Liu Hsieh's *Shen-Ssu*: Its Positive and Negative Capability

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Modern western criticism owes much to the nineteenth-century Romantic poet-critics for a full realization that the source of creativity has to be traced beyond our rational faculty. Wordsworth and Coleridge elevated the neoclassical use of the term "imagination" to denote the creative power. Since then the term is usually defined as a vital power and positive function of the mind. It involves the unconscious and the conscious, although no clear-cut line can be drawn between the two (Gordon xiv; Hirsch 51). Coleridge conceives of it as an "esemplastic" or "shaping" power and therefore stresses its idealizing and unifying function.

Our chief concern here is its negative function – the way how the creative consciousness functions to negate or surpass the existing order to create a new one. And yet, the negation is a negation with a purpose and a negation based on what it negates. In Coleridge's words again, (secondary) imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (*BL* ch. 13, II, 12). In the terminology of Sartrean or Heideggerian phenomenology, "negating" or "surpassing" the reality is "what makes the act of imagination possible," but "the surpassing and the nullifying of the existent are swallowed up in the existent, the surpassing and the free are there but are not revealed, the person is crushed in the world, run through by the real, he is closest to the thing" (Sartre 66-67 *et passim*). For a mutual illumination of this philosophy of the imagination, we may focus on the similar views of some ancient Chinese critics, notably Liu Hsieh 劉勰 (c. 464-522), the author of *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍, or *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, and trace their thinkings to the ancient philosophers. Their discourse on this topic are frequently unique and are related closely to the way classical Chinese writers represent reality.

The Positive Capability

To begin with, ancient philosophers and critics such as Ts'ao P'ei 曹丕 and Lu Chi 陸機 envisioned a universe permeated by a vitality that manifests itself in the ever-moving and changing reality. Although *wu* are things or objects, they are not mere fixties for the imaginative faculty to play with. Chuang-tzu speaks of *wu-hua* 物化 , meaning to identify the self with external objects in one's consciousness – a phrase that strongly suggests Keats taking part in the existence of a sparrow picking about the gravel outside the window (Chuang-tzu, ch. 11, Watson 49; for Keats, see Bush, ed. 259). This is what Keats meant by the non-identity of the poet. In the twenty-sixth chapter of his *Literary Mind*, therefore, Liu Hsieh uses the phrase *shen yü wu yu* 神與物遊 , the creative spirit "roams" with the objects, to point to the way how imagination operates. Liu Hsieh's term *shen-ssu* 神思 can be variously translated as spiritual (or mysterious, divine) thinking (or thought), or mysterious working of the mind. It is essentially the counterpart of "imagination" in classical Chinese literary theory. The imagination, Chinese or western, transcends one's self and reality as a whole to become divinely and mysteriously free.

But, as in the phenomenological account of consciousness and imagination, Liu Hsieh never considers the freedom of the creative spirit as being arbitrary. He affirms that the operation of the creative spirit is governed by the author's conscious will (*chih* 志) and vitality (*ch'i* 氣), and by his ability to exploit language resources. One of the fifty chapters is devoted exclusively to the subject of nourishing creative vitality (ch. 42) and almost the entire latter half of the book is the discussion of various literary devices.

Liu Hsieh's binary thinking is evident in his syncretic apprehension of the two contrary and yet complementary aspects of the creative process – the intuitive-sensuous and the conscious-intellectual. If talent (*t'ien-tzu*) is "god-given" or prenatal and knowledge is a postnatal acquisition, Liu maintains that literary creativity depends on acquired knowledge as well as on inborn talent. Talent is the "real ability," the "leader" in the actual process of writing. Learning, on the other hand, complements talent, and is therefore quite indispensable to literary achievement. He explains the relation of the two as follows:

> Although literary composition requires hard study, real ability to compose comes out of one's natural talent. Talent issues from

> within, and study is achieved by external effort. Sometimes one is erudite and yet lacking in talent, and sometimes one is talented and yet a pauper in learning. Poverty in learning makes a writer hesitant in alluding to facts to prove his ideas; while a lack of talent results in a laborious effort to coin phrases to express adequately the feelings. This illustrates the distinction between what proceeds from within and what is achieved by external effort.
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> Thus, in literary writing, the mind operates in harmony with the writing brush, with talent playing the part of leader, and learning the role of its assistant. When leader and assistant work in perfect harmony, vivid literary patterns will emerge; but if either talent or learning is one-sided or narrow, the result, although it may have artistry, will seldom be a work of high quality. (S 395-97; W 38)

