

Modernizing the Philosophy of Creative Creativity: Fang Dongmei's Fusion of Holism and Individuality¹

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Abstract

Fang Dongmei (1899–1977) is among the most influential Chinese philosophers who lived and worked in Taiwan during the second half of the 20th century. The present article aims to clarify his view on the basic nature of the human Self. This assessment is more multifaceted than it seems at a first glimpse, for Fang's philosophy is also more complex than it seems. As a member of the so-called neo-conservative streams of thought, he criticized the Western-type modernization and aimed to revive the holistic onto-epistemology of classical Confucianism. On the other hand, he highlighted the importance of its basic paradigm which underlay the Confucian discourses from their very beginning, i.e. since the *Book of Changes*, namely the principle of creative creativity (*shengshengbuxi* 生生不息). The alleged contradiction between his advocating of holism and creativity, has been reflected in the apparent dichotomy between the social and relational essence of the Confucian Moral Self on the one side, and individual uniqueness on the other. The paper aims to show that both seeming contradictions are actually parts of the same theoretical principle defining the complementary interactions of binary oppositions.

Keywords: Modern Confucianism, New Confucianism, Fang Dongmei, Taiwanese philosophy, Modern Chinese philosophy, holism, individuality, Moral Self

Modernizacija filozofije ustvarjalne ustvarjalnosti: Fang Dongmeijeva združitev holizma in individualnosti

Izvilleček

Fang Dongmei (1899–1977) sodi med najvplivnejše kitajske filozofe, ki so v drugi polovici 20. stoletja živeli in delali na Tajvanu. Ta članek obravnava njegov pogled na osnovno naravo človeškega sebstva. Ta naloga je bolj zapletena, kot se kaže na prvi pogled, tako kot

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je tudi Fangova filozofija precej bolj kompleksna, kot se zdi. Kot predstavnik t. i. neokon-servativnih idejnih tokov je Fang kritiziral modernizacijo zahodnega tipa z namenom oži-vitve holistične ontoepistemologije klasičnega konfucijanstva. Po drugi strani pa je pou-darjal pomen njegove temeljne paradigme, na kateri so konfucijanski diskurzi osnovani že od vsega začetka, torej od *Knjige premen* naprej, in ki prihaja do izraza v načelu ustvarjalne ustvarjalnosti (*shengshengbuxi* 生生不息). Domnevno protislovje med njegovo afirmaci-jo holizma in ustvarjalnosti se zrcali v navidezni dihotomiji med družbeno in relacijsko esenco konfucijanskega moralnega sebstva na eni strani ter enkratnostjo individuuma na drugi. V članku nameravam prikazati, da sta obe navidezni protislovji pravzaprav del ene-ga in istega teoretskega načela, ki opredeljuje vzajemno komplementarno interakcijo med binarnimi opozicijami.

Ključne besede: moderno konfucijanstvo, novo konfucijanstvo, Fang Dongmei, tajvanska filozofija, moderna kitajska filozofija, holizem, individualnost, moralno sebstvo

Introduction: Fang's Life and Work

Fang Dongmei 方東美, who is also known to English speakers under the name Thomé H. Fang, was born into a family of intellectuals in the central Chinese province of Anhui. He was thus exposed to the Chinese classics at a very early age. After completing secondary school he attended Jinling University in Nanjing, where he was very active in the student movement. In 1919 he participated in the student demonstrations in Nanjing, which were organized in support of the May Fourth cultural reforms. In 1920, he met the American philosopher John Dewey during his lecture tour of China, an encounter which awakened a keen interest in Fang for Western philosophy. After graduating, he went to America, where after only one year he earned his MA at the University of Wisconsin, and then two years later obtained his PhD at Ohio State University. Following his return to China, he taught at different universities, including Wuchang University, South-east University in Nanjing, the Political University (*Zhengzhi daxue* 政治大學) and, briefly, Peking University. While Fang was in Nanjing, the Japanese invasion forced the university to move to Chongqing in the southwest province of Sichuan (Jiang and Yu 1995, 880). The difficult wartime conditions, uncertainty and in-security during this period led Fang to renew his interest in traditional Chinese culture and classical philosophy as a form of refuge and solace (Fang 1959, 17). In 1948 he moved to Taiwan to teach at National Taiwan University, where he remained until his retirement.

