

The Sublime in the Taoist Aesthetics: An Interpretation of Ssu-K'ung T'u's "Ching-chien," "Hao-fang" and "Hsiung-hun"

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This paper stems from my earlier article in which I tried to confront some existing ways of translating the term "the Sublime" into Chinese in order to make justifications for my own choice.¹ There, I followed Professor Yuan Heh-hsiang's advice² to first find out the cause-effect relationship, or the diachronic development of the sublime from Longinus to the 18th, 19th century Romantics, and then to the philosophical treatment as an aesthetic category by Kant. Then, a synchronic structure in semiotic terms of a sublime experience was put in front of historical facts, so that a meaningful comparison between the sublime as adumbrated in the West and its counterpart in China could be undertaken. My conclusion was that whereas the Chinese terms *ch'ung-kao* 崇高 and *hsiung-wei* 雄偉 could be best put side by side with the Longinian rhetorical sublime and the romantic natural sublime respectively,³ they nevertheless lack the kind of philosophical signification so as to be qualified as a counterpart of the Kantian sublime. It is in the hope of looking for such a concept in Chinese aesthetics and philosophy that I ultimately turned to Ssu-K'ung T'u's 司空圖 (837-908) *hsiung-hun* 雄渾 as a more appropriate translation of this Western concept.

For possible demonstrations of a rhetorical sublime and a natural sublime in China, we can of course resort to Chinese art theories and actual creative endeavors respectively. There certainly exists in the Chinese tradition a system of evaluating literature and arts — as epitomized by concepts such as *ch'i* 氣, *feng-ku* 風骨 and *kang-jou* 剛柔 — which exhibits substantial affinities with the Longinian sublime. However, both the Longinian *hypsous* and the Chinese concept of, say, *ch'i* refer to a quality of writing which eludes precise description; and it is only at several steps away from the ineffable substance that we can locate the closest points of contact between the two traditions. With the natural sublime we feel we are treading on a

more solid ground. If nothing else, we are here dealing with the specific feelings and responses aroused in a man when he is confronted with high mountains and wide oceans. It is here that we can apply the concept of sublimity onto a body of Chinese landscape poetry with satisfactory results. But Chinese landscape poetry is firmly grounded in Taoism, a school of thought largely responsible for the Chinese aesthetic consciousness. It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to analyze Ssu-K'ung T'u's three poems "Ching-chien" 勁健 (Vigorous and Strong), "Hao-fang" 豪放 (The Untrammelled) and "Hsiung-hun" 雄渾 (Masculine Whole) in his *Erh-shih-ssu Shih-p'in* 二十四詩品 (*The Twenty-Four Orders of Poetry*), with a hope to demonstrate that there does exist in Chinese poetics and philosophy a mode of discourse analogous to the philosophy of the sublime.

Following the tradition of enumerating poetic styles by Lu Chi 陸機, Liu Hsieh 劉勰 and Chung Hung 鍾嶸, the *Twenty-Four Orders of Poetry*, written in the archaic tetra-syllabic verse, is a creative criticism in twenty-four poems on various poetic styles or attributes. Behind the rhetorical overtone which consistently runs through each of the poems, there can be detected an underlying system of division, in which individual poems can be grouped according to the emphasis each one receives. Poems such as "Shu-yeh" 疏野 (Artless and Unfettered), "K'uang-ta" 曠達 (Debonaire and Carefree) depict a poet's ideal way of life; "Tzu-jan" 自然 (Naturalness) and "Ching-shen" 精神 (Quintessence and Spirit) direct our attention to the way a poet apprehends Tao in contemplating nature; and others such as "Chen-mi" 縝密 (The Tightly-Knit), "Wei-ch'ü" 委曲 (The Devious) and "Han-hsü" 含蓄 (The Reserved) are detailed instructions for specific modes of verse writing. Finally, two groups of poems stand out as a pair of poetic attributes which remind us of the strong and gentle beauties adumbrated in the concept of *kang-jou* (strong and gentle) in relation to the rhetorical sublime. While on the one hand poems like "Hsien-nung" 纖穠 (Fine-woven Richness), "Chi-li" 綺麗 (The Exquisite and Beautiful) and "Tien-ya" 典雅 (Polished Elegant) represent the beautiful, the gentle style, in other words, the *yin* 陰 (feminine) side of literary beauty, "Hsiung-hun" (Masculine Whole), "Ching-chien" (Vigorous and Strong) and "Hao-fang" (The Untrammelled), on the other hand, address themselves to the sublime, the vigorous and vehement style, and the *yang* 陽 (masculine) side of poetry *par excellence*.⁴

These are the three poems which concern us in our analysis:

雄 渾

大用外腓，真體內充。
 返虛入渾，積健爲雄。
 具備萬物，橫絕太空。
 荒荒油田，寥寥長風。
 超以象外，得其環中。
 持之非強，來之無窮。

Masculine Whole

Great Use changes without;
 True body fills within.
 Back to the Void into the Whole;
 Amass strength into masculinity.
 All phenomena now contained,
 It stretches proudly across Space.
 Misty-massy, the flowing clouds;
 Spreading wide, distant winds.
 Thus, all objects are transcended;
 And the Central Ring attained:
 No restraint holding it;
 What comes comes without end.