Obviously, the acquisition of knowledge is a necessary preparation for writing, and talent is the agent that leads in the creative activity. Pieces of acquired knowledge are not deployed mechanically to make literary art. It depends on the writer's ability to select and insert elements and arrange them into an organic pattern (W 43). This ability to transform knowledge into artistic elements is not simply natural endowment. It comes from constant practice and eventually influences the talent within. His recognition of the interaction between the two forms the basis for his emphasis on the importance of learning. He says:

> Accumulate learning to store up treasures, draw from reason to enrich your talent, investigate experience to exhaust enlightenment, tame your feelings to put words in order. Then, let the "cook of mystical understanding" seek the rules of music so as to fix the ink on paper, and let the "wheelwright of unique enlightenment" espy mental images so as to wield his axe. This is the first skill to be mastered in controlling writing, and the main principle in planning a piece. (J. Liu, *Theories* 124; W 26)

This polarity of external learning and internal talent is closely related to Liu's concept of tradition and innovation. Talent manifests itself in innovation, while learning consists mainly in absorbing tradition (W 38). Absorption of tradition is a prerequisite of innovation, and innovation is the only way to make tradition continue. In his essay "Tradition and Individual

Talent," Eliot conceives of tradition as a continually moving flow of cultural body (Adams 784-85). The same concept is found in Liu's binary thinking about the interaction of learning and talent. Learning (including experience and verbal skill) and exercise of intellect contribute to enrich one's talent and sharpen one's intuition. Whatever one acquires through learning is to be digested, internalized, and blended with natural endowment.

It is his awareness of the role of verbal technique and of the limit of its function that enables him to have a firmer grasp of the nature of the creative process than Lu Chi and Ts'ao P'ei. In *Rhymeprose on Literature* (*Wen-fu*), Lu Chi reveals his agnosticism on the creative process; with him inspiration comes and goes without anybody's being able to control it (Fang 530-31, 542, 544, 555). Ts'ao P'ei, an eminent poet-critic before Lu, even went so far as to deny craft altogether. In his "Essay on Literature" (*Tien-lun lu-wen*), he seems to assert that geniuses alone are the producers of literature, and no amount of learning or training enters the picture. To him, "Even what is in a father or elder brother cannot be passed on to a son or younger brother" (Miao 1026).

In "Spiritual Thinking" chapter, Liu Hsieh has a passage which suggests the same agnostic attitude. Yet, although he recognizes in the art of literature a mysterious realm which is beyond the reach of art, Liu Hsieh never renounces the methodology of writing. On the contrary, the subtlety of man's spiritual thinking and the fact that the language may fail him convince Liu Hsieh all the more strongly the need for acquiring knowledge and cultivating technique.

Accomplished writers as they were, Ts'ao P'ei and Lu Chi's pronouncements cannot be lightly dismissed: they carry the weight of experience. But if we ascribe literary creation only or mostly to inspiration, intuition, or genius, art will then become an occasional and sporadic product of talent and inspiration that cannot be passed on to later generations. Such a theory will then encourage the poets to "indulge in mystification and obscurantism" that has nothing to do with a craft to be consciously cultivated (J. Liu, *ACP* 94).

It may be said that Liu Hsieh emphasizes the intellectual aspect of creative activity more than Lu Chi did because he deals with literature in a much more broader sense. It should also be noted that while Lu Chi dealt with the actual process of creative activity, Liu's remarks cover also the preparation before the actual operation of the creative mind. Yet Liu Hsieh's binary outlook is deep-seated. He does not believe that the literary mind

depends entirely on talent or intuition for successful functioning. It has to be fed continually by conscious intellectual labor. Clearly Liu Hsieh conceives of *shen-ssu* as a cooperation of intuition and intellect, or of the unconscious and the conscious (cf. J. Liu, *Theories* 33, 123). The literary mind is capable of carving dragons, the Chinese symbol of vitality and magnificent beauty, because of its twofold capability. It encompasses Maritain's concept of preconsciousness as the creative intuition (Maritain 91; cf. Yao 29-40) and a conscious drive toward an artistic purpose, bringing to bear all the experience or tradition with the mind's reach.