His principal works in Chinese were published in 2004 as the *Collected Works of Fang Dongmei* (*Fang Dongmei quan ji* 方東美全集), in 12 volumes (see Fang

2004a). They include many of his crucial texts, such as *Science, Philosophy and Human Life* (科學, 哲學與人生), which was first published in 1936, *A Survey of the Life Philosophies of Ancient Chinese Philosophers* (中國先哲人生哲學綱要, first published in 1937), *Three Types of Philosophical Wisdom* (哲學三慧), *The Ideal of Life and Cultural Types* (生活理想與文化類型), and several others, less well-known, but nevertheless important (see for instance Fang 2004b; 2004c; 2004d). Under the name Thomé H. Fang² he also wrote a number of books in English, including *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony* (1980b), *Creativity in Man and Nature* (1980a) and *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (1981).³

Fang's theoretical works are characterized by his ability to combine a thorough knowledge of Western philosophy, from the ancient to the contemporary, with traditional Chinese philosophy, especially Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist thought. His work also shows the influence of Indian philosophy. Among modern Western philosophers, Nietzsche had the greatest influence on his theoretical development (Fang 1936, 195). Several of his works are dedicated to comparing Indian and European philosophy in order to define the characteristics of traditional Chinese philosophy.

Fang Dongmei and the Taiwanese Modern New Confucianism (Xin ruxue 新儒學)

The most influential contributions of Taiwanese philosophy to the preservation of the Chinese philosophical tradition, and also to the development of modern Chinese philosophy in a more general sense, can undoubtedly be found in the philosophical work of the second generation of the so-called Modern or New Confucian stream of thought. Most of the members of this generation were living and working in Taiwan. However, there are several different opinions regarding the question as to who can actually be counted as a representative of this stream of thought. Some scholars, for instance, want to include the historian Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990); however, if we concentrate on Modern Confucian philosophy,

2 For the sake of clarity, I will differentiate between Fang's work in Chinese and English: in the references of the present paper, all his Chinese works will be indicated with his family and his given name (Fang), whereas his English works will only include references to his first name, as commonly applied in all other references to Western sources and literature.

3 For a comprehensive and in deep study of his philosophical system, many other works written by Fang Dongmei (i.e. Thomé Fang) in Chinese should also be consulted, at least the ones stated in the bibliography of this article under Fang 1931; 1936; 1937; 1959; 1978; 1979; 1980; 1982; 1983; 1984; 1989; 1992.

than it is not very appropriate to include his work in this group. The most commonly agreed names are Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982), Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978) and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995). However, beside these three scholars I believe that Fang Dongmei (1899–1977) should also be included in the second generation, even though he is sometimes associated with the first. As the teacher of some of the members of the third generation, it seems simply more appropriate to include him among the generation of thinkers immediately preceding this group.

On the other hand, Fang Dongmei never considered himself to be a Modern Confucian, given that his philosophical interests also included traditional Buddhist and Daoist thought. Regarding this question, some scholars (e.g. Li 2002, 269) claim that Fang's work stands beyond the Confucian tradition, because he did not regard Confucianism as the only legitimate philosophy and all others as heresies, as, for instance, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 did. On the contrary, Fang Dongmei argued that Laozi's Daoism was the leading and most legitimate philosophical school during ancient times. Besides, many scholars believe he saw Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism and Buddhism as mutually interacting and integrating components of a holistic cultural process, rather than as several distinct schools of thought. However, he still acknowledged the preeminent role of Confucian thought in the Chinese tradition:

In Chinese philosophy, Confucianism is the body of thought that guides people through their lives. As for Daoism, it collapsed during the corrupt period of the Han dynasty. Even though it was eventually revived, and with it the renewed striving towards ideals, in our view the real Daoists are those artists who consider the world to be useless. [...] After the Wei-Jin period, Buddhist thought spread throughout Chinese society, and compensated for certain Daoist deficiencies. The Buddhists, however, seek their own personal salvation, which has nothing to do with the world [...]. (Fang 1989, 1056)

These considerations aside, the content, concepts and methodological assumptions of Fang's own thought were to a great extent integrated into the framework of Neo-Confucian theories, which provided the "thought-base" for most of the modern Confucian discourses that appeared on the transition from the second to third millennium (Sernelj 2020, 96). However, here we encounter an additional problem with respect to Fang's classification, for he not only distanced himself from Modern Confucians, but also from their historical conceptual base, i.e. from the Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties. In his view—and regardless

of their merit in preserving the classical Confucian tradition and its holistic worldview—these philosophers (especially Zhu Xi’s school) relied too heavily on a mechanistic rationality, as exemplified in the structural logic of the *li* 理 concept (structure, structural pattern). This resulted in a deformation of the holistic tradition in philosophy, in which the binary poles of (rational) structural pattern (*li* 理) and vitality (*qi* 氣) were seen as two divergent principles, even though in their mutual, complementary interaction they were still preserving the harmonic unity of facts, values and the sphere of aesthetic experience (Thompson 2017, 13). However, due to these formal divergences, Fang Dongmei did not consider the Modern Confucians as authentic heirs of Confucianism.