勁 健

行神如空，行氣如虹。
 巫峽千尋，走雲連風。
 飲真茹強，蓄素守中。
 喻彼行健，是謂存雄。
 天地與立，神化攸同。
 期之以寶，御之以終。

Vigorous and Strong

Spirit wings as if through empty space;
 Vital force soars like a rainbow.
 Among the thousand league gorges;
 One treads the clouds, accompanying the wind¹
 To drink in true power, to feed on strength;
 One stores up Essence and keeps it within.
 Thus revolving in the vigorous
 Is called to conserve masculinity.
 Heaven and Earth coeval with it;

As it identifies itself with the Transformation.
 Make solidity your main concern;
 And take as your guide the Ultimate.

豪 放

觀花匪禁，吞吐大荒。
 由道返氣，處得以狂。
 天風浪浪，海山蒼蒼。
 真力彌滿，萬象在旁。
 前招三辰，後引鳳凰。
 曉策六轡，濯足扶桑。

The Untrammelled

Contemplate the natural Mutation without constraint;
 And respire on the Empyrean.
 From Tao, back to the vital force;
 One is sure to cast off restraints.
 Waves and Waves, Heaven's endless wind;
 Looming upon looming, the mountainous ocean.
 With true power overflowing;
 One is flanked by the myriad phenomena.
 In front, to beckon the sun, the moon and stars;
 Behind, to lead the way for the Phoenix.
 Then one can ride the six Tortoises at dawn;
 And to wash one's feet in the stream of Fu-Sang.

Taken as a whole, these poems aim at, and carry with them an overtone of, a fundamental theory of poetry writing which is characterized as powerful, vigorous or grand. Also, ingrained in all these poems is the Taoist aesthetics that creative vitality is generated by the contemplative act, during which the poet enters into all things and embraces all particulars. It results in an amassing of a powerful force with which the poet is fully charged within during artistic creation. This primordial force of creativity is often concretized through images of vast and magnificent natural objects such as "spreading wides," "Thousand league gorges" and "mountainous ocean." Despite these common features, however, the three poems, by virtue of the particular emphasis given to each of them, can still be examined individually and separately.

To be sure, whereas "Vigorous and Strong" is in the main a description of a sublime style through grand conception of the universe, "The Untramed" serves to embody and to materialize such a conception in concrete imagery of natural magnitude. Then, as the first poem of the twenty-four Orders, "Masculine Whole" sets up from start for all others a philosophical base, namely, the Taoist cosmology of an undifferentiated whole. Thus viewed from the perspective of their different accentuated purposes and functions, these three poems may well be looked at — with qualifications in each case of course — as each representing respectively the rhetorical sublime, the natural sublime and the philosophical sublime; and a closer look at them, therefore, will shed some light on the validity of such a proposition.

"Vigorous and Strong" starts out to describe *shen* and *ch'i*, which, once developed before the poets get down to the actual process of creation, will have to be nurtured to the extent of being as unperturbed and uninterrupted as a rainbow shooting across the empty sky. To achieve this, one is to "stroe up essence and to keep it within," with a concentration on "solidity" and "guided by the Ultimate." Reiterating the concept of *ch'i*, which was first introduced to literary criticism by Ts'ao P'i 曹丕 and later developed by other critics, Ssu-K'ung here displays his critical acumen by prescribing a way of acquiring it. Having thus prepared with the vital force, the poet is then able to "drink on true power and to feed on strength," a quality of elevated and vehement expression or composition which would have met the demands of Longinus for a sublime style of writing. The character *su* 素 (essence), by the way, can also mean "first simplicity," a quality suggested by Longinus himself and later insisted on by Boileau as an indispensable constituent for the sublime style. Hence such an attribute of verse composing is summarized as "revolving in the vigorous;" and the "masculinity," which stands for the *yang* side of literary beauty, is conserved. It is like the poet is to co-exist with the whole universe, to wander freely and easily — again, we are reminded of Chuang Tzu's free and easy wandering — in the presence of the stupendous and rugged "thousand leage gorges." This power of masculinity existing in the mutuality of heaven and earth goes beyond methodological significance of literary creation and reaches the essence of truth and beauty in the Heideggerian sense. Just as Heidegger's idea of poetry, which, as truth or the saying of unconcealment in the "nearness," is what brings together the self-concealing and inarticulate depth of "earth" and the disclosing, revealing "world" in an outpouring of the very nature of being, Ssu-K'ung's power of poetry "identifies itself with the Transformation." It

"stores up Essence and keeps it within" the core of what-is in totality.

