

Wang Guowei's Application of Kant

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Abstract: Wang Guowei (1887-1927) was a late Qing scholar who assumed a pioneering role in introducing Western philosophy to China and is regarded as the founder of Chinese ideas about philosophical and literary-aesthetic modernity. His introduction and interpretation of Western ideas has not only inspired later scholars to become interested in European philosophy, but also represents a “showcase” of the “localness” of a cultural interpretation. This paper focuses on Kant's influence on Wang Guowei, especially Wang's use of Kant's epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic theories to reconstruct important Chinese philosophical conceptions such as *xing*性, *li*理, *ming*命, *ya*雅, and what he referred to as Confucius's *meiyuzhuyi*美育主義 (aesthetic educational-ism). The paper aims to enable readers to achieve a better grasp of the continuity and revolution that accompany the emergence of Chinese modernity as well as a better understanding of comparative culture (philosophy) in its “primitive” phase.

Keywords Wang Guowei; Kant; *xing*; *li*; *ming*; *ya*; aesthetic education-ism

I. INTRODUCTION

In Wang Guowei's 王國維 (1887-1927) rather short period of passion for “Western learning” (*xixue* 西學), from 1901 to 1907, he paid significant attention to three German philosophers: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Among the three, Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy is conventionally thought to have influenced him most profoundly, a belief which is supported by Wang's own tragic death; he committed suicide in Kunming Lake at the Summer Palace on June 2, 1927.¹

Despite Wang's complex indebtedness to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kant, in this paper I focus only on Kant's influence. In the author's “Preface” to the *Jing'an Wenji* 靜安文集 (*Jing'an Collection*), published in 1905, Wang wrote, “I started to study philosophy between 1901-1902, and I began to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in the Spring of 1903. However, I had difficulty in understanding it, therefore I turned to Schopenhauer and loved his works...in the spring of 1905, I returned to Kant” (Wang 1983, Section III, 1). In 1907, in *Sanshi Zixu I*, (三十自序 (一), *The First Author's Note on Reaching Thirty Years of Age*), Wang describes his experience of studying Kant in more detail. Wang tells us that he read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in both the Japanese and English translations. He was guided by his Japanese teacher Fujita Toyohachi 藤田豐八 (1869-1929), and stopped his study in this early period at the “Transcendental Analytic” (Transzendental Analytik). He then turned to Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, finding the essay “Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy,” which appeared as the Appendix to Schopenhauer's work, helpful in his understanding of Kant. Wang returned to Kant's ethical and aesthetic works later in 1907 (Wang 1983, Section IV, 19-21; Yuan and Liu 1996, 22-46).

Most of Wang Guowei's writing about Kant, as well as his other work on Western and Chinese philosophies, was published in the *Journal of Educational World* (*Jiaoyu Shijie* 教育

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世界), for which he served as the chief editor from 1904-1907. *The Journal of Educational World* was the first educational journal in China and was founded by Wang's mentor Luo Zhengyu (1866-1940) in 1901. It played an important role in introducing the *new learning* (i.e., Western learning) to Chinese society, and helped to fuel the social and educational reformations at the beginning of 20th century. The journal ceased publishing in 1907.²

Wang's works about Kant can be divided into three categories:³ One, translations and introductions (7)⁴; two, Wang's own writings on Kant (5)⁵; and three, Wang's use of Kant to interpret Chinese philosophy (5).⁶

The articles I analyze in this paper belong to the third category—the ones that use Kant's theories to interpret traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic concepts and ideas. Wang is regarded as the founder of Chinese ideas of philosophical and literary-aesthetic modernity (Wen 1993,1-22; Liu 1996, 58-79; Liu 1998, 310-311; Zhang 1999, 91). Therefore, interpreting Kant's influence on him, especially his use of Kant's epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic theories to reconstruct the important Chinese philosophical and aesthetic concepts, such as *xing*性, *li*理, *ming*命, and *ya*雅, is essential to achieve a better grasp of the continuity and revolution that accompanied the emergence of Chinese modernity, as well as a better understanding of comparative philosophy in its "primitive" phase.

Wang Guowei's unusual reading of Kant is defined by his unconscious motivation to reform culture in the turbulent years of Chinese history. On the one hand, he brings a new perspective to traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic concepts. On the other, his practical application of Kant's theories implies a departure from Kant. I will divide my discussion into two main parts. First, I will discuss Wang Guowei's use of Kant's epistemological and ethical theories, then I will provide an overview and critique of his application of Kant's aesthetic theories.

II. WANG GUOWEI'S APPLICATION OF KANT'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL THEORIES

Three articles will be discussed in this section: "Lun *Xing*" 論性 (3a, see note 6), "Shi *Li*" 釋理 (3b, see note 6), and "Yuan *Ming*" 原命 (3c, see note 6). I will outline the main idea of each article and then summarize what I consider to be Wang's most important contributions in regard to how Kant was read through the eyes of Chinese philosophers and how Wang Guowei's Chinese sensibility plays a role in his "modern" interpretation of Kant.

"Lun *Xing*" ("On Human Nature" 1904):

In this essay, Wang maintains that every theory on human nature in both Chinese and Western philosophical history is in contradiction with itself since *xing*性 (human nature) is "beyond our knowledge." What underlies this position? Wang starts by applying the distinction in types of knowledge as Kant defines them in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Universal cognitions, which have the character of inner necessity, must at the same time be clear and certain in themselves, independently of experience; hence Kant calls them *a priori* cognitions. Those ideas that are merely derived from experience and not of necessity are cognized *a posteriori*, or empirically (Kant 1998, 127).

