

From:

CHUN-CHIEH HUANG

Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts

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The past 60 years have seen the rediscovery of the immense cultural depth of Confucian humanist thought and its power to shape the way human beings are understood in East Asia. In this volume, renowned Confucian scholar Chun-chieh Huang analyzes various East Asian contexts to identify the central pillars of the Confucian humanist spirit: a continuum between mind and body, harmony between oneself and others, the unity of heaven and humanity, and a profound historical consciousness. Scholars of religion, history, philosophy and Asian studies will find this volume an indispensable guide to the rich tradition of East Asian Confucian humanism.

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Preface

Humanism has always been considered characteristic of and core to the Eastern, and especially East Asian Confucian cultures. We can safely argue that what concerned East Asian Confucians was the human world, rather than a heavenly world. Despite an interest in metaphysics among Chinese Confucians since the tenth century – mainly in response to the prevalence of Buddhism – their cosmology and moral metaphysics were still firmly grounded in the soil of ethics. Korean and Japanese Confucians were then led in a similar direction. It is quite obvious that, for East Asian Confucians, the human being represented both the point of departure as well as the point of destination.

Over the past ten years I have been fascinated with the tradition of diverse East Asian Confucian humanisms and have written some articles on this topic. I have now modified and rewritten these articles, linking them together in this volume in a way that expresses the inner logic of their common theme. Chapter 2 is a modified version of “The Mind-Body Relation in East Asian Confucianism,” which appeared in Jay Goulding (ed.), *China-West Interculture: Toward the Philosophy of World Integration* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 35–54. Chapter 4 is based on “Man and nature in the Confucian tradition: some reflections in the twenty-first century,” which appeared in *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 2:2 (December, 2006): 311–330. Appendix 1 was first published in *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, 8:2 (2007): 33–43, reprinted here in revised form by permission of Vilnius University Publishing House. Appendix 2 appeared in *History and Theory*, 46:2 (May, 2007): 180–188, and is included here in revised form by permission of Wesleyan University Press. Appendix 3 appeared in *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*

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Chun-chieh Huang
Taipei
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1. Introduction

HUMANISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This volume seeks to examine the defining character of humanism in the respective Confucian traditions of East Asia. I wish to begin by briefly discussing two key terms: *humanism* and *East Asian Confucianisms*.

“All cultural traditions,” Jörn Rüsen declares, “include humanistic elements.”¹ However, humanism was manifested in a rich variety of forms in the world’s great civilizations. In the Greek traditions, Homer (eighth century BCE) portrayed the realm of the gods on Mount Olympus as intimately related to the human realm on earth, and saw human destiny as decided, more or less, by the will of the gods. In the fifth century BCE, the Greek tragedians Aeschylus (525/4–456 BCE) and Sophocles (496–406 BCE) explored the relationship between the gods and humanity. Christianity regarded God as the absolute creator and human beings as God’s creatures. In the early Middle Ages, St. Augustine (354–430 CE) juxtaposed “The City of God” and the “The City of Man,” with the former dominating the latter. Thus ‘humanism’ in the West tended to be conditioned by tensions between humanity and God, between the human and the divine.

In contrast with the classical Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, East Asian Confucianisms exhibited their humanistic spirit in a different way. Although the expression ‘East Asian Confucianisms’ embraces the Confucian traditions of China, Japan, Korea and

1 Jörn Rüsen, “Introduction. Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Ideas on a New Cultural Orientation.” In: Jörn Rüsen and Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 11–19, 12.

Vietnam, I do not mean to suggest that the traditions in each country simply represent random tiles in a mosaic. The field of East Asian Confucianisms transcends national boundaries; it is a spatial concept, yet it is also a temporal concept. As a spatial concept, East Asian Confucianisms refers to Confucian thought and values in the context of the development of each region in East Asia. As a temporal concept, East Asian Confucianisms refers to the intellectual responses, transformations and advances over time in the context of interactions among Confucians in East Asian countries. It is by no means a stiff, unchanging ideology, abstract and overarching each country's Confucian tradition. East Asian Confucianisms represent a diverse admixture of intellectual and spiritual traditions. This body of traditions does not contain the classical Western hypothesis of 'monism,' thus it does not contain such dichotomies as 'center' versus 'periphery,' or 'orthodox' versus 'heterodox.' It has no pope or supreme central authority—though it does have its warring factions.