This process of opening up a Heideggerian "world" by a "style" of creative writing has been described by Paul Ricoeur in his discussion of hermeneutics. Stylization, to Ricoeur, is a process of "distanciation" in and through which, understanding or interpretation is possible. In an effort of defining a "discourse as a work," Ricoeur takes "style" as a dialectical mediation between "event" and "meaning." Stylization, whose function is to individuate the work as well as its author, "occurs at the heart of an experience which is already structured but which is nevertheless characterized by openings, possibilities, indeterminacies." As a notion which brings together the fleeting event and the repeatable meaning, the "work of stylisation takes the peculiar form of an interplay between an anterior situation which appears suddenly undone, unresolved, open, and a conduct or strategy which reorganizes the residues left over from the anterior structuration."⁶ The mutuality between metaphor and hermeneutics in Ricoeur's philosophy, and also the notion of "hermeneutical circle" which is implicit in what he says here on style, are important issues in our discussion of the Chinese sublime and will be dealt with at length later. For the moment, if we remember that a sublime experience can be defined as "a metaphorical expression of transcendence caused by a hermeneutic situation of comprehension," the relevancy of Ricoeur's remarks to our present concern becomes obvious. First of all, the transcending metaphors in "Vigorous and Strong" such as *shen*, *ch'i* and *hsiang*, on the one hand, are descriptions of the poet's individual style through solidity and keeping within himself the vital power of creativity, and on the other hand, serve as a mediation from internal labor to the interpretive process of projecting one's own most possibilities or modes of being-in-the-world, so that one can be co-existing with heaven and earth, identified with the Transformation and finally guided by the Ultimate. Then the second point of relevancy of Ricoeur's theory points back to the unique character of a Chinese sublime discourse. I have elsewhere made a proposition, by drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's fundamental paradox of "Immanence and Transcendence," that a Chinese sublime experience manifests itself as a negative-positive dialectic, in that an act of negation points back to itself, signifying its own characteristic concealment in which the myriad things are revealed and on which the comprehension of totality is based.⁷ In terms of stylistics, therefore, the Chinese sublime style comes close to Ricoeur's stylization which is put dynamically between structured experience and open, indeterminate and unresolved situation. It is in this spirit that we can look at

some classical Chinese criticism which can be related to a sublime style. For example, when we have remarks such as Ts'ao P'i's "Ying Yang's (style) is harmonious but not vigorous; Liu Cheng's is vigorous but not dense; K'ung Yung's quality and vitality are high and marvelous" 應場和而不壯，劉楨壯而不密，孔融體氣高妙，⁸ or Liu Cheng "possesses an untrammelled *ch'i* (transcending vitality)" 公幹有逸氣，⁹ or Liu Cheng's own "K'ung Yung's style is lofty and stately, definitely possessing extraordinary vitality, a vitality not expressible in brush and ink" 孔氏卓卓，信含異氣，筆墨之性，殆不可勝，¹⁰ or Ch'ung Hung's words that Ts'ao P'i's poetry exhibits a "surprisingly lofty kind of *ku-ch'i*" 骨氣奇高，we are only encountering some vocabularies common in Chinese criticism which resist assimilation into the world of precise meaning because they are meant to be so. These catchwords are meant to be used in such a way that a gap is left open between the signifier and the signified, so that a wide range of multi-signification can be aimed at by the writer/critic and intuitively ideated by the reader. Such a gap reminds us of the opening in the negative-positive dialectic of the model of the Chinese sublime, only here in the rhetorical realm, it functions as a referential horizon against which the ineffable can be expressed "metaphorically" and grasped by the writer/critic and the reader respectively. With this gap wide open, the meaning and significance of what is expressed rely to a great extent on an intersubjective activity of concretization.

The multitudinous shades of meaning in these Chinese words certainly remind us of Kant's feeling of the inadequacy of imagination in the mathematic sublime to which Weiskel refers as the reader's or hermeneutical sublime. In fact the problem of understanding when one is confronted with overwhelming, confusing and difficult texts can well be labeled as a hermeneutical sublime.¹¹ Even hermeneutics, while itself being "a theory of ontological discourse,"¹² is looked at by Gadamer as a discipline which "operates wherever what is said is not immediately intelligible."¹³ It would seem, then, that our ultimate understanding of the Chinese critical terms should be approached by pointing to what Hans Lipps calls the "ring of the unexpressed" (*Hof von Unausdrücklichem*) around every word,¹⁴ or to what Heidegger refers to as "the vast distance in which the nature of saying assumes its radiance," the infinity of what is unsaid.¹⁵ Thus, we see that implicit in ontological hermeneutics itself is a sense of the reader's sublime; and this is how the Chinese literary critical categories can be related to the phenomenological hermeneutics of *Dasein* and poetics. For Gadamer, what a critic has to reproduce "is not what is said in exact terms, but rather what

the other person wanted to say and said in that he left much unsaid. The limited character of his reproduction must also attain the space in which alone dialogue becomes possible, that is, the inner infinity that belongs to all common understanding."¹⁶

To make an analogy between the primordial force behind artistic creativity which is manifested in a powerful or vigorous style on the one hand, and the grand, magnificent and overwhelming features of nature on the other, is to have the rhetorical sublime concretized by nature itself. And it is to such an act of concretization that "The Untrammelled" chiefly assigns itself. Elaborating on the theme of an untrammelled style of writing which values an enthusiasm free from confinement and strictness of fixed standards, the poem is impregnated with natural images, the particular properties of which lend themselves to the notions of elevation, transport and transcendence. Images such as "Heaven's endless wind" and "mountainous ocean" accentuate a sense of magnanimity; "Phoenix" and "six Tortoises" symbolize nobility and ideal virtue; and still some others such as "Mutation," "Empyrean" and "myriad Phenomena" embody the total sum of the Cosmic itself. All these attest to an ideal literary style, which, punctuating an unhampered and unimpeded freedom of expression, is in turn recapitulated by an "overflow of true power."

