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The Global Meaning of the Pluralistic Chinese Cultural Tradition

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Abstract: Since the 17th century, works translated into European languages about China such as the Jesuit reports have given rise to a misleading impression that China has only Confucian tradition. To some extent, Confucianism defines the cultural identity of traditional China, but it does not mean that Confucianism steered traditional Chinese culture into monoculturalism. The tradition of unity in diversity is the fundamental reason why Chinese culture has withstood the test of time. Cultural pluralism not only existed in the history, but it still has a subtle impact on Chinese society and Chinese people today. From the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) to the modern age, Chinese culture has integrated elements of Buddhism, Christianity as well as Western science and social knowledge, which provided it with a potential of transformation and recreation. The author holds that it is this potential that empowers Chinese culture to meet the new challenges of Western modernity without cutting off its connection with the tradition.

Keywords: Buddhism and Taoism; Chinese culture; common values; tradition of Confucianism; unity in diversity

1 Chinese culture in the concept of the axial age

When talking about the pluralistic Chinese cultural tradition, what generally comes to mind first is the situation in the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States brought by the “Contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought (百家争鸣)” which the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) termed “axial period”. Be it the “Six Schools (六家)” that were commented by Sima Tan 司马谈 (?–110 B.C.) or what scholars later called the “Ten Schools (十家)”; both refer to the fact that a small minority of aristocrats did not find themselves able to control cultural knowledge on their own anymore after the traditions that had been

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monopolized by the ruling classes were destroyed. Thereupon countless wandering scholars appeared offering various models of thought and by this built the foundation for the blossoming and thriving of culture. In his explanations on the “breakthrough” of the “axial period” Jaspers writes:

What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of self-hood and in the lucidity of transcendence. [...] In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which human beings still live, were created. (Jaspers, 1968, p.2)

The term “axial period (Achsenzeit)” means that the three high cultures China, India and Greece all broke through the initial phases of their civilizations at the same time and started to develop towards their later respective cultures, thereby forming distinct religious-ethic views and culture patterns. It was at precisely in this period that people began to have a deeper insight and to understand the Being as a whole and thereby the meaning of their Being and its limits.

The ideational foundations that were dominated by the cultural spirit of the “axial period” and their traditional religious-ethic value system are in general valid until today. Because of this they are still regarded as the standard of values and action within the big cultural systems. The cultural consciousness that was shaped in this period became the driving force of the historical development of later generations.

Historically speaking, Laozi and Confucius lived in the time of the glorious Zhou Dynasty during which Chinese history underwent a phase of radical change. Attacked by the Zhou, the mighty Shang Dynasty had perished, and the new system established by the Zhou grew to become the center of Chinese culture. When different states attacked each other during this phase of radical change that was overshadowed by moral decline and immorality, tradition had already lost its original meaning and sanctity, which caused the thinkers of this time to reconsider its status and look for new explanations. This way they created the preconditions for the breakthrough of the “axial period”. This breakthrough did not cause a complete break with tradition, though, which can undisputedly be seen in the teachings of Confucius which attach great importance to historical continuity. From criticism of tradition as well as from its continuation new perspectives arose that broadened historical consciousness. It was this breakthrough that breathed new spirit, in the sense of Paul Tillich’s “ultimate concern”, into the minds of China’s sages.

During the following rather large-scale waves of cultural unification, the Confucian doctrine regained popularity because of Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (179 B.C.–104 B.C.) campaign to “dismiss the hundred schools, and revere only the Confucian (罢黜百家，独尊儒术)” during the Western Han Dynasty as well as the neo-Confucian movements of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in the Song Dynasty and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1528) in the Ming Dynasty, which caused it to achieve orthodox status. Nevertheless, the ideologization of the Confucian doctrine did not lead to a complete elimination of other cultural traditions.

