragedy of the nation.” Yet, Tang explicitly maintained that this was not a case of a “moral problem.” The emigrants had no *moral* obligation toward the nation and its culture, and the exilic individual’s interpretation of nation and culture was not to be morally judged.³⁷

Therefore, instead of moralizing, Tang addressed the threatening consequences of converging exilic and colonial experiences. This convergence was a symptom of the continuing demise of the Chinese cultural nation. In Hong Kong and even in Taiwan, Tang saw signs of a (self-)colonialization of the “social and cultural consciousness.” He found evidence of the colonialized servant’s consciousness in the fact that interest in the Chinese heritage in the fields of science, education, and the arts was dwindling. In these fields the Chinese no longer set their “own standards,” and consequently even “the standards for Chinese scholarship have fallen into the hands of outsiders.” Tellingly, the exhibits from the Palace Museum in Taiwan were only appreciated by the Chinese when they were on loan to an exhibition, after having first aroused interest in the United States.³⁸ No less worrying for Tang was the declining use of Chinese languages (*Zhongguo yuwen* 中國語文), which were no longer spoken even in the “homes of many high-ranking Chinese intellectuals in America and Europe.” He critically observed that at a meeting in Hong Kong on the founding of the *Chinese University of Hong Kong* the majority of people did not have any qualms about speaking in English. For Tang, this was a new development. He pointed out that during the Republican period even the representatives of the so-called New Culture movement, who were critical of Chinese tradition, still used the Chinese language.³⁹ He also deplored that, in the meantime, it had become commonplace that Chinese academics study abroad in order to gain recognition from their compatriots. An unfortunate consequence of this was that those like the graduates of the New Asia College

37 On “intellectual determination” see Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 5; on the “collapse of the national spirit” see *ibid.*, p. 37; on the “tragedy of the nation” see *ibid.*, p. 23; on the “moral problem” see *ibid.*, p. 2.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–38. Tang did not elucidate any further here the link between the colonialized consciousness and Hegel’s famous master and servant dialectic.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

in Hong Kong, who had not studied abroad, became disadvantaged in their careers and socially marginalized.⁴⁰

Intellectual Ethos and Messianic Vision

As an intellectual and social critic in exile, Tang did not engage in practical politics. There were no political parties that had developed within Confucian exile circles, nor had a Confucian social movement emerged as such. Still, the politically active Zhang Junmai did speak of a Confucian “movement” in 1962 and he identified the periodical *Rensheng* 人生, founded in 1951 in Hong Kong, as its mouthpiece. Early references to a “new Confucianism” in the post-war period can indeed be traced back to articles published in *Rensheng* in 1963. In addition, Zhang described the New Asia College as a “center for the reappraisal and revival of Confucianism.” He additionally pointed to the existence of a programmatic platform, whose written testimony was the manifesto *A Declaration to the World for Chinese Culture* from 1958.⁴¹ In support of the assumption that there was a “new” Confucian movement at that time, some scholars have also pointed to certain related developments prior to 1949 such as the establishment of academies and publications from 1939 onwards.⁴² As early as 1941, the philosopher He Lin 賀麟 (1902–1992) had made mention of a “new Confucian movement” in reference to a “modern culture” in China. The movement’s impact as a main strand within politics, society, and culture was said to be only a matter of time.⁴³

Yet there is sufficient reason to doubt whether there was really a “movement” in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the locations of the persons mentioned above would seem to contradict the idea of a concentrated Confucian engagement with political or social forces: Zhang Junmai mostly lived in the

40 Ibid., pp. 36–37; cf. also *ibid.* Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, pp. 491–492. Yet it seemed that not all was lost: Tang also recognized signs for China’s increasing cultural significance in the world, such as the presence of Chinese culture and language as subjects of study at foreign universities. Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 44.

41 Chang (Zhang Junmai), *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, Vol. 2, p. 7. On the *Rensheng*-articles from 1963; see Makeham, “The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism,” pp. 26–27.

42 For example, Fang, *Xiandai xin rujia xue an*, Vol. 1, 17–19, 22–24; Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism: The New Confucian Movement*, pp. 18–21.

43 He, “Rujia sixiang de xin kaizhan,” pp. 611–612.

United States after 1949; Tang Junyi and Qian Mu had lived in Hong Kong since 1949; Mou Zongsan stayed in Taiwan until 1960, before moving to Hong Kong; and Xu Fuguan also moved to Hong Kong nine years later. By that time, the journal *Rensheng* had already ceased publication.⁴⁴ As regards the New Asia College, which Zhang had identified as the institutional “center” of the movement, Grace Ai-Ling Chou concludes in a recent study on its formation and development that “New Asia’s attempt to construct a cultural education that would be Confucian in content, structure, and style was far from straightforward.” Chou further explains that the founders of the college allowed for a conceptual breadth in their understanding of culture that “. . . although potent in its very vagueness and inclusiveness, would lead to increasing uncertainty over the exact scope and nature of the Chinese culture they aimed to preserve.”⁴⁵

There were, moreover, significant political differences among these Confucian intellectuals. Even though Tang, Zhang, Xu, Mou, and Qian all held anti-communist convictions, they expressed divergent criticisms of world communism and Chinese communism. Their political outlook was even more inconsistent when considering their attitude toward the nationalist government of the GMD on Taiwan. For example, Qian Mu, who was not among the signatories of the above-mentioned manifesto, had much fewer reservations about the rule of the GMD in post-war Taiwan than Tang or Zhang Junmai did during the 1950s. The political differences and ambiguities do not end here, however. There was also room for disagreement in the field of political theory. Tang and Xu Fuguan, for instance, openly and intensely discussed their concepts of democracy and the relationship between science and politics at the beginning of the 1950s.⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, at no point in Tang’s lifetime did modern Confucianism have a common political program. It is, therefore, not surprising that Tang indicated in private correspondence on the manifesto that the rumors about an alleged desire to come together as a political party were to be dismissed.⁴⁷ What is more, the manifesto of 1958 was not conceived

44 *Rensheng* appeared until 1968; another important periodical, *Minzhu Pinglun*, was founded in 1949 in Hong Kong and existed until 1966.

45 Chou, *Confucianism, Colonialism, and the Cold War: Chinese Cultural Education at Hong Kong’s New Asia College, 1949–76*, p. 3.

46 Mou Zongsan declared himself in favor of Tang: Lee, *Xu Fuguan and New Confucianism in Taiwan (1949–1969): A Cultural History of the Exile Generation*, pp. 186–188, 192–204. Differences also arose between Qian Mu and Xu Fuguan towards the end of the 1950s and at the start of the 1960s, *ibid.*, pp. 208–218.

47 Tang, *Shujian*, p. 116 (letter of November 28, 1957 to Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan).

as a partisan platform, and Tang himself in fact explicitly stated his disinterest in political activism.⁴⁸ His position is thus markedly different from that of Zhang Junmai, who, 22 years his senior, had already founded a political party at the beginning of the 1930s, and, at the start of the 1950s, tried in vain during a short but intensive period to organize a political “Third Force.” Tang, by the way, never joined Zhang’s “Third Force” activities, even though his own political vision of a future unified and democratic China was basically in line with Zhang’s outlook.⁴⁹

What was actually achieved in the 1950s and 1960s within the Confucian exile circles was a rather loose intellectual, academic, and cultural-political collaboration—such as the one between Tang and Qian when they worked together in founding the New Asia College. None of these intellectuals, however, was engaged in political or social activism. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the programmatic term “new Confucianism” only rarely appears in the exilic writings of Confucian intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s, and, when it does, that it varies greatly in meaning. Even Zhang Junmai did not use this term in the first instance to describe contemporary Confucianism of the 20th century, but rather Confucian currents of the late imperial period.⁵⁰

Although Tang was not part of a movement and abstained from practical politics, his life in Hong Kong was also not entirely one of quiet scholarly harmony. For despite his experience of exilic hardship, he never fully retreated into the academic world. In fact, besides his work in academic philosophy, a central component of his intellectual activities consisted of writing texts and delivering lectures that addressed a general audience. He had already been active in this respect at the very outset of his life in exile and published a remarkable number of articles in a variety of journals and magazines targeted at a well-educated readership.⁵¹ Furthermore, from 1950 onwards, Tang organized a series of public lectures and seminars with various speakers and hosted over 100 events, mostly for small groups of 20 to 30 attendees. In 1962, together with the philosopher Mou Zongsan and others, he founded the *Study Society for Eastern Humanism* (*Dongfang Renwen Xuehui* 東方人文學會) in Hong Kong, which assembled about 70 members worldwide. In addition, he

48 For instance in an article that was published in 1955 in the journal *Ziyou Ren* 自由人: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, p. 421.

49 Xue, *Minzhu xianzheng yu minzuzhuyi de bianzheng fazhan—Zhang Junmai sixiang yanjiu*, pp. 52–53.

50 Cf. his essay in *Rensheng*, No. 297 (March 1963) entitled “Xin rujia sixiang shi xie wan yihou 新儒家思想史寫完以後.”

51 See Feng, *Tang Junyi xiansheng jinian ji*, pp. 7–28.

was continuously involved in a diverse range of academic societies.⁵² The New Asia College's public lecture series which was conducted from 1950 to 1955 is worth noting in this regard. It comprised 122 lectures on a wide range of topics, including a "Comparison between Chinese and Western Medical Theory," "Buddhism and Christianity," "The Spirit of Kantian Philosophy," "Islamic Scholarship in Medieval Times," "The American Presidential Election System," and "The Position of Science in a Free Education." Tang participated himself in this series, delivering altogether sixteen lectures.⁵³

The above-mentioned intellectual activities, while quite diverse, shed some light on Tang's self-image as an intellectual in exile. His activities were borne of the conviction that intellectual engagement—as social critic, writer, lecturer and educator—could contribute to an enhancement of China's "national spirit." This belief was probably motivated by both foreign and Chinese influences. Inspiration from abroad ranged from Babbitt's New Humanism to the German philosopher Rudolf Eucken, who had gained enormous popularity on the eve of the First World War by publishing texts like *Der Sinn und Wert des Lebens* (1908) or *Zur Sammlung der Geister* (Leipzig 1913).⁵⁴ Important Chinese stimuli, on the other hand, included models for exerting intellectual-spiritual influence, among them the communities of followers of Confucian "masters" (beginning with Confucius himself), and the Confucian academies in late imperial China. The founding of academies in the Confucian circles of the Republican period continued to point in this direction, as did the establishment of the New Asia College in Hong Kong.⁵⁵

52 Fang, *Xiandai xin rujia xue an*, Vol. 1, pp. 23–24.

53 Chou, *Confucianism, Colonialism, and the Cold War: Chinese Cultural Education at Hong Kong's New Asia College, 1949–76*, pp. 39–41.

54 On Eucken, see Lübbe, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte*, p. 179. Eucken was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1908 and became an internationally renowned public speaker. As Lübbe expounds, Eucken's brand of idealism was marked by its "Weltanschauungscharakter" (character as a world view) and primarily aimed to reach a non-academic public. Its focus was clearly on the "geistige Tat" (intellectual-spiritual act). Accordingly, the aim of the so-called Eucken-Bund, a sectarian association founded in 1922, was to contribute to "the moral strength of German life." See *ibid.* Eucken's thought became popular in China in the 1920s and 1930s; see Meissner, *China zwischen nationalem 'Sonderweg' und universaler Modernisierung. Zur Rezeption westlichen Denkens in China*, pp. 82–110.

55 As Chou observes: "The New Asia founders believed the traditional Chinese academy, the *shuyuan* (书院) of Song and Ming times, to be the ideal institutional form for the fostering of 'well-rounded talent' since it nurtured students not only academically but also morally through its encouragement of close student–teacher relationships. In such

But Tang was neither nostalgic about the pre-modern idea of exemplary Confucian figures, nor did he expect that the educational ideals exemplified by Confucian academies in late imperial China could be implemented in contemporary Hong Kong. He thus summed up the impact of New Asia College in skeptical, rather pessimistic manner in 1960:

This academy was intended to carry on the tradition of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, but it is still far from reaching that goal. Song and Ming academies had no concern for the career of their graduates. The primary requirement for disciples of Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming was to make up their mind to “carry on the teachings of past sages that would otherwise be lost and usher in a time of peace to last forever.” This is beyond any career. (. . .) Such an ideal is of course somewhat too high for today’s students, and no teacher dares to compare himself to Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. In addition, our perception of the times cannot be the same as theirs in the Song and Ming Dynasties . . . (. . .) In the past, if a scholar would not take the imperial civil service exam, he could study in the countryside while making a living as a farmer, which is impossible today. That is a major problem facing us. We are caught between the past and the present, the ideal and the reality, what is beyond career and the need to face it.⁵⁶

Overall, the intellectual’s ethic of responsibility, upheld by Confucian emigrants after 1949, differed sharply from the traditional ethos of the Chinese literati. The latter demanded that an educated person promote the commonweal and encouraged him to take office in the imperial administration. The traditional ethos did not vanish altogether, however, with the founding of the republic in 1912. Roger T. Ames has pointedly observed that “[m]any Chinese philosophers of our generation continue the tradition wherein scholar-officials are institutionalized intellectuals who have the practical responsibility to forge a ‘way’ for the daily workings of government and society.”⁵⁷ But in the colonial

relationships, teachers were to serve not merely as dispensers of information but as personal mentors and moral guides . . .” Chou, *Confucianism, Colonialism, and the Cold War: Chinese Cultural Education at Hong Kong’s New Asia College, 1949–76*, p. 23.

56 See Tang’s article in *New Asia Life Biweekly*, Vol. 1, No. 17, pp. 1–2 (1960); quoted from: Hong, “The Characteristics and Prospect of the Confucian Academy: A Commentary on Jiang Qing’s Ideas on the Confucian Academy,” p. 190.

57 Ames, “New Confucianism: A Native Response to Western Philosophy,” p. 79.

environment of Hong Kong, the ethos of the scholar-official inevitably faded away and became little more than a romantic social idea.

Since opportunities for political and social engagement were no longer the same as on the Mainland prior to 1949, let alone in imperial times, intellectuals in exile inevitably found themselves faced with the fundamental question of their self-image. It seems that the experience of exile strengthened Tang's personal determination to advocate for a reconstruction of Chinese "national culture" and humanism. At the same time, he grew increasingly critical of the democratic achievements of the various Chinese regimes in the 20th century. At the same time, intellectual life on the exilic periphery not only meant that Tang was physically detached from the Chinese governments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, but it also provided him with a unique opportunity: He was now able to adopt the role of an intellectual unburdened by the traditional ethos of scholar-officials. Since he was no longer subject to status-based obligation to become a civil servant or an advisor to those in power, he was free to become an unrestrained social critic.

The socialist state of the PRC and the GMD state in Taiwan did not allow for a public sphere in which social critics, safeguarded by constitutional rights, could be active. While in exile, Tang thus addressed the democratic Chinese state and its public with futural concepts, i.e. normative anticipations. In the same vein, he conceived of a type of cosmopolitan intellectual who so far had been largely absent in China. The ethos of this intellectual was informed by the awareness that in order to shoulder social responsibility for the moral-humanistic betterment of humankind, it was necessary to act from the peripheral position of a critical observer in exile. Equally important, the ethos contained elements of self-blame insofar as the intellectual elite felt obliged to take responsibility for China's belated efforts to modernize, the failings of Chinese democracy, and the "loss" of the Mainland in 1949. It is thus no surprise that Tang, in pondering the reasons for the failures of the republic after 1912, assigned considerable blame to the role played by Chinese intellectuals (see Chap. 9).

The language of the Confucian intellectual in exile was "philosophical," albeit in a more popular than strictly academic sense. Tang was well aware of the difference between academic and popular philosophy, attributing to the latter the task of addressing broader social issues.⁵⁸ Tang moreover aspired to

58 See, for example, his foreword (from 1974) to the reprint of his book *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* (p. 19). In the foreword to the first edition of this book, Tang already states that the book does not intend to address specialists, but people engaged in social and cultural

the conception of a unity of philosophy and a philosophical way of life, which he inscribed into his modern Confucian project. The aim to instill his philosophy with practical import entailed the risk of undermining critical reflection on modern society by relegating philosophy to a resource (or “wisdom”) for an unburdened individual conduct of life. Indeed, the continuous struggle to negotiate between these two poles without however retreating to either of one of them characterizes Tang’s philosophical endeavor.

Tang’s self-image as intellectual and philosopher is even more ambivalent than it might initially appear. In looking back on his personal and intellectual development, he professed that early in his life he had felt responsible for setting out on a mission to save humanity. According to Tang Duanzheng’s *Chronicle of the Life and Work of Tang Junyi*, Tang Junyi believed at age 26 or 27 that he had grasped—in a moment of sudden enlightenment—the fundamental truth of the universe and of human life, and was convinced that all humanity should do so as well. This epiphany allegedly occurred in 1935 at *Xuanwu* 玄武 Lake in Nanjing and appears to mark a turning point in Tang’s intellectual life.⁵⁹ It is difficult to know the degree to which this messianic self-awareness actually has come to bear in Tang’s philosophical writings.⁶⁰ He generally divided his roles between the intellectual who dealt with the historical world and the messianic visionary who embraced the ultimate realm of *liang zhi*. It seems likely nonetheless that he was deeply convinced throughout his life that he should strive to guide the minds of his fellow men to the highest realm. Kevin Cheng harshly comments: “When he [Tang] was 27 (1935) he

matters, including activists, educators, journalists, editors, those active in the field of religions, and the “youth” (ibid., p. 22).

- 59 Tang, *Nianpu*, p. 33. Tang also recounted how before the age of 30, he often felt that his “mind” (*xinling* 心靈) was located at the periphery of the world, adding that he frequently practiced meditation (quiet-sitting; *jingzuo* 靜坐) and experienced what “Western mysticism” would call “enlightenment” (*zhengwu* 證悟); see Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, p. 476. There is unfortunately still no biography to date of Tang that psychologically interprets this account or the letters to his wife Xie Tingguang from November 1941, which indicate that he experienced a severe personal crisis at that time; see Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 48–51.
- 60 At times, Tang even struck a more playful note in trying to carry out his mission: For example, he wrote a philosophical children’s story entitled “The Journey of Human Life” (*Rensheng zhi luxing* 人生之旅行, first published by Zhonghua Shuju in 1939/40), and the “Songs in Praise of Mind, Principle and the Way” (*Xin Li Dao Song* 心理道頌); see Tang, *Rensheng zhi tian*, pp. 237–298 (*Rensheng zhi Luxing*), pp. 299–337 (*Xin Li Dao Song*; 1941).

arrogantly considered himself as having mastered the foundational truths of the universe and human life.”⁶¹ Perhaps this was indeed just a matter of arrogance. Just the same, Tang found himself in the company of renowned Chinese and Western thinkers who were equally unswerving in their testimony and sense of mission, including many of his neo-Confucian predecessors like Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, prominent contemporary Confucians like Kang Youwei and Liang Shuming, but also Western masterminds like Hegel, Fichte, Comte, and Eucken.

Tang’s messianic self-awareness also resonates from his own account of a crucial childhood experience in which he realized the end of human times. It is not the biographical credibility of this narrative that is of interest here, but rather the much more telling fact that Tang portrayed himself in his mid-forties as a thinker who had always been driven by the notion of an end of human time. Even though he did not envisage an eschatological end of humanity, his reflection on an end time nonetheless bears the imprint of a personal awakening to transcendence:

In retrospect, the root of my antipathy towards any thoughts that regard man as a natural animal, which is the source of my philosophical thinking, can be traced back to an experience when I was only six or seven years old. One day my father told me the scientific prediction that the light and heat of the sun would [one day] vanish. The earth would then reach its final day. By the time of the earth’s final day, there would be only one man with his dog. I remember that this story roused my boundless interest. Several days later, the earth of our courtyard cracked and warped in the sun after a rain. At that time, I thought that the earth might split and collapse. By now, the situation in the courtyard occurred already

61 Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, p. 483. Tang’s strong sense of mission is also evident in his own description of the state of mind that he achieved when writing in an inspired manner: “This self which resides in tranquility seems like a spirit which is totally alone and has nothing to cling onto from the above and from below. This spirit, on the one hand, opens up the door of Heaven so that the horizon of principles descends upon me; and on the other hand surveys the world below. To myself and to those who exist in reality, sometimes I am sympathetic and compassionate, and sometimes I am pious and celebrating. Therefore when I am writing I often feel a tender passion pulsating within me, and I am so touched that I cannot restrain myself from tears.” (Tang in *Rensheng zhi tian*; quoted from: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, pp. 325–326).

forty years ago. I still remember it very vividly. This is, I believe, the source of my philosophical thinking and all my opinions about human nature. Why do people think of the destruction of the world? Included in this [contemplation] is the mystery and dignity of human nature and the difference between man and animals. (...) How can I imagine the havoc of the world while bearing this very existence in my mind? Later on, I reached the firm understanding that man is [a form of] existence which entails the transcending of the material world.⁶²

Insofar as Tang's own account points to the theological layers of his philosophy, it provides more insight than those enthusiastic judgments that portray him as a heroic guardian of China's humanistic traditions in a hostile modern environment. The most influential words of such praise came from Mou Zongsan who, in a commemorative text after Tang's death, called him a "giant in 'the universe of cultural consciousness.'" Mou further compared Tang's intellectual standing to that of Newton, Einstein, Plato and Kant as well as Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) in their respective fields and times.⁶³ The problem with this facile judgment is not only its enthusiasm, but also the fact that it labels Tang with the cliché of a defender of Chinese spiritual culture. This cliché might, moreover, lead to the insinuation that Tang, as such a defender, belongs to the ranks of philosophers of life like Rudolf Eucken, who had diagnosed Germany as being in the midst of a spiritual crisis of unprecedented dimensions. Eucken had warned that the deluge of "reflection, criticism and negation" would put the country in danger of betraying its intellectual and spiritual imprint that had been given to it by "men like Luther, Kant, Goethe, Beethoven," and the philosophers of German idealism.⁶⁴ In contrast, Tang Junyi was not primarily concerned with threats to the intellectual-spiritual life or the *Seelenleben* of the nation as such; his focus was much more on the decay of intellectual and cultural preconditions for the individual's ability to exert "reflection, criticism and negation" in modern society.

62 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 566 (this passage is taken from Tang's account "Wo duiyu zhexue yu zongjiao zhe jueze"); I follow here the translation of Yuk Wong (see Tang, "My Option Between Philosophy and Religion," pp. 414–415), albeit with some alterations and amendments.

63 Mou, "Aidao Tang Junyi xiansheng 哀悼唐君毅先生 (Feb. 12, 1978)," pp. 272–273.

64 For an analysis of Eucken's diagnosis (as elaborated e.g. in *Der Sinn und Wert des Lebens*), see Lübke, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte*, pp. 180–182.

Nation and Culture

Tang Junyi proposed to the various communities of Chinese emigrants that they adopt a self-image that reflected the common experience of exile as one of suffering due to the looming demise of China's national culture. Just the same, many emigrants were apparently no longer linked as a community by the shared experiences of cultural vulnerability. In the eyes of Tang, this transformation had far-reaching consequences, because isolated individuals would not be able to cope with the experience of exile, which is only possible through participation in a cultural community. The idea of such a community was, however, neither embodied in contemporary communities of emigrants, nor in the nationalist definition of China established in Taiwan by the GMD regime. The desirable community envisaged by Tang would consist of members who agree that the binding qualities of the nation are humanistic and cultural in nature. They would furthermore assume that the nation consists of an ongoing, open process of interpretation and identification of national culture by its members. Any dogmatic definition of the national culture would undermine the continuation of the national culture itself.

Even if Tang could not avail himself of a phrase in Chinese for "cultural nation," he interpreted the Chinese nation to a certain extent in the classical manner as a cultural nation. Cultural-nation theorists assume, first of all, that the nation is a form of community worth striving for, mostly because it allows its members to autonomously achieve political unity. As the term suggests, the nation acquires its cohesive power through its "national culture," which functions as a source of communal values, including equality, justice, freedom, autonomy and solidarity, and common daily life practices.⁶⁵ It goes without saying that those who see themselves as members of the nation assume that historical reality befits the national culture as well as the nation itself.⁶⁶ Tang, too, presented China's "national culture" as the central cohesive force for the

65 It was Max Weber who identified a feeling of solidarity as the crucial criterion of any claim to establish a nation: "In the sense of those using the term ["nation"—TF] at a given time, the concept undoubtedly means, above all, that it is *proper* to expect from certain groups a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups." Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Vol. 1, p. 922.

66 Lepsius, "Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland," pp. 193–194, 197. As is well-known, the term "imagined community" calls to account the fact that the nation as opposed to the nation-state has at its disposal neither fixed international borders, nor clearly identifiable constitutional institutions. See, for example: Koselleck, "Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse," pp. 148–149, 388; Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, pp. 5–7; Geulen, "Die Metamorphose der Identität," p. 348.

Chinese nation and, at the same time, as the point of reference for endowing individuals with orientation and shared interpretations of the historical world. In emphasizing the continuity or *longue durée* of the nation, the concept of the Chinese cultural nation as developed in modern Confucianism is also consistent with classical theories of the cultural nation. Accordingly, the national culture is imagined to be a time spanning horizon of shared values, ideas, norms and practices, which extends from the past to the present and into the future. While conceding that contingency plays a part in the history of the nation, Tang and the co-authors of the manifesto of 1958 were convinced that the *longue durée* of the nation was mainly the upshot of ideational, intentional factors, among which Chinese philosophy and religion were particularly influential.⁶⁷

In his narrative of the historical formation of China's national culture, Tang highlighted the topics of unity and continuity. He claimed that Chinese culture evolved out of a "single root" and took the form of a single "cultural system" early on, whereas Western cultures evolved in different currents.⁶⁸ Even though he conceded that there were distinct "cultural regions" in Chinese antiquity, and thus different cultural "trunks," he believed that a consistent current of cultural transmission had already emerged as early as the age of the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou; third millennium BCE to 221 BCE). He further suggested that in the imperial age of the Qin, Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, a "continuous course" of "transmitting the way" in culture, scholarship and thought had persisted despite changing periods of territorial and political "separation" (*fen* 分) and "unification" (*he* 合).⁶⁹

67 With regard to philosophy and religion, the authors of the manifesto placed particular emphasis on the respective "notions of human life" in this context: Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 27.

68 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 13. According to Tang, there were three dominant currents in Western culture: Greek (in philosophy), Hebrew (in religion), and Roman (in law). On this basis, "relatively autonomous domains in culture and scholarship" evolved, as Tang claimed; see *ibid.*, p. 14. In a similar manner, Tang referred to Whitehead's distinction of Western notions of transcendence in the form of ideas of fate in Greek tragedies, the Roman notion of law, and the Christian notion of creation; see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, pp. 75–76.

69 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 13. The use of *fen* and *he* is allusive to the quasi-metaphysical elevation of the empire as narrated in the *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In the same context, Tang was also using the common allegory of the "great river" to refer to the course of China's national culture and its "humanistic spirit" which was said to continuously absorb both religion and politics in spite of dynastic change; see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 414.

Tang's depiction of the Chinese nation and culture is clearly tautological. First, he treated the national culture as a historical fact and described its allegedly typical features, such as an inherent consistency and continuity. He then assumed that these features of national culture were expressed in the nation, i.e. in the "national" way of life. This entailed humanistic traditions, spiritual values, and popular, as well as elitist culture. The national culture, it would thus seem, is manifest in the nation, which, in view of the tautology, is unquestionably an objectively existing entity. Since the nation exists, therefore, so must its essential resource, the national culture. The tautology does not end here, however, for it also includes the conflation of a factual and normative proposition that basically amounts to the following statement: Because there is such a thing as the Chinese nation objectively speaking, the national culture should be made to persist. This tautological approach, taken together with its schematic patterns of cultural essence, chauvinistic portrayal of non-Chinese cultures⁷⁰ and claim of the *longue durée* of the nation and its culture, is reminiscent of the so-called "metaphysics of Germanness" ("Deutschtumsmetaphysik") which was current in Germany in the early 20th century. Much like the metaphysics of Germanness, the manifesto of 1958 claimed global significance for national culture and derived a strong sense of a historical mission from that fact. One of the eminent philosophers of the "German spirit" was indeed the same Rudolf Eucken whose writings Zhang Junmai and others had intensively studied since 1920.⁷¹

It was on this basis that Tang's modern Confucianism strongly emphasized the importance of Chinese national culture and the Chinese nation. In the metaphor of the uprooted tree, the final collapse of China is, significantly, tantamount to the collapse of the nation, which, in turn, results from the dissolution of its cultural cohesive forces, and not simply from the seizure of power on the Chinese Mainland by communist armed forces in 1949. Tang thus did

70 See, for example, the judgment about Indian culture as lacking self-consciousness: Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 26. In a similar manner, there are assertions that in antiquity the "value" of "Chinese" culture was higher than the value of "barbarian" cultures; *ibid.*, p. 30.

71 On Eucken's metaphysics of Germanness, see Lübke, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte*, pp. 187–188. It is also noteworthy that beginning in the early 1950s, in the context of the formation of modernization theory, there was a strong tendency in American anthropology, social sciences and historical research to posit essentialist concepts of more or less unchangeable elements of American culture and national character. Notions of an American exceptionalism and book titles like *The American Mind* were not uncommon; see Knöbl, *Spielräume der Modernisierung. Das Ende der Eindeutigkeit*, pp. 135–138.

not accord key significance to the *territorial* boundaries of the nation. Indeed, if territorial integrity were solely responsible for the nation's survival in the form of a nation-state, Tang would no longer have needed to trouble himself with pondering the future course of the Chinese nation after 1949. When he still referred to the Chinese nation long after the communist takeover, he was evidently aware that its territory no longer constituted a unified nation-state. The cultural nation, in other words, no longer had any state territory to lose. It was, however, in danger of losing its national culture. Herein lay its true vulnerability:

On the other hand, considering it objectively, Chinese culture can persist in the world, whereas the Chinese nation withers away, just like the Greek culture persists, whereas the Greek nation withered away. There is no guarantee for a necessary integration of any nation and culture. However, this fact itself is again causing me pain. (...) Neither have we resigned to the Chinese nation's withering away or to the persistence of Chinese culture solely in the mind of Sinologists. (...) Culture might surpass the nation and have an influence on other nations, whereas the nation cannot part from its original culture.⁷²

The exilic project of Tang's modern Confucianism, therefore, did not need to join with the political and military struggle of the GMD regime to recover the territory of the Chinese nation-state on the Mainland. Instead, it was sufficient to react to the concerns about the continuity of China's "national culture." This was not about defending outer, territorial borders of the nation-state, but a matter of ensuring the inner cohesion of the nation by renewing the appeal of national culture among Chinese communities worldwide. Toward this end, Tang introduced, concomitantly with other representatives of modern Confucianism, the notion of a "main current" (*zhu liu* 主流) within China's national culture. This current is said to consist of the so-called "study of mind and [human] nature," which allegedly constitutes the "core" (*hexin* 核心) or the

72 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 53. In this context, a statement made by Michael Walzer on the South African poet and exiled intellectual Breyten Breytenbach sounds familiar: "If he [Breytenbach—T.F.] is marginal to the world that apartheid has made, he nonetheless declares himself to be in the mainstream of his own history and his national culture." Walzer, *The Company of Critics*, p. 218.

“essence” (*benzhi* 本質) of Chinese culture and scholarship.⁷³ This essence, in fact, is said to be the spiritual lifeline of China’s national culture:

As mentioned above, in conducting research about Chinese history, culture and scholarship, we have to consider these as manifestations of the objective spiritual life of the Chinese nation. But where is the core of this spiritual life? We can say that it is amidst the thought or philosophy of the Chinese. This is not to say that Chinese thought or philosophy would determine the culture and history of China. But it is to say that only by starting from Chinese thought or philosophy can one illuminate the spiritual life in Chinese culture and history.⁷⁴

The reference to “thought or philosophy” might have been misleading because the “study of mind and [human] nature” was not to be mistaken for academic philosophy. According to Tang, the aim was not only to coin a scientific theory or to indulge in pure reflection on human practice. The “study of mind and [human] nature” was, after all, imbued with religious ideas, many of them about human nature, the position of man in cosmos, and the spiritual embodiment of transcendent agents (such as “Heaven,” Buddha, gods) in the human being. Although these concerns are of course not exclusively found within Confucianism, the manifesto of 1958 strongly asserts that the “main current” attained its most comprehensive expression in the context of Confucian traditions and experienced its heyday during the Song and the Ming Dynasty.⁷⁵

The meaning of “Confucian” is understood here in its very broad sense. Accordingly, the concept of Confucian traditions does not rely on references to a clearly defined canon of authoritative texts that would comprise the point of departure for a sought-after contemporary revival of Chinese culture.⁷⁶ For all its essentialist aspects, this depiction of a main current is generally intended to

73 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 8, 21. At times Tang also used the term “discourse on mind and [human] nature” (*xin xing lun* 心性論) instead of “study of mind and [human] nature;” see for example: *Ibid.*, p. 389.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 12. In this context see also Tang’s rejection of the assumption that the contents of national culture may be defined in an “objective,” positivistic manner: Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 8.

75 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 21.

76 On the identification of “Confucian thought” as a main intellectual current within China’s national culture, see, for example, Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* [Hong Kong], p. 592; Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 374, as well as Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 8, 11–12, 21.

provide a basis of inclusion for non-Confucian thought. This is demonstrated by the way in which Tang presented the historical development of the main current, dating it back the period of the so-called Warring States (403–221 BCE).⁷⁷ He asserted here that one salient feature of the “study of mind and [human] nature” is the various notions of continuancy, which were coined in a broad range of references and over the course of millennia. They covered, for example, Daoist notions of longevity, religious practices such as the ancestor cults during the Zhou Dynasty, Confucian notions of the human mind’s “permeating the mind of Heaven” (*tong yu tian xin* 通於天心), but certainly also the very idea of preserving the Chinese nation and its culture.⁷⁸ That the “main current” is not thought of as exclusively Confucian is also evident from a reference to Buddhism, which is said to converge to some extent with the “study of mind and [human] nature.” Yet as inclusive as it may seem, this approach still bears the imprint of a Confucianization of non-Confucian thought, as the discussion of Buddhism in the manifesto of 1958 clearly shows: The authors’ interest in Buddhism is focused explicitly on its quasi-Confucian aspects, and the evaluation of Buddhism is accordingly based on this criterion. Buddhism is thus appraised for its convergence with the “study of mind and [human] nature,” and Buddhist-inspired scholars of the late Qing-period like Kang Youwei, Zhang Taiyan’s 張太炎 (Zhang Binglin 張炳麟, 1868–1936) and Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898) are lauded for their interest in the “study of mind and [human] nature.” The manifesto is quick to add, however, that Buddhist-inspired interpretations do not grasp the “study of the mind and [human] nature” in the same manner as the “Chinese Confucians” of the Song and the Ming-periods.⁷⁹

Whenever the tradition of the “study of mind and [human] nature” was presented as crucial for understanding how the history and culture of the Chinese nation attained their remarkable consistency, the focus was on the *Confucian* humanistic belief in the human being’s ability to “know human nature” (i.e. “its essence”; *zhi qi xing* 知其性), and thereby to “know Heaven”

77 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 27.

78 On Daoism (Tang refers to the *Daodejing* 道德經) and Confucianism (with references to the *Yijing* and *Zhongyong* 中庸): Ibid., pp. 27–29; on filial piety: Ibid., p. 29.

79 Ibid., pp. 21–22. The accentuation on *Chinese* Confucians indicates that the reference to the periods of the Song and the Ming has strong national-cultural and/or ethnic connotations and significantly excludes Confucian thought from the “non-Chinese” periods of the Yuan and the Qing. These connotations are also present in the Chinese term *Song Ming lixue* 宋明理學 which is often translated as “Neo-Confucianism.”

(*zhi tian* 知天) by “exerting his mind” (*jin qi xin* 盡其心).⁸⁰ In Tang’s interpretation, Confucian humanism elevates the human being to the position of the “soul” of this-worldly reality (the “ten thousand things”) and accords an “absolute” value to individual personhood. While Confucian humanism is different from a belief in “objectively [present] gods,” it still has a religious dimension which centers on the belief that the human mind may permeate “Heaven.” The Confucian humanism that Tang had in mind was thus not at all antagonistic to religions; on the contrary, humanism was “complete” only insofar as it acknowledged the importance of religions. It is on the basis of this premise that Tang stressed the potential of Confucian humanism to accept and incorporate non-Confucian religions, while at the same time comparing this quasi-transcendental outlook of Confucian humanistic religiosity with Western forms of idealistic philosophy. He consequently described Confucian humanism as an “idealistic humanism” or “humanistic idealism.”⁸¹ To delineate the broad range of possible manifestations of Confucian humanism, Tang further referred to it as a “view of life,” a “thought,” an “attitude” and a “belief.” Like most forms of Western humanism, Confucian humanism strongly emphasizes a comprehensive intellectual, moral and spiritual education of the individual. It also with humanism in Western traditions the reverence for “humanity and its culture” in general. Tang actually asserted that Confucian humanism attributes an even higher position to culture.⁸² Further similarities pertained to the emphasis on ethical relations and the focus on the historical dimension of the world.⁸³ Equally consistent with common depictions of Western humanism was Tang’s judgment that Confucian humanists were immune to the lures of dogmatism. When encountering “non-humanistic” or “anti-humanistic”

80 Cit. from Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 60; see also Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 23–24, 26. Tang refers here to Mencius VIIA.1: “Mencius said, ‘For a man to give full realization to his heart (*jin qi xin*) is for him to understand his own nature (*zhi qi xing*), and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven (*zhi tian*).’” This is D.C. Lau’s translation: Lau, *Mencius*, p. 182.

81 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* (Hongkong), pp. 592–597. On the above-mentioned notion of a “complete” humanism, see a passage in Tang’s *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi* as quoted in He, “Tang Junyi lun rujia ‘sanji’ de zongjiao jiazhi,” p. 68.

82 Tang elaborated in this context on the term “*wen*” in “*renwen*” and is aware of the fact that “*wen*” has certain layers of meaning that are not fully covered by Western concepts of humanism: see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* (Hongkong), pp. 591–592. He identified a passage from the *Yijing* as an early occurrence of the word “*renwen*,” but he did not present an interpretation of it; see *ibid.*, pp. 590, 594.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 596–597.

thought, Confucian humanists apparently made no effort to suppress it, but rather tried to understand the respective “psychological, personal, cultural and historical background” and in this way potentially overcome their own hostile attitude.⁸⁴

This insistence on the undogmatic attitude of Confucian humanism is rather typical of the ambivalence that characterizes Tang’s reflection on nation and national culture in general. For all its culturalist and essentialist simplifications in favor of “Confucianism,” Tang’s hypostasis of national culture and its humanistic “main current” does not amount to a *traditionalist* reaction. He neither assumed that there is an unbroken normative validity of traditional culture in the modern world, nor did he subscribe to the idea of a return to a safe haven of tradition. The cultural nation, in his eyes, did not persist in eternally valid, fixable elements of national culture or a rigid arrangement of customs and values from a Confucian orthodoxy. The normative relevance of the “main current,” according to Tang, could not be taken for granted. It was a matter of reflexivity which meant that it had to be reconstructed without any claim to a historically incommutable essence. The historical transmutations and changing expressions of the “main current” have to be retraced from within a horizon spanning the modern world and its exilic dimension. In other words, the “main current” itself cannot be isolated from this horizon of interpretation in order to constitute an objective truth. The reader of those texts in which Tang reflects on the topics of China’s national culture, the exilic situation and the process of modernity may indeed find Tang to be a hermeneutic thinker: He maintained that the “main current” was not simply a *result* of interpretation, but an integral part of the cultural horizon of a community of interpreters, that is, a historical context of the act of interpretation per se. In accordance with this hermeneutic approach, the humanistic-cultural “essence” or “main current” is to be understood as a sort of normative web that ceaselessly transforms itself in light of new identifications, interpretations and appropriations.⁸⁵

84 Ibid., p. 598.

85 This concept of cultural essence differs from the concepts which were presented in the *Journal of National Essence* (*Guocui Xuebao* 國粹學報) after 1905 and by members of the *Southern Society* (*Nanshe* 南社) after 1909. Those concepts focused on philological and literary traditions, and not on “Confucian” traditions. Furthermore, they did not assume that the national essence itself might be subject to historical change. Zhang Taiyan’s concept was a notable exception in both regards, even though he refrained from singling out Confucian traditions. Later on, the circle of authors of the *Critical Review* (*Xue Heng* 學衡) also identified a national essence of different contents; see Furth, “Culture and Politics in Modern Chinese Conservatism,” p. 31; Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte*, pp. 82, 109–112; Laitinen, *Chinese Nationalism in the late Qing Dynasty*, pp. 116–118.

The hermeneutic approach thus imposed limits on the essentialist extent of the interpretation of humanistic culture and its Confucian “main current.” On this basis, the question as to whether “Western” thought could be removed from the horizon of interpretation altogether in modern times never even arose.⁸⁶

Cultural Patriotism

A topic that did arise in this context was the coping of individuals with the fateful experience of exile. Tang’s concept of interpretation took account of distinctly exilic experiences by inscribing the exile into a comprehensive horizon of interpretation and meaning. The constitution of the hermeneutic subject, i.e. the individual interpreter of the “main current,” was understood as inextricably linked to the exilic situation, that is, the specific context of the process of interpretation itself. The individual suffering in exile was thus infused with hermeneutic relevance: The manifesto of 1958 declared that only by virtue of the particular experience of intellectual and emotional isolation—shared by the exiled intellectuals at the beginning of their time as emigrants—was it at all possible to “once again” and in a “fundamental manner” turn to “Chinese scholarship and culture, as well as the problems of China.” Tang also suggested that the “problems” of China and its culture are only clearly recognized in exile and, moreover, that “true wisdom” emerges out of the “suffering” (in exile). This suffering, in other words, gave rise to an intellectual openness, or, as Tang called it, “a transcendental and all-encompassing state of mind” that had not been present “ten years earlier.” In Tang’s view, what was at issue here was the liberation of the interpretation of national culture from a “fixed pattern of life” and an overcoming of the “narrowness of one-sided opinions.”⁸⁷

Tang emphatically defended the hermeneutic openness of his understanding of national culture against determinism in the historiography of China’s national history. The nation’s historical course as a whole was in no way to be determined by the hermeneutics of a national-cultural essence, nor predetermined in any other way. The “historical future” has no “particular imperative direction,” and even if there were such a thing, Tang explained, no one would

86 On a programmatic statement in favor of a broad inclusion of Western thought and traditions: see e.g. Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 46–59.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 4; see also: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, p. 478. Tang was undoubtedly aware of Mencius’ claim that personal suffering was an impetus of individual cultural productivity (cf. *Mengzi* VI B.15).

be capable of recognizing it. The course of national history was unpredictable. Tang's understanding of the "tragedy" of the Chinese nation thus had the status of an interpretation, not a scientific diagnosis or prognosis. Equally unpredictable were the duration of exile and the "methods" by which the condition of exile might be overcome. It was precisely these unknowns that triggered the sense of despair in exile, which, Tang stated, could not be eluded. The exiles could not truly find "hope" or "trust" in the promises for the future provided by a nationalist ideology; instead they had to engender such positive sentiments from within themselves. A prerequisite for this, in the first instance, was a "true to life experience" of despair, far beyond the dazzling allure of ideology. Only then could a thorough reflection on the reasons for despair begin that would allow autonomous individuals to establish "ideals" and form their own "will," provided that their reflection entailed some sort of meditation on the history and culture of China in a state of "emotionally reminiscent gratitude." Here, Tang's language once again appears to suggest a nationalist attachment to China, but he in fact took great pains to point out that normative insights ("the ideals") could only be gained in conditions of "absolute liberalism." Thus what is true for the process of reflection is also borne out in practice: Neither the cultural nor the political activities that befit normative insights are predetermined.⁸⁸

The distinction between nationalism and (cultural) patriotism is crucial for understanding the basic orientation of modern Confucianism. For Tang, the highest purpose of China's humanistic culture was not tied to the nation or the nation-state. His modern Confucianism was indeed not nationalistic, but rather an expression of a conservative, defensive type of cultural patriotism.⁸⁹ As a Confucian patriot in exile, Tang strove above all to preserve China's humanistic culture. Such preservation should, of course, secure the continuation of China's national culture and thus guarantee the existence of a Chinese nation. But Tang was unwilling to subject China's humanistic tradition to the nationalist cause of preserving the nation for its own sake. He did not con-

88 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, pp. 47, 49–54, 59–60.

89 Tang did not use the Chinese term "*aiguo zhuyi*" 愛國主義, which is the common translation for "patriotism," most likely because "*aiguo zhuyi*" is part of the ideological vocabulary of the PRC. However, his brand of cultural patriotism is consistent with European concepts of patriotism from the 19th century, when patriotism was increasingly related to concepts of nation and finally served as a concept countering ideas of an expansive nationalism. On patriotism and its link to cosmopolitanism and Enlightenment in Europe of the 18th century: see Alter, *Nationalismus*, p. 12; Giesen, "Vom Patriotismus zum Nationalismus," p. 273; Kluxen-Pyta, *Nation and Ethos*, pp. 163–165.

template saving the nation and the nation-state at the price of sacrificing humanistic ideals. Nor would he have subscribed to an agenda of cultural nationalism that essentially uses cultural symbols, traditions, or even myths to give expression to a nationalist call for mobilization. Tang's reconceptualization of Confucian humanism thus stands in stark contrast to Liang Qichao's nation-state-centered Confucianism. Liang had introduced such an approach prior to the founding of the republic during the 1900s. In doing so, he relegated Confucianism from the sphere of the imperial cult of state to the sphere of the citizen's political and private virtues and values. In Liang's scheme, Confucianism would henceforth fulfill a complementary function within the nation-state.⁹⁰

Tang also maintained a critical distance from the unifying nationalism of the GMD regime. His concept of national culture differed considerably from the sort of (Confucianized) nationalism which the GMD installed in the 1950s and 1960s as the ruling ideology in Taiwan. It is therefore not surprising that he clearly distinguished his Confucian cultural patriotism from Sun Yat-sen's brand of nationalism and Sun's claim that the nation-state requires ethnic homogeneity in order to safeguard its existence. According to Tang, such a premise amounted to nothing less than an elimination of the idea that the citizens shall decide to strive for unity within a state *by reasonable choice*. In bolstering his argument against Sun Yat-sen's ethnic nationalism, Tang contended that national consciousness does not emerge as a direct, "natural" upshot of common origins, language, beliefs, traditions or culture, but indeed arises from the individuals' reasoned "self-awareness" of these commonalities. He therefore insisted that the citizens develop their national consciousness in terms of a "rational" construct.⁹¹

What is more, Tang's Confucian cultural patriotism entailed a Pan-Asian outlook as well as an insistence on the cosmopolitan ideal of a world citizen. In this context, Tang's education ideal for the New Asia College, which he declared with much pathos, is highly illuminating. He exhorted the students not to content themselves to be simply citizens of Hong Kong, for after all, this was what they were purely by virtue of living in Hong Kong. The role of the New Asia College was to support the students in becoming "impressive Chinese [personalities]" and "world citizens of colossal [intellectual] stature." This congruence of patriotic and cosmopolitan personality ideals was

90 On Liang's notion of Confucianism in relation to his concept of the state, see e.g. Machetzki, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao und die Einflüsse deutscher Staatslehren auf den monarchischen Reformnationalismus in China nach 1900*, pp. 56, 59.

91 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 183.

characteristic of the quest to enable the (exilic/modern) self to achieve authenticity. Tang advised students of New Asia College to focus their research on Chinese and Western humanism, philosophy and literature. Students might study Confucius, Menzius, Xunzi and Zhu Xi, as well as the poets Du Fu and Li Bai, and, equally important, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Dante and Shakespeare. All of these illustrious names were apparently considered to be outside Hong Kong's narrow intellectual spectrum. The "intellectual intentions" of the New Asia College were, as Tang suggested, not limited to Hong Kong, but included China and the entire world.⁹² Significantly, Tang was convinced that the renewal of China as a cultural nation could only succeed if Western civilization was even appraised in those core areas of Chinese culture, in which individuals attain the "intellectual determination" to save the nation.⁹³

The Asian perspective should not be dismissed, however. Bringing "new life" to Asian cultures, including Chinese and Indian cultures, which were older than European cultures, was important. This was particularly true, as Tang asserted, given that Asia had been degraded as Europe's largest colonial area over the previous 200 to 300 years. But despite Asia's backwardness in terms of scientific and industrial-technological developments, one was not to assume that the entire "spirit" of Asian cultures was backward.⁹⁴ Notwithstanding this essentialist reference to Asia's cultural spirit, Tang's culturalist concept of a new Asia stopped short of proposing any ideas of ethnic homogeneity of a "yellow race." It clearly differed in this respect from previous forms of Pan-Asianism, which became popular in Japan in the 1890s and were propagated by Liang Qichao between 1896 and 1899. Tang's interpretation of a "new Asia" was closer to Liang's post-1919 concept of cosmopolitanism, in which Liang emphasized that each individual member of the Chinese nation has responsibilities toward world civilization.⁹⁵ It was in relation to this cosmopolitan framework that Tang referred to a singular Asian culture and a new Asia, and the same may be said of other Pan-Asian notions, such as "Eastern/Oriental cultures" (*Dongfang wenhua* 東方文化) or "people from the East/Orient" (*Dongfangren* 東方人). By "people from the East/Orientials" Tang meant Chinese, Japanese

92 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, pp. 505–506; cf. also p. 488.

93 See, for example, Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 4–5, 18, 32–35, 41–42.

94 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, pp. 457–458.

95 Huang, "Liang Ch'i-ch'ao: The Idea of the New Citizen and the Influence of Meiji Japan," pp. 80–82 (on Pan-Asianism); Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 192–193 (on cosmopolitanism).

and Koreans. He distinguished “true” from “ordinary” Chinese, Japanese and Koreans and assumed that there was a common attitude toward life among “people from the East/Orientals,” which he quite schematically distinguished from Western attitudes with respect to inwardness and quietness (Eastern) as well as outwardness and activity (Western).⁹⁶

Nevertheless, Tang’s cosmopolitanism was entrenched in (post-)colonial Pan-Asian ideas about the global relevance of East-Asian cultures in the modern world. His depiction of the current differences between Western and Asian modernization is at times rather crude and also belies his own sophisticated explorations into Western philosophy.⁹⁷ The reasons for the ambivalence of Tang’s intellectual open-mindedness toward Western civilization and his personal resentment towards “the West” most likely stem from profound feelings of inferiority. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Tang gave frank testimony about his inner conflict: He loathed neither Western thought nor cultural traditions, but deplored the fact that most people when he travelled to Europe and the United States in the late 1950s did not show him much respect or interest. Rather than asking him for his opinion of Western cultures, they treated him instead like some insignificant traveler. He concluded that most Europeans and Americans do indeed look down on visitors from East Asia, as if they were visitors from an inferior region.⁹⁸ Yet this estrangement is not merely a consequence of suspicions he had of Western cultural imperialism. When travelling in the West, he astutely observed his own reactions to personal encounters he witnessed between people from Western and East Asian countries. He professed to having had some resentment even with regard to physical differences. For instance, he recalled his discomfort in noticing how an East-Asian person of short stature was forced to look up to a taller person from the West when shaking hands. He felt similarly uncomfortable when he observed that the bridge of a Westerner’s nose was higher and his eyes more deeply set. He even suspected that it was also perhaps why Westerners had been so proud and the East Asians so submissive in their personal encounters during the second half of the 19th century.⁹⁹

96 See his travel notes while visiting Korea in 1965: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 354, 367. Similar juxtapositions of Eastern and Western cultures and attitudes had been debated in China since the mid-1910s (see influential writings by Du Yaquan 杜亞全, Li Dazhao 李大釗, Chen Duxiu and others).

97 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 365.

98 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 364.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 349.

Apart from these psychological issues, Tang had other reasons for being concerned about the prejudiced view of East Asian culture. A loss of normative validity for what he called “East-Asian traditional culture” would have serious consequences for modernization. Given the conception of modernization as concerted collective action based on *conscious* cultural transformation, a postcolonial self-deprecation in East-Asian countries would have had disastrous consequences if allowed to go unchecked. It might indeed have undermined the belief that the process of modernity could be reined in by firmly establishing “cultural” forces within modern societies. Tang thus underscored the need for a reinterpretation of (East-Asian) culture and advocated a “spiritual reawakening,” a “revival” of the “innate spirit” of a culture in a “new form.”¹⁰⁰ This “spiritual reawakening,” he suggested, should also take the form of a “spiritual renewal on a daily basis” in the education and cultural ideals as well as in the ideals of the New Asia College.¹⁰¹

Contemporary Japan was an exemplary case in this regard. In an article from 1971, Tang identified the country’s potential to develop its “traditional culture” within the modern world.¹⁰² He believed that Japan so far has been more successful than Korea, the communities of overseas Chinese, European countries and the United States in preserving many elements of a traditional “cultural way of life.” This comprised a form of ethical life characterized by the prominence of arts, literature, ethics, religion, and wisdom in everyday life. Tang added, however, that Japan was also now struggling with the effects of industrialization and a growing tendency among Japanese to take up Western-style attitudes of “utilitarianism.” There were even signs of a gradual demise of traditional ethical life among the “lower stratum” of Japan’s industrial society and in the student protests of 1969 some of which he witnessed when visiting in Kyoto. But he apparently only took note of these developments in passing and remained optimistic overall with respect to Japan’s ability to conquer this cultural “crisis.”¹⁰³

Such optimism is symptomatic of a vision of modernity based on a sugar-coated Pan-Asian construction of “East-Asian” culture. For all his astute observations on the downsides of modernity, Tang seems to have been oblivious to the deleterious effect of militant Japanese Pan-Asianism and its euphemistic “East-Asian” rhetoric. Indeed, he had little apprehension when visiting

100 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 361.

101 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, p. 459.

102 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 212.

103 *Ibid.*, pp. 208–210.

Japan in the late 1950s, as evidenced by his letters to his wife.¹⁰⁴ He showed no interest in analyzing the formation of Japanese militarism in the context of modernity—a topic he treated only occasionally and never in-depth.¹⁰⁵ Yet it has not always been a case of too little interest in the matter: On August 1, 1957, Tang delivered a speech at *Asia University* in Tokyo (founded in 1941) on “The progress and self-consciousness of humanity” in which he deigned in a vexing manner to play down the Japanese war crimes committed in China during the Second World War, stating that the Sino-Japanese relations had turned into an “unfortunate relationship.” He assumed that this “unfortunate” state would not last forever, quoting from the famous Chinese novel *Water Margin* (*Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳) the phrase “no fighting, no friendship,” and adding that “quarrels among elder and younger brothers are perhaps due to the fact they have a relationship in which the feelings [for each other] are too good”(!).¹⁰⁶

Overall, it seems that Tang was not especially interested in Japan as such, but more in its promise of a better modernity. Japan had seemingly been very successful in establishing an industrialized society while preserving traditional forms of an ethical life. Tang suggested that this was the upshot of a conscious effort by the Japanese, and not just the result of a unique and fortunate historical constellation. In other words, post-war Japan symbolized the human ability to consciously withstand the negative forces of modernity by making specific choices related to humanistic culture. This constellation had an even more intimate relevance from the Chinese perspective insofar as Japan in many ways was portrayed as just another, albeit more successful, “China.” Tang was in fact convinced that the Japanese still orientated their choices concerning humanistic culture and forms of ethical life toward the Chinese model, taken from the periods of the Tang and the Song Dynasties: So it was a “Chinese culture on a small scale” that was still extant in Japan and which, moreover, never collided with the exigencies of modernization. Tang added, tellingly, that it should be even easier for the Chinese than it was for the Japanese to achieve such a form of modernization.¹⁰⁷

104 Tang, *Zhi Tingguang shu*, pp. 330–331 (letter dated February 22nd, 1957), p. 334 (letter dated February 23rd, 1957).

105 See, for example, Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 210, Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 358.

106 See Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 312–313.

107 See an interview by Tang in the *Mingbao* from 1974: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 313, 327.

The depiction of contemporary Japan as a model for a future China stands in stark contrast to the bleak situation of the Chinese in the 1950s and 1960s. It seems that when emigrants like Tang were forced to accept the unfortunate truth that the type of Chinese nation-state which they preferred was neither in the making on the Chinese Mainland nor in Taiwan, the appeal of Pan-Asian ideas and the Japanese model grew considerably. The latter apparently served the purpose of compensation for the loss of hope of rescuing the Mainland from communism: In exile, the intellectual struggle for the political and cultural emancipation of Asia, together with an orientation towards an emerging world culture in East Asia, gradually supplanted the hopeless struggle to save the Chinese cultural nation on the communist-ruled Mainland. If the Chinese contribution to the modernization of East Asia and to the modern world more generally was based on a reconstruction of China's humanistic traditions, the exilic space might indeed become a bridgehead in the struggle for future modernization. China's responsibility toward the modern world would then take its due course. As Tang envisioned in a letter to his wife in 1965, the reconstruction of China's humanistic traditions would first encompass Japan and Korea and then India, Europe and the United States.¹⁰⁸

Defending Authenticity

Notions of reconstructing Chinese and (East-)Asian cultures, along with the idea of recovering a humanistic "main current" or a cultural "spirit," are highly charged with normative meaning, not only in the context of Tang's diagnosis of modernity, but also of his reaction to the exilic experience. In reflecting on exile, Tang assumed that coping with the exilic fate requires individuals to situate their own biographical narratives and actual lifestyles in terms of a humanistic-cultural continuum. In other words, only those exilic individuals who succeed in identifying themselves as historically, culturally, and ethically situated subjects might be able to attain a sound notion of personal selfhood.