But if the grandeur of nature merely serves to exemplify a sublime style of writing, then these natural images of magnitude, as means to an end, are not recording an actually lived experience of the natural sublime. However, our proposition can be saved somewhat by the fact that *The Twenty-Four Orders* is itself a critical theory of poetry. It may therefore be argued, that Ssu-K'ung is here absorbing and reaping the fruits of the natural sublime realized by the landscape poets of the 4th Century and later by T'ang poets such as Wang Wei, Li Po, Tu Fu and Liu Tsung-yüan. It can be said that the critic here is putting to use the achievement of the natural sublime manifested in landscape poetry, by applying it to his own critical endeavor. Also, parallel to Wai-lim Yip's theory that there was in the Chinese aesthetic consciousness toward landscape a gradual development from the 4th Century to T'ang Dynasty, during which "we witness a continuous decrease in the use of statements," since landscape has assumed "a prominent and independent position for aesthetic consideration,"¹⁷ the Chinese natural sublime can also be said to have reaped its harvest only in T'ang Poetry, in which a pure delight in natural grandeur is registered free of external and imposed discursive trappings. Therefore, if Ssu-K'ung's "The Untrammelled"

did not represent the natural sublime, it at least seizes upon such an aesthetic property as a concomitant of the sublime experience in nature for purposes of literary criticism.

But what I am more interested in, however, is the possibility of a hermeneutic reading of "The Untranneled" by shifting it to a discourse on interpretation. In other words, I want to read it as a poem *on reading*, the unique specificity of which can be explained by Ricoeur's notion of "appropriation," and the ultimate result of which turns back to the question of transcendence itself. My proposition — a radical one to be sure — is that the sublime style in "Vigorous and Strong" leans on, as a whole, the pole of authorial intentionality as "work," which in general is subsumed under the concept of "distanciation" or objectification in Ricoeur's theory of "discourse." By turning back to the poet's inner nourishment of a certain quality in writing, stylization functions at the level of configuration and form which implies labor. Here in "The Untranneled," on the contrary, the process of interpretation or the *hermeneutic arc* is completed by a transcending act of understanding. Through an outward directedness or "openness of language to the lived world of experience,"¹⁸ the poem talks of lifting the meaning of discourse from authorial intention and immanent constitution of structure (semiotics and sense), and brings it toward the extralinguistic world (reference and depth semantics), so that a full manifestation of contextual and non-psychological meaning is possible. Let us read the character *kuan* 觀 (contemplate) in the first line as "read," the character *hua* 花 (nature's mutation, literally flower) as "text," and then the term *ta-fang* 大荒 (Empyrean, vast wilds) as the "horizon of a world" in the sense used by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur; and our shift toward hermeneutics is well on its track. Also, *kuan* here embraces simultaneously a double meaning of first bodily perception and then spiritual contemplation. It refers at once to the act of seeing (as used in conjunction with *k'an* as *kuan-k'an* 觀看 and the contemplative process as *kuan-chao* 觀照) in a philosophical and aesthetic sense. Then as "text" in Ricoeur's use of the word, *hua* here can be equated to the third term "the word" which bridges the dichotomy of structure and event, system of signs and actual utterance. Together, the first two lines can therefore be understood as pointing at a way of reading which goes beyond ostensive reference immanent in the text toward "the potential non-ostensive references of the world of the text in a new situation."¹⁹ As if in support of my argument here, the commentator of Ssu-K'ung T'u in the text I use takes the first line to mean "To look at the bamboo, why need to ask (for)

its master?" 看竹何須問主人。²⁰ To read the bamboo (text) without harking back to psychological or authorial intention and meaning is to open up the text to Gadamer's "excess of meaning beyond *mens auctoris*" and Ricoeur's "surplus of meaning." To Gadamer, "the meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always also a productive one."²¹ To Ricoeur, this horizon of a world of genuine modes of being is the proper field of ontological understanding:

To understand is to follow the dynamic of the work, its movement from what it says to that about which it speaks. Beyond my situation as reader, beyond the situation of the author, I offer myself to the possible mode of being-in-the-world which the text opens up and discloses to me.²²

Thus it is the co-existence of the author/reader with this vastness and infinitude of a possible world opened up by the text that the natural images in "The Untrammelled" try to dramatize. However, it is in the concept of "play" implied in these images or symbols that our argument can be pursued another step further. The beckoning of sun-moon-stars, the leading of Phoenix and the riding of Tortoises, which depict how the poet can congenially co-exist with and hence "flanked" by all phenomena, are of course concretizations of the Taoist ideal of "wandering easily and freely." Whereas it can be loosely compared to the Kantian "free play between cognitive faculties and imagination" and "disinterestedness," and Schiller's "play impulse," it is not until Gadamer's theorization of such that the two can be significantly put together on the level of ontological hermeneutics. Gadamer's phenomenology of the game or play suggests the illusion of subjectivism of the aesthetic consciousness as expounded in Kant's and Schiller's aesthetics. In the process of understanding, it is precisely an abandonment of self-possession of the player since he is being played by the dynamic movement of the game itself. Therefore, "in play, subjectivity forgets itself;" and in hermeneutical terms, as Ricoeur has it, "in entering a game we hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader."²³