In the category of Confucianism, Fang includes Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi (Fang 2004b, 155), while he thinks the Han Confucians were “lowly and unworthy of mention” and the Song Neo-Confucians were not authentic followers of Confucianism. He criticized Neo-Confucian philosophy as “hybrid” and full of latent Daoist and Chan Buddhist elements (*ibid.*, 64). In his view, Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 thought was little more than a compendium of the ideas of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Zhang Zai 張載 and the Cheng brothers 程顥, 程頤 (*ibid.*, 66), but without being treated within a coherent system; hence, according to Fang, Zhu Xi’s philosophy was full of logical contradictions (*ibid.*).

Fang Dongmei is certainly an important and influential theorist, whose work made a significant contribution to the theoretical reflection on Chinese modernization processes and the effort to find creative solutions to the challenges posed by Western philosophy. However, as opposed to most Modern New Confucians, Fang Dongmei tried to revive the Chinese tradition based not on Neo-Confucian discourses, but primarily on classical Confucianism, enriched by the aesthetic and metaphysical concepts of classical Daoism and Sinicized Buddhism.

Here, I should point out that my own understanding of the original Chinese expression *Ru xue* (Confucianism; literally: “the teachings of the educated”) is broader than Fang’s own definitions. In my view, it has not been limited to the teachings of Confucius as a historical personage, but instead should be seen as referring to the dominant cultural discourse of the Chinese (and East Asian) tradition, and therefore as comprising a wide range of the prevailing philosophical discourses that combined to make up the history of Chinese (and East Asian) philosophy over a period of over 2,500 years. As a specific example of how these different views are applied in actual theory, we can point out that Fang always interpreted Daoism, which includes numerous critical, individualistic and free-thinking elements, within the framework of a neo-conservative ideology that represents an essential, almost paradigmatic characteristic of Modern New Confucianism.

For these reasons, I believe that Fang Dongmei can be considered a representative of Modern Confucianism, especially within the context of modern Taiwanese philosophy.

Life as Harmonious Creation

Fang believed that Chinese classical philosophy and epistemology were not based on mathematical or proto-scientific paradigms, but on aesthetic ones (Fang 1957, 195–235). However, his ontology is closely linked to the rational structure of the universe, as found in the ancient Chinese classic, *The Book of Changes* (*Yi jing*). Fang also described the process of cosmic change (constant creative creativity of existence) as an expression of rationality, which is rooted in (and at the same time encompasses) the minutely structured system of the “logic of creation” (Fang 1936, 24–26).

In the centre of Fang’s philosophy lies the concept of life or the living (*sheng* 生). According to Fang, all schools of traditional Chinese thought emerged from cosmology, which is defined by the all-prevailing instinct for life, survival, the vital impulse that constantly creates and recreates everything that exists. For Fang, the cosmos was a “living environment” (*shengmingde huanjing* 生命的環境), permeated by “circles of rational principles and feelings” (*qingli tuan* 情理團). While the structural patterns of existence remain fundamental, feelings (*qing* 情) represent the primary source of life (*shengmingde yuantai* 生命的原態): “Life is a world of feelings, and its essence is a continuous, creative desire and impulse” (ibid., 25). For him, life is thus “a flexible, extendable power” (ibid., 163).

The universe is a living entity that cannot be reduced to mere inertial physical stuff. Based on these premises, Fang then added a third category to the dualism of matter and idea, namely that of life: “We can see that life is a novel, original phenomenon; we cannot deal with it in the same way as with matter. Its system is predicated upon an organic wholeness.” (ibid., 179)

This living universe is full of energy, and everything in it is structurally connected to the living process that penetrates the entire realm. Human thought is also rooted in this colourful, sensitive and creative palette of life itself; it is not merely a product of rationality: “Life is the root of the thought, and thoughts are symbols or signs of life” (ibid., 164). Accordingly, even science “is a symbol of the sentiments of life” (ibid., 138) and its value lies in “developing the human desire for life” (ibid., 160).

Life is thus the fundamental driving force of the universe. For this reason, Fang calls it the original (Fang 1982, 149) or ultimate substance (Fang 1984, 28) of the

universe. However, he stresses that while this ultimate substance is transcendent (*chaoyue* 超越), it is not so supremely unique as to be an absolute (*chaojue* 超絕) (ibid., 20). Fang Dongmei’s ontology thus clearly belongs to the holistic realm of what Modern Confucians called “immanent transcendence”.⁴

According to most interpreters, (see e.g. Li 2002, 265; Fang and Li, 895), such a view may be called a “life-ontology” (*shengming bentilun* 生命本體論). Li Chenyang also writes that this life-ontology is more than a “Gaia hypothesis”; for Fang, it is reality. In this regard, the influence of Western philosophers such as Hegel, Bergson, and Whitehead on Fang is evident.

