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SPECIAL ISSUE
CRISIS AS DANGER AND HOPE— COVID-19 IN ASIA

Editor's Foreword

COVID-19 in Asia – Changing Life as We Know It and the New Normal

Jana S. ROŠKER

The present issue of *Asian Studies* is devoted to the investigation of the causes, effects, and ethical and ideological implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia, particularly in East and South-East Asia. COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on global societies. There have been enormous changes in the economy, lifestyles, education, culture, and many other aspects of social life (Caron 2021, 1). The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed societies, cultures, organizations, infrastructures, and many social services into a completely new reality.

In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic is without doubt a crisis of global proportions. Therefore, the whole of humanity should try to find a strategic solution to it, and to this end, the importance of intercultural dialog is manifested in a particularly clear and unambiguous way. Indeed, we are convinced that the agenda of intercultural dialogues must play a significant role in the farming of a new transcultural arrangement that could enable us to create new models of social cooperation and connections not only within specific societies and cultures, but also across national and ethnic boundaries. Of course, intercultural dialogue in this sense has necessarily to surpass the empty connotations of a fashionable slogan, which has much too often been used by the ideological narrations of EU bureaucrats. The present journal has often emphasized such endeavours by highlighting the actual and concrete relevance of such cross-cultural interactions and exchanges between Europe and Asia. In this regard, we can specifically point out the recent special issue on collections and evaluation of artefacts, obtained in various material intercultural exchanges between Slovenia and Eastern Asia, entitled *East Asia in Slovenia: Collecting Practices, Categorization and Representation.* Many authors included in this issue have explicitly laid exposed the importance of concrete and historically contextualized cross-cultural exchanges (see for instance Vampelj Suhadolnik 2021, 7; Grčar 2021, 49, 81; and Motoh 2021, 121).

It is, therefore, no coincidence that the need for such intercultural dialog has become even more evident during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The first major outbreak of the coronavirus was in China. On the other hand, it must also be noted that the societies of East and Southeast Asia have coped with the pandemic more effectively than most countries in Europe and America

(Rošker 2021, 41). Consequently, these facts gave rise to several important research questions that were examined from different perspectives within the framework of Asian studies.

Fourteen authors have contributed their research results to this issue. Their papers have been divided into four categories or chapters. The first one includes papers that are proceeding from different theoretical approaches in social theory. The special issue begins with Luka Culiberg's article entitled "'Praying for the Cure': Transformations of Japanese Medical Traditions and the Question of Modernity". Through the lens of the current pandemic, it investigates the relation between allegedly oppositional notions of magic and science, which symbolically conveys the meaning and highlights the significance of the questions related to the relation of "tradition" and "modernity". Through a comparative analysis of the focal streams of thought delineating the field of pre-modern and modern Japanese medicine, the author aims to question the Western ideology of "modernity" as an exclusively Western accomplishment. This paper is followed by Tinka Delakorda Kawashima's paper entitled "The Relationless Japanese Society and the Practices of Belonging during the COVID-19 Pandemic", in which the author explores some important changes or modifications of the social structure of contemporary Japanese society, which have certain vital consequences for the political measurements and general situations brought about through the COVID-19 pandemic. In a similar context of specifically Japanese social structures and corresponding cultural mindset and psychological formations, Kyoko Ito-Morales elaborates upon the following questions: "Individual Rights vs. Common Good? A Case Study on the Japanese Self-restraint (*jishuku*) and COVID-19". The last article in this category is written by Bart Dessein and entitled "Coping with COVID and the Myth of a Collective China". In this paper, the author analyses the development of "hyper-individualism" in the neoliberal context of contemporary China, and exposes several narratives of collectivism as ideologies established and developed on the fringes of cultural myths. In this context, and against the image of wider political and social implications of such ideologies, Bart Dessein emphasizes the importance of what he sees as a revived or new "political agora", especially in times of national and global crises.

The next scope of contents deals with psychological and artistic expressions of fears and anxiety in such critical times. It opens with Federico Picerni's paper "'Poets, What Can We Do?': Pandemic Poetry in China's Mobilisation Against COVID-19", in which the author analyses Chinese poems that were written shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic. The analysis proceeds on two parallel levels, a literary and a social one; in this double-dimensional context, it highlights the role of traditional social or public responsibility. In her paper entitled

"Anxiety, 'Concerned Consciousness' and Their Manifestation in the COVID-19 Pandemic in China", Téa Sernelj investigates the connections between the traditional Chinese "concerned consciousness" and the modern anxiety, which prevailed during the pandemic. Klara Hrvatin's paper, which is the last one in this chapter, explores the "Japanese Artists' Responses to COVID-19: A Mass Revival of the *yōkai* Amabie". The author shows, how the artistic mass revival of the icon called *Amabie*, which was traditionally used to prevent infection—and, thus, as a cure for individual fear and anxiety—is associated primarily with the period when Japan ordered the closure of the schools as well as the postponement of the 2020 Olympics due to the explosive pandemic situation. In their article "Creative Revitalisation in Rural Japan: Lessons from Ishinomaki", Yao Nancy Ji and Heide Imai also deal with the same symbol and critically introduce its role and function in the context of recovery, regeneration, and local resistance that are partly spreading from Japanese tradition, but can be applied in times of epidemics.

The following three articles belong to empirical studies. Hence, the next chapter is entitled *Empirical Studies: Language, Politics, Social and Medical Recovery.* In this context, Mateja Petrovčič offers a very good linguistic corpus-based analysis of texts published by the Chinese National Health Commission (NHC). Since this commission is the main authority for health-related issues in the PR China, it is interesting to see how it presents news about the COVID-19 pandemic to English-speaking readers. The analysis clearly shows how Chinese authorities aim to relieve the fears and at the same time block the growth of social negativism and anxiety. This paper is followed by Byoung Yoong Kang's article on "COVID-19 in North Korea and Its Effect on the Cooperation of North and South Korea in the Field of Healthcare". In the light of the fact that there is very little information on these issues in the Western academia (and also in the Western media), this paper presents some especially valuable information on the problems related to political, social and cultural relations between North and South Korea. In light of the pandemic, the author focuses upon certain topical (and thought-provoking) interactions in the fields of medicine, healthcare and science, which were partly altered during the COVID-19 crisis. This scope of empirical studies closes with the paper "Heroes in Harm's Way: COVID-19 Narratives of China as a Form of Soft Power", which was written by Jana Fedtke and her co-authors. This article represents an empirical study, but it also applies an interdisciplinary approach, with a focus on contemporary Chinese history, culture, and politics as well as communication issues and narratives. It examines two Chinese TV shows, and illuminates on the basis of analysing their contents, ideological backgrounds and structures, that they provide positive narratives of the social response to COVID-19 in the sense that they highlight civil courage and sacrifice to inspire the Chinese population and contribute in this way to national unification and the development of patriotism.

The last category includes papers connected to different aspects of Asian *Ethics and Ontology*, relevant in times of crises. The chapter opens with Seongmin Hong's paper "The Pandemic, Ecological Justice, and Zhu Xi's Philosophy". The author highlights the significance of human responsibilities and duties for the safety and well-being of communities in the times of crises through the lens of Naess's concept of "deep ecology", as reflected in Zhu Xi's philosophy. In this context, Hong aims to explain ecological justice by applying Zhu Xi's social equality theory to ecology. This paper is followed by Jana S. Rošker's article, entitled "COVID-19, Digital Tracking Control and Chinese Cosmotechnology". It investigates the specific features of traditional East Asian perceptions of technology as such, as well as their ideational underpinnings, which certainly influence specific Sinic perceptions of digital objects. The author hopes that such an approach can offer us a better understanding of the cultural conditionality of differences and commonalities in the global processes of digitalization and their ontological underpinnings. This scope of contents—and the special issue as such—closes with the paper entitled "The Ethical Foundations of Buddhist Cognitive Models: Presentations of Greed and Fear in the *Theravāda Abhidhamma*", written by Tamara Ditrich. Through a meticulous analysis of the Indian Buddhist text *Abhidhamma*, Ditrich detects those elements and factors of human cognition, which allow for an ethical (*kusala*) position and subsequently, for ethical behaviours. The paper proposes that introducing the cognitive models of ancient India can help us to find new approaches to contemporary ethical challenges, and thus contribute to an alternative understanding of, and responses to, greed and fear, which tend to manifest extensively in times of epidemics.

This comprehensive volume of wide-ranging and interdisciplinary contributions on COVID-19 indicates the great importance and topicality of the subject. Importantly, however, the contributions gathered in this special issue not only provide some concrete answers to the many questions that have arisen in the period of this global pandemic, but have also raised and opened up many important questions that can help us find our way into our common global future.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
CRISIS AS DANGER AND HOPE – COVID-19 IN ASIA

Socio-Theoretical Approaches

"Praying for the Cure": Transformations of Japanese Medical Traditions and the Question of Modernity

*Luka CULIBERG**

Abstract

"Science" and "magic" are not simply two opposing thought processes which have a straightforward relationship, first, on a presumed axis of progress—*from magic to science*, and second, within the context of a presumed cultural divide—*Western "science" vs. Eastern "tradition"*. The aim of this paper is to examine in historical perspective the introduction of so-called "Western medicine" in Japan and examine the idea that through this introduction "traditional" Chinese knowledge was simply superseded by "modern" Western science. By looking into the intellectual currents within the field of medicine, specifically in eighteenth-century Japan, and comparing them to those in the West, the article tries to challenge the narrative of "modernity" as a sort of uniquely Western achievement defined by "disenchantment", "rationalism" and "science".

Keywords: science, medicine, West, China, Japan, tradition, modernity, epidemic, disease, epistemology

»Molitev za zdravilo«: preobrazbe japonskih medicinskih tradicij in vprašanje modernosti

Izvleček

»Znanost« in »magija« nista zgolj dva nasprotujoča si miselna procesa v neposrednem odnosu, najprej na domnevni osi napredka *od magije k znanosti*, nato pa v okviru domnevne kulturne ločnice – *zahodna »znanost« proti vzhodni »tradiciji«*. Namen tega prispevka je v zgodovinski perspektivi proučiti vpeljavo tako imenovane »zahodne medicine« na Japonskem in razmisliti o tem, ali je s to uvedbo »moderna« zahodna znanost res preprosto izpodrinila »tradicionalno« kitajsko znanje. S proučevanjem intelektualnih tokov na področju medicine, zlasti na Japonskem v 18. stoletju, in z njihovo primerjavo s tistimi na Zahodu skuša članek spodbijati pripoved o »modernosti« kot nekakšnem edinstvenem zahodnem dosežku, ki ga opredeljujejo »razočaranje«, »racionalizem« in »znanost«.

Ključne besede: znanost, medicina, Zahod, Kitajska, Japonska, tradicija, sodobnost, epidemija, bolezen, epistemologija

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Introduction

Habe nun, ach! Philosophie,
Juristerei und Medizin,
Und leider auch Theologie
Durchaus studiert, mit heißem Bemühn.
Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor!
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor;

Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Faust*, lines 354–59

There are several major factors that can disrupt the course of human societies. They can be broadly categorised as *geological*, *biological* and *political*. Within the first category we can count natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanos, landslides, floods, tsunamis, etc., the second would include contagious diseases, while the major factor within the third category would be wars. It is difficult to assess how a specific factor shapes the course of history, however William McNeill (1998) proposed in his ground-breaking book *Plagues and Peoples*, originally published in 1977, that the international movement of disease accounts for much social and political upheaval and ultimately change throughout human history. A similar hypothesis, namely that infectious diseases are as important to understanding societal development as economic crises, wars, revolutions, and demographic change, is proposed by Frank M. Snowden (2019) in his recent book *Epidemics and Society*, where he considers the impact of epidemics not only on the lives of individual men and women, but also on religion, the arts, the rise of modern medicine and public health, and intellectual history (Snowden 2019, 2).

Often these factors would accompany each other or overlap. Though often exaggerated or misconstrued in general discourse, natural disasters can have serious health consequences, generally associated with population displacement, specifically the proximity of safe water and functioning latrines, the nutritional status of the displaced population or the level of immunity to vaccine-preventable diseases (Watson, Gayer and Connolly 2007, 1). Wars and epidemics likewise like to join hands, be it the Plague of Athens which devastated the famous city-state during the Peloponnesian War in 430 BC or the 1918 influenza pandemic, known as the Spanish Flu, which killed millions in the wake of the First World War.

However, in the decades following the Second World War, a feeling prevailed that humanity was finally coming out on top of contagious diseases, and pathogenic calamities such as the ravaging of the Black Death, the epidemics of smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis, or even Spanish Flu, were becoming a thing of the past, only to be read about in history books and certainly not to be experienced in today's world.[1] In the preface to the 1998 edition of his book, McNeill reflects on the 1970s' overly optimistic atmosphere in medical science, with the prevailing belief that infectious diseases had lost their power to affect human lives significantly, supposing that scientific medicine had finally won decisive victory over germs (McNeill 1998, 9). Indeed, newly discovered antibiotics, advanced public health measures and other developments in medicine made infections easy to prevent and cure. After all, in late 1970s the World Health Organization succeeded in eliminating smallpox from the face of the Earth (ibid.). However, as McNeill (ibid., 10) argues, this was the high point of the WHO's remarkably successful campaign to reduce human death from infections and a germ "counteroffensive" soon followed, most notably with the HIV virus causing AIDS:

> Development of resistant strains of malaria, TB, and other familiar infections was a second, and in many ways more important, sign that twentieth-century victories over the parasitic microorganisms that feed upon our bodies was only an unusually dramatic and drastic disturbance of the age-old balance between human hosts and disease organisms. As the century comes to its close, it seems sure that infections are coming back, regaining some of their old importance for human life … (McNeill 1998, 1)

These words could hardly sound more prophetic in the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic that is still transforming the world. While medical science produced effective vaccines which prevent contracting or at least falling victim to a more severe case of COVID-19, the general attitude of the public across the globe

1 Actually, it was in the mid-70s that Ivan Illich published his book *Limits to Medicine* which opens with the famous sentence: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health" (Illich 1995), arguing that the "threat which current medicine represents to the health of populations is analogous to the threat which the volume and intensity of traffic represent to mobility, the threat which education and the media represent to learning, and the threat which urbanization represents to competence in homemaking" (ibid., 7). Following Illich's critique, we could also argue that this period was a turning point where medical industry or medicalized health surpassed other diseases as the obstacle to a healthy life, the idea that Illich called *iatrogenics*. Illich claims that "The study of the evolution of disease patterns provides evidence that during the last century doctors have affected epidemics no more profoundly than did priests during earlier times. Epidemics came and went, imprecated by both but touched by neither. They are not modified any more decisively by the rituals performed in medical clinics than by those customary at religious shrines" (ibid., 15). We will not explore the theory of *iatrogenics* in this paper, but in arguing the relationship between "magic" and "science" in the field of medicine, we will be following the line of argument in his critique on the "magic" of "medical science".

is nevertheless ambivalent, with a not insignificant percentage of people having a strong distrust of scientific explanations or perhaps subscribing to various conspiracy theories relating to the pandemic and the measures taken to prevent it.

It might seem bewildering how at the start of the third decade of the twenty-first century people still hold deeply unscientific or "magic" beliefs about medicine, and particularly vaccines. However, "science" and "magic" are not simply two opposing thought processes which have a straightforward relationship, first, on a presumed axis of progress—*from magic to science*, and second, within the context of a presumed cultural divide—*Western "science" vs. Eastern "tradition"*. The aim of this paper is to present a historical perspective on the introduction of so-called "Western medicine" in Japan and examine the idea that through this introduction "traditional" Chinese knowledge was simply superseded by "modern" Western science.

The current situation allows us to observe daily the actual complexity of beliefs and attitudes toward the epidemic, vaccines, masks, drugs, homeopathic treatments, etc., and these observations offer useful insights into similar historical contexts. For example, current attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccination cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between pro- and anti-vaccine movements. The public embraces a whole spectrum of fears and beliefs that guide their convictions regarding vaccination. Japan has often been described as a relatively sceptical nation, but in a recent paper exploring today's vaccine hesitancy in Japan, Andrew Gordon and Michael R. Reich (2021) argue that the apparent low public confidence in vaccines is based on a complex history of vaccine acceptance and resistance, and that while today the recommended routine vaccines are generally accepted, the cases of vaccine failures and improper official reactions to these have nevertheless generated significant public and official hesitancy toward some new vaccines in the country.

Belief in "Science"

Vaccination is indeed an unusual technology within the field of medicine. Vaccines are not a cure. One does not take them when sick hoping to get better. Instead, vaccines are administered only to healthy people with the idea that those who get the shot will not get sick if they are infected at some later date. And this is indeed strange as a concept of medication, requiring a certain leap of faith because it expects us to believe that we have not fallen ill precisely because we took the vaccine. And because we can never know this, we must believe it.

However, we should not conflate this belief with the often professed "belief in science". We should not gloss over the fact that "science" is a complex notion which warrants some caution when invoking its powers. There is a significant difference between understanding the *scientific method* as the best possible tool for the inquiry into the nature of things, and an approach to "science" as an object of adoration. Nevertheless, we regularly come across narratives professing "belief in science", which supposedly legitimizes the believer's stance and provides them with the argument to crack down on "nonbelievers". But science is not something to be believed, it is something to be practiced no matter how often scientific conclusions turn out to be false. If we profess our *belief* in science, then nonbelievers can (and they inevitably do) simply point to any of those instances when scientists got things wrong (or were deliberately misleading, which, naturally, happens as well), and they can justifiably ridicule our blind *faith*. Scientists use the *scientific method* and operate with *theories*, while believers conflate them for *truths*. Aside from the question of whether the results of the scientific investigation are "true" or not, science itself cannot be "true". Science is instead a historical mode of thought and inquiry which can provide us with better and more accurate explanations of the world we live in.

By saying that science is *historical* rather than *true*, I want to emphasize that the application of a specific method of inquiry, which we call the *scientific method*, has its own history with its origins and historical development, which is, as we have long been aware, not a continuous progress toward universal truth, but rather a process of paradigm shifts or *scientific revolutions*. Our aim in this paper is not to follow the development of the scientific method across cultures, but to look more specifically into the nature of medical practice and how attitudes toward medicine correlate with the so-called shift to *modernity*.

Have We Ever Been Modern?

We still tend to explain the world history in terms of "progress", "enlightenment", "modernity", etc. by which we try to give meanings to various phenomena regarding human institutions and structures in various societies. The ideological background of the project of modernization requires the modernizing societies to be cut off from their premodern traditions. On the other hand, for the new modernized regime to be maintained, it is necessary to establish the legitimacy of the new order by relying on continuing cultural traditions[2] (Shiraishi 2018,

2 In this sense, as Andrew Horvat (2018, 190) notes, "traditional values—whether historically accurate or constructed—continue to function as social norms, the benchmarks by which correct behaviour is judged."

52). Contemporary sensibilities have discouraged us from the self-assured designations of the anthropology of the past, such as "primitive societies" or "societies without history", and we have adopted a more relativistic approach to human diversity talking rather about "multiculturalism" or "cultural diversity", but we have yet to rethink the attitudes or perceptions that see the world we live in as detached from our past by that *rational* enlightenment, that triumph of reason, which has made us *modern*.

Modernity is essentially understood as a specific view of human societies and their relation to nature, most commonly associated with the notion of "the disenchantment of the world", i.e. the historical process by which the natural world and all the areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious (Jenkins 2000, 12). However, the narrative of a straightforward trajectory that took Western people from believing in spirits, myth and magic to modern, rational individuals has been thoroughly challenged. Josephson-Storm (2017) traces the genealogy of this narrative which supposes that the defining feature of "modernity" is the departure of the supernatural, the narrative which equates modernity with the rise of instrumental reason and alienation of humanity from nature.

This narrative is connected to another narrative that describes the history of the modern scientific paradigm in terms of the rise of mathematical physics and the construction of a model of a "clockwork universe" that no longer needed spirits or a deity to drive the motor of the cosmos (Josephson-Storm 2017, 5). In his pursuit of this myth of Euro-American modernity and its putative relationship to rationality and nature, Josephson-Storm (2017, 5–6) explores the presence of magic in the very instances when disenchantment was itself being theorized.

Some, like Jenkins (2000, 28–29), have argued that (re)enchantment is no less diagnostic of modernity than disenchantment, although it might be even more productive to try and rethink the idea of *modernity* itself. We should ask ourselves, whether modernity provided specific, *modern*, i.e., radically different responses in comparison to premodern ones to the above-mentioned factors of social disruption? Does it construct geological, biological, or political factors in some particularly modern and disenchanted way, compared to premodern societies?

The short answer would be no. "Modernity" has not eliminated warfare. It can be argued that modern rationalism along with technological advancement has indeed "rationalized" killing, be it the form of mass murders in German death camps organized in a manner of Fordist industrial production, or the "rationalization" of "collateral damage" by the application of the contemporary drone technology.[3] However, no matter how technology allowed for the "rationalization" of killing, be it providing solutions to how to kill either more or fewer people efficiently, the fact remains that survival is the self-interest of any individual and that people killing each other is, at least for those actually facing the possibility of dying, a highly irrational endeavour usually fuelled by emotions such as hatred or fear.

In case of geological factors, no matter how people explained causes of natural disasters, they attempted to protect themselves by both "rational" and "irrational" solutions—they were building dams, canals, and earthquake-proof buildings while at the same time they were praying to the gods of nature. As for human health, even though we tend to think that "premodern" societies relied more on magic than science, a look into the history of medicine reveals that people of all times and cultures were investing quite a lot of effort into finding cures to supplement their prayers and magic.

As natural disasters continue to afflict mankind, we try to alleviate their impact by means of technology, although people still resort to prayer. As we have seen, we make use of the advances in technology to improve our lives, while at the same time we use them to wage even bloodier and more lethal wars. Both aspects are characteristics of modernity. In the field of disease, we continue to do what humans have been doing for millennia—we try to keep up with the pathogens by developing our medical science with the aim of preventing or curing a disease. However, as Ivan Illich (1995) warned us in his critique of the modern medical system, we could be falling victim to another "enchantment"—the magic of the medical profession.

At the beginning of this paper, I listed infectious diseases in the category of *biological* factors, but we must be clear from the start that diseases, while being of course

3 Writing about drone warfare, Gusterson (2019, S78) describes these "rationalizations" allowing drone operators to defer a strike until there are no or at least few civilians nearby, and then consult with military lawyers who can decide whether the likely civilian casualties would be deemed "proportionate", and therefore acceptable, within the frame of the laws of war. Drone operators can also use special software to calculate the probable damage radius (and thus the likelihood of civilian "collateral damage") depending on the ordnance selected and the placement of the missile. The proponents of the so-called "technomorality" of drone warfare argue that it represents a kinder, gentler way of fighting (ibid., S77). George W. Bush's CIA director, Michael Hayden, quoted in Gusterson (ibid.), described drone warfare as "the most targeted and effective application of firepower in the history of armed conflict," and called the drone "an exquisite weapon when you want to be both effective and moral". In a similar vein, Harold Koh, legal advisor to the State Department during the Obama administration, said, "because drone technology is highly precise, if properly controlled, it could be more lawful and more consistent with human rights and humanitarian law than the alternatives" (ibid.). The "rationalization" of killing can thus cut both ways: in the case of German death camps, it was perceived as the absolute lowest point for human beings *as moral beings*, while in the case of drone killings it is presented as the epitome of morality within warfare.

a pathological reality, are at the same time also a social construction (Hays 2009, 1). Apart from its material manifestation, a disease is also constructed through various convictions about it. What concerns us here, therefore, is not the biomedical "reality" of disease or scientific "rationality" in the history of medical practice, but rather the idea of rationality itself as manifested in the attitudes, responses and beliefs regarding disease and medicine. Through historical survey, I want to focus on the question of how societies across the cultural spectrum construct their convictions and attitudes toward disease or medicine in a broader sense. I want to question the idea of a fundamental divide between the "modern", rational and scientific attitude based on the European Enlightenment and non- or premodern "magical" approaches. To better explore this, I next present a brief overview of the history of medical tradition in Europe and Japan.

European Medical Tradition

According to Hays (2009, 9), the ancient Greek attitudes and practices show that the border between "supernatural" and "natural" approaches could be very unclear, as it had been for the earlier Egyptians:

> The best-known healing tradition of the early Greeks was associated with the cult of Asclepios, a mythic hero who emerged as a lesser god in the Greek pantheon of the sixth century B.C.E. The sick would repair to the temple of the god and perform ritual sacrifices and bathings, followed by a crucial "incubation sleep" in which dreams and visions appeared to the sufferer. Those dreams either healed directly, or gave directions (interpreted by the priests of the god) for an appropriate therapeutic regimen, which might include bathing, rest, the administration of drugs, and attention to diet. (Hays 2009, 9–10)

This cult of Asclepios, according to Hays (2009, 10), gained a wide following in subsequent centuries, extending into the Greco-Roman world as the principal pagan religious response to disease. Then there was a Hippocratic tradition which had some of its roots in Asclepian temple medicine, but it also included both older traditions of surgery and pharmacology and some newer conceptions of nature.

By assigning explanations for the phenomena of health and disease to nature and reason, the Hippocratic physicians rejected superstition, divination, and magic. They reasoned that if the world was uniform and natural, all phenomena were equally part of nature and if the gods were responsible for any particular phenomenon, they were equally responsible for all phenomena (Magner 2005, 95). This rejection of magic therefore cannot be interpreted as an intellectual shift from magic to reason, but rather a shift in understanding nature as both natural and divine. While Hippocrates ridiculed the deceptions practiced in the name of religious healing, he was not opposed to prayer and piety (ibid.).

Based on the Hippocratic tradition of understanding anatomy and medicine through the theory of *humorism*, the most famous physician and philosopher of European antiquity, Galen, later influenced both medieval Christians and early Muslims (Hays 2009, 11). Indeed, no other figure in the history of medicine has influenced the concepts of anatomy, physiology, therapeutics, and philosophy as much as Galen, the physician known as the Medical Pope of the Middle Ages and the mentor of Renaissance anatomists and physiologists (Magner 2005, 121). His explanation of human physiology was "systemic" in the sense that if disease was a product of the imbalance of the *humors* carried by the different systems, the physician should restore the balance (Hays 2009, 13). Galen, like many other physicians in the Roman Empire, was Greek, because the Romans among whom Galen lived generally did not "practice medicine" as a profession. They rather explained disease as the product of the many gods who superintended each household and indeed each part of the body, and heads of families performed the appropriate rites and sacrifices to preserve family health (ibid.).

Christianity brought a radically different conception of healing which grew out of a religious view which, as Hays (2009, 14–15) argues, sharply contrasted with the ideas of the Greco-Roman culture. It combined the ideas of Judaism, which were shared with Mesopotamian cultures in relating disease to errant behaviour that angers the gods, while the other emphasis was the association of disease and the "unclean". On the other hand, in contrast to the Jews, the Christians lived in the expectation of the imminent end of the world:

> Perhaps because things of the body therefore seemed transiently insignificant, perhaps because pagan learning was not to be trusted, some Christians scorned the orthodox healing routines of the Greeks and Romans. Perhaps the traditions of Hippocrates, or Asclepios, were too closely associated with other gods, while the elaborate purification rituals of the Jews represented the "law" that Jesus's teaching had superseded. The Christians lived in a world entirely dominated by their god's immanence; disease and health, if they had any importance at all, acquired such importance as manifestations of God's power and will. (Hays 2009, 15)

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the early centuries of the European "Middle Ages" were primarily based on agricultural production with little long-distance trade, and this profoundly rural society lacked the urban concentrations that encouraged airborne diseases, so major epidemics were largely absent in Europe until the plague returned in the fourteenth century (ibid., 19). With the later growth of urban centres and long-distance trade, however, medieval cities became intensely crowded and very dirty. The lack of sanitation on one hand meant high levels of intestinal infections, such as diarrhoea, dysentery, and typhoid fever, while on the other hand bigger crowds meant tuberculosis, influenza, smallpox, measles, and of course the plague (ibid., 36).

European medical doctrine regarding contagious diseases in those times was based on the concept of *miasma* (pollution) or as it was also known—*mala aria* or “bad air”. However, though the *miasma* remained a predominant theory regarding the cause of disease up until the late nineteenth century, when the understanding of pathogens as the causes for infectious diseases replaced *miasma* theory with germ theory, the so-called “Black Death” epidemic of the fourteenth century had already prompted some reactions that seemed based on the idea of contagion (ibid., 54). So, as Hays (2009, 54–55) argues, by the fifteenth century the members of health boards gradually began acting on more clearly contagionist assumptions which led to more direct interference in the lives of both individuals and groups. As such, occasions that brought crowds together, like school classes, church services and religious processions became suspect, and were thus objects of regulation.

These public health control measures that were articulated and practiced in fifteenth-century Italian city-states included municipal quarantine and isolation of the victims, and thus with a health commission’s declaration that the plague was present in a city, a series of administrative and political measures were implemented whose goals were quarantine and isolation (ibid., 55).

The complexity of responses to disease from antiquity well into “modern” times certainly belies the idea that the development of a “scientific” thought process followed an imaginary trajectory from “magic” to “reason”. Any change should rather be understood as shifts in mode of thought, sort of epistemological shifts, that seldom completely abandon existing epistemological foundations. *Scientific revolutions* do not occur that often, and Galen remained the ultimate authority on anatomical and physiological questions at least until the sixteenth century (Magner 2005, 124):

> Never satisfied with purely anatomical description, Galen constantly struggled to find ways of proceeding from structure to function, from pure anatomy to experimental physiology. It is rare to encounter a problem in

> what might be called classical physiology that Galen did not attempt to cope with either by experiment or speculation. By extending medical research from anatomy to physiology, Galen established the foundations of a program that would transform the Hippocratic *art* of medicine into the *science* of medicine. (Magner 2005, 125)

As Hays (2009, 78) writes, indistinct boundaries divided science, religion, magic, empirical healing, and folk custom, regardless of the role of God's will as the major explanation of the origin of disease. According to Magner (2005, 197), the Renaissance era may have ultimately transformed European culture in a profound and permanent way that led to the modern world, but it was also a period in which superstition, mysticism, intolerance, and epidemics flourished.

The development of international trade ushered in an era of exploration which, in its turn, set in motion the technical innovations that were based on scientific research. The so-called age of *scientific revolutions* brought challenges on many fields of ancient knowledge and medicine was by no means an exception:

> Important philosophers in the early seventeenth century, especially Descartes and Francis Bacon (1564–1626), came to the radical conclusion that all past knowledge was uncertain and that the human mind must begin anew on different epistemological principles, whether those of deductive reason and mathematics (as Descartes urged) or of the inductive collection of data (as Bacon argued). In either case authority—perhaps Aristotle's, perhaps Galen's, perhaps Christianity's—must be set aside. (Hays 2009, 99)

This raises the question of just how far did the Enlightenment affect the practice of healing? Hays (2009) makes an interesting argument showing how deeply scientific conceptions were related to broader social circumstances and attitudes. Despite all the advances in "scientific thinking", this scientific thought was bound to the wider conceptions of the *rerum natura*, and both medical ideas and practices followed from this. For example, regarding the cause of epidemic disease, there remained a basic disagreement between the *miasma* or "bad air" doctrine and the idea of contagion (ibid., 109).

In fact, by the seventeenth century many states had evolved elaborate public health mechanisms to deal with the plague, but during the eighteenth century that machinery, and the thinking behind it, largely fell from favour, and the reason for this, according to Hays (2009, 110–11), is that in part the *miasma* theory might have been more sympathetically regarded by those Enlightenment thinkers who emphasized the rights of individuals against the coercive powers of the state. Undoubtedly much liberal Enlightenment opinion resisted the infringements on liberty that came with a contagionist doctrine, such as quarantines and health passes, which they considered as classic instruments of a heavy state hand. Just as those who today oppose the mask mandate in the name of personal liberty and argue "rationally" that masks cannot stop the virus, so the eighteenth-century liberals argued "rationally" that disease is spread not through contagion but through "bad air".

On the other hand, contagionist arguments may also have withered because the plague ceased to be a major menace in the eighteenth century, which called into question the utility of the machinery designed to divert it. Seventeenth-century thinkers increasingly relied on mechanical and iatrochemical explanations for the causes of new diseases such as curvy, syphilis, rickets, and above all the "fevers", such as typhus, malaria yellow fever, and influenza. However, older explanations, such as divine wrath, plutonic exhalations, unfortunate astrological conjunctions, etc. persisted (ibid., 109–10).

Medicine in Japan

From the fifth century on the inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago gradually adopted more advanced medical techniques from the Asian mainland through Korea, eventually called *kanpō igaku*[4] 漢方医学 or "Chinese medicine", which came to form the main current of Japanese medical practice until well into the second half of the nineteenth century (Otori 1964, 20). In fact, practices understood under the term of *kanpō* persist in Japan to this day, and according to data from the Japan Kampo Medicines Manufacturers Association (JKMA) during the period from August 5, 2008 to September 12, 2008, 83.5% of 684 medical doctors stated that they were using *kanpō* (Motoo, Seki and Tsutani 2011, 85). *Kanpō* is still greatly integrated into modern medicine in Japan by being a part of the medical education given at all 80 medical schools in the country since 2005 (ibid., 86).

Of course, "Chinese medicine" is just as heterogenous, diverse and complicated as the previously described "European tradition". The earliest written evidence extant today on the theoretical and practical consequences of illness in China dates from approximately the eleventh century BC, and testifies that at the time it was assumed that the well-being of the living depended to a considerable extent on

4 Also sometimes transcribed as *kampō*.

their interactions with the non-living members of the community, i.e., with their ancestors:

> An adherence to specific norms was thought to guarantee social and individual health; transgressions were known to cause the wrath of the dead, who then had to be propitiated with sacrifices. The communication between the living and the nonliving that was necessary to establish the cause of an affliction and to identify an appropriate remedy was recorded on bones and turtle shells, many of which were found in the soil, especially in the province of Henan, earlier this century. Whether the belief in ancestral intervention was supplemented by a pragmatic application of drugs or other empirically valuable means of therapy was not documented in written form at this early time. (Unschuld 1993, 20)

Unschuld (ibid.) writes that subsequent political changes during the first millennium BC, with centuries of civil war, may have been responsible for the rise of a new worldview in which the emphasis switched from the belief in the effect of ancestral curses or blessings on the health of the living to one that understood health or illness predominantly as an outcome of successful protection against the possibility or manifestation of an onslaught of not only visible but also invisible enemies, like demons.

Some of these ancestral and demonological notions survived until the present time as important aspects of the overall system of conceptualized and practical health care, although this should not be interpreted as simply adhering to a "magical" approach toward disease. According to Unschuld (1993, 20), Chinese medicine, documented since the second century BC, developed as a system of ideas and practices based on insights into the laws of nature rather than on metaphysics, while still embodying some of the fundamental tenets of those earlier approaches to understanding health and healing, namely an emphasis on cause-effect relationships and a localistic-ontological notion of disease.

As early as the first century AD, various schools of medical thought had been founded in China and were already producing diverging ideas. These were compiled under the name of the mythical Yellow Emperor and have become the classic text and fundamental source of traditional Chinese medicine—the *Huandi Neijing* 黄帝内經 or the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (ibid.). Another important document for understanding the history of Chinese pharmaceutical knowledge is the text, dated to the third century BC, found in the archaeological site of Mawangdui and subsequently called *Wushi'er Bingfang* 五十二病方 or *Recipes for Fifty-Two Ailments*. From these and other ancient sources it is possible to deduct the nature of the early developmental phase of Chinese medicine. According to Unschuld, central to Chinese medicine is its perception of the human organism:

> … the human organism was described in Han sources as a system of individual functional units that stored, distributed, and processed resources, which were brought into the organism from the outside or were developed within. The individual units were linked through a system of channels, thought to transport resources from one place to another and join the units to the outside world. The terminology used to describe the structure and workings of the organism is largely metaphoric and is based on images from the geographic, economic, and social environment of the Ch'in and Han dynasties in China. (Unschuld 1993, 21)

These resources that passed through the organism and represented a "vital force" thought to be the carrier of life were called *qi* 氣 in *Huangdi Neijing* (ibid.). For a long time, at least until the end of the Song dynasty in the thirteenth century, a dichotomy prevailed between two major currents, which Unschuld (ibid., 23–24) relates to the basic antagonism between Confucian-legalist thinking and the Daoist worldview: one was the so-called medicine of systematic correspondence, the other was pragmatic drug therapy. Various schools emerged within the framework of systematic correspondence, advocating the existence of two (*yin* and *yang*) or five (five phases) categories of all phenomena. It was only after the Song dynasty, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the aftermath of the rise of Song Neo-Confucianism, that certain Confucian-legalist and Daoist tenets were united for a few centuries and attempts were made to construct a pharmacology of systematic correspondence (ibid., 24).

We should be wary, though, of explaining too much of the medical beliefs and practices simply by examining traditional Chinese ideological systems. After all, sinologists in recent decades have discredited many times the notion that Confucianism, Daoism or Buddhism were just abstract and unchanging essences that determined the shape of intellectual history (Sivin 1988, 53). Still, according to the basic Chinese medical philosophy, disease was primarily caused by an imbalance of *yin* and *yang*, resulting in a disorder of one of the five phases, expressed as a dysfunction of the corresponding organ and the organs controlled by it. Therefore, all therapies were directed toward restoration of a state of harmony (Magner 2005, 72).

If we had to forcibly juxtapose both traditions, we could say that Western anatomists studied the body as if dealing with an assemblage of bits and pieces belonging to a machine, while, in contrast, classical Chinese anatomy was more concerned with the dynamic interplay of functional systems rather than specific organs (ibid., 71). Despite considerable debate about various details, we should not simply project modern notions of "official" versus "traditional" medicine back in the past, and we would be at great pains to establish the difference based on the "scientific" vs. "magical" divide. For example, there is little argument about the fact that Chinese scholars accepted the relationship between the heart and the circulation of the blood long before these concepts were incorporated into Western science and medicine by William Harvey (1578–1657) in the early seventeenth century (ibid., 72).

As mentioned above, Chinese medicine probably became the standard in Japan sometime from the fifth century onwards. From the formation of the centralised state the Japanese view of disease was thus primarily influenced by Chinese medicine. The description, diagnosis, and treatment of disease in premodern Japan almost always derive from Chinese texts, though Buddhist scriptures from India could also influence how disease and medicine were perceived in early Japan (Farris 1993, 376). According to Farris (ibid.) it is unclear how much the Japanese knew about disease and its treatment before Chinese and Indian influences, because about the time that the Japanese government borrowed the Chinese custom of recording outbreaks of disease it also borrowed their medical theory. Some medical practices reported during early epidemics may well derive from native Japanese view that saw disease as demonic possession to be exorcised by shamans and witch doctors (ibid.).

It certainly seems plausible that ancient oral societies primarily resorted to magical practices in battling disease, but since we have no records of their "reasoning" behind those practices we can only speculate about the actual "epistemology" of their medical thought. However, based on other "ancient" practices, like hunting, for example, which regularly involve "magical" rituals, we can speculate that just as people involved in hunting pay no less attention to the production of suitable weapons, to the studying of the behaviour of animals, and so on, ancient oral societies gave no less thought to "rational" healing practices. Just as hunters knew that magical rituals alone would not bring dinner to their table, so healers always tried to combine "magic" with healing techniques.

From the time people on the Japanese archipelago introduced Chinese medical concepts and practices along with Chinese writing system we can follow their intellectual thought processes with more certainty. By the time we reach the medieval and early modern periods, we can observe that Japanese medicine was already the site of multiple and conflicting understandings of the human body, its diseases and treatment:

> These different perspectives—especially, Buddhist, Chinese, and Western—do not reflect some inevitable movement from a less sophisticated understanding of medical science to a more sophisticated (Western) one. Rather, these different medical views often coexisted, particularly in the early modern period. (Deal 2006, 232)

We have already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that the so-called "traditional Chinese medicine" or *kanpō* still coexists with the so-called "Western medicine" in Japan. Although the Japanese embraced different medical traditions, both Chinese and Western medical procedures were used to treat certain common and widespread diseases. There are difficulties, however, in determining today exactly what these past diseases may have been, which is due in part to the different ways in which Chinese and Western medicine understood, described, diagnosed, and treated these conditions. Diseases known to have afflicted the Japanese include leprosy, smallpox, syphilis, malaria, tuberculosis, influenza, and measles (ibid., 233).

Chinese medicine was practiced in Japan with little modification until the early modern period. In the Heian period (794–1185), the aristocratic court physician Tanba no Yasuyori 丹波 康頼 (912–995) wrote the *Ishinpō* 醫心方[5] (*Methods at the Heart of Medicine*, 984), the oldest extant Japanese medical text that compiled Chinese medical treatises into 30 volumes. Among the topics explored in the *Ishinpō* were diseases and their origins and treatments (ibid., 233–34). There is nothing "magical" about the medical knowledge in this tenth-century treatise which covers clinical treatments drawing from the ancient Chinese traditional medicine and influenced by Indian medical theories found in Buddhist scriptures as well as Daoist references (Sugimoto and Swain 1989, 140).

From the Muromachi period (1336–1573), a medical perspective blending Neo-Confucianism and Chinese medicine known as the Li-Zhu School began to attract the interest of Japanese medical practitioners, which was partly a result of the interest taken by Japanese Zen monks in Chinese Neo-Confucian ideas, such as vital force and principle 理 (Chinese: *li*; Japanese: *ri*). The school, which derived its name from two Chinese physicians, Li Dongyuan 李東垣 (1180–1251) and Zhu Danxi 朱丹溪 (1281–1358), viewed disease as the direct consequence of a poor lifestyle and vital force imbalances. Treatment consisted of combinations of herbal medicine, acupuncture, and moxibustion (ibid., 234).

In the late Muromachi period, Manase Dōsan 曲直瀬道三 (1507–1594) established the Li-Zhu School as an orthodox approach to medical theory and

5 Also transcribed as *Ishimpō*, *Ishimhō* or *Ishinhō*.

practice. Dōsan, who was both a physician to the imperial family and a prominent teacher, trained doctors in Li-Zhu medical theory and practice at his private medical school (ibid.). His influence continued well into the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), gaining support from high-ranking warriors and the shogunate. As Deal writes, one of the great contributions made by Dōsan and his followers to the Japanese practice of Chinese medicine was to establish standard procedures for diagnosing disease:

> According to these procedures, there were four observations that a physician needed to make to accurately assess a patient's disease: 1) visual observation, especially of such things as skin color, hair condition, feces, and urine; 2) auditory observation of such things as coughs and verbal responses made to pain when the patient was touched, and olfactory observation of patient odors; 3) observation of patient responses to physician questions concerning such things as appetite and emotional state; and 4) observation of pulse and abdomen through touching the body in various ways. (Deal 2006, 234)

It was in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) that the most important achievements took place in medicine. Medical progress was able to build on the existing base of Chinese medicine, and physicians trained in the Chinese tradition later helped to introduce Western science (Bartholomew 1989, 13). The Li-Zhu School remained influential but there was one important competing school of Chinese medicine that developed starting at the end of the seventeenth century—the School of Ancient Medicine, *kohō* 古方 or *koihō* 古医方 (Deal 2006, 234). It was rooted in a scholarly trend from the late seventeenth century developed by Confucian scholars who increasingly rejected Neo-Confucian interpretations of the Confucian classics in favour of a direct reading of the ancient texts.

One of the famous proponents of the School of Ancient Medicine was a Kyōto physician, Yamawaki Tōyō 山脇 東洋 (1706–1762), author of the famous medical text *Zōshi* 蔵志, a book on internal organs, published in 1759, who, according to Deal (ibid., 235), represents a bridge between Chinese and Western medicine as practiced in Japan. Although he administered Chinese medicine as an imperial court physician, he began to have doubts about the traditional Chinese view of the structure of the human anatomy:

> According to this traditional anatomical view, the human body was conceptualized, without any empirical or visual verification, as encompassing five organs and six viscera that interacted with each other and with the meridians, paths along the body through which vital force flowed. In

> turn, the five organs corresponded to traditional Chinese views of the five elements: heart/fire, lungs/metal, kidneys/water, liver/wood, and spleen/earth. The organs themselves were not a site of treatment in traditional Chinese medicine, that is, disease was not caused by malfunctioning organs. Rather, this anatomical view related to the idea that disease was caused by imbalances in and disruptions to vital force and the five elements. Toyo's doubts about the traditional view of human anatomy came about in part because of an anatomical description in one of the Chinese classics that asserted that the body contains nine organs. To determine which anatomical view was correct, Toyo received permission to dissect a human body, which he did in 1754. In 1759, Toyo presented the results of his observations in a publication entitled *Zoshi* (Anatomical record). Although Toyo's findings contradicted the traditional view, the five organs and six viscera theory remained orthodox. (Deal 2006, 235)

Yamawaki Tōyō's experiments and doubts in the orthodoxy of Chinese teachings were important factors in the intellectual turn toward Western medicine. What needs to be pointed out here is that this turn did not happen solely because Western medicine was recognized as "better", but because it appeared to be more in line with the intellectual shift within Confucian thought, a shift that sought greater emphasis on empirical observations. It was only after this epistemological shift that Western medicine became more interesting to the Japanese and established itself as a new competitor to Chinese medicine.

The reason for this turn to European medicine was thus not simply its supposedly inherent advantages as a medical praxis, but also an epistemological turn to the empiricism within the Confucian thought itself. There were many objections raised against Yamawaki Tōyō's bold actions of dissecting corpses, and though some were opposed to it based on the conservative argument that it went against the teachings of the ancient saints, others were arguing against it from a more utilitarian perspective—that it did nothing useful for curing patients (Ogawa 1975, 62).

One other proponent of the epistemological turn to a supposedly "ancient Way" was Kagawa Shūan 香川 修庵 (1683–1755), who is responsible for the formulation of a system of Confucian-medical thought that viewed Confucius' "Way of the sages" as being basically identical with a "Way of medicine" (Hirakawa 1998, 44). According to Kagawa, the sages of antiquity were staunch in their reverence for empirical fact, and latter-day speculative philosophers had obfuscated that emphasis (ibid.).

So, as was pointed out by Hirakawa (ibid., 43), we need to recognize the eighteenth-century intellectual trends to understand the rise of so-called Dutch studies and

Western medicine. Seventeenth-century Japan was dominated by the Cheng-Zhu School (*Cheng Zhu lixue* 程朱理學) of Neo-Confucianism, a grand system of speculative philosophy that provided the principal current of orthodox learning during the Tokugawa period (ibid.). By the end of the century more and more critical voices appeared and challenged the orthodoxy of the Cheng-Zhu School with an epistemological shift toward supposedly more original "Ancient Learning", which, as we have seen, shaped new approaches within the field of medicine as well.

The Li-Zhu School of Chinese medicine, which was a form of speculative philosophy that discussed human pathology in terms of *yin-yang*, the five elements, five circulations, and six *qi*, under the influence of "Ancient Learning" gave way to a paradigm shift that rejected such speculative ideas as latter-day inventions and attempted to return to the "Way" that medicine had supposedly been practiced in ancient China (ibid., 44). As such, scholars like Kagawa Shūan or Yamawaki Tōyō became sceptical of the traditional anatomical diagrams used by Tokugawa specialists of Chinese medicine, and instead of simply relying on such traditional guides they trusted their own experimentation. Yamawaki Tōyō, as we have noted, was the first to have performed an autopsy on an executed criminal in 1754 and recorded his observations (ibid., 45).

As Hirakawa (ibid.) points out, there was thus a clear relationship between the textual rigor of the School of Ancient Learning and the practical and empirical emphases of Dutch studies. Prior to the beginning of the Tokugawa period, interest in Western medicine focused primarily on surgery and *materia medica*, but according to Bartholomew (1989, 13–14) during the eighteenth century we can observe two important developments in Japanese medicine: the diffusion of Chinese style inoculation techniques and the founding of European anatomical studies.

New epistemological logic thus stimulated considerable interest in experimental medicine and led directly to the epochal publication in 1774 of the *Kaitai shinsho* 解體新書 (*New Text on Anatomy*) by Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白 (1733–1817) and his colleagues. This was a translation with drawings of *Ontleedkundige Tafelen*, the Dutch edition of Johann Adam Kulmus' *Anatomische Tabellen*, first published in 1722. Sugita's translation indicates the strongly empirical approach to nature increasingly typical of Tokugawa science, which helped undermine the prestige of Chinese medicine (Bartholomew 1989, 13–14).

The publication of *Kaitai shinsho* inaugurated the study of Dutch medicine (*ranpō* 蘭方) in Japan, together with other Western medical and scientific disciplines (Deal 2006, 237). This scientific and medical knowledge that was entering Japan via the Dutch in Nagasaki convinced some intellectuals that European scientific methods were superior to both Chinese and Japanese ones, and led them to establish the movement of Dutch studies or *rangaku* 蘭学. The word often used by Dutch studies scholars to describe the superiority of Dutch to Chinese learning is "precision" or *seimitsu* 精密. They would say that Dutch learning is "precise" (*sei* 精) and "accurate" (*seimitsu* 精密), while "Chinese" learning is "negligent" (*so* 疎) and "careless" (*sorō* 疎漏) (Aihara 2013, 27).

However, these judgments of superiority and inferiority were not followed by a complete rejection of the Confucian epistemological framework. While Sugita Genpaku was astounded by the effectiveness of Dutch measurement and research, he interpreted this from within the Confucian framework of scientific logic or "penetration of principle" (*kyūri* 窮理) (ibid.). As quoted in Aihara (ibid., 27–28), for Genpaku the Dutch science (*oranda no kyūri*) was grounded in measurement (*jissoku* 実測) and experimentation (*jikken* 実験), and was therefore superior to the "empty" Chinese science (*shina no kyūri*). Genpaku believed that Chinese medical books were based on conjectures and false analogies (憶度附会), while Dutch medical books relied on direct observation (今直観之).

Sugita Genpaku's scathing criticism of Chinese science might give the impression that Dutch studies scholars or *rangakusha* 蘭学者 completely rejected Confucian epistemology, however, it needs to be emphasised again that their turn to the Western approach happened precisely because epistemological shifts were already taking place within the Confucian paradigm.

To give one more example, we can take a look at another interesting eighteenth-century astronomer and physician, Asada Gōryū 麻田 剛立 (1734–1799). Gōryū was not part of the intellectual world that embraced Western science. He was not reading Dutch books, his knowledge of European astronomy was based on Chinese books such as 暦象考成 (*Li xiang kao cheng* or *Rekishō kōsei* in Japanese), a Chinese calendar book of the Qing dynasty, published in 1723, describing the theories of Tycho Brahe and the calendar calculations based on them (Arisaka 1968, 41). A son of a Confucian intellectual in the Kitsuki domain in Bungo province in Kyushu, Gōryū was interested in astronomy from an early age and studied it by himself while also studying medicine. He became a "court physician" of the domain lord until he decided to leave his domain for Osaka (ibid., 42; Ogawa 1956, 353). There he immersed himself in the study of the celestial calendar, constantly improving measurement instruments, and by trusting only actual measurements and empirical verification he eventually discovered what is known as Kepler's third law, namely that square of a planet's orbital period is proportional to the cube of the length of the semi-major axis of its orbit (Arisaka 1968, 42).

As for his medical studies, Gōryū belonged to the *koihō* or School of Ancient Medicine. Arisaka (ibid., 43) notes that even though he himself used to maintain that the great advancement of the *koihō* school can be dated to 1754 when Yamawaki Tōyō performed his dissection, the real breakthrough should rather be ascribed to the positivistic and scientific spirit of medicine as practiced by Asada Gōryū. Asada also performed dissections on various animals and his anatomy of the human body, compiled by his friend Nakai Riken 中井 履軒 (1732–1817) under the title *Essorōhitsu* 越俎弄筆, was published in 1793, a year before the famous text of the Dutch studies scholars, *Kaitai shinsho* (ibid.). Asada's medical theory was thus in no way Western but was based on the positivistic and clinical type of the *koihō* school.

"How the East Was Won"

The history of "scientific" pursuit surely followed different trajectories in the various parts of the world we are considering here. By Hellenistic times in Europe and the Han period in China the scholarly disciplines that were henceforth to be regarded as learning had already settled into their respective discernible patterns. In the West, it was philosophy, medicine, the dialectic and the mathematical sciences (including astronomy and statics) that were considered standard academic pursuits, while inquiries into chemical properties were excluded from the ranks of legitimate learning. In China, the study of the Confucian canon occupied the highest position, while astrology and calendar-making played a supporting role. Medicine ranked far down the list, and the status of mathematics was even lower. Meanwhile, technology and applied science did not find favour in either world (Nakayama 1984, 53).

In most parts of today's world, it seems that the public attaches greatest scholarly respect specifically to medical doctors, which can be argued also from a sociolinguistic perspective by the fact that in many languages the word for a learned person or intellectual—*doctor*—came to be almost exclusively associated with the profession of physician. When people go to "see a doctor", they never mean a philosopher.

On the other hand, throughout history physicians in Europe as well as in Japan were considered quite low status. So, another reason why eighteenth-century physicians would want to identify as Confucian scholars was the respect these enjoyed as such in contrast to being a simple physician. Sugita Genpaku himself explained how doctors in Japan were equated with artisans and thus historically considered to be "lowly people"[6] within the Japanese hierarchical system (Liu 2013, 58). In the Tokugawa period, where social status was strictly hierarchical,

6 夫医は方技の一にして，諸史には其末に加へ，賎しきものになせり

physicians, other than those in the service of *shōgun* or *tennō*, were thus low in the social hierarchy and despised by the *bushi* or the samurai. In order to become a respected Confucian doctor, Kagawa Shūan, for example, advocated the idea of "Confucianism and Medicine as One" (儒医一本論) and thus tried to raise the status of doctors (ibid.).

Many Dutch studies scholars thus reinterpreted Confucianist notions and blended them with the study of Western natural sciences, while still considering themselves Confucianists. Their Confucianism was, therefore, readily accommodating the methodology of Western science which became a major part of Japanese perception of the West (Culiberg 2015). These *rangakusha* did not think that the West was more advanced or represented the next stage in the progress of civilization, because, as Watanabe (2012, 321) points out, such a historical view was still absent in those times. Rather, they believed that, for some reason, it was in the "national character" of the Western countries to assemble information, examine it in detail, investigate its underlying principles, and skilfully employ the knowledge thus gained.

"Science" or "learning" was understood exclusively within a Confucian framework—no science existed outside this intellectual universe, and the *rangakusha*, while retaining this Confucian sensibility, merely shifted the object of their study from China to the West (Watanabe 2012, 321).

This admiration of Western "penetration of principle" (*kyūri* 窮理) eventually led to Japanese anxiety over Western military supremacy. Shocked by China's defeat in the Opium War of 1839–1842, another famous Neo-Confucian scholar and *rangakusha*, Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間 象山 (1811–1864) had thus concluded that the West was engaging in the penetration of principle more correctly and effectively than the countries under the sway of Neo-Confucianism (ibid., 322). In the field of medicine, surgery and the treatment of epidemics such as cholera and smallpox in the nineteenth century led to a further decline in trust with regard to Chinese medicine in favour of Western medicine.

The Japanese adopted Western medicine because by the nineteenth century it was better aligned with the epistemological currents within the Japanese intellectual universe. For example, by the time anatomy became increasingly important, the Western advantage over Chinese knowledge was already immense. Chinese "ignorance" of anatomy, with the scant descriptions and crude illustrations of organs reprinted in one medical book after another, used to be explained simply by Confucian taboos against dissection. But as Sivin (1988, 59) shows, this hypothesis ignores the quite common practice of autopsy. It was just that the early Chinese understanding of health and disease was heavily weighted toward function, while that of Galen focused on structure. To the Chinese it mattered what the organs did, not their design and spatial relations, and thus there was nothing that a doctor could accomplish by cutting into the abdomen. He was curious about the balance of body functions and the propagation of functional imbalance, and the location of an inner lesion was of minor concern (ibid.).

Even in Europe, as we have already seen, anatomical knowledge had practically no clinical utility until the middle of the eighteenth century, but it was a source of prestige for learned doctors whose reputations did not depend on practice. In China the unbroken tie between doctrine and practice removed this motivation for the development of anatomy (ibid.).

The arrival of Western medicine in Japan was doubtlessly a paradigm changing event, however the switch from the Chinese to Western medical paradigm was not simply a story of supplanting one system with the other. It was a complex process of weighing pros and cons, and the main point of contention remained the question of method. In his paper on the perception of motor disability in Tokugawa period medical texts of European medicine, Kawahara (1985) looks at various texts of Western medicine from the late Edo period where he discusses, among other things, the adoption of the so-called empirical method. It was this methodological requirement that guided the course of Japanese medical science.

The fact that Sugita Genpaku still felt the need to critique the *Huangdi Neijing* testifies to how this basic text of Chinese medicine was still important in eighteenth-century Japan. In his treatise *Kyōi no gen* 狂醫之言 (*Words of a Mad Doctor*), published in 1775, Genpaku reiterates anatomical doctrine as explained in the *Neijing*, and then states: "But if we now dissect the body of the condemned and look at the organs, the position and appearance of the organs is different,"[7] and concludes, "since the observation of the actual thing differs, it means that it is a deceiving book"[8] (Sugita 1976, 231; Kawahara 1985, 42; Liu 2013, 62).

Conclusion

As we have seen in the case of medicine in Europe and Japan, the "great divide" between "Western science" and "Chinese tradition" is not as clear as the classical narrative of "modernity" would have it. There was certainly no straightforward epistemological trajectory from "magical" thinking to "scientific" thought. Medicine has always relied both on "rational" examinations as well as "magical" beliefs. And in this sense the "West" was no more rational than the "East".

7 然るに、今刑死を剖りてその臓を観れば、その位置・臓象はこれと異なるなり。

8 これを物に質すにこれと異なれば、すなはち、また人を欺くの書なり。

We have argued that the intellectual framework of Japanese physicians in the eighteenth century remained Confucian, however, as Hays (2009, 130) observes, in this the era of science and enlightenment, when human reason exulted in the powers conferred on it by the giants of the scientific revolution, in Europe too continuities rather than change dominated much of its relations with disease. Physicians' therapies, including for those who could receive the finest medical care, remained fundamentally Galenic. Even in the middle of the nineteenth century, the *miasma* theory was still the leading concept of epidemic disease.

In his book *The Ghost Map* Steven Johnson (2006) tells the story of one of the founders of modern epidemiology, John Snow, who during the 1854 cholera epidemic in London discovered that the source of the disease was polluted water and not *miasma*, and the author claims that

> [d]espite all the technological advances of the Industrial Age, Victorian medicine was hardly a triumph of the scientific method. Reading through the newspapers and medical journals of the day, what stands out is not just the breadth of remedies proposed, but the breadth of people involved in the discussion: surgeons, nurses, patent medicine quacks, public-health authorities, armchair chemists, all writing the *Times* and the *Globe* (or buying classified advertising there) with news of the dependable cure they had concocted. (Johnson 2006, 45)

As today, medical minds of that time were not in possession of the "truth" but followed theories that they devised based on their research, and which they believed explained their observations most accurately. For example, the Philadelphia debates over yellow fever's cause and nature illustrated many of the general themes of such eighteenth-century discussions. Within the general frameworks of *miasma* and contagion, a specific "scientific" theory was proposed that electric fluids in the air were "invariably fatal", and the large number of lightning rods that imperceptibly draw off the electric fluid from the clouds put Philadelphia in peril (Hays 2009, 131).

Such theories, which completely relied on contemporary scientific speculations, coexisted with more "magical" beliefs, that the yellow fever was a divine visitation punishing the wicked as a judgment on the sins and errors of the new nation of the United States, or, echoing very old theories about plague, some believed that fear itself might cause the fever (ibid.).

In this sense, the reactions and attitudes toward contagious disease we are witnessing first-hand almost daily during the current COVID-19 pandemic do not differ in essence from their eighteenth-century counterparts. People all around the world have protested against protective measures preventing the spread of

COVID-19, such as quarantines, face-mask mandates, vaccination, etc., usually in the name of personal freedom. Similarly, for several centuries European city governments struggled to control contagious diseases in the face of similar objections from merchants, who saw quarantines as unacceptable interference with trade. However, in Philadelphia in 1793 the merchant community saw the doctrine of *miasma* as a greater threat to that of contagion, for with the former it might appear to the world that fever was "native" to Philadelphia, tainting all the city's products and inhabitants, and thus the state government switched to the contagion theory, and imposed a quarantine on incoming goods and people (ibid.). Believing the disease was spread by "bad air" or contagion thus had to do with the broader social context, and the same seems to be true in the case of COVID-19.

On the other hand, the current "belief" in "science" has taken us so far that any form of possibly justifiable doubt is immediately aligned with the most absurd conspiracy theories and addressed not as part of a valid or at least potentially legitimate debate, but as a heresy. Vaccination is a powerful tool in the fight against viral diseases, but as already noted its use requires a bigger leap of faith than just taking a medicine. It is natural that from the very beginning of the use of vaccination there have been mixed feelings about the procedure. The reason why many people accepted it in the past was probably due to their greater fear of disease. Such acceptance was never based purely on "rational" deliberation of the "scientific facts", not in the least because scientific facts are much less straightforward than scientific preachers would have us believe.

When the smallpox epidemics abated substantially after the end of the eighteenth century, adherents and adversaries of the vaccine quarrelled about whether this decrease was due to the influence of vaccination. The anti-vaccinationists maintained that a connection between vaccination and the declining number of smallpox deaths could not be proved, because vaccination statistics were unreliable. They instead ascribed the decrease in the number of smallpox deaths to improved hygiene conditions and better nutrition (Huerkamp 1985, 626).

Vaccination has doubtlessly accelerated the process of medicalizing the population. However, the introduction of vaccination by no means automatically resulted in greater credibility for medical professionals in the eyes of the population. Instead, it often had the opposite effect and reinforced distrust and scepticism of professional medicine. The manifold forms of resistance that have been documented provide ample evidence of this, especially where vaccination was enforced by law (ibid., 631). And today, when with the help of vaccination we have lost much of the fear of deadly epidemics, anti-vaccination attitudes seem to be on the rise.

Concerning disenchantment and (re)enchantment, modern societies are an array of opposing tendencies, themes and forces (Jenkins 2000, 13). We tend to believe that our "modern" and disenchanted world is separated from the "premodern" experience in which the belief in magic was replaced by the belief in science. While neither "magic" nor "science" are completely straightforward ideas, it is also hard to draw a simple picture of how the human mind operates following one or the other.

As Jenkins (2000, 17) claims, such scepticism is certainly part of a wider phenomenon related to our understanding of the medium- to long-term consequences of the human impact on the environment and increasing disquiet about the damage that we have done.

> Similarly, in medicine, triumphal upward progress, epitomized by antibiotics, vaccines, and advances in public health, is beginning to look increasingly fragile and uncertain as bacteria acquire resistance, viruses mutate, hospitals become dangerous, infective places again, and new human diseases appear. Apropos healing, the Western scientific model is faced with competitors—such as acupuncture or homeopathy, for example—which, although they may be rooted in radically different cosmologies, are widely believed to "work". (ibid.)

That puts us in a situation where it seems that a unified epistemological and explanatory framework for understanding the natural world which gradually gathered authority after the Enlightenment is no longer assured, and thus the "objective" knowledge of Western science is becoming increasingly understood as contingent rather than a set of permanent verities (ibid.). As Nakayama (1984, 38) writes, science has long been identified with the quest for objective truth and meeting objective standards is, to be sure, an effective means of securing support for one's theories. Yet throughout the history of science such "objective standards" have changed time and again. On the other hand, as Jenkins points out, there is little evidence for a decline in beliefs in magic, though superficially this might seem to be the case:

> Most of us, for example, no longer seek the curing powers of a wise-woman or a cunning-man if we are ill. We go to our doctor. Or, at least, *most of us* go to our doctor *first*: the certainties of scientific medicine are routinely challenged by everyday explanatory frameworks such as fate or luck (institutionalized in astrology and the like), by increasing resort to the alternative treatments which are colonizing some of the spaces previously occupied by "conventional" medicine, or by scepticism and refusal deriving from a variety of sources. (Jenkins 2000, 18)

Ever-expanding knowledge is no longer in itself believed to be enough. The world may actually be becoming somewhat more mysterious rather than less. This should not necessarily be understood as an erosion of the authority of science, but rather as a potential shift in its centre of gravity towards greater epistemological pluralism (ibid., 17). While rationalist science has, in some respects, and for the moment, triumphed, and secularization has been one of the dominant themes in modern societies over the last two centuries, the decline of magic—whether traditional or more recent—is less easy to demonstrate (ibid., 28).

As Magner (2005, 156) reminds us, many aspects of the origin, impact, and present and future threat of modern epidemics, such as AIDS or COVID-19, are still unclear, just as there are many uncertainties about the historical meaning of leprosy and the plague. However, it is not unreasonable to hope that scientific knowledge concerning pathology and epidemiology, as well as historical research illuminating the social context in which particular diseases loomed so large, will eventually allow us to ask more meaningful questions about the ways in which people assess and respond to the threat of catastrophic disease (ibid.).

By looking into the intellectual currents within the field of medicine, specifically in eighteenth-century Japan, and comparing these to those in the West, I have tried to challenge the narrative of "modernity" as a sort of uniquely Western achievement defined by "disenchantment", "rationalism" and "science". Some scholars have tried to explore the problem of why the "scientific revolution" occurred in Europe in the seventeenth century, rather than in China or Islamic areas, which reached a sophisticated level in science and technology centuries earlier. Whether there was such thing as a European scientific revolution or not, interest in astrology, alchemy, magic, religion, and related theories persisted alongside scientific breakthroughs. In that sense, I would argue against the idea that a "scientific revolution" is a valid metaphor for the transition from a "premodern" to a "modern" worldview, in which science is at the very core of life and thought (ibid., 200) as the traditional narrative would have it.

What should probably be mentioned at the end of this paper is that the application of this new mode of thought to anatomy, physiology, and medical education would have been impossible without the work of the humanist scholars in Europe as well as Asia. We have seen how Confucian intellectuals, such as Asada Gōryū, Yamawaki Tōyō or Sugita Genpaku, rooted their ideas in the ancient Confucian learning. The greatest breakthrough in anatomy in Europe happened of course with Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), who in 1543 transformed Western concepts of the structure of the human body by publishing his great treatise, *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (*De humani corporis fabrica*), which is considered the first anatomical treatise based on direct observation of the human body, and is still regarded as a milestone in the history of anatomy (Magner 2005, 206). Vesalius, too, was heir to the humanist medical tradition that had rediscovered the original writings of Hippocrates and Galen. Indeed, he was a member of the first generation of scholars to enjoy access to the complete works of Galen.

"Science" today seems to be increasingly separated from the "humanities" and increasingly dedicated to utilitarian technological advancement. However, it was within the humanist framework that the scientific mode of thought developed in Europe as well as in Asia, and such an interplay of epistemological shifts and philosophical contexts seems more productive in understanding our history of knowledge than relying on simple categories such as "magic", "science", "tradition" or "modernity".

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The Relationless Japanese Society and the Practices of Belonging during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The aging of the population, lonely deaths (*kadokushi*), single-member households, and weak local bonds have been given as signs that Japan is now a "relationless society", or *muen shakai*. The term *muen shakai* has been used by the media to describe a society in which social isolation is intensified because of the lack of connection between immediate family members, more distant relatives, and local community. On the other hand, some sociological and religious studies on Japanese society have shown that it is precisely this social isolation that awakens the need for networking, and even excessive networking. This article studies what types of social relations became highlighted under the new conditions of recommended social isolation due to COVID-19. The Japanese government did not explicitly forbid and sanction socializing, leaving the responsibility and duty for common health to individuals as well as members of groups. It seems that the way in which Japanese society has fought COVID-19 largely depends on existing interpersonal ties and belonging to certain groups and communities. I look at sociocultural factors in social relations in Japan, to examine whether the ties and belonging to groups and communities, which has been more to the fore during COVID-19, is something new in the society or existed preceding the pandemic.

Keywords: Japanese society, COVID-19, social isolation, social identity, practices of belonging, *muen shakai*, relationless society, sociocultural factors

Japonska družba brez odnosov in prakse pripadanja med pandemijo COVID-19

Izvleček

Staranje prebivalstva, osamljene smrti, enočlanska gospodinjstva in šibke lokalne vezi nakazujejo, da je Japonska postala »družba brez odnosov« ali *muen shakai*. Izraz *muen shakai* mediji uporabljajo za opis družbe, v kateri je družbena izolacija še večja zaradi pomanjkanja odnosov med ožjimi družinskimi člani, bolj oddaljenimi sorodniki in lokalno skupnostjo. Po drugi strani pa so nekatere sociološke in religiozne študije japonske družbe pokazale, da prav ta družbena izolacija vzbuja potrebo po povezovanju in celo pretiranem

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povezovanju. Ta članek preučuje, katere vrste družbenih odnosov so postale poudarjene v novih razmerah priporočene družbene izolacije zaradi širjenja COVID-19. Japonska vlada druženja ni izrecno prepovedala in sankcionirala, temveč je odgovornost in dolžnost za zdravje prepustila posameznikom kot članom skupin oziroma skupnosti. Zdi se, da je način, kako se je japonska družba borila proti COVID-19, v veliki meri odvisen od obstoječih medosebnih vezi ter pripadnosti določenim skupnostim. V članku preverjam kulturne dejavnike v družbenih odnosih na Japonskem, da bi ugotovila, ali so vezi in pripadnost skupinam in skupnostim, ki so prišle v ospredje med COVID-19, v družbi nekaj novega ali so obstajale že pred pandemijo.

Ključne besede: japonska družba, COVID-19, socialna izolacija, družbena identiteta, prakse pripadanja, *muen shakai*, družba brez odnosov, sociokulturni dejavniki

Introduction

Since 2010, Japan has been described as relationless society or *muen shakai;* I aim to show in this paper that this may be a misconception. By looking at the COVID-19 responses, I argue that Japanese society is not relationless, but rather that social ties exist in Japan and did not just materialize because of the pandemic. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2020, both scholars' and public interest in social ties increased partly because such connections seemed to have had a significant impact on the ways different societies responded to the pandemic. Social connections were deemed necessary to foster the sense of belonging in the time of social isolation. One psychological study by American, Australian, and European researchers that focused on Western perspectives found that to increase feelings of belonginess and connectedness there was a need for a social identity approach during the COVID-19 crisis (Jetten et al. 2020). But this interpretation may not be applicable to the Japanese context. I aim to add to this research based on the existing ties and group relations, as observed in Japanese society. I argue that *muen shakai* is not an appropriate label in this context.

Many studies in the so-called "Western" societies identified social ties as negative, claiming societies need to start thinking in terms of "we" terms to fight the pandemic. In the newest integrated analysis based on experiences with COVID-19, psychologists discovered that it is necessary to foster feelings of belonging to others in times of crisis and self-isolation (Jetten et al. 2020). The authors further claimed that whether we survive self-isolation without serious health consequences or not does not depend as much on social contact and its frequency, but rather on the feeling of being connected to others (for example, mutual singing during isolation for community preservation) (ibid.). Thus the fight against COVID-19 leans on the feelings of connectedness and establishing mutual identities (ibid.).

Examining Australian, European and American societies researchers found that this is not an easy task, since such societies historically depict such groups and group connections as being "toxic" (Le Bon in Jetten et al. 2020, 92). However, if we wish to protect people from the toxic consequences of isolation, we must point their focus to the currently overlooked significance of group connection. The influence for a negative understanding of group connection stems from arguments of writers such as Gustave Le Bon, who claimed that we lose our own "self" in crowds (Jetten et al. 2020, 92). Since the individual's "self" is seen as the only valid source of standards that guide our behaviour, the loss of "self" means the loss of every source of standards (Le Bon in Jetten et al. 2020). This view has been challenged by Henri Tajfel, who claimed that we need others as part of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Tajfel defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership" (Tajfel 1978). By contrast, personal identity was defined as a person's sense of their individuality (e.g., their idiosyncratic abilities and tastes; Turner 1982). Jetten et al. (2020, 93) write that it is precisely in a crowd or a group that the radical consequences of social identity are shown. One does not lose his/her identity with the so-called model of the social identity of group functioning, but rather only moves from personal identity to social identity based on the change of environment (ibid.; Reicher 1984; 1987). Thus, we do not lose standards, as the foundations of our behaviour just transfer from personal standards to collective norms, values, and beliefs. A very clear example of such a transfer can be seen at the moment that a train breaks down (Jetten et al. 2020, 94). In the beginning, passengers are individuals that feel no connection to other passengers; however, when the train breaks down these individuals begin talking to each other, defending the rights of passengers, criticizing the railroad company, and trading food and drink (ibid.). Such feelings of collective values and the solidarity connected to it can be born in different circumstances, coincidentally or with intent—for example, when visiting holy places on holidays (Delakorda Kawashima 2016).

New psychology research results have shown that it is beneficial to view behavioural differences not as "characteristics of individuals", but rather as differences between the cultural systems they inhabit (Kitayama et al. 2009). Researchers explain that a cultural system can motivate individuals to show more or less individual *versus* collective behaviour, or independence/co-dependence, with individuals expressing this in different ways and to a different extent (ibid.). For example, we cannot say that Americans are characteristically independent and individualistic, while Japanese are dependent and group oriented. We can, however, observe what type of pro-social or collectively oriented functions are encouraged by different agents in these cultures or societies (and what response to that encouragement can be seen in individuals). These observations are interesting if we compare them to frequent perceptions of an individual's (non)religiousness as a characteristic of the culture to which an individual is subjected to. A strong *awareness* of belonging to a group can intensify individual's group membership (Staicov 2020) even if that *awareness* comes from the outside perceptions and claims.

In this article, I examine the literature on sociocultural factors in interpersonal relations, such as psychological, cultural, and spiritual perceptions of ties, to describe the current state of interpersonal bonds in Japanese society. Drawing on sociologists' and psychologists' reviews of what happened in societies in Australia, America, and Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic, I will look at interpersonal bonds that were showcased due to crisis response in the case of Japan. I first summarize some of the dominant findings of current global discussions on the COVID-19 pandemic and the significance of interpersonal ties and sense of belonging to others or society as a whole. Then, analysing the sociology, psychology and religious studies approaches, I aim to shed light on how researchers explain the state and significance of interpersonal ties and relations in contemporary Japanese society, and what historical religious-ethical foundations they ascribe to them.

The results of the analysis will provide researchers of social identity and relations with an insight into an alternative way people can perceive and affirm their connection to others. Based on the example of Japanese society, I point to the necessity of interdisciplinary research on social relations to better grasp the complexity of sociocultural impact factors on relationships, such as collective values, and spiritual understanding of ties.

Background: The "Boost" Response (Non-Mandatory) Strategy in Japan

A comparative analysis of the joint role that the institutional and cultural contexts have with regard to the development of state policy has shown that there is no common strategy against the spread of COVID-19 that would be appropriate for all countries (Yan et al. 2020). The Japanese government first released the "Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control" on 25th February 2020. These policies were revised four times since their release, especially after a state of emergency was declared in six prefectures (Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Osaka, Hyogo and Fukuoka) on 7th April 2020. Although Japan has a unitary government system, subnational governments have gained much autonomy in the process of political development (Jacobs 2003). Japan did not impose any mandatory measures, partly because the central government does not have the legal means to sanction citizens or force them into lockdown for breaking regulations. Even after the state of emergency was expanded to all 47 prefectures on 16th April 2020, the Japanese government did not impose mandatory measures, such as the lockdowns implemented in other countries. Moreover, the emergency state was more of a symbolic gesture than a political action that would actually include the transfer of additional authority to local governments. For example, local policy interventions that directed the behaviour of individuals in Tokyo and in Hokkaido were issued before the recommendations of the national government during the state of emergency.

The basic response against COVID-19 in Japan includes four strategies: early detection, intensive care, securing medical services and the behavioural adjustments of its citizens. The Japanese government released guidelines on the "Three Cs" (closed spaces, crowds, close contacts) to provide the public with vital information on how to avoid infection, and guide or educate the public during the pandemic (Hayasaki 2020; Shaw et al. 2020). The risk of infecting groups is especially high when the "Three Cs" overlap. Therefore, governments in Japan recommended avoiding the "Three Cs" to the public, in order to minimize contact between people.

A proportionately less strict response designated to Japan is supposedly to a large degree the consequence of a decentralized regime and a tight cultural orientation (Shaw et al. 2020). In the context of a so-called "tight culture", citizens are assumed to be more prepared to follow government measures (Gaenslen 1986; Gelfand 2012) because they emphasize solidarity and rules (Poole 2019) and also take others into consideration. Gelfald et al. (2011) have shown that the looseness/tightness of a cultural orientation can influence an individual's consideration of social norms and influences the perception of responsibility of a citizen with regard to government interaction. Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan are supposedly associated by a tight culture due to their Confucian heritage. Through societal compliance with government measures such as containment and closure, these countries contained COVID-19, while elsewhere where a loose culture prevails, individuals show less tolerance for having their behaviour directed and are more inclined to self-responsibility and self-regulation (Gelfand 2012; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Social Identity and Solidarity

In American, Australian, and European societies, Jetten et al. (2020) argued for the need to sweep away anti-collectivism and rationality, understood as the "enlightened pursuit of individual self-interest" (ibid., 15), in the context of COVID-19.

The pandemic is said to have revealed the significance of belonging to a community for health during time in social isolation. For this reason, Jetten et al. (2020) argue in favour of using the social identity approach to examine COVID-19 responses, in other words to shift the emphasis from "me" to "we". This section discusses Western conceptualisations of social identity and solidarity, as these are often used to discuss this in the Japanese context. Because the individual/social identity may be inseparable in a society where individuals perceive themselves as connected and even inseparable from the group, concepts developed in the Japanese context are introduced, as these were relevant during the COVID-19 response: social ties *en* (including their opposite *muen*), the relational self *kanjin*, interpersonal relationships as religion, and practices of belonging.

Pro-Social Behaviour and Solidarity in a Crisis

It has been shown that certain individual characteristics, such as a personal sense of justice and social values, or demographic characteristics such as gender, age or income, are connected to a high tendency for pro-social behaviour (Zagefka and James 2015). However, as shown with spontaneous acts of solidarity (or sometimes hatred) in times of crises, we cannot simply explain behaviour based on relatively stable individual differences. It is necessary to explain it on a social level. Research has shown that people are seemingly more inclined to help and empathize with individuals considered as members of the same group than those outside of it. Thus, we may only display solidarity towards those with whom we share a social identity (Yzerbyt and Phalet 2020).

Viewed historically, during a crisis the most resilient communities are usually those with already strong and dense social networks and norms of trust and reciprocity. Such networks allow for a better readiness to cope with misfortune (Reininger et al. 2013), greater solidarity during catastrophes (Aldrich 2017) and better recovery after them (Aldrich 2012). However, communal and group solidarity can also develop spontaneously in the direct context of a crisis (ibid., 104). Sustaining this spontaneous solidarity long after the crisis has ended is of fundamental importance when facing long-term problems, such as the loss of social networks and livelihoods (Schonfeld and Demaria 2015). As a response to the numerous problems resulting from crises, groups and solidarity are said to be the most important—for practical reasons, as well as for the preservation of the spiritual and physical prosperity of the community (Jetten et al. 2020).

COVID-19: A Threat to Social Identity and the Groups of Belonging

When people act in terms of their social identity, they interact with others based on an identity that they either share (as "us" ingroup members) or do not share (as "us" ingroup members versus "them" outgroup members) (Jetten et al. 2020). Times of crises influence how we draw lines between ourselves and others, between outsiders and friends, enemies and allies, foreigners and co-citizens. During COVID-19, the feeling of connection to a group and the idea of oneself as a member of a group came to the forefront (Jetten et al. 2020, 60), and the various communities to which we belong (family, local community, state) were revealed. Different formulations of danger represented by COVID-19 seem to have consequences for a group. There is an increasing need to understand what it means to be a member of such groups and how group members are expected to behave. Questions that may arise are: What would be the best response of the community?, How do I best take care of the family?, What is the responsibility of teachers in given circumstances?, What is expected of the advocates for minorities? During the pandemic, the danger was often portrayed as not to stemming from the disease itself but by those outside of our groups (other countries or communities). Some politicians claimed that the best response could be to emphasize our mutual humanity in the fight against an external enemy, the virus, but the boundaries between different groups and between us and them remained strong.

We can Only Be "Together Apart" by Strengthening Community and Belonging

In psychological sciences, where the negative influences of social isolation on an individual's health are well known (see, for example, the anthropology of loneliness), researchers have tried to answer the question of how not to get sick in times of self-isolation, an issue facing many individuals all around the world. In the book *Together Apart*, Jetten et al. (2020) question why social isolation can be so detrimental for health and come to the realization that people are social beings in essence, drawing their self-value from their membership in a group. Identifying with a group justifies social aid and gives us a common goal and control, which are of critical significance for our health (ibid.). Belonging to a group and social activities should not be treated as "additional possibilities" that an individual chooses among other activities (ibid., 76). Rather, groups are of vital importance for healthy psychological functioning, because they allow us to express our social identities (ibid.). The authors also stress that numerous recommendations on how to stay connected in the time of self-isolation and avoid sickness (such as emphasizing the need for personal or video contact instead of using a phone or messages, and encouragement of everyday contact) miss the point, since they do not focus on the main role of social identities—the subjective feeling of belonging to some larger collective.

Personal/Social Identity and Collectivist Cultural Values

The extent to which individuals will experience themselves as separated from others, or independent/co-dependent, is determined by culture. Psychology researchers Markus and Kitayama (1991) recognized several modes of independence or co-dependence, and found systematic differences among individuals living in North American societies and those inhabiting the East-Asian cultural environment. Modes of independence included (among many others) representations of oneself as separated from others, emphasis on one's own uniqueness, giving priority to personal goals above the goals of others, and self-expression. Modes of co-dependence included representations of oneself in relation to others and in accordance with others, the sacrifice of one's own goals for others, and self-control. A person with a co-dependent self-image actively looks for relations with others, is attentive to the needs of others and wants to preserve and develop relationships (Bakan 1996). Even though the research made it evident that such personal inclinations dominate (Markus and Kitayama 1991), Kitayama et al. (2009; 2010) later cautioned that independence and co-dependence should be understood not as characteristics of individuals, as inferred by the term "self-image", but rather as characteristics of a cultural context inhabited by individuals.

A more recent multinational study claimed that the theoretical contrast between "independence" and "co-dependence" reflects a wider tendency of Western popular and scientific thought that defines individuality and sociality/collectivity as two opposing poles. The authors further argued that this perception ignores research in many disciplines that has shown that individuality and sociality are necessary and correlative aspects of human functioning in any cultural system (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier 2002; Vignoles et al. 2016, 969; Guisinger and Blatt 1994; Kağitçibaşi 2005; Matsumoto 1999; Spiro 1993). Considering this mutual functioning of individuality and sociality, researchers focused on measuring how independent or co-dependent individuals are in Western and non-Western cultures, instead of asking them in what ways they are independent or co-dependent (Vignoles et al. 2016). Cultural systems can encourage individuals to think, feel or behave independently or co-dependently; however, it was stressed that individuals in the same system may adopt different ways of carrying out a comprehensive set of cultural tasks (Kitayama et al.

2009). Collectivist cultural values seemingly cultivate a co-dependent self-image. As examples of values that are in accordance with the co-dependent "self" and collectivist cultures, Markus and Kitayama (1991) contrast (among other cultural examples) the Chinese emphasis on the collective welfare of all people, which takes precedence over individual welfare, interpersonal connection and kindness, with the Hispanic emphasis on acceptance and sensitivity towards the opinions of others and interpersonal understanding (Marčič and Kobal Grum 2009). In Japan, where a collective orientation prevails, people supposedly value harmonious interpersonal relationships with others (ibid.). Japan has been described as a tight culture (Gaenslen 1986; Gelfand 2012), and as such is expected to show high levels of compliance with government measures, as previously mentioned (Yan et al. 2020). However, taking recommendations seriously may have more to do with awareness of interdependence and belonging to a group. How people responded to the new conditions under the COVID-19 restrictions in relation to collective practices and rituals, can tell us something about the reality of collective orientation and interpersonal ties.

The Relationless Japanese Society

Reviewing the many activities or rituals that stimulate one's belonging to a community (of one's age group, school class, team), and heated responses to their cancelation, reveals the significance they have for the society. The persistent significance of these collective rituals suggests that the pandemic showed that Japanese society is not disconnected. However, labelling Japan as a disconnected society is still prevalent in and outside of the country, usually with the claim that demographic, social, and economic issues have transformed Japan into a society without connections, a "relationless society" (Allison 2013) or *muen shakai* (無縁社会).

The term *muen* (無縁) (together with *kugai* 公界 and *raku* 楽) was used in documents of the Japanese medieval period to describe places outside of secular control, such as temples, shrines, markets and bridges. In its wider usage, it describes people without earthly ties (Amino 2007). The word *muen* originates from Buddhist texts and means "to not be tied" or "being independent" (e.g., without karmic attachments); *kugai* describes temples as living spaces of those who cut secular ties, and *raku* describes the ideal world (or paradise). In the medieval period, these terms signified freedom; however, they lost their positive meaning with the centralization of the country by the end of the 16th century (ibid., 1), and the modern Japanese Dictionary *Daijirin* (Matsumura 1988) dictionary provides very different meanings for them.

In modern times, the negative meaning of these terms is exemplified in by a 2010 NHK television documentary claiming that Japanese society had become *muen shakai* without connections (*Nihon Hōsō Kyokai* 2010). The main reason for introducing the term in 2010 was that 32,000 people had died a lonely death (*kodokushi*) in 2009 (Rowe 2011). Since then, the term *muen shakai* has become synonymous with new forms of social isolation. The media, editorial offices, academics, and newspapers have heavily criticized the Japan of the 21st century as being a society unable to take care of or even incapable of "recognizing" its deceased (ibid., 44). The evidence for the decline in social ties, writes Rowe, is the dilapidation of graves, the production, and maintenance of which was the responsibility of the wider family or familial ties within and between generations. Thus, if Japan were indeed a disconnected society, a pandemic would likely make the situation worse. However, the situation was not worse, which suggests there are still such bonds. However, what makes the bonds strong? To answer this question the current article looks into the spiritual foundations for "belief in dedicated bonds" between people, called *en* 縁.

Social Relations Based on "Belief in Dedicated Bonds" **en**

The pandemic showed that Japanese society is rather connected, as can be seen in people's compliance with the recommended, voluntary measures. In a disconnected society, recommendations made during the pandemic would not have functioned. That the recommendations functioned in Japan, can be explained because of already existing social ties. Social ties depend on how we see ourselves in relation to society, as discussed above. To claim that Japanese society has become a *muen* society means it was previously considered as connected by *en*. The opposing meaning of "untied" *muen* is "tied" *en*. The word *en* describes actual and mystical connections to another person in colloquial Japanese. To "have a bond" (縁がある *en ga aru*) means to have a tie or to be connected accidentally or by fate. To "tie a bond" (縁結び *en-musubi*) means to find a partner or get married. The "regional" *en* tie (地縁 *chien*) describes the connection to one's birthplace or village, while families are connected with "blood" ties (血縁 *ketsuen*). The Japanese Language Dictionary (Shōgakutosho, ed. 1986) lists 35 phrases that begin with *en*, which speaks to the significance of this concept in the Japanese language and culture. *En* is at the same time also the fundamental principle of the Buddhist doctrine of "dependent origination" (縁起 *engi*, skt. *Pratītyasamutpāda*), according to which, everything in the universe is physically and mentally connected to complex chains of causes and conditions or circumstances, and no single being exists independently (Boisvert 2004, 669–70).

The significance and usage of the concept of *en* in Japanese culture explains how individuals see themselves in relation to society. In the doctrines and cultural meanings of *en*, the identity of an individual is incorporated into a web of ties and connections. In other words, writes Rowe (2011, 46), the meaning of *en* denies the identity of the individual. *En* ties are multilayered; they are positive because they connect us to everyone and everything, but also negative because they attach us to others and limit our freedom. Thus, *en* is a matter of the living while its opposite pole or the absence of ties *muen* mainly concerns the dead who are abandoned by their heirs (無縁仏 *muenbotoke*). A person cannot be met by a worse fate than to become a *muenbotoke* or so-called "hungry spirit" (餓鬼 *gaki*). These supposedly travel the world as prosecuted and terrifying ghosts that cannot find peace and rebirth in the Buddhist Pure Land. Rowe finds that people in today's Japan still fear becoming *muenbotoke* and are even more afraid that they might cause a similar fate to their own ancestors (ibid.).

The *en* concept was implemented into the system of interpersonal relations as a new paradigm of research on "Japanese human relations" (Ishii 1998) and Ishii even proposed a so-called "Buddhist *en* perception of the world" and "*en* ethics". The belief in the existence of a dedicated bond *en* (the so-called *en* perception of the world) was widespread in Japan of the time (ibid., 112). On the basis of this belief, people shape, define and preserve interpersonal relationships, Ishii wrote, and proposed a relational examination of ties in Japan *versus* the analytical examination based on individualized relationships in Western societies. This approach was his answer to the blind acceptance of the American/Euro-centrist research paradigms adopted by many Japanese sociologists, psychologists, and cultural anthropologists of the time, whose scientific approaches leaned on Western values of individualism. Ishii criticized the proponents of individualism, who claimed that the relations based on independent individuals are more progressive than those of collectivistically oriented individuals (ibid., 109). Besides Ishii, Hamaguchi also tried to connect *en* and human relations into a system. He introduced the term "between people" or the "contextual person" *kanjin* 間人, and proposed that interpersonal relations in Japan should be studied with the concept of *en* and "interpersonal in-betweenness" (Hamaguchi 1985). Ishii was not the only one who cautioned against the trend among researchers of the time to blindly apply the values of individualism. The well-known psychologist Rosenberger (1992, 2) critiqued ethnocentric views of interpersonal relations that idealize democracy with regard to seeing decision making entrusted to rational individuals in Western societies, while criticizing how non-Western societies control cohesion through collectiveness and relations based on superstition. Rosenberger promoted ethnorelativism in research into interpersonal relations, and argued that Western researchers need to understand that realizing oneself is achieved through connection with others. She also warned of the difference in understanding interpersonal relations. In Western views of relations, it is often expected that they are purposely controlled and manipulated to achieve personal goals. This was supposedly foreign to the Japanese, who consider relationships as freely given and naturally evolving. Similar conclusions were shown by Prunty, Klopf and Ishii (1990) in their comparative study of the practice of argumentation as an element in interpersonal relations. They write that argumentation is foreign to the Japanese, they are not used to arguing and believe it can destroy the balance between the participants in the conversation. Americans, on the other hand, because of their positive view of argumentation, do not destroy relations with it, even if relations are temporarily shaken (ibid. 1990, 78). The research discussed above shows the stubborn tendency of painting a simplistic, black-or-white picture of Western and non-Western, Japanese and American behavioural characteristics. Yet, the evidence from Japan still shows the tendency among people to maintain balance and accord in interpersonal relations and taking other peoples' possibly different opinions into consideration, although this may be done by keeping one's own opinion to oneself. Such attitudes to interpersonal relationships and ties may be rooted in the belief in a mystical *en* connection.

Individuals in Relation to Others, Loneliness, and Suicide

Because in Japan social relations are strongly linked to rituals (e.g., graduation ceremonies, school trips, and afterschool activities) to maintain a sense of commitment and belonging, the cancelation of these rituals intensified social isolation, which could partly be seen in an increase in suicides. Considering that the suicide rate had been decreasing in the last ten years, one may argue that the society had even been improving social connections (Tanaka and Okamoto 2021), and losing these during the pandemic might have led to the rise in suicides.

How individuals experience themselves in relation to others, the community and society in general, can be seen as a spectrum, one extreme of which is the opposite of psychological health, pushing individuals towards suicide—i.e., fear of social abandonment. From psychological and anthropological research, we know that the fear of social abandonment and that nobody will need us anymore are the main reasons for suicide in Japanese society (Ozawa-de Silva and Parsons 2020). At the same time, research has shown that the social usefulness of an individual is the main precondition for a positive self-image, welfare, and a positive attitude towards life in many Japanese individuals (ibid.). Studies on suicide in Japan speak of the necessity of belonging and mutual recognition. However, to what degree are the need for belonging and mutual recognition universal? How was the Internet used to sustain the sense of belonging in Japan?

Researchers identify a lack of relations and feeling of not being useful as the main reasons for loneliness, which has been recognized as one of the major challenges facing public health today (Ozawa-de Silva and Parsons 2020). The authors try to look beyond the aspect of public health and handle loneliness as a social phenomenon that affects everyone. They write that feelings of loneliness, rejection, and social abandonment are all part of the human experience, and there is even talk of an epidemic of loneliness in recent times. Loneliness is not a sickness but a natural state that speaks of the fact that humans are social beings. With the COVID-19 pandemic, our need for connection was brought into focus. If we neglected relations and experienced loneliness before the pandemic, mandatory isolation reminded us of the significance of social connection and forced us to develop ties through the Internet. Online, many experienced more connection to others with whom they did not have a lot of interactions in everyday life before the pandemic. Evolutionary psychology provides strong evidence that the reasons for the common appearance of loneliness in our lives are universal, since they stem from the basic need for belonging and mutual recognition (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008; de Waal 2010; Rochat 2009; Ozawa-de Silva 2020). To sustain a sense of belonging and soften the effect of self-isolation, various institutions in Japan used the Internet to maintain established collective rituals. In some cases, e.g., schools, instead of completely cancelling rituals, teachers replaced the actual events with hybrid ones (see fig. 2). Such efforts show how important these rituals and related ties are in contemporary Japanese society.

Interpersonal Relations and the Practice of Belonging

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sense of belonging to communities was shown to work online, and those communities were not necessarily physical. From previous research on Japanese youth and the use of cell phones, we see that communities already existed in the networks of young people (Nakajima, Himeno and Yoshii 1999).