By taking over this unique character of "play," Ricoeur can now come to terms with a mode of being of appropriation in which "what is emerges." Appropriation, thus, "ceases to appear as a kind of possession, as a way of taking hold of. . . . It implies instead a moment of dispossession of the

narcissistic *ego*." It's fundamental movement that takes the form of a relinquishment, and "primarily a 'letting go,'" so that a hermeneutics of the "I am" rather than that of the "I think" becomes possible.²⁴ It is, therefore, with Ricoeur's theory of appropriation firmly grafted onto the concept of play that we can turn back to the natural images of playfulness in "The Untrammelled." Here the symbolic signification functions as a description how a Chinese poet is "borne along" or "played" by the Transformation and the myriad phenomena, within the space of a *Spielraum* which opens up a new proximity of understanding. With this open state between the dynamics of immanence and transcendence fully understood, we can now approach our last poem "Masculine Whole" in which this openness finds an ultimate articulation.

We remember, the overflowing power in "The Untrammelled," which is achieved through the poet's nourishment of *shen* and *ch'i*, is defined by the "conserving of Masculinity" in "Vigorous and Strong." This masculinity, while characterizing anything that is magnanimous, great, noble or sublime, has been in fact preeminently brought forth in "Masculine Whole." Indeed, it is this poem that provides for all the other orders an aesthetic basis, a philosophical skeleton from which a whole organic body of poetics derives. At the level of the theory of interpretation, it too sums up the reciprocity between personal style and the enlarged self which co-exists with the world of discourse, in other words, between distancing and appropriation. Thus it is the ultimate value of Chuang Tzu's aesthetics summarized in a few lines of poetry; and to expound on it is to review a great part of his ideas and premises leading to the Chinese philosophical sublime.

First of all, Chuang Tzu's teaching of freeing man from the ordinary sensuous world, of breaking away from the manacle of external trappings to get at a total blending with things, is recapitulated in an act of "transcending all objects." But such an act is only a derivative of the fundamental situatedness which takes the form of a central ring as a privileged vista point. The "Central Ring" is a direct allusion to Chuang Tzu's words: "A state in which 'this' and 'that' no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the way. When the hinge is fitted into the central wing, it can respond endlessly" (Chapter 2, p. 40) 彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞，樞始得其環中，以應無窮（齊物篇）。²⁵ It is in the same context that we are reminded of Lu Chi's "Central position at the center of the hub of things" and Liu Hsieh's "grasping at the center of the circle."²⁶ This position of viewing is privileged because it is from this panoramic perspective that things

can be most clearly seen. But it is also absolutely unprivileged in the sense that the act of seeing is firmly situated within the circumference of the circle, in other words, within the very "world" which circumpents both the seer and the seen. Here we are reminded of Merleau-Ponty's paradox of transcendence and immanence, and his idea of perception which "is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but none of which is given exhaustively."²⁷

Chuang Tzu's circle as primordial disclosure can also be explained by the famous Heideggerian "hermeneutical circle" of involvement.²⁸ By rejecting the Hegelian negation of *Aufhebung* which has its root in the Western philosophical tradition of spatializing the knowing process by lifting the subject up away from what is to be known with a vain hope for total objectivity, Heidegger's "stepping back" firmly grounds itself in the "thrownness," the "temporality" of Dasein which is already always in the world, in the situation of interpreting. Paul A Bove, a critic of destructive poetics, neatly sums up this basic tenet of the Heideggerian hermeneutics:

The nature of Dasein's understanding as the basic disclosure of the world necessitates that all interpretation which exhibits whatever is understood and explicates whatever is disclosed, must be circular, caught within the realm of what is being interpreted. In other words, it is impossible to escape from the context of world defined by understanding to a standpoint of interpretation which goes beyond being in and of the material or events being interpreted. A Hegelian claim to see all of history from the end of its working out, and therefore to understand it "objectively" and "abstractly," founders upon Heidegger's demonstration that the Being of understanding itself prevents such atemporal, infinite knowledge.²⁹

In terms of sublime experience, we can now understand anew why Thomas Weiskel denigrates its formulation by Kant as a "fictional moment." The so-called phase three in the structure of sublime moment comes about when Reason intervenes after the collapse of understanding in phase two. But this seemingly time-governed activity is later transcended in favor of a coexistence of everything, since "comprehension is thus the imagination's application of the timeless idea of reason." The subsequent reaction formation, or the ultimate transcendence is therefore necessarily an operative moment, a

project strategically staged all along by Reason itself for its own aggrandizement "at the expense of reality and the imaginative apprehension of reality."³⁰

To reappropriate or to "destroy" this fictiveness of Western metaphysics, Heidegger, with Chuang Tzu on his side, resorts to take up a position within the circle of existence. "What is decisive," for Heidegger, "is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. . . . In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing."³¹ Again, it is Ricoeur who repeatedly reminds us that the hermeneutical circle functions on the plane of ontology rather than on that of subjectivity: "the circle is between my mode of being — beyond the knowledge which I may have it — and the mode opened up and disclosed by the text as the world of the work."³² The acquisition of Tao for Chuang Tzu does not result from, and is not dependent on, simply subjective introspection. Nor is it the acquiring of some newly developed truth, but rather the working out of the infinite possibilities projected in Tao itself.