The second central concept of Fang’s philosophy is the idea of “comprehensive harmony” (*guangda hexie* 廣大和諧), which is characteristic of the traditional Chinese understanding of the world. In this, the universe strives towards a harmonious unity of all the individual particles and entities within its system. In material terms, it is empty, or “void” and expressed only through the richness and insight of its spirit.

In Fang’s reading of the history of Chinese philosophy, he also stressed the harmonious interplay of various schools of thought, rather than their differences and conflicts. One could argue that Fang was too idealistic and romantic in his understanding of these philosophies. However, for Fang, even if harmony was not a reality, it still represented the Chinese “ideal” (Li 2002, 266).

4 Several Modern Confucians, and particularly Mou Zongsan, often noted that Confucian philosophy never established a clear demarcation line between the realms of immanence and transcendence. However, this did not imply that their philosophy was lacking transcendent elements. Therefore, Mou coined the new concept of immanent transcendence, although this soon became very controversial, for Western scholars especially reproached him for coining an oxymoron, consisting of two different and mutually incompatible notions. However, many contemporary scholars (e.g. Lee 2002, 226–27) believe that their critique was based on a misunderstanding, rooted in the claim that Mou has applied the term transcendence in the strict sense, which is obviously not true. However, it is helpful to know that traditional Chinese notions of immanent transcendence like *tian*, *dao*, *tianming* or *tiandao*, can be understood as representing both the source of values and the basis of existence (ibid., 229). Its axiological and creative connotations are thus of utmost importance in Chinese philosophy. In the history of Western philosophy, however, transcendence is generally understood either in the epistemological or the ontological sense. In the first instance, this term signifies going beyond certain cognitive abilities (or possibilities of recognition—especially those linked to experience) in order to reach the realm of an integrated or comprehensive recognition (*quanbu renzhi nengli*, ibid.). The Western critics of the notion, however, only considered the ontological connotations of the Western concept—which primarily denotes a separation and isolation from the world (or existence), while also implying the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* (*wu zhong chuangzao*) (ibid.)—and do not take into account the equally significant epistemological connotations of the term. It is important to stress that the concept of transcendence as applied in the notion of “immanent transcendence” is primarily linked to its epistemological connotations, and is by no means limited to the strict sense of the Western ontological scope.

Holistic Link between Nature and Morals

The belief in harmony and a harmonic universe is also reflected in Fang's understanding of morality or moral philosophy. Because the cosmic tendency to establish and preserve harmony through the concept of *shengsheng* 生生 (creative creativity) is almighty and unlimited, it does not have merely ontological, but also ethical and epistemological dimensions. For him, the natural life order is tightly linked to the moral order (Fang 1979, 351). This means that Fang's philosophy has no room for a division between facts and values. The universe is enriched by goodness, which derives not only from the pragmatic postulates of human co-existence, but is *a priori* a part of its essential structure, as reflected in the sphere of pure aesthetics. Fang thus views morality as the essence of life and a concrete embodiment of the deepest human values. Human existence is not merely about survival, but presupposes the search for meaning and purpose. The aesthetic side of culture and art is the expression of human creativity (Fang 1984, 149), which is always oriented towards perfecting the deficiencies of the world into which we are thrown; Dao represents the path that leads to perfection as well as the path upon which facts and values are merged into an organically structured harmony (ibid., 158). In this way, Fang strove to unite the three ideals of epistemology, ethics and aesthetics, i.e. truth, goodness, and beauty. He was also convinced that *qing* 情 (the emotive reactions) and *li* 理 (the rational principles) cannot be separated. Although Fang's philosophy is established, as we have seen before, on his "life-ontology", it can thus also be called "value-centred-ontology", because, for him, life is the basic value of existence and both life and value are rooted in the *Dao* 道, i.e. the ultimate principle of existence. In his view, *Dao* represents the all-encompassing and all-pervading unity, which is the primary source of life, value, and their harmonious fusion.

In *Zhexue san hui* 哲學三慧 (*Three Types of Philosophical Wisdom*) Fang defined philosophy as a synthesis between the rational structure of thought (*li* 理) and emotions (*qing* 情). According to the *Book of Changes* both originate from the extreme pole (*tai ji* 太極), i.e. the onto-epistemological, indescribable and unexplainable ancient origin of all existence. Thus, *qing* 情 and *li* 理 are not merely the base of all philosophy, but also the fundament of existence as such. Fang believes that the two elements represent a binary category, for their reciprocal relation is correlative and complementary. Li Chengyang (2002, 264) states that Fang sees the mutual, reciprocal interaction between *li* 理 and *qing* 情 as a process that pervades facts as well as possibilities, and from which philosophy draws its origin, truth and mystery.