Here it is important to point out the sociological studies that note the peculiarities of contemporary interpersonal relations in Japan, because of the decline of traditional communities based on *en*. Doi (2014) claims that in today's society with weak traditional family "blood bonds" *ketsuen* and "regional bonds" *chien*, communities and organizations, such as schools and companies, lose their regulatory power over individuals. The young are not born into already existing human relations that provide social belonging, they must create their own relations and have to constantly maintain them by themselves (ibid.). Thus, young people strive to create and maintain bonds in new creative ways, and the Internet helps them expand their physical connections. Longing for strong interpersonal ties (Fujiwara 2019) and the desire for recognition forces young people into excessive networking. A group of sociologists used a longitudinal study and found that the factors that condition happiness and love had changed in the interpersonal relations of young Japanese people (Fujimura, Asano and Habuchi 2016). A well-known ethnographic study of young people and their use of cell phones in Japan found that they provide "a constant intimate community" with close friends and partners (Nakajima, Himeno and Yoshii 1999). Such communities are seemingly especially created by young people who have moved to cities and become independent, and thus no longer have strong ties to the community in their home regions. Connection with close groups is preserved through frequent meetings on the phone where they feel a 24-hour psychological connection (ibid., 90).

Connecting and forging ties via the Internet also existed before COVID-19, as the above research shows. The need to constantly connect over the Internet relates to the need for interpersonal relations and belonging. This does not imply that there is no need for physical connection, though. Social ties are expressed through physical presence, especially in Japan, where being present shows commitment, as seen, for example, in a person's posture. People forced into remote working to avoid the spread of COVID-19 stated that they liked to work at home, but that being present at the workplace is important. This tendency has been observed regardless of the culture, but it may be more pronounced in interdependent societies. In quantitative psychological research, a positive connection was found between emotional support and well-being in interdependent cultures, namely among Japanese and Filipinos (Uchida et al. 2008; Kitayama et al. 2010; Chang et al. 2016). Thus, taking these physical expressions away in Japan presented a significant issue, and during COVID-19 many employees kept coming to work in spite the formal possibility to stay at home. Therefore, rather than highlighting the increased need to connect as something that materialized due to COVID-19, research shows that this need was already there.

Practicing Belonging as Religion

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the social group-based human relationships, which according to Japanese scholars of religion *are* the religion in Japan. Even though Japan has been widely perceived as nonreligious, some researchers claim that religion in Japan has long been, in fact, a religion of interpersonal relationships. Fujiwara (2019, 147) shows that what she calls the "relationship turn" is a trend not only seen at non-religious holidays and rituals, but also in spiritual culture and institutionalized religion. This trend is evident as a sort of obsession in Japanese society with *tsunagari* つながり (relations, connectivity) and *shōnin* 承認 (recognition).

Human relationships are not only portrayed as religion in Japan. In recent research on British society, Day (2011) shows religion as being based on interpersonal relations grounded on "the belief in belonging" as pursued in groups such as the family, local community, friends, and co-workers (ibid., 181). This is another research that supports the claim of the universality of the need for belonging. While people in Japan today, particularly the youth, practice belonging in an intimate sphere, it was once religion as practices of belonging that regulated the public sphere (Fujiwara 2019). As an example Fujiwara gives Yanagawa's explanation of the Bon festivities for ancestors' souls, who stated that the religion of the Japanese is not a belief in a god or belonging to a religious institution, but the "religion of interpersonal relations" (*ningenkankei no shūkyō* 人間関係の宗教) (Yanagawa in Fujiwara 2019, 126).

However, we can say that such a religion is practised and preserved even today. Interpersonal ties and stressing the sense of belonging can be seen in multiple rituals maintained by groups not only in the intimate sphere, but in various aspects of social life in Japan, such as at school and the workplace, and in relation to sports, art, and leisure.

Based on personal communication of the author with students at Japanese schools and universities, such rituals are practiced in classrooms and afterschool activities (*bukatsu* 部活) from elementary to high school. They encourage integration and the solidarity of the group, for example through frequent usage of common greetings, the use of specific speech and intonation, mandatory following of the rules of the group, and the experience of belonging to a group as the highest goal. Such cases show that practices of belonging resembling religion have been sustained in the public sphere.

The belief of belonging to a group is also emphasized through expressions like the aforementioned "connection" *tsunagari*, "bond" *kizuna* 絆, "mutual recognition" *sōgō shōnin* 相互承認 and "affection or empathy" *dōkan* 共感. These expressions are also often the subject of academic and public discourses in Japan (Fujiwara 2019, 127) (fig. 1). For example, in Japanese public schools each class has a common goal that is meant to create a community for the class. Figure 1 shows a classroom with the class goal—the framed character 絆—placed above the blackboard.

Figure 1. A typical classroom in a Japanese public school with the character for "bond" *kizuna* (絆) framed on the left above the board. (Source: *Wikipedia*, open access, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Classroom2.jpg)

Conclusion: The Crises Revealing the Need for Social Rehabilitation

Some notable changes in the social structure of Japanese society, e.g., aging of the population and weakening of family and regional ties, have led to depicting it as disconnected, or *muen shakai.* Using the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study, this article argued against this assumption by examining the practices showing the persistent significance of social ties in Japan. Drawing on the recent research in the field of religious studies, the article calls these practices of belonging.

The re-establishment of ties, the so-called "relational turn" in Japan, emerged a decade ago in spiritual culture, non-religious rituals and holidays, and even in institutionalized religion, as shown by researchers in the field (Sakurai 2015) after the 2011 earthquake and *tsunami* catastrophe in the Tohoku area. So-called clinical religions provided help to the affected in Fukushima, mainly by actively listening to them. After the catastrophe, rather than seeking psychological or spiritual help, people needed care that included social recognition as well as self-recognition. The activities that included such care were seen as potentially re-building interpersonal relationships in communities that had fallen apart (ibid., 29). Even in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became evident that existing values of connection, collegiality, and belonging were activated within groups or communities. In Japan, the closing of schools due to COVID-19 almost coincided with the end of the school or academic year, which meant that students were robbed of the graduation ceremonies within their communities. To keep the ceremonies, the teachers modified them to comply with measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (fig. 2). This example shows that people are aware of the importance of such rituals and their significance for a sense of belonging.

Figure 2. "Robots replace students at Japan graduation ceremony amid COVID-19." (Source: *The Guardian*, April 8, 2020, open access)

The government strategy of fighting the spread of COVID-19 through the transfer of competencies and responsibilities to groups and individuals has been implemented in the active provision of instructions on behaviour through the media of the institutions and communities that individuals are part of. In many societies and communities around the world people followed their social roles and the "appropriate" behaviour connected to them (a parent functions as expected of parents; a teacher in accordance with the responsibilities of a teacher and the school), in Japan the emphasis could have been on fulfilling expectations as the members of the groups, workplaces, schools, etc. that people belong to.

To conclude, the article showed that labelling Japan as a disconnected muen society was too rushed, and we may now have an opportunity to move away from this label because the pandemic showed it does not accurately reflect the situation in Japanese society. The traditional ways of interpersonal connection have been replaced by new ways in new social contexts, and still maintain their significance for the people, as the responses due to cancelation of events that promote those ties revealed. We may thus speak of Japan not as *muen shakai,* but rather as "*en shakai*", a connected society.

Implications of the Study

Did this study show that Japan is collectivist and co-dependent society? What are the implications of its findings? In the overview of various aspects of the significance of social connectedness presented above, it was shown that the transition between personal and social identity, as well as different perceptions of the individual in relation to society, need to be taken into account in the design and analysis of research, as well as in the implementation of social arrangements in times of crisis.

Interest in research on interpersonal relations as fundamental for human spiritual, as well as physical well-being, and its significance for the meaning of life, has been present in different scientific disciplines for some time (Fleming and Baum 1986; Uchida et al. 2008; Kitayama et al. 2010; Chang et al. 2016). These psychological quantitative studies show that people in Asian cultures usually strive for connection, relationism and co-dependence that originates from the image of oneself not as an independent (separated) entity, but rather inherently connected to others (Berry et al. 1992, 94; Oyserman, Coon and Kemmelmeier 2002). The present study emphasized the role of cultural and social systems that influence individuals' responses, so individuals' characteristics should not be treated as inherently present. The research showed there is a universal need for belonging, although it is pursued in different ways, by different agents, in private and public spaces. A comparative study of social relations observed during the crisis could be particularly useful among cultures with more common denominators in sociocultural patterns (e.g. comparison with the relational self in the Chinese context, Rošker 2021).

Another area of interest is to study the meaning of the belief in *en* for interpersonal relations using a comparative study of cultures with a strong presence of this belief. Of course, one must also take into account the aforementioned argument that a culture can only encourage an individual to act, and how and to what degree they will respond and accept a culture depends on the individual (Kitayama et al. 2009). In newer research of cross-cultural psychology, it was shown that it is more reasonable to study interpersonal relations on the basis of the openness of individuals (self-disclosure), which depends on different levels of the "mobility of relations" within the same culture and between cultures rather than the dichotomy of independence and co-dependence (Schug, Yuki, and Maddux 2010). Moreover, psychology studies on the Japanese context for adolescent identity showed that "contemporary Japanese adolescents value individualistic collectivism, pursuing individuality within a collectivistic society" (Matsumoto 2002 cited in Sugimura 2020). However, the emerging individualism of younger people is not in tune with the wider society that is largely collectivist, in that it values the traditional homogeneity of the Japanese (Sugimura 2020).

Based on a multidisciplinary approach to social relations, this study exposed the weaknesses of claims for *muen shakai* based on assumptions from particular disciplines that saw the evidence for their claim in the fall of traditional bonds, graves, and public rituals, and overuse of the Internet. The case study of Japan contributes to the research on social relations and ties by suggesting approaching them as practices of belonging, which are maintained through physical presence/attitude and expanded via the Internet within various communities of belonging. It is in the area of these rituals where collective values and interdependence kept being nourished. The significance of the social ties as practices of belonging in the context of Japanese society suggests that in sociological and psychological research, the individual's mental health issues caused by crises must be observed and considered in relation to the individual's need for belonging.

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Individual Rights vs. Common Good? A Case Study on Japanese Self-Restraint (*jishuku*) and COVID-19

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have been facing one of the most severe challenges of our modern era. As the world experiences ever-greater globalization, a process of assimilation has accelerated in numerous spheres such as cultural, educational, economic, etc., but it is notable that the measures taken by countries to combat the impact of COVID-19 vary significantly. A considerable number of countries have implemented lockdown strategies backed by new laws, whereas some others have been relying on the virtues of good citizenship in order to not depend on their legal systems. Within Asia there are also contrasting approaches; for instance, China and Korea responded with a quick and effective tracking method, while Japan depended on a self-restraint strategy.

The Japanese and Swedish approaches to COVID-19 are unique and ambiguous, because they are based on voluntary self-restraint. There is no legal or political mechanism to control people's behaviours. Still, in rough terms these methods seem to have been working, at least until now. In order to understand the puzzling practice of self-restraint, this research explores the origin and cultural background of self-restraint in Japan descriptively and evaluates its positive and negative consequences. Rather than utilizing the philosophy of communitarianism as the theoretical base, it examines the deep relationship between Japan and the surrounding environment, and the use of self-restraint in various events, including those related to COVID-19. Moreover, this study adds to the debate on seeking the right balance between the communitarian common good that is especially emphasized in the East, and an individual's rights and freedom that are highlighted in the West.

Keywords: COVID-19, Japan, self-restraint, communitarianism, disaster culture

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Individualna pravica proti skupnemu dobremu? Študija o japonskem samoomejevanju (*jishuku*) in COVID-19

Izvleček

Od izbruha COVID-19 se soočamo z enim najhujših izzivov sodobne dobe. Kljub temu da svet doživlja vse večjo globalizacijo in se je proces asimilacije pospešil na številnih področjih, kot so kulturno, izobraževalno in gospodarsko, je mogoče opaziti, da se ukrepi držav za boj proti vplivu COVID-19 med seboj znatno razlikujejo. Veliko držav je uveljavilo strategije zaprtja, podprte z novimi zakoni, medtem ko so se nekatere, da ne bi bile odvisne od svojih pravnih sistemov, sklicevale na vrline dobrega državljanstva. V Aziji obstajajo tudi nasprotujoči si pristopi; na primer Kitajska in Koreja sta se odzvali s hitro in učinkovito metodo sledenja, Japonska pa je bila odvisna od strategije samoomejevanja.

Japonski in švedski pristop h COVID-19 sta edinstvena in dvoumna, saj temeljita na prostovoljnem samoomejevanju. Ne vsebujeta pravnega ali političnega mehanizma za nadzorovanje vedenja ljudi. Kljub temu so te metode grobo rečeno vsaj do sedaj dobro delovale. Da bi razumeli zapleteno prakso samoomejevanja, pričujoča študija proučuje izvor in kulturno ozadje samoomejevanja na Japonskem ter ocenjuje njegove pozitivne in negativne učinke. Namesto da bi kot teoretsko podlago postavila filozofijo komunitarizma, preučuje globlji odnos med Japonsko in obkrožujočim okoljem ter uporabo samoomejevanja pri različnih dogodkih, vključno s tistimi, povezanimi s COVID-19. Poleg tega študija prispeva k razpravi o iskanju pravega ravnovesja med skupnim dobrim komunitarizma, ki je še posebej poudarjen na Vzhodu, ter pravicami in svoboščinami posameznika, ki so poudarjene na Zahodu.

Ključne besede: COVID-19, Japonska, samoomejevanje, komunitarizem, kultura nesreč

Introduction

Since the arrival of COVID-19 we have been living in extraordinary challenging times full of uncertainty, as if the pandemic is testing our capacity and intelligence to cope with the hardships. Confronting this new disaster, determined efforts have been made by all humanity at every setting from the micro or personal level to the governmental macro level. Our world in the 21st century is largely driven by globalized individualism and neo-liberalism, and a sort of assimilation of certain practices in areas as diverse as politics, economy, education, lifestyles and so forth. However, when it comes to the measures taken by governments against the COVID-19 pandemic, they vary in accordance with relevant background, experiences and cultures. For instance, in China or Italy, where the first cases were found, they immediately exercised strict movement restrictions. Broadly speaking, such measures can be split into two categories: forced lockdown and self-restraint

(Katafuchi, Kurita, and Managi 2020, 2). Generally, the great majority of countries in the Western tradition have been taking the policy of lockdowns, enabled and justified by legal pressures. In contrast, some other countries chose a self-restraint policy relying on the civic virtues of all working together for the common good. Japan is one of these countries, as it seems that under the social norm of self-restraint (*jishuku* 自粛), this country has trusted the voluntary decisions of its citizens to refrain from any actions that may raise the danger of infection spreading, such as going out on the streets or meeting with friends and family members. However, this particular social behaviour of self-restraint did not appear all of sudden at this serious moment. In fact, Japan has overcome numerous crises and disasters based on the use of self-restraint. The communitarian-oriented culture that developed along with the long history of Japan has contributed to the establishment of such social conduct.

Despite some critical comments and observations, the Japanese approach of self-restraint seems to be working so far, and there have already been a few studies on the effectiveness of this strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the roots and cultural background of self-restraint have not been examined sufficiently. As such, this study aims to explore the origin, history, cultural background and surrounding key thoughts around the idea of self-restraint in Japan in a descriptive and interdisciplinary way. To start, we use the philosophy of communitarianism as a theoretical framework and observe the Western and Asian approaches within this concept. Then, we carefully examine the Japanese form of communitarianism, which is also called groupism, and the practice of self-restraint in relation to natural disasters. Finally, we study the present Japanese situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of self-restraint to evaluate the positive and negative consequences this measure brings to Japanese society. At the same time, these observations leave us some room to further explore the classic, but still appreciated, debate covering the dichotomy of individualism on one side and communitarianism on the other. Although this work does not intend to give a concrete answer to this long-lasting question, it attempts to encourage the discussion once again at this very moment when we need to recognize the importance of both the pursuit of the common good and the protection of one's individual freedom.

Communitarianism

The question of how to build a good community where diverse individuals meet and interact has been discussed throughout history. The nature of human relationships, the balance of individual rights and the welfare of the affiliated community is a historical, but at the same time contemporary, debate. In fact, in ancient Greece where democracy was born, the philosophy of freedom and equality was promoted, yet simultaneously a mechanism to restrain the egoism of members and raise the awareness of community was also emphasized (Chiba 2000, 5–18; Dahl 1989, 18). In fact, the citizens of Athens at the time were expected to be subordinated to the common good before enjoyment of their own interests (Panagopoulos 2015, 36). Along with painful battles and revolutions, both French-European and English-American democratic models promote freedom and encourage individualism, but do not necessary disregard the centrality of participation in the wider community (Chiba 2000; Tocqueville 2003; Huntington 1993). Still, the shift to liberalism and accompanying movements toward more rights in the contemporary world are undeniable, not only in the West but also in the Eastern sphere. In fact, Fukuyama (2004, 18) comments that politics in the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as a reaction to the challenges provoked by liberal ideas.

The idea of communitarianism emerged to as an alternative against the hegemony of extreme liberalism that demands more and more rights and liberty in Western societies (Fox 1997, 563). To oppose to modern liberalism, as represented by the famous book *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls (1971), contemporary communitarianism puts the focus on the importance of each person's responsibility before joining the community, or as Delanty (2003, 73) puts it, the move "from contract to community". This does not imply the elimination of a rights-based approach. Rather it is considered as a descendant of Tocqueville's school, one that brings the factors of groups, associations and communities into the theory of democracy (Smith and Grønbjerg 2006, 230). Thus, the basic attitude of the Western communitarians emphasizes some degree of (but not total) sacrifice of individual rights and freedom to achieve better functioning and welfare of the community, since humans cannot escape from the practices of socialization (Bell 1993, 9). In addition, in order to achieve this social order, the communitarians rely on governmental intervention to promote active participation by citizens in community matters (Smith and Grønbjerg 2006, 230). Communal ties are thus created and strengthened in three ways: 1) the reciprocal approval of legitimate authority, 2) by the collective participation in community actions, and 3) by the combination of both of these two. Finally, these processes make it possible to establish the concept of the common good as a social norm (Fox 1997, 569). Nevertheless, there is no judicial guarantee that all societies will educate their citizens morally enough to maintain the communitarian system, since no concrete or explicit contract has been made.

Now we turn to the variety of visions that contemporary communitarianism encompasses. According to Delanty's categorizations (2003, 74), there are four basic lines: liberal communitarianism, radical pluralism, civic republicanism (civic communitarianism) and governmental communitarianism. First, liberal communitarianism represents the original ideas that emerged in opposition to Rawls' liberalism. Researchers such as Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor challenge Rawls' argument from philosophical points of view and develop their idea of community to realize the democratic political unities. For instance, Sandel claims that the communitarian idea is indispensable to ensure liberty in a community. That is, if we want freedom, first, we need a community in which to exercise it, and second, we need a sense of belonging to create a community (Sandel 1996, 6). Radical pluralism positions itself opposite to liberal patriotism, and tries to promote the rights of minority groups, and this approach can be seen in feminist theory. Civil republicanism or civic communitarianism shares much of its ideas with the theories of the civil society and social capital, although a nostalgia for "the good" old days in some ideal liberal protestant community in the past is strongly reflected in civil republicanism (Delanty 2003, 85). Finally, governmental communitarianism promotes the empowerment and mobilization of communities to bring neo-capitalist societies bacon onto "the right track", and claims that communitarian policy is an essential part of any governmental plans in this regard (ibid., 74, 87). The fact that governmental communitarianism that welcomes any government interference is a notable difference from the other three forms of communitarianism. Etzioni (2004b, 13–24), one of the proponents of governmental communitarianism, emphasizes the necessity of the marginalization of some rights and liberty in order to raise the sense of responsibility among community members and to recover social morality in the contemporary world.

A number of warnings about communitarianism have been expressed by liberal thinkers for its closeness to traditionalism and conservative values, which can lead a community toward intolerance, violence and hatred (Talisse 2001, 291). Essentially, the critical views cast towards communitarianism boil down to a key issue over human history: the supremacy of the individual over community, or *vice versa*. Thus, there is a long debate about communitarianism and its extreme moral discourse (Talisse 2001, 293; Bell 1993, 1; Delanty 2003, 88). Moreover, the departure point of Western society is in the liberal tradition, which naturally appreciates as much freedom as possible. Therefore, even Etzioni, a devoted supporter of communitarianism, is too faithful to liberalism (Beng Haut 2004, 5). This is the very reason why non-Western studies point out the idealistic trait of Western communitarianism, and Western researchers criticize the Asian Confucian-based communitarianism (which we will examine in the next section) for the lack of freedom that the members of communities enjoy. Although they both seek the common good and a healthy community, a fundamental difference occurs due to their background cultures: an individual orientation on the Western side, and collective conformity on the Confucian Asian side.

Now we look into the Confucian-style of communitarianism, which is sometimes also called soft authoritarianism (Fox 1997, 562; Fukuyama 1995a, 13), because it shares the principles of Western communitarianism, yet there are some significant differences to examine. One claim is that people born in East Asian societies are not as much inspired by liberal ideas as their Western counterparts, because Asian traditional values teach them to live harmoniously within a community even though they sometimes have to sacrifice themselves to serve the well-being of others (Etzioni 2004a, 9). This rather undemocratic nature of Asian communities is often criticized using the term authoritarianism by researchers. For instance, Fukuyama calls it paternalistic authoritarianism (cited in Beng Haut 1999, 579) while Etzioni uses authoritarian communitarianism (2004a, 9). Thus, the Confucian-style of communitarianism is seen to sit somewhere between communitarianism and authoritarianism. However, this view adopts a Western-philosophy-based approach without much consideration of the richness of the Confucian tradition. Beng Haut (1999, 578), who tries to bridge the gap among West and East, explains that the essence of the collective orientation to maintain the social order should always be accompanied by the minimum consensus of community members. Asian societies have long been shamed and made to suffer due to the label of authoritarianism that has been given to their social systems, along with the related undemocratic image (Chan 1997, 46), which was the reason for the absence of dialogue between Western and Asian communitarian scholars. Notwithstanding this, there has been a slow re-evaluation of Asian communitarianism as an alternative of form of social governance. Fukuyama observes as follows:

> The most significant challenger being posed to the liberal universalism of the American and French revolutions today is not coming from the communist world, whose economic failures are for everyone to see, but from those societies in Asian, which combine liberal economies with a kind of paternalistic authoritarianism. (Cited in Beng Haut 1999, 579)

In other words, now it makes sense to study both Western and Eastern communitarianism so that a new model for a better society may be found. Moreover, this is true when it comes to considering the recent global situation, as will be discussed later.

Giving Asia's vast size and cultural diversity, it is not an easy task to identify the roots of Asian communitarianism. Still, some studies indicate the centrality of the Confucian influence over East Asian societies (Fukuyama 1995a; 1995b; Tu 1996; Beng Haut 1999; Fox 1997; De Bary 1998), although most Asian people are in fact not very conscious about the significance of Confucian thought in their lives (Chan 1997, 40). Due to the long history and several schools of thought within Confucianism, it is not easy to grasp the general Confucian characteristics Asian societies share. Still, Tu's observation helps us to understand the overall features, which are: 1) consensus is a preferred method for decision making, 2) negotiation is a conventional way to solve conflicts, 3) informal arbitration substitutes for formal legal procedures, and 4) mediation by third parties is used frequently to avoid problems among rivals (Tu 1996, 1–10). These are strategies that developed over time for the construction of harmonious societies, because the latter is an indispensable precondition for the well-being of community members (Fox 1997, 574, 579). Still, what is lacking here are some practices or customs to form the social norms so that the individuals in the community can learn the correct ways to behave. As an answer to this issue, and similar to Western communitarianism, Asian Confucian societies have valid authorities approved by members of the related communities, as well as the members' participation in communal activities to strengthen their sense of belonging. These two factors are the central pillars to constructing social norms (ibid., 570). In addition, the informal judgement and penalties exercised by the ritual practices are the principal tools to maintain the communitarian orders in these societies, and legally codified rights play a secondary role (ibid., 572). In other words, the creation and maintenance of civic virtues in Asian Confucian societies is based upon moral conviction, the fear of being reported by the rest of the community members, and thus feeling ashamed in front of the eyes of the whole community (ibid.). In Asian Confucian societies, the force of social sanction is the one factor that sustains the social order, without the need for legal authorities to monitor the citizens.

When it comes to the case of Japan, a communitarian orientation is often expressed by the name of groupism (*shūdan shugi* 集団主義). Compared to the original Confucian communitarianism that put the emphasis on the importance of family and the father figure, Japanese groupism pays less attention to the centrality of those in order to avoid the ideological conflict with the role of the Emperor (Fukuyama 1995a; 1995b; Pye and Pye 1985; Hendry 2003; Fukuyama 1998;). Thus, the focus shifts to the priority of the various belonging groups, which can be the nation, companies, clubs, neighbourhood units, etc. (Harootunian 2000, 28). Such a philosophy is part of the typical image of Japan introduced to the world in general (Komai 2000; Takano 2008; Yamagishi 2010). However, evaluations of Japanese groupism vary. Fukuyama (1995b, 27–28) praises the positive disconnection with the familial ties that often constrain traditional Confucian societies, whereas Yamagishi (2010) argues that Japanese groupism is the rational action of the Japanese in order to obtain mutual aid. In contrast, Takano (2008) concludes from his interdisciplinary and comparative research that his findings do not show the evidence of any form of "groupism" in Japan, and hence this is merely a false image created by the theories of *nihonjinron* and Orientalism. In many ways, further research into Japanese groupism is still needed.

As observed above, despite the slight differences among countries and traditions, the general inclination towards communitarian in East Asian nations is beyond doubt. Since our world is now facing one of the biggest challenges in recent history caused by the unexpected and sudden COVID-19 pandemic, one thing we can do to take advantage of the studies that have been done on Asian Communitarianism is to mirror the discussions on the Asian style of communitarianism and Western individualism to promote a dialogue between them. By doing so, we may be able to seek a path that brings a better social order into today's shaken societies around globe. In this sense, De Bary (1998, 9) is right to say that the fundamental debate between Western individualistic liberalism and Eastern autocratic communitarianism is not a matter of geographic or cultural variation, but rather it is a never-ending challenge to all humanity to struggle for the right balance between individuals and social communities. Bell (2006, 8–18) also adds that if we pay sufficient attention to the Asian communitarian cultures and practices, the exchanges of ideas and experiences between West and East will contribute to the making of a better world order, which is likely true and thus absolutely vital for this difficult moment in time.

Natural Disasters, Disaster Culture and Self-Restraint (*jishuku*)

According to the definition offered by Barton (1969, 38), the founder of disaster studies, disasters are situations of collective stress caused by the malfunction of a social system that is expected to supply and protect adequate social and living conditions. Furthermore, there are two subcategories of disasters: those caused by external causes and those provoked for internal reasons. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, typhoons and so forth fit into the first subcategory, while economic recessions, revolutions, civil wars and strikes are in the latter group (Barton 1969, 38; Gillespie 1988, 347). Under the pressure caused by disasters, both societies and individuals need to behave in the correct manner to reduce social disorder and further danger until normality is re-established, which is what we have been doing at this moment. However, in some cases these temporary arrangements stay as normalized practices even after recovery (Gillespie 1988, 349), and become part of the culture. For this reason, it is particularly important to consider the role of culture and how it should be integrated into the strategies to cope with dangers, loss, and tragedies associated with disasters (Hewitt 2012, 86).

In fact, Watsuji ([1929] 2006) claims that disasters, nature and culture are deeply correlated to each other, and nature determines the cultural, philosophical, religious and thought orientation of a nation, although the environmental determinist view remains a subject of discussion. As far as Japan is concerned, this country has constantly suffered from catastrophic natural disasters due to its geographic circumstances. Therefore, its institutional memories and cultures have developed in order to cope with the forces of nature (Duus 2012, 175). In his research on earthquakes since the Tokugawa period up to the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake in 2011, Duus (2012, 176) presents the five stages that the Japanese people have passed through every time disasters occur: blaming, coping, hoping, learning and forgetting. In the first phase, politicians, journalists, the mass media, and practically everybody blames somebody or something (and especially outsiders, with one of example being the Slaughter of Koreans after the Great Kanto Earthquake (Into 2013)) that may have provoked the disaster, but that is a rather natural reaction because "when a tragic event occurs our impulse is to explain it rationally" (Duus 2012, 176). Since the Edo era, or perhaps even before and influenced by Buddhist tradition (Oogi 2016), the Japanese often blame nature itself, which lead to "can't be helped" thinking (*shōganai* しょうがない) (Urushihara 2017), or under the understanding of Confucian tradition, they blame the immorality and selfishness of human actions that eventually trigger the anger of Mother Nature (Duus 2012, 177). Next, the coping stage is particularly interesting for us, because this is when personal trust and social ties nurtured in the Communitarian environment serve as a well-prepared base for cooperation and the sharing of suffering (ibid., 179). During the Edo period, the provision of relief and support was already being expressed in the forms of voluntary charity, mutual support and donations. The Meiji government promoted a sense of unity and altruism that went beyond the immediately affected communities, so that the whole nation became a kind of imaginary big community and all citizens were involved in the nationalized process of recovering from disasters (ibid., 181). In this sense, the expected behaviour of the Japanese people is to share the suffering and burden caused by disasters. To some extent, this is the root of self-restraint, which will be discussed in more detail later. The other three steps after a disaster, namely hoping, learning and forgetting, are indispensable to drive a country forward to the future. Since the entire population of the country is expected to identify themselves as victims of disasters, all citizens also have to work on the creation of hope, to learn the bitter lessons disasters teach and to plough ahead. This is a Japanese disaster culture shaped by the country's nature and experience. Indeed, inspired by Button (2010), Okada, Fang and Kilgour (2013, 47) claim that Japan has developed its own disaster culture that is apparently not obvious, but more of a hidden culture: a culture of mutual aid and cooperation, which helps with effective community management. At the instant of an emergency caused by natural catastrophes being declared, the most urgent and central need is to think about the common good of the local community (ibid.). In the case of Japan, this communitarian orientation expands to the whole country, hence under national emergency provisions everyone has to behave for the good of Japan, although this may limit their own individual interests. As observed above, this strong and firm approach, which sometimes appears in positive ways but also in negative ones during natural disasters, is one of the essential reasons for the Japanese communitarian culture (Amat 2007, 85–86; Calantas 2007, 91–95; Montero 2007, 101). This educates the Japanese to self-sacrifice to achieve the common good of the nation when faced with disasters, no matter whether they are direct victims or not. Nevertheless, as has been seen in many disasters, such as the Haiti Earthquake of 2010 (Munro 2014), and as stated in the Sendai Framework, collective responsibility of people, communities, governments and civil societies has long been exercised and should be acted on all over the world (UNDRR 2019, 28).

The practice of self-restraint (*jishuku* 自粛) has been formed and strengthened in Japan along with this disaster culture. *Jishuku* in Japanese literally means self (*ji* 自) abstention (*shuku* 粛), which can be also translated in a Japanese context as self-control, voluntary restraint, self-censorship, and voluntary ban, among other terms. Within this social norm, when a disaster or tragedy occurs the Japanese are expected to behave in such a way as to achieve the common good of Japanese society, hence they should control their behaviour and refrain voluntarily from whatever activity that might cause social disharmony and which might be considered selfish (Kaneko 2019, 110). Although such action have been around for a long time because of the Japanese communitarian disaster culture, the appearance of the term *jishuku* in academic writings does not have a long history, only dating back to the 1980s when the Shōwa Emperor Hirohito passed away (Higuchi 1990, 58; Fujita 1992, 827). It is said that the origin of the strict and powerful norms of self-restraint action can be found in Japan during the Second World War. At that time, the military regime obliged all Japanese citizens to be responsible and carry themselves to serve for the good of the nation. This norm became a part of the social custom taught through the imperialist ideology, and later it penetrated and stayed as a part of Japanese culture (Abe 2016, 245). It may appear to be strange that the members of a society voluntarily give up their rights to enjoy what they want in order to experience with the suffering of the whole country. This is where the problem of the "free-rider" in rational choice theory comes up (Vasi and Macy 2003, 980). Still, there are two conditions to discourage free riders, which are persuasive communication and crisis messaging (ibid., 981). A tragedy plays an important role here, because some studies show that the uncertainty associated with a crisis causes anxiety that one will not be able to overcome the present difficulty alone, thus increasing the need for cooperation (ibid., 982). The unique situation of Japan, with its firm conviction and communitarian tradition, meet these two essential elements for successful self-restraint for the common good. From the view of an outsider, Japanese self-restraint is similar to a process of mourning, although Kaneko (2019, 110) explains that *jishuku* is instead a movement that wants to achieve cultural harmony and individual sacrifice to show solidarity with the victims of disasters.

Although the first appearance of *jishuku* was in the 1980s, it started to be paid more attention by mass media and the academic field after the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake (*Higashi nihon dai shinsai* 東日本大震災) in 2011. Since that time numerous self-restraint actions were observed. For instance, many concerts and party events were cancelled, shops and restaurants shortened their working hours, families and individuals made an effort to use less electricity and even politicians performed their political campaigns "silently" (Kimura Ida et al. 2015, 32), which addressed some critical social problems such as the lack of electricity caused by the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant accident. Joy Hendry, who has been engaged in Japan studies for many years, confesses in her work the surprise she felt when discovering such *jishuku* activities when she happened to be in Japan during the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake in 2011. Despite her extensive studies on Japan, this was the first time that she observed and felt the atmosphere of Japanese self-restraint (Hendry 2014, 176). Kaneko (2019) documents in her ethnographical study the self-censorship exercised by Japanese musicians and radio stations after the earthquake of 2011 to very carefully select the themes and songs to broadcast, so that the victims were not upset, and to later produce music to cheer up the victims and encourage the recovery of destroyed areas. Whereas Abe (2016) studies the tension between the self-restraint norm and anti-nuclear power protests on the streets played by *chindon-ya* (marching bands typically used for commercial advertising). Moreover, according to the observation made by Kitamura et al. (2015), the self-restraint movement was even extended, and it crossed the Pacific Ocean where Japanese communities in the United States also participated in *jishuku*. These self-restraint activities happened because of prior social conditions and the disaster culture constructed by the Japanese communitarian tradition, which aims to achieve social harmony and the common good of the nation as an extended large community, in spite of the fact that it involves an individual's sacrifices. Putting this in a different way, the practice of self-restraint developed and has been strengthened as a part of Japanese communitarian culture because it is one way to live in a natural disaster-prone country and thus overcome such disasters when they occur.

COVID-19 and Self-Restraint

Ever since the World Health Organization warned of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 19, 2020, counties all over the world (with some exceptions) have been struggling to save as many of their citizens lives as possible by taking different measures. Clearly the virus is an immerse threat to the health of all humanity, and prevention strategies such as wearing masks and cancelling of major events are meant minimize the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, there is no doubt that numerous people of all nations have been cooperating and voluntarily changing their behaviour in order to overcome this health crisis. Yet, it is also true that some concerns and unease have surfaced. Principally they are caused by the lengthy lockdowns that are having a negative impact on the world economy (Bohoslavsky 2020, 383), and there is also a danger of some other human rights violations, such as the rights to food, housing, health, education and work, to name only a few (ibid., 384). In addition, a central discussion has been on the freedom of movement, the right to information, and the freedom of association (Yabuki 2020).

First of all, we draw a big picture of the situation of COVID-19 and related measures in the world. Using the framework elaborated by Katafuchi, Kurita and Managi (2020, 2), the restrictive policies used to avoid the pandemic spreading can be divided into two general categories: the legally justified forced movement restriction on one hand, and the informal movement restriction request relying on the self-control of citizens on the other. The former strategy has been carried out by numerous countries, particularly Western countries such as France, Italy, the United States and more, whereas the second option is less used in a limited number of countries, such as Sweden and Japan (ibid.), and some studies reveal that the countries utilizing soft restriction policies have legal limits on aggressive governmental interventions (Klamberg 2020; Itagaki 2020).

Secondly, when we focus on the Asian region, it is noteworthy that Asian countries are taking specific measures considering their political context, public health service situation, previous experiences with pandemics and the development of information and communication technology (Lewis and Mayer

2020, 1–2). Some of these countries, such as China, Singapore and South Korea, use strict and forceful movement restrictions, using the best of their experience with infectious diseases like SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) and the advances in contact tracking technology as well as the use of big data (ibid.). However, contrary to the rest of Asia, the Japanese strategy of self-restraint or *jishuku* is remarkable. *Jishuku* has partially been enabled due to cultural practices like bowing instead of handshaking, and the social and civil focus on issues such as hygiene, despite the difficulties caused by Japan's high population density and aging society (ibid.).

Looking more closely at Japan, the first action taken by Prime Minister Abe was on February 26th, 2020—a request (*onegai* お願い) to all Japanese to conduct themselves according to what each person interprets from the concept of *jishuku*, self-restraint. *Onegai* could be understood as a petition, a suggestion, or a favour, in other words without the support of a law. However, immediately after Abe's speech, many Japanese understood what to do and what was meant by the self-restraint message, thanks to their previous experiences (Nishi 2020), and results was actually more powerful than merely words would suggest (Miwa 2000). Almost two months after the rest of the world, the Japanese government declared a State of Emergency (*kinkyū jitai sengen* 緊急事態宣言) in seven prefectures, including Tokyo and Osaka, on April 7th, 2020 (Naikaku kanbō 2020a) and for the whole of Japan on April 16th, 2020 (Naikaku kanbō 2020b). Although the State of Emergency was announced, one of the notable characteristics was that there was no judicial power to lockdown cities or the whole nation (Itagaki 2020). Putting it in a different way, the announcement would only be effective if the Japanese citizens choose to pay attention and/or obey it (Katafuchi, Kurita and Managi 2020, 3). It was thus a "voluntary lockdown" (Watanabe and Yabu 2020, 2). Takasu observes that, besides the disaster culture and communitarian tradition that Japan has, there is a strong reluctance in Japan to impose an aggressive lockdown policy or to monitor citizens' movements because of the painful experience of totalitarian control and invasions of privacy carried out by the police before and during the Second World War (Takasu 2021). Another study argues that the unwillingness to use active political intervention is rooted in the incorrect and misleading monitoring of leprosy and cholera patients (Watanabe and Yabu 2020, 3). Overall, Japan did not want to carry out the same track and trace systems to prevent the spread of COVID-19 that South Korea and other Asian countries adopted (Ichihara 2020).

People outside of Japan wondered how it was possible that the Japanese stayed home without the threat of penalty or the presence of police on the street. In fact, the international press such as *Bloomberg*, *The Guardian*, *ABC News* and *Foreign Policy* wrote about the Japanese case as a "mysterious success" (Du and Huang 2020; McCurry 2020; Sturmer and Asada 2020; Sposato 2020). Reports by the mass media probably exaggerate correct behaviours of the Japanese, since there were also many lawbreakers (Reuters 2020; The Japan News 2021). It is also true that these types of solidary actions were seen everywhere in the world. In this sense, the Japanese case is not exceptional. However, what is unusual is that Japanese politics chose a strategy that relies on the citizens' good will, as this has previously been used to overcome natural disasters, although this raises of the questions of how effective this approach has been, and whether it was in fact an irresponsible policy. However, so far this policy seems to have been a success because people are accustomed to living together in difficult environments, without much political leadership (Hiroi 2020). In fact, according to the Hiroi's information (2020, 903), despite the reports of people acting without self-restraint that were often exaggerated in the mass media, the data shows that a considerable number of people were cooperating with the norms of self-restraint. Public opinion supported the idea that going out unnecessarily instead of staying at home under the State of Emergency is a totally anti-social activity (Katafuchi and Managi 2020, 3). Shops and restaurants also followed the self-restraint norm and cooperated to reduce non-essential commercial activities without receiving any governmental or prefectural orders (Hara et al. 2020), and this consensus among business owners also comes from the Japanese communitarian culture (Watanabe and Yabu 2020, 16; Itagaki 2020, 188). In addition, based on their empirical study, Watanabe and Yabu (2020) argue that Japanese self-restraint has been possible because citizens considered and studied the information that is available on the spread of the virus, and as a result refrained from going out. Hence, making correct and accurate information available is also essential in this context. Alternately, the study presented by Katafuchi, Kurita and Managi (2020) statistically shows the role of stigma for effective self-restraint as well as the fear of infection. This finding is in accordance with the theory of Fox (1997, 572) about the formation and maintenance of Confucian civil virtues, which are principally based on social sanction, or the shame in being seen as a lawbreaker and irresponsible member of a community.

The technique of "name and shame" has been seen frequently in the Japanese mass media. During COVID-19, this strategy was used not only by the media and press, but by Social Network Services (SNS), such as Facebook (Itagaki 2020, 188–89; Sakakibara and Ozono 2020). Moreover, the presence of the so-called self-restraint police (*jishuku keisatsu* 自粛警察) is the representative phenomenon of extreme, excessive and harmful self-control among Japanese citizens (Ichihara 2020, 4). These self-restraint police were ordinary individuals who undertook voluntary private tracking of those who apparently do not behave as people as they should have done, by not following the self-restraint norm. The self-restraint police caused considerable harassment and many false accusations, with actions such as making annoying phone calls to those who left their homes unnecessarily, making harmful accusative posts on SNS about restaurants and shops that stayed open despite risk of infection, insults directed toward travellers in cars from other prefectures, and so forth (Katafuchi, Kurita and Managi 2020, 3). There were cases of *pachinko* salons that chose to not obey the government's request for self-restraint, but eventually they had to close their doors due to the unofficial punishment given by the self-restraint police who published the names of their businesses on a website (Itagaki 2020, 189). The Japanese thus grew afraid of the self-restraint police and the eyes of society (*seken* 世間) (Yamazaki 2021). These are the negative consequences of extreme self-restraint and social sanction which communitarian practices encompass.

On the other hand, the Japanese practice of self-restraint leaves us with other issues to consider. The first is that this custom encourages the Japanese government and its politicians to be irresponsible. Indeed, as we have observed, Japan has repeatedly overcome numerous disasters based on the strength voluntary civil initiatives (Wakui 2020, 317). Nishi (2020, 331) warns of the dangers in depending on the good practice of Japanese citizens to control themselves, because then Japanese politics remains thoughtless and without strong leadership. According to an analysis by the US-based Morning Consult data intelligence company, the former Prime Minister Abe, who was in office immediately prior to Prime Minister Suga, actually saw a continued decrease of popularity during the epidemic, while other major political leaders of countries like the UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, France and even the United States (under President Trump) saw a marked rise in their popularity (Morning Consult 2020; Sato 2021). The same trend is presented by the Toluna-Blackbox Index of Global Crisis Perceptions, which ranks Japan and its coronavirus response as the lowest among 23 surveyed countries (Blackbox 2020). Apparently, the rise in the approval ratings of most leaders can be attributed to the "Rally-Round-the-Flag" effect to get through a crisis (Sato 2021). However, this phenomenon does not occur in Japan, which suggests that the sluggish politics and perceived impotence of democracy in Japan is worrisome (Ogasawara 2020).

Another issue is the lack of consideration for diversity in society, which is too often overshadowed by the communitarian culture. This was already warned about during the recovery stage of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake (Yamanaka 2018), and the circumstances underlying the coronavirus pandemic reveals the necessity of individualized attention once again. This is because although the image of

Japan as a monoethnic society is widespread, incidents of discrimination towards minority groups such as Ainu, Burakumin, Okinawan, Zainich Koreans and foreigners confirm that Japan is not a socially, culturally, ethnically homogenous nation (Lie 2001). For example, Giammaria (2020) criticizes the discriminatory orders produced by local governments to control the service sector, especially the entertainment business for adults in the pleasure zones, and Nishi (2020) points out the lack of care for the vulnerable population, such as physically and mentally disabled persons and their families. Inequality and discriminatory treatment of foreigners are serious issues. In this context, and a considerable number of foreign students and researchers, as well as foreign workers, suffered from not being able to enter Japan to continue their academic and professional careers (Osumi 2020; Dooley 2020). In short, in the context of COVID-19, foreigners, persons with disabilities and workers in unwelcomed sectors were shown once again as not considered to be full members of Japanese society.

All these criticisms of the self-restraint norm and communitarian practices have driven some people to think about the necessity of legal and forceful restrictions instead of depending on the good will of citizens. Nishihara et al. (2020) studies the opinions of Japanese university students who had been voluntarily controlling their behaviour in accordance with the self-restraint atmosphere, yet their findings reveal that 60% of their samples expressed a strong desire for the use of a forced lockdown in order to increase their sense of self-efficiency. Since some child daycare centres were asked to temporarily close (Noda, Yoshizono and Kawaguchi 2021), many parents with small children also wanted the government to issue a legal lockdown to that their work places would also close or change to working from home, and thus help them deal with the issue of childcare (Nakai 2021). Certainly, for citizens it is much easier and more secure to have certain criteria for "what is permitted" and "what is not permitted" determined politically and judicially (Takaku 2020). This is also true for the business sector, because it is more comfortable and easier if the government orders all shops and restaurants to close, so that managers do not have to informally negotiate about what to do with their employees, clients, business partners and shareholders (Itagaki 2020, 191). By the same token, it is also appropriate to receive an official and governmental command of business closure when it comes to the grant application of emergency state support (ibid., 192–96). In this sense, the forced lockdown exercised by other countries have advantages as far as official administrative processes are concerned.

Finally, the harassment and attacks carried out by self-restraint police to those suspected of lacking self-control can cause an atmosphere of extreme intolerance, while tolerance is essential for the diversity and respect of all human beings in society (Uno and Kajitani 2020, 41). In this way, Japan moved into a new stage of "language pandemic" of not being able to speak whatever against the communitarian behaviour (Ogasawara 2020). It is undeniable that thanks to its communitarian culture Japan went through the COVID-19 pandemic in a peculiar way without compromising the legal freedom of its citizens. Yet we should never forget that the communitarian culture itself lead to the military regime and fanaticism that provoked the Second World War (Tanaka 2020), and this is why we want to open the discussion on obtaining an adequate balance between communitarianism and individualism.

Search for the Proper Balance between Individualism and Communitarianism

The present circumstances and the policies taken to control the COVID-19 pandemic inspired us to reconsider how difficult it is to locate a fair balance between an individual's freedom and the whole society's common good. Paradoxically, at this moment those Western countries with a tradition of human rights are choosing policies that limit the freedom of their citizens. In contrast, Japan which belongs to the communitarian or soft authoritarian tradition, is depending on the good will of its people, which does not involve political or judicial control. Therefore, it seems in this context that Japan respects the freedom of its citizens more than those countries with forceful lockdown legislation (Uno and Kanjitani 2020), although other issues such as insufficient test numbers and slow vaccination cannot be excluded from a discussion of this. As we found in this work, some of the success seen in Japan is indebted to the practice of self-restraint fostered by the Japanese communitarian culture which helped to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, if we evaluate the universal applicability of the communitarian model of self-restraint to overcome a crisis or disaster, the conclusion is unsure, because each country has its particular culture, and each culture needs a different and adequate governmental system to support it. In fact, Watanabe and Yabu (2020, 19) state that the relevance of the self-restraint strategy cannot be generalized, as it probably will not work in the US or Europe, and, importantly, it will not even function in Japan at different moments and on different occasions in the future if the country's communitarian culture fades, because culture never stops developing.

Even so, the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by different countries have left us with the opportunity to re-examine not only the way to cope with the threats of pandemics and disasters, but also the complex relationship between individuals and the community, or between nations and citizens if we widen the point of view, no matter whether situated in the West or East (Uno and Kajitani 2020, 39). Facing the uncertainty provoked by a novel and unknown virus, nobody has a precise answer about in what way we should behave to protect others and ourselves from the pandemic, except some tips like washing hands, not touching one's face, staying home when feeling sick, etc. Nevertheless, we should never stop questioning what the state's power is and where its limit lies, so that it does not overwhelm our liberty and the rights that we have as humans. Even then, as we have observed from the case of Japan and its self-restraint tactic, to depend totally on the voluntary good will of community members in the name of the common good may be too unstable and fragile. In addition, in the same way it can also violate individual rights, as shown by the example of the self-restraint police. Alternatively, perhaps putting emphasis on the universality of human rights itself might be a Western-biased view, as some anthropologists already warned with the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Merry 2003). It will never be enough to emphasize once more that there is no exact solution to this matter, because this is a long and never-ending debate in human society regarding the balance between an individual's freedom and the common good. Having said that, and as Uno and Kajitani note (2020, 45), it is probably safe to say that the present COVID-19 situation leads us to reconsider the supposed rightfulness of Western philosophy based on modernity, and encourages us to advance the dialogue between East and West to fill the gap between the development of Western individualism and the relative immaturity of Eastern communitarianism.

Conclusion

This article explored the origin and development of communitarianism, the disaster culture and the concept of self-restraint in Japan. Despite the considerable similarities in certain ideas between Western and Asian communitarianism, the Asian societies tend to favour social harmony and community welfare, which are achieved by informal negotiations and social sanctions, whereas Western societies strive for liberty and individual rights, and therefore judicial systems are developed to protect them. In this context, the Japanese practice of self-restraint is unique, because it was developed as a means to deal with the challenges of nature in Japan, without depending on the intervention of governmental power. At the time of writing Japan was still fighting against the COVID-19 crisis using the self-restraint strategy. So far this tactic has worked to moderate the spread of infection, as well as prevent the government from imposing too much on the private lives of citizens. Nonetheless, to protect an individual's rights is a complicated and delicate issue as we learned from the case of the self-restraint police, because those who enforce the social norm do not always come from the public sphere represented by the government or state power, but in fact mostly appear from the private domain. After all, the essence of this dilemma is the proper relationship between individuals and their communities. We do not intend to present an absolute answer to this immense and profound theme, rather what is vital for us at this moment is to never stop questioning the right balance between individualism and communitarianism.

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Coping with COVID and the Myth of a Collective China

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Abstract

Reflecting on the development of the global economic system, the present article describes the phenomenon of hyper-individualism in the age of "second modernity" and, making a distinction between the "family collective" and the "patriotic collective", discusses the individual's oscillating loyalty between the family and the nation state in this process. An answer is sought to the question why, in the contemporary period, individuals who are confronted with a (health) crisis appear to have lost confidence in the authority of the nation state, regardless of whether they live in a country with a democratic government or one with an authoritarian regime. Building on this finding, the article also addresses the importance of a revival of the political *agora*.

Keywords: neoliberalism, second modernity, social action, globalization, locality

Soočanje s COVID-19 in mit o kolektivni Kitajski

Izvleček

Kot razmislek o razvoju globalnega ekonomskega sistema pričujoči članek opisuje pojav hiperindividualizma v obdobju »druge modernosti«. Avtor razlikuje med »družinskim« in »patriotskim kolektivom« ter na tej osnovi prikaže, kako v tem procesu posamezniki in posameznice nihajo med družino in nacionalno državo. Članek išče odgovor na vprašanje, zakaj vse kaže na to, da posameznice in posamezniki, ki se soočajo z (zdravstveno) krizo, v sodobnem času izgubljajo zaupanje v nacionalno državo, in sicer ne glede na to, ali živijo v državi z demokratično vlado ali v takšni, ki ji vlada avtokratski režim. Na osnovi rezultatov pričujoče študije avtor izpostavi tudi pomen preporoda politične *agore*.

Ključne besede: neoliberalizem, druga modernost, družbena aktivnost, globalizacija, lokalnost

Introduction

Soon after the SARS-CoV-2 (hereafter COVID-19) virus hit Europe and the different European governments—so it appeared—struggled with their efforts to

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halt the spread of the virus, mainstream Western media were full of praise about the effectiveness with which China had managed to control the spread of the virus (in the appendix to this article, two sets of figures of total numbers of infections and death toll, as released by the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, are given. The first set are the data released on 9 December 2020 at 09:26; the second are the data released on 1 March 2021 at 13:24). There were many "analyses" that explained how democracies had proven to fall behind in efficiency in countering the pandemic as compared to authoritarian regimes, and, in line with the above, noting that Western individualist societies were less efficient than Asian collective societies. This bold statement brings the questions to the fore as to whether Chinese society can indeed by characterized as "collective" and whether the apparent obedience of the Chinese population to the rules that were imposed by the Chinese government is indeed a proof of the perceived effectiveness of authoritarian traits of the Chinese political system. To develop an answer to these questions, the present article makes a fundamental distinction between the "family collective" and the "patriotic collective", and addresses the consequences the development of the "second modernity" of neoliberalism—in no way synonymous with liberal democracy—has had for the relations among the individual, family, and nation state. This will enable us to at least nuance the cultural absolutism that is at the basis of the "collective Asia" vs. "hyper-individualistic West" dichotomy and that informs the argumentation in Western media reports on the success vs. failure of coping with the COVID-19 crisis. On this basis, the article also addresses the importance of a revival of the political *agora* to avoid our liberal democracies developing into illiberal authoritarianism.

Some First Considerations

In the different assessments of the way China dealt with the COVID-19 crisis as compared to Western countries a few arguments to explain China's effectiveness kept emerging in mainstream Western media. Probably most prominent were the claims that authoritarian countries would be better able than democracies to cope with crises of the magnitude of COVID-19; that China would have been more alert than Western countries were; that (European) corruption would be detrimental to effective handling of the pandemic, while efficient government administrations would be conducive to more effective actions; or that the blame was to be put on the individualism that is characteristic of Western societies, different to collective Asian societies. It is not difficult to give counter-arguments that at least cast serious doubt on the soundness of most of these statements. If authoritarianism would be the better political system to cope with health crises, how then are we to explain the relatively better figures for Taiwan or the Republic of Korea in the period under scrutiny? Might it not be that praising authoritarianism suited an altogether very different domestic political agenda in some Western countries?[1] It may be true that, generally speaking, Northern European countries are perceived to be the least corrupt within the European Union (with Denmark, Finland and Sweden in the top 3 positions with scores of 87, 86, and 85 on a scale of 100 in the 2019 Corruption Perception Index) (European Commission 2020), but does this also apply to China? And how can we explain that Denmark, which was seen as least corrupt, was ranked 68th in terms of the number of infections and deaths on 9 December 2020 (climbing to number 58 on 1 March 2021), while Sweden with an almost negligible difference in the 2019 Corruption Perception Index (85 to 100) was 36th in the number of infections and deaths on 9 December 2020 (climbing to 29 on 1 March 2021)? Moreover, are corruption and an inefficient government administration not correlated? And is, therefore, the claim that efficient government administrations are conducive to an effective dealing with the crisis not tantamount to claiming that authoritarian systems are better suited to deal with a health crisis?

That the alertness of governments is conducive to efficiently dealing with a health crisis goes without saying. It is in this respect important to note that when the COVID-19 crisis broke out it is very likely that the governments and populations of East Asian countries were still well aware of the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) disease that broke out in China in 2003 and spread to four other countries.[2] This awareness may indeed have prompted the governments and populations in these countries to a swift reaction, regardless of whether or not the country concerned has an authoritarian or a democratic political system. This observation is confirmed in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* of 1 November 2020. In this issue, Gregory Poland, Director of the Vaccine Research Group of Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, USA, is quoted as follows: "In China, you have […] a population that takes respiratory infections seriously" (Burki 2020).

He adds to this that the Chinese success is also the result of a population that is:

> willing to adopt non-pharmaceutical interventions, with a government that can put bigger constraints on individual freedoms than would be considered acceptable in most Western countries […]. (ibid.)

1 According to *The Economist Intelligence Unit* 2020, Taiwan ranked 11 of the 167 countries listed as strongest democracies. This is up from rank 31 in 2019. The 2020 top five democratic countries in the world are, according to this list, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Canada (*The Economist Intelligence Unit* 2020).

2 See "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)" (WHO n.d.).

In the same article, Han Fu of Imperial College in London seconded the importance of compliance with government rules. He stated: "Other factors such as […] civil compliance with regulations may also affect the effectiveness of the response." (ibid.)

Compliance with rules was also characterized by Gregory Poland as a typical attitude that makes Asia different from the West. He stated:

> Commitment to the greater good is engrained in the culture; there is not the hyper-individualism that characterizes parts of the USA, and has driven most of the resistance to the countermeasures against the coronavirus. (ibid.)

The claim here is that Asian societies are characterized as collective and take care of the greater good, whereas the USA (and, more generally, the West) are hyper-individualistic. In what follows, this contention will be scrutinized, and some reflections will be formulated on the relation between hyper-individualism and resistance to government countermeasures.

Culturalism, Modernity, and Second Modernity

When, in 206 BCE, political power in China returned to the hands of the feudal lords who had been removed from their positions when Qin Shi Huangdi united the different feudal territories and founded the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE, these feudal lords reinstated the social structures that had existed prior to China's unification, and Confucianism was crafted into these inherited structures as the official doctrine. A Confucian bureaucracy with functionaries who were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the Confucian principles was then installed to administer the Chinese "body politic" of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). In practice, this meant that a fundamental distinction between, on the one hand, the Confucian elite, and, on the other hand, the popular culture of agricultural communities, was installed.

In the eyes of the Confucian elite—a social group that did not possess any specific professional knowledge but the members of which were the representatives, executors, and protectors of Confucian culture—it was their elevated morality that made it possible that the peasants paid their taxes without the use of coercion, and it was regarded as morally correct for the peasants not to interfere with the elite culture and to only engage themselves with their appropriate agricultural communities. Each of these primary agricultural communities had its own peculiar characteristics, but all of them had two traits in common: 1) their type of economy: intensive farming, and 2) their subordination to the elite culture (see Stover 1974, 101–7).

The economic reality for the individual peasant—roughly 90 per cent of the Chinese population—was that the soil he tilled was his only means of subsistence and that it was his paying of taxes that gave him the right to till the soil. In circumstances of unremitting economic hardship, interfering in another family or village community could only lead to reprisal and punishment. The family was therefore the peasant's only insurance against the interests of other families and against the state at large. The fact that the peasant depended on his immediate family and kinship group for shelter and security against the vicissitudes of life forced every family to only focus on their own economic interests (see on this Cohen 1976, 11). The outcome of this was that each family accumulated wealth for itself, to the detriment of other families, and each individual contribution to family wealth was part of that family's achievement.[3]

The social networks that functioned in Chinese society were the obvious outcome of this political and economic "culturalist" model. Chad Hansen (1985) has described Chinese society as characterized by a "part-whole structure". The smallest "part" in this "part-whole structure" is an individual, and the "whole" is a larger structure of which each individual is a part. It is important to note that in a "part-whole structure" not only can each part, in its turn, be part of something still bigger—an individual, for example, is part of her/his core family, which in its turn is part of a local agricultural community, etc.—but that each part can also simultaneously be part of different larger wholes—a woman is thus not only part of her own core family, but is, upon marriage also, be it in a different way, part of her husband's family. Each "part-whole relationship" hereby represents a specific social relation—a *guanxi*, and with each of these relations, a peculiar code of (ritual) conduct is connected. Anne Cheng (1997, 37) put this as follows:

> The result is a vision of the world, not as a set of discrete and independent entities, each of which constitutes in itself an essence, but as a continuous network of relations between the whole and the parts, without one transcending the other. (Author's translation of the original French)

One of the consequences of this "living in a web" is that the web is part of the individual. The "self" is imbedded in relations and does not exist independently from these relations (Redding 1995, 62). The famous Chinese social scientist

3 See Wilson and Pusey (1982, 199). For a more elaborate treatment of China as a peasant society see Wolf (1966).

Fei Xiaotong called this type of social model a "differential model of association" (*chaxu geju* 差序格局). He illustrated this type of relationship with the metaphor of concentric circles that appear when throwing a pebble into the water (Fei 1992, 62–63). The circles of one individual cross the circles of other individuals at different moments, and each interference of one's own circles with those of another individual stands for a separate form of relation and a separate and peculiar code of (ritual) conduct that is connected to it. That the moral code of conduct is connected to specific *guanxi*-relations means that the Chinese model of social organization is particularistic; it has no universal ethical concepts that go beyond specific and peculiar types of interhuman relations (See Fei 1992, 74). As alluded to above, in social and economic terms each *guanxi*-relation boiled down to increasing and protecting family wealth (Redding 1995, 67). To reach this goal, an individual had to make use of the network of social relations that were at her/his disposal, and had to preserve these relations loyally. In these circumstances, the Chinese type of "trust" was founded on personal reputation, it was not the type of "trust" codified in laws. The absence of a "civil society" that characterized China's dual society hereby deprived the peasant of a "space" to negotiate his economic, social and political position. That is to say, the political status of the peasant was one of "non-participation" in politics, and social mobility was in practice virtually impossible.

Here the role of Confucian rituals comes in. Aware of the scarcity of material goods, Xunzi (ca. 310–ca. 235 BCE), a disciple of Confucius (trad. 551–479 BCE) whose ideas would become important in the formation of Confucian state ideology, advocated the instalment of strict social divisions. As *Xunzi* 5.4 states:

> What is it that makes a man human? I say that it lies in his ability to draw boundaries […] Of such boundaries, none is more important than that between social classes. Of the instruments for distinguishing social classes, none is more important than ritual principles. (Translation: Knoblock 1990, Vol. I, 206)
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> 人之所以為人者何已也 ， 曰以其有辨也 […] 辨莫大於分，分莫大於禮。

In the Confucian state, rituals therefore had a double function: they served as a guideline for individual conduct and, by keeping human behaviour within "ritual boundaries", they also offered the possibility to adjust this individual behaviour so as to "harmonize" society at large (see El Amine 2015, 92).[4] A "harmonious socie-

4 El Amine (2015, 33) therefore suggests seeing "the dispositions sought for the common people (to refrain from stealing, to work hard, and to be 'correct') as dispositions relating to orderliness, rather than virtuousness".

ty", to quote Loubna El Amine (2015, 14) is "achieved through the maintenance of a system of rituals (*li*) that all members of society abide by". To this can be added that ancestor worship, a practice that is by definition restricted to the core family, brought the social relations that exist between the living to a transcendent level. This further cemented the existing division between the elite and popular cultures.

This social and political particularity of traditional China that was maintained throughout the Chinese empire very much resembles the situation Karl Marx describes for 19th century France in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, published in the journal *Die Revolution* in 1852:

> The small peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another, instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France's bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no multiplicity of development, no diversity of talents, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. The small holding, the peasant and his family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sackful of potatoes. In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile contrast to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union and no political organization, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. (Tucker 1978, 608)[5]

5 Marx wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* between December 1851 and March 1852. The "Eighteenth Brumaire" refers to November 9, 1799 in the French Revolutionary Calendar, the day that Napoleon Bonaparte had put an end to the French Revolution, and ushered in the Napoleonic era by seizing power in a *coup d'état*.

In *Hong gaoliang jiazu* 红高粱家族, a novel set in 1930s China, Mo Yan 莫言 gives a succinct description of how the importance of the family in Chinese society continued into the early Republic. In the translation by Howard Goldblatt (1993, 85), the passage that describes the threat to the "family collective" that comes along with the fact that women are married into the family of their husbands and, as such, necessarily form bonds with other families, reads as follows:

> What turns the sorghum of Northeast Gaomi Township into a sweet, aromatic wine that leaves the taste of honey in your mouth and produces no hangover? Mother told me once, making sure I understood that I was not to give away this family secret, for, if I did, not only would our family's reputation suffer, but if our descendants ever decided to set up another distillery they'd have lost their unique advantage. Without exception, the craftsmen from our neck of the woods live by a simple rule: they would rather pass on their skills to their son's wives than to their daughters. This established practice carries the same weight as the law in certain countries.
>
> 高密东北乡红高粱怎样变成了香气馥郁、饮后有蜂蜜一样的甘饴回味、醉后不损伤大脑细胞的高粱酒？母亲曾经告诉过我。母亲反复叮咛我：家传秘诀，决不能轻易泄露，传出去第一是有损我家的声誉，第二万一有朝一日后代子孙重开烧酒公司，失去独家经营的优势。我们那地方的手艺人家，但凡有点绝活，向来是宁传媳妇也不传闺女，这规矩严肃得像某些国家法律一样。[6]

In the West, the Industrial Revolution and age of (first) modernity transformed local economies that had been based on agriculture and handicrafts, and that were organized in the context of core families, into economies based on mechanized manufacturing. New technologies and new ways of organizing work made the existing industries more productive and efficient, and enlarged the scale of industrial production from localities to the nation state. This first happened in England around 1750 and in the rest of Europe in the early nineteenth century. Along with the changes in the volume and the organization of factory work, the gradual development of a juridical system, the neutrality and universal principles of which were guaranteed by a neutral state, also opened the road for the individualization of European societies (see Redding 1995, 136–37). The power of national political institutions and the establishment of the socially integrating institutions that are typical for the age of first modernity, such as organized religion and workers'

6 莫言, «红高粱家族» http://www.dushu369.com/zhongguomingzhu/HTML/77684.html. (Accessed March 13, 2021)

unions that guaranteed workers the necessary safety, enabled the workers to shift (part of) their loyalty from the family business to the higher goal of the nation state. The territorial expansion of economic activity, and the insurance of individual legal protection that characterizes this epoch, enhanced the individual's freedom of movement and radius of action.

Different from previous economic globalization processes that were the result of an increase of labour in individual localities or, for the nineteenth century, in nation states, the globalization of the era of neoliberalism that began in the 1980s is one that rejects labour in favour of capital accumulation, because investing in labour and production yields less results than investing in capital. Neoliberalism is therefore characterized by an enormous increase in capital without a parallel increase in the real economy (Verhaeghe 2020, 36). According to French economist and sociologist Jean-Paul Fitoussi (1997), a structural problem therefore ensues: in absolute figures, the global quantity of available work is shrinking (Fitoussi 1997, referred to in Bauman 2006, 19). This means that the neoliberal focus on capital accumulation arguably also constrains the freedom of movement of a growing number of "underclass" citizens, i.e., the growing number of people who, because their skills have become redundant and/or because they have failed to catch up with the speed of the ever-changing second modernity of neoliberalism, have been squeezed out of the production process and become deprived of the concomitant means for individual development that labour had "traditionally" brought about (Baumann 2020, 101). Moreover, with "capital and commodity markets", as Zygmunt Bauman (2020, 148) claims, having now "moved into a *new societally extraterritorial space*, situated well above the realm of nation states' sovereignty and so beyond the reach of their supervising/balancing/mitigating capacity" (emphasis in original), the control over crucial economic factors has shifted from the institutions of (national) government to the free play of market forces (see Castells 2010, 356). In the era of neoliberal globalization, nation states have therefore not only become "economically senseless", but also their political institutions have increasingly become "remnants of the past" (Bauman 2020, 148). With real power increasingly removed from politics and the political *agora*—the "gathering place" to negotiate social and political order—and with capital chasing the least regulations, the neoliberal "society" is not only characterized by a sharp deterioration in life security for a growing number of citizens (see Castells 2009, 177), but also by decreasing possibilities for these citizens to maintain the political consultation with their local and national governments over the conditions in which they offer their labour. As economic power is shifting to extraterritoriality and as the power of those national institutions that had traditionally maintained the security of national citizens is reduced, a "waning of expectations that salvation may come from government buildings, whoever their current or future occupants may be" (Bauman 2006, 19), has emerged.

China's economic development that started with the reform and opening up policies (*gaige kaifang* 改革開放) at the end of the 1970s has also gradually brought this country into the neoliberal system. It is important to take into account, however, that when China entered into the neoliberal system it was not yet a fully developed industrial nation state. To the extent that in China not all local economic power had already been shifted to the nation state—the famous periods of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1968–1976) even saw a new emphasis on the importance of localities—and that the development of civil law based on universal ethical concepts that go beyond specific and peculiar types of interhuman relations was only in its infancy, the country had remained—and still remains—a highly "localized" nation state.[7] This may help to explain why, as Daniel A. Bell (2006, 15) claimed, while modern East Asian countries may have incorporated individual concepts such as property rights, they still tend to, both in terms of justice and morality, see possession as the possession of the whole family, including that of the aging parents.[8]

Hyper-Individuality and Family Resilience

Both in Western liberal democracies in which individual agency came to be regulated through juridical codes that are guarded by a neutral state and that protected the individual in her/his actions,[9] and in the traditional Chinese context where

7 During the Great Leap Forward (*da yuejin* 大跃进), rural China was reorganized in communities that resembled traditional kinship groups that, with the disastrous outcome of this economic experience, "paradoxically" strengthened the old community loyalties (see Perry 2001, 288–94). The actions of the Red Guards (*hong weibing*) during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution reduced individual trust to, at most, a very restricted kinship group.

8 Commenting on the overseas Chinese, Redding (1995, 3) remarks that they have developed one particular form of organization—the family business—and kept to it. The family business remains in essence a family fortress, and at the same time an instrument for the accumulation of wealth by a very specific set of people. Schmidt-Glintzer (2009, 11) noted that with the instalment of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese citizen has given up individual freedom in favour of the unity and independence of the nation state under CCP rule.

9 Bauman (2006, 155) states that "Liberal democracy […] aspires to square one of the most notorious of the notoriously unsquarable circles—to preserve the liberty to act of, simultaneously, state, individuals and their associations, while making the liberty of each a condition of the freedom of the others."

the individual acted within the confines of *guanxi*-relations that were built on mutual trust, these respective forms of assured solidarity have been a prerequisite for individuals to "act in freedom", because the absence of trust and security makes free enterprise a precarious undertaking.[10]

At this point, we need to address the interchangeability of the family and the nation state. Both the family and nation are means to overcome the futility of personal existence in the sense that they place individual existence in a historical lineage and give sense to individual life through labour in favour of those coming after us, be it in the family or in the nation.[11] The degree to which the nation state can effectively become an alternative for the family depends, I contend, on the degree to which juridically protected individuality has been established. Conversely, when the nation state appears to be no longer capable of (juridically) protecting the individual, individuals will be inclined to divert their loyalty away from the nation state. That is to say, for a growing number of individuals who are pushed out of the neoliberal system—those citizens whom Zygmunt Bauman (2006, 170) called the "locals-by-default" in contradistinction to the "globals-by-choice", i.e., the ideologues and executers of contemporary globalization—the shrinking ability of the political institutions of the nation state to take care of them through an organized system of social security, may result in them feeling the need for alternative protective structures. This may be but does not have to be, as I discuss hereafter, the family.

The entry of neoliberalism may have shifted the powers that determine the fate of an individual's life to extraterritoriality, but this does not mean that the individual lives of the majority of the people do not remain predominantly local. Therefore, the security of the sound functioning of civil society and the political *agora* may have made it possible for each individual "citizen" in Western societies to increasingly dissociate her/himself from the constraints of the family and to go on the path of "hyper-individuality", it is arguably this same "hyper-individuality" that has left the same Western individual defenceless in a neoliberal society in which the power of national institutions has been crippled. This is where the totalitarianism of neoliberalism and the privatization of security come in. As Hannah Arendt (1958, 474) put it:

10 Bauman (2020, 21) notes that "in the society of individuals, we all and each one of us are individuals—*de jure*. That is, individuals by law: written law, but also its unwritten variety, no less powerful for being unwritten—by the diffuse yet continuous, overpowering and irresistible pressure of 'social fact'."

11 Both the nation and the family have the possibility, to speak with Zygmunt Bauman (2006, 38), to make one's own "individual mortality a tool of collective immortality".

> [I]solation is, as it were, pretotalitarian; its hallmark is impotence insofar as power always comes from men acting together; […] isolated men are powerless by definition.[12]

The fact that, in the West, neoliberalism was introduced in a socio-economic context of already matured hyper-individuality may help to explain why a crisis of the political institutions may conduce the Western individual not to return to the "family collective", but to an "ersatz family of her/his own individual choice", much more so than this is the case for her/his Chinese homologue.[13] This drive is described as follows by Adorno (1998, 276):

> [A]s recompense for his jumping into the "melting pot" (in which all ingredients lose their individuality) he (= the individual) is promised the grace of being chosen, of belonging. Weak and fearful people feel strong when they hold hands when running.

As noted above, in China, by contrast, the balance between family and nation state had not yet fully shifted "in favour" of the nation state at the moment the country entered the neoliberal economic system. This is partly related to the fact that in traditional Chinese society an individual did not exist without his *guanxi*-relations, and social organization and law were particularistic. As a result, the motivation for hyper-individualism to develop was largely absent. Related to this is the fact that it was only from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards that the unwanted presence of the West first gave rise to nationalist feelings in all layers of Chinese society—in contrast to the "cultural model" in which the elite shared a "proto-national" identity but the general population did not participate.[14] As is well known, the privatization of the Chinese economy in the early 1980s in practice meant that it was local cooperatives in particular that became the new owners of the erstwhile state economy. This, coupled with the fact that, in China, a civil society had not developed and legally guaranteed individual freedoms did not exist in the same way as they do in Western countries (see Peerenboom 2007, 31–32),—an important exception has to be made here for the ideologues and

12 Bourdieu (1997) stated that "precariousness renders the whole future uncertain, and so forbids all rational anticipation and in particular disallows that minimum of hope in the future which one needs to rebel". (Author's translation of the original French). Also see the quotation of Karl Marx given above.

13 Biscop (2020) noted: "Many people no longer feel that they have a personal responsibility to assume. This is probably why Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan perform so much better in controlling the outbreak than we."

14 For the development of Chinese political nationalism in all layers of Chinese society see Harrison (2001, 165–66, 216–17).

executors of the neoliberal order themselves[15]—may help to explain why, in the circumstances of the pandemic, for the Chinese "locals-by-default" of the neoliberal era, a return to the "family collective" for protecting one's own health and the health of one's family is a more viable alternative for the "patriotic collective" than may be the case for a Western individual who clings to her/his acquired individual freedom. I therefore contend that the seemingly Chinese following of rules imposed by the state in the Covid-19 pandemic may have more to do with family maintenance than with loyalty to the government.[16]

Second Modernity and the Issue of Health Care

The shifting of responsibility for insurance against uncertainty to the individual and the associated privatization of insurance that comes along with the neoliberal organization of "society" applies to both China and the West. In China and in Western countries alike, the nation state has left health care to "big business" that has been "making money" with buying and monopolizing the patents of existing medicines, more than it has been investing in the development of new medicines and vaccines (Mak 2019, 46–48). In an article in *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, Mostafa Shookoohi, Mehdi Osooli and Saverio Stranges (2020, 1) note that:

> while the health systems of most western countries have prioritized hospital-centered management of non-communicable diseases, their capacity to prevent and control emerging infectious diseases has not been given adequate attention, with relatively limited public investments to strengthen epidemiological surveillance systems in the community.

Also in China, the introduction of market reforms in the late 1970s has led to a collapse of the health system. While at the beginning of the reform and opening up policies in 1978, a Chinese citizen only had to pay 20 per cent of the medical

15 Since 2016, China has had more billionaires than the United States with, in 2020, 1,058 (as compared to 696 for the United States). See Ding (2021), who states that "China has the world's most billionaires—more than the United States, India and Germany combined—due to a flurry of new initial public offerings and the booming digital economy over the past year despite the pandemic, according to the latest Hurun rankings."

16 The latter may also relate to the preference for the care of elderly parents in China: 45 per cent of Chinese want their parents to live with them, 47 per cent prefer to let them live independently, and only 2 per cent want their parents to live in a nursing home (6 per cent preferred another, undefined, option). These figures may also be explained through the importance of the traditional "family collective". (See Wang, Morris and Brubaker 2016)

costs from their own savings, this had risen to 60 per cent by 2008, and had left the majority of the rural population without medical insurance (Yip and Hsia 2008). In an interview with *AsiaNews* on 10 April 2005, Yu Zonghe, then deputy chairman of the Chinese Hospital Association lamented that "By asking hospitals to make profits to finance expenses, the government is shirking its responsibility". In the same report, Zhu Qingsheng, then Vice Minister of Health is quoted saying that in 2004 his Ministry received only 1.6 per cent of the government's annual budget, of which most went to the cities. As a result "only 30 per cent of the medical expenditure is spent on farmers, who comprise 70 per cent of the population. The urban population, which makes up 30 per cent, enjoys 70 per cent of the medical resources" (*AsiaNews* 2005). Further, according to Zhu Qingsheng about 45 per cent of urban residents and 79 per cent of people living in rural areas were not covered by any insurance plan in 2004, and anywhere between 40 to 60 per cent of farmers could not afford medical care (ibid.).[17] Despite the statement in the new "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Basic Medical and Health Care", issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (2019a) on 28 December 2019 (in effect as from 6 January 2021) that the people's governments at or above the county level "shall provide basic public health services", that the state "shall provide vaccines in the immunization program for residents free of charge … provide basic medical services according to residents' health conditions and medical needs" and "establish and improve the medical service system […] that completely covers urban and rural areas, […] and improve the rural medical service networks and urban community health service networks",[18] and despite the 'Vaccine Administration Law of the People's Re-

17 Kaufman (2010, 288) notes that "By the end of the 1990s, medical expenses topped the list of reasons that rural families gave for falling into poverty". The "China Health Care Forum Summary Report (2005–2015)" states that, in the year 2013, "by increasing government spending, China has rapidly extended basic medical insurance coverage to the vast majority of its urban and rural residents and strengthened its medical infrastructure at the grassroots level over the past four years. However, it is impossible to solve the long-standing and deep-rooted problems in the healthcare sector by simply increasing government spending. Other measures which can deepen healthcare reform and encourage institutional and organizational innovations should also be implemented".

18 Article 15: "基本公共卫生服务由国家免费提供"; Article 18: "县级以上人民政府通过举办专业公共卫生机构、基层医疗卫生机构和医院，或者从其他医疗卫生机构购买服务的方式提供基本公共卫生服务"; Article 21: "国家实行预防接种制度，加强免疫规划工作。居民有依法接种免疫规划疫苗的权利和义务。政府向居民免费提供免疫规划疫苗"; Article 31: "国家推进基层医疗卫生机构实行家庭医生签约服务，建立家庭医生服务团队，与居民签订协议，根据居民健康状况和医疗需求提供基本医疗卫生服务"; and Article 34: "国家建立健全由基层医疗卫生机构、医院、专业公共卫生机构等组成的城乡全覆盖、功能互补、连续协同的医疗卫生服务体系。国家加强县级医院、乡镇卫生院、村卫生室、社区卫生服务中心（站）和专业公共卫生机构等的建设，建立健全农村医疗卫生服务网络和城市社区卫生服务网络".

public of China' of 29 June 2019 (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress 2019b) (in effect as of 1 December 2019) that stipulates that "the price of the vaccine is set independently and reasonably by the holder of the vaccine marketing license in accordance with the law; the price level, price difference, and profit margin of vaccines should be maintained at a reasonable range",[19] the effects of commercialization of health care and the impact this has on the "locals-by-default" vs. the "globals-by-choice" in contemporary China are illustrated by Flynn Murphy (2020, 51), who writes:

> Investigations reveal that experimental vaccines are available to anyone willing to pay for them in some parts of China. In the city of Yiwu, for example, Britain's national broadcaster the BBC interviewed people queuing to pay around US$60 to receive a dose.

While capital may inhabit cyberspace, it is the physical space that remains of primordial importance for individual life, and it is those political institutions that protect this individual life that are valued. In times of a health crisis, these, so it seems, are increasingly local institutions. An interesting graph in this respect was published in *The Economist* of 20 October 2020. It shows that the outbreak of SARS in 2003 in China led to a decrease in public satisfaction with the central government, but to an increase in satisfaction with the provincial government, an even larger increase in satisfaction with the government on a county level, and a sharp increase in satisfaction with the township government.[20] This corroborates the earlier statement that Chinese citizens turn away from the patriotic collective in times of a (health) crisis.

Individual Religion and the Loss of Trust in Science

An important side-effect of the reduction of an individual's ability to exercise her/his rights as a citizen is that trust in one's identity as "citizen" itself is also reduced. A citizen who, in a neoliberal society, is deprived of her/his identity as "citizen" is reduced to a consumer who less and less feels the sense and need to participate in democratic dialogue and the running of the state, or to comply with government-imposed rules (Bauman 2006, 156). In such circumstances alternative identities are sought, and individual religions are created. Analysing current developments in the world of second modernity, Simon Speck (2013, 27) noted that a complex of economic, social

19 Article 33: "疫苗的价格由疫苗上市许可持有人依法自主合理制定。疫苗的价格水平、差价率、利润率应当保持在合理幅度".).

20 Graph from the "Ash Centre for Democratic Governance and Innovation", Harvard University.

and cultural forces compels individuals "to construct their own biographies without resorting to the socially integrating institutions of the first modernity", such as organized religion, workers unions, and organized science. In the second modernity, therefore, "personal religion" arises as yet another consumer commodity. In the same way as the consumption of consumer goods serves to fulfil one or other desire that is very often sold to the consumer, in the "individual religion" that incarnates the "individual choice" of the consumer, "self-realization and the search for sensation are the basic elements" (Bauman 1997, 182). An important consequence of the creation of "individual religion" is that religion has lost its once universal character. That is to say, religion in a consumerist society brings together lonely "losers", i.e., those "who have been left behind in the struggle for the entrance tickets to the consumer's party. […] the consumers who are not able to use the treasures that are shown seducingly within their reach" (ibid.). These lonely "losers" do, however, not shed their loneliness. On the contrary, the very fact that the new religious (or ideological) group of their choice has as little impact on decision making as they themselves, as individuals, have, results in their alignment with likeminded individuals that only reinforces their conviction that they stand alone.[21] Adorno (1998, 118) in this respect stated that the hope of redemption is doomed to be frustrated, since the promise of a compensatory self-esteem "by proxy" is proffered by the self-same collective that makes admission conditional on the suspension or surrender of individuality. "Individual religion" is thus intricately connected to feelings of socio-economic and political impotence. In her study of the rise of *qigong* in China since the 1990s, Nancy N. Chen (2003, 199) stated the following:

> At the onset of the 21st century, the Chinese state bureaucracy faces the recurrent issue of how to retain social order with ongoing market reform. Despite robust exports and access to new goods and job opportunities, the domestic economy has produced not only *nouveau-riches* but also vastly poorer individuals without a familiar net of state welfare or services available. In the midst of market expansion, alternative healing practices gave meaning to those who were being displaced in the new economic order and who came to embody social disorder. Followers were drawn

21 Bauman (2005, 47) phrased this as follows: "[O]nce the task of coping with human existential unsafety has been privatized and left to individual resources, individually experienced fears can only be 'head-counted', but not shred or melted into a common cause and the new quality of joint action. The privatization of fears has a self-perpetuating capacity." Note that this explains why individual religion in the era of second modernity also lies at the base of contemporary religious (and ideological) fundamentalism: different from premodern religion that was centered on the weakness of human beings as a group, individual religion of the contemporary era addresses the weakness of a particular human individual in its comparison with the power of the "globals-by-choice". Also see Cavanaugh (2004, 50).

> to the messages of inclusion where anyone could participate, especially those who had lost jobs or health care benefits. Such a context created a broad-based interest in healing, setting the stage for entrepreneurial masters and the formation of new healing practices.

Distrust in the established political institutions may similarly also incite a feeling for the need for alternative leadership. That is to say, the loss of trust in the traditional political *agora* may bring about the "belief" in populist leaders as a viable alternative—those who claim to understand the lot of the worker and the middle-class man who is pushed out of the system and forced to join the ever growing mass of "locals-by-default", but who are actually the executors of the neoliberal system that has reduced these same workers and middle-class men to amorphous consumers of populist ideas. Indeed, the consumer syndrome that is part and parcel of the neoliberal order also applies to ideology itself, as even ideology has become merchandise, to be sold on the "political market".[22]

The combination of the felt need for alternative political institutions/leadership and the growth of individual religion may help to explain distrust in science that is fostered by institutions that were traditionally linked to the nation state. That is to say, another side-effect of the hyper-individualization of the neoliberal "society" may be the rise of conspiracy theories. Flynn Murphy (2020, 51) in this respect noted that:

> Trump has made assertions that the coronavirus was manufactured in a Chinese lab, and this and other incorrect conspiracy theories are influential: the results of one survey, published in October, show that almost one-quarter of people in the United Kingdom and the United States think that the coronavirus was engineered in a Chinese lab.[23]

As is known, the Chinese popular media is also not free from unscientific conspiracy mongering on the origin of the COVID-19 virus, although, generally speaking, as Gregory Poland remarks in the issue of *The Lancet* quoted at the beginning of this article:

> China does not have the kind of raucous anti-vaccine, anti-science movement that is trying to derail the fight against COVID-19 in the USA. (Burki 2020)

22 See in this respect also the shrinking adherence to traditional political parties in many Western countries, the rise of one-issue political parties, or the rise of political parties who focus on locality–the geographical space to which the "locals-by-default" and their families are most closely connected.

23 To which, in the meantime, a whole series of more recent unscientific reportage can be added.

Conclusion

A first conclusion that becomes apparent from the above is that in times of crisis, trust in the government is the key. This was, among other things, revealed in an opinion poll done in the Republic of Korea, about which Robert J. Fouser (2020) stated in *The Straits Times*:

> In countries where citizens trust the government, people willingly cooperate. In countries where trust in the government is low, resistance builds and the shutdowns become politicised.

The diminished role of national governments that characterizes the neoliberal order appears to have brought the local level of governance back to prominence. Therefore, that

> most western countries have missed the boat by not using the golden window period at the early days of the spread of the epidemic that the East Asian countries used to halt the COVID-19 epidemic, […] necessitates them to strengthen early responses and *community-centered* public health systems, which are in place in some of the East Asian countries. (Shookoohi, Ossoli and Stranges 2020, 1) (emphasis in original).

Looking at the broader socio-political implications the current COVID-19 crisis risks having, the necessity of reviving the political *agora*—local, national, and supranational—becomes prominent. The suggestions Soonhee Kim (2010, 808) made for Japan and for the Republic of Korea are also applicable to the Western world:

> In order to build government leadership for enhancing public trust in government in democratic societies, government leaders can 1) encourage stakeholders to be creative and innovative in the development of new ideas and tools for enhancing economic development, transparency, and *citizen participation*; 2) promote and communicate vision and goals for *enhancing public trust* in government with internal stakeholders as well as external stakeholders; and 3) monitor government performance on economic development, transparency, and *citizen participation*. (author's emphasis)

I contend that, in times of increased Chinese–Western tension and in which, as alluded to in the "some first considerations" section of this article, the West appears to be increasingly doubting its own fundamental democratic principles, a revaluation of the political *agora* on all levels of governance is crucial to revive Western trust in its own values. In the same way as, in the developmental process of the first modernity, political consultation paved the way for enhanced individual freedoms and secured citizens in their individual discoveries of the world, a renewed focus on political consultation to rebalance the social and political excesses of neoliberalism—phenomena that undermine the very existence of liberal democracies—may be an important part of the road to safeguard our very existence as free citizens in a free world.

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Appendix

Ranking and figures of total number of infections and death toll of a selected number of European and Asian countries, and of the United States (total number of countries listed: 192).

9 December 2020, 09:26

Country	Rank	Total infections	Total death toll
United States	1	15,171,676	286,307
India	2	9,735,850	141,360
France	5	2,363,197	56,453
Italy	6	1,757,394	61,240
United Kingdom	7	1,754,911	62,130
Spain	8	1,702,328	46,646
Germany	11	1,229,269	20,002
Poland	13	1,076,180	20,592
Belgium	19	594,572	17,507
Netherlands	21	579,997	9,857
Czech Republic	24	556,927	9,136
Sweden	36	297,732	7,200
Japan	47	167,367	2,334

Denmark	68	95,332	901
China	71	93,782	4,747
South Korea	88	39,342	556
Taiwan	159	718	7

(Source: Johns Hopkins University: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/maps.html)

1 March 2021, 13:24

Country	**Rank**	**Total infections**	**Total death toll**
United States	1	28,606,177	513,092
India	2	11,112,241	157,157
Brazil	3	10,551,259	254,942
Russia	4	4,209,850	85,025
United Kingdom	5	4,188,827	123,083
France	6	3,815,639	86,580
Spain	7	3,188,553	69,142
Italy	8	2,925,265	97,699
Germany	10	2,452,346	70,154
Poland	14	1,711,772	43,793
Czech Republic	20	1,240,051	20,469
Netherlands	21	1,103,564	15,688
Belgium	27	771,511	22,077
Sweden	29	657,309	12,826
Japan	38	432,736	7,939
Denmark	58	211,883	2,362
China	84	100,979	4,836
South Korea	85	90,031	1,605
Taiwan	172	955	9

(Source: Johns Hopkins University: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/maps.html)

SPECIAL ISSUE
CRISIS AS DANGER AND HOPE –
COVID-19 IN ASIA

Anxiety in Art and Reality

"Poets, What Can We Do?" Pandemic Poetry in China's Mobilization against COVID-19

*Federico PICERNI**

Abstract

The present paper investigates poetry written in China on the theme of the COVID-19 pandemic following the outbreak in January 2020, considered both as a social phenomenon and as literary texts. The analysis is primarily interested in considering the impact of the pandemic on poetry's interaction with social reality. In order to do so, the essay follows two trajectories. Firstly, it explores the public role performed by poets in the nationwide popular mobilization that sustained the party-state's effort to curb the epidemic, with a strong emphasis on poetry as a social practice, specifically in a time of crisis, as outlined by both the state and the authors themselves. Secondly, a close reading of selected texts shows the heterogeneity of standpoints adopted by poets in their individual understandings of their role during China's anti-COVID mobilization effort, especially in relation with the "master narrative" advanced by the state. The paper demonstrates that the final configuration of China's pandemic poetry was made possible by Chinese poetry's long-standing tradition of social responsibility, and that the transgression of boundaries between the official and unofficial poetry scenes, and "amateur" and "professional" authors, was instrumental to promote poets' public engagement.

Keywords: contemporary Chinese poetry, pandemic poetry, China Writers Association, grassroots poetry, COVID-19

»Pesniki, kaj lahko naredimo?«: pandemska poezija v času mobilizacije proti COVID-19 na Kitajskem

Izvleček

Članek raziskuje poezijo, napisano na Kitajskem na temo pandemije COVID-19, po izbruhu januarja 2020, ki velja tako za družbeni pojav kot za literarna besedila. Analiza se prvenstveno ukvarja s preučevanjem vpliva pandemije na povezavo poezije z družbeno realnostjo. Izvedli smo jo po dveh poteh. Prvič, raziskuje javno vlogo pesnikov pri vsedržavni ljudski mobilizaciji, ki je podprla prizadevanja partije, da bi zajezila epidemijo, z močnim poudarkom na poeziji kot družbeni praksi, zlasti v času krize, kot so jo orisali avtorji in država. Drugič, natančno branje izbranih besedil kaže na heterogenost stališč, ki so jih pesniki prevzeli pri individualnem razumevanju svoje vloge med kitajskimi

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prizadevanji za mobilizacijo proti COVID-19, zlasti v zvezi z »glavno pripovedjo«, ki jo je predstavila država. Članek dokazuje, da je dokončno oblikovanje kitajske pandemične poezije omogočila dolgoletna tradicija kitajske poezije kot družbene odgovornosti in da je prestop meja med uradnimi in neuradnimi pesniškimi prizori ter »ljubiteljskimi« in »profesionalnimi« avtorji bistveno pripomogel k spodbuditvi javnega udejstvovanja pesnikov.

Ključne besede: sodobna kitajska poezija, pandemična poezija, kitajska pisateljska zveza, ljudska poezija, COVID-19

COVID-19 and Literature: Too Early to Tell?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on the production of literature. There appears to be no consensus, however, whether writers and poets have a role to play in the ongoing crisis, or should instead wait for the privileged position awarded by temporal distance. As early as in February 2020, in an address to students of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the renowned Chinese novelist Yan Lianke 阎连科 claimed that literature can function as a source of alternative viewpoints while a crisis unfolds, providing a precious archive to preserve the memory of the past in a future that will be buried under the applauses for the victors (Yan 2020). Others disagree with this view, and the American writer Olen Steinhauer uses T. S. Eliot's maxim about poetry as "an escape from emotion" to note that perhaps it would be better to write about trauma once it is past (Steinhauer 2020). In contrast, the Jordanian poet Hisham Bustami argues that it is precisely in the middle of a crisis that the work of the writer or artist becomes yet more relevant (Bustami 2020).

"Local" practice can supply some answers to this global question. The context of the People's Republic of China is particularly prolific in this respect, and lockdown/quarantine diaries are the most visible aspect of this fecundity. Such diaries have proliferated since the very outbreak of the epidemic, and particularly following the lockdown imposed on Wuhan on January 23, 2020. Fang Fang's 方方 *Wuhan Diary* is the most impressive and well-known example, which has really turned literature into a "forum for national expression" in the media (Fang 2020, 212), as hoped for by its author. But it is only the tip of the iceberg. Countless diaries have been produced by people coming from different walks of life, many of whom had never written anything before (Bao 2020; 2022; Yang 2021). In sum, while the societies of East and Southeast Asia appear to have responded rapidly and efficiently to the outbreak of COVID-19—even if this came at the cost of draconian measures—the same would seem to have occurred on the literary field.

The present paper provides an analysis of poetry written in China after the beginning of the pandemic. Compared to diaries, poetry has been less noticed or studied. This paper has no ambition to offer a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon, which will surely benefit from more temporally distanced research in the future. However, the existing sources allow for a rigorous discussion on how the historical contingences of the pandemic and the Chinese state's response have impacted the interaction of poetry and poets with society. My endeavour here is therefore twofold: on the one hand, I am interested in the poet as a social figure, in investigating how various players expected poets to respond to the call to nationwide mobilization against the virus, and the ways they actually responded. On the other hand, I will scrutinize a select body of these poems, chronologically located before summer 2020 (that is, in the peaking period of COVID-19 in mainland China), to discuss how this was translated into texts. Overall, the snapshot offered here addresses some long-standing issues in China's poetry scene, namely the existing dynamics between official and unofficial contexts, specialist and non-specialist authorship, art and society, with a special focus on the porousness of the boundaries that separate them.