To "respond endlessly," as Ssu-K'ung points out here, is to receive "What comes comes without end." Such a perpetually forth-coming and temporal unfolding of resourcefulness is in turn ascertained by an emptying process of the mind, a capacity of letting go, or in Ssu-K'ung's words, an act of "holding on without restraint." It is exactly by recognizing the "thrownness" or "a past" or "having-been" of *Dasein* that a "futurity," a "positive possibility" is ascertained or "held on without restraint." The fundamental tenet of the Heideggerian phenomenological hermeneutics is to historicize human beings' relation to the world, reminding us that our ontological being, as against the ontic, the scientific (the present-at-hand or *Vorhandensein* as against the ready-to-hand or *Zuhandensein*), resides in an order of succession, an ongoing transforming act of understanding and being-in-the-world, rather than holding fast to (with restraint, that is) the semblance or illusion of the habitually conceptualized tradition. "Phenomena" are to be "contained," not to be imposed on; and what Heidegger aims at is "to receive the blessing of the earth in order to shepherd the mystery of Being and watch over the inviolability of the possible."³³

Again, Chuang Tzu's Great Use, the function of which is to ensure a Kantian disinterested, pure aesthetic pleasure, is directly taken over by Ssu-K'ung to endorse the ever changing phenomenon of the external world, so that "All phenomena (are) contained." This is an ideal of the ultimate continuum reminiscent of Chuang Tzu's "blending your spirit with the Vastness,

follow along with things the way they are" (Chapter 7, p.94) 合氣於漠，順物自然。(應帝王)。The perfect uselessness of the Kantian aesthetics, however, is conditioned by a "revenge" against the practical world. Lentricchia observes that such a revenge entails another "alienation which permits the aesthetically elite to play in the imagination, a world of freedom beyond and above the practical world."³⁴ But Heidegger's "ready-to-hand" reestablishes the proximity of a tool to human being, who is "fundamentally worldly, and fundamentally temporal."³⁵ Similarly, Chuang Tzu's Great Use does not take abode in the idealistic realm which draws everything homogeneously to itself, but deeply immersed in a world of human practicality which affirms its temporal nature. Chuang Tzu's famous stories about a bell-maker and a butcher clearly show that after the process of "sitting in forgetfulness" and "fasting of mind" for a "disinterested," aesthetic satisfaction of a general purposiveness in the Kantian sense, the instrumentality or the usefulness of craftsmanship is eventually granted substance and value.

The retaining of practical and instrumental significance of Chuang Tzu's *ta yung* within its aesthetic universality and buoyancy which contain all phenomena, can well be taken as a complementary concept to Ricoeur's "depth semantics" in his *hermeneutic arc* of explanation and understanding. It can be explained by Ricoeur's idea that "interpretation, before being the act of the exegete, is the act of the text . . . to interpret is to place himself in the meaning indicated by the relation of interpretation which the text itself supports." But then "the intended meaning of the text is not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction."³⁶ Thus whereas the second line can be read as an act of stylization which individuates within an event — similar to that which we have suggested in "Vigorous and Strong" — through a process in which the poet throws himself open to the Heideggerian "unfolding presence of things," then the line "Great Use changes without," with equal force, bears itself outward toward a full and unreserved reception of the world of the text (nature). It follows that the phrase by some commentator to explain these two lines: "body precise while the use vast" 體精用宏 again reiterates such immanent and transcendent relation. We can say that it describes a text whose internal semiotic components are precisely structured, while its externalized capability of reaching an extralinguistic reality unlimited.

Guided by this line of argument, the poem, on top of being a poetics

of creative writing, can also be taken as a manifesto of a theory of reading. To gather strength into masculinity, a process of acquiring the sublime style as fully prescribed in "Vigorous and Strong," one has to turn back to the Void and the whole. This *hsü* and *hun*, a fundamental concept in Taoism, can be equated to the kind of "open state of the universe of signs,"³⁷ a middle ground which renders reciprocity and interplay between language and lived experience possible. Ricoeur says it well: "The linguistic sign can stand for something only if it is *not* the thing. In this respect, the sign possesses a specific negativity. Everything happens as if, in order to enter the symbolic universe, the speaking subject must have at his disposal an 'empty space' from which the use of signs can begin."³⁸ Thus, within the hermeneutical circle of the "Central Ring," phenomena, or the horizon of possible worlds made possible by signs, can then be contained and at the same time transcended. Again we have to hold on to the internal relations of dependence, or the "sense" of the text through distanciation, but to hold on to it without restraint. For it is not until then that we can, in an act of appropriation which takes the form of "letting-go" or relinquishment, open ourselves to the "orient" of the text, to the plenitude and inexhaustible possibilities of our mode-of-being in the world.