Wang summarizes the idea thusly in his article: "A *priori* knowledge is independent from all particular experiences and it shapes and constructs our experience. A *posteriori* knowledge derives from experience."

“先天的知識如空間時間之形式及悟性之範疇，此不待經驗而生，而經驗之所由以成立者……後天的知識，乃經驗上之所教我者。” (Wang 1983, Section III, 2)

Wang continues:

A priori knowledge is the knowledge of form, not the knowledge of essence (material, matter) and human nature (*xing*) is the essence (material) of knowledge. However, human nature (*xing*) is not *a posteriori* knowledge either since the nature we define through experience is influenced by birth (heredity) and external environment, it is not natural itself. Therefore, human nature (*xing*) is beyond our knowledge.

先天中所能知者，知識之形式而不及於知識之材質，而性固一知識之材質也，若謂於後天中知之則所知者又非性，何則？吾人經驗上所知之性，其受遺傳與外部之影響者不少，則其非性之本來面目，固已久矣，故斷言之曰：性之為物，超乎吾人之知識外也。（Wang 1983, Section III, 2）

While Kant's distinction of "*a priori* cognition independently of experience" (Kant 1998, 129) and experience as "*a posteriori*" aims to advocate a "transcendental" philosophy that synthesizes the rational and empirical types of knowledge, Wang Guowei applies this distinction itself as the foundation of his argument about *xing*. Wang defines *a priori* knowledge as the knowledge of pure form, while human nature is the material of knowledge, hence not *a priori*, and it is not *a posteriori* knowledge either because there are conditions not subject to experience. Thus, for Wang, human nature (*xing*) cannot be categorized as either *a priori* knowledge or *a posteriori* knowledge—it is simply "beyond our knowledge." Following this logic, Wang concludes that every theory that attempts to theorize about human nature is self-contradictory.

Since *xing* is beyond our knowledge, however, we cannot help but intend to theorize about it. There are only two ways to theorize about it: either from transcendental theory or from experience. Interpreting *xing* through experience will end up in the good/evil dualism. Meanwhile, human beings wish to pursue knowledge and to construct a consistent analysis. Therefore, we also create theories of good nature, theories of evil nature, and absolutely transcendent monistic nature. Although theorizing *xing* from human experience is not discussing *xing* itself, yet it will avoid contradiction. Discussing *xing* through transcendent theory and pursuing a consistent analysis, one has freedom to make a theory but when he applies it to our experience, he has to justify himself, then he has to end up with the good/evil dualism. Therefore, every theory (of human nature) in human history will result in contradiction.

人性之超乎吾人之知識外既如斯矣。於是欲論人性者非馳於空想之域勢不得不從經驗上推論之。夫經驗上之所謂性固非性之本，然苟執經驗上之性以為性，則必先有善惡二元論起焉……故從經驗上立論，不得不盤旋於善惡二元論之胯下，然吾人之知識必求其說明之統一，而決不以此善惡二元論為滿足也，於是性善論、性惡論及超絕的一元論（即性無善無不善說及可以為善可以為不善說）接武而起。夫立於經驗之上以言性，雖所論者非真性，然尚不至於矛盾也。至超乎經驗之外而求其說明之統一，則雖反對之說，吾人得持其一。然不至自相矛盾不止，何則？超乎經驗之外，吾人固有言論之自由，然至欲說明經驗上之事實時，則又不得不自圓其說，而復反於二元論，故古今言性者之自相矛盾，必然之理也。（Wang 1983, Section III, 2-3）

To highlight the unique features of Wang's approach, consider that Mencius emphasizes that human nature is good. This is a monistic theory. Mencius refuses to admit that sensuous desires also come from human nature. Experience cannot prove his monistic theory. Therefore, it eventually falls into the debate over good/evil dualism. Xunzi has the same problem. He differentiates between ordinary people and the sage. Where does the sage come from, then? Furthermore, in Xunzi's thought, *li* 禮 is made by the sages for rectifying human desires, and therefore, *li* and *yi* 義 can be considered as deriving from human desires. Therefore, there is a contradiction. The Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosophers established their views of human nature from their different metaphysical perspectives. However, Wang comments that since most of them follow Mencius, none of them avoid the contradiction found in his approach. For example, they distinguish *qizhi zhixing* 氣質之性 (habitual nature) from *tian di zhixing* 天地之性 (instinctive [inborn] nature). Wang wonders how we could categorize *habitual nature* if we exclude *instinctive nature* from *habitual nature*, and hold that human nature is good? Again, if *instinctive nature* is included in *habitual nature*, where is *habitual nature*? In any case, Wang concludes that we inevitably end in dualism whenever we theorize about human nature. Wang holds that even Kant himself cannot avoid the same problem: Kant believes morality is derived rationally from the categorical imperative, but he also concludes that from the very beginning human nature is evil (Wang 1983, Section III, 2). Wang sees a contradiction in these two arguments, and claims that Kant understands human nature as evil without offering any further explanation. It seems to me that Wang's reading of Kantian ethics (moral law, right action, good will, duty, etc.) is shaped by the shadow of Xunzi. Although Wang's argument is based on his use of Kant's distinctions between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge, he develops his own argument (i.e., monistic theory vs. dualism) without further referring to Kant's theory.