He based his interpretation of traditional Chinese philosophy on a holistic view, according to which man forms a unity with space and time. In the forefront of his interpretation we can find the traditional unity of values, which through constant creativity includes the activities of Heaven (*Tian* 天), and man. Regardless of his declaratively broad starting points, which included all the most influential discourses from ancient and classical Chinese philosophy, it was precisely this very central point through which he proved that his thoughts were grounded in the classical Mencian viewpoint of four natural origins (*si duan* 四段) of human goodness; in this way, he (regardless of his—also clearly stated—detachment from Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties) also proved that in fact he followed precisely this very tradition that formed the foundations of this pre-modern Confucian reform.

The universe is a place to live in, and not a place to escape from, because it is a realm of value. Similarly, human nature is something to rely upon, and not something to dispense with, because it has been proved to be not sinful but innocent (Fang 1980b, 99).

However, Fang detached himself from this line of thought by constantly emphasizing that the natural goodness of man is a common characteristic found in all traditional Chinese philosophers (*ibid.*, 87–115). He even tried to convince readers that Xunzi, who is considered to be Mencius' main opponent, in essence shares this opinion, the only difference being that he swapped the roles of nature and emotions:

We can find no valid reasons for the theory of evil nature. Even Hsüntze held the belief that “human nature is a natural achievement” or “human nature attains itself after the pattern of constant nature ...” The reason why Hsüntze considered human nature to be evil is that he confused it with emotion which, logically speaking, is of a lower type than original nature. The evilness of human nature is here inferred, *a posteriori*, from the evilness of emotion. Here Hsüntze commits a fallacy of the confusion of logical types. (*ibid.*, 109)

In his comparative aspect and endeavour to come up with a harmonious synthesis of his own work, Fang mainly focused on the common points of the three central schools of classical Chinese philosophy. He ascertained that they are all connected by the concept of Dao, which each treats from a slightly different aspect and in a slightly different way, but all three are basically describing the concept of holistic harmony and the tendency for perfection. As Dao is possible only in the context

of holistic worldviews, it can reflect the method of immanent transcendence as well as the unity of facts and values, absoluteness and relativity.

Confucianism, Democracy and Science

For Fang Dongmei, the most important principle in a democratic society is tolerance. For this reason, he criticized Mencius for his harsh attacks against the Moist school, which had contributed greatly to the Chinese intellectual tradition, especially in terms of offering new insights and establishing a basic framework for the growth of science in China (Fang 1992, 437). Fang was also convinced that the principle of creativity, which is central to his theories (Fang 1980a, 36), could represent a key element for the future development of Chinese science and democracy. Furthermore, man's mission of cultural creation in the different realms of art, literature, science, religion and social institutions is being carried forward, so that any imperfections existing in Nature and Man may be brought to ideal perfection (Fang 1980b, 11). However, an important premise which preconditions such perfection is the revival of tradition, for the realization of contemporary ideals must be based upon a humanistic spirit: "Only if we work hard and never forget our ideals, will we be able to water the sere tree of life, so that it can grow new roots and put forth luxuriant foliage" (Fang 1980, 6).

Like other Modern Confucians, Fang acknowledged that the Chinese intellectual tradition had failed to lay an adequate foundation for the development of science (which he generally supported). In this context, he claimed (Fang 1980b, 19) that science has not yet gained the dominant position in Chinese culture that it should have. He explained this failure with the holistic nature of the Chinese intellectual tradition:

Regardless of the stream of thought to which its actual contents may belong, or whether it deals with man or the cosmos, Chinese philosophy is always founded upon a holistic wholeness. In Confucian terminology, this is called "the doctrine of pervasive unity", and it is common to all Chinese philosophy. (Fang 1978, 45)

For Fang, the reason was not hard to find. The Chinese can easily realize the importance of science as a form of knowledge. But in the West, several meanings have been attached to it. The Greeks, for instance, saw it as a rational explanation of the intrinsic order of things in the universe to which human beings are harmoniously related. Science in this sense we can also find in China—but science naturally means more than that (Fang 1980b, 19). And even if we could equate

the Greek conception to science as such, there would still be a problem. The Greek thinkers conceived of the things behind the forms of the specious present as existing in eternity. They explained nature only quantitatively as a mechanical process of combinations and separations. Fang Dongmei pointed out that the Chinese usually think differently. For them, nature is permeated with life and charged with value. Any process of change in nature is necessarily qualitative and creates novelties. In this framework, nature and human beings are also in a mutual relation. Thus, in terms of creating culture, nature is a help, not a hindrance (*ibid.*).