The Confucian tradition in each region has its own local characteristics. For example, as the transmitters or creators of Confucian value in China, Confucians were called 'literati' (*shidaifu*, 士大夫); in Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868) they were called *Jusha* (儒者), i.e., 'intellectuals' who transmitted Confucian knowledge and values; in Choson Korea (1392–1910) they belonged to the class of *Yangban* (兩班), i.e., elite noble holders of political power. Placed in the contexts of Chinese, Japanese and Korean societies and institutions, Confucians occupied different social positions and degrees of political authority.² Despite such palpable differences among the Chinese, Japanese and Korean Confucian traditions, they still shared, in varying degrees, Confucianism's underlying spirit of humanism.

While the humanism of East Asian Confucianisms is multifaceted, it has a common core value: the perfectibility of the human person. This represented a belief that human beings are born with the seeds of goodness, so that one who wishes to be 'good' or 'realized'

2 Hiroshi Watanabe, "Jusha, Literati and Yangban: Confucians in Japan, China and Korea." In: Tadao Umesao, Catherine C. Lewis and Yasuyuki Kurita (eds.), *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World V: Culturedness* (Senri Ethnological Studies 28) (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1990), 13–30.

need simply practice self-cultivation, based on his or her native gifts, to be a sage or a ‘worthy one.’ This East Asian Confucian faith in the perfectibility of the human being forms a sharp contrast with the Christian teaching of ‘original sin’ and belief in ‘the fallibility of human beings.’ The East Asian Confucian ‘concept of the human person’ is rooted in archaic civilization. From time immemorial, the Chinese civilization at the center of East Asia did not have a ‘creation myth.’³ Rather, it spawned a form of “organicist cosmology”⁴ or “correlative anthropocosmology,”⁵ accompanied by “correlative thinking”⁶ which, to varying degrees, was shared by Confucian thinkers in each region.

East Asian Confucian humanism, with the perfectibility of the human person as its core, exhibits four salient aspects: a continuum between mind and body, harmony between oneself and others, the unity of heaven and humanity, and a deep historical consciousness. Taken together, these four aspects form its concomitant worldview, characterized as *Harmonia Mundi*: world harmony. The following discussion is divided into four sections which will examine each of these four aspects in depth.

THE MIND-BODY CONTINUUM: THE EAST ASIAN CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY OF MIND- BODY AS ‘MESO-PHYSICS’

The first aspect we can identify in East Asian Confucian humanism deals with the mind-body continuum. We can begin a consideration

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- 3 Frederick W. Mote, “The Cosmological Gulf between China and the West.” In: David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture. A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-ch’üan* (Hong Kong: Cathay Press, 1972), 3–22; Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Colonial, 1971), 13–28.
 - 4 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China II: History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 281.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, 279.
 - 6 Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 350.

of this idea with a discussion of East Asian Confucian views of the ‘self.’

Confucius (551–479 BCE), the founder of East Asian Confucianisms, regarded realization of ‘the Way’ as the aim of personal ‘self-cultivation.’ In spelling out this project, he instructed others to adopt ‘ritual propriety’ (*li*, 禮), ‘humaneness’ (*ren*, 仁), ‘conscientiousness’ (*zhong*, 忠) and ‘empathy’ (*shu*, 恕) as concrete methods. To those who advance steadily along this path into the realm of the ‘noble person’ (*junzi*, 君子)—whose ‘self’ has proven to be a positive medium for realizing the ideal life, whose moral ‘will’ penetrates his or her concrete practice—Confucius would affirm the realization of such a ‘self.’⁷

The concept of the self put forward by Confucius and Mencius (371–c. 289 BCE) was developed further by later Confucians. The most important of such developments was the proposition that the self *termines* the direction of will. This proposition is significant for two reasons: (1) it portrays the self as a free subject, and (2) it presents the norms of the world as originating in the subject’s will.

In his account of the self, Confucius affirmed that people can achieve ‘self-mastery,’ and that genuine transformation of the self would result in transformation of the world.⁸ Confucius argues that “The humane person wants standing, so he helps others gain standing. He wants achievement, so he helps others to achieve” (*Analects* 6:30).⁹ “What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others (*Analects* 12:2); “Do not worry about others not understanding you. Worry about your own lack of ability” (*Analects* 14:32). Such sayings emphasize that the Confucian project of establishing the subjectivity of the self is rooted in interaction between the self and others. In Con-

7 Herbert Fingarette, “The Problem of the Self in the Analects,” *Philosophy East and West*, 29/2 (April, 1979): 189–200.