To put it another way, Kant's theories of knowledge, understanding, reasoning, and experience offer Wang a new way of looking at the topic of human nature in both cultures. Yet Wang's argument is that all the theories about human nature in both cultures and throughout the history of philosophy are self-contradictory, since *xing* or human nature does not belong to either type of knowledge as understood by Kant. Philosophers (including Kant), Wang claims, fail to recognize that they apply theory to something beyond our knowledge. Therefore, Wang's conclusion is that human nature cannot be theoretically explicated, and discussing *xing* cannot help us to understand ourselves better or guide our self-cultivation. It may seem to us that this kind of deconstructive discussion does not solve any problem at all.

As an enthusiast of *new learning* at a particular moment in history, however, Wang is more excited about finding a new philosophical language or structure to discuss an issue than discovering or constructing something concrete (in this case, a theory of human nature). While Wang's article is inspiring in that it helps us rethink the issue of human nature through a historical and comparative perspective, it is also an example of methodological play and practice. Actually, many articles in his *Jing'an Collection*, written between 1904-1907, follow the same pattern. We can also see Wang's method of using Kant for this kind of methodological exploration in "Shi *Li*" and "Yuan *Ming*."

"Shi *Li*" ("Analysis of *Li*" 1904) compares the Chinese conception of *li* 理 with its counterparts in Western philosophy. Wang's understanding and interpretation of *li* is clearly inspired by his reading of Kant's theories of "pure reason" and "practical reason." But again, how much have Kant's ideas been modified by Wang? Wang begins with the idea that *li* has two kinds of meaning, *liyou* 理由 (reason) and *lixing* 理性 (rationality). If we examine the etymological origin of the Chinese *li* and its Western counterparts, we can see that it shares

connotations with the Western philosophical ideas of *logos* (Greek), *ratio* (Latin), *Vernunft* (German), *raison* (French), and *reason* (English). Wang concludes that Western and Chinese traditions interpret *li* as having both metaphysical and ethical meanings. However, unlike Kant, Wang Guowei does not intend to apply this understanding of *li* to either theoretical or practical principles. Instead, he emphasizes, “*li* is only one of the functions of our mind and the things that we can analyze, that is all.” (“然則所謂理者，不過謂吾心分析之作用及物之可分析者而已矣。”) (Wang 1983, Section III, 12).

Although Wang defines *li* as the unique mental quality that distinguishes the human being from other creatures in the world, he denies or discourages metaphysical and especially ethical interpretations of *li*, writing:

The distinct knowledge derived from our sensibility, understanding and conceptual knowledge belongs only to human beings. Therefore, we attribute metaphysical truth and ethical good to our rationality. However, one does not know that rationality is only the function of our understanding that creates concepts and defines the relationship between conceptions, which have nothing to do with ethical values. The misunderstanding of *li* is because it is a general conception.

惟理性之能力為動物之所無而人類之所獨有故世人遂以形而上學之所謂真與倫理學之所謂善盡歸諸理之屬性，不知理性者，不過吾人知力之作用，以造概念以定概念之關係，除為行為之手段外，毫無關於倫理上之價值，其所以有此誤解者，由理之一字乃一普遍之概念故。(Wang 1983, Section III, 25)

As we can see, this discussion could be viewed as a revolution in the conventional understanding of *li*, which was established by the Song-Ming (*Lixue*) school of philosophers and developed by their followers. Over time, the *Li* school of philosophers developed some rather robust socio-ethical principles such as that the so-called *tianli* 天理 (heavenly principle) can only be gained by eradicating humans’ natural desires (*renyu* 人慾). That Wang Guowei’s calls for the reduction of the psychological, metaphysical, and ethical reasoning about *li* in Confucian tradition comes at the beginning of the 20th century is significant. On the one hand, Wang’s warning is deconstructive in the sense that many people had become victims of the dogmatic and *irrational* application of Confucian teaching (in this case of *li*) in Chinese society. On the other hand, it is constructive since Wang Guowei’s emphasis on the pure mental quality/character of *li* is “scientific” and “objective,” and thus insightful and meaningful for enlightening the benighted.

“Yuan *Ming*” (“On the Origin of *Ming*” 1906) considers *ming*, which might be the third most important philosophical term in Chinese history (after *xing* and *li*). *Ming* is usually connected with *tian* 天, as in *tianming* (天命, the command of *tian*). For example, the newly excavated early Chinese bamboo manuscript *Xingzimingchu* (性自命出), from the Guodian tombs, which was published in 1998 and generally agreed among Confucian historians to be dated to the 4th-3rd century BCE, makes use of the concept of *ming* and claims that *xing*, human nature, actually arises from *ming*—*xingzimingchu* 性自命出, and that *ming* descends from *tian*—*mingzitianjiang* 命自天降 (Ding 2000, 3). The use of the expression *mingzitianjiang* immediately reminds one of the very first sentence of the *Zhongyong*, which says, “天命之謂性” (i.e., “What *tian* commands [*tianming*] is called *xing*”). Therefore, “What *tian* commands” has always been an intriguing question in the Chinese philosophical tradition, since the understanding of the relationship between *tian* and *ren* 人 (humanity) differs among philosophers. Chinese philosophers tended either to view *tian* as holding the absolute power over human beings, which resulted in fatalism, or denying its absolute power, which

resulted in nonfatalism. According to Wang, neither of those two theories has philosophical significance; since no Chinese philosopher holds a determinist perspective when looking at *ming*, few of them offer any discussion of *free will*. Yet, inspired by Kant's moral philosophy, Wang focuses on the concepts of determinism and *free will*, and comments that the tension between determinism and *free will* has been an important philosophical topic in Western (Kantian) philosophy, and should receive some attention from Chinese scholars as well.

