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Rebuilding the Chinese Soul: Some Considerations for Education

Abstract This paper tackles the issue of education as the process of person-making and attempts to redefine the ideal and unique Chinese person—the Chinese soul—based on a civilizational dialogue and synthesis that would transform modern education and enable education to play a central role in “redeeming modernity” and revitalizing Chinese civilization. The paper briefly analyzes the historical efforts, and failures, to reform the Chinese soul and argues that the 150-year effort to revitalize Chinese culture and transform the Chinese people by way of adopting certain aspects of Western civilization has mostly failed because a sufficiently coherent and meaningful synthesis of the two civilizations was lacking.

Keywords person-making, rebuilding the Chinese soul, civilizational adoption, civilizational synthesis

Introduction

This paper addresses one of the most fundamental, yet difficult, questions of education in China: At this time in history, how can we redefine, renew, and revitalize the Chinese soul—the unique and ideal Chinese person deeply rooted in its cultural soil but enriched by historical and contemporary thought—for and through education? Education has long been conceived of as a process of “person-making” or self-formation. In the West during ancient Greek times, education was expected to produce virtuous persons, and in modern times, since Kant (1906), rational and autonomous human subjects. Contemporary democratic education is particularly keen on educating citizens who are not only autonomous and independent, but also democratically competent and cooperative (Brighouse, 2009). Similarly in China, Confucians have long believed that the main purpose of education is not to instill knowledge or skills in students, but to cultivate an

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ethical and relational self that brings harmony to the community and to the world. Such a function of education became central when, after the First Opium War, China experienced deep humiliation and frustration in its encounters with the West. Education seemed to be the ultimate hope for transforming the Chinese people and revitalizing their civilization. New concepts of the Chinese soul emerged in different historical periods, from “New Youth” and “Young Chinese,” to “Socialist New Persons.” Today, with the apparently increasing deterioration of the moral climate in Chinese society, there is a widespread cry that something is fundamentally wrong with current education, and with the very human beings Chinese education is producing.

This paper deals with the issue of education as a process of person-making and proposes some considerations for redefining the Chinese soul. A brief analysis of 150 years’ of efforts at revitalizing Chinese culture and transforming the Chinese people through adopting certain aspects of Western civilization and an argument that such efforts have mostly failed because of the lack of a sufficiently coherent and meaningful synthesis of the two civilizations are presented. The introduction of the project of modernity in the West has made possible a new conception of the rational and autonomous human subject. Given the subsequent problems and critiques it has encountered, especially after the tragedies of the 20th century, the author situates Habermas’s paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language within its historical and intellectual context. Habermas’s project intends to move away from the ethical pitfalls of the modern subject and bring in ethical, normative, and subjective dimensions to human rationality. Analyzing the difficulties of Habermas’s project and the insights of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, it is suggested that a civilizational synthesis of modern Western, Judaeo-Christian and Confucian and Daoist thought can help create a new understanding of the human subject as open and connected with the world, rational and active in its conduct, and moral and spiritual in its being. Such a notion of the Chinese soul is essential if education is to play a vital role in “redeeming modernity” and revitalizing Chinese civilization. It may be possible to reach this through a process of dialogue.

China’s Historical Encounters with the West and Modern Chinese Education

For China, the past 150 years have been a period of encounters with the West and struggles to renew and revitalize its civilization. The First Opium War of the 1840s forced open the Middle Kingdom and exposed its weakness and

vulnerability to the world. As Bai (2013, p. 524) describes it, this war “took away the ease” with which earlier Ming scholars had encountered the West, and the study of Western knowledge became “an urgent matter relating to the survival of China.” The pressing need to build China into a “wealthy country with strong military power” (p. 525) took priority and led to a particular approach to Western civilization, perceived at the time as superior to Chinese civilization mainly in its practical means and instruments, an approach which is characterized by a wholesale adoption of Western practical means but rejection of the West’s deeper moral and philosophical substance. Such an approach was termed by Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837–1909) as *zhongti xiyong* (中体西用): using Western technology as a means (西用) to strengthen the Confucian Chinese substance (中体; p. 529).

The beginning of the modern Chinese educational system was also shaped under such an approach. As Bai notes, the 1903 draft of the modern school system was based on the principle of *zhongti xiyong*: students were taught to be Confucian scholars equipped with practical knowledge. Wu also notes that “at that time, Western learning was regarded as illusive, fragmented, and intractable and treated by early Chinese educational reformers as only marginal to the Confucian ‘kingly’ way” (Aleni as cited in Wu, 2011, p. 582). The earliest official educational institution influenced by the West, the Tongwen Academy (同文馆), was set up “under the principle of the Ti-Yong dichotomy” (Wu, 2011, p. 582).