Even though Confucianism dominated the entire empire, they were not destroyed because other intellectual trends of inferior status represented the diversity of social classes had their own ideas of value and morality as well as their own mannerisms and because the diversity of Chinese regional cultures also had to be taken into account. On the contrary, they evolved in every sense, infiltrated the dominant intellectual trends and permeated the various layers of societal life. For this reason, they were termed the “small traditions of Chinese culture”. The status and role that all of the cultures occupied within society were not the same; therefore, they individually played a dominant or a subordinate role, causing Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and all kinds of other cultures to be handed down in the form of complete schools. All these patterns of thought that originated in the axial period exist until today and continue to influence the attitude towards life and behavioral norms of the Chinese people to a large degree.

Chinese culture has been unfolding pluralistically since its very beginning. From the Three Dynasties onwards, a pluralistic cultural tradition with *Huaxia* (华夏) culture at its core was slowly developing. The situation of the “Contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought” in Chinese history could only arise because it was in accordance with the spirit of “mutual support and complementation” inherent in Chinese culture. As all manners of thinking within Chinese culture exist in a dynamic competitive situation in which “one falls and another rises, one vanishes and another develops”, the attitude of understanding and tolerance that unfolded richly and exists until today was able to evolve. This situation of pluralistic coexistence is the force that enables China's culture to be enduring and unending.

Classical Confucianist thinkers have been describing human as pluralistic from the earliest times. Tu Weiming summarizes this as follows: “Humans are perceptual, aesthetic, erudite, social, political and historical; at the same time, they are also transcendent beings that yearn for ultimate concern. After this trend of thought emerged in ancient China, it became an important heritage of human civilization.” (Tu, 2006, p.16) Simultaneously humans were seen as the center of the social network within Chinese society, not as an isolated, helpless individual.

Starting with humans at the center, “[t]heir thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.” (Legge, 1991, pp.358–359).

Confucians emphasize the involvement in human affairs (入世), action in the spirit of active participation and the aim for Zhang Zai’s 张载 (1020–1077) noble goal of “creating eternal peace”; Taoists with their concept of non-action (无为) stress the approach of withdrawing from the world; Buddhists pursue karmic rewards in the next life. In other words, Confucians want to find their place in society and because of this they teach harmonic interaction of people in society; Taoists emphasize the relationship between human and nature and because of this they teach harmonic interaction between human and nature; Buddhists bridge a gap that Confucianism and Taoism are incapable of resolving, the question of the outlook on human life and the outlook on the world. It could even be said that Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism form a unity of opposites: they both repel and attract one another; they oppose and unify one another, and one cannot replace the others. From looking at their relationship one can roughly make out two major aspects of the Chinese cultural tradition in which they were indispensable and complementary throughout the course of a development of over two thousand years. In Chinese cultural, tradition Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism cooperate while individually fulfilling their own unique function in society. It was often the case that traditional Chinese intellectuals proved to be Confucians in the various situations of their professional lives and overtook many societal duties, while they appeared to be Taoists in their leisure time when taking joy in nature, and in times of personal crisis they turned towards Buddhist monasteries to pray. Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895–1976) is justified in writing in his evaluation of Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1037–1101): “There is depth in him and also childlike playfulness, his manner is romantic, his works are elegant, regarding his relationships as father, brother, husband, and superior, he is a paragon of Confucianism but beneath the surface he nevertheless is a Taoist who loathes all hypocrisy and deceit.” (Lin, 1977, p.3) These facts show that Chinese society has been a pluralistic society with diverse, mutually dependent systems of thought for over two thousand years.

Apart from the “Contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought” during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods there have been other flourishing periods of pluralistic cultural development in the course of Chinese history. For example, the enrichment of Chinese thought by the introduction of Buddhism to China in the first century of the Common Era, the great fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism as well as other cultures in the Tang Dynasty, or the encounter

between eastern and Western cultures during the Ming and Qing Dynasty. All of this proves that there is a very tight link between a ruler's attitude toward a pluralism of cultures and the flourishing of a nation's power and culture.

