

*I. Fengliu as a Basic Concept of East Asian Aesthetics*

Generally the name of aesthetics is given to a branch of philosophy which has been shaped and developed in European countries, and its main subjects have been beauty, fine arts and sensual cognition. However, there is no guarantee that the concepts of beauty and fine arts for Western people is necessarily in accord with those for Eastern people. Moreover the concepts of beauty and fine arts in the West were not fixed, and have been changing continuously in history.

Therefore when we East Asian people study our own traditional aesthetics today, it is more fruitful not so much to pay attention to the translated words of beauty or fine arts used in the Western language as to find out our own concepts equivalent to the Western concepts in the role. We cannot assert that the words such as beauty and fine arts are the main concepts in East Asian aesthetics. At least in Korean traditional thought the values and phenomena of beauty and fine arts were not dealt with separately, but treated and regarded as relating strongly to other values and phenomena. They were especially linked to morals or ethics, and, furthermore, sometimes subordinated to them according to circumstances.

In this paper I would like to discuss *fengliu* as a methodological concept of East Asian aesthetics which comprises three main aspects of aesthetic studies such as beauty, fine arts and sensual cognition. In Eastern thought the concept of *fengliu* is able to integrate various aspects of aesthetic issues. It has had an important and continuous role in the historical development in East Asian classical aesthetics. For this reason *fengliu* could also be called the basic founding concept of East Asian aesthetics.

*Fengliu* (or *poongryu* in Korean and *furyu* in Japanese) means »the stream of wind« in the literal sense of the word. It implies giving full play to one's free-spirited and extravagant mind. Once, when Confucius asked his pupils about their hopes for the future, the pupil Zi-lu replied that he hoped to rescue the country from danger as a politician, Ran You hoped to raise the wealth of the people as a person working in the area of economy, and Gong-Xi Hua replied that his hope was to become a government official.

Only Zeng Xi didn't reply, so the Master asked him again. Zeng Xi said that at the end of spring, when the making of the Spring Clothes had been completed, he wished to go with five or six newly-capped youths and six or seven uncapped boys, to perform the lustration in the river I, take the air at the Rain Dance altars, and then go home singing. The Master heaved a deep sigh and said, I am with Zeng Xi.<sup>1</sup> The case of *fengliu* in Zeng Xi meant breaking off relations with the trivialities of ordinary life.

This free and extravagant spirit can be displayed not only in the attitudes on politics and society, but also in the realm of literature and taste. Furthermore, it can be displayed in relation with the opposite sex and in the way of life. In short, the life of a free man, sharing the benefits of an unrestraining attitude towards the environment and a personal loftiness is to be called *fengliu*. To enjoy a hermit's life and to be excellent in »*quintan*« or the clean discourse are good examples of *fengliu*. The disposition of the clean discourse became »*xuanxue*«, or the profound philosophy, as combined with the tradition of Buddhism; later the profound philosophy developed as Zen-Buddhist philosophy so that it placed the tradition of *fengliu* on the side of the mind. *Fengliu* has a tendency to raise the ordinary life to the aesthetic state or the world of art. Therefore the full content of *fengliu* is nothing but the aesthetic way of life.

## II. The Origin and Transition of Fengliu

The implications of *fengliu* have been interpreted differently with the change of times. The original meaning in China implied simply a custom handed down from the preceding king. In the Han period (206 BC – 220 AD) the meaning was changed to become a laudable and beautiful custom in politics and education. Later on it has been used to judge the merit of a person, to qualify the attitude of life and to designate the doctrine of artistic beauty. Still later it implied, on the one hand, the beauty of natural scenery or a person's appearance and, on the other hand, aesthetic life in relation to taste or amorous life.

The concept of *fengliu* as an expression of aesthetic consciousness was widespread in the period of Wei Jin (3rd century – 4th century). According to Yuan Hong's book *Description on Post-Han Dynasty*, the word »*feng*« means moral influence which spreads outside, and »*liu*« means fidelity which inclines toward the inside. Similarly, the concept of *fengliu*, comprising a moral

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<sup>1</sup> *The Analects of Confucius*, translated and annotated by Arthur Waley, Vintage Books, New York, 1938, pp. 154-160.

meaning, such as personality and fidelity, was advanced in the Jin period. It was moreover mentioned just after the description of an event that was attributed to an upright group of university students who struggled against the arbitrariness of eunuchs. The apostle of *fengliu* according to Yuan Hong was none other than this upright group. This kind of *fengliu* was called »*fengliu* of a celebrity« in the book *Shishuo*. In the Jin period the *fengliu* of a celebrity took on the »*fengliu* of a hermit«. Furthermore, *fengliu* implied the character and the tune of poetry. In the usage »*fengliu* of poetry«, »*feng*« signified the elegance of poetry and »*liu*« its uniqueness. Hence *fengliu* in the Jin period which was grounded on fidelity, began to signify both the spirit of Taoist sequestered life of standing aloof of politics and business, and the artistic spirit tintured with the taste of the nobility. It is natural that *fengliu* should be influenced by Taoism, which was very influential in that period. Many Taoists have elucidated the aesthetic way of life. An example can be found in the famous chapter »Let Fancy Roam« by Chuang Tzu. *Fengliu* came close to the aesthetic idea of an artistic and tasteful life, which was supported, formed and developed by the luxurious life of the clan. In this way in the Jin period the concept of *fengliu* acquired the meaning of an aesthetic idea.