But why do we need to go "back to the Void (*hsü*) into the whole (*hun*) in order to "amass strength into masculinity"? It is in the Chinese character *hsü* that we can most concretely locate the essence of the negative-positive dialectic which characterizes a sublime discourse. Within the Taoist aesthetics, a repertoire of directives such as "Emptying, to receive all things" 虛而待物, "Tao abides in the emptiness," and "Look at that which is empty" 瞻彼闕者; 唯道集虛 reiterates the necessity of recognizing the primordial concealment in the universe, the original unknowable before the possibility of any knowledge. Like the Kantian and Hegelian sublime which manifests itself through indeterminacy, unattainability and incomprehensibility, Chuang Tzu's quest for a Great Beauty is also governed and conditioned by an all-embracing negativity. But the negative element in Kant's sublime moment only serves to cause a disequilibrium for a final resolution on a transcendent order; and it does this by staging a self-debasement in favor of the intervention of Reason. Thus "put in the service of subjectivity rather than in the service of the other," this negativity inevitably "produces a permanent sense of exclusion, severance and difference."³⁹ By the same token, the Hegelian negation is eventually nullified for the predisposed synthesis on a higher dialectical plane. The Chinese *hsü* or Void, on the

contrary, points back to itself, holding fast to its indispensibility as the fundamental opening or gap in which man and nature meet in a reciprocal involvement with each other. The recognition and acceptance of the Ultimate Void or Concealment paradoxically enable the establishment of what-is in totality in a simultaneous act of negating and affirming, concealing and disclosing, separating and combining. Once again we may hark back to Heidegger's idea of *aletheia* (truth) as disclosure (*Entbergung*) which is originally and ultimately grounded in the "groundless ground" of the primordial concealment, of the "essential untruth."⁴⁰ Thus this mutual interpenetration and interaction of the external and the internal, the phenomenal and the noumenal, the integrating process of what is revealed and concealed so that a final sense of totality is rendered possible, are finally summed up in the term *hsiung-hun* or masculine whole.

More clearly and appropriately than any other terms one can find in Chinese literary theories or philosophy, the two characters *hsiung* and *hun*, together as "Masculine Whole," serve to have the whole nature and scope of the Chinese philosophic sublime summed up in a grand synthesis. Etymologically *hsiung* is a composite of "father" on one side and "bird" on the other 鷹, so that it is extended to stand for fatherhood. Then also as father of all existence, it is equated to *yang* to mean masculinity 雄爲陽. As an adjective, it is usually used to denote a quality of vehemence 熾盛; and in the poem it has been taken to mean "the greatest and strongest" 至大至剛 or an "invincible great strength 大力無敵."⁴¹ The character *hun* originally is an approximation of the sound of bursting water 水潰涌之聲 or the way water runs 水流貌. It also bears the mark of an undifferentiated Oneness, a unit of multiplicity, a totalization of whatever there is which embraces even the Ultimate Void. Linked to *lun* 淪 or *tun* 沌, it comes to mean that primal state of the universe in which the mass of matter has not been separated with energy into forms, and everything is merged together in an undifferentiated wholeness.⁴² Together as a term, therefore *hsiung-hun* constitutes the primordial power, the original and actively generative force which brings together the universe of which man is very much as inseparable part.

But as a sublime expression, *hsiung-hun* is ultimately a metaphor caused by a hermeneutic situation. We are now in a position, finally, to be able to discern the full implications of our definition of the sublime as such. Here we can make a claim that, in reversion of this definition, as a metaphor, also as a metaphor on the theory of metaphor, *hsiung-hun* is automatically

an act of interpretation as well as a sublime discourse itself. To Ricoeur, a metaphor "does not exist in itself, but in and through an interpretation;"⁴³ and like the act of interpreting, a metaphor, through its genuinely creative character of semantic innovation, regulates the transition from the finite structure of the work to the infinite world or worlds of the work. It is its power of "re-describing reality" that a metaphorical statement makes its way to the realm of hermeneutics; and its general movement is from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic, from its occurrence as an event to the understanding of it as meaning, from its identifying or denominating function to its predicative function, and finally from particularity to universality.⁴⁴ Here, *hsiung-hun* does just that. Separate, *hsiung* belongs to a personal style, internal disposition of a poet characterized by vehemence and strength, while *hun* multiplies in order to unite, but conditioned and governed by a fundamental inexhaustibility. Together, the term serves as the ultimate source as well as major manifestation of a Chinese sublime experience. Finally, it is not only a metaphor of the sublime, but a metaphor on metaphor which embraces all at once the general understanding of a Chinese hermeneutics.