China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion further frustrated Chinese reformers and prompted another wave of heightened study of Western scientific and technological knowledge. Yet a deeper and more comprehensive reform was also called for, one that not only adopted Western technological means but also its political systems. Kang Youwei 康有为, Liang Qichao 梁启超, and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 saw both Western science and political systems, which Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) called Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy, as essential parts of the solution to the Chinese problem. After the fall of the Qing dynasty came the Republic of China, which followed a Western model. Wu further notes that the defeat by Japan signaled to the reformers “how successful westernization had been in Japan and thus symbolized the ‘degeneration’ and ‘backwardness’ of Chinese traditional culture” (2011, p. 582). This led to an enthusiastic wave of borrowing from Japanese educational models starting at the beginning of the 20th century. The curriculum and pedagogy gradually became westernized based on Japanese forms and, later,

European models, and the 1300-year-old civil service examination system was discontinued. Yet, as Wu notes, the education minister, Sun Jianai 孙家鼐, still required Chinese students to immerse themselves in “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application” (2011, p. 582), the same approach as that of the earlier reformers.

The year 1919 saw the beginning of the May 4th Movement, in which a radical attitude of opposition to traditional Chinese culture emerged among varied opponents. Radical intellectuals saw it as their role to bring about the end of “backward” and “sick” Chinese culture and create something new in its place. Lu Xun 鲁迅, Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 and others harshly criticized Confucianism and Daoism and proposed a total denunciation of Chinese tradition. In Qian Xuantong’s words, “in order for China to not perish, for Chinese to become the 20th century’s civilized race, the fundamental solution is to completely wipe out Confucianism and Daoism, along with the language that conveyed them” (Pan, 2013).¹ Confucian stores/shrines were smashed and Confucian and Daoist thought was condemned as the major obstacle to modernity (Hayhoe, 2006). In denouncing the old and welcoming the new, followers of Dewey (Hu Shi 胡适), Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 and the Soviet Union (Chen Duxiu), as well as the German and French-educated Cai Yuanpei, introduced Pragmatism, European thought, and Marxism/ Communism to China and Chinese education. Books on education, curriculum, and pedagogy, mainly from the US, were translated and appropriated (Zhang & Zhong, 2003). Thomas Curran commented that at the time, “rather than relying on traditional Chinese methods while introducing new content, the reformers borrowed Western instructional techniques more or less uncritically” (2013, p. 4).

While some intellectuals, including Xiong Shili 熊十力, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, and Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang 张君勱), steadfastly upheld traditional cultural values, seeing Confucianism as moral and spiritual and Western individualism, materialism, and utilitarianism as shells without substance and morals, their approach was similar to Zhang Zhidong’s *zhongti xiyong*, separating Western progress and technology from the substance of Chinese tradition. Such a dichotomy triggered the well-known debate of the 1920s within Chinese intellectual circles on “scientism vs. metaphysics” (Chang, 1976), in which the Neo-Confucian Carsun Chang defended Confucianism as providing “a higher

¹ In a letter to Chen Duxiu, March 14, 1918: “我再大胆宣言道：欲使中国不亡，欲使中国民族为二十世纪文明之民族，必以废孔学，灭道教为根本之解决，而废记载孔门学说及道教妖言之汉文，尤为根本解决之根本解决。”

court of human appeal...in the spiritual realm” while “Ting Wen-Chiang 丁文江, the principal spokesman of scientism, made extravagant claims for the authority of modern science” (Liu, 1997, p. 4).

After 1949, a long term effort at both rooting out traditional Chinese culture and beliefs and denouncing the evils of the Western capitalist influence was initiated by the central government in the Mainland of China. For a long time, the only thing left from the destruction was the socialist ideology, presumably inherited from Marx, Engels, and the Soviets. Since the reform era began in the 1980s, Western science and technology have again been ardently embraced. The strategies of using science to save China and science for China’s prosperity were once again perceived as the key to China’s nation-building and the renewal of its glory (Bai, 2013). According to Wu (2011), Deng’s pragmatism, “Whatever color a cat is, so long as it can catch a mouse, it is a good cat,” and the opening of the national entrance examination system in 1977 “promoted and consolidated” an instrumental and “calculative mode of thinking” in Chinese education that has made a great impact on the “shaping of students’ souls” (p. 583). In recent years a government-initiated movement to revitalize Confucianism has also been launched, despite the criticism that such a movement is superficial and misleading. The current market economy also exhibits some elements of Western capitalism.