The meaning of *fengliu* became almost the same as that of the word »*ya*« or elegance which is opposite to »*su*« or vulgarism. In the sixth century the meaning of *fengliu* changed again to designate voluptuous beauty. We can find many examples in the poems entitled *Yu Tai Xin Yong Ji* which was one of the best anthologies compiled in those days. In the fifth century there emerged a new meaning, for they would call *fengliu* a man who was untidy and slovenly. From the usage »dissipated *fengliu*« at that time, we presume that the concept *fengliu* and dissoluteness were difficult to separate. As King Jianwendi of the Yang dynasty in the sixth century said, »if the writing is dissolute, it is better,« the excessive movement of feeling was considered to be valuable. The implication of voluptuousness soon began to imply a lewd man as is known from the usage of »*fengliu* talent« which appeared in the Tang poems. In the end, the word *fengliu* was used to designate a voluptuous beauty and suggested especially thoughts of a sexual nature.

As we can see, the meaning of the word *fengliu* has changed many times. Nonetheless, in composition sentences it always accompanied the feeling of yearning and recollection, this being true from the Tang period to the modern ages. This was so because it is derived from the meaning of hereditary customs and character. The Chinese dictionary *Pei Wen Yun Fu* lists most of the usages of *fengliu* that appeared in Chinese classical writings. The usages are rearranged into seven groups in the modern dictionary



*Ci Yuan*. They are as follows: (1) the remnants of a beautiful custom; (2) the physical appearance and attitude of a man; (3) grace or dignity; (4) the brilliance of beautiful scenery; (5) to go against etiquette, to make one's own style and to express something different from ordinary people; (6) unusual spiritual ability; and (7) to call at prostitutes' quarters.

If we reexamine the above contents, we find that the first usage denotes the flowing of beautiful customs made by the preceding king. It means the tradition of morals and customs which aim at the realization of a moral and political culture based on »the Way of a King«. In short we interpret it as good customs among the people or as beautiful customs of the world. The second and third usages signify the individually preeminent character or dignity, and, further, the visible appearance in which the character and the dignity were manifested externally. Consequently it denotes the attitude of life which shows human merits in a broad sense. In some cases we can regard it as the grace of work of art in general because it designates the style or norm of music. The fourth usage denotes the existence of the aesthetic qualities which can be discovered in the attributes of natural things. For example, the aesthetic quality of elegance in the long drooping branches of a willow tree is such a case. The fifth and the sixth usage refer to the spiritual state which is extraordinary, lofty and graceful. It is the aspect of cultured elegance free from the trammels of ordinary life. It signifies the greatness of not only a moral mentality but also artistic and literary cultivation. In short, it is a refined and graceful literati taste. The seventh is a transferred meaning in particular which implies amorous feelings.

The general usages of *fengliu* are the ones mentioned above. The basic meaning supporting those usages, in brief, signifies the existence of a spiritual value. The content was mainly political and educational at first, then it gradually spread into the sphere of moral and aesthetic value, and eventually to that of customs, individuals, natural things and works of art all over the world.

### III. The Contents of Fengliu

#### 1. Fengliu and Individuality

In Wei Jin and the Nan Bei Chao period (4th century – 5th century) the pressure of traditional conventions was diminished, and instead a new tendency toward individualism appeared, which was linked to *fengliu*. There was a kind of romanticism which emphasized the importance to be conscious of one's own nature and of emancipating one's own individuality. It was

entirely different from the rigorous courtesy or decorum of the previous period which emphasized formality. There had been a period like this giving priority to fidelity. To attach great importance to fidelity and honour in this new moral etiquette had a strong connection with an emphasis on the individual or the self. The discovery of beauty in the individual was one of the peculiar characteristics of the thoughts of *fengliu* in the Jin period.

