

1 Key Terms of Exile

Emigration and exile are closely associated with twentieth century history in China. The term exile, however, is problematic as it carries a wide range of semantic variations. When we speak of Chinese exiled intellectuals, we most likely first think of the emigrants who left Mainland China in the wake of the repressions imposed after 1989.¹ If we apply exile in a more general sense to a prolonged absence or displacement from one's native country either through force of circumstance or when undergone voluntarily, we can identify several other exile generations over the past century in China that have left certain indicators of their particular understanding of exile.

This paper explores texts written in the 1950s and 1960s by Lao Sze-kwang 勞思光 (1927–2012) a highly respected academic, renowned philosopher, and dedicated teacher who has lived and worked much of his life in Hong Kong and Taiwan. A former student at the Department of Philosophy at Beijing University, Lao left Mainland China for Taiwan in 1949 and graduated from the Department of Philosophy at Taiwan University two years later.² In 1955 he started work as a lecturer at the Chu Hai College in Hong Kong before his long association with the Chinese University of Hong Kong began in 1964.

Lao's case demonstrates that the dilemma that he faced after 1949 was far more complicated than simply taking an anti-Communist stand. He chose to flee from Communist China, but simultaneously alienated himself from Guomintang Taiwan.³ As a visiting scholar he was several times in the United States at Harvard University and

1 See, for instance, Shi Ming's essay "Wenn mir die Heimat genommen ist, denke ich mir eine neue". Ein Versuch zum Bild der Exilanten aus China in den neunziger Jahren" (Shi 2000). Shi's text is the only contribution regarding the Chinese exile experience in the twentieth century in a recent publication about the impact of exiles.

2 Lau and Cheung 2003, 281–282. See Wu Youneng 2000, 12–14, for additional information on his fellow students and teachers.

3 Lao Sze-kwang 1955, 278. Lao's great-great-grandfather, Lao Chongguang 勞崇光 (1802–1867), was the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces and signed the first Kowloon Treaty on behalf of the Qing Government. Lao's father, Lao Jingjiu 勞競九, was a revolutionary who worked closely with the founders of the Republic of China. When the Guomintang fled from Mainland China, Lao followed his family to Taiwan. Chang 2013, 238–240.

Princeton University, but until the mid-1980s lived in Hong Kong, the place where he established his life and career as an academic.⁴ Lao devoted his long career to the development and interpretation of Chinese culture and philosophy with numerous published works and decades of lectures at universities in Hong Kong and later in Taiwan.⁵ A central question for Lao as someone displaced from home became that of the continuity and re-appropriation of culture: how is culture passed on, by whom, and by what means?

The condition of exile as a context of intellectual history in China has so far been largely neglected.⁶ Moreover, criticism of exile writing has generally tended to analyze works written in or on exile based on somewhat binary distinctions, in which exile either produces creative freedom or it traps the writer in a restrictive conservatism or nostalgia. Edward Said, for example, suggests that exile is either a creative, liberating state, which enables the writer to function free of the limitations of the local or the national, or that a writer in exile is profoundly ideological and yearns for the lost nation:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home: exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions [...].⁷

Expressing the least attractive aspects of exile, Said writes:

Exiles feel, [...] an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. Seeing the “entire world as a foreign land” makes possible originality of vision.⁸

And he goes on to point out that:

Exile is a jealous state, what you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you.⁹

4 Wu Youneng 2000, 1.

5 Lao has authored more than 30 books including the three-volume *History of Chinese Philosophy* (available in classical and simplified Chinese editions, as well as in Korean translation): Lao Sze-kwang 1981–1984.

6 For two exceptions, see Lee 1998 and Fröhlich 2004. Hao Chang first pointed to the “existential disorientation” of the “New Confucians”. Although he might well be describing a larger group of exiled intellectuals, he does not link their disorientation to the condition of exile. Chang 1976, 286.

7 Said 1984, 366.

8 *Ibid.*, 360.

9 *Ibid.*, 360. Leslez Kolakowski also asks the questions whether exile is a lesser evil or whether it

On reading a number of texts by Lao Sze-kwang written during the first decade of his exile, it becomes obvious that rather than favoring one side of a binary distinction, many of his writings actually present both sides with often irresolvable tensions or even ambiguity. Lao's texts show the necessity of arguing for an approach to exile writing that reflects these tensions and refuses to emphasize just one facet of the exile's complex condition so as not to neglect interstitial spaces. His texts written on and in exile contain a series of productive tensions revolving around central topics, such as culture, history, the nation, or language. The intention of this paper is, therefore, to reconcile a concrete case of exile with the more theoretical discourse and highlight the need to reintroduce historical particularity into the discussion of exile.

The following chapter aims to clarify why the two different reactions to exile described above are not strictly oppositional or mutually exclusive, but rather exist along a continuum and often operate simultaneously. The source material used in this chapter consists of short texts containing diary-style entries, descriptions of events, thoughts on newspaper articles or poems, as well as critical observations which add further color to personal experiences or daily occurrences. Reflections on exile often appear in these texts in the form of allusions to the personal, precarious situation of the exiled individual and the encounter with different intellectual positions.