8 Lao Sze-kwang, “On Understanding Chinese Philosophy: An Inquiry and a Proposal.” In: Robert A. Allinson (ed.), *Understanding the Chinese Mind: The Philosophical Roots* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), 265–293.

9 Quotations from Confucius are adapted from Burton Watson (trans.), *Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). References in the text refer to this source.

Confucius' thought, the subjectivity of the self is not that of an imperceptible, motionless subject. Rather, it is a practically capable subject—Confucius defined the subject in terms of ethics, not metaphysics.¹⁰ Whenever Confucius spoke of the self, it was always in the context of practicing 'humaneness' (*ren*, 仁); the quest to be humane is precisely the project of establishing subjectivity. For example, Zengzi 曾子 (505–436 CE), one of Confucius' 5 principal disciples, noted that "Humaneness is the burden he is charged with—heavy, is it not?" (*Analects* 8:7); and Confucius asserted, "To master the self and return to ritual is to be humane. For one day, master the self and return to ritual and the whole world will become humane. Practicing humaneness proceeds from oneself. How could it proceed from others?" (*Analects* 12:1). For Confucius, humaneness (*ren*, 仁) represents the utmost moral sphere; it emerges from the inner pursuit and conscious effort of the self (*ji*, 己). It does not proceed from 'others' (*ren*, 人), nor from outside one's own efforts. In the statement that "Humaneness is the burden [the self] is charged with," the burden here is precisely this practical ideal of humaneness. In Confucius' discourses, the self (*ji*, 己) is basically the subjectivity of morality, but when this moral subjectivity is fully realized, it becomes the province of ethical society. In Confucius' thought, the self can be said to be a sort of "reflective self-conscious subjectivity."¹¹

Mencius' view of the self can be regarded as a continuation and development of Confucius' pronouncements. Mencius stressed the subjectivity of the self. He wrote, "There has never been a man who could straighten others by bending himself" (*Mencius* 3B:1).¹² For Mencius,

10 See Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 74–75, 414.

11 Shimamori Tetsuo 島森哲男, "Genshi Jukyō niokeru Jikō to rinri" 原始儒教における自己と倫理 [The self and ethics in classical Confucianism], *Shūkan Tōyōgaku* 集刊東洋學 [Collected journal of East Asian studies], No. 36 (1976): 43–58, 46.

12 Quotations from Mencius are adapted from D. C. Lau (trans.), *Mencius*, 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984). (This book—without the accompanying Chinese text—was first published in one volume in 1970 by Penguin Books, Hamondsworth, Middlesex, England.) References in the text refer to this source.

the self is the root of value consciousness. The person who cannot establish his or her subjectivity will be unable to judge between right and wrong, good and bad. Without this type of mooring, such a person will easily waver and get lost in the temptations of society, possibly to the extent of destroying the self. Mencius also described those who lack subjectivity as “following the way of the wife or concubine,” that is, “taking docility and obedience as the norm” (*Mencius* 3B:2). Mencius thought that if a person were suddenly able to establish his or her subjectivity, he or she would be able to:

live in the spacious dwelling, occupy the proper position, and proceed along the highway of the Empire. When he achieves his ambition, he shares these with the people; when he fails to do so, he practices the Way alone. He cannot be led into excesses when wealthy and honored or deflected from his purpose when poor and obscure, nor can he be made to bow before superior force. This is what I would call great man. (*Mencius* 3B:2)

As to Xunzi 荀子 (fl. 298–238 BCE), although he diverged from Mencius in his account of human nature; he still regarded the self as free subjectivity, albeit one that must be constructed through ‘learning’ (*xue*, 學). In maintaining that “the norms originate from the determinations” of the self, he was in agreement with both Confucius and Mencius. Xunzi advocated learning as a means of transforming people in mind and body, such that their will would be their inner guide in action. He firmly believed that the relationship between the human person and the world lay in the will of the self. Thus people engage in learning and other forms of self-cultivation in order to set one’s ‘self’ on the right road, and to interact appropriately with the world.