Liu Hsieh's distrust of the so-called "creative frenzy" is in fact a typical classical attitude which is often contrasted to the romantic emphasis on the spontaneous expression of powerful feelings. He believes that the expressive act always has to be purified, or that the operation of imagination has to be bridled by judgment, discrimination, and reason. In *The Literary Mind* Liu Hsieh expresses this concept in many places with his favorite image of reigning a horse. In "Discussion on the Art of Writing," for instance, he says:

> The legs of a thoroughbred may be strong, but it will not be able to cover one thousand *li* if the cords are too long. The length of the cords is only one factor among ten thousand, and yet it is enough to cause failure. How much more surely will this principle operate in the case of the literary composition, where also many factors must work in perfect harmony; for here the slightest weakness in any one of them will most certainly cause the collapse of the whole. (S 449; W 44)

This belief in the necessity of imposing restraint on the creative energy is also shown in his repeated emphasis on *t'i-yao* 體要, which literally means "the gists of the form." The term is contained in Liu's favorite quote from the *Book of History*: "In the choice of language one should emphasize the essential and should not indulge in the extraordinary" (W 2). Liu Hsieh also quotes from Yang Hsiung on the idea about the necessity of restraint. "The *fu* poetry of the Ancient Poets," Yang says, "is beautiful and yet well balanced, and their language is terse and compact; while the poetry of the *tz'u* writers is beautiful but excessive, and their lines are good examples of verbose diction" (W 46).

Restraint may be required as the decorum of the genre, as when Horace says about the propriety of the tragedy: "Tragedy is above a spouting frivolous lines, like a modest matron told to dance on festive days: the

[tragedy] will have little to do, as a respectable woman, with the boisterous satyrs" (Kaplan 97; cf. Adams 71-72). Or restraint may be thought necessary for literary creation in general, as Nietzsche's assertion that the Greek drama was based on a harmony between the Dionysian and Apollonian modes.

This insistence on the intellectual or rational element in literary creation is also found among Romantic writers. Coleridge, for instance, thinks that the creative mind must reconcile "spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose," and coordinate "freedom and law" (cf. Abrams 121-23; *BL* II, 258). In other words, great poetry is not simply the product of "spontaneous feeling"; it must be governed by the "impulse for order," or by "purpose and judgment" (Abrams 122). Thus, what I call "the positive capability" is a convenient play on words to lump together the intellectual and purpose part of the creative mind. The other part is the "negative capability" – a phrase made prominent by John Keats whose letters are frequently found in anthologies of critical writings.

The Negative Capability

The creative mind has to be released and exalted from its usual self to a higher state in which it can embrace the not-self as well as the self, the far as well as the near in time and space. This state constitutes the essential quality of the literary mind. Liu Hsieh touches upon this topic but briefly in his "Spiritual Thinking" chapter presumably because he wants to deemphasize the intuitive part of the literary mind. He does state clearly, however, that the highroad that leads to this state is *hsü-ching* 虛靜, or emptiness and tranquillity, of the mind. We will explore the implication of this concept in the Chinese history of ideas and bring it into comparison with similar concepts in Romantic poetics, especially that of Coleridge.

Liu Hsieh tells us that it is important for the creative mind to be in *hsü-ching*, to be empty and still. At the beginning of this paper, I have referred to the modern phenomenologists' similar concept that the creative consciousness has to retreat from or negate the reality for a transcendent freedom. In its immediate context, the condition of *hsü-ching* merely implies a cleansing of the mind. The passage reads: "For this reason, vacancy and tranquillity are important in the development of literary thinking: the achievement of this state of vacancy and tranquillity entails the cleansing of the five viscera and the purification of the spirit" (S 299; W 26). Yet *hsü-ching* is the state in which aesthetic contemplation takes place; it is what

makes great art possible. Looking before and after the passage in which the term *hsü-ching* appears, we find:

> Quietly absorbed in contemplation, his thinking reaches back one thousand years; and with only the slightest movement of his countenance, his vision penetrates ten thousand *li*; he creates the music of pearls and jade between his poetic lines, and he witnesses the rolling of wind and clouds right before his brows and lashes. . . .
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> Though the mystic subtlety of the imagination, the spirit and the things in the outside world are one in their excursion. . . . When *shen-ssu* [or spiritual thought] is in operation, all possible vistas open up before it. Rules and principles become mere formalities and there is not least trace of carving or engraving. (S 302-03; W 26)

That all this has to do with the state of *hsü-ching* will become clear when we trace the concept to its sources in earlier philosophic writings. Judging from the similarity of expression, Liu's direct source may be Taoist thinking of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, but it is nearly as possible that he was first exposed to the cognate ideas in Confucius and Hsün-tzu. We may quote from Lao-tzu and Confucius to see that the paradoxical nature of the topic won the hearts of both schools of Chinese thinkers.