Tang applied here a pathos-rich language of authenticity with phrases such as "true self-awareness" and a "true self:" human beings, who were called to life as "biological beings," might achieve their authentic "existence" only by clearly recognizing their "true reality." This required them to absorb "instruction and nourishing" through the medium of the language, history, culture,

108 Tang, *Zhi Tingguang shu*, p. 488.

customs and traditions of their nation.¹⁰⁹ Such a process required that the normative significance of the “past and present” of the national culture be “conserved.” Authentic self-awareness was thus related to the (re-)interpretation of the national culture itself—that is, by acts of interpretation in which the individual is already embedded through his or her very existence:

But as the ecumene-as-family (*tiaxia yi jia* 天下一家) has not yet been reached, the individual can only strive to authentically live and exist in the past, present, and future of his own state, nation and historical culture [in order to] set the self at ease and establish destiny (*an shen li ming* 安身立命).¹¹⁰

Tang’s culturally conservative yet effusive language tends to mask the critical-emancipatory substance of his concept of authenticity of the self: Even though he assumed that the perpetuation of national culture can occur in a “natural” or “direct” manner and thus, to a certain extent, without critical reflection, cultural “conservation” was not to be misunderstood as an uncritical absorption. Rather, it required a guiding conservative principle of conscious reappropriation. Tang emphasized that because each decision about the transformation of elements of national culture was difficult by itself, conscious changes should only be allowed in cases in which there was no doubt that those elements called into question are now “without value.”¹¹¹ This preference for a critical, albeit defensive, stance towards national culture, and not for a blind apology, was also apparent in the announcement that it would “self-evidently” be better if all individuals were to “analyze and reflect on” the national culture, instead of simply following established habits.¹¹² The highest authority with respect to the personal adoption of the national culture was therefore the individual

109 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, pp. 8, 11. In his late work *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Tang further developed this notion of the embeddedness of the subject. He introduced the notion of so-called “horizons” of the subject’s interrelation with its physical, historical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual environment. Only in relation to these horizons could the human being acquire self-awareness and subjectivity, as well as views of life, world views etc. For a brief introduction to the idea of “horizon” in *Shengming cunzai yu jingjie*, see Liao, “Tang Junyi ‘panjiao lilun’ de chubu kaocha,” p. 39.

110 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 9, p. 484; cf. *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 24.

111 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 8.

112 *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 16.

“conscience” (*liang xin* 良心). It was here that the conserved elements of national culture must stand the test.¹¹³

The freedom of conscience was a necessary, albeit not sufficient precondition for authentic self-awareness. Two more components were required, namely, the expression and the situating of the self.¹¹⁴ In Tang’s philosophy, expressivity plays a crucial role in coping with intellectual, emotional, and social isolation in exile and in the modern world in general. The creation of opportunities for overcoming this isolation presupposes, according to Tang, that individuals retain the ability to express themselves as members of a national-cultural community whose ongoing interpretations of the humanistic “main current” are bound together with a sense of cultural patriotism. Individuals would thus affirmatively identify certain collective ties in society and the state as integral elements of their own historical and biographical narratives. Otherwise, there would be no way for them to cope with their unique experiences of alienation, except by falsely retreating into purely subjective inwardness. In Tang’s modern, romantic-expressivist notion of authenticity, the individual’s self-awareness requires, in order to become authentic, opportunities for *expression* in social contexts. Here, Tang presumes that the very expression of such self-awareness involves a “place” (*chu* 處) where commonality can be experienced. Tang relates this to the exilic situation in a passage from 1961:

[Only] if we would have been formerly completely without ideals existing in our consciousness with respect to the state and politics, could we also be without suffering [now that we] see all kinds of facts that are in disagreement with them. But amidst this [current situation] men must strive for a place where [they] can express confidence and hope, and, in turning our heads in such manner, [we may] become aware of the existence of these ideals. I can have any ideal and I can then begin for myself to put this ideal into practice. What I can put into practice, [other] people can [put into practice] too. In that case, this place has then already become the place where I may express confidence and hope. [...] This is

113 Ibid., p. 20. In this context, see also Luo Yijun’s commentary on Tang’s understanding of “self-awareness:” Luo, “Shidai beiqing yu wenhua xinxin,” p. 57.

114 For the following analysis of Tang’s interpretation of authenticity, Hartmut Rosa’s critical analysis of Charles Taylor’s conception of authenticity proved very thought-provoking: see Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis*, pp. 24–25, 93–94, 149–155, 191–212.

then also the place where we all may, in any environment, express confidence and hope.¹¹⁵

Exile would thus lose its character as a non-place and the exilic subject could situate him- or herself within the long continuum of interpretation and appropriation of China's humanistic culture. Consequently, Tang saw the authentic self being realized in "concrete human beings" (*juti de ren* 具體的人) and concrete world citizens, who are able to preserve their moral autonomy and to assure themselves of their manifold collective ties, including their affiliation to a state or a nation and belonging to a cultural tradition. Only in this way could they achieve self-esteem, or in Tang's words: an "independent personality of colossal stature."¹¹⁶

To be sure, these "independent personalities of colossal stature" would neither reduce China's humanistic traditions to a mere context, nor scrutinize them as rigidly fixed objects. Instead, they would realize that national culture emerges only in the process of interpretation itself and consequently finds its "place" *in* the interpretation. In terms of coping with the exilic experience, this re-conceptualization of national culture is of crucial importance. It exemplifies the conviction that the Chinese nation, while in danger of immediate extinction after 1949, might still survive in the hermeneutic place of its renewal through exilic cultural patriotism. This vision of a historical and normative continuity in interpretation has itself a compensatory effect insofar as it posits the *longue durée* of interpretations, thereby temporally expanding the experience of historical time and bridging the generational isolation experienced in exile. It is at this point that the exilic hermeneutics of the national culture and the hope for its salvation converge in modern Confucianism's sense of mission.

In contrast to the self embedded in the context of national culture, Tang elucidated the characteristics of a self that is not situated in the hermeneutics of national culture. What he had in mind here above all are "pure believers," who seek their salvation by placing *unmitigated* trust in God or in an eventual paradise,¹¹⁷ and "abstract world citizens," who advocate a false and empty universalism. According to Tang, the latter was demonstrated, for example, in an interpretation of the old ideal of "the ecumene as one family," the *locus*

115 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, pp. 54, 59 (for the sentence after the omission). Spatial topics with respect to the subject of individual self-awareness figured prominently in the philosophy of the Kyoto school. However, I could not locate any substantial reference from Tang to discussions of this topic within the Kyoto school.

116 *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 58.

117 *Ibid.*

classicus of which can be found in the *Record of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記; Chap. “Li yun” 禮運). Tang wholly disagreed with those who accept this ideal out of a yearning for China’s absorption into a “culture of humankind,” which would entail the complete disappearance of particular national cultures. Although he did not mention any names, he obviously opposed Kang Youwei’s idea of the uniformity of mankind, elucidated in *The Book of Great Uniformity* (*Da tong shu* 大同書). It had an air of admonition when Tang stated that such misguided universalistic notions did not constitute a *moral* problem as long as they are solely expressed as private opinions.¹¹⁸

Yet the situating of the self in the hermeneutics of the national culture was also threatened in exile by those positivist currents in the social sciences and the humanities that Tang declared philosophical war against. He again mentioned no names, but remarked nonetheless that some within the emigrant elite engaged in the humanities asserted a positivist concept of culture under the influence of Western schools of thought. The positivist currents falsely conceive of “Chinese culture” as a conglomeration of relics from a lost culture and reduce the interpretation of culture to a crude dichotomy of enquiry between subject and object. This stands in stark contrast to Tang’s own idea of an “authentic” understanding of national culture which must take as its hermeneutic horizon the humanist “main current” of China’s national culture. As we have seen, Tang expected the interpreters to perceive the “main current” not as a mere object of scrutiny, but as belonging to their own horizon of understanding. An “authentic” interpretation, therefore, cannot claim to represent objective truth. He consequently argued that positivist approaches failed to live up to their own claims of objectivity.¹¹⁹ Tang did not turn against these currents merely because they were anti-traditional. Their positivist tendency to objectify “culture” and hence isolate it from the individual subject was effectively a mirror-image of exilic isolation. He located this aberration in contemporary sociology, psychology, historical studies and cultural anthropology and traced

118 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 7, 28.

119 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 9–11. This critique explicitly comprised the historical studies of the so-called “reorganization of the national heritage” (*zhengli guogu* 整理國故), which was one of the dominant tendencies in historical research from the 1920s onwards. Its representatives, among them Hu Shi, claimed to lay the groundwork of a new, “scientifically” accountable cultural and social consciousness in China by conducting comprehensive scientific research in Chinese history; see Fröhlich, *Staatsdenken im China der Republikzeit (1912–1949). Die Instrumentalisierung philosophischer Ideen bei chinesischen Intellektuellen*, pp. 335–336.

the reasons for the anomalous objectivism back to untenable epistemological stances in the concerned academic disciplines. Positivist approaches in these disciplines, he suggested, had restricted themselves to the detection of supposedly objective facts, which then must be accepted as “reasonable.”¹²⁰

However, this apparently academic critique of the theoretical and methodological implications of rampant objectivism in the humanities did not constitute Tang’s actual line of attack. The real bone of contention was the objectivist pretense of identifying “true values.” The positivist appropriation of “cultural theory” accorded the human being the position of an ahistorical subject and hence rendered it impossible for the individual to create an authentic form of self-awareness. As an “abstract self,” the individual would no longer command any “historical reality.” It was the status and the significance of the “tragedy” of the Chinese nation that was really at stake in dealing with the untenable objectivism described above. Inasmuch as positivist approaches “rationalized” the ostensibly imminent demise of China’s national culture, the awareness of the tragedy dissolved. This would have severe consequences for the individual’s chances of attaining an authentic self.¹²¹

Yet by contrasting the objectivist approach to China’s national culture and history with what he called an attitude of “empathic understanding” (*tongqing de liaojie* 同情的了解),¹²² Tang himself exceeded the limits of philosophical hermeneutics. He in fact demanded much more from a sound interpretation of national culture than just a hermeneutical awareness of its own historical and practical boundedness and a reflection on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* (effective history) of seminal writings. For Tang, the interpreters should in addition take on the role of performers of national culture and be willing to infuse their intellectual interest with an emotional attachment to their “own” national

120 On sociology, psychology, historical studies and cultural anthropology, see Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 18. On the problem of objectivist aberrations, see *ibid.*, pp. 18, 28.

121 On the rationalization of the “tragedy,” see Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, pp. 7, 18; on the epistemological position of the subject of interpretation, see *ibid.*, p. 12; on the “abstract self” see *ibid.*, pp. 18, 28.

122 The concept of empathic understanding had been current in Chinese reflections on historiography at least since 1930, when the German-trained historian Chen Yinke called for an “empathetic understanding” of the historical manifestations of China’s “national spirit” (e.g. in Chen’s article on the first volume of Feng Youlan’s *History of Chinese Philosophy*); see Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte. Zwei chinesische Historiker auf der Suche nach einer modernen Identität für China*, pp. 135–136; Schneider, “Reconciling history with the nation? Historicity, national particularity, and the question of universals,” p. 127.

culture. “Authentic understanding” would hence require empathy and respect for the national culture. Thus, for all Tang’s critique of dogmatism and positivism in the humanities, he himself opened the door to a notion of interpretation that is only partially reconcilable with philosophical hermeneutics.¹²³

The considerable strain placed on hermeneutics in Tang’s exile philosophy is to a large degree due to his insistence on the authentic self-awareness of a historical self situated in national culture:

Here, we have to clearly recognize, first of all, that the life of human beings (*ren zhi shengming* 人之生命) does not exist solely due to its abstract probability, but exists due to its genuine reality. God and nature may create me in any society or territory; this is merely an abstract probability from [the time] before I have been created. But within this abstract probability, I am indeed without a life of authentic existence (*zhenshi cunzai* 真實存在). My life of authentic existence still exists in that I am created as a member of the Chinese nation and accomplished by receiving an education and upbringing in the languages, culture and social customs of China; and this whole education and upbringing as well as the Chinese nation out of which I am created cannot be distinguished from the existence of my life. Whether I am self-conscious of that from which I have been created and about the whole existence of education and upbringing is in fact the same thing as whether I am truly self-conscious about the existence of my life.¹²⁴

This passage reads like a nationalist avowal which also borders on denying self-consciousness to those who refuse to identify with China’s national culture—even more so because of its almost intimidating tone. One cannot brush the statement easily aside, especially because it is hardly a unique occurrence in Tang’s writings of the 1950s and 1960s. The question therefore arises once again of whether Tang crosses the line from a culturally conservative patriotism to outright nationalism. The picture remains ambivalent given Tang’s aforementioned diffidence with respect to the ethnic nationalism of the GMD and his unswerving insistence on “absolute liberalism” for individuals to choose their own ideals. To help clarify this ostensible inconsistency, it should be noted that Tang made the above statement in a text that explicitly deals with the problem of exilic life. From this perspective, his message appears to be much less intimidating than defensive, stemming from an existential concern that the

123 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 10–11.

124 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 11.

experience of emigration might deny the individual any awareness of historical belonging. One of the fundamental lessons of Tang's exilic philosophy is that an isolated individual cannot attain such awareness. To be meaningful to the exilic individual, the awareness of belonging to China—even if this China is only present in the form of interpretations of national culture—requires that the individual be able to assure him- or herself that other individuals share the same awareness and similarly identify themselves as “true Chinese.”¹²⁵ Without this shared awareness among the emigrants, the exilic space inevitably turns into a non-place.

In exilic thought, avoiding such a vacuous existence and the demise of the Chinese nation necessitated, as we have seen, a concept of national culture in which its “main current” was dissociated from the territorial boundaries of the contemporary Chinese nation-states. According to this imagined transgression of external boundaries that were imposed politically and intellectually, the nation and its culture would now be able to exist outside the two Chinese nation-states on the Mainland and on Taiwan. Even outside of these territories, however, there were intellectual boundaries imposed by modern, “(self-)colonizing” tendencies which threatened the continuation of the “main current.” As a consequence, the Chinese nation had to retreat behind “inner” boundaries, which were continuously drawn and redrawn through reflection and reinterpretation of the national culture.¹²⁶ Tang reflected on the “inner boundaries” in an allegorical way: He professed that, as an emigrant, he could only seek shelter in Hong Kong, and even if his life in exile was an unhappy one, he could still reach Shenzhou 神州 in his “dream-ego.”¹²⁷ Shenzhou traditionally represents two visions: A mythological place inhabited by immortal beings and a territory from which the civilization of the Chinese empire emerged. By expressing his longing for Shenzhou, Tang asserted that under the current conditions of exile and modernity his subjective yearning for transcendence had not yet been obliterated and his identification with China's national culture had not yet been annihilated.

125 Ibid.

126 On the concepts of inner and outer boundaries, see the analysis of Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* in: Kallscheuer, “Deutsche Kulturration versus französische Staatsnation? Eine ideengeschichtliche Stichprobe,” pp. 156–161.

127 Tang, *Shuo Zhonghua minzu zhi hua guo piaoling*, p. 29.

The Theological Accentuation

Theological Foundations

In the manifesto from 1958, Tang and his co-authors suggested that Confucianism is characteristically based on a notion of human nature (*xing* 性).¹ In explicit accordance with Confucian and neo-Confucian predecessors, Tang placed the human being at the center of a cosmic order which he referred to as “Heaven” (*tian* 天). Similar to Wang Yangming’s “study of the mind,” Tang singled out, as we have seen, a passage from *Mencius* VIIA.1: “Mencius said, ‘For a man to give full realization to his heart (*jin qi xin*) is for him to understand his own nature (*zhi qi xing*), and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven (*zhi tian*).’”² Tang interpreted this as a proposition about the human being’s potential to fully actualize him- or herself. This actualization is said to be equivalent to a “penetrating awakening” which allows the human mind to access “the ultimate source of the universe and human life” (*yuzhou rensheng zhi benyuan* 宇宙人生之本原). In this sudden realization, then, the human being will apprehend Heaven and hence the spiritual source of all reality.³

What Tang meant by “mind” may be approximated by reference to Max Scheler’s broad concept of mind (*Geist*), which ascribes to it discursive thought (*Ideendenken*) as well as “[a] specific type of ‘intuition’ (*Anschauung*) . . . of original phenomena or contents of essence” and thus “a specific class of *voli-*

1 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 25.

2 Lau, *Mencius*, p. 182; see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 60; see also Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 23–24. For a concise discussion of Mencian speculation and its impact on neo-Confucianism, see Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, pp. 369–380. *Mencius* VIIA.1 is of great importance for Wang Yangming’s thought: see Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 20 (see also Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 1.6), 101 (*ibid.*, 1.66), 202 (*ibid.*, II.134), 216 (*ibid.*, II.136), 334 (*ibid.*, III.174).

3 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 577. Tang provided equivalent formulations such as the ability of the human being to penetrate the “metaphysical ultimate source of universe” (*yuzhou zhi xingshang de benyuan* 宇宙之形上的本原) or the “absolute pattern of Heaven” (*juedui de tian li* 絕對的天理): Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 586; also cf. Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 29 where the authors state that the human mind can “penetrate the mind of Heaven” (*tong yu tian xin* 通於天心).

tional and *emotional* acts such as benevolence, love, remorse, awe, intellectual amazement, beatitude, and despair, free choice.”⁴ Referring to Confucian and neo-Confucian speculation with a similarly broad concept of mind, Tang used the Chinese word *xin*⁵ and assumed that “mind” appears in the realm of finite being, which includes the human being. He identified *xin* as the essence, the inner principle of the human being and, as such, as the subjective mind which functions as the intermediary or agent of Heaven: “In this, as seen with regard to the way of Heaven, the fulfilling of this mind and this principle by this human being is indeed the self-realization of the way of Heaven (*tian dao zhi ziji shixian* 天道之自己實現).”⁶

Tang’s “study of mind and (human) nature” rests on three basic assumptions: 1) the foundation of all life in a cosmic process referred to as “Heaven”; 2) the possibility of human self-elevation to the point where the human being partakes in the “way of Heaven;” and 3) the essential unity of human existence to be achieved through a human being’s insight into the absolute (“Heaven”).⁷ By inscribing these assumptions into a theological framework, Tang distinguished his speculation from the thought of Mencius and Wang Yangming. What is at stake here is the epistemological status of the speculation on human nature. The locus classicus is *Mencius* IIA.6, which depicts the famous instance of someone experiencing an instantaneous urge to save a child from falling into a well. To be sure, neither Mencius nor Wang ever narrated such an instance in order to discuss the epistemological implications of making propositions about human nature. But the question remains as to whether they understood this narrative as an allegory, as an observation or as something else.⁸ Possibly,

4 Scheler, *Schriften zur Anthropologie*, p. 158 (my translation).

5 Tang distinguished between “mind” and “consciousness,” translating the latter in most cases with the neologism *yishi* 意識.

6 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 369. Tang’s notion of such a relation between the human and the Heavenly mind is in loose convergence with Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology. Tang studied Scheler’s thought however only in passing; cf. a brief reference in Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, p. 652.

7 Roger Ames suggests a fundamentally different understanding of Tang’s speculation which he describes as “a radical empiricism” that offers “an understanding of agency [which] is wholly naturalistic in that it makes no appeal to a metaphysics of self” (p. 150). Ames is accordingly compelled to translate Tang’s use of term *tian dao* 天道 with such variants as “the natural and cultural processes,” or the “natural and cultural legacy,” (p. 145); see Ames, “Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics: Tang Junyi on Human Nature as Conduct.”

8 Iso Kern speaks of Mencius’ “examples” that Wang Yangming had taken up, albeit with a different interpretation; see Kern, *Das Wichtigste im Leben*, pp. 208–210.

they presumed to identify here an empirically accountable proposition about the essential dispositions of human beings. Wang's discussion of such dispositions, especially of those mentioned in *Mencius* 11A.6, shows that he believed that human beings were naturally endowed with a potential to act upon moral intuition ("innate knowing": *liang zhi*). The following passage from the *Chuan xi lu* with its rhetorical question is telling in this regard: "When I see a child fall into a well [and have a feeling of commiseration], there must be the principle of commiseration. Is this principle of commiseration actually in the person of the child or is it in the innate knowledge (*liang zhi*—TF) of my mind?"⁹ Unlike Mencius and Wang, Tang explicitly reflected on the epistemological status of his speculation on human nature and moral intuition. He interpreted the Mencian proposition on human nature and the possibility to "know Heaven" as a statement of *religious* conviction or "faith" (*xinyang* 信仰):

That all human beings are equal in their nature and that there is nothing which [by nature] is not good in them, is [a matter of] a transcending faith. As it [= this faith] cannot seek to obtain encompassing proof by direct experience, there is nothing I can do, if you want to raise doubts. But this faith itself flowed from the inner spirit of a human being endowed with the spirit of humaneness. If a human being thoroughly recognizes its own humaneness and the goodness of its nature, it will spontaneously be able to suddenly attain the [following] immediate realization: in the nature of all human beings, there is nothing that is not good, and nobody is not endowed with humaneness.¹⁰

By rephrasing the Mencian idea of human nature as a matter of religious faith, Tang shifted the foundation of his reflections. He accordingly ascribed to his modern Confucianism the quality of "religiosity" (*zongjiaoxing*), and hence related it to the field of religions.

Tang's notion of religion puts strong emphasis on how religions respond to human concerns about the highest good, eternal justice, a higher truth, the

9 Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 209 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 11.135) as translated in Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*, p. 99.

10 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 418; cf. p. 60. Wang Yangming had also professed his "faith" (*xin*) in *liang zhi* at the latest stage of his philosophical work. According to Kern's impressive study on Wang, this stage was marked by Wang's new, "religious-enthusiastic" concept of *liang zhi*; see "Kern, *Das Wichtigste im Leben*, pp. 187–189.

eradication of sin and evil, or an afterlife.¹¹ He assumed—in the comparative context of the world religions—that religions provide the human beings with answers to their longing for immortality (Daoism), absolute justice (Islam), overcoming pain and suffering (Buddhism), and redeeming sin and evil (Christianity). What is more, religions characteristically “confirm” the existence of an afterworld, including notions of immortality, an afterlife or resurrection, as well as notions of God, Allah, Brahman, Buddha, Bodhisattva or the Immortals.¹² Tang added that a human being needs myths, miracles, and artistic representations of religious notions in order to “break through” to the sphere of religion. Myths, miracles, and religious art thus fulfill a double function by fostering the belief in a transcendent power, while at the same time expressing the human longing for transcendence. Nevertheless, neither myths nor miracles are the *defining* features of Tang’s concept of religion.¹³ In reflecting on the distinction between (world) religions and (Confucian) religiosity, Tang pointed out that Confucian religiosity did not evolve out of notions of miracles, myths, original sin, and divine grace.¹⁴ Still, the Confucian person is said to believe in a “transcendent power” (*chaoyue lilian* 超越力量).¹⁵ The manifesto of 1958 even suggests that the Confucian belief reaches deep enough into individuals to produce Confucian martyrs.¹⁶ This reference to Confucian martyrs echoes Zhang Taiyan’s claim that the Confucian martyr’s spirit is manifest in the Confucian’s willingness “to die in the performance of benevolence.”¹⁷ The idea of a Confucian belief in a “transcendent power” is crucial for Tang’s reflection on modernity. He suggested that religions and religiosity might play an important part in deflecting the danger of a Western type of modernity which submits mankind to materialism, positivism, and instrumental rationality.¹⁸ In the future, Western culture should therefore “revert to the

11 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 363–364, 368, 380–385; Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 587–589.

12 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 587.

13 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 363–364.

14 Tang, “The reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” pp. 366–367; Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 363–365.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 364.

16 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 19–20.

17 See chap. 5 (“*Ru xia*” 儒俠) in Zhang’s *Book of Persecutions* (*Qiushu* 卮書 [old edition, published in 1900 or 1901]); quoted from: Shimada, *Pioneer of the Chinese Revolution*, p. 112.

18 Tang listed the following philosophical opponents of religions: materialism (most dangerous in his eyes), logical positivism, empiricism and, to some degree, naturalism; see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 595.

divine” in order to avoid the reification of the human being as a material object. What is necessary, in other words, is a “revival” of religions, and hence the common perspective of world religions and Confucian religiosity in modernity.¹⁹

By emphasizing the religious core of Confucianism, Tang addressed an issue which had been raised by Max Weber, who famously denied that Confucianism had any metaphysical or religious outlook. Weber made this assertion in the context of his large-scale comparative investigation into the formation of modernity. Tellingly, the manifesto *A Declaration to the World for Chinese Culture* from 1958 thoroughly refutes the Weberian notion that “Chinese culture” is void of “transcendent feeling of a religious nature”²⁰—albeit without explicit mention of Weber’s thesis about Confucianism.

An important aspect of Tang’s version of Confucian religiosity concerns its ritualistic elements. Tang strongly highlighted the so-called “three forms of ritual sacrifice” (*san ji* 三祭) to “Heaven and Earth” (*tian di* 天地), to the “ancestors” (*zuzong* 祖宗), and to “saints and worthies” (*sheng xian* 聖賢). He was convinced that these rituals had existed over a long period of time and were practiced within a large segment of society.²¹ For reasons which he did not elaborate, he treated these rituals as specifically Confucian, and even identified them as the “center” of Confucian rituals.²² The rituals not only entailed the worship of Heaven and Earth, the ancestors, and the saints and worthies, but also the Heavenly call to the worshippers to realize their individual self-fulfillment in intuition. If the rituals are carried out with attentiveness, the creative “virtues” (*de* 德) of Heaven and Earth, of the “lord on high” (*shangdi* 上帝), of the ancestors, and of the saints and worthies might “appear” (*cheng* 呈) in the mind of the worshipper and “directly manifest [themselves]” (*zhijie biaoxian* 直接表現).²³ In the course of the rituals, the worshipper thus realizes that he or she is summoned to “connect in [mutual] affection” (*gantong* 感通) with a transcendent existence.²⁴ The worshipper can then “set the self at ease

19 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 26–27.

20 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 16.

21 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 374.

22 Ibid., p. 389. On the three forms of ritual sacrifice, see also: Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 374–389; Tang, “The reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” pp. 363–364.

23 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 387.

24 Ibid., p. 375. For Tang, “*gantong*” is a mode of activity in which recognizing, feeling and intending are simultaneously taking place and the distinctions between agent/receptor and subject/object are suspended. The scope of *gantong* is not limited to religious experience, but may also include sensory perception and intellectual activity. On *gantong* see Liao, “Tang Junyi ‘panjiao lilun’ de chubu kaocha,” pp. 40–44. As for the relation between

and establish destiny” (*an shen li ming* 安身立命), thereby realizing the fundamental sense of the “Confucian teachings” (*Ruzhe zhi jiao* 儒者之教).²⁵

Tang further explained that the notion of the human condition, as manifest in these rituals, is not determined by feelings of sinfulness, as in Christianity, nor by an existence marked by pain and suffering, as in Buddhism. Instead, these rituals express the aspiration of the Confucian worshipper to “transcend” or “enlarge” his or her “self” (*zi wo* 自我), and thus “permeate” (*tong da* 通達) Heaven and Earth, the ancestors, and the saints and worthies.²⁶ In pathos-rich language, Tang assumed in this context that the “pure Chinese” (*chuncui de Zhongguoren* 純粹的中國人) who believe in Confucianism are convinced that they can fulfill the “essence” (*benzhi* 本質) of the human spirit. But to achieve this it will not suffice to simply “establish destiny” in philosophy, science, literature, art, politics, or economy. One also has to reach for the infinite “realm” (*jingjie* 境界) beyond these fields.²⁷ Against this backdrop, Tang called for a contemporary revival of Confucian ritual practice, including *rites de passage* which should not be left entirely to the followers of other religions.²⁸

The (modern) Confucian faith is, according to Tang, not a matter of revelation, but is based on human reason *and* feeling and is characterized by a conflation of belief and knowledge in the ultimate realm of insight into the absolute.²⁹ Tang’s theological metaphysics thus contains a medial double-principle (*mediales Doppelprinzip*), to borrow a term from research on Fichte: in an act of intuition, the human mind recognizes and realizes itself as an appearance of Heaven, and at the same time, Heaven manifests itself through intuition, thereby recognizing itself in the human mind.³⁰ As Tang put it: “Heaven recognizes [itself]” (*tian zhi* 天知) as it “appears” in the human “self,” and the self-realization of Heaven is “identical” with intuition.³¹ In partaking in the self-attainment of Heaven, the human mind is lifted above itself. Still, this self-transcendence does not extinguish the human mind, and the

gantong and *liang zhi*, one might tentatively propose that the mode of cognition in *liang zhi* is to be called *gantong*.

25 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 365.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 384.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 365–366, 374–375.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 390.

29 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 363. In this conflation, Tang’s theological metaphysics is similar to Fichte’s metaphysical realism; on Fichte see Oesterreich, *Der ganze Fichte*, pp. 203–204.

30 For a discussion of the medial double-principle in research on Fichte’s allegories of light see Oesterreich, *Der ganze Fichte*, pp. 221–224.

31 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 587.

difference between the mind of Heaven, which Tang understood as a metaphysical reality, and the human mind is preserved in the illuminated mind as “the sage mind.”³² According to this notion of the absolute, Heaven attains self-realization by manifesting itself in the mind of the human being (the “sage”; *sheng ren* 聖人), whereas the latter apprehends in an act of (moral) intuition the ultimate principles of reality (the “principles of Heaven”).³³

With respect to notions of the sage in Chinese history, Tang explained that the sages were considered to have “descended from Heaven” during the Han Dynasty, whereas the neo-Confucians shared the belief that the way of becoming a sage could be studied by mortal beings. Neither the sages themselves nor their virtue were understood by neo-Confucians as being produced solely by Heaven, but also by the “power” of men.³⁴ Tang’s outlook is indeed in line with most neo-Confucian notions of sagehood in that he associated sagehood with an elusive spiritual state that is attainable by every human being, even though it remains, in fact, inaccessible for the vast majority of believers. By the same token, Tang followed his neo-Confucian predecessors by downplaying the influence of Buddhist teachings in shaping neo-Confucian ideas about sagehood.³⁵ The human “self-belief” (*zi xin* 自信) in the spiritual potency of becoming a sage is said to set Confucian religiosity apart from the world religions. Yet Tang also conceded that Chan Buddhism, Christian mysticism, and the Daoist teaching of the all-encompassing truth (*quanzhenjiao* 全真教) contain similar ideas.³⁶ He even hints at a basic convergence of Confucianism and Daoism in

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- 32 Tang, “The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy” [1959], p. 33.
- 33 The translation of *tian li* as “principles of Heaven” stems from the English text: Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” p. 188. Although this translation is not Tang’s own, it is likely that he approved of it, since he discussed the difficulties of translating Chinese concepts into English at length, and at times took issues with prevalent terminology of translation (see below on *liang zhi*).
- 34 See Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 522; Tang, *Zhongguo renwen zhi jingshen fazhan*, pp. 25–26. On the sage in an ideal humanistic world, see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 63. In the following, “sage” will be used with respect to Tang’s speculation, even though Tang’s usage of the term is ambivalent. At times, he used terms like *sheng xian* 聖賢 (“sages and worthies”) and *sheng ren* in an apparently colloquial way to refer to individuals of a “personality of highest integrity” who bear great responsibility for society and therefore deserve special reverence from others; see e.g. Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 288, 612; *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 63, 65, 395–396.
- 35 For a highly instructive overview of notions of the sage and sagehood in the Chinese context, see Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 14–17.
- 36 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 369.

their belief that Heaven achieves its self-fulfillment in the “great person” (*da ren* 大人), the “sage,” the “true person” (*zhen ren* 真人) or the “Heavenly person” (*tian ren* 天人).³⁷

A key aspect of Tang’s understanding of sagehood concerns temporality: Sagehood is conceptualized as an ephemeral, intuitive state that is, in fact, not to be mistaken for an enduring form of social existence. The “sage” embodies at once the actualization of human nature and the self-realization of Heaven, but he is not a figure of historical temporality. Tang consequently refrained from depicting a historical perspective of a society governed by sages.³⁸

It is significant that Tang explicitly referred to the transcendent breakthrough of the individual who becomes a sage as a “religious intuition” (*zongjiao de liang zhi* 宗教的良知).³⁹ In his theological metaphysics, such intuition is not a mental activity of an individualized subject, but the working of the ultimate reality,⁴⁰ i.e. the mind’s convergence with self-illuminating

37 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 22, p. 362.

38 Metzger takes Tang’s reference to the topic of becoming a sage at face value, thus portraying him as a stern, ideologically misguided believer in the feasibility of a permanent and comprehensive actualization of human nature on a social scale; see, for example, Metzger’s discussion of a passage from *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*: Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific. Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today*, p. 238. As I will argue below, this interpretation misses the point of Tang’s civil theology. Although Tang’s late metaphysical work *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie* is strewn with soteriological expectations and inklings to salvific history, his political thought clearly highlights the idea that individuals may attain the state of sagehood only in fleeting moments, thus remaining for the most of time in an imperfect world. This indeed may not prevent the believer from having faith in the possibility of achieving a perfect world populated only by sages, but the thrust of Tang’s political thought is not based on a “faith in the practical possibility of the world’s total moral transformation” as Metzger would have it (Metzger, *ibid.*). In fact, Tang was well aware of the ideological dangers involved in such a vision (for his critique of the notion of a “great uniformity” [*da tong*] see Chapters 4 “Defending authenticity,” 12 “Overcoming totalitarianism?” in this book).

39 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 593.

40 Tang followed here a fundamental assumption of Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming: see Shimada, *Die neo-konfuzianische Philosophie*, p. 133. As regards modern Confucianism, Tang related his metaphysics to the speculation of Xiong Shili and Mou Zongsan, but not to Feng Youlan’s who was, as Mou recalled, rebuffed by Xiong for claiming that *liang zhi* was a mere “hypothesis” (*jiading* 假定) of the subjective mind, and not a (spiritual) fact; see Mou, *Wushi zishu*, p. 88.

“principles” of Heaven.⁴¹ Tang rephrased this notion many times. We find, for example, the statement that the “way of Heaven,” to be understood as the process of change of all reality, becomes manifest within the empirical “reality of phenomena” in “the way of man.” The latter is thus said to culminate in the intermediation of the mind of Heaven by the human mind in the act of intuition. Through this intermediation, the “self-realization of the way of Heaven” is achieved.⁴² As co-creator, the human being is not a creature, but rather, as it were, Heaven in the making. What unfolds is a “relationship of mutual preservation and merging”⁴³ in the course of which the human being “enriches” reality as produced by Heaven.⁴⁴ In this respect, Tang’s theological metaphysics is not in line with the metaphysical realism developed by Fichte, who did not elevate the human being to the position of co-creator and identified, in his later work (after 1801), the “absolute being” with “God.”⁴⁵

The fact that one may discern the above-mentioned double-principle in Tang’s speculation does not mean that he was following Fichte specifically, since the double-principle has had several proponents in the Western history of metaphysics, as Max Scheler reminds us: “It is this old notion of Spinoza, Hegel and many others: the original being (“das Urseiende”—TF) becomes aware of itself in man in the very same act in which man sees himself based in it.” Scheler went on to observe critically that this tradition has been represented so far in a way that was “far too one-sidedly intellectualistic.” Instead, he proposed to reinterpret the idea of self-realization to the effect that, in correspondence with the “ideal demand of the deity (Deitas),” self-realization is seen as “a *consequence* of the *active installment of the center of our being*.” Scheler continues:

The place of this self-realization—we can also call it self-deification (*Selbstvergottung*)—which the being-that-exists-through-itself (*Durch-sich-seiende-Sein*) seeks and, for the sake of its coming into existence, it puts up with a “history”—*this is indeed man*, the human self and the human heart. These form the only place of becoming god which is within our reach.⁴⁶

41 Tang, “The Spirit and Development of Neo-Confucianism,” p. 79; see also Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 130.

42 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 369.

43 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 587.

44 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 369; see also Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 211 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 11.135).

45 On Fichte see Oesterreich, *Der ganze Fichte*, pp. 228, 237.

46 Scheler, *Schriften zur Anthropologie*, p. 215 (there are all my translations; all emphases are Scheler’s).

Tang would have agreed with Scheler's strong emphasis on the active, participatory part of the human being in the course of the self-realization of the absolute, though he would not have identified his notion of Heaven with Scheler's monotheistic notion of god. For Tang, the vision of the human being as Heaven in the making is indeed one of the salient features of the Confucian religious faith. Nevertheless, he did not consider the notion of the absolute's self-realization as an exclusively Confucian idea, but as being wide-spread within Eastern and Western traditions. Significantly, he referred to the absolute with a whole range of different terms such as "Heaven," "deity" (*shen* 神), "tathatā, bhūtatathatā" (*zhenru* 真如), the "supreme ultimate" (*taiji* 太極), and "Brahman."⁴⁷

At this point, we may thus identify several key elements of Tang's theological agenda. The first of these is the exposition, explanation, and systematization of what Tang variously called "faith," "philosophical faith," "feelings of transcendence," etc. At the core of this theological discourse we find: (a) the notion of an absolute, non-personal "Heaven" which achieves its full realization in the mind of the sage; and (b) the notion of the human being's inborn longing to overcome his detachment from "Heaven" by transcending his individual existence (thereby becoming a sage, i.e. a co-creator or a Heaven in the making). The second key element is the infusion of the modern Confucian ethos of individual self-fulfillment with theological limit-concepts of intuition and sagehood. These positive limit-concepts fulfill an orienting function with respect to the individual's conduct of life. They are positioned, as it were, precisely *on* the border between social reality, on the one side, and the realm of ultimate reality, on the other. Thirdly, even though Tang's theological Confucianism does not advocate clerical or liturgical institutions, let alone a Confucian church, his notion of a Confucian religiosity entails propositions about the form and meaning of ritual practices. The fourth key element pertains to the civil-theological taxonomy of human knowledge and cognition based on the limit-concepts of intuition and sagehood as its rationale. In accordance with these limit-concepts, the taxonomy of knowledge and cognition neither contains sacred scriptures nor an orthodox canon of classics. And, lastly, the fifth key element concerns the stipulations for the "true" philosopher, which include a messianic sense of mission.

47 Cf. Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, p. 318.

The Taxonomy of Knowledge and Intuition

Tang's civil-theological taxonomy of knowledge and intuition serves as a frame of reference for integrating the political, moral, religious, cultural, and historical aspects of modern Confucianism. The point of departure for establishing this taxonomy is Tang's decision to accord a higher status to the intuitive cognition of the principles of Heaven than to discursive knowledge (in philosophy, metaphysics, and the special branches of science). Specifically, the highest level of cognition is said to be achieved in an act of intuition.⁴⁸ This accentuation, however, does not amount to a denial of the relative autonomy of science and philosophy. They are rather affirmed by the taxonomy as forms of rational knowledge on an intermediate level.

In a historical and comparative perspective, all claims to universally valid definitions of philosophy are highly problematic, as Tang stated. He further elaborated that the contemporary Chinese neologism for "philosophy," *zhexue* 哲學, is not identical with Western concepts of "philosophy." *Zhexue* is far more comprehensive than what is usually referred to as "philosophy" in the West and includes Chinese, Western, and Indian philosophies in a very broad sense.⁴⁹ Moreover, Tang reminded his readers that there is no generally accepted definition of philosophy in the West, and that probably every Western philosopher would answer differently the question "What is philosophy?" He added the observation that Western books presenting an overview of philosophy often fail to offer a definition of philosophy and, further, that even those authors who provide such a definition, tellingly, usually put it at the end of the book.⁵⁰

These terminological and conceptual difficulties of defining philosophy notwithstanding, Tang arranged philosophy, i.e. *zhexue*, within the civil-theological taxonomy of knowledge and intuition. The taxonomy is structured according to the rationale of forms of knowledge that assist the human mind in attaining an intuitive apprehension of the absolute. Within this taxonomy, philosophy is situated between the fields of scientific research and the intuitive realization of the "principles of Heaven." With respect to this intuitive realization, philosophy has two supreme functions, both of which are related to

48 Ibid., p. 567. This assumption entails a notion of a spiritual self who attains intuition and is thereby able to pass correct judgments on the whole range of human behavior; see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 585–586.

49 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 21, pp. 16, 19–20. On this topic see also Peng Guoxiang's close reading of the prefaces and the first section of Vol. 1 of *Zhexue gailun* (pp. 1–33): Peng, "Tang Junyi de zhexue guan—yi 'Zhexue gailun' wei zhongxin," pp. 111–117.

50 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 21, pp. 19, 26.

the notion of intuition (*liang zhi*) as an act of realization, which is located— to use an image in line with Tang’s own allegorical language—on the very border of philosophical reflection: *liang zhi* is neither completely detached from discursive philosophy, nor is it a process of philosophical reflection.

The first function of philosophical reflection is to initiate the opening of the human mind in order to allow intuition to take place. To this end, philosophy reflects on the many forms of reification of the human subject’s relation to itself and to the social and natural environment. In the course of such reflection, the human being may become aware that it is not restricted to its empirical self, but able to transcend the empirical self to reach beyond the realms of reification. In his *An Outline of Philosophy (Zhaxue gailun)*, Tang called this type of philosophical reflection “transcendental reflection” (*chaoyue de fanxing* 超越的反省) and explained: “The transcendental-reflective method means that we do not attach ourselves to but transcend our speech, understanding, knowledge of existence, and value.”⁵¹ According to Shun Kai Kevin Cheng, Tang intended here to delineate the “center of all philosophical method.”⁵² But if we are to comprehensively analyze Tang’s concept of philosophy, it will be insufficient to solely rely on this statement about philosophical method. What needs to be considered are the *limits* of philosophical reflection as outlined by Tang himself. Cheng assumes that in Tang’s vision “[t]he decree of Heaven is revealed in the present immediacy,”⁵³ and that this “immediacy” is fully embedded in philosophical language and reflection i.e. transcendental reflection. However, Tang’s notion of intuitive immediacy points to a deep gap between the philosophical (transcendental-reflective) initiation of such intuitive immediacy and the very act of intuition itself. As shall be shown below, this notion of a gap plays a crucial role in determining the function of philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular as building a “bridge” for human consciousness to cross into intuition. When depicting the function of philosophical language, Tang suggested the image of opening a gate to one’s own spirit and to all existence, and referred to the philosophical soliloquies of St. Augustine, Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard which took, according to him, the form of prayers.⁵⁴

51 Quoted from: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, p. 294.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 295.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 324; Cheng refers here to Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 233f.

54 See Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 520–521. The speculation about the fundamental gap between philosophical reflection and immediate, intuitive cognition (*liang zhi*, “wisdom” etc.) constitutes a central issue in modern Confucianism. For

The second function of philosophical reflection is to devise discursive representations of intuitive cognition. These representations include core elements of Confucian religiosity, namely, the individual's spiritual self-assurance that human nature as endowed by Heaven calls the human being to transcend its empirical self and achieve immediate unity with Heaven. Philosophy takes here the form of a "teaching" (*jiao* 教) which is inscribed into the framework of Confucian theology. Tang highlighted the importance of philosophical teaching in a mystifying retrospection of his own intellectual development. Looking back at the past 30 years, he declared that the point of departure of his philosophical development was a "feeling of transcendence" (*chaoyue de ganqing* 超越的感情) which led him to experience manifold "awakenings to transcendence" (*chaoyue de huiwu* 超越的會晤). This statement is even more remarkable for it is one of the very rare instances where Tang at least hinted at the effects that such a spiritual awakening might have on an individual's conduct of life. As regards the theological foundation of philosophy, he explained the philosophical "transformation [of the individual] through teachings" (*jiaohua* 教化) consists of familiarizing oneself with the many contradictions between different philosophical schools and ideas. Such contradictions, after all, are due to a "secret intention of Heaven." Tang consequently professed that he himself hardly ever intended to devise theories, preferring instead to reflect on a constellation in which mutually contradictory statements contribute to intuitively "accomplishing the teaching" (*chengjiao* 成教).⁵⁵

Both philosophical tasks are obviously difficult to achieve, and the latter is particularly challenging since intuition is, from the standpoint of symbolic representation, elusive by necessity. Any attempt to translate intuition into terminologies and grammatical structures can at best amount to an accommodation. Even so, philosophy, and especially metaphysics, assumes a leading role among the various types of symbolic rapprochement with intuition. It is telling in this context that Tang repeatedly attested to the great significance of the religious orientation of his philosophy by highlighting personal experiences of spiritual

example, Mou Zongsan's philosophy also highlights the problem of reflection about such a gap. As Sébastien Billioud shows in his excellent study of Mou Zongsan, this becomes particularly evident in the context of Mou's moral philosophy. Billioud concludes that Mou "does not provide enough elements to enable us to better characterize (hence, better understand) the noncausal links between the radical rupture implied by *dunwu* [sudden enlightenment—TF] and an intermediate process of moral integration that takes place through retrospective verification;" see Billioud, *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity*, p. 226; also cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 218–232 for a comprehensive discussion of this issue.

55 *Ibid.*

awakening.⁵⁶ The origin of philosophy is, if we are to follow Tang, a yearning for transcendence—“a specific uncertainty” of the human being longing to “transcend” the “limitations” of its consciousness (in an intuitive perception of Heaven). Thus, philosophy shall lead to intuition, while remaining separate from the non-rational perception of Heaven itself. Human beings may, through philosophy, attain a discursive “self-consciousness” (*zijue* 自覺) of the “wholeness of their spiritual potency” (*qi xinling zhi quan* 其心靈之全), which initiates their “turning back” to the “source” of all knowing and which cannot be gained by strictly compartmentalized scientific activity.⁵⁷ It is at this point that the “realm of void potency of the mind” (*kong ling xin jing* 空靈心境)—a state which itself remains aloof from philosophical thought—might be reached.⁵⁸

The delineation of the “realm of void potency of the mind” serves as the background for a concept of philosophy that outlines the unity of all sciences. Yet Tang was most of all interested in conceptualizing philosophy in terms of a human mind-set, or “spiritual attitude” (*jingshen taidu* 精神態度).⁵⁹ After all, he did not accept the claim of inductive metaphysics which sets out to construct a comprehensive world view by delineating a synopsis of all branches of science. According to Tang, this “formal idea” of a “philosophical synthesis” of all branches of science cannot be achieved anymore in a modern world of rapid evolution of knowledge. Inductive metaphysics is only of interest to Tang insofar as it shatters the respective claims to a totality of knowledge within specific branches of science and, at the same time, points toward the urge of the human mind to reach beyond the range of scientific knowledge. Hence, the pursuit of a uniform foundation of the various systems and orders of knowledge is relevant for the emergence of a “pure consciousness of a transcendent and all-embracing disposition” (*chuncui zhi ju chaoyuexing hangaixing zhi yishi* 純粹之具超越性涵蓋性之意識).⁶⁰ In turn, this can lead the human mind to an awareness of an ultimate reality.⁶¹

Tang suggests that intuition is neither bound to scientific systems of knowledge, nor to specific scientific methods, theories or discoveries, and it clearly cannot be understood as a synthesis of empirical or theoretical knowledge.

56 Cf. Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 556–589 and *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 453–524.

57 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 576; on the “turning back” see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 369.

58 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 364, 373.

59 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 563.

60 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 355–356.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 366.

Metaphysics, too, is not exempt from this limitation of discursive knowledge in comparison with intuited cognition. Consequently, Tang conceptualized the function of metaphysics as a sort of philosophical meditation on the limits of human cognition, on the essentially irrevocable human aspiration to overcome these limits, and on the human potential to do so in an act of intuition. But metaphysical reflection, as Tang understood it, does not necessarily have to lead to a new system of knowledge. The value of metaphysics ultimately lies in its function to question or even destroy all forms of “relative knowledge,” including metaphysical systems themselves.

As a result of this destruction of knowledge, the “realm of void potency of the mind” may (suddenly) become accessible to the human mind. Tang therefore spoke of metaphysics as a bridge leading from symbolically represented cognition to the immediate presence of intuitive knowing.⁶² He emphatically reminded his readers that one should attempt to cross this bridge without lingering on it.⁶³ At this point, there is a clear shift of emphasis in Tang’s thought in favor of a non-intelligible ultimate reality.⁶⁴ This sharp line of demarcation between discursive thought and intuition separates Tang’s theological metaphysics from earlier Confucian and neo-Confucian speculation, which did not construct such a tension between philosophical and theological metaphysics.⁶⁵ Insofar as meditation in metaphysics leads one to the other side of the bridge, discursive thought comes to a temporary halt: In a “moment” (*ji* 機), the subject “realizes” (*tihui* 體會) “the metaphysical reality of the absolute mind and pattern” (*juedui de xin yu li zhi xingshang shizai* 絕對的心與理之形上實在).⁶⁶ But contrary to what the bridge-allegory might seem to imply, Tang subsumed intuition itself within the notion of metaphysics, thereby proposing “metaphysics” as a term for the interlacing of philosophical and theological aspects of the study of mind and (human) nature. We may assume that he did so with respect to the above-mentioned double function of philosophy in relation to

62 Ibid., pp. 364, 373. Contrary to Henri Bergson’s new metaphysics, Tang did not bind intuitive perception to a passage through the positive sciences.

63 Ibid., p. 366.

64 Arlt gives an account of Max Scheler’s metaphysical anthropology which can be seen as pointing in a similar direction: see Arlt, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, pp. 23–24.

65 Cf. Tang’s own account of neo-Confucian speculation in Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jing-shen jiazhi*, pp. 87–91; Tang, “The spirit and development of Neo-Confucianism,” p. 68.

66 For these concepts see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 365–366; also cf. *ibid.*, pp. 364, 373.

intuition—the moment of intuition hence remains accessible to philosophical thought, even though the intuition itself transcends reflection altogether.

Within the framework of his theological speculation, Tang interpreted the transcendental philosophical reflection on the categorical limits of cognition as the liberation of the human mind from dogmatic fetters. He described this in Buddhist terms as a spiritual initiation to the “unpinning” (*chaoba* 超拔) of the consciousness from its “limitations,” and thus as an “appearance” of the “non-‘limited’” (*wu “xian”* 無“限”—Tang’s emphasis).⁶⁷ This vision amounts to a post-transcendental return to theological metaphysics. It entails the claim that the ultimate reality will disclose itself as an upshot of the destruction of pure reflection and of the Kantian self-limitation of transcendental philosophy. From this perspective, Kant’s transcendental reflection on the constitution of empirical cognition is seen as a philosophical impetus to the self-transcendence of the human consciousness in intuition.⁶⁸ Thus, Tang’s focus is not so much on the destruction of discursive knowledge per se, but rather on the taxonomical demotion of forms of knowledge prone to categorical and conceptual fixation. Seen from Tang’s Buddhist-inspired aspiration of attaining intuition by pushing the mind through the breakdown of discursive thinking, Kantian critical philosophy with its insistence on conceptual and categorical thought must be restrained.

The goal in setting up such a taxonomy of knowledge is neither the construction of a methodologically defined system of knowledge, nor the formulation of an epistemology. Significantly, Tang spoke of a “very long and winding road” leading from Western philosophy and its main currents of epistemology, philosophy of science and analytical philosophy to the ultimate realm of intuition. He further assumed that while travelling along this road, one may easily be bogged down by “intellectualism.” But this should not be mistaken as an attempt by Tang to initiate a struggle of Western science and philosophy vs. Eastern philosophy for supremacy over the construction of a modern world view. On the contrary, he explicitly stated that the road of Western philosophy was “more suitable for the present age.”⁶⁹ Instead of supporting an opposition to Western science, modern Confucianism aspires to a mutual

67 Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, p. 100.

68 Tang’s approach must be clearly distinguished here from Scheler’s philosophical anthropology which defines philosophy in a fundamental sense as “evidential cognition of essence” (*evidente Wesenserkenntnis*) and, in contrast, portrays neo-Kantian philosophy as an absurdity; Arlt, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, p. 84.

69 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 577–582.

relief or task-sharing with an allegedly over-burdened scientific world view. Scientific research cannot bear fruit if it is supervised, at every step, by moral considerations. The manifesto of 1958 bluntly states: “The crucial point—why the Chinese lack this kind of scientific spirit—is basically the overemphasis on moral practice in Chinese thought.”⁷⁰ Regarded from the standpoint of its social functions, Tang’s modern Confucianism set out to embrace scientific and technological progress in much the same way as religions may do in Western societies of the post-Enlightenment age.⁷¹

Limits of Philosophical Exposition

Tang’s writings are characterized by an unusual, hybrid style that cannot, first of all, be clearly identified as either written vernacular Chinese (*baihuawen* 白話文) or classical literary Chinese (*wenyanwen* 文言文). While the hybrid nature of his writing style requires further research, Anja Steinbauer had made an astute observation of two characteristic traits of his style: 1) Tang’s texts are abundant with passages where he introduced terms as if he “expected from his readers an associative and intuitive understanding [of these terms];” 2) Steinbauer discerns a tendency of Tang to compose very long sentences with utterly complex grammatical structures, which are difficult to understand. It seems to her that Tang tried to “overcome the limitations which were imposed on him by language as a vehicle—if not through a deliberate attempt to break (these limitations) up, then at least through non-observance [of conventions of academic writing].”⁷² We may suppose that Buddhist inspirations again come into play here. The peculiarities of Tang’s writing style seem to convey his concern about the limits of philosophical exposition as a means to attain intuitive insights, but also as a medium suitable for giving an account of intuition itself. Besides, when immersing oneself in Tang’s texts, one almost cannot help but suspect that he deliberately chose to express himself in a thorny style. Perhaps

70 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 34.

71 On this aspect of religions in modern Western societies, see Lübke, *Religion nach der Aufklärung*.

72 Steinbauer, *Tang Junyi's System der neun Horizonte des Geistes*, pp. 103, 105 (English translation: TF). Thaddeus Hang (Xiang Tujie) came to a similar conclusion in an article on Tang Junyi and Xiong Shili published in 1979, when he critically remarked that “. . . [r]eading the writings of Mr. Tang. . . I feel that they are suffused by literary and poetic sense rather than strict logical reasoning”; quoted from: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, p. 297.

he wanted to slow his readers down and draw them deeper into a meditation on the text, or to at least provide his readers with a first-hand experience of his own struggle with language as an inadequate vehicle for a speculation about intuition. Viewed from this perspective, both reading and writing seem to be part of a philosophical-meditational practice of self-fulfillment. The fact that Tang's writings abound with frequent and tedious rephrasing of statements substantiates this assumption.

Moreover, it is conceivable that he wanted to express, at a formal level, his suspicion of modern scientific civilization: his allusive, allegorical, at times obscure writing style should serve as an antidote to modern tendencies to reify human existence under conditions of instrumental rationality and, accordingly, to restrict the human mind. We can furthermore assume that Tang tried to bring the form (style) of his writings into complete accordance with his basic philosophical intention in this way. He apparently aimed for a totality of authentic expression by creating a type of philosophical exposition which generated a coherence between philosophy and intuition, not only in terms of their content, but also in formal and linguistic respects. Such coherence could not, as we have seen, take the form of a conceptual (Western) philosophical language. The quest for authenticity here refers, first of all, to the philosopher who, by aiming at an intuitive insight, relativizes conceptual claims to truth and thereby tacitly acknowledges linguistic and terminological ambiguity. This in turn accords with the peculiarities of Chinese philosophy as Tang identified them. He contended that the language of Chinese philosophy "merely" fulfills the function of a makeshift bridge between the existential and spiritual realm. After the bridge is crossed, it is "transcended." Theoretical/philosophical reflection, in other words, has no exclusive claim to truth. It is as provisional as other truth claims. Besides using language of a "theoretical nature," Chinese philosophers, according to Tang, also placed great importance on a "literary" language and the forms of philosophical dialogues and letters.⁷³

73 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 420–421. In the course of a recent discussion about whether some of Tang's works should be "rewritten" in a more accessible style, as Wu Rujun has suggested, Zhao Jingbang quotes a passage from Tang's *Rensheng zhi tian* that indicates the quasi-soteriological function of language in Tang's work. Tang states that in his "written language" (*wenzi* 文字), he deliberately let "the margins of the realm of *li* 理 become enveloped in fog." He apparently believed that his writings were thus "even richer in evocativeness and guiding [function]," which in turn caused his "spirit" (*jingshen* 精神), upon reading his own texts, to "ascend to this realm of *li* with even more ease." See Zhao, "Dui Wu Rujun xiansheng jianyi chongxie Tang Junyi xiansheng zhuzuo de yi xie fansi," pp. 119–120.

A further attempt to integrate form and content can be detected on the level of terminology in Tang's thought. In Tang's usage, *zhexue*, as we have seen, has a very broad scope, comprising Chinese, Indian and Western traditions. This notion of *zhexue* has repercussions on the philosophical vocabulary in Tang's texts. Hence, we find passages where Tang paralleled neologisms and terms from pre-modern Chinese thought to denote the same notion, for example *juedui* 絕對 / *tian li* 天理 as a pair within the semantic field of the absolute. In other instances, he indicated the flexibility of the Chinese philosophical vocabulary by using the same Chinese word for different philosophical notions (Western or Chinese), depending on its use as terminology for the translation of Western philosophy, or as terms stemming from pre-modern Chinese philosophy. This holds also true for the core concept of *liang zhi*. Tang introduced several terms to delineate his notion of intuition, but he clearly singled out the term *liang zhi*. With the use of *liang zhi*, he explicitly referred to the thought of Wang Yangming and his followers. In fact, he considered the theory of *liang zhi* to be at the center of Wang's philosophy,⁷⁴ which he described as the climax of the Mencian theory of human nature.⁷⁵

Tang himself was reluctant to translate *liang zhi* into English, refusing to use the common English translation "innate knowledge" and relying, instead, on the transliteration "liang-chih."⁷⁶ The terminological difficulties do not end here, since Tang, in his discussion of British philosophy, translates the term "conscience," apparently without hesitation, as *liang zhi* in Chinese. Yet, this should not be taken as a hint to, conversely, translate *liang zhi* in the context of Confucian philosophy simply as "conscience." The ambiguities surrounding Tang's references to *liang zhi* in Chinese and English serve as a reminder that his philosophical vocabulary is highly stratified and open to complex cross-references.⁷⁷ Perhaps unsatisfied with the transliteration "liang-chih," but unable to coin an adequate English translation, Tang proposed several English expressions as equivalents. Obviously, the results of his effort failed to convince even himself—rightfully so, one may add, as his translations indeed offer

74 Tang, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi," p. 188. On the topic of "*liang zhi*," Tang recommended Mou Zongsan's *Wang Yangming zhi zhi liang zhi zhi jiao* 王陽明之致良知之教: Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 587.