Kant claims that, "The concept of freedom is the stone of stumbling for all empiricists, but at the same time the key to the loftiest practical principles for critical moralists, who perceive by its means that they must necessarily proceed by a rational method" (Kant 1997, 7). Wang Guowei understands that Kant tries to blend theoretical and practical reason when dealing with the issue of *free will*. Kant's concept of the *categorical imperative* is his application of pure practical reason as a fundamental principle of our moral duties. Kant argues that morality implies rationality, and rationality implies *free will*. Thus, Kant claims, "freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other" (Kant 1997, 26). Despite this understanding, Wang focuses more on the conception of *zeren* 責任 (duties, responsibilities) than on *free will*. Not only does he claim that Schopenhauer's theory of *denial of the will to live* is only an empty exercise, but he also holds the following:

Thus, if we maintain that our actions are necessarily determinable and thus not free, where does the understanding of *zeren* (duties, responsibilities) come from? I would say: each action must have its external and inherent reasons. If those reasons do not exist at present, they must have existed in the past; if they do not exist in our consciousness, they must exist in our unconsciousness. Therefore, those reasons must have their reasons (to exist) and we are determined by those reasons, and we cannot choose. For example, some of the reasons certainly are due to education or the influence of the society. One lives in such a society and is educated by this kind of education, even though one has some other reasoning to determine, those reasons will still often make one not to realize that the current action is not necessary to reach the life goal. It is like one has full freedom but at the same time he has the feelings/understanding of duties, responsibilities or remorse. Those feelings, as some kind of psychological force, will sufficiently determine why one will act in a certain way in the future. They are the practical values of the feeling/understanding of duties and responsibilities. Therefore, the feeling/understanding of duties and responsibilities can only influence later actions but it is unable to determine the freedom of action before it happens. I believe that the tension between these two theories (determinism and *free will*) could be connected with the conception of *ming*. Therefore, I made my comments here and wish people to know that the idea of duty and responsibility has its practical values and its (ethical) value does not have to refer to *free will*.

然則吾人之行為既為必然的而非自由的，則責任之觀念又何自起乎？曰：一切行為必有外界及內界之原因，此原因不存於現在，必存於過去，不存於意識，必存於無意識，而此種原因又必有其原因而吾人對此等原因但為其所決定而不能加以選擇……例固半出於教育及社會之影響而吾人之入如此之社會受如此之教育亦有他原因以決定之而此等原因往往為吾人所不及覺現在之行為之不必於人生之目的也，一若當時全可以自由者，於是責任及悔恨之感情起而此等感情以為心理上一種之勢力故，故足為決定後日行為之原因，此責任之感情之實踐上之價值也，故吾人責任之感情僅足以影響後此之行為而

不足以推前此之行為之自由也。余以此二論之爭與命之問題相聯絡。故批評之於此又使世人知責任之觀念自有實在之價值，不必藉意誌自由論為羽翼也。(Wang 1983, Section IV, 5)

Although Wang Guowei appreciates Kant's (and Schopenhauer's) discussion on *free will*, he believes that *free will* is not a transcendental necessity, since one should understand that responsibility (to society, nation, etc.) has practical value in understanding and establishing our *ming*. Wang Guowei introduces the concepts of determinism and *free will* to his Chinese readers in order to bring a new perspective on the traditional conception of *ming*. However, his goal is quite different from Kant's in constructing the pure rational foundations for morality. Wang's conclusion is that we should understand that it is our *ming* to take responsibility for our society because as relational beings our *ming* cannot be separated from the context in which we live (our family, community). Apparently, Wang's unconscious cultural sensibility plays a role in his understanding and interpretation of Kant. Wang seems very cautious about valorizing the individual, while doing so is crucial to both Kant and Schopenhauer's ethical theories. Wang's argument in this essay is a good example of how he applies the new concepts of Western learning to promote traditional Confucian relational values.

III. WANG GUOWEI'S APPLICATION OF KANT'S AESTHETIC THEORIES

Two of Wang Guowei's articles will be discussed in this section: "Guya zhi zai Meixue shang zhi Weizhi" 古雅之在美學上之位置 ("The Position of *Guya* in Aesthetic Thinking," 3d, see note 6) and "Kongzi zhi Meiyuzhuyi" 孔子之美育主義 ("Confucius' Aesthetic Educational-ism," 3e, see note 6). I will use these essays to discuss how Wang's aesthetic thinking was influenced by Kant.

"The Position of *Guya*" was written in 1907. In this essay, Wang creates the aesthetic term *guya* 古雅 to mean *classical elegance*. Wang's neologism occurs under the inspiration of Kant's aesthetic thinking. Kant discusses two important aesthetic terms in his own work—the *beautiful* (*yomei* 優美) and the *sublime* (*hongzhuang* 宏壯). Wang Guowei maintains that between these two aesthetic understandings is a third that Kant does not discuss, i.e., *guya*—*classical elegance*.