The third chapter deals with early cultural theoretical writings. Lao Sze-kwang takes as his departure point and subject matter a lack of orientation observed with increasing perspicuity for a series of essays compiled in the 1950s, initially in Taiwan and later in Hong Kong:

I grew up in a time full of confusion, because traditional culture had begun to lose influence and, at the same time, no modern cultural order had yet been realized; under such historical circumstances, the question "where is Chinese culture leading?" was unavoidable. The consideration of this question even became a sort of "historical assignment".¹⁰

The theme of cultural analysis mirrors not only Lao's theoretical work but an ongoing strand of cultural self-reflection, ranging from the Self-Strengthening Movement at the beginning of the 1860s to The New Culture Movement of the 1920s, through to the

offers privileges unknown to those who did not leave their native soil. "Any exile can be seen either as a misfortune or as a challenge; it can be no more than a reason for despondency and sorrow or a source of a painful encouragement." Kolakowski 1985, 58.

10 Lao Sze-kwang 2002, XIII: 我生長在中國傳統文化開始失效，而現代文化並未實化為新文化秩序的迷亂時代；在這樣的歷史環境中，面對‘中國文化向何處去’的問題幾乎是不可避免的事。就此而論，對文化問題的探究成了一種‘歷史任務’。

Taiwanese cultural debate in the 1960s, which continues to pervade recent Chinese intellectual history until the present day.¹¹

Lao's thoughts on the concept of a so-called "re-building" or "re-appropriation" (*chongjian* 重建) of "Chinese culture" (*Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化) and its potential for intervention, reveal the broader vision underlying the texts. In suggesting the interdependence of two aspects that is, the personal crisis of exile and the belief in the possibility and necessity of cultural achievements displaced from the territory of the nation-state, the conclusion will focus on how Lao conceived a view of a national culture and its development, capable of accommodating change and providing continuity for core values at the same time.

2 The Experience of Exile: Tensions and Ambiguities

A recurrent topic of Lao's exile experience is the forced need to travel and wander, a theme already suggested by the title that Lao chose for some documentary-style essays he wrote during his first years in exile: *Collected Notes from the Sojourn in Hong Kong* (*Liu Gang zaji* 留港雜記).¹² Lao is aware that at each stage of history the universal theme of exile and the painful search for an abode attains its own specific meaning. In his short introduction, he points out that he originally intended to name the collection of essays *Impressions of Travels in Hong Kong* (*Gang you xinying lu* 港游心影錄)¹³ but realized that this title was too easily associated with Liang Qichao's *Excerpts from the Impressions of Travels in Europe* (*Ou you xinying lu jielu* 歐游心影錄節錄).¹⁴ For Lao, the experience of Liang in

11 This issue was addressed once again in Lao's monograph from 2007 *A World of Crisis and the New Century of Hope: On Contemporary Philosophy and Culture*. Lao Sze-kwang 2007, 187–218.

12 These essays originally appeared in the publication *Current Democracy* (*Minzhu Chao* 民主潮) under this main title and were later integrated into the existing collection. Lao Sze-kwang 1956e, 273–275.

13 *Ibid.*, 273.

14 Liang 1936, 23. According to Tang Xiaobing, after his journey through post-war Europe in 1918, Liang Qichao distanced himself from an understanding of modernity as progressive temporality. Instead, Liang proposed a dynamic anthropological space in separate but interacting cultural systems, which became accessible and comparable only in a new global concept of difference. Instead of reducing progress to technological advancements or direct causality, Liang wished to rescue it as the expression of a global ideal. Tang 1996, 8 and 216–223. Lao similarly does not regard modernity as necessary or exclusively progressive, but rather talks of problematic disruptions within the so-called "modern" and offers fascism as an example: Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 176. Moreover, Lao holds a similar view on the historical development of

Europe truly represents what “travel” (*you* 游) means in the sense of a voluntary period of absence from home. As the circumstances of his experience were different not only as regards time and space, but also in terms of emotional impact, he was searching for a title which reflected his own situation and finally chose *liu* (留).

This choice of word is explained with reference to a “prose poem” (*fu*) from the Later Han Dynasty. In his *Deng lou fu* 登樓賦 (*Fu: Ascending the Tower*), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217) combines the description of a beautiful landscape which can be seen from a tower with the description of his yearning to be able to return to the place he is being kept away from due to the political unrest at the time. It is in this line, shaped by the author’s personal experience of political unrest and homesickness that Lao finds the appropriate association for the title of his own notes:

Though truly lovely, this is not my homeland,
How can I linger (*liu*) even briefly here?¹⁵

The concept of *liu* as “lingering” or “sojourning,” Lao explains, does not include the same connotations of safety, connectedness, belonging and community, which the terms “at home” or “the right place” imply. After all, despite its proximity to Mainland China, Hong Kong is soberly referred to as a “Colony of the English, and despite its beauty thus not our land (*wutu* 吾土).”¹⁶