Although the pre-Qin Confucian view of the self stressed the will of the ‘mind,’ it also emphasized the ‘unity of body and mind.’ Wang Yangming 王陽明 (Shouren 守仁, 1472–1529), in his *Questions on the Great Learning* (*Taxue wen*, 大學問), fully elaborated on the notion of the unity of body and mind as well as on the freedom of subjectivity. For example, he argued:

What is it that is called the person? It is the physical functioning of the mind. What is it that is called the mind? It is the clear and intelligent master of the person. What is meant by cultivating the personal life? It means to do good and get rid of evil. Can the body by itself do good and get rid of evil? The clear and intelligent master must desire to do good and get rid of evil before the body

that functions physically can do so. Therefore he who wishes to cultivate his personal life must first rectify his mind.¹³

Wang Yangming maintained that human ‘desire’ (*yu*, 欲) expressed the subjective freedom of the self.

In Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868), although every Confucian school had its own teaching and intellectual inclination, they were in close agreement regarding the unity of body and mind, and the freedom of subjectivity. Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯 (1670–1736), the son of the great master of the Tokugawa School of Classical Learning, Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627–1705), wrote:

One who wants to shoot an arrow must practice archery. One who wants to drive a chariot must practice charioteering. One who wants to write words must practice writing words. Only after [practice] can one shoot arrows, drive chariots, write words; and that by which one masters these skills is the mind.¹⁴

Itō Tōgai emphasized the significance of the unity of body and mind for self-cultivation. His use of the term ‘want’ signaled the active nature of the mind. The nineteenth-century Japanese Yomei (Yangming) scholar, Ōhashi Chūsai 大塩中齋 (Heihachirō 平八郎, 1794–1837) noted that:

Expressed in form, then the heart is in the body that wraps the heart. Seen from the Way, then the body is in the heart that wraps the body. The heart being in the body, once the heart abandons its function of dealing and guiding, things will encumber me. Sensing that the body is in the heart, I can always subtly transcend beyond things to enslave them. Enslaving things and being encumbered by things, their distinction must be well understood by all those who learn [how to live well].¹⁵

13 Wing-tsit Chan (trans./ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, 1973), 664.

14 Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯, *Kanki Hitsuroku* 閑居筆錄 [Reflection on the life in leisure], Vol. I. In: Seki Giichiro 関儀一郎 (ed.), *Nihon Julin Sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 [Series on Japanese Confucianism] (Tokyo: Ootori shuppan 鳳出版, 1971), Vol. 1, 14.

15 Ōhashi Chūsai 大塩中齋, *Sensindō Sakki* 洗心洞劄記 [Notation book of the Mind-washing Grotto] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 岩波書店, 1983), Upper Volume, Article 6.

Heihachiro stressed that one simply needs to recognize the “min within the body” in order to comprehend the subjective freedom of the self. His discussion closely parallels Mark Johnson’s discussion on the “body in the mind.”¹⁶ This is a marvelous example of the convergence of ideas across the world.

In sum, the East Asian Confucian axiom of unity between body and mind expressed two facets of the Confucian view of the self: an inner and an outer dimension. First, regarding the relationship between body and mind, the Confucians stressed that body and mind were interpenetrating, formed one entity. Second, with regard to the relationship between the human person and the world, the Confucians stressed that transformation of the self was the root and starting point for transforming the world. This is the first aspect of the Humanism of East Asian Confucianisms.

HARMONY BETWEEN SELF AND OTHERS: THE COMMUNITARIAN SPIRIT IN EAST ASIAN CONFUCIANISMS

The second aspect of East Asian Confucian humanism is harmony between the self and others. Confucius noted: “To be Humane is to be fully human” (仁者, 人也) (*Doctrine of the Mean*, Zhongyong 中庸 ch. 20). Following his approach, other East Asian Confucians defined the ‘person’ in terms of interactive relations between people in their complex social and political contexts, thus expanding the significance of ‘person’ beyond the isolated individual. Hence, the East Asian view of the person already incorporates the spirit of communitarianism. As the problems of Western individualistic liberalism become increasingly more evident in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Confucian communitarian spirit of harmony between oneself and others becomes especially noteworthy.