The history of China’s modern encounters with the West, it seems, can be characterized as resulting mostly in an instrumental approach, seeing the West as providing only useful means and forms, and adopting an over-simplistic view of China’s cultural heritage, seeing it as either the true substance or “old” and “sick,” needing to be either maintained or replaced. A successful grafting of Western civilization into Chinese civilization has proved to be difficult. Insufficient attention has been paid to the deep philosophical underpinnings of the Western “means,” including its political forms, and a thorough analysis of the Chinese tradition in the face of the modern challenges has been lacking. What caught the reformers’ attention were the external manifestations of Western civilization, but not its internal logic and course of development. They overlooked the fact that modern Western achievements in science, economics, and political systems are only the logical results of a deeper and broader development in the philosophical understanding of human beings and their relationship with the world. Western science and technology, for example, long perceived and adopted by Chinese reformers merely as skills and means, became possible only because a deeper and more fundamental revolution in the way the

human person was conceptualized had taken place during the Enlightenment. Without Descartes' locating the origin and certitude of knowledge in human consciousness, without Kant's proposal that rational and autonomous human beings ought to impose order on the natural and moral worlds, and without Locke's and Hobbes' idea that free and rational men are capable of taking care of their own lives and that governments can be legitimately established only through voluntary contract with the governed, modern science and democracy in their current shapes would have been hard to achieve. The early modern thinkers strived to establish a new social order, but only through revolutionizing Western understanding of the human person and holding up human agency and value at an unprecedentedly high level. Modern Western philosophy, called the philosophy of consciousness or the philosophy of the subject, originates from and is built upon the idea that humans distinguish themselves from other species by their consciousness, rationality, and thus freedom. Science, technology, and democracy are grounded in such a philosophy. While the project of modernity has, unfortunately, become deeply tangled during the course of its development, or as Habermas pointed out, has been at variance with itself and has resulted in tragedies that have damaged humanity, the problems need to be understood and analyzed in light of their origins and development.

The same applies to economic systems. It was believed that capitalism was market controlled and profit driven, and thus economic reform inspired by capitalism meant relaxing government control and allowing people to pursue profit. What is little understood is that the emergence of Western capitalism is situated in a broad social, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical movement that fundamentally transformed the way the individual, his work, and his responsibility to himself and to God is conceived (Weber, 1905/2012). This movement provides a normative context where moral principles and justifications of economic conduct can be established. Capitalism is about much more than just "all for money" or "all for profit." That is why modern capitalist societies are no less normative than traditional societies. Without such groundwork, or alternative groundwork, the current Chinese "capitalist" economy may only be described as a form of "primitive capitalism." Western capitalism's social and philosophical underpinnings are ignored and its cultural influences are frantically guarded against.

Thus we have not fully appreciated what appear to be the advantages and strengths of Western civilization. Bits and pieces are introduced and adopted, but the entire foundation is not fully integrated. Even Hu Shi's introduction of Dewey's pragmatism and the central government's adoption of Marx's

communism demonstrate the lack of a full appreciation of their origins and underpinnings. Hu Shi's pragmatism over-emphasizes the empirical and functionalist aspects of Dewey's philosophy and downplays the more humanist and spiritual aspects (see Zhang, 2013) and the broader context within which pragmatism was born. People tend also to be not aware of how Marx's communism is located in the context of the history of the philosophy of consciousness and how Marxism is a development as well as a critique of and response to this philosophy. To truly benefit from or to be able to coherently adopt Marxism, or democracy, or science or technology, for that matter, knowing only what Marxism or democracy is and how to do it is not enough; there is a need to understand where they come from, how they have come to be, where they are likely to go, and what are their strengths and pitfalls. There is a need to understand deeply both where they are and where we are so as to examine, compare, and judge whether, or in what ways, something from them can be introduced or implanted into Chinese soil and with what consequences: there needs to be a true, meaningful synthesis.

But such a synthesis is largely absent. In this long history of West and East encounters and China's efforts at revitalizing its civilization, there is a lack of careful investigation and analysis of what should be learned and adopted, and what should be denounced and avoided. The author argues that such a lack is caused partly by the nature of the encounters. The "collective memory of China's humiliation" (Bai, 2013, p. 530) influenced the modern Chinese mentality toward learning from the West, a mentality guided mostly by the urgent practical purpose of "saving China" using Western means. In China there is a limited understanding of what the "West" meant when China tried to be "Westernized." It was appreciated little, for example, what an integral role Christianity, particularly the development of Protestantism, played in the transformation of modern Western thought, not only in the areas of culture and spirituality, but also in the development of modern science and political systems.