Without the belief that there is a connection between an individual and a place, exile loses its meaning. Therefore a sense of national belonging is necessary for the exile. However, Lao’s linguistic register does not primarily conjure up nationalistic sentiments. A corresponding vocabulary is otherwise absent in Lao’s texts, particularly with increasing critical distance to the regime in Taiwan. Moreover, his view on “nationalism” (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主義) is complex and often involves a critique of the Guomindang: Lao combines at least three separate attitudes to nationalism in his early writings. First, he rejects the authoritarian nationalism of the Guomindang; second he opposes the exploitation of nationalistic sentiments by the Chinese Communist Party; and third, he also suggests that nationalism always implies the repression of difference.¹⁷

cultures with a recognition of history as both movement as well as (cultural) dissimilarity. However, a detailed analysis or even comparison of Liang’s and Lao’s views on cultural history lies beyond the scope of this paper.

15 Lao Sze-kwang 1956e, 274: 雖信美而非吾土兮, 曾何足以少留! The translation follows: Miao 1982, 273.

16 Ibid., 274.

17 Lao Sze-kwang 1955, 278 and for a more detailed view: Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 265–267.

Whilst his search for an abode (he also uses the terms *liuwang* 流亡 or *taonan* 逃難) carries with it the meaning of loneliness and loss in a more spiritual sense, Lao also describes his status as that of a “refugee” (*nanmin* 難民, or *bannanmin* 半難民).¹⁸ In the postwar years there was a dramatic shift in the population and in Hong Kong’s relationship with the Chinese mainland. Throughout the colony’s previous history, its Chinese residents had largely come from Guangzhou and neighboring areas, and their movement back and forth across the border had been unrestricted. During the late 1940s and the early 1950s these “locals” were joined by an increasing number of refugees from more varied and distant regions from Mainland China. Strict new border controls instituted by both the Chinese, anxious to stop the outflow of human resources, and the British, fearful of the refugee burden, made the sense of separation in the early 1950s a concrete reality in the realm of immigration policy.¹⁹ For Lao with his legal status as a refugee, passports and visas become very real aspects that determined his life; they underline the fact that geographical territories are not merely imaginary but are powerful signs of the containment of one’s free will to move. Exile in Lao’s view is, therefore, both condition of restriction and forced movement. This may well be one of the reasons that China (as a nation or nation-state) as a result is to become less a spatial or geographical and more a cultural referent.

Questions of publication and audience, as well as social and institutional contexts, all of which add to his experience of being alienated from society are also central topics in his writings. Lao addresses the problems that scholars encounter in Hong Kong when trying to pursue their careers. He reproaches the colonial administration for being reluctant to offer university education taught in Chinese and to provide the necessary research facilities and libraries. The numerous young refugees from the Mainland nurtured the establishment of an informal private Chinese-language education system. Recent research by Chou and Law supports the view that these Chinese-language schools were considered inferior as Hong Kong University would only admit students coming from Hong Kong’s English-language schools at that time.²⁰ Lao would later support the establishment of the first Chinese-language University founded by the colonial government. For him, the formation of the bilingual Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963 symbolized the British government’s recognition of a Chinese-

18 Lao Sze-kwang 1956b, 294.

19 *Hong Kong Report 1952*, 7. See also: Hamm 2005, 49–50. Emphasizing the positive aspect of having the opportunity to work in Hong Kong Lao refers to himself as a “guest in a foreign land” (*yixiang weike* 異鄉為客) who has been given the status of an “Employee” (English in the original). Lao Sze-kwang 1956e, 274.

20 Law Wing Sang 2009, 152; Chou 2012, 4–7, and for an earlier account Ng 1994b, 17.

language university-education, what he unlike other exiled intellectuals welcomed and strongly supported.²¹

It is these two moments, loss of one's roots on the one hand, and an insecure and discriminatory environment on the other, that Lao describes as two ruthless blades, which, like scissors, sever the emigrated intellectuals from a feeling of safety as well as favorable conditions.²² Nevertheless he strongly upholds the view that a positive outcome is dependent on one's individual engagement in finding solutions.

In one of his most critical observations on Hong Kong customs, he describes his new surroundings as a profit-driven place where behavior is only guided by ideals at most in an instrumentalized sense.²³ Regarded as a colony and cultural wasteland by many Mainland Chinese, Hong Kong in Lao's view, nevertheless, possessed two major advantages for the Chinese-speaking exiled intellectuals in the 1950s. First, whilst financial support was limited, it was particularly important after 1949 to allow scholars to pursue independent academic careers.²⁴ Second, although it was rather hostile to the Guomindang regime in Taiwan, the British administration permitted the expression of all kinds of views in publications, especially in Chinese periodicals.²⁵ The publishers and authors of these Chinese periodicals were, therefore, able to establish one essential element in the colony's printing and publishing that is, a focus not just on the local community which spanned the Hong Kong / Guangdong border, but also on the Chinese nation as a whole, upon which the British-ruled territory offered a privileged vantage point, for self-cognizance and critical reflection. Generally speaking, Lao and other fellow exile authors were more interested in national than in local affairs, and at the same time they were dedicated to the linguistic standard of the "National language" (*guoyu* 國語).²⁶ The distinction between "mainland" and "local" orientation was, however, far from absolute, as neither aspect was alien to the interests of a substantial part of