As I shall illustrate in chapter two, four types of tension between the self and others can be observed in the history of cultural inter-

16 Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

actions in East Asia: (1) the tension between the ‘political self’ and ‘cultural self’ (seen in the work of Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇齋 [1618–1682]); (2) the tension between the ‘cultural self’ and ‘cultural others’ (seen in Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 [1666–1728]); (3) the tension between the ‘political self’ and ‘political others’ (seen in Li Chunsheng 李春生 [1834–1924] in the early years of the Japanese colonization of Taiwan [1895–1945]), and (4) the tension between ‘cultural others’ and ‘political others’ (as revealed in the work of Japanese sinologists Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 [1866–1934] and Uno Tetsuto 宇野哲人 [1875–1974]).

Although the self and others form four kinds of tension in the context of cultural identity and political identity, in East Asian Confucian thought these conflicts and tensions could still be resolved, reaching a state of harmonious relation.

The East Asian Confucian advocacy of ‘harmony between oneself and others,’ as a theoretical axiom, is closely related to the Confucian philosophy of the body discussed above. In the East Asian intellectual tradition, the body is not the physical entity grasped through objective knowledge. Rather, the body is steeped in the consciousness of cultural value, since the body is functionally connected with, and intimately involved in, interactions and events in the concrete social and political arena. Spatially, this sort of body occupies a position in the social context; temporally, it receives the summons and baptism of historical experience. Under these conditions, it forms a type of rational and perceptual subject. By ‘rational subject,’ I mean here that the body accepts the guidance of ‘rationality’ such that in the operations and conduct of daily life, social norms and politics, the body has a social and political character. In sixteenth-century Choson Korea, when the Zhu Xi scholar, Yi Tóeige (Yi Hwang 李滉; Tóeige 退溪, 1502–1571) declared that “the ritual propriety of a state is like the body of a person,” he regarded this “body of a person” as a type of ‘political body.’¹⁷ In this context, “the ritual propriety of a state” served as the way that a person manifested his or her political life. This sort of body in the East Asian intellectual tradition was also a perceptual subject: the body was always

17 Zhang Liwen 張立文 (ed.), *Tuixishu jieyao* 退溪書節要 [Excerpts from the Works of Yi Tóeige] (Beijing: Renmin Daxue chubanshe 人民大學出版社, 1998), 146–147.

in a state of intimate interactive relations with its surrounding situation, context, conditions, etc. In the *Analects*, Confucius pictures the body immersed in the values and norms of society, which were refined and internalized. Consequently, his ‘living body’ was transformed into a concrete manifestation of the social values. In seventeenth-century Tokugawa Japan, Ogyū Sorai stressed “accommodating [the] body to rites,” indicating the effort of cultivation by which a physical body was transformed into a social body. The Japanese Yomei (Yangming) scholar Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648) respected Confucius’ self-transformation by practicing ritual propriety in order to embody humanistic values.

East Asian Confucians regarded the ‘cultural identity’ of this sort of body (completely immersed in its social and cultural context) as more significant than its ‘political identity’ because political identity was simply a manifestation of one’s ‘political self.’ Human beings are political animals that must pursue a collective life. They must decide to belong to a political group (such as a country) and fulfill their duties to the political group (for example, by paying taxes or joining the military) in order to receive security and protection for their personal life and property. Such choices and actions establish one’s political identity. Thus, many factors are involved in choosing such a political identity—the most influential being short term, *a posteriori* factors, such as our political and economic common interests and the protection of our personal security. In contrast, ‘cultural identity’ is a manifestation of one’s ‘cultural self.’ Human beings are not just political beings (*Homo politicus*), however, nor are they just economic beings (*Homo economicus*). Human life occurs in the nexus of a long, complex, winding cultural network. People are essentially “cultural beings,” born and nurtured in their given cultural life. In other words: from birth, people are steeped in their cultural network; they breathe the air of the values and worldview of their cultural network. ‘Cultural identity’ is relatively abstract and operates over the long-term. One does not change one’s customs, practices, rituals or ethical values due to short-term interests. While these sorts of long-term cultural values are prior to and give rise to the ‘personal,’ it is the ‘personal’ that drives them on and leads to their innovation. As the eminent anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) pointed out, the ‘personal’ and the ‘cultural’ are interac-

tive and interpenetrating.¹⁸ The highly influential anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1923–2008), also affirmed that in many modern societies certain *a priori* factors (such as perceptivity and customs) form the foundation for constructing identity.¹⁹ The East Asian Confucian view was quite close to that of these cultural anthropologists; they believed that conflicts between the ‘self’ and ‘others’ could be resolved and that these relationships could be made harmonious by appeal to common, shared cultural values. According to East Asian Confucianisms, people with a humanistic outlook had a certain loftiness and depth; they were not a one-dimensional *homo economicus* or *homo politicus*; rather they were a sort of *homo culturus* or *homo historien*, grown over the long-term, incubated and steeped in their surrounding cultures.