Ya 雅, elegance, has been one of the most important aesthetic terms in Chinese literary and artistic appreciation. Classical Confucian texts are known for emphasizing the importance of elegance in rituals and music in the educational system. This tradition can be traced back to the Zhou dynasty (11th to 3rd century BCE). While the Zhou court emphasized the political and educational importance of dance and music, the *Liuwu* 六舞 (Six Major Dances [or Dance and Music of Six Dynasties]) had already been developed. The *Liuwu* were used as instruction manuals for court ritual music, which is called *yayue* 雅樂—literally, "elegant music." As is well known, the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) has two types of ritual and sacrificial songs, which are called *daya* 大雅 (major Odes) and *xiaoya* 小雅 (minor Odes), respectively. These Odes consist mainly of the hymns or eulogies used to praise the founders of the Zhou dynasty or to be sung in sacrificial ceremonies or at court banquets. Traditionally, the political and educational role of *ya* (elegance) poetry is emphasized, as it is defined in the "Preface" of the *Shijing*: "*Ya* means correct. They tell the causes of why the royal government decays or flourishes." 雅者，正也。言王政之所由廢興也。(Shijing 1991, 36).

The aesthetic principle of *ya* is well expressed by a sentence in the *Analects*: "Pleasing without being excessive, mourning without being injurious." 樂而不淫，哀而不傷 (*Lunyu*

1998, 86). Wang Guowei builds on the traditional aesthetic conception of *ya* to create the new aesthetic term *guya* (classical elegance). *Guya*, according to Wang, is “something between *the beautiful* (*youmei*) and *the sublime* (*hongzhuang*)” (Wang 1983, Section IV, 27). Despite its relationship to the beautiful and the sublime, *guya* has a unique and “independent aesthetic value” (Wang 1983, Section IV, 24).

Wang Guowei understands both *the beautiful* and *the sublime* to belong to the first or the immediate form of beauty; *guya*—classical elegance—belongs to the secondary form, yet is expressive of the first type. It is beauty of the first form that cannot exist in nature but only in art (Wang 1983, Section IV, 24).

For Wang, *guya* as the secondary form of beauty either reflects certain intrinsic forms of beauty or creates a new form to express them. Therefore, the first form has the secondary form and its value, but not vice versa. The first form (*the beautiful* and *the sublime*) is more intense and explicit, while the secondary form is more subtle and implicit. Ordinary things are turned into art by the hands of a painter and poet. They are beautiful because they carry the secondary form, *guya*—which is also necessary for achieving the first forms, *the beautiful* and *the sublime*. Therefore:

Classical elegance is acquired and empirical, *the beautiful* and *the sublime* are innate and *a priori*, therefore universal and necessary. Furthermore, the judgment of *guya* changes throughout time. What we view as classical today is only because we view it from the standpoint of the present time. The works from ancient times are all more elegant than today’s works; although ancient literature was not good, the reader of today would still consider it as elegant. Therefore, the judgment of *classical elegance* is acquired, empirical, particular and circumstantial.

後者先天的，前者後天的、經驗的也……（后者）亦普遍的、必然的也……。若古雅之判斷則不然，由時之不同，而人之判斷之也各異，吾人所斷為古雅者，實由吾人今日之位置斷之。古代之遺物無不雅於近世之制作，古代之文學雖至拙劣，自吾人讀之無不雅者，若自古人之眼觀之，殆不然矣。故古雅之判斷，後天的也、經驗的也，故亦特別的也，偶然的也。（Wang 1983, Section IV, 26）

Kant claims that “beautiful art is the art of genius” (2000, 186). However, in the work of *guya*, Wang Guowei maintains, this is not always the case:

Since it does not exist in nature, and its judgment is derived from experience, therefore, the work of *classical elegance* is not necessarily created by genius. It could be achieved through practice and refinement.

古雅之性質既存於自然，而其判斷亦但由於經驗，於是，藝術中古雅之部分，不必盡俟天才，而亦得以人力致之。（Wang 1983, Section IV, 26）

Should we consider, then, that the value of *classical elegance* is less important than *the beautiful* and *the sublime*? “No,” Wang Guowei argues:

Agreeable but not useful is the quality for all kinds of art which applies to the form of *the beautiful* and *the sublime*, as well as *classical elegance*. The form of *the beautiful* makes the heart peaceful; the form of *classical elegance* makes the heart rest, therefore, the latter could be considered as the low level of the beauty. The form of *the sublime* often arouses feelings of awe through its irresistible magnitude; and the form of *classical elegance* arouses admiration and amazement through its extraor-

dinary and unworldly image. Amazement is the start of admiration. Therefore you also can say that *classical elegance* is the lower type of *the sublime*. Hence, the position of *classical elegance* is in between *the beautiful* and *the sublime* and bears the qualities of both. As for the practical aspect of it, since the *classical elegance* can be acquired and cultivated therefore it could be a “ferry bridge” (i.e., a vehicle for) for aesthetic education. Therefore, though the aesthetic value of *classical elegance* cannot compare with *the beautiful* and *the sublime*, it is effective and efficient for its educational value for the common people.

可愛玩而不可利用者，一切美術品之公性也。優美與宏壯然，古雅亦然。優美之形式使人心和平，古雅之形式使人心休息，故亦可謂之低度之優美；宏壯之形式常以不可抵抗之勢力喚起人欽仰之情，古雅之形式則以不習於世俗之耳目故，而喚起一種之驚訝，驚訝者，欽仰之情之初步，故雖謂古雅為低度之宏壯亦無不可也。故古雅之位置，可謂在優美與宏壯之間，而兼有此二者之性質也。至論其實踐之方面，則以古雅之能力能由修養得之，故可為美術普及之津梁。雖中智以下之人，不能創造優美及宏壯之物者，亦得由修養而有古雅之創造力；又雖不能喻優美及宏壯之價值者，亦得於優美、宏壯中之古雅之原質，或於古雅之制作物中得其直接之慰藉，故古雅之價值，自美學上觀之誠不能及優美及宏壯，然自其教育眾庶之效言之，則雖謂其範圍較大，成效較著可也。(Wang 1983, Section IV, 27)

The above-quoted text shows that Wang Guowei’s interpretation of Kant’s aesthetic theory is rather simplified (even shallow) and liberal. Wang uses “agreeable but not useful” to describe all kinds of art, and this represents his own simplified (mis)interpretation of Kant’s theory of beauty as “an object of satisfaction without any interest” (Kant 2000, 96). He seems to identify *the agreeable* with *the beautiful*, which is clearly divergent from Kant’s meaning (Kant 2000, 90-98).