21 Lao Sze-kwang 1994, 128–129.

22 Lao Sze-kwang 1956a, 298.

23 Ibid., 297–300.

24 Lao creates an impression of the financial situation which confronted many of the authors who had turned their back on the Mainland. An author who sold his work to a publishing house or magazine based in Hong Kong could earn around 15–20 Hong Kong dollars for 1000 Chinese characters. Daily newspapers paid only 8–10 Hong Kong dollars for the same amount of text. However, according to Lao, newspapers financed by the Communist Party paid over 50 Hong Kong dollars for texts with the appropriate ideological slant. Lao Sze-kwang 1956d, 286–287.

25 Lao Sze-kwang 1956b, 294–295.

26 See, for example, his critical remarks on the use of Cantonese expressions in newspapers and especially in erotic literature: Lao Sze-kwang 1956d, 285–286.

the Chinese-speaking population of Hong Kong at that time. Lao's insistence on the use of the National language based on the "vernacular" (*baihua* 白話) reveals another ambiguous twist in his position between the national and the local, the nationalistic and the imperialistic.

Hong Kong under colonial rule had always been a place where Chinese language could develop and where the use of English was common mostly and almost exclusively in the elite stratum. To render it more precisely, there was always a space for Cantonese language to thrive and, in addition, until the 1940s there could still be found a preference for the "written classical language" (*wenyanwen* 文言文) over the "written vernacular" (*baihuawen* 白話文) in Hong Kong.²⁷ As the National language was based on northern language it was for many Guangdong people still unfamiliar at that time.²⁸ Lao's call for the use of the National language and the dismissal of local language forms in literature ran counter to localist claims to consider local dialects as vernacular and, hence, as part of the national tradition and to abolish the binary between the National language based on *baihua* and local dialects. To Lao, Cantonese cultural products owed their appeal partly to the vulgar tastes and the eroticism characteristic of the colonial environment. Under British colonial rule the local Cantonese dialect had survived the campaigns of language unification and had influenced popular written cultural forms, such as cartoons and satire, but also erotic and romantic literature.²⁹ The invocation of this May Fourth anti-traditionalism by Lao can, therefore, not only be seen as in opposition to local cultural forms but also as a criticism of local forms understood to be derivative products of colonialism and, therefore, peripheral to a national culture.

A complex mix of inferiority and superiority prevails as Lao faces his new exilic situation. On the one hand, he felt like a refugee having lost his home and previous privileges, but, on the other, he was optimistic about being able to maintain his role as a publicist and critic in a comparatively free environment and reflect on the prospects for a Chinese culture.

27 Law Wing Sang 2009, 112.

28 Even among intellectuals in cities the debate over the use of the written classical language by writers of the so-called Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School lasted until the 1930s. It is revealing that this popular literature was also criticized as being of low taste, helplessly outmoded, morally decadent, and exemplifying the foreign concession culture of Shanghai. See Chen 2008, 57.

29 Law Wing Sang 2009, 129. Leung Ping-kwan 2009, 26. Leung gives a descriptive account of the language issue in Hong Kong, as well as a poetic reflection of his own search for alternative articulations. *Ibid.*, 33–38.

A further tension considering language expressed by Lao is that between the experience of exile and its representation. Lao exhibits a certain degree of distrust at his ability to convey through his writings the intensity of the exile experience. Nevertheless, he never abandons the hope that his writing may be able to communicate his experience to others. Moreover, the urgency of his writing lies in the way his essays serve as a memory and version of alternative realities, both of which provide creative sustenance and hope in otherwise dire circumstances.³⁰ To clarify further this version of alternative realities, it is necessary to turn to his prospects for a “Chinese culture”. To the extent that Lao uses his writing as a means of resistance, his essays on cultural re-appropriation also reflect his belief in the ability of language to express and to affect the world in which we live.

3 Cultural Re-Appropriation

The themes of loss, loneliness and failure were experiences lived by Lao. However, he also expressed the belief that the sense of predicament results from man’s awakening to his own responsibility, and man has the ability to eventually solve that predicament.

The predicament of the last few decades³¹ provided Chinese people with a chance to examine the deficiencies inherent in China’s culture. Unfortunately, the efforts undertaken in this respect have not yet been successful. Awareness, however, never comes too late, and if we recognize our ills (*bing* 病) we will be able to find our own remedy.³²

When writing about Chinese culture, Lao shifts from the realm of his personal experience to the realm of a collective vision. He expressed his early ideas on the re-appropriation of Chinese culture predominantly in the two periodicals *Minzhu Pinglun* 民主評論 (The Democratic Review) and *Minzhu Chao* 民主潮 (Current Democracy).³³ In 1965, an influential monograph was published, *Zhongguo Wenhua*

30 The crisis of language, however, while revealing the crisis in the subject, does not lead to the negation of representation of the subject. Rather it suggests that the connection between language and the subject must be reconsidered. Lao Sze-kwang 1955, 280.