In the course of a very long historical process of merging with numerous other ethnic groups, the Han-Chinese have become a nation that is not monocultural. In Chinese culture, the term “harmonize (合)” also frequently was assigned distinct meanings in different fields like philosophy and methodology. Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), who studied in India for 17 years, once while in Nālandā (the most influential Buddhist monastic university in India from the 5th/6th century onward) wrote the article “On the integration of [Buddhist] schools (会宗论)” integrating the viewpoints of the Mādhyamika school and the Yogācāra school to debate with Shiziguang (Simha-raśmi) 师子光, who at the time was a famous Buddhist teacher, on their basis. This proves the deep influence of the philosophy of “harmony” on Chinese intellectuals. Apart from this, Confucian intellectuals have further elucidated the concept of “harmony (和)” in Confucius “harmonic but not identical (和而不同)” which can manifest as cultural tolerance and participation in contemporary times. In his later years Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895–1990) formed the sentence “animosity is necessarily resolved by harmony (仇必和而解)” (Feng, 1996, pp.258–261), thus stressing the connecting value of harmony.

As China has an area equivalent to Europe's, historically and in the present, the unbalanced diversity of its political, economic, and cultural development should be regarded as a normal state. Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910–2005) viewed this as follows: “Its main stream consists of a great many scattered and isolated ethnic units that made contact, mingled, established ties and fused while at the same time splitting up and withering away; they formed a pluralistic whole that was characterized by mutual coming and going and having each other in one's middle while every component still contained their individual characteristics.” (Fei, 1989, p.1) Due to several thousand years of regionally unequal development, the culture of Chinese thought, religious convictions and value systems took a pluralistic shape; it was a historical inevitability. We should place our hope in insisting on plurality in unity. Only by doing so can we avoid to one-sidedly emphasize and rigidly understand the universality and unity of Chinese culture, so as not to prioritize theory over history. At the same time, we also should not neglect unity, blindly exaggerate the extraordinary nature and exceptionality of Chinese culture and in any case, we should not negate the universality of humans' basic values because of the extraordinary nature of cultures. Whether in history or in contemporary times, it is inevitable for all kinds of elements of Chinese culture to compete and coexist in a pluralistic general structure. Only by vertical, horizontal, multilayered, multiangled, and three-dimensional comparison can we comprehensively and equitably understand China's history and current situation. The Chinese

tradition of a pluralistic culture not only has national meaning but also global meaning. It should be an important resource for pluralistic coexistence and the development of peace for the civilizations of the 21st century, it should be used and carried on and to create new values from it.

2 Universality and cultural diversity

In contemporary China, there are many phenomena that on a surface level seem like problems between China and the West. In reality, these are problems between tradition and modernity. In other words, many differences that seem to be spatial are actually rooted in time. Therefore, the way out for Chinese culture lies in smoothly resolving the issues of the interrelations between traditional culture and modernity, or even “postmodernity”. It is undeniable that the future shape of Chinese culture should be both national and global; it should integrate a unity of national and modern aspects as well as particularities and universalities.

The so-called pluralistic culture of today is characterized by spatial diversity, synchronicity in time and constant mutual contacts between its internal elements. The current development of Chinese culture still has not deviated from the path of pluralistic culture and the basis for this developmental direction is laid by tradition. Traditionally, every kind of culture is a collaborative development, mutually beneficial and in no way mutually opposing or conflicting. This state of complementation, which resembles a Taiji-diagram, adequately indicated that the pluralistic Chinese culture of ancient times was fairly mature.