THE HOMO-COSMIC CONTINUUM: THE ‘HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE’ BETWEEN THE HUMAN PERSON AND NATURE

The third distinctive aspect of the East Asian Confucian humanistic spirit is its distinctive ideal of a ‘homo-cosmic continuum.’ With deep roots in Chinese culture, this ideal is closely associated with the correlative anthropocosmology and correlative thinking of archaic Chinese civilization (as noted above in section I). It has persisted as a basic value in the culture down through the ages from Confucius in the Eastern Zhou to contemporary New Confucianism.

Among Confucians, Wang Yangming was especially eloquent in his portrayal of the humanist ideal of the ‘homo-cosmic continuum’:

The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he does so.²⁰

18 Cf. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1959 [1934]), esp. chap. 8.

19 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 260.

20 Wing-tsit Chan (trans./ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 659.

Wang Yangming here invokes three propositions: (1) the ideal person forms “one body” with Heaven, Earth and the myriad of things; (2) any bifurcation between the person and Heaven, Earth and the myriad of things would be less than ideal; and (3) the reason why persons can form a “single body” with the myriad of things in nature is fundamentally because the human mind is endowed with a humane, moral nature; such an integration could never be achieved intentionally.

East Asian Confucian thinkers such as Wang Yangming all tend to advocate this belief that the human person forms a relationship of ‘one body’ with the myriad of things in nature. This expression, ‘one body,’ does not refer to a mechanical relationship but to an organic relationship in which the two sides are interactive, interpenetrating and symbiotically resonating. This sort of organic relationship is possible because human beings are endowed with the virtue of ‘benevolence.’ Benevolence in this sense is general and necessary; indeed, every life form in nature is endowed with the substance of ‘benevolence.’

This advocacy of such an inborn virtue of benevolence reflects the common faith of East Asian Confucians. Before Wang Yangming, the brothers Cheng Hao 程顥 (Mingdao 明道, 1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 頤 (Yichuan 伊川, 1033–1107) affirmed that “the man of benevolence forms a unity with all things without any differentiation.”²¹ Also, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) argued that, “The mind of heaven and earth is to produce things.”²² Generally, they regarded benevolence as the common substance of both the human person and of nature; thus the human person and nature organically combine to form an indivisible ‘single body.’

According to this ideal of the homo-cosmic continuum, East Asian Confucians viewed nature as a ‘moral universe’ and the human being as a ‘moral person.’ Since persons and nature both have this sort of organic relationship, they are well-attuned and resonant. In the *Analects*, Confucius famously commented that, “At the age of fifty, I knew mandate of Heaven,” and, “Who but Heaven appreciates me?”²³ These

21 Wing-tsit Chan (trans./ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 523.

22 *Ibid.*, 593.

23 D. C. Lau (trans.), *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983), 11, 143.

propositions illustrate the relationship of resonance between the human person and nature.

The East Asian Confucian principle of a relationship of resonance between the human person and nature implies that the more deeply persons enter into their nature, the more deeply they will realize in themselves the will of nature or ‘heaven,’ i.e., the “mandate of Heaven.” The relationship between human persons and nature can be seen as the Confucian version of a hermeneutical circle. Indeed, the Confucian idea of the “mandate of Heaven” forms the pivotal concept in this hermeneutical circle between persons and nature. Confucius’ idea of the “mandate of Heaven” was rooted deeply in archaic, political history. In the eleventh century BCE, when the Zhou King Wu (r. 1049/45–1043 BCE) overthrew the Shang dynasty establishing the Zhou dynasty, his regime appealed to the “mandate of Heaven” to justify their military assault and victory. The god of the Yin (Shang) was called *Di* (帝), and the utmost Yin god was their primal ancestral spirit. During late Yin times, the term *Tian* (天) (Heaven) came into use. After the Zhou King Wu overthrew the Shang, the Duke of Zhou began to use the concept of the “mandate of Heaven” to rationalize the Zhou military assault on the Shang. In a warning to the remaining Yin people on the field, the Duke of Zhou raised the idea of the “mandate of Heaven” to justify, first, the Yin seizure of the Xia’s mandate and, later, the Zhou seizure of the Yin’s mandate. The *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*, 尚書) contains the *verbatim* text of the Duke of Zhou’s warning to the Yin people that the Zhou now had the “mandate of Heaven” and thus were authorized to replace the Shang. Centuries later, Confucius adopted this early Zhou political and cosmological idea, thus investing it with personal significance to complete the ‘inward turn’ of the ‘mandate of Heaven.’ When speaking of “knowing the mandate of Heaven,” Confucius took the early Zhou religious concept of Heaven—seen as exerting control over human affairs from the outside—and affirmed that when one completely cultivates one’s mind, one achieves resonance with the will of Heaven.²⁴ When Confucius mentioned “know-