31 The inheritance of the consequences of the Chinese Civil War may well be one of the reasons why Lao seldom reflects a sense of loss in a nostalgic way. Although the larger historical context of the 19th and 20th century is at the same time hinted at, Lao’s analysis takes the 20th century as its central focus.

32 Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 180: 在近代苦難中，中國人得到反省文化缺陷的機會，但可惜已往反省的努力太不深入，不過覺醒永遠不會嫌遲的，倘使我們認清自己的病，則不難找到自己的藥。

33 *Minzhu Pinglun* was Hong Kong-based while *Minzhu Chao* was Taiwan-based; both magazines were – at least at the beginning – sponsored by the GMD.

Yaoyi 中國文化要義 (Essentials of Chinese Culture). Intended as a textbook on traditional Chinese culture for the then newly established Chinese University of Hong Kong, it includes two chapters on theoretical questions and gives valuable insight into Lao's systematic conception of cultural understanding in his early writings.³⁴

Lao formulates his early cultural analyses as an ongoing development of a cultural spirit or mind.³⁵ The contours and boundaries that these developments take in modernity are mostly determined by the nation or state. The nation, or state, provides space in which the spirit of a culture is realized, such that a general development coalesces into a culture. This, in turn, facilitates the comparison with other cultures and the development of corresponding cultural histories.³⁶ The purpose of this comparison is not to create a hierarchy in which one culture is placed at the top in world history, but is, rather, to be used creatively to enable an examination of one's own views with reference to other cultural ideals, so as to benefit from the critical potential of diversity. The notion of culture is aligned here with human intellect, presupposing that actions are voluntary and conscious. What is

34 In addition Lao gives a descriptive account of the most important trends and achievements of Chinese culture. Each chapter contains an appendix with relevant source material. Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 7–11.

35 A more detailed overview of his early theoretical thinking on culture as spirit is given in a postscript (dated 1962) to his book *Lishi zhi chengfa* (The Punishment by History): Lao distinguishes four stages in the development of a cultural spirit: 1: “The natural state” of the physical self (*ziran zhuangtai* 自然狀態). 2: “Manifestation and unfolding of the freedom of the subject” (*zhuti ziyou zhi xianxian yu zhankai* 主體自由之顯現與展開). 3: “Manifestation of restrictions on the freedom of the subject” (*zhuti ziyou zhi xianzhi* 主體自由之限制). 4: Manifestation of a “spirit of accepting incompatibility” (*chengdang jingshen* 承當精神). Lao Sze-kwang 1993, 286–304. In his early writings Lao held the view that change in a culture must be internally impelled, not externally derived. *Ibid.*, 296–297.

36 Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 2–8. Lau Kwok-ying 1997, 57–60. In his article “Oulu zhexue zai Xianggang 歐陸哲學在香港 (European Mainland Philosophy in Hong Kong)” Lau points out that this strand of philosophical thought influenced by Hegel was introduced into Hong Kong in the 1950s by Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978), Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995), and Lao Sze-kwang. Lao's early essays on culture rarely mention or cite Hegel. But, very generally speaking, his essayistic writings shared with Hegel the notion of spirit (*Geist*) that develops in the perspective of time such that it will actualize through a variety of stages (see footnote 35). Lao often writes about spirit being synonymous with culture as (realized) values that will relate to the norms of a specific culture. Reality, therefore, is not to be understood by means of mechanical causality alone, but also by a critical evaluation of a so-called spirit of a culture. On the concept of culture and its relation to Hegel's concept of spirit (*Geist*) see Arndt 2010, 96–100. On the concept of culture see also Peerpet 1984, 21–28.

described is the interdependency of a person and respective collective powers, above all in terms of intellectual trends, moral concepts, institutions and customs.³⁷ In this view, the subject always remains part of a historical life-world and is, for this reason, able to comprehend intellectual trends of times gone by and past eras. Culture can be conceived of both in terms of its historical development and its peculiarities. On the one hand Lao discusses the relationship between ideas, intellectual trends, social realities and corresponding values, and, on the other hand, his cultural analyses reveal a historicizing of the world. In his later writings, Lao makes important additions and adaptations to his concept of culture in order to cast theoretical light on the process of a so-called modernization, a process associated with the appropriation of foreign cultural achievements.³⁸

As increasingly less space was available for social or ideological opposition to be developed in Mainland China, the intellectuals in exile were, in Lao's view, to be responsible for consolidating the foundation for an alternative culture and future change. Future change as such is imaginary and its potential is in providing an alternative to what Lao sees as the growing uniformity of thought in Mainland China. Furthermore, Lao remains cognizant of the colonial context he is writing in: the combination of these negatives, communism and colonialism in the form of capitalism, leads to the articulation of an alternative culture. One major feature of this articulation is the re-appropriation of specific Confucian values. Lao emphasized cultural particularity whilst at the same time arguing that all cultures have equal status, thus implying also a universalistic perspective. Therefore, the gradual "development" (*fazhan* 發展) of a so-called "spirit of Chinese culture" (*Zhongguo wenhua jingshen* 中國文化精神) was possible.³⁹ He identifies Confucian teachings and values as forming the mainstream (*zhuliu* 主流) of Chinese culture, stressing the idea of an ongoing process containing different historical manifestations, rather than an immutable essence.⁴⁰ Within this normative concept of culture, values form the core and are rendered concrete through personal action and

37 Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 7. Customary or historically developed practice is, therefore, not rejected as a source of norms and values, but may have to undergo critical examination or modification.