Fang ultimately concluded that the current forms of scientific development should not be pursued. Because modern science was rooted in Cartesian dualisms and viewed human beings only as mechanistic components of a society that was separated from nature, he considered it essentially dogmatic and incapable of providing the basis for real democracy. It was, in fact, an obstacle to democratic development, because

pure science arises out of the desire for knowledge; through the application of abstract laws it seeks to arrive at purely logical conclusions, and absolute justice, without taking into account their effective reality. Its line of reasoning always transcends human life. (Fang 1936, 194)

For Fang Dongmei, modern Europeans view science as the systematic study of nature, organic as well as inorganic, separate from the concrete human beings. He thus believed that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities tends to exclude humans from real nature. Science seeks pure objectivity while men, according to modern psychology and epistemology up to the mid-19th century, are essentially subjective. In such a realm of “pure objectivity”, science tries to analyse the abstract. It remains limited, however, to what is mainly quantitative and to determining what is exact. In order to reduce everything, it works with formulas of identity. In Fang’s view, humans should not be treated in this way (Fang 1980b, 19).

Hence, he believed that the Chinese tradition not only implied certain seeds that could grow and develop into a democratic system, but also possessed certain characteristics that could lead society towards a true democracy which, thanks to the organic connection between man and nature, would be much more reasonable and legitimate than Western-style democracy. This view arises out of Fang’s general conviction that Chinese philosophy could help resolve the current crisis of the prevailing Western philosophies and empirical sciences, a crisis which derived from their dualistic, rationalistic and scientific nature.

Self and Individuality

The common Western arguments based on the belief that the Chinese notion of the Self does not possess any strong “individualistic” connotations are, for the most part, too generalizing. Besides, the Western notion of an isolated, delimited and completely independent individual is, to a great extent, also a product of the ideologies of modernization. Thus, when treating or exploring the Chinese notion of the “self-realization” of the Self, we must proceed with due caution, for whoever has been acculturated within the discourses of Western modernity automatically tends to equate this term with the self-realization of an individual existence.

David Hall and Roger Ames (1998, 25) emphasize that the notion of “individuality” has two different meanings. First, it refers to a particular, uniform, indivisible entity which can, due to a certain feature, be included in a certain class. As an element (or a member) of a certain kind or class, this “individuality” is interchangeable. This concept of individuality underlies the equality of all individuals before the law, the concept of universal human rights, equal access to opportunities, and so on. According to Hall and Ames (*ibid.*), it is precisely this understanding of the individual which also makes it possible to elaborate notions such as autonomy, equality, free will, and the like. This type of Self belongs in the domain of a one-dimensional, empirical self or, to express it in Chinese terms, in the sphere of the “external ruler” (*wai wang* 外王).

But Hall and Ames point out that the notion of the individual can also be linked to the notions of uniqueness and singularity, which do not possess any connotations of affiliation, or membership in any class. Here, equality is posited on the basis of the parity principle. According to them, it is this sense of “unique individuality” which enables us to understand the traditional Confucian notion of the Self. Fang Dongmei has advocated a very similar idea, emphasizing that the uniqueness which underpins the Confucian Self is already a value in itself:

Dao is omnipresent and unites everything in itself to an entity. Therefore, we say that the great Dao is unlimited. But, on the other hand, it also contains specific particularities. We have to accept the uniqueness of these particular entities as being true. Every particularity which has been realized bears in itself a tendency of value. Thus, its significance cannot be denied. (Fang 2004d, 259)

However, even this kind of Self which possesses a unique individuality is “unique” in a “typical Chinese” (i.e., relational) way, for it constitutes itself by means of the quality of its relations with the external world.

A person becomes recognized, distinguished, or renowned by virtue of a social or communal deference to the quality of their character. Much of the effort in understanding the traditional Confucian conception of the Self has to do with clarifying this distinction ... While the definition of the Self as irreducibly social certainly precludes autonomous individuality, it does not rule out the second, less familiar notion of uniqueness expressed in terms of roles and relationships. (ibid.)

Thus, in exploring Fang's views on the relation between the transcendent and empirical self, we must bear in mind that in the Chinese tradition to which it belongs, this relation (in contrast with the dualistic model) has always been posited *a priori* within the structures of the different social networks which form the individual identity.

The same holds true for the epistemological dimensions of the Self. In his (sometimes slightly too idealizing interpretations of Chinese culture), Fang Dongmei proceeds from the holistic worldview in which noumenon is equated with phenomenon, and in which they are both equally permeated by the sphere of values. Fang writes (1957, 60–61) that the universe is a place to live in, and not a place to escape from, because it is a realm of value. Thus, for him, humanness or the human condition (*ren xing* 人性) is something to rely upon, and not something to dispense with, because it has been proved to be not sinful, but innocent. This holds equally true for the whole universe, which is a coalescing of matter and spirit. It is, in other words, a transformed realm wherein matter and spirit tend to assume a higher form of perfection, which can be called exalted life. Universal life permeates the universe and penetrates everything that exists. In the process of continuous creation, it increases the value of what is already valuable, as well as what is quite indifferent. For Fang Dongmei, the existential aim of human life is the realization of the supreme Good, which, however, is not merely to be found in some "other world". Hence Fang stresses that from the very start we must learn what is most precious in life by actually living in the real world.