### 2. *Fengliu and Nature*

The Taoist philosophy of *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*, which is the basis of Chinese thought, gave reliable ground to the people who lived in the midst of great political and social upheavals. The art of living for Taoists meant to »return to nature.« The representative poets in this period Dao Wenming and Shi Lingwin tried to return to pastoral nature in order to achieve the emancipation of one's own nature. Many people sought truth and beauty in nature. The people who escaped from corrupt society were able to achieve goodness in nature. For them nature was the only environment in which they were able to emancipate their individuality freely and to regain their original goodness. They looked for Arcadia in nature in which they could forget real society. The idea of the return to nature and to emancipate the individuality was gradually colonizing the notion of the hermit's *fengliu*. In this way the idea of *fengliu*, which had regard for the impressive beauty of individuality, came to imply the beauty of nature.

### 3. *Fengliu and the Fine Arts*

Both music and dance have their own structures and offer unique impressions. They have peculiar characters and norms, respectively. This also holds true in the case of poetry. The idea of *fengliu* is similar to that of fine arts, for it enables us to discover the uniqueness of and recognize the individuality in various kinds and types. We can find the expression »one personality has one school« which used the word *fengliu* in the chapter of *Biography of Shi Lingwin* by Wen Shen. This usage informs us that *fengliu* has the attribute of individual items. The beauty of individuality in music and literature has two sides. One is the individuality of the author or the performer, while the other is the individuality of the work of art. According to Gu Kaizhi, the most important thing in figure painting is to animate the individuality of a person by tracing the divine energy. He also maintains that the expression of the divine principle is vital in landscape painting. *Fengliu* is a synonym of the word such as divine energy or spiritual brilliance, which is the expression of the divine principle.

### 4. *Fengliu and the Playing Man*

Chinese culture had flourished in the period of Wei Jin, especially in the period of Dongjin. The persons leading the prosperous culture were the

hermit and the nobility of that period which were generally called the »sons of noble birth«. Many *fengliu* men from Shi Shuo Xin Yu were the youth born in purple, i.e. nobility. The power of the nobility was great and their sons had the opportunity to take an active part in the life of the time. Under such social circumstances *fengliu* developed rapidly among the sons of noble birth, and consequently the aesthetic way of life formed a specific feature of the intellectual class. At such a time the character of *fengliu* shifted from the sequestered life to the fashionable taste of the aristocratic youth living in flourishing towns. The moral *fengliu* such as fidelity became the aesthetic *fengliu* of aristocratic youth in the Jin period.

#### IV. The Korean Thoughts of Fengliu

The first Korean usage of the word *fengliu* or »*poongryu*« (in Korean) is in *A Foreword to the Monument of Aengrang* written by Choi Chiwon in the late ninth century in the Shilla period. According to the record, »the way of *poongryu*« was the main practical idea of education. Its contents include the thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. It originally came from the Korean ancient traditional thought and was afterwards combined with those three foreign traditions. Some scholars called the ancient traditional thought »*barg* or brightness thought«, others called it »*buru* (archaic word for *poongryu*) thought«.

In Korea the idea of *poongryu* had been established in conjunction with the »*hwarang*« corps which was an educational and military organization meant to train and cultivate the youth. Perhaps it was called »the Way« of *poongryu* in the sense that it was the educational idea of *hwarang* to bring up an aesthetic man. Its main contents are as follows: firstly, to learn morals and beautiful customs; secondly, to enjoy fine arts in daily living; and thirdly, to appreciate beautiful nature. The first one came from the original meaning of *fengliu*, signifying that we could contribute to the realization of moral and political culture by continuously observing the traditional beautiful customs of the preceding king. The second one implies that Shilla people, especially the *hwarang*, enjoyed poetry, music and dance, aiming at a sublimation of the human mind into unworldliness and harmony. The youth *hwarang* purified their hearts by artistic life, obtained inner harmony of mind, and experienced the infinite freedom of spirit. The third designates the method of cultivation which trains the mind and body by wandering over hills and waters. The *hwarang* foster faith and reverence to majestic nature through visiting mountains and rivers and enjoying beautiful scenery. They



contemplated the beauty and sublime of nature and prayed to nature. They breathed the ether of nature and indulged in it. At last they constructed the unworldly and lofty spirit world within themselves. The way of *poongryu* was a principal idea in Shilla culture, especially as an educational idea for *hwarang*, and it contributed largely to national prosperity.

The thought of *poongryu* established in the Shilla period has played an important role in forming the tradition of Korean aesthetics. For Koreans the *poongryu* helps seek the refined and harmonious sublimation of the human mind. It has been always supported by moral consciousness. In some cases it was supported by the magnanimous spirit of reconciliation, in others by the spirit of fidelity or constancy, and in some cases by the spirit of transience.