On being asked about the "Perfect Way," Lao-tzu replies: "You must fast and practice austerities, cleanse and purge your mind, wash and purify your inner spirit, destroy and do away with your knowledge" (XXII; Watson 238). On the other hand, in speaking to Yen Hui, Confucius says:

> Make your will one! Don't listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don't listen with your mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (IV; Watson 57-58)

This idea of turning inward and away from external reality had a profound and lasting influence not only on classical Chinese culture, but a vast area of the Oriental way of thinking. Among Liu Hsieh's immediate predecessors, we can cite Lu Chi, who discusses the first state of the creative process as withholding one's sight and turning one's hearing inward (Fang 532; cf.

Chang Heng 14).

In various sources in which *hsü-ching* or similar concepts appear, cleansing remains the basic content. The mind of an ordinary mortal is clogged with worldly concerns and blunted by preconceptions. To ensure that the creative mind functions on a higher order it has to be purged first. The mind is to be emptied of all irrelevancies, which presumably include what Wordsworth calls the "meddling intellect" ("The Tables Turned"), as well as sundry sensations that do not contribute to the creative act. It involves getting rid of one's petty ego, so that the mind is elevated to the cosmic level, ready to interact with external objects and to synthesize aesthetic experiences into a new unity.

Granted that *hsü-ching* is first of all a cleansing of the mind, it does not mean mere nothingness or utter silence, as the words *hsü* and *ching* might be taken to mean. On the contrary, it is to be conceived as a means for achieving a more active intuitive cognition, or what may be called "cosmic intuition," for it is only through this "mystic vision" (*Lao-tzu* X; cf. J. Liu, *Theories* 30-31) that the Tao or ultimate reality can be apprehended. The mind is emptied of all forms of prejudices and freed from all worldly involvements, so that the self is elevated from its ordinary confinement to be at one with the cosmic spirit (*ch'i*). It is, as it were, an expansion of the self from its microcosm into a macrocosm in which the mind, liberated from its former bondage of utility and rational knowledge, is free to roam with a keen insight.

The mind in *hsü-ching* is often compared to a mirror in classical Chinese philosophy. *The Great Learning* 大學, a Confucian classic, contains a passage about daily polishing of one's mind's mirror. The following, however, are from the Taoist:

> Can you polish your mysterious mirror
> And leave no blemish? (*Lao-tzu* X; D. D. Lau 66)
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> The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror – going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself. (*Chuang-tzu* VII; Watson 97)
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> The sage's mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things. Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction – these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way and its Virtue. Therefore the emperor, the king, the sage rest in them. Resting, they may be

> empty; empty, they may be full; and fullness is completion. Empty, they may be still; still, they may move; moving, they may acquire. (*Chuang-tzu* XIII, Watson 142; see also XXXIII, Watson 372)

The mirror repels nothing and forms no attachment to anything. Being vacant, it is able to include everything. Paradoxically, therefore, emptiness leads to fulfillment, and tranquillity means action in its refined sense. The mirror, moreover, is a metaphor more of the placidness of the poet's mind than of what it reflects or imitates, as is often the case with Western criticism (Abrams 52). In its "emptiness, stillness, limpidity" it is able to be impartial toward all things, and to include myriad things in the crucible of the creative mind, fusing and unifying the subjective with the objective.

The attainment of *hsü-ching* is also described as a return to man's fundamental nature, which is conceived as pure, serene, and perfect before it is disturbed and contaminated by man's physical and intellectual desires (*Lao-tzu* VI; cf. J. Liu, *Theories* 31). As in the round of innocence-experience-[higher level of] innocence in Blake's philosophy, it is never simply a return to innocence in the derogatory sense of complacent ignorance. Called "the second harmony" by Vincent Yu-chung Shih, the foremost English translator of Liu Hsieh's book (*TkR* 31-42), it is rather a high order of enlightenment in which the mind, unhindered either by empirical knowledge or egotistical considerations, sees with heightened insight. It is Wordsworth's philosophic mind that sees into the life of things.