To be sure, attempts have been made at a more coherent synthesis in learning from the West. For example, Liang Qichao attempted a new synthesis that "would be neither Chinese nor Western but in fact both Chinese and Western" (Bai, 2013, p. 530), but was stopped short by his disillusionment with Western civilization after observing early conditions in "the nineteenth-century scientific revolution and industrialization" (Bai, 2013, p. 532). Liang concluded that these conditions represented "the law of the jungle" (Bai, 2013, p. 530), which for Liang became the essence of Western civilization. The reasons for the conditions he found so unappealing were not fully understood and analyzed and therefore

could not be avoided in a new synthesis. Another reformer, Carsun Chang, who visited Europe with Liang Qichao and met with Henri Bergson (Furth, 1970), one of the pioneers in the West attempting to reverse the direction of the philosophy of consciousness, was fully aware of the “world-wide response to crass rationalism, unlimited technological salvation and [the] serious neglect of [the] problems of human conditions” (Liu, 1997, p. 6). Chang meant his defense of Confucianism to address the problems of consciousness/being, soul/body that are at the core of Western philosophical tradition (Liu, 1997). But his overall denunciation of Western scientific culture and his broad defense of Confucianism indicate the continuing lack of deep civilizational synthesis.

As a consequence, the 150 years of East-West encounters have mostly introduced only the forms and manifestations of Western civilization, which are incapable of taking root and strengthening and transforming the overall Chinese approach to human persons and their relationships with the world. The Chinese soul remains distinctively and unmistakably Chinese in the way it perceives and approaches the world, whether rejecting or embracing Chinese tradition. The only difference may be whether Chinese characteristics are explicitly articulated and ardently defended, or implicitly demonstrated. In fact, Curran (2013), citing Richard E. Nisbett’s work on language and ways of thinking, argues that the way Chinese perceive and approach the world remains “significantly different” from the West (p. 2), despite the fact that Chinese language and discourse have been largely Westernized and transformed. In Chinese education, Ruth Hayhoe (2013) also argues, the “Soviet curricular patterns of the 1950s reinforced state Confucian... patterns while the Cultural Revolution curriculum reflected... Daoist... influence” (pp. 2–3), despite the fact that in these two historical periods Confucianism and Daoism were explicitly and officially denounced. Also no one can deny the quintessentially Chinese characteristics of Chinese communism, which is far from a pure importation of the German or Soviet invention.

Thus the incoherent mixing of Western and Eastern civilizations made the transformation of the Chinese soul difficult, as demonstrated in Liu’s (1997) study on the refiguration of the subject in Chinese modernity. Liu observes,

China’s entry into the modern times is such that the self to be conceived as a subject out of its traditional past has to encounter such rites of passage as dislocation, rediscovery and refiguration of the self. ... As Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, Qu Qiubai, Ye Shaojun, Lu Yin and other writers have shown through their fiction narratives, the formative process is beset with existential anxiety,

intellectual and cultural mediation. (p. i)

The refiguration often resulted in a reinforcement of the “principally Confucian self” even “on the brink of total despair or collapse” (Liu, 1997, p. 1). Modern Chinese intellectuals “repeatedly sought to recover and refigure its identity...[which] usually ended up redefining their newly assumed roles in terms of the centralizing identity of *shi* [士]” (Liu, 1997, p. 1, 3). According to Liu, their failure to embrace new elements in their self prevented the development of “any real social metamorphosis and an autonomous identity of their own” (Liu, 1997, p. 3).

The renewal, transformation, and revitalization of the Chinese soul based on a genuine and coherent civilizational synthesis thus failed to occur. For education, it means that modernization and transformation takes place only procedurally and formally, without a careful design of change in deep meaning. Education as a process of person-making fails to transform. It also means that modern Chinese education is not able to help bring into being new Chinese citizens who are deeply rooted in their cultural soil but enriched by Western, historical, and contemporary thought and sources.

A Synthesis of the West and the East: Redefining the Chinese Soul for Education

A redefinition and renewal of the Chinese soul has to emerge from a meaningful civilizational synthesis because, on the one hand, it has to be rooted deeply in the cultural soil to benefit from the culture’s rich resources and to engage people situated in the cultural environment. On the other hand, without learning from the positive experiences of other civilizations and the lessons from their struggles, there is a risk of recycling problems, being trapped in one’s own limitations, and repeating others’ failures. Western and Chinese cultural approaches to the human person have had their own historical struggles and have both benefited and damaged humanity in different ways. A civilizational dialogue and synthesis provides an opportunity to learn from each other. At a time when Western modernity is under heavy attack, a civilizational dialogue and synthesis may help in “redeeming modernity” (Hayhoe, 2000) and revitalizing Chinese civilization. While Chinese learning from the West may have been superficial, as argued above, Western learning from the Chinese has been even more limited. A meaningful and sufficient civilizational synthesis is perhaps necessary for both civilizations.