75 Tang, "The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy" [1968], p. 6.

76 See his remarks in Tang, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi," p. 188.

77 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 2, index p. 39; see also Tang, "The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi."

little help. Some of these translations even create new problems, for example the highly interpretative translation of *liang zhi* as “consciousness of *li*” (理). First of all, in the semantic field of intuition, the term “consciousness” must be understood in a very broad sense (namely, designating a state of mind where the distinction of subject and object is *not* present). Furthermore, Tang created more translation problems with his use of another transliteration (*li*).⁷⁸ The same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of other translations of *liang zhi* into English introduced by Tang in various of his writings: “conscientious consciousness of mind”;⁷⁹ “original-good-conscientiousness” (a translation which should express, according to Tang, the fact that *liang zhi* was not just “original knowing,” but also has a derivational meaning of “good,” and is always “sensitive” towards “values of good”) and “original-good-conscientious-knowing”;⁸⁰ Tang also proposed “moral consciousness” and “being of the moral mind” as possible translations, hence positioning *liang zhi* unmistakably in the field of moral philosophy.⁸¹

Tang’s struggle with a conceptual fixation of *liang zhi* seems to be less a matter of a struggle *with* language than *about* language and its limitations for discerning the inner workings of intuition. Consequently, he tried to coin adequate terms not only in English. As for Chinese terms introduced by him to refer to *liang zhi*, they also serve as testimony of his difficulties to conceptualize it. We find, for example, the following terms relating to Tang’s idea of intuition: “the wisdom (*zhihui* 智慧) of realizing metaphysical reality,”⁸² or just the “absolute . . . cognition (*juedui* 絕對 . . . *zhishi* 知識).”⁸³ Neither *zhihui* nor *zhishi* adequately convey Tang’s understanding of *liang zhi* as intuition *in actu*. More helpful for a tentative conceptual approach to *liang zhi* are perhaps the following: “immediate awareness,”⁸⁴ to “realize” the “metaphysical reality of absolute mind and pattern;”⁸⁵ and “to know” “mind” and “[human]

78 Tang, “The Spirit and Development of Neo-Confucianism,” p. 80.

79 Ibid., p. 79.

80 Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” p. 188.

81 Tang, “The Spirit and Development of Neo-Confucianism,” p. 80.

82 *Tihui xingshang shizai zhi zhihui* 體會形上實在之智慧: Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 367.

83 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 359.

84 *Zhi jue* 直覺: Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 363 and Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 567.

85 *Tihui* 體會, *juedui de xin yu li zhi xingshang shizai* 絕對的心與理之形上實在: Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 365; see also: “to realize” (*tihui*), “this mind” (*ci xin* 此心) and “this pattern” (*ci li* 此理) Ibid., p. 366.

nature.”⁸⁶ As we have seen, Tang called the spiritual state in which the human being is prepared to attain intuition the “void potency and bright awareness of the mind.”⁸⁷ The terms *xu ling* 虛靈 (void potency) and *ming jue* 明覺 (bright awareness) also figure in Wang Yangming’s reflection on intuition to indicate that the immediacy of intuition is “void” insofar as intuition is neither bound to sensory perception, nor restricted to other modes of experience.⁸⁸ Significantly, the original state, in which Heaven is in motionless self-identity, is often referred to in the neo-Confucian vocabulary as the “great void” (*tai xu* 太虛). The dynamic notion of an identity of Heaven and human mind in the act of intuition requires the human mind, according to Wang Yangming, to achieve a state of “great void” in which it is able to attain intuition.⁸⁹

Like Wang Yangming before him, Tang used allegorical language to describe the process of intuition. Allegories of light play a particularly important role, as Tang took up two allegories from Wang Yangming’s *Chuan xi lu*, one depicting eyesight, the other sunlight.⁹⁰ In his analysis of these two allegories, Tang introduced the conceptual pair of substance and function, but without any intention of proposing a definition of the absolute as a substance in the sense of an ontological difference between substance and function. The absolute is said to manifest itself in a permanent process of becoming, which creates all reality, but this is not meant to imply that substance precedes its own manifestation (or functions). On the contrary, the terms “substance” and “function” apply to the idea that substance and function are inseparable in the ongoing, permanent manifestation of the absolute itself. Similarly to the “substance” of eyesight, which does not simply exist as eyesight as such, but only in its “function” of perceiving colors, the “substance of the mind” (*xin zhi benti*

86 *Zhi* 知, *xin* 心, *xing* 性: Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 371.

87 *Xin zhi xu ling ming jue* 心之虛靈明覺: Ibid., p. 363.

88 Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 477 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 111.274): *xu ling*; and p. 334 (ibid., 111.174): *ming jue*.

89 Wang, *ibid.*, p. 472 (Chan, *ibid.*: 11.269).

90 Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” pp. 189, 194. Tang’s references to 3.19 (allegory of sunlight) and 2.19 (allegory of eyesight) are based on an edition of the *Chuan xi lu* from 1917 (Shanghai) which I have not been able to cross-check. His reference to “3.19” is probably identical with Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 486 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 111.282) according to the prevalent arrangement of the text. I was not able to locate the allegory of eyesight.

心之本體) — i.e. the “pattern of Heaven”⁹¹ — exists inasmuch as the mind manifests itself in *liang zhi*.⁹² The allegory of sunlight also illustrates this notion of substance: where there is light, there is a sun. Accordingly, the absolute is referred to as the “substance of liang-chih’s substance” — in other words as the “substance” of a human mind attaining *liang zhi*.⁹³

As the absolute emerges in the human mind by shining into it, *liang zhi* manifests itself as a vision or illumination in the mind that takes the form of intuition *in actu*, i.e. of a “happening” (*shi* 事).⁹⁴ At the same time, the absolute recognizes itself in the light which shines into the mind: *Liang zhi*, therefore, is “the self-illumination and self-consciousness of the pattern of Heaven.”⁹⁵ In this “self-illumination and self-consciousness” of the absolute, human cognition is achieved as an immediate and affective unity of appearance and insight. This does not mean that the human mind passively “sees” or conceptualizes the absolute. After all, the latter cannot be objectified or therefore take the form of an image or a concept. Tang himself explicitly attested to the inadequacy of language to give expression to the absolute and consequently paid only scarce attention to related terminological distinctions.⁹⁶

The human being’s vision of the absolute is itself a phenomenon of the absolute’s manifestation. Instead of conceptualizing the absolute, the human spirit should therefore try to apprehend it by intuitively taking part in it. Such

91 See Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, pp. 27 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 1.8), 174–175 (ibid., 1.122).

92 Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” p. 194. The idea that colors are not properties existing independently of perception was neither for Wang Yangming nor for Tang Junyi a matter of discussion, but one may suppose that both of them would have agreed with this idea; see also the famous allegory in the *Chuan xi lu*: Wang, *Chuan xi lu*, p. 479 (Chan, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*: 111.275).

93 Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” p. 189.

94 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 380.

95 Tang, “The Development of the Concept of Moral Mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi,” p. 188. The expression “the self-illumination and self-consciousness of the principles of Heaven” is not my translation. The corresponding Chinese expression is *tian li zhi zhao ming ling jue* 天理之照明靈覺. This is an interesting case for questions concerning linguistic analysis of Tang’s philosophical language. Tang obviously agreed with this translation, and thus with the interpretation of *zhao ming* and *ling jue* as reflexive expressions (“self”).

96 On this see William Ng’s study about Tang’s *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*: Ng, “Tang Chun-i on Transcendence: Foundations of a New-Confucian Religious Humanism,” p. 296.

participation results, according to Tang, from a complete actualization of “reason” (*lixing* 理性). This entails a “transcending of self-awareness” on the part of the human being. In his use of the Chinese term *lixing* for “reason,” Tang explicitly stated that reason in the sense of *lixing* is not to be reduced to the function of a “universal lawgiver,” since it transcends human self-consciousness. He then suggested that the term *liang zhi* may be used instead of *lixing*.⁹⁷ By equating *lixing* with the non-conceptual and quasi transrational *liang zhi*, Tang obviously negated any identification of *lixing* / “reason” with a calculating and instrumental type of rationality. Here, Tang’s thought is in general agreement with a popular critique of the European Enlightenment’s philosophical naturalism and its concept of rationality. Charles Taylor regards this criticism of the “disengaged reason” of enlightenment as one of the main aspects of German, French and British Romanticism; it seems reasonable to add modern Confucianism to this list.⁹⁸

The Limit-Concepts of “Philosophical Faith”

Judging from Tang’s taxonomy of knowledge, the mind aspires to overcome its own limitations in all areas of human cognition, either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. The arrangement of this taxonomy follows the pattern of a spiritual and intellectual endeavor which, ideally, would lead a human being to his or her spiritual self-fulfillment. The underlying idea of this taxonomy—namely an increasing detachment of the human mind from finite states and from conditional knowledge—is very likely the

97 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 379–380. The term “*lixing*” is highly ambivalent in the context of modern Confucianism and it is sometimes difficult to determine whether Tang was using it as neologism (thus referring to Western philosophical vocabularies of reason/rationality) or in relation to the semantic field of “*liang zhi*” indicated above. In the second preface to his *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason*, Tang explained that *lixing* was the equivalent of what the Chinese Confucians called “*xing li* 性理.” He equated it with the “original substance” (*ben zhi* 本質) or “selfhood” (*zi ti* 自體) of the moral self, spiritual self and transcendent self; see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, (author’s second preface), p. 19.

98 Consider the following quote from Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*: “The Romantic order, in contrast, was not organized on principles which could be grasped by disengaged reason. Its principle of order was not exoterically available. Rather it was itself an enigma, and one could only understand it fully by participating in it.” Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 380; see also pp. 382–384.

result of Buddhist inspiration.⁹⁹ Tang referred to this spiritual endeavor as the attainment of “transcendental spirituality” leading the human mind towards intuition.¹⁰⁰ This endeavor is part of a multifaceted practice which is thought to lead to the full actualization of the human being’s spiritual nature. Tellingly, Tang inscribed the notion of the sage onto the “spirit of practice” of Chinese philosophy, contrasting it to what he perceived as the mainstream of Western philosophy.¹⁰¹ Hence, the longing of Chinese philosophers to reach beyond the conceptually knowable world and its corresponding orders of knowledge is supposedly particularly strong.

Such an understanding of philosophy highlights the “effort” (*gongfu* 工夫) to recover the “wholeness” of a “harmonious human existence” by striving to connect diverse types of knowledge. This orientation towards the existential dimension of philosophy, by the way, stands in stark contrast to the criticism that modern Confucianism is overly theoretical and lofty (see Chap. 3: “Dogmatism”). In fact, the outlook of Tang’s modern Confucianism is in line with, and was perhaps influenced by, the concept of philosophy presented by Rudolf Eucken and other philosophers of life from the early 20th century. Even though Eucken did not devise a civil theology, he placed great emphasis on the existential dimension of philosophical thought and highlighted the responsibility of philosophy to function as a form of intellectual engagement with social reality.¹⁰² For Tang, too, philosophy is not a purely intellectual effort. It is also a teaching which ultimately aims to “thread together” the processes of “cognition” (*zhi* 知) and “action” (*xing* 行) in an act of intuition whereby the ultimate reality reveals itself. It is thus hardly surprising that Tang introduced the term “philosophical faith” (*zhexue de xinyang*) in this context.¹⁰³ The self-realization of the absolute in intuition, however, is not perforce conditioned

99 Metzger’s observation on the influence of the idea of *pan jiao* 判教 (i.e. the division of Buddha’s teachings) on Tang’s arrangement of different philosophical ideas seems to confirm this interpretation; see Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific*, pp. 229–230.

100 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 361.

101 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 469.

102 Zhang Junmai had visited Eucken for four months in Jena in 1920 and published a German book entitled *Das Lebensproblem in China und Europa* together with Eucken in 1922. On Zhang Junmai’s relation to Eucken, see Fröhlich, *Staatsdenken im China der Republikzeit (1912–1949). Die Instrumentalisierung philosophischer Ideen bei chinesischen Intellektuellen*, pp. 140, 151, 165. On Eucken’s concept of philosophy, see Lübke, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte*, pp. 182–186.

103 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 21, pp. 27, 32–33.

by philosophy, but may occur spontaneously, i.e. without prior philosophical reflection and without explicit (philosophical) faith.

Whereas the historian of philosophy can conduct research without personally “believing” in any philosophy, the “true philosopher,” as Tang added in an autobiographical reference, must have such philosophical faith and a “spiritual attitude of [taking] responsibility,” especially when he or she is not blessed with living in peaceful times. Otherwise, the philosopher will be nothing more than a “wandering ghost” (*you hun* 游魂).¹⁰⁴ In a personal retrospection of his own work, Tang elaborated on the responsibility of the philosopher and emphatically declared that the value of philosophy has to be found in its capacity to assist individuals who wish to restore their faith by overcoming their doubts.¹⁰⁵ Tang’s enthusiasm was almost delirious when he proclaimed that a philosopher must have a soteriological intention of redeeming the world and should strive for his or her own awakening as well as that of other human beings.¹⁰⁶ Here, Tang’s idea of philosophy as a way of life points to a moral dimension. From this perspective, he discussed moral intuition which is simultaneously present as moral behavior. Through intuition, the human being apprehends “original moral principles” in the form of principles which are given to it as moral orders that in turn effectuate *simultaneous* moral conduct. In contrast to moral intuition, discursive moral philosophy has its origin at the very point of a discontinuity, or a “break” (*duan* 斷), between moral truth and moral cognition or between moral truth and conduct—in other words: moral philosophy is necessary where moral intuition is not accessible. Moral philosophy ideally evokes, according to Tang, original moral principles, which then become visible in the derived form of “principles of concrete existence.”¹⁰⁷ In that sense, moral philosophy is quintessentially the quest for a discursive recovery of moral truth, and at the same time a form of spiritual exercise to recover the individual’s original moral sensitivity.¹⁰⁸ It seems that Tang had in mind an enhancement of moral sensitivity through a continuous

104 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 562–563.

105 Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, p. 493.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 519. Tang was convinced that those who conduct philosophical research in a strictly academic manner also fulfill an important task. Yet, by academically pondering philosophical problems, they set only themselves, and nobody else “at peace:” *ibid.*

107 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 371.

108 On Tang’s description of a moral way of life as characterized by continuous moral self-examination of the individual: see *ibid.*, pp. 521–522.

effort of the individual which would thus further develop a disposition to act morally.¹⁰⁹

The theological twist of this endeavor is explicitly stated by Tang when he identified faith as the root of ethics: "In the Chinese style [of ethics], the source of the moral mind is the belief in the humaneness (*ren* 仁) of human nature as the humaneness of the way of Heaven."¹¹⁰ He further reflected, in a general manner, on the necessity of religious faith with respect to sustaining moral efforts:

We hence need to believe that behind and above all the irrationalities which we cannot but bear there should be an absolutely reasonable otherworld, a universal divine being. This otherworld or divine being is the source of our reasonable moral efforts, and it is also the highest guarantee for their authenticity, and the setting place of all moral efforts. It is this otherworld or divine being wherein the human being's metaphysical true nature and true spirit exists.¹¹¹

Tang apparently did not take this claim to mean that religious faith is the cause of morality, but rather the anchorage or foundation of morality (if not in the Kantian sense). In terms of moral practice, the idea of moral intuition belongs to the same category as the related notion of the sage (who serves as a symbol of moral intuition): the status of these notions in Tang's philosophy is that of a positive limit-concept. Although Tang never explicitly referred to the notions of the sage and moral intuition as "limit-concepts," he indeed ascribed to them a limiting and orienting function with respect to the religious dimension of Confucianism, but also to its political, social and moral dimensions. As positive limit-concepts they are neither completely outside of historical and social reality nor fully inside. Or as Tang writes in a typically allusive description:

The realization of *liang-chih* is a way to sagehood because every man has it in himself to be a sage. We could even say that in the depth of every man's heart there lies hidden a sage waiting to be revealed when the closed door of the mind is opened.¹¹²

109 It is in this sense that Tang's following statement might be understood: The "origin" of moral judgment is "moral wisdom" and it is displayed in "moral practice." Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 585.

110 Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, p. 109.

111 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 313.

112 Tang, "The Spirit and Development of Neo-Confucianism," p. 82.

Sages are, then, neither god-like figures dwelling in a sphere beyond reality nor hermits living outside of the human community. Nor do they directly intervene in the human world as benevolent and wise rulers (as many philosophers from the Confucian tradition would have it). For individual members of different types of human communities, including the political community, the notion of the sage is accessible as an orienting prescription for a paradigmatic human being. Yet the sages will never appear in the guise of saintly historical figures, moral teachers, virtuous politicians, benevolent social leaders, or model intellectuals. Sagehood, in other words, is an elusive state of the absolute's instantaneous realization, and neither a form of social existence nor reflective of a superior type of moral or ethical deliberation. In turning the notion of the sage into a positive limit-concept here, Tang moved beyond the mainstream of Confucian traditions—and possibly without being guided by any other tradition.¹¹³

With his depiction of the sage as a paradigmatic figure, Tang had no intention of reducing the sage to a mere rational construct of the human mind. The notion of the sage is not a negative limit-concept that functions, in the Kantian sense, to relieve human reason from the burden of engaging in futile efforts to reach beyond the knowable. On the contrary, Tang insisted that everyone may instantaneously *become* a sage, even though this may not constitute a permanent state of social existence. While someone arguing from within the framework of neo-Confucian concepts of sagehood might presume that this distinction indeed means that “one could argue that sagehood was irrelevant,”¹¹⁴ Tang's modern Confucianism takes this distinction as a crucial element for developing renewed conceptualizations of politics, ethics and religiosity.

Given that the immediacy of a (moral) intuition *in actu* forgoes any symbolic representation of knowledge, insight or cognition, sagehood as understood in terms of intuition cannot constitute a state of cultivation or education. There is a fundamental gap between the cultural and educational praxis of individual self-fulfillment, on the one hand, and the instantaneous spiritual transforma-

113 Lao Sze-kwang believes that Tang, as well as Mou Zongsan, devised “limiting concepts” with respect to the perfectibility of the human being, but failed under Buddhist influence to distinguish between limiting concepts and “goal concepts” (i.e. positive concepts of something that can be actually achieved in social reality). Lao, who hardly gives any evidence to support his assumption of Buddhist influence, in fact means *negative* limit-concepts by “limiting concepts”. Lao merely alludes here to the Buddhist idea of a “comprehensive doctrine” (*yuan jiao* 圓教); see Lao Siguang (Lao Sze-kwang), “Cong Tang Junyi Zhongguo zhexue de quxiang kan Zhongguo zhexue de weilai,” p. 25.

114 Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, p. 26.

tion into a sage, on the other. The consequence of this gap becomes particularly evident when Tang ascertains that one can actually attain an immediate realization (*liang zhi*) without actual awareness of having attained it.¹¹⁵ The discursive inaccessibility of intuition itself impedes the individual's recounting of the intuition, and, literally, his or her ability to come to terms with it. Tellingly, Tang stated that the many efforts of what is often summarily addressed as "self-cultivation" are indeed situated as such outside of the "realm" of the sage:

... the final realm of the way of learning [to become] a sage ... is attained without effort and reached without thinking.¹¹⁶

One who achieves the full development of his moral life or the realization of the essence of his moral nature (*jen*) is called a sage in Confucianism. In the sage mind, there is no borderline of differentiation between the fully developed mind and the universe, and this kind of mind can be taken as both originated from the sage-man and revealed from Heaven. (...) The idea of "universal attainability of [being a] sage" itself may be taken as a metaphysical belief, since no empirical verification in the ordinary sense can be found.¹¹⁷

In contrast to human beings who cannot live in a continuous state of intuition (which would mean that they stay in an infinite realm beyond any discursive forms of communication and also beyond any symbolic representation), the sage belongs to an elusive, immediate presence. The salient characteristic of a sage is thus not a form of discursive wisdom, but his or her intuitive access to the "sublime realm" (*shengshen zhi yu* 聖神之域) of "knowing Heaven."¹¹⁸ A society populated by sages is consequently not within the reach of human history, and any hope that the sages could be saviors of the human world is as vain as it is misguided:

115 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 463.

116 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 380. "... attained without effort and reached without thinking" is a quote from *The Doctrine of the Mean* 20.18. Tang also referred here to the "worthy person," but makes no distinction between the sage and the worthy, thus placing the latter in the realm of the former.

117 Tang, "The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy" [1959], p. 33.

118 Tang explicitly ascribed this notion to the "orthodox school of Chinese metaphysics" (*Zhongguo xingshangxue zhi zhengzong* 中國形上學之正宗): Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 22, p. 374.

But no matter how men [engage in their moral] refinement and cultivation, and no matter how they remake their [actual] conditions, in the end, they can neither enable everyone to become sages and worthies, nor have their [own] conditions conform completely to [their] ideals. There will always remain many things which can neither be transformed nor reached through human strength. It is for this reason that the opposition between the irrational and moral ideals will still persist.¹¹⁹

Tang emphatically asserted that even if all the sages, from antiquity to the present, were to appear in the contemporary world, they would still not be able to save the world, because they do not wield power themselves, but exist solely in the mind of all people. Any hope that sages can or will intervene in historical reality is therefore futile. What is needed instead is the willingness of the people to orientate their actions toward the sage's path.¹²⁰ This is why Tang refrained from calling a society which is not governed by the moral intuition of the sages a manifestation of human failure. These limit-concepts, then, do not cause a "predicament" of imminent and constant failure, even though the sage and moral intuition are in fact beyond the reach of individuals and collectivities. Their grip on praxis is not destructive in the sense that they install standards and convey expectations for human behavior which cannot actually be met. Therefore, one cannot agree with Thomas Metzger when he stated that Tang "conceptualized praxis as a resolute 'inner' effort to implement ideals..."¹²¹—such a narrow concept of praxis would permanently damage social reality since it would be seen solely from the perspective of unfulfilled "ideals." With his notion of limit-concepts, Tang exactly avoided this strangulation of praxis by overwhelming ideals.¹²²

Neither the sage nor moral intuition are "ideals" in the strict Kantian sense. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant exemplarily cites the notion of the sage in Stoicism when stating that ideals have a practical function. According to Kant, ideals are relevant in praxis insofar as they function like "regulative principles," which means that they serve as a standard for actions ("Richtmaß von Handlungen"), albeit without prescribing specific rules for moral conduct.¹²³

119 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 312.

120 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 429.

121 Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific*, p. 191.

122 It is, by the way, no coincidence that social figures such as the worthy (*xian* 賢) or the noble man (*junzi* 君子), who mark distinct stages on the path to sagehood in many Confucian traditions, are largely absent from Tang's modern Confucianism.

123 Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, pp. 549–550.

Tang assumed in the same vein that the notions of the sage and moral intuition have practical relevance, but his limit-concepts do not function as standards for actions. The insights gained by intuition are unforeseeable after all, and cannot serve as a standard for decision-making. Instead, Tang's limit-concepts fulfill their practical, regulative function by delineating and stabilizing an ethos of individual self-fulfillment. This entails another important difference between Tang's limit-concepts and Kant's ideals: Whereas Tang wanted the individual to believe that the goal of becoming a sage is, in principle, attainable, Kant not only declares that those who uphold an ideal should keep in mind that they will not be able to fully realize it, but adds that any attempt to do so will harm and weaken the ideal, because the inevitable failure to implement it would eventually make people believe that the ideal was illusory and without practical relevance.¹²⁴ Suffice to say that Tang's limit-concepts have even less in common with Kant's "pure concepts of reason" than they have with Kant's notion of an ideal.¹²⁵

124 Ibid.

125 "God," according to Kant, is a pure concept of reason, which means that reason needs such a notion of "an absolutely necessary being" ("absolut notwendige[s] Wesen") to regulate the intellect. But the fact that reason needs the idea of "God" is of course not to be mistaken as a proof of an "objective reality" of god—it is, after all, a "mere idea" ("bloße Idee"): *ibid.*, p. 567. Concepts of reason, or "ideas," find their symbolic objectification, according to Kant, in "ideals" which function, as mentioned above, as a yardstick or standard for action, see Baruzzi, "Kant," pp. 152–153.

The Moral Vision

Moral Intuitionism

The differences in the practical philosophy of Kant and Tang Junyi go beyond the Kantian concepts of ideals and regulative ideas, on the one hand, and positive Confucian limit-concepts, on the other. Contrary to Kant's deontological moral philosophy, Tang's moral thought cannot be categorized as an ethics based on principles. Understanding his moral thought as "moral intuitionism," however, offers a sufficient point of departure. Yet this should not belie the fact that Tang did not elaborate a full-fledged moral theory. After all, we do not find a comprehensive meta-ethical discussion about methodological issues in his writings on moral philosophy. Tang, though, dealt with practical ethics in more than just a pedestrian way.¹ Notwithstanding these reservations, we may first relate his moral philosophy to theories of moral realism, and, in a following step, to moral intuitionism. This will shed some light on implicit assumptions in Tang's moral thought which pertain to the issue of moral truth, its relation to reality, and the lingering question of moral subjectivism and irrationalism.

According to David McNaughton, moral realism is best understood in terms of several different assumptions,² all of which can be found, with some modifications, in Tang's moral thought. First of all, there is the claim that moral reality exists independently of human ideas, opinions, and perceptions. Moral values as elements of an independent moral reality can thus be detected or discovered, without the need to construct them philosophically. This assumption is indeed in line with Tang's notion of the absolute moral reality of the "moral nature of Heaven" (*daode de tian xing* 道德的天性).³ In discussing "spiritual values," Tang insinuated that even though values can be discovered, the role of the human being is not restricted to that of a passive recipient of pre-existing values. He hence transformed Lincoln's famous formula by stat-

1 On the tripartition of moral philosophy in practical ethics, moral theory and *meta*-ethics, see McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, pp. 15–16. Tang sketched out central topics of his moral thought in *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 515.

2 The following passages on moral realism draw on McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, pp. 4–5, 7–8, 17, 24, 39–40, 51–52, 96.

3 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 62.

ing that “spiritual values” are characterized by their threefold relation to the (human) mind: they are “by the spirit,” “for the spirit” and “of the spirit.” This somewhat enigmatic statement may be interpreted in different ways, but it seems safe to say that the human spirit is understood here as taking a more active part than merely contemplating the realm of values. One interpretation may run as follows: Spiritual values are detected and enacted “by the spirit,” inure to the benefit of the human mind (“for the spirit”), and cannot exist without the participation of the human mind (“of the spirit”).⁴

According to Tang, human agency is essential in value-formation because even if values may originally belong to the realm of “Heaven”—a point which is not entirely clarified by Tang—the realization of values hinges on the participation of human agency.⁵ Inasmuch as *liang zhi* is not identical with mere contemplation but amounts to an intuition *in actu*, values are not just objects of contemplation, for they must be enacted in order to become real. Such enactment by *liang zhi* is not a matter of a human subject implementing some transcendent value-objects, because *liang zhi* takes place as an intuition that is not structured by a subject-object relation. The human mind cannot grasp the absolute moral reality of “Heaven” by objectifying it, but only by partaking in its realization as a sage.

Tang, however, is not in agreement with an important qualification of moral realism introduced by McNaughton. Even if we were to assume that moral reality exists independently of human ideas and perceptions, McNaughton points out that human beings’ apprehension of moral reality still cannot be separated from their respective world views. An *immediate* perception of moral reality is, in other words, unattainable. In contrast to such a view, modern Confucianism’s notion of *liang zhi* assumes that human beings have the capacity to attain a moral intuition which equals an immediate apprehension of an absolute moral reality (i.e. the “moral nature of Heaven”). It is on this premise

4 See Tang, “The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy,” pp. 1–2.

5 It is this premise which must be taken into account when examining Tang’s concept of value according to which whole categories of values such as moral and aesthetic values are in fact attributes of “nature” (*ziran* 自然). Tang even claimed that this assumption about values is a crucial feature of Chinese culture in general, and a focal point of distinction between Chinese and early modern Western cultures (see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi* pp. 107–108). He characterized values (as well as virtues [*de* 德 or *dexing* 德性]) as a capacity within “events and things” (*shi wu* 事物) to mutually affect each other to the effect of enabling development and growth. The partaking of the human spirit in the realization of the moral nature of Heaven is thus to be understood as the highest form of such interaction; see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi* pp. 106, 110–112.

that Tang labeled his brand of Confucian moral thought an “absolute idealism” (*juedui weixin lun*) or “moral idealism” (*daode weixinlun* 道德唯心論).⁶ But he did so, as we have seen, in the context of his explicit intention to move from such idealism to a “transcendent realism” (*chaoyue shizai lun*), or some sort of synthesis of the two.

Based on the idea that moral reality exists independently of human ideas and perceptions, moral realists conclude that reality can function as the criterion of moral truth. Standards of moral truth are hence non-conventional, that is, independent of opinions, linguistic specifications etc. Propositions about moral right and wrong are thus seen as truth-apt in principle. Tang’s vision of Confucianism is basically in line with this tenet of moral realism. What is more, Tang’s moral thought shares similarities with the non-naturalistic type of moral realism represented by G.E. Moore, who held that moral properties cannot be described as natural properties. Moore characterized the identification of moral propositions with descriptions of natural properties as a naturalistic fallacy. Tang would have agreed with Moore that the meaning of “good” cannot be apprehended by a linguistic description, but only by an immediate perception, that is, an intuition. He therefore equated *liang zhi* with the “self of moral reason” (*daode lixing zhi ziwo* 道德理性之自我) calling the latter the “self which is able to judge the good and the non-good of our acts; [it is the self which] makes the good perfect and detests the non-good.”⁷ For Tang, as for Moore, the concept of moral good defies a language-based definition as much as the meaning of a color cannot be apprehended without a sensual perception.⁸

In conclusion, Tang’s moral intuitionism holds a minor position within moral realism. This is mainly due to his assumption that absolute moral truth can be attained by an intuition which is in principle independent of world views and sensual perception. Significantly, Tang had no intention of accommodating Western strands of moral intuitionism, a moral theory which is also outside of the mainstream of moral philosophy. Even though Tang was familiar with G.E. Moore, Nicolai Hartmann, and Max Scheler, to name but a few exponents of moral intuitionism (some of whom had been discussed also by Zhang

6 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 368.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 531.

8 On Moore see Ricken, *Allgemeine Ethik*, pp. 66–68, 70–71.

Junmai⁹), he explicitly stated his preference for Mencian moral thought when it came to moral intuitionism.¹⁰

In spite of this affinity for a non-Western tradition, Tang's moral thought shares with Western moral realism and moral intuitionism not only the above-mentioned features, but also the precarious assumption about the justification of moral judgments. Specifically, if propositions about right and wrong have the status of propositions about an absolute moral truth gained by intuition, there is no need to deliberate about moral judgments in the first place. In terms of the justification of moral judgments, it would suffice that those who claim to pronounce or enact the truth assert that they obtained it by intuition. This has invited the criticism which blames moral intuitionism of being inherently irrational, subjectivist, and inaccessible to any moral philosophy that tries to justify its propositions in terms of inter-subjective reasoning. The reproof of subjectivism might be countered by the assertion that intuitionism does not in fact intend to establish the idea that moral truth is the result of subjective perceptions or opinions, but claims, on the contrary, that moral truth is absolute. Yet this offers no solution to the problem of justification. Even if one were to accept the assertion that Confucian sages are capable of intuitively apprehending moral truth and that an ascription of moral judgment to sages may therefore serve as a justification, such a solution would be fundamentally flawed. This is because there is no comprehensive description of a sage which might, in turn, qualify claims to sagehood. The elusiveness of the sage is, after all, beyond description and bears silent witness to the moral vision of the sages

9 Zhang identified Chinese ethics in general, including Mencian "theory of *liang-chih*," as a sort of virtue ethics. He explained that "Chinese ethical theory" was focussing on issues of moral obligation and stipulated that judgments on moral obligation were to accord to "one's own conscience" (p. 176). Mencian theory of *liang-chih* included, according to Zhang, ideas on how to attain *liang-chih* and the ability to pass sound judgment on one's moral obligations (p. 178). When discussing the controversy between G.E. Moore and H.A. Prichard, whom Zhang called "an extreme intuitionist," Zhang claimed that their controversy was about the question of "whether good or right is to be the fundamental concept of ethics," with Moore insisting on "good," Prichard and David Ross on "right" (pp. 180–182). With respect to Chinese (Mencian) ethics, Zhang concluded that they posited that "right and good being identical in their meaning, all controversy on this issue has been avoided." The "Chinese intuitionists," Zhang continued, would agree with Moore that the good "cannot be expressed in words," while upholding the idea that "[g]ood consequences are but the natural result of right action" (pp. 182–183); see Chang (Zhang Junmai), "Mencius' Theory of *Liang-Chih* and the Intuitive School of Ethics in Contemporary Britain."

10 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 515–516.

who are solitary bearers of moral truth. If sages were to participate in an open moral discourse, they would be indistinguishable from imposters.

The sagely mastery of moral intuition remains so elusive that it rejects any reference to the moral heroism of virtuous role models. Tang was certainly aware that moral heroism was prone to authoritarianism. Referring to elusive “sages” in the context of moral judgment was thus not entirely without its benefits. All the same, his eschewal of the problem of moral justification is unsatisfying and seriously questions his concept of moral values, which plays an important role in his moral theory. If moral values are indeed to be seen as manifestations of intuition-based action, value-based activity would then appear to be ultimately grounded in a transrational (or irrational) realm of intuition free of deliberation. To be sure, as Hans Joas observes, there is now a broad consensus in philosophy that individuals do not acquire their personal value-orientation in a rational (deliberative) manner. To say that a person can deliberate about his or her choice of values and justify it in hindsight, is, after all, not the same as claiming that one’s value-orientation itself initially resulted from rational, deliberative choices.¹¹ The illusion that an individual’s value-credo is the product of a rational selection and can therefore be “rationally” manipulated may be attractive to those who dream about cultural engineering in modern society. Indeed, many proponents of Confucianism since the 20th century seem to share such an aspiration, often prescribing allegedly superior Confucian values for individuals in a modernizing Chinese society. Tang’s moral thought, however, did not lend itself to such a prescriptive cultural objective (see below).

Tang’s moral intuitionism not only invites critical questions with regard to the justification of moral judgments. As a matter of fact, even the core concept of *liang zhi* is beset by ambiguity. When elaborating on the individual’s ability to autonomously pass moral judgment (“cognize out of itself” *zi zhi* 自知), Tang introduced three ways to attain moral judgment, namely “utilitarianism,” “rationalism,” and the “principle of *liang zhi*” (*liang zhi zhuyi* 良知主義). Yet he also claimed that these three modes of moral judgment actually form one single, tripartite position and that any autonomous moral judgment is to be called *liang zhi*.¹² This seems to imply, first, that correct moral judgments are not an exclusive matter of *liang zhi*, and yet also, second, that any correct moral judgment can be made by *liang zhi*. In other words, while moral judgments of

11 Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, pp. 16, 22–23.

12 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 532–533. Tang related moral autonomy to the ability of the individual to consciously develop moral ideals that take effect as orders issued from and addressed to the self; see *ibid.*, p. 520. Here, Tang insinuated that “moral ideals” may emerge in *liang zhi*.

utilitarian or rationalist provenance may be confirmed or rejected by *liang zhi*, the opposite is not necessarily possible. There are thus moral judgments made by *liang zhi* that remain outside of the scope of utilitarianism or rationalism.

What is more, the scope of *liang zhi* cannot be defined.¹³ In Tang's understanding, *liang zhi* is not restricted to *moral* intuition, but can also cover the intuitive apprehension of a hierarchy of values that are not *moral* in the narrow sense. Tang equated *liang zhi* with an immediate "awareness of values" that enables the individual to "acknowledge," "confirm," and "judge" the hierarchy of values with respect to "scientific, aesthetic, religious, political and economic acts"—or even more generally "acts of human life and culture."¹⁴ He claimed in this context that in an "initial step," the "cognizing" (*renshi* 認識) and "realizing" (*tiyan* 體驗) of values is not a matter of reflection.¹⁵ There is, according to Tang, the example of the scientist who intuitively knows that in science the values of fame and wealth rank lower than the value of truth, and that the value of truth-seeking, in turn, ranks below the value of "stimulating" *liang zhi* in other people.¹⁶ This hierarchy of values is clearly in line with his taxonomy of knowledge and cognition. Still, the identification of *liang zhi* with an awareness of objectified values and hierarchies is problematic even from the point of view of Tang's own intuitionism. The intuition *in actu* cannot, it would seem, yield objectified ideational units such as values, because the intuition itself operates without subject-object relations.¹⁷

More problems arise here, none of which Tang addressed. It is doubtful, to say the least, whether the example of the scientist's intuition may indeed be considered a matter of intuition. After all, there are explicit rules of conduct and ethics in the scientific profession which mandate the highest regard for the search for truth. Intuition, then, is not only unnecessary, but perhaps even precluded by such conventional ethics. Furthermore, the search for truth

13 In fact, even with regard to *moral* intuition in the narrow sense, Tang did not offer a clear definition of the scope and contents of *liang zhi*. On the one hand, as we have seen, he equated moral intuition with an immediate apprehension of particular "original moral principles" and moral "orders;" on the other, he referred in the same context to "the entirety" of all moral values, which is apprehended "instantly" (by "self-consciousness" [*zijue*]): Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, p. 92. For a discussion of Tang's concept of "*zijue*" in this context, see Ng, "Tang Junyi's Spirituality: Reflections on Its Foundation and Possible Contemporary Relevance," pp. 386–387.

14 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 585.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 380.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 585.

17 This problem becomes even more obvious in a manuscript from 1972 which Tang marked—possibly for this reason—as "unfinished;" see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 458–468.

as the highest value of science may not be taken out of its historical context. Depending on the situation, science might consider values pertaining to the good—such as producing acceptable living conditions or the preservation of life—to be more important than the quest for truth.

These ambiguities notwithstanding, Tang's moral thought points to what we may call, with some qualification, ethical pluralism. According to such pluralism, correct moral judgments are not an exclusive matter of moral intuitionism, but can be attained by other forms of morality, too. Since moral intuition, after all, is not available to the individual as he or she may wish, non-intuitive moral theories are, in the meantime, virtually indispensable. They fulfill the interim double-function of providing moral judgment while at the same time increasing the individuals' moral sensitivity, which consequently enhances his or her ability to attain moral intuition. Given such a pluralistic outlook, any dogmatic claim to moral truth and to an ultimate justification of moral judgment is suspended by the ever-pending confirmation through moral intuition. Moral theories and teachings that rely on discursive forms of moral justification all rest on an equal footing insofar as none of them may claim that they amount to an intuitive apprehension of an absolute moral truth. Based on Tang's moral thought, then, discursively interacting individuals, who know their interlocutors currently have no moral intuition, should acknowledge that there may be multiple acceptable moral theories on the mediate discursive level.

Here, ethical pluralism rests on a notion of contingency that is derived from Confucian civil theology: The moral judgments which are gained by intuition are contingent insofar as they cannot be summoned at will, neither with regard to time or a given situation. The unpredictability inherent in intuition thus necessitates recourse to alternative forms of moral judgment in an individual's actual moral life, even though none of the judgments that are derived without intuition can assume ultimate authority, either in content or form. It suggests by itself that this civil-theological qualification of ethical pluralism has far-reaching theoretical consequences. First and foremost, those moral theories that reject the claim that moral propositions are truth-apt and that an *ultimate* justification of moral judgment is feasible or even desirable would certainly find it hard to agree to the civil-theological underpinnings of such an ethical pluralism.

Struggling with “Self-Cultivation”

In Tang's modern Confucianism, ethical pluralism is closely related to the issue of the individual's striving for self-fulfillment as a sage. Because such

self-fulfillment culminates in an immediate apprehension of the absolute, no ethical teaching, fixed catalogue of virtues, values or practices is given preference as the exclusive trajectory for sagehood. Such openness is obviously in accord with Tang's taxonomical arrangement of spheres, forms, and applications of knowledge, which suggests that there are many different ways to realize sagehood. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that moral reflection and moral practice play a particularly important role, even if the reasons for their accentuation are not always explicitly stated by Tang. He, indeed, refrained from providing his readers with a comprehensive explanation for why they should center on their development as *moral* persons when striving for sagely intuition. Even so, we still find scattered across Tang's works traces of an explanation, which points to fundamental assumptions about self-cultivation in the framework of Confucian civil theology.

In research on Confucianism, the term "self-cultivation" has become common currency when referring to ideas about the individual's quest to realize self-fulfillment in sagehood. Yet there is no term in Chinese that exactly matches the English word "self-cultivation." This is not to say that there were no notions of self-cultivation in Confucian thought. Still, when using the term "self-cultivation" in the analysis of Tang's thought, it is important to note that for Tang self-cultivation neither implies that becoming a sage is a *cultural* achievement resulting from self-improvement, nor that sagehood itself a state of *culture*. For those Confucian thinkers like Tang Junyi who conceived of sagehood as an intuitive communion with the absolute or the sublime, the ephemeral state of the sage is a result of the human being's de-individualization and self-transcendence. As such, it is detached from "culture." Self-cultivation—if one chooses to use this term—hence comprises the idea of a "cultural" practice that aims at overcoming or transcending itself. The limit-concept of the sage marks precisely this cleavage between the "cultural" practice of an individual striving for self-fulfillment, on the one hand, and the non-individualistic spiritual reunion with "Heaven," on the other.

With respect to this cleavage, it is significant that Tang and other proponents of modern Confucianism neither envisioned this reunion, nor its actual enactment as a collective experience related to a cult, ceremony, or ritual. Although they agreed with the mainstream of neo-Confucian philosophers that "learning" to become a sage is not a mere intellectual task, but also includes, apart from ethical and aesthetical concerns, ritualistic and ceremonial knowledge and practice, they did not maintain that the culmination of such learning is to be achieved in a ritualistic or ceremonial context. Tang did not highlight the idea of ritualized, regular conduct with respect to *liang zhi*, but instead elaborated on the notion of one-way crossings leading to the realm of intuition.

There are, then, no overland roads that can be traversed back and forth. The self-cultivating practice, in other words, is certainly not *technical* in the narrow sense, because whatever measures may be applied toward this end, they will be dissolved in the sought-after realm (i.e. sagehood).

Sagehood is thus characterized by a transcendence of technical mastery and a suspension of the techniques of self-cultivation. The status of cultural activities in general is therefore precarious vis-à-vis sagehood, including the sphere of humanistic culture and the so-called “main current” of Chinese culture itself. As a consequence, Tang avoids any hypostasis of particular historical cultures or cultural practices. He rather deems the human being to be culturally polymorphic, thus arguing in favor of cultural plurality. Against this backdrop, there is a strong tendency to relate the individual’s quest for self-fulfillment to a holistic notion of culture which encompasses not only ethics, education, religion, and the arts, but also individual dimensions such as a person’s moral preferences, spiritual outlook, and the molding of his or her character. In addition, “culture” pertains here to the realm of science, politics, economics, and law. Tang’s understanding of culture, as it is manifest in self-cultivation, thus appears to have an explicit normative meaning: In order to realize their individual selfhood and mold their personality, human beings need to consciously refer to and apply cultural standards and practices. Yet culture as a normative resource remains in a suspended state, because, as we have seen, the cultivated selfhood of the individual marks a mere interim state. Eventually, the realization of sagehood in *liang zhi* will elevate the human mind above and beyond any adhesion to the cultural existence of the empirical self. Culture, in the end, becomes a self-suspending means of the individual’s spiritual self-transcendence.

Individual acts of self-cultivation serve, first of all, to mediate between a human being’s animalistic traits and his or her moral “nature”. Tang believes that as long as human beings are driven by baser instincts (lust, passion, etc.) their ability to enact moral intuition cannot be fully developed. Cultural acts are therefore concordant with moral acts insofar as they both require some measure of self-control:

We therefore say that amidst all cultural acts there are, unconsciously, moral acts involved and the moral good is being realized. However, by saying that these cultural acts involve moral acts and entail the realization of the moral good, [we] also [refer to instances in which] the formation of these cultural acts is restrained. The moral acts and the realization of the moral good] stem from our personality, and our personality

commands these cultural acts. We have to discuss this [from the perspective of] the self which controls and dominates itself.¹⁸

The moral potential of cultural acts lies, as Tang suggests, in the self-control that individuals effectuate. Morality is thus “immanent” (*neizai* 內在) in cultural activities, albeit in a “latent” (*qianzai* 潛在) manner and “without [moral] self-consciousness” (*bu zijue* 不自覺).¹⁹ In this sense, the individual’s quest to “complete his personality” (*wancheng qi renge* 完成其人格) by “creating culture”—in “literature, the arts, philosophy, science, religion, politics, economy, law, etc.”—is morally relevant.²⁰ In the second preface to his *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason*, Tang stated somewhat cryptically that the realization of cultural ideals requires individuals to “transcend” their “concrete natural psychic disposition and natural instincts” and thus amounts to a manifestation of moral reason.²¹

Tang, however, holds that “cultural manifestations” cannot fully express the moral consciousness of the individual, as they do not completely accord with the “criteria of morality.”²² For one, the main values in morality differ from those in other cultural spheres. With respect to morality, Tang highlighted “the good,” while allocating “justice” (in the distribution of rights and duties) to the sphere of politics, “wealth” to economy, “truth” to science, “beauty” to the arts, and “deification” to religion. Whereas cultural values require an objective manifestation (in “practice” and “things”), Tang claims that moral values exist inside the personality of the individual.²³ The moral value of diligence, for example, is not to be mistaken for the external results achieved by diligent efforts, because the moral value applies exclusively to the individual’s “transcending” of the “empirical self.” The same holds true for the *moral* value of (secondary) virtues such as orderliness, bravery, forbearance, and circumspection. The moral value, according to Tang, pertains here to the willingness of the individual to endure discomfort caused by the attempt to overcome the natural inertia of the empirical self. Consequently, happiness is to be discounted as a moral value. Tang indeed argued that disregarding one’s personal happiness

18 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 519.

19 Ibid., pp. 516–517, 528.

20 Ibid., p. 304.

21 Ibid., (author’s second preface), p. 15.

22 Ibid., p. 374.

23 Ibid., pp. 516–518.

is a moral value insofar as it attests to the transgression of limitations imposed by the empirical self.²⁴

Tang's notion of a *latent* presence of morality within the sphere of culture is "modern" insofar as it provides the basis for a functional differentiation of spheres of values and institutions without subordinating cultural plurality to the moral dictates of world views, ideologies, or ethical convictions. According to this view, however, cultural acts are not morally neutral since they share with moral acts an essential requirement, namely, a certain degree of self-restriction imposed by the individual. It is this idea of conquering the empirical self that served Tang as a point of reference for identifying the latent moral potential of cultural activities, artifacts, or institutions. Given this assumption of a proto-moral surplus of cultural acts, Tang's notion of self-cultivation captures the coherence of morality and culture, albeit without merging them into one. Significantly, Tang maintained that the realization of moral values depends much more on the individual's willingness to initiate an "effort" in moral "refinement and cultivation" (*xiu yang* 修養) than on being inspired by *culturally* creative "men of genius" (*tiancai* 天才). He hence concluded that the realization of values in moral and other cultural activities entails different "forms of consciousness" (*yishi xingtai* 意識形態).²⁵

According to Tang's notion of self-cultivation, individual "efforts" may vary greatly in form, contents, and mode, and are by no means simply a matter of repressing natural instincts. Tang discussed in this context, for example, artistic creation: Whereas a piece of art in its material form has no moral value as such, the process of artistic creation has moral value insofar as the artist does not selfishly keep his notion of beauty to himself. By expressing his vision of art, he or she shows a willingness to transcend an egotistic, subjective inwardness.²⁶ It is significant that Tang refrained from considering the artist's motivation to produce an object of art. The focus lies solely on the artist's willingness to "transcend" restrictions imposed by the empirical self, such as his inclination to withdraw into an isolated inwardness. In a similar way, Tang introduced the traditional notion of "music" as expressed in the "spirit of rites and music" (*li yue zhi jingshen* 禮樂之精神). He interpreted "music" in a very broad sense as an equivalent to the arts in general and related it to an "artistic conduct

24 Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, pp. 55–57. This line of thought is at once incompatible with Utilitarian ethics and Kant's categorical imperative (see also Tang's reflection on the moral value of altruistic acts where he again highlighted the overcoming of the empirical self as the criterion for moral value); see *ibid.*

25 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 519–522.

26 Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, p. 59.

of life.” The subjective consciousness temporarily “forgets” the empirical self when appreciating the beauty of art or creating a piece of art. The moments of artistic self-oblivion occur in the immediacy of producing and contemplating art and entail, as Tang believed, the type of self-oblivion that a scientist may experience when conducting research in a highly concentrated manner. Here, the containment of the instinct-driven self happens, as it were, as a side-effect. Tang thus deemed these experiences to be spontaneous ways of restraining the “selfish spirit,” and thereby of unfolding the individual’s “social nature” (*shehui-xing* 社會性).²⁷

Contrary to what one may expect from Confucian ethics, Tang had no intention of establishing rigid moral standards for self-cultivation. In fact, his approach rather implies the opposite, namely, an attenuation of morality in the narrow sense within a very broad range of (self-) cultivating practices. The latter comprises a variety of moral, intellectual, spiritual, aesthetical, and bodily practices, as well as ritual acts performed, for example, in the “three forms of ritual sacrifice.” There is hence no notion of a moral dictate, nor is there an avowal of a thorough moralization of all spheres of culture. The various self-cultivating efforts, including ethical practice, are all inevitably separated from the realm of sagehood. Consequently, when identifying the moral consciousness as the highest form of cultural consciousness, Tang referred merely to its function of “harmonizing,” instead of subordinating, cultural activities. The ensuing transformation of the “spontaneous” self is said to enhance further *cultural activities*.²⁸

The tendency to attenuate morality within self-cultivation becomes particularly evident in Tang’s thoughts about the individual’s “moralization of [his or her] conduct of life” (*shenghuo zhi daodehua* 生活道德化). His discussion of “ten prescriptions” is the closest that he ever came to providing prescriptions for self-cultivation. The overarching focus here is the domination of “instincts, impulses and desires” that afflict the individual. One of Tang’s fundamental, albeit implicit, assumptions is that any attempt to directly resist human instincts and passions is doomed to fail. What the practitioners of self-cultivation should learn instead is how to avoid being severely afflicted by the baser instincts in order to circumvent a clash with moral duties. Overall, the ten prescriptions are aimed at a preparatory state of the individual’s mind which facilitates his or her immersion in moral reflection and practice. The prescriptions therefore contain neither an explication of moral theories, principles, values or virtues, nor an elaboration of ethical conventions. Tang’s own extensive use

27 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 64–66.

28 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 525–526.

of the word “morality” in this context should neither be understood in terms of a Kantian or post-Kantian concept of morality, nor virtue ethics.

The main thrust of the ten prescriptions consists in a reflection on the transcendent self, and on the limitations, narrowness, and ignorance of the empirical self. The Buddhist inspiration is explicit. Tang wanted the practitioners to read into “philosophy and Buddhism”—to contemplate the impermanence and the “principal and secondary causes” of reality (prescription 5), and to refrain from striving for happiness for the sake of happiness (prescription 8). Meditation and bodily exercises are not mentioned, however. The only instances where the effort of self-cultivation is directly tied to physical activity is the advice to go into nature (as a way to contemplate it) and to submit oneself to strict physical discipline (prescriptions 4 and 9). With respect to the ten prescriptions, we may state that Tang apparently deemed “moral” any effort to restrain natural instincts, impulses, and desires, no matter whether it actually involves moral reflection or even a moral struggle against an insufficiently moral world. As a result, the “moral” effort might also comprise the individual’s decision to *not* resist an adverse environment at any cost, but rather to adjust to unchangeable circumstances in order to minimize or bring to an end the continuing affliction by overwhelming impulses and desires (prescription 7).²⁹

To conclude, the ultimate goal of such self-cultivation is not the formation of a moral individual or a moral world for the sake of morality. Rather, the aim of self-cultivation is to prepare the subject’s mind to overcome the pull of natural instincts, passions and desires, but also to transcend reflective activities altogether, thereby generating a “transcendental spirituality” or “void potency” (*xu ling*) of the mind. Here, the void potency is conceptualized as a dynamic spiritual condition in which the ultimate spiritual reality permeates the subjective mind. Moral reflection and practice are instrumental to this effort inasmuch as they serve to restrain any digressions of the practitioners’ mind. Still, as important as they may be, they are not the sole pathway to the spiritual state of void potency.

Tang’s notion of self-cultivation may indeed warrant questioning a common assumption in research on Confucianism which posits that self-cultivation is quintessentially guided by *moral* concerns (in the above-mentioned sense). If

29 Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, pp. 80–83. Tang’s approach to self-cultivation which aims to eliminate obstacles to realizing *liang zhi* in everyday life is reminiscent of post-Wang Yangming thinkers like Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574), Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562), Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563), Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (1504–1563); cf. Lin, “Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan de yangming houxue yanjiu,” p. 28.

interpreted strictly in terms of deontological ethics and virtue ethics, Confucian teachings of self-cultivation often seem to fall short. Indeed, it might appear as if they merely offer the moralistic promise that “the more diligent you practice self-cultivation, the more virtuous (or moral) a person you will become.”

Moreover, self-cultivation does not denote a practice which simply prescribes the individual’s immersion in the cultural realm for the sake of character-building and moral sensitizing. Tang was aware, much more than many of his fellow Confucians, of imminent, potential dangers arising from the individual’s commitment to self-cultivation. The cultural inventory of self-cultivation could be distorted, or even manipulated, and thus lead to the deception, and possibly even the self-deception, of individuals under the dulcet label of self-cultivation. As a matter of fact, various forms of oppression loom in the effort towards self-cultivation exactly because it entails the strenuous attempt to rein in the empirical self. Though Tang did not explicitly discuss the possibility that the label of self-cultivation serves to conceal authoritarianism, it seems safe to say that he recognized such a danger all the same. Indeed, he left no doubt that culture and cultural activities may serve evil ends and even warned of a “higher ranking” evil that emerges when the values of the true, good, and beautiful are subjected to an “inversion” and all value-standards become distorted.³⁰

Perhaps even more unsettling is the danger that self-cultivation may have repressive psychic effects on the individual practitioners which are self-inflicted and difficult to discern. This problem concerns the inherent claim of self-cultivation that practitioners bolster the formation of their individual selfhood by internalizing social and ethical standards. It is due to this supposedly reassuring promise that the practitioners are prone to submit themselves to an internalization of practices, norms and values that may have a detrimental effect on them. This particular problem concerns the question of how individuals might grasp the psychic impact of their effort to “cultivate” the empirical self. In more blunt terms: “Who is actually ‘cultivating’ whom?”; or, in more explicitly Freudian terms: “How can the ego authenticate his or her self-cultivating practices and distinguish them from the super-ego’s oppressive rule?” Tang largely disregarded the dangers to the individual’s psychic health that may accompany the implementation of “self-”cultivation. These dangers entail an internalization of repressive images, values, conventions, and practices of the self that are disguised by the ideal of moral self-improvement, but in fact produce pathological forms of selfhood. Yet, for Tang “culture”

30 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 107–108.

and “self-cultivation” are civil-theological, not psychoanalytical, concepts. Modern Confucian thought in general shows very little interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and related social philosophies and theories, in spite of its considerable interest in the formation and development of individuality and subjectivity. Tang’s thought is no exception here, as one finds only scattered, predominantly negative comments on Freud in his writings. Among them, there is his blanket repudiation of theories that liken the human being to any other living being, such as Freud’s view of the sexual drive, Nietzsche’s and Adler’s views about the will to power, Pavlov’s behavioral psychology, and also Marxism. Tang concluded that even though these theories arrived at “discovering something about human nature,” they still fell short of genuinely “seeing the essence of human nature.”³¹ Tang’s hesitancy toward psychoanalysis in general is particularly evident in the above-mentioned ten prescriptions for the individual’s conduct of life. In his discussion of the human being’s animalistic traits, impulses, and desires, he did not conceptualize them in terms of a libido, which can never be fully restrained by “cultivation.” On the contrary, he called on the practitioners of self-cultivation to acknowledge that their mind is not bound to their physical body, since the latter is merely something inside the mind. Hence, the “importance” of the physical body could and should be “forgotten” as often as possible.³² We may assume, then, that this call to disregard the physical body implies that the practitioners should not conceive of themselves as subjected to the libido and its ties to the unconscious.

It is not difficult to see why specific elements of Freud’s psychoanalysis were rejected by Confucian thinkers of the 20th century. The Freudian theory on the formation of self-identity in childhood (involving the Oedipus complex) is obviously difficult to reconcile, in an affirmative manner, with Confucian notions of filial piety. Freud’s discussion of the “oceanic feeling” in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and Its Discontents*) is particularly challenging to Confucian thought.³³ It seems likely that Freud would have

31 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 565.

32 Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, p. 81. In an interview in the monthly magazine *Mingbao* from April 1974, Tang took this expectation to the extreme when musing over the sexual “indulgence” he believed to be rampant in Europe and North America. He explained this as a reaction of the individuals to the overwhelming pressure of life in times of industrialization and commercialization, and accompanying feelings of meaninglessness. Tang assumed that if one’s life were truly “enriched, substantial and complete,” like it was for “some religious believers,” one could get by without having a sexual life at all. In this context, Tang also referred to the notion of marriage life according to “the tradition of Chinese culture,” where the sexual life makes up an “extremely small part;” see Tang, pp. 325ff.