Therefore, in his system, there is no place for any kind of separation within the Self. Fang does not accept the concept of the subject and thus fails to see the line dividing its transcendent factors from its empirical ones. He remains loyal to his holistic metaphysical pragmatism:

Because human beings possess both a rational and a spiritual nature, their experience of the Divine and of human nature is direct and not inferential; it is intimate, not separate, intuitive and not analytical. This direct experience permits Chinese philosophers to posit that the ultimate

goodness of human nature is rooted in the divine nature. And while human beings can certainly lose this capacity or potential, this loss is never casual, but is due to the individual straying or deviating from the heavenly way. (Fang 1979, 270)

The Problematic Nature of the Human Subject and the Fusion of Reason and Emotion

For Fang Dongmei, the idea of the subject is therefore something which actually distances men from their humanity. He argued that this idea was closely linked to the development of modern European science, understood as the systematic exploration of an organic and inorganic “nature” completely separated from human beings. In his work, there is a clear tendency to emphasize de-anthropomorphism (Fang 1983, 20–25). The distinction between primary and secondary qualities tends to exclude human beings from their real nature. As noted above, science pursues pure objectivity while man, in the view of modern psychology and epistemology up to the mid-19th century, is essentially subjective (Fang 1978, 223–25)

Subjectivity is thus something which is diametrically opposed to and in contradiction with pure objectivity, which science uses to analyse abstraction, record the existent based on quantitative criteria and reduce the multiple dimensions of phenomena to formulas for different identities (Fang 1979, 258–60). For Fang, this methodology was essentially the negation of men as natural beings situated within the interwoven organic structures that constitute the universe, as well as in time and space.

Although Fang Dongmei was the only member of the second generation of Modern New Confucians who had not been a student of Xiong Shili 熊十力, his work is nonetheless linked to this pioneer of the Confucian revival precisely due to a similar insight into the Self. In this context, Xiong’s view was based on the Buddhist contradictions and paradoxes revolving around the sustainable Self (the awareness of *prajna*) and the transient awareness of life and death. Similar to Xiong, Fang also tried to resolve this paradox through a complementary interaction between substance (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用). For him, the mind is a sort of “supervisor” that governs the operations of all human properties, capacities and faculties. It is both substance and function. As a substance, it can embrace infinite modes of “thought” that are directed at any conceivable object. Its function instead consists of the ways in which it acts spontaneously upon things (Fang 1980b, 103).

With respect to the infinity of individual human characteristics, all these innate differences seek a harmonious fusion in the unity of an infinite multiplicity within the great Dao. Once they are in Dao, they can no longer get lost in the infinite emptiness, or in the trivial solitude of separateness or some apparent form of equality or equivalence (Fang 2004c, 261).

Fang does not refer to the subject, but rather to the “subjective spirit” (*zhuti jingshen* 主體精神) which is an inseparable part of the ontologization of “life”. In his philosophy, the “objective world” (*keguan shijie* 客觀世界) is necessarily joined by means of a “continuous organic creativity of the clear spirit” (*shengming shengshengbuxide cuangzaoli* 生命生生不息的創造力) to the “subjective spirit of humanity” (*zhutide renlei jingshen* 主體的人類精神). The subjective spirit in this sphere of life first transforms itself—through objectivization—into the objective spirit, and then ontologizes itself into a transcendent spirit. Only through self-realization can the individual preserve the organic bond with all that exists and be incorporated into the process of continuous organic creativity, which forms the basis of life. Thus, Fang concludes (1981, 23–28) that between the two paths of self-abnegation and self-affirmation, the Chinese tradition stresses a third way, that of self-development and self-realization.

This process of self-development and self-realization is, of course, closely linked to the inner spiritual cultivation of individuals. We think of the individual in terms of observed actualities and idealized possibilities. From actuality to possibility, there is a complex process of self-development. According to Fang (1981, 27), this self-development can be achieved through self-(cultivation) and a full range of self-realization.

However, the awareness of the individual’s unity with all that exists which results from this process of self-realization is not metaphysical in the sense of an abstract separation from the actual reality. The concrete values of human life do not belong either to the sphere of idealized imagination, nor to a transcendental paradise, for if they did, it would deprive them of any real value, as it would not be possible to realize them in the real world. At the same time, they cannot remain enclosed within the inner world of the individual, otherwise that person would remain trapped in a subjective egocentrism which cannot benefit any human community. The only sphere in which the individual can realize and fulfil these values and in which they can transcend the narrow limits of their own personal interests is the state. For Fang, the state represents the only possible form of extended existence, which guarantees the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number of people. In order to reach this goal and to liberate ourselves from self-bondage, social constraint and enslavement, we must overcome the many difficulties that

stand in our way through effort, courage, perseverance and sagacity. Li Chenyang (2002, 278) writes, in this context Fang laid stress upon the fact that we are “real beings”, bound by the limitations and imperfections of the “real world”. This is why we continuously have to seek to remedy the numerous—internal and external—imperfections that hinder us in achieving this goal. If we do all this, we can escape from the limitations below and behold the light of day in perfect freedom and happiness (see *ibid.*).