Advocates for a pluralistic culture existed in German history as well, for example the pioneer of German late 18th century Romanticism, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who due to the concept of “toleration” that was advocated in the Age of Enlightenment also paid attention to the research of other people and cultures. He believed that all kinds of cultures were equal and that each had its own independent value. On this basis he emphasized a pluralism of cultures. This pluralism recognizes that every culture and value system possesses a potentially unlimited diversity as well as ultimate values yet not necessarily a common standard that allows mutual appreciation.¹

In the wake of the booming of the world economy and the rapid development of science and technology, humanity established all forms of communication on

¹ cf. Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 Vols. (Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1784–1791). For an English version see Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflections on the philosophy of the history of mankind* (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

an unprecedented scale and with an unprecedented speed. All cultures in the current world are in a situation of diverse unity with many facets and many forms, but also mutual dependency. Different nationalities and ethnic groups, different languages, different beliefs and religions, different cultural lives are interwoven in a way that is without parallel in history. First and foremost, we have to accept one fact: We are living in a world full of diversity, and compared with the past, the notions of time and space in human consciousness have changed fundamentally. At the same time modernity and the technological progress have had a huge negative impact on humanity, causing many shortcomings in human values and the loss of humanitarian spirit. Even though we have all profited from the high efficiency and the many kinds of conveniences brought about by the globalization process, we also have to confront the contradictions and suffering created by globalization. In the current era of globalization, we must recognize the common interests of all humankind, acknowledge common values, recognize the common culture and system of values of humanity that exceed ideology, make universalities our prerequisites, overcome our prejudice and narrow-mindedness with the help of the diversity of culture in order to end isolation from other cultures and begin an age of opening up and freedom, because for the future of humanity the following holds true: “East and West: the human spirit is the same; North and South: the paths to be taken are similar.” (Qian, 1984, p.1)

The modern age is an era in which numerous doctrines, tides of thought and ideologies as well as all kinds of cultures coexist. It has already become hard to hear catchphrases from last century’s Cold War like “Who supersedes whom? Who annihilates whom?”. Since we cannot replace one another, we are better off striving for co-existence and competing peacefully; instead of eliminating differences, we are better off seeking common ground and putting our differences aside; and instead of clinging stubbornly to tradition, we are better off opening up for one another. It is the historical choice of either enriching ourselves through a fusion of cultures or holding on to our own culture that greatly influences our nation’s fate. In fact, globalization reinforced the trends of regionalization, localization, nationalism as well as diversification. Individual identity is undoubtedly linked to one’s own culture while globalization can easily cause people to lose their home and private surroundings. A culture this essential for people consequentially has become a source of establishing individual identity and meaning. Thus, it is not hard to understand why people especially endorse their own national culture in the current age of globalization.

Globalization does not at all mean Westernization, although currently most of the globally influential fundamental systems of values come from the West. However, it is not possible to view the modern Western cultures—especially the thought of Western elites since the Age of Enlightenment—as common cultures;

that kind of view is clearly biased. Max Weber's proposition that "only in the Occident certain kinds of rationalization can be found to develop" (Weber, 2006, p. 22) more and more often meets with questions and criticism by scholars, including European ones.² A common system of values belongs to all of humanity, it depends on the joint participation and creation of the diverse cultures of all nations. The first principle ingrained in humans is the principle of commonness of all humans, and only secondly their affiliation with the characteristics of nation and culture. In fact, the civilizations of non-Western countries are not necessarily opposites to those of Western countries. The similarities of all great cultures of the world are obvious and easy to see. If one were to say globalization formerly was a process of Westernization and modernization, then the circumstances of today are already substantially different: More and more nations and cultures participate in the shaping of globalization together. People from different nations do not only identify with common values, but they also create them. This is a process in which all kinds of cultures diversely coexist and continuously interact while simultaneously helping people to transcend and overcome the values that had been dominant in their minds for a long time, get to know the values of peripheral cultures to the best of their abilities and on this basis propose universal ethics and moral standards. The sources for the forming of a common value system are the diverse cultures of our world. The Chinese pluralistic cultural tradition undoubtedly can be an important resource for this.