Methodologically, the paper benefits from a mixture of sociology of literature, close reading of texts, and discourse analysis by putting authors and texts under scrutiny against the backdrop of the Chinese party-state's "master narrative" on the epidemic. As for terminology, *pandemic poetry* seems the best-fitting option, and is also favoured for its terminological resonance with the "quake poetry" that emerged after the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 (Inwood 2011a), another striking example of poetry's direct interaction with society.[1]

The Poet and the Establishment: A Never-Ending Story

Pandemic poetry was engendered by a historical contingency fraught with political implications. On the one hand, it cannot be separated from the level of public discourse around COVID-19 as determined by the master narrative of the party-state (see the following section); on the other hand, it was actively promoted by cultural institutions, a fact that calls into question poets' relationship with the establishment and the kind of public role they are expected to perform.

1 I borrow "pandemic poetry" from Michel Hockx, who used it in his lecture to the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago on "The Regulations of Literature in Xi Jinping's China", on 16 February 2021.

Historically, poetry in China has always had a close and complicated relationship with political power. This even predates the historical establishment of the figure of the poet as author. Many works contained in the *Shijing* 诗经 (*Book of Songs*), the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry (eleventh to seventh century BCE), probably originate from folk, or actually peasant, poems and songs, that were later superimposed with official commentaries to reconnect them to moral orthodoxy (Granet 1982). Institutional(ized) poetry was progressively given the role of providing moral instruction, and eventually ossified in strict conventions and endless repetition of the classics. No clear lines separated poets and the officialdom, with reclusion and seclusion often becoming viable choices to protect or achieve creative autonomy. In 1905, the abolishment of the Imperial examination system, where poetry was a criterion for the selection of the bureaucracy, compelled poets to reposition themselves in relation to society (Yeh 1991, Ch. 1). While several poets and schools of that period favoured a divorce from politics to dedicate themselves exclusively to writing, many others did not relinquish their social commitment, playing an important role in the proletarian (1920s), left-wing (1930s), anti-Japanese national defence and liberated areas (1940s) literary configurations. Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art", delivered in 1942, declared the primacy of politics over art in creative writing: poets were first encouraged and then required to partake in the political struggles of the time, and mandated to come from the grassroots or to accept re-education from the masses of workers and peasants to remould their class viewpoints.[2] The basic guidelines for cultural policy in the People's Republic of China from its foundation in 1949 until Mao's death in 1976, modelled after the "Talks", again gave poetry a didactic function under bureaucratic control. The Reform and Opening Up (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) policy inaugurated in 1978 and the liberalization of the publishing industry in the 1990s once again pushed the poets to the margins and generated new controversies about their social role (Inwood 2011b).

Alongside the establishment flourished a vast scene of unofficial poetry, initially written and distributed underground, then, starting from the late 1970s, allowed to publish with relative freedom outside state-controlled editorial mechanisms. Unofficial poetry, closely studied by Maghiel van Crevel (2008; 2017a), presents a rich and vibrant environment, where the meanings of "avant-garde" (*xianfeng* 先

2 Against the common assumption that 1949–1976 "official" poetry was devoid of any aesthetic value, the peculiar artistic phenomena from the period, above all worker-peasant-soldier poetry (*gongnongbing shige* 工农兵诗歌), entailed several issues around poets' relation with society; at the least, these authors managed to draw inspiration from "things and places in which their predecessors had discovered no stimulus" (Lin 1972, 241).

锋) versus official senses of aesthetic value are constantly disputed and challenged as new actors burst on the scene and try to make sense of the possibilities there. Generally speaking, unofficial poetry has continued to explore the potentialities of language beyond established conventions and jargons, ventured across thematic boundaries, and experimented wildly with style and form. Far from marginal, it is in this creative area that "everybody that is anybody in contemporary poetry from the PRC first published and developed their voice" (van Crevel 2008, 6).

Under such historical circumstances, scholars divide the contemporary field of poetic production in China along two scenes: the official, or *guanfang* 官方, and the unofficial, or *minjian* 民间. For Michelle Yeh (1996, 51–52), the official scene "comprises publications—newspapers, literary journals, poetry magazines, books of poetry—funded, edited, and published by the state at various administrative levels (e.g., central, provincial, city)". By contrast, the unofficial refers to "that part of contemporary poetry that operates on its own initiative, outside the publishing business as formally administered by the state" (van Crevel 2008, 7). Of course, the burgeoning Internet scene has immensely expanded the means at the disposal of poets who write outside official circuits (Hockx 2015), creating what Yeh (2007, 34) calls a "Borderless Republic of Poetry". However, the "institutional" side of things does not exhaust the plurality of dichotomies that one can draw when discussing poets' relationship with the state, the publishing industry, and the art. The Chinese word itself, *minjian*, implies several different aspects, aptly summarized by Sebastian Veg (2019, 7–8):

> Its literal meaning is "among the people", [and it is characterized by] a combination, to different degrees, of three characteristics of people or institutions: independence from state income (self-funded), lack of approval by the state system (unofficial), and a low social marker (nonelite or grassroots).[3]

All these traits, however, do not necessarily overlap in the realm of poetry production. The separation between official and unofficial works for what concerns primarily the institutional side (journals, associations, and environments where

3 Notably, *minjian* can mean other things as well in the context of contemporary Chinese poetry. In 1998–2000, the word became entrenched in a polemic between a *Zhishifenzi* 知识分子 (Intellectual) writing that favoured lyricism, abstraction, and distance from the mundane, and a *Minjian* (Popular) standpoint, more interested in the quotidian, with a plain and often colloquial language. The polemic has been widely discussed (Inwood 2014, Ch. 1; Liang 2020; van Crevel 2008, Ch. 12; Yeh 2007), particularly highlighting its importance in forging, or rather systematizing, aesthetic sensibilities (van Crevel 2008, Ch. 1), and, again, for what concerns poets' self-consciousness in constructing their own identity *vis-à-vis* canon formation (Kunze 2012, 145).

poetry is produced, published, circulated, discussed), and also, as a consequence, questions of hegemonic and counterhegemonic (or hybrid, for that matter) aesthetics, language, style. Yet, on the level of poets themselves as creative individualities other lines can be drawn, which are not automatically juxtaposed with the official/unofficial dichotomy: we can differentiate, for example, between professional (*zhuanye* 专业) and amateur (*feizhuanye* 非专业 or *yeyu* 业余), establishment and avant-garde, elite (*jingying* 精英) and grassroots (*caogen* 草根) or low-rung (*diceng* 底层). Terminology is tricky, and while taxonomizing is helpful to get a hold of real processes, poets in practice tend to operate across these boundaries, not only within them. Most of the early unofficial and avant-garde poets active since the late 1970s used to be amateurs who would share their works in self-run journals, often under the note "for internal exchange" (*neibu jiaoliu* 内部交流), although several were later able to publish with prestigious outlets and publishing houses, questioning their continued status as "unofficial" or "non-elite" (cf. the case study on Yang Lian 杨炼 in Edmond 2006). However, a well-established ("elite") author may have an interest in maintaining a simultaneous presence in unofficial journals, just like a non-specialist author can be welcome in important official venues, often after being "discovered" by influential patrons.

Pandemic poetry is precisely a case where different dimensions interpenetrate each other, both in terms of discourse and authorial identity. For the purposes of this paper, I will therefore move along two levels—the institutional and the individual. I will mainly refer to the official and unofficial as an overarching distinction involving institutions and spaces, but I will then distinguish between specialist and non-specialist for what concerns poets as persons and *personas*, and thus the image they present to the world. More specifically, exploring how the relationship between official publications and non-specialist authors has been rearticulated in the framework of pandemic poetry facilitates a discussion on how poets' social responsibility was encouraged and given visibility by state cultural institutions. As result of the historical vicissitudes in 20th-century Chinese poetry outlined above, the question about the poet's responsibility towards social, political, and public actualities is still open. As noted by Heather Inwood (2011b, 50),

> For many poets, a widely experienced sense of responsibility stems from both a common investment in the scene of contemporary poetry and from a deep-rooted belief in the importance of the poet as a public intellectual who has a duty to Chinese society despite—or perhaps because of—poetry's widely acknowledged marginalisation within mainstream culture.

In pandemic poetry, this responsibility materializes at least in two ways: we have poems that deal with the pandemic as a theme, but we also have poets who participate in the anti-epidemic effort as distinct sociocultural figures. For this reason, it is necessary to look not only at texts, but also at how cultural institutions and unofficial publications alike developed their discourse around individual poets' participation in the anti-epidemic effort, often highlighting their trait as non-specialists, i.e. as poets on the ground.

Mobilization and the Master Narrative

Pandemic poetry can be understood only if placed in its discursive context. COVID-19 became a high-level emergency in China on January 20, and Wuhan was put under lockdown on the 23rd. The hallmark of the party-state's response to the crisis was a nationwide mobilization of the people. In fact, mobilization is nothing new in the Chinese (or South/East Asian) context. Kristen E. Looney (2019, 41–42) describes mobilization as a mode of policy implementation based on "any effort to activate and involve a population in the pursuit of certain goals". Mobilizations have been instrumental to state campaigns for national development during the second half of the 20th century, to the point that they almost became immaterial institutions. As for China's anti-epidemic mobilization, its specific features have recently been analysed by a number of papers, with specific focuses on data tracking, community lockdown and community-based organizations (Mei 2020), or on the ability to mobilize resources through the People's Liberation Army and the state-owned enterprise sector (He, Shi, and Liu 2020). Wang Hui 汪晖 stressed the role of mobilization at the community level to connect the dimensions of "family, work unit and individuals" with the authorities in a vertical way, going so far as to suggest, in Gramscian terms, that it may "re-ignit[e] the agency and active role of the People, and once again compe[l] unity between the People and the 'Modern Prince'" (Wang 2020, 237–38)—the Modern Prince being the Communist Party of China.

An extremely relevant part in the anti-COVID mobilization has been its discursive component; to wit, the role played by the state-promoted narrative. Scholars have investigated this hegemonic narrative from several perspectives (Molter and DiResta 2020, Qiaoan and Gallelli 2021, Xie and Zhou 2021), and also with respect to its external implications, especially in the propaganda conflict with the United States (Jaworsky and Qiaoan 2021). Domestic and external discourses are clearly dependent on each other here, all based upon the instrumental control of the storytelling. The rhetorical strategy deployed domestically by the Chinese party-state has concentrated in particular on a martial language (Gallelli 2020).

In fact, the "sweeping war narrative" put forward by institutions and official media has contributed to the nationwide mobilization on the level of emotions, "appealing to citizens for behavioral compliance with coercive measures" and "penetrat[ing] into the entire society" well beyond mere "social rhetoric or metaphor by political leaders" (He, Shi, and Liu 2000, 251–52). Such a narrative is centred around the concept of the People's War (*renmin zhanzheng* 人民战争), which, as pointed out by Wang Hui (2020, 236), is not merely a military concept but a political category. Summoning the People's War has been instrumental to both shape warlike imagery, with the whole people mobilized as one huge army, and evoking the cultural legacy of the Chinese Revolution as well as the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945), originally considered the first actualizations of the People's War.[4] In the vocabulary underpinned by such a belligerent framework, medical personnel have been framed as "warriors clad in white" (*baiyi zhanshi* 白衣战士) on the frontline (*diyixian* 第一线) in the fight against an "invisible enemy" (*kanbujian de diren* 看不见的敌人), under the personal leadership of the CPC and General Secretary *cum* State President Xi Jinping 习近平. But overall, the function of the *People's* War lies in *mobilizing* a plurality of forces: party organizations as the backbone, health-care staff and scientific experts as the main force, and the whole people united as one as the rear-guard (*Renmin ribao* 2020a, 1).[5] Additionally, the virus has also been presented as a natural calamity (*zainan* 灾难) or a demon (*mogui* 魔鬼). Even more so after the initial mismanagement of the crisis on the part of the authorities and the case of Li Wenliang 李文亮, one of the first whistle-blowers harassed by the Wuhan police (Li subsequently died of COVID-19), the importance of this narrative clearly goes beyond the anti-epidemic campaign: it rather reasserts the governing capability and the legitimacy of the party-state, and aims at consolidating the people's trust in it (Wu and Huang 2020). There is no need for further explanation, then, on why hegemony over the narrative is paramount.

Poets Mobilized: Poetry to Resist COVID-19

In China, pandemic poetry generally goes by the name of *kangyi shige* 抗疫诗歌, literally "resist-epidemic-poetry". Encompassing everything that has been written

4 The very construction of the term *kangyi* 抗疫, literally "resist the epidemic", while nothing exceptional according to the formal standards of the modern Chinese language, also evokes *kangri* 抗日, "resist the Japanese", and therefore it appears in line with the People's War-related belligerent language employed by the state response.

5 While not strictly academic, it is worth reminding that a common joke about quarantine measures told by people in China in the early months of 2020 was that everyone would give their contribution to the motherland by sleeping all day.

with the COVID-19 epidemic as a subject, pandemic poetry, published mainly online, has grown into a vast phenomenon with considerable visibility since the very early months of 2020. That is hardly surprising, considering that pandemic poetry is precisely one of those cases where "differences between who is or is not on the 'poetry scene' can be put aside in the interest of a greater cause" and poetry "is far from immune to […] the political mobilization of grassroots culture" (Inwood 2014, 158), also thanks to the peculiarly public participation of/in China's poetic tradition. Inevitably, a kind of poetry marked by high social significance and participation is haunted by suspicions about its aesthetic quality. In the case at hand, such concerns are typified by the young writer Zong Cheng's 宗城 statement, published in the journal of poetic theory *Xingxing* 星星 (*Stars*), that most pandemic poetry only voices its authors' "frivolous laments" (*qingbo de gankai* 轻薄的感慨) with no attention to artistic polish (Zong 2020, 13). He also acknowledges that its "true significance" (*zhenzheng yiyi* 真正意义) is to be found in it becoming "a whole-people campaign" (*quanmin yundong* 全民运动) that asserts poetry's "[promoting] equality" (*shige de pingdeng* 诗歌的平等) and its "warm, sincere strength" (*wennuan chengzhi de liliang* 温暖诚挚的力量) (ibid., 14). The assumption that poetry has transgressed its own boundaries to become an instrument of the whole people, also at the expense of formal refinement, is actually consistent with the wider mobilization of the arts in the service of the anti-epidemic effort.[6] In turn, the arts' public engagement directed by the state appears shaped by the legacy of Mao's aforementioned "Yan'an Talks", but also carries a much older heritage that goes back to the Confucian mandate to the arts to serve the purposes of moral edification.

Early examples of pandemic poetry were actively promoted (and presumably commissioned) by *Shikan* 诗刊 (*Poetry*), China's most important poetry journal under the aegis of the China Writers Association, the official body of literary

6 On February 26, 2020, *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (*People's Daily*), the central organ of the CPC, published a collection of aphorisms and messages written by famous Chinese writers and poets under the headline "On the Same Boat, A Wall of Will" (*Tongzhou gongji, zhongzhi chengcheng* 同舟共济 众志成城), to express the "active participation of the world of literature" (文学界积极行动) in the "smokeless war" (没有硝烟的战争) against the virus, and as "a tribute to the boundlessly heroic medical personnel" and "an encouragement to the vast ranks of party members and cadres and the broad masses on the frontlines of the struggle" (向英勇无畏的医务工作者致敬，为奋战在一线的广大党员、干部、群众加油鼓劲) (*Renmin ribao* 2020b). Classical poetry has also been used in the context of international cooperation from China (Xi 2020). In this respect, it is worth remembering that *Shikan* published a collection of classical "Italian" poetry (that actually included Latin authors, too) on March 10, 2020 in solidarity with Italy's nationwide lockdown. Crates of masks and other supplies shipped to Italy from China also carried a saying attributed to the Roman philosopher Seneca: "We are waves of the same sea, leaves of the same tree, flowers of the same garden."

bureaucracy. *Shikan* published two different series of pandemic poetry on its *gongzhonghao* 公众号, or "public account", on the popular social media app WeChat. The first series was titled *Yi shi kang yi* 以诗抗疫 (*Combat the Epidemic with Poetry*) and ran three instalments on 27, 29, and 30 January 2020. The series carried no paratext, but the subtitle clearly set its orientation: *Wuhan shiren zai fengcheng qijian* 武汉诗人在封城期间 (*Wuhan Poets during the Lockdown*). In other words, it purported to publish the works of poets who found themselves in the quarantined city, accompanied by pictures of Wuhan and some propaganda posters. The timing alone is surprising, considering that the lockdown was enforced only four days earlier the start of the series; it is therefore conceivable that the journal's editorial board, or the Writers Association at local or central level, asked poets to produce something as soon as possible.

Shikan started a second series on February 18, titled *Zhandou zai yiqing diyixian de shirenmen* 战斗在疫情第一线的诗人们 (*Poets Fighting on the Frontlines of the Epidemic*). This second series ran through February and March. The preface to the first post specified that published authors were poets committed in various ways to the "frontlines" of the anti-epidemic effort—having positions in command centres (*zhihuibu* 指挥部), emergency clinics and hospitals, or serving on duty in quarantined areas. The definition was therefore fairly elastic, giving a sense of how poets from different walks of life were taking part in the effort. Interestingly, the February 18 inaugural post carried poems that had been published before the epidemic, and therefore the focus was, again, on the poet's public role in that exceptional moment, not strictly on new production or coherent subject matter. Later instalments reversed the trend and ran original poems that addressed the epidemic. This notwithstanding, the poets' public role continued to be highlighted. Each author's name was accompanied by a note on the epidemic-related job they were performing, and by pictures of them on duty, as opposed to the *Yi shi kang ri* series that only added generic pictures of cityscapes.

Some of the poems published on *Shikan*'s blog were later printed in the multiple-author collection *Kang "yi" zhi ge* 抗"疫"之歌 (*Odes of the Anti-"Epidemic" War*), published in March 2020 by Zuojia chubanshe, the publishing house affiliated with the Writers Association. The book was presented as a collection of 65 pieces by as many authors from different occupations:

> Medical staff, police officers, writers, teachers, journalists, public servants, retired personnel, laid-off workers—authors' different occupations have conferred their works a plurality of points of view, and have made manifest the strength and determination displayed in the moment of crisis by the whole people, united as one to combat the virus.

> 医护工作者、警察、作家、教师、媒体记者、公务员、离退休人员、下岗职工等，作者不同的职业赋予了作品不同的视角，彰显了危急时刻，万众一心全民抗疫的气势与决心. (Zhongguo zuojia wang 2020)

Once again, then, what was stressed was the poets' participation in the markedly collective effort.[7] The table of contents divided the poems into two section, titled "Geshi he wei shi er zuo" 歌诗合为事而作 (Odes and Poems are Written for the Sake of Events) and "Wenzhang he wei shi er zhu" 文章合为时而著 (Literature is Written for the Sake of Times), two parts of a phrase by the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易. This classic reference not only insisted on poets' active involvement in the affairs of society, but also reconnected to the political nature of poetry in Imperial times. In fact, although they were all published in a very official dimension, these poets could hardly be dismissed as all belonging to the establishment, regardless of the fact that some of them actually held positions within the Writers Association. Heavy paratextual intervention was there precisely to show that the majority of these poets were non-professional, in what was clearly a mobilization of grassroots creative and cultural resources.

Besides context and paratext, textual analysis offers further insight. "Shiren" 诗人 (Poets) by Liu Yishan 刘益善, a poet from Hubei and former vice-chair of the provincial branch of the Writers Association, is perhaps what we may expect from state-sponsored pandemic poetry. After a programmatic couple of questions in the opening stanza, "Poets, what should we do? / What can we do?" (诗人，我们该做什么？/我们能够做什么？), the poem continues:

> For those who have been hit
> Pray, and wish them
> To resist with all their might, to rise up again soon
> And enjoy the sun and breeze of spring with us
>
> For warriors clad in white on the field night and day
> Scornful of danger and ready to sacrifice
> We write a poem of profound emotion
> To offer them the salute and tribute we nurture in our hearts

7 The collective principle is also highlighted in another printed anthology, which precedes *Kang "yi" zhi ge*, namely *Ling yi zhong chiyuan de jiti xingdong—2020 nian Zhongguo kangyi zujizhan shixuan* 另一种驰援的集体行动—2020年中国抗疫阻击战诗选 (*Another Kind of Collective Rescue Action: A Selection of Poems From China's War to Stop the Virus*, 2020), edited by the poet Liang Ping 梁平.

To soldiers who have rushed to our aid from a thousand *li*
To teams of doctors from everywhere who have
Left their dear ones and renounced to their rest, to anyone
Who donated goods and money, we write a long poem
To celebrate their merit and altruism

What else can we do?
We can wear a mask
Drink a lot, wash our hands,
Stay home, not go out
We are with the rest of China!

我们给被袭击的人们
祝福祈祷，愿他们
顽强抵抗，早日站起来
和我们一起享受春风阳光

我们给不畏危险与牺牲
日夜战斗在疫区的白衣战士
写一首深情的歌
献上我们心中的问候与敬意

我们给奔驰千里来援的军人
我们给告别家人放弃休假的
各地医疗队，给各行各业
捐物捐钱的人们，写一首长诗
歌颂他们的奉献和无私

我们还能做什么?
我们还能做的就是戴口罩
多喝水，勤洗手
坚守家中不出门
我们就是与中国在一起！(Liu 2020)

The style of this poem is blandly prosaic, especially in the last stanza, with somewhat of a wooden translation of the government's slogans into poetry. These characteristics appear justified if considered in the context of the traditional pedagogic role assigned to poetry, condensed in the traditional precept "Literature as a

Vehicle of the Way" (*wen yi zai dao* 文以载道). Mimetically transmitting the slogans of the government can also be understood as Liu Yishan's effort to exalt his own role as part of the mobilization, simply repeating its master narrative.

Unsurprisingly, the tropes of the hegemonic discourse abound in pandemic poetry. The language is often bombastic, and extols the deeds of doctors and nurses, sometimes also soldiers, with martial overtones, praising their fulfilment of duty (Xie and Zhou 2021). Two recurrent opposites are the aggression (*qin* 侵) of the virus and the response of the "order" (*mingling* 命令) issued by the authorities. Pronouns are conspicuously plural, with an abundance of We/Us (the mobilized, often in the rear) and several occurrences of You (to whom "We" present our ode), contributing to conveying an impression of unity and closed ranks. Images such as the spring breeze (*chunfeng* 春风) and flowers blossoming at the warmth of spring (*chunnuan huakai* 春暖花开) are evoked to present the coming season, which becomes a metaphor for the victory against the COVID-19, connecting with the temporal dimension of the anti-epidemic effort. The poems tend to grow stylistically and thematically more diverse when it comes to poets of the second series (i.e., those not living in Wuhan): other emotions, particularly homesickness, become more relevant, but always under the context of a military-like mobilization. Some poets escape the referential immediacy of much of pandemic poetry and delve deeper into more abstract themes, including life (threatened), marital and parental love (often separated), and the power of apparently insignificant moments and gestures (under the menace of death). Finally, a considerable amount of pandemic poetry is documentary, creating a sort of poetic reportage of life in hospital wards, night shifts, and so on.

Most pandemic poetry is message-based, it invests little energy in craft and style, and often repeats the same images, moods, and tones (which is nothing odd considering its historical context). Its function appears to be first of all operative, if not so much to stir the people's fervour (considering the limited readership of poetry today), then more to show off poets' commitment to mobilization. Art here is at the service of public safety, and to this end it forgoes or rather readapts its conventions. However, some poems are reinforced with ulterior elements, like cultural and historical references. In Xie Keqiang's 谢克强 "*Shiyan*" 誓言 (Pledge), for instance, we read that "Norman Bethune's blood / flows in our veins" (白求恩的血/流淌在我们的血管里; Xie 2020), thus creating a connection with the Canadian doctor who served with the Communist-controlled Eight Route Army during the Anti-Japanese Resistance and has since been exalted as a paragon of internationalist altruism in CPC annals (and another symbol of the People's War). In a similar vein, Bai Lingyun's 白凌云 "Bu Suanzi. Taihang kangri jinianbei cunzhao" 卜算子•太行抗日纪念碑存照 (Taihang Anti-Japanese Monument for Future Reference: To the Tune of Bu Suanzi) contains some interesting intertextual and historical elements:

> Erect standing on the precipice, peaks are covered with snow. A million mountains, a million soldiers, the army haunts all night.
>
> Lofty and towering narrating springs and autumns, bugle horns in the night of Pingxingguan. May strength have no rest until Loulan is breached, hearts like steel until death.
>
> 绝壁立森严，叠嶂苍岩雪。百万青山百万兵，将士同宵猎。
>
> 巍耸记春秋，号角平型夜。不破楼兰势不休，到死心如铁。(Bai 2020)

The reference to the Anti-Japanese Resistance is concretized through the mention of the Battle of Pingxingguan, a major victory for the Communist military against the invading Japanese army in September 1937, but it is also made poetically more powerful (and, in a way, more artistically legitimate) by citing, with a slightly different wording, a verse by Tang poet Wang Changling's 王昌龄 fourth "Congjunxing" 从军行 (The March of the Army): "May there be no return until Loulan is breached" (不破楼兰终不还), where the state of Loulan symbolically represented enemy nations beyond China's north-western frontier. In the tradition of classical Chinese poetry, the concrete enemy here, namely the virus, is only alluded at, behind references that aim at preserving the originals' (the War of Resistance, Wang Changling's poem) sense of tragic heroism. Bai himself is a political commissar in the People's Liberation Army and his poem was highly praised by the *Jiefangjun bao* 解放军报 (*Liberation Army Daily*), the military's news outlet (Zhang 2020).

The Sound of the City's Silence

The theme of the city—the deserted, spectral city under lockdown—is also prevalent, both in as well as beyond Wuhan. Traversing, observing or reflecting on the pandemic-hit city becomes a sensorial experience, enacted by impressing the poet's mood on the surrounding urban landscape or environment, or through a mimetic relationship between authors/individuals and the city. Just like the city is empty, individuals are lonely; the quarantine not only closes down the city, but also separates individuals from its living spaces. Li Luping 李鲁平, for example, conveys a surreal sense of living in a ghost town in "Fengcheng de rizi" 封城的日子 (Lockdown Days): "No footstep remains on the streets, no fallen leaf / Not even the script written by a wheel" (道路上不存一只脚印，一片树叶/甚至一辆车轮写下的字迹; Li 2020). The choice of words compels the reader to conceive of the lockdown city as a text that remains unwritten or is actively un-written by those who inhabit it. Along the same lines, the most interesting and provoking piece carried in the lockdown series is "Jinye de Wuhan shi anjing de" 今

夜的武汉是安静的 (Quiet is Wuhan Tonight), by Jian Nan 剑男, a well-known poet from Hubei. The poem is worth quoting in full:

Quiet is Wuhan tonight
Quiet the waters of the East Lake
Quiet the Yellow Crane Tower and the Cintai Theatre
Quiet the streets, the trees and the lights
Just like those who, after an incident,
Hands behind their back, reflect on themselves in the silence
From the top of buildings veiled by thin rain
The gaze slowly turns from Jiedaokou to the river
Like when I was slowly falling in love
With her sounds. She has known countless floods,
Wars, even plagues, naturally
Never was she perfect, just like now
The angels are busy, but someone's heart
Is frozen, as due to another virus
The price for this silence pains
But if I insisted asking who allowed
The virus to propagate, will then fly out
Bats, one after another from dark
Corners, and will they list
Our sins to us? All the cures, one by one,
Are being carried out in the quiet, and I almost seem to hear
The pulsing beats of this city's heart
In big Hankou and old Wuchang, in Caidan
And at Yinglu port, like countless
Hearts beating in unison, silent but powerful

今夜的武汉是安静的
东湖的水和长江的水是安静的
黄鹤楼和琴台是安静的
街道、树木和灯光也是安静的
就像一个人经历某事后
反剪着双手在静静地反思自己
我站在细雨朦朦的楼顶
目光缓慢地从街道口望向江边
就像我曾经缓慢地爱上
它的喧闹。它遭遇过无数洪水
战争、包括瘟疫，显然

它从来不是完美的，就像此刻
天使在忙碌，一些人的
心却结上了冰，像另一种病毒
这安静的代价令人伤悲
但如果我一直追问，是谁导致
病毒的蔓延，会不会有
一只又一只的蝙蝠迅速从黑暗
角落俯冲下来，并数落
我们的罪恶。一一所有的救治
正在无声地进行，在这
空旷的安静中，我似乎听见了
这座大城市怦然的心跳
在大汉口也在老武昌，在蔡甸
也在阳逻港，像无数的
心脏跳动在一起，默然而有力 (Jian 2020)

The poem is well-constructed, both in how it handles its subject matter and in formal craft. The poet imagines himself standing on the top of a building, enjoying a panoramic view of the city. De Certeau describes this as the voyeur's gaze, which puts the subject at a distance, and only allows for a "fiction of knowledge" from "this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (de Certeau 1984, 92). However, while de Certeau was criticizing an arrogant view from above that was alien to the concrete practices of lived urban space "on the ground", Jian Nan here makes use of a trope from classical Chinese poetry, which saw the poet ascending to a higher place to acquire a better view and reflect on the world. Structurally, the poem zooms in and out, in almost a cinematographic way, of the deeper city. It is a progressive movement from the material and concrete city, evoked through topographic elements and name-places, down into a darker subconscious (individual as well as social, by the way), and then back to the material.

Bats are a relevant presence here, especially because they do not make frequent appearances in the pandemic poetry under survey in this essay, despite their perceived role in spreading the virus.[8] Here, bats' symbolic association with the virus is

8 Two other occurrences of bats in the body of poems under survey here are far more predictable, as the animals are presented as "seal[ing] off the land" (给大地打上封条) in Xiong Youkun's 熊游坤 "Yi zhanshi de ming" 以战士的名 (In the Name of Warriors), or, with evident speciesism, as hellish beings in Li Jianchun's "Gaishang fengyin de cheng" 盖上封印的城 (A Seal On the City): "This is not the dusk of the gods, but the dusk of bats' vengeance / Infernal face, demonic wings, / Bony and skinny body, what's good to eat in them?" (不是众神的黄昏，是蝙蝠复仇的黄昏，/ 它长着地狱的脸，魔鬼的翅膀，/它瘦骨嶙峋的身子，有什么好吃的).

re-signified through their interaction with the narrator (and, metonymically, human beings). Bats are not presented as guilty, but instead they embody nature, reminding humans of their "sins", reminiscent of David Quammen's seminal *Spillover* (Quammen 2012). The descent into the urban subconscious is therefore also a descent into deeper truths of sociopolitical relevance. These lines divert the reader's attention from the trope of the natural calamity towards human responsibility. This can be linked to debates around the Anthropocene and Capitalocene (Moore 2016), and particularly to the role played by the prevailing development model in disrupting environmental stability and facilitating the spread of epidemics. While the image of hearts beating in unison undoubtedly connects to the rhetoric of unity in mobilization, the power of silence, also reasserted in the final verse, purports a less "mobilized" and more contemplative function (opposed to the shouting of slogans and orders). The (global) trope of the silent city therefore acquires new meaningfulness, and, camouflaged behind an ostensible inadequacy of language, actually upholds the ability of poetry to open up new possibilities for thought.

Nevertheless, this by no means prevents a poet like Jian Nan from partaking in the highly publicized function of pandemic poets. "*Jinye de Wuhan shi anjing de*", which was part of the very first batch of poems from locked-down Wuhan in the "*Yi shi kang yi*" series (January 2020), has had substantial success in official and unofficial contexts alike. Several clips of people reciting it can be found online, and it has also been republished on a number of other websites and blogs, up to its inclusion in the first volume of *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue xuanben* 中国当代文学选本 (*A Collection of Modern Chinese Literature*), edited by Wang Xinpeng 王昕朋 in late 2020. It was also recited by Xu Zechen 徐则臣, the recipient of China's prestigious Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2019, on the occasion of an online reading hosted by the Writers Association on March 10, 2020.

Again, what mattered more was the poets' engagement with their public responsibility, namely their part in the national anti-epidemic mobilization, rather than what they actually wrote (and textual analysis reveals multiple layers that go often beyond any mere repetition of slogans). In fact, while this is undeniably state poetry, given that the subject matter is mandated by state institutions such as the Writers Association and it explicitly serves the objectives of the government,[9] the element of top-down prescriptiveness should not be overestimated.

9 This stands in partial contrast to most of quake poetry from 2008, which was largely produced by netizens (also anonymously) and then appropriated by the media (Inwood 2014, 174–75). Conversely, it is reminiscent of how the establishment—specifically the party's Central Propaganda/Publicity Department—explicitly called for works of prose and poetry that could document the events during the SARS epidemic of 2003 (Tamburello 2005, 1136).

Crucially, the operation in place here has the effect of clearing any distinction between specialist and non-specialist poets. The operation unfolds mainly by giving ample visibility to non-specialist poets in the markedly official environment of *Shikan*. Mobilizing and giving ample visibility to grassroots resources in the process appears therefore motivated by an intent to show the extension and pervasiveness of "your next-door" poets' intervention in public affairs. Specialist and non-specialist poets appear to find common ground in accepting their social responsibility, with non-specialist authors being the "privileged" incarnation of poetry's public role.

Symbolic Evasion (Material Censorship?): A Nurse's Poem

The case study I will introduce now is another interesting instance of the interaction between (non-specialist) poets and social responsibility promoted by the official side. Ruo Shuiyin 弱水吟, pen-name of Long Qiaoling 龙巧玲, is a hospital nurse in her native Gansu province, as well as a Writers Association member. After the epidemic's outbreak, she volunteered to go to one of Wuhan's makeshift (*fangcang* 方舱) emergency hospitals. *Shikan* published her poems on February 21 as part of the "*Poets Fighting on the Frontline*" series, covering the activities of fellow nurses, a driver who brings them food and equipment, night shifts, and a vision of the city (unchangeably silent). They were accompanied by a screenshot showing her giving a TV interview and leading a group of female medical employees. The picture included a subtitle of her stating she was a Communist Party member and repeating CPC keywords. So far, so good—her portrait was typically that of a mobilized grassroots poet.

In early February, Ruo Shuiyin also saw other four of her poems published in *Xiang zi wen ren* 向字问人 (Ask the Writing about the People), a public account on WeChat interested in the broader themes of literature and culture in general, under the attractive headline: *Wuhan fangcang yiyuan yi ge hushi de shi* 武汉方舱医院一个护士的诗 (*Poems by a Makeshift Hospital Nurse in Wuhan*). The poems can be read on the *China Digital Times* website (with Josh Rudolph's English translation), which also claims that they have been deleted from WeChat, possibly due to censorship.[10] However, the poems, while seemingly no longer available on *Xiang*

10 *China Digital Times* published the poems under a slightly different headline than the original one, "Zhe wei Wuhan fangcang yiyuan nushi de shi, ling zanmei biande xiuchi" 这位武汉方舱医院护士的诗，令赞美变得羞耻 (These Poems by a Wuhan Makeshift Hospital Nurse Turn Eulogy into Shame). A lexical element of explicit disharmony with the otherwise ubiquitous eulogy is added also by another WeChat blog, *Dangdai xianfeng wenxue* 当代先锋文学 (*Contemporary Avant-garde Literature*), which republished the poem on 20 February under the title "Suoyou de zanmeishi dou you zui" 所有的赞美诗都有罪 (Every Eulogy is Sinful).

zi wen ren, could still be found on several other WeChat public accounts in June 2021. Among these poems, "Qing bu yao darao wo" 请不要打扰我 (Don't Disturb Me, Please) has attracted substantial interest, especially outside China, perhaps due to lines like the following:

> Please allow me to take off my protective clothes and mark
> To remove the flesh of my body from its armour
> Let me trust my own health
> Let me breathe undisturbed
> Ah…
> The slogans are yours
> The praise is yours
> The propaganda, the model workers, all yours
> I am merely performing my duties
> Acting on a healer's conscience
> Often, there's no choice but to go to battle bare-chested
>
> 请容我脱下防护服和面罩
> 把我的肉身从铠甲抽离
> 让我靠一靠身体
> 让我平静呼吸
> 唉……
> 口号是你们的
> 赞美是你们的
> 宣传、标兵，都是你们的
> 我只是在执行岗位职责
> 做一个医者良心的拯救
> 常常，不得已赤膊上阵 (Ruo [Wei] 2020, in Josh Rudolph's translation)

These lines place the poem in a conflictual relation with the role demanded from medical personnel in the wake of the nationwide mobilization. What is contested here is clearly not the actual duty of doctors and nurses, but their discursive appropriation as "warriors clad in white". Ruo Shuiyin was venting her anger against harassment from journalists, explicitly mentioned later in the poem. However, the words that have come out of her exasperation suggest a more general critique. After all, contesting the aforementioned discursive appropriation is the equivalent of rejecting an appropriation of medical personnel as elements "mobilized" to consolidate the party-state's symbolic authority. Removing the armour and going into battle bare-chested deliberately employ the military imagery of the master narrative to explicitly disassemble and dismiss it. Nudity, here, suggests precisely having removed the protective armour of state discourse.

The poem continues along the same lines by refusing applause and official decorations, and insisting that the author needs sleep and rest far more than praise from the media. Consistent with this de-eulogising intent, Ruo Shuiyin reveals that her ambition is far from heroic:

> I just want to return home safe when the epidemic ends
> Even if all that remains are my bones
> I must bring myself home to my children and parents
> 只想疫情结束能安全回家/即使剩下一把骨头
> 也要把自己带回给儿女、
> 爹妈 (ibid.)

The poem concludes with the visually striking image of abandoned cell phones that belonged to victims of COVID-19: "The cell phones drifting about in the crematorium / Have their owners been found?" (火葬场那些流浪的手机/有没有找到主人) (ibid.). This last image probably refers to a photo that circulated on the Chinese internet in February 2020, one that was later revealed to be fake.

All considered, then, the poem—especially, but not exclusively, in its first part—is first and foremost an act of escape from an artificially-constructed subjecthood. The removal of the armour and the bare-chested warrior tend to validate this possible interpretation. Far from suggesting any dereliction of duty (she is doing her job, after all), the poet is nevertheless not conforming to the master narrative. Ruo Shuiyin's refusal of slogans, praise, and, above all, the heroic role superimposed on doctors and nurses appears as an evasion from the "institution of an identity", to put it in terms of Bourdieu, an act that "*signifies* to someone what his [*sic*] identity is[,] thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be" (Bourdieu 1991, 120–21). In general, different samples of pandemic poetry, despite the very diverse approaches to form and content, can still be brought together by poets' willingness to participate in the anti-epidemic mobilization. In contrast, the case scrutinized here is difficult to reduce to any officially-sanctioned public role of non-specialist poets from the grassroots, and instead is this very role that is challenged.

Irony from the Margins: A Worker Poet

The final case study will come from workers poetry, a fascinating phenomenon of massive proportions in the socio-literary landscape of contemporary China (cf.

Pozzana 2019; Sun 2012; van Crevel 2017b). Since most of the country's industrial and service workforce is made up of rural–urban migrants, workers poetry today largely means migrant-worker poetry (*dagong shige* 打工诗歌). Most migrant-worker poets, save for a limited number of successful individuals, are not specialists and publish online or in unofficial journals. What worker authors (not only poets) have written during and about the pandemic is interesting in many respects. One of these is the authors' being in their native rural areas to celebrate the Lunar New Year when the virus emerged, thus setting them apart from other, predominantly urban strains of pandemic poetry. Their return-to-work diaries (*fangong riji* 返工日记) also constitute an important addition to the genre of pandemic reportage, worthy of more scholarly attention.

Ni Zhou 逆舟 is one of these poets. Originally from a rural area in the south-central province of Hunan, he spends most of his year in Changsha, the provincial seat, as a construction worker. His poems have frequently appeared in an independent, unofficial journal called *Gongren shige* 工人诗歌 (*Workers Poetry*), edited by the "*Gongren shige lianmeng*" 工人诗歌联盟 (Workers Poetry Alliance). So far, the journal has brought out only three issues in 2007, 2009 and 2018, but it has lively online activity, publishing original poems, older Chinese workers poetry and foreign poetry in translation. The periodical belongs to the sea of unofficial poetry journals in China, generally self-published and self-funded.

Already present in the printed anthologies, a collection of Ni Zhou's pandemic-themed poems was published on the journal's WeChat public account on February 25, 2020, under the headline "Shenghuo bu keneng yongyuan anping" 生活不可能永远安平 (Life Cannot Be Placid Forever). With respect to the more serious and solemn language found in most pandemic poetry, Ni Zhou stands out for the sharp sarcasm and the flashes of humour found throughout his verses, together with a disavowal of grandiloquence and heroism. Doctors, in his verses, are no warriors clad in white, but simply people doing their job who have suddenly been drafted into an unexpected "military campaign" (*zhanyi* 战役), and whom the poet prays can go back to their families and ordinary lives. In several poems Ni Zhou avoids military terms to employ an intentionally simple lexicon, as in "Zhiwu" 职务 (Professions): "All those who live and work are human beings" (在生活的在工作的都是人). The choice of words expresses a return to a human and common dimension, less heroic and high-sounding: as the verse continues, "and employed persons are masses, people, humankind" (职业人是人群、人民、人类) (Ni 2020). The Chinese original is far more efficacious than the translation, because the three final words are actually compound words including the word *ren* 人, human, thus connecting with the above verse.

For Ni Zhou, the virus is an opportunity to rethink his own relationship with his home village, completely reversing a certain commonplace vision of it as backward, dull and remote. In sharp contrast, distance and uneventfulness become markers of positivity in "Wo shenghuo de xiaoshancun" 我生活的小山村 (My Small Mountain Village). The poem develops along a pattern consisting of listing all the catastrophic events that left the village basically unaffected despite their magnitude—floods in 1998, SARS in 2003, the major earthquake of 2008—followed by the laconic assertation that "Not in the small mountain village" (小山村没有), reinforced in later instances by adverbs like "also" (*ye* 也), "still" (*haishi* 还是) and "again" (*yiran* 依然). The reader is thus accompanied in this atmosphere of bucolic peace until the climax, where the quiet of distance from the events of the world, somewhat reminiscent of classic poets' similar pictures of rural seclusion, appears fundamentally different from the quiet of the city haunted by the virus. The environment finally mixes up with a rediscovery of the native place's significance for the self, discarding the previously held contempt for it:

> For this remote and backward small mountain village
> For the small mountain village I grumbled about,
> sighed about, and detested
> All of a sudden, I feel such a burning love
>
> 忽然，我对这个偏僻的、落后的小山村
> 抱怨过的、叹息过的、厌恶过的小山村
> 是多么的热爱 (Ni 2020)

Such a rearticulation of feelings towards the native countryside produced by forced residence there due to quarantine is present in other writings published by workers. *Gongren shige*, for example, published some recent works by another poet, Rao Jinhui 饶金辉, who also positioned himself as an observer of life slowly going by in the village, conjuring up animals, roads, quiet atmospheres suddenly disturbed by the noise made by neighbours, walls with disappearing signs of old slogans. In a similar vein, Ni Zhou also expresses the paranoid and frantic disinfection measures carried out daily despite the fact that there are no infections at the village (Rao and Ni 2020).[11]

11 A considerable amount of nonfiction has been written as well, and the *Jianjiao buluo* 尖椒部落 (*The Pepper Tribe*) blog in particular published several accounts during spring 2020 by female migrant workers stuck at home and struggling with a sudden loss of economic and gender independence. Delving deeper into this would lead us beyond the scope of this article. However, it is a compelling topic for future studies into grassroots testimonies of life during the epidemic.

Ni Zhou's poetry also aims to convey the habits and voices of those quarantined in villages. So far, it is nothing special compared with the efforts of state pandemic poetry to be told from the grassroots. What makes Ni Zhou's case interesting is his vision of the ordinary people's experience as marked not by participation in mobilization or, at the very least, a staunch resistance in the face of the crisis, but rather by doubt, misinformation, and bewilderment. The question is quite delicate, for it touches the generally forgotten issue of the initial propagation of actual or alleged fake news in China following the outbreak. Irony is employed to play with rumours and fake news to create a fairly complex atmosphere in "Huoji shi zaoyaozhe" 伙计是造谣者 (Mates Spreading Rumours):

> One mate said
> That this novel coronavirus is a mutation from
> Last year's swine fever, passed on to humans
> Pigs also had a fever when they died
> Another mate said that the virus is just venomous wind
> Otherwise, they say
> This virus would not have been able to come
> Faster
> Wilder
> Than the cold wave
>
> Please, forgive our stupidity
> And forgive our ignorance
> Because we truly can't understand
> Why all this?
>
> 一个伙计说
> 这新冠肺炎病毒是去年猪瘟
> 变的，传到了人身上
> 猪死的时候，也是发烧
> 另一个说病毒就是毒风
> 他们说，不然
> 这病不会来得比寒潮
> 还快
> 还猛
>
> 请原谅我们的傻吧
> 也请原谅我们的愚昧
> 因为，我们实在想不明白
> 这是为什么？ (Ni 2020)

The rural poet here—or, to be more precise, the poet from the countryside—is visibly distant from the bard of mobilization extolling conscious participation in the common effort. The apparent self-victimization may sound like a justification of fake news, raising more than one eyebrow in what is often (and often improperly) called the "post-truth" age. Fake news was a sensitive matter in China from the very start of the epidemic. The situation was made even more complicated by the state's tight control over the press, which made it harder to discern genuine journalism from unreliable reporting. The authorities' early attempts at hiding the story and slow reactions have now been admitted, at least at the local level, which also generated a backlash against their non-transparency (Ran and Yan 2021). But Ni Zhou does not seem interested in discussing the accuracy of the rumours, much less in validating them. The dominant feature of the poem is rather the incredulity of ordinary people caught by surprise.

This interpretation is supported by textual analysis. While irony is the unifying pattern of the poem, the first stanza is not at all ironic, and its affirmative tone concedes a certain degree of seriousness to reported rumours. The second stanza wraps up the show and turns to the audience, clarifying that they are not reliable rumours while simultaneously asking for "forgiveness", thus hiding a powerful statement behind an apparently self-depreciating one. It is indeed a way to come to terms with rumours as a product of mistrust, not just ignorance. Furthermore, the poet positions himself within this condition by using the plural pronoun: *We* are stupid, *We* are ignorant. Irony conveys not only bewilderment, but above all an implicit indictment of an insufficient degree of information sharing.

Objectively, Ni Zhou's production muses about the possibilities of writing about the epidemic. His powerful irony is balanced by another poetic statement he makes: "facing the epidemic we cannot play tricks cannot play jokes" (我们面对疫情不能作假不能作戏). While his stylistic choices aim at bringing poetry closer to the level of the ordinary individual, that is hardly his peculiar trait, given that state-hosted pandemic poetry also prided itself on conveying the point of view of common citizens. His use of irony and sarcasm, however, are much less common. The way he pushes the "ordinary individual's point of view" to the extreme, especially through his poetic refusal of grandiloquence when referring to medical personnel, also distances him from the majority (although he is certainly not alone, see Ruo Shuiyin for another example of this). Ni Zhou is not ridiculing the unfolding events nor merely documenting rumours or facts from an otherwise overlooked rural reality; he is instead offering one more possibility to look at the ambiguities below the unifying tunes of the master narrative.

To what extent is Ni Zhou's operation representative of a "workers pandemic poetry"? To put it simply, it is not. Workers are exposed to the "trickle-down" effect of the master narrative like everyone else, and many other instances of pandemic-themed poetry produced by individuals who are variously identified as "(migrant-)worker poets" replicate the base traits found in state-sponsored publications. That is true for style, as well. Resolve and doubt, solemnity and sarcasm are better understood as parts of a spectrum of possibility than components of opposing camps, and pandemic-themed poetry, both "official" and "unofficial" alike, tends to oscillate between them. More originality in workers' productions can be found in prose like the return-to-work diaries and stories from rural (or, rarely, urban) quarantine, but this investigation, as already mentioned, needs further research.

Conclusions

Throughout this study, pandemic poetry has proven itself to be a valid case to investigate the social role of poetry and poets in China, especially at a time of crisis like that of the COVID-19 epidemic. Inevitably connected with the nationwide mobilization that marked the country's response to the crisis, and therefore subject to the language of the master narrative, pandemic poetry has also lent itself to an analysis focused on the dynamic relation between official and unofficial, and to the enlistment of non-specialist poetry. The variety of viewpoints taken under scrutiny reveals not only diverging ways of writing about such an extraordinary time. To connect with the title of this paper and Liu Yishan's poem from which it is extracted, it also exposes alternative visions of what the poet is expected to do in terms of their public role and responsibility, a question perhaps as old as "Chinese poetry" itself.

The distinction between specialist and non-specialist poets is a necessary premise to explain why the effort to show poetry's participation in social emergencies, both officially sanctioned and in unofficial spaces, was boosted by the fact that many of the authors were ordinary individuals (medical staff, service personnel, police officers, workers, etc.) who wrote poetry as amateurs. The raw fact alone that non-professional poets have been sought after or set out to participate in the mobilization is a clear demonstration of Inwood's assertion that "poetry in China continues to flourish as a social form, one that possesses great symbolic importance for the nation no matter who is doing the writing or critiquing" (Inwood 2015, 54).

How poets have actually acted in this context, handling the possibilities they found at their disposal, sheds more light on the inner workings of the field. While the master narrative has shaped the discursive response of China's state system to the epidemic, creative singularities—the poets—have not responded with a unanimous voice, be it coerced or genuine, but have balanced their choices between integration, adaptation, negotiation, and evasion. This list is not exhaustive, but such options form an organic whole that has crossed the many institutional divides of the field of poetic production, including that of official versus unofficial. Once again, an "either or" approach proves to be unhelpful to explain the movements of the field. A dialectic method is needed to grasp how poetry behaves once it intervenes to fulfil its public responsibility—a duty it does not seem ready to shrug off.

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Anxiety, "Concerned Consciousness" and Their Manifestation in the COVID-19 Pandemic in China

*Téa SERNELJ**

I can see your eyes now
Two crystals among Spring's rays
Like viewing two stars, without darkness
Viewing an oasis, without a desert
I am imagining your beauty
Your kindness and demure
But I dare not remove your facemask
Dare not reveal the scars of this era.
(Lei Mo 2020)

Abstract

The article examines the specifics of the Chinese containment measures of the COVID-19 pandemic and their social consequences at the beginning of 2021. The author analyses empirical psychological research results on distress and anxiety of people in times of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, and explores to what degree the individual feelings of anxiety in contemporary China are conditioned by the traditionally prevailing absence of faith in higher transcendent forces on the one hand, and social isolation on the other. It proceeds from Xu Fuguan's interpretation of the origins of a traditional Chinese concept of "concerned consciousness" (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識). The author shows that this concept can be compared to the feeling of anxiety, but highlights important differences which separate it from the anxiety as developed and understood in the framework of modern Western philosophy. The paper aims to provide some preliminary answers to the questions of whether and in what way such a traditional feeling of anxiety in the sense of a "concerned consciousness" manifested itself in the period of social isolation that was implemented as a part of the government measures for the COVID-19 pandemic in China. These questions are being investigated through an analysis of philosophical studies on concerned consciousness on the on hand, and a contemporary case study on the other. The results show that the specifically Chinese kind of anxiety, which is rooted in concerned consciousness, is tightly

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linked to the relational nature of Chinese ethics and the corresponding understanding of individual identity. In addition, it is connected with the traditional understanding of human destiny, which is not fatalistic or determinist, but rather based on autonomous decisions based on the social responsibilities of a free human self.

Keywords: The concept of concerned consciousness, *youhuan yishi*, Xu Fuguan, anxiety, China, COVID-19

Tesnoba, »zaskrbljena zavest« ter njune manifestacije v pandemiji COVID-19 na Kitajskem

Izvleček

Članek raziskuje posebnosti ukrepov zajezitve pandemije COVID-19 ter njihovih družbenih posledic na Kitajskem v začetku leta 2021. Avtorica analizira rezultate empiričnih psiholoških raziskav o stresu in tesnobi ljudi v času prvega vala pandemije COVID-19 na Kitajskem. Hkrati obravnava vprašanje, do kolikšne mere so individualna občutja tesnobe v sodobni Kitajski pogojena s tradicionalno prevladujočo odsotnostjo vere v transcendentne sile ter socialno izolacijo. Pri tem izhaja iz Xu Fuguanove interpretacije izvora tradicionalnega kitajskega koncepta »zaskrbljene zavesti« (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識). Avtorica pokaže, da lahko ta koncept primerjamo z občutjem tesnobe, a hkrati izpostavi določene pomembne razlike, ki to občutje ločujejo od tesnobe, kot je razvita in razumljena v okviru zahodne filozofije. Članek ponuja nekatere preliminarne odgovore na vprašanje, zakaj in na kakšen način se je tradicionalni občutek tesnobe v smislu »zaskrbljene zavesti« manifestiral v obdobju socialne izolacije, ki so jo na Kitajskem izvajali kot del vladnih ukrepov proti pandemiji COVID-19. To vprašanje je avtorica raziskala z analizo filozofskih študij o zaskrbljeni zavesti in na osnovi sodobnih empiričnih študij. Rezultati so pokazali, da je specifično kitajska oblika tesnobe, ki je osnovana na zaskrbljeni zavesti, tesno povezana z relacijsko naravo kitajske etike in vzporednega razumevanja človeške usode, ki ni fatalistično ali deterministično, temveč prej temelji na avtonomnih odločitvah, ki izhajajo iz družbene odgovornosti svobodnega sebstva.

Ključne besede: Koncept zaskrbljene zavesti, *youhuan yishi*, Xu Fuguan, tesnoba, Kitajska, COVID-19

Introduction

The article examines the problem of the increase in the feeling of uncertainty that manifested in China due to the coronavirus outbreak, and the subsequent use of social isolation as a governmental measure for its containment. In this context, I aim to illuminate the cultural specifics of the Chinese conception of this feeling of uncertainty and fear, which can be seen as a form of existential anxiety, although the concept itself is very different from the one which has been developed in the context of modern European philosophy. I believe that such a sense of anxiety is very specific and typical of China because it is connected to the relational perception and conceptualization of the self as well as to relational ethics. In the European tradition, on the other hand, a conceptualization of anxiety as an inseparable mode of existence is fairly new, and we could claim that in its modern form, it is—to a great extent—based upon Heidegger's philosophy. For Heidegger, anxiety is an elementary mood of existence that reveals the finitude of *Dasein* that implies—*inter alia*—human existence as such (Wheeler 2020, 2). In Sartre's existentialist philosophy, the concept of anxiety is developed further, and it is produced from the awareness of the absolute freedom of the individual in which a person is fully responsible for his or her own actions and their consequences, which means that this freedom also determines their morals.[1]

As we shall see, the origin and conception of anxiety in China differ in essential ways from the ones in the West. Even though they can overlap in certain connotations, their distinctions are clearly evident especially in the fundamental paradigm on which Western and Chinese intellectual traditions developed. These can be seen distinctly through the very conception of the so-called "relational self", which will be explained in more in detail in the later parts of this paper, and which was developed in the Chinese ideational tradition. As we shall see, such a conceptualization of the human self is still being reflected in the mentality of the contemporary Chinese people.

In the first part of the article, I will present the socio-historical reasons for the creation of the concept of anxiety in China. This concept was analysed in detail and interpreted in a sense of "concerned consciousness" by the Taiwanese Modern Confucian Xu Fuguan (see Rošker 2020, 10). I will then connect this specific mode of psychological feeling of uncertainty with the traditional Chinese perception of the individual and the conceptualization of the so-called "relational self" and "relational ethics". In this regard, I will proceed from a supposition of the immense importance of the axiological connection of art, aesthetics and philosophy in the Chinese tradition and its significance for the psychological development of human beings, as revealed by Wang Keping (2020, 184).

In the following, I will explore the reasons for anxiety in the post-socialist period, i.e. in the time of transition into a capitalist economic-political system, which begins to develop in China at the end of the 20th century.

1 Sartre claims that anxiety gives a lucid experience of the freedom which is, although often concealed, characteristic of human existence as such. For him, freedom is the displacement of the consciousness from its object, foundational "nihilation" or negation, with the help of which consciousness can comprehend its object without losing itself in it: to be aware of something, means to understand that you are not it (the object). This "no", however, develops in the very structure of consciousness as being on its own (Crowell 2020, 3).

In the last part of the article, I will provide a case study and examine a concrete example of an outbreak of anxiety in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, attempting to place it in a fruitful relation with some of the ideational remnants of Chinese (mainly Confucian) intellectual tradition, especially regarding Xu Fuguan's interpretation of the traditional concept of "concerned consciousness" (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識), as well as the traditional Confucian idea of the mandate of heaven (*tianming* 天命), which is conceptualized as a remedy for such feelings of impermanence, existential uncertainty and unpredictability.

The Origin of the Concept of Concerned Consciousness (*youhuan yishi* 憂患意識) in Ancient China

In his work *The History of the Chinese Theories on Humanness* (*Zhongguo renxing lunshi*) published in 1963, Xu Fuguan[2] gives his interpretation of the origins of the concept of anxiety that developed in the time of the transition from the Shang to Zhou dynasties which was the consequence of socio-political transformations influenced by the transition from a nomadic to an agricultural society. The establishment of this new social order influenced the development of a system of ethics that was based on the absolute moral responsibility of every individual.

According to Xu, the specifically Chinese feeling of anxiety in the sense of what he called "concerned consciousness" developed when people began to address their problems through their own activity and personal aspirations. People were forced into this at the time of the transition from the Shang to Zhou Dynasties when traditional deities lost their credibility that they held until that time and people could no longer project their concerns on external, supernatural forces. Remedies designated by original Confucianism in this context were "the improvement or completion of one's 'self' (*cheng ji*)" and "ruling with virtue (*de zhi*)".

Such a specific feeling of anxiety led Chinese tradition to seek virtues and values and consequentially practicing morals. The feeling of anxiety leads to discovery, understanding, and the transformation of people themselves (Xu 2010, 12–14). It

2 Xu Fuguan is one of the representatives of the second generation of modern Confucians, that lived in the 20th century in Taiwan and Hong Kong and worked on revival of original Confucianism, its social ethics and morals. However, Xu Fuguan, who was primarily a historian and sociologist who studied the political and social aspects of Confucianism and, like other modern Confucians, sought to include Confucian ethics in the context of modernization and democratization of Chinese societies. The contents of the first two chapters of this article are in part taken from my book on Xu's aesthetic theory, in which I explored Xu Fuguan's theory of Chinese aesthetics (see Sernelj 2021).

is a psychological state in which a person feels responsible for overcoming concerns based on his/her own efforts. Anxiety originates from moral consciences and is actually the feeling of responsibility, reactiveness, awareness and self-reflection which leads to ideas such as respect, dedication and the manifestation of a moral character (Rošker 2021, 330). According to Xu Fuguan's interpretation (see Xu 2010, 21ff), the origin of anxiety stems from a person's awareness of their responsibility to themselves and the world. This consciousness arises from the uncertainty that established itself with the downfall of shamanistic and animalistic pantheon religions of early Chinese antiquity at the transition of the Shang to Zhou dynasties (around 1066 BC). These uncertainties are solved when a person becomes morally autonomous (Xu 2010, 20).

In a religious, faith-oriented atmosphere a person leans on faith in salvation. He/she transfers all their responsibilities to God and is thus less worried. Their confidence arises from their faith and trust in God. Only when human beings take responsibility for themselves will they feel anxiety and concern. This feeling includes a strong will and the spirit of self-reliance and personal responsibility (ibid.).

In his explanation of the emergence of concerned consciousness, Xu Fuguan thoroughly explains the connection between the decay or decline of "primitive" religions and the creation of the idea of moral self, which fall into the basic characteristics of the Chinese (especially Confucian) intellectual tradition.

Anthropomorphic deities were known by the Chinese during the Shang (or Yin, approx. 1600–1066 BC) and Zhou dynasties, but Confucius and Mencius transformed the originally anthropomorphic form of "Heaven or Nature" (*tian* 天) into the concept of "Mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命) which was a moral or ideological concept. Confucians were therefore not interested in personification of the "Way of Heaven" (*tiandao* 天道) and its transformation into an external anthropomorphic God. They were more interested in the method of its individual internalization than in its symbolic forms of creativity.

Xu Fuguan saw the reasons for different concepts of ethics in Chinese and Western societies in different ideological reactions to similar conditions of social transitions.

In his view, all cultures had their earliest beginnings in religion, originating from the worship of God or gods. The peculiarity of Chinese culture has been that it soon came down, step by step, from Heaven to the world of men, to the concrete life and behaviour of people. This preoccupation with earthly matters had started during the Zhou dynasty[3] (1459–249 BC): the spirit of self-conscience was beginning to work, and people developed clear will and purpose. They were moving progressively from the realm of religion to the realm of ethics. Since that early stage, the Chinese people were free from metaphysical concerns. Unlike the Greeks, who at the same critical stage in history moved from religion to metaphysics, the Chinese moved from religion to ethics (Bresciani 2001, 338).

With the concept of a specifically Chinese feeling of anxiety, Xu Fuguan provided a fruitful foundation for further development of many aspects of Modern Confucian philosophy that were later on elaborated by his colleagues and followers. According to Bresciani, Xu also showed in detail how the concept of this kind of what he called "concerned consciousness" (i.e. *youhuan yishi*) was developed by the Duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong) and how it became known in Chinese culture later on through Confucianism (ibid.).

Broadly speaking, the Zhou dynasty was a successor of two different types of culture: it was a fusion of an agrarian system which represented the typical production and reproductive form of the defeated Shang dynasty (1600–1066 BC) on the one side, and of the hunting and food gathering system which represented the socio-economic mode of production in the society of predominantly nomadic invaders on the other. The conceptual world of the Shang dynasty was based on the cult of fertility, and its economic system of cooperation and division of labour within the family clan, whereas the nomadic religion of the Zhou invaders was founded upon the cult of Heaven.

In a cultural sense, both of these production modes were the heritage of the Zhou society. The mixture of elements of agrarian and nomadic religions was a result of their collision. The cult of ancestors as a type of ritualized worship that combines both aspects gradually became a common thread throughout all periods of Chinese history (Bresciani 2001, 23ff).

God, or "the ultimate ruler" (*Shang di* 上帝), who represented the highest religious entity in the Shang (Yin) culture, did not yet refer to interpersonal or human ethics (Yang 2007, 2). According to Yang Zebo (ibid.), this fact clearly demonstrates that the religion of the Shang period was still at an early stage of development, and thus limited to the sphere of the nature. This radically changed after the defeat of the Shang (Yin) dynasty by the Zhou invaders. In Yang's opinion, the reason for the transformation from the prevailing natural religion to a

3 Similar to the prevailing currents of Western historiography which have seen the Ancient Greek society as a "cradle of Western culture", the society dominated by the Zhou dynasty was understood as the "cradle of (Han)-Chinese culture" by most Chinese historians (Xu 2010, 20).

system of morality could be found in the "concerned consciousness"[4] of the ruling class, which in turbulent times of political and social chaos wanted to ensure their power and to justify it through this ideology (ibid., 3).

As explained by Xu, the authority of the Heavenly Mandate in the period of the reign of You (795–771 BC), at the time of the transition from the Western to the Eastern Zhou dynasties, was already completely loosened due to inefficiency, corruption, nepotism and the exhaustion of the population by the ruling class, which led to the downfall of the belief in an anthropomorphic deity *Tian* or *Shang di* (Rošker 2013, 174).[5]

Chen Lai (1996, 4) points out the reasons for this turning point in Chinese history. He claims that this transformation did not emerge because people recognized their own limitations and were therefore directed towards the search for some kind of transcendent and infinite existence which could have led to the establishment of a monotheistic religion, but on the contrary: they recognized the limitations of deities, and thus focused upon the real world and upon problems connected to the regulation of society and of human relations. Thus this important shift in Chinese history did not manifest any kind of a "breakthrough towards transcendence"; instead, it has marked a "breakthrough towards humanities" (Chen 1996, 4).

All this indicates an important difference in the intellectual and spiritual development of Chinese and European cultures after the "axial period" (see Roetz 1993).

4 Here, Yang's idea of "concerned consciousness" refers to Xu Fuguan's concept, which was explained above. However, in Xu's study, this specific kind of anxiety does not only pertain to the ruling classes, but rather to all people in the transitional society.

5 We can argue that traditional faith-based concepts that represented the fundamental parts of dominant beliefs in the early Zhou dynasty after the establishment of a new culture, which included agrarian as well as nomadic elements, almost entirely disintegrated. This shift was very significant, since it showed that ancient China at the time was already defined by characteristics typical for the period that Karl Jaspers (2003, 98) described as the axial age. According to Jaspers, this period refers to the time between the 8th and 3rd centuries BC. When a significant qualitative change in thinking and perception of reality occurred simultaneously in different parts of the world, among which there did not necessarily exist any kind of mutual interactions. The conceptual shift refers primarily to the questions about the essence of human existence, where the question of transition from mythological belief to ethics and morality is at the forefront. In that period, people started to realize their own limitations; furthermore, the concepts of individuality, self-reflection and the practice of self-cultivation were formed. At that time there was a religious crisis in which monotheistic religions developed. According to some theoreticians (see Roetz 1993; Black 1992), Jaspers was, in his theory of the axial period, too generalizing and universal, since he wanted to limit the development of different cultures or civilizations to the simultaneous and unified development of mankind as a whole. In our case, Jaspers' theory is also problematic in the fact that in China a qualitative breakthrough in thinking, which relates primarily to the transition from mythological beliefs to ethics, happened much earlier (with the start of the Western Zhou dynasty, around 1066 BC) and not only with Confucius and Laozi (around 6–5th centuries BC).

While the latter ones stepped on the path of "more developed" forms or stages of religion, the further ideal development of Chinese society was not determined by any turn towards monotheism, but rather to the pragmatically defined search for an ideal social order. The reason for this orientation lies in the fact that a major religious crisis happened in China before the onset of the axial age, in which an anthropomorphic Heaven as supreme god and moral instance lost credibility.

And since this morally defined religion during the early period of the Western Zhou dynasty lost all of its moral appeal, it would be difficult to overcome the doubt that had already prevailed in the broadest strata of population and re-establish the theological mindset that would enable the development of monotheistic religion. Thus the supreme deity was replaced with a belief in the rational structure of the universe, while the concept *tian* 天, which previously denoted "Heaven" (in a spiritual sense), was simply turned into "nature" (Yang 2007, 3).

Xu Fuguan points out (2010,15) that the original Confucianism tried to establish an ethical basis for moral decisions in the idea of subjective justice, which should have replaced the previous fear of ghosts (or, in other words, the hope for the salvation in Heaven instead of the suffering in Hell) as a basic criterion. He points out that the reason for such a transformation lay in the higher level of spiritual development, in contrast to transformations that led to monotheistic religions that were based upon the idea of (external) God. In his opinion, this transformation led to humanism which is based on a rather high level of "self-awareness" (*zijuexing* 自覺性).

Although the Duke of the Western Zhou dynasty and his contemporaries considered the notion of concerned consciousness from the perspective of the individual's concrete social situation, which then determined his proper behaviour, Confucius transformed this idea and considered it from the perspective of the individual's moral self-reflection. As already mentioned, the idea of the responsibility that each individual carries for their own actions implicitly contains the spirit of egalitarianism. For Xu, this is an essential feature of the concerned consciousness (Huang 2018, 208).

The concept of anxiety is therefore the central notion of Xu Fuguan's interpretation of Confucianism. The significance of anxiety, as assigned by Xu, links important moral ideas of original Confucianism, such as filial piety, humaneness and rituals. For Xu, these moral concepts and proper behaviour, as their concrete consequence, are a manifestation of concerned consciousness. At first glance, this concept appears to us as something that preserves the political power of the rulers, that is, as the concept of political philosophy. But when we look at it from his role in the cultivation of an individual's personal moral awareness, it becomes clear that it equally belongs to the sphere of moral philosophy (ibid., 220).

A Specific Form of Anxiety in a "Chinese Mindset": The Role of Concerned Consciousness in the Conceptualization of the Relational Self and Relational Ethics

Thus, according to Xu's interpretation, concerned consciousness, which can be seen as a specific kind of anxiety, is created with the realization that a person is himself/herself responsible for their actions and, of course, also for the consequences of his/her decisions. If the belief in external deities that function as forces that control human functioning while also judging whether these are good or bad ceases to exist, then a person has to lean exclusively on himself/herself and function in a moral ethics system which will function universally for the entire community.

Rituals and music that were strongly emphasized by Zhou Gong in the Western Zhou dynasty formed the foundation of a system of ethics which was later improved by Confucius. The foundation of Confucian ethics is formed by the concept of humaneness (*ren* 仁), meaning the love for a fellow human. From the very structure of the character, we can see that the human (left radical) is always tied to the other (right radical, meaning two, duality or plurality). According to the oldest Chinese etymological dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*, from the first century AD, the character 仁 was also written as 忎, comprising of a radical (at the top), which denotes a large number or the number 1,000 and the character meaning "heartmind" (at the bottom). We can see from both characters that they are about a person's relation to others. The aforementioned dictionary, however, defines humaneness as the love for one's fellow people (relatives, family, see *Shuwen jiezi* s.d., 4927).[6]

The establishment of strong moral and ethical principles, developed by the legendary Duke of Zhou, was strengthened and expanded by Confucius (6th century BC), and functioned as a point of conciliation of anxiety within an individual on the one hand, and as a socio-political ideal on the other. In Chinese ideational tradition, the human personality is built on the basis of relations or relationships with other members of the community, primarily within the family and later with all the members of the community. In Chinese tradition, such a "self" (*ziwo* 自我) is always relational and not isolated and individualized in the sense of de-contextualization.

6 仁，亲也.

In classical Confucian texts there is a division between the big self (*dawo* 大我) and the small self (*xiaowo* 小我). The small self refers to the notion of the self as an individual, consisting of human desires, needs and expectations, which is at the same time embedded in a broader, namely a social context, which is defined as the big self. The great self, however, is primarily about responsibility and duties within the community. In other words, in Chinese ideational tradition the individual self does not exist without its broader placement in society.

While the Western ideational tradition stems from the idea of a free and independent individual, the foundations of the Chinese social order are a network of relations and could therefore be labelled as the "ethics of relational virtue" (*guanxizhuyide meide lunli* 關係主義的美德倫理). This basic differentiation leads to great differences in ethical thoughts which dominated these two cultural and philosophical discourses, not only by their views of the relationship between the individual and society, but also by the relationship between reason and emotions (Rošker 2021, 325).

Li Zehou, one of the most important contemporary theoreticians of Chinese ethics and aesthetics, emphasizes that traditional Chinese societies were structured as networks of relationships that connected individuals who were not established as isolated and independent entities, but rather as so-called "relational selves", i.e. these people were, in fact, interpersonally connected and their social relationships defined their identities to a large degree. Li stressed that a concept of the human "self" as such, always found in certain concrete situations and social environments, is connected to Chinese, and especially Confucian, traditions where the conceptualization of a person focus on relationships. This also means that chosen functions, failures and achievements of every person can be understood only by considering their interactions with others (see ibid.).

As pointed out by Rošker (2021), Li Zehou uses the term "relationalism" or (*guanxizhuyi* 關係主義), which emphasizes morals based on social relationships, and not on the foundations of individualism, as such, it is the typical product of the Chinese worldview.

Due to the Confucian view of the "one world", people valued interpersonal relationships and earthly human emotions even more. They mourned the finite nature of life and death. Their search for the meaning of their existence resulted in them finding it in the middle of their actual life with fellow human beings. In this way, they found infinite infinities within the finite and discovered that it is possible to achieve liberation in this world (see ibid.).

The conception of the relational self is already clearly shown in the Confucian ethic of five relations (*wulun* 五倫) found in the work of *Mengzi*, which forms the fundamental structure of familial, social relationships, and those of relatives in which an individual is embedded. This structure is not only based on the rationalization of interpersonal relationships, order of ethics and responsibility, but also includes emotions:

> There must exist a love between fathers and sons, proper morality between leaders and their subjects, differences between husbands and wives; the elders should have precedence over the young, and there must be trust among friends.
>
> 父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有序，朋友有信． (*Mengzi* s.d., Teng Wen gong I: 4)

A vital part is played by filial piety (*xiao* 孝), or deep respect of the family, when it comes to interpersonal relations (Rošker 2020).

According to Xu Fuguan, the Confucian filial piety is a source of co-humaneness, which is the foundation of humanism and at the core of Confucian morals. He writes:

> Humaneness means being a human. It does not come from the will of the gods, but is the essential character of a person, for human character is already endowed with the virtue of humaneness. (Xu in Huang 2018, 210)

Filial piety originates from the love children have for their parents and represents a source humaneness. In this context, the practice of filial piety is followed by the practice of humaneness. According to Xu's interpretation filial piety is the source of Confucian moral behaviour and the foundation for all other virtues.

Xu believes that Confucian thought emphasizes filial piety also and mainly for socio-political reasons. According to him, there is a strong connection between filial piety and the patriarchal clan system. In Chinese antiquity, where the ruling family and the patriarchal clan coincided, the role of filial piety was to prevent the risk of overthrowing the ruler, i.e. the preservation of political power (ibid.). In this sense, filial piety can also be seen as a remedy for personal and political anxiety.

According to Xu, Confucian thought has two main components. The first is the theory of inner morals, which is based on the doctrine of the goodness of human character; this is precisely what separates humans from animals. According to this, people are capable of transforming themselves to become beings permeated by the virtue of humaneness (see Xu 2010, 186). Thus, a person can become a noble person (*junzi*) showing responsibility to the world.

The second component concerns inner morals and their manifestation in the form of everyday interpersonal interactions. With the practice of these orderly interpersonal relationships a person can honestly nurture the "love for others". The internal morality based on humaneness and the practice of human interactions are inseparably connected, because in this context, an individual's inner world and external reality are united (ibid.). For Xu, Confucius was the first person to develop the idea of an individual's inner moral world, the infinite nature of humaneness directed to the external reality in which it is also concretely defined. This enables people to live in the world of reason. A moral subject inhabits every individual, without the remnants of old religions.

The uniformity of the external and internal worlds of a human being, pointed out by Mengzi, is seen by Xu as an infinite process where the absence of borders is what causes people to be in a constant state of concern. For him, this type of concerned consciousness is tightly and inseparably linked to the concept of humaneness (*ren*) in the sense of social empathy. He explicitly writes:

> The fundamental expression of humaneness is precisely this concerned consciousness.
>
> 仁的基本表現還是憂患意識. (Xu 2010, 184)

This type of concerned consciousness can be seen as a form of anxiety, even though this anxiety differs from the Western, individual-based feeling, which is not only existential, but also private in its very nature. Given the fact that in China the individual identity has never been constituted as an isolated self, separated and independent from one's fellow human beings, the human self has a relational ontological basis. In this sense, a person's very existence is determined in a relational way (Ames 2020, 174ff). Thus in China anxiety as a basic form of being in the world does not pertain to the individual, but rather to communitarian existence. Indeed, as every human being is interdependent in their relation to other people, each individual existence as such is determined by collective concerns.

Anxiety in Contemporary Chinese Society

In the previous two parts, we examined social and historical reasons that led to the development of the concerned (or "collectively anxious") conscience in ancient China and its connection to the Chinese relational "self". As we have seen, such a self is not based on the concept of the individual as an independent subject, as is typical for the Western conception of the self. Rather, it emerges as an organically integrated part of an inherent unity of familial and wider social relationships.

Hence the Chinese type of anxiety, as the deepest or even fundamental feeling of uncertainty of human existence, differs profoundly from its Western counterpart, as discovered by Heidegger's new ontology and later founders of existentialism. The Chinese type of anxiety is rooted in what Xu Fuguan calls concerned consciousness; it is a specific mental state or feeling within the Chinese tradition, which does not refer to the existential crisis of the individual. Rather, it is primarily developed from the reflection of one's own actions and their consequences in the context of an ethical behaviour that is formed within a family and spread to the wider community. In other words, the traditional Chinese feeling of anxiety is a key emotion guiding the process of questioning and self-reflection about the appropriateness of one's own moral character and the cultivation of ethical principles within a community, vitally connected to the elementary care and concern for others. Thus we can see that both traditional Chinese anxiety, as well as the conception of "self", are of a relational nature.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Zhang Li in her book *Anxious China: Inner Revolution and Politics of Psychotherapy*, published in 2020 as the result of many years of studying of the establishment of psychotherapeutic practices in China, anxiety appears to be a predominating by-product of the expansive economic development of the contemporary Chinese society that is most present in the urban middle class. In China's explosive development of its economy and neo-liberal free market, such individuals seem to have lost the connection to their families, their closest significant others, and hence, alienated from their relational self, a basic product of traditional Chinese socialization.[7]

Cities are spaces where new internet technologies, mass media, and global influences are at a person's disposal. In her research, Zhang points out that people in cities mostly describe their experience of life in a modern urban environment using two words, "turbulent" or "restless" and "anxious". Both, however, share an uncertainty with regard to reality, the future, and the precarity of life (Zhang 2020, 136). The Chinese urban middle-class today are concerned about the new property policies, the future of their children who face vast competition and have to fight to gain the best education which, of course, is expensive, yet the labour market still does not provide any guarantee that they will gain employment. Thus,

7 In her article entitled "The Cultural Conditionality of Comprehension: The Perception of Autonomy in China", Jana S. Rošker (see Rošker 2012, 38ff) offers some empirical proof for the presumption according to which the nature of self-reflection and the consolidation of individual identity is still relational in nature.

most of them feel trapped and alienated from the world around them. In a world that has been developing and improving on a material level, the feelings of happiness, security, and contentment expected from this expansive development are not being produced (ibid., 37). Instead, people are plagued by confusion, emptiness, and uncertainty, even though they live materially comfortable lives. The difficult position of the Chinese middle-class was described by the author's informant in the following fashion:

> It would seem as though we have everything now, but in actuality, something important is missing. We live in a society lacking justice, security, and justice. Just look around you, the environment is worsening, food safety is questionable, health care is inaccessible ... How can a person truly be happy? (Zhang 2020, 37)

Therefore, the search for happiness is becoming increasingly common today as a project of the contemporary Chinese urban middle class that strives for a good and beautiful life (*meihao shenghuo* 美好生活) (ibid.).

Zhang points out that the Chinese of the previous century practiced different ways of searching for happiness in everyday life, although there has never been such an explosion of discussion on the subject of happiness and psychotherapeutic intervention as nowadays. In the past, the idea of happiness mostly arose in connection with the family, collective institutions, or the national state. Today, however, the search for or attainment of happiness is understood as a project of the individual, even though this individual is relational, i.e. intertwined in the familial and social context. This transition presents two important shifts: from the unified national focus on economic growth and material prosperity which we witnessed in the last three decades, and the shift to the psychotherapeutic regime of well-being that directs the questions of one's "self" and the meaning of life to the psychological and emotional experiences of individuals (ibid., 133).

The Chinese government is increasingly favouring this psychological approach to the "happy self" and life for two reasons: The first is the fact that it is supposedly less threatening to the *status quo* compared to other therapeutic approaches focused on the resolution of victimization, and empowerment. The search for happiness can, therefore, re-direct the attention of the people to personal matters and strategies of engaging one's self instead of questioning or even refuting the general social order. The second is the "happiness fever" (*xingfu re* 幸福热) which includes an element of individualization, as it probably will not transform into an organized mass movement. These usually individualist and self-centred practices are thus completely depoliticized, and even drain the collective revolutionary energy (ibid., 134).

In Xi Jinping's project "the Chinese dream" (*Zhongguo meng* 中國夢), the happiness and well-being of people (not only economic growth) became a fundamental building block of this new vision (Zhang 2020, 151). Chinese psychologists and psychological health experts quickly attached the significance of their work with the discourse of this dream, and articulated the psychological motivations of people with the official conceptualization of the construction of a harmonious socialist society (*Hexie shehui* 和諧社會). In this context, psychological care (*xinli guan'ai* 心理关爱) becomes a new and useful tool that fosters the feelings of well-being, stability, and social harmony beyond the aspirations for material wealth. While China experienced deep changes and social polarization during its economic and political reforms, there is a constant search for innovative ways to control society (ibid.).

Zhang believes (2020, 153–55) that it is becoming more and more evident that psychological counseling and other work in the field of psychological health is becoming a new form of political authority when it comes to shaping people's lives in post-socialist China. It became an indispensable part of developing and running all state organizations—the army, police, schools, universities, hospitals, companies, factories, etc. Instead of ruling through force and discipline, the most appropriate method of governing social institutions is through the mantra of *guan ai* 关爱 (loving care) or *ren ai* 仁爱 (benevolence). Thus, the political decision-makers call upon the familiar saying from the classical work of "historical writings" *Shiji* 史記: "If you are kind and loving towards your soldiers, they will be willing to die for you" (*Shi Ji*, s.d. IV, 12). The same can be said for the optimal relationship between the ruler and his people: The conquest of people's hearts is most important and most reliable to the ruler. Hence, in the official media today, the Chinese government is massively promoting loving care for its people. Some consider this a welcome experiment of the so-called "friendly governance" based on the notion of humanization (*renxinghua* 人性化), as opposed to past socialist rule, which was largely based on an emphasis on class struggle and political coercion. According to such observers, therapeutic management represents a form of kind management, defined by care, kindness and human feelings (*renqing* 人情). At the same, however, there is a rather sharp critique of this approach, seeing it as a subtle form of manipulation. Under the veil of care and benevolence, opponents see state power and control at work. Some also warn of the dangers of psychologizing social and economic problems through which politics nullify the need for structural change by using temporary and superficial corrections, and also in focusing on the need for change in an individual, but not in a political or socio-economic system (Zhang 2020, 155).

Zhang emphasizes that the new phenomenon of "therapeutic control" should be seriously observed from several perspectives, examining its application and the various concrete effects it entails, and not just as a form of false consciousness or psychological manipulation foisted upon the population by politics (ibid.)

Some critics refer to the new phenomenon as "emotional capitalism", a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices shape each other (Yin 2021, 5). They claim that in this context psychologists and counsellors, armed with specific knowledge, have become experts in the field of improving interpersonal relationships and increasing productivity in the workplace. They explain the goal of this development as follows:

> It seems that psychologists offered nothing but profit enhancement, combating worker unrest, organizing worker-supervisor relationships without conflict, and neutralizing potential class struggles by packaging them in the benign language of emotion and personality. (Zhang 2020, 155)

Anxiety in China during the COVID-19 Pandemic as Reflected in Empirical Data

From the above, then, we can see that the Chinese state interferes very much with the mental health of its people. There is also much sharp criticism of its "loving care" policy, which seems relevant and even justified given the political strategy of the Chinese Communist Party. The argument that these are mechanisms to prevent any revolt or criticism of the political leadership seems particularly relevant. For let us recall that it was precisely the political leadership that covered up the first phase of the COVID 19 epidemic outbreak in Wuhan. Despite clear and multiple warnings of Chinese doctors on the appearance of unknown pneumonia, local political representatives (including the director of the hospital) withheld this information and even threatened these doctors for spreading rumours which could damage social stability.

What is most significant here is the fact that it is precisely the state which should be providing prosperity, harmony, and care for the Chinese people. People would sense trust, security, and care from the state if it were to actually function according to the principles of loving care. However, as shown by psychological research on the increase in anxiety, depression, indignation, anger, and hopelessness published in scientific journals,[8] the truth is very different.

8 See for instance Shuai et al. 2020; Wang and Zhao 2020; Liu et al. 2020; Zahir et al. 2020; etc.

An essay entitled *The Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic Declaration on Psychological Consequences: A Study on Active Weibo Users*[9] (Shuai et al. 2020) has shown that there was also been an increase in negative emotions (anxiety, depression and indignation) and the sensitivity for social risks as well as a decline in positive emotions and life satisfaction after the proclamation of COVID-19 in China. People showed more concern about their own health and the health of their families and cared less about free time and friends. The use of data obtained from social media ensured the timely understanding of the impact of severe measures in the field of public healthcare and mental health during the epidemic. Therefore, staying home with the family and reducing recreational activities also meant a way to prevent the spread of the disease.

The survey also pointed out that people began to take more care of their health and sought psychological support from their families, which was also influenced by limited travel policies and regulations on self-isolation by health authorities and the central government. The confirmation of the assumption that COVID-19 could be transferred from person to person, in contradiction with previous reports, led to many people to be very dissatisfied with the inaccurate information published in provincial governments and ineffective regulations. These actions caused an increase in indignation and anger directed at the government.

Shuai et al. (2020) have also shown that it was precisely anxiety that was the most common psychological state among students. Although a lot of informants listed anger, outrage and fear, anxiety was by far the most commonly listed. The researchers also emphasized the dangers of post-traumatic stress that could carry long-term consequences, which also stem from the worsening economic state. Reports on the infected and deceased healthcare workers, everyday problems, social injustice, and corruption, the powerlessness of common people living in Wuhan, and the use of social media in times of social isolation caused depression, anxiety, stress, fear, frustration, and anger. Indeed, anxiety was one of the main mental states of people in China judging by the feedback of different hotlines for psychological advice (see e.g. Liu et al. 2020; Zahir et al. 2020).

While research on online mental health services in China during the COVID-19 outbreak has shown that there was an increase in the number of public and healthcare workers educating themselves on mental well-being through online social platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Tik Tok, and over 28 books on the subject of prevention, containment, and mental well-being connected to COVID-19 were published by the Chinese Association for Mental Healthcare as early as February 2020. Moreover, online psychological advice was established

9 One of the largest Chinese social networks online.

on mass through the WeChat platform led by experts for mental well-being in healthcare institutions, universities, and academic societies in all 31 provinces and autonomous regions in continental China, ensuring free 24-hour services every day of the week. They also developed an online psychological system for self-help, including online cognitive behavioural therapy for depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness (again, using WeChat). There have also been several AI programs used as interventions for mental crises during the epidemic. Individuals who showed suicidal signs were recognized by the AI program through a system for tracking and analysing messages published on Weibo, with online volunteers then warned to act according to the acquired information.

Based on the above-mentioned research studies published in February, March, and May of 2020, we can see that anxiety and also anger were by far the most dominant feelings in this crisis, which stemmed, as we have seen, from feelings of uncertainty, fear of disease, family care, and the loss of trust in the political authority. Most people solace in their familial ties, in part also with the help of consulting groups. Here it is also important to take into account the fact that the outbreak of the epidemic happened at the time of Chinese New Year celebrations, or just before them, when the biggest movement of people in the world happens each year in China. This is one of the reasons why the epidemic spread so fast among the population, because, as we have already mentioned above, the government did not notify the population of the danger of the virus in a timely fashion or covered up this data.

The measures for containment of the epidemic that the Chinese government implemented were the complete suspension of all public life, social isolation and the complete shutdown of all border crossings in the epicentre of the outbreak of COVID-19, the city of Wuhan and the entire province of Hubei. These measures have, at first glance, proven to be an effective way to contain the epidemic, but the dark side of this apparent success has far-reaching social consequences. Of these, it would seem that the loss of the intimate sphere is most concerning. This intimate sphere allows a person to state his/her feelings, opinions, or perhaps even a (subtle) critique of political power through social media. As seen from the results of the research outlined above, consultants could make interventions with individuals through web platforms on the basis of the text messages such individuals had sent on those very platforms. Since China has introduced a strict system of control and censorship of messages that flow through these social media platforms, there is a fear that this control will become even more severe. It is clear to Chinese political authorities that in this situation, even if only for a brief moment, they lost credibility, and caused discontent and anger of the population over the concealment of data and the repression of those who handed then this data to the public. Therefore, it would seem that an increase in censorship and control are highly likely, since this would act as a mechanism for preventing potential social unrest.[10]

All this raises the question of whether the Chinese government will continue to tolerate any other mental or emotional states with its Chinese Dream project, which should be run by a happy population. If there is already a diversified network of consulting groups that interferes in the sphere of privacy and controls it, it is only a matter of time before anxiety becomes listed as a deviant behaviour or emotional state that could potentially harm or even destroy the realization of a harmonious society.

Despite such interference of politics into the intimate sphere of people, it is becoming clear that intimacy does not stay in the domain of the individual but is always constructed by others, whether the closest family members or the wider community. In research done by Zhang Li, which confirms a part of Chinese (Confucian) tradition which states that an individual in his/her mental dimensions always stays embedded in relationships with others, where anxiety, spurred by the wounds of modernity in a sense of alienation brought forth by the capitalist economic system on the one hand, and the crisis we are facing in the COVID-19 pandemic on the other, is primarily reflected in the care we have for one another. In the next chapter, we will look at a concrete example that affirms this anxiety which stems from the care for another and is also calmed by it.

Case Study: *Letters from Wuhan*, a Conversation with a Young Philosopher

In the time of the epidemic and the complete shutdown of the city of Wuhan, I had a brief conversation with a young teacher of philosophy from Wuhan University. I was most interested in whether he experienced anxiety at this difficult time. As we shall see from our correspondence and his own published reports, anxiety is still relational in contemporary China. In addition, however, Ouyang Xiao, my correspondent, has connected the specific Chinese feeling of anxiety to another significant concept from the Chinese tradition, namely the concept *ming* (fate) or *tianming* (Heavenly Mandate or order), which has been already mentioned in the previous parts of this paper.

10 Since the propaganda apparatus of the Chinese Communist Party already managed to plant the belief that the virus came from abroad amongst the people, the fear of rebellion was unnecessary. Of course, this was influenced by the all-encompassing, already established system of social control.

Wuhan, along with the province of Hubei, of which it is capital, saw the most drastic measures that also lasted the longest. The government practically locked down the entire province and implemented social isolation of all the population for three months practically overnight. Because this happened at the time of Chinese New Year celebrations many families became stuck between the four walls of their homes.

My correspondent (Ouyang Xiao), is an associate professor of Western aesthetics and comparative philosophy at the Wuhan University. His parents came to visit from the province of Sichuan for the Chinese New Year celebrations. Just two days after their arrival, i.e. from January 23, 2020 onward, they were stuck for almost three months in his studio apartment without a balcony. Ouyang Xiao published his experience of a three-month-long quarantine on his Facebook page, which was also published on the webpage of the Irish national radio.[11] However, in our correspondence, he talked more about his personal distress and opinions on the subject of anxiety. He stated the following on the experience of living with his parents in such a small space:

> Family means everything to me, it is only now in the last three weeks that I understand completely how connected we are or how we live together as a family. My emotions are their emotions, their health is my health. When I feel uneasy because of the newest news or simply because there is no sign that the quarantine might end, they also become stressed when they try to comfort me. The first thing I do in the morning is check if they are feeling alright. If I hear one of my parents coughing I will stay awake and attentive to whether it will continue or not. Whatever happens, the family stays together. My mother said: "I cannot imagine how worried we would have been if we were in Sichuan and you could not come home because of the city lockdown." In their eyes, I am always the one that needs their protection and I feel in my heart that I should be the one taking care of them since they are more vulnerable. Lately, I started hugging them and they like it. Unlike the Europeans, the Chinese usually do not hug, not even family members. I believe that if I am to be infected, there is only a small chance that they would not be. (Ouyang, Xiao, electronic correspondence with author, April, 2021)

He also commented on people facing the crisis and the general mood in the community by stating the following:

11 Ouyang Xiao finished his PhD at Dublin University and is a correspondent for the aforementioned Irish national radio.

> Wuhan is still in this battle—we still have not seen a breaking point—however, panic is unnecessary. People here remain strong, they help one another. Lately, the government implements more and more regulations. The city is ruled by order, and I believe that it is only a matter of time until we defeat this virus. (ibid.)

He replied to my main question on anxiety by saying:

> If we think about others we can temporarily forget "ourselves". The fact that people love you and take care of you creates a feeling of joy that eases the pain caused by anxiety. Thus, it is not that anxiety could be stronger and more intense because of the care for others. In a healthy relationship where we take care of others, of course, others also take care of us. Perhaps the feeling that someone cares for you triggers a sensation of protection, safety; even though this protection cannot truly defeat the great threat (virus), it is still protection as such. Protection is a form of functioning, not the product of functioning. I believe that this radical case is not an example of overcoming anxiety, not in a sense that we would be able to nullify it, but rather coming to terms with it and re-directing it to some other level. We have to recognize the real unavoidable challenge, but still think of it in a wider context. Here we come to Daoist metaphysics and its wide discourse about life and death. If we face "death" or any other form of threat with people we love, it becomes a lot easier. The certainty we feel and witness in an intimate relationship (between parents and children, among lovers ...), mutual care for one another is shown in detrimental moments. We were also helped by prayers to God or a deity. Even I, an atheist, prayed. However, in the end, we were saved by the very change of the situation. Good news from the community and the government played a very important part here. (ibid.)

From this written record we can see that the feeling of anxiety and the fear of death and uncertainty tied to it evolved into one of the most fundamental Confucian values, i.e. (co)humaneness (*ren* 仁), which is based on the love and care for one another. The basis for this, as mentioned in the second part of this article, is the virtue of filial piety (*xiao*) or love and respect for parents (and children) and people in general. Thus, from this concrete case, we can see that, in China, anxiety is connected to care and concern for those one is close to. As stated by Ouyang, this care is mutual, and the feeling things brings calms and overcomes anxiety.