As mentioned above, the modern era in the West is marked by a new understanding/construction of the nature of human beings and their capacities. A series of modern thinkers set the groundwork for the ultimate determination of the existence of the world and the fate of humans by the rational thinking of the human subject. The project of modernity, to a certain degree, is a radical departure from the past in modern history in that human beings, instead of God, become the center of the universe. Such a construction of the human subject, which rejects tradition, superstition, and external forces and authorities, is posited to bring freedom and empowerment to humanity. Along with the notion of the modern subject come associated notions of human liberty, autonomy, and agency.

This notion of the subject and the pursuit of freedom and autonomy, as well as the practice of human science, has also been pivotal in the development of modern education. As Gert Biesta (2010) points out, “with Kant the rationale for education became founded on the idea ‘of a certain kind of subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing’” (p. 3). Educational philosophers have come to assume that “education is about producing rationally autonomous individuals” and is a process of “liberation” that is distinguished from indoctrination or domestication (Wain, 1996, p. 351).

What enabled the new construction of the human person in modern philosophy is the placing of human essence in human consciousness. Among all human existential experiences and capacities, modern philosophy is particularly keen on the active capacity and freedom of our consciousness, located by Descartes in the *ego cogito*, which constantly gathers, identifies, comprehends, and organizes the fleeting and chaotic material “immediacies” (Hegel, 1977, p. 59). While our bodily existence is fettered by material boundaries, our consciousness knows no bounds and limitations. Locke (1975) suggests that it is our consciousness that gives us a sense of integral and continuous self-identity. Hegel (1977) also notes that the world never provides any certainty and connection of all things; it is our consciousness that mediates through the infinite instances and immediacies and generates coherent knowledge out of them. The ability of our consciousness to initiate, enact, and see through purposeful activities in the world, our capacity for reason and freedom, thus becomes the essence of the human species. In a sense, the human self becomes God (Tucker, 1961) and the world becomes the self’s project. That is why modern philosophy is often called the philosophy of consciousness or the philosophy of the subject.

While the central focus on ego and consciousness has brought freedom and agency to our being, the role of consciousness in organizing and projecting the

world is also full of ambiguities and problems. For one thing, it is always arbitrary and aggressive, disregarding material limitations and crushing all obstacles, either from the external world or from other consciousnesses. Thus it is always a question how feasible such freedom can be and how ethical and spiritual such freedom is. In fact, the post-structural and postmodern attacks have been on both fronts. For example, Foucault (1970, 1977) argues that the very ideas about the human subject are produced by discourses and the subject is dominated by a knowledge-power apparatus. Freedom is an illusion. The soul is “the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body” (Foucault, 1977, p. 29).

The problems with the modern subject can be explained from two aspects: the problem with itself: the problem of freedom and spirituality; and the problem with the other: the problem of ethics. An ego and consciousness constantly and freely comprehending and organizing the world is inevitably enclosed in its own world and trapped in its own power. According to Levinas (1987), Descartes’ “I think,” which is meant to indicate that the soul is the origin of ideas, also indicates the soul’s “monologue,” its “conversing with itself” (p. 49), thus its self-enclosure and self-circulation. The problem with such self-enclosure is that the human subject is shut off and disconnected from the world beyond, and loses its possibility of transcendence and spirituality, understood as the possibility of going beyond its own nature and being affected by the outside. On the other hand, the self’s conscious knowing of the other suppresses and possesses the other, leading to the comprehension, absorption, and assimilation of the other. For the self-dominating subject, the other is the alien, the obstacle, the one that threatens the autonomy of the self in its own territory. Hence Harold H. Oliver (1992) comments that “the fundamental problem of Western philosophy has been the status of the ‘not-I,’ of the ‘other’ ” (p. 38). An ego- and consciousness-centered subject makes ethical relationships between human beings difficult to achieve. This difficulty is at the root of many of the tragedies of the 20th century, in which others who are different—savages, the colored, the lower class, women, etc.—are damaged. Since the time of Hegel, strenuous efforts have been made in Western philosophy to conceptualize and re- conceptualize the other and to ease the tension between the self and the other. With an enclosed, egoist self, however, it has been difficult.