33 See Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, p. 197.

concluded that the notion of sagehood as a state of mind where “there is no borderline of differentiation between the fully developed mind and the universe” is an expression of a (regressive) “oceanic feeling,” of something “boundless, limitless” (“wie von etwas Unbegrenztem, Schrankenlosem”). Freud was convinced that such an oceanic feeling or yearning could be retraced to a “regression” to an infantile, “early phase of self-awareness” (“frühe Phase des Ichgefühls”) that predates the ontogenetic formation of a clear demarcation between the “I” and the social and material environment. As Freud believed, the human being’s regressive longing for the return to such a state of undifferentiated self-awareness may trigger “an initial effort of religious consolation” (“erster Versuch einer religiösen Tröstung”).³⁴

Nonetheless, Tang’s disinterest in, and perhaps even aversion to, a psychoanalytical theory of culture should not be mistaken for a blind defense of an optimistic concept of the human mind and psyche. Tang himself remained deeply skeptical when it came to the possibility of eradicating human evil through spiritual, self-cultivating efforts. He stated matter-of-factly: “But whether everything which is needed to eliminate the evil in the human mind is indeed merely related to engaging in a spiritual effort (*xin shang yong gongfu* 心上用工夫) is yet another question.”³⁵ As we have seen, Tang remained skeptical about self-cultivation and admonished individuals to not ignore the peril of being immersed in a false, distorted “culture” marked by an inversion of values. They also should not expect that they will be capable of eliminating their own malice once and for all.³⁶ The question still looms large here of whether, and if so how, individuals can be certain when practicing self-cultivation that they do not in fact indulge in a harmful, possibly even deviant practice. The answer that may be gleaned from Tang’s work is as paradoxical as it is complex: Individuals have no way of knowing with absolute certainty whether they are going astray, unless they attain moral intuition.

34 Ibid., pp. 201, 204.

35 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 105.

36 Tang cautioned his readers with the warning that if “human nature” “degenerated” only for a single moment, “satan” would immediately appear; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 113. On the terminology and Tang’s concept of evil, see below Chap. 7 “The Political and Its Demonic Aspects.”

Outlines of a Confucian Ethos

The reader of Tang's work learns much less about how to live a life devoted to becoming a sage than the reader of many neo-Confucian texts.³⁷ Tang's reluctance to provide detailed directions on how to practice self-cultivation is consistent with his concept of modernization. He recognized that binding prescriptions of a catalogue of virtues and values to be followed by self-cultivating individuals in all spheres of life might curb the emancipative effects of the ongoing process of modernization. His awareness of the potential downside of self-cultivation and the janiform of culture certainly further contributed to his reluctance.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Tang only loosely related his ideas about self-cultivation to Confucian texts and thinkers from pre-20th century periods. In a sketch of traditional Confucian self-cultivation in his book *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture*, he summarily referred to, among others, *The Analects*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning*, the *Book of Changes*, and to Cheng Hao, Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming, and Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583).³⁸ Although lacking a thorough analysis of these different notions of self-cultivation, Tang's sketch is instructive as it reveals what he himself considered to be important elements of self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition. There was, first of all, the idea that self-cultivation requires the willingness of the practitioners to constantly examine whether they are behaving morally; this, in turn, would eventually enable them to instantly detect immoral intentions. Practitioners were furthermore obliged to lead disciplined lives. The quintessence of self-cultivation was to effectuate a disposition and an attitude which allowed the individual to "naturally" conform to the requirements of moral conduct. Tang quoted (incorrectly) in this context from *The Doctrine of the Mean* 20.18 to illustrate what it means to reach the highest sphere of morality: "[He who], without the exercise of thought, hits upon what is right, and without effort apprehends" (*bu si er zhong, bu mian er de* 不思而中, 不勉而得).³⁹ In order to

37 For a concise discussion of neo-Confucian practices of self-cultivation (including spiritual exercises, ritual acts, reading of classics, practicing "attentiveness," "reverence" and "quiet sitting"), see Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 144–160.

38 On this and the following sketch, see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, pp. 224–226.

39 In Legge's translation, the passage reads: "Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity, is he who, without effort, hits what is right, and apprehends, without the exercise of thought;—he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains sincerity, is he who chooses

acquire the correct disposition and attitude, Confucian thinkers proposed that the practitioners should build their character by observing a broad range of cultural and ethical conventions, many of which affected their daily life, such as family relations and various customs related to food and clothing. Other practices pertained to the *rite de passage* and to the arts. This “moral education,” to use Tang’s term, was to begin in one’s youth and thus entailed the idea that achieving an individual disposition to act morally was gradual. As we have seen, however, Tang did not have a traditionalist intention to reestablish the observance of pre-modern conventions, ceremonies, and rituals in the 20th century.

Tang’s reluctance to equate his own position with specific notions of self-cultivation from Confucian traditions is consistent with his reservations about referring to specific moral theories—Western or Eastern—in order to identify prescriptions for individual self-fulfillment. He actually cautioned practitioners about the adverse effect of confining their mind to a systematic reflection of moral theories. Tellingly, he gave preference to those (non-systematic) “teachings that go along with a [particular] person or a [particular] situation” and stated:

This is the reason why the highest ranking works of moral philosophy in the East and the West, such as *The Analects*, *The New Testament*, and *The Nikāyas* are all devoid of systematic exposition. Moral practices must involve a multitude of practical things, and with respect to a specific practical thing, they all hold a specific normative principle to be realized.⁴⁰

Narrative forms of moral thought are thus particularly well-suited to self-cultivation, and this includes anecdotes about the moral conduct of virtuous persons. The focus here is not on analyzing principles of moral conduct, but on familiarizing oneself with the exemplary moral acts of virtuous persons and thereby retracing, in effect, their particular moral judgments. This entails—to refer to Max Scheler—a type of interpretation which is distinct from attempts to objectify virtuous models or imitate certain moral acts. Instead, it requires

what is good, and firmly holds it fast.” Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Works of Mencius*, p. 413. The underlined passage reads in *The Doctrine of the Mean* 20.8: *bu mian er zhong, bu si er de* 不勉而中, 不思而得. Perhaps, Tang, who quoted the passage correctly in *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* (see above) put here “without the exercise of thought” in front to underscore the fact that the intuition of the sage unfolds without reflection.

40 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 373.

identification with the virtuous persons' volition.⁴¹ In this way, it is the personal determination to attain sagehood as it becomes manifest in Confucius, which is to be emulated. In terms of volition, Tang highlighted the quality of "moral sincerity" (*daode shang de zhen cheng* 道德上的真誠).⁴² It is said to be crucial for the human being's "partaking [in] and awakening [to] (*can wu* 參悟)" the "origin of the universe and human life." Moral sincerity is not an exclusively Confucian virtue, but rather, as Tang believed, a common topic of "the path of Eastern philosophy," including Buddhism and Daoism.⁴³ There is, then, neither a need to establish a personality cult and sectarian idolization of Confucius, nor to strictly follow ideas about virtues from earlier Confucian texts.⁴⁴ Tang remarked, however, that Confucius was better suited to serve as a model figure than Buddha or Jesus, because of his secular orientation and his recognition of the immanent and transcendent aspects of the "mind of humaneness."⁴⁵

Even though a detailed ethos of self-cultivation is not what Tang had in mind, the outlines of a modern Confucian ethos emerge nonetheless:

First, the commitment of individuals to an ethos of self-cultivation is not enforceable by legal, political, or social sanctions. With respect to inducing the individual's willingness to engage in self-cultivation, Tang remained skeptical about whether virtue models from religious or other traditions could actually produce a sufficiently persuasive effect. He concluded that it would indeed be difficult to teach someone to instantly engage in self-cultivation.⁴⁶

Second, Tang's discussion of individual self-fulfillment strongly insinuates that practitioners should acknowledge that self-cultivation is the pathway for attaining the intuitive realization of sagehood. Practitioners were furthermore called to believe that the "mind" (or "pattern") of Heaven is the

41 Scheler, *Schriften zur Anthropologie*, p. 169; on Scheler see also Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, p. 154.

42 Tang explicitly stated that the "effort of refinement and cultivation" (*xiu yang zhi gongfu*) must entail an "effort to consider sincerity" which in turn consists of an "effort to attain *liang zhi*;" see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 567.

43 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 577.

44 Tang departed for example from the scheme of four cardinal virtues in the *Mencius* (VIA.16) by considering the "spirit of humaneness" to be fundamental to the unfolding of other virtues; see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 391–392, 416–418.

45 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 368, 383; on Tang's statement in favor of the need to identify role models, see *ibid.*, p. 63.

46 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 567.

“ceaselessly self-generating” (*sheng sheng* 生生) “source” of our “moral nature” (*de xing* 德性).⁴⁷

Third, the practitioners’ constant efforts to “transcend” the empirical self are expected to generate a personal disposition that facilitates the individual’s domination over his or her animalistic and selfish traits. These efforts not only comprise moral reflection and moral conduct in the narrow sense, but also various cultural, spiritual, and bodily practices aiming to rein in one’s baser instincts. Inasmuch as the practitioners develop and reinforce their ability to dominate their baser instincts, they enhance their capacity to attain moral intuition. Self-cultivation thus seems to propel moral progress towards moral intuition, even though it remains ontologically separated from intuition itself.

Nonetheless, the relation between the empirical self of self-cultivation and the transcendent self of moral intuition remains unsettled in Tang’s thought. Its vagueness resembles the ambiguity in Wang Yangming’s model of self-cultivation, which is based on the assumption that individuals have an inborn capacity to intuitively “discover” moral truth. It differs therefore from those development-models of self-cultivation that claim moral growth and continuous moral progress gradually lead to the individual’s moral perfection. With respect to these two models, which are analyzed by Ivanhoe, Angle concludes that although Wang Yangming would not have subscribed to the idea that there is a “development of our moral sense(s),” he would have admitted that one’s commitment to strive for *liang zhi* may actually grow and deepen.⁴⁸ Tang’s notion of self-cultivation conforms in this regard to Wang Yangming’s ideas.

Fourth, the practitioners’ “moral conduct of life” (*daode shenghuo* 道德生活) is to entail, albeit not exclusively, moral reflection and the orientation toward moral “ideals,” both of which are said to contribute to a constant embrace of the good. The “essence” of moral life is reflection,⁴⁹ and not the submission of moral subjectivity to extant moral codes, mores, or traditions.

47 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 28–29. “*Sheng sheng*” refers, according to Tang, to a specifically Confucian notion: It posits that everything which is generated by human beings, as well as the capacity (the “virtue” [*de*]) that enables them to generate their world, is a manifestation of Heaven; see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, p. 116.

48 Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 115–117. Angle draws here from Ivanhoe’s examination of Confucian ethics, which depicts ideas ascribed to Confucius and Mencius as representative for the development-model of self-cultivation; see Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yangming*, pp. 48–50, 103–104.

49 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 521.

Fifth, the practitioners must establish a personal attitude or habitus that grants leeway to ethical pluralism. An unyielding insistence on certain theories, principles, world views or ideologies would contradict the fundamental civil-theological assumption of this ethos, namely, the relativity of all discursive truth-claims in relation to the immediate apprehension of the absolute in *liang zhi*. Tang's Confucian civil theology consequently does not lend itself to the idea of a universal criterion which allows the practitioners to objectively assess whether they are making moral progress en route to self-fulfillment. After all, "the final realm," as quoted above, will be reached without measurable effort and without "thinking."

Sixth, the individuals who strive for self-fulfillment must act as social beings and not isolate themselves from their social environment.⁵⁰ The "moral conduct of life" does not call on the practitioners to withdraw into a spiritual inwardness, but to engage in mundane matters and practical affairs. In the words of Tang: the "deep comprehension in immediate awareness" results from "practice" (*shijian* 實踐).⁵¹ Yet, the status of self-cultivation remains circumscribed with respect to the attainment of sagehood-as-intuition. Self-cultivation is characterized here by a self-suspension of its techniques vis-à-vis inner sagehood. It is this unbridgeable gap which delineates the conceptual space for reconciling the universal foundation of self-cultivation in human nature as endowed by Heaven with the assertion that the practice of self-cultivation is subject to cultural and historical particularities.

Seventh, the self-cultivating individuals are not compelled to accept the world as an unchangeable reality which demands compliance and conformity as the only course of action. The modern Confucian ethos stands in contrast to Max Weber's dictum on Confucian ethics. Weber assumed that Confucian ethics was "a rational ethic which reduced tension with the world to an absolute minimum," adding that "[t]his was true of its religious depreciation as well as its practical rejection." He concluded that Confucianism entails an "ethic

50 See for example Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 62. This aspect of Tang's notion of self-cultivation is highlighted by Roger Ames who presents Tang as a representative of a type of role ethics which, according to Ames, does not entail the idea of an ontological dualism. Given the crucial importance of such a dualism in Tang's speculation about *liang zhi*, the interpretation of Ames seems to be questionable; see Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: a Vocabulary*, pp. 128–134.

51 Tang, *Daode ziwu zhi jianli*, p. 92; on this see Ng, "Tang Junyi's Spirituality: Reflections on Its Foundation and Possible Contemporary Relevance," pp. 386ff.

of unconditional affirmation of and adjustment to the world.”⁵² Even though modern Confucianism does not contain a notion of “afterlife” that might serve as the spiritual foundation of a radical denial of the mundane world, a “tension” in the sense of Weber’s analysis is indeed present in Tang’s civil theology. The latter, in fact, does not exclude a radical denial of the world, at least not in principle. Among the many passages that bear testimony to such a tension between a transcendent realm and the mundane world, we find the following: “The perfection, realness, and goodness in my yearning cannot be found in the world of reality . . . Therefore, I understand that my yearning has a . . . source that transcends the world of reality . . .”⁵³ The sort of historical optimism which permeates modern Confucianism (see Chap. 11) is thus different from the “radical worldoptimism” which Weber ascribed to Confucianism and which was allegedly responsible for the Confucians’ inclination to merely muddle through mundane reality, unable to truly express their subjectivity by resisting the world altogether.⁵⁴

Eighth, Tang suggested that ideas about the individual’s withdrawal from the world stem from Indian philosophy and referred to allegedly “Indian” notions of a “release” (*jietuo* 解脫) and “unpinning” (*chaoba*) from the “real world.” Without further clarification, he proposed that Chinese thought, in contrast, “confirmed” things and events of the real world, along with the practical

52 Quoted from: Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, pp. 227, 229 (see also Weber’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, pp. 514–515). The international discussion of Weber’s analysis is very extensive. Thomas Metzger’s approach is particularly convincing as he not only points to methodological problems in Weber’s research on Confucianism and to Weber’s limited knowledge of Chinese history and thought, but also discusses neo-Confucian philosophical ideas as well as attitudes and mentalities of neo-Confucian thinkers. In his response to Weber, Metzger highlights the “sense of predicament” (i.e. a sense of a tension to the world) of neo-Confucian thinkers who were keenly aware of the rift that existed between their own goals and ideals and the realities of the historical world (on this, see also Metzger’s seminal work *Escape From Predicament. Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture*). But Metzger overstates his case, when he assumes that the apperception of a tension between ideals and historical reality triggered a general tendency in all “modern Chinese thought” to develop utopian and moralistic schemes in order to overturn mundane situations; see Metzger, “Max Webers Analyse der konfuzianischen Tradition. Eine Kritik,” pp. 235–236, 244, 251, 254–255.

53 Translated from Tang’s *The Establishment of the Moral Self (Daode ziwu zhi jianli)* in: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, p. 293.

54 Quoted from: Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, p. 235 (see also Weber’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, p. 522.).

engagement of the human being.⁵⁵ This confirmation, it seems, is crucial for Tang's exilic philosophy which claims that the formation of individual selfhood is inseparable from the notion of the individual as an embedded social being. Here, the ethos of self-cultivation indeed echoes the concern about the ever-looming threat of social, intellectual, and emotional isolation of the individual in exile. The assumption that self-cultivation requires individuals to engage in the transformation of their life-world is certainly in accordance with the conception that exiles need to transform the non-place of emigration.

55 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 22, p. 362. "Chinese thought" includes, according to Tang, Confucianism, Daoism and (Chinese) Buddhism. The distinction between Buddhism in China and India remains unclear.

Shifting the Foundations of Confucian Political Thought

The Political and Its Demonic Aspects

Tang Junyi was well aware of the danger of political dogmatism stemming from Confucian traditions. In response, he rejected any idea of a traditionalist return to a pre-modern ethos of rule by virtuous elites, let alone “sages,” which might undermine the emancipative potential of modernity. By the same rationale, he rejected the traditional ideal that politics should be evaluated by purely ethical or “humanistic” standards. He instead re-conceptualized the sphere of the political as a sphere of action which was, by necessity, governed by wills for power. Modern politics thus had only a derivative function with respect to the realization of “humanistic” values in society and would merely serve to secure the collective preconditions for the individual’s quest for self-fulfillment by realizing his or her “inner sagehood.”

Tang’s Confucian civil theology assumes that the human being has an inherent potential to actualize sagehood, but also to unleash his or her lust for power. The reflection on the human being’s struggle with his or her own lust for power is of fundamental importance to Tang’s political thought in general. It is against this backdrop that he explored the formation of the human being’s political and moral subjectivity in his two-volume monograph *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason* (*Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*) from 1958 and in a number of articles published between 1950 and 1953.¹ Here, Tang conceived of the human lust for power in a manner that was unprecedented in Confucian political thought. He now analyzed problems of power and evil with respect to politics and the individual’s existence far more comprehensively than his Confucian

1 Cf. the following articles: “The Sources of Humanity’s Evil” (first published in the weekly supplement of the *Hong Kong Times* [*Xianggang Shibao* 香港時報] in 1950; reprinted in Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 104–115); “Basic Knowledge about Humanistic Culture and Democracy” (first published in: *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 3, No. 24 [December 1952]; reprinted in Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 388–401); “Social Humanism and the Spirit of Democracy in China and the West” (first published in: *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 4, No. 4 [January 1953]; reprinted in Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 402–425).

predecessors. This shift in his thought seems to have occurred gradually, for he published an article as late as July 1949 in which he still highlighted well-known Confucian topics such as the human being's essentially social nature, the feasibility of harmonizing the community by fostering individual ethical self-cultivation, and the importance of relying on virtuous role models. At the time, however, he was already departing from these fundamental assumptions of traditional Confucian political anthropology.²

Tang's new theory of power plays a pivotal role in his philosophical project of renewing Confucianism under conditions of social modernization. He now contemplated power and its demonic aspects in politics in a way that suggests he was reacting to the famous passages of Max Weber's study on Confucianism in which he claims that Confucianism lacks a conception of radical evil. Among these passages, we find one about the Confucian state cult and Daoism, where Weber states that "[b]oth forms of religion lacked even the traces of a satanic force of evil against which the pious Chinese . . . might have struggled for his salvation."³

One should bear in mind that while Weber's study on Confucianism introduces the concept of evil as a religious-ethical issue, Tang took an interest in the notion of evil with respect to the political. He thus discussed the meaning and relevance of the lust for power in the context of *political* action in general. It is therefore enticing to relate Tang's reflection on power to the ideas about power and the nature of politics that Weber presents in his famous lecture *Politics as a Vocation* from 1919. Whether Tang actually reacted to Weber's writings is uncertain, but it seems rather unlikely that he was familiar with Weber's lecture. Nonetheless, a selective cross-reading of Weber and Tang reveals some illuminating intersections and disparities with regard to their concepts of power and the political.

Towards the end of *Politics as a Vocation* Max Weber draws the following conclusion:

Anyone who wishes to engage in politics at all, and particularly anyone who wishes to practice it as a profession, must become conscious of these ethical paradoxes and of his own responsibility for what may become of *him* under the pressure they exert. For, I repeat, he is entering

2 See his article "The Ideal Humanistic World" (first published in: *Minzhu Pinglun* [Hongkong], Vol. 1, No. 2 [July 1949]; reprinted in Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 59–72).

3 Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, p. 206 (for the German original, see Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, p. 490).

into relations with the satanic powers that lurk in every act of violence. (...) Anyone who seeks the salvation of his soul and that of others does not seek it through politics, since politics faces quite different tasks, tasks that can only be accomplished with the use of force. The genius, or the demon, of politics lives in an inner tension with the God of love as well as with the Christian churches, and it is a tension that can erupt at any time into an insoluble conflict.⁴

Weber demands from politicians, particularly those who engage in politics as a vocation, that they perceive a specific political danger. This danger arises because the consequences—including the ethical consequences—of political acts inevitably elude safe calculation and control. Even more perilous is the fact that politics by definition involves the possibility of a *forceful* implementation of decisions that ultimately have unforeseeable outcomes. This fact, according to Weber, is especially distressing for those politicians who subscribe to a credo of ethics of conviction, which posits “that nothing but good comes from good and nothing but evil from evil.”⁵

In his *Politics as a Vocation*, Weber took a dig at politicians who are committed to such an ethics of conviction. Still, in the passage quoted above, Weber not only admonishes politicians, but all political actors, because they must face the danger inherent to the incalculable consequences of political decisions and should therefore acknowledge that one cannot rely on claims to pure convictions or good intentions to achieve good ends in politics. As Weber understands it, a specifically *political* danger arises from the inevitable use of certain means which are characteristic of politics, namely those involving the exertion of power and force.⁶ Politics, according to Weber, means “to strive for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power, whether between states or between groups of people contained within a state.”⁷ There are two distinct aims that motivate people to strive for power in politics and other

4 Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. “Science as a Vocation” “Politics as a Vocation,” p. 90 (for the German original, see Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 64).

5 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 86 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 60).

6 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 86 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 60).

7 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 33 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 8): For Weber, power is “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” See Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 53. This passage is followed by Weber’s often quoted amendment that the concept of power is “sociologically amorphous” (*ibid.*).

social relations. Both involve the longing for power “as a means in the service of other goals, whether idealistic or selfish, or . . . power ‘for its own sake’ . . . so as to enjoy the feeling of prestige that it confers.”⁸ In conceptualizing the quest for power as a sustaining element of politics, Weber places his focus on the state. From this perspective, he conceives of a peculiar relation between power and violence. Insofar as the quest for power is directed at the state, it involves the means of power that is specific to the state and which only the state may use in a legitimate manner: the use of coercive force.⁹

Political activity, in Weber’s conceptualization, entails an element of irrationality, for those who apply specifically political means (i.e. coercive power, violence) cannot foresee whether or how they themselves will be transformed by the “demonic” impact of these means. In Weber’s view, it is characteristic of politics that not only political activity as such, but also its effects on the world and the political actors themselves may in the end contradict ethical standards. In fact, Weber emphasizes that “the ultimate product of political activity frequently, indeed, as a matter of course, fails utterly to do justice to its original purpose and may even be a travesty of it.”¹⁰ It is exactly this self-awareness of the potential of a political “travesty” which marks the peculiarity of politics vis-à-vis the realm of ethics and religion. What is more, whereas the ethics of capitalism and its inherent goal to accumulate profit have been ushered into Western society (albeit inadvertently, as Weber assumes) by Protestant asceticism and its rejection of the world, the looming conflicts between the “satan of politics” and the “Christian God” remain “insoluble.” As Weber insists, politics indeed has its own reservoir of satanic powers.¹¹

In *Politics as a Vocation* Weber harshly admonishes the proponents of what he calls a pure ethics of conviction for their inability to act in a politically responsible way. Whoever is unable to acknowledge that the credo of an ethics of conviction does *not* amount to a truism with respect to political action is “in fact a mere child in political matters.”¹² The political immaturity of proponents of an ethics of conviction is manifest in their belief that “the ethical demands

8 Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. “Science as a Vocation” “Politics as a Vocation,” pp. 33–34 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 9).

9 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 29; see also: Lenk, “Max Weber,” pp. 310–311.

10 Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. “Science as a Vocation” “Politics as a Vocation,” p. 78 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 53).

11 See Von Ferber, *Die Gewalt in der Politik*, pp. 68–75.

12 Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*. “Science as a Vocation” “Politics as a Vocation,” p. 86 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 60).

made on politics” may remain untainted by the fact “that politics operates with a highly specific means, namely, power, behind which *violence* lies concealed”.¹³

To make things worse, those who subscribe to a pure ethics of conviction are also capable of applying violence as a means to realize ethical demands. Indeed, their fatal failure to cope with reality shows itself at the very point where they have to face the “problem of justifying the means by the ends,” and hence the use of violence. Here, there is some likelihood that “the representatives of an ethics of conviction suddenly become chiliastic prophets,” who call upon their followers to participate in “the very *last* use of force” in order to overcome an insufficiently ethical world altogether: “[T]he man who embraces an ethics of conviction is unable to tolerate the ethical irrationality of the world.” Believers in pure ethics of convictions are dangerous, because they are unable to grasp the diabolic threat that accompanies the use of violence as a means of politics, and are thus inclined to sanctioning all means of violence in the attempt to attain salvation.¹⁴

In contrast, the type of professional politician Weber favored should opt for the maxim of an ethics of responsibility. Weber, in fact, considered the two maxims of an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility to be “irredeemably incompatible,”¹⁵ although he still warned that the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility should not be treated as “absolute antitheses.” They are, after all, “mutually complementary, and only when taken together do they constitute the authentic human being who *is capable* of having a ‘vocation for politics.’”¹⁶ In conclusion, Weber called on the professional politician to endure this ethical tension with the “trained ability to scrutinize the realities of life ruthlessly, to withstand them and to measure up to them inwardly.”¹⁷ In doing so, he or she should not count on the “goodness and perfection” of their fellowmen, but must reckon with the “average human failings.”¹⁸ As for the Confucian individuals, they fail to live up to this demand, as Weber assumes. Instead, they believe that the world they live in is “the best of all possible worlds” and remain convinced that “human nature was disposed

13 Weber, *ibid.*, pp. 80–81 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 55).

14 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 85 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 59).

15 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 83 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 57).

16 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 92 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 66).

17 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 91 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 65). The reference to ruthlessness does not indicate that Weber favored a type of politicians who are driven by their lust for power. For Weber, the professional politician should not strive for power solely for the sake of power: *Ibid.*, p. 78 (for the German original, see *Ibid.*, p. 52).

18 Weber, *ibid.*, p. 84 (Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 58).

to the ethically good” and “[m]en . . . capable of unlimited perfection . . . were in principle adequate for fulfilling the moral law.”¹⁹

Similar to Max Weber’s approach, Tang Junyi identified the core dogma of Confucian religiosity as the belief in the inborn ability of human beings to attain moral perfection. But in stark contrast to Weber’s depiction of Confucianism, Tang’s Confucian civil theology does not support the conviction that the human being is capable of fulfilling the “moral law” by merely following conventional ethics. Tang, as we have seen, conceptualized self-cultivation as a multifarious effort that comprises, above all, moral self-reflection, but also forms of practical engagement in politics and society at large. The individual’s impetus for such practical engagement is not purely ethical. On the contrary, Tang called on individuals to consider their own egotistic side as a crucial impetus for their practical, and most of all political, engagement.

As Tang saw it, the Confucians in pre-modern times also addressed such a call to the practitioners of self-cultivation, but they insufficiently grasped the human *lust for power*. The Confucian “worthy” and “sages” hardly took notice of the fact that the “transformation through the teachings,” which they wanted to bestow on humanity, could be “fundamentally” resisted by the human lust for power.²⁰ Nor did they reckon with the “deepest selfish desire” of the human being, namely, the “pure will for power” (*chuncui de quanli yizhi* 純粹的權力意志). Like Weber, Tang defined this pure will for power as the will to wield power solely for the sake of wielding power. It is in this sense that the pure will for power culminates in a decision about “leaving alive or killing, giving or taking, rewarding or punishing.”²¹

19 Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, pp. 227–228 (for the German original, see Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, p. 514).

20 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 396. Tang’s critique is echoed in Chang Hao’s famous essay “Dark Consciousness and Democratic Tradition.” Chang discusses different expressions of pessimistic notions of human nature and the human being (hence the “dark consciousness” [*you’an yishi* 幽暗意識]) in Western and Chinese contexts and concludes that overall, Chinese philosophers gave only insufficient thought to the “dark” side of man. Chang’s essay is highly stimulating in many respects, but regrettably does not discuss Tang’s concept of evil. The only part of Chang’s book *You’an yishi yu minzhu chuantong* which deals with Tang’s philosophy is a general overview found in the Chinese translation of Chang’s English article “New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China”; see Zhang (Chang Hao), *You’an yishi yu minzhu chuantong*, pp. 3–32; see also pp. 33–78.

21 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 395.

Among the “satanic” aspects of the pure will for power is the inclination for cruelty. Tang distinguished in his analysis different forms and degrees of cruelty. Their most despicable manifestation is reached whenever a person derives deep satisfaction from observing another’s suffering after insidiously harming him or her through planned, “rational” action, without revealing who the perpetrator was.²² The pure will for power may indeed apply rational means to achieve this end, but any analysis that disregards the irrational side of the lust for power inevitably falls short. The Marxist approach that examines the will for power through an analysis of socioeconomic structures and a calculation of interests is therefore misleading according to Tang. By way of example, Tang elaborated on the fact that there are cases where human beings apply a degree of cruelty which stands in no rational relation to the economic interests at issue. Furthermore, in the course of a conflict in which both parties suffer great material losses, it is possible that the one party whose losses are less severe still gains some satisfaction from observing that their opponent has lost even more.²³ Here, the pure will for power elevates destruction for destruction’s sake to a virtue of “satan” (*sadan* 撒旦). Moreover, in becoming satanic, the human consciousness lifts itself above the worthies and sages, who are now the object of contempt.²⁴

Tang’s insights into the human lust for power and its potential for cruelty contain several references to “satan,” but also to “god” (*shangdi* 上帝) or “father” (*fu* 父).²⁵ It is difficult to explain why Tang used such terms. To be sure, he did not introduce an ontological notion of evil here, and this also holds true for an allegorical passage in which he claimed that the satan is a “satan in the human mind,” who “stands at our side at any moment.”²⁶ While Tang was not interested in situating evil ontologically, he did explain that it only emerges when

22 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 564–565.

23 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 111.

24 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 395. It seems significant that Tang does not refer to the subject of the lust for power solely with the pronoun of the third person singular or by general references to “the human being” or “the lust for power.” These types of references would insinuate a safe distance between the “I” of the interpreter and his readers, on the one hand, and the subject of the lust for power under scrutiny, on the other. Instead, Tang often uses personal pronouns of the first person (“I,” “we”) in this context. He apparently had no intention to grant any exceptions from the potential affliction by the lust for power, thereby denying any pre-established moral superiority to himself or his readers.

25 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 113.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

“human nature cannot completely reveal itself.”²⁷ He consequently suggested that the full actualization of one’s human nature, in which one has “exerted the mind” and “knows human nature,” is certainly without evil. Yet, the individual’s self-absorption with the lust for power seems to belong to human nature, too, and only momentarily dissipates at the stage of an ephemeral, sagely actualization. There is a peculiar change in perspective here, inasmuch as the lust for power is not seen as the result of an unrestrained display of human nature (in terms of instincts and passions), but, on the contrary, as a symptom of the incomplete manifestation of human nature (*xing*) itself. According to Tang’s civil theology, this failure is due to the fact that the individual is still in a state of self-imposed constraint vis-à-vis his or her true nature.

The references to satan and god seem to be more allegorical than theological in nature. Tang rarely used these allegories, and when he did, he did so without any specific relation to theological concepts from Jewish-Christian traditions. Significantly, there are passages in which he directly combined the terms “satan” and “god” with Confucian terms like (good) “innate knowing” (*liang zhi*) and (evil) “selfish desires” (*si yu* 私欲), without any elucidation of their mutual relation.²⁸ The somewhat enigmatic notion of selfish desires does not denote a specific set of desires or behavioral impulses, but rather a particular, i.e. egotistic, way in which individuals try to satisfy their needs. It is in this context that Tang depicted the source of evil as an “unrestricted expansion of the will for power inside the substratum of the human mind,”²⁹ which he thus identified with the *pure* will for power.

For Tang, evil, as it becomes manifest in the pure will for power, is a problem of human subjectivity. Even though he conceded that social structures and orders can effectuate evil results, he rejected the idea that human subjectivity and free will are completely subdued by social structures. He thus insisted that social systems should be regarded as if they were formed and validated by the human mind.³⁰ Although he did not explicitly refer to the concept of freedom in this context, it is clear that his concept of the pure will for power is closely related to the free will. Evil is therefore neither a necessary consequence of economic, political, or social structures, nor an inevitable epiphenomenon

27 Ibid., p. 107.

28 Ibid., p. 113. In this context Huang Zhaoqiang’s discussion of Tang’s *Rensheng zhi tian* is instructive: Huang quotes Tang’s statement that he takes the term “deity” (*shen* 神) to refer to the human being’s “immanent spirit;” see Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhaxue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 33.

29 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 108.

30 Ibid., p. 104.

of the human being's animalistic nature. In fact, the manifestation of a pure will for power lifts the human being beyond his or her animalistic nature: Because humans, unlike animals, are self-conscious and possess a "mind," they have an insatiable lust for power, wherein the yearnings exceed the satisfaction of mere animalistic and materialistic needs. Tang elaborated on this notion of an insatiable lust for power by distinguishing between a pure "will for power" (synonymously, a "lust for power" *quanli yu* 權力欲), and an "unconscious" (*bu zijue* 不自覺) will for power. The latter, constituted by life-preserving instincts like the sense of hunger and the sexual drive, is common to both human beings and animals. It targets particular objects and can consequently be satisfied. It is hence "restricted" and not "necessarily" evil.³¹

In Tang's view, it was the blind spot in the political thought of pre-modern Confucians that they overlooked the satanic, irrational presence of a lust for power, which is inherently insatiable and condemns the individual to a life of compulsive repetition (to use a Freudian expression). Tang wanted to eliminate this blind spot, for there is a lot at stake:

[If] people do not recognize the existence of this evil [of the pure lust for power], they also cannot truly understand what socio-political systems and cultural forms [actually are] that really contain evil. Neither can they truly understand what socio-political systems and cultural forms are the best.³²

It therefore will not suffice to put one's confidence solely in the good deeds of the worthies and sages, who validated "the values of human existence and culture" (i.e. guiding values in ethics, religions, science, arts, education, and the economy). After all, the pure will for power may completely reject all the values and deeds of the worthies and sages at any time.³³ What is more, the pure will for power is neither a mere pathological phenomenon, nor a demonic aberration of the human being, but rather a "natural" incitement for political action. As Tang argues, the very quest for political power marks the core of political history, and the lust for power is a motivational force which drives history.³⁴

Nevertheless, striving for power is not an exclusively political phenomenon. As Tang's theory of power posits, power itself as well as the lust for power are sociologically amorphous in the sense of Max Weber. They become manifest,

31 Ibid., pp. 109, 111.

32 Ibid., p. 110.

33 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 395.

34 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 182.

to cite examples provided by Tang, in a “concealed” manner in the mutual depreciation of scholars, writers and artists, in the dogmatic claims to truth by religious leaders and moral experts, and in people’s indulgence in debauchery and hunger for profit. Individuals may even become captivated by the lust for power when they strive for the values of truth, beauty, and good.³⁵

Introspection in the Will for Power

Tang defined politics, like Weber, on the basis of its specific means of power and force. He also related the function of politics conceptually to the sphere of the state. The function of politics, namely, is to ensure the existence of the state and to uphold, if necessary by the use of force, the social order.³⁶ But unlike Weber, Tang tried to define politics with respect to its goal (its “essence,” in the words of Tang), which he thus defined as achieving “an arrangement for a reasonable distribution of power.” From this perspective, politics can be conceptualized as a sphere in which one may strive for the good.³⁷ This does not mean, however, that there was or could be a superior type of politics which is completely devoid of struggles for power. On the contrary, politics in general is characterized by particularly vehement manifestations of wills for power, including the irrational lust for power. After all, as Tang suggested, political actors *must* strive for power. They are thus distinct from scholars, writers, artists, and religious leaders, who may at times orientate their actions toward the goal of gaining power, but may also go about their affairs without striving for power. In contrast, the political actors who want to attain a reasonable arrangement of power in society do not have such a choice, for they need power if they want to achieve their goals.³⁸

Tang obviously made good on the call of the manifesto of 1958 for a distinction between moral and political subjectivity by conceptualizing politics as a particular sphere of activity in which the actors inevitably strive for, and make extensive use of, power (including the legitimate use of force in terms of state power). In the course of struggling for power and force, and by making use of these means, political actors always run the risk of being severely afflicted by these means psychically and morally. Similar to Weber, Tang reflected on this sort of self-endangerment of political actors by call-

35 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 112.

36 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 390.

37 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 113.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.

ing attention to the fact that the actors' own lust for power may grow "easily" and in a "hidden" way. The danger of becoming completely absorbed by the lust for power is particularly great in the political sphere, since politics is essentially concerned with the arrangement of power, and it thus provides the "deepest" satisfaction for the lust for power.³⁹ It is for this reason that Tang conceived of politics and political activity in terms of the exposure of actors to the "satanic" potential of their own lust for power.

Even though Tang conceptualized politics with an emphasis on irrational elements that are deeply rooted in the human lust for power, he also reflected on political action in terms of opportunities for actors to express their "innate" capacity for goodness. Hence the lust for power, though belonging to the natural endowments of the human being, does not completely dominate political action. To argue this crucial point, Tang set out to establish that human beings are not held captive to the lust for power, but may lift themselves above it. He therefore undertook an analysis of the consciousness of power-seeking individuals—an approach which entails a phenomenological introspection into the subjective consciousness as well as deeper psychic layers.

It is safe to say that Tang, in his analysis, had neither predecessors nor successors in Confucian thought. The structure of the analysis is such that it reveals an inner dialectic of the individual will for power, which is related to the famous master-servant dialectic from Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.⁴⁰ Yet Tang did not mention Hegel in this context, perhaps because he not only felt that the reference was all too obvious—he introduced the figures of "master" (*zhuren* 主人) and "servant" (or "slave"; *nuli* 奴隸)—but also potentially misleading.⁴¹ Be that as it may, the focal point of Tang's phenomenology of the

39 Ibid.

40 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 185–197. In his article "The sources of humanity's evil" (see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 104–115), Tang related the analysis of the pure will for power rudimentarily to the dialectical structure of the individual's struggle for recognition.

41 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 189, 192. Liu Guoqiang does not elaborate on the proximity of Tang's analysis to Hegel's phenomenology of self-consciousness that introduces the notion of a struggle for recognition between "master" and "servant." As a consequence, Liu interprets Tang's thought as if Tang were to present a dogma which states that human self-consciousness naturally tends to transcend the (empirical) "self;" see Liu, "Tang Junyi de zhengzhi zhaxue," pp. 59–61. The fact that the notion of a (self-)transcending self-consciousness is fundamental to Tang's thought is also stated by Shun Kai Kevin Cheng in: Cheng, *Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study*, pp. 231–236, 247–248. Nevertheless, it seems problematic to interpret Tang's analysis of the human consciousness of power

lust for power is the assumption that individuals, while giving in to the lust for power, may still attain an enlightening realization of their “true” moral nature.

For Tang, the human lust for power is first and foremost a desire to subdue others.⁴² This desire is initially sustained by a self-referential “blind adherence” to power on the part of the empirical self (the “real self”). However, self-consciousness is not restricted to the empirical self—it is a “doubled self” which is revealed in the will for power itself:⁴³ Apart from the empirical self, there is the “transcendent self,” which is manifested in the willingness to risk one’s life (i.e. the life of the empirical self) in the struggle for power. The transcendent self strives to overcome the opponent’s lust for power and force the opponent to acknowledge it as the superior will. The “very first impulse” of the transcendent self to subdue the opponent consists in a yearning to gain such recognition. This necessarily implies that the transcendent self initially recognizes the opposing consciousness as equal, for otherwise the recognition (by an already inferior opponent) would be meaningless.⁴⁴ Indeed, the depth of the satisfaction which the will for power attains by subduing an opposing will depends upon the strength of the opponent.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, once the opposing will is forced into submission, its recognition cannot continue to satisfy the victorious consciousness of power, because the latter no longer recognizes the inferior will as an equal.⁴⁶ At this point, the superior consciousness experiences a “great emptiness” (*da kongxu* 大空虛):

When, therefore, what is regarded as the human being’s will for power reaches [a point where it has] nothing left to achieve and [thus] perceives that there are no more human wills worthy of its antagonism, worthy of fighting [it] for supremacy, it will turn around and perceive a great emptiness. This was so when Liu Bang could not help crying when [reciting] “Now that my might rules all within the seas;”⁴⁷ and it was also so when Alexander, after unifying Persia and reaching India, gazed into the vast

without taking note of his dialectical approach. For an insightful critique of his notion of (self-)transcendence, see Chan, “Tang Junyi: Moral Idealism and Chinese Culture,” pp. 316–318.

42 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 182.

43 Ibid., pp. 182–184.

44 Ibid., pp. 183–185.

45 Ibid., p. 186.

46 Ibid., p. 187.

47 Tang quotes here from the *Song of the Great Wind*, which is traditionally attributed to Liu Bang (canonized as Emperor Gao of Han; 256–195 BCE). Liu Bang is said to have written the song upon returning to his ancestral village after suppressing a rebellion in 196 BCE.

sea shedding tears. Hence, the will for power, true to its original nature, is in the end unable to find satisfaction. (. . .) Now that the constant surrendering of an antagonistic will must be continued, an antagonistic will is constantly being discovered, sought out and established, right until every antagonistic will is forced into submission, up to the point where [the will for power] arrives at the great emptiness.⁴⁸

The dialectic structure of the recognition-based struggle for power propels self-consciousness into an idling cycle. Within this cycle, the pure will for power, which is by definition insatiable, restless and finally aimless, is perpetually trapped. But human self-consciousness is not dully tied to this cycle and may eventually overcome the blindness of the will for power at the very point where it gains insight into its inner self-contradiction as a will for power. The tears of Liu Bang, the founder of the Han Dynasty, and Alexander the Great testify to the awareness that the will for power cannot further expand into the “great emptiness” and is hopelessly trapped by its inner restlessness. At this point, a “reversal” towards moral consciousness may take shape, which Tang elucidated in the following step of introspection in the dialectic of the consciousness of power. Toward this end, he again reflected on the victorious will for power and on the consolidation of its rule once victory has been attained.

As a point of departure, Tang established the fact that the victorious will must secure the obedience of the conquered will in order to safeguard its ruling position. If the victorious will manifests itself solely as an irrational, animalistic drive, it cannot expect obedience in the long run, for this requires the issuance of orders in a regular, normalized manner and form. The obedience it obtains is even deeper if it acquires honor and wealth during the course of its rule, which in turn earns it the admiration of the conquered will. Yet in striving for honor and wealth, it depends, nonetheless, on the conquered will to recognize the merit of such striving. What is more, the quest for honor and wealth involves objects that cannot be enjoyed by all wills to the same degree. They are the privilege of the ruling will, which inevitably gives rise to envy. The ruling will, therefore, cannot secure the obedience of the inferior will in a complete and lasting way. For this reason, the ruling will is compelled to conceal its “selfishness” (*si xin* 私心).⁴⁹

The above translation is Burton Watson's; see Minford, *Classical Chinese Literature. An Anthology of Translations Volume 1: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, p. 415.

48 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 187.

49 Ibid., pp. 188–197.

Permanent and “deep” obedience may only be established if the admiration of the inferior will is not due to the victorious will’s possession of an external object, but is directed at something internal to the victorious will. Inasmuch as the object of admiration is not extrinsic, material and quantifiable, but intrinsic to the will (i.e. related to inner qualities), it remains, at least in theory, accessible to all the wills. Part of these inner qualities is the ability to recognize and realize values related to truth and beauty. Because this specific ability does not require the possession of external, limited goods, the inferior will does not envy the victorious will, but rather recognizes its exemplarity stemming from a superior ability to realize certain values. Yet, the display of this ability in truth and beauty still involves goods that are external to the victorious will.⁵⁰ At this stage, it therefore still receives no recognition solely for its own sake, but for the external values that it creates and embodies. Such recognition does not reflect the ultimate degree of recognition—the latter is only attained if the victorious will displays an exemplarity due to qualities that are completely inside the will itself and hence represent the highest degree of universality (in terms of being theoretically attainable by any will).⁵¹ This pertains, most of all, to “moral values” that become manifest within the victorious will and may thus be universally recognized as “objective values.”⁵² Significantly, the deepest, i.e. voluntary, obedience is therefore achieved only by those who take up their position of power as a “moral personality.”⁵³ Tang highlighted this change of perspective towards the moral person as a “reversal” of the consciousness of power:

The great emptiness, which [exists] after obtaining absolute power, causes the human being to perceive that since there is nothing to which power [may] be extended, [the absolute power] must also necessarily be reversed. Through such a reversal, the transcendent self reveals [itself]. In this way, [the absolute power] can also do an about-face and have compassion for the antagonist that it killed. It [can] even protect and care for the antagonists who surrendered; or it [can] divide power with human beings whom it initially ignored, like enemies who surrendered to it and those who are under its command. If the will for power, therefore,

50 Ibid., pp. 197–200.

51 Ibid., p. 201.

52 Ibid., p. 202.

53 Ibid., p. 203. The reference to Kant is obvious; see also He, *Ruxue yu xiandai minzhu*, p. 119.

truly aspires to find peace, it will necessarily transform [itself] into or initiate a sort of moral will.⁵⁴

Tang obviously assumed that once the will for power subjugates its antagonist, it falls into an abysmal idling cycle of restlessness. This compels it to perpetually repeat its power-driven behavior, even though it is already in a situation where no equal antagonist can emerge. The only escape from this “great emptiness” is the self-transformation (“reversal”) of the will for power into a “sort of moral will.” The will for power thus seems to be capable of overcoming itself and predetermined to do so exactly because, as long as it requires an antagonistic will, it inevitably fails to satisfy its claim to recognition from others in a self-sufficient manner.

However, this auto-therapeutic transformation is extremely demanding. It requires self-consciousness to fully grasp the dialectical mode of its own will for power and to recognize the inner contradiction of a will for power which collapses upon confronting a dead end, namely, the intrinsic impossibility of its own satisfaction. Tang, in fact, posited here that human beings, due to the very nature of their lust for power, ultimately strive to overcome once and for all an “inner,” psychic and intellectual state of restlessness by realizing their moral subjectivity. Significantly, Tang had dealt with the topic of eradicating the pull of the instincts and the lust for power in his reflections about the sublime realm of sagehood, where the chasms of subject and object, self and others, I and self are extinguished. It is therefore likely that his reference to the “transcendent self” and the initiation of “a sort of moral will” in the passage quoted above alludes to the state of sagehood as it unfolds in *liang zhi*.

With respect to the mundane life situation of the empirical self, the conclusion presents itself that since the state of attaining sagehood (or *liang zhi*) is impermanent, the self-transforming reversal of the will for power also does not produce a permanent state of existence. Otherwise, by overcoming the absorption of the self in power-driven behavior, the individual could terminate the totality of his or her *political* life once and for all. But the promise of an apolitical life, which is free from the impact of power and power-seeking, is not what Tang had in mind here. The “reversal” rather constitutes a recurrent task in the individual’s moral endeavors. This understanding of moral self-reflection is highly optimistic. It entails the expectation that the ego’s introspection amounts to a self-liberation from the idle cycle of insatiable power-seeking. The ego is seen here as a self-consciousness capable of learning from its

54 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 187–188.

experience as a will for power and, consequently, of “rationally” choosing a superior mode of self-fulfillment. Given this capacity to dominate its irrational side, the ego advances to a position of self-mastery in which it no longer strives for the recognition of others anymore and therefore can refrain from futile power-seeking. To paraphrase Freud, the ego is thus portrayed as a master in its own house. Tang’s notion of an active initiation of the reversal also stands in stark contrast to Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the will in *The World as Will and Representation*. It remains open to debate whether Tang’s philosophy of the will for power was at all informed by Schopenhauer. Nonetheless, Tang’s notion of self-cultivation clearly contradicts Schopenhauer’s assumption that insight into the workings of the will only liberates the human being to resignation and renunciation and merely offers the peace and consolation that comes from the knowledge that whatever befalls a person is inevitable and irreversible.

Tang’s analysis of the will for power has repercussions for his reflection on the foundations of socialization. As the foregoing analysis of the dialectic suggests, even in constellations that are characterized by power struggles, individuals remain, albeit unintentionally, within the horizon of the moral will and moral subjectivity. Hence, the individual’s socialization ultimately rests not solely on a rational calculus of self-interests, but on the moral implications of the antagonistic structure of the struggle for recognition. Tang’s explanation of the foundation of the social state of existence thus differed from contract theories in Western philosophy, which place much more emphasis on the individuals’ (enlightened) self-interests as a basis for their willingness to participate in collective life. It is therefore hardly surprising that Tang took issue with the Hobbesian theory of a social contract, as well as mainstream contract theories, by stating that such an approach conveys a one-sided and pessimistic image of human nature. He critically added that since these theories depict the individuals’ mutual recognition solely in terms of contractual provisions, such intersubjective recognition is inevitably restricted in terms of scope and duration.⁵⁵

At first glance, there seems to be congruence between Tang’s and Hegel’s theory of recognition, which also took a critical stance towards contract theories. As Axel Honneth demonstrates, Hegel tried to show that “subjects can, on their own, reach a conflict resolution based on law (as formulated in the

55 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 392, 416–417; see also Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 245–249. On Tang’s criticism of social contract theories, see also Liu, “Tang Junyi de zhengzhi zhaxue,” p. 65.

social contract) even under conditions of hostile competition.” With this aim in mind, Hegel, in contrast to contract theories, conceptualized the adoption of the social contract not as an intellectual construct which claims theoretical necessity, but as an “empirical necessity” arising from the social constellation itself. Hegel, according to Honneth, argues “that all human coexistence presupposes a kind of basic mutual affirmation between subjects” which entails a “moral potential evidenced in the individual’s willingness to reciprocally restrict their own spheres of liberty.” Thus, an “implicit form of legal consciousness” takes shape here. As Hegel assumed, individuals are ready to make the transition from the natural state to the social state “at the moment in which they become conscious of their prior relationship of recognition.”⁵⁶ Hegel therefore, like Tang, attempted to uncover the potential for ethical relations in the midst of present hostilities relating to empirical struggles for recognition—a potential which Hegel understood to be foundational for the legal arrangement of coexistence.

There is, nonetheless, a fundamental difference between Hegel’s and Tang’s approaches insofar as Tang, in the end, did not anchor this ethical potential within intersubjective relations, but within the subjective inwardness of the individual who gains insight into the spiritual necessity of a “reversal.” It is certainly no coincidence that Tang exemplified the formation of moral subjectivity, which arises from the power struggle for recognition, with the solitary figures of Liu Bang and Alexander the Great. Tang conceptualized the individual’s willingness to restrain his or her own lust for power and engage in an intersubjective practice of self-cultivation, ethical life, and legal coexistence as stemming from the subjective mind’s own inner exploration. Indeed, it is in this existentialist sense that he interpreted the Mencian notion that a man should “give full realization to his mind (*jin qi xin*)” in order to “understand his own nature (*zhi qi xing*).” Yet, Tang’s and Hegel’s ideas are in conformity in another important respect: Both denied that the subjectivity of the individual arises from a higher, pre-existing ethical harmony. In fact, they each suggested that the formation of subjectivity occurs only when traditional ideas of a substantive unity or harmony are shattered.

56 All quotes from Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, pp. 42–43.

The Moral Dimension of the Political Will

Tang Junyi had no intention of playing down the “satanic” impetus of the human lust for power as a mere prelude to the unfolding of moral subjectivity. His interest in the lust for power indeed centers on the question of how moral subjectivity emerges *in the midst of* the omnipresence of the lust for power in human existence. From this perspective, we may understand Tang’s speculation as addressing a question which we may phrase in allusion to his allegorical language: How do we reconcile the Confucian belief in human nature, in which everyone can become a sage like the legendary emperors Yao or Shun, with the realization that in fact everyone wants to become a Liu Bang or Alexander the Great (if only in their daily struggle for prestige or wealth)? Tang did not content himself with the mere claim that individuals, even if they are involved in acts of utter cruelty, may still experience sudden moments of a “disconcertment within the inner spirit” which indicate that moral intuition (“innate knowing”) is not absent altogether.⁵⁷ He wanted to bolster this assertion with his analysis of the lust for power. His phenomenological introspection into the workings of its inner dialectic should demonstrate that individuals, who by all appearances are completely captivated by their lust for power, still accord with (self-)restrictions on their drive for power that point them in the direction of morality. The lust for power is hence intrinsically related to the formation of moral subjectivity. Tang consequently refrained from depicting morality solely as an antipode of the lust for power that tries to restrain, subdue, or even extinguish it. Morality is rather the ultimate escape that comes into view even as the will for power faces the “great emptiness,” i.e. the stagnancy of its dialectical movement, which is in terminal self-contradiction.

However, the “great emptiness” itself is clearly not the same as the vacuity of the “void potency [and] bright awareness” (*xu ling ming jue*), which the individual achieves as the state of mind in which moral intuition (*liang zhi*) occurs. Neither Liu Bang nor Alexander the Great actualizes *liang zhi* and becomes a sage in the moment of despair when faced with the paralyzing emptiness after the last victory. The “great emptiness” is not identical with the “void potency,” which emerges from the successful practice of self-fulfillment. Whereas such practice leads the human spirit to the vacuity of the “void potency [and] bright awareness,” the engagement in power struggles only produces the consuming emptiness of a restless lust for power.

The distinction between the “great emptiness” and the vacuity of the “void potency [and] bright awareness” is also crucial because it indicates a line of

⁵⁷ Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 565.

demarcation between a Nietzschean conception of power and morality and Tang's conceptualization. When solely considering Tang's reflection about the formation of moral subjectivity in the "great emptiness," a quasi-Nietzschean conclusion seems to suggest itself: Moral subjectivity ultimately evolves out of a frustrated, pure will for power. Even though such a conclusion does not entail the idea of a genealogical development of power vis-à-vis morality in human history, it still bears a Nietzschean imprint. As a matter of fact, Tang remained skeptical about (Confucian) claims that traditional ethical relations and practice (i.e. of self-cultivation) should be considered morally correct *per se*. Indeed, as we have seen, he even warned against the danger of an aberrant practice of self-cultivation that is carried out under the false pretext of moral education. What is more, the dialectical analysis of the lust for power demonstrates that the "deepest" (voluntary) obedience is paid to a will that functions as a model of moral exemplarity. Here, too, one might therefore argue that morality remains closely intertwined with ulterior power-related issues. Yet, moral intuition emerges in the vacuity of the "void potency [and] bright awareness," and connotes a solitary, spiritual self-transgression of the subjective mind. This is the very point at which Tang departed from Nietzsche: Because moral intuition is situated in the state of spiritual vacuity, it is, in fact, detached from any inter-subjective practice, whether or not it is dominated by the lust for power. It can only be speculated why Tang did not discuss Nietzsche's philosophy of power in-depth, and it is also unclear whether he ever even studied the German philosopher.⁵⁸ Perhaps his silence on Nietzsche is due to an implicit trait in his civil theology which tends to ignore incommensurable ideas, trusting instead that they, in the worst case, turn out to be temporary stumbling blocks along the spiritual path to the realm of self-fulfillment.

With its skepticism towards claims about an allegedly superior, traditional ethics, Tang's reflection on power has repercussions for his notion of self-cultivation. For one, self-cultivation, which requires the practitioner to "understand his own nature (*zhi qi xing*)," inevitably entails the danger that the diabolic side of human nature manifests itself, in either explicit or hidden form. After all, self-cultivation inevitably takes place under the condition of the subject's inextricable absorption with the lust for power and hence cannot

58 Tang's diaries from 1948 onwards, in which he listed his readings with minutely detail, do not give any hint at an intensive study of Nietzsche. In the context of his reflection about power, Tang mentions Nietzsche only in passing, once negatively, at another point more affirmatively. For an affirmative statement, see Tang's article "The sources of humanity's evil" (in: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 110); for a critical reference, see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 565.

be considered immune from moral failure. Indeed, it is the awareness of a tension between essence (moral nature; *xing*) and existence (in a reality marked by manifold power-relations, most of all in political life) which sustains the continuing effort of self-cultivation: Individuals should neither presume that they embody unlimited goodness and perfection, nor that their actions are thoroughly characterized by purely moral motivations, morally correct reasoning, and morally fully accountable effects. Tang therefore criticized his Confucian predecessors for falsely believing that political activity (i.e. existence) can be turned into an “immediate extension of the moral consciousness” (i.e. essence).⁵⁹ A moral consciousness may enable the human being to strive for the ethical good in politics, but it does not necessarily allow him or her to eliminate evil.⁶⁰ Human beings must brace themselves for the bleak prospect that their political will cannot offer any guarantee for the realization of moral goals by the use of moral means. Tang resisted here the wide-spread Confucian belief that human beings can realize political and social ideals, provided that their choice of means and aims truly conforms to the standards of a higher (Heavenly) order—or, as seen from another perspective, the claim that human beings who fail to realize political and social ideals apparently erred in their conception of the highest good in the first place. Tang, for his part, did not share the basic assumption of this belief, namely, that the intensity of the “ought” (aspired to by the moral will) determines the very reality in which the human will exists. Such an ideologically loaded moral ontology, by the way, has not lost its attractiveness in Confucianism today. A tell-tale sign is the peculiar type of appellative Confucian rhetoric with which some proponents of Confucianism express their conviction that the successful implementation of their ideas immediately depends on the intensity of the moral will (as expressed by their urgency of their appeal to the reader).