There is an image of »a stream of wind« that comes about under the influence of the consciousness of *fengliu* as we know it in its literal meaning. While a stream of water is controlled by the configuration of the ground, a stream of wind experiences no restraints. At the bottom of *fengliu* there is a vigorous spirit which stands aloof of the trivialities of life and wanders around the empty sky. This stream of wind is differentiated by strong and weak currents, and fast and slow ones, depending on the time and place. There is a soft breeze in spring, on the one hand, and a refreshing breeze in autumn, on the other. A rough typhoon accompanies a storm, while a blizzard accompanies a snowstorm. If we look in retrospect at the history of Korean aesthetics from the viewpoint of *fengliu*, it appears sometimes as a stream of wind raised high and sometimes raised low. Just like the wind becomes warm or cold, according to seasons and topological circumstances, *fengliu* became mild (or »*fengya*«, a kind of elegance) or severe (»*fengci*«, a kind of satire). In other words, there exists a positive and an affirmative *fengliu*, on the one hand, and a negative and rebellious *fengliu*, on the other.

When Koreans discuss the characteristics of their own culture and art they frequently use the word »*meot*«. *Meot* is one of the representative words conveying the Korean aesthetic consciousness, and cannot be written in Chinese characters. Although it is used in some cases to indicate the beauty of nature and work of art, it mainly implies the beauty expressed in human personality, attitude, behaviour and way of life. In this sense it possesses a peculiarity in contrast to other aesthetic categories. It is not only one of the norms of aesthetic judgment but also an idea of human cultivation. *Meot* has developed as a norm of life to Koreans more than as an artistic implication. It denotes nothing more than spiritual freedom and a mode of life unrestrained by practical life. In this sense *meot* is inseparably related to *poogryu*. In other words *meot* is another name for *poogryu* in modern times. It is a

kind of *meot* to live freely in the rural environment, leaving behind fame and wealth and distancing oneself from the numerous everyday events in the current time of confusion. But *meot* is different from the life of a recluse, for it is connected with optimism.

We don't know exactly when the word *meot* was used for the first time. We presume that it indicates the *poongryu* which permeates the life of common people, while the word *poongryu* signifies the aesthetic consciousness or way of life of the nobility or the educated literati. We may say that *meot* is a new Korean version of *fengliu*. It is notable that *meot* is one of the main aesthetic categories in Korean culture. At the same time it is the educational idea to foster »*seonbi*« or literati who have both learning and morality, as well as sympathy and generosity. Just as the idea of human cultivation of *hwarang* in the ancient Shilla period was *poongryu*, the idea of human cultivation of *seonbi* or literati in the modern Choseon period was *meot*. Both *meot* and *poongryu* share the »*hung*« or attractiveness and the »*shinbaram*« of exulted spirits. Both share the optimistic playfulness, on the one hand, and mettle, fidelity, vigorousness, and broad-mindedness, on the other. For Koreans »to live with *meot*« or »to know *poongryu*« is the highest praise. *Meot* and *poongryu* are concepts of the aesthetic way of life.

It should be noted that recently the word *poongryu* or *meot* has become less used than in the past. In modern society it seems to be gradually withering away, for everything is becoming »average«. In this period of internationalization of culture its meaning and thoughts are being lost little by little. Indeed, nowadays it is more significant to inquire into the aesthetics of *fengliu*. We have defined the *fengliu* concept as follows: it means to give full play to one's free and extravagant spirit which stands aloof of the trivialities of life, in spite of having connection with reality. In such a case the nature offers an open place in which the free spirit is not restricted in its movement. Poetry, music and liquor are the intermediate items in order to give full play to the free spirit effectively. *Fengliu* is a way of behaviour or life which has aesthetic and moral character.

### V. Conclusion

Recently a Japanese writer Fujiwara Shigekazu wrote a book on *fengliu*.<sup>2</sup> He tried to suggest *fengliu* as a model of environmental life while inquiring into the structure of *fengliu*. According to him, the factors supporting

<sup>2</sup> Fujiwara Shigekazu, *The Thoughts of Fengliu (Furyu no Shiso)*, Hosokan, Kyoto, 1994, pp. 263-266.



the structure of *fengliu* are as follows: an unrestrained posture, play, surplus, an open mind and body, and detachment. At the bottom of these factors nature is permeated deeply. Consequently *fengliu* signifies a come-and-go approach to boundaries and one's pleasure unrestrained by both the subject and the object. It is a borderless reconciliation that is not involved in the distinction between the subject and the object. It is a correspondence with all things in nature through a sense of playfulness. It is a way of living, i.e. a free detachment which is always employed to establish contact with things and leave its direction to wind, opening the mind and body to all things. It is just the time that we have to make a new life model or life manners grounded on the ethics covering the whole ecosystem which consists of all living creatures. At this time I hope that the manners of *fengliu*, which can be called the poetics of correspondence with all the things within an ecosystem, will be resuscitated. I think that in the present time the environmental implication of *fengliu* is very important. I expect that the idea of *fengliu* will play an important role as a model of environmental life and still more as a model of the way of life which is able to cultivate our personality grounded on the true subjectivity of human existence.