At any rate, the modern subject, with all the benefits it has brought to humanity, has become a deadened (lacking spontaneity and spirituality), self-centered (lacking an ethical dimension), soul that hurts both the self and the other. Since the time of Heidegger, generations of philosophers have worked on

these problems and different approaches have been proposed. Among them, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is the most recent and currently most influential. He proposes a paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language, in which human beings are no longer conceived of as primarily isolated conscious, thinking beings but as essentially speaking and acting agents intersubjectively locked in their social and symbolic actions.

As Habermas (1992) sees it, the problem with the consciousness-centered subject is that the consciousness has to approach the self and others through observing, comprehension, and thus objectification. In such objectification, the subject and the other become objects, things, and lose their freedom, originality, and spontaneity. But if we are conceived as primarily language-use beings, in communicative actions, with the help of the linguistic structure, the personal pronouns and the perspectives of a speaker and listener, both the self and the other's subjectivity and individuality can be preserved and recognized, and equality and ethics can be achieved. The communicative experience indicates an "intersubjectivity that is established between ego and alter ego in communicative action" (Habermas, 1984, p. 111). Citing H. Skjervheim, Habermas emphasizes that in such communication, the other "is a fellow-subject who concerns me as one on an equal footing with myself, in that we are both concerned with our common world" (1984, p. 113). Our relationship to ourselves also changes and now we relate to ourselves "as a participant in an interaction from the perspective of alter" (Habermas, 1992, p. 274). This relationship allows us to escape "the kind of objectification inevitable from the reflexively applied perspective of the observer" (Habermas, 1992, p. 274).

Locating human agency in communicative actions also enables Habermas to expand the concept of rationality to include an ethical and a subjective dimension and to uphold reason's central role in human actions. A more comprehensive concept of communicative rationality recognizes that human actions are carried out in the context of a shared lifeworld of all participants. In order to express and understand the purpose and validity of their meanings and actions, speakers and hearers have to refer to the same objective world, as the totality of an interpreted lifeworld. "As soon as we conceive of knowledge as communicatively mediated," rationality can also be assessed by raising and defending validity claims in establishing a common normative definition of a given situation, as well as by how the speaker discloses or conceals his subjective world to other participants" (Habermas, 1992, p. 276). "Communicative reason makes itself felt in the binding force of intersubjective understanding and reciprocal recognition" (p. 279).

Habermas's effort at re-conceptualizing the human subject in a way that preserves the benefit of the modern subject (pursuit of freedom, the central role of human reason and agency) and overcomes its problems with ethics and spirituality has been much appreciated. However, there is also doubt as to whether a linguistic subject will be able to fulfill his purpose. Some still think that "Habermas's alternative...retains a fundamental plank of subjectivist idealism and liberalism" and his theory has the "potential to suppress significant social differences" (Maddock, 1999, p. 44). The problem with Habermas's philosophy of language, this paper argues, lies in the fact that the thread of language is too thin for a subject to cling to. His relying on language-use to break the confines of the philosophy of consciousness and to open up the subject to the world and to others also seems insufficient. If the problem of the modern subject lies in the single-minded focus on ego and consciousness, to solve the problem of the philosophy of consciousness, it seems, we have to go beyond ego and consciousness and locate the origin of human subjectivity in the pre-ego, pre-consciousness connectedness of the self with the world and with others, and this is precisely the lesson we can learn from Daoist and Confucian thought. Levinas, coming from a background in the Jewish religion and philosophy, also emphasizes the necessity of the self's being confronted and led by the beyond before the ego and consciousness take the reins, and the formation of the self in its responsibility to the other, the precise insights of Confucius. It seems that if what is needed in the notion of the modern subject is an integrated sense of openness, a possibility for ethics and spirituality within the subject, a civilizational dialogue and a synthesis of modern Western, Judaeo-Christian thought with Confucian and Daoist thought can be extremely helpful. Such a civilizational dialogue has been suggested by Ruth Hayhoe in her presidential address at the 2000 CIES conference, entitled "Redeeming Modernity." Facing the postmodern challenges, she asks, "Do we have listening ears for the subtleties of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist morality and spirituality, as they intersect with elements of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic beliefs that continue to offer hope for redemption?" (Hayhoe, 2000, p. 425).