Tang rejected the conceptualization of the political as an extension of morality not only because it weakens the defenses of modern Confucianism against political ideologies. There is also the fact that in the ideologically distorted vision of a thoroughly moralized, depoliticized reality, “moral efforts” by individuals are bound to disappear altogether, for there would no longer be a reason to strive for moral self-improvement in a perfect world. This would clearly contradict Tang’s liberal credo that each individual must take up his or her own personal struggle for moral integrity. If the individual abandons this

59 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 419.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 396. In another passage, Tang stated that the “evil” in politics might be “reduced”—though, tellingly, he did not claim that evil may be eliminated for good; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 114–115.

struggle, nothing less than the “death of the humanistic world” is at stake. Any opportunity to establish a humanistic world of the “highest harmony” would be forsaken, because harmony and relations of “mutual excitation” (*xiang gan* 相感) between individuals require the possibility of “deviation.” The ideal humanistic world is therefore different from a world of “great uniformity” (*da tong*), in which the political nature of the human being would be eliminated for good in favor of a new man who is perfectly rational and virtuous.⁶¹ Tang obviously criticized here Kang Youwei’s vision of a future world of great uniformity. But he also more than likely turns against the totalitarian ideology in the PRC, and perhaps also against the ideology of the GMD, for it was, after all, Sun Yat-sen who vehemently upheld the ideal of a great uniformity in his *Three Principles of the People*.⁶²

61 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 71.

62 Sun, *San minzhuyi*, p. 50.

On Statehood

Failed Statehood in China

Tang did not develop his ideas about a modern state out of a purely theoretical interest, but in the context of his diagnosis that China's current political impasse, which he saw culminating in the communist victory on the Mainland in 1949, mostly consists of failures in state-building.¹ He was convinced that these failures were mainly due to the dubious heritage bequeathed to the republic by imperial China, a heritage that entailed the notion of a spiritual ecumene (*tianxia* 天下)² with an empire at the center of political power. In referring to the beginnings of imperial China, Tang asserted that with the unification of the ecumene during the Qin and the Han Dynasties, the concept of "statelet" (*guo* 國) became blurred and eventually disappeared altogether. Henceforth, the "clan system" (*zongfa zhidu* 宗法制度) was firmly established, while it was up to the literati-officials to consider themselves responsible for the fate of the ecumene. The concepts of clan/family (*jiating* 家庭) and ecumene thus won out.³ This constellation is said to have remained for the most part unchanged in the course of Chinese history. As a consequence, the imagery of an ecumenical empire produced a type of "universalism" (*shijiezhuyi* 世界主義) that transgressed the particularistic notion of strengthening the dynastic state according to the legalist "principle of wealth and power" (*fuqiangzhuyi* 富強主義). Tang deemed this to be an unfortunate development, because it was the particularistic concept of the dynastic state that might have been conducive to the intellectual evolution of a modern Chinese nation-state (*minzu guojia* 民族國家). Instead, Chinese concepts of state became engulfed by the universalistic notion of an ecumenical empire which blocked the coinage of a

1 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 165.

2 The notion of "ecumene" (*tianxia* 天下) as applied to pre-imperial periods refers to the royal domain of the Zhou kings; with the unification of the empire and the ensuing dissolution of a royal domain, "*tianxia*" took on other meanings, including that of a global community consisting of civilized and not-yet civilized peoples; see also Weber-Schafer, *Oikumene und Imperium*, p. 9. Tang at times denoted by the term "*tianxia*" simply the "world" in a broad historical sense; see for example Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 409.

3 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 154.

modern concept of state. According to Tang, this amounted to the “deepest inner contradiction” of Chinese state-building up to the present time.⁴

Tang deplored the fact that the legalist notion of a powerful dynastic state had been downplayed in the historical evolution of Chinese political thought. He actually maintained that only legalism might have nurtured Western-type concepts of state. He further contended that as a result of the domination of ecumenical universalism, the Chinese developed a spirit of “self-oblivion” (*wang wo* 忘我), which left them incapable of taking hostile attitudes toward the outside world.⁵ Tang’s analysis of China’s failure to deploy a nation-state concept is without a doubt open to historical criticism. Still, his analysis is remarkable due to his refusal to portray Legalism as the historical culprit, as Confucian mainstream narratives would have it. What is more, given Tang’s assumption that a strong nation-state was indispensable for guiding the process of modernization, this diagnosis refers back to a depiction of China’s thorny path to modernity. The bleak conclusion is that even though there were notions of empire and nation in traditional China, it took the historical events of the Qing Empire’s encounter with Western and Japanese imperialism to pave the way for a concept of nation-state. Tang suggests that, as late as the 19th century and under “the impression of an invasion from the West,” China finally became aware of “modern industrial organization” and modern nation-states. During the confrontation with the “dynamic power of ‘hard, crystalline states,’” the traditional “consciousness of an ecumenical empire” (*tianxia yishi* 天下意識) began to crumble.⁶ Since then, there was the transformation from the “heavenly state” (*tian guo* 天國) of the Taiping movement to the “earthly state” (*di guo* 地國) of communist China, while the breakthrough to a “human state” (*ren guo* 人國) had not yet been achieved.⁷

What Tang meant by the incomplete breakthrough of the “human state” can be seen from his highly critical judgment of the ideas of state that were popular with Chinese elites at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republican period. Tang believed that, whereas the traditional clan system finally withered away during the period of China’s encounter with the West, the notion of an ecumenical empire lingered on, preventing the idea of a nation-state from gaining wide acceptance. He cited Tan Sitong, Kang Youwei, and Zhang Taiyan as thinkers who failed to devise a modern concept

4 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 265.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

6 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 225; see also pp. 193–194.

7 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 263.

of the nation-state, even though they rejected the traditional notions of family and clan. To be sure, they strove for the preservation of the “land” and the “race,” but they still clung to the notion of the ecumenical empire and hence neglected the nation-state.⁸ This outlook, according to Tang, was in line with traditional Chinese political thought, which envisions a world unified without states.⁹

In his critique of Chinese thinkers who failed to establish a concept of state, Tang also included Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen. He elaborated that although Liang had been aware of the importance of the state and Sun of the importance of the nation, they, too, like Kang Youwei and Zhang Taiyan, upheld a vision of universal commonality, while neglecting the idea of elevating the state to the highest position.¹⁰ Tang’s criticism of Liang and Sun in particular seems unjustified and can only be understood in the context of his attempt to develop a new concept of state which should reconcile—in a Hegelian way—ethics, the moral consciousness of the individual, and a constitutional state based on the rule of law (see below). Significantly, he contradicted Sun Yat-sen, who assumed in *The Three Principles of the People* that while a nation like the Chinese developed out of “natural,” non-violent resources, a state is predominantly the product of coercive means.¹¹

The New Culture Movement which emerged during the second half of the 1910s allegedly also failed to develop an adequate concept of state, although it succeeded in destroying the traditional “consciousness of the family” (*jiating yishi* 家庭意識) in Chinese society.¹² Tang assumed that the reasons why proponents of the New Culture Movement were not aware of the need to establish a strong and unified nation-state must be sought in their preoccupation with criticizing Chinese culture and history.¹³ This rebuke, however, was not meant

8 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 155. Tang lists in this context Kang Youwei’s *The Book of Great Uniformity*, Tan Sitong’s tract *On Humanity* (*Renxue* 仁學, written in 1896/7) and Zhang Taiyan’s essay “On the Five Negations” (*Wu wu lun* 五無論, published in the *Minbao* 民報 in 1907).

9 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 160.

10 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 265.

11 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 155–156; see also p. 161. Tang was also convinced that it was detrimental to the establishment of a modern state with a democratic, constitutional government to focus, in the way Sun did, solely on nationalism and national consciousness, the so-called “people’s rights” (*min quan* 民權) and “people’s livelihood” (*min sheng* 民生); see *ibid.*, pp. 159–161.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.

13 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 266.

as a complete rejection of the movement. Tang rather took issue with the movement's refusal to merge its call for political reform and national reconstruction with a sound reinterpretation of China's intellectual and historical traditions. He felt that by detaching itself from these traditions in a sweeping manner, the movement not only failed to gain broader acceptance of its political ideas, but it also missed an opportunity to critically reflect on its own attempt to absorb Western thought, traditions, and institutions.¹⁴

With respect to Chinese socialism, Tang astutely observed that the notion of an ecumenical empire was still present, albeit in a different form.¹⁵ For one, the aforementioned attitude of self-oblivion, together with the inability to perceive the hostility of the outside world, led the CCP to forget, all too willingly, the crimes committed by the Soviet Union when invading China's northeast. In the same spirit, he continued, countless Chinese youth were convinced that it would be possible to create a new world order. The traditional notion of the "ecumene as one family" (*tianxia yi jia* 天下一家) would be realized by the "brotherly friendship" of the Soviet Union and China.¹⁶ Tang hinted in this context at the conclusion that the Marxists' negative view of the state as an instrument for repression readily accommodated the traditional, universalistic notion of a global ecumene.¹⁷

In spite of his elevation of the "consciousness of the state" to a position of eminent historical importance, Tang did not subscribe to the exaltation of the state in the circles of the Chinese Youth Party and the GMD's right wing. He strongly criticized the "stateism" (*guojiazhu yi* 國家主義) of the Youth Party with its organic concept of the state and the "fascism" of the GMD, deeming both to be widespread after the dissolution of the first united front in the 1920s and during the war against Japan in the 1930s and 1940s. In conclusion, Tang called the traditional heritage a mixed blessing, because the persistent longing for an ecumenical empire triggered radical reactions, ranging from fascist tendencies to anti-fascist (Marxist) currents in which an ecumenical universalism survived, albeit in an unconscious manner.¹⁸

14 The manifesto of 1958 cites Chen Duxiu's attack on Confucianism in the mid-1910s to explain that given such a negation of indigenous traditions, the only remaining (and unsuccessful) option was to try to establish political democracy as a foreign import: Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 42.

15 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 155–156.

16 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 266.

17 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 160–161.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 157–158, 161 (on the Youth Party).

In the face of these failures, Tang made clear that a new “consciousness of the state” (*guojia yishi* 國家意識) was essential for establishing a modern nation-state in China. Yet such a consciousness could only take form in a “conscious, rational” process within the circles of the educated elite, and especially in the spheres of culture and scholarship. Without such awareness of the importance of the state, the vacuum that had emerged due to the dissolution of the traditional clan system and its “consciousness of the family” would be filled by an unrestrained, selfish individualism. The contemporary Chinese literati had, according to Tang, deceived themselves by adhering to the “ideal of the world as one family” (*shijie yi jia zhi lixiang* 世界一家之理想), but they could not deny the fact that they had indulged in a selfish, “absolute” individualism. As a result of such a pretense, the struggle between political parties became aggravated and led to chaos.¹⁹

Tang’s diagnosis of China’s failure in state-building since the mid-19th century rests on a conceptual distinction between (age-old) nation and (modern) nation-state: The old Chinese nation in its dynastic form constituted an empire, but not a modern, territorial nation-state with fixed borders and a constitutional government. The bottom line here is that the Chinese nation had failed to produce a modern political form, and that such an effort—from a global perspective—was now belated. As Tang suggests, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that the quest for a nation-state gradually became the formative “historical experience of the Chinese nation.” During this period, the “political consciousness of the nation” evolved—if we are to follow Tang—through nine stages. Each of these was defined by specific political developments carried out by political and intellectual elites: the Taiping Rebellion, the prolonged period of institutional reforms in the effort of “Self-Strengthening,” the “Hundred Days’ Reform” in 1898, the republican revolution of 1911, the ensuing failure of the constitutional government, the New Culture Movement, the Northern expedition, which led to the formal national reunification of China under the GMD in 1928, the war of resistance against Japan, and finally the communist takeover in 1949.²⁰ These nine stages are not to be interpreted as a *progressive* succession. On the contrary, they represent the continuing failure of Chinese elites to attain an authentic understanding of China’s national culture, which, in turn, impeded the effort to establish a democratic nation-state as the adequate political form of the nation.

Tang conceded that there were also so-called “outer” historical factors responsible for the failed nation-state-building in China, but the main thrust of

19 Ibid., pp. 159–161.

20 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 155–176.

his analysis is focused on “inner,” intellectual factors, such as the persistence of misguided concepts of state, nation, bureaucracy, government, party as well as political counseling and planning. The reasons for these misconceptions supposedly pertain to “traditional Chinese thought,” Western ideas, age-old political and social habits, but also to the inherent weakness of human nature and “accidental” historical developments.²¹ As a result, present-day China’s “problem” was still to be found in the fact that the “nation” was unable to establish a nation-state by democratic measures.²²

The current situation was particularly bad, because it was characterized by a double failure in state building: The communist rule on the Mainland was, according to Tang, the biggest “outer” obstacle for the establishment of a modern nation-state. Yet, Tang also deemed the progress of the GMD’s regime on Taiwan in “democratic constitutional politics” to be “questionable.” It marked only the “beginning” of a development towards democratic, constitutional government. Tang detected deficits in democratic legitimacy on the part of the GMD government and concluded that it met the requirements for democratic constitutional government only in a formal respect (based on the constitution of 1947), but not in terms of democratic practice. It was therefore still unclear whether the “political consciousness” of the GMD government and its supporters was actually in full accordance with the “inherent goal” of the political consciousness of the Chinese nation.²³ This reference to the nation is telling, and even more so with respect to Tang’s depiction of China as a cultural nation. The fundamental conclusion is that both the CCP’s regime on the Mainland and the GMD’s regime on Taiwan were at odds with the eminent political values, ideas, and norms stemming from the humanistic “main current” of China’s national culture. It seems, indeed, that Tang was utterly disappointed, both

21 Ibid., p. 178; see also pp. 179–180 (on concepts of political planning and bureaucracy), pp. 180–181, 184–187 (on concepts of the state), pp. 181–182 (on concepts of party and government), pp. 182–184 (on concepts of the nation).

22 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 36.

23 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 175–177. Tang shared this critical stance toward the GMD government on Taiwan with Taiwan-based liberal thinkers, among them Yin Haiguang and Zhang Foquan. To my knowledge, Tang hardly made any mention of their work. This may be somewhat surprising, perhaps less so with respect to Yin Haiguang. One may surmise that Tang remained silent on Yin’s position due to the intense polemics between Yin and Tang’s fellow Confucian thinker Xu Fuguan. Another icon of Chinese liberal thought who is also largely absent from Tang’s work is Hu Shi. In the eyes of Tang, Hu was one of the chief proponents of a misguided scientism. This view, it seems, deterred Tang from discussing Hu’s criticism of the GMD, which had been prominent in China from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s.

by the way that the GMD made political use of Confucian traditions²⁴ and by the growing attacks on Confucianism on the Chinese Mainland. For him, neither the total elimination of Confucian traditions, nor their integration into a political ideology were adequate incentives for building a modern, democratic state embedded in national culture.

Tang's thoughts on the formation of a modern nation-state in China are centered on two basic insights into the historical and normative dimension of state-building. First, modern nation-states cannot arise from a normative void, but only in the context of a reinterpretation of indigenous cultural and political traditions.²⁵ In the Chinese case, this means that the concept of a modern nation-state must absorb normative inputs from a reinterpretation of Confucian humanism. It is against this background that Tang developed the idea that the Confucian "main current" of Chinese culture can only find its authentic historical expression in a modern, democratic state (see Chap. 11 "Modernity and Agency"). Such a modern state was not only to entail a constitutional government and the rule of law, but also to embody the community's ethical substance. Tang even deemed its ethical values worthy of an "aesthetic appreciation." Moreover, the state's "transcendent existence"—i.e. the interconnection of ethical life and moral subjectivity—is worthy of religious reverence.²⁶ This line of thought has a Hegelian twist, and Tang to be sure attested to the affinities of his own thought with Hegel's theory of the state as the actuality of ethical life.²⁷ But unlike Hegel, Tang attempted to fathom the normative resources of the democratic nation-state by interweaving the historical, Confucian "main current" with the future-bound project of a modern Confucianism in the making. The ethical quality of the state is hence seen as constantly evolving out of the convergence between reinterpretations of the "main current," on the one hand, and the requirements of constitutional government and the rule of law, on the other.

Tang's second insight into the formation of a modern nation-state in China pertains to the concept of the Confucian "main current." As we have seen,

24 For an analysis of the ideological usage of Confucianism by the regime of the GMD, see Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing," pp. 136–141.

25 Tang, "The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia," p. 361.

26 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 263.

27 He professed that among Western theories of state, Hegel's theory comes closest to his own ideas: Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 254. On Tang's critique of Marxist and utilitarian concepts of state, and of contract theories and organic concepts of state, see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 217, 238–253, and Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 198–199; see also Chap. 11 "History and Normativity."

he deemed an authentic understanding of the “main current” crucial for the foundation of a democratic nation-state. Conversely, the reinterpretation of Confucian traditions must be guided by concepts of a modern state and society. A traditionalist reconstruction of Confucianism as a *holistic* force that conflates ethics, politics, law, and aesthetics is unwarranted because it would be detrimental to the formation of modern society. Consequently, Tang, as we have seen, introduced the differentiation of moral, aesthetic, political, and social dimensions to Confucianism and on this basis related Confucianism to the concept of constitutional democracy. The Confucian tradition is therefore not to be preserved in its entirety. Tang indeed considered the fragmentation of Confucianism to be inevitable, and this also pertained to the humanistic “main current.” In fact, it is under this premise that China’s national culture is to serve as the point of reference for the renewal of ethical life in modern China.

For the time being, however, a “democratic Chinese nation-state” which lives up to the official name of the new state—“Republic of China” (*Zhonghua Minguo* 中華民國)—was still in the making.²⁸ Eventually, as Tang maintained, “*Zhonghua*” would exemplify “the continuity of China’s historical and cultural traditions” upheld by the “nation,” “people,” or “modern citizenship” within a modern state.²⁹ In spite of all the setbacks since the mid-19th century, Tang was still unshaken in his belief that the progress toward a modern Chinese nation-state will finally prove to be irresistible. The source of this optimism was ultimately his conviction that, so far, the efforts of state-building had been undertaken without an adequate reinterpretation of the main current of Confucianism.³⁰

The State and Individual Self-Fulfillment

Tang considered the role of the state mainly from the perspective of the individual’s quest for self-fulfillment. The state is to safeguard the freedom, safety, and livelihood of its members, and to secure the conditions for their ethical life.³¹ But the state must not be permitted to subject individuals to a dogmatic,

28 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 175–176.

29 Ibid., p. 156.

30 Ibid., pp. 175–176.

31 Tang used several terms to refer to the notion of “ethical life” as he anticipated it for a modern China: “moral way of life” (*daodexing shenghuo* 道德性生活), “moral refinement and cultivation” (*daode xiu yang* 道德修養), but also, depending on the context, “culture”

petrified form of ethical life, for this would prevent them from actualizing their innate potential to attain self-fulfillment in moral intuition. Tang's concept of the (future) political state as an embodiment of ethical life obviously requires that a distinction be made between the actual ethical life at a certain stage in history, on the one hand, and the moral subjectivity of individuals who are embedded in ethical life, but not predetermined by it, on the other.³² A political state which subjects its citizens to dogmatism fails to live up to the true idea of a state, because it suppresses moral subjectivity. Consequently, Tang conceived of an ideal state which embodies an ethical relation, without however suppressing moral subjectivity (i.e. "moral reason"). Against this backdrop, he developed his thoughts on human freedom. By freedom, he understood moral and spiritual self-fulfillment, and thus the authentic selfhood of the individual. This notion seems to harken back to Western concepts of positive freedom—i.e. the freedom to participate, to cultivate one's personality etc.—and negative freedom—i.e. freedom from undue intervention by the collectivity and most of all the state. But Tang explicitly claimed to follow a Confucian tradition of identifying freedom as the freedom to build one's personality and character and thereby attain the "true self" of an ethical person. Although the modern Chinese term for freedom, *zìyóu* 自由, was unknown to pre-modern Confucianism, Tang listed expressions like "pursuing the perfection of one's personality" (*qiú réngé de wánmǎn* 求人格的完滿), "self-fulfillment" (*zì chéng* 自成), or "self-pursuit" (*zì qiú* 自求) as identical in meaning.³³

The notions of freedom as selfhood and the self-realization of the individual are at the basis of Tang's discussion of different kinds of individual and collective freedom. The individual's arbitrary freedom, political liberties, and the collective freedom of families, communities, societies, nations and states are all conceptualized in relation to the notion of freedom as the moral, spiritual, and intellectual self-realization of individuals.³⁴ Significantly, Tang assumed that the individual rights and liberties that have developed in Western societies did not perforce contradict a renewed Confucian notion of freedom as the self-realization of individuals in an ethical context. He even took this

(*wenhua* 文化), "(objective) spirit" (*jingshen* 精神) or "spiritual substance" (*jingshen shiti* 精神實體). With respect to morals in the traditional sense of an ethos, he speaks of *fengsu xiguan* 風俗習慣; see e.g. Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 601.

32 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 610.

33 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 378; see also p. 346.

34 On Tang's theory of freedom, see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 330–346; see also Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 606.

assertion one step further, trying to show that Confucian concepts of tolerance and solidarity have a vital function as social and ethical safeguards for individual liberties.³⁵ Here, “tolerance” (*duliang* 度量) entails the willingness to brook another person’s choice of values and ideals. Solidarity, on the other hand, requires the willingness to support other individuals in their attempt to realize their choices of values and ideals and thus to actively help them build their ethical personality, thereby displaying one’s “humane mind” (*ren xin* 仁心).³⁶ It is on this basis that Tang explored how an individual and a collective consciousness of solidarity take shape within the contexts of the family, the state, and the international order of nation-states.

With respect to individuals, Tang did not conceptualize tolerance and solidarity as either civic duties or civic virtues, but, significantly, as expressions of individual freedom. Tolerance and solidarity are seen as requirements for the individual’s freedom to strive for self-realization, and therefore as indispensable assets of a community whose individual members are free to choose their own path towards self-realization. Tolerance and solidarity are thus connected to the actualization of freedom, and specifically to the individual’s expression of selfhood. In practicing tolerance and solidarity, individuals actualize their essentially ethical nature and, at the same time, display their freedom by acting on their ethical mindset. The crux of this conceptualization of freedom consists of the interrelation between individual rights and liberty, on the one hand, and renewed morals or *Sittlichkeit* (i.e. substantial freedom), on the other. Tang understood individual rights and liberty as a precondition for the (Confucian) renewal of morals, whereas renewed morals, in turn, serve to safeguard individual rights and liberty within the political community.

Tang was probably aware of the fact that there are counterparts in Western political thought that match, at least in part, his own reasoning, such as theories of civic virtues in the traditions of republican thought.³⁷ One may also find

35 Here and in what follows: Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 343–346.

36 Tang did not introduce a modern Chinese word for “solidarity,” possibly because there was no such neologism established yet. Depending on the context, he relied instead on a number of related terms such as “responsibility” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 293), “moral responsibility” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 295, 297), “sense of responsibility” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 293), “love for the family” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 295–298), “love for the state” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 295–298), “consciousness of love for the state” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 295), “loyalty toward the state” (Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 298).

37 This line of reasoning about republican thought had been explicitly pursued, for example, by the political scientist Xiao Gongquan who in 1937 had discussed the requirements

commonalities with contemporary communitarian ideas about the relationship between individual liberty, rights, and civic virtues. But more significant is perhaps the fact that Tang's concept of rights is similar to Hegel's, which suggests that there is no real freedom in a community that does not recognize the subjective rights of individuals. In Tang's view, China's political systems in the past were characterized by a traditional ethos and the strong tendency to subdue the subjectivity of the individual.³⁸ Curiously enough, Tang's critical review of Confucian traditions is not abetted by his own system of a philosophy of law. He also did not bother to criticize Western philosophies of law, let alone try to improve on them by synthesizing Western and Eastern ideas. The notion that the system of law is the modern institutional precondition for the existence of morals in the realm of the state, which is of great importance to Hegel,³⁹ is simply implied by Tang. Rather than discussing it in detail, he merely anticipates it by referring to a hypothetical Chinese present that is characterized by the rule of law and constitutional government. His texts thus lead to the impression he is writing about an extant liberal democracy in China.

As we have seen, Tang proposes a "Confucian" interpretation of tolerance and solidarity as manifestations of freedom that are indispensable for guaranteeing constitutional liberties. The assumption here is that these liberties would be far too fragile in a political reality where citizens would respect them solely out of individual interest or due to the power of law. What is necessary is a degree of *voluntary* obedience in the form of a willingness to respect the constitutional rights of others. This entails a habitual, as well as culturally and morally stabilized, willingness of individuals to comply with the constitutionally guaranteed individual rights of others. This does not, however, mean that such compliance should solely emerge from traditions or habits, thus effectively downplaying the importance of actively sought-after moral consent among individuals. As Tang saw it, such a constellation of habitual compliance would merely amount to the "lowest stage" of the "legal consciousness."⁴⁰

for constitutional rule in China in an article entitled "The Preparations for Implementing Constitutional Government" ("Shixing xianzheng zhi zhunbei 實行憲政之準備"; published in the *Da Gong Bao* 大公報 on May 2, 1937). Xiao had observed that Western scholars consistently claimed that constitutional rule required "good habits" (*liang hao xiguan* 良好習慣) from the people and could not rely on legal regulations by the government alone; see Xiao, *Xianzheng yu minzhu*, p. 15.

38 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 609.

39 On Hegel, see Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, p. 309.

40 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 609.

Consequently, Tang envisioned a higher stage of legal consciousness where the process of forming law-abiding habits among the citizenry is put in place by the workings of the rule of law itself. This would make it “increasingly unlikely” that people indulge, without restraint, in striving for power.⁴¹ Legality is thus said to be an important cause in the formation of the individual’s ethical mindset within political society. Yet this ethical mindset cannot be fostered by legal institutions alone.⁴² As this foundation is not strong enough, the rule of law and a constitutional guarantee of individual rights require the citizen’s “moral refinement and cultivation” (*daode xiu yang*).⁴³ However, this is not to be mistaken as a claim to conceptualize morality as the *cause* of legality. It is rather a matter of relating the individual’s moral formation to the state and the legal system, thereby embedding the rule of law in social reality. That said, Tang cited “law” (*fa* 法) and “rites” (*li* 禮), two traditional terms, and infused them with new meaning to flesh out the idea that a community’s ethical and cultural contexts can never find full expression in a universal and abstract “legal consciousness” (*fa yishi* 法意識). To fill out this legal consciousness, a “consciousness of rites” (*li zhi yishi* 禮之意識), meaning an ethical disposition, must take shape among the citizens. It follows that the system of law cannot be detached from the community’s morals, but should instead be seen as shaped by discourses and practices related to ethical, social and cultural contexts. Tang understood the idea of morals and ethical disposition in a modern, Hegelian sense as something which does not submit the moral subjectivity of individuals to the rule of an overbearing tradition or ethos. Quite to the contrary: The ethical contexts of the community must stand the test of moral subjectivity and need not be accepted blindly. The “consciousness of rites” is therefore as much the result of the subjective morality of individuals as it is of extant morals and traditions.⁴⁴

State and Society

On the basis of conceptualizing individual rights as requirements for the Confucian renewal of morals, Tang interpreted the individual’s ethical relations at the stages of family, communal associations, and social sectors. These ethical relations were to be understood as an expression of the individual’s

41 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 396.

42 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 614.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 612.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 614.

freedom to develop his or her personality and aspire for self-fulfillment.⁴⁵ The initial stage is characterized by the individual's embedding in the family. According to Tang, in order to experience the family as a sphere of freedom, individuals must not conceive of family relations solely in terms of blood ties or of securing their economic subsistence by cooperating within the family.⁴⁶ The family belongs to the sphere of freedom only insofar as it can be interpreted by individuals as an ethical relation that enhances their chances of achieving self-fulfillment through moral "refinement."⁴⁷ The moral relation par excellence is that of a child and his or her parents. Tang insisted on an interpretation of "filial piety" (*xiao* 孝) as a moral idea in the context of modern societies where familial ties tend to disintegrate. He thus argued that the physical presence of the parents was not an indispensable precondition for practicing filial piety.⁴⁸ His insistence on filial piety in the absence of the parents is somewhat typical for his individualistic interpretation of traditional norms and practices: In the absence of parents, the modern individual has to consciously choose to practice filial piety, create a different form for the practice, and reinterpret its ethical meaning. The individual's moral subjectivity will therefore not be overwhelmed by the actual practices of traditionalist forms of ethical life.

The wider spheres of communal ties and social relations also belong to the sphere of ethical life, although not in the same degree or kind. Tang distinguished between these two spheres systematically, as well as from a historical perspective. In communal associations, the members meet each other "immediately" on the basis of shared ethical values, or territorial, familial, or emotional ties—i.e. without the intermediation of "outer" purposes like common economic interests. Tang suggests that Chinese communities typically include the family and the clan, but also organizations of alumni, members from the same birth-place, academics, participants in "poetry and wine gatherings," and even secret societies. Tang presumed that these quasi-natural associations were more common in China than in the West, and that some of them may continue to form important contexts of individual self-realization in Chinese

45 The sequence of these stages is loosely in line with the topical arrangement of chapters in *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, which is most likely inspired by Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and hence corresponds to the idea of retracing the stages of the development of individual freedom (in: family life, economics, politics, philosophy and science, art and literature, religion, morality, physical exercise, military training, law, education).

46 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 67, 113.

47 Ibid., p. 66; see also pp. 111–113.

48 Ibid., p. 109.

modernity.⁴⁹ This continuity is said to be conducive to reducing negative side-effects of social modernization. However, Tang did not provide any sociological explanation for this proposition, and hence simply implied that some traditional formations may resist the forces of modernity.

Yet Tang's position is not aptly described as traditionalist. He strongly insisted on the importance of the sphere of civil society which is fundamentally different from communal ties. Even though Tang did not elaborate on the Hegelian notion of civil society ("bürgerliche Gesellschaft") as the sphere of law in which "abstract" legal subjects entertain contractually organized relations, he still implied the significance of a civil society. Yet he hardly used the general term "society," preferring instead the pluralizing concept of "social associations" (*shehui tuanti* 社會團體). Social associations are to be understood as associations emerging from the shared interests of their members. Such outer, intermediate interests or purposes are thus instrumental for the existence of these associations. What Tang actually had in mind here were the "usual social groups and organizations of a Western, modern type," such as industrial organizations.⁵⁰ As his use of the term "Western" indicates, he claimed that there had been no such organizations in pre-modern China or, for that matter, a notion of society comparable to Western concepts of civil society.⁵¹ In order to catch up with the West, China's modernization would therefore require the development of a civil society as a sphere regulated by law and organized according to contractual relations between abstract legal subjects and the logic of division of industrial labor.

Tang's modern Confucian notion of individual self-realization obviously does not condemn the pursuit of individual self-interest, as was predominantly done in traditional Confucian ethics. In a modern state, individuals have no choice but to participate in the sphere of the civil society in some form or another. Moreover, it is in this sphere where the individuals encounter each other first and foremost as legal persons. As Tang sees it, individuals consequently acknowledge each other solely in regard to the "single aspects" of their

49 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 193, 206.

50 Ibid., pp. 193, 206: Moreover, Tang mentioned "the organizations of class interests" and those "religious organizations" that rely on a "transcendent belief in an abstract manner" (ibid. p. 193); at another point, he sketched the spectrum of social associations by referring to scientific societies, welfare organizations, as well as political, economic and military associations. He even listed bands of robbers, following here the rationale that they also function upon principles of cooperation and a division of labor to achieve common goals; see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 205–207.

51 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 193.

specific economic functions, social roles, and legal status. There is hence no need for them to recognize each other as ethical persons or individuals with a background of particular family ties, unique character traits, etc. By definition, the ethical values may be realized in civil society within only a very restricted scope,⁵² and the human being's "moral reason" also can be realized to only an "utterly minor degree."⁵³

Tang contrasted this perspective to China's traditional society and its social and political thought, concluding that the absence of a concept of civil society corresponds to pre-modern China's lack of a concept of constitutional state. The modern, constitutional state not only has to deal with individuals and certain communities, but also with a broad, competitive sector of industrial and commercial organizations which are established on the basis of a system of civil law—an undertaking unknown in imperial times.⁵⁴

For Tang's modern Confucianism, individuals are embedded in spheres of ethics *and* rights (legal life) by belonging to families, communities, and civil society. These associations constitute contexts for the individual's moral self-realization. However, Tang presumes that the integration of these spheres in a way that successfully avoids suppressing the manifold expressions of particularity can only be achieved in a (future) constitutional state which embodies ethical life. What is at stake in this Hegelian outlook is a concept of a modern state that incorporates a democratic government, the rule of law, as well as a renewal of Confucian morals. In Tang's view, traditional Confucianism was in no position to achieve this integration.

Modern Confucianism hence needs a renewed concept of ethical life that does not contradict the basic tenets of constitutional government and the rule of law. As we have seen, a key element of this renewal is the reconceptualization of ethical life in the broad sense as a sphere of *individual* freedom. The individual's moral subjectivity thus must not be subordinated to social and religious traditions and a supposedly sacred imperial order. From the perspective of moral subjectivity, Tang discerned the foundation of the individual's attachment to the family and the state in a spirit of solidarity, i.e. a "benevolent mind" (*ren xin* 仁心) and a "public spirit" (*gong xin* 公心). Individuals do not attain such a spirit by blindly submitting themselves to a powerful ethos or tradition and having their moral subjectivity overwhelmed. Rather, the spirit of

52 Tang, *Zhexue gailun*, Vol. 22, pp. 555–556.

53 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 223.

54 The "Western, modern organization of the state" strives, according to Tang, to have "social groups" join in building a unity: *Ibid.*, p. 206.

solidarity has to be seen as a manifestation of the freedom of the “moral self” (*daode ziwo* 道德自我). In fact, as Tang suggests, the individual’s consciousness of the family and the state arises exclusively from “moral reason” (*daode lixing* 道德理性), which, in turn, is ultimately anchored in human nature and “the way of Heaven.”⁵⁵

With its focus on the individual’s moral subjectivity, Tang’s idea of the modern state reflects the enormous conceptual shift which occurred when the Republic of China was established in 1912. In contrast to the old dynastic state and its ritual order, the new state was not seen as representing the sacred sphere of Heaven. Instead, it was fully accessible by the political will of its citizens, at least in principle, and thus individuals no longer faced a politically intangible “Heavenly” order. Modern Confucianism fully consummates this shift by interpreting the state as a manifestation of human self-realization. The modern state is hence an actualization of human reason, or in Tang’s words: “an objectification of the reasonable self (*lixing ziwo zhi keguanhua* 理性自我之客觀化).”⁵⁶ Tang therefore regards the existence of the state as a demand from the “unified, reasonable self of our inwardness” which strives for “objectified manifestations [of itself].”⁵⁷ As he bluntly states:

According to our theory, [the reason] for which the state exists is originally not its instrumental value of actually enabling the individuals to achieve [their] interests, but [the fact that] it is the objectified manifestation of men’s unified reasonable actions. The direct goal of the state’s

55 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 162–163. Tang also at times referred with a Buddhist vocabulary to the higher unity formed by the freedom of the individual will and the general will of the state embodying ethical life: see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 256.

56 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 238. Tang strongly rejected the theories of Hobbes and Marx “on the origin of the state” and added that it was these two thinkers who departed most clearly from his own theory on the origin of the state. With respect to Marx, he disagreed with the assumption that the state was evolving out of armed struggles between nations or people only to become, thereafter, a “relation of class rule.” As for the theory of Hobbes, Tang took issue with the view that men overcome their natural state of existence out of fear from each other and agree on the terms of a contract by conceding their own rights to the sovereign rule: *Ibid.*; see also Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 238; Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 214; Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 392.

57 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 218.

existence consists in fulfilling the demands of the objectification of these reasonable actions.⁵⁸

In accordance with this, Tang's Confucian civil theology identifies the state, in its highest form, as the political form fully embodying human reason and facilitating the individual's quest for self-fulfillment in moral intuition. Since it is "Heaven" which reveals itself in and through human intuition, the state retains, as it were, the potency to represent the sacred, albeit in an intermediate way. Tang's hypostasis of the modern state is most likely a reaction to the weakness of the ill-fated republican state in China and serves a compensatory purpose. After all, the republican state, which failed to establish political unity after 1912, was depleted of any religious meaning. It was perhaps no coincidence that a practical-minded ruler like Yuan Shikai was among those who clearly recognized the grave effects that the swift dissolution of the imperial state cult and its rituals and ceremonies would have on the young republic. But Yuan's attempt to reinvent official rituals of Heaven within the republican state in 1914 was short-lived and unsuccessful.⁵⁹ Henceforth, the Chinese state seemed to represent nothing but mundane political interests driven by competing military, economic, and social forces. It is this secularizing vacuum of representation that Tang's civil theology attempted to fill by conceptualizing a constitutional state embodying ethical life. The modern state was thus related to the individual's moral subjectivity and the quest for self-fulfillment in "inner sagehood."

The World Order of "Ecumenical States"

For Tang, the formation of modern nation-states was an ongoing historical process of global dimensions. Any swansong for a world order of nation-states would therefore be premature. Tellingly, he categorized a peaceful world order in which nation-states form the basic elements as an ideal.⁶⁰ According to Tang, the two major criteria for evaluating such a world order are international

58 Ibid., p. 242. In the same context, Tang explained that the theories of Hume, Bentham, and Mill, who strongly emphasized individual interests, were insufficient in terms of an explanation of the origin of the state. They may rather explain the persistence of the state, i.e. its *courant normal* which includes the "subjective mental state" of people in everyday life with regard to the state: Ibid.

59 Zarrow, *After Empire*, pp. 230–239.

60 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 301.

peace and “international cultural cooperation,”⁶¹ whereas the idea of global political, social, and economic justice plays a minor role.

Tang was convinced that international peace, understood as the eschewal of wars between nation-states, cannot be guaranteed by international law alone. It requires, in addition, a willingness of individual and collective actors to voluntarily refrain from the use of force, to engage in cooperation, and to act in solidarity across national borders. This willingness should further entail the implementation of international law. One of the crucial questions, therefore, is how solidarity across national borders may be evoked and sustained. The idea of a universal moral law as such cannot function as a source of solidarity within the world order of nation-states, because, as Tang observed, such a universal moral law had no stable foundation in historical reality. As long as the moral duty to act in transnational solidarity solely pertains to an abstract, universal humanity, it would remain fragile, even if bolstered by a “sense of responsibility,” and never equal the strong display of solidarity within nation-states. According to Tang, this fragility is due to the fact that, other than the concrete, particular idea of fellow citizens within a nation-state, the abstract idea of humanity does not pertain to concrete institutions and structures. The actual content of the idea of humanity is hence meager in comparison with the idea of membership in a nation-state. Besides, the responsibility for humanity remains abstract because the actors lack a “method” to actually live up to it, even though they might be willing to do so.⁶² Tang consequently summarized this constellation with the brief phrase: “Whoever does not love the state, will in any case be unable to love the ecumene.”⁶³

As a source of international solidarity, Tang identified cultural patriotism with a cosmopolitan outlook.⁶⁴ This outlook entails an explicit distinction

61 Ibid., p. 298. Tang was not the first Chinese political thinker to posit that the realization of international peace was intrinsically related to the nation-state. In his *The Three Principles of the People*, Sun Yat-sen had already assumed that international peace required the inner stability of the nation-states and hence could not be imposed on the world to the neglect of the importance of nation-states. On Sun, see Fröhlich, “Der Machtstaat in Sun Yat-sens *Drei Volkspinzipien*: Nationalismus und Expertokratie in der chinesischen Republik,” pp. 98–99.

62 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 293.

63 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 161. It should be noted here that the term “love” indicates a reference to “patriotism” (in Chinese: *aiguo zhuyi* 愛國主義).

64 In this context, it becomes clear that the original title of the manifesto of 1958 has a programmatic ring: “A Manifesto with a Message for International Personalities Concerning Chinese Culture. Our Joint Understanding of Research about China as well as the Future of Chinese Culture and World Culture.”

from notions of a global *society* as a source of international solidarity. Tang is indeed in agreement with Hegel's diagnosis about the inevitable tendency of industrializing *societies* to expand and colonize other countries. Hegel assumed that increasing productivity regularly compels civil societies to open up new markets in colonized countries and thus push for a global society.⁶⁵ In a similar manner, Tang perceived a danger stemming from the tendencies of social and economic forces to gradually seize hold of the world and weaken the nation-states. For Tang, it was a tell-tale sign that such a creeping quasi-socialization of the world order is obscured by the notion of a universalistic "consciousness of the ecumene" (*tianxia yishi*), which is abstract insofar as it does not contain the concept of a (nation-)state.

As long as this false universalism persists, there will be no awareness of the fact that colonialist expansions are triggered by socioeconomic productivity and may only be curbed in a world order of nation-states. According to Tang, the consequences of such a misconception are severe, because uncurbed expansion remains at the disposal of specific types of socioeconomic organization, namely, those based on instrumental rationality and which tend to conquer "others." Tang warned that the notion of a universal ecumene inevitably serves to conceal an "absolute egotism" which threatens to annihilate humanity.⁶⁶ As the main beneficiaries of this cover-up, Tang discerned globally active socioeconomic players who push nation-states into "imperialist politics."⁶⁷ Tang did not clearly identify the historical context of his diagnosis, but it does not seem far-fetched to suppose that China's experience in the international opium trade and its wars in the 19th century likely played an important role in shaping his view that ruthless economic actors were capable of exerting considerable influence over their country's foreign policy.

Tang did not believe that the weakening of the state in a dynamic process of socioeconomic development was a matter of historical necessity. A modernizing community might still avoid such a course and instead strive for a superior "ecumenical state" (*tianxia guojia* 天下國家) which embodies a transnational type of solidarity. By introducing the notion of the ecumenical state, Tang perhaps referred to the speculation about the world order represented in *The Great Learning* (*Da xue* 大學). However, he moved beyond such speculation by focusing on the problem of fostering patriotism within a modern state

65 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, pp. 189–191 (§246, §248); see also Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, p. 222.

66 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 162.

67 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 223–224; see also Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 300.

without unleashing nationalist fervor. From this perspective, patriotism is neither restricted to the narrow interests of strengthening one's own nation-state, nor to a merely emotional attachment to the state. It rather calls on individuals to exercise the cosmopolitan virtue of acknowledging that the patriotism expressed by the people of other nations is as virtuous as their own patriotism. Individuals, hence, are to respect the moral responsibility of others for their state and consider their patriotism as a reasonable cause of the existence of other states.⁶⁸

At least the basic outlines of these ideas resemble European and American ideas about the foundation of a mutual recognition between nations or peoples. Michael Walzer reflects on such ideas when referring to Isaiah Berlin's interpretation of Herder, which centered on a "core principle of reiterative universalism." Such universalism does not posit that there exists a universal history following a "covering law" (as is the case in Christian and Hebrew traditions, but also in Hegelian and Marxist philosophy of history). In contrast, reiterative universalism relies on the particularistic view that the historical experience of nations should be understood in terms of narratives or histories, but not as a universal history which accords to unitary principles or laws. If notions of a covering law (such as "repression is always wrong") are to be considered at all, then only in the sense that such laws are exemplary for a multitude of particular historical experiences and hence can be considered repetitive.⁶⁹

Tang envisioned the formation of international solidarity to take place within the nation-states and their national cultures, provided that they were orientated toward cosmopolitan patriotism. It is only in such a particularistic context of solidarity that a collective will to curb the socioeconomic sector and, therein, to guarantee preconditions for implementing international peacekeeping and international law might eventually emerge from within the nation-states. Whereas the political form of the nation-state is to remain unchanged within the (future) world order of international peace, the national cultures must entail a dynamic moment and foster the formation of

68 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 296–298. Tang assumed that the individual's cosmopolitan patriotism emerges from a gradual formation of his or her "consciousness" of the family, the state, and the ecumene—as originally indicated in *The Great Learning*. Such a formation will eventually lead to the manifestation of the "nature of the Heavenly mandate" (*tianming zhi xing* 天命之性); see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 162.

69 Walzer, *Nation and Universe*, pp. 509–515, 532–533, 551; on Berlin/Herder see p. 551; on the notion of a covering law, see pp. 524–525.

cosmopolitan patriotism (instead of nationalism). Tang referred to this transformation by the term “ecumenical states,” which are to maintain a cosmopolitan-patriotic “culture, education and morality.”⁷⁰

An accentuation of culture, education, and morality in the context of international peacekeeping can also be found in the Confucian thought of imperial China. Yet, Tang removed the “ideal” of a peaceful world order from its attachment to the (Chinese) empire and related it to the idea of a global ecumene made up of a *pluriversum* of modern nation-states.⁷¹ He thus distinguished his own conception of ecumene from earlier Confucian speculations. On this basis, his outlook was rather sober and only loosely related to the traditional discourses about the civilizational centrality of the Chinese ecumene. He actually never identified China as the sole center: After *all* the states in the world have begun to strive for “progress in culture, education and morality” and renounced the use of force, except for the immediate purpose of self-defense, a global situation might emerge in which nation-states that possess a “comparatively progressive culture, education and morality” will be “gradually” respected as “central states.”⁷² The exemplarity of these culturally and ethically advanced nation-states would be due to their willingness to pursue, on an international level, a course of action that is orientated toward peace, cooperation, and solidarity.

Although Tang had no intention of proclaiming certain nation-states or national cultures to be the bearers of cultural supremacy, his conception is not entirely free of such insinuations. Moreover, his notion of a “main current” in national culture unwittingly encourages, as we have seen, tendencies to reify the Chinese nation and its culture. It is regrettable that he did not discuss these implications, even more so because he refrained from portraying Chinese culture as a device for healing the modern world. Such an outlook

70 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 301.

71 Here, it is obvious that Tang’s conception of peace is only very loosely in line with the Kantian idea of eternal peace. For a comparative examination of Tang’s and Kant’s conceptions of peace: see Huang, “Tang Junyi de yongjiu heping lun—shiyi yu juxian,” pp. 87, 95.

72 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 301–302. This notion of “central states” or “middle states” (*zhongxin guojia* 中心國家) clearly evokes the period before the unification of the empire in China, when the royal house of the Zhou was to reign over statelets in the central plane that were labeled as “middle states,” thus forming a cultural and military realm. Tang refers in this context explicitly to the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi* and introduces the ancient term “kingly way” (*wang dao* 王道) to denote an ideal way of ruling (a term, by the way, that also figured prominently in Sun Yat-sen’s and Qian Mu’s thought on the Chinese nation and its culture): *Ibid.* p. 302.

could not be reconciled with his concept of modernization as a global process which is characterized by an inevitable and inextricable split between spiritual inwardness and individual subjectivity, on the one hand, and an increasingly instrumentally ordered, alienating objective world, on the other. According to Tang, the elimination of all forms of such alienation within a unified nation, a unified global ecumene, or some future state of “great uniformity” (*da tong*) is beyond the reach of humanity.

For further clarification of Tang’s idea of ecumenical states, it is instructive to briefly consider, by way of comparison, Fichte’s etatism. In Fichte’s philosophy of history, the culturally advanced state is, similar to Tang’s view, a manifestation of the highest form of human culture. Unlike Tang, however, Fichte assumed that this state *unintentionally* strives for “the foremost purpose of humanity” (“den allerersten Zweck der menschlichen Gattung”), while pursuing its own interests. Fichte thus claimed, in fact, that the outcome of the forceful expansion of the state’s cultural potency onto its European neighbors, and even more so onto territories overseas, did not necessarily run counter to the purposes prescribed by the divine “plan for the world” (“Weltplan”). The global “peoples’ republic of culture” (“Völkerrepublik der Kultur”), which Fichte posited in his philosophy of history as a goal of humanity, seems at first glance to be in line with Tang’s notion of a global community of ecumenical states. But Tang and Fichte held different views on the formation of such a community; after all, Tang did not support the Fichtean idea that the state, while striving for power internationally in promoting its own interests, unwittingly works towards the ultimate good in history. Fichte was convinced that the actual, higher purpose of humanity (which is to become manifest in religion, science, art, and ethics) cannot be directly turned into the purpose of state action. The state may contribute to realizing the purpose of humanity only by implementing the conditions for its realization.⁷³ Tang’s future ecumenical states would, much like the superior state in Fichte’s scheme, assume a position of power among the nation-states, but they would use their superior power only for the purpose of self-defense, and not for power politics or imperialist expansion. Thus, Tang did not follow Fichte’s speculation about the formation of a peaceful future world order on the basis of unintentional state action. He assumed, on the contrary, that only if the state works for the realization of international peace, cooperation, and solidarity, intentionally and guided by an advanced national culture, does it qualify as an ecumenical state.

73 For the quoted expressions and the analysis of Fichte’s theory of state, see Fetscher, “Johann Gottlieb Fichte,” pp. 182–184.

Tang's "ecumenical state" is evidently a futural political concept. Nevertheless, it may be applied to the present as a normative criterion, even though there are currently no "ecumenical states" in existence. Accordingly, Tang reached a very sober conclusion in 1974 with respect to the current world order. He stated that even though many people worldwide long for a unified "world government" (*shijie zhengfu* 世界政府) and a "world state" (*shijie guo* 世界國), the dominant tendency in military, political, and economic matters since the First World War was one of division, in spite of such ideas as the League of Nations, a world government, and a world state.⁷⁴ As regards the United Nations, Tang labeled it a forum which had already lost its original meaning and "authentic value" in the midst of contending nation-states. He deemed the notions of world government and world state therefore to be merely remote ideals.⁷⁵

The tendency towards separation in international politics following two world wars was further evidenced by the fact that a number of new states had already been founded or were about to emerge in Asia and Africa. Tang believed that there was no historical precedent for this development and emphatically rejected any analogy that might be drawn with the constellation of the Warring States period in pre-imperial China.⁷⁶ With regard to the global economy, Tang detected a similar tendency toward separation in the fact that the economies of advanced Western nations were increasingly challenged by rising nations, such as a rapidly industrializing Japan, oil producing Arab countries, and developing Third World countries. Besides, Tang referred to a global tendency towards the dissolution of centers of military power. The "core" of military power—i.e. nuclear weapons—was no longer an exclusive matter of the Soviet Union and the United States, for France, the PRC, and India had become nuclear powers and more states would certainly follow suit in the future.⁷⁷

Based on his interpretation of the history of the 20th century, Tang was convinced that a concentration of coercive means and military power, even if it were to be achieved by a global community of nations, would not provide a way to world peace. On the contrary, he foresaw that the realization of world peace must entail, on the one hand, a renouncement by existing nation-states of the suppression of ongoing global tendencies towards further "separation"

74 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, pp. 409–410.

75 Ibid., p. 411. Already in 1953 Tang introduced the concept of a "world state" (*shijie guo*) explicitly as an "ideal" which should help to avoid a Hegelian hypostasis of statehood. In the same vein, he introduced the "ideal of an ecumenical great peace which transcends the state;" see Huang, "Tang Junyi de yongjiu heping lun—shiyue yu juxian," pp. 82, 96–97.

76 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 410.

77 Ibid., p. 411.

(*fensan* 分散) into new nation-states, and, on the other, gradual progress within nation-states in terms of “culture, education and morality.”⁷⁸ This view of advancement towards a peaceful world order is certainly highly optimistic, but it is not to be mistaken for a blind belief in historical progress. Tang neither set out to detect signs of historical progress in every corner of the world or at every stage of historical development, nor did he expect human history to culminate in the realization of the good. His assumption that cultural and moral progress first become manifest in ecumenical states rather serves the purpose of highlighting a possible outcome of human history, while, at the same time, raising awareness that the course of history is not inescapable.

There is thus leeway for critical thinking about political reality. Consequently, Tang’s reflection about world order remains skeptical about positions of “realism” which tend to downplay the need for normative judgments about the political reality of world order, which is to be taken for what it is. By referring to the future world order of ecumenical nation-states as an ideal, Tang simultaneously rejected a naïve idealist outlook. Instead, he claimed that it is necessary to brace oneself for the fact that such an ideal world order is unlikely to be ever fully realized over the course of history. He consequently did not aim to issue political prescriptions for state action that will lead to an immediate transformation of political reality. It is indeed this delicate balance between skeptical realism and critical idealism which distinguishes Tang’s political writings from mainstream Confucian speculation about modern world order.

78 Ibid., p. 410.

Anticipating Democracy

“Confucian Democracy”: Dead Ends and Alternatives

The notion of a Confucian democracy receives considerable attention in the academic world today, but unfortunately Confucianism is often identified summarily and uncritically as the historical essence of China, or even of East Asia more generally. Imagining that Confucianism could be a cultural remedy for the defective political reality of democracy still influences the political thought of many proponents of Confucianism. So far, no “Confucian democracy” has existed in any country, and none of the political ideas associated with it has had a profound impact on international discussions of democracy theory, let alone an impact on the institutions of existing democracies. The only noteworthy exception, if one wants to consider it Confucian, is Sun Yat-sen’s model of five constitutional powers, as it survives on the island of Taiwan.

Many recent studies of Confucian democracy are located in the field of Chinese Studies, where political philosophy and various social sciences intersect. These studies focus on (traditional) Confucian themes regarded as relevant to theories of democracy in the broadest sense, including concepts of political participation, human rights, and citizenship. When they elaborate on how to inscribe elements of Confucian thought into Western democratic thought (such as pragmatism or communitarianism), it is usually in reference to the “classical” pre-Qin periods of Confucian thought. At most, concepts of democracy as developed by modern Confucians such as Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan are considered in passing.¹

Chinese thinkers have debated “democracy and Confucianism” since the early 20th century, though often in quite inconsistent and contradictory ways. Given Confucianism’s dubious record when it comes to promoting democracy in China, this is hardly surprising. Early in the Republican period, positions ranged from identifying Confucianism as the ideological enemy of political

¹ Recent titles include Tan, *Confucian Democracy*; He, “Rujia zhengzhi zhaxue de qianjing;” Jang, “A Confucian Deliberation on Rawls’s Liberal Conception of International Justice;” Jin, *Zhongguo min ben sixiang shi*; and Hall, *Democracy of the Dead*. Bell’s *Confucianism for the Modern World* takes a different path in attempting to identify Confucian political or religious institutions and relate them to democratic ideas and institutions.

democracy (and of republicanism)² to portraying it as a repository of traditional Chinese ideas and institutions conducive to solidifying, if not improving on, Western models of constitutional democracy in a Chinese context. Zhang Junmai, for example, accentuated how conducive the Confucian tradition is to developing civic virtues, which he understood as a necessary pre-condition of nation-building and, consequently, democracy.³ In a quite different vein, claims to improve Western democracy through the Confucian tradition are abundant in right-wing GMD ideology (such as in the New Life Movement of the 1930s) and also can be found in Sun Yat-sen's thought.⁴ The major parameters for discussing the compatibility of Confucianism with democracy thus were set decades before the contemporary debate about so-called Asian values began.

Although Mainland Chinese intellectuals who favor "Confucian democracy" often critique China's present government and its policies (mostly within the limits sanctioned by the CCP), some are equally critical of Western democracies. Jiang Qing, for example, strongly emphasizes the (seemingly foreseeable) superiority of a Confucian(ized) democracy over "Western liberal democracies."⁵ Similar tendencies can be found when the CCP highly praises China's democratic tradition, which is seen as embodied in pre-modern Chinese notions of a common welfare and rests on the idea of a government adhering to the principles of the "people as foundation" (*min ben* 民本).⁶ Much in the same vein, Chinese "neo-conservatives" of the 1990s stressed the necessity of establishing Confucian nationalism as a foundation for a future Chinese democracy.⁷

The conceptualization of Confucianism varies widely in these contexts, but two features clearly stand out. First, Confucianism is understood in relation to

2 For example, Chen, "Xin Qingnian zui'an zhi dabianshu," pp. 361–362.

3 Zhang, "Xueshujie zhi fangxiang yu xuezhe zhi zeren" pp. 203, 224.

4 On the political implications of the GMD regime's official "Confucianism" between 1949 and 1987, see Zhongguo wenhua xiehui (ed.), *Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong*, pp. 5–7; Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing," pp. 138–141.

5 See Jiang, *Zhengzhi ruxue*.

6 Wen, "Wen Jiabao zongli lun Huang Zongxi sixiang de qin bi xin," p. 5. It is ironic that it was a staunch anti-communist thinker like Xu Fuguan who highlighted the idea of "people as foundation" in a similar manner. In an article from 1951, which he published in exile, Xu interpreted this idea as an equivalent of the "principle of rule by virtue" (*dezhi zhuyi* 德治主義), calling it the "highest maxim" of Confucian political thought; see Xu, "Rujia zhengzhi sixiang de gouzao ji qi zhuanjin," p. 49.

7 Xiao, *Yu zhengzhi langmanzhuyi gaobie*, p. 229.

modernization. China's position in the modern world here is seen optimistically, and the proponents view Confucianism as one of China's crucial assets. They think it holds the promise of being able to create a successful modern state (including democratic government), if not of being superior to political modernity as experienced in the West. Second, there are strong tendencies to define Confucianism as a cluster of *values*—whether political, social, cultural, or religious. Confucianism might even be portrayed as a Chinese or East Asian mentality that plays an important role in the value orientation of all individuals.⁸ Confucian values and virtues are often linked to notions of individual self-cultivation, or the self-transformation of entire communities. From this perspective, the quality of democratic government seems to depend to a large extent on the “cultivation” of personal qualities and virtues by either rulers or citizens, or on the kind of values they share and put into practice.⁹ *The Great Learning* is often cited in this context with the traditionalistic assumption that standards of personal self-cultivation are the yardstick for the quality of modern democracies.¹⁰

It should be noted here that the notion that individual or collective self-cultivation is embedded in certain clusters of values is distinctly modern. The very idea of values, and therefore that of a community united in common values that an individual was free to accept or reject, was as foreign to pre-20th century China as it was to pre-19th century European thought (apart from the “values” implied in 18th century economic thought¹¹). The increased currency of “values,” a term

8 In related international debates on Asian values, one end of the spectrum is represented by Francis Fukuyama's conflation of Confucianism and democracy, the other end by Samuel Huntington's declaration that they stand in inherent contradiction; see Fukuyama, “Confucianism and Democracy”; Huntington, “Democracy's Third Wave,” pp. 15, 18, 21. Neither Fukuyama nor Huntington are specialists in Chinese studies, yet similar value-based conceptions of Confucianism, Confucian self-cultivation or Confucian communities can also be found in more specialized studies.