24 Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, *Dechuan riben lunyu quanshi shilun* 德川日本論語詮釋史論 [An interpretive history of Tokugawa Japanese interpretations of the Anelects] (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2007), 293–294.

ing the mandate of Heaven,” this referred to his own process of personally testing, confirming and realizing the lofty will of the cosmos in his own concrete moral practice. For Confucius, knowledge of the mandate of Heaven could only be attained through one’s daily upright conduct in interpersonal relations. In other words, he was not claiming that the ‘mandate of Heaven’ existed prior to humanity and predetermined human existence. Rather, he maintained that it is only through one’s own strenuous efforts to carry out one’s moral-ethical responsibilities that one can affirm that the mandate of Heaven is authentically present in one’s mind-heart. Zhu Xi insisted that the “root origin” of “the mandate of heaven” had to be confirmed in concrete “affairs matters,” as in “the affection between parent and child.”²⁵ Thus the single thread upon which the East Asian Confucians focussed their efforts for cultivation was *the mystery of the unfathomable transformation of one’s personal spirit, which takes place through the daily upright conduct of interpersonal relationships*.

As human conduct is endowed with the active subjectivity of free will, one can test and confirm the mandate of Heaven through concrete upright practices in interpersonal activity and daily affairs. However, the concrete sphere of human affairs itself only offers a narrow, limited perspective. One must undertake countless difficult, strenuous efforts in order to realize that one was born as a result of Heaven’s ‘mandate’ and has received the ‘mandate of Heaven’ as one’s moral ‘nature.’ Only through such efforts at cultivation can one realize that, in the words of the *Book of Odes*: “Heaven produces the teeming multitude; As there are things, there are specific principles; When people keep to their moral nature; They will love excellent virtue.”²⁶ Confucius said that at the age of fifty he comprehended the mandate of Heaven. These words intimate that he felt a resonance between the “mind of Heaven” and the “mind of man.”²⁷ By undertaking the practical, moral-ethical responsibilities that arise in the activities of daily life, one produces an

25 Li Jingde 黎靖德 (ed.), 朱子語類 [Classified Dialogues of Master Zhu] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), vol. 4, 552.

26 Wing-tsit Chan (trans.), “Ancestors and the Lord on High.” In: *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 5.

27 Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (1791–1855) et al., *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 [Correct meanings of the Analects] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 44–45.

interactive relationship of resonance with the transcendent substance of the cosmos. In this way, ‘the moral person’ enters the sphere of ‘the religious person.’ Ultimately, in this way, the mandate of Heaven and the human person form together a Confucian version of the hermeneutical circle.

THE FUSION OF PAST AND PRESENT: HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN EAST ASIAN CONFUCIANISMS

The fourth distinctive aspect of the East Asian Confucian humanist spirit is historical consciousness. In East Asian Confucian thought, the human person is a *historical* person. The human self is steeped in temporality, based on one’s historical cultural tradition. Therefore, the historical consciousness in East Asian Confucian thought is a particularly vibrant one. The historical consciousness of Confucianism is rooted deeply in an abiding sense of inescapable temporality. In the sixth century BCE, Confucius lamented by a riverside that time flowed in a similar fashion: ceaselessly, day and night. He inferred from the flow of time the transience of human affairs, and realized that history contained both changing and unchanging facets. Following in Confucius’ footsteps, later East Asian Confucians embraced a deep sense of historical consciousness, which formed the core of their humanistic spirit.