The “real” human being is a Self, composed of reason and emotions. For Fang Dongmei, reason was rooted in the rational structure (*li* 理) of the universe which, however, is also defined by feelings (*qing* 情). His basic supposition was that both elements formed a correlative and complementary binary category that arose from the ultimate pole (*taiji* 太極). Within the onto-epistemological wholeness which is characteristic of the classical Chinese tradition, this category provides both the basis of philosophical thought and the foundation of existence as such.

In Fang’s interpretation, “*li*” is the absolute (highest) expression of objective phenomena, while “*qing*” represents the fundamental feature of subjectivity. Because his concept of “life” includes both notions, it clearly implies the sense of transcending the separation between subject and object (Fang, Keli and Li Jinquan 1989, III/894). In his *Three Kinds of Philosophical Wisdom* (哲學三慧), Fang Dongmei also unites the notions “*li* 理” and “*qing* 情” into an epistemological concept of “sensuous reason” (*qingli* 情理). In its fusion of feelings and rationality, this concept provides a fundamental and original core, or basis of comprehension, and can thus be seen as a “seed of wisdom” (*zhihui chongzi*) (*ibid.*).

Qingli 情理 belongs to the original symbolic images within the system of philosophical terminology. *Qing* 情 arises in connection with *li* 理 and the existence of the latter is again dependent on the former. In their magical interaction they circulate around each other and are thus each other’s original cause. The realm of their coexistence can be recognized by intuition, but this is difficult to express or explain. (Fang 2007, 2)

Because *qingli* 情理 implies both reason and feelings, it can only be recognized through the intuitive, and not the mere rational or analytical method. This epistemological dimension of *qingli* 情理 is therefore reflected not only in the field of perception, but also in the field of interpretation, for it is a concept that cannot be expressed, since it surpasses all semantic distinctions that define the concrete reality of human life:

The *qingli* 情理 sphere is both distant and near, deep and superficial, open and concealed. There is nothing which can be seen beyond it, and the structure of its inwardness can only be defined by our hearing and vision, and the cultivation of our personality. (ibid.)

And yet human beings need both *qing* 情 and *li* 理 for their existence and life: “Human life is conditioned by *qing* 情 and human existence by *li* 理” (ibid.).

For Fang, reason as such (i.e. when separated from feelings) represents the third of six levels of personal development. This level corresponds to human mastery of the natural world and manifests itself in the culture of science. While Fang acknowledges the importance of this aspect of human development, he argues that humanity must pursue the even higher spheres of art (beauty), morality (goodness) and perfection (harmony), i.e. the spheres to which human beings cannot gain access without possessing intuitive (moral) knowledge.

Conclusion

In their unification, this correlative complementarity of reason and emotion constitutes the innate moral configuration of human beings. In a similar way, Fang seems to resolve many other apparent contradictions between oppositional concepts that constitute his philosophical system. Just as its fundamental holism is not a static monolithic construct, but rather an arrangement of dynamic creativity, his concept of democracy is a relational and not a normative one, for it is based upon a dynamic complementarity between individuals and the state. For the same reason, which arises from the fundamental design of the Chinese philosophical framework of reference,⁵ the concept of the individual in Fang’s system is marked by her essential, relational embeddedness into society on the one hand, but also by her radical uniqueness on the other.

A general and widely assumed presumption is that Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi were the only two theoreticians of the second generation of Modern New Confucianism that developed their own philosophical systems. This presumption might simply rest on the fact that Fang Dongmei’s work has hitherto not been much researched. A more detailed examination of his work would show that it is certainly worth studying in a more profound way. In his philosophy, Fang Dongmei

5 For a detailed explanation about the frameworks of reference and their role in individual philosophical systems, see Rošker 2015, 59–63. The referential frameworks that underlie typical or dominant philosophical discourses in China are marked by dynamic holism, binary categories, principle of complementarity and the transformation of the empirical into the transcendental.

reproduces and modernizes the main paradigms of traditional philosophical Confucianism in a very innovative way, without departing, from the main classical ideas and methods by which it was determined. Because of these characteristics, Fang Dongmei can doubtless be counted not only among the most creative representatives of the specific philosophical stream of Modern Confucianism, but also among the greatest representatives of modern Taiwanese philosophy in general.

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