The feeling of anxiety or anxious conscience is, as seen in the first part, strongly tied to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the sequence of events in external reality. In his article entitled *Toward the Post-coronial: Thinking Life and Uncertainty Through Chinese Philosophy* published in Labont – Center for Ontology in 2020, Ouyang argues that this specifically Chinese feeling of anxiety is strongly connected to another traditional concept that also denotes very basic feelings. The concept of the Mandate of Heaven, or *tianming* 天命. This idea, which primarily described the function of external, anthropomorphic deities at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, was later transformed or defined as the functioning of the cosmos in the sense of an absolutely good and harmonic entity by Confucians (Ouyang 2020)

The Confucians also transferred *tianming* as a cosmological principle to the world of people. It served as a reference for the moral and ethical functioning of every individual within the community. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected all of humanity, the Chinese understanding of catastrophes or natural accidents as the unpredictability of the cosmic or natural *tianming* becomes especially interesting. As explained by Ouyang, in reality, the Chinese understanding of catastrophes or natural accidents as the unpredictability of the cosmic or natural *tianming* means, the nurturing of an appropriate intuition which is not based on any ruling religious tradition when it comes to the relation towards change or uncertainty in human life. The *ming* 命 character has more meanings, which describe "naming" or "name", order, ordering, destiny of life, and cosmic law. Ming is conceptualized in the sense of impermanence, uncertainty and unpredictability (*wuchang* 无常) of life. The existential uncertainty that stems from *tianming* creates a feeling of fear and respect for the Heaven or nature/the cosmos *tian* 天 which is its end source:

> Confucius says: a noble man has three forms of awe, to cosmic law, to great people, and to the words of sages.
>
> 孔子曰：君子有三畏：畏天命，畏大人，畏聖人之言。 (*Lunyu* s.d. 16:8)

As pointed out by Ouyang (2020) *tian* 天 can be understood as the appeal to the cosmos itself, instead of a personalized deity or supernatural being such as God or Allah in Western religious traditions, which is clearly shown by the quote of Mengzi, who defines *tian* as well as *ming* as follows:

> That, which is made without human activity comes from the heavens (*tian*). What happens without a human causing it is endowment (*ming*)
>
> 莫之為而為者，天也；莫之致而至者，命也。(Mengzi 9:6).

Even the Daoist classics similarly define cosmic endowment or law. *Liezi* states the following in the chapter "Li ming":

> I do not know, why it is as it is, that is *ming*.
>
> 不知所以然而然，命也。 (*Liezi*: Li ming)

These definitions describe the concept of *ming* as something which is completely beyond human influence, intelligence, and knowledge. Even Zhuangzi defines *ming* as something humans have no influence over. It is endowed or is the laws of the functioning of the cosmos (or *Dao*) as such:

> Among things that are the way they are under the influence of the earth, only the pine tree and the cypress are the best examples. Vividly green in summer as well as winter.
>
> 受命於地，唯松柏獨也在，冬夏青青. (Zhuangzi s.d. Nei pian, De chong fu, 1)

Ouyang actualizes the relation of Confucians and Daoists have with *ming* in the context of facing the dangers of the new coronavirus.

> Recognizing *ming* takes courage. Some find it difficult to accept that people are in fact vulnerable and powerless. Recognizing *ming* does not make us weak or unreasonable, however, it is a necessary step towards a true understanding of life. People have to admit this enormous existential characteristic of the human condition: uncertainty. In Confucian thought, without accepting or understanding *ming*, we cannot truly become human. (Ouyang 2020)[12]

Adapting our relation to life after accepting *ming* does not mean a fatalist or any other pre-defined relation. If the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道) is distinct to Confucian thought then the human Way (*rendao* 人道) is the establishment of relations between the exertion or diligence or power (*li* 力*)* and *ming*. If a person does not exert him/herself or is completely passive in his/her relation to *ming* this is understood as *non-ming* (*fei ming* 非命) or *incorrect ming* (*fei zheng ming* 非正命). The negative consequences such as sickness, death, danger and so on that stem from such passiveness are not a manifestation of destiny but rather a consequence of one's actions or decisions caused and chosen by ourselves (*zi qu* 自取) (ibid.).

12 不知命，無以為君子也。(Analects 20:3)

As stated by Mengzi:

> Therefore, the one that understands *ming*, will not stand under precipitous walls.
>
> 是故知命者，不立乎巖牆之下. (*Mengzi* s.d. Jin Xin I, 2)

A very interesting definition of the relation between human functioning and so-called destiny or the laws of the cosmos or Heaven can be found in the classic Yangzi fayan 扬子法言, written by the Confucian philosopher Yang Xiong from the Han dynasty:

> Someone asked what is *ming* and the master replied: *ming* is a Heavenly decree and not a matter of human functioning. Human functioning is not a matter of *ming*. And what is human functioning? The master replied: a human can survive or disappear, live or die and that is not a matter of *ming*. *Ming* cannot be avoided. Someone else asked: What about Yan Yuan and Ran Geng? The master replied: They could not avoid early death because of *ming*. But if one stands under a steep cliff that is about to collapse, when your every move would cause a catastrophe and any form of action would cause your death, is that *ming*? (Yangzi Fayan 7:11).

From this quote, it is clearly evident that *ming* is not about a form of destiny in the sense of some previous endowment or determination, but rather that humans alone are responsible for their actions and the consequences of these. In this context, *ming* can also be translated as destiny, although it is understood as the destiny that we hold in our own hands and is not subjected to external celestial forces. This is also pointed out by Xunzi in the following quote:

> Those that know themselves do not blame people. Those that understand *ming*, do not blame the sky. Those that blame people are empty and miserable and those that blame the sky are without goals and will. (Xunzi 4:6)
>
> 自知者不怨人，知命者不怨天；怨人者窮，怨天者無志。

In light of such views that developed in the bosom of Chinese tradition, we can perhaps better understand not only the situation of Chinese people who were engulfed with anxiety, but also the position in which we find ourselves, experiencing isolation, fear, and loss due to the pandemic, the effects of which hit us soon after the people of Wuhan.

Blaming China for "throwing" this new coronavirus into the world is reprehensible, however, as viruses do not know of a homeland, nor borders. Viruses are a part of nature, a part of our cosmos. They are truly life-threatening, and remind us of how vulnerable we are, despite the expansive material, technological and scientific progress we have made. Moreover, all the racism and Sinophobia that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that the world is not exactly one, and that people are not even close to being equal.

If this danger is also to be an opportunity, then we should see anxiety somewhat differently, as just an uncomfortable feeling. Since it was anxiety that overwhelmed us in the time of social isolation, the absence of social life and the everyday things we were used to, it has also shown what is most valuable in our lives. And this is our interpersonal connections, relationships with other people, because without them human existence cannot be given any meaning.

Conclusion

This article is thus, among other things, an ode to anxiety as a way of raising the awareness of human freedom and the responsibilities related to it. It has highlighted that the origin and psychological basis of the feeling of anxiety, which prevailed in China during the COVID-19 pandemic, was closely related to the nature of traditional Chinese self-reflection and the perception of individual identity, which was—in contrast to the consolidation of Western individuals—deeply rooted in and constituted by interpersonal, especially familial, but also social relationships. On the other hand, the article showed that such a "specifically Chinese" concept of anxiety is also intrinsically linked to the ancient idea of human destiny (*tianming*), which does not represent a fatalistic determinism, but can rather be understood as a form of autonomous human becoming, evolving upon the endless path of our common nature (*tiandao*).

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Japanese Artists' Responses to COVID-19: A Mass Revival of the *yōkai* Amabie

*Klara HRVATIN**

The art is of course powerless against the virus, but with the drawing of Amabie we can console ourselves that we have at least contributed a little.

(Junya Kono, prominent Kyoto-based Japanese *yōkai* artist, in Alt 2020)

Abstract

Artists are responding very differently to the COVID-19 around the world. In Japan, this has been manifested in artistic production of the mythical creature called Amabie, one of the *yōkai*. Most often, it appears as a mermaid, with both animal and human features recognizable by its three limbs, long hair, beak-like mouth and body covered by scales. This is a mythical character which, according to legend, allegedly predicted the plague and advised people to share drawings of its image with each other, thus protecting them from diseases. The character was documented for the first time in 1846 in one of the early *kawaraban* newspapers.

This paper presents a new wave of Amabie that overran social media when COVID-19 seriously affected Japan. The author focuses on the world of art, where the character distinctly stepped to the fore, and examines the characteristics of Amabie's interpretation by selected artists. One of the first to attract special attention in this respect is the artist Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015), a master of the *yōkai* genre, whose comic book featuring Amabie was revived in the midst of the pandemic. He was followed by other illustrators, designers and artists or groups of artists. Utilization of the character of Amabie as a talisman, however, is specific not only of the artists' domain. The mass popularization of the character, including drawings, puppets, paper sculptures, costumes, sweets, tattoos and the like can be followed through all kinds of social media. The paper attempts to lay stress on the phenomenon of the struggle of Japanese society with COVID-19 through the prism of popularizing Amabie folklore, which has become in the last few months an internet meme and mascot of pop culture that has spread around the entire world.

Keywords: *yōkai*, Amabie, COVID-19, art, folklore, popularization

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Odziv japonskih umetnikov na COVID-19: masovna oživitev *yōkaija* Amabie

Izvleček

Umetniki so se po svetu na COVID-19 različno odzvali. Na Japonskem je do izraza prišla umetniška produkcija lika, enega od *yōkaijev* ali bajeslovnega bitja po imenu Amabie. Navadno se pojavlja kot morska deklica tako z živalskimi kot človeškimi potezami, prepoznavna je po treh okončinah, dolgih laseh, kljunčkastih ustih in luskastem telesu. Gre za lik morske deklice, ki naj bi po legendi napovedal pojav kuge in ljudem naročil, naj delijo risbe z njegovo podobo, ki jih bo obranila bolezni. Lik je bil prvič dokumentiran v enem izmed zgodnjih časopisov *kawaraban* iz leta 1846.

Prispevek bo predstavil fenomen novega vala pojavljanja lika Amabie, ki je preplavil družbene medije, ko je COVID-19 resneje prizadel Japonsko. Avtorica se bo osredotočila na svet umetnosti, kjer je lik prišel najbolj do izraza, in preučila značilne interpretacije lika pri izbranih umetnikih. Eden prvih, ki je prišel do izraza, je umetnik Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015), mojster žanra *yōkai*, čigar lik Amabie v obliki stripa je oživel sredi pandemije. Sledila so dela drugih ilustratorjev, oblikovalcev in umetnikov ali skupin umetnikov. Uporaba lika Amabie kot talismana pa ni značilna samo za umetnike. Na družbenih medijih lahko spremljamo njegovo množično popularizacijo v različnih upodobitvah, vključno z risbami, lutkami, papirnatimi skulpturami, kostumi, slaščicami, tetovažami in podobno. Članek želi izpostaviti fenomen soočanja japonske družbe s COVID-19 skozi prizmo popularizacije folklore Amabie, ki je v zadnjih mesecih postala spletna meme in maskota pop kulture.

Ključne besede: *yōkai*, Amabie, COVID-19, umetnost, folklora, popularizacija

Introduction

The mythical creature Amabie アマビエ took over social media in the spring of 2020, and slowly become a Japanese symbol for COVID-19. Amabie was supposedly one of the versions of Amabiko アマビコ (known also by the inscriptions 海彦, 尼彦, 天日子, 天彦, あま彦), *Amahiko-nyūdo* 尼彦入道 and *Arie* アリエ, whose depictions include characters similar to a bodiless monkey or bird, usually with three limbs. The first related tweet appeared on February 27, when it appeared on *yōkai* artist Orochidō's[1] 大蛇堂 page with a contemporary image of the Amabie character, and this reportedly aroused renewed interest in the Amabie character and inspired for similar art and posts (*Mainichi shinbun* 2020c; Furukawa and Kansaku 2020, 532). The Amabie character has been part of a rich Japanese cultural tradition since at least 1846—when its first

1 Orochidō (大蛇堂) is the name of the artist, but this also serves as the name of the store specializing in *yōkai* hanging scrolls, managed by the artist (see *Orochidō* 大蛇堂).

descriptions appeared along with a legend that gives both Amabie and sharing its image the power of a talisman for the prevention of infectious diseases. The first publications of Amabie appeared and spread in one of the earliest newpapers, *kawaraban* (瓦版), which were woodblock-printed bulletins that contained news, rumours, and gossip (Furukawa and Kansaku 2020, 531). More recently it reappeared during the struggle against COVID-19. This second wave spread by sharing the Amabie character through social media, and can be understood as a contemporary version of the previous newspaper version. In a very short period of time interest in the character revived: from a few tweets on March 1st 2020 there were already some 46,000 tweets at the peak of the phenomenon on March 15th, followed by approximately 10,000 to 20,000 per day in April (Furukawa and Kansaku 2020, 532). The mass revival of Amabie on social media is associated primarily with the period when Japan ordered the closure of the schools as well as the postponement of the 2020 Olympics due to the severity of the spread of COVID-19.

In a short time, the image of Amabie in the role of talisman completely overtook Japan. It was used as a symbol and logo on posters and warnings issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare against the spread of the COVID-19 (see figure 1). It could be seen in artistic works by illustrators, designers and artists, in many cases depicted in a very innovative way. Likewise, the icon was widely and universally disseminated, and could be seen almost everywhere: in the form of drawings in Japanese kindergartens (see Furukawa and Kansaku 2020, 532), or as paper sculptures and traditional dolls (NHK World-Japan), as well as in other forms. Its appearance and integration into the lives of the Japanese was also linked to market demand, as images of Amabie as a talisman were sold in temples, pastry shops, coffee shops, tattoo parlours, and more. Therefore, on July 7th 2020, companies applied to register more than 10 trademarks associated with Amabie, which subsequently triggered several problems as they could be used for profit (*Mainichi shinbun* 2020b).

Figure 1. A poster by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare with the character of Amabie.[2] (Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2020).

The following article examines the current phenomenon of the Amabie character and its use in the visual arts, whether in graphics, design, painting, industrial design, architecture, and beyond, from the figure's inception to its popularization. Its evolution under the pens of various designers and artists will also be scrutinized. Some of the questions we will try to answer are: How and in what way did the second wave of the figure's appearance come about, compared to the first wave that spread through print? What expressive power has the character of Amabie, with its legendary message of *draw me and share*, acquired in the 21st century, and which artists have been most successful in its expansion? We will also try to understand and explain the various aspects of the figure's use in Japanese art, examining what the spread of Amabie offers and what characterizes it as a social phenomenon significant for the period of COVID-19 in Japan?

The author will first provide insight into the early sources on the subject of the character of Amabie, on the first wave of its appearance. This will be followed by an analysis of sources of the second wave of the character as used in the visual arts; firstly, through the publications of selected artists in Japanese newspapers, as well as through social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Personal communication with some of the Japanese artists who have used the

2 The poster is entitled *STOP! Kansen Kakudai* 感染拡大- *COVID-19* (Stop the Spread of COVID-19 Infections) with the character of Amabie. The top title, which carries the message *Shiranai uchi ni, hiromechaukara* 知らないうちに、拡めちゃうから (Because it is spreading without knowing it) on this poster, is available from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in countless versions with various warning messages.

character of Amabie and are conscientious and cooperative in the dissemination of the Amabie character, such as Yūhei Takada, and Fusao Hasegawa and Shunsuke Satake will be essential in examining these issues subject.

The Origin of Amabie

Sources explaining the origin of the character of Amabie are rare. We are surprised by their small number, particularly with regard to academic articles. Eishun Nagano 長野栄俊 (1971–), an Amabie expert, Director of the Fukui Prefecture Archives in Fukui Prefecture, presents a rare but detailed study of the various illustrations of the Amabie character, the frequency of their appearance, and the Japanese places where a particular version of the figure has allegedly appeared. The only surviving document showing the earliest Amabie monster—with the image of Amabie—is a *kawaraban*, a print on wooden or clay blocks. This was a commercial newspaper from the Edo period that in 1615 began to report on natural disasters, fires, local events such as suicides due to unrequited love, as well as on revenge stories, gossip and festivals, while in the 19th century it also dealt with political topics (Johnson 2018, 1–5; Wada n.d.; Steele 2003, 1–13). It was printed on a cheap type of wood; compared to the cheap *ukiyo-e* prints, the *kawaraban* prints were even cheaper, printed on thinner paper, often in one colour only, and usually done by less specialized master engravers.[3] The *kawaraban* with the impression of Amabie and the attached text is from 1846 (see figure 2). The inscription on the right alongside the picture of Amabie on the left speaks of the legend of Amabie appearing in Higo Province (present-day Kumamoto Prefecture). After a glowing object allegedly appeared a couple of times in the sea in the evening hours, a city official made it for the shore to investigate (Furukawa and Kansaku 2020, 531). With long hair, a beak-like mouth, covered with scales from the neck down, and three limbs, Amabie said to him: "I live in the sea. My name is Amabié. Good harvest will continue for six years. At the same time disease will spread. Draw me and show me to the people as soon as possible." (ibid.) A date is also written next to the inscription, specifically the year Kōka 3 (1846, mid-May) (ibid.).

This is, of course, not the only character used during major epidemics in the distant past. In view of its mermaid/merman-like figure, Amabie has many cognate creatures, differing from them by the place, time of appearance and shape, and different names, such as Amabiko アマビコ or 天日子, Amahiko 尼彦, あま彦 or 天彦, Amahiko-Nyūdō 尼彦入道, Amahiko-no-mikoto 天日子尊, Arie ア

3 See more on *kawaraban* in Wada (n.d.); Steele (2003, 1–13); Salter (2006, 58–60).

リエ, and others. It is said, however, that Amabie most resembles the figure of Amabiko アマビコ. According to Eishun Nagano, who studied various prints from the 1844–1882 period with characters similar to Amabie (see Nagano 2005, 22) (see figure 3), Amabie is supposed to be the same character as Amabiko, where during the recording of Amabiko アマビコ an erroneous transcription of the name occurred: the syllable for katakana *ko* (コ) was wrongly converted into *e* (エ), which changed the recording of the character into Amabie アマビエ (see ibid., 4). Considering various individual prints, it appeared most often in different images in the areas of the present-day Kumamoto and Miyazaki Prefectures and in the north in the area of the modern-day Niigata Prefecture (which at that time did not include Sado Island).

Figure 2. The image of Amabie, printed in the *kawaraban* newspapers during the Edo period or, to be more precise, in 1846. (Source: *Wikipedia* s.d.c.)

Figure 3. The picture above depicts a variant of Amabiko 尼彦, on a print from the early Meiji period (1871), which allegedly appeared in the area of modern-day Kumamoto Prefecture. (Source: *Wikipedia* s.d.)

Yōkai researchers also refer to them as to prophetic beasts or *yogenjū* (予言獣) (Nagano 2005, 9). The artistic staging of *yōkai* dates back to the 12th century, although the term *yōkai* for spirit, a strange apparition or phantom, was only used from the Meiji period onwards (Komatsu 2001, 451). Instead of the name *yōkai*, terms such as *oni* (オニ, devil), *oni* (鬼, demons), *bakemono* (化け物, ghosts or monsters) (*Nihon ōyō shinri gakkai* 2020, 74) had previously been used. Yasumura Toshinobu underlines that they were most characteristic of the genre known as *jigoku-e* (地獄絵, paintings of hell) or the genre of the images illustrating hell; these function as the source of the images and the source of what we nowadays denote as *yōkai* (*Waraku nipponbunka no iriguchi magajin* 2017). The paintings also began to appear among the annals of Japanese paintings in the 12th century under the influence of the flourishing of Buddhism, used to attract new believers. Images of subsequently named *yōkai* can be found in *hekiya-e* (辟邪絵, Extermination of Evil), a type of image depicting traditional Asian deities persecuting evil (see Banzato 2017, 15). In the first place, however, the Edo period should be set out, in which drawing of *yōkai* became the domain of numerous artists. Let us also mention the famous *ukiyo-e* artist Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788), who marked the domain of the *yōkai* with four collections of illustrations.[4] These "illustrated encyclopaedias" (*Nippon* 2017) were to stimulate the popularity of *yōkai* in Japan, and many renowned artists showed their imaginations by depicting them. Of particularly great influence are the works of Hokusai, Kuniyoshi and Hokusai's pupil Takai Kozan, who in his later years devoted himself exclusively to drawing pictures of the *yōkai*.

Kazuhiko Komatsu 小松和彦 (1947–), the Japanese anthropologist and professor of *yōkai* studies[5] has underlined that during the COVID-19 pandemic the Japanese were in a similar situation as in the Edo period, when they not only traditionally but also cathartically drew *yōkai*, which supposedly transferred their fears from their subconsciousness to the paper (Kuhn and Kobayashi 2020). Pandemics and new diseases often spread havoc among the population, which drove them to seek new hope. Moreover, people became aware that *yōkai* do not in fact exist but were created by humans, so they actually began to enjoy looking at them (ibid.). Thus, all appearances of the Amabie mermaid character reflect the deadly epidemics occurring in Japan in the second half of the 19th century, and the Japanese supposedly believed that they were able to chase away evil spirits with the aid of images that represented good spirits—*yōkai* in the form of prophetic saviours who make a brief appearance, make a prophecy, then disappear. As we can see with Amabie, newspapers and their illustrations spread such images which people were to hang in their homes as protection against diseases (*Yokai – the online database 2020*).

The character of Amabie reminds us, with its image and particularly the beak and the eye area, of the protective clothing worn by doctors treating the plague during the 17th century. The image, which was presumably characteristic mainly of continental Europe (France and Italy) and illustrates the probably negative image of the doctor treating this particular disease, a man with a long waxed dress, a stick, gloves and a beaked mask, into which certain things were to be

4 These are *Gazu hyakki yagyō* (1776), *Konjaku gazu zoku hyakki* (1779), *Konjaku hyakki shūi* (1781) and *Hyakki tsurezure bukuro* (1784).

5 Kazuhiko Komatsu is also the project leader in designing the *yōkai* database, i.e. the Kaii-Yōkai Denshō Database (怪異・妖怪伝承データベース), published on the website of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. It is a database of *yōkai* and stories from Japanese folklore.

inserted that would protect him—according to popular belief—from infection (see figure 4). These things were predominantly strongly scented herbs that were believed to purify the air, hence providing a layer of protection between the infected and the doctor (Blakemore 2020). Plague physicians wearing beaked masks and the aforementioned attire became an icon mostly in Italy. Their costumer was later also used in theatre, in the comedy of improvised dialogues known as *commedia dell'arte*, and has remained a traditional mask, or *Medico della peste*, at the Carnival of Venice to this day (Boeckl 2000, 27). Even in 2020, we were able to witness it prior to the announcement of the festival being suspended on February 24 (Blakemore 2020). Some writers are convinced that the character of Amabie is closely associated with the character of the physician, and that images of the latter made it to Japan, so that he was also well known to people there (Thornton 2020).

Figure 4. Depiction of a 17th century plague doctor. (Source: *Wikipedia* s.d.a.)

A similar symbolism and communication capacity as carried by Amabie is known in Slovenia, too. This is Saint Roque, who is revered as a great protector against the plague (people also turn to him for snake bites, cholera and pain in the knees and legs). He is depicted in pilgrim costume, with a pilgrim's staff and pumpkin, while his coat with a seashell is also a characteristic feature. He has a visible wound on his thigh, to which he points with his hand, and this wound is characteristic of the bubonic plague (Dugac 2000, 100; Kuret 1989, 593). Beside him a dog with bread stands, and at times he is also depicted with an angel carrying medicines for the infected. He is often drawn with St. Sebastian, who is also a protector against the plague; he, too, is depicted with an angel carrying a container of medicines to an infected patient. In addition to St. Roque, we know of many other patron saints of the plague in Slovenia. There are believed to be as many as seventeen of them, including the Saints Charles of Borromeo, Aloysius Gonzaga, Francis of Assisi, Gregory the Great and Joseph Cottolengo. The worship of St. Roque was especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the form of prayer (*Franciscan Brothers* 2020; *Catholic Church* 2020). However, we can draw no direct parallel between him and the prevalence of the character of Amabie as a talisman.

The Second Wave of Amabie: The Appearance of the Character in Fine Art

Shigeru Mizuki's Amabie and Its Influence on Manga Illustrators

One of the artists or producers that exerted a decisive influence on the revival of Amabie's character is Mizuki Production, which shared on Twitter the character of Amabie by the late manga artist Shigeru Mizuki 水木しげる (1922–2015). Mizuki loved to draw the *yōkai* and reshaped them in his own way to make them more popular. This particular manga artist and historian is known, *inter alia*, for a manga series created in 1960, *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (ゲゲゲの鬼太郎), originally known as *Kitarō of the Graveyard* (墓場鬼太郎, Hakaba Kitarō) (see Papp 2010, 47, 57). The series is distinguished by the popularization of the *yōkai*, which act as the main protagonists, with the story relating to the early 20th century Japanese folk tales which had originally been staged as *kamishibai*.[6] The work is also known in the form of anime, video games, and other media. On March 17, 2020, Mizuki Production shared Mizuki's illustration of Amabie in pen and India ink, with a call for the COVID-19 situation

6 The culture of *kamishibai* has become very popular in Slovenia in recent years, particularly since 2013, when it was part of the storytelling festival *Fairy Tales of Today* in Ljubljana (see Cvetko 2018).

to improve (*Sankei News* 2020). In the two days after the character was posted on Twitter, the image was apparently shared as many as a hundred thousand times. Amabie was also in constant demand in Mizuki Shigeru Kinenkan (the museum dedicated to the artist), based in Sakaiminato, the Tottori Prefecture in western Japan, Mizuki's birthplace. A panel dedicated to Amabie in the exhibition space on traditional Japanese *yōkai* was now placed near the entrance to the museum, where it attracted numerous visitors to enter and explore the works on display (*FNN* 2020).

With this other manga artists were enticed to join the new wave of Amabie's popularity in the country and to publish their illustrations on social media with hashtags such as "「#みんなのアマビエ」(#Amabie for everyone)" and "「#アマビエチャレンジ」(#Amabie Challenge)", such as the manga artist Mari Okazaki おかざき真里 (1967–) with a colourful cartoon version of Amabie, as well as an anonymous manga artist, illustrator and designer with the pseudonym Chica Umino 羽海野チカ (1966–), Junji Itō 伊藤潤二 (1963–), the famous horror manga writer with a darker black and white version of Amabie, the manga writer Keiichi Tanaka 田中圭一 (1962–), and the manga writer and video game creator Shin'ichi Hiromoto ヒロモト森一 (1966–) (*Minna no Amabie* 2020), probably best known for his Star Wars comic book. Hiromoto widened the character of Amabie, linking it with the illustration of the mascot of the city of Taman (Kumamoto Prefecture) called "Tama Nyan", and incorporated both in eight illustrations (*Tamana City* 2020). The works of the main representatives of the manga genre, including those listed above as well as manga artists such as Rieko Saibara 西原理恵子 (1964–), Hiroko Matsuda 松田洋子 (1964–), Noriko Nagano 永野のりこ, Katsuya Terada 寺田克也 and Momota Nakahara なかはら桃太, were combined with works by other artists in the publication *Minna no Amabie* (みんなのアマビエ, Our Amabie), published in May 2020 (*Minna no Amabie* 2020).

Freelance Illustrator Shunsuke Satake and Freelance Artist Fusao Hasegawa

More examples could probably be mentioned, and not just limited to the world of manga art, as the Amabie character became familiar in all kinds of art forms. Hereinafter, we shall present two artists whose drawings of Amabie, outside the style and depictions of manga illustrations, were among the first to appear and take over social media in Japan. The front cover of *Minna no Amabie* was made by the freelance illustrator Shunsuke Satake サタケシュンスケ (1981–), lecturer at Kyoto University of Art and Design and some other schools of design, as well as member of the illustration unit Nariyuki Circus

(なりゆきサーカス), who likes to present his illustrated works of stylized animals. Even prior to the wave of Amabie's appearances after the publication of Shigeru Mizuki's work, he published his own version of Amabie (figure 5), which turned out to be a great success. After getting acquainted with Amabie in early March 2020, he himself, as a creator, wished to make a product that would contribute to a positive attitude in the current situation in Japan and around the globe. Quite unexpectedly, he got responses immediately after sharing it on the Internet, but was soon noticed by domestic as well as foreign online media. Here, an important role was also played by "Spoon&Tamago",[7] a website on Japanese art and design culture. After that, Satake's illustration of Amabie became very popular on Instagram, and spread into the world of international illustrators and was published in the *New Yorker* in early April 2020. The author received payment for his illustration, but decided to donate the money to the Coronavirus Prevention Fund and for anti-corona measures (*Shingata koronauirusu kansenshō: Kakudai bōshi katsudō kikin* 新型コロナウイルス感染症：拡大防止活動基金). At the same time, he was given an offer to commercialize the drawing and orders for a poster from Thailand, and also contacted by journalists from England and Spain. The commercialization of the image was further extended to the Amabie pandemic prevention project (*Amabie ekibyō taisan purojekuto* アマビエ疫病退散プロジェクト),[8] which with the aid of Heso Productions Co. enabled production of several articles with the illustration of Amabie produced by Satake. These are sold on the website operated by Heso Productions Co. Ltd.[9]

These items are predominantly small magnets, folders, face masks, T-shirts and cups, and the selection sold on online will expand in the future. The author also upgraded his collaboration with the firm Sakura Crepas and designed crayon boxes. Satake has explained in detail his success and the amount of money he has been able to donate from the income derived from this illustration to various

7 "Spoon&Tamago" ("Japanese art, design and culture") is an international blog with its bases in New York and Tokyo. It was created in 2007 by the artist and writer Johnny Waldman. It is characterized by its ability to cover, with the aid of an international perspective, various aspects of Japanese design, from fine art, architecture and graphic design to arts and crafts.

8 For more details about the project see the artist Satake's website (Heso Productions 2020). The project's main goals are to support activities that would enable donations given to doctors, nurses and volunteers taking part in anti-COVID measures, while it also wishes to create new jobs for domestic producers, and as an individual artist Satake is striving to positively contribute to society with his work. Twenty percent of the proceeds from product sales are intended for the Japanese Red Cross Society (Heso Productions 2020).

9 Heso Productions Co. Ltd. is a company focusing on the planning, production and sale of original products.

institutions working to alleviate the consequences of COVID-19, such as the Japanese Red Cross and Yahoo, on his website (Heso Productions 2020). In this way, the artist achieved secondary promotion, which means that he did not directly advertise his works, but acquired numerous customers through the recognition of his Amabie illustration.

Figure 5. Satake, illustration of Amabie. (Source: Satake 2020)

From the list of young contemporary artists who produced image of Amabie let us also mention Fusao Hasegawa[10] 長谷川維雄 (1988–). He has been proclaimed an "artist of the next generation" (*BS Fuji* 2018), and attracts much attention with his style of reproductions of famous Western and Japanese works, into which

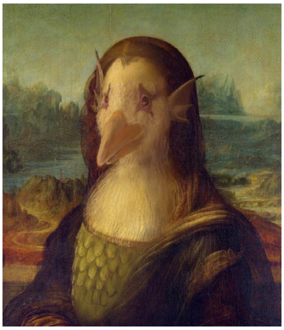
10 Fusao Hasegawa is well recognized for his massive production of plastic coloured cones of the statues of Jizō (地蔵), a very popular Buddhist deity, protector of children and travellers. He has erected the statues of Jizō in various cities in Japan. He is also known for his installations emitting the sound of harbingers of summer, the *semi* (cicada), when their sound has faded at the end of the summer, thus conjuring up a feeling of summer among people (Fusao Hasegawa, message to the author, August 24, 2020).

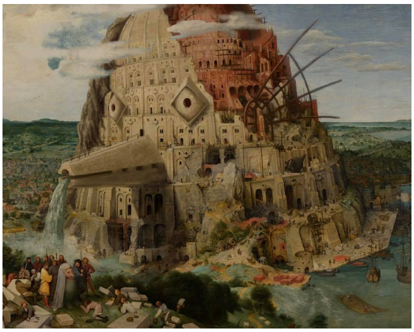
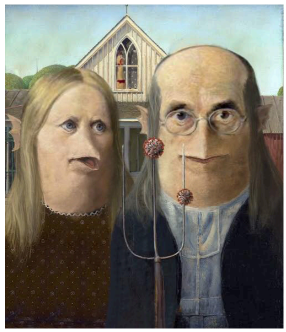
he included the Amabie motif. These works, named the *Series of Processed Images* (*Kakō gazō shirīzu* 加工画像シリーズ) (Hasegawa, Fusao, message to the author, August 20, 2020), are characterized by the inclusion of the character of Amabie as an authorial intervention into already existing well known works of art.[11] This is a corpus of 17 works with no special individual titles. Hasegawa created the series gradually, one work per day, both to hope for better times and as practice during self-isolation, using an iPad app called Procreate (ibid.) as a tool. In this way he used works such as the *Mona Lisa* (Leonardo da Vinci), *Birthday* (Marc Chagall), *The Birth of Venus* (Sandro Botticelli), *The Persistence of Memory* (Salvador Dalí), *American Gothic* (Grant Wood) and *Sunflowers* (Van Gogh). As far as Japanese works are concerned, a major intervention was made especially into *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* 百鬼夜行図巻 (*Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Picture Scroll*)[12] (see figures 11, 12) and into a work by Yoshimoto Nara.

Amabie's character replaces either an already given character, object or person in a well-known work of art (see figures 6–9), as observed in the author's intervention into *The Tower of Babel* (Pieter Bruegel the Elder), or is newly incorporated in the work's composition, such as in *Sunflowers* (Van Gogh), *The Milkmaid* (Johannes Vermeer) and *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* (*Premonition of Civil War)* (Salvador Dalí) (see figure 10). The latter approach is best expressed in the intervention into the Japanese work *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* 百鬼夜行図巻 (*Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Picture Scroll*) with the already original staging of the *yōkai* costume parade, to which Hasegawa adds Amabie and a simplified illustration of the structure of the virus (see figures 11 and 12).

11 His figures of Amabie have not become as recognizable as Satake's illustration (for now at least), but are certainly extremely prominent on social networks like Facebook.

12 For more on painted scrolls *Hyakki Yagyō,* see Nicolae (2015).



Figures 6–9 (from left to right). Fusao Hasegawa, from the *Kakō gazō shirīzu* series (2020), author's intervention into the *Mona Lisa* (Leonardo da Vinci) (fig. 6, upper left); *Birthday* (Marc Chagall) (fig. 7, upper right); *The Tower of Babel* (Pieter Bruegel the Elder) (fig. 8, bottom left); and *American Gothic* (Grant Wood) (fig. 9, bottom right).[13] (Source: Fusao Hasegawa)

Figure 10. Fusao Hasegawa, from the *Kakō gazō shirīzu* series (2020), author's intervention in the work *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* (Salvador Dalí, 1936).[14] (Source: Fusao Hasegawa)

13 It is most often the author's intervention where the character of Amabie replaces an already given character, person or object in a well-known work of art.

14 The character of Amabie is added: in the left corner there is a plastic container with disinfectant or

Figure 11. *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* 百鬼夜行図巻 (*Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Picture Scroll*). (Source: Wikipedia s.d.b.)

Figure 12. Fusao Hasegawa, from the *Kakō gazō shirīzu* series (2020), author's intervention in the work of *Hyakki Yagyō Emaki* 百鬼夜行図巻 (*Night Parade of One Hundred Demons Picture Scroll*).[15] (Source: Fusao Hasegawa)

soap, merged with the image of clouds.

15 The original (see figure 11) presents a scroll depicting phantoms in the form of pots and water heaters. The original story evolved from a tale from the Muromachi period. The character of Amabie and an illustration of the structure of the virus used by the media around the world are added to Hasegawa's work.

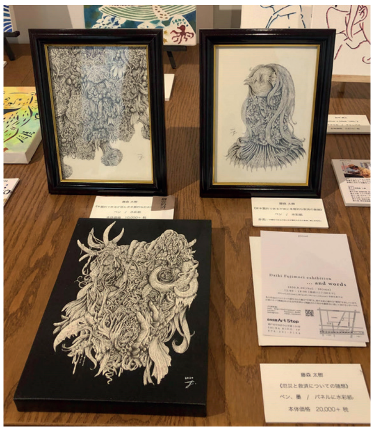
Tendency of Displaying and Treating the Character of Amabie in Japanese Museums, Galleries and Online Galleries

There are numerous artists who have dealt with the character of Amabie in their own way, and it can be said that almost every artist has tackled the character, regardless of their field. This is why we can witness its mass presentation in museums and galleries directly or indirectly dealing with Amabie. Indirectly, this can be perceived in museums dealing with the character of Amabie thematically, with an emphasis on the topics presenting the character of Amabie from the very start, as is the case of the Mizuki Shigeru Kinenkan Museum, where the first exhibited panel featuring Mizuki Shigeru's Amabie is very popular (*Mainichi shinbun* 2020a). Then there was the exhibition that was on display until August 16, 2020 at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of History (兵庫県立歴史博物館) featuring, *inter alia*, the only surviving copy of the printed Amabie *kawaraban*, which had originally been owned by the Central Library of Kyoto University (*Imaga news* 2020). Above all, however, we should underline the growth of online galleries and exhibitions, such as the online gallery *Tower Records (Tower Records* 2020) and the online *Exhibition 58 Amabie* (*Gallery-58* 2020), where either exhibitions were on display or numerous authorial works on the theme of Amabie were collected, each with its own technique and dealing with a common topic—Amabie.

Among the artists on display in these exhibitions one of the central figures was Yūhei Takada 高田雄平 (1983–)[16] from Hyōgo Prefecture, a follower of Shōzō Shimamoto 嶋本昭三 (1928–2013), the co-founder the first post-war radical art group Gutai (具体, or *Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai* 具体美術協会). He excels in works made from waste materials, especially newspaper, with which he designs two- and three-dimensional objects, drawing from "Japanese mythology, dragons, mountains, mists, sunrises and sunsets" (Pirnat 2017). In figure 13 we can see a sculpture made in various design techniques of newspaper bonding, which is his most recognizable method, although square wood is also used in his work. With the symbolism of the dragon's lower part, which illustrates the COVID-19, and its upper part, which rises above the virus, he wished to embrace the situation of fighting the virus.

16 More details about his biography and main works can be found in *Art Scenes: Yuhei Takada* (https://art-scenes.net/wat-art-browsing/artists/269).

Figure 13. Yūhei Takada, a work entitled *Futōfukutsu* 不撓不屈 (*Tenacity*) (newspaper, cardboard, square wood, wire), Kyoto Ashiya Gallery, November 2020. (Source: Yūhei Takada)



Figures 14 (on top), 15 (below, right), and 16 (below, left). Works on display within the framework of the exhibition *With Amabie Against Corona*.[17] (Source: Yūhei Takada)

17 Works by the following artists are shown: Daiki Fujimoto 藤森太樹 (India ink, figure 14), Yūka 優花 (graphics, wooden engraving, figure 15), Yoshiko Okajima オカジマヨシコ (Amabie figurine, figure 16).

More evident than his participation with solo installations on the subject of Amabie is Takada's involvement in organizing a series of exhibitions titled *With Amabie Against Corona* (*Corona vs Amabie ten* コロナＶＳアマビエ展), where he initially invited more than 80 artists to take part. A collection of their works as a moving exhibition with the same title has been on display at various locations since March 2020, starting with a gallery in Kobe and moving on to galleries and department stores in Osaka. With a title that has become a true brand of exhibitions of this kind, one of its venues has been the Okamoto Comminca exhibition ground (岡本コミンカ), where Takada works as chief exhibition producer. The space used by designers was in May 2019 turned into a gallery (second floor) and a café (first floor). Takada himself is the crucial figure in spatial design, organization of exhibitions and creating opportunities for other artists (which in turn leads to the sale of their works), as well as in managing the café (*Mainichi shinbun* 2020d).[18] This process was, of course, decisively influenced by the drawing of Amabie that was supposed to ward off the epidemic and transformed into a major "movement" (Yūhei Takada, correspondence with the author, from September 26 to December 14, 2020). The exhibitions were supplemented by various works, including ones made by children during self-isolation. He also sees a special significance of exhibitions of this kind in the fact that they include the authors' different views (ibid.).

Takada is enthusiastic about the spread of this phenomenon elsewhere in the world, and hopes that the works will be exhibited outside Japan as well. In the photographs (see figures 14–16) one can see three such works by three different artists from the Okamoto Comminca gallery, each representing Amabie (India ink, graphics, figurine design), with a different technique and story, where the figurine of the Amabie character (figure 16) is considered a work of art that makes a deep impression and is very popular (Yūhei Takada, correspondence with the author, from September 26 to December 14, 2020). The works were for sale, which enabled many artists to earn some money. In general, people like to purchase those works in order to help artists, and as a sign of good wishes present them to family or friends and thus spread a positive attitude towards the current situation in Japan and around the world (ibid.).

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 epidemic Japan saw a wave of popularization of the Amabie character—a mythical mermaid/merman that first appeared in Japan during

18 He underlines that thanks to the *yōkai* Amabie, artists have been given more opportunities to exhibit their works in spite of the current hard times that make it very difficult for exhibitions to be held.

the Edo period as a response to the severe epidemics raging in the country at that time. With the same basic statement, *draw me and share*, exchanges of images of the character on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were decisive for the rise in popularity of Amabie. One of the most prominent examples in fine art was an already existing illustration of Amabie made by the late manga artist Shigeru Mizuki (shared on Twitter along with the basic statement *draw me and share*), which encouraged other artists to take part in the presentation of Amabie. Japan soon witnessed a wave of illustrations of Amabie drawn by major manga artists born in the 1970s and after, such as Mari Okazaki, Chica Umino, Junji Itō, Keiichi Tanaka, Shin'ichi Hiromoto, Rieko Saibara, Hiroko Matsuda, Katsuya Terada and others. Such works were of course not limited to the manga genre, and with the mottos *Minna no Amabie* (#みんなのアマビエ, Our Amabie) and *Amabie charenji* (#アマビエチャレンジ, The Challenge of Amabie) many different types of artworks appeared on social media from March 2020. This paper focuses on two artists, the freelance illustrator Shunsuke Satake, whose Amabie met with a great success in Japan as well as abroad and brought the artist considerable recognition, and to the *Series of Processed Illustrations* by the artist Fusao Hasegawa, in which he included Amabie as an authorial intervention into already existing art works, particularly famous Western ones. Amabie also became a common muse of numerous exhibitions, both at actual galleries and in online galleries and exhibitions. As a phenomenon of circulating group exhibitions and a collection of artists, the paper put to the foreground the works by the artist Yūhei Takada, a follower of Shōzō Shimamoto, who organized the circulating exhibition *With Amabie Against Corona* showing his own works and those of others, as well as creating a creative space for greater participation and possibilities for artists during the pandemic.

Since a great many artists in Japan worked with the character of Amabie, it can be denoted as a "movement" (Yūhei Takada, correspondence with the author, from September 26 to December 14, 2020) as Takada puts it, that has marked the fields of fine art in both narrow and broader ways. The integral whole is hard to embrace, as the phenomenon of Amabie's presentation is not yet complete and is still evolving. "Although everyone is dedicated to the same motif—Amabie, it is pleasant and interesting to observe how very differently it is portrayed by individual authors."[19] (Yūhei Takada, correspondence with the author, from September 26 to December 14, 2020)

In this sense, the Amabie phenomenon could be seen as an artists' identity

19 「同じアマビエをモチーフにしていますが、作家さんによって捉え方はさまざまで、同じ作品にはならない面白さがあり見ていて楽しいです。」

movement, and understood as a kind of artistic activism, with which artists draw attention to themselves in a benevolent form (Jani Pirnat, conversation with the author, February 9, 2021). In it, we can endeavour to look for ritual values, a therapeutic role, artists' actions in a range of media responding to the crisis, although at the same time we can find ourselves baffled by the infantile attitude towards the very reproduction and sharing of a character that has evolved from a superstition into a pop-cultural phenomenon. Another thing that defines this movement is that it started, and in most cases functioned as an art movement involving the internet or "activism on the internet" (Chandler and Neumark 2005, 17), where the cultural receptivity of social media platforms played a crucial role.

Besides the benevolent side of artists' involvement in this phenomenon, we can find the appearance and integration of Amabie into the lives of the Japanese is also linked to market demand. This is a crucial aspect which also coincides with the popularization of the character in Japanese society. Amabie has acquired new dimensions from the aspect of *yōkai*, from the already existing illustration of Amabie made by the late manga artist Shigeru Mizuki which triggered massive re-productions of his work, wrapped in the "folklore" from the Edo period and bearing witness to the same pattern of behaviour as in the past—drawing and sharing Amabie, which should herald better times—except now through different media. Via online networks, and initially through the art of manga, Amabie has spread all over the world and globalized itself based on the characteristics of media transmission. As a social phenomenon of drawing and creating the same character during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the support of artists and promotional efforts, Amabie has become popular to such an extent that its image can be found virtually everywhere in Japan. Not only as a major "muse" during the pandemic in the world of art, but also with wider dimensions in the Japanese media, in print and on screen. We can also find Amabie as an illustration on T-shirts or a pattern on face masks, in the form of candy, on Happy New Year 2021 cards, as amulets that can be bought in temples, as a new character in traditional art and craft objects, and as a new role in traditional *nō* theatre, as well as in other places.

In this way we could consider the spread of Amabie as another example of Mizuki's *yōkai* characters which have long been used in the "character merchandizing business, turning them into toys, plastic dolls, cellphone cases, advertisement posters, collectables, video-game characters, designs for everyday objects like beverage and food product packaging, and even statues lining streets" (Suzuki 2005, 2202) where manga serves as a "popular medium that is viable as a commercial force" (ibid., 2203). Its different manifestations using cross-media marketing could embrace what has been termed the "thingification of media" (ibid.), or the phenomenon where the *yōkai* leaves the manga world, from where it originated, and gets transformed into everyday objects (ibid.) to serve commercial ends. Crucial in the whole story is the importance of "Japanese media mix" (or "a popular, widely used term for the cross-media serialization and circulation of entertainment franchises" (Steinberg 2012, viii)) practices, which add to "the sense of intimacy with *yokai*" (Suzuki 2005, 2202) and as well functioning as various "business and marketing strategies" (Ōtsuka and Steinberg in Suzuki 2005, 2201).

As the currently most attractive pop mascot of Japanese culture and an online meme in the COVID-19 era, Amabie has become a powerful cultural symbol, which spread even on international level, and as such globally recognized brand, which on the one hand gives Japanese people the feeling that they are connected to each other and that through distributing and buying Amabie products they are joining the collective online creation and sharing of something "positive", while on the other hand at the same time the phenomenon is strategically intertwined and determined by market demands. It would be interesting to examine to what extent is the phenomenon of the Amabie revival based on "fakelore", or to which extent it is "folkloresque", and examine how its physical manifestations will integrate and expand further in the scope of tourism contents in Japan and beyond.

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Creative Revitalization in Rural Japan: Lessons from Ishinomaki

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*Heide IMAI***

Abstract

Different disasters throughout history have prompted Japan to develop diverse approaches to recovery, revitalization, and local resilience. The current global COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. In this paper, we argue the need to study the impacts of COVID-19 on outside major cities such as Tokyo as such areas were already experiencing socioeconomic decline. Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture is a city that has also been undergoing extensive post-disaster reconstruction after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE), notably through various bottom-up approaches, often initiated by volunteers and migrants bringing new, creative ideas to community revitalization. These efforts continue to shape the social life of its residents during COVID-19, making Ishinomaki an important case study in both disaster reconstruction and rural revitalization. This paper examines examples in which creativity played a key role in revitalization, recovery, and community resilience in Ishinomaki over the last decade to shed light on current creative revitalization initiatives at the grassroots level, initiated and carried out by citizens. Drawing on an ethnographic approach conducted remotely in the form of semi-structured interviews, the paper presents the personal narratives of a diverse range of residents and social networks committed to rebuilding the soft infrastructure that is often overlooked compared to hard infrastructure. The paper proposes suggestions for the future based on lessons learned from the past decade, and hopes to illuminate how Japan's rural areas are adapting to a new normal in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: sustainable development, creativity, rural revitalization, Ishinomaki, Japan

Kreativna oživitev na japonskem podeželju: lekcije iz Ishinomakija

Izvleček

Skozi zgodovino so razne katastrofe Japonsko spodbujale k razvijanju raznolikih pristopov k okrevanju, oživitvi in vzpodbujanju lokalne vzdržljivosti. Trenutno trajajoča globalna pandemija COVID-19 pri tem ni izjema. V tem članku zagovarjamo nujnost raziskovanja

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vpliva bolezni COVID-19 na področja izven velikih mest, kot je Tokio, saj so ta področja družbenoekonomsko nazadovanje doživljala še pred omenjeno pandemijo. Mesto Ishinomaki v prefekturi Miyagi je mesto, ki je bilo prav tako deležno obsežnih postkatastrofalnih rekonstrukcij, ki so sledile velikemu vzhodnojaponskemu potresu (Great East Japan Earthquake, GEJE) iz leta 2011, predvsem prek raznih pristopov »od spodaj navzgor«, ki so jih pogosto izvajali na pobudo prostovoljcev in migrantov, ki so prinašali nove, ustvarjalne ideje za ponovno oživitev podeželja. Ta prizadevanja družbeno življenje njegovih prebivalcev oblikujejo tudi v času pandemije COVID-19, zaradi česar je mesto Ishinomaki pomemben primer proučevanja tako rekunstrukcije po naravnih nesrečah kakor oživitve podeželja. Ta članek nadalje preiskuje primere, v katerih je pri ponovni oživitvi, okrevanju ter vzpostavljanju skupnostne odpornosti ključno vlogo igrala kreativnost, pri čemer bo naš namen osvetliti predvsem trenutne pobude kreativne oživitve na osnovni ravni, ki jih dajejo in izvajajo navadni državljani. Izhajajoč iz etnografskega pristopa, ki ga izvaja s pomočjo oddaljenega pristopa v obliki polstrukturiranih intervjujev, želi pričujoči članek predstaviti osebne pripovedi raznolikih prebivalcev in družabnih omrežij, ki se posvečajo obnovi mehke infrastrukture, ki jo za razliko z grobo infrastrukturo pogosto spregledamo. Na podlagi lekcij, ki smo se jih naučili v preteklem desetletju, članek prav tako ponuja predloge za prihodnost ter si prizadeva osvetliti, kako se japonska podeželjska območja v odzivu na pandemijo COVID-19 prilagajajo na novo normalnost.

Ključne besede: trajnostni razvoj, kreativnost, oživitev podeželja, Ishinomaki, Japonska

Introduction

Japan's rural regions have been shrinking for several decades, leading to diverse revitalization efforts with varying levels of success. According to provisional calculations by the think tank Japan Policy Council in 2014, the over-concentration of major cities like Tokyo will cause many of the more peripheral municipalities to disappear (Government of Japan 2019). This article focuses on the example of Ishinomaki and its recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake (hereafter referred to as the GEJE) as a case study on rural revitalization. In addition to the effects of shrinkage and aging experienced by other rural and regional areas in Japan, the case of Ishinomaki was accelerated due to the disaster. The official reconstruction process by top-down methods focused on the physical rebuilding, or "hardware", of public buildings and infrastructure without enough consideration of pressing social issues (Dimmer 2016). In short, the government failed to provide the necessary social and welfare services to disaster victims, leading to NPOs and social enterprises taking up the role to revitalize the community (The Japan Research Institute 2016). Ten years on we should continue to study the situation in Ishinomaki in order to continue improving revitalization efforts and the lives of citizens. We aim to show that even though Ishinomaki is, like other rural areas in Japan, suffering from the effects of a shrinking economy, declining birth rate, and rapidly aging population, times of crisis can be seen as an opportunity for more creative revitalization strategies. Rather than adopting pro-growth strategies a more "adaptation-oriented" approach is gaining favour where regrowth seems unfeasible (Matanle and Sato 2010; Chang 2018). The paper aims to contribute to current research on rural revitalization and creative placemaking through the presentation of narratives featuring key actors who are actively adapting to an era of shrinkage by focusing on community wellbeing, entrepreneurship and activating site-specific assets (Chang 2018). The case of Ishinomaki will be useful to learn from for other rural areas in Japan as well as shrinking regions worldwide with regard to how to respond and adapt to a post-growth era by taking up the opportunities that depopulation offers.

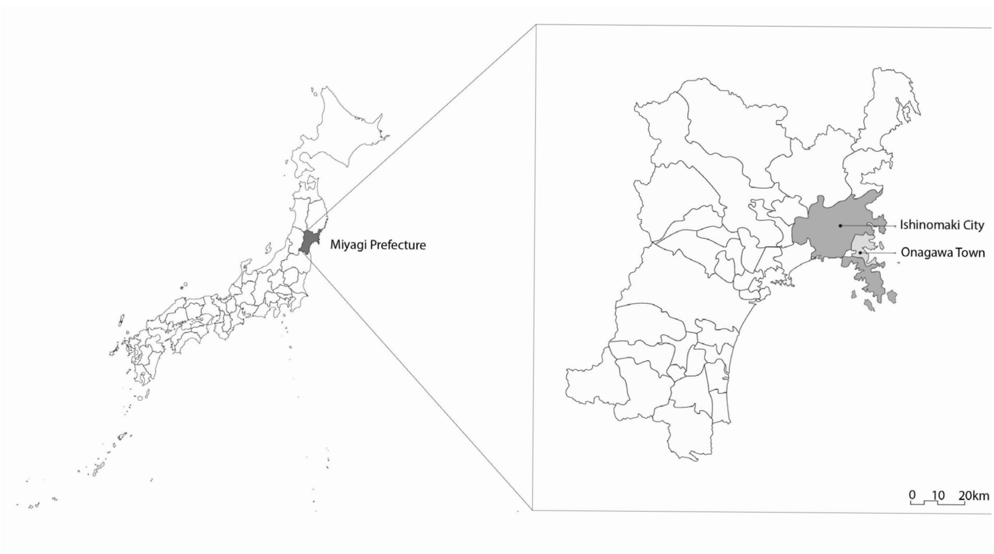

Figure 1. Location map of Ishinomaki City. (Source: Author's drawing)

Ishinomaki City (figure 1) has the second-largest population in the northern prefecture of Miyagi, with approximately 142,000 people. During the 2011 GEJE Ishinomaki suffered the highest number of casualties and was one of the most severely damaged municipalities. Although Ishinomaki is mostly known as a post-disaster town, the region was already facing problems before the GEJE. Like many other rural areas in Japan, young people were relocating to larger urban areas to find work or better sources of income, and the city struggled to attract new migrants. Interviewees described Ishinomaki as “quiet and boring” and “not very attractive” when asked what their impression of the town was. According to the population census conducted every five years, Ishinomaki’s population hovered between 1700,000 and 180,000 after the war, reaching a peak around 1985. The city’s population began to decrease for the first time in 1990, and has since been declining consistently ever since with a projected population of 77,000 by 2060 (Ishinomaki City s.d.). The city lost about 3,600 lives due to the GEJE, with many more moving away shortly after, hastening the existing depopulation trend. All 26 affected towns have continued to lose residents through migration, while the population of Sendai, the prefectural capital, has been increasing yearly since 2011, with an average growth rate of approximately 0.6% (table 1).

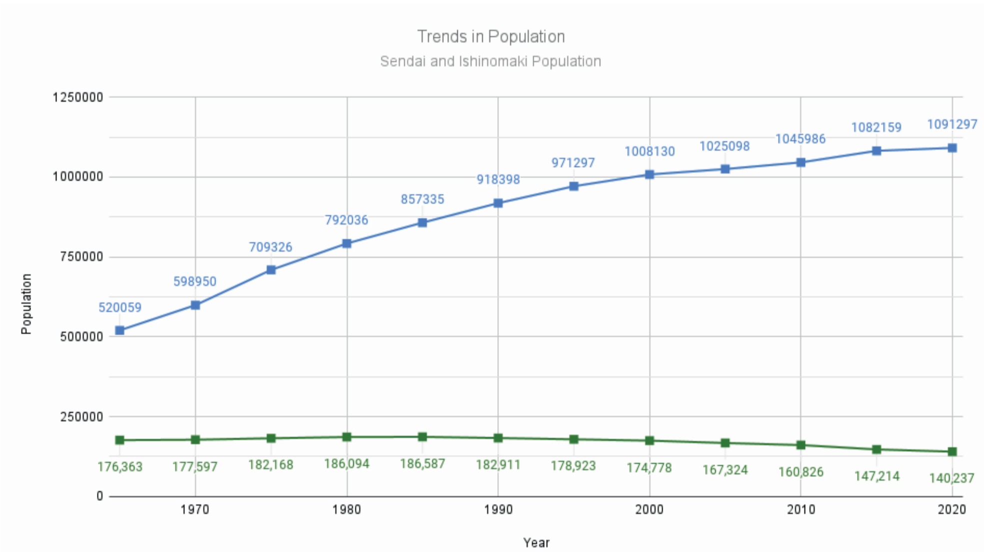

Table 1: Populations of Ishinomaki and Sendai.

Source: Population Census of Japan—Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Why Ishinomaki?

Although the GEJE did enable a new start and encouraged innovation and experimentation at a higher level and faster pace compared to other, unaffected areas, current revitalization efforts have not managed to reverse population decline. It can be argued that Ishinomaki could not reach the necessary level of resilience to sustain its population. However, we argue that the case of Ishinomaki is still valuable to study and should not be overlooked and judged simply by population trends. The whole population of Japan is decreasing, and most communities will continue to shrink. If some do not then it simply means that other regions will shrink even more to compensate, as competition for migrants becomes fiercer. As Matanle (2010, 4) points out, "the idea of returning to growth, if that is what revitalization means, is now an unattainable objective for nearly all of Japan's regional areas." Therefore, instead of focusing on growth, what's more important is accepting depopulation and focusing on increasing the quality of life for current residents with the aim of developing a more stable, sustainable, and inclusive community (Sorensen 2008; Mitsuhiro 2017). Matanle (2018) further contends that there are some potential benefits of shrinkage, in what he terms a "depopulation dividend" referring to positive outcomes such as less impact on the environment and more sustainable forms of living.

Immediately after the 2011 GEJE Ishinomaki attracted many volunteers and revitalization efforts, as well as scholars examining the various new initiatives and projects launched as a direct response to the disaster (figure 2). However, as one of our interviewees noted, a decade on such efforts have decreased in recent years, and now with the COVID-19 pandemic the city has gotten quieter compared to before (Interview 8). The ten-year anniversary of the GEJE in March 2021 offers a timely reflection and opportunity to look ahead to the future. While many volunteers have left, others continue to return with some even making the move and migrating to Ishinomaki full time. In a study of newcomers in Ishinomaki, Klien (2016) refers to them as examples of Florida's "creative class" who are instrumental in offering innovative revitalization ideas and producing new creative networks comprised of both local and non-local members. During the time of Klien's research many initiatives were still in the incubation period (ibid.). New rebuilding initiatives in communities take time to establish, and this is an ongoing and evolving process. This paper continues to study those who are engaged in different community activities and forms of entrepreneurship in order to provide updated insights into placemaking practices in Ishinomaki. We look at the roles their efforts play in the recovery process and how diverse narratives are influencing the definition of a "common goal" for Ishinomaki and vice versa.

Figure 2. Visitors inside Ishinomaki Community & Info Center. (Source: Copyright Ishinomaki Community & Info Center)

Contribution to the Field

Both the current literature and government material have written extensively about the physical reconstruction progress at Ishinomaki, such as Ubaura, Nieda, and Miyakawa (2016), who studied the urban spatial transformation after the GEJE. While some scholars have analysed post-disaster recovery processes from a social perspective, most have focused on the immediate phase after disasters and the description of best practice of disaster relief (Chan, Man, and Lam 2019; Goldfine 2011; Rotolo and Berg 2011). Others have described the situation of survivors and their lived experience by studying the everyday lives of residents after the Kobe Earthquake in 1995 and the Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004 (Miyamoto and Atsumi 2008; Tatsuki 2007; Varghese 2010). A few have continued to study individuals who have stayed and how they make a living, move away, return or, in the case of new migrants, relocate to a place many have chosen to leave years later after the disaster itself (Hawkins and Maurer 2010). Shaw and Goda's (2004) study highlighted the important role of civil society in the form of voluntary organizations and NPOs to address social issues that were still prominent nine years after the Kobe earthquake. Similarly, Aldrich (2012) stressed that high levels of social capital—defined as the networks and resources attainable through people's connections to others—are crucial in building resilience in the long run, and more effective compared to the short-term benefits of economic aid and physical infrastructure. Storr and Haeffele-Balch (2012) found that community-based organizations play a key role in connecting heterogenous and loosely connected communities that lack high levels of social capital. The rise of local NPOs and non-local actors who have moved to Ishinomaki (both temporary and permanent) or commute regularly, and/or have set up their own business or social enterprise projects, have been crucial in bringing new ideas and energy to Ishinomaki that deserve to be studied, along with the victims who suffered directly from the disaster.

In addition, as Dimmer (2016) noted the GEJE triggered strong positive advancements in place- and space-forming disciplines, leading to an "unprecedented collaboration of so many different creative domains". Mano and Noda (2020) describe the importance of studying *machizukuri* (bottom-up citizen participation in community building) not only through spatial transformations, but also the various programs that take place and the people that operate them. Similarly Posio (2019) highlighted how both the process and product of *machizukuri* are instrumental in the rebuilding of soft infrastructure, as this involves local participation from residents as active stakeholders in community building. Who are the architects, artists, designers, social entrepreneurs, and other creatives who are active in Ishinomaki, and how do they collaborate through different networks, and ultimately contribute to the rebuilding of Ishinomaki in both tangible and intangible ways? Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, how are they getting on and adapting to a new normal? This paper contributes to the current literature by providing individual narratives of a range of actors involved in collaborations that are not only contributing to the physical but also the soft infrastructure of Ishinomaki that many feel is still lacking. Thus the contributions of this paper are as follows: 1) to present diverse individual voices of those living and actively contributing to revitalization in Ishinomaki, 2) expand on methods of digital ethnography and virtual fieldwork, 3) contribute to a better understanding of how Ishinomaki is still evolving (not just shrinking) by adopting new approaches to placemaking, describing who they are supported by, and how can they succeed in the long term to better inform future policies.

The paper will first outline the research methodology and explain how remote ethnography was adopted as the main method to collect data during the pandemic. The second section introduces social revitalization and recovery in the context of rural Japan and then focuses on Ishinomaki as a case study. The last part discusses the personal individual narratives drawn from in-depth interviews and what we can learn from them in understanding current attitudes and developments of rural revitalization and placemaking in contemporary post-growth Japan.

Research Methodology—A Narrative Approach

Narratives can highlight the need for actions to address social problems and critical conditions local communities are facing. Narratives also tell us more about the specific person concerned, which in turn provides insight into the wider community and the challenges it faces as a whole. Narratives turn a story into knowledge for the recipient, as the informant decides and orders the relevant issues, introduces them through storytelling and relates the details into the context. As such, narrative data provides active, multi-perspective/multi-vocal and accessible data on sensitive matters, especially when we try to grasp the dialectic nature of topics such as rural revitalization in Japan.

Interpretation of Narratives

To interpret the individual narratives, in this research we applied the "interpretation schema", established by Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2011) as a methodological tool to analyse what guides community (old and new) members' decision to revitalize their community. This analytical lens has been chosen as Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2011) argued in their work that social capital in the form of collective narratives can play an important role for community to recovery after disasters. As such, the individual and collective narratives offer insights into the life stories, collective schemes and community composition which different members use to evaluate the (new) crisis situation and determine which recovery approach to take. We recognized the "interpretation schema" as the missing link between individual stories and collective narratives which could help explain not only how and why individual revitalization efforts take place, but also how these efforts contribute to diverse collective narratives and "common goals" to rebuild Ishinomaki.

Ethnography and Fieldwork during a Pandemic

This study is part of a larger research project that examines rural revitalization in contemporary Japan with a focus on socially engaged and bottom-up approaches, especially those initiated by rural migrants who are contributing to the "(re) making of a new rural" (Ji 2021). Prior to the pandemic, the authors conducted multi-sited physical fieldwork on different revitalization projects, including Ishinomaki. The study transitioned to online fieldwork from April 2020 when a state of emergency was declared in Tokyo on April 7, 2020, lasting until May

25, 2020. Another state of emergency for the Tokyo metropolitan area was announced on January 7, 2021, and was expanded to eleven prefectures. The data for this paper draws on online ethnographic fieldwork conducted between April 2020 and March 2021 through a series of semi-structured interviews via Zoom with individuals who either live in Ishinomaki or have participated in revitalization projects there. Additional online data was obtained from various websites and social media platforms including Instagram and Facebook. Such types of "digital ethnography" (Pink et al. 2016) and "digital anthropology" (Miller 2018) have become the new normal in ethnographic research in the digital age. In a previous paper, the authors examined similar themes of social capital, innovation, and local resilience in a traditional Tokyo neighbourhood during the COVID-19 pandemic (Imai and Ji 2021), with a focus on creative individuals and small businesses. The present study is a continuation of this research on social revitalization during the pandemic, looking to the rural context in contrast to the urban.

Social Revitalization and Recovery in Rural Japan

Rural revitalization in Japan refers to the need to address difficulties faced by rural regions, including a rapidly decreasing and aging population, lack of progress, and socioeconomic decline. In response, the Japanese government has implemented several policies and measures since the early 1970s, including town mergers to decentralize and save on administrative costs (Rausch 2006). In parallel with government initiatives, there has been an increase in local bottom-up efforts of "self-revitalization" initiated by migrants, activists, artists, and academics (Dilley, Shinzato, and Ando 2017; Love 2013). Dilley, Shinzato, and Ando (2017) have noted the diverse names given to contemporary revitalization movements, including regional revitalization (*chiikiokoshi*), regional placemaking (*chiikizukuri*), and village making (*murazukuri*). In this paper, we propose the term "creative revitalization", drawing on theories of creative placemaking (Courage and McKeown 2019) and the self-revitalization approach of *machizukuri* (Sorensen and Funck 2009; Satoh 2020). The present paper aims to illuminate examples of the bottom-up creativity that is transforming Ishinomaki from a post-industrial/post-growth, post-disaster city into a creative city that has maintained a group of active entrepreneurs, designers, and creatives ten years on after the GEJE, which we argue has been a key factor in maintaining Ishinomaki's vitality and culture which ultimately increases the attractiveness and liveability of the city as a whole.

Machizukuri and Creative Placemaking

Many authors (Dimmer 2016; Evans 2002; Satoh 2020; Sorensen and Funck 2009) cite the importance of emerging *machizukuri* practices in Japan for inclusive community development. *Machizukuri* (literally translated as "town making") is characterized by citizen participation as a progressive planning approach. It is often contrasted with traditional urban planning, *toshikeikaku*, which refers to top-down government-initiated approaches. According to Satoh (2020) the word *machizukuri* is not easily translated to English as it contains various concepts and meanings. It can be roughly understood by key words such as "community design", "community development", "community building" and "placemaking" amongst others (Satoh 2020, 3). *Machizukuri* practices developed in Japan from the 1960s on, and are an example of "bottom-up creative approaches based on collective action and use of local resources" that includes the improvement of both the physical and social environment as well as their collective management (ibid., 254). The term is broad and has come to be used widely as a general category, but at its core emphasizes citizen participation and the engagement of common people and residents. Ishinomaki experienced high levels of *machizukuri* activities immediately after the GEJE due to an influx of new volunteers and migrants. However purely bottom-up community development was seen to have reached a "deadlock" around the third year of reconstruction, with advocates arguing that *machizukuri* is not enough as a standalone method (Murakami and Wood 2014). Satoh (2020) calls for more integrated planning approaches to *machizukuri*, which include urban planning and policies that support *machizukuri* rather than relying purely on bottom-up community development.

Creative placemaking is an emerging practice that is still evolving with diverse approaches (Courage and McKeown 2019). In their 2010 White Paper for the National Endowment for the Arts, Markusen and Gadwa describe creative placemaking as follows:

> In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired. (Markusen and Gadwa 2010, 3)

In their book *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice*, Courage and McKeown (2019, 202) go on to define creative placemaking as "creative practices within the process of placemaking". Creative placemaking offers opportunities for citizens to engage and co-create with an emphasis on collaborative and participatory approaches, similar to the *machizukuri* approach introduced earlier. Therefore, we believe there is overlap between the two concepts and that the *machizukuri* movement in Japan can be enhanced by incorporating different creative placemaking initiatives.

The community was already aware of the need to find creative approaches to revitalize Ishinomaki before the GEJE (Ishiguro et al. 2015; Sato 2017), and this was intensified after the disaster. Creative initiatives include contemporary art festivals, restructuring of existing industries, especially fisheries, and new agriculture ventures such as growing olives (Kato and Miyake 2018; Mano and Noda 2020; Tagore-Erwin 2018). Dimmer (2016) noted that the GEJE was in fact a catalyst for existing developments that were accelerated and infused with new ideas, new money and new people who turned their attention to the disaster struck regions. When the global pandemic hit alternative initiatives were already underway, as illuminated by our interviewees. The resilience and attitude of people in Ishinomaki to COVID-19 reminded one individual of the time of the disaster, "this is the same Ishinomaki that has overcome all kinds of difficulties since the GEJE, now with the added complexities of the pandemic we are responding in the same way as we did ten years ago" (Interview 7). The next section focuses on Ishinomaki as a case study for post-disaster reconstruction by briefly summarizing recovery efforts to date, before presenting individual narratives.

Great East Japan Earthquake 2011

The Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE), measuring a magnitude of 9.0, was the biggest earthquake to occur in post-war Japan, along the east coast of the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011. The earthquake caused a tsunami that destroyed the seawalls, resulting in over 28,000 casualties and the destruction of over 120,000 buildings nationwide. Ishinomaki was one of the worst affected cities, being the closest to the epicentre of the earthquake. After the 2011 disaster, damaged areas received around 280,000 volunteers from Japan and abroad, including many who later migrated to live and work in Ishinomaki. New facilities have opened in the last few years, such as the Ishinomaki Genki Ichiba Food Market in June 2017, and a major new community cultural centre called the Maruhon MakiArt Terrace, designed by the well-known Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, opened in early 2021.[1] To provide some context of revitalization in Ishinomaki we briefly

1 The MakiArt Terrace -Ishinomaki City Complex Cultural Facility includes a concert hall, exhibition and meeting rooms, museum and cafes. For more information see website https://makiart.jp/.

sketch out the different phases below: 1) Ishinomaki before 2011, 2) recovery efforts immediately after 2011, 3) from recovery to revitalization up to 2020, and 4) responses to COVID-19 and the 10-year anniversary of the GEJE.

Phase 1: Ishinomaki before 2011

Ishinomaki's main industries are fishing and shipbuilding, with an emerging tourism industry. The fishing industry prospered after the Meiji Restoration but started declining in the 1970s, while the city centre went into decline from the late 1990s (Mano and Noda 2020). Labour-intensive industries had long been declining, leading to rising unemployment and out-migration. For more than 50 years before the GEJE, the former and current Ishinomaki city had already been experiencing depopulation, as seen in many other areas in Japan (Matanle 2011). Ishinomaki adopted similar strategies as other regional towns and aimed to attract migrants by cutting taxes and offering new incentives for young people and families to move to the area (Pongponrat 2017).

Phase 2: Recovery Efforts Immediately after 2011

According to the government's Reconstruction Agency, over 470,000 people were evacuated from their homes and the government's focus was on building new housing as fast as possible.[2] This was also the period where a large number of volunteers came and started to set up new groups and initiatives, including the well-known volunteer team "ISHINOMAKI 2.0"[3] made up of a group of urbanites, mostly from Tokyo. The influx of new people after the GEJE resulted in the rise of creative businesses and initiatives, leading to a diversification of industries beyond the reliance on fishing and farming. Along with other groups the movement of citizen-led *machizukuri* processes started in Ishinomaki through small-scale "micro-initiatives" such as the renovation of vacant and damaged properties (Mano and Noda 2020).

Phase 3: From Recovery to Revitalization up to 2020

Current reports state that 99% of private (18,000) and public housing (30,000) projects have been completed in Ishinomaki as of August 2020, and approximately

2 See https://www.reconstruction.go.jp/english/.

3 See https://ishinomaki2.com/ for overview of projects and activities.

154,000 buildings were rebuilt by individuals who received support grants to rebuild themselves.[4] The term "creative reconstruction" was used by the government with the hope that Ishinomaki's restoration would be an exemplar case for Japan's future, but the results fell short with many residents unhappy with restoration policies and delays in rebuilding (*The Mainichi* 2021). Nevertheless creative revitalization efforts have continued, including the new biennale Reborn Art Festival that first ran in 2017, consisting of contemporary art, music, and food events. While it aims at regional revitalization and promotion of disaster-stricken areas, it is also a vehicle to showcase the current recovery progress of the area (Itoh and Konno 2019).

Phase 4: 2021 and Beyond: Responses to COVID-19 and the 10-Year Anniversary of the GEJE

According to the Reconstruction Agency, as of early 2021 most of the infrastructure in the areas affected by the earthquake had been completed. Due to the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, many events had to be cancelled but some were able to transition online while others rethought ways to engage with the public in a pandemic safe environment, such as starting livestreams of music performances and concerts with limited in-person attendance. Crowdfunding platforms were used to disseminate information on new projects and raise funds with the help of existing social networks and the general public. Three of our interviewees have launched new projects utilizing crowdfunding platforms, which include the reuse of existing properties into DIY workshops and studio spaces for artist and creators, and a multi-purpose complex housing a theatre, music venue, eateries, shops and workshop space. As one of our interviewees said,

> The pandemic coincided with the 10-year anniversary of the GEJE which made people realize they cannot keep going the way things are. Both the pandemic and anniversary prompted a re-evaluation for what kind of new direction we want to head towards. (Interview 7)

Next, we introduce narratives drawn from original data from interviews to illuminate examples of some of the new revitalization directions in Ishinomaki.

4 See "Progress to Date" for further information: http://reconstruction.go.jp/english/index.html.

Introduction of Narratives and Placemaking Projects

One of the biggest positives after such a devastating event has been the influx of new people, many of whom were former volunteers who migrated to Ishinomaki and became involved in grassroots recovery processes in the form of creative social enterprises engaged in various community design projects (Dimmer 2016; Klien 2016). While the government has released details on the reconstruction progress, not much news has been reported on the communities themselves and how they have attempted to rebuild their social lives (Matthews 2020). While sceptical toward government, locals have appreciated the help of individual groups and volunteers, albeit some are still cautious, and newcomers need to take the time needed to gain trust (Klien 2016). We interviewed a total of 12 individuals and present six as representative narratives. Interviewees consisted of both long-term residents and returning/new migrants working in local NPOs, social enterprises, and small businesses (table 2). The interviews lasted between one to two hours, were recorded with permission, and later partly transcribed and translated. The interview questions revolved around three key sections: 1) their personal background, 2) their involvement in post-disaster reconstruction, and 3) the impacts of COVID-19 and their response to it.

Out of the 12 individuals six are I-turners (migrants who were originally from outside Ishinomaki and migrated), 4 are U-turners (originally from Ishinomaki and returned after the GEJE), and two live outside of Ishinomaki but continue to be involved in projects and visit regularly. We have used pseudonyms for all interviewee names.

Table 2: Interviewees

	Business Type	Location
1	Social enterprise – Sustainable fashion	Onagawa
2	Social enterprise – Recycled jewellery	Ishinomaki
3	Entrepreneur – Guesthouse and outdoor sports	Ishinomaki
4	Commercial business – Furniture and design company	Ishinomaki
5	Independent small business – Side dishes and sweets	Ishinomaki
6	NPO – Reuse of vacant property	Ishinomaki
7	NPO – Reviving art and culture	Ishinomaki
8	NPO – Migrant support	Ishinomaki
9	Incorporated company – Community design	Ishinomaki
10	Museum director	Ishinomaki
11	Designer and architect	Yokohama
12	Architect	Kobe

Narrative 1: "Outsider" Starting a Social Enterprise from Scratch in Ishinomaki

Sally started a social enterprise in 2012 that trains local women in making a range of jewellery products. Her business currently employs 16 staff, including 13 local staff in Ishinomaki. Originally from America, Sally moved to Ishinomaki after the GEJE from another part of Japan to volunteer and contribute to community rebuilding. Sally's business did not receive any financial support from the government but managed to support itself with sales of the products to create a sustainable business model without relying on external funding. Sally says there are years when the business does well and surplus profit is donated to other groups in need. As a foreigner and migrant to Ishinomaki Sally is aware of her unique position, "I value collaboration and input from the team but because I am in a position of power (as the founder) I recognize there is an inequality. I try to be aware of it as much as I can. I am also a foreigner and did not experience the disaster like some of the workers." When asked what the biggest challenge in running a social business was Sally said, "the biggest challenge is balancing the social part, the community, and being a business that needs to make money. We are a social enterprise, but I didn't know if I could pay the women at the start as I didn't know if people would buy our products, but at least we could create community by gathering to work together." Sally's business pays staff by the hour and has a flexible working policy which allows workers, many of whom are mothers, to balance their work and life.

During COVID-19 Sally's business received subsidies from the government to cover the loss of income due to requests from the government to shut down for a few weeks during the state of emergency. When they could work, staff hours were staggered to increase social distancing as it was hard to work from home, due to the tools required to make the products. Sally also noted how staff appreciated being able to come to work as staying at home was sometimes more stressful. Sales decreased for a few months and were affected by shipping restrictions, but overall the business was able to stay afloat. Sally credits the help of government grants but noted they were not always easy to apply for: "I am pleased with what the government offered but we had to research and apply for the grants ourselves, which was hard to navigate. I knew other small businesses that didn't know how to apply, and our staff helped some others to apply through the right channels." Sally is an example of a social entrepreneur who focuses on a small scale business to provide a livelihood to residents in a time when jobs are scarce, especially for those who are more vulnerable, such as women and mothers. In addition to providing a paid job the supportive work environment contributes to the social revitalization of the community.

Narrative 2: U-turn Environmental Entrepreneur

Originally from Ishinomaki, Akira enjoyed playing in nature such as going fishing and canoeing as a child. His parents' house was damaged during the GEJE, and he wanted to help his hometown while trying to reconnect with nature. In 2019 he started a guesthouse and offered marine activities such as SUP and canoeing. The guesthouse has a homelike feeling with the common space resembling a large living room, and it is often used as a community space. Akira describes himself as an environmentalist and wants to connect more with the community, "natural disasters occur in various places around the world and there is a limit to what I can do, so I am doing what I can such as providing a place for people to make friends and gather at the guesthouse, which has a shared kitchen." He noted that many people move to Sendai and other big cities, as Ishinomaki is considered a rural area. As work is limited in Ishinomaki, he started his own business: "I am trying to work on my own and find a reason to remain in Ishinomaki, as I am invested in staying for a long time and settling here." Most of his customers at the guesthouse are young people in their 20s and 30s, especially students. Akira spends time with them and often participates in social activities such as shared meals, water sports, and beach clean ups, which are regularly featured on the guesthouse's active Instagram account.

During COVID-19, the number of tourists decreased by up to 80%. In response, Akira has transitioned to long-term stays of about one to three weeks similar to a shared house model. As the guesthouse is aimed at visitors, Akira is trying to think of how to engage more with local people. His outdoor water activities have been popular among young locals who could not travel during COVID-19, but discovered they can do fun activities in Ishinomaki. Akira also hosts students for an internship program where they come and stay and work at the guest house. In 2020 the internship transitioned online. Akira worked with students to develop a new concept for the guesthouse, which eventually became the "studycation", concept based on the idea of a workcation proposed by the students themselves. As classes are conducted remotely, the program is aimed at inviting students to stay at the guesthouse and enjoy nature and outdoor activities in their free time with others, rather than studying alone by themselves. The program has been successful, with more students recruited in the 2021 season. Akira is an example of a motivated entrepreneur who has successfully started his own business by combining his passion for the environment with giving back to the community and acting as a bridge to connect young people to learn more about Ishinomaki.

Narrative 3: Urban-Rural Migrant Supporting Other Creative Migrants

Originally from a town near Tokyo, Kaori was one of the 280,000 volunteers in Ishinomaki that arrived shortly after the GEJE. At the time she was already looking for a job in Tokyo but gave that up to be more involved in Ishinomaki, where she regularly commuted back and forth before making the decision to move permanently. During the volunteer period she noticed there was a shortage of rental properties, especially places where volunteers and potential migrants could stay short to long term. She decided to work on filling the gap in the market and founded a company that purchases and renovates vacant houses to create affordable housing for young people and new migrants, "In Japan the old houses have no asset value, but that's the sort of properties we want to work on to create new value, not only by renovating but by creating social value by attracting creative people to live and work together." The company has renovated over thirty old houses to date, and operates eleven shared houses. Other than renovating properties, Kaori's company also works to connect people in the community through activities such as the coordination of student internships and training for migrants who wish to start their own businesses.

In response to COVID-19, Kaori's company has launched a new project that was crowdfunded online with the help of over 150 people, raising a total of nearly 1,800,000 yen. A vacant warehouse was transformed into a community space and live/workspace for artists impacted by COVID-19. Current residents include a performing artist who lost commissions in Tokyo and moved to live in the shared house and studio when it opened in June 2020. Others include a student who lost their part-time job, and another art student who had to postpone plans to study abroad. The system provides free rent for up to three years with basic living materials and goods donated through the community in the form of a gift bank, where residents can recycle homeware and other daily goods. Similarly the artists also give back in various non-monetary ways using their skills and labour, such as holding public events and workshops for the community. In this way the organizers hope to emphasize the need for non-monetary forms of giving based on mutual support and concepts such as paying it forward, which they believe should be the future in the post-growth, post-pandemic era. The group also has partnerships with galleries in Tokyo in prominent locations, including Harajuku, where creators can exhibit their work and maintain a connection to urban areas. Kaori still notes the importance of face-to-face connections and other offline activities during the pandemic, and is trying to hold as many in-person events as possible on a small scale, such as markets and art performances. Kaori is an example of a young, active migrant who has committed to staying and working in Ishinomaki after the GEJE, working to create new value by utilizing existing resources.

Narrative 4: Creating a Place for the Arts and Culture during Pandemic

Riku was originally from Ishinomaki and went to Tokyo where he attended a prestigious university before starting work. After the GEJE he felt drawn to return to his hometown and contribute in some way. Arts, culture and entertainment venues were declining in Ishinomaki, and most of the few that remained were damaged by the GEJE. As government efforts were mainly focused on rebuilding housing, cultural spaces were neglected, leading Riku to focus his energy on providing a place people could meet and exchange ideas: "I noticed there were not many places people can gather and enjoy art or attend live music events. I wanted to revive the cultural scene in Ishinomki, which I had enjoyed in Tokyo, to make Ishinomaki an interesting and attractive place." In the next few years Riku involved himself in various activities including founding an organization that holds music, theatre and art events, acting as chairman for a local theatre committee, and migrant support. He says, "I see myself as a planner and organizer that makes things happen. People think Ishinomki is boring, but I want to create a movement where we activate places to enable local people and visitors to experience interesting events in all kinds of artistic and cultural fields, such as theatre, music, dance, photography and so on."

Figure 3. Drive in Theatre using newly constructed sea wall. © Rino Kawasaki.

Riku has been active during the pandemic, working on several new projects including devising a new way for the public to enjoy theatre events in a safe way. Rather than adopting online methods, one of the innovative ways Riku proposed was to adopt reconfigure a small room to create a stage for one viewer to watch one volunteer performer through a small hole to create a virus-safe viewing experience. Riku also notes other innovative events held in Ishinomaki, such as a drive-in theatre where viewers watched a movie projected onto a 10m high sea wall and listened to the audio through their car radios: "The people were actually against the building of the new sea wall and there were negative feelings around it. However, after the movie event where the sea wall was used in a positive way there was some change in perception, and even some acceptance, which is very powerful" (see figure 3).

Figure 4. A vacant property that will be transformed into a new multi-purpose complex including a venue for music and theatre, along with clothing stores. ©Ryuta Yaguchi.

In addition, Riku recently started a new group with three other members that aims to revive theatrical arts in Ishinomaki. The group's first major project involves transforming a vacant property (figure 4) into a place for theatre with other add-on programs for all member of the community: "I want to create a place where people of all ages can come and gather. Not everyone wants to watch movies, which is why we will also have clothing shops, eateries and other programs where people can come and then have chance encounters" (figure 5). He describes his vision as being similar to the hip neighbourhood of Shimokitazawa in Tokyo known for its diverse blend of cultures and programs, such as second-hand clothing shops and music venues. The new complex is scheduled to be completed next spring in 2022, mostly through DIY methods to involve the local community. The project is a continuation of the original DIY projects such as IRORI Ishinomaki, which was one of the first multi-use spaces remodelled from a vacant property and now houses an open co-working space, café and general meeting space. Riku is an example of an active member of the community who is devoting his time and energy into multiple *machizukuri* projects often collaborating with others and adopting digital platforms such as SNS, Youtube and crowdfunding sites to promote Ishinomaki and its charm.

Figure 5. Conceptual drawing of proposed programs in the new transformed property. © Ryuta Yaguchi.

Narrative 5: New Migrant Starting a Small Business

Maki is an I-turner in her 30s from a prefecture near Tokyo who is in the process of setting up her new business in Ishinomaki. She worked as an office lady in Tokyo before losing her job due to the poor economic situation her company faced after the GEJE. Shortly afterward, she found a new job in 2011 working for a disaster relief organization and came to Ishinomaki to help clear up vacant houses. During that time, she had a dream of opening her own coffee shop. She moved back to Ishinomaki in 2017 and started to work at a local café, where she gained valuable contacts before opening her own store in May 2020, at the height of the pandemic. She now runs a take-out shop selling *sōzai* (side dishes) and *manjū* (buns). When asked why she chose Ishinomaki, Maki cited the supportive and tight-knit community:

> There are many people who started their own business here or are in the same situation as myself. Depending on the season, people also share a variety of vegetables with each other. The physical size of the town is big, as you need a car to get around Ishinomaki, which can be inconvenient, but the people are close. Cities like Tokyo are too big; even Sendai is too big for me.

To open her shop, Maki participated in a business training program held by Kaori's company, at the recommendation of her boss at the café where she worked. Along with six other hopeful entrepreneurs, the program they completed was not so much about teaching management skills or other textbook methods on how to start a business. Rather, it prompted them to understand themselves better by asking themselves why they wanted to start the business and why they chose Ishinomaki, helping them to clarify their own business goals and set up a successful business plan.

As a young migrant in the community, Maki does not know many local people her age where she lives and works, and mostly interacts with other migrants of the same age group. Maki seemed very motivated and positive, with a clear idea of what she wants even though things were not always easy. As her business is new, she is not eligible for government support, and thus took out a loan and used her own savings. She operates the shop six days a week and does not have much time to rest. She does not employ anyone and does all the food preparation, selling, and social media. Eventually she hopes to grow her business to the point where she can hire one other person but no more than that:

> I want to keep a close relationship with customers. If I expand too much and become too busy, I may not have this deep connection. I am so busy now working more than 12 hours a day, and I think this kind of lifestyle will continue for a while. Even though it is tiring, there are times I really enjoy it. I do wish I had more time to myself sometimes, but right now this lifestyle is just right for me.

Maki is an example of an individual struggling to make a livelihood in Ishinomaki without relying on governmental support, but who is supported by her social networks.

Narrative 6: Long-term Resident Staying to Support Ishinomaki

John is a long-term resident in Ishinomaki. Originally from the UK, he came to Japan to work as an English teacher. John identifies as a survivor of the earthquake: "I am definitely a survivor, I could have been killed when the tsunami struck, I was just lucky to be in a safe place at the time." Turning down the opportunity to return to the UK straight after the earthquake, John felt compelled to stay and contribute to rebuilding efforts because of his friends. He remarked that these ties have deepened because of his choice to stay: "I don't think Ishinomaki was a particularly attractive city, but I had a lot of good friends here which was the reason I wanted to stay, and my friendships have strengthened as people appreciated my choice to stay with them and face the rebuilding together." John noticed a difference between how people responded to the disaster: some are very positive and want to rebuild, as in the case of many migrants, while others are still suffering trauma and get emotional visiting certain sights. He thinks the government's reconstruction is "a little ironic", as "the more rebuilding there is to make the city look better the harder it is to tell that a tsunami had been here", effectively erasing the memory of the disaster apart from a few signs here and there. John thinks it is important to keep the memory alive and not just make Ishinomaki look like another generic city, which is unfortunately turning out to be the case.

Being one of the few of the interviewees who was already living in Ishinomaki prior to the GEJE, John says: "The city was already losing its population prior to the earthquake, which magnified the problem of depopulation and out migration. The centre of the city is pretty dead, there was no supermarket until one opened recently, and lots of shops have shut." Though there are some new migrants in recent years, many had left after volunteering in the reconstruction, John feels the volunteers can be tribal: "There are many different people and different groups operating in Ishinomaki, but I do not feel there is much collaboration. Some groups, for example, are aimed at the younger generation, and I do not personally attend many of their events but will collaborate if asked." John cites the 2005 merger of the city as challenging in terms of social cohesion and efficient decision making, "Even after the merger [of the areas to form the new city], I along with other older residents still refer to each town individually, and this is perhaps why it is hard to reach a consensus, which slows down decision-making compared to smaller neighbouring towns like Onagawa." John spends his time these days as the director of an information centre dedicated to the GEJE and provides both Japanese and English explanations to visitors and students. It is one of the only places where one can obtain information in English about the GEJE. There are plans for a new permanent facility soon, but John thinks that rather than focusing on building large high-tech facilities, the personal connection of having someone to talk to visitors is most important for conveying memories of the event. John is an example of a long-term resident who has seen new people coming in and adopt different approaches, but is happy to focus on his own efforts to educate visitors about the GEJE rather than creating something new. He places importance on the personal encounters and direct interactions with people that he engages in to connect with them in a meaningful way.

Discussion of Narratives

The 2011 disaster was a catalyst for many volunteers to come and assist in the reconstruction work and motivated some to stay and live in Ishinomaki (I-turn), while attracting some who had previously left to return (U-turn). Many people lost everything in the disaster, which led to a growing awareness of the unsustainability of a capitalist society but also an increase in awareness and changes in attitudes in people who want to focus on other kinds of wealth, to find purpose in doing something more meaningful and rewarding. In the example of Kaori's project, she emphasized how the free rent model was open to include anyone who creates something, including those working in the arts, crafts, design, music and so on. Another emphasis of the project is on non-monetary contributions, as Kaori stated, "it's not about the money, it's about support", where supporters can donate unwanted items or contribute their time to participate in DIY renovation and building maintenance workshops. Riku's project also hopes to engage the local community in workshops to involve them in the renovation process to feel a sense of ownership as well as a chance to interact with the wider community. Such models not focused on growth but on sharing, reusing and personal relations are highlighted as common goals for the future.

Towards a More Self-Sufficient and Inclusive Community

As such, most narratives presented in this paper generally want to see the rebuilding of a better soft or "social infrastructure". More than one interviewee said that the physical "hard infrastructure" is more than enough, even to the point of being unnecessary. Some are worried that ongoing management costs may be too high with the continued depopulation. What is important now is to focus on how to create a livelihood to improve the quality of life of those that do choose to stay and live in Ishinomaki. Most of the interviewees have started their own business or social enterprise and hope to continue to sustain themselves in a freelance capacity. The advantage of sustainable business models that do not need to rely solely on government grants, subsidies or external donations became clear as an over-reliance on the latter can be unsustainable in the long run. This emphasizes the need for self-sufficiency and the ability for projects to generate enough income to support themselves.

Many of the interviewees pointed to the importance of creating a "community", especially one that is more inclusive as well as diverse. As one U-turn migrant said,

> Japanese communities especially small rural ones can be "closed" and not accepting to outsiders. Before the GEJE we had a sense of pride and weren't really open to outsiders. After the GEJE when everything was broken, we became more open to new ideas and migrants who helped contribute to rebuilding. (Interview 1)

One of the interviewees also noted the need to move beyond words such as "reconstruction" and "disaster area" and instead to convey the local charm of Ishinomaki and its people. One artist said the challenge is to break away from the identity of Ishinomaki as a disaster town and allow citizens to freely express other themes. In a recent exhibition for young artists the curator chose not to "curate" and instead allow anyone who was willing to participate, in order to be more inclusive and give them the freedom to pursue non-disaster themes in their work.

Diverse Networks with a Common Goal

While it may seem like there are different groups and individuals working on their own projects, as John mentioned, Akira and Maki talked about a "supportive community" and believe there is a collective sense of community and common goal. Similarly, people like Riku also wish to make Ishinomaki an attractive place to live for people of all ages, both long-term residents and migrants, by providing specific places for certain activities where people can meet and interact. As Akira said:

> There are many entrepreneurs in Ishinomaki but due to the relatively small size of the town we all know each other, especially the new groups that have formed directly after the disaster where everyone started at the same time. Although our specialties and methods are different, I think we all the same goal which is to better the region.

He further added that there is an atmosphere that makes it easy to start something new because there is an existing community, which is crucial when facing challenges such as COVID-19: "When the pandemic hit we all shared information with each other and shared where to apply for subsidies and how to get help." Many interviewees were quick to respond and utilize online platforms, including social media, crowdfunding, and livestreaming to continue to facilitate exchanges between residents and visitors (such as with the warehouse-turned-artist studio project).

Conclusion

In this paper we have set out to understand recovery efforts in Ishinomaki as told through personal accounts to offer insight into the micro-level processes of revitalization. Drawing on in-depth interviews in the form of individual narratives allowed us to understand them from a wider perspective to comprehend shared visions as well as differences and struggles. We see that creative revitalization comes in various forms of entrepreneurship and placemaking strategies, which do not only involve the rehabilitation of physical spaces but also social revitalization through the systems, programs and activities that take place. The case of Ishinomaki is not that different to other rural areas in Japan which have adopted community-led approaches, but the case of Ishinomaki demonstrates concentrated and diverse forms of creative revitalization which are valuable references for other areas. Future studies should not only focus on the quantitative or economic measurement of success or failure, but also on the analysis of the quality of revitalization efforts and how they can be analysed against non-growth oriented measures. We emphasize the importance of studying revitalization through the lens of individuals in the community at a personal level, as their collective response gives an insight into the specific benefits and challenges of various approaches. This is an important consideration as small communities often do not benefit from policies focusing on economic recovery in the long run, and only by continued study of the lived experiences of residents involved can the real success stories of social revitalization be understood. In addition, the current COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the relevance of understanding the interplay of all forms of recovery (economic, political, and social) and the need for innovative policies and stimuli measurements tailored to support local communities.