9 From the vantage point of such conceptions of Confucianism, Western democracies are accordingly understood in terms of values and normative principles, and less in terms of institutions and procedures.

10 Anne Cheng calls the contemporary tendency to ignore the historical horizon of *The Great Learning* in interpreting “self-cultivation” “jack-of-all-trades Confucianism.” Cheng, “The Way of Confucius and sprouts of democracy,” pp. 20, 24; see also Cheng, “Des germes de démocratie dans la tradition confucéenne?,” pp. 102–104. For an analysis of the reception of *The Great Learning* in Chinese political thought of the 20th century, see Fröhlich, “Regulating, Governing, and Pacifying the Modern World: Optimism Regarding Progress in Chinese Interpretations of the *Great Learning*.”

11 Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, p. 37.

rendered in modern Chinese by the neologism *jiazhi* 價值, in Chinese discussions about Confucianism could plausibly be related to the breakdown of the imperial cult of state at the beginning of the 20th century and the prolonged failure of the republican state after 1912. There has thus been a tendency since the 1910s to overemphasize, in an almost cultish manner, the notions of values and a value-centered culture. This should probably be regarded, as mentioned before, as compensatory—as a quasi-religious veneration of “values” and “culture” intended to replace the sacral significance of the former imperial cult.

Obviously, the discourses about Confucian values and the identifications of “Chinese culture” with Confucianism are intertwined with considerations about cultural particularity and universality in theories of modernity and modernization. With respect to the issue of “Confucianism and democracy,” two positions are particularly relevant:

(1) Support of Confucianism’s potential to embellish or even overcome liberal democracy, based on particularistic assumptions of modernization. The cultural uniqueness of China’s political modernity is highlighted here and democracy is only accepted in a specifically *Chinese* variant, so that institutional adjustments need to be made to Sinicize democracy. Sun Yat-sen’s constitutional blueprint, for example, adds the governmental powers of the control yuan and examination yuan to the executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Likewise, in his lectures on “people’s rights” (*min quan* 民權) in *The Three Principles of the People*, he suggested a “Chinese solution” for what he deemed to be the fundamental problem of Western democracies: the lack of trust between government and citizens. Sun’s “solution” is linked to what he identified as the Chinese tradition of meritocratic thought and institutions, meaning the governance of elites composed of capable, virtuous men.

Still, despite Sun’s emphasis on the Chinese tradition, it is likely he drew upon European liberal thought, and J.S. Mill in particular, that argued for independent political representation by elites, whom he deemed capable of making wiser judgments than the mass of less educated citizens (see, for example, Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* from 1861). Broad political participation and popular sovereignty would thus be restrained. This pertains also to the position of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew who, in 1992, recommended that the voting laws be changed to award a double vote to those in their 40s and 50s to reflect their broader experience in taking responsibility for their families and hence their superiority in making reasonable decisions.¹² Jiang Qing’s “political Confucianism” and his idea of adding a Chamber of Confucians to a parliamentary representation system can be included here. Jiang views

12 Heinz, “Vom Mythos der ‘Asiatischen Werte,’” pp. 60–61.

“democratic ideas” such as freedom, equality, the rule of law, and human rights as typically Western and favors a more “substantial” Confucian type of political democracy instead that would guarantee the moral quality of voters and politicians alike.¹³ Such approaches entail strong elitist, if not authoritarian tendencies. Yet, as we have seen in the case of Sun Yat-sen, the allegedly typical Confucian or Chinese enhancement of democracy may in fact have roots in the Chinese reception of Western political thought. It seems that the elitist strands of European liberalism of the 18th and 19th century which often resulted from a need to defend social and political privilege were adopted by Chinese thinkers who attempted to establish a strong, modern nation-state.

(2) The second position is closely related to modernization theory and its assertion that, in the long run, there will be a world-wide convergence of modernization. From this perspective, considerations about “Confucianism and democracy” do not center on the question of how Confucianism can enhance (Western) democracy, but rather on whether Confucianism is compatible with political modernization, i.e. democracy. Early examples of this approach can be found, for example, in the work of Hu Shi or Chen Duxiu. Both of these major thinkers of the New Culture Movement have asked why China has failed, so far, to develop a democracy on its own. Their answers point to the conclusion that there is an incompatibility between Confucianism and democracy. Contemporary Confucianism outside the Chinese Mainland, such as in Taiwan or the United States, generally assumes instead that the two are compatible. Tu Wei-ming’s theory of multiple modernities, for example, emphasizes that there are culturally specific versions of modernity (hence the plural “modernities”), but it still presumes a universal convergence of clusters of core values, ideas and practices. This convergence contains, among others, concepts of democracy, open society, and scientific progress that originated in the West.¹⁴ According to Tu, concepts of individual rights, constitutionalism, natural law, and individual freedom were indeed absent in Confucianism, but they can now be integrated into a globally evolving Confucian discourse on democ-

13 Jiang, *Zhengzhi ruxue*, pp. 22–23, 283–284, 366–368. Jiang elaborates his idea of a “chamber of Confucians” only in the Taiwanese edition of his book; see Sébastien Billioud’s translation: Jiang, “Le confucianisme de la ‘Voie royale’, direction pour le politique en Chine contemporaine,” p. 117. For an English translation of texts by Jiang Qing on the enlarged, tricameral legislature and on the political key function of a Confucian academy, see Jiang, *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China’s Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*, Chap. 1 and 2. David Elstein has discussed Jiang’s proposal of a tricameral legislature from the perspective of the question of political legitimacy: Elstein, *Democracy in Contemporary Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 146–147.

14 Tu, “Multiple Modernities—Implications of the Rise of ‘Confucian’ East Asia.”

racy, without however contorting Confucianism itself. Against this backdrop, Tu argues that, in fact “Confucian personality ideals” would be “realized more fully” in a liberal democracy.¹⁵

In the 1950s and 1960s, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Mou Zongsan also discussed the relationship between Confucianism and democracy. Whereas Xu Fuguan is often portrayed as the most practical-minded political thinker of the three, Tang and Mou are commonly recognized as eminent proponents of Confucian ethics and metaphysics. Unfortunately, their ideas of democracy in particular, and political philosophy in general, receive little attention, even among contemporary Confucians. This is regrettable because their notion of a Chinese democracy in the making transcends many of the culturalist boundaries that limit the discourse on Confucian democracy. To begin with, Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan were both convinced that the *political* tradition of Confucianism cannot function as a normative resource of liberal democracy, but ought to be seen instead as harmful to it. Mou Zongsan singled out a meritocratic form of “administrative democracy” that was void of any trace of constitutional government but was prevalent in pre-modern China. In Mou’s view, this kind of administrative democracy must not be confused with political democracy. Political democracy was unknown in pre-modern China, and if the two notions were conflated, he suggested, efforts to introduce liberal democracy to modern China were doomed to fail.¹⁶

Tang also set out to find the limitations in the political tradition of Confucianism and to use this critique as a resource for his discussion of liberal democracy.¹⁷ He criticized the concept of political action held by the pre-modern Confucians as reductionist and dangerous, exactly because they had understood political action in terms of a person’s moral awareness and ethical standards. He assumed that, if they were to live in modern times, his Confucian predecessors would have falsely concluded that the struggle of

15 Ibid., pp. 70–71.

16 On Mou Zongsan’s theory of democracy and his analysis of pre-modern Confucian political thought, see my “Confucian Democracy’ and its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism,” pp. 177–183. Peng Guoxiang’s book-length study on Mou’s political thought also addresses these issues. Due to its date of publication, I could not include it in my study; see Peng, *Zhizhe de xianshi guanhuai: Mou Zongsan de zhengzhi yu shehui sixiang*.

17 Tang applied a broad concept of democracy comprising constitutional government, the rule of law, general elections, parliamentary representation, and a multi-party system. Yet he neither discussed specific aspects of constitutional law, the scope of participation in a representative democracy, nor the difference of presidential and cabinet systems of government.

individuals to protect their rights only amounted to morally questionable, selfish behavior. The Confucians would have failed to understand that the struggle for one's rights heightened the need for checks and balances among contesting wills for power, and hence produced something politically desirable.¹⁸ This affirmation of an individual struggle for rights clearly goes against the grain of Confucian traditions. Tang was not the only modern Confucian thinker to point out that no conception of the individual's struggle for political rights had ever emerged in the Confucian tradition. In 1951, Xu Fuguan had already come to the same conclusion when pondering why Confucianism had at best managed to mitigate harsh autocratic rule in pre-modern China, but failed to lay a foundation for democratic constitutional rule. In this context, Xu had identified as a historical root of modern Western democracy the individual's struggle for political rights, which he believed had been absent from China not least because of the Confucian idea of "rule by virtue" (*dezhi* 德治).¹⁹

According to Tang, pre-modern Confucians were content with conceptualizing political acts in general, and power relations such as the one between emperor and prime minister in particular, as belonging to the ethical perspective of the so-called five cardinal relationships (*wu lun* 五倫).²⁰ Tang assumed, in other words, that these Confucians were still convinced that educational, ethical, and religious means would suffice to normatively shape political power. They thus neglected the importance of constitutional law and institutional measures offering checks and balances. As a case in point, Tang cited the Confucians of the Han Dynasty. He held them responsible for the belief that practical politics might be contained by a "religious mind," as evidenced by their attempts to convince the emperor to worship Confucius as a deity. As regards Confucians of the Song and Ming Dynasties they are said to have aimed for the independence of scholarship from politics, and the formation of politics by means of education, lectures, and writings, and by establishing academies and scholarly associations. Tang provided yet another example, referring to measures to check political power implemented in the context of local self-administration, such as the ancient model of the so-called well-field system or, in the Song Dynasty, the so-called community compacts. He concluded that these were both unsuccessful attempts to contain "real politi-

18 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 290–291.

19 Xu, "Rujia zhengzhi sixiang de gouzao ji qi zhuanjin," pp. 49–50, 53–54; on Xu see also Huang, *Dongya ruxue shiyu zhong de Xu Fuguan ji qi sixiang*, pp. 223–224.

20 The other relations are those of father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother, and of friends.

cal power” in the spirit of “social humanism.”²¹ Still, Tang was not fundamentally opposed to the idea that politics as well as the ethical “transformation [of human beings] through [Confucian] teachings” should *both* assist human beings in actualizing their potential for self-fulfillment as endowed to them by Heaven.²²

In abandoning the political tradition of Confucianism and its notions of benevolent rule by superior individuals, Tang and Mou Zongsan conceptualized political power in a way that they claimed was never done in China’s traditional political philosophies. A salient feature of their brand of modern Confucianism is the view that justifications of liberal democracy need to take into account that politics necessarily operates according to the logic of political power and, therefore, should not be envisioned as an appendix to ethics. Tang and Mou placed this justification within a distinct historical outlook in order to assert that liberal democracy is Confucianism’s authentic political form, and hence that Confucianism can only fulfill itself in modern society.²³ According to Mou Zongsan, “Confucian rationalism” (*rujia de lixingzhuyi* 儒家的理性主義) had never been comprehensively manifested in pre-modern Chinese politics. Mou asserted that it can only achieve this now due to the introduction of a “renewed outer king” (*xin wai wang* 新外王), by which he meant democracy and science.²⁴ Xu Fuguan shared with Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan the view that the modern reconstruction of Confucianism ultimately pointed toward a constitutional democracy as its political form. However, whereas Tang and Mou focused on the justification of constitutional democracy in terms of Confucianism, Xu seems to have been considerably more ambitious. He further anticipated a future Confucian democracy characterized by a renewed infusion of Confucian ethics into democratic politics. This would lead, as Xu expected, to a substitution of the individual’s struggle for rights

21 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 422.

22 Ibid., p. 417. He indeed saw “transformation through teachings” as emphasizing the self-determination of the individual. See also Mou, *Zheng dao yu zhi dao*, pp. 124–125. Tang accordingly emphasized the aspect of individual self-fulfillment within the speculation about the Heavenly mandate, while disregarding its relevance for the dynastic cult of state and the elevation of the emperor as the Son of Heaven (Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 421). The latter aspects had been rendered obsolete by the founding of the republican state.

23 For the manifesto of 1958 on this point, see Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 39.

24 For Mou’s reference to “Confucian rationalism” and “new outer king” see Mou, “Cong rujia de dangqian shiming shuo Zhongguo wenhua de xiandai yiyi,” p. 312. For Mou’s concept of “new outer king,” also cf. Mou, *Zhengdao yu zhidao*, pp. 15, 20–21 (introduction to the new edition).

(a typical feature of Western-style democracies) with a harmonization of political contestation through renewed “rites,” i.e. ethical values and virtues.²⁵

Like Xu Fuguan, Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi left no doubt that traditional Confucianism had failed to produce a liberal democracy out of its own resources. As a result, a justification of liberal democracy in terms of a renewed, modern Confucianism was necessary if the introduction of democracy to China was not to spell the end of Confucianism as a political and social force. In this context, it is instructive to refer to Richard Rorty’s characterization of the relationship between democracy and philosophy. Rorty identified, on the one hand, a strand of theories that try to provide liberal democracy with a comprehensive philosophical justification. These theories, among them communitarianism, assume political institutions can be no better than their philosophical foundations. On the other hand, Rorty pointed to a strand of theories that is represented by pragmatism as understood by Dewey and Rorty himself, which denies the need for any comprehensive philosophical justification of (American) democracy. At most, democracy might need some kind of philosophical articulation, though a full justification through philosophy might even be harmful to it.²⁶

Tang Junyi’s, Mou Zongsan’s, and Xu Fuguan’s modern Confucianism belongs to the first strand of theories identified by Rorty. Neither Mou and Xu, who were in Taiwan during the 1950s, nor Tang, who was in Hong Kong at the same time, could describe and analyze a liberal democracy from within the system itself. Instead, they had to anticipate its workings as well as its problems, and rely

25 Xu, “Rujia zhengzhi sixiang de gouzao ji qi zhuanjin,” pp. 59–60. Xu was convinced that a “true” democracy which rested on a secure ethical foundation could be achieved only on a Confucian basis: *ibid.*, pp. 53–54. For Xu, the substitution of the use of political power and the enforcement of law for the rule of virtue was not merely an ideal or limit-concept, but a historically realizable possibility; *ibid.*, p. 50. For a critical assessment of Xu’s position, see He, “Rujia yu xiandai minzhu,” p. 147; Xiong, “Xu Fuguan lun minzhu zhengzhi,” p. 49.

26 Rorty, “Der Vorrang der Demokratie vor der Philosophie,” p. 82. Rorty identified Robert Bellah, Alasdair McIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and the early Roberto Unger as communitarians; *ibid.*, pp. 85–86. Given Rorty’s persuasive interpretation of Dewey’s pragmatism as fundamentally different from communitarian approaches to liberal democracy, analogies between Confucian political thought and a “communitarianized” Dewey seem problematic. A differentiation of political theory somewhat similar to Rorty’s can be found in Ernst Vollrath’s *Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen*, albeit in the context of comparing the development of Anglo-American and German political theory. Vollrath’s analysis is in reference to Hannah Arendt’s attempt to develop a concept of power of political judgement out of an interpretation of Kant’s third critique.

on their observations of non-Chinese democracies. Where American philosophers can look back on the history of American democracy to understand the formation of political judgment, modern Confucians of the second generation had to make conjectures about almost everything that was related to liberal democracy. And while Rorty was not thinking specifically of Confucian philosophers, his approach is still helpful in describing their thoughts on democracy. Their political thinking starts from strong religious-metaphysical assumptions about the nature of man. In view of Rorty's juxtaposition of philosophy and democracy, they can therefore be labeled as "philosophical" in a broad, foundationalist sense. For them, it was pivotal that their modern reconstruction of Confucianism entailed a comprehensive philosophical, or, in the case of Tang, civil-theological justification of democracy.

The Weakness of Democracy in China

Tang's thoughts on a Chinese democracy and his above-mentioned examination of the reasons for the absence of a modern nation-state in China are closely related. But it was the communist victory on the Chinese Mainland in 1949 that formed the immediate historical context for his reflections about political democracy. Tang apparently presumed that the communists would not have succeeded in conquering the Mainland if there had been a modern nation-state, complete with a democratic constitutional order. In an article dated September 1950 and entitled "The Cultural Background of China's Contemporary Chaos,"²⁷ Tang analyzed the failure of democracy after the foundation of the republic in 1912. During the 1950s, he published a number of texts dealing with the same question, among them: "Basic Knowledge about Humanistic Culture and Democracy,"²⁸ "The Humanistic and Democratic Spirit in Chinese and Western Societies,"²⁹ the Confucian manifesto of 1958, and the monograph *Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason*, which was published in the same year. Tang clearly assumed that this search for the roots of the problem should precede any attempt to anticipate the requirements for a future Chinese democracy.

27 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 260–281.

28 Published in *Democratic Review (Minzhu Pinglun)*, Vol. 3, No. 24 (February 1952); see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 388–401.

29 Published in *Democratic Review (Minzhu Pinglun)*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (February 1953); see Tang, *ibid.*, pp. 402–425.

In order to present a balanced examination of the related shortcomings in China's political history and Chinese political thought, Tang did not neglect to discuss (contingent) historical developments that worked to foreclose the formation of constitutional democracy in China, even though he placed more emphasis overall on intellectual issues. The manifesto of 1958 rejected the view that solely the lack of democratic ideas in traditional Chinese political thought was to blame for China's failure to develop a democratic government. The manifesto reminded its readers that the final failure of democracy in China in 1949 was mainly due to actual developments in political history, such as the high tide of nationalism and the failure of reforms under the government of the GMD after the Japanese intrusions in the early 1930s, the Second World War, and the ensuing civil war. Most importantly, the government of the GMD had been unwilling to establish a democracy after the successful military unification of the country in 1928 and instead implemented a single-party government under the guise of a so-called political tutelage.³⁰

These turns of events happened in the aftermath of the republican revolution in 1911 which, according to the manifesto of 1958, was not so much a victory of democracy as a success of anti-Manchu Han nationalism. The manifesto consequently suggests that the founding of the republic had been widely perceived by the Chinese as just another dynastic change, even more so since there were no clear ideas of popular sovereignty, democracy, and political rights among the population.³¹ The authors of the manifesto concluded that given such a weak presence of democratic ideas before and after 1911, it was not surprising that communism gained wide currency at the expense of democratic thought—especially given China's historical experience with an “invasion at the hands of Western capitalism and the repression by imperialism.”³² The absence of a democratic government in China was thus not entirely due to the peculiarities of political thought in pre-20th century China, but also a result of the unpredictable course of Chinese history since the mid-19th century. Besides this, Tang also took geographical and demographical aspects into account, such as the size of China's population and territory, and referred the reader to a broad historical context of pre-imperial and imperial China.³³

The gist of Tang's analysis, however, deals with the social structure of late imperial China and the social background, the mentality, and the intellectual preferences of the social and political elites. The focus lies here on develop-

30 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 42–43.

31 Ibid., p. 41.

32 Ibid., p. 43.

33 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 420.

ments and constellations in China which stand in stark contrast to the historical evolution of Western democracies. Particularly important is the historical formation of an elite mentality that ultimately prevented an engagement with democracy. With this in mind, Tang called attention to political and economic issues such as the fact that there had been no feudal aristocracy in imperial China. He, moreover, highlighted the weak accumulation of large amounts of capital in commerce since the Han Dynasty, the difference between traditional Chinese associations of commerce and the more autonomous guilds in Western countries, the traditionally low social prestige of merchants in imperial China, the absence of an autonomous class of landowners since the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the absence of a capitalist class in modern China, and the traditional detachment of farmers, craftsmen, and merchants from politics. In addition, he mentioned the inability of clerical organizations in traditional China to dominate the state and society in a manner comparable to Christian churches.³⁴ Thus, whereas Western democracies gradually took shape in societies which were stratified by an aristocracy, powerful families and land owners, clerical organizations, and eventually by the process of industrialization, leading to the formation of labor organizations, late imperial China did not see such developments.³⁵

As for the educated elites in China and their particular mentality—in Tang’s terminology their “spirit” (*jingshen*)—he concluded that they had mainly evolved since the Tang and Song Dynasties in the context of the imperial civil service examinations. Accordingly, unlike their Western counterparts, modern Chinese intellectuals did not emerge from the church, the aristocracy, the landowners, or, finally, the petty bourgeoisie.³⁶ As a consequence of this social-historical setting and the mentalities it shaped, the predominant ideal for the educated person in China was to shoulder the responsibility for the whole ecumene (*tianxia*). This ideal required the educated to refrain from representing politically the interests of a specific class, social organization, or church. Instead, non-partisan participation in politics became, at least in theory, one of the guiding ideas of an elite culture wrought by the civil service system of imperial China. In the post-revolutionary political environment of the republic, this mentality proved to be very harmful, as the intellectuals who had already lost their traditional vitality now contented themselves with representing their personal “individualism.”³⁷ Members of the intellectual elite,

34 Ibid., pp. 270–271.

35 Ibid., p. 272.

36 Ibid., p. 270.

37 Ibid., pp. 270–271.

including those who acted as members of parliament, now had the mentality and the social background of free-floating intellectuals and academics. Unlike members of parliament in Western countries, they represented neither specific class interests, nor particular professional groups or religious organizations. They were thus not swayed by social or economic forces and their political position was weak. At the same time, they remained aloof to social reality. Their speeches and actions were not regulated or restricted by any social, economic, or clerical clientele, nor were there political parties powerful enough to exert a system of checks and balances in parliament.³⁸

It is against the backdrop of this depiction of late imperial and early Republican China that Tang reflected on the impact of Confucian humanism on the evolution of democratic ideas. He was, as we have seen, highly critical of Confucianism's *political* traditions, but he did not reject its humanist strands. His analysis is indeed nuanced, as evidenced by his statement that before 1911, "[t]he humanistic spirit of China's past contained a democratic spirit, but there were no institutions of democratic politics in the Western style."³⁹ The Confucian "humanistic spirit" is thus identified as an intellectual resource of democracy in China. As for the democratic function of this spirit, Tang was convinced that it was manifest in the great importance which Confucianism placed on the personality of individuals.⁴⁰ This facilitated—if we are to follow the interpretation from the manifesto of 1958—the establishment of meritocratic ideas and institutions in imperial China.

Although meritocratic elements, which were predominantly related to the notion of a government by virtuous and able persons,⁴¹ are part of an "ideal" democracy, they were, according to Tang, severely flawed. First of all, there was no persistently effective safeguard against the abuse of power by the rulers, even though some meritocratic measures and institutions had been established, such as the civil service examination system, which was open to competition for parts of the male population; a sort of cabinet in the government, which not only counseled the emperor but at times would remonstrate against him; the so-called censorial system, which functioned to survey and admonish the officials as well as the emperor himself; and the institutional-

38 Ibid., pp. 270–271; see also Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 41.

39 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 420; see also *ibid.*, p. 413. For a similar statement, see Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 289–291: Here, Tang concluded that there was no rule of law in Chinese history comparable to the development of the rule of law in the West.

40 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 416, also cf. p. 413.

41 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 288–289.

ized production of a historiography which passed posthumous judgments on emperors and dynasties. These institutions, however, proved to be inefficient when it came to preventing or at least sanctioning serious abuses of power. Ultimately, the quality of the political order depended on the willingness of those in power to abide by meritocratic ideals.⁴²

Not only were the institutions of meritocracy deficient, but the idea itself was fundamentally flawed. A truly virtuous ruler would certainly encourage his subjects to reinforce their moral personality, but since the subjects depended on exemplary rulers and were, in fact, for the most part denied political participation, they would never attain sufficient autonomy to actualize their moral subjectivity.⁴³ Tang therefore concluded that the Chinese spirit of democracy was present only in the “moral spirit” of Confucianism, and thus in a “hidden” form that never amounted to the manifestation of a “political spirit.” Consequently, the Chinese people were not aware of their status as political subjects and had no conception of any claim to political rights:⁴⁴

I say that Confucian thought contains the highest democratic spirit, because [Confucian thought] believes in the highest sense that every human being can become a sage and join Heaven in virtue. Now people may ask: Why didn't Confucians talk about Western style democratic politics...? (...) My answer is: Originally, Confucians took politics just as a direct extension of morality; politics was [thought of as an] occasion for the direct realization of human moral consciousness.⁴⁵

In the same vein, Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan critically reflected on the absence of “political subject[ivity]” (*zhengzhi shang de zhuti* 政治上的主體), to use Xu's term, from traditional Confucian political thought. As Xu maintained, this was the downside of the Confucian conflation of politics and ethics, which essentially resulted in the supplanting of political subjectivity by moral subjectivity.⁴⁶ Tang, too, left no doubt that the reason for the lack of subjectivity had to do with Confucianism itself. In particular, he was concerned,

42 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 37–38; see also Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 289.

43 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 38–39.

44 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 420.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 419; also cf. p. 422.

46 Xu, “Rujia zhengzhi sixiang de gouzao ji qi zhuanjin,” p. 55. On Mou, see my “‘Confucian Democracy’ and its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism,” pp. 177–183.

as we have seen, with the inability of pre-modern Confucianism to reach an adequate understanding of the lust for power that is deeply rooted in human nature. Unlike Xu Fuguan, he argued that since Confucian philosophers had failed to develop an adequate political anthropology, they held on to a false belief in the potential of individual character-building and education, and thought this would be sufficient to contain the human lust for power. They did not recognize, in other words, how deeply rooted this desire is in human nature. Consequently, they settled for a political philosophy that treated political power mostly in terms of educational efforts directed at individuals, including the rulers, who were expected to cultivate their moral natures.⁴⁷

The Civil-Theological Justification of Democracy

Tang's justification of democracy is based upon an idea of man which is closely intertwined with his Confucian civil theology. A key element of the civil-theological idea of man is the assumption of an indissoluble human lust for power. Because the political traditions of Confucianism severely misjudged the latter, Tang denied that pre-modern Confucianism was suited for bolstering the call for constitutional democracy. After all, with respect to democracy, one needed to account for the human being's persistent lust for power:

What makes democratic politics a necessity is indeed that human beings have a political consciousness stemming not only directly from [their] moral consciousness, but also from a drive for power. This means a government of sage-kings or Plato's philosophers can almost certainly not appear in reality. If such [government] would [actually] appear, it would not be able to objectively guarantee its continuation.⁴⁸

Among the indispensable arrangements to prevent the abuse of political power, Tang deemed the institutions for legislation and public elections to be especially important. This entailed a system of checks and balances which would gradually reduce the likelihood that political wills destroy "the values of human existence and culture."⁴⁹ Tang thus justified democratic institutions—

47 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 395–396, 422.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 394–395. Since this political anthropology is fundamental to Tang's political philosophy, He Xinquan's (Ho Hsin-chuan) critique that Tang only partially separated politics from ethics is unjustified; see He, *Ruxue yu xiandai minzhu*, pp. 128–129.

49 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 396–397.

in particular the democratic formation of the political will—by stating that they effectively balance and mitigate the wills for power. It is also significant that he conceptualized the necessity to curtail dangerous power struggles without an accompanying call for a “new man” of higher moral qualities.

The justification for institutions of checks and balances is hence inseparable from the idea that individuals express their “political consciousness” by striving for power (i.e. by participating in politics).⁵⁰ Tang’s political thought takes a turn here which is untypical, to say the least, in Confucian traditions: His line of argument clearly suggests that something “good,” such as a democracy, can arise from something morally questionable, namely, the latently evil lust for power which elicits the need to establish checks and balances. As he pointedly concluded, the source of democracy is not “perfectly holy.” He therefore took issue with any political philosophy founded on an excessively optimistic belief in human goodness.⁵¹ Tang certainly resisted the lure of an ethics of conviction, favoring instead an ethics of responsibility. As a consequence, any justification of liberal democracy based on the assumption that the political consciousness of individuals might and should become a direct extension of their moral consciousness must be regarded, according to Tang, as inadequate and self-contradictory. The belief that the moral good can be readily detected and thereafter implemented given that political decisions are taken by a truly moral consciousness amounts, in fact, to a denial of the desirability of popular participation. Tang maintained that if the identification and implementation of moral truths were taken to be crucial criteria for decisions in politics, a monarchy (or an authoritarian system for that matter) in which a tiny minority of exemplary figures rules according to their presumably superior moral standards would have to be regarded as the best political system.⁵²

Therefore, Tang did not justify institutions like the rule of law or public elections in terms of moral subjects, but rather in terms of the idea that individuals are universally entitled to claim rights for themselves:

The spiritual foundation of early modern Western rule of law and government by the people consists in the universal recognition of the rights of the people. This establishing of a principle of reason in recognizing everyone’s rights can be said to originally come from each individual affirming and grasping their own rights, which [in turn] stems from human’s selfish desires. Yet, each individual’s affirmation of their own rights [in turn leads

50 Ibid., pp. 394–395, 398.

51 Ibid., pp. 396–397.

52 Ibid., p. 394.

to a situation where] the rights of all individuals constrain one another. From this, human beings attain the notion of transcending their individual rights and recognizing the rights of others. Thus, there is the establishment of the reasonable principle that the rights of all men should be recognized. (...) By establishing this principle of reason ... everyone can observe the guidance this principle [provides] and become aware of their own reasonable self as it transcends their striving for rights, further nourishes and expands their moral will and completes their moral personality through self-awareness. (...) Only then may China's past ideals of government by virtue, government by [upright] men, and government by morals be truly realized.⁵³

In other words, the contemporary realization of the ideal of "government by virtue" rests upon a much less optimistic view of human nature. It thus makes room for the political institutions of liberal democracy, which were inconceivable for Confucians of the pre-Qin and imperial centuries. As Tang suggested, the Confucian tradition provided an insufficient basis for the justification and stabilization of core institutions of liberal democracies such as the rule of law and the legal protection of human rights:

Here, the Confucian idea of the whole man as a cultural and moral being seems inadequate as the spiritual ground for the establishment of a modern community and modern vocational morality. . . . the modern ideas of human rights, as related with ideas of democracy, freedom, and equality, are all defined objectively in terms of the individual's social, political, legal, and economic relations to others. (...) Thus the human rights protected by modern laws are actually protected by the whole legislative system, which is related to the whole political and social systems and not protected merely by our subjective moral sense of justice. Here, we see that the Confucian idea of a moral sense of justice has never developed enough to build such a modern systems [sic]. The Confucian's idea of freedom is man's moral freedom to do the moral good. The Confucian's ideas of right and the equality of men are essentially the equality of moral nature and moral right to be sages. All of these Confucian ideas are not sufficient to provide a spiritual basis of modernization. To respond to the demands of the age, a further development of Confucianism from within is called for.⁵⁴

53 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, pp. 289–290.

54 Tang, "The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia," pp. 368–369.

The question, then, is what role, if any, can a renewed, modern Confucianism play in the context of establishing a democracy in China? Given Tang's, as well as Xu Fuguan's and Mou Zongsan's, judgment about the ambivalent nature of Confucianism (on the one hand, it is an intellectual "sprout" of democracy; on the other, it is responsible for the failure to establish a democratic government before 1911), the issue becomes even more delicate. Addressing this problem was particularly important, because they considered a democratic nation-state to be modern Confucianism's authentic political form. They therefore needed to explain how democracy, constitutional government, and the rule of law can be understood and justified in terms of Confucianism. It was not enough to understand them as Western additions, as mere formalities added onto a Confucian ethical substance. After all, neither Tang nor Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan fell back on the pattern of 19th century *Tiyong* thought. Their concept of liberal democracy was not based on such simplistic notions. They also did not speculate about how to improve, or Confucianize, constitutional arrangements and institutional practices of extant Western liberal democracies. It was not their ambition to alter the form of liberal democracy even before it had begun its political life in China.

A fundamental assumption of Tang's, Xu's and Mou's transcultural political thought is that, in order to take root in modern China, Western institutions and ideas need to stand the test of a *full* justification in terms of indigenous philosophy. In this context, Tang Junyi delineated comprehensive "philosophical" approaches (to borrow Richard Rorty's term) to justifying democracy as those based on a theory of natural law and those focusing on a concept of the dignity of the individual. As Tang explained, he attempted to justify democracy by introducing the Mencian idea that every human being can "become a Yao or a Shun." He presumed that "becoming a Yao or a Shun" is a formula connoting that every individual, as a "moral subject" (*daode de zhuti* 道德的主體), has the same natural potency to become a "sage." All individuals should therefore also receive equal recognition as "political and social subjects" (*zhengzhi shehui zhi zhuti* 政治社會之主體).⁵⁵ Accordingly, when discussing the ultimate goals of those striving for democracy and freedom, Tang singled out the idea of realizing the individual's (moral) nature, reason, and holiness.⁵⁶

55 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 45.

56 See his article from 1952 entitled "The Establishment of Chinese Democratic Thought" ("Zhongguo minzhu sixiang zhi jianli" 中國民主思想之建立) reprinted in: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 165.

Tang did not develop a full-scale theory of democracy that deals with questions of political justice, legitimacy, or sovereignty in-depth.⁵⁷ Yet one may still find some remarkable peculiarities in the democratic ideas that he enunciated on the basis of his Confucian civil theology. To begin with, there is the attempt to comprehensively integrate the idea of a renewed Confucian ethical life (including the “consciousness of rites”) into the institutional setting of a liberal democracy. This entails, as we have seen, a “Confucian” interpretation of civic virtues such as solidarity and tolerance as manifestations of the individual’s freedom to practice moral self-cultivation in the community. The democratic practice itself is hence said to provide impetus for the individual’s moral self-cultivation. Moreover, democracy is deemed desirable because it allows individuals to engage in moral and spiritual self-fulfillment, and do so without risking their own survival in the political community along the way. Equally important, the striving of individuals to attain political power is not entirely curbed in a liberal democracy, nor is their pursuit of individual self-interest. From the perspective of modern Confucian civil theology, it is therefore possible for individuals to give expression to both their moral nature and their evil inclinations, albeit within legal limits. They can thus learn to judge for themselves whether their actions are morally questionable or not, and, in so doing, further develop their moral subjectivity.⁵⁸

Based on his belief that individuals need to attain the freedom of expressing their natural endowments when striving for self-fulfillment, Tang identified liberal democracy as the political form best suited for the quest for self-fulfillment. Democracy can be understood as an institutional and procedural precondition, and at the same time as an ongoing political and ethical context for personal self-cultivation. Tang thereby abandoned the older notion of good government as depending on the virtuous quality and superior personality of the rulers. Democracy, in Tang’s view, can work even if those in power are not virtuous, self-cultivated individuals. Citizens need neither qualify themselves by becoming moral beings, nor manifest their goodwill by engaging in self-cultivation and education:

57 Tang’s notion of liberal democracy does not differ significantly from Mou Zongsan’s; cf. Fröhlich, “‘Confucian Democracy’ and its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism,” pp. 177–183.

58 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 394–395, 398. On the meaning of politics in relation to anthropological-metaphysical assumptions of the original nature of human beings, see, *ibid.*, p. 417.

Therefore, the rule of law and democratic institutions are also [a way of] cultivating and nourishing ordinary people so that they are endowed with the self-awareness of the universal reasonable self. It is thus already sufficient if ordinary people do not overstep the limits set by the law in their affirmation and grasp of their own rights and in [their] struggle for rights with other people—[in this regard, they] cannot make a grave mistake either. (...) But the philosophers of China's past did not yet thoroughly understand this.⁵⁹

If citizens do not behave morally, it does not mean democracy is failing or unjustified. In other words, modern Confucianism should not justify political authoritarianism in the guise of pursuing lofty ideals of moral and spiritual education with ostensibly still immature Chinese citizens. Tang, therefore, departed from the authoritarian approaches to Confucianism by assuming that a democratic government neither needs morally superior sage-rulers, nor a model citizenry of exemplary, virtuous personalities. If politicians and citizens behave like morally advanced individuals, democracy would flourish, but it could also function if they are not morally superior persons. Clearly, Tang did not support the conflation of politics and ethics, which he saw as ever-present in the Confucian tradition, and in this sense his reconstruction of Confucianism is distinctly modern. Although Tang did not explicitly refer to Kant's distinction between a good, law-abiding citizen and a morally good individual, he followed a similar line of thought—in contrast, for example, to Xu Fuguan.⁶⁰ Given Tang's distinction between good citizens and morally good persons, his rejection of the belief that sage-rulers or sage citizens are preconditions for a functioning democracy is not surprising. He was indeed content to conceive of a democratic community as a political and ethical context for an individual's pursuing "the perfection of [his or her] personality."

By conceptualizing the individual's *being* a sage as a fleeting moment of moral intuition, Tang's modern Confucian civil theology implied that an enduring, morally perfect human community cannot be attained and political reality cannot be turned into an earthly paradise. At the same time, Tang used the civil-theological limit-concept of selfhood as a sage to establish a critical distance from political life and avoid the danger of simply reaffirming the current political reality. The other side of the coin is that what individuals in the ephemeral moment of sagehood perceive as true, authentic, or correct is

59 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 291.

60 For a critique of Xu's tendency to blur the conceptual distinction made by Kant, see Xiong, "Xu Fuguan lun minzhu zhengzhi," p. 51.

internal to themselves and done without reasoning with other human beings. “Inner sagehood” is not a democratic figure, and nor could such a sage accept a political compromise. He would not submit to rule by the majority or to the idea that decisions are democratically valid, not because they are correct, but because the procedures of decision-making are a matter of agreement about that process in advance. A community populated only by sages would lose its political character altogether, and there would be no negotiating, no use of political power, and even no communication. There would just be a complete unity of “innate knowing” and behavior. This vision obviously transcends the realm of liberal democracy in a radical sense. To be sure, neither Tang Junyi nor Mou Zongsan expected such a community would ever become a historical reality. The community of sages is real only insofar as it is part of the civil-theological justification of democracy. It is neither the highest ideal of democracy itself, nor its ultimate historical form. In spite of this limitation, the justification of democracy in terms of this limit-concept poses two problems in particular:

(1) The persuasiveness of arguments in favor of liberal democracy rests on the religious-metaphysical assumptions of modern Confucianism’s civil theology. That means a shared belief and social acceptance of Confucianism as a form of religious humanism (or civil religion) is crucial to the justification. This does not necessarily mean religious freedom would be endangered, since Confucian religious humanism is not a ruling ideology bolstered by constitutional provisions. Moreover, it could be argued that a Confucian civil religion can also tolerate other forms of religion. But if we understand modernity today in post-metaphysical terms, things look different. Even if it were possible for Confucianism to develop into a civil religion—a highly problematic and questionable prospect—what would happen if Confucianism (as religious humanism) gradually lost its appeal as social change occurs? Is there some underlying rationale for dealing with a plurality of justifications? And would that rationale have to be justified in terms of Confucianism?

(2) The civil-theological justification paradoxically points towards the complete dissolution of democracy. After all, there is an implicit tendency to portray democracy both as a precondition or a context and as a means to the (apolitical) higher end of self-fulfillment as a sage. The problem is not so much that democracy is seen as a means, since this is asserted in other political theories, including Western theories, without undermining the existence of democracy. The problem is that Tang assumed that the end to which democracy is supposed to lead (i.e. the sphere of the sage) is settled beyond the sphere of politics, making democracy as means not just optional, but accidental. Consider the rationality of the procedures of democratic decision-making in terms of

Confucianism: In the course of discussing political issues, in the framework of democratic rules, participants following those rules not only identify themselves as citizens or politicians who accept procedural agreements of democratic decision-making. They also represent themselves as human beings who have not attained “inner sagehood,” and are thus in need of self-cultivation. There would otherwise be no reason for discussion, since the sages intuitively know the one truth without prior communication. From a Confucian point of view, participating in a democratic debate, and in so doing respecting the opinions of others, is conducive to one’s self-cultivation. Starting a fistfight is not. But how does one know that this is true? The foundation of this knowledge cannot consist of a conceptually or otherwise symbolically represented form of cognition, because such a form of knowledge would function vis-à-vis one’s ultimate, intuitive insight merely as a means. It is consequently a matter of *belief* that abiding by democratic rules and having a democratic attitude could be conducive to attaining the intuitive insights of a sage. But the same could be said of any form or technique of self-cultivation. If one does not share this belief, the civil-theological justification of liberal democracy loses its appeal. As a result, the precarious conceptual foundation of democracy would be laid bare: it would float between the two poles of a concept of the political sphere marked by the individual’s irrational lust for power, on the one hand, and the notion of an individual’s spiritual inwardness culminating in an irrational intuition, on the other. It is the destruction of rationality in (democratic) politics that looms large at this point.

The crucial question, in the end, is what function this justification has relative to the workings of a liberal democracy. If it is considered fundamental, in the sense that democracy can only work if everyone, or at least a majority, shares these Confucian convictions, then the old trap of dogmatism is set again. This is not what Tang had in mind. He clearly stated the priority that a constitution and the rule of law must have over continuing the *political* traditions of Confucianism. Modern Confucianism would thus be one among many other intellectual or religious resources for reproducing civic virtues and democratic convictions among the citizens. Reading Tang Junyi (and Mou Zongsan), though, one cannot help but feel that what he actually wanted was a far more prominent role for Confucianism. Just the same, at least until the mid-1960s, Tang and Mou resisted the lure of Confucian authoritarianism. Besides, it is no contradiction that they were simultaneously both ardent cultural conservatives who emphasized the importance of Confucianism, and political liberals who insisted on legal guarantees for political pluralism and religious freedom. Their *cultural* conservatism was a kind of outlet for their high expectations of Confucianism. They had to politically moderate those expectations in order

to fulfill what they perceived a democratic modern China would require. This was, of course, part of a discourse on democracy that is proleptic in character: Tang argued for the effectiveness and the desirability of a type of democracy which had not yet emerged in Chinese history.

Humanistic Culture and Democracy

According to Tang Junyi, democracy does not solely rest on constitutional institutions and procedures, but also on individual attitudes, virtues, and values deemed favorable for sustaining a democratic order. Tang indeed avoided a highly formalized conceptualization of constitutional democracy which would preclude any elements of a value-rational justification. Instead, he understood the practice of democracy to include virtues, values, and habits of individuals who conform to the rule of law voluntarily, and not solely due to heteronomous legal force.⁶¹ The ethical and cultural preconditions of democratic government do not exclusively pertain to the realm of the individual, but also to the collective sphere of social and cultural life. In order to effectively meet the requirements for democracy, “the position and dignity” of the individual must be given “objective political meaning.”⁶² This will take place, as Tang explains, in a “social atmosphere” (*shehui fengqi* 社會風氣) that allows the individuals to develop an awareness of the “humanistic world.”⁶³ For one, such a social environment entails the formation of a public opinion that holds “personalities from [the sphere of] society,” such as entrepreneurs, scholars, educators, and those engaged in charitable work, in equally high esteem as politicians.⁶⁴ Hence, not only the recognition of political roles in the narrow sense matters to political life, but also the recognition of social and cultural roles.

Tang posited here, in fact, that the individual quest for recognition is a core element in political, social, cultural and economic life, even though the forms of recognition and the means to achieve it may differ. This claim corresponds, as we have seen, to the analysis of the lust for power as driven by the individual's desire to gain recognition from others. From the perspective

61 On this topic, see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 105.

62 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 401, 423–424. Tang refers in this context to “humanistic forces” (*ibid.*, p. 423) and to “social and cultural forces and organizations” (*ibid.*, p. 401).

63 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 237.

64 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 424.

of power politics, the willingness to recognize others as rulers is due to the suppression by an opposing will. As regards the victorious will, it would take its self-exhaustion and subsequent “reversal” in the “great emptiness” to turn it into a moral will that voluntarily recognizes the will, personality, or value orientations of others (see Chap. 7). Even the individual’s deepest absorption with the lust for power hence still provides a possibility for non-coercive recognition. In turning to political life in a democratic society, we may conclude from this analysis that although power struggles may prevail, there is still a measure of voluntary recognition to be expected from political actors. At this point, Tang’s political thought takes an almost existentialist turn. His reference to the individual’s reversal in the great emptiness indeed suggests that beyond the forms of legally enforced and voluntary recognition, there is an existential ground for recognition.

In spite of his focus on the issue of recognition in social interaction, Tang appears to have not devised a theory of recognition that differentiates between recognition among abstract legal subjects, individuals in ethical relations, or collectivities within social sectors. It is, therefore, more apt to say that Tang established a foundation for further theoretical reflection about issues of recognition, without pursuing such a path himself. But even so, he clearly arrived at the conclusion that struggles for recognition were as pervasive in political, power-driven interactions as in social and cultural interactions. We may further conclude that if the members of a democratic community have sufficient opportunities to become immersed in the “humanistic” realm of recognition, they might eventually become more inclined to voluntarily recognize other individuals and their value orientations. This, in turn, would have the effect of mitigating power struggles and reducing the need to resort to legal force as a means to sustain democratic practice and order.

In the same vein, Tang warned against the tendency to perceive politics and political life in general solely in terms of power struggles.⁶⁵ Such a misguided perception would preclude the awareness that the “original” motivation for political acts indeed stems from a “mind of humaneness and justice,” which facilitates forms of voluntary recognition. Rather enigmatically, Tang claims that this reflection about the motivation to pay recognition is concerned with a psychological fact.⁶⁶ But what about the will for power as a driving force of political activity? As we have seen, Tang considered the will for power to be “original,” too. The coexistence of the “mind of humaneness and justice” and the will for power at the motivational origin of political activity seems to

65 Ibid., p. 424.

66 Ibid., pp. 391–392.

be an uneasy one. However, they are not necessarily unrelated to each other. Tang had tried to show in his analysis of the will for power that it operates dialectically, undergoing a reversal into a moral will. What is more, the “mind of humaneness and justice” does not have to be understood for it to completely lack a will for power. Be that as it may, Tang was certainly not saying here that political life may be cleansed from all power-seeking action and motivation. He rather wanted to highlight that the concept of politics must not be reduced to a definition in terms of struggles for power, domination, and rule. The practice of civic virtues, tolerance, and solidarity that entails the willingness to pay voluntary recognition in political life is also to be considered political in an original sense.

On this basis, Tang argued that humanistic issues matter to political life in a democracy. He further assumed that the “spirit of humaneness and justice” essentially evolves within a humanistic realm composed of the spheres of ethics, religions, science, literature, art, education, and the economic sphere.⁶⁷ As he saw it, these spheres belong to the so-called humanistic territory of collective life.⁶⁸ By acting in these humanistic fields, the individuals are said to practice virtues and values and develop habits of voluntarily recognizing the personality and the value orientation of others. The humanistic realm in society was obviously not to be confounded with an apolitical realm for the retreat of individuals into a spiritual or religious inwardness, but should contribute to the normative preconditions of democratic political order. Tang emphatically stated that “all thinking and concepts in politics” should be related to humanistic thought and concepts, and this was also to pertain to the concept of democracy which had to be interpreted from the perspective of humanistic concepts.⁶⁹

According to Tang, in terms of their relevance for the social formation of a non-coercive practice of recognition, the sciences and the economic sector should be set at the periphery of the humanistic core area of ethics, religions, literature, art, and education. Politics, on the other hand, is only to have “subordinated” relevance.⁷⁰ This outlook entails the assumption that the willingness of individuals to *voluntarily* recognize “values of human existence and culture,” i.e. the value orientation, personality, and dignity of others, results from the individual’s immersion in the humanistic core area. At the same time, this willingness is to form the normative basis for the political consciousness of

67 Ibid., pp. 403, 409–410.

68 Ibid., p. 403.

69 Ibid., p. 388.

70 Ibid., pp. 63–66.

citizens in a democratic society.⁷¹ It is with this rationale that Tang identified China's "humanistic spirit" in general and the "Confucian spirit" in particular, which holds the individual's personality in the highest esteem, as the spiritual foundation of democracy.⁷² It should be kept in mind here that Tang was, as we have seen, convinced that any Confucian renewal of the individual's ethical life and his or her ethical disposition (i.e. a "consciousness of rites") in turn required the practice of constitutional government and the rule of law.

Tang's reflections about issues of recognition in a democracy may seem to remain somewhat nebulous, because he neither bolstered them with a comprehensive political ethics, nor with a political axiology that might clarify the hierarchy and inter-relatedness of political values. Even so, he obviously considered the individual's ability to evaluate "political personalities" on the basis of a hierarchy of political values as a key competence of citizens in a democracy. He referred to the period of the founding fathers of the United States as being exemplary for this civic competence. In the early period of the republic, the Americans are said to have still "cultivated" a "spirit of striving for higher [values and virtues]" together with the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the republic.⁷³ In order to preserve such a civic mindset under conditions of a progressive modernization (within a future Chinese democracy), it would be necessary to accord key relevance to a humanistic core area which must, consequently, be shielded from a thorough politicization or economization. Tang was not overly optimistic in this regard, as he bluntly stated that historical developments in the United States showed how, at the stage of advanced industrialization and increasing division of labor, the danger of a domination by "instrumental values" (*gongju jiazhi* 工具價值)⁷⁴ was growing and with it a general leveling in value orientations. The existence of a humanistic core area within modernizing societies was thus not only threatened by ideational factors such as a misguided reduction of politics to power struggles, but also by factors pertaining to the socioeconomic, structural conditions of modernization that tend to undermine the civic consciousness in a democratic community.⁷⁵

71 Ibid., pp. 391–392. Tang related this to the Confucian worthies who allegedly made humaneness and justice their "basis" for recognizing values of human existence and culture. According to the "teachings of the goodness of [human] nature," all human beings are capable of such recognition; *ibid.*, pp. 416, 418.

72 Ibid., p. 416. This is the political meaning of the proposition from the manifesto of 1958 according to which the Confucian "study of mind and [human] nature" was at the "heart" of Chinese culture and scholarship; see Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 21.

73 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, pp. 134–135.

74 Ibid., p. 134.

75 Ibid., pp. 132–134.

If Tang had been an American political thinker, he might have belonged to the tradition of the liberal left. Both his concept of a humanistic core area within a democratic society and his notion of a renewal of traditional “communities and associations of alumni, of members from the same birthplace, of academics, of participants of poetry and wine gatherings” under conditions of social modernity roughly correspond to John Dewey’s conception of a “Great Community.”⁷⁶ Dewey assumed that given the evolution of modern mass communication and the ensuing emergence of a badly informed, politically disinterested mass public, the participation of individuals in “lesser communities” (e.g. neighborhood communities) and local associations should play an important role in politics, because, as members of such communities and associations, individuals could gain experience in political participation. Dewey thus stated that, after all, “[d]emocracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”⁷⁷ At the heart of this idea, there is a concept of the individual which more or less accords with Tang’s concept. Dewey, too, assumes that

an individual is nothing fixed, given ready-made. It is something achieved, and achieved not in isolation, but [sic] the aid and support of conditions, cultural and physical, including in ‘cultural’ economic, legal, and political institutions as well as science and art.⁷⁸

76 Dewey refers in his book *The Public and its Problems* from 1927 to the pre-modern type of family and neighborhood associations of “the Orient,” claiming that these were neither *political* communities nor part of the societal sphere. According to Dewey, such familial communities were ruled by “personal loyalties” and politics were “submerged in morals,” while the “theocratic state” was considered to be remote. As a result, “[t]he intimate and familiar propinquity group [was] not a social unity within an inclusive whole;” see Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 41–42. Tang might have agreed. After all, when proposing to link up with the tradition of Chinese communities and associations, he did it on the basis of his diagnosis that there had been neither a civil society nor a modern nation-state in imperial China. Tang’s position is therefore not in obvious contrast to Dewey’s judgment. Tan Sor-hoon recently took a different approach and refuted Dewey’s analysis with respect to pre-imperial and imperial Chinese (especially Confucian) thought: Tan, *Confucian Democracy*, pp. 122–123.

77 Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 210–213. On this issue in Dewey’s thought, see Kallscheuer, “Pluralismus, Universalismus, Hermeneutik,” p. 225; see also Kallscheuer, “Ein amerikanischer Gesellschaftskritiker. Michael Walzers kommunitarer Liberalismus,” pp. 140–144.

78 Dewey, “The Future of Liberalism,” p. 227; see also Kallscheuer, “Ein amerikanischer Gesellschaftskritiker. Michael Walzers kommunitarer Liberalismus,” p. 141. For a discussion of the similarities between Dewey’s concept of the individual and pre-imperial

However, the similarities between Tang's modern Confucianism, on the one hand, and Dewey's political philosophy and other strands of American and European traditions of republican thought, on the other, should not be overstated. Modern Confucianism and Western republican traditions are based on vastly different theoretical frameworks. There are, for example, clear differences between Dewey's concept of liberty which states that liberty is the "... fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others,"⁷⁹ and Tang's theory of freedom which is based on the civil-theological notion of the self-fulfillment of personal potentialities *as endowed by Heaven*. These different points of departure entail vastly different ideas about the practice of individual self-fulfillment and the meaning and relevance of inter-subjective contexts.

Another difference pertains to the concepts of political reason which lie at the basis of the reflections about constitutional democracy. Anglo-American traditions of political thought in general take the long-standing experience with constitutional government as a crucial historical precondition for the formation of political reason, no matter whether constitutional government was republican or monarchic in nature, or whether there was a written system of constitutional law or a tradition of common law that did not produce written constitutions. In any case, political reason appears to be shaped by the reflection about the political history of one's "own" constitutional government. The formation of political reason and sound political judgment is thus seen as depending on the interpretations of the constitutional and political history, and not so much on philosophical speculation. In contrast, the latter flourishes when a long-standing, dominant tradition of constitutionalism is unavailable in one's own historical context. Political thinkers consequently try to tap more speculative sources of political reason.⁸⁰

Tang Junyi's attempt to devise a civil-theological basis for political philosophy can be considered a typical case of the speculative mode of political thinking. Tang was, after all, in no historical position to refer to a time-tested,

Confucian concepts of human nature (*xing*); see Tan, *Confucian Democracy*, pp. 25–32, 50–53, 101–102.

79 Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 150.

80 Vollrath considers the mainstream of 19th-century and early 20th-century German political thought as a case in point. On his comparison between German and Anglo-American traditions, see Vollrath, *Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen*, pp. 140–148, 159–160. In this context, Vollrath deems it significant that studies in political history and political biographies are particularly prominent within Anglo-American political thought: *Ibid.*, p. 148.

indigenous tradition of constitutional government, as there was no such tradition in China's political record. It indeed seems to make a great difference whether political thinkers are forced to anticipate constitutional democracy or whether they can critically reflect on it while actually living in a political community that is generally described as a constitutional democracy. A pragmatic, non-speculative type of political thought which is skeptical about philosophical attempts to construct a theoretical foundation for political reason and truth claims has therefore literally been out of reach for Chinese theoreticians of the 20th century. Given this intellectual-historical context, it is perhaps little surprising that Chinese political thinkers like Tang Junyi focused on a conceptual juxtaposition between (humanistic) culture and the lesser realm of politics.⁸¹ This again stands in stark contrast to Anglo-American traditions of political thought which conceptualized culture (or "civilization") to encompass the whole realm of political experience.

In order to deflect, on a conceptual level, tendencies to politicize the humanistic core of society, Tang developed a concept of politics that circumscribes the function of politics with respect to the social recognition of values and value orientations. Politics is hence said to have an *indirect* bearing on the deliberations and value orientations in public life. Tang explicitly referred to the American, British, and German post-war democracies in this context and explained that politics in general and political power in particular should be restrained, on the basis of constitutional law, by public opinion, social education, and economic forces. Such "restricted politics" (*xianzhi zhengzhi* 限制政治) would be confined to a "mediate form" (*jianjie xingtai* 間接形態), which would preclude an immediate, totalizing politicization of society.⁸²

Tang further elucidated his concept of politics by comparing the function of politics, in a manner similar to differentiation theory, to the role of a policeman who is standing guard at the entrance of a theatre. The policemen thus facilitates the realization of (humanistic) social and cultural values (inside the theatre), but he does so "indirectly," without participating in the theatre performance itself, neither as spectator nor as a critic.⁸³ Consequently, the "active tasks" to be fulfilled in politics, for example in the field of educational, cultural, or social welfare policy, are mainly to entail the task of organizing extant

81 Such a constellation is reminiscent of similar juxtapositions of culture and politics in German conservative thought of the late 19th and early 20th century. On the German concepts of culture, civilization and the political, see also Vollrath, "Zur Problematik eines Begriffs des Politischen," pp. 321, 329.

82 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 237.

83 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 390. On this aspect of Tang's concept of politics, see also Liu, "Tang Junyi de zhengzhi zhaxue," pp. 50–51.

social, cultural, and intellectual currents. Here, too, politics is to be understood primarily as a means.⁸⁴ It should hence be limited to a “domain” (*lingyu* 領域) within culture and society and must not be conceptualized as permeating the social and cultural domains.⁸⁵ According to this conceptual strategy, politics itself is neither a sphere in which humanistic culture is produced, nor should politics take responsibility for making judgments about specific normative contents of humanistic culture. The foremost task of politics is to safeguard humanistic culture on the whole and in so doing prevent democracy from deteriorating into a combat zone of ideologies.

The confinement of politics to the function of safeguarding normative resources for democratic deliberations also has consequences for the role of political parties and politicians. Tang suggested that in a democratic setting, political parties do not need an “ideology,” nor in fact even a “philosophy,” but merely political strategies for practical application.⁸⁶ This prescription for political parties should obviously preclude the existence of ideologically charged parties such as the CCP or the GMD in a future Chinese democracy. Tang completed his exhortation by adding that practical politics had to be concerned with concrete and particular issues, which was why politicians should refrain from relying on abstract principles and theories.⁸⁷ Otherwise, there was a risk of falling victim to an ideologization of politics that might engender totalitarianism. Such a type of politics is characterized, according to Tang, by the ambition to realize truth claims “immediately” and within all social and cultural sectors.