The *Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu)* relates the following event from 607 BCE:

Chaou Ch’uen 趙穿 (Zhao Quan) attacked [and killed] duke Ling in the peach garden, and Seuen 宣 (Xuan), who was flying from the State, but had not yet left its hills behind him, returned to the capital. The grand historiographer wrote this entry,—“Chaou Tun 趙盾 (Zhao Dun) murdered his ruler,” and showed it in the court. Seuen (Xuan) said to him, “It was not so;” but he replied, “You are the highest minister. Flying from the State, you did not cross its borders; since you returned, you have not punished the villain. If it was not you who murdered the marquis, who was it?” [...] “Confucius said ‘Tung Hoo 董狐 (Dong Hu) was a good historiographer of old time: his rule for writing was not to conceal. Chaou Seuen (Zhao Hsuan) was a great officer of old time:

in accordance with that law he accepted the charge of such wickedness. Alas! If he had crossed the border, he would have escaped it.”²⁸

Regarding this event, because Zhao Dun had not personally murdered the prince, the historiographer’s record did not tally with the historical facts. However, Confucius called him “a good historiographer of the old times,” and approved of his historical record completely. How are we to understand what Confucius meant here? Confucius agreed that, in the flow of history, men are endowed with free will. The autonomy of their subjectivity is not determined solely by the political structure or mode of production.

Confucius considered that Zhao Dun’s actions were determined by his own free will, and thus that Zhao Dun should bear moral responsibility for the consequences of his actions. In Confucius’ view, historical ‘facts’ must be evaluated in the context of ‘value’; thus, his historical consciousness was perceived through his value consciousness. Following Confucius, East Asian historians, steeped in the historical consciousness of Confucian thought, agreed that in the flow of history the human person was a free-willed ‘agent of action.’

In the East Asian Confucian traditions, the human person is seen to possess free will. Therefore the history that humanity creates must include ethics as well as political or moral principles. Thus this sort of history contains a sort of ‘ahistorical’ impulse.²⁹ In East Asian Confucian thought, history is not a mummified museum artifact. Rather just as persons can enter into the lessons and wisdom contained in a library, so too they can enter into the library of history, to engage the ancients in dialogue, and thereby connect the past with the present, fusing them together as one body. In this way, human life is imbued with broad, deep, lofty senses of temporality and historicity. This is precisely the deeply ingrained historical directedness of the East Asian Confucian spirit.

28 James Legge (trans.), *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 290–291.

29 Benjamin I. Schwartz, “History in Chinese Culture: Some Comparative Reflections,” *History and Theory*, 35/4 (December, 1996): 23–33; and Chun-chieh Huang, “The Defining Character of Chinese Historical Thinking,” *History and Theory*, 46/2 (May, 2007): 180–188; see Appendix A2 in this volume.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the foregoing discussions, we can now draw some conclusions. The world of East Asian Confucian thought is characterized by keywords such as ‘continuity’ rather than ‘rupture’ or ‘dichotomy,’ and ‘harmony’ rather than ‘conflict’ or ‘stress.’ These keywords reflect the fact that East Asian civilization did not produce a creation myth, as was common in the Middle East and West.

In the *Harmonia Mundi* (world harmony) constructed by East Asian Confucianisms, human life persisted in the dynamic equilibrium of polarities. Basic manifestations of this equilibrium in East Asian Confucianisms can be found in such concepts as mind-body unity, self-other harmony, and homo-cosmic continuity. Given the interplay of inner and outer polarities in life, the human person in East Asian Confucianisms is not merely a one-dimensional person; rather, they view the person as baptized by full-immersion in historical consciousness. The person carefully nurtures wisdom for the present from the past in order to chart the best course for the future. For the individual, the past and the present are fused, ultimately, as one. These four aspects constitute the foundation of the East Asian Confucian humanist spirit.

In the East Asian Confucian traditions, persons are deeply steeped in a consciousness of history and culture. Therefore, in the process of uniting ‘body’ and ‘mind,’ they are able to transform their ‘physical’ body into a ‘cultural’ or ‘psycho-somatic’ body. Taking their ‘cultural identity’ as a foundation point, individuals can transform the strained relationship between the self and others, creating a ‘fiduciary community.’ Furthermore, between the dichotomies of ‘the human person’ and ‘nature,’ between ‘past’ and ‘present,’ individuals can establish an intimate, interactive relationship through which they will be united ultimately as ‘one body.’