Taking the term *hsü-ching* apart, the first character means "emptiness." But emptiness does not really mean blankness. Instead, it is an absence of sensual or even intellectual preconceptions and egotistical or utilitarian considerations. It is the same thinking that goes into Coleridge's lines about the inability of "the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd" to see "A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud/Enveloping the Earth" ("Dejection: An Ode"). "Emptying" one's mind, therefore, is what Keats meant by making the irrelevant and discordant (the "disagreeables") "evaporate," and opening one's mind for a heightened receptivity to reality (Bate in Bloom 327, 332). It is, in short, an act of excluding the aesthetically irrelevant for greater inclusiveness.

On the other hand, "Tranquillity," the second half of the term, does not mean "doing nothing" or utter passivity. The idea of tranquillity is akin to Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's concept of *wu-wei* 無爲. But, to do justice to

the entire system of Taoist philosophy, *wu-wei* can never be interpreted as indolence (cf. Wang Yuan-hua 71). Rather, it is a negation of self-righteousness and an affirmation of the nonchalant way of nature. It looks like a mere passivity, while in fact it is one for attaining an activity on a higher level (*Lao-tzu* II, XXXVII; *Chuang-tzu* III, IV).

Such paradoxical nature of *hsü-ching* is also seen in Keats' concept of "negative capability." He proposed this term and labored to define it as the capability of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Bush 261). This capability can be taken to mean the same thing as "the only means of strengthening one's intellect" which, he says later, "is to make up one's mind about nothing – to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts" (Bate in Bloom 332). Bate's comment on this bears a striking resemblance to the idea of *hsü-ching*: "In our life of uncertainties . . . what is needed is an imaginative openness of mind and heightened receptivity to reality in its full and diverse concreteness. This, however, involves negating one's own ego" (Bate in Bloom 332).

Why should anyone "keep to the deed that consists in taking no action"? And what is the way that "never acts yet nothing is left undone"? (*Lao-tzu* II, XXXVII; D. C. Lau 58, 96). Answers to such esoteric questions cannot be easy. The English Romantics, with their return to nature, came quite close to answering these questions, but they frequently wavered either in theory or practice. Wordsworth, for instance, preached the virtues of "wise passiveness," yet the nature poet was still blamed by Keats for having "egotistical sublime" (Bush, ed. 279, 263). Keats' own "negative capability" is also quite similar to the concept of *hsü-ching*, but he later dismissed it away as "a mere sophistication, however it may neighbour to any truths, to excuse my own indolence" (Bate in Bloom 334). The English Romantics often likened this passivity of the mind in creation to the Aeolian lyre, which responds to the breeze by giving off musical sounds without being touched by hands. In the last analysis, however, the analogy was found inadequate because, in Shelley's words, "there is a principle within the human being . . . which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds of motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them" (Adams 499). Likewise, Coleridge later declared that the creative mind resembled, not an Aeolian harp, but rather "a violin . . . played on by a musician of Genius" (Abrams 346, n. 66).

By contrast, the concept of *hsü-ching* is much more deepseated in the Chinese history of ideas. Aside from its ethical and religious ramifications, it has taken its root at the center of Chinese aesthetic theories. Be that as it may, let us see how Liu Hsieh and Coleridge differ in their points of emphasis.

In comparing *shen-ssu* with the concept of imagination, James Liu implies that the main difference lies in the former's having a "quiescent or receptive mode" in addition to the latter's "active or projective mode" (*Theories* 125). This is, of course, a correct observation. We should not, however, overlook the fact that both *shen-ssu* and imagination have their active and passive phases. Liu Hsieh's emptiness and tranquillity tend to stress the receptivity of spiritual thinking. It is the state of mind in which aesthetic contemplation can be made. Coleridge, on the other hand, makes much of the dynamic quality of creative imagination. He says: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this rendered impossible, yet still at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital . . ." (*BL* ch. 13, I, 202). In the above-mentioned analogy of the Aeolian lyre, Coleridge also considered passivity an inherent quality of imagination. We still have to ascertain how the mind in *hsü-ching* transforms itself to the dynamic aspect of spiritual thinking. In other words, the question is how the apparently passive state of the literary mind leads to its dynamic aspect.