38 See for example: Lao Sze-kwang 2000, XI–XIII. Confucianism had constantly interacted with changing political trends, authorities, and with other influential schools of thought. With modernization, the focus shifts to an ongoing exchange between China and foreign influences in order to show that its culture can be developed through the critical assimilation or imitation of external influences.

39 Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 5–7 and Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 166.

40 I use "Confucian" here according to Lao's definition to mean a system of thought attributed to Confucius and Mencius and further developed and expounded by Neo-Confucian thinkers. *Ibid.*, 170 and Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 14–18.

practice on the one hand, and through institutions, on the other. Culture is thus always bound to an empirically experienced reality.⁴¹ Values are one basis of social reality, providing a framework that shapes the discourse on how the social world operates and, moreover, providing the basis for a reflection on how it should operate.⁴²

As a result, values can be derived both from the corresponding institutions, as well as from the history of ideas. The reconstruction of central value concepts through the history of ideas or philosophy is thus given great significance. Therefore, Lao's apparently reductionist concepts of "Chinese values" or "Confucian values" are derived from his analysis of the historical processes, which construct precisely such concepts for the sake of the social or cultural coherence of a given society. Expressed in a different way: tradition or values are not only derived from the past, but are part of a continual process of interpretation or re-appropriation of meaning in the present.

Closely connected with this is the conviction that an understanding of culture can be achieved through reflection. Culture in its normative dimension can thus be determined in isolation from its original territory, in this case the People's Republic of China. Moreover, a critical re-appropriation, which can refer to various sources of knowledge and theories without restriction, is no longer possible in the People's Republic of China at this point in time. Borders, therefore, become both more and less important. They are more important because they now very precisely define "inside" and "outside," "official" and "non-official" interpretations. They are less important because culture is experienced as something displaced from territorial space.

Lao highlights those values, ideas, and activities that do not reject human moral accountability and therefore, challenge an interpretation of culture, which implies a negation of a classless humanity or human moral independence. He holds that the central Confucian notion of *ren* 仁 could make a significant contribution.⁴³ As *ren*, according to Lao, is predicated on each person's free will and the capacity of each person to act humanely and rationally towards another, it shall be translated as "benevolence". This sense of care and concern, to which Lao awards a quality, which allows people to be responsive to others, can have an inspiring effect in the present, by promoting the ability to respond through sincere moral awareness.⁴⁴

Lao's interpretation of the term *ren* draws on the ideas of Confucius. In order to achieve social order in his own time, Confucius, according to Lao, stressed the importance

41 Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 166–169.

42 Ibid., 165–166.

43 Ibid., 171.

44 Ibid., 171, Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 16.

of re-evaluating past traditions or “ritual rules” (*li* 禮). This should be done according to the criterion of “appropriateness” (*yi* 義). In this light, the ritual rules become subject to revision or even elimination. Confucius argued that the appropriateness of any aspect of the ritual rules is finally dependent on whether it is benevolent or not. Lao emphasizes that in its original meaning of Confucius, benevolence was a guiding principle for interaction with and conduct within the family or lineage and became, therefore, the ultimate standard of behavior and social order as well as the core of Confucianism.⁴⁵ Confucius, according to Lao, stressed that everyone stands in a specific relation to everyone else and that social order can be maintained only when every specific duty, which corresponds to the specific status of a person, is properly fulfilled. To Confucius these duties should not just be dictated but must be re-evaluated according to appropriateness and benevolence. To Lao the latter’s relevance in the present is a matter of reasoned judgment and in a more abstract sense conforming to contemporary conditions, he explains benevolence as a sense of responsibility for the concern of others regardless of any class distinction; he equates insensitivity and irrationality with a lack of benevolence.⁴⁶

Lao contrasts his interpretation of values against a prevailing materialism, in which everything that exists is either a thing or a process with only physical properties and in which the spirit or a normative idea emanating from a subject is not regarded as a primary determinant.⁴⁷ Moreover, arguing that Communism in stressing the class nature of morality is fundamentally incompatible with Chinese cultural values, Lao regards the re-appropriation of Chinese culture as a most useful way to weaken Communism’s hold in China.

Cultural re-appropriation should, therefore, inevitably include content pertaining to the current situation. This presupposes that the Confucian tradition is not yet exhausted by that which has been historically realized, and assumes a readiness to deal with these very teachings in a creative but equally critical way.⁴⁸ Consequently, Lao never simply exalts Confucian values. He emphasizes the need to develop an awareness of a

45 Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 171, and more detailed Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 15–16. Despite a divergence of interpretation and of different meanings, the term *ren* combines, according to Lao, two substantive aspects above all: that of overcoming “self-serving motives” (*simian* 私念) and, dependent on this, the aspect of “purifying one’s will” (*yizhi de chunhua* 意志的純化).