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SPECIAL ISSUE CRISIS AS DANGER AND HOPE— COVID-19 IN ASIA

Empirical Studies: Language, Politics, Social and Medical Recovery

Chinese National Health Commission's Reporting Strategies on COVID-19

*Mateja PETROVČIČ**

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives dramatically and caused much fear around the world. While social media can contribute to faster information flow, this environment also gives rise to intensifying anxiety. This paper examines the research questions of how the Chinese National Commission (NHC), as the main authority for the health-related issues, presents the news about COVID-19 pandemic to English-speaking readers, which topics related to the coronavirus are stressed most, and what reporting strategies are used in presenting the current events and issues. The results indicate that the authorities are well-informed about the dynamics of public attention, since the same dynamics can be observed in the amount and structure of news. Moreover, from the perspective of reporting strategies we can see that the authorities subtly follow all the criteria that were proposed to allay fears and slow down or break the spiral of negativism with regard to the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, fear, media, National Health Commission, reporting strategies

Strategije poročanja Nacionalne zdravstvene komisije o koronavirusu

Izvleček

Pandemija koronavirusa je močno spremenila naše življenje in povzročila različne strahove. Socialna omrežja sicer prispevajo k hitrejšemu pretoku informacij, vendar pa so tudi vir za intenziviranje strahu. Pričujoči članek obravnava raziskovalna vprašanja, kako Nacionalna zdravstvena komisija Ljudske republike Kitajske kot osrednji organ za zdravstvena vprašanja angleško govorečim bralcem predstavlja novice o pandemiji novega koronavirusa, katere teme, povezane s tem, so najbolj poudarjene, in katere strategije poročanja zasledimo pri predstavitvi trenutnih dogodkov in aktualnih zadev. Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da so oblasti videti dobro obveščene o tem, čemu javnost posveča največ pozornosti, saj enako dinamiko poročanja opazimo tudi pri količini in strukturi uradnih novic. Poleg tega z vidika strategij poročanja vidimo, da oblasti mehko sledijo vsem predlaganim kriterijem, kako ublažiti strahove in upočasniti ali celo prekiniti spiralen razvoj negativizma.

Ključne besede: COVID-19, strah, mediji, Nacionalna zdravstvena komisija, strategije poročanja

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a huge challenge to society. While political actions are taken in the realm of health management, public security, and financial economics, psychological health is probably the most neglected aspect of the pandemic (Schimmenti, Billieux, and Starcevic 2020, 41). Societal safety measures are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely, and increase stress and anxiety (CDC 2020). Among other effects, stress can cause feelings of fear, frustration, helplessness, and other similar emotions.

Numerous studies have already shown that fear is a basic and adaptive emotion that is activated in response to a perceived threat. It serves to mobilize energy to deal with potential danger (Schimmenti, Billieux, and Starcevic 2020; Mertens et al. 2020, among others). From this perspective, fear can be a positive force, and a rational response is to understand and manage the threat of harm. However, an irrational but common response may lead to negative effects and result in panic (Ng and Kemp 2020, 752).

In search of news about the novel coronavirus, people often browse Internet or use online social media platforms as the main source of information. According to the 47th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of December 2020, online news sites had 743 million users, or 75.1% of China's total netizen population (China Internet Network Information Center 2021). We are all consciously or unconsciously influenced by these new communication channels. Ng and Kemp (2020, 752) thus pointed out that the established press and media need to understand that they have a responsibility not to inflame fears just to promote their stories or attract more readers and viewers. This is of great importance because social media can be a fear-generating environment, and serve as a tool both for searching and producing information, which easily results in fake news. Therefore, one should especially pay attention to evaluating of the reliability of the information received in such context. In general, it is not surprising at all that since the outbreak of the pandemic we have been exposed to a negative discourse that heightens concerns and promotes irrational fears on a daily basis.

This article examines the research questions of how Chinese authorities present the news about the COVID-19 pandemic to English-speaking readers, which topics related to the coronavirus are stressed most, which reporting strategies are used to deliver information, and towards which direction the informing policy goes.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In the section *National Health Commission*, we introduce the National Health Commission as the main authority on the field of health policies in China, which is consequently expected to provide relevant news and information about the novel coronavirus. At this stage, a general overview of the dynamic of news is outlined, whereas a more detailed analysis of the findings is presented in later sections. To place the news within a broader context, Section *Reporting Strategies* first presents the reporting strategies in journalism and outlines the framework proposed by Gyldensted (2015), followed by a brief review of other studies that are relevant for this discussion. In Section *Studies of Public Attention*, the focus is placed on studies of public attention and fear. Their results are then in Section *News on the NHC's Website* interwoven with the findings of our study that demonstrates how the NHC's news subtly follows the various guidelines of how to act in the current pandemic. Finally, Section *Conclusions* summarizes the results and draws the conclusions of this study.

National Health Commission

The National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China (NHC) is a central government commission sitting under the State Council, which is responsible for formulating health policies in the country. Among other functions, the NHC plays an important role in coordinating the national efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic (National Health Commission of the PRC 2020). As the leading agency in China on this field, it is expected to provide news and information about current health issues.

The NHC's website does indeed its contents update daily, and in the first three quarters of 2020 the News section included more than 2,300 pieces of news in English. The distribution of posts mainly corresponds to the findings of Li Sijia et al. (2020, 3), who observed a peak of searches on Weibo in late January and February, then a drop, followed by another rise in March, and a gradual decline afterwards. Our findings have shown a slight time delay in the intensity of news, as these peaks were observed from February to April 2020.

Li Sijia et al. (2020, 3) explained that the trend on Chinese social media largely reflects the progress of the pandemic in China. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the spread from Wuhan to the rest of the country corresponds to the first peak. The subsequent drop reflects the apparent promise with regard to containing the virus, followed by a minor relapse in March. Cui and Kertész (2021, 9) further observed an increase in social media activities on April 4 due to the national Qingming Festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day, where those who died in the COVID-19 pandemic were mourned. In the months afterwards there was a decline in the number of few posts. The dynamics of news releases by the NHC are quite similar to those reported in previous studies, as shown in Figure 1.

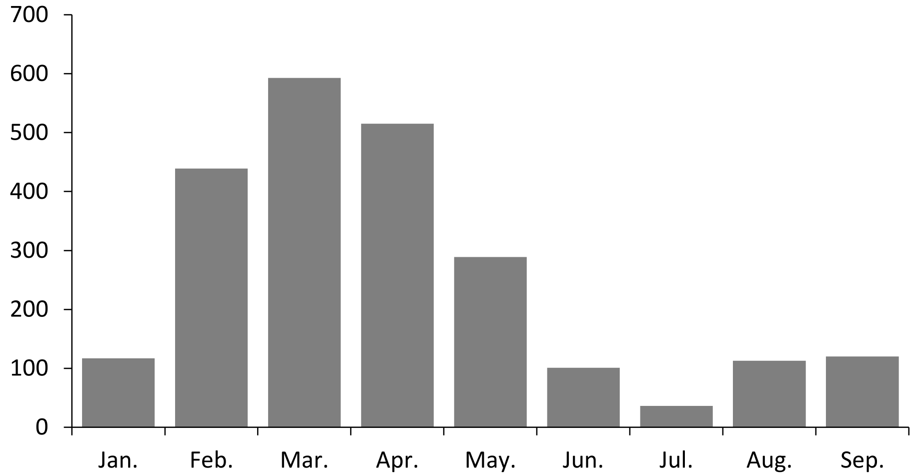

Figure 1. Amount of news stories by month (1.1.2020–30.9.2020).

Although the intensity of publishing news slowly decreased, the writing style and reporting strategies remained unchanged. As will be further demonstrated later, the news stories posted by the NHC tend to reflect a positive orientation, even though the main topics are the coronavirus and pandemic-related issues.

Reporting Strategies

By definition, journalism refers to collecting, compiling, and delivering fact-based news and other related information to the general public in an unbiased manner (MasterClass 2021). Gyldensted (2015) questions the inclusion of word "unbiased" here, although a critical part of journalists' self-image is that a journalist covers reality as it is without differentiating whether a story will prove to be positive or negative. Gyldensted (2015), however, argues that this is not the way it unfolds in reality. Moreover, news reporting has a negative bias. The author adds that sometimes unbalanced and negative bias stems from journalism's own methodology, even if this was not intended. Journalists seek to challenge authorities, fight for the weak against the powerful. They are on the side of the little guy. Therefore, classic journalism would normally zoom in on a person's victim status and any negative spiral associated with this (ibid.).

Moreover, Gyldensted (2015) claims that today we face a problem with being too obsessed with reporting negative issues, stemming from a belief that only by focusing on what is wrong with the world, and as such being "critical", can we keep power accountable (Gyldensted 2015, 6). And from the perspective of the audience, a study from 2011 showed that people are tired of negative critical journalism (Rosenstiel and Mitchell 2011). Many respondents reported that the news gives them a feeling of hopelessness, which is related to the generally accepted negative format (Gyldensted 2015, 6).

Therefore, Gyldensted proposed changes to journalism based on behavioural sciences like positive psychology, moral psychology and neuroscience, to create content that involves and inspires readers. According to her, constructive journalism is necessary for turning the wheels of society forwards, counterbalancing the negativism that may push us backwards (ibid.). A more constructive approach to reporting encompasses all classic domains, from domestic affairs, foreign news, politics, and health, to science and business. The same applies to genres, from breaking news, top stories, features, interviews, investigative journalism to debates (ibid., 46).

Seligman (2012) points to five elements of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. *Positive emotions* include happiness and satisfaction, but also more nuanced feelings like gratitude, trust, hope and respect. *Engagement* is the mental state of operations in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in feelings of energized focus, full involvement and enjoyment. *Relationships* exist in relation to family and friends as well as in a professional context, and they can focus on positive, constructive and close relationships. *Meaning* is related to attaching oneself to something larger than oneself. And finally, *Accomplishment* means to reach a personal goal. The five key concepts can be expressed with the acronym "PERMA".

The PERMA model can also be applied to constructive journalism, and according to Gyldensted (2015) it is possible to transform these principles to the corresponding reporting guidelines. For example, questions that focus on positive emotions, include *Who is hopeful? Who is grateful? Who is experiencing flow? Who has put in a significant effort? Who is passionate about something?* Potential questions that focus on relationships in news reports would be *Who helped? Who has been brought together?* Questions that highlight meaning would be, for example, *Who is wiser now? What did they learn? What is the inspiration for the others? What is the meaning? What is the higher purpose? What will be the higher meaning?* And finally, accomplishments are addressed with the questions *What did it take? What was overcome? What was achieved? What will be achieved?* (cf. Gyldensted 2015, 72–73). As will be seen more clearly below, all of these items are included in the news on the NHC's website that are written by *China Daily*.

In short, Gyldensted concludes that people are most longing for meaningful content through inspiring, authentic storytelling. Behavioural research also suggests that in the presence of positive emotions we become more creative, collaborate better and are able to see the big picture (ibid., 52). Moreover, Schimmenti, Billieux, and Starcevic (2020) also argue that improving the psychological health of individuals is vital for strengthening the resilience of society as a whole.

Numerous previous studies have shown that, in general, some societies in East Asia and the Pacific had better performance in containing the spread of COVID-19, compared to the rest of the world. Ma, Wang and Wu (2021, 59) explored how East Asian regions have dealt with the pandemic, and how both the infection and government policy have affected emotional well-being. Their analysis shows that East Asia's success, compared with the selected Western societies, can be attributed to stronger and more prompt government responses, as well as better civic cooperation. The importance of cooperation between the state and civil society in the search for an effective pandemic response was also argued in Schwartz (2014, 1139). The frequently cited South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han sees the main reason for successful coping with pandemic in an authoritarian mentality which comes from the cultural tradition of Confucianism. Therefore, the citizens in East Asia are said to be more likely to obey the orders of the government in a health emergency. In addition, Confucian culture also contributed to the selective confinement of the virus, as since people trust intellectuals and experts the orders are respected, and the individual comes after the community (Noh 2020). Moreover, Rošker (2021, 325) draws attention to the fact that safety measures were the most successful in the East Asian societies with democratic, and *not* autocratic political systems, therefore an authoritarian mentality is not the primary reason for the effectiveness. Instead, the crucial factors are indeed related to Confucianism, and specifically to the system of interpersonal relations. Moreover, as stated in Schimmenti, Billieux and Starcevic (2020, 41), the resilience of a society facing such challenging events also depends on how its individual members cope with their anxieties and fears. On the psychological level, a positive approach is more viral than a negative one, which indirectly contributes and leads to more effective measures being taken.

Let us return back to the debate about reporting strategies. It was shown that a positive approach is beneficial for various reasons. The question then arises: why are there so many negative stories in the media if readers are reluctant to engage in negativism?

The overall purpose of news stories is to provide information about events, to stimulate thinking and shape readers' viewpoints. To achieve this, news stories have to elicit readers' attention first, which is known as the pragmatic function. Headlines are of great importance because they influence whether someone will want to read the full text. In other words, they should grab readers' attention so that people are drawn to the article. Therefore, a short, punchy writing style is used that both captures readers' interest and satisfies space constraints (Hagin 2018). Moreover, marketing experts know how to grab attention using fear and sensational news. This brings us back to promoting negative emotions rather than their positive counterparts.

While the use of sensational language can trigger further reading, as Maria Konnikova notes a headline changes the way people read an article and remember it. The headline frames the rest of the experience and sets the tone for what follows. Psychologists have long known that first impressions really do matter. What we see, hear, feel, or experience in our first encounter with something colours how we process the rest of it (Konnikova in Hagin 2018). The reporting style therefore has a certain effect and influence on people's perceptions.

Although there are various views in the literature on whether news journalism mirrors society or whether it creates and moves it, extensive negative reports and stories in both the traditional and social media have served to generate fear, panic, stigmatization, and instances of xenophobia. In the case of the COVID-19, news reporting can even more intensely increase fears because the threat is novel, unseen, and potentially fatal, especially to those most vulnerable groups in society: the sick and aged (Ng and Kemp 2020, 752). Therefore, the authors argue that, among others reasons, avoiding inflammatory language that generates fear and panic is essential to break the circle of fear and panic. To achieve this, it is desirable to understand where the emphasis of public attention is placed.

Studies of Public Attention

Based on the above, it is not surprising that the COVID-19 pandemic has already given to several studies that analyse data from various social media. Scholars have recognized that using social media data may provide timely understanding of current issues (Li Sijia et al. 2020), and that microblogging services provide important insights into the functioning of a society. That user-generated content on social media provides an important source for understanding public emotions and concerns was already argued in Li Xiaoya et al. (2020). The authors stated that a close look at how the public were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic could help us understand people's reactions and thoughts in the face of the new crisis. Thus, it is crucial for policymakers to understand people's opinions toward the pandemic so that they can balance the concerns of stopping the pandemic on the one hand, and keeping people in good spirits on the other hand, as well as anticipate people's reactions to certain events and policies so that the policymakers can prepare in advance. Cui and Kertész (2021) also claimed that in this age of information deluge the dynamics of public attention is of great importance in many areas, including education, politics, marketing and governance. They stated that identifying the patterns of online attention dynamics and their relationships to specific events and measures during pandemic may contribute to more efficient and effective decisions being made.

Cui and Kertész (2021) conducted a survey on hashtags on Sina Weibo, and grouped the users' points of interest into various categories. They claimed that specific events, measures and developments during the epidemic affected the emergence of different kinds of hashtags. Their study also noticed algorithmic interference from Weibo, and the authors were able to pinpoint direct interventions from the side of the provider with regard to the ranking of hashtags (Cui and Kertész 2021, 15). They suppose that as one of the most popular and influential social media providers in China, Weibo might have taken on the responsibility during the global public health emergency to keep people informed about related news in China and around the globe, by means of changing the algorithm towards COVID-related hashtags to promote crucial news (ibid., 12). As we shall see a bit later, news on the NHC's website is similar in distribution and thematic coverage as was found in this earlier study.

Li Xiaoya et al. (2020) focused on people's emotions and the emotional triggers on Weibo. Their findings revealed that the trend of *worry*—which is the closest emotion to *fear* among the six analysed emotions—is largely in line with the trend of the general intensity of the COVID-related posts (Li Xiaoya et al. 2020, 4). Speaking of fear, initial reports indicate that people's fears of the coronavirus related to different topics. Schimmenti, Billieux, and Starcevic (2020) pointed out that fear during the COVID-19 pandemic is organized on the psychological level around four interrelated dialectical domains. The first domain relates to a sense of physical vulnerability and potential infections; the second domain relates to interpersonal relationships, which are considered the core of human identity; the third domain concerns the cognitive aspect of mastering certain situations; and the last domain concerns the behavioural consequences of taking or not taking actions. All these fear domains and their related aspects formed the complex experience of fear during the pandemic.

Similarly, Mertens et al. (2020) showed that more exposure to threatening information (e.g., reading news bulletins about new deaths, social media posts) would increase fear of the virus. Under such circumstances, which may apply to the current COVID-19 crisis, it may not be very helpful to maximize fear, as this could only increase distress (ibid., 6). The authors stress that fear appeals in the media should be used carefully, although further studies with empirical evaluation would be needed to find out whether fear appeals are working for the current situation or not.

Mertens et al. (2020) further suggested that if there is the causal connection among these constructs then there are opportunities for policymakers and journalists to reduce excessive fear. One way to do this is to ensure that communication is clear and unambiguous, because uncertainty tends to increase fear. Information should also be provided without sensationalism or disturbing images, although the analysis of the news on the NHC's website shows that some of the posts did have such content.

News on the NHC's Website

In this study we analysed all news stories posted from January 1, 2020, to September 30, 2020. As already noted in Section *National Health Commission*, the dynamics and distribution of posts is in line with the findings of Li Sijia et al. (2020, 3), although with a slightly time delay. While the peak of hashtags on Weibo was in late January and February 2020, followed by another one in March, we observed the most active months to be February, March, and April. Afterwards, there was a notable decrease in intensity. According to the interpretation of Cui and Kertész (2021, 3), collective attention towards online news decays with time due to the fading novelty and attractiveness in competition with other news stories.

We also mentioned in Section *National Health Commission* that the writing style and reporting strategies remained unchanged in the period examined. But before we focus on the contents of the posts, we must look at the origin of news on the NHC's website.

Table 1 below shows that the NHC's stories originate from various sources, with Xinhua News Agency and *China Daily* as the top two providers.

Table 1: Sources of news published on the NHC's website (1.1.2020–30.9.2020)

Source of news	**No. of items**
Xinhua	1,129
China Daily, *China Daily Global*, *chinadaily.com.cn*	1,046
Ministry of foreign affairs (fmprc.gov.cn)	56
National Health Commission (en.nhc.gov.cn)	40
The State Council of the People's Republic of China (english.www.gov.cn)	24
China Global Television Network (CGTN)	4
The Knowledge Center for China's Experiences in Response to COVID-19 (covid19.alliancebrh.com)	2
People's Daily Online (en.people.cn)	1
Qiushi (http://en.qstheory.cn/)	1
N/A	20
Total	**2,323**

Almost half of the news stories are provided by *China Daily* and its variants. The other half derive from Xinhua News Agency. The diversity of sources is in fact only superficial, since Xinhua News Agency is the official state-run press agency of the People's Republic of China, whereas *China Daily* is a quasi-official newspaper of the Chinese government that reports on their own reading of public internet postings by individuals on the BBS (*bulletin board system*), i.e., the microblogs (*weibo*), and blogs (*boke*). In other words, this is government controlled "unofficial press" news disseminated on the Internet (Lanigan 2015, 491).

The *China Daily* on its website states that being "an authoritative national English-language media organization bridging China and the rest of the world, it is committed to telling China's stories well and making China's voice heard". Also, "in an era when the world is experiencing a once-in-a-century change, China, as a rising country, needs to tell the world diverse, real and multidimensional stories about the country through various media". This also includes the otherwise "politicized reporting on the fight against COVID-19 that needs to get the facts straight so that the readers and viewers have a more balanced view" (Song 2021). Lanigan (2015), on the other hand, understands that news items and stories posted on China Daily have a singular editorial purpose—a propaganda effort by the central government, in the guise of news reporting, about government policy on social issues of the day (ibid., 506).

Either way, being a newspaper belonging to the Chinese government, it reflects the official orientation towards reporting the news. The analysis of contents has shown strong overlapping with the results of Cui and Kertész (2021, 8), who grouped the Weibo hashtags into the following categories: *Bad News*, *Good News*, *Regulations*, *Life Influence*, *Front Lines*, and *Science*.

The *Bad News* category comprised news on confirmed infections and victims of the novel coronavirus. On the NHC's website, there are daily briefings on novel coronavirus cases in China, posted by the NHC itself (source: en.nhc.gov.cn). These reports are written in a factual writing style with information based on facts and "real" data. In general, such news stories do not carry any emotional load, and try to keep the neutral reporting position. However, a closer look reveals several traces of positive orientation. Where possible, paragraphs end with a sentence reporting that "serious cases decreased by [number]", which creates an uplifting tone. Similarly, news headlines tend to offer a positive perspective even though the topic itself is new infections, e.g. *Proportion of severe COVID-19 cases drops significantly: official* (17.2.2020), *Novel Heroes: Wuhan hospital head says new fever cases on decline* (21.2.2020), *China sees overall decline in numbers of new confirmed COVID-19 cases* (21.2.2020), *Capital sees no new cases in 24-hours* (23.2.2020), *New virus cases in Wuhan expected to drop to zero by late March* (6.3.2020), *New Xinjiang cases drop to single digits* (13.8.2020), *Chinese mainland reports no new locally-transmitted COVID-19 cases* (2.9.2020). Several news stories also stress the foreign origin of new infections, e.g. *China's Henan reports 38 imported asymptomatic cases* (14.9.2020), *Shanghai reports 5 new imported COVID-19 cases* (29.9.2020). According to Gyldensted (2015), the explanatory style is a positive or negative psychological attribute that indicates how people explain to themselves why they experience a particular event. A negative explanatory style typically attributes negative outcomes to internal, stable, and global causes, whereas a positive explanatory style typically attributes negative outcomes to external, temporary, or specific causes. Most often the positive explanatory style builds an upward mental spiral (ibid., 19–20).

Therefore, the "bad news" actually moves towards the "good news", which in Cui and Kertész's (2021) study focus on cases of recovery, sufficiency of supplies, and decreases in daily infections or deaths. Examples of the NHC's headlines that reflect this include *22 workers released in good health after two-week quarantine* (1.2.2020), *Cabin hospitals see good treatment results, says health official* (15.2.2020), *Good news on research front in contagion battle* (18.2.2020), *Nation steps up supply of* *medical goods* (9.4.2020), and *Treatment for expectant mothers with COVID-19 sees good effect: official* (22.4.2020).

The news stories that fit into the Cui and Kertész's (2021) *Regulations* category consist of announcements by authorities of national, regional, institutional laws, rules and regulations associated with public behaviours and concerns during the pandemic. The source of such news was often Xinhua News Agency, with such articles found to a greater extent in the Chinese version of the NHC's website, rather than the English one.

On the other hand, the posts that originate from China Daily are mainly news stories in the *Live Influence* or *Front Lines* categories. These stories typically evoke positive emotions, stressing the tenacity, courage and sacrifice of front-line workers and common citizens. Some of the headlines include *Volunteer drivers show bravery on front line* (6.02.2020), *Doctor on the front line believes epidemic battle will be won* (20.02.2020), *On the front line, it's one for all, all for one* (24.02.2020), *Novel heroes: Wuhan post-90s policemen work at front line to fight epidemic* (24.02.2020), *Critical care doctor spends birthday on front lines in Wuhan* (3.03.2020), *Without blinking, Beijing nurses stepped into action* (12.05.2020), and so on. These news stories stress the idea that the coronavirus is an enemy that should be fought and can be defeated, as also observed in Kalinin (2021). These stories also indirectly address various domains of fear, as elaborated in Schimmenti, Billieux, and Starcevic (2020) and outlined in Section *Studies of Public Attention*. They relate to interpersonal relationships, the cognitive aspect of mastering situations, and the question of taking or not taking actions. As for writing strategies, these stories are emotionally moving, authentic and engaging. We can observe a strong emphasis on all five elements of well-being and constructive journalism: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, motivation, and accomplishment.

Similar to Cui and Kertész's (2021) findings, news on the NHC's website also pay stories particular attention to the role of science. This category incorporates scientific understanding of the virus and its properties, vaccine development, and methods of public protection offered by authoritative doctors. The NHC's news regularly presents stories from this field, such as *Chinese scientists working with int'l peers on virus vaccine, cure* (15.2.2020), *Scientists target major cause of critically ill virus deaths* (16.2.2020), *Plasma transfusion therapy shows success in treating virus* (26.2.2020), *Chinese scientists make progress in developing coronavirus vaccine, antibody drugs* (2.4.2020), and *Dying coronavirus patients saved by lung transplants* (13.5.2020).

Among the NHC's news stories, we have also detected a remarkable number of articles that stress the role of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), with more than one hundred posts discussing the value and efficiency of TCM regarding the novel coronavirus. The titles of these stories are clear and straightforward, and include *TCM plays important role in COVID-19 treatment* (15.4.2020), *TCM use reduces COVID-19 death risk: expert* (18.4.2020), *Chinese expert team holds discussions with Malaysian practitioners on TCM against COVID-19* (23.4.2020), *TCM effective in treating COVID-19 patients in Wuhan: expert* (24.4.2020), *TCM effective in preventing, treating emerging infectious diseases: Official* (27.4.2020), *Understanding TCM and its role in fighting COVID-19* (9.5.2020), *TCM provided COVID-19 patients with hope, advisor says* (22.5.2020), *Bigger role for TCM urged in disease control* (28.5.2020), *TCM leaves its mark in COVID-19 recovery* (29.5.2020), *TCM helps fight COVID-19 in Xinjiang* (10.8.2020), and *'People's Hero' shows Chinese virtues in TCM work* (16.9.2020). It is clear that these stories aim to increase the reputation and influence of TCM abroad, as they appear only in the English version of the NHC's website, whereas the stories in Chinese hardly contain any mentions of TCM.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives dramatically and created several challenges. Various measures have been taken to cope with the spread of the virus, which are undoubtedly necessary, but the long-term nature of the pandemic has nevertheless increased stress and anxiety. Several previous studies have shown that people face different kinds of fears that are traceable to the user-created posts on social media platforms. It has been argued that nowadays social media plays an increasingly significant role in communicating information and news, which may unfortunately lead to even more stress and fear due to the flood of bad news, including false news. According to Ng and Kemp (2020, 753), fear arises through a circle. Social networks may produce fear-stimulating contents, which are strengthened by confusing messages from health officials. These are further enhanced by striking media headlines and scare stories that produce even more contradictory messages, and the result is a spiral of increasing fear and panic. Therefore, to slow down the negative spiral, or finally move it towards a positive direction, scholars have proposed several additional measures, from detecting and eliminating misinformation, to delivering only clear, consistent, and well-considered guidance from the authorities, as well as avoiding inflammatory language that generates fear and panic.

Our study has shown that news stories posted on the NHC's website systematically and subtly follow all these criteria. The contents are delivered in a positive way that creates uplifting emotions, and stresses interpersonal solidarity, which is one of the most effective tools in safety measures. This is also closely related to a certain degree of self-discipline, motivation, and placing the community above the individual.

We have shown that the posts of the NHC coincide with the collective attention towards the pandemic, which suggests that the authorities are well-informed about the dynamics of people's queries on social media, especially Weibo. Cui and Kertész (2021) support the idea that targeted and timely stimuli should be given to hold the attention and raise the awareness of the public throughout the pandemic to prevent future waves of COVID-19. From another point of view, interference in citizens' Internet activities can be considered inadmissible, and a feature of an authoritarian regime.

This overlap can also be partly attributed to the fact that the NHC publishes news written by China Daily, which is a quasi-official newspaper of the Chinese government, with a focus on public Internet postings by individuals. Besides, as noted in Gyldensted (2015), people long for meaningful content through inspiring, authentic storytelling, and thus personal stories seem trustworthy and easy to identify with. Such stories also tend to be "liked" and "shared" on social media. This is also the orientation of *China Daily*, which is shifting to positive value rhetoric as observed in Lanigan (2015, 519). The strategy to create emotionally moving, authentic and engaging contents is in line with the concept of constructive journalism, which may contribute to turning the wheels of society forwards, counterbalancing the negativism that may push us backwards.

The positive image that the NHC creates through daily news, outwardly shows that everything is under control in China. This positive approach could soothe the world's reactions and fears regarding the coronavirus. From a common foreign reader's perspective, this approach diverges from one's expectations. Namely, classical journalism would normally zoom in on a person's victim status and promote a negative spiral. Positive news stories are therefore not very common within the framework of traditional journalism.

Besides, to elicit readers' attention we are often exposed to news that emphasizes the pragmatic function and is made more appealing with various attractive devices, such as sensational headlines. However, during a pandemic negative emotive language may worsen people's psychological health and cause more fear.

The general image that the NHC outwardly creates functions very reassuringly and counterbalances the news stories that provoke fear. The selected topics on the one hand reflect the points of interest of domestic users, and on the other hand promote stories about the effectiveness of the Chinese system and society.

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COVID-19 in North Korea and Its Effect on the Cooperation of North and South Korea in the Field of Health Care

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Abstract

COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease that first appeared in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and first spread throughout the country and then worldwide. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, concerned about the rapid spread of COVID-19, officially declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) barred foreign tourists from China on January 21, 2020, and then completely closed its border with China.

In this article, I will explore the impact of COVID-19 on North Korean society and research the cooperation plan between South and North Korea. I will also briefly introduce in the post-COVID-19 period. To better understand the health care system and health conditions in North Korea, I will first analyse the infectious disease management system and, in the context of this, then try to investigate in detail how COVID-19 has affected North Korea. From an economic point of view, I will examine the changes in economic cooperation between North Korea and China, and then try to explain the social changes caused by restrictions on movement and lack of goods, and the political situation in North Korea during the COVID-19 crisis.

Finally, I will try to research the situation facing North Korea and suggest a way for cooperation between South and North Korea in the future. The basic aim of this research is to find a useful alternative for joint cooperation in the field of health care and safety and to improve cooperation between South and North Korea in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords: North Korea, South Korea, COVID-19, infectious diseases, pandemic, North Korean health, South Korean health, North Korean society, inter-Korean cooperation, post-COVID-19

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COVID-19 v Severni Koreji ter njegov vpliv na sodelovanje med Južno in Severno Korejo na področju zdravstva

Izvleček

Koronavirusna bolezen 2019 (COVID-19) je nalezljiva bolezen dihal, ki se je prvič pojavila decembra 2019 v Vuhanu na Kitajskem in se najprej razširila po celotni Kitajski, nato pa po vsem svetu. Generalni direktor Svetovne zdravstvene organizacije (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus je, močno zaskrbljen zaradi hitrega širjenja bolezni COVID-19 po vsem svetu, 11. marca 2020 uradno razglasil globalno pandemijo.

Severna Koreja (Demokratična ljudska republika Koreja) je 21. januarja 2020, po izbruhu COVID-19 na Kitajskem, onemogočila vstop tujim turistom, naslednji dan pa popolnoma zaprla mejo s Kitajsko. 28. januarja 2020 je sprejela hitre in odločne ukrepe, med drugim je vzpostavila Nacionalni sistem za urgentno preprečevanje epidemije. Pojav COVID-19 je, skupaj s sankcijami Organizacije združenih narodov (OZN) proti Severni Koreji, zadal močan udarec severnokorejskemu gospodarstvu, vplival pa je tudi na družbo in politiko države.

V članku bom raziskal vpliv COVID-19 na severnokorejsko družbo in preučil načrt sodelovanja, ki bi ga morali uvesti Južna in Severna Koreja v času po COVID-19. Za lažje razumevanje zdravstva in zdravstvenih razmer v Severni Koreji bom najprej analiziral sistem obvladovanja nalezljivih bolezni in v okviru tega nato poskušal podrobno raziskati, kako je COVID-19 vplival na Severno Korejo. Z gospodarskega vidika bom preučil spremembe v gospodarskem sodelovanju med Severno Korejo in Kitajsko, nato pa poskušal razložiti tudi družbene spremembe, ki sta jih povzročila omejitev gibanja in pomanjkanje dobrin, ter politične razmere v Severni Koreji v času krize COVID-19.

Na koncu bom poskušal preučiti razmere, s katerimi se sooča Severna Koreja, in predlagal način za sodelovanje med Južno in Severno Korejo ter skupno obvladovanje razmer v prihodnosti. Temeljni cilj te raziskave je najti koristno alternativo za skupno sodelovanje na področju zdravstva in varnosti ter izboljšanje sodelovanja med Južno in Severno Korejo v obdobju po COVID-19.

Ključne besede: Severna Koreja, Južna Koreja, COVID-19, nalezljive bolezni, pandemija, severnokorejsko zdravstvo, južnokorejsko zdravstvo, severnokorejska družba, medkorejsko sodelovanje, čas po COVID-19

Preface

The coronavirus disease 2019 (hereafter referred to as COVID-19) first appeared in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and spread globally from there. On March 11, 2020, the general director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreysus was convinced that COVID-19 would spread around the world, and therefore declared a pandemic and called upon the world to cooperate and strive for a joint response. By December 12, 2020, COVID-19 was present in 220 countries, 1,594,775 people had died and 71,081,563 were confirmed as having been infected (JUH CSSE 2020). The pandemic has greatly affected all fronts of our lives, in terms of society, economics, politics and culture. COVID-19 does not acknowledge borders, races, nationalities, ages, or genders.

Even the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) could not escape the global pandemic. The spread of infectious diseases in North Korea, which has a weak health care system and health care infrastructure, poses a risk that seriously threatens the functioning of state power. The United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea have hampered the development of the North Korean economy, while the spread of the infectious disease has further worsened the lives of North Koreans (Cho Young-Ki 2020, 173). North Korean authorities recognized the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the existing sanitation and preventive care system was replaced by the National System for the Urgent Prevention of the Epidemic. To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, North Korea closed all land, sea, and air routes, and also declared that they would implement thorough disinfection, preventive measures, and preventive health lectures (Hwang 2020, 21). Despite this, the end of January and early February 2020 saw the death of three patients suspected of having COVID-19. However, the official reason for death was given by the hospital as "acute pneumonia" and not COVID-19, and the hospital did not release further details of the deceased, who were being treated for high fevers, and instead declared them confidential, also keeping them secret from the WHO (Jang 2020, 3). On November 9, 2020, Edvin Salvador, the representative of the WHO in Pyongyang, gave an interview to the American Free Asia radio station (Radio Free Asia, RFA), quoted the words of the North Korean Ministry of Health and said that as of October 29, 2020, they had tested 12,072 people for COVID-19 and all of them were negative (*Yonhapnews* 2020). Thus, the North Korean Ministry of Health officially stated that they had no confirmed cases of infection. Still, the South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha attended the International Institute for Strategic Studies' conference on December 5, 2020 in Manami, Bahrain, and said it is hard to believe that there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in North Korea. Kim Yojong, the First Deputy of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) (*de facto* number two in North Korea) vehemently denied this (*Maeil Business Newspaper* 2020), and reiterated that there are no COVID-19 infections in North Korea.

Nevertheless, North Korea was unlikely to be an exception in the great crisis facing all of humanity due to the spread of COVID-19. Recently, there have been increased reports of North Korean cyberattacks not only on South Korean pharmaceutical companies, but also other pharmaceutical companies that develop vaccines for the disease, such as AstraZeneca. North Korea is attempting to gain information in order to develop their own vaccine. At the same time the country has also tightened border controls on that were already closed, including the demilitarized region between north and south (Jeong Yong-su 2020). Such actions prove that North Korea is aware of the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and seeks different ways to overcome the disease.

North Korea's health care system almost completely collapsed in the early 1990s, and has still not fully recovered (Hwang 2020, 21). To better understand the current North Korean conditions, we must first explain how the North Korean political system addresses epidemics, and then we can better explain the difficult situation facing North Korea because of COVID-19. Then we will discuss how it was possible to develop cooperation between North and South Korea in the field of health care and to create a common system for health and safety in the post-COVID-19 period.

Health Care in North Korea

The General Understanding of the North Korean Health Care

Choi, Kim and Hwang (2006) list five characteristics of the North Korean health care system. At first glance North Korea has a "system of free health care for all citizens" and encourages citizens to believe that the socialist social order is beneficial to them. In 1947, the state announced a system of free health care in accordance with the law on Social Security and started to implement it in 1953. In February 1960 they also adopted the resolution on the implementation of a comprehensive and universal free health care system (ibid., 22–24). Nevertheless, some claim that contrary to the statements of the authorities, the health care system in North Korea is not functioning as it should (ibid., 27). Refugees who escaped to South Korea and worked in the health care sector have revealed that the facts about health care in the North are not even close to what is claimed by the government (Nam Sung-wook 2020).

Secondly, North Korean health care policy emphasizes preventive medicine. When the Supreme Leader North Korean Kim Il-Sung announced in 1966 that "socialist medicine is preventive medicine", the entire country increased preventive behaviours against infectious diseases and measures related to this (Hwang 2020, 24). In order to improve living and working conditions, the state has conducted various campaigns and worked to reduce environmental pollution. The North Korean authorities claim that they expend much effort to carry out the continuous research and development of preventive medicine (Seung 1986, 77–109). There are two reasons that could explain why socialist countries focus on preventive medicine.

1. Preventive care means a lower social cost than medical treatment

2. The population can be included in different campaigns that promote public hygiene and public health care

Therefore, North Korea insists on preventive care due to the lower cost and spirit of mutual cooperation. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to rely solely on preventive care, especially when the government needs to battle an unfamiliar or infectious disease. Furthermore, an overemphasis on preventive medicine creates an imbalance in the health care system. It is also difficult to expect that forcing citizens to participate in movements to promote public health care will have long-term effects.

Thirdly, North Korea has a "system of regional general doctors", which refers to a system in which authorized doctors take over the health care of the citizens in its entirety in a certain region (Choi Kim and Hwang 2006, 28). Usually, two to 10 doctors are responsible for around 4,000 inhabitants in urban regions and 3,000 in rural areas (Seung 1986, 110–30). At first glance, such a system seems to be good, as certain medical personnel can be undisturbed in their observation of their patients and apply measures systematically. However, the health care system implemented by North Korea can also be very problematic, because the regional medical doctors have to manage not only the treatment and care of patients, but also health hygiene, preventive vaccinations, and regular health check-ups. Therefore, such systems can be very fragile, especially in times of epidemics.

Fourthly, North Korea also seeks to invest in the development of traditional medicine, called *goryeouihak* (Korean medicine), as well as Western medicine. "Korean medicine" is also called *jeontonguihak* (traditional medicine) or *dong(yang)uihak* (Eastern medicine). In each province, there is a hospital that specializes in traditional medicine, however, there are also many pharmacies that sell traditional medicine products. Korean medicine from North Korea is also known in South Korea, where the branch is known as *hanbanguihak*. In North Korea people are very proud of Korean medicine, which is known as an excellent form of preventive care. Korean medicine is thus mainly preventive, while Western medicine is mostly meant for treatment. Moreover, nowadays people in Korea are trying to use and develop both branches of medicine for health care (Choi, Kim and Hwang 2006, 30).

Fifthly, in North Korea health care services are conducted with the help of citizens. These are various movements (campaigns) carried out by the North Korean government under the banner of collective health care services. One of the main movements is the "antipollution campaign", which involves hunting animals and other pests that carry contagious diseases, thus preventing pollution. We cannot say that the intentions of such a campaign are bad, but it is difficult to know whether the participation of the citizens is voluntary or mandatory on the orders of the authorities. The North Korean health care system appears to be well intentioned and well designed, but there is often a lack of health care facilities and medical personnel. It is also criticized for giving precedence to state security rather than health care (Gim Yeong-gyo 2020).

North Korea's Fight with Infectious Diseases

Based on the above-mentioned health care policy, North Korea adopted the Infectious Disease Prevention Act in 1997 as the only law to prevent and contain epidemics. It is composed of five chapters and 45 articles. The law aims to protect the lives and health of the citizens of North Korea, with the main focus on detecting the causes of infectious diseases and isolating infected cases (Hwang 2020, 23). The law covers almost everything that needs to be done to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, which entails: the detection and isolation of sources of infectious diseases, testing, reporting of sources and suspicions of infectious diseases, organization of an urgent body to prevent the epidemic, disinfection of objects, a temporary suspension of operations for areas where infected patients have been detected, isolation and transportation of patients, determination of residences of infected persons, treatment of patients, and the processes of health examinations after patients are discharged from the hospital. Important steps to prevent the spread of the disease are thus regulated by law.

The most important part of the law is the 8th article. According to this, North Korea would have to cooperate with the international community in the case of an epidemic, i.e. it would have to support exchanges and cooperation with other countries and international organizations in the field of infectious disease prevention (Hwang 2020, 23). This means that North Korea is aware of the dangers of the spread of such diseases and considers international cooperation to be essential in the search for alternative solutions.

In addition to passing laws, North Korea also sought to increase the number of health care workers trained to contain infectious diseases. For example, there are specially trained doctors who manage protective measures and do preventive work against the spread of such diseases. A Department of Hygienic Nursing has been created in Pyongyang Medical College and in 11 provincial medical universities across the country. After completing the five-year program, students become hygienists. In 2011, 2,840 students obtained this title. In accordance with the system of a regional general doctor, a hygienist was also appointed in each region.

Since 1990, the country has had a developed system of "health care assistant-doctors" who specialize in detecting infectious diseases and making a diagnosis. If someone wants to become a health care assistant-doctor, he/she must attend a higher school of public health. Currently, there are reportedly about 40-50,000 health care assistants in North Korea (Hwang 2020, 24).

North Korea also conducts research work on infectious diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms at the Institute of Medical Biology and the Institute of Microbiological Research, which are part of the Academy of Health Sciences of the Ministry of Health. Recent data shows that the Institute of Medical Biology mainly conducts research on the hepatitis virus (ibid., 28).

In North Korea, infectious disease containment is organized like other systems of administration. The North Korean Workers' Party is at the centre of central administration, while the Ministry of Health oversees sanitation and prevention policies (Cho Sungeun 2020, 63). Nevertheless, it is difficult for most residents to obtain an accurate diagnosis or expert medical advice, so they self- diagnose and purchase medicines from the market, making it difficult to control a disease outbreak in its early stages (Hwang 2020, 28). When an infectious disease emerges in North Korea, preventive and control measures usually focus on the predicted regions of disease outbreak. At the time of the SARS epidemic in 2003, the government sanitary inspectorate created the National Board for urgent epidemic prevention, created checkpoints, and monitored conditions throughout the country. When the Ebola virus broke out in 2014, they set up a sanitary station in the vicinity of the Daedong River and strengthened inspections at airports and seaports, thoroughly checking anyone attempting to enter North Korea (ibid.). To prevent the spread of infectious diseases through public transportation, they established a sanitary station responsible for the hygienic care of railways under the jurisdiction of the (North) Korean State Railway (Baek 2007, 21). When an acute infectious disease such as measles, typhoid or paratyphoid breaks out, residents are not allowed to move between regions. They can only enter another region if they have a "sanitary certificate", which is issued at checkpoints in each residential district to those who do not display symptoms of infection (Hwang 2020, 28). If infectious diseases appear abroad, the people desiring to enter the country must be quarantined or they will be deported. Thus they prevent the spread of infectious diseases within the country. During the SARS outbreak in 2003, they halted all overseas flights and completely sealed off all sea routes. This was the most extensive border closure measure in the world. At the time, anyone entering North Korea had to go into quarantine for 10 days, while ship crews from foreign ports had to anchor 30 km from the port and endure quarantine there.

The North Korean measures against infectious diseases are preventive and very strict, which is positive, but one would not expect the reason for this to be hidden in the outdated health care system. However, because health facilities are so outdated, an epidemic could be a hopeless tragedy, and this is the reason why North Korea focuses on preventive medicine.

North Korea's Fight with COVID-19

When COVID-19 spread rapidly in China in early 2020, North Korea created the "temporary board for the advice of citizens on health care" and established a national system for urgent prevention of epidemics (Hwang 2020, 21).

Each province organized severe restrictions, while stricter prevention controls were implemented in places where contact with the outside world was possible, such as borders, seaports, and airports. Thus North Korea reacted quickly and acted immediately after closing the border on January 22, 2020, in an attempt to show that it had the best system of governance. On January 28, when the National Disease Prevention System was established, the customs office in Dandong was closed; two days later, they also halted the function of the Inter-Korean Relations Office. The next day, rail and air traffic between North Korea and China was suspended. Foreigners coming to North Korea had to go into quarantine (*Rodong Sinmun* 2020), and the quarantine period was extended from 21 to 30 and later to 40 days. In addition, guidelines for the disinfection of goods coming from abroad and regulations for border and preventive controls were published in February 2020, and their consistent compliance was ordered (Cho Sungeun 2020, 71). For air travel, health and preventive controls were conducted on the plane rather than at sanitary-inspection checkpoints in the country (*Rodong Sinmun* 2020b). According to the guidelines, the authorities inspected and disinfected goods coming from abroad, these were then isolated for 10 days and only then distributed (Bak Myeong-su 2020). They prevented the spread of infectious disease by first restricting anything that could cause the spread of infection, and thus claimed that there were no cases of infection with COVID-19 in North Korea. Still, it is hard to know exactly what the current conditions are in that country.

If we look at recent responses of North Korea to COVID-19, we can see several irrational behaviours. While the various reports might appear to be nonsensical, they can be considered as following an inner logic of DPRK governance.

For example, when the economic crisis began due to COVID-19, which caused the exchange rate to fall, Kim Jong-un ordered the execution of a leading money trader, blaming him for the sharp drop in the exchange rate in Pyongyang, and because seawater might be infected with the COVID-19 virus, he prevented fishermen from fishing and also stopped the production of salt (Song 2020). In addition, North Korean hackers attempted to penetrate the systems of South Korean pharmaceutical companies researching the treatment of COVID-19 and developing vaccines. They also attempted to break into the systems of American and British pharmaceutical companies (Nyus1 2020). Japanese media also reported that North Korea has imported Russian vaccines and begun the process of vaccination (Bak and Gim 2020). Considered all together, we can assess that North Korea is struggling with numerous issues due to COVID-19 and is striving to find solutions as best as possible. The impact of COVID-19 is thus so great that even North Korea cannot overlook it.

The Impact of COVID-19 on North Korea

The Impact on the Economy

The issues raced by the North Korean economy are nothing new, and therefore it would be difficult to argue that they arose because of COVID-19. Nam Seong-uk describes the current conditions as a "double blow", meaning that North Korea's issues have more than one cause, at least two (Nam Seong-uk 2020, 25). North Korea first struggled with economic problems due to economic sanctions implemented by the United Nations Security Council, while these problems deepened due to COVID-19 in 2020.

In the last decade North Korea has conducted about six nuclear tests and also tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that threatens not only neighbouring countries, but the entire world. Therefore, the United Nations Security Council has decided that it will prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons through economic sanctions. This is a reasonable decision, as a complete ban on trade with North Korea would halt the flow of goods and money and hinder the development of weapons from an economic perspective. Additionally, it would attempt to prevent North Korea from profiting from foreign countries through the sale of weapons of mass destruction. The development and production of nuclear weapons are made difficult without an income. Therefore, when living conditions became difficult for its citizens, the government of North Korea decided to stop the development of nuclear weapons and ask the international community for aid.

After the United Nations published the "Resolution of the Security Council of the UN 2270" on the restrictive measures against North Korea in 2016, the North Korean economy took a massive step backwards. There was a complete ban on the inflow of the American dollars to North Korea, while the import of goods related to oil and essential for industrial development was limited to small quantities. These restrictions on the inflow of money and oil had a significant negative effect on the economy of North Korea. The level of economic growth was -3.5% in 2017, -4.1% in 2018, and was expected to be -6% in 2020. Exports were greatly reduced, and while in 2017 these stood at 1.77 billion dollars, in 2018 this fell to only 240 million, and there seems to be no end to these conditions. The restrictions also ban overseas workers from sending money back home, further collapsing the North Korean economy (Cho Young-Ki 2020, 184). In 2017, North Korea attempted to overcome the economic crisis created by the official sanctions and bring about an economic turnaround through various construction projects, but the desired effects failed to materialize. Even more, the entire mining, manufacturing and heavy chemical industries declined even further and have still not recovered.

After the United Nations Security Council economic sanctions, North Korea became dependent on China. Since 2015 China has been the country's largest business partner, although North Korea also trades with others, including India, Pakistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, Taiwan, Saudi-Arabia, and Brazil. However, in 2016 the economic sanctions of the United Nations Security Council changed things very rapidly. Whereas India had previously imported goods worth \$100 million from North Korea, this amount dropped by 95% to only \$4.84 million. Likewise, Pakistan imported North Korean goods worth \$7.3 million in 2018, which was 85% less than a year earlier, while Taiwan and Mexico ceased to import North Korean goods. Although the volume of trade with China has not increased, the degree of dependence has, due to the fall in trade with other countries. Based on the report published by the Korean Association for International Trade, the Chinese share of North Korean total foreign trade increased from 17.3% in 2001 to 91.8% in 2019 (Nam Seong-uk 2020, 30). The current economic dependence of North Korea on China is thus immense. Even though China has decided to participate in the sanctions imposed on North Korea, it cannot seem to fully comply if it wants to maintain the "market" economy created by smugglers, and therefore continues to export goods into North Korea (Go 2020, 36).

Before the UN Security Council economic sanctions, it seemed as if the North Korean economy would take off. North Korea created the *jangmadang* economy (North Korean marketplaces), it increased profits by increasing exports to China, and it improved its economy by sending workers to China to generate money in foreign currencies. They assumed that such economic policies would be successful (Go 2020, 33). However, when the economic sanctions became official, trade routes to China were cut and there were fewer opportunities to work abroad. Additionally, in early 2020 the border between North Korea and China was completely closed due to COVID- 19, causing exports of goods to China to drop by 96% and imports to drop by 90%. As a result, economic growth sustained by trade with China came to a complete halt due to COVID-19.

The economic shock was carried over to the inhabitants of North Korea. The borders were closed in January 2020 and prices for goods began to fluctuate as early as February. The North Korean government acted quickly. First of all, it announced that sellers could not ask for more than 5,000 North Korean won for a kilogram of rice, and that anyone who violated this rule would be severely punished. Nevertheless, in mid-February the residents of some regions of North Hamgyong Province had to pay more than 10,000 North Korean won for a kilogram of rice, meaning that the price had doubled (Kim Ji Eun 2020c, 97). According to sources from the North Hamgyong Province, there was a significant decrease in the number of people at the *jangmadangu* (North Korean marketplaces) in March 2020 due to COVID-19, although these are usually full of people depending on the weather (ibid., 98). The North Korean economy, which had been heavily dependent on China since 2010, was devastated by the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council and then had to go through an even bigger crisis due to COVID-19 before it could recover from the first.

Impact on Society

COVID-19 affected not only the economy of North Korea but also its society. North Korea closed its borders and actively encouraged its citizens to wear masks to prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 from abroad. Despite this, the citizens allegedly did not pay much attention to mask-wearing (Kim Ji Eun 2020c, 95). As mentioned earlier, the prices of food, such as rice, increased rapidly, but the prices of masks surprisingly remained the same due to the lack of interest from the public. The reason for this is the lack of information provided by the North Korean government on the number of cases of infection, despite actively educating people on preventive care. Therefore, the citizens did not have accurate information about the dangers of COVID-19 and believed the disease was not very dangerous. There was a lack of information on COVID-19 leading to a spread of unreasonable opinions among the population, such as that the drug methamphetamine could be successfully used as a cure for COVID-19 (ibid., 96). North Korea's educational system also suffered greatly from COVID-19, with the start of the school year being pushed back by two months. Even South Korea had problems in carrying out its education in 2020 due to COVID-19, not only in elementary and middle schools, but also in universities. Classes were often cancelled, and most university lectures were held online, leading to some schools being sued for tuition refunds. Many problems occurred when, due to the adverse circumstances, the date of the final exams for high-school and middle-school students had to be postponed (Sin 2020). North Korea could not avoid similar problems. The new semester there usually starts on April 1, but students in 2020 did not start classes until June 1 after the start date was postponed three times (Jo 2020). The early semester break was announced on April 1, just a month after the semester started. In addition, students from rural areas living in dormitories in Pyongyang had to return to their places of origin immediately by order of the education authorities. It could be said that achieving a regular education was almost impossible during this time (Kim Ji Eun 2020a, 97). Although North Korea made an official statement that there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection, the education authorities adopted decisive measures. We can thus deduce that North Korea suffered from the consequences of COVID-19 in numerous areas, including education.

The second social problem that stands out is the increase in discontent among the citizens of North Korea, because the government needed to control people more strictly due to the "double blow". We must emphasize that such discontent has increased not only among the common people, but also among the upper class.

The saying "Are you the General Kim Jong-il?" has reportedly been heard a lot recently among the people of North Korea, it was also used in the South Korean television series *Crash Landing on You* (*Sarangui bulsichak*) (ibid. 2020b, 126). Behind this popular humorous expression is a criticism of the "highest dignitary (Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un)" who likes to pretend that he is well respected and something more. Ostensibly, this is how North Koreans expresses their dissatisfaction with the Communist Party, which constantly enforces coercive control and fails to provide the people with even the minimal requirements for survival (ibid., 127–28). It is not common to make jokes about the supreme leader, however, and thus the popularity of this rhetorical question indicates that life of North Koreans had become so difficult that the people decided to direct their dissatisfaction against the highest person in the land, Kim Jong-un.

Although Kim Jong-un stressed the "safety of the lives of the people of Pyongyang", it would seem as though these were just words to prevent the agitation of those living in the capital who are the main supporters of his party (Gim Myeong-seong 2020). Since the higher classes of North Korean society, such as

Communist Party members, government officials, and soldiers, reside in Pyongyang, it has a special administration and enjoys certain benefits. However, due to the economic sanctions against North Korea and the outbreak of COVID-19, their lives were also made more difficult. During the outbreak of COVID-19, food was so scarce that even administrative workers of the ruling party could not procure it, prompting Kim Jong-un twice (in March and June 2020) to order that Pyongyang residents be provided with food, electricity and firewood. This measure was necessary because, as mentioned above, the consequences of increasing economic issues and long-term sanctions against North Korea and the closure of the borders due to COVID-19 were also felt by the residents of the capital, who began to complain because of psychological issues and discomfort. Pyongyang residents are the main supporters of the regime, so Kim Jong-un actively tried to reduce public discord and ensure social stability (Kim Hakil 2020).

The North Korean economy struggles with irreversible issues because of COVID-19, the consequences of which are felt not only by ordinary citizens but also by the central ruling class. COVID-19 is a huge blow to the entire society because it forced the restriction of economic activity and the halt of the educational process. Dissatisfaction is thus growing in all sections of society, and it is obvious that these conditions are also causing the policies of the North Korean regime to change.

Impact on Politics

In recent years, it has been difficult to say that the highest ruler of North Korea is its supreme leader Kim Jong-un because of the growing influence of Kim Yo-jong, the first deputy of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and the younger sister of Kim Jong-un. She has also made frequent appearances on the political stage during the 2018 Pyongchang Olympics, acting as the voice of Kim Jong-un. With her arrival, the so-called "politics of brother and sister (or the rule of brother and sister)" began (Cho Young-Ki 2020, 180).

Since then, the two leaders have had good and bad political roles. Most notably, outwardly Kim Jong-un (with a moderate attitude) functions as a "good cop", while Kim Jo-jong functions as a "bad cop" (with a relentless attitude). They express different political messages.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, the North Korean "double politics" became even more apparent. As noted above, North Korea could not avoid economic and social problems during the global crisis, and thus its leadership seems to have assessed that the system would be difficult to sustain with only the unilateral local and international policies and one-sided messages that they relied on in the past.

When North Korea tested the launch of two ballistic missiles on March 2, 2020, the Blue House (Cheongwadae, the executive office and official residence of the Republic of Korea's head of state) convened an emergency ministerial meeting and issued a statement: "We urge you to cease your behavior, it does not contribute to the relaxation of military tension on the Korean peninsula." This was an expected response from South Korea. Kim Jo-jong however, intensely criticized it. She said "I am surprised at the half-witted way of thinking of the Blue House." She then added, "It is similar to the unreasonable demands of the United States of America." She did not hold back on the use of insulting terms, such as "cowardly dogs" and "complete idiots" (Noh 2020). On the other hand, the day after her statements the Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un sent a letter offering support in the fight against COVID-19 to the South Korean President Moon Jae-in, which the latter replied to (Seong 2020).

At first glance, the actions of North Korea seem unreasonable, however, they are based on a carefully planned strategy (Cho Young-Ki 2020, 182). We could say that these statements were pre-prepared on the orders of the North Korean double politics.

Kim Yo-jong made another decisive statement on June 4, 2020. It said that due to North Korean deserters who had fled to South Korea and are releasing balloons with leaflets, they will close the Gaesong industrial complex, the facilities South Korea built on Mount Geumgangsan, and the Inter-Korean liaison office. The facilities of this office were actually blown up and the beginning of the military action against South Korea was declared, causing great tension between the two Koreas (ibid.). Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un declared on June 24 that the country would hold off on the plan for military action. This was in complete contradiction to the statement of Kim Yo-jong in the same month, who once again embraced the role of the "bad cop" who increases tensions, while Kim Jong-un took the role of the "good cop" who eases them. Therefore, the prevailing opinion is that Kim Jo-jong is not simply an assistant to Kim Jong-un, but has a larger political role, and it is clear that she has an all-encompassing influence on politics, diplomacy and military affairs (Jeong and Bak 2020). "The brother-sister politics" of Kim Jong-un and Kim Yo-jong, which began in 2018, became even more evident and publicized due to the spread of COVID-19 in 2020. It would seem that they are trying to alleviate the economic and social crises caused by the spread of COVID-19 and the sanctions against North Korea by implementing a form of "joint rule". This may not be the best solution, but it could be seen as a way to avoid or divide responsibility. Even though Kim Jong-un is the official supreme leader of North Korea, he left military affairs to the head of the military administration Choe Pu -il 최부일 and Ri Pyong-chol 리병철, the deputy chairman of the Central Committee of the North Korean worker's party, economic affairs were left to Pak Bong-Ju 박봉주, the deputy chairman of the State Affairs Panel and Prime Minister Kim Tok-Hun 김덕훈. He likely did this to avoid responsibility for the incoming economic and social distress and divided the pressures of citizens' complaints among several people (Kim Kwang Il 2020). Moreover, it seems that the statements made by Kim Yo-jung try to show an image of a strong North Korea, while those made by her brother, Kim Jong-un, aim to calm South Korea and the outside world. North Korea has therefore been emphasizing "the cooperation of the Korean community" since April 2020, insisting that issues on the Korean peninsula should be solved directly by South and North Korea alone, without relying on the interventions of the USA and other countries. South Korea should stop clinging to international opinions and respect the inter-Korean agreements and cooperate with North Korea's economy. The calm attitude of Kim Jong-un is thus understood as a message to the government of Moon Jae-in to ensure economic support so that North Korea can defeat the crisis caused by COVID-19 with the help of inter-Korean cooperation (Cho Young-Ki 2020, 183).

North Korea is making efforts to overcome its major economic and social problems, and puts on a political show to share the responsibility associated with the major challenges it already faces or will face. In 2020, the *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper revealed that North Korea was seriously studying the conditions and preparing political tactics and strengthening political projects to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, the reports noted that it would never be able to defeat COVID-19 with politics and "political power" alone (Jang 2020, 6).

The Cooperation between South and North Korea in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Cho Han-bum (2020, 2) emphasized the "importance of cross-border cooperation" in combating the disease, noting that "COVID-19 is democratic". He used the words of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who said that "poverty is hierarchical, while smog is democratic". Cho Han-bum perceives COVID-19 as democratic because the related crisis affects all people equally and without exception. In this sense, COVID-19 might be even more "democratic" than smog, since smog occurs mostly in big cities where there is more pollution, while it was almost absent in rural areas with cleaner air. In contrast, COVID-19 does not know proportional dispersion. It thus goes without saying that a joint response and not isolation is important for victory against COVID-19, which has spread across all borders and affects all humanity. South Korea especially needs mutual cooperation with North Korea, the only country it borders. Some claim that inter-Korean cooperation means aid from a humanitarian point of view, and while this could be a start it should certainly not be the ultimate goal. All this should be perceived as a step towards mutual cooperation and living, not as one country helping another.

Current Conditions in the Field of Medical Cooperation: The Focus on the Prevention of Infectious Diseases

Until now, North Korea has relied on the technical and financial support of international organizations and South Korea when it came to the control of infectious diseases. When a new influenza (so-called swine flu) broke out in North Korea in November 2009, it asked the government of South Korea directly for assistance with medical treatment. Inter-Korean relations were not good at the time, yet South Korea helped. Even during the Ebola epidemic in 2014 and outbreak of MERS in 2015, there were exchanges in the field of health care; for example, at the request of North Korea, South Korea facilitated the installation of a thermal imaging camera in the entry office of Gaeseong Industrial Complex and collected data on preventive measures (Hwang 2020, 32). If we are accurate, we could call this unilateral support rather than an exchange (or cooperation).

Support for North Korea in the health care sector began in 1997, and until 1999 this accounted for only 1–4% of total humanitarian aid to North Korea. However, since 2000 the amount increased rapidly as health sector support also included infectious disease control, medicines, and medical equipment (Yeonseu-iryowon 2015, 53). Health care support to North Korea in the field of infectious disease prevention can be divided into two parts. The first part is the prevention of autochthonous infectious diseases, while the second part is support to combat infectious diseases that come from abroad. Malaria is one of the autochthonous diseases, while foreign infectious diseases include swine flu, MERS, SARS and COVID-19.

Malaria first appeared in North Korea in 1999, with a report of 15,362 patients, in 2000 the number rose to 90,582, and in 2001 to 143,674 (WHO 2011, 233). When the number of patients increased rapidly in 1999, the WHO decided to help North Korea with the cooperation of South Korea. On March 8, 2000, the Korean government purchased 500,000 US dollars' worth of prevention and health care materials from the WHO (Tonglibu 2002, 169). In 2001, it increased the amount and received the support of 590,000 American dollars (ibid. 2003, 237). The amount of South Korean government support for the fight against malaria in North Korea continued to grow, reaching one billion Korean won in 2008 and 1.3 billion in 2009. This support enabled North Korea to manage the number of patients relatively well, with 16,989 in 2008 and 14,845 in 2009. However, when inter-Korean relations became colder South Korea ceased to support North Korea in the fight against malaria. The number of people infected by malaria increased to 16,760 in 2011 and 21,859 in 2012 (WHO 2019, 182). From this, it can be seen that the support of South Korea has been crucial in the prevention of malaria.

North Korea also received South Korean support in the fight against infectious diseases coming from abroad, and the effect of the support was even more evident in the fight against swine flu than against malaria. Swine flu first appeared in the USA in April 2009 and spread to 214 countries. At the time, WHO warned of the disease and declared a pandemic (Kim Eu Suk 2020), which North Korea was unable to escape. On December 9, 2009, the North Korean news agency KCNA officially reported that there were nine confirmed cases of swine flu in Sinuiju and Pyongyang (Bak Ji-hwan 2009). When the South Korean government received this news, it sent 400,000 doses of the drug Tamiflu and 100,000 doses of Relenza, for a total of 500,000 doses (Kim Seung-wook 2009). North Korea revealed on January 19, 2010 how they used the medication received from South Korea. They distributed 380,000 doses to all cities and provinces, while storing 120,000 doses in the State Committee for Emergency and Disaster Management (SCEDM) (DailyNK 2010).

During the outbreaks of MERS and the Ebola virus brought to North Korea from abroad, the South Korean government procured and gave away equipment for preventive measures, such as thermographic cameras. We must emphasize that North Korea requested aid through the Board for the Management of the Kaesong industrial complex (Kim Hojun 2015). This is evidence that North Korea recognized the threat of infectious diseases spreading from abroad and wanted to act quickly by encouraging help with preventive care from South Korea.

Since COVID-19 is also a foreign infectious disease, North Korea strived to prevent the spread on a national level and therefore closed its borders with China at the beginning of the outbreak. However, it did not officially ask for South Korean support when it came to preventive care, as previously done to combat swine flu, Ebola or MERS. Nevertheless, the South Korean government issued a permit for the support of projects by private humanitarian organizations to help North Korea with preventive care in the fight against COVID-19, without disclosing their names or plans. Although there was no official support at the government level, the private sector was allowed to help North Korea, and there were reports that at least 300 million Korean won' worth of relief supplies were procured by various organizations.

The inter-Korean medical cooperation has not been reciprocal, as only South Korea has provided humanitarian aid to North Korea. This mainly happened in cases where North Korea needed or asked for aid, and in these cases aid was limited to urgent cases that made the end results clear, with relatively short-term projects.

Relations and political factors between the two Koreas also influenced health care and medical cooperation. However, since health care and medical cooperation are directly related to the lives of ordinary people, it should be carried out regardless of the political circumstances, and most importantly without interruptions.

The Plan for Inter-Korean Cooperation in the Field of Health Care

The agreement on the mutual statement from Pyongyang issued by the inter-Korean leadership on September 19, 2018 included a written record that South and North Korea should jointly take necessary measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and strengthen cooperation in the field of preventive care and health care. This record on inter-Korean health care cooperation in the Agreement on the Pyongyang Mutual Declaration Agreement shows that the Koreas should make joint efforts in this field because in this way they could protect people's lives and reduce socio-economic problems in advance (Hwang 2020, 31–32).

However, for inter-Korean cooperation in health care to be effective and undisturbed, a more concrete plan is needed, not just an aimless project.

Firstly, humanitarian aid through private organizations should continue. As mentioned earlier, North Korea did not officially request aid from its southern neighbours during the COVID-19 outbreak, but only accepted aid from private organizations. If we wish to build trust, we must not stop helping through private and international organizations. The channels of private organizations should always remain open, because they work independently of the government and are not influenced by politics.

Secondly, awareness of inter-Korean cooperation in the field of health care and medicine should be raised in South Korea. Such cooperation should be taken as a starting point for the "Korean Peninsula Living Communities" or "Korean Peninsula Health care Community" currently under discussion. It should be stressed that cooperation in the health care and medical fields could ensure a healthy life together for the residents of both South and North, therefore they should be actively informed about it (Lee Wootae 2020, 105). If we ignore the health care crisis in North Korea then we should not be surprised if it also endangers South Korea, and it must be recognised that in the case of infectious diseases the whole peninsula is at risk. We must also not overlook the fact that if the two Koreas were to unite, there would be even greater costs if we neglect cooperation in the field of health care. Closing the gap in health care systems between the South and North is one of the ways to prevent conflicts after unification. The fact that health care cooperation has a direct impact on reducing the cost of reunification should be actively promoted, and ties of empathy should be developed in both Korean societies.

Thirdly, there should be a beginning of low-level practical cooperation in accordance with current United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea. Joint academic conferences in common fields, the exchange of health care and medical technologies, and preventive cooperation would be possible. An infectious disease control network, and thus information sharing, should be established based on the existing inter-Korean agreement (Hwang 2020, 33). From a long-term viewpoint there should be an exchange of information not only on infectious diseases, but also from the general health care and medical fields, as well as from the fields of climate, environment, forestry, and so on, thus expanding cooperation.

For more effective and long-term cooperation in the field of health care and medicine, a special organization would have to be formed, such as the inter-Korean board for health care and medical cooperation. This could be considered as a fourth step. Such an organization would not only allow for regular and sustained health care cooperation, but also a joint response in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. In addition, a guidebook on health care could be issued, and perhaps the organization could even be used to conduct joint research.

We must not view cooperation between the Koreas in a narrow sense. Such cooperation is not only directly related to the lives of the inhabitants of both countries, but is also the foundation of cooperation in other areas, such as climate, the environment and forestry.

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Heroes in Harm's Way: COVID-19 Narratives of China as a Form of Soft Power

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Abstract

This paper examines COVID-19 narratives of China as a form of soft power. The coronavirus pandemic and its handling have presented an image problem for China on the global stage. The country has struggled to control the narratives surrounding the pandemic. This article is interdisciplinary in nature with a focus on contemporary Chinese history, culture, and politics, as well as communication issues and narratives. It analyses non-fictional and fictional narratives as part of China's COVID-19 diplomacy. Beyond documentaries, this paper examines the two docudramas *Heroes in Harm's Way* 最美逆行者 (2020) and *With You* 在一起 (2020) and how these popular TV shows present the coronavirus crisis in China at the beginning of the pandemic. We argue that they provide positive narratives of the COVID-19 response that highlight people's courage and sacrifice to inspire the Chinese population to stand together as a nation. The docudramas showcase everyday life during the lockdown in Wuhan over 76 days from the end of January 2020 to early April 2020. Nurses, doctors, and patients are represented as heroic characters who fight the pandemic together. *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* are testament of a united China broadcast both to domestic audiences and viewers abroad. The docudramas function as damage control to enhance China's image in the world. This helps increase China's soft power as the country presents itself as a capable force for good within its boundaries and beyond.

Keywords: China, COVID-19 narratives, soft power, wolf warrior diplomacy, docudramas, heroism

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Heroji v Plemenitih upornikih: kitajske pripovedi o COVID-19 kot oblika mehke moči

Izvleček

Članek obravnava pripovedi o koronavirusni bolezni na Kitajskem kot obliki mehke moči. Pandemija in soočanje z njo sta na svetovni ravni na Kitajsko vrgla slabo luč, zato se je država trudila nadzirati pripovedi o pandemiji. S poudarkom na sodobni kitajski zgodovini, kulturi, politiki ter vprašanjih komunikacije in naracije pričujoči interdisciplinarni članek analizira resnične in izmišljene pripovedi kot del kitajske koronavirusne diplomacije. Obravnava priljubljeni dokumentarni drami *Plemeniti uporniki* (kit. Original 最美逆行者; ang. prevod Heroes in Harm's Way) in *S skupnimi močmi* (kit. original 在一起; ang. prevod With You) iz leta 2020 ter pokaže, kako ti seriji prikazujeta koronavirusno krizo na Kitajskem ob začetku pandemije. Trdimo, da ponujata pozitivne pripovedi o odzivu na COVID-19, ki poudarjajo pogum in požrtvovalnost ljudi, da bi navdihnili kitajsko prebivalstvo, naj stopi skupaj kot narod. Izbrani dokudrami prikazujeta vsakdanje življenje v 76 dneh zaprtja Wuhana od konca januarja do začetka aprila 2020. Medicinske sestre, zdravniki in bolniki so predstavljeni kot junaški liki, ki se skupaj borijo proti pandemiji. Heroji v omenjenih serijah pričajo o duhu enotne Kitajske, epizode pa so na voljo tako domačemu občinstvu kot tudi gledalcem v tujini. Dokudrame delujejo kot nadzor škode za izboljšanje podobe Kitajske v svetu. To pripomore k povečevanju mehke moči Kitajske, saj se država predstavlja kot sposobna sila znotraj in zunaj svojih meja.

Ključne besede: Kitajska, pripovedi o COVID-19, mehka moč, diplomacija volčjih bojevnikov, dokumentarne drame, junaštvo

Medical and Political Background: China during the Coronavirus Pandemic

On May 26, 2021, the White House released a statement by US President Joseph Biden regarding the analysis of the US Intelligence Community into the origin of COVID-19 (White House 2021). The report concluded that there was no definitive answer as to whether the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 emerged naturally by transmission from animals to humans, or whether it was accidentally leaked from a lab when it first emerged in Wuhan, the People's Republic of China, in late 2019 (ibid.). This statement was a departure from the previous official position, which had assumed that the virus emerged at a seafood market in Wuhan. It thus marked "a big shift from the derision heaped on the lab theory by many in the media and politics last year, when Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Senator Tom Cotton and others floated the idea" (BBC 2021a). China vehemently rejected the lab leak theory, labelling its resurfacing as "smear campaigns and blame shifting" (ibid.). Previously, the lab leak theory had predominantly been advocated by people wanting to blame China for the pandemic or by conspiracy theorists. Now it looks like this idea is regaining traction, with President Biden having stated that there was not "sufficient information to assess one [theory] to be more likely than the other" (White House 2021).

The World Health Organization (WHO) sponsored an investigation into the origins of COVID-19 in early 2021 (Maxmen and Mallapaty 2021). China's reluctance to admit researchers and the fact that "Chinese government officials suppressed crucial public-health data at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the 2002–04 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic" have become further cause for concern in this context (ibid.). While there is currently no evidence that the virus was bioengineered or leaked from a lab, there is also no substantial evidence that it was transmitted from an infected animal to a human being, although "many infectious-disease researchers agree that the most probable scenario is that the virus evolved naturally and spread from a bat either directly to a person or through an intermediate animal" (ibid.). It can take years to determine the origin of pandemics, as seen during previous investigations into, for example, SARS and Ebola. The pandemic itself, its handling, and the continued investigation present an image problem for China. The country has struggled to control the narratives surrounding the pandemic after it was highly successful in containing COVID-19 within China in 2020.

Our paper is interdisciplinary in nature, with a focus on contemporary Chinese history, culture, and politics as well as communication issues and narratives. It investigates several fictional and non-fictional narratives concerning the coronavirus pandemic and China's public image as a result of the events in 2020. We analyse these narratives as part of China's COVID-19 diplomacy. Simultaneously, we pay attention to critics of the Chinese efforts such as writer Fang Fang 方方 and artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未, who have painted a darker image of China's COVID-19 response. Beyond documentaries, we are particularly interested in fictional representations of the country's efforts in containing the pandemic, and specifically the two docudramas *Heroes in Harm's Way* 最美逆行者 (2020) and *With You* 在一起 (2020). We examine how these popular TV shows present the coronavirus crisis in China at the beginning of the pandemic. In this paper, we argue that they provide positive narratives of the COVID-19 response that highlight people's courage, sacrifice, and heroism to inspire the Chinese population to stand together as a community and a nation.

The docudramas showcase everyday life in COVID-19 affected neighbourhoods and hospitals in Wuhan, showing heroic actions by nurses, doctors, and common people. *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* are representations of a united China broadcast both to domestic audiences and viewers abroad. On YouTube, each episode of *Heroes in Harm's Way* has somewhere between 80k and 500k+ views at the time of writing. The first episode has the largest number of views, 500K+, while the average is around 200k. The number of views of *With You* is even higher, as some episodes have more than one million. However, compared to other Chinese dramas, such as historic costume dramas and videos posted by popular Chinese bloggers, the number of views is quite small. The docudramas present China's efforts at controlling COVID-19-related narratives, and function as damage control to enhance the country's image in the world. This helps increase China's soft power as the country presents itself as a capable force for good within its boundaries and beyond. The target audiences of China's soft power goals and strategies are both external and internal. The external ones are foreign and elite Western audiences, particularly key foreign policy decision-makers. If China can reach and persuade global audiences, it can be an expert at gatekeeping to control the flow of global media coverage towards Chinese domestic audiences. The gatekeepers put the content of global media coverage into a context that is helpful for the Chinese government. They recycle, repurpose, and use what fits into the official narrative to frame it for internal audiences. Additionally, they make sure that the potential positive impact of China's soft power will not be lost, because some sources other than the Chinese government are telling China's story.

At the time of writing in June 2021, over 180.5 million coronavirus cases have been reported worldwide (Johns Hopkins 2021). According to Worldometer (2021), the number of COVID-19 cases in China is officially at 91,780 as of June 30, 2021. Of those cases, 86,689 patients have recovered, while 4,636 have died (ibid.). There are currently 455 active cases, of which 2% are considered serious, while the vast majority (98%) are classified as mild (ibid.). After the detection of the coronavirus in Wuhan, the daily number of cases showed a huge spike in January and February 2020, with the highest daily number recorded at 14,108 on February 12, 2020 (ibid.). After February 2020, the numbers dropped significantly and decreased steadily, so much so that China was able to declare the pandemic as contained within the country. With the emergence of the coronavirus in Wuhan and the subsequent rapid spread of the pandemic all over the world, however, China is still seen as the origin of the virus and the pandemic, which has consequently contributed to a rise of anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiment around the world.

People perceived to be Chinese or of Asian heritage in general have been discriminated against in various countries and in sometimes dramatic incidents. They have been blamed for the worldwide spread of the pandemic and become scapegoats for what some see as China's guilt. In a resurgence of the trope of the "yellow peril" (Kawai 2005), people of Asian heritage have had to endure racial slurs and stereotyping during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the US, for example, this has led to "the swift shift from model minority to contagious pariah" (Li 2021). These perceptions of a "contagious pariah" were fuelled by former US President Donald Trump and others when racializing the coronavirus and labelling COVID-19 "Kung Flu" (BBC 2020). Su et al. (2020) argue that it is time to stop using names such as the "Wuhan virus", "China virus", or "Chinese virus" to avoid any stereotyping due to locations or the perceived origin of the virus. Along the same lines, Vasquez (2020) points to the xenophobia inherent in such terms. Reny and Barreto (2020) also analyse changing attitudes towards Asian Americans in the US, and find that they were othered in the early stages of the pandemic. The process of othering positions Asian Americans as outsiders who do not belong to the community or nation. It marks them as different from the norm or any accepted behaviour, and various studies have noted increased racism and bias towards Asian Americans since the start of the pandemic (Devakumar et al. 2020; Ho et al. 2020; Sastry and Ban 2020). Discrimination against individuals has increased as people of Chinese heritage and Asian backgrounds are perceived as an immunological threat. This threat also operates on a societal level, with China as a nation being perceived as a threat to the global community since trust in its transparency and handling of the pandemic in the early stages has largely been eroded. Not providing access to its research facilities to further investigate the origin of the virus has also been construed as China's attempt at hiding facts, and this perceived lack of transparency has further damaged the country's reputation.

China's image problem extends beyond the pandemic. In the past few years, the country has been criticized for various issues deemed unacceptable by other powers such as the US and the European Union. These include, among others, the country's growing arsenal of weapons, its recent handling of the situation in Hong Kong and the passing of the controversial new National Security Law, and its treatment of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) 新疆维吾尔自治区. Following the most recent NATO Summit in Brussels, Belgium, in June 2021, leaders of the member countries issued a press release warning that "China's stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security" (NATO Summit 2021, point no. 55). They further stated:

> We remain concerned with China's frequent lack of transparency and use of disinformation. We call on China to uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system … in keeping with its role as a major power. (NATO Summit 2021, point no. 55).

This accusatory rhetoric was met with an equally critical response by the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the EU 中华人民共和国驻欧盟使团:

> NATO is slandering China's peaceful development and misjudging the international situation and its own role. It represents a continuation of the Cold War mentality and bloc politics. (Mission of China to the EU 2021a)[1]

The spokesperson further stated:

> China urges NATO to view China's development in a rational manner, stop hyping up in any form the so-called "China threat", and stop taking China's legitimate interests and rights as an excuse to manipulate bloc politics, create confrontation and fuel geopolitical competition. (Mission of China to the EU 2021a)[2]

Just a few days later, at its most recent meeting in the UK in June 2021, the Group of Seven (G7), consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and US, harshly criticized China again. China strongly then defended its actions:

> Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet-related issues are China's internal affairs. The East and South China Seas concern China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. All these issues represent China's fundamental interests and allow no interference. (Mission of China to the EU 2021b)[3]

China thus categorically rejected any accusations of wrongdoing, highlighting its confidence and strong role in the world:

> China is no longer like what it was in the past. The Chinese people have stood up. Intimidation will never work on us. We will stay on the course of peaceful development and at the same time, firmly safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests. (Mission of China to the EU 2021b)[4]

1 北约称中国构成了所谓“系统性挑战”，是对中国和平发展的诋毁、对国际形势和自身角色的误判，更是冷战思维延续和集团政治心理作祟。

2 中方奉劝北约理性看待中国发展，停止渲染各种形式的“中国威胁论”，不要将中国的正当利益和合法权利作为操弄集团政治、人为制造对立、刺激地缘竞争的借口。

3 台湾、香港、涉疆、涉藏问题是中国的内政，东海、南海涉及中国领土主权和海洋权益，这些问题关乎中国的根本利益，不容干涉。

4 中国早已不是过去的中国，站起来的中国人民是不会被吓倒的。中方将坚定走和平发展道路，也将坚决捍卫国家主权、安全、发展利益。

These exchanges show the conflicting interests between various world powers. However, despite this hostile rhetoric between China, the US, and the EU, the People's Republic has recently attempted to alter image by moving from the confrontational "wolf warrior" style to present China as "trustworthy, loveable and respectable" to the world (BBC 2021b).

From "Wolf Warrior" to "Loveable China": COVID-19 Diplomacy as Soft Power

In recent years, China's foreign policy has been called "wolf warrior diplomacy" 战狼外交. This term is an allusion to the 2015 film, *Wolf Warrior* 战狼, and particularly its sequel, *Wolf Warrior 2* 战狼 2 (2017). This action film, starring Wu Jing 吴京 as a Chinese soldier overseas, in this case in an African country, highlights China's role on the international scene. It showcases how a "lone Chinese wolf" defends China and Chinese values abroad by fighting those that might stand in its way. This is exemplified by the film's tagline: "Anyone who offends China will be killed, no matter how far the target is 犯我中华者虽远必诛". One of the highest-grossing films of the year, *Wolf Warrior 2* celebrates Chinese nationalism in its embrace of violent means to defend China if necessary. This wolf warrior attitude has been translated into diplomatic styles as well, although outside of China the term is used with negative connotations, implying that the aggressive nature of defending China at all cost may be more suitable in films than real life.

Several scholars have examined wolf warrior diplomacy in the context of contemporary politics. Analysing the transcripts of press conferences by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) 中华人民共和国外交部 over the past twenty years, Dai and Luqiu (2021) found that "MFA spokespersons have become increasingly hostile since the beginning of Xi's presidency, with 2019 and 2020 mark[ing] unprecedented high levels of hostility in the past two decades" (Dai and Luqiu 2021, 23). Other observers have pointed out that wolf warrior diplomacy is hurting China's foreign policy, as some confrontational comments and reactions have created pushback (Zhu 2020). One example was a comparison of China and India during the ongoing coronavirus crisis. In contrasting images, China was celebrating a rocket launch, while cremations of people who had died with COVID-19 represented India (Palmer 2021). This implied that China had successfully handled the coronavirus pandemic, whereas other countries, such as India, were still burying thousands of people because they had not been as decisive in combating the virus. These images were met with disgust as users on Chinese social media called them "tasteless", which ultimately prompted the images to be deleted (ibid.). While "from China's perspective, wolf-warrior diplomacy is a direct response to 'unfair' approaches by other countries" (Zhu 2021), people perceive the limits of the effectiveness of such aggressive and uncalled-for approaches which are seen as offensive, as in the example of India.

More recently, President Xi Jinping 习近平 has attempted to rethink foreign policy. In a speech to officials of the Communist Party of China (CCP) 中国共产党 in early June 2021, President Xi spoke of the country's need to present a "credible, loveable and respectable China 可信、可爱、可敬". There has been some confusion with regard to the most appropriate translation of President Xi's words, with options ranging from "reliable, admirable, and respectable" (Xinhua News Agency 新华通讯社), "trustworthy, loveable, and respectable" (Bloomberg) to "believable, lovely and respectable" (Google Translate) (Brouwer 2021). Despite the slightly different meanings in translation, this statement promises a friendlier tone in diplomacy, which might mark a return to earlier strategies such as former President Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 policy 韬光养晦 "to calmly observe, hold one's ground, react firmly, act but keep a low profile 冷静观察、稳住阵脚、沉着应付、韬光养晦、有所作为" (Pang 2020, 1). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this move might present an attempt to salvage China's reputation in the world.

In addition to the friendlier rhetoric, China has also provided help to other nations during the pandemic. In the early stages, China was able to support other countries in their handling of COVID-19. After the country had successfully contained the virus in 2020, it shipped masks and PPE (personal protective equipment) to other countries. Kowalski discusses China's shipment of masks to several Eastern and Central European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Serbia, Poland, and Romania, and notes that China "has been promoting the narrative of its transparent and timely response to the outbreak of the pandemic, while at the same time nurturing its image as a (benevolent) global leader in the struggle against the coronavirus" (Kowalski 2021, 1). Kowalski argues that this has helped China both on the domestic front and international stage, "aiming to cover up China's leadership's failure to contain the pandemic in its initial stage, while also turning acts of foreign gratitude to its advantage" (ibid.). Additionally, Kowalski shows how mask diplomacy has paid off for China in this context as people in countries such as the Czech Republic, for example, have an "unexpectedly positive" view of China, with the majority believing that more aid came from China than from the EU (ibid., 7). Even though the deliveries were commercial enterprises, many people actually perceived the arrival of the medical supplies from China as free aid (ibid.). This shows how China has been able to aid other countries and, at the same time, influence its COVID-19 narratives to its own benefit. China has thus succeeded in helping foreign countries and in promoting an image of stability to its own citizens.

China has also been active with regard to "vaccine diplomacy" (Sreeganga and Ramaprasad 2020; Ninomiya 2021). The term itself is problematic, because it implies that the delivery of vaccines can be used as a political tool to influence other countries in one's favour. Ninomiya (2021) examines China's role in delivering its vaccines to developing countries, such as those in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. The author also reports on concerns that other countries might have with regard to the undue influence of China on the world stage and the advantages it has gained in terms of foreign relations. Sreeganga and Ramaprasad (2020) also explore whether China's engagement in vaccine diplomacy is predominantly meant to aid other countries or whether it might be part of a larger strategy to gain global power. Similarly, Lian (2020) argues that China's plans are "much more sinister", warning of Beijing's soft power ambitions. Referring to President Xi's Chinese Dream 中国梦 as the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation 中华民族的伟大复兴", Lian is concerned about the possibilities of a dream of "global dominance" (ibid.). The author argues that governments and observers have focused too much on China's hard power in its geopolitical presence and neglected its soft power ambitions and strategies: "they are only just beginning to appreciate its far more invasive soft-power strategy—and it might already be too late" (ibid.). Health diplomacy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is one such instance of soft power, and China has been successful in expanding its soft power in various parts of the world.

Nye defines soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment" (Nye 2019, 7). He originally described the concept in the context of the Cold War (Nye 1990, 153–57). More recently, Nye has also characterized soft power as "a struggle to win hearts and minds" in the fight against international terrorism (Nye 2008, 94). In addition to hard power resources, the author argues that "a country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values and policies" (Nye 2019, 7).

China is a powerful actor in international affairs, but it aspires to become a normative power. The discussion of China's soft power goals and strategies, including vaccine, mask, and health diplomacies, can be conceptualized as wanting to become a normative power in the international community, which is capable of shaping normality and thus become a normative actor with moral responsibility. As Sjursen (2006) asked in the European context: How can the EU be a "normative" power? The same question can be formulated in the Chinese context: How can China be a normative power in multipolar power relationships?

In Mandarin Chinese, the term 标准 (*biaozhun*) can be translated in English as "normative" in the sense of standardization rather than a moral imperative (Womack 2008). Manners defines normative power as "the ability to shape conceptions of normal". He refocuses the notion of normative power in the discussion of "power over opinion" or "ideological power" (Manners 2002, 239). Manners perceives normative power as the power of (virtuous) example (ibid., 252). Other scholars identify four instruments of influence of normative power, including persuasion, activation of international norms, shaping what is "normal", and leadership by example (Forsberg 2011, 1184).

Traditionally, Chinese culture, strongly influenced by Confucianism, advocated a highly elaborated "ethic of social interaction that emphasized leadership by example, teaching morality, and the duties associated with relational roles" (Womack 2008, 2). Vaccine, mask, and health diplomacies can be understood as soft and non-coercive instruments. In fact, the so-called vaccine diplomacy finds its root in the gift-giving and gift-exchanging culture in traditional Chinese society, in which *Guanxi* 关系 or social relationships are maintained through "the skillful mobilization of moral and cultural imperatives such as obligation and reciprocity in pursuit of both diffuse social ends and calculated instrumental ends" (Yang 1989, 35). These ancient practices have shaped modern diplomacy. Gratitude inspired by generosity enables China to consolidate its international authority (Kustermans 2019). But to what extent can some of these instruments of influence of normative power help China become a normative power? Tocci (2008) distinguishes between normative and imperial powers based on the assumption of "others-empowering" or "self-empowering". One can ask whether China is using vaccine, mask, and health diplomacies to empower others or itself. In *Foreign Affairs*, Huang (2021) argues that China "has not won the soft power stakes, but it has an early lead".

The example and discussion of the EU as a normative power is helpful, because it can make us aware that efforts to justify foreign policy regarding social diffusion and activation of international norms lead to suspicions of hidden agendas. China has carefully managed to keep the imperial and self-empowering dimension of power absent from its narrative to the rest of the world, and its various soft policy instruments can be understood in the context of the decline of Western powers and the "rise of the East". Fitting China's goals of soft power strategies into a normative framework does not hinder its potential contributions to general normative international action. China has adopted a "good neighbourhood policy" to maintain better relations and pursue mutual benefit with the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Ye 2019, 95). The challenge is to find out to what extent China can capitalize on these normative aspirations and extend far beyond its region to be recognized not necessarily by the West but by the "rest" as a cosmopolitan "force for good" in international relations. Viewed from an idealistic perspective, while the notion of normative power is not new, its importance is only likely to gain traction in the future.

As one of the largest and most populous nations in the world, China has traditionally played an important role in the soft power sector. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, China was ranked 5th worldwide in terms of its soft power index (Global Soft Power Index 2021). In 2020, presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic, China's ranking suffered and fell to 8th after Germany, Japan, the UK, Canada, Switzerland, the US, and France, respectively (ibid.). The report reveals a mixed reaction to China's role in the pandemic: "among Western countries, the perception of China has turned markedly negative. Despite providing much of the world's personal protection equipment, it is accused of politicising exports and boasting" (ibid., 98). The Global Soft Power Index (ibid.) points out that China's vaccines have often been "denigrated as being less advanced and effective". On the other hand, the report shows that "among many developing countries, the esteem of China has gone up. China is seen to have performed much better than the US and Europe" (ibid.). This stark contrast is an indication of the various perceptions of China's handling of the coronavirus pandemic as well as an outcome of its mask diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy.

Verma (2020, 255) argues that China's health diplomacy has helped the country portray itself as a "Good Samaritan". In addition to mask diplomacy, China has also introduced a campaign to question the origins of the COVID-19 and has blamed the US in an effort to divert attention from itself and to dissociate itself from the pandemic (Verma 2020). Similarly, Kobierecka and Kobierecki show how China has engaged in "assistance rhetoric" (Kobierecka and Kobierecki 2021, 9), by projecting a positive image in its media, positioning itself "as a global leader in fighting against the pandemic. Even before China managed to overcome the outbreak, the narrative promoted by Chinese media referred to the supremacy of the Chinese way of fighting the disease" (ibid., 8). China was able to position itself rhetorically as a winner of the fight against the pandemic. It contrasted its successful handling of COVID-19 with that of the United States, for example (Gauttam, Singh, and Kaur 2020). China has expanded its influence beyond trade and politics via what Gauttam, Singh, and Kaur (2020, 326) call China's "Health Silk Road", in an allusion to the famous trade route. The authors interpret China's aid as "an organized effort to become hegemon in the coming times through expanding its geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic influences across the globe" (ibid., 330). They even anticipate that the "*status quo* would change in favour of China in the post-pandemic world order" (ibid., 333). While this may be a welcome change for some, it has also been met with concern by others, most notably the US.

The "Health Silk Road" can also be regarded as an extension of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes also referred to as "One Belt One Road 一带一路" or "The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road 丝绸之路经济带和二十一世纪海上丝绸之路". As its original title indicates, the project consists of a number of roads, ports, pipelines, waterways, and railways along six economic corridors that span across Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and Europe. Initiated in 2013, the BRI is intended to improve trade, investment, and infrastructure between China and the various countries on the route. In addition to facilitating trade, the BRI also has the potential to increase China's political influence. To many observers, the initiative speaks to the country's global ambitions (Brakman et al. 2019; Buckley 2020; Chen, Song and Yang 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries along the route of the BRI have become partners in China's roll-out of its vaccines. A notable region is the Arab world with, for example, the UAE among others, which collaborated closely with China's vaccine efforts. As Ninomiya (2021) states: "Sinopharm chose UAE not only for its high number of cases but also for its foreign labour force with workers from 125 countries". The UAE has also set up a vaccine production facility in Abu Dhabi in cooperation with China (Woertz and Yellinek 2021). According to Woertz and Yellinek, such licensing deals also imply long-term pharmaceutical cooperation.

The UAE has shown continued support of China's vaccine trials and the BRI more generally (Wang and Khalifa 2021). In a survey of Arab perceptions of China among nationals of Arab nations in the UAE, "62.19% of the participants thought Arab countries should collaborate with China to combat COVID-19. Almost 80% of the respondents believed that China made a positive contribution to the MENA's economy" (ibid.). Wang and Khalifa suggest that "China needs to use its resources to enhance its soft power in the region in order to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on its image", but the authors also state that "many Arab residents of the UAE continue to view China as a great power and an important partner of the region" (ibid.). Continued collaboration between Arab countries and China can strengthen China's role in the region and the world at large. While facts matter, it is also important to highlight people's perceptions and feelings, even if these differ from reality. China has been successful in presenting an image of itself that makes other nations and people appreciate its efforts. While China has had to confront image problems, the narratives it has been telling have had an impact on rectifying some of the earlier perceptions of the pandemic as China's fault.