Wang also seems to claim that sublimity is a form of *the beautiful*, which is also contrary to Kant’s distinction of the aesthetic forms. Kant defines *the beautiful* as “an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest” (Kant 2000, 96). For Kant, while “the beautiful in nature is in calm contemplation,” *the sublime* is “absolutely great, and consequently also a relation to the law of reason to adopt this alone as the supreme measure of magnitude” (Kant 2000, 141). Thus, “the inner perception of the inadequacy of any sensible standard for the estimation of magnitude by reason corresponds with reason’s laws, and is a displeasure that arouses the feeling of our supersensible vocation in us, in accordance with which it is purposive and thus a pleasure to find every standard of sensibility inadequate for the ideas of the understanding” (Kant 2000, 141). In contrast, Wang Guowei simply reads the form of *the sublime* as being capable of “arous[ing] feelings of awe through its irresistible magnitude” (Wang 1983, Section IV, 27). He does not acknowledge, as Kant does, that it is “inadequacy of reason,” not sensibility, that is crucial for sublimity.

Wang Guowei is not (and does not intend to be) a faithful interpreter of Kant. Rather, he seeks to use Kant for his own purposes. He aims to name an art form for the purpose of educating common people. This is why he emphasizes the “acquired” and “cultivated” values of *guya* in contrast to the art of genius. This practical objective could be viewed as the continuing interest of Wang’s aesthetic educational-ism, which he shows more explicitly in an earlier article entitled “Kongzi zhi Meiyuzhuyi” 孔子之美育主義 (“Confucius’ Aesthetic-Educational-ism”).

Wang wrote “Kongzi zhi Meiyuzhuyi” in 1904. In this article, he actually applies three philosophers’ thoughts—Kant’s, Schopenhauer’s, and Schiller’s—to his interpretation of Confucius’s thinking, which he claims is “aesthetic-educational-ism.” Wang views human-kind as consumed with “desiring personal interest,” whereas beauty is the pleasure of disinterest and the only way to end the suffering caused by desire. He laments,

What does one labor for day and night? For personal interest. Since one has life, one has desires, and desires seek for satisfaction. Therefore, (there arises) the distinction of gains and losses. Gains bring lust, losses bring grief. Everybody is the same... Avoiding suffering and seeking for enjoyment, loving gains and disliking loss, unwilling to yield and eager to win—everybody is the same, too. Those struggles are carried within and will cause suffering, and when they are brought out to society, they are crimes. Could anything in the world eliminate this idea of personal interest and obliterate the distinction of property to reduce the crimes of the world and to end the suffering of the human heart? Yes, that is beauty.

人之所以朝夕營營者，安歸乎？當於一己之利害而已。人有生矣，則不能無欲。有欲矣，則不能無求；有求矣，不能無生得失。得則淫，失則戚，此人之所同也……。避苦而就樂，喜得而惡喪，怯讓而勇爭，此又人之所同也。於是內之發於人心也，則為苦痛；外之見於社會也，則為罪惡。然世終無可以除此利害之念，而泯人己之別者歟？將社會之罪惡固不可以稍減，而人心之苦痛遂長此終古歟？曰：有！所謂美者是已。（Wang 1997, 155）

Wang’s reading of the truth of life as desire and suffering sounds pessimistic, which could be concluded as the influence of Buddhism and Schopenhauer. Yet Wang’s focus is different. He concentrates more on the “cure” for rather than the disease of suffering. In fact, in “The First Author’s Note on Reaching Thirty Years of Age,” Wang expresses his concern and claims that “The (haunting) problem of the universe and human life” drove him to search for answers in Western philosophy (Wang 1983, Section IV, 20). He finds that Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment—the disinterested pleasure 不關利害之快樂—is the way to help one to rescue oneself and to transcend this world of interest (Wang 1997, 155).

Wang believes that Western philosophy as a whole follows the tradition of applying aesthetics as an aid for moral education. He comments, “Western philosophers since Aristotle use aesthetics to assist moral education, which continues to Schiller” (Wang 1997, 155). Then he elaborates on Schiller’s theory and states that the aesthetic is the bridge between the material and moral worlds. The highest ideal lies in the 美丽之心 (beautiful soul); therefore, one cannot separate aesthetic education from moral education. Wang returns to the Confucian tradition to claim that Confucius’s teaching starts and ends with aesthetic education. This is shown in the *Analects*, where Confucius emphasizes the importance of poetry; it can also be seen in Xunzi’s discussion of music, and so forth. Wang laments, at the end of this article, that beauty has been ignored by Chinese society for a long time and, he argues, the educator should take responsibility for restoring Confucius’s aesthetic-educational-ism to the society.