By rejecting calls to a comprehensive realization of political doctrines, the modern Confucian project is most of all about retracing ideational foundations of democracy and freedom—and not about efforts to implement doctrines and prescriptions.⁸⁸ Tang was therefore merely being consistent when stating that “our scholarship” should not be directly turned into a political force.⁸⁹ The idea here is that democratic discussions among citizens about which traditions to follow and how to interpret the normative foundations of their collective life require a humanistic realm that is free from direct interference by political

84 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 391; see also *ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

85 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 226–227. On Tang’s notion of politics as a sector within the “domains of human culture,” see also Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 389. “Culture” and “society” are used here as umbrella terms, that is, in a very broad sense.

86 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 226.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

ideologies and power politics. As a consequence, no particular humanistic tradition should obtain political protection above all others and this includes Confucianism. Tang's reluctance to provide a detailed, prescriptive depiction of Confucian humanism is therefore not due to a lack of practical concerns. On the contrary, the relative vagueness of Confucian humanism functions to prevent its abuse by political ideologies, and thus facilitates open deliberations about its contents and meanings among citizens in the first place. By raising the awareness for the need of such open deliberations, modern Confucianism is conducive to establishing a political culture that befits liberal democracy.

Unlike what one may generally expect from a Confucian philosopher, Tang did not support the idea that, in modernity, politics should be refueled with ethical values so as to fully reestablish the "representational value of the political."⁹⁰ Instead of longing for a substantial reintegration of politics and ethics, Tang chose virtually the opposite direction by relieving politics from claims to a higher moral truth. From now on, the field of politics was to be seen as characterized by the quest for power of contesting wills and the institutional and procedural arrangements for mitigating these contests. Even though cultural, social, or ethical values are not completely dysfunctional within politics, let alone absent from politics altogether, the operational logic of politics itself is not determined by such value orientations.

With this approach of differentiation, Tang sought to address challenges to constitutional democracy as he perceived them in the 1950s and 1960s, while at the same time rejecting the ideological lures of a concept of pure politics incorporating a higher morality, a scientific truth, or a historical necessity. He therefore deplored the fact that, on the Chinese Mainland after 1949, political rule had completely dominated the humanistic realm. In the "modern Qin Dynasty," as he called it, the CCP had elevated politics to the highest position in the whole sphere of culture in order to subdue the "humanistic world." The respective socialist theories of art and science should be discarded, according to Tang, because they submit the arts and sciences in total to political and economic standards.⁹¹

90 The term "representational value of the political" ("Repräsentationswert des Politischen") is borrowed from Bolz, who introduces it in his analysis of Walter Benjamin's critical remarks about the erosion of representational substance in democratic politics driven by the mounting dominance of mass media in politics: Bolz, "Charisma und Souveränität," p. 251.

91 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 65, 68, 388. This diagnosis of Tang has been refuted from a Marxist perspective by Zhang Xianghao, who criticized Tang's political

With respect to contemporary (and future Chinese) liberal democracies, Tang supported, as we have seen, the idea of indirectly enhancing the representational value of democratic politics by reaffirming the importance of the humanistic realm. He was walking a fine line here. While rejecting the traditionalistic idea of resubmitting politics altogether to pre-modern ethical standards and values, he repudiated the idea of reducing politics to a purely functional sphere deplete of any normative contents. The middle position that Tang envisioned for politics is an elusive terrain which is difficult to demarcate conceptually, even though he set a perimeter around the two-fold dimension of dissociative and associative aspects of political action. On the one hand, he depicted the sphere of political action as characterized by a dissociative struggle for power which involves specific means, institutions, and procedures; on the other, he conceptualized a social sphere of humanistic culture and values which is said to function as a crucial normative input for fostering associative behavior in politics.

Such an expectation with respect to the political relevance of humanistic culture appears to be overly optimistic, while at the same time underestimating the increasing political impact of modern mass communication. Tang assumed, for example, the success of politicians in democratic elections to be the result of a broad acceptance of their value orientations by the constituency.⁹² In the same vein, he was convinced that the values represented by the constituency have a crucial impact on decisions about who is to be entrusted with political responsibility.⁹³ To be fair, it should be mentioned again that Tang developed these views not as descriptions of extant democracies, but rather as to explore the normative potential of democracy. Indeed, when reflecting on the American democracy in his time, he not only observed an excess of instrumental values in politics, but also a dangerous tendency to turn democratic elections into a barter trade. Apparently both candidates and the constituency perceived each other as instrumental for the pursuit of their respective goals. Modern election campaigns are hence designed, Tang believed, to evoke a certain psychological condition in which the voters are easily incited. In a somber mood, he concluded that only those candidates get elected who are capable of inciting an emotional response in their constituency, whereas political personalities in the true sense of the word fail to be

thought for neglecting the "substance of classes" and disregarding the question of which class holds power to rule; see Zhang, *Tang Junyi sixiang yanjiu*, p. 161.

92 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 399.

93 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 132.

elected. In the end, “human beings” are not elected, but the financial power behind the campaigns of the candidates.⁹⁴

Even though these reflections on the downsides of modern democracy were in general agreement with pessimistic diagnoses of mass democracy in Europe and the United States, there are also some significant differences to be found. About two decades prior to Tang’s critical view of American democracy, Walter Benjamin presented a profound critique of the modern parliament and its public. According to Benjamin, the technical innovations of radio and film were for the most part responsible for an essential change in the nature of political selection. Now, the new procedure of “presenting the politicians before the recording equipment” was gaining so much momentum that parliaments and theaters were likewise in a state of atrophy. Benjamin concluded that given this novel “selection before an apparatus,” only “the champion, the star, and the dictator” would be able to succeed.⁹⁵ Tang did not consider the distortion of democratic politics and the depletion of normative deliberation under the impact of mass communication with the same heightened attention as Benjamin. But even so, he also did not believe in the feasibility of replenishing modern democracy with rejuvenated forms of rule by virtue, nor did he advocate the idea of a Confucian democracy characterized by meritocratic standards of political selection.

As regards the modern politician, Tang’s “humanistic” concept of the political suggests an ideal which is quite different from the one found in the thought of Max Weber, even though Tang, like Weber, expected politicians to resist the lure of an ethics of conviction. But the ideal politician described by Tang does not belong to the Weberian type of modern, professional politician who lives for and from his or her political activities. Tang rather envisioned politicians who reluctantly engage into politics and conscientiously acknowledge that they do not directly contribute to the realization of common values.⁹⁶ Such political personalities should be persons of broad humanistic education who do not use their power to suppress others, but to “treasure culture.”⁹⁷ They are thus “worthy persons” of humanistic background who volunteer to shoulder the burden of political engagement. Due to such a lack of political passion, ideal politicians would find it easier to stay impartial and free from partisanship

94 Ibid., pp. 137–138.

95 Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, p. 50, Endnote 24 (for the German original, see Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, pp. 27–28; Footnote 20).

96 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 390.

97 Ibid., pp. 67, 394.

when assuming higher office.⁹⁸ They would hence remain aloof from social and political pressure groups and resist the paralyzing pressure of bureaucratic mechanisms. Even though Tang referred here explicitly to an ideal, one may still wonder whether his political thought is not prone to an elitist elevation of personalities of humanistic breadth. In this regard, his portrayal of ideal politicians and his requirements for practitioners of self-cultivation are in conformity insofar as both depict outstanding individuals capable of bearing up under the failures of their efforts when facing the downsides of the modern world.

98 Ibid., p. 394.

Civil Religion on a Confucian Basis

Civil Religion for a Future China

The fact that Tang's ideas about a Chinese democracy are *anticipatory* in character becomes particularly evident in his writings concerning the role of Confucian religiosity within a future democracy. In this context, Tang developed the notion of a Confucian-based civil religion.¹ This civil religion is to serve as a basis for civic virtues, including the virtue of religious tolerance. In order to outline the historical form, the dogmatic contents, as well as the social and political functions and effects of a future civil religion, Tang made reference to his concept of a Confucian civil theology and, above all, to the civil-theological limit-concepts of the sage and (moral) intuition.

Tang's concept of a Confucian-based civil religion is embedded in historical claims which entail temporal and normative implications. These implications can be readily clarified by briefly considering comparable constellations in Western concepts of civil religion. First of all, in relating Tang's approach to civil religion to research on civil religion in the United States, we may note that in the American case, there is a predominantly descriptive-analytical framework based on the assumption that civil religion is actually extant in American society. Civil religion in the United States is consequently treated as a phenomenon which can be observed in historical time and space. In

1 With respect to terminology, it should be noted that Tang did not use a direct verbal equivalent to "civil religion" in Chinese. Translations of terms like "civil religion," "civic religion," and the French "religion civile" were not yet current in the Chinese-language discourse on religion of the 1950s and 60s. Tang referred to the idea of a civil religion with various Chinese terms, and most of these terms not only cover the concept of civil religion, but also other meanings. Among these terms, the following are the most common: "religiosity" (*zongjiaoxing*), "religious spirit" (*zongjiao jingshen*), and "complete religion" (*wanman de zongjiao* 完滿的宗教); see Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 594. The term "renewed Confucianism" (*xin ruxue* 新儒學) also deserves special attention in this context. In one of the few instances where Tang applied it, he referred to the role of religions in China and reminded his readers that Buddhism had an impact on neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties. In analogy to this Buddhist-inspired formation of neo-Confucianism, he concluded that religions might "initiate" the formation of a "renewed Confucianism" and a future "renaissance" of "the religious spirit which was originally present in Chinese culture." See Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 34.

contrast, such an assumption is rejected, for example, in the case of post-war Germany. Researchers from the disciplines of sociology, political science, philosophy, and intellectual history have not reached a consensus whether a civil religion—or at least some related phenomena—actually evolved in Germany after the war. Yet another approach can be found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's classical depiction of a civil religion or "*religion civile*." Rousseau developed his concept of civil religion in section eight of the final chapter of his *Du contrat social* with the intention of anticipating a civil religion for a future community. In so doing, Rousseau interpreted extant Christian denominations with the goal of reducing their dogmatic contents to the point where they should become generally acceptable as a civil religion across different denominations.

Civil religion as conceptualized by Tang may, *mutatis mutandis*, be labeled Rousseauian insofar as it functions as an anticipation of the future: Neither the Chinese democracy nor the civil religion which Tang foresaw as instrumental for the implementation of civic virtues such as religious tolerance, were yet in existence. But whereas Rousseau devised the idea of a civil religion to bolster his theory of social contract, Tang conceived of a civil religion with the goal of redefining the role of Confucian religiosity in modern society. This entailed an attempt to counter ideas of a Confucian theocracy (*Kongjiao* 孔教), a dogmatic Confucianism (as in the authoritarianism of the GMD), and a political religion (Marxism-Leninism, Maoism).

In order to achieve the status of a civil religion in a future Chinese democracy, the religious convictions inherent in Confucianism would have to be conducive to the unity and stability of a democratic community in China. This involves, first of all, the idea of the emancipation from the shackles of political-religious dogmatism and authoritarian claims made in the name of ostensibly traditional (Confucian) values and virtues. At the same time, the civil-religious convictions were to compensate for the loss of traditional worldviews in modern society. Here, Tang's concept of civil religion is in accord with what Robert N. Bellah analyzed as a fundamental idea of American republicanism, namely, that a republic needs an encompassing system of values symbolized in a civil religion. The democratic republic aims at fostering an ethical commitment from its citizens, and the civil religion serves as a symbolic representation of a higher order that gives meaning to republican virtues and values.²

But Tang and Rousseau, and possibly also Bellah, differed in their ideas about engendering the citizen's willingness to act upon civic virtues. Rousseau, like the mainstream of Enlightenment philosophy, believed that the citizens needed the assurance of a reward for virtuous deeds that was to be obtained, if

2 Bellah, "Religion and Legitimation in the American Republic," p. 197.

not in this world, then in the afterlife.³ In contrast, the Confucian citizens are left on their own, without any reassurance of a reward in an afterlife or in the present. They are expected to accept the burden of virtuous behavior based on the demand to engage in self-cultivation, even if the prospects of success, i.e. becoming a sage, are dim. Confucian religiosity is, after all, in essence a religiosity of individual inwardness without a notion of divine grace.

Based on his distinction between world religions and the religiosity (or the “religious spirit”) of a renewed Confucianism, Tang assumed that Confucian religiosity is better suited than the world religions to foster civic virtues in general, and religious tolerance in particular. More specifically, he expected that Confucian religiosity can provide a foundation for other religions to attain a position of mutual “recognition” in China’s (future) “humanistic world” (*renwen shijie* 人文世界).⁴ Tang’s notion of religiosity is here in line with European concepts of religiosity, which evolved from the late 18th century. These concepts essentially served to anchor religion in reason while, at the same time, highlighting moral duties as an integral element of religion.⁵ In this regard, Enlightenment notions of religiosity accord with ideas of a civil religion, including the concept of a Confucian-based civil religion in China.

However, some qualifications need to be made here. For one, a typical feature of Western notions of civil religion is absent from Tang’s reflection on the social and political role of Confucian religiosity within a democracy: Tang did not attempt to reduce the dogmatic contents of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, whereas it was common practice among European thinkers to conceive of a minimizing of Christian dogmas. This reductive move was meant to defuse tensions between different Christian denominations, which were singled out as potential triggers of religious and civil war in European history. In contrast, Tang found no traces of a malignant dogmatism in Confucianism. The dogmatic content of “[religious] Confucianism” (*rujiao* 儒教), as he pointed out, merely enticed with the idea that

3 Forschner, “Rousseau über religion civile,” pp. 24–25, 34.

4 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 389.

5 Ritter et al., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, pp. 653–654. Both deism and notions of a religion of reason (“Vernunftreligion”) evolved in the intellectual context of the European Enlightenment, namely philosophies of natural law and natural religion dating back to the 17th century. They are consistent with Tang’s idea of religiosity insofar as they, too, do not contain ideas of cults, revelation, miracles, or anthropomorphic notions of God: *ibid.*, p. 657; see also Kleger, “Einleitung: Bürgerliche Religion, Religion des Bürgers, politische Religion, Zivilreligion, Staatsreligion, Kulturreligion,” pp. 11–12.

... human beings only need to examine themselves and be sincere ... [so that even] amid the whole turbid and sinful spirit, all of them will be able to perceive this original nature of the highest good, this existence of innate knowing.⁶

Neither did Tang find traces of dogmatism in Daoism and Buddhism. He apparently adopted the traditional cliché of a peaceful integration of the so-called Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) as a master narrative of China's religious history, and concluded that there was no historical evidence for genuinely religious warfare in China comparable in scale and intensity to the religious wars in Europe.⁷ Moreover, Tang assumed that the three Confucian forms of ritual sacrifice (see below) did not evoke "feelings of religious insistence and urgency" that were as strong as those in world religions which were ecclesiastically organized, relied on revealed sacred scriptures and rigid doctrines, and upheld a fixed monotheistic or polytheistic belief.⁸ Tang's portrayal of Confucian religiosity is, by the way, in some accordance with the image of Chinese "religion" or "theology" held by Sinophile philosophers of the European Enlightenment, such as Voltaire, Leibniz, Wolff and Hume. Still, when interpreting Tang's approach to Confucian religiosity in terms of a civil religion, it is necessary to take into account a shift in perspective: Tang's agenda was to demonstrate that Confucianism actually had a religious dimension of its own, in spite of the fact that there were rampant Western misconceptions of it which denied it profound religious significance. This intention clearly differs from Western agendas of civil religion. For Tang, reinterpreting Confucian religiosity as a civil religion was not a matter of reducing religious dogmatism, but of substantiating that the "Confucian spirit" did have religious significance, even though its dogmatic content was rather thin.

As regards the topic of religious tolerance, Tang is more or less in line with Western ideas of civil religion in that he placed great emphasis on tolerance. He deemed Confucian religiosity exceptionally suitable for infusing religious tolerance into society due to its lack of religious dogmatism and hence tried to convince his readers that Confucian religiosity should serve as a spiritual pivot. Consequently, he discussed at length the potential of Confucian religiosity to open up a "spiritual ground" or "meeting place" for all religions in China and the world. Religious conflicts would hence be peacefully solved and religious

6 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 590–591.

7 See Tang's depiction of the historical development of humanistic thought in China: Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 12–32.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

tolerance and harmony would be implemented in society by upholding “our Confucian position.”⁹ Crucial in this regard is the assumption that religious tolerance can be promoted in communities by emphasizing and fostering commonalities of religious convictions.¹⁰ As the minimal content of such commonalities, Tang singled out the civil-theological notion of human nature and its potency to attain moral intuition. Religious tolerance would be established on the basis of Confucian religiosity due to the fact that the Confucian belief in human nature may even tolerate, for example, Judeo-Christian notions of original sin or Brahmanic and Buddhist beliefs in karma. Therefore, no “fundamental” antagonism between Confucianism and Christianity, Buddhism and Brahmanism would persist.¹¹ Confucian religiosity is hence said to acknowledge that “different religions are different ways of attaining sagehood . . . that the ultimate destination of all the ways may be the same, but that no one way is itself ultimate.”¹² On this premise, Tang claimed that:

[A] man with moral sincerity can rise above the frontier of particular knowledge to attain an exalted and intimate realization of the origin of the universe and human life, whether he lives and behaves according to Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, or solely engages himself in reflecting on his personal status amid human communities and history.¹³

But even if one were willing to endorse the conviction that Confucian religiosity is such a source of religious tolerance, a number of questions remain. For one, Tang never elucidated the role of Confucianism vis-à-vis dogmatic or social tensions and conflicts between non-Confucian religions. Nor did he clarify the implications of his accentuation of Confucianism as the religious “meeting place” in terms of constitutional law. There is no doubt that Tang situated his discussion of religious tolerance within the context of a liberal constitution that guarantees religious freedom. But since he did not treat this subject in depth, we can only assume that he was convinced that the burden of legal enforcement of religious freedom and tolerance in society had to be

9 Ibid., pp. 389–390; see also Tang, “The reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” pp. 366–367; and Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 591–593.

10 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 591.

11 Tang, “The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy” [1968], p. 8.

12 Tang, “Chinese Attitudes Towards World Religions,” p. 330.

13 Tang, “My Option between Philosophy and Religion,” p. 425. See also Tang, *Zhongguo renwen zhi jingshen fazhan*, p. 369.

strictly separated from the task of Confucian religiosity to create a spiritual “meeting place” for religious believers. The latter must not compete with constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and should reject any aspiration of dominating the state and the constitutional process. After all, the agenda of the modern revival of Confucianism was not to be defined by dominating the constitutional order and turning the modern state into a Confucian state. It is against this backdrop that Tang criticized neo-Confucianism from the Song and Ming Dynasties for having established an antagonistic relationship between Confucian teachings and other religions.¹⁴

The modern form of Confucian religiosity is said to contain neither a sort of catechism, nor a clerical structure that could lead to the establishment of a Confucian state religion. Nonetheless, it has certain ritualistic forms. Tang identified the aforementioned three forms of ritual sacrifice and stressed not only their local particularities, but also the highly individualized character of these rituals: Individuals worship their own ancestors, saints, and worthies in these core rituals of Confucianism and, what is more, these rituals are highly diverse in form and content depending on the professions of the worshippers and the localities where they are performed. According to Tang, Confucian rituals therefore cannot be amalgamated into a universal church, even though there are indeed some rituals of a unitary character, such as those performed to honor Confucius, the Yellow Emperor, or Heaven and Earth.¹⁵ Although Tang conceded here that Confucian religiosity in fact contained some unitary elements of ritual practice, he still claimed that these rituals were never integrated into a Confucian clerical and doctrinal structure comparable to the organizational patterns of (world) “religions.”¹⁶ Tang consequently predicted that the project of strengthening Confucian religiosity in modern society cannot be accomplished by political, clerical, academic, or economic organizations. Such an effort should be undertaken by precursors who do not build an “[organizational] form,” but maintain the mutual relations of “teachers and friends” engaged in social, cultural, political and academic practice, and strive for a moral conduct of life. The renewed Confucian religiosity would then slowly diffuse throughout society in a non-hierarchical manner. This outlook must have been particularly attractive for Confucian intellectuals who were driven by a strong sense of mission to stop the decline of the (religious)

14 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 369.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 376, 378, 381.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

“Confucian spirit,”¹⁷ while struggling with the difficulties of establishing a solid organizational framework in exile after 1949.

With respect to world religions, Tang noted with “deepest regret” that the followers of Christianity, which he depicted as the strongest religious force in the contemporary world, but also Buddhists and Muslims, could not yet accept “the value of divergent religions.”¹⁸ It is the prevention of future religious conflicts which was on Tang’s agenda here.¹⁹ From this perspective, he interpreted the religious history and dogmatic developments of Christianity in close relation to his Confucian matrix of religious tolerance. By focusing on Christianity, he portrayed the West as a zone of latent religious warfare dominated by hostile Christian denominations and suggested that future religious tolerance would evolve on a global scale on the intellectual foundation of Confucianism. But still, he remarked, it would be crucial to further develop “harmonizing notions” that already exist within Christianity.²⁰

There are three problematic consequences of this approach. First, Tang disregarded the traditions of religious tolerance, and civil religion for that matter, which have evolved in the West. The irony here is that Tang himself reflected on historical traces of religious tolerance within Christianity in a manner that is indeed common in Western notions of civil religion, namely, by applying the strategy of reducing the dogmatic contents of Christianity to a minimum in order to dissolve the danger of conflicts sparked by confessional differences. Second, Tang’s interpretation of Christianity as well as other world religions is highly idiosyncratic and also simplistic, if not reductionist, in terms of religious history and theology. This pertains to the very selective way of viewing certain dogmatic and institutional aspects of Christianity, among them the idea of exclusive salvation as offered by divine grace, the idea of original sin, and the absence of a belief in the mundane perfectibility of man, as well as the clerical institutions and organizations.²¹ As for other “world religions” like Islam, Judaism, or Buddhism, but also Daoism, they are only incidentally mentioned in this context. Third, Tang tended to interpret the religious commitment of devotees of world religions from a highly rationalistic perspective. Their religious commitment and fervor is thus seen as if it had resulted from a

17 Ibid., pp. 390–391.

18 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 564. Judaism is marginalized in Tang’s discussion of world religions.

19 Ibid., p. 593; Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 377.

20 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 564.

21 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, p. 377; Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 592–594.

conscious choice or even a rational decision taken by the individual believers. Tellingly, Tang forwent a clear conceptual distinction between religious devotion and the conscious choice of certain (religious) values by individuals.

These problematic issues in Tang's reflection on religion are, to a certain extent, due to the fact that he did *not* conceive of civil religion as a historical reality in China. As a projection of a future social reality, his conceptualization of a Chinese civil religion tended to produce reductionist depictions of religious history and schematic representations of dogmatic aspects of Confucian religiosity and world religions. There is, one may conclude, a high likelihood of failure in attempts to implement a civil religion as an intervention into social reality. It seems that Tang was aware of the precarious nature of his vision to inscribe Confucian religiosity into the democratic life of (future) Chinese society. He preferred instead to imagine its formation as a gradual development initiated, but not engineered, by a minority of individuals. He expected, in other words, that the development of civil religion in China should be perceived, in hindsight, as the outgrowth of a historical evolution, not as the result of a target-orientated project.

Political Ideals and Reality

There is yet another reason why Tang did not devise a plan for the implementation of a Confucian-based civil religion in modern China. Such an effort would, after all, easily deteriorate into the ideological ambition to impose a higher religious truth on political reality. This would run counter to the fundamental assumption of Tang's Confucian civil theology that (moral) truth—i.e. the moral intuition of the “principles of Heaven”—is only indirectly related to political reality, namely, as a positive limit-concept. Notions of an immediate presence of absolute truth in political reality, as exemplified for example by the imperial figure of the Son of Heaven, have been abandoned by modern Confucianism.

One crucial implication of the Tang's civil theology is that any implementation of absolute truth claims in political reality inevitably subdue individuals' subjectivity and thus deprive them of the opportunity to actualize their (moral) nature in the course of their social and political life. As a consequence, Tang did not conceptualize political order and institutions as representations of an ultimate truth. He understood the modern world to be fatally fractured and inevitably devoid of a substantial harmony between the realm of Heaven, the human being, and political reality. Modern subjects should therefore brace themselves for the somber fact that political reality never totally accords with

the exigencies of individual self-fulfillment. Tang's political thought indeed insists that modern society cannot be accommodated by a pre-modern, ecumenical speculation about the representation of a "Heavenly mandate," because the substantial unity of political form and Heavenly order is irreversibly broken. What is left, is a sharp conceptual distinction between the individual's "inner sagehood" and the "renewed outer king" (i.e. the renewed political form), and their communion is irrevocably called into question. The lacuna that now separates the two requires an effort of reflection in order to retrieve their inter-relation. This effort is undertaken by modern Confucianism via such categories as "ideals" (*lixiang*), "values" (*jiazhi*), and "spirit" (*jingshen*), and hence in reference to newly coined terms which were unheard of in pre-imperial and imperial China.

The orientation towards political ideals has consequences for the anticipation of political reality in modern Confucianism. For one, the category of ideals indicates that political reality will never be fully consistent with it. By introducing "ideals," Tang's speculation precludes expectations of an instantaneous implementation of a perfect political community. Tellingly, Tang did not issue political prescriptions for the realization of allegedly superior Confucian ethics. His approach here might cause uneasiness among apologists of Confucianism who muse over the superiority of a Confucian democracy, or meritocracy, even before democracy is established in China. As a matter of fact, Tang cautioned against the idea of a meritocracy in which worthy and able persons are recommended for and promoted to office, deeming it a "distant view" (*yuanjing* 遠景) that transgresses the present world and cannot be realized in a "leap" (*yue* 越).²² It would necessitate a corresponding attitude among citizens, which would, at best, gradually emerge from the core humanistic realm, and only "perhaps" do so under the influence of the Confucian intellectual tradition.²³ In the same vein, Tang called attention to the fact that abstract, universal ideals—including the ideal democracy—may at most initiate the unification of individuals, but they cannot produce a complete reality out of themselves.²⁴ In accordance, approaches to realizing political ideals should take shape on the basis of a *gradual* transformation of cultural and ethical values. For Tang, safeguarding such an evolution of values and attitudes was the ultimate purpose of politics.²⁵

Given Tang's cautious reflection about the relation between political ideals and political reality, it seems that contemporary critics who denounce his

22 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 2, p. 140.

23 Ibid., p. 138.

24 Ibid., p. 105.

25 Ibid., p. 141.

modern Confucianism as too lofty or too “philosophical” miss a crucial point. Tang did not intend to submit political reality to a dictate of ideals under the pretense of effectuating an immediate political impact. This is not to say that he rejected the idea of making political ideals a yardstick for reality, but he remained careful to clarify and restrict their function. Here, a quasi-Platonic, cognitivist paradigm becomes obvious: Tang clearly conceptualized the foundation of political order as resting on the insight of its members into the guiding principle of the order itself.²⁶ The Confucian political order thus requires the awareness of its members that it is based on a specific notion of human nature, which includes the ideal of individual moral self-fulfillment and the ideal of an authentic conduct of life. What is more, the political actors should at all times be aware that politics as such only has an intermediate function in relation to the higher goal of realizing humanistic values.

Political ideals like the ecumenical state embodying ethical life may, according to Tang, only pertain to a distant future. Nonetheless, they are fully situated within the horizon of human history. These ideals thus have a different ontological status than the limit-concepts of the sage or a community of sages. Such a community cannot be realized *within* history and, indeed, it has no historical dimensions, because the sagely members are identified by the very fact that they dwell in the ahistorical realm of absolute, unchangeable truth. If a community of sages were possible, its members would behave in total unanimity and thus constitute an apolitical community. It is significant that Tang does not consider this vision to be an ideal and refrains from devaluating political reality altogether by contrasting it to a community of sages. Clearly, Tang’s Confucian civil theology makes a crucial distinction between limit-concepts and ideals. It is under the label of “ideals” that Tang takes up the task of historicizing and temporalizing limit-concepts.²⁷ The figure of the “sage” is hence historicized as the “ideal politician,” and the sagely community of intuition is temporalized as the ecumenical state within an ideal humanistic world. But in so doing, Tang did not advocate a complete rejection of political reality. He remained immune to the ideological appeal of claims aimed at a total transformation or a re-founding of political society altogether. His modern Confucianism therefore establishes its critical distance from a political reality which will never be perfect, but is permanently in need of reflection and supportive action that advances it toward an ideal community.

26 On the cognitivist tendency in Plato and in German political thought of the 19th century, see Vollrath, *Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen*, p. 57.

27 Tang’s notion of ideal clearly differs from Kant’s understanding of an ideal; see above Chap. 5.

Coming to Terms with History

Modernity and Agency

Tang Junyi pursued the highly ambitious goal of establishing a normative theory of modernity covering all spheres of society as well as the dimension of human subjectivity. This agenda is arguably a defining feature not only of Tang's philosophy, but also of mainstream Confucian thought since the 20th century. An adequate appraisal of the Confucian philosophical projects must take into consideration their strong assumptions about Chinese and global history that permeate their attempts to reconstruct Confucianism. For Tang, there is no doubt "that the revival of Confucianism in a new form, i.e. a reconstruction of Confucianism is a necessary condition for keeping such a [historical] continuity in some East Asian countries."¹ Apart from generating continuity, this reconstruction served another purpose, namely that of uncovering a broad range of social, cultural and political ideas, principles, values and norms that were to guide Chinese modernization.

Even though Tang never claimed that modernization as a whole could be guided by holistic social planning, he was convinced that modernizing communities could exert a considerable measure of control over the process of modernity. He believed that modernization on a global scale would, in the long run, lead to the establishment of modern nation-states with democratic and constitutional governments, and to pluralistic, industrialized and scientifically progressive societies (see Chap. 4). Modernity was thus not characterized by a forceful nature, as it was depicted, for example, in Max Weber's image of an "iron cage of dependence," which consists of the anonymous coercive power of bureaucratic and economic structures and processes that tend to subdue the individual and collectivities alike. Tang rejected such bleak prospects and claimed that modern man may retain the power of consciously choosing and opting for a specific type of modernity in terms of a *project*—a claim that pertains also to the reconstruction of Confucianism in the context of modernity:

1 Tang, "The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia," p. 361.

... we have to acknowledge that there are some new ideas and new spirits which are missing in traditional Confucianism. If we do not want to keep Confucianism backward of age, we have to look forward and plan a reconstruction of the Confucian spirit to meet the modern need.²

Confucian concepts of modernization thus hold the promise that the project of modernity will produce an overall betterment of Chinese society and, eventually, also of non-Chinese societies. In this historical vision of modern Confucianism, the fact that China arrived belatedly to a modernizing world of nation-states does not take away the hope of “catching up” in terms of modernization. The notion of progress refers here to a willful collective effort that involves “learning” from historical experience, good or bad, Chinese or foreign. One striking example (among many) of this line of thought can be found in a passage where Tang elaborates on the economic backwardness of contemporary China. In a highly optimistic manner, he perceives this backwardness as a fortunate break that will provide China with an opportunity to avoid the consumerism and cultural-spiritual shallowness that has afflicted modernizing Western countries such as the United States, where, in the eyes of Tang, the reification of modern man was particularly severe.³

The expectation that China’s project to catch up in terms of modernization is, essentially, manageable by a Chinese community whose members agree on the goals and means of modernization, is reminiscent of German theories of a “Sonderweg” (special path) in the modern world. Theories of a “Sonderweg,” which emerged in Germany at the end of the 19th century, placed equal emphasis on belated efforts in nation building, industrialization and technological progress. Before the Second World War, these theories were applied in an affirmative manner, and centered on the assumption that there were actually many benefits to Germany’s alleged ability to refute “Western” rationalism and adhere to its own superior cultural spirit.⁴ Tang’s depiction of China’s path to modernity and his project of a Confucian renewal is in line with the main thrust of theories of a Sonderweg that affirm cultural particularity. The core element here is the anticipation of a superior social modernity guided by humanistic values and ideas that are gleaned from a reinterpretation of

2 Ibid., p. 369.

3 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 135.

4 For a concise introduction to theories of a German “Sonderweg,” see Ottmann, *Geschichte des politischen Denkens. Das 20. Jahrhundert. Der Totalitarismus und seine Überwindung*, pp. 335–338.

China's allegedly unique culture and history. On the basis of such reinterpretation, an effort to "learn" from achievements and failures in Western modernization shall take place.

The optimistic expectation of implementing modernization through a learning mode was widespread in 20th-century China.⁵ Tang related the topic of "learning" not only to the sphere of collective action by the state and certain social agents, but even to how individuals conduct their lives. In a particularly striking statement from 1974, he mused about the "beautiful virtues" of the Chinese, which he said were still observable in the Taiwanese countryside. In contrast, he asserted that most city slickers in Taiwan and Hong Kong who indulged in materialistic lifestyles were under the negative influence of Western culture. The obvious conclusion was that "we just need the resolve to change customs, which will not be difficult [to do]," given that these negative customs came from "outside" and were thus not deep-rooted. If one really wanted to change them, it could be done right away. Tang provided a disturbing example of this by claiming that the CCP managed to rid Shanghai of lavishness and corruption after 1949.⁶ It seems that the point here was neither a vindication of communist measures to implement social change, nor a reaffirmation of the CCP's actions in Shanghai as a model for modernization. Still, Tang was obviously fascinated by the prospect of reining in the woes of modernization in such a willful collective effort.

The negative effects of the progressive division of labor in modern societies were treated in a similar manner. Tang pointed out that this is a crucial matter in Western countries, and particularly in the United States, because the increasing division of labor created a social situation in which individuals could no longer estimate the intrinsic value of their labor.⁷ The problem concerned not only the economic sphere but also such phenomena as the increasing "professionalization" in other social spheres, including academic life. These were signs of an ongoing submission of "cultural forces" to political and economic forces resulting in general tendencies of "reification" and cultural "degeneration."⁸ According to Tang, only purposeful change in the form of social and cultural activities might prevent these tendencies from spreading further into society. Such change was to include, as we have seen, a renewal of traditional Chinese associations on the level of communities. In these communal contexts, human

5 See Fröhlich, "Regulating, Governing, and Pacifying the Modern World: Optimism Regarding Progress in Chinese Interpretations of *the Great Learning*."

6 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 324.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

8 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 392.

beings might truly interact with each other as individuals, and hence break up the uniform standards of instrumental values on the basis of their individualized value-consciousness. It is significant that Tang focused here on the form of these tradition-inspired associations and interactions, and not on specific contents and values.

In the same vein, he ascertained in very general terms that non-instrumental forms of interaction hinged on a revival of a “classical kind of spirit” in society, politics and ethics, which engendered a certain “value-consciousness.” The individuals would learn to interact with each other by evaluating their respective accomplishments and knowledge within a broad range of intellectual or artistic activities as well as other forms of individual “effort” (*gongfu*). However, Tang did not naively believe that the workings of instrumental rationality might be completely dissolved in modern societies, but instead expected that they could be confined to their appropriate areas, such as the economic sphere. This might result in a foil for modern society in which the “lines of latitude,” as Tang called them, could be calculated according to the “spirit of societies based on the division of labor of the modern type,” and the “lines of longitude” according to a classical spirit.⁹ Tang seemed confident that East Asian societies, due to their particular cultural traditions, were in an excellent position to create these foils of social modernity. Yet, at that time, he identified Japan as the only country in the region to pursue such a course of modernization.¹⁰

To conclude, there can be no doubt that Tang deemed ideational factors to be crucial for solving global problems of modernity. He therefore highlighted an awareness of cultural traditions that should strengthen the consciousness of a “we”-group whose members are ready to act upon their normative choices.

9 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 115–118, 123, 125, 129. In this context, see also the following passage in which Tang rhetorically asks: “How can an individual spiritual being really be an individual, if his religious, moral, and cultural life is not integrated into a unity as a genuine Confucian aspires to?”: Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 365.

10 At times, Tang’s confidence in the success of Japan’s modernization was shattered, leaving him to express his hope that the Japanese would not define Japan’s progress in industrialization solely in terms of an increase in industrial production alone, but also with respect to the benefits of cultural life; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 211. Whether Tang’s topical way of thinking in longitudes and latitudes is inspired by topical thinking as prevalent in the philosophy of the Kyoto school is difficult to determine. Be that as it may, Tang obviously shared with the Kyoto school, and with influential European and American intellectual trends of the mid-20th century, the apprehension that the process of modernity might entail strong tendencies of massification and deterioration of cultural standards.

Such an endeavor, he believed, would involve a broad range of humanistic cultural activities, including intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic “efforts” of individuals to “overcome themselves,” for example by engaging in Confucian scholarship, Chinese arts, Indian Yoga, Buddhism or Christian devotion.¹¹

The main trajectory for propelling normative inputs in the course of modernization was, as Tang saw it, state action. Accordingly, he refrained from characterizing modernity as an increasing deterioration of the state’s capacity to dominate societal development. On the contrary, the idea of an evolving modern Chinese state, still in the making, assumed an orienting function in the modern Confucian project. In spite of the misappropriation of state coercive power in the dictatorial party states in China before and after 1949, the idea of statehood still looms large in Tang’s concept of modernization. Whereas he considered the extant party-states of the CCP and GMD to be bad options, he expected that the modern Chinese nation-state, in its democratic form, would evolve as an emanation from the normative resources of a renewed Confucian “main current.”

In giving thought to the formation of the modern state, Tang drew selectively, as we have seen, from Hegel’s concept of a state of ethical nature. But he was clearly not a Hegelian theoretician of state, and he accordingly refrained from applying the speculative framework of Hegelian philosophy of history to his own concept of state. As a consequence, he never referred to the historical manifestation of a “world spirit” in this context. Tang also differs from Hegel in that he envisioned the ideal form of the modern state as an *immediate* emanation of the human (ethical) will to the state. He thus designated the state to be the highest, direct manifestation of *human* reason in history (see Chap. 8 “State and Society”)—and not, as Hegel would have it, as the historical manifestation of a “cunning of reason” which remains aloof from concerted human action.¹² Tang bolsters his departure from the Hegelian theory of the state by criticizing Hegel for failing to clarify that the state, although it is a “manifestation of the objective spirit,” cannot detach itself from the striving of “the subjective spirit which exists for itself,” that is, a striving resulting “spontaneously” from the “rational self” and the moral will of individuals.¹³

The rejection of Hegelian speculation facilitated an optimistic vision of modernity: Given a successful “reconstruction” of the Confucian “main

11 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 56–57.

12 In the famous words of Hegel: “This may be called the *cunning of reason*—that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss.” Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 47.

13 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 262.

current,” China would be able to partake in global progress by implementing its own type of guided modernization. The general direction of this modernization would be foreseeable, because it was part of a global process of modernity that tended toward democracy and constitutional government, scientific and technological development, industrialization, and an open, pluralistic society. For Tang, modernity was thus not a lost cause for humanity, but carried, on the contrary, a promise to empower human agency to the point where it becomes the master of its own fate. The belief in such empowerment is indeed a salient feature of modern Confucianism. Pessimistic notions of modernity as an inescapable historical fate or as a process which is, essentially, beyond control fundamentally contradict the Confucian notion of human agency asserting itself in the process of modernization. Tellingly, Tang bluntly rejected, in his late work, Western notions of human history as an inevitably chaotic process characterized by contingent events, along with Western theories that undermine a firm belief in the effectiveness of “holy values,” such as existentialism and the Freudian psychology of the unconscious.¹⁴ Even though he was apprehensive of human agency suffering from reification and alienation—a modern threat causing individuals to become oblivious to the dangers of modernity—he disagreed with an overall pessimistic vision of modernity.¹⁵

Tang’s belief in the dominant role of human agency in the process of modernity is based on assumptions about human nature and the human being, which he obtained from his interpretations of Confucian thought. Two perspectives are particularly relevant in this regard:

1) Tang’s civil theology asserts that the perfectibility of the human being as a sage is a historical reality, but such sagehood is neither a permanent state of mind nor an individual’s way of life, nor can it be realized by whole collectivities of human agents, such as congregations, nations and classes. A revolution in the name of establishing a community of sages is consequently absent from Tang’s modern Confucianism, as is the idea of a collective will totally dominating history. But the opposite notion is also absent, namely, the idea of human

14 Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, pp. 461–462. Tang elucidated in this context the historical development of the “victory of Marxism” in China mostly in terms of a general loss of faith in “traditional” values of Chinese and Western cultures: *ibid.*, p. 464. His skepticism towards existentialism dates back to at least the late 1950s; see his criticism of existentialism’s inability to “actively” seek a solution for humanity’s spiritual crises in the modern world: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 57.

15 See for example Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 127.

beings subdued by the process of modernity.¹⁶ In fact, Tang depicted “inner sagehood” as the moment in which the human mind breaks free from its own embedment in history. Accordingly, he conceived of the sage as being detached from a particular historical context. It is therefore no coincidence that nowhere in the modern Confucian discourses do we find the assumption that the very mode of an ahistorical, immediate presentification of sagehood itself changes under different historical circumstances. And whereas the so-called outer king (*wai wang*) is said to be in need of a “renewal” (*xin*), the “inner sage” (*nei sheng*) remains untouched by changing times. Obviously, by relating the notion of human nature to “inner sagehood,” modern Confucianism presumes that human nature, and consequently the human being, is intangible vis-à-vis history, including the process of modernity. This, in turn, is the religious-anthropological basis for the Confucian insistence on the stronghold of human agency in history, including the process of modernity.

2) Modern Confucianism clearly refrains from claiming that human beings are perfectible as a *species*. Even if one was to believe that, at one point in history, a community of sages might be realized, their offspring would not be born as sages, nor would the institutions and structures of such a community perforce lead every human being to perfection. The perfectibility of the human being evidently pertains to the individual, not to the species, and as individuals human beings retain the freedom to strive for sagehood, or not to strive for it, or to strive and fail along the way. As a consequence, there will be no “end” of history brought about as the victory of sagely inwardness over all “outer,” alienated formations of modernity. Tang’s philosophy does not offer the consolation of an idyllic modern world that is free from alienation. But even though “objective” constellations of alienation will persist, the Confucian individuals may be spared the distress of experiencing them solely as “outer” obstacles. Instead, they can mitigate the downside of modernity as historical conditions

16 As mentioned above, Thomas Metzger subsumes Tang Junyi’s modern Confucianism to the category of an “epistemological optimism” that is characterized by the assumption that the “ultimate reality” of all phenomena is detectable and describable by human beings; see Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific. Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today*, pp. 21–31, 171–182 [endnote 138], 220, 672–676. Yet with respect to Tang’s philosophy, it should be noted that the idea of the human being’s insight into the absolute truth of the “Heavenly principles” cannot be detached from the assumption that such an insight is attainable only in an ephemeral moment of intuition and only by individuals, never by whole (political) collectivities. As a consequence, the intuitive insight never amounts to a permanent, *political* state of existence. Claims to absolute truth, together with their totalitarian repercussions, are therefore not supported by Tang’s political thought.

of their quest for sagely inwardness, which might be attained in the course of participating in and struggling with the modern world.

The religious-anthropological notion of the intangibility of human nature marks one of the main rifts between modern Confucianism and Marxism. While both tend to emphasize the importance of the role of human agency with respect to the course of history, Marxism does so by positing that the human being should be considered the product of a historical and social formation. A purposeful transformation of human collectivities through generating the conditions for the emergence of a “new man” within a perfected society is feasible according to the Marxist scheme. In contrast, modern Confucianism assumes that the “nature” (*xing*) of the human being is not subject to historical change and remains essentially out of reach of any attempt to objectify or manipulate it. What is subject to change is indeed not the human being itself, but only its symbolic representations, which might find their “true” cultural expression in the humanistic “main current.” This Confucian outlook had to be defended not only against Marxism, but also against positivist theories of historical research. Tang criticized these theories because he believed they reduced history to a mere “object” of research, and implied, at the same time, the depletion of subjectivity by stripping the human subject of its historical dimensions, thereby reducing it to a putatively pure subject of cognition.¹⁷

History and Normativity

Tang Junyi’s speculation about history defies a clear-cut classification as philosophy of history, theology of history or philosophic-historical anthropology. The difficulties of classification partially stem from the fact that Tang was not a historian, neither by professional training nor by the thrust of his work. He himself referred to his speculation as a “philosophy of history” (*lishi zhexue*), yet this may lead, if taken at face value, to considerable misunderstandings.¹⁸

17 On Tang’s criticism of positivism in the context of historical research, see for example: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, pp. 165, 167; for a discussion of this issue see Chap. 4 “Defending Authenticity.”

18 The fact that Tang conceived of *lishi zhexue* not simply as a philosophy of history in the European tradition becomes evident when he agreed with Mou Zongsan that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) are the pioneering works of Chinese “*lishi zhexue*”; see Tang’s article “A Philosophical Inquiry of Chinese History,” published in the journal *Rensheng* (No. 120; November 1955): Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, p. 178. Besides, Tang labeled the works of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) as the beginning of “historical studies” (*shixue* 史學) in China and

Instead of regarding Tang's "philosophy of history" as an offshoot of European philosophies of history, it is more apt to delineate it in a much broader conceptual framework—so broad that it even includes references to German historicism from the 19th century. The latter was indeed highly critical of classical European philosophies of history. It evolved in the political context of German nation-state building and was, in fact, a hotbed of the above-mentioned theories about a German "Sonderweg," while at the same time fostering the institutionalization of a professionalized science of history in modernizing German universities. Even though historicism was not, as its label seems to indicate, a historiographical *school* in the narrow sense of the word, the majority of classical historicist thinkers like Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) shared a profound skepticism towards philosophies of history as well as positivist approaches to historical research.¹⁹

Whether Tang's historical thinking was actually informed by German historicism is difficult to determine. His diaries reveal that he was reading a "book by Dilthey" in July 1953, but there is no title indicated.²⁰ There are other channels through which he might have become familiar with historicism, for example through the work of Chinese historians like Chen Yinke, whose concept of historiography suggests remarkable affinities to the basic tenets of historicism. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether Chen and Tang actually had studied European historicist thought.²¹ Be that as it may, key historicist ideas appear repeatedly in Tang's own speculations about history. Among these is the assumption that the different periods in Chinese history need to be considered with respect to their particularity and uniqueness, for they each have, according to Tang, their own specific meaning and "value."²² Also in accordance with historicist thinkers, among them Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) and Dilthey, is the strong rejection of positivist claims to the objectivity of historical "facts," and the assertion that the quest for the meaning of history is inevitably bound

compared this achievement to the contributions of Galileo and Newton to Western science. Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhexue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 25. But for all this praise, Tang still remained elusive about the actual innovations made by those scholars from the Song Dynasty.

19 See Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 18–23.

20 Tang, *Riji*, Vol. 27, pp. 151–152.

21 On Chen Yinke's affinity to historicism, see Schneider, *Wahrheit und Geschichte. Zwei chinesische Historiker auf der Suche nach einer modernen Identität für China*, pp. 140–141.

22 Tang, "Zhongguo wenhua zhi yuanshi jingshen ji suo jingli zhi tiaozhan yu you huiying er xingcheng zhi fazhan," p. 10. In contrast to most European historicist thinkers, Tang did not relate this uniqueness to the idea of equality before god.

to the ascription of meaning to singular facts, events and intentional acts by individual interpreters:

This, then, [means that] with respect to identical historical facts, their meaning can originally contain interpretations added by men according to different orientations. As stated above, all of these interpretations are something that men have perceived and created. In these [interpretations], the historical facts themselves, which exist at the basic level, cannot necessarily determine [the following, namely]: the direction men's interpretations take at the higher level [of interpretation].²³

Instead of proclaiming the search for a universal truth in history as the foremost task of the interpreter, Tang underscored the pragmatic aspects of historical thought, and especially its function to provide normative orientation with regard to the present situation,²⁴ i.e. the epochal interest in nation-building and the formation of a nation-state. In contrast, "positivist" historical thought appears to be restrictive because it disregards the present historical context and pretends to be completely detached from human praxis in society, politics, culture and ethics.²⁵

In his rejection of positivism, Tang shared with Dilthey, Chen Yinke and others the hermeneutic awareness that interpreters of history should reflect not only on the context of their interpretations, but also on the formation of their own subjectivity. The latter comprises the moral personality of the interpreter, as well as everything that "makes up [his or her] personhood." As a consequence, the interpreter's moral standards are relevant to the interpretation. However, Tang assumed that the historical situation in which the interpreter exists does not predetermine the details of the interpretations, but only their general orientation, which includes the guiding ideas of the interpretations and the selection of historical sources. Therefore the values that the interpreter applies to history have only relative validity. Tang did not advocate a devaluation of the past by subsuming it to values and standards of the present. He rather expected, in line with historicism, that the engagement with the past as a foreign intellectual territory would produce new insights for the present—provided that the approach to the past was one of "empathic understanding"

23 See Tang's article "Historical Facts and Historical Meaning," published in two consecutive issues of *Minzhu Pinglun* (Vol. 14, Nos. 22, 23; November 1963): Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, pp. 165–166.

24 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, pp. 167–169.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 166, 170.

and “openhearted and upright intentions,” which lead the interpreters to see themselves from a foreign perspective.²⁶

One of the focal points of this hermeneutical engagement with history was to acquire a better understanding of the human being itself. What was at stake is the self-enlightenment of the interpreters about the true nature and constitution of human beings and their manifold cultural and social expressions. This orientation inspired Tang to inscribe the effort of interpreting history into the broad agenda of individual self-cultivation.²⁷ Historical interpretations were to contribute to the individual’s understanding of the nature of man. To this end, the intentions of human agents in history had to be reconstructed. Whether it is the history of the humanistic “main current,” the demise of the Chinese nation since the mid-19th century, or China’s democratic failures of the 20th century, Tang’s interpretations underscore the crucial impact of intentions, foresights or misapprehensions on the part of political, social and intellectual agents. Here, the traditional topic of history providing ethical education reappeared. The adherence to this well-known aspect of historiography in pre-modern China entailed the assertion that the interpreters of history may attain ethical insights by studying historical paragons whose acts can be judged as either good or bad. At the same time, the interpreters are said to produce “new meaning” in writing history, which in turn has an impact on the course of history itself. Yet Tang did not take these ideas to indicate that the “moral consciousness” itself was the product of a *historical* formation.²⁸

26 Ibid., pp. 164–166.

27 Cheng Chung-yi concludes that Tang’s hidden agenda of reconstructing a taxonomy of scholarship was one of guiding the human being’s practical efforts to attain an authentic existence. In this context, Tang proposed a sequence of modern disciplines which he tried to bring into accord with the standard fourfold classification used in imperial libraries, which distinguished between “classics” (*jing* 經), “histories” (*shi* 史), “masters [philosophers]” (*zi* 子), and “collections [of literature]” (*ji* 集). Yet Tang’s reconstruction seems to be forced and somewhat self-contradictory. He categorized, for example, “philosophy” as “*zi*,” and as “*jing*” (which includes works of moral philosophy). He left, however, no doubt that “*shi*,” which would include modern historical research, is closely linked to the individual’s self-cultivating quest for authenticity; see Zheng (Cheng Chung-yi), “Tang Junyi lun renwen xueshu,” pp. 362–363.

28 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 7, pp. 167–169. Tang related the notion of creating “new meaning” and therein acting as a “creator” of history to the Confucian notion of “transmitting the way” (*dao tong* 道統). He then referred to Confucius as the founding figure of historical speculation and took up the traditional belief that Confucius authored the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; see *ibid.*, pp. 164, 168, 170.

It is because of such proximity to historicism that Tang's *lishi zhexue* is clearly set apart from Hegelian philosophy of history. Overall, *lishi zhexue* is not an enterprise of detecting the self-realization of reason in history, as Hegel's philosophy of history claimed to do by retracing the historical manifestations of the "world spirit." The cosmic unity, i.e. the "mind of Heaven," does not permeate human history as a historical force. Consequently, Tang's speculation entails no idea of a world spirit present in history,²⁹ and, what is more, he criticized Hegel's philosophy of history for its assumption that "all cultural affairs and heroic personalities" were mere vehicles for the self-manifestation of "absolute spirit." Hegel, it would thus seem, failed to acknowledge that the human being could indeed firmly establish its cultural activities and its individual personality as its own "inherent goals."³⁰ In contrast to Hegelian philosophy of history, Tang measured historical reality against the religious-anthropological assumption that human beings are destined to realize their natural ability to attain sagehood. Tang's speculation about history is indeed intimately related to his Confucian civil theology. "Reason" in history is hence to be found in the formation of conditions which are conducive to individual self-perfection in sagehood—a formation that entails, to be sure, a dialectical structure, as Tang's analysis of the will for power had shown.

Tang's modern Confucianism conveys an overall optimistic outlook by depicting the course of history as pointing to an increasing formation of political, social and cultural conditions that are favorable to individuals' self-perfection. This optimism also pertains, as we have seen, to the process of modernity. Tang in fact left no doubt that modernization would amount to a betterment of individual and collective life—provided the members of the Chinese nation obtain an "authentic" understanding of the humanistic "main current." Chinese humanism hence appeared to have the capacity to rein in the woes of modernity:

What we are awaiting is merely the self-consciousness of all humanity, in which it will seek a common goal and then take up common endeavors. As for this common goal, one can talk about it from two perspectives: 1) It is indispensable to liberate "culture" from the heavy pressure of "politics" and "economics" and to do the utmost to have the "cultural powers" surpass the "political powers" as well as the "economic powers" (this is

29 See also Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhexue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, pp. 27, 54–55, 61–62.

30 Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, p. 231.

“humanism”). 2) Whatever the new social ideal is, those who make a great effort to realize this ideal must, at the same time, engage in self-reflection and clearly recognize in advance the potential abuses so as to prevent them in time (here, we must wait for those of great insight and wisdom).³¹

Yet this optimistic outlook gave rise to the problem of identifying foundational elements of necessity in history. Otherwise, what reason was there to be optimistic in the first place? Huang Zhaoqiang assumes that an “optimistic mind” was entrenched in Tang’s conviction that the moral consciousness might overcome all hindrances in history and that this very conviction was, on top of it, a crucial impetus of historical betterment. According to Huang, Tang indeed believed that a moment of necessity was at work here.³² Stringent as this interpretation by Huang is, it probably underestimates the ambivalence in Tang’s speculation with respect to the belief in a victory of morality in history. While Tang was convinced that the moral will might be able, in principle, to conquer historical reality, he stated time and again that it regularly failed for reasons that pertain to the finiteness, i.e. the inextricable moral imperfection, of the human being and its historical world.

Tang’s difficulties with the problem of necessity are symptomatic of his trouble in coining a full-fledged Confucian philosophy of history. The fundamental reason for this trouble has to do with the unresolved and probably unresolvable tension between the attempt to historicize our understanding of the world, on the one hand, and the insistence on the Confucian religious-anthropological outlook that posits an unchanging, ahistorical and pre-determined “nature” of the human being, on the other. It is this outlook that accommodates the historicizing perspective, and not the other way around. This does not preclude historical-philosophical reflections, but the dominant perspective throughout is characterized by the attempt to relate history to the “natural” disposition of the human being, albeit in dialectical twists and turns.

Tang’s strategy for dealing with the philosophical problem of historical necessity was one of avoidance. As an upshot, his optimism seems to be suspended in ambiguity, and resembles more a personal attitude or faith than a conviction based on stringent arguments. He asserted, for example, that the ideal of national unity of China would “necessarily” come about because the “historical impetus” (*lishi dongli* 歷史動力) of national and cultural life in

31 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 393.

32 See Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhexue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 132.

China originated from a single root.³³ “Ideals” entailed an “impetus” that “perforce” worked for their realization, and the truth of this could be revealed, as Tang maintained, by “philosophical reflection.”³⁴ The problem of coming to terms with the notion of historical necessity still looms large here, even more so since Tang himself remained skeptical with respect to the belief that ideals could actually forge history. He did not, after all, naively believe that history was guided by ideals or that ideals could be realized with ease. Besides, according to Tang, it was often impossible to identify those who were responsible for the failure to realize certain ideals. He even warned that attempts to implement ideals might lead to unintended negative effects. Any “consciousness” of ideals should therefore entail the awareness that ideals can produce negative results in historical reality.³⁵

Overall, Tang’s dealings with this issue remain obscure. He elucidated neither the workings of necessity in depth, nor how the interpreter of history might detect or retrace the historical effects of necessity. Tellingly, whenever he referred to certain periods in Chinese or world history, he refrained from depicting the transformations of one period into the following as a *necessary* development involving specific antinomies as the driving forces of the transformation.³⁶ There is, indeed, no clear-cut, comprehensive concept of distinct antinomies in Tang’s “philosophy of history,” which thus lacks a pivotal element of philosophies of history in the tradition of German idealist thought.³⁷ The closest Tang came to positing a historical constellation of epochal antinomy was his reflection about the formation of modern Confucianism itself. The whole body of his work on the reconstruction and renewal of China’s humanistic culture seems to suggest that modern Confucianism has arisen from inner contradictions of late imperial Chinese society, most of all related to problems of stabilizing the political and social order, and from the challenge of facing

33 Tang, “Zhongguo wenhua zhi yuanshi jingshen ji suo jingli zhi tiaozhan yu you huiying er xingcheng zhi fazhan,” p. 10. For similar assumptions about quasi-necessary historical tendencies, see, for example, the assumption in the manifesto of 1958 about the “inner” trend in Chinese history towards the establishment of a constitutional democracy: Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 37–39.

34 Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, p. 493.

35 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 386, 388.