Although Western science, which is based on Western rationalism, exposes more and more of its own limitations and one-sidedness, we also should not categorically reject the acceptance of common values that originated in the West. Since the Opium Wars almost every step the Chinese people took—from Westernization to modernization and globalization—was enforced, only rarely was there a choice. Due to the history of enslavement and colonization by the West, current developing countries tend to reject common values that originated in the West and content themselves with pointing to the dark sides of the West, which can easily lead them get caught in the pitfall of nationalism and glorifying the characteristics of their own people. "A nation with a culture of several thousand years, even though it underwent a history of over hundred years of humiliation, should not let itself be dominated by a narrow-minded mentality of revenge or lust for power", Tu Weiming argues (Tu, 2006, p.51). The resistance (of oppressed peoples) against the West clearly has arisen due to a long-term inferiority complex towards

² cf. Joseph Needham, *The Grand Titration. Science and Society in East and West* (G. Allen and Unwin, 1969). Kōsaka Shirō, 近代之挫折: 东亚社会与西方文明的碰撞 [The defeat of modern times: The collision of East Asian society and Western civilisation], translated by Wu Guanghui (Hebei Renmin Chubanshe, 2006).

the West and its people. If these nations cannot overcome this psychological barrier, it will be very hard for them to integrate their independent cultural values in the great currents of the present world.

A common culture should, of course, not lead to unification and convergence, instead it must be pluralistic. Only if there is pluralism, differences between various cultural concepts can exist. These differences might cause conflict, but through dialogue and exchange conflict can be resolved and different opinions achieve order and legitimation in order to finally form a state of pluralistic coexistence and competition. Cultural differences and conflict simultaneously are the driving force of human culture and the source that nourishes the mental development of humanity. Were there no differences between cultures, there would be no need for exchange. In fact, cultural differences are fundamental and permanent. In other words: Diversity is the normal state. Tolerating difference is the first step towards intercultural exchange. The symbiosis and coexistence of diverse cultures in the age of globalization is a process of interaction between multiple cultures, while at the same time new cultural traditions are continuously generated. At present, we should at all costs defend this vivid and vital diversity of common values. It is precisely in this process, that the idea of a common value system will be enriched and refined. Pluralism of cultures is the necessary basis for the development of universalism, which is continuously nourished by the symbiosis and coexistence of many cultures. With this in mind, Friedrich August von Hayek (1899–1992) already warned that the creativity of society and the source of vitality would dry up if people would limit themselves to only the model of one main current.

Cultural imperialism runs counter to the development of global cultural pluralism. Wolfgang Kubin criticizes the current role of US-American sinology and the dominance of English that is considered to be the sole language used in science: “The third huge success of American sinology was establishing a worldwide academic discourse that is anti-metaphysical or, one could even say, anti-European. Any sinologist who wants to make a contribution today has not only to publish his/her works on China in English and must further subject his/her vocabulary and thought structure to the American mainstream” (Li, 2008, p.1 “Kubin’s Foreword”).

The global culture strategy pursued by the US apparently aims to replace the cultures of other nations in many aspects by US-American culture, thereby causing diversity to lose significance. Today, intellectuals of all countries are faced with the serious challenge to contain and correct this situation, that has gotten out of hand, to finally, since the time of Enlightenment, enforce a pluralistic culture instead of reverently and idly watching the cultural hegemony of a single nation.

Although there are huge differences between different cultures, of course there are also certain similarities—this is the original reason why cultures of a different kind can coexist in a coordinated system. The pluralistic tradition of ancient China offers numerous attitudes and methods for an approach of coexisting cultures. Only if a culture really encounters other cultures and interacts with them, can they appreciate the other culture's value and more profoundly understand their own characteristics.

3 Contemporary values of Chinese cultural traditions

The current rapid development of science and technology as well as the acceleration of the rhythm of life have made many things comfortable for people but have also brought about unprecedented dangers and challenges. Modern culture has brought about feelings of loneliness and incomprehension, which are growing stronger day by day, leading to mental and psychological crises, creating detachment in interpersonal relationships and causing people to lose their psychological balance and even their self-control. Increased material wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness, it can also cause polarization and social disparities. For many years, intellectuals have been seeking a way out of their depression, indecisiveness, melancholy, and discontent for their culture and for themselves. Can the wisdom of China's pluralistic tradition still inspire today's people?