On the Chinese side, the Chinese cultural approach to person-making, according to Tu Wei-Ming, has been based on the belief that "each human being has sufficient internal resources for ultimate self-transformation" (1985, p. 8). The notion of *tianren heyi* (天人合一) grants unconditional legitimacy to natural human feelings and sentiments (Zhao, 2010). Rather than singling out ego and consciousness as the origin of human essence, the all-embracing appreciation of human nature and the entrusting of natural human sentiments as a point of

departure for self-cultivation and ground for moral actions characterizes the Chinese cultural approach to person-making. This appreciation of natural human sentiments contrasts sharply with the Western emphasis on the rationality of human beings. As Tu Wei-Ming (1985) comments,

In a comparative perspective, it seems that Neo-Confucian ontology, grounded in the ultimate certitude of human sensitivity, our ability to feel, sense, and experience an ever-enlarging reality as an integral part of our selfhood, is diametrically opposed to Kantian metaphysics in which the objectivity of the moral will, devoid of any emotional content, features prominently. (p. 15)

While it has the advantage of preventing any cultural and political projects from going so far as to estrange and alienate humanity and allows the appreciation of humanity in all its shapes, the deep appreciation of natural human feelings and sentiments and their use as ground and justification for moral actions and social organization also risks subjecting human conduct to unpredictable and sometimes erratic feelings and passions, as many Western thinkers have warned. In addition, it has resulted in the underdevelopment of the Chinese capacity for reason. In the West, the human capacity for reason is viewed as the single most important quality of humanity. Especially in modern times, reason is seen as that which freed human beings from the confines of nature, liberated people from superstitions and irrational fears, and enabled individuals to take control of their own lives. The effect of relying on reason can be felt in every aspect of modern Western life, from advancements in science and technology to the establishment of democratic social political systems. Grounding humanity on rationality also brought about the ideas of human dignity, equality, and freedom. In China, it is still evident that the lack of a sharpened sense of reason underlies many problems in social and personal lives. Though Confucians have worked strenuously to establish harmony among people, irrationality undermines people's interactions and relationships and impedes the development of the society.

On the other hand, in the Chinese cultural approach to selfhood, there is a sense of the openness of the self, either to the human other, the social world, or the larger whole, the universe. The self as an "open system" (Tu Wei-Ming) and the experience of fusing with the larger whole is emphasized by most schools of traditional Chinese thought and is considered the ground for transcendence and spirituality. For example, Zhuangzi's non-being self is a self immersed, lost, or

expanded in the larger whole, the *tian* 天, or *dao* 道. Before the thinking, judging, and evaluating mind, we are led by the encompassing and unfathomable spirit of the universe. Such openness prevents the self from enclosing itself in its own ego and totalizing the world under its autonomous power. Like Levinas, Zhuangzi found the openness, connectedness, and spirituality of the self through grounding human subjectivity on pre-ego and pre-consciousness experiences. Between Levinas and Zhuangzi is a shared, cross-civilizational insight (Zhao, in press).

To locate the origin of the self in the pre-ego, non-being self does not mean we have no use for being, reason, and agency. For the Daoists, nothingness never means absolute void or death. In Laozi's *Dao De Jing*, *yousheng yuwu* 有生于无 (being originates from nothingness/nonbeing). Nothingness is the basis of everything. "That which is called nonbeing is the beginning of things and the completion of affairs" (Yu, 1985, p. 134). Here we see the shared insights of the Daoists with Hegel's "dialectic of being and non-being," which is probably why when Heidegger pursued this line of Hegel's thinking, he eventually encountered the Daoist notion of nonbeing and emptiness and found it inspiring and essentially important. He claimed that "in this [genuine] in-between [of things] dwells the human" (as cited in Zhang, 2009, p. 80). This Hegel-Heidegger insight into being and nonbeing has become increasingly important in post-metaphysical philosophies (Derrida, Levinas, and Deleuze). The strenuous efforts being made to diffuse the self, deconstruct the presence and identity, disrupt its autonomous power, and reconnect it to the field of existential experiences are striking, yet there is little understanding that such an approach to the self is already deeply ingrained in Chinese civilization.

Thus, based on the notion of "the dialect of being and nothingness," the author suggests that it is possible for us to focus on our rational and active conduct in the world, without losing the ethical and spiritual aspects of our subjectivity. A dialogue with Habermas's expanded notion of rationality and his embrace of the centrality of rationality can help us in education to cultivate this human capacity to govern our conduct in the world.

Another layer of Chinese openness is characterized as openness to other human beings, underscored by Habermas in his search for intersubjectivity to ensure ethical relationships among humans, and expressed by Confucianism as its central project. For Confucius, as for Levinas, the formation of the human subject is not a lone and isolated endeavor but a joined accomplishment. The encounter of the self with the other, for Confucians, "necessarily leads to one's sense of responsibility and generosity or hospitality towards others in oneself"

(Cheng, 2008, p. 545). Both Levinas and Confucius see ethics as the first philosophy and consider the subject ultimately in ethical terms. They both take the phenomenological basis for love, kindness, and holiness, Mencius's *buren ren zhixin* 不忍人之心, "the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others" (Wu, 2008, p. 579), as the ground of our subjectivity.