46 *Ibid.*, 171.

47 *Ibid.*, 170, 180. At the same time he expresses certain reservations about positivistic influences of science in general and an accompanying preoccupation with what is external.

48 Lao points to social conditions that were unfavorable to the full implementation of original values of Confucianism over time and to the distortions that Confucianism began to suffer. Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 21.

tradition's limitations.⁴⁹ In acknowledging the past as historical, elements that are no longer relevant to the present must equally be conceptualized and a process of critique and rejection set in motion. The process of a critical examination of tradition takes as a starting point the intellectual and political trends, which found a most obvious culmination in the May Fourth Movement (1919).⁵⁰ Lao acknowledges that science or scholarship in general did progress considerably during the May Fourth Movement.⁵¹ However, this progress was – with the exception of the literary movement – mostly limited to the academia and, moreover, had little remaining influence on society. More culturally influential during that period were two slogans resulting in much controversy: on the one hand, a total rejection of the Confucian tradition and, on the other, Westernization.⁵² While the former would leave no room for a critical evaluation of China's cultural tradition, the latter was equally diverting and, too often, adopted a narrow view denouncing all traditional values, paving the way for revolutionary, iconoclastic and nationalistic slogans to fill the spiritual void.⁵³ In contrast to the conscious break with the traditional legacy in Communist China, Lao's strand of interpretation seeks compatibility between traditional values and a contemporary culture, thereby criticizing the limitations inherent in the Confucian tradition and impeding a process of innovation.

Lao argues that a moral subjectivity is the main tenet of Confucian thought, whereas knowledge is the main focus of Western thought.⁵⁴ He criticizes an over emphasis in certain respects placed on the primacy of moral subjectivity in Confucian thought. His criticism consequently includes a rejection of those values identified as responsible for the hierarchical or vertical order of society; the doctrine of The Five Relationships (*wulun* 五倫), in Lao's view, helped to organize interpersonal relationships, but failed to provide a space in which a horizontal order could be developed for a whole group, society, or state.⁵⁵ The intertwining between the personal and the public had also helped to create authoritarian structures. A ruler-focused approach, for instance, had barely succeeded in regulating the ruler's power. The lack of corresponding institutions had negatively influenced cultural development in different realms of society, administration, education, politics, and the economy.⁵⁶ To overcome this limitation,

49 Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 173–174.

50 Ibid., 175.

51 Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 256.

52 Lao Sze-kwang 1965, 257–269.

53 Ibid., 258.

54 Lao Sze-kwang 1952, 170.

55 Ibid., 173.

56 Ibid., 170–173.

a critical examination of concepts and values as developed within the political philosophy of Europe or the United States of America was, therefore, inevitable.

Finally, the process of cultural re-appropriation according to Lao is not restricted to a critical engagement with Confucian teachings in their respective historic contexts, but should be conducted within a corresponding practice. The process of interpretation and the resulting outcomes should enable an insight into institutions in the educational, political and economic sectors.

4 Cultural Re-Appropriation in Exile: Concluding Remarks

As a participant in, as well as a researcher on the history of ideas, Lao's early essays provide us with both testimony and reflective analysis of his times. In him, a voice emerges that incorporates the critic as an active participant in the search for a normative culture. Rather than providing definitive answers, his essays written in the early years of his exile contain temporary responses to questions of culture, history, and change. Lao's cultural analyses are an attempt to guard against relativism by holding particularity in esteem without abandoning the quest for culture as a meaningful whole. The intellectual in exile is thereby assigned a dominant role in the interpretation of a national cultural history and a normative culture, both of which can no longer be regarded as a monolithic given tied to the homeland, but must rather be understood as provisional and open signifiers.

Lao expresses some tensions in his experience of exile, which implies at once disconnection and reconnection, gains and losses; exile thereby is basically constructed on anguish and dispossession. Yet Lao's case shows that exile also carries the potential for hope, as confidence in a possible future provokes an urge to speak about, reflect on, and re-appropriate culture in the form of values. However, Lao acknowledges that his analysis of a value-related cultural development depends on the supposition that values can have their origin in a rational mind and that creating values in the phenomenal world is basically possible.⁵⁷ Intellectuals and scholars primarily develop this conception of a normative culture: a project, which secures the role of the intellectual in exile and, at the same time, is able to inspire optimism in Lao. At this point in time exile is the condition and no longer the cause of Lao's intellectual response which, to borrow from Claudio Guillén, "is often characterized by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad visions or universalism."⁵⁸

As an exile, expelled from a nation and simultaneously interested in the future of that nation, Lao cannot avoid nationalist sentiment. His insistence on the use of the national

57 Lao Sze-kwang 1956f, 5–15.

58 Guillén 1976, 272.

form of language is a revealing example. However, he also refuses to advocate any type of totalizing systematic change, a method associated with nationalist ideology. A contradiction inherent in the situation is that Lao is attempting to establish the roots of an ideological struggle, whilst at the same time suggesting that any type of struggle that is truly capable of liberation must reject any authoritarian ideological base. By reacting specifically to the historical conditions that forced him to work in exile, Lao's essays become an act of defiance and, equally, an act of communication.