While the cultures of the world all made large efforts to shine the spotlight on themselves, the Chinese civilization, due to their pluralistic unity, undoubtedly possessed the essential characteristics of the modern spirit of Enlightenment, because only in the fusion and competition with other civilizations was it possible for culture to achieve development and improvement. As early as 1919, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962) in his essay “The meaning of new trends of thought (新思潮的意义)” already defined the guiding principles of the new trends of thought and the new culture, namely: “researching problems”, “importing scientific theories”, “organizing national cultural heritage” and “reconstructing traditional culture”. Within these four central procedures, “importing scientific theories” (*at the time mainly Western ones*) was supposed to introduce cultural and philosophical concepts to the country with the aim of transforming Chinese culture by blending it with other cultures while still heading for the future based on tradition. According to Hu Shi, the importance of importing scientific theories lay in getting to know and accepting these universal scientific theories while at the same time reflecting upon and renewing one's own culture for the sake of redefining the value and place of

Chinese culture and improving its image. At present, the deeper meaning of “importing scientific theories” also lies in acknowledging and accepting the idea of a common value system. Hu Shi did not at all believe this approval implied assimilation to the West, but rather the “rebirth” of one’s own culture, namely in the form of a dialogue between one’s own and the Other, gradually restoring the value system of one’s own tradition as well as adapting to the global development of today and the future. In fact, Hu Shi’s guiding principles did not only play a role in establishing a new system for Chinese culture but also offered China’s fundamental experience for solving the issue of a way out for culture.

The best method for concretely dealing with diverse cultural development might be the “golden rule” proposed by Confucius: “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you (己所不欲, 勿施于人)”: What is best for me, might not be the most appropriate choice for others. No one has the right to force his own culture, beliefs and will on other people. Thus, the “golden rule” can be explained by negation, which includes a call for empathetic interpersonal behavior. Concerning the so-called “Clash of Civilizations”, Samuel Huntington (1927–2008) explains: Wherever cultural conflicts exist, no nation—no matter how powerful it is economically and culturally—must force its system of values and developmental patterns on other people (Huntington, 1996).

No single culture is perfect, only in exchange with others can it obtain vitality. There is no reason for ignorance paired with conceit and undervaluing oneself. In a pluralistic cultural tradition history transforms into reality, regional standards become values with shared human significance. This indicates clearly that the development of humanity has entered a brand-new phase. The pluralistic cultural tradition is part of the rich cultural heritage of Chinese history and has become a developmental pattern for an entirely new and modern culture. This pluralistic culture, as compared to a unilateral cultural development, shows its superiority in modern society more and more clearly. The existence of a pluralistic culture furthermore provides us with an additional source of great inspiration, namely intercultural tolerance.

“How can a new cultural perspective be developed through tolerance, mutual learning and mutual dialogue in a pluralistic world? For this reason, we need to recognize our traditional culture again and treat it like an important resource; We have to get from a critical understanding to a reinterpretation, use it as a resource again, that is, turn it into an important duty that all humanities scholars have to shoulder.”(Tu, 2006, pp.3–4) During every intercultural exchange, collision, fusion or even reconstruction cultural prejudice and cultural discrimination have to be overcome. The emergence of religious wars, cultural conflict and ethnic hatred are closely linked to intercultural intolerance. Humanity needs a peaceful development and there is no alternative to pluralistic coexistence.

4 Conclusion: globalization and diversified coexistence

At the end of 2006, after taking up my position as head of a cultural institute in Düsseldorf in Germany, I visited the editor of *Monumenta Serica* in Sankt Augustin near Bonn, the sinologist Roman Malek. I asked for his opinion on a series of lectures on the topic of cultural dialogue that the institute intended to organize. Malek believed that offering a series of lectures on the Chinese tradition of a pluralistic culture would certainly be of particular interest for the upper middle-class German public.