We are not a society of fine arts. Everything is judged by its practical use. We have been ignoring beauty for a long time... therefore all the fine arts cannot reach their full development. Alas, beauty has been ignored for a long time. Nobody knows that the use of the useless is more superior than the use of the useful. The aesthetic taste is so lacking in our society that we are not surprised to see that people are seeking for their personal interests and have lost their way to return! The teaching of the

sage is definitely not what those narrow-minded Confucians are teaching, that is why I elaborate on Confucius' aesthetic education to educate the educators.

我中國非美術之國也。一切學業，以利用之大宗旨貫註之……美之為物，為世人所不顧久矣……故一切美術，皆不能達完全之域。美之為物，為世所不顧久矣，庸詎知無用之用，有勝於有用之用者乎？所以我國人審美之趣味之缺乏如此，則其朝夕營營，逐一己之利害而不知返者，安足怪哉！安足怪哉！庸詎知吾國所尊為大聖者，其教育固異於彼賤儒之所為乎？故備舉孔子美育之說，且詮其所以然之理，世之言教育者，可以觀焉。(Wang 1997, 158)

In this rather short article, Wang Guowei not only synthesizes Kant's, Schopenhauer's, and Schiller's theories on aesthetic education in a very broad and free way, but he also connects Confucius's teachings by means of a free interpretation. However, his comments reveal that his understanding of Western aesthetics is heavily influenced by a Chinese cultural sensibility—the inseparability of the beautiful and the good (*meishan tongyi guan* 美善統一觀). We can see this by comparing Wang with Schiller. Schiller was inspired by the enlightenment thinking of Kant, and he believed that human history is evolving from the natural state to the spiritual (rational) one. Schiller's aestheticism is based on his reflection on Western history, and he makes the aesthetic world the bridge to the material world, and the moral world a strategy to reestablish the natural human being as a rational one. In Western tradition, "progress" is the truth of life, but Schiller's nostalgia for ancient Greece represents a new approach towards contemporary issues. Ancient Greece reminds Schiller of the unity of sensation and rationality, and prepares the way for progress. Wang Guowei, on the contrary, does not share this linear and progressive historical thinking. For him, the heart is naturally born for the beautiful and the good. His remark that Confucius's teaching starts from and ends with aesthetics emphasizes his stress on circular returning. When Wang says that the highest ideal is the *meilizhixin* 美丽之心 (beautiful soul), his translation of "soul" for *xin* 心 implies that his understanding of this ideal is alien to the Western philosophers he mentions (Wang 1997, 157). The beautiful soul, for Wang, is neither about sensation's victory over rationality nor sensation as the supplement and help to rationality. Rather, Wang eulogizes natural human feelings and considers the human heart as the beginning of the ideal human world. In short, a beautiful heart full of beautiful feelings is naturally moral. Wang's "meiyuzhuyi" (aesthetic educational-ism) echoes the *Analects*' call to "find inspiration by intoning the songs, learn where to stand from observing ritual propriety and find fulfillment in playing music" (*Lunyu* 1998, 122) and "set... sights on the way, sustain... with excellence, lean upon authoritative conduct, and sojourn in the arts" (*Lunyu* 1998, 112). Inspired by Western aesthetic ideas, Wang's ideal for Chinese education reform nevertheless finds its root in the Confucian teaching of self-cultivation, which starts from and consummates itself in art.

IV. CONCLUSION

Unlike his contemporaries Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), and Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921), who were interested in introducing Western politics, social science, and other practical revolutions for the reestablishment of China as a great power, Wang Guowei was the first Chinese intellectual to introduce the "great metaphysics, sublime ethics and pure aesthetics"⁷ of the West (Wang 1983, Section IV, 21).

Wang Guowei's interpretation and application of Kant can be viewed as a "showcase" of the "adaptation" of Western philosophy and aesthetics. From a scholarly perspective, his

encounter with Kant is not a typical philosophical criticism, and his study is not systematic, either. Wang Guowei's reading of Kant and his new interpretation of several important Chinese philosophical terms and aesthetic ideas might be simple, liberal, and less detailed than most philosophical commentary from today's perspective, especially when we consider that comparative philosophical studies have been developing steadily over the last one hundred years. However, Wang's interpretation and analysis is still inspiring and useful for its methodological significance and reflective character. Wang Guowei introduces many new Western philosophical terms into Chinese philosophical discourse: *free will*, *reason*, *rationality*, *a priori knowledge*, *a posteriori knowledge*, *understanding*, *the beautiful*, *the sublime*, etc. His reinterpretation of Chinese concepts in dialogue with these new Western ones gave his thought a "modern" character. His rational analysis of those conceptions has not only academic but also cultural significance since so many irrational events took place at the end of China's imperial history.

Wang's approach to the *new learning* might be different from that of the Chinese philosophers interested primarily in social and political thought, yet his deconstructive interpretation of *xing*, reduction of the ethical values of *li*, introduction of a new perspective from which to look at *ming*, and aesthetic educational-ism all share the same goal with his contemporaries: social change and cultural reformation.