Lao finds himself removed from the historical time of the Chinese nation. In order not to lose ties to the future time in the homeland, the outlines of a normative culture as well as the act of realizing concrete institutions, therefore, serve both performative and pedagogic ends. His contribution to the founding and development of educational institutions, for example his engagement at the Chinese University of Hong Kong among many others, significantly helped to shape a growing pluralistic intellectual landscape in Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time the founding of new institutions in the British colony enabled the younger generation of Chinese-speaking students to advance into the ranks of international professional academics.

Lao subscribes to a view of culture that left space for plurality and a diversity of interpretations.⁵⁹ Since the experience with the communist system in China had made evident an ever-increasing alignment of ideological viewpoints and social influences, the significance of pluralism grew in Lao's writings. Social pluralism is not explicitly mentioned in the early texts, but it is nevertheless present in the demand for a variety of critical opinions to challenge an ideology which attempts to construct all social life according to one organizing principle and to subordinate all areas of life to the dictates of a single source of social power. Lao simultaneously argues for a diversity and plurality of intellectual creative forces and social spheres, which exist in a competitive relationship and which cannot all be subsumed under the same ideology.

Lao's cultural concept does, to a certain extent, represent plurality or decentering, and yet, it also relies on the re-appropriation of traditional values to challenge the official culture on Mainland China. In order to argue a case against these official interpretations, Lao only partly employs a multiple or heterogeneous view, since such a state of cultural relativity would be incapable of posing a true challenge to authoritarianism. Lao's work also suggests that there may be a viable alternative to cultural essentialism and social determination.

But the question of how these outlines of a normative culture could be reinserted into the historical time of Mainland China is only vaguely addressed. The impact of his early writing in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s is, therefore, likely to have

59 Lao Sze-kwang 2000, XVIII.

been far greater than his influence on Mainland China at that time.⁶⁰ One reason for this might be that Lao was not searching for the “real Chineseness” at the expense of negating the experience of everyday life, the local life that surrounded him in Hong Kong.

In trying to transcend the geographical and political boundaries of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, more recent efforts at Confucian revival have increasingly played a role in bridging the ideological and social divide separating mainland and overseas Chinese scholars. In sharp contrast to an interpretation of Confucianism as being conducive to economic development or to the government of the People’s Republic of China, who in 1994 promoted a “Confucian renaissance,” to counter undesirable social tendencies,⁶¹ Lao’s texts on the prospect for Confucian values written during his early years in exile present an attempt to guard against a depredation and loss of specific interpretations of traditional norms and values. Cultural origins and traditions in his view are important, but they themselves must become critical topics. Although Lao rejects being called a New Confucian⁶² his work on the prospects for a Chinese culture or for Confucian values remind us of the complexity and influence of what is widely perceived as conservative thinking in China. Arguing that forms of human thought and experience are historically variable, Lao favored a sense of cultural particularity and an anthropocentric view of values that is related to human concerns.

60 Except for his article “Zhongguoren zhi fanxing” 中国人之反省 (The Chinese examine themselves), which was published in 1988 in the People’s Republic of China, his early works have been published in Hong Kong or later in Taiwan. For a bibliography see: Lau and Li 2003.

61 For further discussion, see: Dirlik 1997, 226–228. On the role of the state, see: Chun 1994, 1–29.

62 Lao Sze-kwang 2001, 109–112. Lao’s standpoint in the debate on, what he calls, a New Confucian Humanism (*xin ruxue renwenzhuyi* 新儒學人文主義) can be traced back to his very early essays written in Hong Kong. However, according to his own statement, he refused to commit himself to the manifesto of 1958 (*A Declaration to the world for Chinese Culture*), which gave way to what is today generally summarized under the name New Confucianism. See: Zhang Junmai 1958, 2–21. In his above-mentioned publication, Lao explains that he had not supported the 1958 Declaration because despite a close relationship with Mou Zongsan, there was some distance between himself and Tang Junyi in their respective evaluations of Confucianism. Furthermore, Lao held the view that to gather momentum, the Declaration should have been signed by a larger group of scholars, including some from Mainland China. See also: Makeham 2003b, 51. Special thanks go to an anonymous reviewer from whom I received useful comments. Lao’s early writings, however, shared with the New Confucians a holistic view on culture inspired by Hegel. Lao Sze-kwang 1965, XIII.

The question of the extent to which one should rely on traditional values became central to twentieth-century intellectual history in China. By moving to Hong Kong where the experience of exile influenced Lao's work, answering this question became a perpetual and modifying process of what is relevant to a modern society of Chinese culture, which can no longer be confined to national boundaries alone and in which traditional values, if not indefensibly irrational, can stand for valid deployments of a normative culture.

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