Since the 17th century reports on China by priests of the Jesuit order have misled people and caused Western intellectuals to believe that China only had Confucian tradition for a long time. Indeed, Confucian thought has exerted significant influence on political and cultural developments in the Chinese elite society since the Han Dynasty. Confucian culture also determined some basic cultural characteristics of traditional Chinese society as well as the main cultural customs of the Han people, while at the same time deciding the understanding of and attitude towards other cultures.

But under no circumstances can we conclude from this that the Chinese cultural tradition was only Confucian. At that time, the purpose of organizing a series of lectures like this, lay in correcting the many prejudices the Western world had with understanding the Chinese cultural tradition since the Jesuits had come to China.

The pluralistic tradition of Chinese culture definitely does not only exist in Chinese history, but it exerts a subtle influence on Chinese society and people until today. In other words: Who wants to deepen their understanding of modern China also has to grasp the pluralistic tradition of Chinese culture.

Moreover, such a series of lectures — taking place in Düsseldorf where the East Asian (and especially Japanese) culture holds an important place in society—can support and deepen cultural exchange. Only in dialogue the diversity of cultures can emerge. In fact, the so-called universalism can only emerge from a pluralism of cultures but not from isolation and assimilation. The interest in the Confucian tradition of East Asia shows that tradition still plays an active and stimulating role even in today's modern society. The process of modernization that is currently happening all over the world has already proven the diversity of cultural patterns.

“Modernization as a grand narrative includes multiple versions of the global significance of native knowledge.” (Tu, 2006, p.75) At the same time the pluralistic cultural tradition of China also has great significance with regard to the idea of common systems of values originating in the West. This is the question of “Is it possible to come up with a constructive response to the values that have been in

place since the Western Enlightenment?” (Tu, 2001, p.23) that Tu Weiming proposed.

We have to learn from the West but not give up our identity with our own cultural tradition, learn to respect other cultures and remain faithful to our own cultural tradition. Only if Chinese culture undergoes the transformations of modernity can it gain theoretical competence and have a say in discussions on all current issues in today's world.

The German sinologist Heiner Roetz has made valuable contributions in the fields of modernization and contemporary value of Confucian tradition. Kubin chose prose as a genre to show us—to name just one example—the contemporary meaning of Confucian tradition. Raoul David Findeisen examines the over two-thousand-year long tradition of Chinese literature to highlight a literary tradition that is diverse both with respect to different dynasties (time) and different places (space). Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer wrote an explanation of the traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese history, showing the importance of these traditions in understanding contemporary Chinese thinking. We have a responsibility to draw from the source of traditional thought, and to put out new reflections on the contemporary value of tradition and its relation to the contemporary world in order to promote dialogue between the culture and thought of different nations. Only in the process of accepting common values, can we recognize the phenomena in traditional culture that are contrary to the norms of modern human society clearly, thereby unearthing the common values contained in our own culture and, starting from the pluralistic Chinese cultural tradition, construct a new system of expression that can accommodate modernity and globalization, causing Chinese culture to turn into the joint cultural heritage of humanity.

The Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan once wrote on a commemorative plaque for Southwestern Associated University, describing its academic atmosphere as follows: “The same is no harm to the different, the different does not harm the same; the five colors shine and complement one another, the eight sounds play a melody that ends harmoniously and in a level tone ... ‘All things are nourished together without their injuring one another. The courses [...] are pursued without any collision among them. The smaller energies are like river currents; the greater energies are seen in mighty transformations. It is this which makes heaven and earth so great.’”³ (Feng, 2000, p.301) Diversity is not only a requirement for

³ Note of translator: This passage is a quote from the *Doctrine of the Mean* (《中庸》) but not marked as a quote in the original text. This translation is taken from *The Chinese Classics. Confucian Analects. The Great Learning. The Doctrine of the Mean*. Translated by James Legge (Southern Materials Center, 1991), pp.247–248.

academic prosperity, but also a requirement for the prosperity of human culture. I believe Feng Youlan's description of the coexistence of multiple academic disciplines at the Southwestern Associated University at the time should also become the ideal for pluralistic coexistence during today's globalization.

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