Hsün-tzu, another possible source of Liu Hsieh's concept of *hsü-ching*, provides a succinct explanation of the transition from stasis to kinetic movement of the literary mind. The philosopher deserves to be quoted at length:

> How does a man understand the Way? Through the mind. And how can the mind understand it? Because it is *empty, unified, and still.* The mind is constantly storing up things, and yet it is said to be *empty*. The mind is constantly marked by diversity, and yet it is said to be *unified*. The mind is constantly moving, and yet it is said to be *still*. Man is born with an intellect, and where there is intellect there is memory. Memory is what is stored up in the mind. Yet the mind is said to be unified because it does not allow the understanding of one fact to impinge upon that of another. Therefore it is said to be *unified*. When the mind is asleep, it produces dreams; when it is unoccupied, it wanders off in ideal fancy; and if allowed to

> do so, it will produce from these all manner of plots and schemes. Hence the mind is constantly moving. And yet it is said to be still, because it does not allow such dreams and noisy fancies to disorder its understanding. Therefore it is said to be *still*. (XXI; Watson 127-28 – italics mine)

In saying that the empty mind is one in which "what has been stored . . . does not hinder the reception of new impressions," and that the unified mind is one which "does not allow the understanding of one fact to impinge upon that of another," Hsün-tzu arrives at the same conclusion as Coleridge's concept of the reconciling, synthetic nature of imagination. Moreover, he tells us what this "empty, unified, and still" mind can do:

> Emptiness, unity, and stillness – these are the qualities of great and pure enlightenment. When a man has such enlightenment, there are none of the myriad beings of creation that have form and yet are not perceived by it, none that are perceived and yet not comprehended, none that are comprehended and yet not assigned to their proper places. He who has such enlightenment may sit in his room and view the entire within the four seas, may dwell in the present and yet discourse on distant ages. He has a penetrating insight into all beings and understands their true nature, studies the ages of order and disorder and comprehends the principle behind them. He surveys all heaven and earth, governs all beings, and masters the great principle and all that is in the universe. (XXI; Watson, 128-29)

The virtue of the mind in *hsü-ching* is thus directly equated to the all seeing power of what Liu Hsieh calls spiritual thinking and what the Romantics call imagination. The imaginative mind sees not only the present; it is capable of reaching toward the remote past and future, and expanding toward the infinite distance.

Although Liu Hsieh affirms the importance of (emptiness and tranquillity) in the development of literary thinking, there is no way to determine whether he has in mind all the meanings that have accrued to the term *hsü-ching*. We can be sure, however, that Liu considers *hsü-ching* as the essential quality of the creative mind. For *t'ao-chün* 陶鈞, Liu Hsieh's original for "development" in the passage quoted above, has the meaning of "operating" besides "molding." Thus, the attaining of emptiness and

tranquillity is not merely a process of preparation or discipline before the creative act takes place. More importantly still, it is to be realized as part of the creative act.

The point may be clarified by a comparison of *hsü-ching* with Wordsworth's "tranquillity" with reference to Samuel Alexander's distinction of material and formal passions. Alexander means by "material passions" those "aroused by the subject," and by "formal passions" those "fed and controlled" by material passions, but are "superadded to them, as their fine flowering into something they do not themselves contain" (in Adams 861). This transformation of "passions" is precisely what Wordsworth means in his well-known formulation:

> I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the motion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. (Adams 441)

The emotion in the physical experience goes through a process of transformation in the poet's mind to become an aesthetic emotion (which is "kindred" to the original emotion) by recollection and contemplation in tranquillity. The state of *hsü-ching* also implies the same capability to transform material passions into formal (i.e., aesthetic) passions. It is to be cultivated as a capability before the creative act, but it has to be maintained at the same time as part of the creative mind. The transformation as the essential part of the creative process cannot be considered as a separate process before it.

The fact that impersonality has become a requisite way of self-expression, just as emptiness and tranquillity are part of the creative process, is perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes in modern theoretical literature since the Romantic period. In the history of modern criticism the concept has assumed various forms. Coleridge maintained that "willing suspension of disbelief" will constitute "poetic faith" (*BL* ch. 14, II, 6). Hazlitt valued "gusto," which consists in relishing of the living character of objects through sympathetic identification with them "from the truth of feeling" (Bate, ed. 301-03; Bate in Bloom, 328). Yeats also described a "slight trance" in which the creating artist suspends his critical faculty as well as desire (cf. Ueda

137). The phenomenologists deem the "suspension" or "abstension" (of judgment) a necessary condition for attaining "pure consciousness" (cf. J. Liu, *Theories* 59-62). There are of course differences of terminology and emphasis, yet all of them point to the same mystical condition in which the distinction between subject and object is at least temporarily terminated for a greater grasp of reality.

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