36 According to Tang, the different historical periods in Chinese history each have their own characteristics, meaning and value, and variously express the historical impetus of China’s national and cultural life: Tang, “Zhongguo wenhua zhi yuanshi jingshen ji suo jingli zhi tiaozhan yu you huiying er xingcheng zhi fazhan,” p. 10.

37 Odo Marquard assumes that the notion of distinct antinomies is a key element of philosophies of history; see Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 114–115.

Western nation-states and Western thought. But it is not entirely clear whether Tang believed that the formation of modern Confucianism really entailed a moment of historical necessity. So even if he shared with classical European philosophies of history the basic assumption that history is evolving as “progress,” he refrained from explicitly retracing the course of history by referring to the idea of a necessarily progressive advancement. He consequently did not seek factual proof for an unfolding of progress across the different historical periods.

Signs of Progress

In the face of the pending ambiguity of historical necessity, it seems that Tang contented himself with the idea that there are at least scattered signs or indicators of progress in history, which the interpreter can detect. These signs may be taken as pointing to a general tendency of historical progress towards a betterment of humanity and its societies. The fact that humanistic personalities time and again found a following and were able to shape the history of nations, peoples or states thus appeared as a sign of progress. The list of such figures mentioned by Tang in a variety of writings includes Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi, but also Sun Yat-sen and Karl Marx.³⁸ There is a distinct tendency in Tang's thought to elevate historical figures to a position of admiration, thereby underscoring the historical relevance of human agency in general. For example, when praising the “classical kind of spirit” that he deemed to be beneficial to modernizing societies, Tang highlighted the “classical” admiration of “great personalities” in politics, religion, culture and society in China and the West.³⁹ In the same vein, he considered the persistent recurrence of the “classical” humanistic spirit itself to be an indication for progress in history, even though it did not necessarily emerge in a straight, unbroken line. Tang saw “humanity” rather following a “line winding upwards,” one that is “in accordance with reason,” but can be recognized only after history has taken its course.⁴⁰ He hence

38 Such references to Confucius, Buddha and Jesus are abundant in Tang's writings; see for example Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 442. For the reference to Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen and Marx see an article from 1952, quoted in Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhaxue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 142.

39 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 125–126.

40 Tang, *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing*, p. 302. Tang argued here in accordance with Hegel's famous reflection on history at the end of his preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: “History thus corroborates the teaching of the conception that only in the maturity of reality does

contradicted those theoreticians of history whom he presumed to be believers in a straight line of historical progress, like Marx, Condorcet, Comte and Spencer.⁴¹

In contrast to these concepts of linear, continuous progress in history, Kant's consideration on "signs of history" in his *The Contest of Faculties* (1798)⁴² is partially in line with Tang's historical thinking. Kant dedicated the second section of his book to the question of whether humanity is on a course of constant progress and betterment—in the words of Kant, "Is the human race continually improving?" In order to answer this question, Kant introduced the idea of signs of history, which he believed serve to indicate a general tendency in human history, albeit not in the sense of a prognostic tool that provides the basis for specific forecasts about the future course of history.⁴³ Like Tang, Kant did not claim to make propositions about the "betterment" of humanity as a *species*, but instead focused on human collectivities such as nations, peoples or states.⁴⁴ Humanity's progress in history can be detected, according to Kant, in signs of history that emerge as publicly displayed attitudes of individuals, but not perforce as specific "deeds or misdeeds."⁴⁵ On the basis of Tang's historical speculation, one might agree here. It seems, however, that Tang would not have hesitated to claim that certain historical events were indeed "progressive" in themselves, such as the alleged unification of China as a cultural nation, or steps taken in the global course of modernization, such as the implementation of democratic government.

Tang left open to debate the question of whether this sort of progress is reversible in the course of history. Kant, on the other hand, emphasized the irreversible impact of the public attitude with regard to the events of the French

the ideal appear as counterpart to the real, apprehends the real world in its substance, and shapes it into an intellectual kingdom. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering." See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 20.

41 Tang, "Zhongguo wenhua zhi yuanshi jingshen ji suo jingli zhi tiaozhan yu you huiying er xingcheng zhi fazhan," p. 10.

42 The following quotations and references are from the edition of *The Contest of Faculties* in: Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*. Tang had most likely no knowledge of Kant's text.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

44 Kant explicitly stated that he is concerned not "with any specific conception of mankind (singulorum)," but with "the whole of humanity (universorum), united in earthly society and distributed in national groups;" *ibid.*, p. 177.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Revolution as a historical sign of progress.⁴⁶ By welcoming the revolutionary founding of republican government based on a civil constitution that entailed a prohibition against wars of aggression, the public had displayed, according to Kant, a desire to participate in the implementation of these revolutionary ideas, despite the danger of suffering repression as individuals.⁴⁷ Such a sign of progress would never be forgotten again, even if the revolution were to fail. Kant assumed that the lofty ideas of republican government and the abolition of wars of aggression were so closely interlaced with the general interests of humanity that such progress is historically irreversible in the long run.⁴⁸

Tang did not focus, as Kant did, on the public and the attitude it displays, and he would certainly have disagreed with Kant's prediction that the progressive improvement would *not* be brought about by "the education of the young people in intellectual and moral culture, reinforced by the doctrines of religion."⁴⁹ Kant, after all, much more than Tang, contented himself with the assumption that signs of history indicate, if nothing else, the fact that humanity's progress is at least "negatively" assured—i.e. it will unfold in the long run,⁵⁰ even if there are no cultural forces present to willfully propel it.

Although the workings of reason in history and the winding course of progress may only be understood in hindsight, Tang's speculation still asserts that the realization of progress and the prevention of an ultimate catastrophe require purposeful efforts on the part of human agency. The following passage from *Life, Existence and the Horizons of Mind* is particularly striking in this regard:

Today it is solely true religion, morality and philosophical wisdom which are able to dominate all [kinds of] specialized knowledge and technology in order to invoke—to varying degrees and in all individuals . . .—distinct moral refinement and cultivation as well as knowledge cultivated by philosophical wisdom, so as [to enable them] to embrace and tolerate each other within a vast and bright spiritual horizon. This should allow the human world to [succeed in] avert[ing] [its] collapse and disintegration,

46 In this context, Kant referred to the "attitude of the onlookers as it reveals itself *in public*;" *ibid.*, p. 182.

47 Kant assumed with respect to the French Revolution that "... this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators . . . a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger;" *ibid.*, p. 182.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 185.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

and hence disrupt and dissolve [its] anxiety. In this case, the contemporary way to save the world consists of religion, morality and philosophy.⁵¹

In *Life, Existence and the Horizons of Mind*, Tang's speculation about history takes a sudden turn towards salvific thought, thereby highlighting the potency of human agency to create its own history. While the salvific assumptions clearly stand out in comparison to Tang's earlier, far more sober writings, the claim that collective normative action might create a better world had been raised by Tang time and again. The question of whether this entails a permanent salvation in terms of historical time was left unanswered. However, Tang left no doubt that any historical form of progress depends on the prerequisite that human beings attain an awareness of their role as creators of history. Tellingly, he took issue, as we have seen, with Hegel's theory of the state because he believed it insufficiently valorizes the historical force of the human will. Tang's defense of the elevated historical role of human agency also comprised a rejection of those theoreticians of historical materialism who "talked solely about historical necessity and the laws of reality as it is."⁵² In contrast, modern Confucian speculation itself was to be understood as propelling the formation of historical subjectivity (complete with a self-awareness as creators of history) and, hence, progress.

Delimiting a "Philosophy of History"

Tang had not developed a philosophy of history in the sense that he claimed to reveal either a "plan" or a "law" of history that would explain, by measure of necessity, the sequence of certain periods or epochs in history. Perhaps the case of Mou Zongsan is different. Yet for whatever reason, Mou was solely concerned with Chinese history from the Xia Dynasty (ca. 21st–16th BCE) to the Later Han Dynasty (25–220 CE) in his book on *Philosophy of History* (*Lishi zhexue* 歷史哲學) from 1955. It remains doubtful, to say the least, whether Mou's philosophy of history at all operates within the speculative mode of retracing epochal antinomies as triggers for *necessary* change from one period of Chinese history to the next. Equally doubtful is whether Mou Zongsan's and Tang Junyi's philosophies of history entail the teleological idea of human

51 Tang, *Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*, Vol. 24, p. 465.

52 Tang in "The Genesis of Humanity" (published in *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 3, No. 1; 1952); quoted from Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhexue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 144.

history taking a general course towards a final goal or purpose, such as the ultimate realization of freedom and emancipation. The “ideal humanistic world” to which Tang referred would not, it seems, mark a final stage of history, nor would the forms of individual and collective freedom realized in such a society be the pinnacle of freedom. After all, the perfectibility of the human being in “inner sagehood” is not a matter of *historical* subjectivity.⁵³ It rather entails a transgression of the totality of historical conditions: in realizing self-perfection in the highest form, human beings lift themselves beyond their historical existence. Accordingly, modern Confucianism does not speculate about the final realization of human emancipation in history, nor does it speculate about an apocalyptic crisis of humanity.⁵⁴

European philosophies of history contain self-reflection about their own role and impact within history. This was certainly attractive for Tang as it opened a gateway to self-reflection on the pivotal role of “modernized” Confucian thought in creating historical progress: by triggering the dynamics of China’s humanistic “main current,” modern Confucianism would raise the historical self-awareness of the Chinese. The impulse of modern Confucianism would therefore enable China (as a cultural nation) to tap into the driving forces of history. Here, Tang was in accordance with the mainstream of European philosophies of history, which are characterized by the fact that they “see and want” progress.⁵⁵

Also similar to European philosophies of history, the modern Confucian speculation about history entails both a national perspective and a vision of world history, i.e. an anticipation of modernization on a global scale. As we have seen, a crucial element of this speculation is the assumption that the process of modernization within nation-states is not self-propelled, but depends on the human factor. This accentuation of human agency and the need to attain historical subjectivity was to take the edge off a rapid social transformation that might otherwise be experienced as largely uncontrollable and contingent. What is more, modern Confucianism provided the individual

53 With respect to European philosophies of history, Marquard deems the notion of the human being’s perfectibility *within* history to be a tenet of the historical-philosophical conception of history as the progressive development of human emancipation; see Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 67–68.

54 Significantly, Tang took little, if any, interest in the eschatological implications of European philosophies of history; nor did he reflect on the thesis that philosophies of history evolved out of a secularization of earlier theological speculations about history.

55 On European philosophies of history, see Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 14, 67–68.

members of society with an unchanging “anthropological” point of reference that served their need to stabilize self-images and life patterns amidst the detrimental effects of accelerated modernization. Yet there were, as we have seen, lingering contradictions between such insistence on *historical* subjectivity and the *anthropological* perspective.

In Tang’s speculation, the epoch of modernity acquired a civil-theological foundation that in effect supported comprehensive and continuous modernization. One might thus speak here of a “modernizing conservatism.” Such conservatism implicitly curtails criticism of modernization. This may seem odd given the abundance of critical remarks about “Western modernity” in Tang’s writings. However, there is all the same a strong tendency in Tang’s work to disregard any critique of modernization that is directed at fundamental structures which elude the immediate reach of interventions by human actors. This raises, in turn, the question of whether his modernizing conservatism provides individuals with a soothing, yet dubious consolation of self-fulfillment, while they actually remain caught up in the “iron cage” made of modern capitalism and the bureaucratic state. This consolation, in other words, would seem illusory because the basic social, political and economic realities that cause the predicament remain unchallenged due to the deceptive immobilization of spiritually consoled individuals. If this were the case, modern Confucianism might as well function as “opium of the people.” Yet one should recall that modern Confucianism neither entails the promise of an afterlife nor accepts an escapist way of life that might thoroughly placate the individual’s distress under conditions of modernization. On the contrary, Tang’s civil theology depicts individuals as being in constant need of addressing the modern world. Tang once even described *liang zhi* as the human being’s “last source” of the “historical age.”⁵⁶ With its focus on the historical implications of *liang zhi*, it would seem that Tang’s Confucianism may accommodate a critique of modernity that takes the increasing disempowerment of human agency into account.

56 See Tang’s text from 1972: “Wang Yangming zhi liang zhi xue zhi shidai yiyi 王陽明之良知學之時代意義” quoted from Huang, *Xueshu yu jingshi—Tang Junyi de lishi zhaxue ji qi zhongji guanhuai*, p. 56. In the same vein, Tang referred to the “moral self” as the driving force of human history; see Huang, *ibid.*, p. 53.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Totalitarian Challenge

Among the proponents of a modern Confucianism who addressed the topic of totalitarianism, Tang Junyi's political thought stands out. Indeed, from the early 1950s onwards, Tang's reflections on totalitarianism were more comprehensive than those of the vast majority of his fellow Confucian thinkers.¹ A discussion of Tang's writings on totalitarianism needs to take his own claim regarding the global significance of modern Confucianism at face value.² Tang of course did not address totalitarianism by focusing exclusively on Chinese communism, but made reference to what he identified as Western European and Russian phenomena of totalitarian rule. What is conspicuously absent, however, is a reflection on a defining experience of the modern West that was brought about by a totalitarian regime: the Holocaust. I do not point this out as a way of counterbalancing the fact that Western philosophers have often paid only scant attention to the non-Western world in their reflections on modernity. Rather, I want to suggest that if we are to take the Confucian claims to *global* significance seriously, we need to consider the problem that the Confucian critiques of "Western modernity" have largely ignored the Holocaust and hence revolve around a black hole. A rigid exegete of Tang's work might content him- or herself with stating that Tang, for whatever reason, chose to forgo a discussion of the Holocaust. There are other options, however. For one, we can relate Tang's thought to a reflection on the Holocaust and examine to what effect it might contribute to our understanding of this cataclysmic experience. In this

1 For example, Zhang Junmai commented on international communism and Chinese communism after the Second World War (see Zhang's articles in *Zhang Junmai yanlun ji. Yijiusijiu nian yihou*, Vols. 2, 3, 4). In the 1930s he had written a book about the Soviet Union under Stalin, covering the period from 1928 to 1933 (*The Soviet Union Under Stalin*; 1933), and published a brief comparison of the dictatorships in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (in his *The Way to Establish the State*; 1938), using terms such as "fascist" or "autocracy;" see Zhang, *Shitailin xia zhi Su'e*; Zhang, *Li guo zhi dao*, pp. 117–137.

2 Such claims have been repeated time and again since the end of the Second World War, for example in the Confucian manifesto of 1958 (Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*). More recently, Tu Wei-ming prominently raises similar claims about the global significance of a renewed Confucian humanism; see e.g. Tu, "Multiple Modernities—Implications of the Rise of 'Confucian' East Asia," pp. 60, 66–67.

sense, the present chapter, much like the previous ones, is an attempt to think with Tang, instead of merely thinking about him.

At first glance, Tang Junyi seemed to be in an awkward position to examine the formation and various manifestations of totalitarianism, because he hardly took account of speculative elements that are often considered fundamental to totalitarian ideologies. Among these are secularized eschatologies stemming from philosophies of history, complete with ideas about a historical struggle of humanity against its enemies, and the accompanying belief in the final, this-worldly elimination of all antinomies. It is thus not surprising that in his analysis of totalitarianism he did not attempt to explore the ideological foundations of Western forms of totalitarianism in a comprehensive manner. Yet he apparently felt that to remain silent on totalitarianism was not an option. Given the experience of European fascism, National Socialism, Stalinism, the communist takeover of the Chinese Mainland and the tensions of the Cold War period, the need to examine totalitarianism was compelling, even more so because Tang was convinced by the early 1950s that the government of the PRC was in fact a totalitarian regime (see below).

Apart from the harsh experience of civil wars and world wars leading up to the mid-20th century, other issues engendered Tang's interest in totalitarianism. Most of all, his optimistic outlook on human history in general and on the global course of modernity in particular was at stake. If an analysis of totalitarianism would show that totalitarian societies were as likely to be the outcome of modernization as democratic societies, then this optimism would have been shattered. What is more, the renewal of "humanism" that was at the core of modern Confucianism had to measure up to the catastrophic experience of totalitarianism if it was to avoid the criticism of being a mere reverie of an idyllic world or, worse still, a naïve escapism that curtails critical thought. The following shows that, Tang addressed these challenges in his reflections on totalitarianism, but he did so in a highly selective manner when it came to include the history of non-Chinese totalitarianism. Far from leaping into such reverie, Tang assumed that totalitarianism was neither non-modern nor anti-modern, nor a mere aberration that occurred as a singular event in the course of Western-induced modernity.

On the Origins and Causes of Totalitarianism

Tang probably first dealt with the problem of totalitarianism in 1951, when he wrote an article for the *Democratic Review* about repressive and violent

measures taken by the communist regime on the Mainland.³ His choice to publish this text in the *Democratic Review* set a precedent for the following decades, when he continued to publish articles on totalitarianism in journals that appealed to a broad readership. Whereas the historical contexts of Tang's interest in analyzing totalitarian rule can be readily discerned, we can only speculate about the theoretical inputs he had absorbed. It is not unlikely that he was aware, in the early 1950s, of American discussions about totalitarianism that had begun in the mid-1930s. On the whole, Tang's analyses are to some degree in line with conservative critics from the *American Review of Politics*: these critics had assumed that a totalitarian reaction was triggered by a fatal crisis of Western civilization, complete with an equally disastrous crisis of capitalism, which entailed unrestrained materialism, rampant individualism and a widespread spiritual void in modern Western societies. Consequently, some of these conservative thinkers identified an ethical renewal of society as the essential antidote to totalitarianism.⁴

Tang neither devised a theory of totalitarianism nor presented a comprehensive analysis of totalitarian ideologies or totalitarian regimes. This is, however, not surprising given the state of international studies on totalitarianism on which one commentator recently concluded: "'Totalitarianism' remains as ambiguous today as ever: as a historical concept it is insecure and contested, as memory it is geographically promiscuous and unstable, and nebulous; only as a semantic marker of new political constellations, identities, and ideological alli-

3 The article is entitled "Is a Human Being a Human Being after All?" and was published in *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 2, No. 24 (June 1951); see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 131–137.

4 On the early American debate about totalitarianism, see Knöbl, *Spielräume der Modernisierung*, pp. 116–120. The *Review of Politics* was founded in a Catholic milieu. John Nef, an economic historian from Chicago University, warned about the detrimental effects of unrestrained materialism and the crisis of capitalism in Western societies including the United States in 1940: Knöbl, *ibid.*, p. 119. American public and academic debates about totalitarianism date back to the 1930s and over time comprised a broad intellectual and political spectrum, at one time bringing together socialists, liberals and conservatives in the "Committee for Cultural Freedom" founded by philosophers Sidney Hook and John Dewey in 1939. The scope of "totalitarianism" was contested throughout and discussions responded to shifts in international politics, from the Hitler-Stalin Pact to the U.S. cooperation with the Soviet Union in the war against Nazi Germany and to the subsequent rift in the Cold War period, which led to a revival of studies on totalitarianism in the 1950s; see Rabinbach, "Moments of Totalitarianism," pp. 89–93; Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism*, pp. 12–14.

ances is it, as ever, indisputable.”⁵ As for Tang’s writings on totalitarianism, we find no comparative analysis of the inner workings of totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, even though he conceptualized totalitarianism to include Italian Fascism, National Socialism, Stalinism, and Chinese communism. Nor did he analyze ideological components of totalitarianism such as fascism, racist ideologies or anti-Semitism. Overall, he applied the label of totalitarianism in a very loose, sometimes polemical manner.

With regards to the system of Chinese communism, Tang did not examine it in a comprehensive manner, but rather presented detailed observations about its workings and inscribed these into a larger theoretical framework of totalitarianism[s]. From the 1950s to the 1970s he used the terms “totalitarianism” (*jiquanzhuyi* 極權主義), “totalitarian world” (*jiquan shijie* 極權世界), “totalitarian system” (*jiquan zhidu* 極權制度), “totalitarian society” (*jiquan de shehui* 極權的社會) and “totalitarian politics” (*jiquan de zhengzhi* 極權的政治) to refer to Chinese “totalitarianism from Qin Shihuang up to the contemporary Qin Shihuang-ism of Mao Zedong,”⁶ to the European “Fascists” Mussolini and Hitler and to the Russian “communists” Lenin and Stalin.⁷ Whether Tang’s use of “totalitarianism” includes GMD rule, which he believed was “fascist” during the period from the dissolution of the first united front in the mid-1920s until the end of the Second World War, is not entirely clear.⁸ Be that as it may, Tang gives the concept of totalitarianism a very broad extension here, which comprises even the dynastic rule of the Qin as well as czarist Russia.⁹

It is deplorable that Tang did not substantiate this extensive use of “totalitarianism.” Whether he actually believed that there were intellectual or institutional roots of totalitarianism reaching back to the Qin Dynasty and whether he, therefore, agreed with Xu Fuguan’s diagnosis of Chinese despotism, remains

5 Rabinbach, “Moments of Totalitarianism,” p. 100. In the same vein, A. James Gregor states in a recent study that “[w]hat ‘totalitarianism’ is not is a ‘theory’. (...) It is not clear that all members of the class share all its defining traits—nor is it clear how many of those defining traits, or in what measure, are required for entry into the class.” Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism*. p. 17.

6 See a 1974 article by Tang in *Mingbao*: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 428. The reference to Mao Zedong pertains to Chinese communism of the early 1950s; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 136.

7 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 331.

8 For Tang’s diagnosis of fascist tendencies in the GMD; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 157–158.

9 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 318–319.

doubtful.¹⁰ What is more, Xu Fuguan polemicized in the early 1950s against Tang and Mou Zongsan by claiming that their project of modern Confucianism was not immune to an absorption by totalitarian ideas.¹¹ In countering Xu's criticism, Tang presented a conceptual argument as well as a historical interpretation. On the conceptual level, as we have seen, he proposed a definition of politics that placed the emphasis on the need to confine politics to an institutional realm without imposing it on other spheres within society. Politics had to be functionally limited to the task of *indirectly* supporting the realization of social and cultural values by safeguarding the organizational and institutional framework. Aside from these systematic considerations, Tang reacted to Xu Fuguan's criticism with an attempt to discern intellectual currents in Chinese history that are characterized, to some degree, by an affinity to totalitarianism. This approach is typical of Tang's profound skepticism towards the *political* traditions of Confucianism, which in fact exceeds Xu Fuguan's critique of the Confucian tradition. As Tang saw it, the Confucians of the past had tried to endow their doctrines with immediate ruling power by propagating the idea that the "ruler" (*jun* 君) and the (highest) "teacher" (*shi* 師) should be one and the same person.¹²

Tang detected similar tendencies of infusing politics with totalizing, doctrinal claims to truth in strands of Buddhism, Daoism and "original" Christianity,¹³ but he primarily targeted the New Culture Movement of the 20th century, insinuating strong affinities to totalitarian thought. These affinities are said to become manifest in the conviction of New Culture advocates that the totality of extant drawbacks in Chinese society can be removed by implementing a new, anti-traditional and anti-metaphysical culture in a surgical manner. Accordingly, the totalizing notion of a "new culture" promised to eliminate all the remnants of Confucianism, including the familial virtue of filial piety, and to replace the social significance of religions altogether with "science and democracy." In his criticism of such a belief in the salutary conflation of politics

10 As Liu Honghe points out, Xu Fuguan assumed in his study of centralized, bureaucratic rule in imperial China that a "totalitarian" type of despotism evolved in the Qin and Han Dynasties and persisted, in various forms, throughout imperial China; see. Liu, *Confucianism in the Eyes of a Confucian Liberal. Hsu Fu-kuan's Critical Examination of the Confucian Political Tradition*, pp. 111–112.

11 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 226–227.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

13 *Ibid.* According to Tang, in these currents the evil in politics was considered to be identical with the evil in man. The ensuing attempts to eradicate all evil intentions in man were in effect attempts to transcend politics and its evils once and for all. As a consequence for practical life, politics would thus be depleted of its contents.

and true doctrines, Tang arrived at the drastic conclusion that the New Culture Movement on the whole played a crucial role in facilitating the spread of communism in China.¹⁴

Given Tang's very broad conceptual extension of "totalitarianism," it is not surprising that he did not present a clear-cut definition of totalitarianism, but instead contented himself with elucidating certain characteristics and mechanisms of totalitarian rule and ideologies. Tellingly, the focus is here on communist rule in China, and not on Soviet Stalinism or National Socialism. In 1951, on the occasion of writing about trials and killings in communist China that involved incidents of children exposing crimes allegedly committed by their parents, Tang deemed these incidents to be "unbearable." He added that Chinese communists' "massacres" and repressive propaganda could not be fully comprehended by solely analyzing some specific political or other reasons for such actions.¹⁵ The communist concept of politics according to which "politics" was to rule and control every aspect of human life, and which allowed only for a single distinction—the one between a "we"-group and an enemy who must be eliminated—had to be taken into account. The involvement of children's accusations in the execution of their parents was, it seemed, to serve the purpose of eliminating the very root of "humaneness" in human beings, namely by eradicating the sphere of intimate feeling for one's parents as the initial expression of humaneness.¹⁶ The totalitarian politics of Chinese communism aimed, therefore, not only at dehumanizing the enemy; it also served to create a "we"-group whose members are similarly incriminated and entangled in dehumanizing acts of breaking taboos that amount to a fundamental denial of humaneness. Tang hence called Chinese communism an ideology of "negating everything" (*fouding yiqie* 否定一切), which thereby attained the intensity of a "new religion." By reifying the human being to the point of dehumanization, the ideology of Chinese communism was truly "satanic."¹⁷

There are two conclusions that we might draw here: First, the communist campaign to systematically dissolve familial ties was an attempt to destroy those social and ethical relations that play an important role in the formation of an individual's personal identity. Second, there are mechanisms of totalitarian rule that function to categorize the victims under anonymous, de-individualized labels, thereby facilitating a decrease of solidarity and a

14 Ibid., p. 237.

15 Ibid., pp. 131–132, 134.

16 Ibid., pp. 132–133.

17 Ibid., p. 136. Arguably, Tang came close to a concept of "political religion" in his analysis of totalitarian ideologies.

growing indifference on the part of bystanders. With respect to incriminating the “we”-group into the acts of the perpetrators, the term “satanic” is relevant because it links Tang’s analysis to his reflection on the human lust for power and inclination toward cruelty (see Chap. 7 “The Political and its Demonic Aspects”). It is implied here that the totalitarian mechanisms of Chinese communism radically dissolve ethical relations and social contexts of humanistic culture, and hence serve to expose the individuals to their own self-consuming lust for power.¹⁸ Incriminated, exposed and de-individualized human beings would now be ready to participate in the violent tearing down of the old order. Tang alluded to this aspect of totalitarian ideology in his sharp rejection of revolutionary morality:

The communists’ acclamation of revolutionary morality as the highest morality of man is one type of pan-moralism which is morality perverted for a political purpose. The ideology of such a pan-moralism can strip a man of all his cultural garments and sacrifice him naked on the altar of political revolution. Such an attitude, be it admitted, is not without moral sentiment originating from within. But, nonetheless, when the naked moral being of a revolutionary hero is worshipped above all men, the preservation of traditional human culture would be considered as of no essential importance, and barbarism among other things will come out from this very pan-moralism.¹⁹

However, totalitarian rule in communist China was ridden with inner contradictions, even regarding the treatment of familial ties. Tang recognized that the communist regime did not intend to dissolve these ties altogether, but rather tried to make use of them in order to secure and exert power within the ruling circles. Two particularly striking cases were the ascendance to power of Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, and the Red Guards’ intimate attachment to Mao that culminated in their fervent admiration of the “Great Helmsman.” This

18 Tang explicitly stated that in the world of Marxism-Leninism, human beings are deprived of opportunities to rely on a moral or cultural way of life in order to rein in their lust for power. He added that for the Communist Party, the existence of political power is identical with the existence of human life; see an unpublished manuscript from 1972 entitled “On the Contradiction between Chinese Nationalism and Marxism-Leninism, and on the Road of China,” reprinted in Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 422. See also Tang’s diagnosis of the totalitarian politicization, and hence destruction, of the humanistic realm in the PRC: Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongian*, pp. 65, 388.

19 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 368.

was, according to Tang, clearly reminiscent of familial ties and was probably even inspired by Mao's earlier readings of late imperial novels such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*.²⁰ The obvious conclusion is that communist rule in China had to rely on such traditional measures to secure power because it was permanently faced with severe ideological contradictions. Among these, the ideological tensions between universal aspirations to world revolution and particular claims of Chinese nationalism that took shape in the rift between a pro-Soviet and an anti-Soviet camp within the CCP stand out. It is regrettable that Tang did not attempt to inscribe such detailed observations of the inner workings and mechanisms of totalitarian rule on the Chinese Mainland into a systematic examination of Chinese totalitarianism. Instead, he tried to detect particular signs of contradictions within communism in China, never attempting to systematize his observations in the manner of Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* (1942/1944), which contains an analysis of the inner antagonisms, rampant contradictions and chaotic aspects of National Socialism. Neither did Tang try to relate his observations about the Chinese communist state to an extensive examination of totalitarianism on the scale of Friedrich and Brzezinski's classical *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956), which he most likely had not studied.

Even though Tang did not present a comprehensive analysis of totalitarianism, he did try to uncover the sources of totalitarianism. His approach—loosely similar to Hannah Arendt's in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* from 1951—highlights factors that were conducive to the emergence of totalitarian rule without claiming to identify all the compelling causes that lead to totalitarianism. Such an approach involves vastly different elements and layers. With respect to the question of why individuals show inclinations towards totalitarianism, Tang turned to habitual attitudes. He identified a specific “attitude of thinking” that is best described as a “passive state” in which individuals “habitually conform to opinions that they themselves have naturally formed.” Due to a lack of intellectual alertness and reflection, individuals are particularly prone to fall victim to political, religious and social propaganda that aims to make them readily conform to a “totalitarian system.” In a pessimistic diagnosis, Tang ascertained that these attitudes are very difficult to alter.²¹ One effect of such habitual passiveness can even be seen, he believed, in the United States where many people strove solely for their own personal gain while trying to minimize their losses vis-à-vis their government. Similarly, many overseas

20 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 427–429 (unpublished manuscript).

21 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 572–573.

migrants from China became increasingly unwilling to actively resist totalitarianism the longer they lived in the “free world” (*ziyou shijie* 自由世界).²²

On a different level of analysis, Tang diagnosed the decline of the individual in modernity and related this development to the rise of totalitarianism. He depicted modern societies as characterized by the excessive spread of instrumental rationality throughout the political, social, cultural and economic sphere. As a consequence, the individuals understand, evaluate and organize their own lifeworld, including their mutual relations and their self-conceptions, solely in consideration of efficiency and utility, thereby reifying the human being itself. The objectified human being is thus put at the disposition of the alleged overall progress of society. The quintessence of Tang’s diagnosis of modernity is evident from his conclusion that there is a potential convergence between totalitarian and liberal societies in the common degeneration of the individual: Both totalitarian societies and societies of “laissez-faire individualism” are made up of individuals who are closely enmeshed in an unrestrained quest for wealth, power, and prestige which eventually leads to the individual’s loss of a “feeling of authentic existence” (*zhenshi cunzai gan* 真實存在感).²³ The decline of the “authentic self” pertains to the individual’s loss of self-awareness as a being that is capable of lifting itself up to the realm of sagehood—and to achieve this not at the cost of others but on the basis of recognizing each other’s political and social freedom as a precondition for one’s quest for self-cultivation. This decline in turn gives rise to the formation of an isolated and alienated self in the spheres of politics, society, and “academic culture.” This self is utilizing human beings as means to maximize its gains in terms of wealth, power and prestige, thereby exterminating those forms of recognition that do not accord with instrumental rationality. Such objectification affects not only the others but also encapsulates the self. It eventually turns into an atomistic self that is particularly prone, according to Tang, to the lures of totalitarianism.²⁴

22 See Tang’s 1958 article in *Zuguo Zhoukan*, Vol. 28, No. 3–5; reprinted in Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, here: p. 110.

23 Ibid., pp. 424–425. Tang stated, in the manner of Western mainstream criticisms of reifying effects of modernity: “. . . modern man, who sees and does nothing other than what his profession demands of him, leads a way of life more or less like a bee or an ant, thus degrading the human spirit”; see Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 370.

24 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 424–427, 428. Tang was here referring, among others, to Jaspers, Buber, and Sartre as philosophers who warned that the basic problem of human existence in the 20th century, in capitalist as well as socialist societies, was not so much one of material life as one of a deepening isolation and solitude on

In this context, Tang turned to the global ascension of a Janus-faced scientific civilization that is crucial to “free and democratic societies” but may also function as a trajectory for the reification of modern man:

If man is regarded merely as an object in the external world, then like other external objects he has no reason not to be used, controlled and manufactured. The totalitarian states do in fact use scientific knowledge and techniques to remold men for political purposes, degrading their dignity and condemning their soul. Here we can again see the need for Confucian teachings, which respect scientific study on the one hand, and hold sacred the transcendental subjectivity of man on the other.²⁵

Without critical reflection on the mixed blessing of the modern advancement of science and technology, a failure of the project of modernity is looming. The reconstruction of Confucianism was thus to serve as a bulwark against such danger. This entailed repeated warnings against the totalizing reification of the human being in modern societies, including totalitarian societies which also make comprehensive use of modern science and technology. Here Tang drew a parallel between the repressive regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union:

For example, Hitler and Stalin and other dictators all made use of scientific and technological methods to build a human society. But what kind of society did they actually build? They applied scientific and technological methods to control and enchain the freedom of humanity, form autocratic and dictatorial politics, and destroy democratic institutions. [This] was evidently even more effective than not using scientific and technological methods.²⁶

Another layer of origins of Chinese totalitarianism pertains to the peculiar historical conditions under which communism took hold in China. In Tang's view, “Marxism-Leninism” became accepted in China in the context of widespread anxieties among the Chinese about the survival of their nation amid imperialistic threats foreign nation-states posed since the mid-19th century.

the part of the individual, which runs counter to an “authentic” mode of life; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 435 (unpublished manuscript).

25 Tang, “The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia,” p. 367.

26 See Tang's 1959 article “World Humanism and Chinese Humanism,” reprinted in: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, p. 49.

Communism was thus seen as a powerful weapon to resist imperialistic intrusions and also as a tool to strengthen the Chinese nation.²⁷ This perception certainly fit the popular view that the whole Chinese nation had become a “proletarian class” at the hands of “capitalist states of the West.” Besides, the fact that Marxism-Leninism was “anti-Western Western thought” decisively enhanced, it seems, its attractiveness in the Chinese world.²⁸ Whether Tang himself agreed with this view is open to discussion. He did not, after all, clarify the meaning of capitalism nor its relation to imperialism and colonialism. His analysis of Western imperialism suggested, however, that socioeconomic groups and organizations within Western nation-states were the driving agents propelling imperialistic politics (see Chap. 7 “The World Order of ‘Ecumenical States’”). Hence the submission of the nation-state to forces from the socioeconomic sphere was a crucial prerequisite for imperialistic action, which in turn effectuated a totalitarian backlash in the victimized countries. Tang consequently insisted on the need to establish strong nation-states in order to contain totalitarianism. Only within the institutional setting of democratic nation-states would the societal sphere with its capitalist dynamic be reined in, and a totalitarian backlash therefore prevented. The nation-state in its political form of liberal democracy was thus identified as a bulwark against totalitarianism, and its absence in China had particularly disastrous consequences.

Perhaps it is due to this diagnosis that Tang never considered the quest for a strong nation-state as a potential origin of Chinese totalitarianism. He instead bolstered his analysis by drawing his readers’ attention to the fact that Mussolini, Hitler, Lenin and Stalin all proclaimed their determination to resist “inequality and crimes in the capitalist societies of the modern West” when they successfully mobilized the masses.²⁹ This analysis is highly problematic, not only because the generalizing equation of Italian Fascism, National Socialism, Leninism and Stalinism is misleading from a historical point of view. Equally disturbing is the implicit vindication of totalitarianism as a form of self-defensive reaction against severe capitalist or imperialistic threats to one’s nation.

27 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 445 (unpublished manuscript).

28 See an interview with Tang from 1974 in *Mingbao*, reprinted in: Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 318–319.

29 See an interview with Tang from 1974 in *Mingbao* (Hong Kong), reprinted in Tang, *ibid.*, p. 331.

Overcoming Totalitarianism?

The strengthening of (democratic) nation-states vis-à-vis transnational socio-economic aspirations of imperialistic expansion is not the only means of curbing the danger of totalitarianism that Tang discussed. He also deemed it imperative, as we have seen, to initiate a renewal of humanistic thought and values (e.g. as a renewal of a “classical spirit”) within a liberal democracy. He related this agenda explicitly to the struggle of the “free world” against the “totalitarian world,” which he saw unfolding in the 1950s as a struggle that should involve the reconstruction of a “democratic spirit.”³⁰ The notion “democratic spirit” refers to the conviction that the stability of democratic government requires the social diffusion of a humanistic culture. Tang thus warned, in an interview from 1974, that because democracy was abused by totalitarianism in the 20th century, establishing a kind of “education and culture” that generates common knowledge about “true democratic political institutions” was now necessary.³¹ When seen from this perspective, the modern Confucian project to interweave the renewal of China’s humanistic “main current” with the adoption of a democratic political form is also an attempt to fend off totalitarianism.

Tang’s modern Confucianism entails, if not a detailed prediction about the future of Chinese totalitarianism, then at least the general prediction that totalitarianism is bound to eventually collapse in China primarily because of its antagonistic stance toward the “main current” of China’s “national culture.” In the manifesto of 1958, Tang and his co-authors expected that Chinese Marxism-Leninism would falter due to the self-destructive power struggles within its ruling elite, but most of all because of its erroneous concepts of human nature and culture that are fixed to the “standpoint of class.” These concepts were said to run counter to globally shared principles of “higher culture” and also to China’s “cultural thought” of several millennia, which refers to the “[human] mind” and “human nature” in order to establish the “moral subject.”³² Tang, who frequently repeated this expectation from the 1950s to the 1970s, here once again deployed—implicitly—the tautological depiction of the relation between the Chinese nation and its “main current” (see Chap. 4

30 Ibid., p. 104.

31 Ibid., p. 331. He had already claimed in 1951 that the problem of “Chinese communism” was in fact neither a problem that was primarily related to certain political parties nor to certain political systems, but rather a problem of “culture” and “mind and [human] nature”; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, p. 136.

32 Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, p. 44.

“Nation and Culture”). The tautology of the prognosis asserts, in essence, that totalitarianism is not entrenched in the cultural “main current” of the Chinese nation, whereas the democratic nation-state is indeed its authentic political form. Accordingly, there is no historical “necessity” for the victory of totalitarianism (i.e. “Marxism-Leninism”) in China. Establishing a democratic nation-state, on the other hand, will eventually occur as “evidenced” by the fact that it is in accordance with the “main current” that shapes the course of Chinese history.³³

However, as we have seen, Tang did not conceptualize this historical development as a result of linear, planned human action. The individuals are unburdened, in Tang’s theory of state, from the need to unreservedly identify themselves with factual efforts of nation-state building. Similar to the so-called Hegelian Left, Tang’s political hermeneutics distinguish clearly between the truth claims of the state in historical reality and the truth of the concept or the idea of the state: the “idea of the state” (*guojia zhi linian* 國家之理念) is a “purely spiritual idea” (*chuncui jingshen de linian* 純粹精神的理念).³⁴ The historical reality of the state, in other words, is not to be considered an *immediate* manifestation of reason.³⁵ In a somber mood, Tang drew the distinction, in 1955, between the “Republic of China” as the label for a pending effort of state building on the one hand, and as the denominator for the contemporary, unsatisfying reality represented by the current state of the Chinese Republic on the other:

Although today’s national government has retreated to Taiwan, the question about its achievements in carrying out democratic, constitutional politics is another matter altogether. But nothing will ultimately be able

33 Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 318–319; see also Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian*, Vol. 10, pp. 445–446 (unpublished manuscript); Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie*, pp. 44–45. In the same vein, Tang made retrospective prognostications in the form of historical diagnoses. Among these, we find his highly questionable dictum that contemporary Russia, due to its “totalitarian” tradition of czarism, was far more likely to witness a prolonged totalitarian era than China, whose “totalitarian” past had merely lasted for the very short period of the Qin Dynasty; see Tang, *Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie*, Vol. 8, pp. 318–319.

34 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 392–393.

35 The so-called Hegelian Right in Germany is often said to have considered the factual state as the rational state, whereas the Hegelian Left attempted to conceptualize a *future* human community in which alienation and the institutions of the state would have ceased to exist; see Vollrath, *Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen*, p. 128.

to obstruct the Chinese nation from proceeding along this path, in order for the Republic of China to make a name for itself and conform, in actuality, to [the concept of the] Republic of China. [...] The outer impediments consist, of course, in the Communist Party, which completely disagrees with the spirit of the Chinese Republic striving for the construction of a 'Chinese, national, democratic state', and [instead] solely believes in Marxism-Leninism, one-sidedly [establishing] an autocracy of one party and one class.³⁶

Furthermore, Tang did not assume that the *concept* of the state wields such power over reality as to enforce its own implementation by prefiguring and anticipating actual political and social movements.³⁷ In accordance with this conceptual delimitation of the theory of the state, Tang repudiated Kang Youwei's vision of a limitless world of "great uniformity" in which all extant legal, political, social and cultural "boundaries" (*jie* 界) and institutions would eventually dissolve:

If we again imagine that in an ideal world everybody would generally have only one [way of] thinking, one [single] will, one [way of] feeling, and would lead the same cultural life, again without any difference, then the interchange of human thought would no longer exist, and neither would affectionate mutual concern . . . This would amount solely to the death of the humanistic world . . . Our ideal world is thus not a world of identity in which there is no difference between human beings . . . We therefore do not call our ideal world a world of great uniformity, but rather a world of grand harmony (*tai he* 太和). The difference between harmony (*he* 和) and uniformity (*tong* 同) is something that we must urgently recognize.³⁸

We may conclude from this critique that such visions of a great uniformity are totalitarian in essence, not only because they applaud a totalitarian

36 Tang, *Zhongguo renwen jingshen zhi fazhan*, pp. 175–176 (this article was first published in *Zuguo Zhoukan*, Vol. 12, No. 7; November 1955).

37 Koselleck called this latter type of concepts, which gained wide currency after the French Revolution, "collective and motivating concepts capable of reordering and mobilizing anew the masses." These concepts, many of which were "isms," aided political mobilization and were (and still are) used not only in academic contexts, but also as political watchwords; see Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, p. 80.

38 Tang, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, pp. 71–72 (this article was published in *Minzhu Pinglun*, Vol. 1, No. 2; July 1949).

future, but also because the visionaries ascribe to their own ideas a totalizing, reality-consuming power. The danger, then, lies in the assumption that the respective “ideals” wield total power over reality. Tang tried to hold this totalitarian implication at bay when he pinned down “ideals” by introducing notions of sagehood and moral intuition as *limit-concepts*.

Given this astute awareness of ideological aberration of totalitarianism, it may seem perplexing that Tang, for all his criticism of the downsides of Western types of modernity and modernization, refrained from linking the critique of modernity/modernization more closely with a diagnosis of Western types of totalitarianism. As for the mainstream of contemporary Confucian thought, an even more perplexing image emerges. It is indeed ironic that Confucian critics of “Western modernity” generally stop short of tapping into those intense Western debates about modernity that take up the issue of the project of Western Enlightenment reverting into a totalitarian collapse of civilization. By abstaining from these debates, the Confucian reflection on modernity evades disturbing questions and unsettling perspectives, above all the acknowledgment of “the gnawing suspicion” that Zygmunt Bauman expressed, namely “that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration . . . from the otherwise straight path of progress . . . We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire.”³⁹ Such a somber assessment adds additional weight to the question of why the Holocaust—as well as the Soviet Gulag—plays such a marginal role in modern Confucianism’s critical reflections on modernity.

It should be noticed that although Tang Junyi mentioned National Socialism and Stalinism in the context of totalitarianism, he did so only in passing, and without attempting to explore the implications of the Holocaust and the Gulag. Trying to provide a comprehensive explanation for such reservations would be tedious, perhaps even futile. Without a doubt, one would have to take into account the fact that by the 1950s and early 1960s, Chinese exiles’ most immediate concern about totalitarianism was its Chinese manifestation, which they were quite literally facing from Hong Kong. It was therefore a particularly pressing topic, even more so in the general context of the Cold War period. To avoid an anachronistic default in intellectual history, one would moreover have to consider the international discussions and debates as well as the media coverage about the Holocaust up to the 1970s (in Tang’s case) and take into account the reception of these in the Chinese-speaking world. Even though there is a severe lack of research on this topic, it seems safe to say that

39 Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 7.

Adorno and Arendt, for example—two of the most prominent thinkers of the immediate post-war period to reflect on the Holocaust as the other side of the modern society's coin—were largely unknown in Chinese circles in the 1950s and 1960s.

Given these qualifications and constraints, simply brushing aside the topic with respect to Confucian critics seems prudent. However, the whole issue has a sting to it because, for one, modern Confucianism emphatically insists on its responsibility to address an international public, and not solely the Chinese audience. This, if nothing else, validates the concern of examining Confucian reflections on the Holocaust—or rather, the lack thereof. This concern would arguably not need such validation in the first place. Be that as it may, instead of asking why modern Confucianism continues to marginalize the Holocaust, one might rather be inclined to think about the upshot of overcoming such neglect. This is, in other words, a matter of pondering the consequences for modern Confucianism if it were “*to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society*”⁴⁰ and hence share “. . . the [disturbing] awareness that ‘if it could happen on such a massive scale elsewhere, then it can happen anywhere; it is all within the range of human possibility. . . .’”⁴¹

From such a perspective, serious doubts might be raised about modern Confucianism's optimistic assumption that modernity-as-modernization is, on the whole, a process leading to the betterment of human society. This assumption rests, after all, on the conviction that the dangerous excesses of modernization coupled with instrumental rationality may be swiftly contained by a collective effort based on commonly shared humanistic concerns and values. In this context, modern Confucianism depicts the threat of the human being's reification in societies undergoing rapid economic and technological transformation as pertaining to the authenticity of the individuals' way of life. But the lethal threat industrialized reification posed in death camps is met with silence. By neglecting this terminal point of “*the hidden possibilities of modern society*,” modern Confucianism misjudges the real danger of reification. It also disregards the fact that the genocide on the scale of the Holocaust involved highly advanced, modern bureaucratic procedures, technological achievements, industrial organization and pseudo-scientific theories.

It is, moreover, doubtful whether modern Confucianism is prepared to reflect on the fact that as the Holocaust moved forward, its bureaucratic routinization and industrial mechanisms established assiduous functional

40 Ibid., p. 12.

41 Ibid., p. 11.

patterns and structures on the basis of which perpetrators and sympathizers cast aside moral concerns. When applying a Confucian approach that essentially relies on a normative juxtaposition of instrumental and moral rationality, the Holocaust cannot be adequately described, let alone analyzed. The same holds true for attempts to grasp the mind-set of the bystanders: simply describing them as morally degenerate individuals or as a mass of people who were cut off from ethical relations and deprived of a humanistic education would be incorrect. The Holocaust resulted, in other words, not just from a temporary absence or weakness of moral rationality, humanistic culture and ethics vis-à-vis instrumental rationality, but “... *was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement*...”⁴² When seen from this perspective, it is questionable whether the Confucian vision of modernity, with its highly optimistic expectation of a modernization guided by a renewed humanistic culture, may apprehend “... the most terrifying, and still most topical, aspect of the ‘Holocaust experience’: that in our modern society people who are neither morally corrupt nor prejudiced may also still partake with vigour and dedication in the destruction of targeted categories of human beings... This is by far the most important lesson of the Holocaust.”⁴³

This “lesson” seems to thwart depictions of totalitarianism as an epiphenomenon of modernity that may be eliminated by a Confucian project integrating the renewal of humanistic culture and efforts of democratic nation-state building. The reflection on the Holocaust sobers optimistic outlooks on modernity. Two conclusions may be drawn here: first, the analytical and conceptual resources of modern Confucianism provide an inadequate basis for reflecting on the process of modernity as entailing the possibility of a Holocaust. Second, keeping the reflection about the Holocaust at bay is indeed a precondition for preserving the kind of historical optimism that characterizes the vision of a superior, Confucianized project of modernization. This belief in the superiority of a modernization informed by Confucianism thus

42 Ibid., p. x. With respect to instrumental rationality, Bauman cogently analyses: “This is not to suggest that the incidence of the Holocaust was *determined* by modern bureaucracy or the culture of instrumental rationality it epitomizes; much less still, that modern bureaucracy *must* result in Holocaust-style phenomena. I do suggest, however, that the rules of instrumental rationality are singularly incapable of preventing such phenomena; that there is nothing in those rules which disqualifies the Holocaust-style methods of ‘social engineering’ as improper...”: Bauman, *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

43 Ibid., p. 250.

comes at a considerable price, and its claim to establish a renewed humanism of global dimensions remains dubious.

However, Hannah Arendt raises another concern about the Holocaust in her controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Tang Junyi's moral philosophy may address:

What we have demanded in these trials . . . is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them. (...) These few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented.⁴⁴

Arendt reflects here on a social situation in which all conventionally authorized moral wisdom, established ethical rules and religious authorities fail, without exception, to provide individuals with sound moral judgments. The problematic that arises in such a situation not only concerns the correctness of moral judgments as such, but also alternative sources for moral judgments that individuals might tap into in order to acquire (or preserve) the ability to tell right from wrong. This latter issue echoes in Tang's thought. His moral philosophy, as an integral element of the whole modern Confucian project, is a response to the deplorable state of China in the mid-20th century: according to Tang, China was deprived of reliable moral standards by the 1950s—on the Mainland under communist control, as well as in Taiwan under the authoritarian regime of the GMD. Modern Confucianism was thus confronted with the issue of identifying reliable sources of correct moral judgment. However, Tang and other Confucian intellectuals did not address this issue by relating it to totalitarianism in as straightforward manner as Hannah Arendt did.

Still, Tang was evidently convinced that propagating Confucian moral values and virtues in societies threatened by totalitarianism—no matter how diligently this was done—would not suffice to secure correct moral judgments, let alone prevent totalitarian takeovers. Nor would it effectively reduce the spread of indifference and passiveness on the part of the bystanders once the shift to a regime of terror had begun. As a matter of fact, Tang remained skeptical with

44 Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), pp. 294–295, quoted from Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 177.

respect to the moral impact of Confucianism in modernizing societies, even if those societies were not immediately endangered by totalitarianism. In 1965, he expressed his skepticism as follows:

... the modern industrialized community is highly departmentalized in its structure by the division of labor. Here man must particularize in something, has his special profession, and consequently has his special social position in a corner of the complicated structure. Man's moral practice as demanded by the modern community is just to be loyal to his special profession and not feel ashamed of his special position. Here the Confucian idea of the whole man as a cultural and moral being seems inadequate to be the spiritual ground for the establishment of modern community and modern vocational morality.⁴⁵

He consequently refrained from turning his moral thought into a search for allegedly superior moral values and virtues or ethical practices. His reflection on a Confucian concept of morality and ethics did not lend itself to practical concerns in such an immediate, yet insufficiently complex manner. Instead, his moral thought is best described as centering on the issue of the self-image of individuals. What is at stake here is the capacity of individuals to conceive of themselves as solitary moral authorities, namely as sages capable of moral intuition. Such a self-depiction can be considered as an intrinsic requirement for the individuals' ability to make autonomous moral judgments. With its core concept of *liang zhi*, Tang's Confucian civil theology unfolds a moral vision that describes the individual as having immediate access to an innate source of judgments about right and wrong. This entails a tendency to de-emphasize the role of society as the producer of morality.

But *liang zhi* does not belong to this moral vision exclusively: notions of *liang zhi*, after all, also proved attractive to Chiang Kai-shek and his followers, as well as to 20th-century Japanese militarists. It seems that there is an inevitable ambiguity to the notion of *liang zhi*. Given the idea of an intuitive enlightenment that is quintessentially aloof, in its immediacy, from any symbolic prefiguration and representation, any attempt to attach such enlightenment firmly to certain normative choices amounts to a precarious undertaking. Faced with such a dilemma, Tang inscribed his moral intuitionism into an ethics that stressed the individual's social responsibility. The Confucian individual was not to withdraw into the irrationality of purely spiritual inwardness, but rather called upon to bear the tension between the requirements of social life

45 Tang, "The Reconstruction of Confucianism and the Modernization of Asia," p. 368.

and the continuous effort to realize the self-image of becoming the sole mediator of the “inner sage.” Still, the individual is seen as not bound by conventionally sanctioned moral rules in realizing his or her capacity for moral intuition. Tang’s modern Confucianism addresses, in other words, “the question of *moral responsibility for resisting socialization*”⁴⁶—and hence a problem that belongs to the reflection on the Holocaust.

46 Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 177.

Appendix: Biographical Survey

Preliminary remark: For a brief biographical outline of Tang's life and career, see e.g. Qin, *Zhongguo xiandai shi cidian*, p. 250. Much more detailed information on Tang's biography can be obtained from Tang's diaries from 1948 to 1978 (see Tang, *Riji*). Biographical accounts in narrative form are provided by Tang Duanzheng's *Tang Junyi zhuanlüe*; see also Tang Duanzheng's *Chronicle of the life and work of Tang Junyi* (Tang, *Nianpu*, pp. 3–243). The latter work is particularly important with regard to Tang's biography. The *nianpu*, however, should be read with care, because it does not make reference to source material. What is more, parts of the *nianpu* obviously stem from an autobiographical account which Tang published in the second volume of his *Life, Existence and the Horizons of the Mind* (*Shengming cunzai yu xinling jingjie*). In this text, Tang recalled events that pertained to his own intellectual and spiritual development. The inclusion of some of these passages in the *nianpu* has been done without any indication. For penetrating comments on Tang's intellectual biography see Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific*, pp. 194–226 (Metzger's account is based on: Feng, *Tang Junyi xiansheng jinian ji*, pp. 119–139). None of these biographical accounts makes extensive use of Tang's manuscripts and personal correspondence.

The following biographical sketch is based, where not otherwise indicated, on the *nianpu*. Tang Junyi was born into a middle class family of school teachers in Yibin county 宜賓縣, Southwestern Sichuan province, on January 17, 1909. After receiving private tutoring at home, he entered junior middle school in Chengdu in 1919 at age 11. In 1925, he graduated from a middle school in Chongqing and went to Beijing and briefly enrolled at the recently founded Chinese-Russian University (*Zhong E Daxue* 中俄大學). He passed the entrance examination for the Department of Philosophy of Peking University (*Beijing Daxue* 北京大學) shortly thereafter, remaining in Beijing for one year and a half. At age 18, he studied philosophy as a major and literature as a minor at Southeastern University (*Dongnan Daxue* 東南大學; renamed Central University [*Zhongyang Daxue* 中央大學] in 1927) in Nanjing, one of the top three universities of the time. Tang graduated from the Department of Philosophy at Southeastern University in 1932 at age 23. This was, it seems, the highest academic degree that he received. He had never left China prior to 1949, and unlike many Chinese academics and intellectuals of his generation, he had never studied in a Western country.

In 1933, Tang taught philosophy at Central University in Nanjing. He returned to Chengdu in 1937 to teach at Chinese Western University (*Huaxi Daxue* 華西大學) as well as several middle schools. By 1939 the general situation in Chengdu had become very tense due to the course of the war. Tang moved to China's war capital Chongqing and was employed by the ministry of education as an editor by special arrangement. In October 1940, he returned to teaching philosophy at Central University in Chongqing.

Before long, he was listed by the ministry of education as being qualified for the position of full professor in the following year and became editor of the wartime journal *Ideal and Culture* (*Lixiang yu Wenhua*). In 1944, he became full professor at age 36 and headed the department of philosophy at Central University. He received permission to take leave for one year to teach at Jiangnan University in 1946.

Tang's exile began on June 8, 1949, when at the age of 41, travelling from Guangzhou, he arrived in Hong Kong accompanied by the famous historian Qian Mu.¹ He remained in Hong Kong, together with his wife Xie Tingguang and his adopted daughter Tang Anren 唐安仁, the daughter of his younger sister, for the rest of his life. Despite initial financial difficulties, he managed rather seamlessly to continue the academic and intellectual work he had started on the Mainland. As early as October 10, 1949, on the National Public Holiday of the Republic of China, he founded the evening school *Asian Humanities and Business Night College* (*Yazhou Wenshang Ye Xueyuan* 亞洲文商夜學院) in Hong Kong, together with Qian Mu and others. The school became well-known after it was renamed the *New Asia College* (*Xin Ya Shuyuan*) following a reorganization on February 28, 1950. Fourteen years after his arrival in Hong Kong, in 1963, Tang was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which had been founded the same year. He remained at this university, also serving as head of institute and dean, until his retirement in October 1974. During this period, he was able to travel abroad on several prolonged lecture tours to the U.S., Western Europe and Korea and Japan, the longest of these tours taking place from February to August 1957.² After his retirement from Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tang headed the New Asia Research Center (*Xin Ya Yanjiusuo* 新亞研究所), which had become an independent research institution in 1974, until his death. Tang was diagnosed with lung cancer in August 1976, followed by an operation in Taiwan. In March 1977, he was told that he had only a few more months to live. He decided that he wanted to die in Taiwan and be buried there, allegedly stating that he wanted to rest in native soil. Tang died on February 2, 1978. A mourning ceremony was held in Hong Kong, the funeral took place in Taipei.

1 Tang, *Riji*, Vol. 27, p. 34.

2 After 1949, Tang travelled abroad fourteen times, including trips to Taiwan, Japan, Europe and the United States; see Li, "Tang Junyi shujian xi nian xianyi bu ding," p. 134. Since March 1966 Tang suffered from an eye disorder for which he received treatment in Kyoto in 1967; see: *ibid.*, pp. 159–160.

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