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NOTES

1. I argued against the conventional reading of Wang Guowei's debt to Schopenhauer in my article "The Third Kind of Tragedy: How Wang Guowei Departures from Schopenhauer" (He 2013).
2. *Journal of the Educational World* also included articles on educational system changes, details on school schedules, courses arrangement, class schedule, western pedagogy, education theory, and so forth.
3. This list references Professor Li Minghui's categorizations in his article "Wang Guowei and Kant's Philosophy" (Li 2009: 119). Also, Yuan and Liu 1996, 25-46; Chen 1988, 50-108.
4. a. "Hande zhi Zhexueshuo" (汗德之哲學說, "Kant's Philosophy"), *Journal of Educational World* (Hereafter, *JEW*), (1904) no. 74, May, unsigned. b. "Hande zhi Zhishilun" (汗德之知識論, "Kant's Epistemology"), *JEW* (1904) no.74, May (according to Li Minghui, these two articles were based on selections from Kuwaki Genyoko's translation of Wilhelm Windelband's *Geschichte der Philosophie* [1892] [Li, 2009, 119]). c. "Deguo Zhexue Dajia Hande Zhuan" (德國哲學大家汗德傳, "Biography of German Philosopher Kant"), *JEW* (1906) no. 120, March, unsigned (the source of this translation may be Nakajima Rikizo's [1858-1918] book *Biographies of Western Philosophers* [1899] [Li 2009, 119]). d. "Hande Xiangzhuan" (汗德詳傳, "Memoir of Kant"), *JEW* [1906] no.126, May, unsigned (this article was translated from Thomas Kingsmill Abbott's [1829-1913] translation: *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics* [the first version was published in 1813]. The version Wang read may have been the fourth [1889] or the fifth [1898]). e. "Geluozai zhi Youxilun" (哥羅宰氏之遊戲論, "On Giovanni Antonio Colozza's Theory of Play"), translated from the Japanese version done by Kikuchi Shuntei [1875-1967]. One of the chapters discusses Kant's theory of play, *JEW* no. 104-106, 110,115,116, July 1905-January 1906, unsigned). f. "Zhexue Gainlun" (哲學概論, "Introduction to Philosophy") (Wang translated two chapters of Kuwaki Genyoko's [1874-1946] Introduction to Philosophy [1900] into Chinese in 1902—Chapter Five discusses Kant's epistemology and Chapter Six was devoted to Kant's Aesthetics. This translation was published by *JEW* Press). g. "Xiyang Lunlixue Shiyao" (西洋倫理學史要 "Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers"), by Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) published in London in 1886 (Wang translated the part on Kant's discussion of the postulate of Free Will and published it in *JEW*, [1903] no. 59-61, August-October).
5. a. "Hande Xiangzan" (汗德像贊, "Eulogy of Kant"), a poem written by Wang for *JEW* (1903) no. 81, August. Later, it was included in the *Sequel to Jing'an Collection*. b. "Hande zhi Shishi Jiqi Zhushu" (汗德之事實及其著書, "The Facts about Kant and His Work"), *JEW* (1904) no.74, May, unsigned. c. "Hande zhi Lunlixue ji Zongjiaolun" (汗德之倫理學及宗教論, "Kant's Ethics and His Discussion on Religion"), *JEW* (1905) no.123, May, unsigned. d. "Lun Jinshi Jiaoyu Sixiang yu Zhexue zhi Guanxi" (論近世教育思想與哲學之關係, "The Relationship Between Recent Education Thought and Philosophy"), *JEW* (1904) no.128-129, July, unsigned. e. "Shubenhua zhi Zhexue ji Jiaoyu Xueshuo" (叔本華之哲學及教育學說, "Schopenhauer's Philosophy and His Educational Thought"), *JEW* (1904) no.75 and 77, April (later, it was included in *Jing'an Collection* [see note 7]. This article interprets Schopenhauer as Kant's successor and claims that Schopenhauer's metaphysical, aesthetic and ethical theories are based on Kant's epistemology).
6. a. "Lun Xing" (論性, "On Human Nature"), *JEW* (1904) no.70-72, January-February (later, it was included in the *Jing'an Collection*). b. "Shi Li" (釋理, "Analysis of Li"), *JEW* (1904) no. 82, 83 and 86, July-September (later it was included in the *Jing'an Collection*). c. "Yuan Ming" (原命, "On the Origin of *Ming*"), *JEW* (1906) no.127, May (later, it was included in the *Sequel to Jing'an Collection*). d. "Guya zhi zai Meixue shang zhi Weizhi" (古雅之在美學上之位置, "The Position of the Idea of Guya in Aesthetics"), *JEW* (1907) no. 144, January (later, it was included in the *Sequel to Jing'an Collection*). e. "Kongzi zhi Meiyuzhuyi" (孔子之美育主義, "Confucius's Aesthetic Educational-ism"), *JEW* (1904) no.69, February, unsigned.
7. This quote is from Wang Guowei's "Sanshi Zixuer" 三十自序 (二 ("The Second Author's Note on Reaching Thirty Years of Age"). "Sanshi Zixuer" was originally published in *Jiaoyu Shijie* 教育世界 (*Journal of Educational World*. [1907] 10, no.152, May). Later, it was included in *Jingan Wenji Xubian* 《静安文集续编》 (*The Sequel of Jing'an Collection*), which was edited by one of Wang's disciples, Zhao Wanli in 1934 after Wang's death, and which later was included in *Wang Guowei Yishu* 王國維遺書 (*Posthumous Selected Works of Wang Guowei*, 16 vols., Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1940). *Jing'an* is one of Wang Guowei's style names. This article and some of the other articles cited in this paper were included in the fifth volume of a photoprint edition of Zhao's edition (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1983). Volume 5 was divided into four sections. The first two sections were some of Wang's selected reading notes and poetry. Section three is *Jing'an Collection* (edited by Wang himself in 1905) and Section four is the *Sequel of Jing'an Collection*, and the page numbers of each section were arranged independently. To avoid confusion, I add section numbers in this paper.