Coronation: Documenting China's Handling of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Despite China's best efforts to present itself in a positive light, some narratives from within China and certainly also from outside the country have been critical of China's response to the pandemic. One of the earliest examples is writer Fang Fang's 方方 *Wuhan Diary—Dispatches from a Quarantined City* (2020a; 2020b) 武汉日记. Chronicling the events in Wuhan during the city-wide lockdown from January through March 2020, Fang Fang originally posted her thoughts and observations online, after which they also received attention abroad and were ultimately published in book form in various languages. According to Davidson (2020), "On Weibo, 'Fang Fang Diary' has had 380m views, 94,000 discussions, and 8,210 original posts ... On Twitter, the hashtag #wuhandiary shows hundreds of critical posts". Fang Fang has been accused of giving critics a "giant sword" (ibid.) to attack China. Similarly, *Wuhan Diary* tells "uncomfortable truths about China … her entries began to seem like samizdat" (Garner 2020). Fedtke, Ibahrine, and Wang (2021) argue that Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary* is an act of sousveillance in which the author advances her observations as a critique from the bottom up. The text serves as an early observation of China' response to the pandemic in Wuhan, and while Fang Fang is generally supportive she does chronicle some shortcomings of its early handling of the crisis.

Artist and activist Ai Weiwei 艾未未 presented an even grimmer view of the pandemic in Wuhan in early 2020. Living abroad, Ai directed a documentary from afar with "an assortment of amateur cinematographers", capturing the footage within China itself (Bramesco 2020). The documentary mentions at the very beginning that "getting reliable information from within the country is difficult" (*Coronation* 2020, 0:00:15). Juxtaposing the coronavirus crisis with the events in Hong Kong, *Coronation* raises questions about the role of the individual in society, which is particularly important in the context of a health emergency when the population depends on others members cooperating and collaborating. Similar to Fang Fang, Ai Weiwei takes a critical look at the silencing of doctors in Wuhan in the early stages of the pandemic: "They delayed… they stopped those doctors talking about it … it gave the disease a big advantage to spread … I am sure it was not their intention. They miscalculated the situation" (ibid., 0:04:05–0:04:30). Ai Weiwei also compares the situation in China to that in the US: "But almost no government in the world has complete transparency. If you see what happened to Assange, Snowden, Chelsea Manning … you can see the US do the same … but at a different level" (ibid., 0:10:42–0:11:02). The documentary also includes disturbing images of body bags in Wuhan to document the tragic extent of the pandemic (ibid., 0:12:13). Johnson (2020) points to an "awesome efficiency" in China's handling of the pandemic, especially when building a new hospital from scratch in a matter of a few days. Such moments express the deep contradiction between the failure and success of fighting the pandemic in Wuhan.

Wu Hao's 吴皓 *76 Days* is another example of a Wuhan-related documentary, which also chronicles the time during the lockdown in Wuhan over 76 days from the end of January 2020 to the end of the lockdown in early April 2020. The documentary takes an inside look into the functioning of hospitals in Wuhan during the most critical time for the city, with many patients in the ICU, needing intubation and other intensive care. *76 Days* shows the immense pressure under which hospital staff operated in the early stages of the pandemic, but at the same time it illustrates the interactions among doctors, nurses, and patients. Despite the tragic setting and the seemingly impersonal and hidden identities of nurses in PPE labelled only with their names and sometimes a drawing on them, the documentary manages to showcase the sympathy and strong will that hospital staff show when caring for their patients. This is evident in scenes such as feeding the patients, relaying messages from their loved ones to them, or nursing the wounds that the intubation might have left.

In the Same Breath, directed by Wang Nanfu 王男栿, also documents the events in Wuhan at the beginning of 2020. Zeitchik (2021) interprets the documentary as arguing that "the alleged suppression led to an untold number of deaths and the virus spreading rapidly, as unaware people kept taking risks". In its reporting of the crisis in Wuhan, *In the Same Breath* is much more critical of the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The documentary premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was financed by HBO (ibid.). This raises questions of where and how the documentary will be available and what China's reaction as a major market might be (ibid.). Filming for the various documentaries has been difficult, with virtually all filmmakers relying on volunteers and citizen journalists on the ground in Wuhan to supply them with footage from inside hospitals, for example.

Released right around the first anniversary of the lockdown in Wuhan, *Days and Nights in Wuhan* 武汉日夜 has been called state-backed propaganda (Wang Fujiyama and Wu 2021). At the same time, the documentary is a sensitive portrayal of the problems and struggles that patients and staff were facing. The director Cao Linjing 曹金玲 has been quoted as saying,

> We wanted to record the journey of battling against the COVID-19 epidemic via motion picture. Some of the details, including the intense care, anxious waiting, heart-breaking farewells and hopeful rebirths, might strike a chord with viewers. (Wang Fujiyama and Wu 2021)

Days and Nights in Wuhan focuses on the lives of ordinary people thrown into the midst of the pandemic by surprise and trying to cope with the unprecedented situation. The documentary includes many scenes of family members talking to or about the patients, for example, mentioning their favourite food or describing how they were holding their hand in the hospital bed. These stories are heart-warming and inspiring. As in *76 Days* and *In the Same Breath*, audiences see the experiences of the doctors and nurses first-hand. After watching the documentary, one can appreciate the difficulties both the staff and patients were facing. The documentaries all showcase heroism in ordinary people, which is similar to how fictional narratives of China have shown the events in Wuhan in 2020, as discussed below.

Fictional COVID-19 Narratives: Docudramas as Showcases of Heroism

As seen in the discussion of the non-fictional texts, narratives of COVID-19 in China are highly contested. Who gets to say what, where, and when with regard to China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance for the country's public image—both domestically and internationally. While China has been criticized for its response to COVID-19, it has attempted to control its image worldwide, conveying a message of strength and decisiveness in dealing with COVID-19. Molter and DiResta (2020) examine how Chinese state media propagate narratives that favour the country's response to COVID-19. The authors show how China and Chinese actors use social media platforms to control the narratives surrounding the pandemic in China. Along the same lines, Jaworsky and Qiaoan (2020) analyse the "narrative battle" between China and the US with regard to the coronavirus pandemic. Jaworsky and Qiaoan (2020, 295) argue that it is necessary to understand the "performative function" of the battle to deescalate it and to move beyond the current surge of nationalism in the dialog between the two countries. In addition to this performative function, Jacob has identified six strategies that China uses to control the narratives of COVID-19 on the international stage: magnify the scope of China's mitigation efforts, highlight the struggle of other countries, promote China's contribution to helping other countries, strengthen the political system within China, deflect the blame from China, and question the origin of the pandemic in China (Jacob 2020, 378–80). Fictional representations of COVID-19 narratives in and of China help magnify the country's efforts in combating the pandemic and help China strengthen its own image.

The two docudramas *Heroes in Harm's Way* 最美逆行者 (2020) and *With You* 在一起 (2020) are the most prominent examples of fictional TV shows that portray the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan in early 2020. The 14 episodes of *Heroes in Harm's Way* aired on CCTV (China Central TV) from September 17–25, 2020. Dragon TV broadcast the 20 episodes of *With You* from September 29–October 8, 2020. All episodes are freely available on, for example, YouTube, unlike some of the other commercial documentaries. *With You* can be watched with subtitles in English, whereas only episodes 3 and 4 of *Heroes in Harm's* Way were available with English subtitles at the time of writing. According to Prensario Internacional, *Heroes in Harm's Way* was also to be aired on Sky UK and other global platforms. The TV show became a popular topic: "As of September 27, the viewing number of relevant Weibo topics of the TV series exceeds 8 billion, hitting Weibo's trending list 17 times, while the hashtag #HeroesInHarmsWay was viewed by 2.9 billion Weibo users" (Prensario Internacional 2020). It was also trending on social media:

> On Douyin (TikTok), the TV drama stays on the trending list for three consecutive days topping the list. A single relevant video clip on Douyin generates viewings as high as 15 million … making *Heroes in Harm's Way* the most discussed CCTV TV series on social media in recent years (ibid.)

Apparently the shows have benefitted from casting one of China's top idols Xiao Zhan 肖战 in one of the episodes, who rose to stardom in 2019 for his role in the enormously popular fantasy drama *The Untamed*.

On the other hand, *Heroes in Harm's Way* has also faced criticism, particularly for its gender discrimination. Even before it was to be aired abroad, controversy engulfed *Heroes in Harm's Way* due to the show's portrayal of gender. Allen (2020) points out that "the name of the show was seemingly chosen because … female medical staff are often hailed as 'Heroes in Harm's Way'. However, in Chinese, the name of the show translates more literally as 'Beauties who go against the tide'". In fact, the literal translation should be "the beautiful people who went the opposite way", reading the word 美 as gender neutral. Allen (2020) discusses some controversial scenes that seem to imply that women's roles in the pandemic, particularly at the frontline, were not valued as much as those of men. Jing (2020) makes a similar criticism of certain scenes, for example

> a female doctor was asked to step aside in a surgery because of her gender; a female nurse was not allowed to work at the front line because her doctor husband had already done so and there would have been no one to look after the elderly and kids at home. (Jing 2020)

In Episode 3 of *Heroes in Harm's Way*, the male Dr. Yue is chosen to serve at the frontline instead of the female nurse Zhou, who had volunteered first and should have gotten this job. Dr. Yue says to her: "This is a war, not a honeymoon—you're not ready for this 我是去打仗，你以为度蜜月呢，你这样咋咋呼呼地去了" (*Heroes in Harm's Way* 0:17:04). Nurse Zhou responds: "Don't question my professionalism" 不许你质疑我的专业" (*Heroes in Harm's Way* 0:17:11). According to Jing, such representations of women "reinforced society's gender stereotypes and downplayed their contributions to the fight against COVID-19". This is even more disconcerting as "in actual fact, of the over 42,000 medical workers dispatched to help fight the coronavirus in Hubei, two-thirds were females" (Jing 2020). In addition to this criticism, the *Global Times* 环球时报 (2020) reported that "some Chinese netizens also criticized the TV series for handing out ammunition to Western media to smear and obliterate China's efforts in fighting the virus".

In both *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* medical staff are celebrated for their efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. One example at the end of Episode 3 of *Heroes in Harm's Way* shows a patient bowing to Dr. Yue for saving his life (0:42:58). Conversely, when a patient dies, the medical staff bow in front of the hospital bed to express their respect (*Heroes in Harm's Way,* Episode 4, 0:12:54). Even though doctors and nurses are presented as ordinary people, they are elevated to a special status due to their commitment to their job, work ethic, and care of their patients. Viewers are shown everyday heroism that saves lives in the face of a common enemy, the pandemic. The doctors and nurses are represented as smart, sacrificing, willing to endure hardship, and caring. Despite the obvious impetus to praise them as heroes, Cox has cautioned against the overuse of the term hero in the media and elsewhere. Cox argues that

> the heroism narrative can be damaging, as it stifles meaningful discussion about what the limits of this duty to treat are. It fails to acknowledge the importance of reciprocity, and through its implication that all healthcare workers have to be heroic, it can have negative psychological effects on workers themselves. (Cox 2020, 510)

Instead, Cox advocates for a re-evaluation of the duties of healthcare workers during a pandemic (ibid.). Similarly, Hopkins examines the role of healthcare workers in light of the term heroism, asking what it means for the profession of doctors and nurses to be grouped in the same "essential" category as sewage workers and grocery store cashiers (Hopkins 2021, 109). Despite this criticism of this concept of heroism, this term helps create an image of glory, which in turn helps China's soft power ambitions in presenting itself as a conqueror of the pandemic.

Sacrifice and Courage in *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* as Soft Power

Heroes in Harm's Way and *With You* function as narratives of soft power to strengthen China's image in its handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Ma (2021) points out that "*Weiji*, or crisis in the Chinese language, comprises two words: danger and opportunity". What seems like a contradiction at first in the English language shows that a pandemic can both present a danger, and yet also an opportunity for renewal and strength. Ma highlights the role of the fight against the pandemic by explaining language and metaphors on the

> play on the homonym of *yi* for epidemic (疫) and battle (役). The radical *chuang* (疒) for disease in epidemic is replaced by the radical *chi* (彳) to form battle. 彳 suggests little steps like those taken by soldiers at the guard post holding a weapon or lance inherent in the radical *shu* (殳). 彳 also denotes two persons or a group in combat readiness. Broadly speaking, *yi* (役) means military service, forced labour, and duty … The fight against the epidemic, by word association and emotional affiliation, comes to acquire a sense of military urgency and even honour. (Ma 2021)

Both *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* also praise the role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) 中国人民解放军 in containing COVID-19. In Episode 2 of *Heroes in Harm's Way*, viewers see how a hospital is built from scratch in a short period of time, supplies are delivered, and trained personnel arrive to take care of the patients (*Heroes in Harm's Way* 0:30:02). Episode 3 of *Heroes in Harm's Way* (0:40:45) also mentions the concerted effort of bringing trained personnel to Wuhan: 344 teams as well as 42,322 medical professionals. In Episode 11 of *With You* (0:01:03), reinforcement from the PLA also arrives in Wuhan to begin the construction of a hospital for up to 1,000 patients, which they are able to complete in just ten days (0:13:25). Both shows address the initial lack of supplies in the hospitals (Episode 3 of *Heroes in Harm's Way*; Episode 1 of *With You*).

War rhetoric also dominates the use of language when talking about the pandemic in both shows. As the Spring Festival is approaching fast, people's hopes are to defeat the virus as soon as possible. As the title *With You* or *Together* indicates, "We should work together and fight a war of annihilation 我们同心协力，我们一起打一个歼灭战" (*With You* Episode 1, 0:17:21). Episode 7 of *With You* (0:26:25) also shows creative ways to ensure supplies for the hospitals. One of the doctors is shown giving an interview to the press to help spread the word and secure more equipment. The rhetoric of war and fighting the pandemic is also evident in Episode 13 (0:03:40): "We're comrades in this battle. We live in the same trenches. We'll face the bullets together 咱们是战友，咱们同处一个战壕，共同面对枪林弹雨". These quotes highlight the nature of the pandemic as a battlefield, but they also show that the way to win is through cooperation and standing together as a community.

Sometimes, this community engagement also assumes a political undertone. In *With You*, the role of the CCP is highlighted positively. In Episode 14, some of the patients complain about the conditions in the hospital, such as the sanitary facilities or the cold. This prompts the staff members to take the matters into their own hands and improve the conditions. They claim that "the Party is with you" as they raise the Chinese flag in the main hall of the hospital. The staff members organize activities for the patients to keep them physically healthy and mentally engaged. The hospital functions as a newfound community: "no matter what language or colour, we sail in the same boat, be each other's family, let's stay together 无关语言肤色，同舟共帆，不就是彼此的家人，我们在一起" (*With You* Episode 14, 0:05:48-0:06:30). Another example of how the Chinese flag symbolizes community is at the end of Episode 4 of *Heroes in Harm's Way* (0:41:42), when a worker holds a miniature Chinese flag and kisses it. The flag also represents pride in the nation as exemplified in Episode 5 of *With You* (0:35:00): "I'm proud of my homeland, let the five-star red flag fly free, the dream lights up the way ahead 我为我的祖国而感到骄傲，就让五星红旗自由地飘，有一种理想照亮了迷茫". This song can be interpreted as a reference to President Xi's Chinese Dream 中国梦. The shows encourage patriotism through the use of the flag in the context of the healthcare emergency. This implies that China is with the patients and supports them even in such dark times. Such support is also evident from a financial viewpoint when the patients are told that they do not have to cover any of the medical fees incurred because the Chinese government will take care of it (*With You* Episode 2, 0:07:20).

The community and helping one another play an important role in furthering this idea of patriotism. In Episode 1 of *With You* this is shown in the song that reflects on one's contribution to society:

> There's no difference between life and death. As a human being, we're armed with love to lighten the life of others. If sacrificing my life will save another life, I'd like to leave. There's someone who will always remember – life is the extension of love.
>
> 从来没有生死之分。只是生而为人，总要有颗心来防身才能够照亮他人。如果失去了一个我能换另一个我，离开总会有人记得，生命不正是爱的延伸. (*With You* Episode 1, 0:30:15-0:31:06)

Sacrificing one's life to save someone else is seen as a high virtue. Similarly, *With You* constantly reinforces the idea of a strong city and, by extension, country: "Wuhan will be strong, Hubei will be strong 武汉就能撑住，湖北就能撑住" (*With You* Episode 2, 0:35:02). In Episode 4 (0:31:00), the neighbours encourage one another with similar powerful slogans: "Wuhan, stay strong, China, stay strong 武汉加油，中国加油". In another unique feat of unity, buildings across the country in cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chongqing display encouraging messages: "I love Wuhan. Wuhan will win 我爱湖北，武汉必胜" (*With You* Episode 4, 0:38:50). In Episode 8 (0:31:00), viewers see a moment of silence across the country to honour the dead and staff members of hospitals.

Despite the messages of support and encouragement, *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* do not shy away from showcasing the occasional deviance of those who do not want to follow the rules of strict quarantine in lockdown. In Episode 7 of *Heroes in Harm's Way* (0:18:47), a pregnant woman does not want to leave home. In *With You*, Episodes 9 and 10 focus on an elderly woman who resists isolation in the hospital and is actually successful in escaping this environment, so that staff members have to relocate her. *With You* also touches on smaller moments of resistance. For example, when a couple is trying to escape isolation by jumping over a wall (Episode 19, 0:07:20), or an older gentleman who wants to go for a walk without wearing a protective mask (Episode 19, 0:22:05). While these incidents represent irresponsible behaviour in the face of the pandemic, they are turned into occasions for showcasing the effectiveness of the community workers who are successful in helping the people or convincing them to do their part for society by not endangering others during the pandemic.

With You includes several moments of ordinary people who have become heroes during the emergency. Episodes 3 and 4 focus on a delivery driver, Gu Yong, who becomes a hero as he is brave enough to continue delivering supplies even at the height of the pandemic. He is seen delivering masks to people as well as food to hospital staff. At first he rides a scooter, but later on he also drives a car to transport healthcare workers to and from the hospital. Gu Yong also helps a little girl, Ji Nian, who has recently lost her grandfather to COVID-19 and whose father is missing (*With You* Episode 4). Other examples of help and sacrifice include the doctors and nurses on whose faces viewers can clearly see the marks left by the face masks and shields (*With You* Episode 3). Viewers also learn that the medical staff had to wear diapers, since they had long shifts with no time to go to the bathroom (*With You* Episode 8, 0:16:10). Episode 2 of *With You* (0:29:00) alludes to another moment of sacrifice when the family of a deceased patient donates his body to the hospital for research purposes. This was critical especially in the early stages of the pandemic, to find out more about the disease and how it affected patients. Other examples show

how businesses such as clothing factories repurposed their machinery to produce face masks when they are in short supply (*With You* Episode 17). Episodes 15 and 16 of *With You* details the case of Song Xiaoqiang from Dalian, who is stranded on a train in Wuhan when the lockdown starts and decides to help by working in one of the local hospitals. *Heroes in Harm's Way* develops the same storyline in Episodes 11 and 12. These stories show how ordinary people's lives are thrown into chaos and how they are able to overcome the obstacles they face.

While most scenes are necessarily bleak, with people suffering and with the hospital environment, Wuhan itself is represented as a beautiful and lovely place. Both *Heroes and Harm's Way* and *With You* provide a local flavour of Wuhan by highlighting its landmarks such as the Yellow Crane Tower 黄鹤楼 or the Second Yangtze River Bridge 武汉长江二桥 (*Heroes in Harm's Way* Episode 1, 0:06:35; *With You* Episode 1, 0:02:39-0:03:11). These images recur throughout the shows and are meant to convey a positive image of the city that does not only focus on the horrific events of the pandemic in Wuhan, but that also allows viewers to think of a brighter future. Ma (2021) points out that *With You* "serves the state agenda as well as boosts performing arts in showcasing COVID-19 Triumphalism". Indeed, both TV shows aim at highlighting the aspect of opportunity in "crisis" 危机. While the danger is real, *Heroes in Harm's Way* and *With You* are predominantly interested in presenting how characters are able to confront problems and then emerge as better people. This in turn helps the Chinese media promote images of hope, collaboration, sacrifice, and heroism. Our chosen examples show how TV shows contribute to presenting resilience and encouraging people during the recent pandemic. They are one example of how fictional narratives have the power to affect people's evaluation of China's COVID-19 response.

Conclusion

Our paper explored non-fictional and fictional narratives of COVID-19 of China. The country has adopted soft power strategies to win the "hearts and minds" of global audiences in the context of COVID-19. China has systematically created its own story about the COVID-19 pandemic and its global spread. The country obliged other stakeholders to accept this narrative as the most appropriate one without questioning it. In this way, they have tried to rewrite and own the narratives surrounding the pandemic. COVID-19 has presented China with the chance to revise its soft power and its communication strategies, including the control of the narratives of COVID-19 on the international stage and the promotion of China's contribution to helping other countries. Fully aware that soft power is linked to hard power, China has been building its soft power strategies with health, vaccine, and mask diplomacy. By using this soft power, China has successfully engaged in reinterpreting COVID-19 narratives to suit its own purposes. This image of China as a world power has increasingly been enhanced, in particular with regard to its promise to provide the Chinese vaccines as a public good. In the long run, this management approach to the health crisis has promoted its reputation as a global leader. China has been able to present itself as the most successful nation in containing the virus domestically, and reverse the narrative of being cast as a global health pariah. The fictional representations, in particular, show how China views its own COVID-19 response as successful. Promoting unity in the fight against the pandemic, highlighting the positive role of the CCP, and showcasing ordinary people as heroes invites viewers to see China and its handling of the COVID-19 crisis as a positive example to the world.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
CRISIS AS DANGER AND HOPE—
COVID-19 IN ASIA

Ethics and Ontology

The Pandemic, Ecological Justice, and Zhu Xi's Philosophy

*Seongmin HONG**

Abstract

COVID-19 has brought many changes to society and encouraged mankind to reflect on its civilization. The pandemic has revealed that our health care systems and community solidarity are far more fragile than we believed. It made us rethink the solidarity of human civilization and community, and more fundamentally, reconsider the global ecosystem beyond human society. This paper claims that COVID-19 was an inevitable result of the anthropocentric perspective, and argues that it is necessary to change the perception to an ecological worldview and practice ecological justice in order to solve this situation. First, it analyses the ecological reasons for the regular outbreak of zoonotic diseases, including COVID-19, and then it examines Naess's deep ecology with regard to a fundamental change of perception, but also finds several weaknesses in this. Third, this paper focuses on Zhu Xi's philosophy in order to compensate for the weaknesses of deep ecology. It argues for the importance of human roles and obligations in relation to the safety and health of the environment based on his philosophy, and explains ecological justice by applying his social equality theory to ecology. Finally, it sheds new light on Zhu Xi's theory of investigation of things (*gewu* 格物) as a practical way of implementing ecological justice.

Keywords: pandemic, ecological justice, deep ecology, investigation of things, self-realization

Pandemija, ekološka pravičnost in Zhu Xijeva filozofija

Izvleček

COVID-19 je prinesel številne družbene spremembe in človeštvo spodbudil k razmisleku o njegovi civilizaciji. Pandemija je razkrila, da so naši sistemi zdravstvenega varstva in skupnostna solidarnost veliko krhkejši, kot smo mislili. Primorala nas je v ponoven razmislek o solidarnosti znotraj človeške civilizacije in skupnosti ter v še temeljnejši razmislek o globalnih ekosistemih onkraj človeških družb. Članek trdi, da je bolezen COVID-19 neizogibna posledica antropocentričnega pogleda, in utemeljuje, da je treba za rešitev tega položaja spremeniti naše dojemanje v ekološki svetovni nazor in prakticirati ekološko pravičnost. Članek najprej analizira ekološke razloge za redne izbruhe zoonotičnih bolezni,

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vključno s COVID-19, nato pa prouči Naessovo globinsko ekologijo, s poudarkom na temeljni spremembi dojemanja, pri čemer ugotovi tudi nekaj pomanjkljivosti. Tretjič, članek se osredotoča na Zhu Xijevo filozofijo, da bi nadomestil slabosti globinske ekologije. Na podlagi njegove filozofije utemeljuje pomen človekovih vlog in obveznosti v odnosu do varnosti in zdravja okolja ter ekološko pravičnost pojasnjuje z uporabo njegove teorije družbene enakosti v ekologiji. Na koncu na novo osvetli Zhu Xijevo teorijo raziskovanja stvari (*gewu* 格物) kot praktični način vpeljave ekološke pravičnosti.

Ključne besede: pandemija, ekološka pravičnost, globinska ekologija, raziskovanje stvari, samorealizacija

Introduction

COVID-19 brought many unexpected changes to society. People's meetings were controlled, cities were shut down, unemployment rose and community trust was broken. Unfounded hatred and violence against Asians also broke out in many places. Fortunately, a vaccine has been developed and is being used, but the fear and anxiety are not diminishing because mutated viruses, including the delta variant, appear one after another. Moreover, even if COVID-19 is over, no one can guarantee that there will be no more new viruses that cause a pandemic. The anxiety and danger to society may persist for a very long time. This is worrisome, in that it is a sign of a serious and unprecedented rift in the human community.

If these concerns are even a little true, what we need to worry about now is not the superficial question of how to combat the COVID-19 virus. We need to find a fundamental way to strengthen the solidarity of the human community in order to lead a social life without problems, despite the constant threat of the virus. In particular, considering that these infectious diseases are not selectively transmitted to a specific country or society, but threaten the entire planet, it is necessary to be clearly aware that all human beings are under one fate and have a sense of camaraderie toward them all. In response to COVID-19, Rošker says:

> This emergency demonstrates that we live in an extremely interdependent world. A thorough recognition of our vital mutual connections and common threats can certainly help us to find a way out of the global crisis. On the other hand, a failure to value our tight interconnections may even prolong its dangers instead of eliminating them. … we must spread the awareness that we are all parts of global humanity, and hence we are all in the same boat: we sink or swim together. Therefore, it is also

> necessary to nurture a sensitivity and empathy for our fellow human beings who might be suffering. (Rošker 2021, 65, 74)

Her exhortation is timely and insightful. In order to end COVID-19, or even if that cannot be achieved, then for the safety of all, the path we must take is the solidarity and cooperation of all mankind. The members of that solidarity must be all the people of the world, transcending nationalities, cultures, religions, and classes. If even some of us do not enter the safe zone of quarantine, the threat of COVID-19 will never end and can spread again. The safety of individuals will be guaranteed only when the scope of solidarity for quarantine is expanded to the fullest extent to all mankind.

Furthermore, if we think about it more fundamentally and comprehensively, it seems that the scope of solidarity should be expanded beyond mankind. It is necessary to expand the scope of our community to nature and consider solidarity with the ecological world. This is because viruses do not occur between human beings, but at the point where we and nature come into contact, and are created when we invade the ecological habitat of wild animals. Therefore, only when we pay attention to and preserve ecosystems can we fundamentally prevent a resurgence of this or another virus. In short, only when the scope of solidarity extends beyond mankind to the entire global ecosystem can we truly be safe from the novel viruses such as COVID-19.

This article attempts to assert that the fundamental prescription for us to get out of the pandemic is the formation of an ecological community. The prescription for this should include not only a shift in perception towards an ecological worldview, but also the practice of ecological justice. The term 'ecological justice' means the state in which all beings are in harmony while living their own lives contentedly without infringement, in other words, *suum cuique* in ecology. Obviously, in order to form and maintain a social community, a form of justice that guarantees 'to each what rightfully belongs to him or her' in the community must be adopted. Likewise, for an ecological community in which humans and nature coexist, a form of ecological justice that enables all beings to live their own optimal lives must be prioritized. This requires efforts to understand each living thing in an ecosystem in detail and treat them appropriately, away from anthropocentric, selfish and biased interests. To this end, this paper will focus on Zhu Xi's (朱熹) philosophy. The reason for paying attention to this is that he not only constructed an elaborate metaphysics of life, but also presented it as an ecological ethics in the real world and emphasized the concrete, practical actions people can take for ecological welfare.

This article will first look at the ecological reasons for the steady outbreak of zoonotic diseases, including COVID-19, and will then examine Naess's concept of deep ecology with regard to making the fundamental change toward an ecological worldview. Third, in order to address the weaknesses of Naess's argument, it will examine our roles and moral obligations as ecological subjects for the safety and health of the whole ecological community by focusing on Zhu's philosophy. Fourth, it will illuminate the idea of ecological justice by applying Zhu's social equality theory to ecology. Finally, it will elucidate Zhu's theory of investigation of things (*gewu* 格物) as a practical way of implementing ecological justice.

The Ecological Cause of the Pandemic

The recently invented COVID-19 vaccines could be an exit from the dark tunnel of the pandemic. In addition, various medicines being developed around the world show hope that we will completely overcome COVID-19. Already, the UK and other European countries have lifted social restrictions through the use of vaccination, while Singapore and China have eased controls, too. South Korea is also expected to declare "With CORONA" around November 2021 and relax restrictions. Is the pandemic thus coming to an end? Probably not. This relief and optimism are only limited to COVID-19. If we think about when a new coronavirus will break out and plunge the world into a pandemic again, the relief of today will not last long. This is not pessimism, but a predictable fact given the recent history of coronaviruses.

In November 2002, SARS emerged in Guangdong Province (廣東省), China, which shocked Asian countries. In March 2009, an outbreak of swine flu influenza in San Diego, USA, terrified the world, In April 2012, MERS-CoV occurred in Saudi Arabia, causing many casualties, and in December 2019, COVID-19 in Wuhan (武漢), China, plunged the world into the darkness of today's pandemic. In fact, new viruses are discovered every 3-6 years, but mankind is not prepared for them at all.

One biologist predicts that the cycle of infectious diseases will become shorter in the future, and new ones will emerge every three years or even each year (Choi 2020, 32). Although vaccines and medicines for COVID-19 may be short-term prescriptions, they cannot be a fundamental and structural solution (Ha 2020, 101). Are consecutive contagions a fatal disaster that cannot be stopped by human power? It doesn't seem so. If you think about the reasons why coronaviruses have been spreading one after another, you can see that this is because of human error. Because these diseases are closely related to the development of human civilization.

All the diseases that pose a great threat to mankind are zoonotic, coming from animals. The Black Death, which killed 20 million people between 1347 and 1351, came from rat fleas; the Spanish flu of 1918, which killed 25–50 million people, from pigs and birds. H1N1 influenza is believed to have originated from pigs, the Ebola virus from bats and gorillas, MERS-CoV from bats and camels (Quammen 2012, 30), and COVID-19 from bats and pangolins, although the details are not yet known.

The origins of these epidemics that caused so much death are all animals. Animal viruses are transmitted and transformed in human beings, causing serious damage. However, if an ecosystem operates stably, then pathogens are only preserved in the body of the host without any problems. But when there is a change in an ecosystem, hidden pathogens are exposed and become the cause of infectious diseases. Rapid changes in ecosystems come from mankind. As we destroy ecosystems and invade animal habitats, people and animals naturally encounter each other, and in the process the latent viruses in the host's body are released and can cause disease.

It is an optical illusion or myopia that defines today's pandemic as only due to a sort of virus from the natural world named COVID-19. Considering the outbreak of the pandemic and resulting global fear, we can see that it has more comprehensive causes and conditions. It is not difficult to understand that all zoonotic diseases, including COVID-19, were caused by the production-consumption structure of modern industrial civilization and capitalism. According to the UN Environmental Programme, zoonotic diseases originate entirely from human actions. For example, deforestation and other land use changes, illegal and poorly regulated wildlife trade, climate change, antimicrobial resistance, intensified agriculture, and livestock production, are all factors of that increase the number of zoonotic diseases (UNEP 2020). In addition, Lee Humber analyses the impact of modern industrial factory farming on the outbreak of the virus. According to him, the genetic monoculture of animals that has developed for increased productivity and ease of management removes the firebreak of immunity, and species without diversity are vulnerable to viruses, making common zoonotic diseases spread faster and stronger (Humber 2020). In short, industrial practices inherent in the capitalist mode of production, now globalized and intensified by 50 years of neoliberalism, are actively breeding more and more virulent and deadly pathogens. This pattern of epidemics is not accidental (ibid.), and the consequences of destroying ecosystems to achieve human goals have returned as a disaster (Im 2006, 76).

> As ecosystems were destroyed due to industrialization and land development, the nature inhabited by wild animals such as bats was transformed into farmland, pastureland, factory sites, and residential areas, drawing wild

> animals closer to the realm of human activity. The destruction of ecosystems, such as the destruction of forest resources and clearing and cultivation of native land, also expands contact areas with wild animals, increasing the possible spread of zoonotic diseases. In addition, as the population density increases due to urbanization and the movement of the population increases due to the development of transportation, infectious diseases can spread more rapidly and to a wider area (Jeong 2020, 213).

Industrialism and capitalism use anything as a production material for profit. They regard natural ecosystems only as materials and resources, and consume them until they are exhausted. Developmentalism has focused only on short-sighted interests, and even turned the ecosystem into a resource, with the consequences now being seen. In this respect, the virus should be defined as a social disease, not just a biological one, and the treatment and prevention of the virus should be recognized as a political and economic problem, not simple a medical one (Kim 2020, 125).

So, what about sustainable development? But this would also be a "shallow" fiction. Although sustainable development theory has brought environmental and ecological problems into the debate, its focus remains on development. This so-called "environment-friendly" development theory regards development as the top priority, and any ecological and environmental problem as secondary. Such a theory runs the risk of being employed as logic to justify development at all costs. But sustainable development theory also remains based on the anthropocentric viewpoint, in that it is centred on the prioritization of man's exclusive interests at the expense of the ecosystem as a whole. Ecological theory is rooted in the perception of man and nature as equal beings. Viewed from this standpoint, any sustainable development theory that seeks to develop and preserve nature based on man's needs cannot be regarded as ecological or as having ecological ethics (Hong 2011, 17). Therefore, it is necessary to change the very fundamental perception of ecology and people.

So, why do people do these things that harm the environment and ultimately themselves? The root cause lies in the view of nature. The medieval historian Lynn White has suggested that the emphasis in Judaism and Christianity on the transcendence of God above nature and the dominion of humans over nature has led to a devaluing of the natural world, and a subsequent destruction of its resources for utilitarian ends (White 1967, 1203–7; Tucker and Grim 1998, xxv). His words may go too far, but the impact of Western thinking on the destruction of the environment is by no means small.

Tu Weiming points to the Western Enlightenment mentality as the main culprit in the destruction of the environment. According to him, the Enlightenment mentality underlies the rise of the modern West: science and technology, industrial capitalism, a market economy, democratic polity, mass communication, and professional organizations. Furthermore, liberty, equality, human rights, the dignity of the individual, respect for privacy, government for, by, and of the people, and due process of law are genetically related to the Enlightenment mentality. However, there is a dark side to the modern West as well. The Enlightenment mentality, fuelled by the Faustian drive to explore, know, conquer, and subdue, has persisted as the reigning ideology of the modern West. As such, modern Western hegemonic progress may entail inequality, self-interest, and individual greed (Tu 1998, 3–5).

In this sense, Thomas Berry argues that the magnitude of destructive industrial processes is so great that we must initiate a radical rethinking of the myth of progress and of humanity's role in it. He asserts that we have become autistic in our interactions with the natural world because we are locked in our own egocentric perspectives and short-sighted needs (Berry 1988; Tucker and Grim 1998, xvii). The poet Wendell Berry said:

> We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. (Berry in Keenan 2018, 187)

What is now required of mankind is a full and thorough self-reflection and a transition to a completely new awareness. What is ecological nature to us? Do we deserve to own, use, consume and destroy it? Where will we live after ecological nature is destroyed? Unless we change our perception of ecological nature, understand the world anew, and pursue an ecological life, we will never escape the pandemic. Rošker said:

> The face of such a crisis, ethical decision-making becomes crucial, because science alone cannot tell us what values we should prioritize. The important decisions in this context are clearly ethical and not scientific. (Rošker 2021, 64)

Her words can also be applied to changing our attitudes towards ecology. We can no longer regard ecology only as object beings and natural resources separate from humans and entrust it to Enlightenment science. Ecology must be regarded as an ethical object rather than a scientific object, and it must be treated as an object of ethical practice rather than scientifically explored and developed.

Deep Ecology and Neo-Confucianism

What is ecology to us? Ecology is concerned with the idea of the Greek *oikos*, or "house", as in *oikumene*, "inhabited world". A house is a "dwelling" in a broad sense: an individual, social, and cosmic sense of house is *oikos* (Ro 1998, 170). In this respect, ecology can be said to be the cradle and dwelling place of mankind, which cannot be separated from human life. If we do not have ecology, we are just homeless wanderers. What kind of epistemological shift is needed to recognize the natural environment as a home for human life rather than a usable resource? What is the metaphysical basis for the shift? Western intellectuals are urging a comprehensive change in the perception of ecology. Various views of environmental ethics on ecology and life have been raised, and the ecological movement is actively developing based on them. Among them, I would like to pay attention to deep ecology. Because it insists on the most radical and thorough shift in perspective on ecology, deep ecology will lead to the most fundamental reflection and transformation for the resolution of the current ecological destruction and pandemic, even if it has some unrealizable aspects.

Lovelock redefines the ontological meaning of ecology. According to him, the Earth itself is a living planet, which he called Gaia. Despite the continued increase in entropy, the Earth has maintained homeostasis for the past 4 billion years, because it is able to maintain its own life in an appropriate equilibrium state, which is evidence that it is a living planet. The Earth itself can be said to be a single complex life form that includes the biosphere, atmosphere, ocean and soil. And humans are only a small species that parasitize life on Earth, and do not have any leading authority. Nevertheless, human beings have harmed the Earth, their mother, with industrialization and urbanization. As such, Lovelock argues, humans are just pests, "intelligent fleas" (see Lovelock 2000). Lovelock uses this view to criticize human activities that degrade and pollute the living planet. Whether intended metaphorically or literally, the Gaia hypothesis is a powerful source of ethical arguments in favour of protecting the natural environment (Desjardins 2013, 170).

Naess also urges us to completely change our perception of ecology. He argues that humankind should no longer perceive ecology shallowly as a resource, but should understand it "deeply" as the basis of mankind and the mother of all life. He sees individual beings as related to each other and belonging to the Earth as a huge single life. This is a "a kind of vast whole" created by all beings intertwining with each other through a complex network of relationships, so Naess defines the Earth as a "relational total field" (Naess 1989, 200). He likens individual beings to water droplets and the Earth to an ocean of life, asserting that "all Life is fundamentally one". Individual beings are thus nothing but cells of the vast living organism of nature, including humans (Barnhill 2001).

According to Naess, individual living beings coexist in a relationship with each other on the huge base of life called the Earth. There is no independent thing. To exist is to be related, and without a relationship, there is no existence. In this sense, Naess asserts that no living beings on Earth have a position superior to others, in that all beings are evenly related and coexist. All things are in an absolutely equal relationship. All beings are equal and have equal rights. Such rights are absolute and cannot be violated or deprived by anything, and no one can possess or control any other being (Naess 1995, 223). This can be said to be biotic egalitarianism, and thus Naess argues that human beings have no right to control or use nature at all, but rather that we should be reduced to a smaller population, minimizing interference with the natural world (ibid. 1998, 196–200). His thoughts, needless to say, urge deep reflection on the modern Western worldview, which places humans in a dominant position and ordered to use all other living things in nature (Devall and Sessions 1985, 65–66).

But Naess's argument seems to be insisting that we must give up our identity and status as human beings and return to primitive nature. Is this possible? Here, Naess calls us to a new ethical attitude. This converts human desires into ecological concerns so that we become ecological ethical subjects. He calls this "Self-realization". According to Naess, the modern view of the self takes the individual's selfish desire for granted and regards struggles or agreements with others as legitimate, but we must now abandon this attitude and regard all living beings as ourselves. When we deeply recognize the ecological fact that all living things are closely interwoven within one network, we can abandon our selfish and destructive desire to conquer nature and regard all beings as one body. In other words, the modern "self" must be transformed into an ecological "Self". This Self can be realized through identification between the self and the other. Identification means that we regard other living beings as our own bodies, and either embrace them within ourselves or dwell within them. Through this process, the self is transformed from an egoistic, isolated, and atomic self, to an altruistic, interdependent, and holistic Self. Naess argues that the preservation of biodiversity in nature and the symbiosis of all living beings can be achieved through Self-realization (Naess 1989, 81–85). He describes the state of the ecological great Self-realization through the identification of the self and other as follows:

> Early in life, the social "self" is sufficiently developed that we do not prefer to eat a big cake all by ourselves. We share the cake with our friends and our nearest. We identify with these people sufficiently to see our joy in their joy, and our disappointments in theirs. Now is the time to share with all life on our maltreated Earth through a deepening identification with all life-forms and the greater units: the ecosystems and Gaia, this fabulous old planet of ours. (Naess 2005, 526)

If this is the case, however, how is a Self-realization that identifies the self and the other concretely practiced? Naess defines emotions as crucial in leading us into caring for others, and emphasizes empathy and compassion. He argues that our empathy should reach not only humans but also all living things on Earth, as we have an ethical obligation to care for all beings. He states that he felt compassion when he saw a dying flea in a chemical lab, which originated from a feeling of identification, and stresses that this is the basis of solidarity between human beings and ecosystems (ibid., 518).

Naess's ideas are not unfamiliar in the East. The Chinese philosophy of life and relational ethics overlaps with the claims of deep ecology. For example, Chinese philosophy represents a life-centred cosmology defined by an all-prevailing instinct for life and survival, a holistic worldview predicated upon an organic wholeness, a relational ontology and interpersonal empathy, and Self-realization through the community, among other things (Rošker 2021, 67–71). These ideas are not limited to human society, but can be widely applied to all beings in ecosystem.

Confucianism has significant intellectual and spiritual resources to offer in the emerging discussions regarding attitudes toward nature, the role of people, and environmental ethics. Its dynamic, organismic worldview, its vitalist understanding of *qi* (氣), its respect for the vast continuity of life, its sense of compassion for suffering, its desire to establish the grounds for just and sustainable societies, its emphasis on holistic, moral education, and its appreciation for the embeddedness of life in interconnected concentric circles, are only some examples of the rich resources of the Confucian tradition in relation to ecological issues (Tucker and Berthrong 1998, xxxv).

In particular, Neo-Confucianists were convinced that all things in the universe were originally one body in terms of metaphysics, and emphasized that benevolence (*ren* 仁)[1], the ultimate value of Confucianism, means that all beings achieve

1 Kuwako Toshio 桑子敏雄 proposes that in the context of ecology, he will translate *ren* as benevolence, not humanity or humaneness. This is not because benevolence is a satisfactory translation, but because humanity or humaneness is inappropriate in relation to ecology. The term "humanity in Heaven and Earth" is awkward and contradictory. Kuwako says he will not use the translation of humanity or humaneness to show the anti-anthropocentrism of Neo-Confucianism (Kuwako 1998, 154). Moreover, it may be mistaken for something related to the humanism of the Western tradition. I agree with his idea and translate *ren* as benevolence in this paper.

their will to live and become one by interacting with each other smoothly. Cheng Hao 程顥 clearly explained the meaning of benevolence by comparing it to a paralyzed body. He said:

> The man of *ren* regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body. To him there is nothing that is not himself. Since he has recognized all things as himself, can there be any limit to his benevolence? As in the case of paralysis of the four limbs, the vital force no longer penetrates them, and therefore they are no longer parts of the self. (Cheng Hao in Chan 1963, 530)

According to the metaphysics of Neo-Confucianism, the essential state of the self is oneness with all things, and the purpose of cultivation is to identify all things with the self. In this sense, Self-realization constitutes a great Self that encompasses all things within itself. Zhang Zai 張載 regarded Heaven and Earth and all beings as one family and one body in *Ximing* 西銘 (*The Western Inscription*), and asserted Self-realization in "enlarging the mind" (*daxin* 大心). He says:

> By enlarging one's mind, one can enter into all the things in the world. If anything is not yet entered into, there is still something outside the mind. The mind of ordinary people is limited to the narrowness of what is seen and what is heard. The sage, however, fully develops his nature and does not allow what is seen or heard to fetter his mind. He regards everything in the world to be his own self. (Chan 1963, 513)

His argument can be said to be consistent with Naess's concept of Self-realization.

Furthermore, it is also in line with Naess's idea that Neo-Confucianists emphasize empathy in the process of identification. According to Neo-Confucian thinking, since all living beings were created by Heaven, they all have a will to live equally and a noble right to live their own lives well. Therefore, Neo-Confucianists seek to realize the will of Heaven by helping the lives of all things without infringing upon them. Empathy is the impulse that puts them into practice. It is the same as Mencius's "the mind which cannot bear to see the suffering of others" (*burenzhixin* 不忍之心) and is mainly expressed as compassion for the weak. For example, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 did not cut the grass growing outside his window, because he thought the feeling of the grass and his mind were the same. Zhang Zai heard the cry of a donkey and said the same thing (Cheng and Cheng 1981, 60).[2] And Cheng Yi 程頤 rebuked the young emperor for breaking branches on spring days,

2 周茂叔窗前草不除去. 問之, 云與自家意思一般. 子厚觀驢鳴, 亦謂如此.

saying that "You must not break branches without any reason" (ibid., 342).[3] Wang Yangming 王陽明 is perhaps the most vivid example of empathy and Self-realization. He felt compassion for weak animals as well as inanimate objects (tiles and stones shattered and crushed) and identified with them. Wang emphasizes that seeing all things as one's own body is Self-realization, and that such a person is a great man (*daren* 大人) and benevolent man (*renzhe* 仁者).[4] All of these examples can today be reinterpreted as the ecological attitude.

We need not accuse these earlier thinkers of unscientific animism. They were not unscientific, but ethical. The reason Neo-Confucianists felt compassion for trivial animals, grass, and even broken tiles was not because they believed that spirits reside in these things, but because they wanted to treat these things with a moral mind. A view of the world cannot and should not be solely scientific. In today's ecological crisis, as Rošker noted, important decisions are clearly ethical and not scientific.

Deep ecology and Neo-Confucianism are similar in many ways. Both Naess and Neo-Confucianism emphasize that we should identify with both the self and other, and should feel compassion and empathy for the other, and further stress that Self-realization and cosmic solidarity can be achieved when those feelings are expanded to infinity. In short, the ecology of Naess and Neo-Confucianism will enable eco-ethical practice of caring for all living beings in the ecosystem, as well as mitigating the harmful effects of indiscriminately taking resources and destroying nature.

However, it should not be overlooked that there are some clear differences between them. Deep ecology is by no means perfect, and has been criticized in many ways. For example, biotic egalitarianism is criticized for denigrating human's status in the natural world and negating the value of cultural human beings. This is not found in Neo-Confucianism, which instead focuses on the role of human beings as ecological subjects. Humans are the helpers of the ecology that help all beings to live well. Neo-Confucianism did not believe that nature and humans were separated or opposed in the first place, but that human efforts further enlarged the sphere of life of ecological nature and strengthened its vitality. On the other hand, Naess still did not get out of the Enlightenment frame of mind that humans and nature are opposed to each other, so he thought that the realm of humans should be reduced for the sake of ecology. This is unacceptable in Neo-Confucianism. As discussed in detail later, Neo-Confucianism emphasizes the necessity of human beings as practitioners of ecological well-being. This is the main difference between deep ecology and Neo-Confucianism.

3 一日講罷未退, 上忽起, 憑檻戲析梛枝. 先生進曰: 方春發生, 不可無故摧折. 上不悅.

4 See, Wang Yangming, Daxuewen 大學問 (*Inquiry on the Great Learning*) (Chan 1963, 659).

Furthermore, Naess's method of ecological practice is not perfect. Empathy and identification are very important in that they are the motives and driving forces of ethical practice, but these alone cannot be a complete and successful practice. Empathy tends to be ambiguous, capricious, and arbitrary. In addition, it is possible to mis-empathize with the other's situation, and the empathizer may treat the other unilaterally the way he feels. How can we be sure that human empathy about other living things is always correct, and that human behaviour will be always performed in the right way? If people's empathy and behaviour are wrong, their concerns and treatment will result in destroying nature, and the bad consequences will affect humans again.

In this respect, empathy must be objective and reasonable, and for these humans must become appropriate empathizers. To this end, Neo-Confucianism emphasizes the necessity of self-cultivation and suggests two methods. The first is internal cultivation, which is to maintain reverence (*jujing* 居敬) that makes the mind of the empathizer impartial without selfishness. Keenan sheds light on the ecological significance of maintaining reverence. According to him, one can achieve a form of personal identification with other living things through this practice (Keenan 2018, 199), because reverence clarifies the human mind without selfish desire and unifies it with the principles of Heaven, and so the empathizer can form one body with all things without self-centred bias. In this sense, the Cheng-Zhu School (程朱學派) placed great importance on maintaining reverence. The second method is external cultivation, which is to investigate things (*gewu* 格物), as this makes the empathizer understand the other correctly and treat them appropriately. Each being wants to live in their own way of life, but if the empathizer treats them according to his or her own feelings without an accurate understanding of their nature and situation, this can lead to unnecessary interference or even violence. And the result will again affect human beings. Therefore, the investigation of things is essential for appropriate empathy and moral practice, and this will be explained in detail later (see, chap. "Investigation of Things and Self-Realization").

The Mission of Humans: Realization of Ecological Justice

Naess sought to demote the status of human being as rulers of the ecology. He thought that the ecology would recover to its optimum state only when people ceased to invade and dominate it and come down to an equal position with other beings. But Zhu did not think so. He stressed the active practice of human beings realizing the will of Heaven and Earth. Since Heaven and Earth have the will to give birth to and grow all things, human beings must help them to realize that will to the fullest. In short, the mission of humans is "to participate and assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth" (*canzanhuayu* 參贊化育).

But what does it mean to participate and assist in this? Cheng Yi explained that people simply conform to the laws of nature with an attitude of sincerity (*cheng* 誠), but not actually assisting Heaven and Earth (Cheng and Cheng 2002, vol. 11).[5] According to him, there is nothing humans have to do for the prosperity of all things, and there is no important position of humans in the ecosystem. Humans are merely bystanders of nature. Zhu, however, opposes his idea.

> *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*The Doctrine of the Mean*) states "The sage assists in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth." Human beings are located between Heaven and Earth, although the trinity serve the same purpose, they have different tasks. There are things that human beings can do, but Heaven and Earth cannot do in the transforming and nourishing process. For example, Heaven gives birth to all things, but ploughing and sowing the fields require human effort. Water can moisten all things, but irrigation must be done using human power. Fire can burn all things, but making a fire with firewood must use human power. "Controlling all things and complementing each other" (*caichengfuxiang* 財成輔相) is something that human beings must do. What about this is not assisting Heaven and Earth? Master Cheng said, "It is not actually assisting Heaven and Earth", and that it is actually wrong. (Zhu 1986, vol. 64)[6]

While the role of Heaven and Earth is to give birth to and make all things live, the role of human beings is to help the living beings fully realize their will to live. With the help of people, all living beings can become more satisfied and prosperous. The flourishing of all things is the original will of Heaven and Earth, but it cannot be achieved alone. For this reason, humans must help Heaven and Earth to realize and expand their will. From this point of view, the status and role of human beings are very important in Zhu's ecological cosmology, as they are nurturers who look after and care for the creatures of the ecosystem on behalf of Heaven and Earth.

5 至誠可以贊天地之化育，則可以與天地參贊者. 參贊之義，先天而天弗違，後天而奉天時之謂也. 非謂贊助，只有一箇誠何助之有.

6 "贊天地之化育." 人在天地中間，雖只是一理，然天人所爲，各自有分，人做得底，卻有天做不得底. 如天能生物，而耕種必用人；水能潤物，而灌溉必用人；火能熯物，而薪爨必用人. 裁成輔相，須是人做，非贊助而何？程先生言："'參贊'之義，非謂贊助." 此說非是.

Zhu's thoughts, however, should not be mistaken for anthropocentrism. The fact that he emphasized the role of human beings does not mean that he defined them as owners and users of all things. The role of people is only to help all things live contentedly, not to exploit and destroy them. While Naess argues that for the purpose of restoring optimal ecology people must be driven out of the centre of ecology, Zhu argues that human action is necessary for this purpose. Zhu's anthropology is markedly different from the anthropocentrism of the West.

Furthermore, Zhu emphasizes that the existential purpose and ethical obligation of human beings are the flourishing of the entire ecosystem. Human beings can fulfil their purpose of existence only when they faithfully realize the will of Heaven and Earth, which is nothing other than achieving the flourishing and satisfaction of all beings in the ecosystem. *Zhongyong* said: "Sincerity is not only the completion of one's own self, it is that by which all things are completed" (Chan 1963, 108). In this sense, the Self-realization must imply the realization of the other. As Zhu says:

> To fully realize another person's life (*jinren* 盡人) is to treat each person appropriately, whether virtuous or mean, whether dying young or living long, so that every being can acquire an optimal abode (*gedeqisuo* 各得其所). To fully realize another being's life is to treat each being appropriately, regardless of being a bird, animal, insect, fish, grass, or tree, so that every being can live an optimal life (*gedeqiyi* 各得其宜). (Zhu 1986, vol. 64)[7]

Zhu's words have several implications. The first is biotic egalitarianism. As creatures of Heaven and Earth, all beings have an equal right to live their lives satisfactorily. Second, however, is the diversity of lives. All beings live their own way of life, and each way must be respected. Third, human beings are responsible for all of them. The human duty is to help all beings live optimal lives because humans are the surrogate nurturers of Heaven and Earth. Fourth, human beings should know the patterns of each being's life in detail and treat each one appropriately. For this, Zhu says that people should investigate the principles of each being's life (*qiongjiqili* 窮極其理), and should help them to fully realize their lives in accordance with those principles (*jinqili* 盡其理). In short, Zhu argues for biotic egalitarianism similar to Naess. However, unlike Naess he emphasizes the role and duty of human beings as well as the diversity of beings, then argues that the role of humans is to observe the differences of all beings and treat them accordingly.

7 至於盡人, 則凡或仁或鄙, 或夭或壽, 皆有以處之, 使之各得其所. 至於盡物, 則鳥獸蟲魚, 草木動植, 皆有以處之, 使之各得其宜.

It would be an ideal state not only for human society but also for the entire ecosystem that all beings lived their lives happily without interference. This is an appropriate (*yi* 宜) and harmonious (*he* 和) state. Xunzi 荀子 believed that such a state could be realized through righteousness (*yi* 義). He emphasized that because there is righteousness in mankind, society is constituted, and all living beings, including human beings as well as animals and plants, can live lives worthy of their true natures, in the ideal state of "happy symmetry" (Ivanhoe 1991).[8]

According to Chen Lai 陳來, the word righteousness (義) has two meanings. One is "appropriateness" (宜) and the other is "to restrict" or "to judge" (Chen 2020). In short, the word righteousness (義) means a comfortable and appropriate state (宜), and at the same time it also means the determination and restrictions needed to achieve that state. As Zhu says, "righteousness is the determination of the mind and the appropriateness of the situation" (Zhu 2003, 201).[9] But what is the appropriateness of the situation? Zhu explains it with a "measuring square" (*xieju*, 絜矩):

> If a superior wants to take care of his family (*xiaodi* 孝弟), then of course, subordinates also want to take care of their family. The superior must ensure their survival so that the subordinates can satisfy themselves the need to care for the family. So, it can be called the Way of the measuring square. If, against their conscience, they voluntarily collect heavy taxes and extort the people's property, so that they cannot fulfil their desire to take care of their own families, that is injustice. (Zhu 1986, vol. 16)[10]

Daxue 大學 (*The Great Learning*) presents the Way of the measuring square as the method to make the world peaceful (*pingtianxia* 平天下). Zhu interprets "to make peace" (*ping* 平) as "to make equal" (*junping* 均平) (Zhu 1986, vol. 16).[11] According to Zhu, the way to make the world peaceful begins with equal distribution of resources to ensure the all beings can survive. He argues that all human beings should be able to equally satisfy their family's survival needs regardless of their position, and that superiors must satisfy the people's needs. This is because it is a basic need for survival that cannot be violated. In the desire to live life in a family community, there can be no discrimination between upper and lower

8 According to Ivanhoe (1991), Xunzi is similar to Hobbes, but unlike Hobbes, Xunzi opposed human's reckless development of nature and tried to achieve a happy symmetry with ecosystems.

9 義者, 心之制・事之宜也.

10 上面人旣自有孝弟, 下面民亦有孝弟, 只要使之自遂其孝弟之心於其下, 便是絜矩. 若拂其良心, 重賦横歛以取之, 使他不得自遂其心, 便是不方.

11 平天下, 謂均平也.

status. For Zhu, social justice is a condition in which everyone can enjoy their own life with equal guarantees of survival. This state is appropriate, and is the situation in which righteousness is realized.

Confucianism always regards righteousness and interest as antagonistic, and warns that interest harms righteousness and harmony. But this is a misunderstanding. The interests that Confucians warned of were taking excessive profits beyond the fair portion, and the legitimate interests necessary for survival were perceived as righteous and harmonious. In other words, the fair share that individuals must have for a humane life must be satisfied, and this will then achieve a harmonious society, as Zhu emphasizes:

> *Zhouyi* 周易 (*The Book of Change*) said "Benefiting creatures, the superior man is fit to exhibit the harmony of all that is right (利物足以和義)". This means that there will be no disharmony in its righteousness if all beings can all benefit from it. Righteousness means limiting and cutting, so it can be seen as harming harmony. But only righteousness allows all things to be proper in each other, not to interfere with each other, and not to infringe on one another, so that all beings gain their share and harmonize. (Zhu 1986, vol. 68)[12]

Zhu believed that harmony in society could be realized only when all beings could fully enjoy their own appropriate interests. To do this, we need a righteousness that protects the proper share of all. It can be said that righteousness is the basis for distributing profits fairly and creating harmony in society, and thus Zhu asserts "there is no justice unless it benefits all beings" (Zhu 1986, vol. 6).[13]

Zhu's concept of righteousness can be applied to elucidate ecological justice. The ideal state of ecology can be said to be a "happy symmetry" in which all beings are in joyful harmony while living their own lives contentedly without interference. This can be defined as a state of ecological justice. Perhaps anthropocentrists would ask: Do all things in nature have the right to live their lives satisfactorily? Where does that right come from? They would argue that if all things did not have such a right, there would be no ecological justice. To this, Zhu would answer that the right to life in all things is equally acquired from Heaven and Earth, the survival of all things is the will of Heaven and Earth, and ecological justice is to achieve happy symmetry in the natural world while all beings live their lives

12 利物足以和義者, 使物物各得其利, 則義無不和. 蓋義是斷制裁割底物, 若似不和. 然惟義能使事物各得其宜, 不相妨害, 自無乖戾, 而各得其分之和.

13 利物足以和義, 義者, 事之宜也; 利物, 則合乎事之宜矣. 此句乃翻轉, 義字愈明白, 不利物則非義矣.

satisfactorily. Zhu said, "The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things. In the production of man and things, they receive the mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind" (Chan 1963, 593).[14] According to Zhu, the mind of Heaven and Earth is the will of life, and the minds of man and things are also the same will of life as the mind of Heaven and Earth. The mind and will of all beings can be interpreted as an inviolable right. Therefore, all things can fully achieve their own life. They must not infringe upon the lives of other beings, nor are they infringed upon by other beings. When every being fully achieves their own life, the life of Heaven and Earth can be achieved. This state can be called ecological justice and benevolence. In this respect, Zhu said "Righteousness is appropriateness, and appropriateness is righteousness. It is the sum of righteousness that all things have their own abodes to live appropriately." (Zhu 1986, vol. 68)[15]

Therefore, the mission of humans as ecological subjects is to provide the help and care needed for all beings to live their lives well, and thus fulfil the will of Heaven and Earth. In order to meet human desires and needs, humans should not interfere with other lives recklessly, but rather watch over and protect them.

> When the sage appeared in the world and took care of all beings, he guided their lives according to their own nature. So, none of the creatures, such as insects and plants, did not live according to their nature. People obtained them at the right time and used them according to the rules. At the time of birth in the spring, young pups were not caught, nests were not spilled, and embryos were not killed. After the vegetation was gone, the sage allowed people to go into the mountains to get firewood, after the otters performed ancestral rites with fish, allowed the hunters to go into the lakes, and after the wolves commemorated forebears with animals,[16] allowed to hunt. In this way, the reason that the sage enabled all creatures to live their optimal lives is because he knew in advance the original will of Heaven and Earth to bear and grow all beings. (Zhu 1986, vol. 114)[17]

Zhu's words show his reverent and cautious attitude towards ecology. He introduces the ecological behaviour of the sage as the ideal human, and tells us the ecological norms of how we should behave. The sage understands the lifestyles of

14 天地以生物爲心者也. 而人物之生, 又各得夫天地之心以爲心者也. *Renshuo* 仁說 (*A Treatise on Benevolence)*.

15 義者, 宜也, 宜卽義也; 萬物各得其所, 義之合也.

16 An otter's behavior indicates the end of winter (January on lunar calendar), and a wolf's behavior the onset of winter (from October on) (see Kong Yingda 1999, 6: 375).

17 聖賢出來撫臨萬物, 各因其性而導之. 如昆蟲草木, 未嘗不順其性, 如取之以時, 用之有節: 當春生時'不殀夭, 不覆巢, 不殺胎; 草木零落, 然後入山林; 獺祭魚, 然後虞人入澤梁; 豺祭獸, 然後田獵'. 所以能使萬物各得其所者, 惟是先知得天地本來生生之意.

all beings in nature and helps them live according to this. He fully respects their lives, minimizing encroachment on their ecological areas, even when people need resources. That way, every living being can enjoy their life equally. There is no discrimination of classes, races, or species. All beings are equally respected and related to each other. This egalitarian ecological network would be the image of ecological justice that Zhu imagined.

Investigation of Things and Self-Realization

Naess argues that the attitude toward all objects in the ecological world is the identification between the self and them. For Naess, such identification is perceived as an emotional and aesthetic act rather than an ethically normative one. However, this has a weakness in that it is difficult to secure objectivity and validity in practice. For ecological practice, an intuitive and emotional awareness to realize the wholeness of ecology (like Naess does) is required, but concrete actions to realize that intuitive awareness in the real world are also needed. In other words, it is necessary to explore concrete and realistic ecological sites as well as to understand the wholeness and integrity of lives, because the way various being exist in the real world is different. If one does not investigate them concretely, such an ecology will remain an abstract and vague idea, and its practice in the real world will be blurred. We can consider this issue based on Zhu's theory of "principle is one but manifestations are many" (*liyifenshu* 理一分殊).

> All things have this principle, and the principle comes from one source. However, since the circumstances in which each being lives are different, the functions (*yong* 用) of the principle are different. … (and conversely) All beings each have their own principles and live in different ways, but there is nothing that is not the activity of a single principle in their lives. The sage "explores the principles of all beings and realizes their own natures so that they can reach heaven's mandate" (窮理盡性而至於命). Therefore, the sage explores all the principles of all beings in the world to the very end, so that they can each find their own place to live satisfactorily and arranges even the smallest thing to achieve the optimal state. If there is no thing, there is no principle of it. If there is a thing, there is nothing that a sage does not fully realize of it. Thus, *Zhongyong* said, "If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth." (Zhu 1986, vol. 18)[18]

18 萬物皆有此理, 理皆同出一原. 但所居之位不同, 則其理之用不一. …… 物物各具此理, 而物物各異其用, 然莫非一理之流行也. 聖人所以'窮理盡性而至於命', 凡世間所有之物, 莫

This is an important logic of Neo-Confucian metaphysics that elucidates the relationships between universal and particular, unity and diversity, ultimate idea and concrete norms. In response to Yang Shi's 楊時 question, Cheng Yi 程頤 emphasized that universal moral principles can be expressed in different concrete norms, and that different concrete norms contain universal moral principles. However, Cheng emphasized that benevolence (仁) as a universal moral principle can only be realized by practicing righteousness as a concrete norm of practice (Cheng and Cheng 2001, vol. 9).[19] It was not a deductive practice method that applied a single universal principle to various things, but an inductive method that grasped the universal moral principle in the process of practicing various concrete norms one by one. In other words, while the "one principle" is only a metaphysical premise or ultimate goal, the cultivation and practice to realize it should proceed only in "many manifestations".

Zhu inherited Cheng's thought and made it the basic structure of his own worldview. This applies to his ecological point of view as well. Although the original life of Heaven and Earth is one, that original life is revealed by the lives of numerous beings. Thus, all life is the same and different, different and the same. However, ecological practice consists in carefully examining and caring for various beings, not contemplating the original life of Heaven and Earth. It is necessary to take concrete actions to care for and help various individual beings to live contentedly according to their own way of life, and the original life substance can be realized through the accumulation of those actions. In other words, *canzanhuayu* (參贊化育) is nothing but the practice of righteousness to assist and arrange even the smallest thing to achieve the optimal state. Only when ecological righteousness is practiced can cosmic benevolence be realized.

In this regard, Zhu emphasizes the investigation of things (*gewu* 格物). In general, *gewu* is defined as exploring the objects in the world and understanding their principles. The purpose of the traditional "investigation of principles" was ultimately the task of understanding one's complex relational reality and the conduct fitting such a reality, but beyond such traditional concerns a postmodern investigation of principles would direct itself not only to the pattern of human social relatedness, but also to its embeddedness in the larger network of life and Earth relationships as well. The simple facts that bear on our relational reality and the temporal rates of natural processes call for equally deep reflection and have the power to transform our lives profoundly (Kalton 1998, 97). *Gewu*

不窮極其理, 所以處置得物物各得其所, 無一事一物不得其宜. 除是無此物, 方無此理; 既有此物, 聖人無有不盡其理者. 所謂 '惟至誠贊天地之化育, 則可與天地參者也.

19 In "Letter in Reply to Yang Shi's Letter on the Western Inscription (答楊時論西銘書)".

is also scientific, but this is very different from the modern Western, scientific attitude. Because even science is a symbol of the sentiments of life (Rošker 2021, 67), and its purpose is not to pursue intellectual satisfaction, but to love all beings (*aiwu* 愛物). The ultimate purpose of this is to realize benevolence as the ultimate value. Meng Peiyuan 蒙培元 defines *gewu* as deep ecology (Meng 2010), and this is quite reasonable.

> Since the ancients loved all beings in the nature, they also set a time for cutting down a tree. Since there was no place where their love did not reach even the slightest bit, there was no being which did not benefit from it. the ancients were able to do this because they thoroughly practiced *gewu*. (Zhu 1986, vol. 15)[20]

Zhu's *gewu* is an effort to understand the ecological principles and ways of survival of other beings in order to better consider them in the ecosystem. It is to thoroughly explore the principles of each being and lead the lives of all things to their optimal state. Compassion and empathy are important, but they alone cannot provide adequate consideration for all beings. Only when we investigate closely the lifestyles of living beings in the ecosystems we can treat them appropriately. This attitude seems to be in line with A. Weston's "environmental etiquette". Proposing "multicentrism" (Weston 2004, 30–36), he argues that humans should regard all beings in the ecosystem as the centre of the universe and engage in equal communication with them. According to Weston, people should carefully observe and kindly care for all living things and help them to fully realize their lives. This is the "etiquette" of human being towards ecology, and in this way people can communicate with other beings and participate in the life of the Earth together (ibid., 37–38). Needless to say, Zhu's metaphysics is a kind of centrism, but his attitude towards all beings seems to be close to multicentrism. According to his theory of *liyifenshu* (理一分殊), the world fundamentally converges to one principle, but in the phenomenal world it is revealed by the lives of various beings. Each of these beings has the right to live their life well, and humans have a duty to protect their rights. This is because people are a being of the Trinity with Heaven and Earth, and they regard *canzanhuayu* as their moral duty. It is the moral responsibility that is bestowed upon humankind as the highest embodiment of the moral content of the universe that draws the unique Confucian position on the relation of humankind and the universe (Taylor 1998, 43). *Gewu* is nothing more than a way to protect and realize the rights of all beings.

20 古人愛物，而伐木亦有時，無一些子不到處，無一物不被其澤．蓋緣是格物得盡，所以如此．

Zhu asserts that by clearly understanding other beings we can deeply empathize with them, and by caring for them kindly, we can reach a point where the subject and the object are united.

> The self and the other have never been separated. If we know that the principle of life of beings is like this and treat them according to their natural principles, then we will understand the principle of the unity of the self and the other. All beings in sight now have their own principles of life. Every grass, every tree, every bird, every beast has a principle of life. Grass and trees are born in spring and wither in autumn, want to live and hate to die. We are well aware that all things have the same energy and the same body as us, therefore (Mencius said) "having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die; having heard their dying cries, he cannot bear to eat their flesh", "Do not cut down a tree or kill a small beast unless the time is appropriate", and (*Liji* 禮記 said) "They did not kill pregnant animals, nor those which had not attained to their full growth. They did not throw down nests." This is the principle of the unity of the self and the other. (Zhu 1986, vol. 15)[21]

One of the important methods of *gewu* is inference (*tuilei* 推類). Inference is a method of cognition that grasps the unknown based on what is known and understands the distant based on what is close. This includes the extension of empathy as well as logical reasoning. Zhu emphasizes the need to expand empathy by recognizing that all beings have the same life needs and principles as ourselves. This is the same as Confucius said, "to be able to judge of others by what is nigh in ourselves (*nengjinqupi* 能近取譬)". Therefore, *gewu* does not stop with the search for knowledge, but creates empathy based on that knowledge to feel and care for beings as if they were ourselves. When we fully satisfy the life needs of beings in this way, we become one with them. And if we continue to practice this process, we will eventually reach the point of fully understanding the essence and principle of all beings in the world (*huoranguantong* 豁然貫通). Only then can we experience the ultimate unity (*wanwuyiti* 萬物一體) that fuses nature into us and dissolves us into nature. This is the Self-realization pursued by Zhu, which is the identification and achievement of the great Self, as it were, when the self is expanded to include all beings within the self, while the self resides in all beings.

21 他內外未嘗不合. 自家知得物之理如此, 則因其理之自然而應之, 便見合內外之理. 目前事事物物, 皆有至理. 如一草一木, 一禽一獸, 皆有理. 草木春生秋殺, 好生惡死. ‘仲夏斬陽木, 仲冬斬陰木’, 皆是順陰陽道理. 自家知得萬物均氣同體, ‘見生不忍見死, 聞聲不忍食肉’, 非其時不伐一木, 不殺一獸, ‘不殺胎, 不殀夭, 不覆巢’, 此便是合內外之理.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has brought major changes to society and is encouraging mankind to fundamentally reflect. It has made us rethink why we need civil autonomy and community solidarity. To ensure the safety of individuals and communities, human relationships must now change, education systems, political structures, economic relations, and cultural production must all change as well. However, it will not be easy to cope with the outbreak of fatal viruses just by changing the structure of society. What is more fundamental is that the ecological perception needs to be changed. Clearly, the pandemic is caused by human intervention and destruction of ecology. Without clear awareness of this fact, thorough reflection, and change of perception, a pandemic like COVID-19 will keep happening.

In this paper, in order to urge a fundamental change in the perception of ecology, the practice of ecological justice was considered based on Zhu's philosophy. While agreeing with the transition to ecosophy suggested by Naess, it was argued in this article that the establishment of ecological justice is necessary in terms of practice. Naess's deep ecology has great significance in that it presents an eco-centred worldview while reflecting on the ills of technology and dismantling anthropocentric thinking. Based on the holistic life theory and biotic egalitarianism, he acknowledges the equal value of life for all beings in the ecosystem and tries to prevent humans from selfishly encroaching on nature. He also insists on Self-realization, in which humans escape from the egoistic self, embrace all beings in themselves, and coexist with all living things. This is to transform human beings from technological capitalist subjects to natural ecological subjects, and it is judged to have significance in evoking a fundamental change in the awareness of people and nature, and awakening human moral responsibility and ecological obligations.

However, Naess's argument has several weaknesses. To address these and realize mutual flourishing with ecology, it is necessary to practice ecological justice. This paper looked for ideas about how to achieve this in the Zhu's philosophy, and paper argued as follows based on this: In order to solve the situation in which the inequality of capitalism is prevalent in the entire ecosystem, measures to protect the basic rights of all beings are required. Ecological justice presupposes that the lives of all beings are equal, and thus protects and helps other beings to live their own lives well. This can be said to be the principle of ecological distribution that respects different lifestyles and takes measures so that everyone can fully enjoy their own lives. When ecological justice is realized, the entire ecosystem will be harmonized, and the Self-realization will become possible.

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COVID-19, Digital Tracking Control and Chinese Cosmotechnology

*Jana S. ROŠKER**

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to numerous global problems that can only be solved on a global scale. Especially in light of the good performance of the Sinic region in containing and eliminating the coronavirus, the importance of intercultural dialogue between East and West became even more evident. In this context, this paper explores the role of digital technologies and the underlying ontology of digital objects in China as well as in the wider Sinic region. Indeed, the third millennium, which has just begun and will witness the accelerating trends of global warming and most likely the deepening of the gap between rich and poor, numerous wars, and new pandemics, will certainly be marked by the development of digital technologies. Therefore, the paper investigates the specific features of traditional Sinic perceptions of technology as such, as well as their ideational underpinnings, which certainly influence specific Sinic perceptions of digital objects. This will, I hope, provide us with a better understanding of the cultural conditionality of differences and commonalities in the global processes of digitalization and their ontological underpinnings, so that we can pay more attention to both the dangers and the opportunities that cross-cultural interactions in this area can offer us.

Keywords: digital technology, ontology of digital objects, China and the Sinic region, COVID-19

COVID-19, digitalno upravljani nadzor in kitajska kozmotehnologija

Izvleček

Pandemija COVID-19 je pokazala na številne globalne probleme, ki jih lahko rešimo samo na globalni ravni. Zlasti v luči dobrih rezultatov siniške regije pri zajezitvi in odpravljanju koronavirusa je postal pomen medkulturnega dialoga med »vzhodom« in »zahodom« še toliko bolj jasen. V tem okviru se pričujoči članek osredotoča na raziskavo vloge digitalnih tehnologij in ontologije, na kateri temeljijo digitalni objekti na Kitajskem, pa tudi v širši siniški regiji. Tretje tisočletje, ki se je šele dobro začelo in v katerem bomo soočeni z vse hujšimi posledicami globalnega segrevanja, s poglabljanjem brezna med bogatimi in revnimi, s številnimi vojnami in novimi pandemijami, bo namreč hkrati

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zaznamovano z razvojem digitalnih tehnologij. Zato avtorica raziskuje specifične značilnosti tradicionalnega siniškega dojemanja tehnologije kot take ter njenih idejnih osnov, ki zagotovo vplivajo na specifično percepcijo digitalnih objektov v siniški regiji. Avtorica upa, da nam bo to omogočilo boljši vpogled v kulturno pogojenost razlik in podobnosti v globalnih procesih digitalizacije in njenih ontoloških osnov, kajti tak uvid nam lahko omogoči tudi boljše razumevanje nevarnosti in možnosti, ki se kažejo v medkulturnih interakcijah na tem področju.

Ključne besede: digitalna tehnologija, ontologija digitalnih objektov, Kitajska in siniška regija, COVID-19

Introduction

The high efficiency in containing and partially eliminating the COVID-19 pandemic in the Sinic[1] geopolitical area was often attributed to the autocratic traditions of this region. Numerous Western media reported that because of such traditions the Sinic population was more obedient and less critical, which allowed governments to implement repressive top-down measures more easily than in the West.

As I have shown elsewhere (see Rošker 2021, 67), such assumptions are populist, unfounded, and unscientific, and the instead reasons for this greater efficiency in combatting COVID-19 are most likely related to traditional Confucian relational ethics.

An additional problem often highlighted in the context of COVID-19 is that of digital control of individuals in Sinic cultures based on databases of personal information, which allow for rapid and efficient control of infected individuals, their appropriate treatment and isolation. These are measures that cannot be similarly implemented in Western societies for the time being, not only because of the legal requirements for the protection of personal data, but also because of the corresponding attitudes of their citizens, who would most likely resist most such actions. On the other hand, empirical studies have shown that the majority of people in the East Asian region were convinced that their societies could achieve freedom for the community as a whole by individuals giving up—at least in part—their private, individual liberties (Bauer 2020, 8).

1 This is the region that has historically been heavily influenced by Chinese writing and certain cultural elements that originated in China, particularly Confucianism and Chan (Zen) Buddhism. Besides China itself, the area includes Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but also some parts of Southeastern Asia, such as Vietnam, Laos and Singapore.

The enactment of compulsory "social distancing" and strict isolation measures was backed up in many European states not only with fines and similar disciplinary measures, but also with restrictions that in some cases came close to violating the constitutional order. Particularly problematic were such measures that imposed curfews, closed not only inter-state but also local borders between different regions of the same state, or banned gatherings of large numbers of people, even if they wanted to exercise a fundamental right of democratic societies by protesting the political decisions of their governments. Many people were concerned that traditional Enlightenment values—such as freedom and autonomy—would succumb in this way to the pressures of new "corona dictatorships"[2], a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly problematic, especially in some Central and East European countries (Buras 2020). Nonetheless, many Europeans expressed concern about the supposedly autocratic methods of digital control that are spreading in the wake of anti-pandemic measures in the Sinic regions, but also in many other areas of Asia and Russia. In this context, the assumptions about the "totalitarian character" of Sinic societies noted above have been constantly repeated. Therefore, in order to gain a more realistic insight into the current situation, it seems necessary to shed light on the complex relationship between traditional forms of social control and contemporary measures of disease control in the Sinic region. This paper attempts to illuminate this relationship from the perspective of the specifically Sinic understanding of digital objects and through the lens of classical Chinese cosmotechnology.

Digital Tracking Measures in the Sinic Region: Traditional Backgrounds and Contemporary Implications

While the countries of the Euro-American regions continued to adhere to physical distancing and the closure of public spaces not vital to the functioning of society during the second wave of the epidemic, the societies of the Sinic region relied heavily on the mass use of digital applications to combat the pandemic. In various publications, East Asian authors ask whether COVID-19 could not be a signal for a general reflection on how we can achieve a balance between privacy on the one hand and the public sphere on the other[3] (Huang, Sun in Sui 2020). The emphasis on the protection of privacy in the process of combating pandemics, as we

2 This term has been used frequently in the Western media, see, for example, BBC News 2020.

3 At the time of writing, a number of Western countries have also begun to develop digital applications that, on the one hand, allow the tracking of contacts, but on the other also preserve the anonymity of users and limit the amount of data collected.

are witnessing in the Euro-American area, obviously affects not only the decisions of the populations of Western countries, but also the relevant legislation, since a number of measures that could be implemented in East Asia could not be realized in Europe, as they would violate many legal provisions on the protection of personal data.[4] With this in mind, it is also important to reassure people that such data would be deleted from digital databases once the pandemic is over.

Digital control applications, which are part of pandemic containment measures in many Sinic countries, typically work as follows: When a particular person tests positive, their phone number is sent to the local police station, which sends a digital application to collect all the data about the infected person to the centre for Personal Data Collection. The smartphone data shows the locations where the person has been in the last few days. The items in these places are sanitized by the crisis centre staff, who also contact all the people who have been in these places at these times; to do this, they can use bank data from credit and other payment cards that show who has paid bills in the same restaurants and other places the infected person has been, or who has used the same bus lines. In this way, they try to get as complete a list as possible of people who have been in contact with, or at least near, the infected person. These people are then contacted by the medical centre, which calls them in for tests and at the same time sends them into self-isolation.

With all the heated discussions around the complex issues of digital control of individuals in times of crisis, which confront us with moral and ethical dilemmas about what is more important, human life and societal security or individual liberty, it is good to also reflect on how technologies of digital control—like any other technology—can be used for both beneficial and harmful purposes. It is the free and critical humanities, with their underlying humanistic values, that bear the greatest responsibility in this regard. The only guarantee that digital control technologies will be used in a way that helps to preserve human life and, in the long term, also to protect fundamental human rights and freedoms, is firm and stable, but also flexible, legislation and ethics that protect the values of interpersonal responsibility, solidarity and cooperation, and the fundamental freedom and dignity of every person.

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4 In Sinic societies, large databases often contain a combination of data from many different sources, e.g. banks, medical and automotive databases, security cameras, etc., through the kind of procedures that are strictly forbidden in the EU and US. On the other hand, the critical awareness of the populations in these areas with regard to this issue is not much higher than that of the populations of East Asian countries, considering how generous people are when they enter their personal data on the websites of various social networks and online applications. In most European countries, public health systems also hold data on all physical and biological characteristics of individuals, as well as digital records of their entire medical history with diagnoses and treatments.

In what follows, I will highlight two very different ways in which the use of digital technology in the contemporary Sinic space has contributed, each in its own way, to the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first is associated with normative ethical behaviour based on the standards of an autocratic ideology, and the second is based on democratic networks of data application. The foundations of both systems can be traced back to Confucian philosophies or ideologies.

The best example of a very problematic form of digital control in East Asia is the infamous "social credit system" (*shehui xinyong tixi* 社會信用體系) gradually introduced in China since 2020. It is important to see that its historical roots were linked to the traditional power structures based on the model of the family and its hierarchical relations, which underlay Confucian social ideologies. Although classical Confucian relational ethics still has a positive influence on social solidarity, effective cooperation, and mutual empathy, the normative state doctrines developed on the basis of these moral philosophies also provided a solid foundation for a strictly defined framework of normative standards of conduct, which was reinforced by socio-historically shaped mechanisms of social control. These were not only implemented at the various levels of the state and its legislative and executive institutions, but were even more deeply rooted in civic communities themselves.[5]

Similar to today's system of social credit, the system of informal control at the basic local levels of towns and villages, often supported by groups of street overseers, had an eye on the morals and behaviour of individuals. The two systems also share similar mechanisms of propaganda; throughout Chinese history, the traditional system of control has always been based on state propaganda that monitored and influenced popular culture in a way that reinforced the state ideology. If we understand this traditional combination or fusion of formal and informal control mechanisms and instances, it will be easier for us to grasp the fact that the introduction of the social credit system is supported by the majority of the population at all levels, and especially by educated people (Kostka 2019, 1565).[6]

5 The control mechanisms that prevailed in traditional Chinese (and various Sinic) societies constituted a system or network of formal and informal control instances, the basic cell of which was the family and its organization, based on hierarchy and supported by ideological control functions (Kempter Streib and Streib 1998, 207). In their pure, ideal-typical form, such forms of strict and all-encompassing control were based on certain elements of legalistic doctrine, which were integrated into the new social ideology of Confucianism in the course of the first reform of Confucian teachings in the period of Han Dynasty. Later, this "Confucian" ideology prevailed in China in the form of a state doctrine consisting of a combination of legalistic normativity and Confucian ethical-moral prescriptions or guidelines. Such a normative ideology could function both at the official formal level and at the informal level of local community structures.

6 A recent study conducted in China by researchers at the Free University (FU) in Berlin found that as many as 80% of Chinese informants strongly support the social credit system, while the remaining 19% of respondents are undecided and only 1% oppose it (see Hui 2019, 6).

In Maoist China, too, ideology played a major role in mass mobilizations and power struggles (see Heubel 2019, 39), even if today it seems that it could no longer be a single, central instrument for maintaining social stability. And yet we could argue that the "system of social credits" of the digital control type is a form of technology that is not only based on ideology, but is itself a kind of ideology. This system, which the National Development and Reform Commission (*Guojia fazhan he gaige weiyuan hui* 国家发展和改革委员会) has been preparing since 2014 and which has been in use throughout China since 2020, is closely related to axiological systems based on ruling ideologies that emphasize the vital importance of social stability and patriotism. It is a digital system of all-encompassing control that employs the latest technologies, including facial recognition and even technology that recognizes the specifics of individual motor skills. It aims to assess the creditworthiness, reliability, and performance of individual citizens by ranking and evaluating their "moral integrity", which manifests itself in various behaviours, from frequency of visits to parents to trustworthiness, work habits, and adherence to traffic rules. Moreover, the consequences of such evaluations are revealed in the concrete punishments and rewards of the observed individual.

Digital technologies are certainly about much more than a set of algorithms. Their attachment to ideologies is inherent, as the production and development of these technologies is based on the assumption that a selection of digital systems, shaped by a small technical elite, can over time take on a life of their own, to the point where they not only complement but displace humans. This assumed ability to replace human judgement with systems created and implemented by a small technical or theoretical elite distanced from interactions with the real world is what links these contemporary ideologies to the surviving ideological relics of so-called "real socialism" and its centrally planned production. "It is thus not all that surprising that the Chinese Communist Party would find AI to be a welcome technological formulation of its own ideology" (Lanier and Weyl 2020).[7]

On the other hand, however, the development of the COVID-19 pandemic in East Asia has clearly shown us that digital technologies and large databases can

7 However, it is somewhat more surprising that, at first glance, leading Western technology companies and governments have been quick to adopt a number of similar ideologies that relate to artificial intelligence as such. One of the reasons for the rapid spread of such technologies is perhaps the loss of faith in the institutions of liberal democracy, which—despite everything—are supposed to be based on the values of human freedom and dignity, and not just on the worth of capital and profit. It is therefore no coincidence that today the richest companies, individuals and regions are precisely those closest to the most powerful computers for data collection. In this context, artificial intelligence may point to the death of the pluralistic visions of traditional liberal democratic marketing (Lanier and Weyl 2020). It is therefore increasingly clear that we need to rethink and ask ourselves once again what role technology plays—and should play—in people's lives.

also be used autonomously and in a liberating manner, and not only as tools of all-encompassing centralist control, as China is striving for with its system of social credits.

A very telling example of such a change in mentality and the function of technology can be found in Taiwan. Almost half of the population on this island voluntarily joined the state's platform for organizing and sharing data even before the pandemic began, allowing citizens to autonomously organize the use of data and demand services in exchange for it, to participate thoughtfully in public decision-making, and to vote in innovative ways on numerous state issues.

> Driven neither by pseudo-capitalism based on barter nor by state planning, Taiwan's citizens have built a culture of agency over their technologies through civic participation and collective organization, something we are starting to see emerge in Europe and the US through movements like data cooperatives. (Lanier and Weyl 2020)

In Taiwan, numerous data (or digital) cooperatives have already emerged in the early 21st century. The most interesting thing here is that the tools derived from such approaches have played a key role in Taiwanese successes in controlling COVID-19. Digital cooperatives are built on grassroots democratic principles. In such associations, digital data belong to the cooperative members, who manage and use it for purposes that do not involve community control of individuals, nor do they have the exclusive goal of profit-making, but rather are guided by the aim of achieving transparent equity for all members.

Taiwan even has a minister without a portfolio for Digital Affairs, Minister Tang Feng (Audrey Tang),[8] who contributed in important ways to Taiwan's unforeseen success in limiting and stopping the spread of the epidemic by democratically disseminating digital technologies for disease control and tracking accessible medical devices, and who emphasizes the value of digitization in the context of the widest possible consensus among the entire population. The measures she proposed were based solely on recommendations, as no one was forced to adopt the digital applications used in the process. Nevertheless (or precisely because of this), they were voluntarily used by a large majority of the Taiwanese population. This is what she sees as enabling Taiwan's successes in fighting the epidemic, especially during the first and the second waves. Tang stresses that forced action is not an effective means of combating the epidemic: "Any top-down coercion, whether from capitalists or the state, is equally bad" (Audrey Tang in Kim 2020, 12).

8 Tang is a transgender person who was known as Tang Zonghan, or Atrijus Tang before her gender transition.

In the case of Taiwan, one of the reasons for the acceptance of digital technologies in the fight against the epidemic is the confidence of the majority of the population in the state and their fellow citizens. In China, on the other hand, with the wide acceptance and positive evaluation of the social credit system based on digital control, we see an idea diametrically opposed to that of mutual trust, or privacy protection. Moreover, the Chinese online social network WeChat is more or less ubiquitous, as it has increasingly become an indispensable part of everyday life and communication, a way to access important information and use public infrastructures, from public transport to libraries.

Despite all the major local differences between autocratic and democratic societies in East Asia, which can be observed in the use of digital technology, it is nevertheless obvious that the general attitude towards digital objects in the whole Sinic cultural and linguistic area differs considerably from that in the West. Among other things, this is related to different traditional notions of intimacy and privacy,[9] but it is also rooted in traditional attitudes toward or perceptions of technology in general and digital technology in particular. Let us therefore consider the actual relationship between humans and this particular kind of technology from the perspective of Chinese intellectual history, for these specific attitudes or perceptions are built on a common foundation of a cosmotechnological view that is also representative the wider Sinic space.

Cosmotechnology and Technodiversity

Cosmotechnology is a term that refers to the various different relationships between humans and technology as developed in different cultures and their corresponding symbolic, economic, and linguistic worlds. In other words, it is a part of the cosmologies associated with the specific attitudes of individuals and communities toward various specific techniques that are vital to their survival, and toward technology as a coherent, rationally ordered system of those techniques. In this sense, cosmotechnology is a system based on the combination of the cosmic and moral, aesthetic or axiological order in the acts of practicing and passing on techniques. In the history of humankind, many different systems of understanding or explaining the cosmos have evolved, as have many different techniques. Therefore, there cannot be only one cosmotechnology (i.e., the European one), for there exist as many individual cosmotechnologies as there are symbolic orders of perceiving

9 I have dealt with these differences regarding the perception, understanding and role of privacy and intimacy in Chinese and European intellectual history in great detail in my recent book on COVID-19 in East Asia (see Rošker 2021, 152–56).

and understanding the cosmos. This culturally conditioned miscellany of different techniques and cosmotechnologies is called technodiversity.[10] It consists of orders that are culturally and linguistically conditioned, while the process of applying techniques and designing their products is, as such, universal.

The question of the relationship between universality and the (culturally conditioned) particularity of techniques has long agitated the minds of innumerable philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, linguists and scholars of social sciences. Here, it is worth mentioning the French archaeologist and anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who established the notion of technical tendencies arising from the relationship between the two. In his book *Environment and Techniques* (*Milieu et techniques* 1945), he tried to present this relationship within the framework of the general theory of dynamic interactions, in which human communities behave as complete organisms living in the environment defined by external (geography, climate) and internal (culture, tradition) factors. He named the natural and social environment as the external and internal milieus (Leroi-Gourhan 1945, 333). In this framework, the concept of technical tendencies represented a movement or tendency that forms within the inner milieu and becomes the primary factor influencing the functioning of the community in its natural environment.

Contemporary Chinese theorists have also devoted much attention to determining the relationship between the universal and culturally conditioned factors.[11] One of the most important representatives of philosophical anthropology is Li Zehou, who considered techniques, in the sense of the making and systematic application of tools (as well as the intergenerational transmission of the corresponding

10 Technodiversity emphasizes the need for the simultaneous existence of different kinds of relationship between human beings and technology, which manifest themselves in different paradigms of cosmotechnology. Yuk Hui, a scholar of informatics and philosophy from Hong Kong, believes that understanding different culturally conditioned forms of cosmotechnology (or, as he himself calls them, cosmotechnics) is important because it can prevent a universalistic equalization of ideas (or ideologies) about the role and manner of interaction between humans and technology. In other words: technodiversity is a term which is based upon different patterns of cosmotechnology, i.e. the relationship between humans and technology. In this context, it emphasizes cultural diversity. It is an understanding based on technological diversity that allows for multi-layered and pluralistic starting points for the study of such relationships. On such foundations we have produced throughout history a number of different forms of knowledge, linked to the world and the Earth in different ways and through diverse, specific, multi-faceted relationships that cannot be measured solely by the criteria of the linear progress of modern science and technology. Only an understanding of the existence of such heterogeneity (as opposed to the isolated contributions of individual "nations" and "cultures") will allow us to resolve the tensions between increasingly isolated social groups.

11 Of course, this is by no means a specific interest of Chinese scholars. Many Western philosophers, anthropologists, and even political scientists have also elaborated on this issue, see e.g. Rockmore (2019, 56).

techniques), as the basis of becoming human, and thus as the decisive characteristic that distinguishes humans from (other) animals.

Many scholars believe that tools are extensions of human limbs or organs, and thus Li Zehou speaks of human beings as beings for whom tools or techniques are a "universal necessity", since humans represent "supra-biological beings" who could not survive without all these extensions of their bodies Li Zehou 2016, 28). Further similarities between the philosophical anthropology of Leroi-Gourhan and Li Zehou can also be found in the fact that both see technology as a form of externalization of human memory (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 219 ff.; Li and Cauvel 2006, 3).

The culturally defined dimensions of technology are thus at the forefront of the conceptualization of different cosmotechnologies as different externalizations of memory. This is the search for a new frame of reference for technology, a new framing of its interpretations that will transcend both the ancient Greek concept of *techné* (including its connotation of creation or *poiesis*) and Heidegger's concept of the *Gestell*, which for him marked the essence of modern technology (Heidegger 2000, 21).

But what are the defining or characteristic features of the specific Chinese cosmotechnology? How does it contribute to the global technodiversity? Within the framework of such questions, Yuk Hui has set himself the task of systematically examining the ancient concepts of *dao* 道 (the Way, method, original principle) and *qi* 器 (vessel, accessory, tool, device). This pair of terms appears for the first time in the history of written Chinese together in the ancient *Book of Changes* (*Zhou Yi*), where it is described as follows: "What is above the forms we call method (*dao*), what is below them we call tool (*qi*)."[12]

In the quest for Chinese cosmotechnology, then, Hui's starting point is certainly correct and sensible, but his interpretation of this pair of terms and their meaning is problematic, as he sees in them a kind of Cartesian dualism (Hui 2018, 2), which is certainly not true. Indeed, these two opposite poles have the typical form of a binary category, which does not operate according to the principle of contradiction but rather to that of mutual complementarity.[13] Even though the two models of dialectical oppositions have already been explained in many sinological writings, I would like to reiterate here the theoretical foundations of this distinction, since in this context it is situated in the concrete example of understanding the relationship between the basic principles of human existence and technology. In this context, it is even more important for understanding the given criticism of Hui's theory.

12 形而上者谓之道，形而下者谓之器.

13 For a detailed explanation of the differences between Cartesian dualism and the model of binary categories, see Rošker (2021, 48ff); and Tian (2019).