Notes

1. "Hsiung-wei fu? Ch'ung-kao fu? Hsiung-hun fu?" 雄偉乎? 崇高乎? 雄渾乎? *Wen-hsueh, shih-hsueh, che-hsueh* 文學史學哲學 (Taipei: Shih-Pao, 1982), pp. 167-200.
2. "East-West Comparative Literature: An Inquiry into Possibilities," *Chinese-Western Comparative Literature: Theory and Strategy*, ed. John J. Deeney (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 9-16.
3. It is in the hope of distinguishing "the sublime in external Nature" from the Longinian concept in *On the Sublime* through Boileau's translation in 1674, that Marjorie Hope Nicolson calls the former natural sublime and the latter rhetorical sublime. See *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (New York: Norton, 1959), pp. 29-30.
4. I am following roughly Ch'u T'ung-yüan's 朱東潤 scheme in his "Ssu-K'ung T'u shih-lun t'sung-s'su" 司空圖詩論綜述 in *Chung-kuo wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing chia yü wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing* 中國文學批評家與文學批評, I, ed. Ch'u T'ung-yüan (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng, 1971), p. 172.
5. "Masculine Whole" is Wai-lim Yip's translation in *Stone Brook*, 2 (1969), 269. The other two poems are my translation. The original is from *Shih-p'in chi-chieh* 詩品集解 (Taipei: Ho Lo, 1974), p. 3; p. 16; p. 23. For other translations, see Herbert Giles' version in *Chinese Literature* (London: Heieman, 1901), p. 197; Yang Hsieh-yi and Gladys Yang, "The Twenty-four Modes of Poetry," *Chinese Literature* (July, 1963), 65-77; Maureen A. Robertson, "To Convey What Is Precious: Ssu-K'ung T'u's Poetics and The Erh-shih-ssu Shih P'in" in *Translation and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture, A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-ch'üan*, ed. David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote (Hong Kong: Cathay Press, 1972), pp. 323-57. Also, in Pauline Yu's translation, "Hsiung-hun" is appropriately rendered as "Grandeur." See "Ssu-K'ung T'u's Shih-P'in: Poetic Theory in Poetic Form," *Studies in Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, Vol. 1, ed. Ronald C. Miao (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), p. 93.
6. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p. 137.
7. See my "Negative-Positive Dialectics of the Chinese Sublime" in the forthcoming *The Chinese Text: Studies in Comparative Literature*, ed. Ying-hsiung Chou, Heh-hsiang Yuan, John J. Deeney (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univ. Press).
8. Quoted from Hsiao Tung's 蕭統 *Wen Hsüan* 文選, II, 1127. Translation mine. Cf. James Hightower's "The *Wen Hsüan* and Genre Theory," in *HJAS*, 20 (1957), 514.
9. Quoted from Kuo Shao-yü 郭紹虞, *Chung-kuo wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing* 中國文學批評史 (rpt. Taipei: Ta Yung, 1969), I, 77. "Untrammelled *ch'i*" is James Liu's translation in *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 12. "Transcendent vitality" is Vincent Shih's rendering in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Taipei: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 228.
10. See Vincent Shih, pp. 228-29.
11. Referring to Thomas MoFarland and his "Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century." Neil Hertz has related "a scholar's fear that soon we shall all be overwhelmed by the rising tide of academic publication" to his "Notion of Blockage

- in the Literature of the Sublime." Collected in *Psychoanalysis and Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 63.
12. This is Richard Palmer's definition in his *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969), p. 137.
 13. Hans-Georg Gadamer in his "Aesthetic and Hermeneutics," *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 98.
 14. *Untersuchungen zu einer hermeneutischen Logik* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1959), p. 71. *Also, in expounding on Heidegger's concept of "Saying and Being" not being pierced by thought, Alvin H. Rosenfeld touches on a notion which is directly relevant to a sublime experience. In his "The Being of Language and the Language of Being": Heidegger and Modern Poetics," he says: "Yet what we have is less a matter of ultimate frustration and failure as it is an acknowledgment of awe before a presence too vast to be contained within conceptual categories." See *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature*, ed. William V. Spanos (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), p. 198.
 15. *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 53.
 16. Gadamer, "Man and Language," *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 66.
 17. "Aesthetic Consciousness of Landscape in Chinese and Anglo-American Poetry" in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 (1978), 216-21.
 18. "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), p. 251.
 19. "Explanation and Understanding," *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fortworth: The Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976), p. 81.
 20. *Shih-p'in chi-chieh*, p. 23.
 21. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), p. 280. English translation quoted from David E. Linge in his Introduction to *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. xxv.
 22. "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," *Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 177.
 23. "Appropriation," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 185.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 191-93. Cf. Ricoeur's "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject" and "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 223-66; *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, p. 94.
 25. Translation is from Burton Watson's *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970). My Chinese text is *Chuang-Tzu tsuan-t sien* 莊子纂箋, ed. Ch'ien Mu 錢穆 (Hong Kong: East-south, 1951).
 26. Lu Chi's *Wen-fu* 文賦 in *Wen Hsüan* 文選, Vol. 1, p. 350. Liu Hsieh's phrase is found in the chapter "Ti-hsing 體性 of *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍. I am quoting from Vincent Shih's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, p. 225.
 27. *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 15-16.
 28. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 25, 191-92.

29. *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 73-74.
30. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 40-41.
31. *Being and Time*. p. 195.
32. "Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 178.
33. *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stumbaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 109.
34. *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 84.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
36. "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 161-62.
37. "The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem," *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 65.
38. "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 116.
39. Maire Jaanus Kurrik, *Literature and Negation* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 51, 53.
40. "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 53-55; "On the Essence of Truth" in *Existence and Being*, pp. 311-16. Also, Gadamer has aptly used this idea of Heidegger to bring together art criticism, hermeneutics and ontology of being. In "Heidegger's later Philosophy," he says: "there is clearly a tension between the emergence and the hiddenness that constitute the being of the work itself. . . . The conflict between revealment and concealment is not the truth of the work of art alone, but the truth of every being, for as unhiddenness, truth is always such an *opposition of revealment and concealment*. The two being necessarily together." See *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 226.
41. *Shih-p'in chi-chieh*, p. 4.
42. *Hun-tun* appears in Chapter 7, *Chuang Tzu*, p. 97.
43. "Metaphor and Symbol," *Interpretation Theory: Discourse in the Surplus of Meaning*, p. 50.
44. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, et al. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 6, 69-76. Cf. "Metaphor and Symbol," *Interpretation Theory: Discourse in the Surplus of Meaning*, pp. 49-50; "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 167-68.