However, based on the Chinese appreciation of natural feelings and sentiments, the philosophical project of Confucius to bind people together in family relationships is not without problems. As described elsewhere (Zhao, 2009), for Confucius, the most natural state of the human person was one of relationship with parents, and the relationship between son and father signaled the difference between humans and animals. But such an origin of human relatedness can become an obstacle to the establishment of a civil society that includes all members and is particularly problematic in the contemporary, globalized world. Within the Chinese context, it has been difficult to locate the source of human relatedness beyond family and social networks. Those beyond the personal circle of family and friends, unknown and unrelated to one's personal life, remain nobodies, and there are no cultural resources to grant them recognition and respect. Such an approach also prevents the emergence of the idea of equality among all members of society. Even within personal/family circles, the responsibility of people to each other is identified as filial piety, submission of self to authority, or as patronage, protection, making decisions for others, rather than respecting others' rational ability and freedom to make their own decisions.

Here a dialogue with and learning from Levinas may address the problem of Confucianism. For Levinas, the other does not have to have the status of a family member; rather, it represents a radical alterity that cannot be comprehended, absorbed, or assimilated by the knowing subject. I suggest that the very responsibility of the self to the other signifies the beyond-ness, the inexhaustibility of the other's subjectivity, and the ethical nature of our being. Nurturing such relatedness in our being with such an other in education can enable a genuine community or democracy that appreciates and preserves radical differences.

Therefore, a civilizational synthesis can help locate the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the subject and maintain its spontaneous, inexhaustible subjectivity and individuality. Its uniqueness and originality come from its openness and connectedness with the world and others. Encounters with the outside facilitate the emergence of the new and unpredictable subject. As human beings, we are subjects because we are "otherwise than being" (Levinas, 1998, p. 46), never exhausted in essence and in others' knowledge of us, and our openness

and connectedness with the world provide infinite resources for our transformation. On the basis of such ethical and spiritual subjectivity, human beings can enter into intersubjective relationships and create a world that is humane, democratic, and equal. Our attempt to measure and judge the other is tempered by our unconditional responsibility and openness to the unique human other. Whenever humans encounter each other, in communication and in critical discussion, love, kindness, and justice remain primary and critical analyzing, evaluation, and judging remain secondary. Each of us remains a unique other to others, and yet we are inevitably connected and unconditionally responsible to each other. Such responsibility and connectedness are not justified by reason and consciousness. We are responsible to others not because they are our family, nor because we have judged that they are worthy, but because each of them is a human being with a unique subjectivity. Such responsibility ensures that the use of reason will not fall back into the domain of the “imperialist” ego and consciousness where everything is under its gaze and power. Thus the Chinese soul can be rational, unique, and free, but at the same time be open and connected to the world, an autonomous being with a sense of humility and modesty.

Such a notion of subjectivity may indeed help redeem modernity and enable a genuine democracy where the common good and justice can be reached collaboratively. Such a Chinese soul may also help revitalize Chinese civilization with its spiritual resources appreciated and invigorated and its limitations and pitfalls avoided. Such a notion of subjectivity entails a complete transformation of modern education, both within and without China, and makes education as a process of person-making essentially meaningful. As Biesta (2012) argues, since the modern philosophy of the subject “specifies a norm of what it means to be human *before* the actual manifestation of ‘instances’ of humanity” (p. 587), modern education in the West has been reduced to a process of socialization and normalization. The ideal or essence of humanity, even though conceived of in modern times as freedom and autonomy, becomes the norm that students have to be made into, and they are deprived of the opportunity to be their own unique persons. With the notion of unique and inexhaustible subjectivity, education will become a genuine process of subjectification, as Biesta (2010) describes it, a process in which students are encouraged and nurtured into their own singular beings with morality and spirituality. The modern paradox of “spontaneity and reproductivity” (Schleiermacher as cited in Biesta, 1998, p. 3), which has deeply affected education, may be avoided and the “unfinished work of freedom” may be finally realized.

In this time, when instrumentalism dominates in Chinese society and education, in the sense that students are used as instruments for social and political purposes and also that students approach education instrumentally, and when Chinese education is failing as the process of person-making, such a notion of the Chinese soul calls for a total transformation and restructuring of education.

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