Both cases represent a form or theoretical model of binarity in the sense of a relation between two opposite poles. In Cartesian dualism, the two opposing poles stand in a mutually exclusive relationship, i.e. they are not only opposed to each other, but are in mutual contradiction, which is best seen in the construction of Hegel's dialectic, within which they are usually interpreted as thesis and antithesis. Both dualism and the dialectic derived from it are only possible on the basis of a static and unchanging understanding of being, as formed within the paradigm of Parmenides, which at the same time allows for the development of the basic principles of formal logic in terms of the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. In the model of complementarity-based dialectics, the opposite poles are in mutual opposition, existentially defined by co-dependency and at the same time enabling their mutual completion. In this model, the opposing poles constitute two sides of the same coin; their difference and mutual delimitation is the basic condition for the existence of the whole of which they are essential parts. It is also important to note at this point that this model does not produce a qualitatively separate synthesis of the two opposing poles that could exist as an independent new entity, since synthesis is constantly present precisely in the interaction between the two. Since this is a typical model based on process philosophy, formal logic has no valid basis within its framework.

This has far-reaching consequences for understanding the specifically Chinese relationship between technology and nature, and thus for the Chinese system of cosmotechnology and science itself. The comparison between the terms *dao* and *qi* and the ancient Greek terms *techné* and *areté* is particularly problematic. While *dao* is said to be the superior and primary factor compared to *qi*, the ancient Greek worldview is said to be more instrumental and (at least from Aristotle onwards) to place more emphasis on the importance of the means to achieve goals (Hui 2016b, 89). The latter claim, referring to ancient Greek philosophy, is undoubtedly correct, and in what it describes we can observe the essence of what later, in the last two centuries of the previous millennium, shows itself to be the basis for Western-type modernization, namely instrumental reason. Hannah Arendt therefore also sees the origins of this in the tendencies that determined the development of the ancient Greek relationship between action and production or manufacture, within which the first—already in Plato's theories—was gradually but consistently transformed into the second:

> How persistent and successful the transformation of action into a mode of making has been is easily attested by the whole terminology of political theory and political thought, which indeed makes it almost impossible to discuss these matters without using the category of means and

> ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality … We are perhaps the first generation which has become fully aware of the murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided that they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end. (Arendt 1998, 229)

But if we now build on this and look more closely at the part of Hui's comparison that relates to the ancient Chinese understanding of technology and its use, his interpretation quickly proves problematic. The core problem is the aforementioned fact that Hui does not understand the difference between Cartesian dualism and binary categories. If we follow the assumption that the relationship between method (*dao*) and device or tool (*qi*) is not a Cartesian dualism, but—like most other conceptual pairs within the Chinese tradition of ideas—belongs to the model of binary categories, then we will have a hard time arguing that within the complementary correlativity of their mutual relationship one of these opposite poles is indeed primary, even though methods (*dao*) as such can be used in other places and in completely different activities that are not tied to the device (*qi*). In this broader context, where it is an overarching category, method (*dao*) is certainly more fundamental. It is also true that a device (*qi*) as a tool cannot function without the method (*dao*), since its use is necessarily tied to it. But in the concrete model of their mutual relationship, which is also the basis of their joint activity, the method cannot exist without the device either. We must distinguish here, then, between method and device as independent categories, on the one hand, and method and device as equal parts of the same complementary model, in which they are correlative and interdependent, on the other. In the former case they can exist without each other, but in the latter each of them depends on the other, opposite pole, and neither of them is primary or a cause of the other.

Traditional Differences and Modern Universalism

In interpreting this pair of terms, then, we must continue to know that they are both categories, not concepts. An important contemporary Chinese philosopher, Zhang Dainan (1909–2004), has pointed out that we cannot understand Chinese intellectual history without understanding these kinds of distinctions. Zhang sees concepts as a form of naming concrete things and phenomena. These designations may include other, more general entities as well as their partial or narrower special properties, but they always refer to the concrete meaning of the words. Categories, on the other hand, are only the formal, arbitrary tool for analysing reality. On this basis it is easier to understand that the term *dao* in the context of the proto-philosophical classic *Book of Changes* has no moral connotations as attributed to it by Yuk Hui. Such a meaning was ascribed to the word *dao* only much later, through Confucian commentaries on this work, and thus also exclusively in the context of the Confucian view of the cosmos. Of course, we must take into account here that such an understanding, within which the universe is saturated with moral principles, had due to the dominant position of Confucianism, already acquired a paradigmatic status in the early Middle Ages. This moral component is particularly noticeable in the compound word *rendao* 人道, which refers to the "Way of Humankind" and describes human ethical maxims.[14] In the *Book of Changes* itself, which is much older, *dao* is seen only in its most basic meaning of the Way, that is, the methods, principles and modes of action.

The same is true of the descriptions of the relation between the words *dao* and *qi*, that is, of those parts of the text which refer exclusively to techniques in the sense of the relation between physical tools and immaterial methods of their use. On the other hand, however, Hui equates the word *dao*, which in the above quotation refers to that which is "above the forms", with *noumenon* in the Kantian sense (Hui 2017b 8), but in the same breath (only slightly earlier) criticizes the translation of the phrase *xing'er shang xue* (literally: above the forms) with the term metaphysics[15] (ibid.). Thus, such a comparison seems premature, especially if we bear in

14 The opposite pole to the word *rendao* 人道 is the term *tiandao* 天道 (literally, the *dao* of Heaven or nature), a cosmological term characteristic of Daoist interpretations of the category of *dao*. In later Confucian texts, e.g., *The Analects*, the word *dao* is used quite frequently in the sense of "the right" way (or method), and this "rightness" has very clear moral connotations. Whereas the word *qi* in the sense of "tool" or "device" is often used in these sources in its adjectival function, meaning to master certain techniques or to possess certain skills needed to perform certain kinds of tasks. A good example of such a development of meaning can be found in the *Zi Lu* chapter of the above-mentioned work, which states, "Exemplary persons are easy to serve but difficult to please. If we want to please them in a way that is not morally appropriate, they will not be pleased. Exemplary persons employ people according to their skills. (君子易事而難說也：說之不以道，不說也；及其使人也，器之.)" (Lunyu s.d. Zi Lu, 25)

15 Here Yuk Hui explicitly demands that such an equation (of the expression "above the forms", i.e. "*xing'er shang xue*" and the term "metaphysics") be abolished. Although I fully agree that the translation is inadequate, I cannot defend his proposal. First, the term metaphysics is often (mistakenly) interpreted in the West as the name of a discipline that, according to its name, is supposed to be concerned with the transcendent sphere that goes beyond the sphere of sensually perceptible (form-giving) reality. It is known that Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, whose title is the first instance of the use of this term and from which the term derives its paradigmatic meaning, takes its name only from the editorial note written in the 1st century AD. This is because the text's first-century compiler (most likely Andronicus of Rhodes) added the title "Metaphysics" to indicate that the book was a collection of essays that followed Aristotle's natural philosophy (i.e., "physics") (see, e.g., Cohen in Reeve 2020, 1). The Chinese translation has exactly the same etymological meaning as the ancient Greek original. Of course, this does not mean that it (or the modern meaning of the term metaphysics) overlaps with it in all related semantic connotations. Nevertheless, *xing'er shang xue* is a term too well established in pre-modern, modern, and contemporary Chinese philosophy to simply "correct" it arbitrarily and deliberately, to interchange it with any other, as this would lead to additional confusion within comparative and transcultural philosophy.

mind the dangers of misinterpretation that we face if we do not take into account the different frames of reference, which define many cultural differences in different philosophies (see for instance Heubel 2019; Tian 2019). We must therefore be careful in such places; from the mere fact that in a certain passage in the *Book of Changes dao* is referred to as something above the forms, while *qi* is referred to as something below the forms, we can by no means infer that the former refers to the *noumenon* and the latter to the concrete objects or phenomena.

This, of course, does not detract from the value of Hui's original assumption that the *Book of Changes*, as a central work of the earliest Chinese philosophy of nature and life, implicitly asserts through such an explanation of the specific relationship of *dao* and *qi* that tools must necessarily follow the method of application in their handling (Hui in Dunker 2020, 14). It is also important to point out here that the method itself must also conform to the nature or internal composition of the device or the tool; in the process philosophy of this work, the opposite poles of the complementary binary categories always follow and complete one another. This represents a kind of relationship between technology and human beings, in which the application of technique (*qi*) is in harmony with method (*dao*). *Dao* in this context is method in the broadest sense, for it can also be seen as a general philosophical guideline that shows us the way out of chaos, the complex jungle of wild and untamed nature.

In his book *The Question Concerning Technology in China* (2016a), Hui tries to figure out the ways in which Chinese philosophy can help us think through the supposed contradiction between tradition and modern technology. His rationale is to find a way out of the universalistic tendencies of technological singularity, which is the product of Western-style modernization, and globalization, which is its result. According to Hui, this kind of technological singularity would lead to apocalypse (Hui in Dunker 2020, 14). He wants to overcome this dangerous tendency by introducing the so-called "techno-diversity" or technological multiplicity, which is based on different epistemological approaches and paradigms of human attitudes towards technology and nature. This is represented in the triad of cosmic order, humans and technology, which is manifested in the concept of cosmotechnology. What Hui uncovered in his further explication of the traditional Chinese relationship between method and device[16] is, among other things, that the cosmos as such was seen in prevailing (i.e., especially Confucian) Chinese philosophy as

16 In his book, Hui charts the evolution of the relationship between *dao* (method) and *qi* (device) throughout Chinese intellectual history, focusing on three phases that he sees as key to the development of this relationship and the changes therein: 1) the phase of pre-Qin philosophy and the philosophy of Han dynasty, 2) the phase of Neo-Confucian philosophy, and 3) the phase of modern philosophy that emerged based on the adoption of Western technology and thought.

a sphere saturated with values. This axiological component, expressed in Chinese moral philosophy and ethics as well as in traditional Chinese aesthetics, has always prevented the reduction of technology to its applicability in the sense of instrumentalization. With modernity, this view of the triad of humans, technology and cosmos changed fundamentally, conditioned by the (then necessary) adoption of superior Western technology and the ideas on the basis of which it had been developed.

However, taking into account the specifics of the crisis that China faced at the time of the adoption of Western technology, another fact is important here, and that is that the adoption occurred precisely at the time when there was a crucial transition within the development of technology itself. Modern technology, with new techniques such as various forms of radiation, electrical energy, and data transmission through immaterial waves, surpassed the function of extending human organs (and limbs) and externalizing human memory that it had before.[17] It was precisely the latter, that is, the externalization of memory, that had the function of preserving and transmitting technical knowledge in the earliest and simplest forms of technology, for which it was characteristic that they created and thus displayed objects that had not previously existed in nature. For humans, technology has always been closely connected not only with their being human and the discovery and development of themselves, but also with the process of discovery and development of the world. As mentioned earlier, the first form of discovery of reality in the Western intellectual tradition is tied to the usefulness of the objects in it (Hui 2016a, 89). In capitalist production and reproduction, this utilitarianism was also applied to nature, which thus became alienated from itself. All its axiological components, including ethics and aesthetics, became subordinated to the demands of application. In this way, modern developments have distanced technology itself from the simple relationship between the end and the means to achieve it. Thus, instead of seeing technology as a kind of extension of basic human tools, Heidegger (1979, 16) warns that modern technology also brings with it its own laws. For him, the problem with modern technology lies not only in the fact that, unlike traditional tools, it uses sources of energy that are external to humans and their labour, but rather in its dominant character. Even though technology does not take place outside of human agency, with modernization technical processes have to some extent become independent,

17 For an extremely rigorous analysis and interpretation of these two functions and their role in the constitution of humanness, see Li Zehou (2016). In the same work, the cultural features of technological development in China are analyzed in detail, with Li focusing on the group condensation of memory through the processes of specific types of rituality that accelerated and fortified mental sedimentations through which technology was passed from older to younger generations.

reducing humans to producers who essentially only ensure that technology exists and thrives. Within this new framework, the human is no longer the basic framework, i.e. the *Gestell* (Heidegger 2000, 15) that "launches" the existence and development of technology—instead, this function is taken over by technology itself. In the processes of modernization, human beings, who on the one hand ruled over nature and became its supreme masters, lost their previous function and their Selves, and became more and more alienated from the world and its truth. According to Heidegger, this should not lead us to hatred of technology and technological development (cf. Heidegger 1969, 12'03"), but rather to a desire to understand and reflect on both (Heidegger 2000, 15) and to arrive at the transformed (and at the same time completely new) discovery of the demand for human freedom hidden in the very essence of technology. This is indeed the very "enframing" (*Gestell*) of the modern world (ibid., 26). Heidegger thus created a theoretically innovative and lucid foundation for the modern philosophy of technology and the ontological basis of the paradigmatically altered use of energy sources. However, this philosophy has faced new challenges in recent decades, as we are now dealing with immaterial, digitalized sources that require the establishment of new ontological theories.

Ontology of Digital Objects and Structural Onto-Epistemology

The World Wide Web as a network of data has presented us with new challenges related not only to the discovery, isolation and exploitation of techniques for storing and using energy, but also to the existence of digital objects. These are dynamic, relational units of data, embedded in networks, which Luciano Floridi (2014, 97) calls infospheres. The concept of the digital object can help us understand modern automated systems of online interactions. This is because through the lens of digital objects we can redefine such systems

> in a way that passes through the concepts of preindividual milieu, individuation, world, being-in-the-world, *Zuhandenheit* and its associated milieu—which may in addition provide new resources with which to interpret the notions of *Gestell* and *Ereignis*, through which Heidegger explored the cybernetic age. (Stiegler 2016, viii)

The Hong Kong philosopher of technology Yuk Hui defines these as objects "that take shape on a screen or hide in the backend of a computer program and consist of data and metadata governed by structures or schemas" (Hui 2016b 1). These give semantic and functional meaning to the metadata (i.e. data about data): "In computer science, these schemas are also called ontologies—a word that immediately evokes associations with philosophy" (ibid.).

In this way, digital objects provide a good basis for a new metaphysics and ontology—or at least for an updating and extension of it (Stiegler 2016, ix). Within such an understanding, a digital object then constitutes discursive relations on the basis of which it is itself also interwoven; with such interconnectedness of itself, it establishes its own existential relations (ibid., xi). A digital object belongs to computers and is therefore by its very nature technical, but it cannot be limited to technology alone. Hui's understanding of digital objects even goes beyond the questions about such objects as they are treated by application-oriented computer technology, which usually reduces them to a set of representational structures. In his reflections, Yuk Hui does not stop at engineering pragmatic questions of digitality as a phenomenon, but tries to understand its existential status (Hui 2016b 3). In doing so, he starts from assumptions similar to those expressed in Quine's slogan: "To be is to be the value of a variable" (ibid. 273, fn. 73).

In the digital age, then, there is a burning necessity to question the being and modes of existence of digital objects. Since they consist of relations and connections between data schemata, these objects are only concretized as such through the materialization of these relations: "The genesis of digital objects is the process of concretization and materialization, first of forms, second of explicit relations and connections between objects" (ibid., 72). This gives a new form or a new way of existing in the world, in which we are again confronted with new questions: "We may want to ask, to what extent can we value this philosophical trajectory of relations as we have outlined it?" (ibid., 142).

Here, then, we are concerned with the transformation of quantitative structures of data into qualitative communicative-semantic or even axiological values. In this way it should be possible to overcome man's alienation from technology, which arises from not understanding these values:

> The most powerful cause of alienation in the world of today is based on misunderstanding of the machine. The alienation in question is not caused by the machine but by a failure to come to an understanding of the nature and essence of the machine, by the absence of the machine from the world of meanings, and by its omission from the table of values and concepts that are an integral part of culture. (Simodon 1980, 2)

Contemporary technological systems, driven by digital technology, have a tendency to lead to a homogeneous relationship between humans and technology. However, for this very reason, and because of the need for technodiversity, it is necessary and important for different cultures to reflect on their own histories and ontologies within the framework of their own specific languages and symbolic orders, because only in this way will they find ways to accept and adopt digital technologies without disappearing and merging into a homogeneous, synchronized unit of a "global" and "generic" system of acquiring knowledge and understanding about reality. Only in this way will humanity be able to preserve, even in the global age of digital technologies, the possibility of different attitudes to the world and different ways of seeing and understanding new realities. And this, as we know, is the basis of human freedom and autonomy.

In this respect, Chinese philosophy may also open up some new possibilities. Here we may recall the modern Chinese structuralist Zhang Dongsun, who—partly under the influence of Chan Buddhism and its specific conception of reality based on the illusory character of the phenomenal world—created a system of structural-relational onto-epistemology in which there is no substance, since the world consists exclusively of relations. Such a relational nature of knowledge acquisition is at the same time the basic paradigm of most Chinese epistemologies, which are based on the assumption of structural compatibility between the external world and human consciousness (see Jiang 2002, 65).

Zhang Dongsun is undoubtedly one of the most important Chinese philosophers of the 20th century. Although he was—due to his criticism of the Sinicization of Marxist ideologies and his role as a political dissident—almost completely and unjustly forgotten for a while in the last decades of the century, in recent years there has been a growing interest in his work among Chinese theorists. Zhang's philosophy is particularly significant in the field of theory of knowledge, which began with a pluralistic epistemology and culminated in a cultural one (ibid., 57).

As a starting point, Zhang established an innovative system of a pan-structuralist cosmology, in which we can also see the influence of Chan Buddhism. This system formed the basis of his specific worldview. Zhang Dongsun's cultural epistemology, based on a pluralist epistemology, is derived from the assumption of cultural conditioning or the culturally conditioned nature of knowledge.[18] Another important assumption of his epistemology is the neorealist position, according to which the external world exists independently of our consciousness, and there is no precise correlation between the phenomena of the external world and our perception of them. This Kantian legacy implies, of course, that we can never perceive

18 This aspect of his philosophy is still very relevant and valuable today, especially in the field of methodology of transcultural research. His studies in cultural philosophy are based on detailed comparative analyses of Chinese and European thought. Particularly important here is his research on the influence of the structure of language on different philosophical systems and on the connections between cultural differences and the formal logical systems of different traditions.

external objects as they actually are. According to Zhang, the external cause for our sensation is not a substance, but the order or structure of the external world. What is transmitted to us through our sensory impressions is a modification of this external order (ibid., 59) In interpreting the basic structure of reality, he also referred to scientific discoveries regarding atoms and their most elementary structures, which transcend the categorical boundary between particles of matter and non-substantial electromagnetic waves. Here, his critique of substance was quite radical, and he denied the real existence not only of the smallest particles of matter, but also of quanta, electrons and even electromagnetic waves.

The denial of substance also refers to the sphere of ideas. As in Chan Buddhism, all that we perceive is not only empty in the sense of substantial absence, but also illusory. Therefore, Zhang's cosmology is neither materialistic, nor idealistic: "Pluralistic epistemology ... rejects 'substance' and is of the opinion that the dualistic theories of idealism and materialism are completely wrong."[19] (Zhang 1995, 214)

One reason for our inability to recognize the essence of external things "as such" is thus to be found in the very nature of their existence; for Zhang, who did not acknowledge the existence of substance, reality was a process of constant change that manifests itself in the inter-relations of particular entities. In contrast to Kant, who did not abandon metaphysics, even though he gave priority epistemology, which radically altered its role, Zhang's cosmology is not metaphysical. In his system the impact of Chan Buddhism is much stronger (Jiang 2002, 63). Because he rejected the existence of substance, he emphasized that the objects perceived by us can not possess any "ontological status" (Zhang 1995, 215). All beings exist in a process of constant change that manifests itself in a never-ending modification of structural connections, and the growth and decline of the qualities of the "essence" of particular entities. According to Zhang, our consciousness can only recognize certain aspects of these manifest changes. However, this refers not only to the level of our perception and comprehension; according to Zhang, the structured order of relations is all that really exists in the cosmos. Zhang argued that all these structures are empty, for they possess neither substance, nor its qualities. The level of material being (*wu* 物) is thus a merely physical phenomenality which cannot be equated with material substance, but, at the most, with structural relations and the physical laws which determine its existence (Jiang 2002, 64).

Hence, Zhang's cosmos does not imply any substance or essence; it exists solely as a relational process of structural order. However, even this order is not totally natural and objective, but also depends upon our cognitive activities:

19 "認識的多元論...勢必根本上否認 '本質' (substance), 以為本體論上的唯心論唯物論兩元論全是不對的.

> However, these structural forms as such do not entirely belong to external things as such ... From the viewpoint of essence, there are no external things. But with respect to structure and form, most of the forms result from the process of comprehension. In other words, they belong to the domain of subjectivity.[20] (Zhang 1995, 171)

All external structures are manifested in our mind, that (re)-establishes them in the process of forming structural patterns of thought and comprehension. However, Zhang's theory is not solipsistic, since the external reality for him is not an exclusive product of our recognition: "At least some of these structural forms are not just a product of the laws of our recognition"[21] (ibid.). The relation between the external world and our subjectivity is interactive and correlative:

> Our cosmos does not possess any essence; it is only a structure. Its constitution is not entirely natural, but inseparably connected with the function of our recognition. Without recognition we could get a glimpse of the original image of this structure. But it still cannot completely seize its essence. Therefore, we can still claim that the cosmos is a structure.[22] (ibid., 218)

In this view people, or rather our minds (but also our biological bodies, as these are inseparably tied together), are fundamentally structured in the same way as the cosmos. However, this does not only imply homogeneity, which would allow inference from objects of the external sphere to objects of the internal sphere, as Bertrand Russell assumes in his structural epistemology, but also a direct flow of data, which at the same time represents states of relational structures moving from one sphere to another.

In his pan-structural epistemology, based on the plurality of the cognitive process (Rošker 2008, 264–87), Zhang thoroughly shows how our minds are supposed to transform such informational signals originating from what he calls the "external order" into the axiological and aesthetic values of our individual interior space through a series of *a priori* forms. Since Zhang here, as mentioned earlier, takes as his starting point not only the Chan Buddhist onto-epistemology but also a classical Chinese understanding of the cognitive process, it is important to see

20 但這些構造方式固然不是完全屬於外物本身的...以實質而言，本來就沒有外物. 以構造與方式而言, 大部分的方式仍是屬於認識作用本身的, 換言之, 即屬於主觀的.

21 這些構造方式... 其中至少有若干是不由于我們的認識立 法所造.

22 我們這個宇宙並無本質，只是一套架構. 這個架構的構成不是完全自然的，而必須有我們的認識作用參加其中. 因為我們不能拔開認識以窺這個架構的本來面目. 然而亦決不十分大虧其本質. 所以仍可以說宇宙是個架構.

that what is also at stake here is the compatibility of two relational structures, the external and internal, both of which can be seen as carriers of meaning and axiological values. The basis of the prevailing Confucian ethics is the moral core of the order of the universe, or what Zhang calls "external order". The axiological foundations are, within this frame, already contained in the signals themselves, which the forms of our minds only need to decode correctly.

Conclusion

Within this view, digital objects, as insubstantial data structures of relations within their own infospheres, should also exist as systems that are directly and organically compatible with our minds, not only in the sense of transmitting information, but also in the sense of meaning and value. Similar to relational ethics and Chan Buddhist onto-epistemology, which we introduced in the previous section using the example of Zhang Dongsun's system, Chinese cosmotechnology is also based on relationships, on a relational network of innumerable connections between humans and technology, arising from a binary relationship between *dao* and *qi*, i.e. between the immaterial method and the physical device or tool.

One of the reasons, then, that people in Sinic societies are more inclined to the digitalization of life and less suspicious of digital objects lies precisely in the relational nature of the latter. This is not only because relationships are central to Sinic ethics, as they also form a foundation of Sinic onto-epistemologies, that were briefly discussed in the previous section. One could argue that they provide the basic *modus vivendi* that defines the fundamental symbolic order of Sinic societies. This is, of course, an extremely subtle factor, operating on a subconscious level. On the other hand, such a relational foundation of life, which may link the ontologies of digital objects to the mode of existence of the pure and unalienated humanity, can by no means be the only reason for the general Sinic preference for information technologies. Rather, this kind of Sinic inclination toward digital life forms is in all likelihood also the result of a whole range of other factors. As already mentioned, one of them is surely connected with the specific Sinic understanding and perception of the concepts of privacy and intimacy (see Rošker 2021, 152–56).[23]

One of these probably has much to do with the fact that the people of the Sinic area, in their specific processes of modernization, may not have fully internalized

23 This reference is to a book written and published in my native language. However, the chapter on privacy and intimacy will also form part of my new book on COVID-19, which will be published by Bloomsbury in 2022.

the culturally conditioned forms of Enlightenment values on which modern science is based. This is not to say, of course, that there is no positive appreciation of the ideas of freedom, autonomy, and rationality in Sinic societies. I merely wish to point out that such concepts arose differently in the Sinic (especially Confucian) intellectual traditions, and that their ideational foundations are therefore different from the paradigms on the basis of which they arose in European history, and especially in the Age of Enlightenment.

The digitalization of our lives demands—and will probably demand in the future—many sacrifices from us, because in the course of its development we have to give up many values and ideals of modernity, which were created on the basis of European Enlightenment and were given to the majority of people born and raised in Western societies through their earliest socialization.

As digitalization is likely to take a much more important role in our lives in the future, it would certainly be appropriate for people in Europe and other regions of the so-called Western world to also engage with it in a different way and try to develop such conceptualizations of autonomy, freedom and democracy that are compatible with it. With this goal in mind, it is certainly a good idea to look beyond the narrow limits of Enlightenment conceptualizations of the subject and consider alternative forms of the human self and personhood, such as the ones, for instance, that can be found in the Confucian relational ethics. Such ethics can help us to establish a relational view of reality, which can also help us develop a closer and less fearful connection to the relational nature of digital objects, and hence, the digital world in general.

Indeed, digital technology can provide us with a powerful tool for combating pandemics, ecological disasters, global poverty and so on. We must therefore learn to use it autonomously and responsibly, and actively create the political and economic conditions for such positive application. The most important prerequisite for such use of digital technologies, however, is transcultural mutual learning—but first we must learn to listen to each other.

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The Ethical Foundations of Buddhist Cognitive Models: Presentations of Greed and Fear in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*

*Tamara DITRICH**

Abstract

While issues related to greed and fear are ubiquitous in everyday life, they become particularly evident in crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, when societal responses are frequently based on either fear of the disease or craving for the reestablishment of pre-pandemic "normal" life. In this context, a question can be posed whether it is possible to approach and understand these phenomena in other ways, and consequently respond in a different manner. In search for alternative approaches to the problem of human greed and fear, this article investigates their conceptualisations from the perspective of the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, an important formulation of ancient Indian Buddhist philosophy. The *Abhidhamma* analyses and expounds the processes of cognition, using a multivalent and complex structure, comprised of interrelated and interdependent components (*dhamma*), which are involved in the ever-changing flow of mental and physical phenomena. This article proposes that the entirety of the structural cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* is founded on, and permeated by ethics. The components involved in cognitive processes are classified in three ways, as ethical, unethical, or indeterminate; greed and fear are presented as components of unethical mental states, which in turn may lead to actions that are harmful to oneself and society. This Abhidhammic analysis of cognition provides a model, in which a different conceptualisation of greed and fear is presented; it identifies those components and conditions for cognition which allow for an ethical (*kusala*) stance and consequently ethical actions. The article thus propounds that the knowledge of cognitive models of ancient India can be relevant to the search for new approaches to contemporary ethical challenges, and may contribute to a different understanding of, and responses to, greed and fear.

Keywords: Buddhist ethics, Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, ethics in the *Abhidhamma*, fear and greed in Theravāda Buddhism

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Etični temelji budističnih kognitivnih modelov: prezentacije pohlepa in strahu v theravādski *Abhidhammi*

Izvleček

V vsakdanjem življenju se nenehno soočamo s problemom strahu in pohlepa, a to postane še očitneje v kriznih obdobjih, kot na primer v času pandemije COVID-19, ko številni družbeni ukrepi in spremembe odražajo negotovost in strah pred boleznijo ter hlepenje po ponovni ekonomski rasti tržnega gospodarstva. Pri tem si lahko zastavimo vprašanje: ali lahko o strahu in pohlepu razmišljamo na povsem nov način in posledično delujemo drugače?

V iskanju drugačnih perspektiv pri gledanju na problem človeškega strahu in pohlepa ter njunih posledic v osebnem in družbenem življenju pričujoči prispevek raziskuje staroindijske kognitivne modele, ki se v svojih osnovah in pristopih bistveno razlikujejo od zahodnega diskurza. Pri tem se osredotoča na konceptualizacijo strahu in pohlepa v *Abhidhammi,* enem najpomembnejših besedil staroindijske filozofije, ki kognicijo opisuje kot kompleksno strukturo medsebojno povezanih in soodvisnih komponent (*dhamma*), udeleženih v toku mentalnih in fizičnih pojavov, ter jih predstavi kot hipne fenomene brez intrinzičnega bistva. Prispevek raziskuje, kako je strukturalni model kognicije v *Abhidhammi*, ki združuje analitični in sintetično-dinamični pristop, v celoti osnovan na etičnih izhodiščih. Posamezne komponente kognicije so predstavljene kot etične, neetične ali nevtralne; strah in pohlep sta uvrščena med neetične ter sta še posebej izpostavljena kot temeljni komponenti in gibali pri tvorbi večine neetičnih mentalnih stanj, iz katerih posledično izhaja sebi in drugim škodljivo delovanje. Zato *Abhidhamma* predlaga drugačen odziv na pohlep in strah ter identificira tiste kognicijske komponente in pogoje, ki omogočajo etičen odziv (*kusala*) ter posledično vodijo v etično delovanje. Prispevek tako pokaže, da je poznavanje kognitivnih modelov staroindijske filozofije zelo relevantno pri iskanju novih pristopov k etičnim izzivom današnjega sveta in da bi lahko pomembno pripomoglo k razmisleku o drugačnem razumevanju in odzivih na pohlep in strah.

Ključne besede: budistična etika, theravādska *Abhidhamma*, etična izhodišča *Abhidhamme*, strah in pohlep v theravādskem budizmu

Abbreviations[1]

A	*Aṅguttaranikāya*
As	*Atthasālinī*
D	*Dīghanikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇi*
M	*Majjhimanikāya*
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī*, *Majjhimanikāyāṭṭhakathā*
PED	*Pāli-English Dictionary*
S	*Saṃyuttanikāya*
Sn	*Suttanipāta*
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī*
Vibh	*Vibhaṅga*
Vibh-a	*Sammohavinodanī*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

Introduction[2]

At the time of writing this article, the COVID-19 pandemic has been spreading worldwide for over a year, engendering societal responses that are largely based on fear of the disease itself and future uncertainties on the one hand, and the desire to return to pre-pandemic "normal" life on the other. Consequently, many countries have been undertaking measures that, often irrationally, sway between total or partial lock down in attempts to control the spread of the disease, and the reinstatement of public life, frequently with a stated aim to strenghten economic growth, which is the foundational principle of the currently prevailing politico-economic

1 The abbreviations of Pāli sources and the quotation system follow the *Critical Pāli Dictionary* (Epilegomena to vol. 1, 1948, 5*–36*, and vol. 3, 1992, II–VI). The numbers in the quotations of Pāli sources refer to the volume and page of the PTS edition (e.g., M I 21 refers to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, vol 1, 21).

2 This paper is partly based on the author's article about the ethical foundations of ancient Indian cognitive models, published in Slovene (Ditrich 2021), with substantial changes, new materials and foci added.

paradigm. When such reactions predominantly stem from fear, they often seem to provoke panic, depression, anger and even violence, which are also reflected in the frequent use of military terminology in relation to COVID-19, such as "war with the virus", the "invisible enemy", "elimination of the virus", "victory over the virus", etc. When the reactions are triggered by craving or greed, they give rise to various socio-economic measures to allow for increased production and consumption in the endless pursuit of economic growth. Similarly, fluctuations between responses based on greed and fear are also the main underlaying principle of the consecutive rise and fall in share markets, as noted by many investigators (Investopedia 2020; Westerhoff 2004).

Greed and fear have undoubtedly been major components of human life since time immemorial, and have been mostly taken for granted as an unavoidable part of life. However, the role and significance of fear and greed in today's world requires a new consideration, especially in the light of expansive technological achievements, the applications of which, when motivated by fear or greed, can have unprecedented consequences, not only in crises such as epidemics, natural catastrophies and wars, but above all, in facing perhaps the greatest ever challenge of humanity—the massive impoverishment and destruction of the natural environment, which endangers the very existence of humans along with numerous ecosystems. Despite this great existential threat, it is the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently at the forefront of societal attention, but only rarely linked to broader and much more dangerous environmental issues (Klenert et al. 2020), which in turn are deeply related to the ethical challenges of modern societies. Therefore, in this article I reflect upon greed and fear in an ethical context and explore whether they could be approached from an alternative viewpoint and consequently, engaged with in a different manner. With this aim, the article investigates the notions of fear and greed within the ethical framework of ancient Indian cognitive models, as presented in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, and identifies those components of cognition, which allow for an ethical stance and moral action.

Ancient Indian Cognitive Models: the *Abhidhamma*

Contemporary research into ancient Indian culture, religions and philosophy involves many challenges because of the encounter with a discourse which is considerably different from the modern Western one.[3] The difficulties in trans-

3 Here the term "Western" is used in reference to the European-American paradigms that have become, due to politico-economic and other reasons, increasingly predominant worldwide.

lating ancient Indian texts are not only linguistic but above all cultural, because many aspects and components of ancient Indian religions and philosophies are incommensurable with Western presumptions. Since Indian and Buddhist studies are relatively young disciplines, with their early beginnings in the late nineteenth century, they are underpinned by, and considerably reflect, Orientalist discourse, based on European science, ideas of universalism, romanticism, and colonial social sciences of the time (McMahan 2008). Consequently, ancient Indian traditions and their texts were often translated and transposed into the dominant Western discourse and presented within the framework of Western assumptions. Even thereafter, in the twentieth century, attempts in creating bridges between the two disourses have frequently allowed for the traffic moving across the bridge to be in one direction only, that is towards the Western bank. These issues are especially relevant for the investigations of ancient Indian cognitive models, which comprise numerous components that have no counterpart in Western discourse and are consequently difficult to explain with Western concepts. Therefore, it is important to firstly attempt to understand and explicate them within ancient Indian discourse on their own terms.

One of the earliest known attempts to systematically study cognitive processes in ancient India is recorded in the body of texts in the Pāli language, called the *Abhidhamma*,[4] usually dated to the third century BCE, which encompass, in terms of Western categories, philosophy, ethics and phenomenological psychology (Bodhi 1993, 3–4). The *Abhidhamma* presents cognition as a dynamic structure, comprised of a number of components that are involved in cognitive processes, and analyses their interrelations, the causes and conditions required for generating various mental states.[5] Although its subject matter largely concurs with the topics considered in Western psychology and philosophy, the *Abhidhamma* has received scant scholarly attention. One of the reasons for this relatively limited interest may lie in the structural generative model of cognition presented in the *Abhidhamma*, for which no parallels can be found in the current Western psychology, cognitive science or other branches of knowledge.

4 This paper focuses on the *Abhidhamma*, as recorded in Theravāda Buddhism. Only two ancient Indian *Abhidhamma* (*Abhidharma*) full sets of texts are extant, i.e., one from the Sarvāstivāda Buddhist school which survived only in ancient Chinese translations, and the other from the Theravāda school, preserved in Pāli. Although the texts from the two traditions differ in many aspects, their overall genre, the underlying structural principles and paradigms are quite similar.

5 As Rošker (2018) argues, in many ways similar structural models of perception or cognition were also developed in ancient Chinese philosophy.

The *Abhidhamma,* as handed down to us, is a collection of seven works,[6] belonging to the Theravāda Buddhist Canon, usually situated in the third century BCE, although its foundations may stem from the early beginnings of Buddhism (Karunadasa 2014, 2). The texts are concerned with systematising the core components and features of Buddhist teachings, which are articulated in a very precise technical language, providing definitions of the key concepts and terms, and detailed analyses of cognitive processes. The first two books of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* in *Vibhaṅga*, are particularly significant since they comprehensively bring forward the entire structural model of cognition, establish a detailed typology of cognitive states, describe and analyse all the components involved in cognitive structures of lived experience, and link them with the materiality or material aspects of life (Karunadasa 2015). The last and the largest book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Paṭṭhāna*, describes the entire dynamics of the cognitive processes in the light of the formula of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), presenting the model of interdependent conditionality through twenty-four conditions or modes (*paccaya*), governing all the interrelated *dhammas* (Karunadasa 2014, 275–95; Ledi 2004, 31–61; Nyanatiloka 2008, 162–215).

The *Abhidhamma* presents cognition as a complex structure, comprised of basic components or units, which in Pāli are called *dhamma* (Sanskrit *dharma*), often rendered into English as "phenomena" (Warder 1971, 272–95). *Dhammas*, which are presumed to comprise the rapid flow of momentary mental and physical phenomena or events, are considered interdependent, ever-changing, and without a self or individuality. The *Abhidhamma* presents lived experience at the fundamental level (*paramattha*) as an interaction of a number of interdependent *dhammas*, which are classified into four categories: (1) cognition (*citta*), (2) mental concomitants (*cetasika*), (3) materiality (*rūpa*), and (4) *nibbāna* (Bodhi 1993, 25). The first three categories are considered impermanent, unsatisfactory and without intrinsic substance or self, while *nibbāna* is regarded as the unconditioned state which is empty, beyond time, change, and any afflictions.

The first category is *citta*, which may be translated as "consciousness, cognition, knowing". It is defined in the commentary *Atthasālinī* as that "which knows, cognizes, is conscious of the basis/object of knowing".[7] Cognition (*citta*) is considered momentary and very subtle; moments of cognition (*citta*) follow each other so rapidly that they create, at the conceptual level, a sense of continuity.

6 These are: *Dhammasaṅgaṇi, Vibhaṅga, Dhātukathā, Puggalapaññatti, Kathāvatthu, Yamaka,* and *Paṭṭhāna* (As 21–23).

7 As 63: *Cittanti ārammaṇaṃ cintetīti cittaṃ; vijānātīti attho.*

The impermanent and empty nature of cognition (*citta*) can be revealed only at the fundamental level, mainly through meditation practice; this is also reflected in the classification of 121 different types of *citta* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, among which more than half refer to various meditative states of high concentration (*jhāna*), insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and *nibbāna* (Dhs 9–133) (Ditrich 2016, 26–29).

The second category are *cetasikas*, mental concomitants, which always arise in various groups along with every moment of cognition (*citta*), and recognise, determine, and affect how the objects of cognition are experienced (e.g., with peace, happiness, mindfulness, anger, greed, envy). According to the *Abhidhamma*, lived experience is a flow of rapidly arising and passing away moments of cognition (*citta*), alongside sets of mental concomitantas (*cetasika*), without there being any observer or reference point existing outside this process. Different types of cognition (*citta*) are classified from an ethical perspective as wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate, depending on the types of mental concomitants (*cetasika*) that accompany each moment of cognition (*citta*). The Abhidhammic texts list 52 mental concomitants (*cetasika*) (Dhs 75–76; 87; 120) (Table 1).

Table 1: Mental concomitants (*cetasika*)[8]

Ethically variable (13) **Universals (7)** 1. Contact (*phassa*) 2. Feeling (*vedanā*) 3. Perception (*saññā*) 4. Volition (*cetanā*) 5. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) 6. Life faculty (*jīvitindriya*) 7. Attention (*manasikāra*) **Occasionals (6)** 8. Application of thought (*vitakka*) 9. Sustained thought (*vicāra*) 10. Intention (*adhimokkha*) 11. Energy (*viriya*) 12. Joy (*pīti*) 13. Wish to act (*chanda*)[9] **Unethical/unwholesome (14)** **Universals (4)** 14. Delusion (*moha*) 15. Moral recklessness (*ahirika*) 16. Disregard for consequences (*anottappa*) 17. Restlessness (*uddhacca*) **Occasionals (10)** ***Greed group (lobha) (3)*** 18. Greed (*lobha*) 19. Views (*diṭṭhi*) 20. Comparison/pride (*māna*) **Aversion group (dosa) (4)** 21. Aversion (*dosa*) 22. Envy (*issā*) 23. Selfishness (*macchariya*) 24. Regret/worry (*kukkucca*) **Delusion group** 25. Dullness (*thīna*) 26. Torpor (*middha*) 27. Confusion (*vicikicchā*)	**Ethical/wholesome(25)** **Universals (19)** 28. Trust (*saddhā*) 29. Mindfulness (*sati*) 30. Moral restraint/conscientiousness (*hiri*) 31. Moral control/ scrupulousness (*ottappa*) 32. Non-greed (*alobha*) 33. Non-aversion (*adosa*) 34. Mental equilibrium (*tatramajjhattatā*) 35. Tranquillity of mental concomitants (*kāyapassaddhi*) 36. Tranquillity of cognition (*cittapassaddhi*) 37. Lightness of mental concomitants (*kāyalahutā*) 38. Lightness of cognition (*cittalahutā*) 39. Readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāya-mudutā*) 40. Softness/malleability of cognition (*citta-mudutā*) 41. Readiness/wieldiness of concomitants y (*kāya-kammaññatā*) 42. Readiness/wieldiness of cognition (*citta-kammaññatā*) 43. Proficiency of mental concomitants (*kāya-pāguññatā*) 44. Proficiency of cognition (*cittapāguññatā*) 45. Straightness/rectitude of mental concomitants (*kāyujukatā*) 46. Straightness/rectitude of cognition (*cittujukatā*) **Occasionals (3)** 47. Right speech (*sammā-vācā*) 48. Right action (*sammā-kammanta*) 49. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) **Illimitables (2)** 50. Compassion (*karuṇā*) 51. Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) **Absence of delusion (1)** 52. Wisdom (*paññā*)

8 This is a modified table, with Pāli terms added, from Bodhi (1993, 79).

9 In the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, *chanda* is not listed as a mental concomitamnt but is introduced only in the commentaries (As 133).

Each cognitive moment (*citta*), whether ethically wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate, is invariably accompanied by at least seven universal mental concomitants (*cetasika*) which occur simultaneously:

1. Contact (*phassa*), which arises when consciousness gets in touch with an object/basis of cognition, and thus initiates the cognitive process (As 107–09).
2. Feeling/feeling tone (*vedanā*) is an affective tone or flavour of an experience, which can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (As 109–10).
3. Perception (*saññā*) notes and recognizes an object (As 110–11).
4. Volition (*cetanā*) is the conative aspect of cognition, which organizeses and coordinates other associated mental states on the object/basis of cognition (As 111–12).
5. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) concentrates or focuses on the object/basis of cognition, and brings together the mental states that arise with it (As 118–19).
6. Life faculty (*jīvitindriya*) sustains the associated mental states, and provides continuity of the mental process (As 123–24).
7. Attention (*manasikāra*) draws awareness to the object/basis of cognition, drives and joins the associated mental states to the object, and faces the object (As 133).

The group of these seven universal mental concomitants (*cetasika*) can be joined by several other ethically variable concomittants (listed under 8–13, Table 1), which include: application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), intention (*adhimokkha*), energy (*viriya*), joy (*pīti*), and wish to act (*chanda*) (As 114–18; 133; Karunadasa 2014, 103–20). The ethicaly variable concomitants in turn can also be joined by other concomitants, either ethically wholesome or unwholesome ones (14–52, Table 1).

Among the ethically unwholesome concomitants (*akusala cetasika*), there are four that are invariably present in all unwholesome mental states, i.e., delusion (*moha*), lack of moral restraint (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences or unscrupulousness (*anottappa*), and restlessness or agitation (*uddhacca*) (As 248–50; 260) (14–17, Table 1). These four are good indicators of unethical mental states; for example, the presence of agitation indicates that one is experiencing an unethical or unwholesome mental state. In addition, they can be joined by other unwholesome concomitants which include the following ten: greed (*lobha*), views (*diṭṭhi*), comparison/pride (*māna*), aversion (*dosa*), envy (*issā*), selfishness (*macchariya*), regret/worry (*kukkucca*), dullness (*thīna*), torpor (*middha*), and confusion (*vicikicchā*) (18–27, Table 1) (Karunadasa 2014, 121–31).

The largest group is formed by the twenty-five ethically wholesome or beautiful (*sobhana*) mental concomitants (*cetasika*) (28–52, Table 1). Among these, nineteen invariably occur in all ethical mental states: trust (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), moral restraint (*hiri*), moral control/scrupulousness (*ottappa*), non-greed (*alobha*), non-aversion (*adosa*), mental equilibrium (*tatramajjhattatā*), tranquillity of mental concomitants (*kāyapassaddhi*) and cognition (*cittapassaddhi*), lightness of mental concomitants (*kāyalahutā*) and cognition (*cittalahutā*), readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāyamudutā*) and cognition (*cittamudutā*), readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāyakammaññatā*) and cognition (*cittakammaññatā*), proficiency of mental concomitants (*kāyapāguññatā*) and cognition (*cittapāguññatā*), straightness/rectitude of mental concomitants (*kāyujukatā*) and cognition (*cittujukatā*) (28–46, Table 1) In addition, these universal wholesome concomitants can be joined by other wholesome ones, such as appropriate speech (*sammā-vācā*), appropriate action (*sammā kammanta*), appropriate livelihood (*sammāājīva*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and wisdom (*paññā*) (Karunadasa 2014, 133–44) (47–52, Table 1).

Unethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*) are incompatible with the ethical ones and *vice versa*; e.g., anger and restlesness cannot arise together with peace, mindfulnees or wisdom. Thus the *Abhidhamma* classifies the types of cognition (*citta*) on ethical grounds, with regard to wholesomeness or unwholesomness of mental concomitants (*cetasika*) that arise along with cognition (*citta*).

Ethical Foundations of the *Abhidhamma*

Even a quick glance at Table 1 reveals that the Abhidhammic model of cognition differs significantly from any Western models, such as those in psychology or cognitive science. The differences not only involve a considerably incompatible taxonomy and lexicon but, most importantly, disparate fundamental postulates and aims underlying the cognitive models. Consequently, the English renderings of key terms from Pāli are a compromise since, for many words or concepts, there are no precise English translations, and clarity about what they connote has to constantly be kept in mind, i.e., an exact clarification of what each term refers to within the framework of the whole Abhidhammic structural cognitive model is necessary before we can comprehensively examine the model.

It may be contended that the entire Abhidhammic cognitive structure is grounded on, and permeated by, ethics. The pivotal role of ethics is also evident in the very first sentence of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, the first book of the *Abhidhamma*; as in many other ancient Indian texts, the entire topic and aim of the book is introduced at the very beginning through a question: "Which *dhammas* are ethical (*kusala*)?"[10] The implicit premise of the *Abhidhamma* is that only wholesome or ethical cognitive states (*citta*), arising in conjunction with wholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), can act as the necessary condition for the occurrence of wisdom (*paññā*), which in turn can lead to the final soteriological goal, to *nibbāna*. Thus, the *Abhidhamma* analyses various mental states with the aim to determine which components, causes and conditions make cognition (*citta*) ethical or not. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* presents over one hundred types of cognition (*citta*), which are listed and analysed with reference to ethics (Dhs 9–133), and classified into the following four groups (Bodhi 1993, 23–75):

1. *Kusala-citta*,[11] usually translated as "wholesome/skilful cognition", which arises in conjunction with wholesome or ethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*), such as trust, mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom (Dhs 9–75).
2. *Akusala-citta*, translated as "unwholesome/unskilful cognition", which arises in conjunction with unwholesome or unethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*), founded on the following unwholesome roots (Dhs 75–87):
    a. Greed (*lobha*): grasping and sticking to the object without letting it go (As 249).
    b. Aversion (*dosa*): hostility, anger, hatred, and similar states, always accompanied by displeasure (*domanassa*) (As 257).
    c. Delusion (*moha*): mental blindness, unclarity, not seeing the nature of the object experienced. Delusion is also always present in mental states with greed or aversion and is seen as the root of all unwholesome states (Dhs 249).
3. *Vipāka-citta* "resultant cognition"; indeterminate in reference to *kamma* (As 265–93).

10 *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* 9: *katame dhammā kusalā*?

11 The Pāli term *kusala* is in these contexts usually translated as "good, wholesome, skillful" (Cousins 1996, 136–64).

4. *Kiriya-citta* "functional cognition"; performing tasks that have no *kammic* causes or results (As 293–94).[12]

The first two groups—wholesome cognition (*kusala-citta*) and unwholesome cognition (*akusala-citta*)—are pivotal for Buddhist practice, which is grounded on the cultivation of ethical mental states. The underlying motivation for this Abhidhammic analysis of cognitive process at the fundamental, non-conventional level, is not the search for knowledge about human cognition *per se* but has instead a pragmatic goal: its structural model provides a cognitve map that, above all, articulates meditative experiences and insights which are proposed to lead to liberation from the unsatisfactoriness of existence (*dukkha*), to *nibbāna*. Such experiential understanding or insight, which Buddhism refers to as wisdom (*paññā*), is presumed to be developed through the cultivation of moral virtues (*sīla*) and meditation (*samādhi*). The primary aim of Buddhist practice, as expressed in early Buddhism, is not a moral or ethical improvement of individuals and society, but rather the liberation from the entanglements and entrapment of individuals within the society, and the ultimate freedom from *saṃsāra* (i.e., the cycle of continuous births and deaths). Nonetheless, the essential condition, a *sine qua non* for reaching such a deliverance is the cultivation of ethical mental states and moral virtues in relation to all living beings, which would be undoubtedly reflected in societal life.

In other words, only those aspects of human cognition are investigated and analysed that are important for the cultivation of ethical mental states which are in turn pivotal for liberation from suffering. This main premise of Buddhist teachings is expressed in many texts, such as the *Alagaddūpamasutta* (M I 140), in which the Buddha states that what he teaches is about suffering and the cessation of suffering.[13] This is also pointed out in the frequently quoted Buddhist parable of the poisoned arrow in the *Cūḷamālunkyasutta* (M I 533–36), explaining that the immediacy of human suffering needs to be addressed first, like a poisoned arrow has to be immediately removed from the wound, before proceeding to address any other questions. The Buddhist discourse proposes that such an essential knowledge, which is about liberation from suffering, can be achieved through the cultivation of ethics, meditation and wisdom, leading to a deep transformation of human consciousness. On the path to deliverance from suffering, the cultivation of virtue is considered an essential foundation. The earliest texts already inform about the moral guidelines or rules (*sīla*) for monks and nuns as well as for laity. Moral rules for lay people basically instruct them not to cause harm or suffering

12 Since the last two types, *vipāka-citta* and *kiriya-citta* (Karunadasa 2014, 92–93), have no ethical consequences, they are not discussed in this article.

13 M I 140: *dukkhañ-c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ*.

(to oneself and others) through speech and actions. It is thus recommended that one should abstain from killing sentient beings, stealing, lying, consuming alcohol and similar substances, and engaging in harmful pleasures (Harvey 1990, 264–81). The cultivation of moral virtues is also embedded in the noble eightfold path, which is one of the main representations of Buddhist doctrine (*Vibh* 235–43).

Table 2: The noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*)

<table>
<tr><td>appropriate understanding/view (sammā diṭṭhi)</td><td rowspan="2">wisdom (paññā)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate thought (sammā saṅkappa)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate speech (sammā vācā)</td><td rowspan="3">moral virtues (sīla)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate action (sammā kammanta)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate way of life (sammā ājīva)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate effort (sammā vāyāma)</td><td rowspan="3">meditation (samādhi)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate mindfulness (sammā sati)</td></tr>
<tr><td>appropriate concentration (sammā samādhi)</td></tr>
</table>

The eightfold path comprises three interrelated clusters: moral virtues (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The Pāli term *sammā,* which is used as an attribute of each individual component of the eightfold path, has a wide semantic range; it could be translated as "appropriate, right, suitable" in the sense of being appropriate or right for the path leading to liberation from suffering, to *nibbāna*. The first two components of the path constitute wisdom (*paññā*), encompassing right view or deep understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*) of the impermanent, impersonal nature of all phenomena, and right or appropriate thought (*sammā saṅkappa*), founded on such wisdom. The next three components constitute moral virtues (*sīla*), which are the very foundations of the Buddhist path and include appropriate speech (*sammā vācā*), action (*sammā kammanta*), and way of life (*sammā ājīva*); by implementing these, one does not cause suffering or harm. The last three components are related to meditation practice, encompassing appropriate effort (*sammā vāyāma*), mindfulness (*sammā sati*), and concentration (*sammā samādhi*) (Table 2).

Modern scholars often state that ethics as such has never existed in Buddhism as an independent discipline; consequently, Buddhist ethics had been quite neglected by Western scholarship until the 1990s. Even then, more recent attempts at theorizing Buddhist ethics have been conducted mostly from a Western perspective, trying to situate the Buddhist model(s) within the principles, notions and indeed categories of Western ethics. Though such studies make valuable contributions, their approach is significantly different from the Buddhist one. Though such studies make valuable contributions, their approach is significantly different from the Buddhist one. For example, the deployment the deployment of Western psychological concepts such as "emotion" and "rational intellect", for example (de Silva 2002; Keown 1992), have no equivalent concepts in Buddhist discourse.

Most scholars successfully link Buddhist ethics to moral virtues (*sīla*), which, in the case of Theravāda tradition, they investigate primarily by drawing from the *Suttapiṭaka* and *Vinayapiṭaka* (Edelglass 2013; Harvey 2000, 3–42; Keown 1992, 107–16). However, to my knowledge, there has been no attempt to systematically theorize and link Buddhist ethics to the *Abhidhamma* models. King (1964, 5), for example, states: "Abhidhammic ethical theory [...] seems to be a vocabulary and system of distinctions almost completely foreign and meaningless to the Western mind, in which the ethical element, in the Western sense, is lost sight of in an unfamiliar maze of Buddhist psychological terminology." Keown (1992, 60) comments on King (1964): "one looks there in vain for the articulation of a theoretical structure [in the *Abhidhamma*] … it bears no resemblance to what would be regarded in the West as a treatise on ethics or moral philosophy."

Furthermore, the ethical premises of the *Abhidhamma* are inextricably linked to the axiomatic notion of non-self (*anattā*). The Buddhist teaching of non-self (*anattā*) or the absence of an intrinsic individuality has been the subject of a range of interpretations and contentions from the earliest Buddhist schools onwards, and it was an important component of ancient Indian philosophical debates. Consequently, every book on Buddhism will inevitably have to touch upon the fundamental Buddhist premise that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent (*anicca*), subject to non-satisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and that they are without an intrinsic self (*anattā*). Surprisingly, however, most modern works on Buddhist ethics do not explore how ethics as such can be intrinsically related to the notion of non-self, or they only tangentially touch upon this subject; thus, for example, Keown (1992, 19) justifies the notion of self or identity in the following manner: "Buddhism provides sufficient criteria for personal identity to allow the identification of subjects with the moral nexus". Such a statement is an example of how Buddhist ethics tends to be examined from a Western perspective through Western concepts, which cannot but assume the category of a subject or that of a personal identity.

In contrast to these standard approaches, it is proposed here that despite the fact that ethics is not articulated as a special or separate branch of knowledge, it is deeply embedded in Buddhist doctrine, especially in the model of cognitive processes as presented in the *Abhidhamma*. This model is founded on the principle of *kusala,* which is usually translated as "good, wholesome, skilful" (PED, *s.v.*), largely in reference to ethical mental states. Moral virtues (*sīla*) serve as the foundation of, and aid for the cultivation of ethical mental states, which in turn constitute a prerequisite for the emergence of wisdom (*paññā*), viewed as an essential mental factor (*cetasika*) for reaching liberation, *nibbāna.* Wisdom (*paññā*) is often presented as a deep insight into impermanence (*anicca)* of all phenomena (*dhamma*), their intrinsic unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and emptiness (*anattā*) (Vism 436–38). It means that one can then observe phenomena at a deep level and no longer identifies with them, but rather understands that everything that appears is an ever-changing flow of physical and mental phenomena that are impermanent and without any self or innate essence (*anattā*).[14] Conversely, any identification with, or attachment to the phenomena and processes that constitute lived experience creates an illusory identity that leads to confusion, dissatisfaction and suffering (*dukkha*) (Vism 436–38). In other words, non-identification with phenomena is the basis of ethics: insight into emptiness is a perfect ethical stance because in such moments there is no identification with the phenomena contained in an experience, no identity is generated nor any separate individual or "self" and with it therefore no "other". In such moments, the three roots of all harmful mental states—greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) —are also absent.

Representation of Fear and Greed in the *Abhidhamma*

Having outlined the main features of the structural cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* and its ethical foundation, fear (*bhaya*) and greed (*lobha*) will now be taken up in order to examine how they are understood and conceptualized within this paradigm. As frequently stated in the *Tipiṭaka*, fear *(bhaya)* and greed (*lobha*) are intrinsically linked to craving (*taṅhā*), which is viewed as the fundamental vehicle for non-satisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*) (e.g., Dhp 61). The key role of craving (*taṅhā*) is already established in the four noble truths, allegedly explained by the Buddha in his first speech, the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, in which he summarizes the entire Buddhist doctrine. The four noble truths speak of 1) the dissatisfaction and suffering of human existence (*dukkha*), 2) its cause, which is craving (*taṅhā*), 3) the possibility of liberation from suffering (*nibbāna*), and 4) the noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) that leads to freedom from suffering (Table 2) (S V 420–25). The Pāli term *taṅhā* literally means "thirst"; this is a yearning, craving or desire to retain pleasurable experiences and discard

14 The notion of non-self has been explored from various angles by many scholars. It was also discussed in relation to Buddhist meditation (and mindfulness in particular) in a special issue of the *Asian Studies* journal, with contributions by Zalta (2016) and others.

unpleasurable ones, which necessarily creates a conflict between actual experience and expectations, hopes, ideas or thoughts. Buddhism identifies three types of craving (*taṅhā*): 1) craving for sensual pleasures (*kāmataṇhā*), 2) craving for being and becoming (*bhavataṇhā*), which includes the desire for continuation of one's identity or "I", and yearning for eternal life after death, and 3) craving for non-being (*vibhavataṇhā*), ceasing to be, annihilation, removal and destruction of anything unpleasant, which may lead to violence or suicide.[15] Because craving (*taṅhā*) is considered the root cause of unsatisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*), it is associated not only with fear and greed, but also with all other harmful or unwholesome mental states, as it is, for example, comprehensively expounded in the formula of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), showing how craving (*taṅhā*) can lead to clinging (*upādāna*)[16] and, eventually, to unsatisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*).[17]

Greed (lobha)

The term *lobha* is usually rendered as "greed" (PED, s.v.); it is frequently closely related to the terms *rāga* (referring to lust or passion), and *abhijjhā* (referring to covetousness) (Dhs79). Greed (*lobha*) is always regarded as unwholesome desire or clinging to objects of experience and, as iterated in many instances in the *Tipiṭaka* such as the *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*, it is always listed among the three unwholesome roots (*tīṇi akusalamūlāni*)—greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*)—which are considered the very foundations for all unwholesome states (M I 47). Greed (*lobha*) is also presented as one of the defilements (*kilesa*), i.e., unwholesome mental components that incite unethical states and obstruct the cultivation of clarity, wisdom and other wholesome qualities.[18] Sometimes it is included among the fetters (*saṃyojana*), i.e., the factors that bind living beings to *saṃsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths that generates suffering (*dukkha*).[19] The ultimate

15 M I 48–49: *Yā' yaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī, seyyathīdaṃ: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā, ayaṃ vuccat' āvuso dukkhasamudayo.*

16 Four kinds of clinging are listed in SN II 3: to sensual pleasures (*kāmupādāna*); to views (*diṭṭhupādāna*); to rules and rituals (*sīlabbatupādāna*); and to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*).

17 For discourses on causation and dependent origination, see the *Nidānavagga* (SN II 1–133; D II 55–71).

18 Defilements (*kilesa*) are variously presented in the Pāli texts, most frequently as a group of ten: 1) greed (*lobha*), 2) aversion (*dosa*), 3) delusion (*moha*), 4) conceit (*māna*), 5) views (*diṭṭhi*), 6) doubt (*vicikicchā*), 7) sloth (*thīna*), 8) restlessness (*uddhacca*), 9) shamelessness (*ahirika*), and 10) lack of fear of doing wrong (*anottappa*) (Dhs 257; Vism 683).

19 For example, the *Potaliyasutta* (M I 360–361) includes greed among the following eight fetters: 1) destroying life (*pāṇātipāta*); 2) stealing (*adinnādāna*); 3) false speech (*musāvāda*); 4) malicious speech (*pisunā*); 5) covetousness and greed (*giddhilobha*); 6) blame and scolding (*nindārosa*); 7) anger and malice (*kodhūpāyāsa*); and 8) conceit (*atimāna*).

aim of the Buddhist path is freedom from defilements and fetters; this is why *arahants* as well as the Buddha are described in many instances in the *Tipiṭaka* (e.g., S I 220) as free from greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). The absence of greed (*alobha*) is a wholesome mental concomitant (*cetasika*) (32, Table 1), which is invariably present in all ethical mental states (*citta*) and considered a condition for understanding impermanence—as opposed to greed which seeks for prosperity to be permanent (Karunadasa 2014, 139). The commentary *Atthasālinī,* as well as the *Visuddhimagga* describe greed (*lobha*):[20]

> Greed has the characteristic of grasping the object like birdlime. Its function is clinging, like meat thrown into a hot pan. It manifests itself as not letting go, like the dye of lampblack. Its cause is perceiving pleasure in things that bring bondage.[21]

In the *Abhidhamma,* greed (*lobha*) is considered a mental concomitant (*cetasika*) which is always unwholesome (18, Table 1), and can occur only in unwholesome mental states (*citta*). In this analysis, greed (*lobha*) is invariably accompanied by another four unwholesome concomitants, i.e., delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), and restlessness (*uddhacca*) (14–17, Table 1), as well as two specific concomitants, namely, views (*diṭṭhi*) and comparison or pride (*māna*) (18–19, Table 1). Greed is thus always accompanied by delusion (*moha*), which the commentary *Atthasālinī* explains as ignorance, mental blindness, absence of judgment and lack of wisdom, and considers it the source of everything unethical (*akusala*).[22] Moreover, greed always occurs along with restlessness (*uddhacca*),[23] described in the *Atthasālinī* as agitation, and compared to rough water or a flag blowing in the wind.[24] Mental states comprising greed (*lobha*) also include moral recklessness (*ahirika*), i.e., absence of moral shame, resulting in moral misconduct, and disregard for consequences or absence of moral apprehension (*anottappa*) (15–16, Table 1); it means that when greed is present, there are no shame or moral "brakes" (in relation to

20 All translations from Pāli into English are by the author of this article.

21 As 249; Vism 468: *Tesu lobho ārammaṇagahaṇalakkhaṇo, makkaṭālepo viya; abhisangaraso, tattakapāle khittaṃ maṃsapesi viya; apariccāgapaccupaṭṭhāno, telañjanarāgo viya; saṃyojanīyadhammesu assādadassanapadaṭṭhāno.*

22 As 249: *Moho cittassa andhabhāvalakkhaṇo aññāṇalakkhaṇo vā, asampaṭivedharaso ārammaṇasabhāvacchādanaraso vā, asammāpaṭipattipaccupaṭṭhāno andhakārapaccupaṭṭhāno vā, ayonisomanasikārapadaṭṭhāno. Sabbākusalānaṃ mūlanti daṭṭhabbo.*

23 Restlessness (*uddhacca*) is presented is the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga* as "agitation, disturbance, turmoil of the mind" (Dhs 205; Vibh 255: *avūpasamo cetaso vikkhepo bhantattaṃ cittassa*).

24 As 251: *Uddhatabhāvo uddhaccaṃ. Taṃ avūpasamalakkhaṇaṃ, vātābhighātacalajalaṃ viya anavaṭṭhānarasaṃ, vātābhighātacaladhajapaṭākā viya.*

oneself and others respectively) and consequently, harmful speech and actions can ensue (As 248, Vism 468).

Another two mental commitants that accompany greed (*lobha*) are attachment to views (*diṭṭhi*) (18, Table 1), and comparison or pride (*māna*) (18, Table 1). Many canonical and commentarial texts discuss views; the term refers to dogmas, opinions, convictions or ideas, grounded in craving (*taṅhā*), which one grasps or holds on to, identifies with, and erroneously regards as permanent (As 252). Therefore, in several texts, such as the *Paramaṭṭhakasutta* (796–803) of the *Suttanipāta*, it is said that one should abandon past views and not take up any new views, but instead live beyond them, without attaching to, or relying on any view (Sn 156–58). Conversely, as comprehensively expounded in the *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*, Buddhism presents right or appropriate view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) as the understanding of what is wholesome or ethical and what is not, and links it to an insight into the four noble truths, dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and taints (*āsava*)[25] (M I 46–55). Comparison or pride (*māna*) (19, Table 1) is yet another concomitant that is invariably linked to greed (*lobha*). The *Visuddhimagga* and *Atthasālinī* describe pride:

> its characteristic is haughtiness, its function is arrogance, its manifestation is desire for prominence, its cause is greed, dissociated from views, and it should be considered madness.[26]

As explained in the *Sāratthappakāsinī,* pride (*māna*), in conjunction with views (*diṭṭhi*) and craving (*taṇhā*), creates the (delusionary) idea of self, which comprises the following three aspects: "I am" (*aham asmi*) which is linked with views (*diṭṭhi*), "mine" (*mama*) which is linked with craving (*taṇhā*), and "myself" (*me attā*) which is linked with pride (*māna*).[27] Pride (*māna*) is explained in the *Dhammasaṅgani* as three kinds of thoughts: "I am a superior person", "I am as good a person", and "I am an inferior person" (Dhs 197–98).[28] The *Abhidhamma* thus places comparison with others among unethical mental states, related to greed and other unwholesome components, which can eventuate in unethical action.

25 The term "taint" (*āsava*) refers to predispositions such as sense desire (*kāma*), becoming (*bhava*), ignorance (*avijjā*), and views (*diṭṭhi*), which obstruct liberation and motivate further existence. According to the *Atthasālinī*, the term *āsava* refers to deeply rooted corruptions, defilements, or "intoxicants", which flow through the five senses and the mind (As 48).

26 Vism 469, As 256: *Ayaṃ viseso: so uṇṇatilakkhaṇo, sampaggaharaso, ketukamyatāpaccupaṭṭhāno, diṭṭhivippayuttalobhapadaṭṭhāno, ummādo viya daṭṭhabbo.*

27 Spk II 215: *ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayāti ahaṃkāradiṭṭhi ca mamaṃkārataṇhā ca mānānusayā ca.*

28 Dhs 197–198: *Seyyo 'hamasmīti māno—sadiso'hamasmīti māno—hīno 'hamasmīti māno.*

To recapitulate, greed (*lobha*) is presented within the cognitive structure in the *Abhidhamma* as an unethical mental concomitant (*cetasika*), which is invariably linked with a number of other unethical concomitants, such as delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), views (*diṭṭhi*), and comparison or pride (*māna*); these can then serve as indicators for any unethical mental state, and signal the potential for harmful, immoral speech and action.

Fear (bhaya)

Much like greed (*lobha*), fear (*bhaya*) is also linked to craving (*taṅhā*), which is considered the source of all discontent and suffering (*dukkha*). As stated, for example, in the *Dhammapada* (verse 216):

> From craving is born grief, from craving is born fear.
>
> For one who is free from craving, there is no grief; where from is then fear?[29]

Fear (*bhaya*) is related to the craving to avoid unpleasant experiences, such as the loss of agreeable circumstances, suffering and pain, and especially, as illustrated by *Bhayasutta*, the fear of birth (*jātibhaya*), aging (*jarābhaya*), disease (*vyādhibhaya*), and death (*maraṇabhaya*) (A II 12). It is said in the *Suttanipāta* (576) that mortals are in constant fear of death (Sn 113),[30] which the *Visuddhimagga* compares to "a murderer with poised sword", appearing already at birth (Vism 231).[31]

The *Vibhaṅga* describes various types of fear, presented in three fourfold classifications, which refer to the most common natural and societal threats and dangers: 1) fear of kings (*rājabhaya*), thieves (*corabhaya*), fire (*aggibhaya*), and water (rivers and oceans) (*udakabhaya*); 2) fear of waves (*ūmibhaya*), crocodiles (*kumbhilabhaya*), whirlpools (*āvaṭṭabhaya*), and savage fish (*susukābhaya*); and 3) fear of self-blame (*attānuvādabhaya*), blame by others (*parānuvādabhaya*), punishment (*daṇḍabhaya*), and misfortune or unhappy destiny (*duggatibhaya*) (Vibh 376; Vibh-a 502). In addition, the fivefold classification in the *Vibhaṅga* lists: fear related to livelihood (*ājīvikabhaya*), fear of blame (*asilokabhaya*), timidity or embarrassment in assembly (*parisasārajjabhaya*), fear of death (*maraṇabhaya*), and fear of misfortune or unhappy destiny (*duggatibhaya*) (Vibh 379; Vibh-a 505–06). The texts frequently refer to the fear experienced by renunciates when they dwell alone

29 Dhp 61: *taṇhāya jāyatī soko taṇhāya jāyatī bhayaṃ, taṇhāya vippamuttassa n' atthi soko kuto bhayaṃ.*

30 Sn 113*: niccaṃ maraṇato bhayaṃ.*

31 Vism 231: *Evaṃ ukkhittāsiko vadhako viya sahajātiyā āgata*ṃ *pan'etaṃ maraṇaṃ gīvāya asiṃ cārayamāno.*

in the forest (Vism 115) or contemplate corpses (Vism 187), and advise on how fear and dread can be prevented and conquered (Vism 218).

Fear (*bhaya*) is sometimes listed along with greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) as the main root of all unwholesomeness (A I 72) and associated with foolishness or lack of wisdom (A I 101). In many *suttas*, such as the *Bhayabheravasutta* (M I 1720), fear (*bhaya*) and dread (*bherava*) are called unwholesome (*akusala*) states (M I 17) which were, as narrated in the *sutta*, overcome by the Buddha. Absence of fear is thus seen as one of the virtues and spiritual achievements (Vism 64); advanced practitioners are called fearless (*abhaya*), and *nibbāna* is compared to a place without fear (*abhayadesa*) (Vism 664).

Fear (*bhaya*), which is linked to craving (*taṅhā*), could be presented within the framework of the Abhidhammic analysis as an unwholesome state, comprised of several unethical mental concomittants (*cetasika*). These always include the four universal unwholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), i.e., delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), and restlessness (*uddhacca*) (14–17, Table 1), which were discussed earlier since they also accompany greed (*lobha*). Because fear is associated with the craving or desire to prevent unpleasant experiences, it can arise along with the mental concomitants (*cetasika*) which are listed in the unethical aversion group (21–24, Table 1). Aversion (*dosa*), one of the three unwholesome roots (i.e., greed, aversion, delusion), refers to dislike, obstruction, irritation, anger, and similar states (Dhs 84, 190; As 257). It can lead to morally harmful speech and actions, including violence, because it is always associated with delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), and disregard for consequences (*anottappa*). In addition, aversion can be joined by another three specific mental concomitants: 1) envy (*issā*) toward anyone who appears to be in better circumstances (Dhs 198–99; As 257);[32] 2) selfisheness or lack of generosity (*macchariya*) which is shown as unwillingness to share anything (from materials things to good reputation and knowledge) with others (Dhs 199);[33] and 3) worrying or regret (*kukkucca*) which is often associated with sadness, remorse, and grief (Dhs 205; As 258).[34] Fear and greed can

32 Envy (*issā*) is described as "jealousy at the gifts, honour, hospitality, praise, respect, and reverence given to others" (Dhs 198–199: *Yā paralobhasakkāragarukāramānanavandanapūjanāsu issā issāyanā issāyitattaṃ usuyyā usuyyanā usuyitattaṃ--idaṃ vuccati issāsaññojanaṃ.*).

33 Five types of meanness or lack of generosity (*macchariya*) are listed in the the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*: "meanness in relation to the dwelling place, family, gifts, social reputation, and doctrine" (Dhs 199: *Pañca macchariyāni--āvāsamacchariyaṃ kulamacchariyaṃ lābhamacchariyaṃ vaṇṇamacchariyaṃ dhammamacchariyaṃ.*).

34 Worry (*kukkucca*) is described as perplexity about "what is appropriate in the inappropriate, what is inappropriate in the appropriate, immoral in the moral, moral in the immoral—this is worry, remorse, remorsefulness, regretfulness of the mind" (Dhs 205; Vibh 255: *akappiye kappiyasaññitā, kappiye akappiyasaññitā, avajje vajjasaññitā, vajje avajjasaññitā. yaṃ evarūpaṃ kukkuccaṃ kukkuccāyanā kukkuccāyitattaṃ cetaso vippaṭisāro manovilekho.*).

also give rise to attachment to rites and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) in the hope that these will bring security and the fulfillment of desires (Ps I 288).

Unlike greed (*lobha*), which the *Abhidhamma* invariably considers as one of the unwholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), fear (*bhaya*) is not classified as a mental concomitant. As already noted by Heim (2014, 101–2), this seems puzzling since fear is a universal impulse, which seems as prevalent as greed, and yet the Abhidhammic analysis does not consider it a fundamental unit (*dhamma*) of sentient experience. The explanation for this proposed here is that *bhaya* is a more complex notion, appearing in different contexts, and therefore it cannot be reduced to a fundamental unit of experience. Though largely associated with unethical mental states which are related to craving (*taṅhā*), the word *bhaya* also occurs in other contexts. In many instances the term *bhaya* refers to understanding the troublesome, dangerous, and oppressive nature of life and, more generally, *saṃsāra*, and the danger of defilements that may arise due to lack of moral restraint and wisdom.[35] In this context, instead of rendering the term *bhaya* as "fear, fright" (PED, *s.v.*), which implies a fearful mental state, it would be more suitable to translate the term as "danger". For example, the *Visuddhimagga* explains that a monk (*bhikkhu*) is the one who "sees danger (*bhaya*) in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*)" (Vism 3), which does not imply that the monk is "afraid." Similarly, the *Upanīyasutta* (S I 3) talks about "seeing danger in death" (*bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno*), and the *Sīhasutta* (S III 85–86) uses the term in the sense of oppression and danger due to impermanence and instability of the world.[36]

In the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, in which the fruits of homeless life are discussed, the ascetic who has renounced the wordly life is described to cultivate, among other things, virtue, and sees danger in the slightest fault (*aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī*) (D I 63), referring to danger of breaking their virtuous behavior and thus allowing unwholesome states to arise. Similarly, the term *bhaya* occurs in relation to perception of danger (*bhayasaññā*) in regard to moral offences (A II 241) or danger of breaking the five precepts (A III 205), and dreading self-blame (*attānuvādādibhaya*) that could arise due to the lack of virtue (Vism 10). In these instances, *bhaya* is not considered to be linked to craving (*taṅhā*) but is rather regarded

35 This is also discussed by Giustarini (2012), who shows that apart from being seen as an obstruction, fear (*bhaya*) can also provide motivation and support in the Buddhist path; his argument is well supported through an analysis of two compounds, *bhayūpurata* and *abhayūpurata*, usually rendered as "restrained by fear" and "unrestrained by fear" respectively.

36 Other examples include the *Sammasasutta* which uses the term in reference to the world as dangerous (*bhayato*), along with being impermanent (*aniccato*), unsatisfactory (*dukkhato*), without self (*anattato*) and subject to disease (*rogato*) (S II 110). The five aggregates (*khandha*) are also regarded as dangerous (*bhayaṭṭha*), along with being impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self (Vism 611).

as an insight into the impermanent nature and instability of phenomena that comprise experiences, along with an understanding that unethical mental states are dangerous, leading away from the path to the liberation and freedom from the entanglements of *saṃsāra*.

The *Atthasālinī* links *bhaya* with moral control or scrupulousness (*ottappa*) (31, Table 1), which is listed among ethically wholesome, universal concomitants, and described as shame of doing wrong, and shrinking from evil (As 124–125). When different types of insight knowledges are discussed, the term *bhaya* is used in the sense of danger, weariness, insecurity or peril: for example, in the *Atthasālinī* the term *bhayadassana* refers to discernment of peril (As 352), and describes that seeing birth, aging and death as danger (*bhayato disvā*) gives rise to the desire to be liberated (*muccitukāma*) from the cycle of rebirths (As 407). The word *bhaya* often occurs along with apprehension (*santāsa*) and incitement or urge towards liberation (*saṃvega*), which is experienced when the unsatisfactory aspects of existence and the four noble truths are revealed and understood (S III 85; A II 33; Vibh-a 189).

Thus, the word *bhaya* can refer to seeing danger in all phenomena one experiences due to their impermanence, instability, and lack of intrinsic self. With such an insight, which is based on wisdom (*paññā*) and is therefore ethical, one can develop a different perspective towards fear: instead of identifying with it and thus triggering unethical states, one observes it with a deep insight into its potential danger and therefore does not grasp it. This understanding occurs at certain levels of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and is comprehensively described in Buddhist texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, in the section "Purification by knowledge and vision of the way" (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*) (Vism 639–71).[37] The section depicts nine stages of insight knowledges (*vipassanāñāṇa*), experienced by meditation practitioners, which include the knowledges of contemplation of danger (*bhayatupaṭṭhānañāṇa*) and oppression (*ādīnavānupassanāñāṇa*); at that stage, the meditator understands at a deep level that phenomena experienced are liable to destruction (*khayato*) and falling away (*vayato*), that they are dangerous (*bhayato*), and intrinsically empty (*suññato*) (Vism 644). Importantly, as explained in the *Visuddhimagga*, one who has the knowledge of danger is not afraid[38] but instead knows that all phenomena—past, present and future—continuosly dissolve, are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), devoid of self (*anattā*), and intrinsically empty (*suñña*) (Vism 646–47). Thus, seeing danger in the impermanent phenomena comprising sentient experiences is fundamentally different from being afraid: the former is a wholesome

37 The stages of insight knowledges are also thoroughly discussed in Mahāsi (2016, 303–466).

38 Vism 646: *Bhayatupaṭṭhānañāṇam pana na bhāyati.*

mental state, inciting wisdom and detachment, the latter is unwholesome, generating unethical states and obstructions in the Buddhist path.

This insight into danger leads to dispassion, equanimity, and final liberation, *nibbāna*, which eventually diminishes or destroys fear, enmity, and other unethical states (Vism 649–63). Wisdom (*paññā*) (52, Table 1) is thus positioned as the ethical mental concomitant (*cetasika*) that can lead to the uprooting of fear through an insight into the intrinsic emptiness (*suññatā*) and impermanence (*anicca*) of all phenomena and non-identification with them. That is why the fully awakened ones (*arahant*) and Buddhas[39] are often described with the epithet *abhaya*, "without fear, fearless"; this is not the fearlessness of a brave hero, but rather wisdom and detachment of a highly ethical person who cannot be unethical under any circumstances, neither in thought nor in action.

To summarise, in the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma*, greed and fear that are related to craving exclude the arising of ethical mental states and actions. Instead, one identifies with experienced phenomena and views them from a standpoint of "I" or "self" as constant, unchanging events. Since living beings are born with fear and greed, Buddhism recommends many approaches on how to limit or prevent their arising and thus avert unethical states. For this purpose, the cultivation of moral virtues (*sīla*), generosity (*dāna*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*) are recommended.[40] With meditation, including mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), the meditator can cultivate ethical mental states that condition the arising of wisdom (*paññā*), which engenders non-identification with experiences and consequently, impedes and gradually reduces unethical states. As recommended by the *Tevijjasutta* (D I 251), the following four meditation practices are particularly useful in counterbalancing fear, greed and other unethical states: 1) friendliness or loving kindness (*mettā*) that wishes for all to be well and thus diminishes anger and fear (Vibh 86); 2) compassion (*karuṇā*) towards all who suffer, the altruistic state that counteracts selfishness (Vibh 86–87); 3) joy over the happiness and success of others (*muditā*) which counteracts jealousy and envy (Vism 318); and 4) equanimity (*upekkhā*) which refers to non-attachment, absence of greed or aversion, and evenness or equity in relation to wordly matters and concerns.[41]

39 For example, in the *Mahāsihanāsasutta*, the Buddha claims to live in peace, fearlessness, in confidence (M I 72: *khemappatto abhayappatto vesārajjappatto viharāmi*).

40 The cultivation of moral virtues *(sīla*), generosity (*dāna*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*) are the three foundations of ethical development and the prospective liberation from suffering (*dukkha*); this is stated in many texts, such as the *Dānavagga* section of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (A IV 241: *Tīṇ' imāni bhikkhave puññakiriyavatthūni. Katamāni tīṇi? Dānamayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ, sīlamayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ, bhāvanāmayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ.*).

41 For a detailed description of these four meditation practices, called "the divine abodings" (*brahmavihāra*), see *Visuddhimagga*, 295–325.

Conclusion

This article has briefly delineated the complex theoretical model of cognition in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, which appears to be founded on the ethical principle of *kusala.* In discussing two important, commonly experienced components of mental states, those of fear (*bhaya*) and greed (*lobha*), both related to craving (*taṅhā*), it demonstrated how within this cognitive model, they are considered to be unethical. It further explored another connotation of the term *bhaya* which refers to the dangerous or oppressive nature of all phenomena due to their impermanence and lack of an intrinsic self. In this sense, the word *bhaya*, by understanding phenomena as dangerous, can serve as an incitement for cultivating the path to liberation from suffering. This approach indicates that it is possible to see danger (in relation to a particular object or more broadly) without being fearful or afraid but instead perceive it with knowledge and wisdom, which is to say in an ethical manner.

From the Buddhist perspective, the removal of unethical states such as fear, greed, and ignorance constitutes the necessary precondition for a person to act ethically (*kusala*). Therefore, Buddhist praxis is to a large degree focused on recognizing and deeply understanding and identifying the roots of, and conditions for the arising of unethical mental states with the intention of limiting and stopping them temporarily or permanently. A major role in this process is played by wisdom (*paññā*), which is equated with insight into the intrinsic emptiness (*suññatā*) of all phenomena and the illusonary nature of identity or "self". In this model, the absence of wisdom allows for the erroneous perception of an individual as a separate entity and thus for the dichotomy of "I" and "other". Individuality or in fact any separate identity is thus viewed as deceptive, unethical, and dangerous since it can cause harmful speech and actions. Thoughts, ideas, words, and actions can be ethical only in the absence of fear and greed (and other unethical mental states), which means that at such moments one does not cling to experiences and consequently create any perception of individuality. According to this Buddhist model, thoughts and actions founded on kindness and compassion (i.e., absence of aversion or fear), generosity (i.e., absence of greed), and wisdom (i.e., absence of delusions), mean that the "I" and "other" dichotomy is not created. Thus, the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* indicates that humans have the potential for transformation and can develop radically different perspectives on the fundamental premises related to lived experience.

Returning to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which instigated this piece of research in the first place, I wish to conclude with a few reflections on the current attitudes to the pandemic from the point of view of the *Abhidhamma*.

As mentioned earlier, fear and greed seem to be the prime movers for societal responses to the pandemic, which fluctuate between various levels of lock-down, aiming to control the virus temporarily, and then a projected return to "normal" public life, hoping to in due course reinstate economic growth, i.e., the previous model. It is evident that the anxiety about economic loss, disease, personal suffering and death is at the forefront, creating a parallel pandemic of uncertainty and fear. This in turn is greatly boosted by mass media, and seems significantly more contagious than the virus itself, evoking a range of reactions such as depression, anger, and exacerbating existing divisions, violence, and various conspiracy theories, to name a few. The virus has become the "other", an invisible enemy we are at war with. In contrast, from the Buddhist perspective, as specifically expressed in the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma*, all mental states rooted in fear, greed, and ignorance, are considered unethical and viewed as grounds for harmful actions. However, it is possible, as the model shows, not to fall pray to fear, but instead understand its nature and not act upon it. Such a response is founded on wisdom, cognizant of the fact that there is no autonomous self (perceived as an individual, group, or collective human identity) which is separated from other sentient beings and the natural world (including viruses).[42] Thus, the Buddhist analysis of cognition points out that through the absence of fear, greed and ignorance, an ethical stance is indeed possible, not only to the COVID-19 pandemic but also to the far greater challenges of the environmental crisis.

By way of recapitulation, in the light of the currently prevailing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic which are largely motivated by fear and/or greed and have conceivably grave consequences, this article has explored, through the analysis of ethics within the framework of the Abhidhammic cognitive modes, whether greed and fear may be approached in an ethical manner, suggesting in turn that cognitive models of ancient India may serve as incitement in the search for new approaches to ethical issues in today's world.

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The paper has not been previously published and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

42 The Buddhist idea of the interrelatedness of all phenomena, presented in some Buddhist schools of thought as non-separation or oneness of humans and all the natural world, has been the main starting point in recent scholarly research on how Buddhist teachings may contribute to the current environmental crisis (e.g., Loy 2015, 123–33); for a panoramic overview of literature on Buddhist environmental ethics, see Kaza (2018, 432–52).

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OTHER TOPICS

The Idea of Supreme Peace (*Taiping*) in Premodern Chinese Philosophies of History

*Dawid ROGACZ**

Abstract

The paper examines the development of the idea of Supreme Peace (*taiping* 太平) in premodern Chinese philosophies of history. It is shown that while Daoists identified it with the pristine unity of humans and nature, Han Confucians equated Supreme Peace with the harmonious social system under the rule of one of the first Chinese emperors or Confucius. In the latter case, the notion of *taiping* was reduced to a descriptive category, which was then employed by historiography but ridiculed in the critical thought of Wang Chong. With *Huainanzi* and the *Xiang'er* commentary to *Laozi*, the Daoists started to argue that it is possible to restore the Supreme Peace under new historical conditions. This was systematically developed in the *Scripture of Supreme Peace* (*Taipingjing*), which offered a detailed depiction of the future era of equality and freedom. However, after this radicalization, the idea of *taiping* was utilized by imperial propaganda and disappeared from the dominant philosophical discourse. An exception to this rule was Li Gou (1009–1059), who envisaged Supreme Peace as an ideal socio-economic system resulting from endowing peasants with land and money. A similar vision was expressed by Gong Zizhen (1792–1841), for whom Supreme Peace had to entail land equalization and the reduction of social inequalities. Similarly to *Taipingjing*, however, Gong Zizhen described *taiping* as the culmination point of the increase of human knowledge. With such an approach, the premodern Chinese views of Supreme Peace became noticeably close to Western progressivism, and therefore inspired the utopian project of Kang Youwei.

Keywords: *taiping*, Supreme Peace, Han philosophy, millenarianism, New Text Confucianism

Ideja velikega miru (*taiping*) v zgodovini predmodernih kitajskih filozofij

Izvleček

Članek proučuje razvoj ideje velikega miru (*taiping* 太平) v zgodovini predmodernih kitajskih filozofij. Medtem ko so daoisti idejo velikega miru povezovali s pristno enotnostjo človeka in narave, so jo konfucijanci iz dinastije Han enačili s harmoničnim družbenim sistemom pod vlado enega izmed prvih kitajskih cesarjev ali Konfucija. Pri tem je bil pomen velikega miru zreduciran na deskriptivno kategorijo, sicer uporabljeno v zgodovinopisju,

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ki pa jo je kritični mislec Wang Chong zasmehoval. V knjigi *Huainanzi* in *Komentarjih Xiang'er h knjigi Laozija* so daoisti začeli trditi, da je mogoče idejo velikega miru ponovno oživiti v novih zgodovinskih okoliščinah. To so nadalje sistematično razvili v knjigi *Klasik velikega miru* (*Taipingjing*), v kateri so podali podroben opis prihodnje dobe enakosti in svobode. Vendar je po tej radikalizaciji ideja velikega miru pristala v rokah cesarske propagande in s tem izginila iz prevladujočega filozofskega diskurza. Izjema je bil Li Gou (1009–1059), ki si je idejo velikega miru zamislil kot idealen družbeno-ekonomski sistem, v katerem kmetje dobijo zemljo in denar. Podobno vizijo je imel tudi Gong Zizhen (1792–1841), ki je menil, da mora veliki mir voditi v enakost zemljišč in zmanjševanje družbenih neenakosti. Veliki mir je opisal kot vrhunec povečanja človeškega znanja, s tem pristopom pa se je predmoderni kitajski pogled na veliki mir opazno približal zahodnemu progresivizmu, zaradi česar je navdihnil utopični projekt Kang Youweija.

Ključne besede: *taiping*, veliki mir, filozofija dinastije Han, milenarizem, novi teksti konfucianizma

Introduction

The idea of Supreme Peace (*taiping* 太平) is one of the core concepts of the classical Chinese philosophy of history and various attempts at its implementation had a tremendous influence upon Chinese history itself, from the first peasant rebellions up to the Taiping Rebellion in the nineteenth century. As a conceptual expression of the future social ideal, the notion of *taiping* was taken up by modern Chinese thinkers, forming one of the bridges between premodern and modern Chinese historical thinking, and was an idea which early on served to familiarize China with the Western concept of progress. As such, it also challenges the stereotype that linear views of history were alien to Chinese thought. It is therefore surprising that to date there has been no paper dedicated to the systematic treatment of this notion, whereas those few studies which seem to deal with the topic neglect a philosophical analysis of this category. Timoteus Pokora's seven-page essay on the origins of the concepts of *taiping* and *datong* (大同, great unity) (Pokora 1961) is, despite its title, a textual history of one Daoist work. Vincent Shih's monograph on the ideology of the Taipings and its sources focuses, in turn, on the Confucian-rooted ideas of Heaven, spirit, human nature, and rituals, discussing the Confucian approach to the category of *taiping* on only two pages, without mentioning its Daoist understanding (Shih 1967, 165–214, 277–80). Some references to the ancient Chinese understanding of *taiping* can be found in Barbara Hendrischke's introduction to her translation of the *Scripture of Supreme Peace* (*Taipingjing* 太平經) (Hendrischke 2007, 6–14), but they are not systematic and do not go beyond that period. The following paper aims to fill this research gap.

However, it should first be noted that it would be quite misleading to believe that there exists one, pan-Chinese understanding of the idea of Supreme Peace that subsequently clashes or merges with the "Western" concept of progress. Ideas have their own history, and this also applies to the notion of *taiping*, the evolution of which is analysed in this essay. Due to limited space, I focus on the classical evocations of this ideal, putting aside their relation to modern Chinese encounters with the utopian projects of Christianity, socialism, and Marxism. In addressing these issues, the paper pays particular attention to differences between Daoist and Confucian formulations of *taiping*, which are here portrayed as two parallel developments of this idea. Whereas the most complete exposition of the Daoist vision of *taiping* comes from the early medieval *Scripture of Supreme Peace*, the Confucian conception of Supreme Peace was fully developed only by Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), whose thought is discussed in the last part of the paper. In conclusion, it is argued that in spite of the internal diversity of premodern Chinese views on *taiping*, there are certain common points among these conceptions, which opens up new directions for further comparative research.

Early Daoist Conceptualizations of the Idea of Supreme Peace

The first philosophical evocations of the ideal of Supreme Peace were from the outset characterised by a certain dichotomousness, as they functioned within either Daoist or Confucian conceptual frameworks. Of course, as Karyn Lai (2015) reminds us, a distinction between Confucianism and Daoism was made during the Han dynasty and, in spite of many differences, both philosophies shared the image of an individual always entangled in relations with others and the surrounding environment. On the other hand, the first visions of Supreme Peace were not formulated prior to Han times (202 BCE–220 CE), and this means that the ambiguous relation between Daoist and Confucian discourses during that period translates into discrepancies and similarities within the subsequent conceptions of *taiping*.

The notion of Supreme Peace does not appear in any Chinese historical and philosophical writing that emerged, in whole or for the most part, in the Warring States Period (476–221 BCE). It is not to be found in four out of five later Classics: the *Documents* (*Shu* 書), *Songs* (*Shi* 詩), *Changes of the Zhou* (*Zhouyi* 周易) and, most importantly, the *Springs and Autumns* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). It is also missing in the founding works of the line of scholars (*rujia* 儒家), known in the West under the name of Confucianism, namely in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) attributed to Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, 551–479 BCE), *Master Meng* (*Mengzi* 孟子), and

Master Xun (*Xunzi* 荀子). The concept was also unknown to the authors of *Master Mo* (*Mozi* 墨子), the only preserved work of the Mohist school, and to the authors of *Master Sun's Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法). *Master Han Fei* (*Hanfeizi* 韓非子) makes two enigmatic allusions to "scholars of [the days of] Supreme Peace" (*taiping zhi shi* 太平之士), but this is all we can find in the so-called Legalist (*fajia* 法家) texts.

The earliest reference to the category of *taiping* comes from the Daoist work *Zhuangzi* 莊子, precisely its "external chapters" (*waipian* 外篇), which according to Chen Guying (2016, 110) were authored by a later generation of the disciples of the historical Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (c. 369–286 BCE).[1] Importantly, it already introduces a genuinely Daoist vision of Supreme Peace:

> The ancients who illuminated the great Dao, first unclouded nature and only then the Way and power; when the Way and power were already illuminated, then came charity and righteousness (...) This is what is meant by Supreme Peace, the epitome of order. (Zhuangzi 13:4/471)[2]

This concise fragment pertains to another passage of *Zhuangzi*, which puts flesh on the view of history related to the *taiping* ideal:

> Power continued to decline, and then Yao and Yu took control of the world. They initiated a strand of ruling by transformation, defiling purity and shattering simplicity. The Way was abandoned for the sake of goodness, whereas power was substituted with morals. After this, they forsook their nature and followed their minds, minds were joining minds in associating their knowledge, but were not able to bring stability to the world. After this, culture was added, and breadth was piled on top. Culture destroyed the substantial; breadth drowned the mind; as a result, the people began to be confused and disordered. They had no way to return to their nature and feelings, to return to the Beginning. From this we see that the world has lost the Way and the Way has lost the world; the world and the Way have lost each other. (*Zhuangzi* 16:2/551-552)[3]

1 Esther Klein (2010) argues that the entire *Zhuangzi* was created under the Han.

2 故古之明大道者，先明天而道德次之，道德已明而仁義次之 (...) 此之謂太平，治之至也。All translations are my own, unless the translator is mentioned. Page number according to the quoted/cited edition.

3 德又下衰，及唐、虞始為天下，興治化之流，澆淳散朴，離道以善，險德以行，然後去性而從於心。心與心識知而不足以定天下，然後附之以文，益之以博。文滅質，博溺心，然後民始惑亂，無以反其性情而復其初。由是觀之，世喪道矣，道喪世矣。

The era of Supreme Peace, as understood in *Zhuangzi*, was a kind of paradise: a state of perfect and in essence prehistoric unity between humans and nature, which was abandoned by the creation of culture along with its normative order (goods, morals), which set people back from the Way of living in accordance with the course of things. There is no doubt, however, that this paradise had been irretrievably lost, and there are no ideas in *Zhuangzi* on how to break this tragic historical deadlock.

Some general hints about possible ways of restoring the state of unity with nature appear in Daoism, starting with the work *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (c. 139 BCE). Not without some influence from Legalism, *Huainanzi* calls not so much for a return to the original state of harmony that has been lost once and for all, as for recreating harmony under new circumstances, taking account of all cultural innovations that have occurred along the way (*Huainanzi* 11:17/1157).[4] Charles Le Blanc (1985, 209) compares it to the "wave" pattern of history in Christian eschatology, which, however, misrepresents the message of *Huainanzi*. First, the restoration of unity with nature is possible only by adapting to the tendency (*shi* 勢) of the development of things, and in this sense it is impossible to foresee the exact shape of the upcoming epoch (*Huainanzi* 9:13/931).[5] Second, both the tendency and the future unity are essentially inner-worldly. As Anna Seidel (1984, 163) aptly observes, "these early formulations of the state of Great Peace differ from Western notions about the messianic age insofar as they do not imply any total break, any total discontinuity with the relative conditions of the present". Finally, the advent of this future era does not hinge on the will of any god, but depends entirely on the actions of the sovereign and therefore does not have to come about at all. In fact, *Huainanzi* rather pessimistically concludes:

> Ancient generations nurtured the root, whereas later generations serve the branches. That is why Supreme Peace cannot yet arise. If a ruler who wishes to govern well does not appear in every age, and a minister who can accompany him in ordering things does not appear even once in ten thousand [officials], and we expect them to encounter each other, then this is a chance that does not occur even once in a thousand years. (Huainanzi 20:16/2074)[6]

4 是故世異則事變，時移則俗易。故聖人論世而立法，隨時而舉事。尚古之王，封于泰山，禪于梁父。七十餘聖，法度不同，非務相反也，時事異也。

5 夫推而不可為之勢, 而不修道理之數, 雖神聖人不能以成其功, 而況當世之主乎!

6 上世養本，而下世事末，此太平之所以不起也。夫欲治之主不世出，而可與興治之臣不萬一，以萬一求不世出，此所以千歲不一會也。

In this way, *Huainanzi* is actually much closer to *Zhuangzi*'s defeatism than to eschatological confidence about future salvation.

Later Daoist references to the idea of Supreme Peace come from Eastern Han commentaries to the *Old Master* (*Laozi* 老子), which in itself does not yet contain any references to *taiping*, including its versions from the Mawangdui and Guodian tombs. Heshang Gong's 河上公 commentary to *Laozi* (first century CE) describes Supreme Peace as a time when there was no difference between the noble and the lowly, people lived to a grand old age without suffering any harm, as the Way they cultivated themselves did not inflict any damage on the gods (*Heshang Gong Laozi* 35/139; 55/211).[7] Analogously to *Huainanzi*, it is claimed that in the era of Supreme Peace each human being practiced their own purity and neither knew nor even desired to know such things as charity (*ren* 仁), righteousness, integrity, and correctness (*Heshang Gong Laozi* 18/73).[8] But there is no recipe there, not even an idea, of how to reclaim that state. Similar depictions can be found in the *Xiang'er* 想爾 commentary to *Laozi* authored by Zhang Lu 張魯 (d. 216)—a leader of the religious Way of Celestial Masters (*Tianshidao* 天師道), with the difference that *Xiang'er* invokes a deified Laozi, who descends to call on humans to work to restore Supreme Peace (see Puett 2014, 14–18). Another text associated with this sect, *Commands and Admonitions for the Line of Great Dao* (*Da Daojia lingjie* 大道家令戒), assures its followers: "you will see Great Peace; you will pass through the catastrophes unscathed and become the seed people of the later age", but then reminds them: "people must aid Heaven in bringing about Great Peace through their actions" (Bokenkamp 1999, 173, 176–77). In this way, however, a quasi-messianic faith in the ruler becomes replaced with faith in the people, which, along with a hitherto unknown conviction about the still increasing deterioration of the world, had a huge impact upon the Daoist conceptions of *taiping* in the early Middle Ages.

Taiping in Han Confucianism

In Han Confucianism, on the other hand, the image of Supreme Peace related exactly to everything that from the Daoist perspective separated humanity from the primordial unity with nature. In the discourse of scholars (*ru*), the category of *taiping* played the role of a referent to the "the good old days": when the political power of the sovereign was strong, all subjects were aware of the obligations

7 萬民歸往而不傷害，則國家安寧而致太平矣。治身不害神明，則身安而大壽也 (...) 太平之世，人無貴賤。

8 此言天下太平不知仁，人盡無欲(不)知廉，各自潔己不知貞。大道之世，仁義沒。

arising from their social positions, and this was manifested in rituals and moral conduct, due to which there was order and peace in the state. Such an understanding of *taiping* is dominant in the youngest of the Classics, *Records of Rituals* (*Liji* 禮記), which put this vision of the era of Supreme Peace into the mouth of Confucius himself (*Liji* 28:9/1390).[9] Similar depictions are to be found in the texts associated with the New Text School of Confucianism written in the Western Han period, such as *Records of Rituals by Dai the Elder* (*Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記) and *Garden of Sayings* (*Shuoyuan* 說園), with the latter pioneeringly contrasting *taiping* with an epoch of chaos (*luanshi* 亂世) (*Da Dai Liji* 35.40; *Shuoyuan* 5.11, 13.1). *An Outer Commentary to the Master Han's* Book of Songs (*Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳), another key work of New Text provenance, goes even as far, and states that

> In the times of Supreme Peace there were no persons dumb, deaf, lame, one-eyed, feeble, dwarfed, or mutilated. Fathers did not [have to] weep for their sons, nor elder brothers to weep for their younger brothers (...) In the age of Supreme Peace the people, in supplying forced labour, did not go beyond the time [fixed]; men and women did not neglect the time [proper for] mating; filial sons did not neglect the time for nourishing [their parents]. Abroad there were no unmarried men, and in the seclusion of the house there were no dissatisfied women. (Hanshi waizhuan 2:10.19, translated by Hightower 1952, 87, 96, modified)[10]

Importantly, *Hanshi waizhuan* treats *taiping* as a historical embodiment of the ideal system of social divisions reflecting concrete prescriptions of Confucian morality and, unlike the vision of *datong*, it emphasizes that, in their daily activities, the humans of the era of Supreme Peace "did not go beyond" the moral obligations towards *their* family members. Yet again, we are not told how to reconstitute that social order. The only hint at restoration of this lost paradise in Han Confucianism comes from *Abundant Dew of the Springs and Autumns* (*Chunqiu fanlu*

9 南面而立，夫是以天下太平也。諸侯朝，萬物服體，而百官莫敢不承事矣。禮之所興，眾之所治也。Of course, *Liji* is most famous for establishing another utopian ideal, *datong*, the description of which was also put into the mouth of Confucius. A discussion of *datong* goes beyond the limits of this paper, but a few things can be observed. First, the concept of *datong* in premodern thought never referred to the future or even integrated into cyclical views of history, which happened to *taiping*. Second, its presence outside the *Liyun* chapter of *Liji* is marginal, even in Confucianism: whereas *Kongzi jiayu* literally repeats the *Liyun* depiction, in *Chunqiu fanlu* (52.1) *datong* is rather understood as a "unity of *yin* and *yang*" and does not entail any philosophy of history. Lastly, in *Mozi*, *Zhuangzi*, the texts of *mingjia*, and in Wang Chong, the notion of *datong* refers to "big similarities" (versus "small differences"), being therefore an entirely different philosophical concept.

10 太平之時，無瘖、https://zh.m.wiktionary.org/zh-hans/%F0%A4%BC%83、跛、眇、尪蹇、侏儒、折短，父不哭子，兄不哭弟 (...) 太平之時，民行役者不踰時，男女不失時以偶。孝子不失時以養；外無曠夫，內無怨女。

春秋繁露) attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), who argues that *taiping* will be reached if the emperor returns to the root of the Kingly Way (*Chunqiu fanlu* 6:2/107),[11] which probably meant for Dong the entire system of ritual response to Nature (*Tian*) inscribed into his correlativism, as he also depicts Supreme Peace as the time when divine pneuma (*qi* 氣) will again spontaneously flow out of its source (*Chunqiu fanlu* 78:2/634).[12] However, given the lack of any vision of the future other than repetition of the cycles of three standards (*santong* 三統) of white, red, and black (cf. Rogacz 2020, 74–78), it is difficult to assume that Dong indeed thought of *taiping* as breaking out of history, rather than just identifying it with some particular (repeating) epoch.

These visions are echoed in the Eastern Han in such works as *Comprehensive [Records] from the White Tiger Hall* (*Bohutong* 白虎通) by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) and *The School Sayings of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語) compiled by Wang Su 王肅 (195–256 CE), in which the epoch of Supreme Peace is generally identified with the regency of Prince Zhou (c. 1042–1035 BCE). Such a consentaneous and, in fact, purely rhetorical use of the notion of Supreme Peace in the emerging imperial ideology was similar to the way the concept of *taiping* was understood in Han historiography. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE), for instance, referred *taiping* to the former times of pristine peace amongst the people, associated with the reign of Yu the Great (21st c. BCE?)—the founder of China's first hereditary dynasty.[13] As Barbara Hendrischke (2007, 9) aptly observes, "the major controversy developed around the question as to at which point in time the world had been in a stage of great peace."[14]

Thus the solidifying interpretation of *taiping* became, however, quite swiftly subjected to criticism. One of its main contesters was Wang Chong 王充 (27–97 CE) who, convinced that there are no essential differences in the pneuma (*qi*) constituting the people of past and present times, distrusted the Confucian idealization of distant antiquity. Wang was well-aware that the tendency to hyperbolize the past is somewhat natural, and that many of his contemporaries consider everything old as right, but this does not excuse historians, who should investigate whether some claims about the past are true or false (*Lunheng* 16/232.458.483;

11 反王道之本，譏天王以致太平。

12 為致太平，若神氣自通於淵也。It refers to the idea of Grand Vortex (*taiyuan* 太淵)—the reservoir of primordial pneuma (*yuanqi* 元氣), associated with *yin* energy.

13 Interestingly, Sima Qian puts into the mouth of Qin Shi Huangdi a "will to foster Supreme Peace" 欲以興太平 (*Shiji* 6:41/258). If that were true, the concept of *taiping* would have already been in use under the Qin, but even then there are no traces of its pre-imperial employment. (Cf. Hendrischke 2007, 5–6).

14 Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE), for instance, situated *taiping* during the rule of Yellow Emperor.

85/1684-1685). Wang's main argument against the Confucians is that if the main criterion distinguishing *taiping* is the welfare and absence of wars, then it should rather be concluded that "in fact, Supreme Peace has already come", counting it at the latest from the reign of Han Wendi (190–157 BCE). If, however, the Confucians do not agree with equating *taiping* with *Pax Sinica*, then they make unrealistic demands, such that cannot be met by any people, which makes Supreme Peace as such impossible (*Lunheng* 57/1093-1106).[15] Emblematically, this criticism comes from the chapter provocatively entitled *Praise of the Hans* (*Xuan Han* 宣漢). This notwithstanding, Michael Puett (2005/2006, 280–81) asserts that although Wang Chong was far from idealizing the past, he awaited the advent of the future era of peace, although Puett fails to quote any passages that could validate such a reading.[16]

Obviously, this sort of critique, if not deconstruction, of the ideal of *taiping* could not have been welcomed by the Confucians, and as a result some New Text Confucians who came after Wang Chong tried to add more philosophical panache to the dominant view of Supreme Peace. He Xiu 何休 (129–182 CE) in his elaboration on the *Gongyang Commentary to the Springs and Autumns* incorporated his vision of *taiping* into an exposition of Chinese history in the Chunqiu period, which was divided into three epochs (*sanshi* 三世). The first of these (the years 722–627 BCE) was the time of decay and chaos (*shuai-luan* 衰亂), which corresponded with what Confucius knew, based on the records of his native state of Lu. The second one, the epoch of rising peace (*shengping* 升平; 626–542 BCE), represents what Confucius knew from what he had heard, particularly with regard to the differences between the inhabitants of Central States (*Zhongguo* 中國) and barbarians. Finally, the last epoch—that of supreme peace (*taiping*; 541–481 BCE)—ran parallel to the times witnessed by Confucius himself, which were to be a period of blurring the lines between the Chinese and barbarians (*Gongyang jiegu* 1:26). Undoubtedly, He Xiu's sequence of epochs was of an "ascending" nature, although seeing it as a general theory of progress, as Feng Youlan (1948, 201–2) does, rather exaggerates the case. First, He Xiu's scheme is narrowed down

15 The notion of *taiping* appears in Wang Chong's *Lunheng* almost 100 times and there are many minor polemics with its Confucian proponents besides the main line of argumentation. Targeting Dong Zhongshu, for instance, Wang argues that if Supreme Peace entails the harmonization of pneuma (*qi*), then no ruler is able to introduce it, as there are no humans capable of influencing the spontaneous transformations of nature, which means that if Supreme Peace ever comes, it will come by itself, by means of spontaneous harmonization of *qi* without any human intervention (和氣自至，太平自立矣; *Lunheng* 19/319).

16 Puett is rather alone in this view. Hendrischke (2007, 10) has no doubts about Wang Chong's "matter-of-fact" and "fairly narrow understanding of the notion of great peace" as something that had been reached.

to the particular period of Chinese history and was never employed outside of these frames. Second, the universalization of this scheme does not exclude a cyclical interpretation, which was, in fact, much closer to original intentions of He Xiu.[17] Interestingly, it is this seemingly perfunctory view that will, partly due to its ambivalence, inspire modern Chinese thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century to rethink the classical Confucian approach to the category of Supreme Peace.

Medieval Pursuits of Supreme Peace

Surprisingly, the common feature of early Confucian attitudes towards Supreme Peace was to treat it as a strictly descriptive category, whereas Han Daoists were not yet sure if Supreme Peace could indeed be reintroduced and under what precise conditions. As a result, the concept of *taiping* referred mostly to particular historical times: the remote past before the establishment of culture and political institutions (Daoism), the golden age of monarchical rule that was already the subject of chronicles (Confucianism), or simply the Han dynasty (Wang Chong).

The situation changed with the outbreak of the famous Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 CE, which was initiated by Zhang Jue 張角 (d. 184), a charismatic leader of the Way of Supreme Peace (*Taipingdao*). Zhang Jue himself was a disciple, and perhaps a relative of, Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (34–156), the founder of the Way of Heavenly Masters (*Tianshidao*), who just like the above-mentioned Zhang Lu, and even prior to him, relied on the epiphany of the Supreme Lord Lao (*Taishang Laojun* 太上老君). In his teachings, Zhang Jue heralded the imminent arrival of an era of peace, equality and community of goods, and he also accepted women and barbarians (mainly Huns) into his community (Hendrischke 2007, 26). There are many indications that Zhang Jue constructed his view, at least in part, on the work later known as the *Scripture of Supreme Peace* (*Taipingjing*).[18] The text of *Taipingjing* in its current form, however, was finally shaped in the late sixth century

17 There are a few passages in which He Xiu extrapolates his view beyond the Chunqiu period. One of them is certainly the discussion of the last event recorded in *Springs and Autumns*, namely the capture of a mysterious *qilin* 麒麟 (481 BCE), which was for him a definite "sign" of the realization of "great peace". He Xiu continues, however, suggesting that the Qin and early Han brought chaos, and with his remark that the Dao of Confucius was identical to that of emperors Yao and Shun, we may suppose that his view of history was actually much closer to other cyclical conceptions of history that were quite popular in the Eastern Han era. (See *Gongyang jiegu* 28: 624–28).

18 The two versions of the text existed already under the Han. The shorter, twelve-chapter version, *Tianguan li Baoyuan Taipingjing*, mentioned in the *Book of Han* (*Hanshu*) has been lost, while 58 out of 170 chapters have been preserved of the longer *Taiping qingling shu* version. The latter was included in the Daoist Canon and become the basis for the 1960 *Taipingjing hejiao* edition of Wang Ming, which I am drawing on here.

(Beck 1980, 151, 180)[19] and the pieces of this extensive anthology, undoubtedly made up from the contributions of multiple authors, circulated throughout the entire period of political chaos, competing with other apocalyptic currents, as evidenced by numerous criticisms of "false prophets" in *Taipingjing*. A particular object of attack of the *Taipingjing* were various types of messianism, which, historically speaking, inspired peasant rebellions in China to an ever greater degree: be it Buddhist, associated with the belief in the descent of Buddha Maitreya, or the Daoist ones. The latter were presented in works such as the *Scripture of Divine Spells from the Most Precipitous Abyss* (*Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經), which crowned its colourful visions of the underworld and the plagues accompanying the apocalypse with the image of the descent of a "messiah" named Li Hong 李洪, identified as the incarnation of Lord Lao, who will gather the faithful, called "the seed people" (*zhongmin* 種民), thus inaugurating the era of Supreme Peace (Seidel 1969/1970, 216–47; 1984, 161–74).

The *Taipingjing* did not share such unequivocal eschatological optimism. In fact it drew an extremely pessimistic image of human nature, which was centred around the idea of "inherited guilt" (*chengfu* 承負). It is said that that people originally lived in harmony with Heaven and Earth, going without any laws and customs. At some point, evil was committed; this moment, however, is not strictly specified, once estimated at hundreds of thousands of generations ago, another time equated in age with Heaven and Earth themselves (*Taipingjing* 37:60, 41:32, 72:295, 92:371).[20] With time, people "added" more and more evil with their deeds. It is stated that each generation passes on to successive generations not only its own faults, but also all the evil that it had inherited, so that the guilt is heavier from generation to generation (*Taipingjing* 36:52, 37:61, 44:143). Unlike the concept of original sin, it is not only the original fault that is transmitted; contrary to the idea of karma, individual faults are transferred not from person to person, but to the whole of humanity. As Michael Puett (2008, 185) notes, this leads to paradoxical consequences: people suffer as a consequence of the evil they did not commit, so they are basically not responsible for what is happening in their time and are in this sense innocent, whereas those who disturbed the primordial state of harmony in which they lived in are to be blamed in the first place. *Taipingjing* confirms this interpretation, stressing that even if a ruler has unparalleled virtue it will not improve the situation of mankind. Chaos and corruption are not the only misfortunes that affect humanity because of inherited guilt: they also include cataclysms and anomalies (*Taipingjing* 37:56.60). In this way, *Taipingjing* radicalized

19 On the other hand, Hendrischke (2007, 4) notes that "it has come down to us more directly than have most 'great' texts. It has not been revised and smoothed by generations of editors".

20 On various estimations see Hendrischke (1991, 12).

the Daoist idea of the fall expressed first in *Zhuangzi*, and then in *Huainanzi*.

Unlike *Huainanzi*, however, there are passages in *Taipingjing* in which a somewhat theistically understood Heaven plays the role of an "executor" of the consequences of inherited guilt and, if necessary, it will not stop even from exterminating the whole human race (*Taipingjing* 92:370-375). But it is the constant and gradual increase of evil itself that leads to a further escalation of cataclysms and, finally, apocalypse. As a result of droughts and epidemics, humanity is to become completely extinct, so that no human being survives the final "annihilation" (*miejin* 滅盡). Then the unity of Heaven and Earth will collapse and the whole world will soon thereafter be destroyed. If nothing changes, the arrival of that time is rather imminent (*Taipingjing* 92:373). Hence, the philosophy of history in the *Scripture of Supreme Peace* can be justifiably referred to as a millenarian one. However, Stephen Bokenkamp (1994, 61) disputes the claim that there was millenarianism in China, as he believes that such a vision is necessarily related to the linear conception of history, while the Chinese were—apparently—preoccupied with cyclical views, thus the notions of "millenarianism" and "apocalypse" can be used only metaphorically in this case. Surprisingly, however, *Taipingjing* is not mentioned amongst the many Daoist writings to which Bokenkamp refers, in spite of its clearly linear view of history, which fully meets his criteria for millenarianism. Bokenkamp seems here to share the influential yet very outdated opinion of Mircea Eliade, who saw the image of cyclical and fundamentally good cosmos as common among all "primitive" cultures, challenged only by the Jewish idea of linear time (Eliade 1964, 107). In contrast, Anna Seidel, who introduced Daoist messianism, argues that "the longing for paradise on earth (...) is one of the most elementary hopes which lie deeply hidden in man" (Seidel 1984, 161). Unlike Bokenkamp, Livia Kohn has no doubts that *Taipingjing* is an instance of genuinely Chinese millenarianism, which also led to a major transfiguration of the *taiping* ideal: "the cyclicality of the mandate of heaven was modified to allow a linear course for history; the idea of Great Peace implied a total break with the preceding age as well as the judgment and destruction of the wicked" (Kohn 1998, 39). Of course, *Taipingjing* specifies some cycles such as the lifecycle, the seasons, or the cycle of traditional chronology, but the concept of cyclicality does not refer in the "macro" scale to the consequences of guilt, and is actually criticized in this context (Petersen 1990, 28–29).

However, it is still not clear how to situate the eponymous ideal of Supreme Peace in the perspective of the upcoming apocalypse, especially since, due to the remote roots of evil, it is impossible to locate *taiping* in the distant past. This problem was solved by rejecting the monolinearity of history and assuming that the apocalypse is not the only possible scenario for the end of history. The authors of *Taipingjing* firmly believe that it is possible to build the Supreme Peace in the future and there already exist guidelines on how to make it. It is argued that the various teachings that have emerged throughout history set themselves the task of eliminating evil in the world. Each of these doctrines carries seeds of truth and is not entirely false (*Taipingjing* 91:348), although, at the same time, each of them does so fragmentarily, and cannot be treated as the depositary of total and absolute truth. Should people follow them in their entirety, the inherited guilt will not cease to accumulate. However, as these teachings spread and become the dominant systems, they do not allow for any criticism, much less an extraction of their doctrines. But the emergence of yet another doctrine is not a solution, either. *Taipingjing* strongly criticizes any faith in the appearance of a "future sage" *houshengren* 後聖人 (announced in the *Gongyang zhuan*) or any figure who is heralded as being able to resolve all the problems of humanity. This would actually escalate Heaven's rage and only accelerate the apocalypse (*Taipingjing* 27:58, 69:270, 91:350). These fragments, which are clearly directed against the then-dominant, messianistic face of Daoist religion, are rightly identified by Jens Østergaard Petersen as an instance of the "anti-messianic millenarianism" of the *Taipingjing* (Petersen 1990, 32).

The most important message, however, is that since each doctrine contains a seed of truth, it is necessary to collect all these pieces from all epochs and combine them into one, "penetrating scripture" *dongjijing* 洞極經 (*Taipingjing* 91:349-350).[21] It is believed that all people must participate in the process of compiling this scripture: the old and young, women and men, free people and slaves, Chinese and barbarians (*Taipingjing* 67:255, 86:327, 91:86.348-351). The questions arise as to the criterion for "sifting" truth from lies, and regarding the basis on which future generations would know which elements of human culture should be included in the ultimate moral guide for humanity. This is of course related to the particular morals of Zhang Jue and his followers, which were projected onto a future utopia. However, although theoretically speaking one can distinguish between the epistemological conditions for collating "the ultimate scripture", the ethical system of the Taiping sect, and its socio-political (and historiosophical) vision, in reality the answer was rather simple and it referred to the very same precepts that would enable humanity to succeed in such a unifying endeavour:

> The authors of the T[ai]P[ing]J[ing] proclaimed that society had to abolish all habits that prevented its naturelike functioning. They saw a particular need for the general togetherness of all, and even for a certain

21 天下文書，及人各言一，或言十數，而天下之疑事悉自解，亦無大煩也。但各居其處而言之，傳持付上耳。是名為天下集言而共語，以通達天地之意，以通達天地之氣，以除帝王災害，以利凡民 (...) 天下人共集辭策及古今神聖之文以為洞極經。

> equality between all (...) This togetherness had to be active, as was the cooperation between man, heaven, and earth in the course of the agricultural year. Thus, not to communicate and not to participate was seen as an evil, an idea that led to a number of detailed prescriptions, from the need to convey any knowledge one might have gained to the demand that wealth should be shared and that everyone should take part in productive labor. Everybody, including women and serfs, was part of this social interchange (...) Since great peace meant harmony between nature and men, the need to maintain the integrity of heaven and earth required social reforms. (Hendrischke 2007, 14–15)

The *taiping* era must thus reflect the universalism accompanying the process of its pursuit. In the state of Supreme Peace there will be equality between men and women, the Chinese and barbarians, and there will be no slaves or bondswomen. In particular, violence against women and infanticide of female newborns will be stopped (*Taipingjing* 35:34-36, 51:83, 88:333, 91:348.352). Wars and chaos will disappear, and humans will no longer destroy nature, nor will people hoard property, as they will only work to the best of their abilities.[22] As Petersen argues, the authors (and most probably also the authoresses) of *Taipingjing* offer the possibility of "jumping out of history" and creating "a world where no change occurs and no change is needed" (Petersen 1990, 32). This notwithstanding, unlike Buddhist and Christian eschatology, Supreme Peace is still pictured as a "Heaven on Earth", realized by the joint efforts of all humanity. It is therefore conceptualized as a final social system in which people continue to live, work and reproduce in full harmony with each other and nature.[23]

Thus understood, this utopian ideal inspired many peasant uprisings and, most importantly, the Taiping Rebellion in the nineteenth century. However, Chinese rulers no less eagerly used the notion of *taiping*. A native of the Tabgach (*Tuoba* 拓拔) tribe, the Taiwu emperor of northern Wei 魏太武帝 (408–452), even took the title of "the True Ruler of Supreme Peace" (*Taiping zhenjun* 太平真君), thereby initiating the practice of adapting the word *taiping* as an era name (*nianhao* 年號). As a result, Chinese emperors of the Tang, Song and Ming Dynasties referred to *taiping* as their era name as many as ten times. This was probably intended to discredit the utopian project hidden behind this term and to ideologically equate the millenarian ideal with the current political reality.

22 For more details of these images, see Hendrischke (1992, 71–72).

23 In contrast to *Huainanzi*, *Taipingjing* is silent on the place of technology in the future utopia, regardless of its great esteem for accumulating and sharing knowledge.

With few exceptions, the idea of *taiping* ceased to be an inspiring model for the Chinese philosophers of history (especially those of Daoist provenance) until the end of the eighteenth century.[24] One of them was Li Gou 李覯 (1009–1059), the teacher of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) and the founder of the "practicalist learning" *shigongxue* 事功學 within broadly understood Neo-Confucianism. Surprisingly, Li Gou believed that Supreme Peace would be more or less identical with the ideal socio-economic system depicted in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), a work traditionally associated with the Old Text School of Confucianism (He Xiu and the majority of the Han Confucian proponents of *taiping* were of New-Text provenance). In his treatise entitled *The* Rites of Zhou *shall lead to Supreme Peace* (*Zhouli zhi Taiping lun* 周禮致太平論), Li Gou describes Supreme Peace as the state in which "there are no kings outside, and the world is one family, each foot of land is a field, and each of the people is treated like a son, the whole country is full of goods and money, like a money bag, while taxes and rentals flow equally from everyone" (*Li Gou ji* 6:76).[25] Li Gou's dream, which was certainly a retro-utopia, was, however, as Shan-Yüan Hsieh observes (1979, 104–9), rooted in the materialistically understood evolution of civilization.[26] Following the *Hongfan* 洪範 chapter of the *Documents*, Li argues that no political and moral change will be possible if food and goods are not secured. The most important amongst these usable goods (*caiyong* 財用), often called "commodities" (*huo* 貨), is money/gold (*jin* 金) (*Li Gou ji* 16:136). Hence, in order to enter Supreme Peace, people—specifically peasants—should be given not only their own land, but also money.[27] And once again, in Li Gou's eyes, this is by no means different from the golden age of the Zhou. While the ancients used money as a means of exchange, later feudal landlords began to treat it as treasure, which, due to their lack of involvement in any kind of labour, could be multiplied only by increasing the fiscal oppression of the people (*Li Gou ji* 16:137). The case of Li Gou is, therefore, an intriguing example of developing the Confucian approach to the *taiping* ideal. Although the concept of *taiping* still referred to the idealized social system of former kings, Li Gou also argued that Supreme Peace, thus imagined, could also be a

24 In Daoism, one such exception was the *Extended Records of Supreme Peace* (*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記), completed in 978 and designed as a complement to the *Imperial Digest of [the Reign of] Supreme Peace* (*Taiping yulan* 太平御覽) of 983, which, however, merely repeat the ideas from the *Taipingjing* (cf. Kirkland 1993, 47).

25 蓋王者無外，以天下為家，尺地莫非其田，一民莫非其子，財物之在海內，如在橐中，況於貢賦之入。

26 On Li Gou's historical materialism, see Rogacz (2021, 8–10, 13).

27 On the details of Li Gou's economic and political project and its later echoes in the *Book of Statecraft for Grand Peace* (*Taiping jingguoshu*) 太平經國書 by Zheng Boqian (1128–1192), see Song (2015, 52–77.336).

future utopia, the possible realization of which entailed severe social criticism that was rather unimaginable for Han Confucians.

Gong Zizhen and Late Imperial Search for Supreme Peace

The idea of Supreme Peace returned with the renaissance of New Text Confucianism, which took place only during the Qing dynasty, due to the then-famous Changzhou School. One of its representatives, Zhuang Cunyu 莊存與 (1719–1788), contributed to the popularization of the ideas of He Xiu, whereas his grandson and disciple, Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776–1829), tried to universalize the sequence of the three epochs (*sanshi*). As Liu states, the *sanshi* scheme does not refer merely to the Spring and Autumn Period, but repeats itself cyclically (*fu ru xunhuan* 復如循環) and therefore serves as a model for future generations (*Lunyu shuhe* 1297:8). Hence, as Elman (1990, 255) notes, "in Liu Feng-lu's hands, this vision of antiquity as the repository for inert precedents was radically transformed. Instead, precedents became part of a vision of future change and reform." This notwithstanding, it has to be emphasized that treating the order of the three epochs as a cyclical pattern rather than a linear scheme of all history implied the postulate that the era of Supreme Peace would be followed by yet another period of chaos. The proposed reforms were, in turn, rather reactionary in nature, and so Liu Fenglu called for a return to ancient feudalism, along with the institution of barons and marquises (*zhuhou* 諸侯), considering this period the essence of Supreme Peace (*Liu Libu ji* 4: 38).

A view of history similar in terms of its internal structure was later proposed by one of the epigones of the Changzhou school, Song Xiangfeng 宋翔鳳 (1779–1860). Song believed that the order of the three epochs constituted a hidden meaning of not only the *Springs and Autumns*, but all the other writings of Confucius, including the *Analects*. Most importantly, however, Song Xiangfeng equated the notion of *taiping* with the concept of *datong* from the *Liyun* chapter, believing that these two terms refer to one and the same era when "people will find peace in their homes, enjoy their work, live to a grand old age, and take advantage of the circumstances" (*Daxue guyi shuo* 2:12.15). This fusion of two utopian ideals of premodern Chinese philosophy of history had a great impact upon the thought of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), although it has to be borne in mind that, just like Liu Fenglu, Song Xiangfeng understood the sequence of three epochs cyclically—as beginning anew from the moment of its completion (*Lunyu shuoyi* 2:19, 5:3).

The next step towards the universalization of the Confucian idea of *taiping* was made by Liu Fenglu's most prominent disciple, Gong Zizhen (1792–1841). As rightly observed by the editors of his collected works, he might be referred to as the last thinker of the classical era and the first of the modern one (*Gong Zizhen quanji*, 1). Deeply inspired by the *Springs and Autumns*, as he himself admits, as early as 1817 Gong starts to think of history in terms of an (at least apparently) linear tripartite scheme. Depending on the various degrees of talent spread among all the members of society, three epochs are distinguished: the epoch of order (*zhishi* 治世), of chaos (*luanshi* 亂世), and of decline (*shuaishi* 衰世) (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:6). This scheme is, however, retrogressive, and it was not until 1819, when Gong begun his studies under Liu Fenglu in Beijing, that the "vector" of his historical vision changed. At this juncture, Gong states that history develops through the epochs of chaos, rising peace and, finally, Supreme Peace, and that this sequence is manifested in all spheres of culture, especially laws, rituals and customs. What is more, Gong believes that the idea of three epochs is exemplified not only in the *Springs and Autumns*, but also in other Classics: the *Hongfan* chapter of the *Documents*, the *Liyun* chapter of the *Records of Rituals*,[28] the *Analects*, a few parts of the *Changes of the Zhou*, and even some of the poems from the *Songs*. Gong's reinterpretation of the *Hongfan*, included in his *Treatise on the Great Meaning of Five Classics from their Beginning to the End* (*Wujing dayi zhongshi lun* 五經大義終始論), is particularly interesting. By matching each sphere of political activity described in this text with one of the three epochs, Gong argues that food and commodities correspond to the epoch of chaos, then the matters of sacrifices, education, public works and penal code represent the epoch of rising peace, while the emergence of culture (*wén* 文), following the rise of soldiers and teachers, brings the era of Supreme Peace into being (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:41–48). This scheme works as a diachronic exposition of the dependence of culture upon its material foundations, which will be further developed in Gong's later thought.

Importantly, throughout *Wujing dayi zhongshi lun*, Gong Zizhen claims that the culture of the Zhou founders was an embodiment of Supreme Peace, if not its first historical instance, which means that the above-described sequence could be treated as cyclical. Wang Jilu (2002, 471) argues that this constitutes one of the major contradictions of Gong Zizhen's philosophy of history. Eventually, however, there is no conflict, as Gong openly states that "all history could be divided into three epochs (*tong gujin keyi wei sanshi* 通古今可以為三世), and the events from the beginning to the end of the *Springs and Autumns* could also be divided

28 Gong strives to fit the *Liyun* into the Procrustean bed of the *sanshi* scheme, despite the fact that the era of *datong* and its definitive end is followed by the era of Small Prosperity (*xiaokang* 小康), which results in an essentially retrogressive and pessimistic narrative. Gong seems to be aware of this fact and remains silent about both eras, trying to show that the periods of original chaos and the "ultimate one" (*taiyi* 太一), which precede the imminent arrival of *datong*, fall into his progressive order.

into three epochs" (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:48). This means that, just as the beginning, middle and end can be distinguished both in the scale of the whole process and its singular phases, so the scheme of the three epochs is a universal key to the knowledge of both the entirety of history and its component periods. Gong's pioneering employment of the concept of *sanshi* with regard to history in general did not come at the expense of a cyclical view, but by virtue of incorporating the latter, which perfectly testifies to the transitional nature of his philosophy of history. As Wang and Ng rightly point out,

> As Gong himself made clear, this temporal trichotomy was after all a repetition of the antique Three Ages, in that its ending point was the age of universal peace, an age which happily replicated that same great golden era of yore. In other words, the paradigm of historical classicality still held sway in Gong's historicism. (Wang and Ng 2005, xx)

An important feature of the epoch of Supreme Peace is that, unlike the previous two epochs, the difference between "the inner" and "the outer" spheres of the country, or in other words, China and the rest of the world, is no longer in force. In order to allay all those who might be concerned that this implies some sort of cosmopolitanism which would be harmful to the *raison d'État*, Gong Zizhen emphasizes that loving and protecting one's country is not in conflict with care for other states, just as the public (*gong* 公) does not oppose the private (*si* 私). On the contrary, the public interest will not be satisfied if people do not recognize it as convergent with their private interest: the public and the private have to "mutually elevate" each other (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:92). This idea led Gong to an intriguing vision of history.

In *An Essay on the Patrilineage System in Agriculture* (*Nongzongpian* 農宗篇) from 1823, Gong Zizhen argues that when people started to cultivate the soil, in accordance with their intelligence and strength, some of them tilled a foot of land, others two, ten or hundred feet, becoming the "masters" of the respective portion of earth. The establishment of private property involved the rise of inequality: those whose land was broad could afford to meet the wants of their children, and when they were no longer concerned about satisfying their basic needs their behaviour became standardized and known as customs and law. The task of preserving one's property, in turn, entailed a set of rules of conduct, which became honoured as virtues.[29] Ultimately, all social divisions were sacralized as coming from

29 "If the father was not partial to his eldest son, then he was unkind. If the eldest son was not obliged to his father, then he was unfilial. If the other sons did not honor the eldest son, they would not display brotherly love. If the eldest son did not provide for the other, he was unrighteous. If the father did not distinguish between the eldest and the remaining sons, then the hundred mou estate

Heaven (*zu shen qi shuo yu Tian* 卒神其說於天) (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:49).

In *An Essay on Equal Distribution* (*Pingjunpian* 平均篇), written in the same year, Gong additionally points out that "people's hearts" reflect their economic situation: while the rich enjoy glory, the poor weaken each day, becoming more and more irate, envious, and miserable. Therefore, economic inequality is the decisive cause of the decline of states in history: "the greater the gulf between those who have too much and those who have too little, the faster the state declines; but if that gulf is somewhat narrowed, good government will be somewhat more quickly achieved" (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:78, translated by Borei 1977, 282–83). Gong Zizhen believes that in remote antiquity achieving equality was the ideal of the rulers, but with time these "small inequalities gradually led to great inequalities" (*jian zhi da buxiangqi* 漸至大不相齊). As a witness of the Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813, Gong Zizhen urges the Qing emperor to follow the example of the ancient rulers and to make "adjustments according to the time"—the equalization of land, which in his opinion could be achieved in less than ten years (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:78–80). However, the rise of inequalities after the reform will be inevitable, as the human desire to possess and protect private property is ineradicable. Just as the golden age of ancient rulers was an epoch of reconciling the public with the private, so the future era of Supreme Peace is a time of harmonizing people's private needs with the publicly oriented objectives of the centralized power. The time of the Zhou—an instance of the era of Supreme Peace within a portion of history—serves as a model for the future implementation of this utopia.

Knowledge of history, therefore, plays a significant role in the realization of Supreme Peace. As Gong Zizhen puts it, "the great tendency [of history] that cannot be skipped ahead" (*buneng tiao guijin zhi dashi* 不能逃古今之大勢) irreversibly leads towards an increasing number of historical events and their complexity (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 5:334). This fact should be reflected in historical records, which ought to include not only political and military history, but also economic history, the history of rites, customs, literature, and art, including archeological research, local histories and the records of ethnic minorities (*Gong Zizhen quanji* 1:80-81, 4:265-267.281). In this way, by extending the resource of historical experience to the utmost, politicians would be given the largest "instrumentarium" possible. Gong's idea of the tendency of history shows that in spite of all the concessions made to the cyclical views of history, he viewed the general historical process in rather linear terms.

Transforming the concept of the three epochs into a universal scheme, Gong recognized the golden age of Chinese history as the first and paradigmatic instance

would be portioned out several times, it would no longer exist. Not being able to make a hundred mou estate last over time is not being intelligent." (ibid., translated by Whitbeck 1980, 156) of the epoch of Supreme Peace, or that of culture, preceded by the era of economic and political changes. This meant, though, that culture (morality and religion in particular) reflects and sanctions the economic differences created at the dawn of history. This calls for the reform whose aim is to bring about equalization, which is to be initiated by the emperor with the help of state historians. It will be probably done in the ultimate era of Supreme Peace which, given the necessary trend towards accumulation of knowledge, will coincide with the greatest amount and level of culture. The visions of irreversible and linear progress that were about to come to China a few decades later were never so close to the domestic views of history, and it is quite natural that in his encounter with Western theories of progress Kang Youwei drew on the ideas of Gong Zizhen and New Text Confucianism.[30] Commenting upon this influence of Gong Zizhen, Federico Brusadelli writes that "this may suggest that a linear vision of history had already emerged out of the Chinese Classical tradition, prior to any significant impact by Western theories", albeit for Gong Zizhen "there is no assurance of eternity, for the age of Supreme Equality might easily collapse again into an age of Chaos, thus starting again the (natural) cycle of history" (Brusadelli 2020, 21–22).

Conclusion

The paper discusses the premodern Chinese views of Supreme Peace and demonstrates that the idea of *taiping* was unknown prior to the Han dynasty, originally referring to idealized remote past. Whereas the Daoists identified it with the primordial, pre-cultural unity of humans and nature, Han Confucians equated Supreme Peace with the harmonious and hierarchical social system under the sagacious rule of one of the first Chinese emperors (or Confucius for He Xiu). The latter being the case, the notion of *taiping* was reduced to a purely descriptive category, which was then employed by official historiography but ridiculed in the critical thought of Wang Chong. With works such as the *Huainanzi* and the *Xiang'er* commentary to *Laozi*, the Daoists started to argue that it is possible to restore the Supreme Peace under new historical conditions, with help of gods, a visionary emperor, or due to the efforts of unified humanity. The last option was taken up and developed in a systematic way in the *Taipingjing*, which offered a detailed depiction of the future utopia of freedom, equality, and fulfilment. For the authors of *Taipingjing*, however, Supreme Peace has not yet been present in any period of history, since from its inception humanity accumulates and

30 It should be emphasized that Kang Youwei used the terms *taiping* and *datong* rather interchangeably, while his most detailed depictions of future utopia refer, in fact, to the notion of Supreme Peace, cf. Brusadelli (2020, 61–63, 86–91).

transmits "inherited guilt" to subsequent generations. In the search for a recipe for *taiping*, all people, regardless of their origins and gender, have to gather the seeds of liberating truth from all world teachings and implement them in social life. However, with the radicalization of the project of Supreme Peace, the notion of *taiping* was soon utilized by imperial propaganda and disappeared from the dominant philosophical discourse. An exception to this rule was Li Gou, who envisaged Supreme Peace as an ideal socio-economic system resulting from endowing peasants with land and money. A similar vision was later expressed by Gong Zizhen, who revived He Xiu's scheme of the three epochs, treating it as a universal structure of the historical process in terms of both its totality and all its phases. For Gong, who argued that morality, customs and religion reflect and solidify the economic status of the people, Supreme Peace must entail land equalization and the reduction of social inequalities. In contrast to Daoism, both Li and Gong saw *taiping* mostly as a socio-economic project, which in fact developed the position represented by the Han Confucians. In the same way, Li Gou and Gong Zizhen also believed that these reforms would restore the golden age of the Zhou rather than break with all hitherto known institutions. Similarly to *Taipingjing*, however, Gong described Supreme Peace as an epoch of culture, seeing it as the culmination point of the increase and development of human knowledge. With such an approach, the premodern Chinese views of *taiping* became significantly close to Western progressivism, which explains why Gong's ideas and New Text Confucianism in general became such good allies of the utopian project of Kang Youwei and his followers.

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The Motherboard of Myriad Things: Daoism, Zhuangzi, and the Internet

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Abstract

Machines, instruments and tools offer many benefits, but according to the classical Daoists—Laozi and Zhuangzi—they can also interfere with living a life in harmony with nature. Despite this, the *Zhuangzi* offers numerous stories of individuals who use technologies whilst exemplifying the virtues of a sage, although how this is achieved is not well understood. I examine two recent interpretations and argue that they are problematic on both philosophical and interpretative grounds. In their place I offer a new solution based on comparing Zhuangzi with recent studies of the effects of the internet on the way we think.

Keywords: Daoism, Zhuangzi, Laozi, technology, *wuwei*, *xinzhai*

Matična plošča neštetih stvari: daoizem, Zhuangzi in svetovni splet

Izvleček

Stroji, instrumenti in orodja ponujajo številne prednosti, vendar po mnenju klasičnih daoistov, kot sta Laozi in Zhuangzi, vplivajo tudi na življenje, ki je v sožitju z naravo. Kljub temu Zhuangzi predstavi številne zgodbe posameznikov, ki uporabljajo tehnologije, hkrati pa ponazarjajo vrline modreca, čeprav ni povsem jasno, kako to dosežejo. V članku preučujem dve nedavni razlagi in trdim, da sta problematični tako s filozofskega kot interpretacijskega vidika. Namesto njiju ponudim novo rešitev, ki temelji na primerjavi Zhuangzija z nedavnimi študijami o učinkih svetovnega spleta na način našega razmišljanja.

Ključne besede: daoizem, Zhuangzi, Laozi, tehnologija, *wuwei*, *xinzhai*

Introduction

The image of the sage in the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* is a person in harmony with the natural world who harbours no desire to change or modify it. One might expect, therefore, Daoism to be anti-technology. This expectation is not

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entirely unjustified. In the *Dao De Jing* Laozi tells us that "with the simplicity of true nature, there shall be no desire; without desire, one's original nature will be at peace" (2021, ch. 37). The best life is one that follows the Way (*Dao* 道). As Laozi puts it: "The Way does nothing and yet nothing is left undone". Similar sentiments can be found in Zhuangzi when he claims that the sage is "spontaneous and does not add anything to the process of life" because "the Way gives us the guise, and Heaven gives us the shape" (Graham 2001, 82). If the world is already perfect then technology represents one aspect of human ignorance, an attempt to improve on the unimprovable. Such attempts are futile and will only lead to harm and unhappiness.

The perception of Daoism as anti-technology arose early in its history. In Zhuangzi's story of the gardener and the well, we are told of an encounter between Confucius's disciple Zigong and a gardener who expends much effort collecting water. Zigong tells him about a machine called a "well sweep" that allows him to collect more water using less effort. The gardener dismisses the idea, saying it will lead him to spoil what is "pure and simple". But Confucius is not convinced. He calls the gardener "bogus", saying he does not know where his life is going. The Confucian stereotype of Daoism as anti-technology persisted well into the rise of neo-Confucianism, and can be found as late as Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), who warned against following Daoism based on its impracticality and likely impediment to the development of society (Tan 2020).

Except for the story of the gardener, however, there is little in the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi that is explicitly anti-technology, while A. C. Graham (2001) points out that there are many examples of technology in the stories of Zhuangzi. For example, the famous story of Cook Ding illustrates how an individual can practice effortless action (*wuwei* 無為) when Ding uses a knife to slaughter an ox. Likewise, the story of the hunchback shows how it is possible to craft new tools and instruments from nature whilst still following the sagely ideal. The *Dao De Jing* does not offer as many examples as the *Zhuangzi*, but Laozi uses technical artefacts as a metaphor for the Dao, such as when he compares the Dao to the centre of a potter's wheel (De Reu 2010). This has led many to speculate that Daoism is not necessarily anti-technology, but instead offers a cautionary warning of how technology can impede the sagely life. Precisely how this happens, and what one should do to get the benefits from technology without spoiling what is "pure and simple", is contested.

In this paper I will evaluate recent proposals by Barry Allen (2010) and George Teschner and Alessandro Tomasi (2009). Neither Laozi nor Zhuangzi offer anything like a set of conditions that should be followed to use technology in a sagely way. The interpretations by Allen and Teschner and Tomasi go some way to filling this gap. However, I will argue that both proposals are problematic and cannot provide a complete picture. Focusing on the stories of Zhuangzi, I will compare his warnings about technology with recent studies on the effects of the internet on the way we think, particularly our ability to concentrate and form long-term memories. According to Nicholas Carr (2020) and Susan Greenfield (2015) the internet is impairing our ability to think creatively in a very distinct, human, sense of "creativity". This echoes Zhuangzi's complaint that technologies prevent us from acting spontaneously (*ziran* 自然) and impede the manifestation of our natural inner powers (*De* 德).

The rest of the paper will be structured as follows. In the next section I begin by outlining the three most important stories from the *Zhuangzi* that involve technology. These will serve as a benchmark for evaluating existing interpretations and developing my own. In section 3 I discuss and critically evaluate Allen"s proposal that sagely technology is technology that is "*wuwei* effective". In section 4 I discuss the ideas of Teschner and Tomasi who propose that Zhuangzi's main concern about technology is that it prevents us from transvaluating the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). Whilst I believe that these existing interpretations have correctly identified some of the inherent dangers in technology for the Daoist sage, I do not believe they offer a correct solution for how those dangers can be overcome. In section 5 I compare Zhuangzi's concerns about technology with the work of Carr (2020) and Greenfield (2015). Their conclusions about the impact of the internet on our minds helps us to reinterpret Zhuangzi's philosophy and suggests connecting the technology stories with his spiritual practice of "mind-fasting" (*xinzhai* 心齋).

Stories in the Zhuangzi Involving Technology

Whilst there are several places in the Zhuangzi that refer to technologies, I am going to focus on three stories that provide the most detailed insight into Zhuangzi's ideas. The first comes from chapter 3, "The Secret of Caring for Life" (養生主) with one of the most famous stories in the entire text. In this story Cook Ding is butchering an ox for Lord Wenhui, who, impressed with Ding's skill, inquires how he became a master.

> Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole

> ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint." (Watson 2013, 19)

The story of Cook Ding is one of the so-called "skill" stories that are often taken to illustrate how individuals can develop *wuwei* in their life. Lord Wenhui announces after hearing Cook Ding's explanation that he "learned the secret of caring for life". However, the story also provides insight into Zhuangzi's attitude towards technology. What is noticeable about the story is the humility of Ding. He is not boastful about his skill and does not explain it as the direct result of his long hours spent training (although in another passage we are told he has been cutting oxen for 19 years). Instead, he puts his ability down to the Dao, which he claims places him in a transformed state of consciousness. When Ding first began butchering oxen, he used his mind to guide his actions. He needed to "see the ox" and decide which parts needed cutting. This blunted his knife and required him to change it many times. But after years of practice, he no longer sees the ox. As he puts it "perception has come to a stop". The perceptual part of his mind no-longer guides his actions: instead, he acts based on his spirit (*shen* 神).

Just how Ding can achieve this and how it connects to the Dao is open to interpretation. We know that Zhuangzi makes an ontological distinction between the mind or "heart-mind" (*xin* 心) that is responsible for perception and making rational judgements about the world, and a person's spirit. What is clear from this story is that Zhuangzi believes that it is possible to act sagely even when using instruments and tools: the activity of using the knife is no barrier for Ding in attaining *wuwei*.

A similar result is found in a story from chapter 19 "Mastering Life 達生". Here, we are told of an encounter between Confucius and a hunchbacked man who has constructed a device to catch cicadas. Just as Wenhui asked for the secret of Ding's skill, so Confucius asks the hunchback, who replies:

> No matter how huge Heaven and Earth or how numerous the ten thousand things, I'm aware of nothing but cicada wings. Not wavering, not tipping, not letting any of the other ten thousand things take the place of those cicada wings—how can I help but succeed? Confucius turned to his disciples and said, "He keeps his will undivided and concentrates his spirit—that would serve to describe our hunchback gentleman here, would it not?" (Watson 2013, 147)

This passage is useful because we get a third-person perspective via Confucius' description of the hunchback's state of mind and spirit when using his device. Again, just like with Ding, there is a reduction in the amount of work being undertaken by the mind as he does not see or perceive all the different things around him. Instead, his will is "undivided", and his spirit has become "concentrated". Like the story of Ding, this suggests that the hunchback has undergone some psychological process in which his spirit plays a more significant role in his actions.

The stories of Ding and the hunchback thus provide little grounds for Daoists to reject technology. On the contrary, they both speak approvingly of the potential of *wuwei* to be realized through the everyday use of tools and instruments. But it is in the last story, found in chapter 12 "Heaven and Earth" (天地), where Zhuangzi indicates his reservations. When Confucius and Zigong encounter the gardener, Zigong tells him about a machine that can make his life easier.

> The gardener raised his head and looked at Zigong. "How does it work?" "It's a contraption made by shaping a piece of wood. The back end is heavy and the front end light and it raises the water as though it were pouring it out, so fast that it seems to boil right over! It's called a well sweep." The gardener flushed with anger and then said with a laugh, "I've heard my teacher say, where there are machines, there are bound to be machine worries; where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine hearts. With a machine heart in your breast, you've spoiled what was pure and simple, and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest. Where the life of the spirit knows no rest, the Way will cease to buoy you up. It's not that I don't know about your machine—I would be ashamed to use it!" (Watson 2013, 91)

There is a lot of detail given in this passage. The first thing to note is that the gardener says he has heard of the machine but has already decided not to use it. His justification ultimately connects back to the Dao. He explains that if he were to use this machine (and others like it) he would in some way distance his actions from the Dao. The Dao would no longer "buoy" him up. He equates the Dao buoying him to having a focused spirit. When the spirit is restless it is distant from the Dao and a restless spirit is, in part, caused by having a mind with "machine thoughts" (*ji xin* 機心). Where do those machine thoughts come from? The gardener is referring to the use of the well sweep. If he were to abandon his existing technology (probably a handheld bucket), he is likely to develop machine thoughts, and spoil what is pure and simple.

The story of the gardener, when held in contrast to Ding and the hunchback, presents something of an interpretive puzzle for Daoists. On the one hand Zhuangzi suggests technologies can be used whilst living up to the sagely ideal of *wuwei*; on the other hand, he suggests that using technologies can spoil the mind, placing the user at a greater distance from the Dao. If a person is to follow Daoist teachings on living the good life, it is important for them to know how they can practice them whilst existing in a technological society. I now turn to examine two recent interpretations on how this can be achieved.

Barry Allen's *Wuwei* Effectiveness

When evaluating a technology, we typically care most about its effectiveness, i.e., how useful it is for achieving some end, goal, or purpose. For example, a knife is better than a spoon for cutting oxen, binoculars are better than a microscope for viewing distant objects, and email is better than letters for a quick response. Barry Allen argues that Zhuangzi warns against overemphasizing effectiveness. If effectiveness is the only criteria by which we judge technologies, we will be "held hostage to efficiency and profit". As a result, we will become selfish and fail to the live up to the ideals of the sage. This is not to say that effectiveness is not important, but that effectiveness should come from the Dao itself, rather than the mind of the designer.

> The problem is not with machines *per se* but the people who maintain them, or more exactly with their knowledge ... It is not knowledge as such that causes confusion and disorder; it is confused, disordered knowledge—superficial, inadequate, unsubtle, and artless. The argument does not devalue technology: instead it sets a new goal, defines an alternative ideal—alternative to engineering held hostage to despotic ideas about efficiency and profit. Not all technology is the same. Some may be coercive and unbalanced, some more generous and sage-like. (Allen 2010, 154)

This an interesting interpretation and switches the debate from one centred on the user to the design of the technology itself. According to Allen, some technologies are effective because they function similarly to the natural world. Technologies can be more or less *ziran* depending on how well they emulate the Dao. He calls technologies that most resemble the Dao, the ones that are most sage-like, "*wuwei* effective", because when we use them they present a lesser obstacle to achieving *wuwei*. He gives the double-action bellows, reinforced concrete, and suspension bridges as just some examples of technologies that are *wuwei* effective.

Allen's concept of *wuwei* effectiveness is similar to "biomimicry" whereby the designer takes inspiration from mechanisms found in the natural world. Examples of biomimicry include airplane wing design, suction cups, water-repellent fabrics, hypodermic needles, and underwater sonar systems.

Of course, all technologies are artificial to some extent and must come from the mind of a designer: only the myriad things are *directly* created by the Dao. However, if the designer has the right kind of knowledge and understanding of the Dao and its De, then they can use this knowledge to design more sage-like creations. This is how Allen explains the gardener's objection to the well sweep:

> To return to the old man cursing Zigong: his argument is that ingenious machines are the products of ingenious minds, which cannot be pure and simple, and therefore cannot move with the Dao ... The old man does not say all machines are ingenious or all the work of impure hearts. Only the really machinish, mechanical ones are. I think that means ones that lack subtlety, being obviously contrived to force what would otherwise not happen ... We might say the old man condemns mechanical minds, facile minds, minds whose techne is merely clever and superficially fixed on "efficiency". (Allen 2010, 158–59)

So according to Allen, the gardener is objecting to the well sweep because it was not the product of a mind knowledgeable of the Dao. As a result, the well sweep is not a very sage-like technology, and when used by the gardener is likely to lead him to act in ways contrary to the Dao. But what about the gardener's original bucket? On this logic the gardener can only use the bucket if it is *wuwei* effective and acts like nature. Although Allen does not address this question, in other places he mentions that the concept of "void" is one of the most important Dao design features, and certainly a simple bucket easily fills with water because of its void, and perhaps this is why it is *wuwei* effective. The cases of Ding and the hunchback can be explained in a similar fashion. Ding's knife is an example of a sharp edge. This is a design feature one readily finds in nature in the form of teeth, claws, and defensive spikes. The hunchback's device is a "sticky pole", which again is not overly "clever and superficial" and has countless instances in nature.

From this it might be concluded that *wuwei* effectiveness provides a neat and accurate explanation of the three stories. The well sweep is rejected by Zhuangzi because it is not *wuwei* effective whereas other tools like knives and sticky poles are. However, I do not believe this can be the full story. Here I want to raise what I take to be three problems with Allen's interpretation.

The first concerns the identification of the features that make a technology *wuwei* effective. We are told by Allen that the well sweep is *not wuwei* effective, that it is the result of a facile mind fixed on efficiency. But it is not obvious why this is the case. Consider the facts about how the well sweep works. It is comprised of a long beam with a shorter distance between the pivot and the bucket. This makes lifting water easier because it spreads the force over a greater distance requiring less power to use. But this mechanism, this design feature, is found throughout nature. It is employed, for example, when a lemur or monkey extends their tail to maintain balance, or when a person contracts their muscles to lift a heavy object. Given the ubiquity of this mechanism in nature the gardener should be able to use it with little obstacle to *wuwei*, but we are told that he cannot. If it is not the lever aspect of the well sweep that is causing the trouble, what else could it be? There is not much else besides this that is different from the traditional handheld bucket. Without further identifying those aspects that are meant to be overly artificial, it is hard to see why the gardener should object to such a technology.

A second problem concerns the stories of Ding and the hunchback. These show how one can successfully use technology and remain true to the sagely ideal. On Allen's interpretation this is because their tools work like the Dao and so do not impede *wuwei*. But this explanation appears to shift responsibility for *wuwei* too far in the direction of the technology and its design. We are told that it was not until after long periods of practice that the two men were able to attain *wuwei*. Cook Ding had been butchering for 19 years and it was not until after three that he began perceiving the ox with his spirit rather than his mind. The hunchback, likewise, trained for six months before he was able to use the sticky pole to catch cicadas. It is true that Ding does not credit his practice for his excellent skill; instead, he credits the Dao and his transformed mental state. But this does not mean that his practice is irrelevant. Clearly it formed part of the causal conditions necessary for transforming his mental state to attain *wuwei*. Explaining how Ding and the hunchback can successfully use technology must surely therefore include their practice, and it is not obvious what role, if any, practice plays in Allen's *wuwei* effectiveness.

A third and final problem for Allen's interpretation concerns Zhuangzi's context-dependent notion of sagely action, which contrasts with the context-independence of *wuwei* effectiveness. Zhuangzi is notorious for rejecting the existence of absolute truths beyond simple facts about the power of the Dao. Instead, Zhuangzi offers up a perspectivist (Connolly 2011) or relativist (Hansen 2003; 2014) approach to thinking about knowledge. However, the practice of *wuwei* does not require factual knowledge or "knowledge-that", but skills-based knowledge or "knowledge-how". Here Zhuangzi appears to offer a context-dependent explanation of whether a person has achieved the know-how to practice *wuwei*. This can be seen in the discussion between Confucius and Zigong. Although Confucius dismisses the gardener's comments, he does not disagree with him entirely. It seems that what he is really saying is that the gardener is too over-zealous in his attitude towards technology. He agrees that the gardener is justified in his choice not to use the well sweep, but it is not an absolute truth that the well sweep cannot be used in a sagely way. In other words, the gardener is inferring an absolute fact about technology where none exists.

After Confucius calls the gardener "bogus" he retreats to a more conciliatory tone:

> He knows the first thing but doesn't understand the second. He looks after what is on the inside but doesn't look after what is on the outside. A man of true brightness and purity who can enter into simplicity, who can return to the primitive through inaction, give body to his inborn nature, and embrace his spirit, and in this way wander through the everyday world. (Watson 2013, 93)

Burton Watson interprets Zhuangzi as saying that the true follower of the Dao, the true sage, "does not retire from the world, or reject society and its inventions" (ibid.) but learns to balance their inborn nature with the demands of the outside world. This is what Zhuangzi in other passages calls "walking two paths". Confucius' criticism, therefore, is that the gardener should be subtle in his attitude: whilst technology can detract from a life close to the Dao, it need not necessarily do so, and there is no intrinsic property of the technology itself that means it cannot be overcome with skill and practice. Interestingly, Allen himself seems to suggest that the gardener's rejection is a result of his peculiar situation rather than the technology itself:

> Could the old man be objecting to the kind of machine Zigong describes? He is evidently able to get the water he needs without the sweep. If he had it he could irrigate a hundred times the vegetables he does, but why should an old man want to irrigate a hundred times more vegetables? (Allen 2010, 153)

It could be argued that since the gardener does not need large amounts of water and has already attained a sagely way of life, he does not need to begin the practice required to use the well sweep. This explanation seems convincing, but it does not fit consistently with *wuwei* effectiveness. The comments by Confucius suggest that the know-how needed to live a sagely life is relative to one's context, including one's mental states, needs, and skill. On the other hand, *wuwei* effectiveness is context-independent and depends only on the design of the technology itself. I believe this shows that Allen's account cannot provide a full explanation of what is needed for the sagely use of technology.

Embodiment and Transvaluation

George Teschner and Alessandro Tomasi (T&T) (2009) take a different approach to Allen. Their interpretations agree regarding the nature of the problem technologies pose, but they disagree over what the correct solution should be. Both believe that Zhuangzi's main worry about technology is that it effects the mind in a way that makes *wuwei* difficult to attain. However, whilst Allen believes the best way to resolve this is through the design of the tool or instrument, T&T believe it comes down to the relationship between the user and the tool. The wrong kind of relationship is when the machine imposes on the user a series of thoughts that must be followed to successfully use it. When this happens "the controller becomes controlled and must think like a machine" (T&T 2009, 191). These thoughts spill out into our judgments about the natural world and other people. Their worry echoes Maslow's dictum: "to the man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail". Technologies narrow our perspective and lead us to measure and judge success relative only to that technology.

This is a problem because according to T&T one important Daoist virtue is being able to "transvaluate" objects, to see the usefulness in the useless. The true sage has what they call an "entrepreneurial" mind that can see the value of objects from multiple points of view. They provide as evidence of this the numerous stories in the *Zhuangzi*, such as that of Huizi and the gourds, the story of the bleaching salve, and the story of the ugly tree, where Zhuangzi teaches us to go beyond our own perspective when thinking about the value of objects. Technology imposes a single perspective and reduces the ability to transvaluate. Despite this, it is possible to use technologies whilst also transvaluating the world. For T&T this is achieved when an individual becomes "embodied" with the technology. The basic idea behind embodiment, a concept they borrow from the writings of Don Ihde (2001) and Hubert Dreyfus (1986), involves a collapse of the "self/other" distinction. The tool becomes an extended part of the body and mind, and it is at this moment when the harmful effects of technology can be avoided.

This is how T&T bring together the gardener's rejection of the well sweep with the stories of Ding and the hunchback:

> Another way of understanding the gardener's rejection of the tool is to say that the machine was not a device with which the gardener could enter an intimate relation. By "intimate" is here meant a relationship of embodiment between user and the tool … The use of a tool in case of embodiment is spontaneous, and non-deliberative, without reflection dividing the action into the subject as user and tool as object … It is illustrated by the actions of Cook Ding in cutting up the ox and in the hunchback catching cicadas with the sticky pole. Embodiment is the criterion that the gardener used in rejecting the use of the machine for raising water. (T&T 2009, 201–2)

T&T claim that the gardener rejected the well sweep because it is not a technology he can become embodied with. They do not speculate further on why this might be the case. However, given what we already know about the gardener, that he lives a simple life and is already able to get what he needs, it seems reasonable to suppose that the years of practice required to become embodied is beyond him. The explanation in terms of embodiment also seems to fit very well with the stories of Ding and the hunchback. In fact, Ding's self-commentary on how he achieved *wuwei* with the knife perfectly exemplifies the stages of embodiment found in Ihde and Dreyfus. In the beginning Ding had to memorize how to use the knife when cutting different parts of the ox. But after much practice he no longer needs to "go through the mental process" and his actions are intuitive. Unlike Allen's *wuwei* effectiveness, embodiment is also context dependent. Just because the well sweep is unsuitable for the gardener does not mean that it cannot be used by others in a sagely way. This is because embodiment is an "intimate" relation, depending only on the user and the technology in question.

According to T&T, embodiment is the way to escape instrumental thinking caused by technology. By becoming embodied with the machine, we can transvaluate objects in the world. My main concern is with the relationship between these two activities. After all, why should embodiment be the means to transvaluation? Whilst a convincing case can be made for Ding and the hunchback becoming embodied with their instruments, far less convincing is the claim that they have transvaluated the world. At no time does Ding tell us he sees the world in a different way or values the ox in a different way. In fact, he tells us he "no longer sees the ox" as "perception has come to a stop". The hunchback reports a similar result. If this is the case, how can they also revalue their tools or the myriad things and act in an entrepreneurial way?

To explain this T&T appeal to the concept of no-mind (*wunian* 無念). This is the state of no thought or "thinking without thinking" and "contrasts with the temporal mind that plans and calculates" (T&T 2009, 197). Some caution is needed here, as the concept of *wunian* in Chinese thought does not originate with Daoism but with later commentaries on Buddhism. The earliest mention comes from Zhi Qian (c. 300 CE) in his translation of Sanskrit Mahayana texts (Yun-Hua 1986). It is therefore, strictly speaking, a Chinese rendering of Buddhist "emptiness" (śūnyatā) rather than Daoism's "nothingness" (*wu* 無). They cite as evidence of the role of *wunian* the famous mind fasting passage in chapter 4 where Confucius instructs his disciple Yan Hui to "fast his mind" (*xinzhai* 心齋) to achieve his goal without becoming distracted by the myriad things. When a person has mentally fasted, this places them on the "hinge of the Way" and allows them to see the world from the perspective of the Dao. As a result, they can transvaluate objects and act entrepreneurially.

I agree that mind fasting plays an important part in understanding how Zhuangzi thinks it is possible to use technologies whilst attaining *wuwei*. However, I disagree that this is because of transvaluation. When we look at examples of transvaluation in the text this is almost never carried out by individuals exercising *wuwei* or *xinzhai*. In fact, it is carried out by individuals in a discursive mode using the "planning and calculating" parts of their minds. In the exchange between Zhuangzi and Huizi over the usefulness of the gourds, neither are in a meditative state. Zhuangzi illustrates seeing usefulness in the useless by comparing his case with that of the King of Wu. This exchange requires the use of the parts of the mind we would normally associate with planning, such as memory, goal direction, concentration, and analogical reasoning. Each of these processes requires making correct/incorrect or is/is-not (*shi/fei* 是/非) distinctions—precisely the kind of "complete mind" (*chengxin* 成心) that Zhuangzi identifies as the opposite of an "empty mind" (*xinzhai* 心齋).

A better explanation of the stories relating to usefulness is that they are a lesson in Zhuangzi's epistemological relativism or perspectivism, rather than any ethical or normative ideal relating to entrepreneurial values. This is how Steve Coutinho (2014, 102–4) interprets these passages as a warning against taking cultural and social conventions as ultimate truths representing the way things are. That is not to say that Zhuangzi is not concerned with what we might call "creativity". There are many other stories, such as that of engraver Qing, that do draw a clear connection between fasting the mind and acting creatively. However, these are different in tone to the "use stories" and instead talk about individuals tapping into the De of the Dao and using this as the foundation for their actions. When they do so, their actions become spontaneous and, on this basis, they can truly act in a way that mirrors the Dao. I will come back to this example in section 6 as it forms the basis for my interpretation.

How the Internet Affects the Way We Think

Unless we understand the nature of the problem that technology poses to the sage, we will not be able to clearly understand Zhuangzi's solution to it. The gardener story seems to be the most telling case in the whole text. He rejects the well sweep because he claims it will give him "machine thoughts" and "machine worries". However, beyond this brief characterization, we are left to speculate further on what precisely is meant by a machine thought. Even more obscure is how having machine thoughts can obstruct *wuwei*, *ziran* and life in harmony with the Dao.

The objection of the gardener is strikingly similar to recent observations about the internet and how using it changes the way we think. These recent studies provide insight into what might have been the basis for Zhuangzi's reservations and help to reinterpret his worries in a way that makes his proposed solution more intelligible. In addition, by looking at the relationship between Zhuangzi's philosophy and the internet, it is possible to demonstrate the relevance of Zhuangzi's teachings to modern issues and provide guidance for contemporary Daoists who live in a world very different from the time of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

In just a few short decades the internet has infiltrated almost every aspect of our lives: work, communication, entertainment, shopping, and education all now take place on the internet or depend upon it in some way. The average amount of time a person spends online is ever increasing, brought on by the introduction of devices connected to it wirelessly such as smartphones, satnavs, smartwatches, and other objects in the so-called "internet of things". As early as the 1990s researchers began questioning what kind of impact this would have on our behaviour and thinking. Since then, study after study has confirmed that prolonged use of the internet radically changes the way our minds think and process information.

Some have argued that these changes are beneficial. For example, Clive Thompson (2013) claims that the internet enhances our ability to multitask and gather information in a shorter amount of time. However, there are others who think that the internet is having a negative impact. The neuroscientist Susan Greenfield (2015) is so concerned about the effects of the internet on our minds that she calls it "Mind Change" by analogy to "Climate Change", and believes the consequences could be just as disastrous. In a similar vein, Nicholas Carr (2020) argues that the internet is currently designed in a way that affects our ability to think deeply and creatively. The internet, he argues, positively encourages "shallow thinking" that is routine, algorithmic, and devoid of human creativity. To understand why this is the case it is necessary to understand what Greenfield and Carr take to be the two most important cognitive faculties underpinning creative thought: (i) long-term memory and (ii) concentration.

That the internet is influencing our long-term memory would not come to many as a surprise. Why bother to remember the names of the kings of France when a quick Google search will provide the answer? A study carried out at the University of Columbia (Sparrow, Liu and Wegner 2011) demonstrated that individuals who believe facts are stored in a computer will subconsciously put less effort into remembering them. They called this the "Google Effect", and since the publication of their ground-breaking work their results have been attested to by many. From a Daoist point of view, however, it could even be argued that this benefits the sage. Laozi says in chapter 19 of the *Dao De Jing* "banish wisdom, discard knowledge, and the people will be benefited a hundredfold" (Waley 1934, 166). In chapter 20 he instructs us to "banish learning" saying if we do so there will be "no more grieving" (ibid., 168). Zhuangzi, likewise, is critical of the person who knows too much saying that a sage should forget what they know: "You forget your feet when the shoes are comfortable. You forget your waist when the belt is comfortable. Understanding forgets right and wrong when the mind is comfortable." (Watson 2013, 153)

But it would be a mistake to take these passages as rejecting the value of memory for Daoists. Memory is not the same as knowledge. The kind of knowledge Laozi and Zhuangzi are concerned with is knowledge based on *shi/fei* judgements, whereby an object is believed to belong to one conceptual category or another. Zhuangzi's own arguments from relativity and perspective show that such attempts at knowledge are futile because there are no objective facts of the matter. From the perspective of the Dao, there are no distinctions (or alternatively, every possible distinction is seen from the perspective of the Dao).

Carr claims that those in favour of outsourcing memory "have been misled by a metaphor" (2020, 191), because biological memory works in a very different way to computer memory. The human mind creates long-term memories through a process of "consolidation", whereby cognitive pathways are repeatedly activated. Consolidation comes in two forms: explicit (when the person is consciously aware of the activation) and implicit (when the person is unconscious of the activation taking place). Explicit consolidation happens during rote learning, practice, and intentional recall, whereas implicit consolidation occurs when old memories are connected to each other and to new ones in our subconscious mind. It is believed a lot of this implicit consolidation happens during sleep. The point Carr is making is that long-term memory is not static: it is constantly evolving, whether we intentionally want it to or not, and this makes biological memories fundamentally different from data stored on a computer.

The consolidation process plays an important part in our ability to reinterpret the world and provides the foundation for creative thought. Thinking creatively, according to Greenfield, is novel and unpredictable—but is not random. It is about drawing new connections between existing ideas, reinterpreting our experiences, and forming new ideas in the process. Computers can draw connections too, but when we follow their connections this becomes a passive and algorithmic form of creativity, providing less long-term meaning and significance to the individual:

> The problem could now be one not so much of relying too heavily on an external source for facts but of letting that mentality of collecting isolated bits and pieces of information overtake the formerly normal process of making use of these facts, of joining up the dots ... if you can only remember the places to look for answers rather than the answers themselves, then even these dots will not be learned and therefore cannot be joined up with other dots to form an individual perspective of the world. (Greenfield 2015, 206)

Moreover, it is not just memory, as concentration is also believed to play an important role in creativity. Being able to concentrate allows for "deep thinking", which Greenfield understands as the ability to create an internal narrative that forms new cognitive connections. Carr credits the printed book as promoting "reading in one's head", which helped strengthen our ability to concentrate. The stories in the Zhuangzi also demonstrate that concentration is a virtue and plays a role in *wuwei*. Cook Ding and the hunchback have "concentrated spirit", the gardener rejects the well sweep because it will lead him to "distractions" and "worries", and Yan Hui is told to have a "unified will". All reference the importance of concentration in helping to avoid getting caught up in the myriad things.

The internet appears to undermine the capacity for concentration. Citing several studies, Carr (2020) claims that internet users are less able to sustain chains of thought. The changing nature of the internet supports this conclusion: websites like Twitter, Buzzfeed, TikTok, and Yahoo Pulse all present information in easily digestible "bitesize" amounts. Using hyperlinks, websites actively encourage "horizontal thinking" that encourages users to leapfrog from topic to topic based on algorithm recommendations. This contrasts with the printed book, and arguably even the early internet, which encouraged "vertical thinking" through pursuing a single idea to greater depth. This situation has been made worse by smartphones and other connected devices that compete for our attention.

Although Zhuangzi was not equipped with the modern understanding of the mind in terms of neurological actions in the brain, there are obvious parallels between his concerns and those raised by these recent studies. Carr and Greenfield claim that long-term internet users risk losing the ability to think creatively in a uniquely "human" sense of creative. This creativity comes from our natural capacities to forge new ideas through making neurological connections. This cannot be substituted by a computer, which follows a different method, one which is more artificial and less dynamic. This gives us insight into why Zhuangzi believed technologies pose a risk to living a sagely life.

For Daoists the concern is with spontaneity rather than creativity *per se*, although the impact of technology on both is similar. According to Laozi and Zhuangzi, *ziran* is the best way to live because it is when our internal De, or power given by the Dao, is most potent. When we act according to this power our natural abilities are elevated. It can be seen in Cook Ding when he puts his ability down to the Dao rather than his practice and perception. Just as the internet impedes creativity by affecting concentration and memory, so technology more generally impedes spontaneous action. In the philosophy of Zhuangzi this is caused by a "blocking" of the action of the Dao. The gardener says as much when he claims that if he used the well sweep "the Dao would cease to buoy him up".

The problem for Daoists can now be stated more concisely. When we use technology it imposes on our mind artificial forms of thinking, typically in the form of rules and principles for using the instrument as well as *shi/fei* judgements that allow its application to the myriad things. For example, when cook Ding was learning to use the knife, he needed to make judgements about the different parts of the ox, such as which bits should be cut and in which way. This activity fills the mind and makes it more difficult for the Dao to guide or influence a person's actions. As a result, their life becomes less *ziran* and their internal power for spontaneous action is reduced. Their life follows an artificial Way, the Way of technology, rather than the Way of Nature or Heaven (*Tian* 天). Now the problem has been stated it will be easier to explain how I think Zhuangzi proposes to solve it.

Protecting the Mind with *Xinzhai*

The internet produces a challenge unrivalled by previous technologies. This is because the internet is not just a means to an end, but for many it is an end in itself. It produces its own ontology, a "digital myriad", that forms a basis for desire that rivals the myriad of the Dao. Despite this, its effect on us and Zhuangzi's advice remain the same. The internet, just like the gardener's well sweep, draws us away from the Dao, by imposing artificial *shi/fei* distinctions through which we judge the world. However, technology is not the only phenomenon that Zhuangzi believes can do this. How he responds to these other challenges provides insight into technology and how it should be handled by the sage. One area that has a similar impact is social interaction and it is in his mind fasting passage that he offers guidance on how to protect the mind from such harm.

In this story Yan Hui tells Confucius of his plan to travel to a neighbouring state and reform its ruler who is oppressing his people. Confucius warns Yan Hui that he should not overly rely on his preconceived ideas. Instead, he tells Yan Hui to focus on his goal:

> Make your will one! Don't listen with your ears, listen with your mind. Don't listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits for all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (Watson 2013, 25)

Confucius believes Yan Hui is in great danger of being distracted by all that goes on in the courtly affairs of a ruler and is likely to lose sight of his goal. He likens the promise of fame, intrigue, or death at the hands of the ruler to being in a "birdcage", which traps the mind and restricts the possibility of spontaneous and flexible action. He instructs him to fast his mind because only by doing this can his actions be guided by his spirit. Zhuangzi proceeds to give two analogies for *xinzhai*: "flying without wings" and the "empty room". The second of these provides an insightful model of how Zhuangzi connects the spirit to the mind and the role it plays in *wuwei*:

> Look into that closed room, the empty chamber where brightness is born! Fortune and blessing gather where there is stillness. But if you do not keep still—this is what is called sitting but racing around. Let your ears and eyes communicate with what is inside and put mind and knowledge on the outside. Then even gods and spirits will come to dwell, not to speak of men! This is the changing of the ten thousand things. (Watson 2013, 26)

A mind that has fasted is compared to an empty room through which a beam of light enters.[1] Why does Zhuangzi make this analogy? If light shines into a room that is not empty its path is disrupted as the rays bounce around the furnishings. The light is therefore affected and transformed by the contents of the room. This is analogous to how our inner *shi/fei* distinctions interpret the input of our senses. As a result, we do not "see" the world in its natural state, but only from the

1 Compare James Legge (1891): "Look at that aperture (left in the wall); the empty apartment is filled with light through it." 瞻彼闋者，虛室生白.

perspective of our organized minds. This creates a single perspective that results in rigid and inflexible outcomes. By emptying the mind, we see the world more clearly, and act more naturally. But if the mind is empty, how can we act at all? To answer this Zhuangzi appeals to the spirit. The spirit competes with the mind as a determining factor in our actions, but neither is the "lord" of our body.[2] Unlike the mind, the spirit is passive, it "awaits on things", and does not impose itself on the world. When a person is guided by their spirit, they act without *shi/fei* distinctions and are closest to the Dao. When their mind is quiet, and their spirit guides their actions, they act on the power of the Dao and their actions are more spontaneous.

This raises a question about the relationship between *xinzhai* and the skill stories, as none mention *xinzhai* as the process undertaken. Despite this, other skill stories, such as that of engraver Qing in chapter 19, do claim that *xinzhai* plays an essential role. In this story it is said that by fasting his mind people would marvel at the result of Qing's engravings, wondering if they were "made by the spirits" themselves. The point is that once Qing's mind is cleared of *shi/fei* distinctions he can tap into an inner power guided by the Dao and not the mind. According to Wai Wai Chiu, this is the real purpose of mind fasting: it allows one to act and change the myriad things without being acted upon, what he calls "being thinged by things".

> By harmonizing with the environment, a skillful expert is able to minimize the chance of being thwarted or hurt, as when Cook Ding's knife is kept intact. This is "not being thinged by things". At the same time, the skillful expert succeeds in bringing a task to completion; this is "thinging things". (Chiu 2016, 46)

In the stories of Cook Ding and the hunchback *xinzhai* is being practiced even if it is not mentioned explicitly. Their states of concentrated will, not being aware of the myriad things, and letting their spirit guide their actions, mirror the mental states of Yan Hui and Qing. What about the gardener? In the ensuing discussion, Confucius calls the gardener "bogus", and criticizes him for wanting to draw himself away from the world. This might be taken to show that Zhuangzi believes the gardener acted too rashly. But there is another way to look at it. The story can be taken as representing Zhuangzi's position from two different perspectives. The gardener is raising a general worry about what can happen when confronted with

2 Although Zhuangzi makes a distinction between the mind and the spirit, this should not be interpreted as meaning he was committed to some form of Cartesian or substance dualism. For more on the historical and contextual reasons why this is the case, see Roth (1990).

a new technology. To rush into it without any preparation or awareness can lead to adopting the Dao of the technology. The gardener is justified because he has already achieved his goal using the simple bucket. The remarks from Confucius in both this and the mind fasting passage tell us that this does not mean the solution to all *shi/fei* harm is to reject worldly activity. The solution is to guard your mind from that harm by practicing *xinzhai*. Once this has been done one can carry on with the activity needed to attain one's goal, whether that is use technology, engage in social interactions, or other worldly pursuits.

How does an individual fast their mind? The *Zhuangzi* itself says very little about this. The most obvious answer is through some form of meditation practice. We know meditation is an important method through which Daoists in later periods believed they could join the Dao and tap into its power. Other ways of doing this include forms of *daoyin* or "Daoist Yoga" (Kohn 2008), such as *Qigong* or *Taiji quan*, as well as tantric sexual practices. It might be argued that this makes *xinzhai* too extreme or radical a method to be used alongside technology. But the minds of Ding and the cicada catcher cannot be *completely em*pty: they still need to have some goal or motivation, otherwise they would not pick up their instrument in the first place. What they seem to have emptied is their preconceived ideas of how to achieve that goal. This point is emphasized by Chris Jochim (1998), who says that for Zhuangzi the mind is not intrinsically bad and *xinzhai* is not about abandoning it entirely. Instead, it is about "letting the mind wander with the Dao", by letting the spirit take control of our mind and body. When *xinzhai* is understood in this sense, it can be realized though a wide variety of means, many of which we would not normally associate with formal meditative practice.

For example, in the cases of Ding and the hunchback, their years of practice seem to have quietened their minds and provided the means to *xinzhai*. Perhaps practice engrains the know-how in their long-term memory, a form of memory that is non-conceptual and less prone to making shi/*fei* distinctions. When a person uses their short-term memory, they rely on conceptual distinctions and the memorization of rules or algorithms to apply the technology correctly. This is not the same as Teschner's and Tomasi's embodiment. I am not suggesting the distinction between the user and the tool becomes collapsed, rather that the epistemological state of the user after *xinzhai* becomes less perspectival as it is carried out from a position of fewer *shi/fei* distinctions. It is not based on perceptions, ideas, or beliefs, but on one's natural abilities. These natural abilities are, according to Zhuangzi, the result of the power of the Dao.

Contemporary Daoists, like almost everyone else in society, need to use technologies like the internet regularly. What lessons can they take from Zhuangzi on how to minimize their negative impact and live a more sagely life? If my interpretation is correct the answer lies in reducing the amount of *shi/fei* activity in the mind by relying on a deeper, more primordial, mode of thinking, which Zhuangzi connects to the spirit. As there are many ways to do this, some inspiration can be found in the skill stories themselves.

From the story of the gardener, contemporary Daoists should question whether any given technology is necessary for them to achieve their goals. In the case of the internet, the user might want to consider whether visiting some webpage is essential and how likely it is to generate "machine thoughts" that distract them from the Dao. If the same information can be found through a different medium, such as a book, it should be preferred if the medium poses less risk. Of course there will be some trade-offs, but this kind of reasoning is precisely what the gardener himself engaged in. If a technology must become an essential part of a person's life, then they should initiate other ways to minimize its impact. This could involve focusing on one's goal or intention and being mindful of the myriad things that the technology produces and how they might distract you. This is the approach taken by Yan Hui, who must "unify his intention" and stay mindful of the influences of the ruler and court.

The user might even consider engraining the technology in a deeper part of their mind, so that using it no longer requires making *shi/fei* distinctions. This is the lesson of Cook Ding and the hunchback. By practicing, they can use the instrument or tool intuitively without needing to rely on *shi/fei* distinctions and a set of guidelines. How this approach to *xinzhai* can be followed by internet users is less clear. One option might be to encourage users to store more information in their own long-term memories so that they no longer need to keep searching for it. In other words, to minimize the "Google Effect" by reducing how much memory they outsource to the internet. Another option is to increase the amount of time spent on one webpage or resource and reduce the number of hyperlinks clicked. This could strengthen one's resilience to clickbait and other distractions in a similar way to how the hunchback learned to only focus on cicada wings.

Conclusion

For practicing Daoists, navigating a world full of technologies presents a formidable challenge, and the internet presents possibly the most daunting challenge yet. Although Zhuangzi was writing some two and half millennia ago, he was acutely aware of these challenges, and his solution in terms of *xinzhai* offers a flexible approach that allows individuals to take advantage of the benefits of technology without abandoning the ideals of a sagely life.

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BOOK REVIEW

Rémi LOPEZ: *The Impact of Akira: A Manga [R]evolution*

Martin DE LA IGLESIA

(2020. Translated by Jennifer Ligas. Toulouse:
Third Éditions, pp. 192. ISBN: 2377842801 (ISBN13: 9782377842803))

An English-language monograph about an individual manga title is still a rarity. Only Julian Darius's little booklet on *Mai, the Psychic Girl* comes to mind (Darius 2014), and apparently another book by Third Éditions, on the late Miura Kentarō's *Berserk*, has recently been published (Boëton 2020). With regard to Ōtomo Katsuhiro's *Akira*, there is also *Akira Club* (Ōtomo 2007), which amounts to an official handbook (and which was also one of Rémi Lopez's sources for *The Impact of Akira*). This dearth of books published about *Akira* in the almost four decades after the beginning of its serialization would be surprising if we took at face value Lopez's statements that "[i]t is widely agreed that *Akira* divided the world of manga into a before and an after" (Lopez 2020, 7) and that "*Akira* would revolutionize the manga genre, creating a demand for Japanese comics that extended well beyond the country's borders" (ibid., 38). In fact, the precise impact that *Akira* had is a matter of debate—some earlier and later manga titles are often said to have been more decisive in the development of the art—and it is not a trivial task to assess that impact.[1] Despite the title of the book in question being *The Impact of Akira*, however, Lopez is not actually concerned with the reception of this manga, neither domestically nor overseas.

What then is this book about? Basically it is divided into two parts, the first shorter one titled "Creation" (ibid., 9–80), and the longer second one "Creature" (ibid., 81–200). The former is an extensive biography of Ōtomo. Sub-divided into three chapters (before, during, and after the creation of *Akira*), it describes in astounding detail all of the shorter manga works and other projects Ōtomo created besides *Akira*. It also becomes clear that Lopez's subject is not only *Akira* the manga, as the subtitle *A Manga [R]evolution* would imply, but also its anime adaptation

1 A scholarly investigation of *Akira*'s reception in the Western world is part of de la Iglesia (2020).

from 1988 directed by Ōtomo himself, and throughout the book it is sometimes difficult to tell which of these two different works Lopez is referring to. In this first part of the book, it would also have been helpful to Lopez's non-Japanese speaking target audience if he had included a bibliography of Ōtomo's works that have been translated into English, as some of them have become rare collector's items that are hard to track down.

From a scholarly perspective, it is also noticeable that while Lopez relays many bits of obscure information, fascinating anecdotes, and direct quotations from Ōtomo, he uses very few footnotes in his book, and those that do appear do not always contain references to the sources of his information. The bibliography at the end of the book supplies some more sources, but it is difficult for the reader to figure out which bibliography item was the source of which piece of information. Several published interviews are listed which are most likely the source for the numerous Ōtomo quotations,[2] so strictly speaking there is no original research informing *The Impact of Akira*. Even if the lack of references makes clear that the book is not a scholarly text, there is still a wealth of information in it that might prove useful to researchers, provided they are ready to do the work and verify each of the "statements" given.

In contrast to the first part of the book, the second is rather problematic. Each of its eight chapters is structured in the same way: a purported theme in *Akira* is identified—e.g. World War II, the body and sexuality, the "(New) New Religions" / *(shin-)shinshūkyō*, etc.—and then this theme is traced through Japanese cultural history. There are two main problems with this approach. The first is that Lopez's forays into the history of a certain motif, while demonstrating his impressively deep and wide knowledge of Japanese and international (mostly popular) culture, are rarely connected back to *Akira*. For instance, Lopez discusses (in the context of the topic of war) at some length the anime series *Uchū Senkan Yamato* from 1974 (Lopez 2020, 90–92), or (regarding the theme of fictional post-apocalyptic cults) the live-action film *Mad Max: Fury Road* from 2015 (ibid., 176)—but why? What is the relation between those two works and the actual subject of his book, *Akira*? Does Lopez want to say that *Uchū Senkan Yamato* inspired *Akira*, or that *Fury Road* was inspired by *Akira*? If so, why does he not explicitly say this?

The other problem in the "Creature" part of the book is that any identification of a motif in a text is a matter of debate, and the merit of such an interpretation

2 Furthermore, much of what Lopez says about the production of *Akira* the anime (51–62) is obviously based on the official making-of video *Akira Production Report*, which was widely circulated on VHS and DVD (and also on YouTube, according to Lopez's bibliography).

relies on how convincingly the author makes a case for each such claim. If the reader does not agree with one of Lopez's readings, anything else he writes on that particular topic becomes dubious. In chapter 2.1, for example, Lopez spots the "A-Bomb Specter" haunting *Akira*: "Otomo has never explicitly referred to the obvious juxtaposition between his work and the scars inflicted by the events of August 1945; he really didn't need to" (ibid., 82). Is this juxtaposition really that obvious though? Of course, the idea that the fictional cataclysmic explosions in *Akira* (particularly the one in the flashback at the beginning of both the manga and the anime) can be compared to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 is nothing new.[3] However, the explosions caused by Akira are certainly not nuclear ones; they are psychic, supernatural, "a new kind of bomb" (*shingata bakudan* 新型爆弾), as it says on the very first page of the manga. This distinction is important as there are in fact actual nuclear explosions depicted in the manga, near the end of the 5th volume in the six-volume edition when Tetsuo seizes control of the nuclear missile launchers of the aircraft carrier—with mushroom clouds and all. This often overlooked scene would have merited a close reading and a comparison to those featuring psychic explosions, as this would have put in perspective the facile equating of the latter with the real-world historical bombings in WWII.

More straightforward is the identification of the motorcycle gang phenomenon called *bōsōzoku* phenomenon as a trope that informs *Akira*, although one wonders why Lopez discusses it primarily in connection with Kaneda's gang ("known as the Capsules" (ibid., 108)) and not their decidedly more flamboyant rival gang, the Clowns. Regarding the so-called Capsules, Lopez admits later in the book that this gang is only "unofficially dubbed the 'Capsules'" (ibid., 165)—i.e. neither in the manga nor in the anime are they given a name—but then reads too much into this extratextual designation when he writes about Tetsuo's need to "recognize and accept his addiction to 'Capsules' (both the bikers and the drugs)" (ibid., 165).

There is an overall tendency in *The Impact of Akira* towards interpretations that are more arbitrary than compelling. "Many parallels can be drawn" (ibid., 155) between *Akira* and more or less any topic, but do those parallels really need to be drawn? In his chapter on cyberpunk (2.4), Lopez wriggles out of giving a proper definition of this genre, instead listing a wide array of possible cyberpunk tropes, and then saying that "cyberpunk works aren't required to tackle all of the above" (ibid., 143)—which conveniently allows *Akira* to be placed in the cyberpunk genre. Actually the relation between *Akira* and cyberpunk is far more complex than

3 E.g. perhaps most prominently in Bolton (2014): "To see *Akira* in the United States in 1990 was to be transported back in history to the moment of Hiroshima […]."

this suggests, and it is a pity that Lopez has apparently not taken notice of the published research regarding precisely this question (de la Iglesia 2018).[4]

"So, what are we to make of *Akira*?", Lopez asks in the Conclusion; "what's it all about? […] *Akira*'s complexity prevents it from being fully grasped" (ibid., 197). Is this really the question that readers bring to this manga, though? Do they need a book to help them understand what it is all about? Perhaps they would rather learn more about the creation of *Akira*, and about its creator Ōtomo, and this is what (the first part of) *The Impact of Akira* achieves quite well. As for the second part of the book, *Akira* definitely is a complex work full of mysteries that might puzzle many a (Western) reader, and these indeed require (or would at least benefit from) deeper exploration and explication by someone with—possibly even Japanological—expertise. I am thinking of, for example, the mode of speaking of the character known as the "Rhymester" (who, in the English translation, speaks in rhymes), or the malapropisms in Yamagata's speech, or the ghostly apparitions of Kaneda and Kei which seem to be visions of the future, but not quite.

Finally, two more things about *The Impact of Akira* are worth mentioning. One is the complete lack of illustrations inside the book: the stunning cover illustration by Guillaume Singelin might give the false impression of a lavishly illustrated coffee-table book, but in fact it contains no images whatsoever. The other is that this shortcoming is to some extent made up for by the great readability of the text, as the translation from French by Jennifer Ligas is almost flawless,[5] and the result is a work of elegant prose. To sum up, this book might not be a "must-read" from a scholarly perspective, but for those just beginning to explore Ōtomo's manga, it might serve as a starting point for further research.

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4 Another relevant text that came out too late to be considered by Lopez is de la Iglesia and Schmeink (2020).

5 One of the few obvious errors is the translation of what must have originally been "planches de dessinées" as "panel illustrations" in the sentence: "In fact, 1980 was his [i.e. Ōtomo's] most productive year in terms of panel illustrations, as he published a total of 553!" (Lopez 2020, 39). Surely the meaning here is pages, not panels.

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