

SCHOLARS SCORN EACH OTHER, DON'T THEY?

On the Psychology of (Not Only) Chinese Literati

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Dealing with a living culture does not only entail an encounter with its artistic, literary, or philosophical achievements, but also with the people that constitute this culture, in this case with Chinese artists and writers. Talking to them about their experience with literary or artistic criticism (mostly modest and indirect in nature compared with that of Western critics), they tend to explain it with the saying “scholars scorn each other” (*wenren xiang qing*).

As is well known, this saying is about 1800 years old, being coined by Cao Cao's son Cao Pi (187-226). Its venerable and authoritative age calls for a questioning of its validity, i.e. whether – from a historical perspective – it can be confirmed or not, and if so, whether it constitutes a significant part of the so called “cultural-psychological structure” (*wenhua xinli jiegou*) of the Chinese intellectuals, or whether it rather refers to universal patterns of behaviour. Before I attempt to give an answer to these questions, I shall try to approach the problem indirectly by first asking and answering a set of different questions: Which behavioural patterns are characteristic for the traditional Chinese scholar-literatus (*shi* or *wenren*)? What is the relative weight of literary compared to public or moral merits? And which are the standards for Chinese literary and artistic criticism?

Behavioural Patterns

As to the questions concerning the behavioural patterns, we first have to distinguish between standards and modes of behaviour, i.e. between ideal and reality. Needless to say, it was (and largely still is) the Confucian code of behaviour which the literati

had to abide by. The Chinese scholar-literatus was first of all committed to moral self-cultivation and service to the community. If, after this, he still had some left over energy, he might commit it to literary or artistic pursuits. As is said in a well known quote from the *Lunyu* ("Analects"):

A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.¹

The passage following the one above in the *Lunyu* aims in the same direction:

If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere: although men say that he has not learned (*xue*), I will certainly say that he has.²

Learning, thus, was in the first place moral cultivation and not erudition or academic scholarship. Therefore, it was not so much literary but rather moral and public ambition that characterizes the traditional scholar-literatus. According to a well known passage from the *Zuozhuan* on the three ways of "immortality" (*bu xiu*), everlasting fame was to be gained in the first place through moral qualities (*li de*), in the second place through public merits (*li gong*), and fame through words (*li yan*), i.e. literary fame, stood in the third and last position.³ There are countless literati that could be quoted in accord with these lines; in the following, a few shall be presented with slightly different preferences.

In his letter to Yang Xiu (Dezu), Cao Pi's younger brother Cao Zhi (192-232) writes:

¹ *Lunyu* 1.6; JAMES LEGGE, *The Chinese Classics*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1970, vol. 1, p.140.

² *Lunyu* 1.7; LEGGE 1970, vol.1, pp.140-41.

³ *Zuozhuan*, Xianggong 24.1; LEGGE 1970, vol.5, p. 505.

I might well be a person of limited virtues [...]. I do cherish hopes of being given the opportunity to serve the state, to benefit the commoners, to lead a career that posterity will remember as worthy of inscription on metal or stone. How can I be content with achievements in brush and ink, or regard myself as a princely person for my rhyme-prose?⁴

Cao Zhi's preferences reflect the priorities in the above quote from the *Zuozhuan*. When he mentions first of all his lack in moral cultivation, it remains unclear, however, if this is just ritualized modesty or if it accords with reality.

Cao Pi, likewise, regards literary in the context of political merits, but for him literature constitutes the ultimate base for an immortal fame⁵ when he says:

Literature is no less noble an activity than the governing of a state; it is also a way to immortality. The years pass and one's life runs out its natural course. Honours and pleasures cease to be with one's body. Against these inexorable facts, literature lives on to eternity.⁶

Two centuries later, also Liu Xie (600 A.D.) writes in his *Wenxin Diaolong* ("The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons") on the relationship between virtue and literature without showing any preferences: "Therefore, a man of virtue (*junzi*), in his relationship with the people of the world, aims at establishing both his character (*de*) and his words (*yan*)."⁷

In spite of this apparent ambivalence, the general evaluation of literary compared to public or moral merits was unmistakable: They were ranked in the rear

⁴ *Zhongguo Lidai Wenlun Xuan*, ed. by GUO SHAOYU, Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1979, vol. 1, p.165; *Early Chinese Literary Criticism*, transl. by SIU-KIT WONG, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1983, p. 29.

⁵ It seems that each of the two brothers put more emphasis on their respective weak sides: The politically successful Cao Pi is ranked as the inferior poet; Cao Zhi, whose poetic talent has been hailed throughout the ages, would have liked to be given higher political responsibility, i.e. to become emperor.

⁶ GUO 1979, vol. 1, p. 158; WONG 1983, p. 21.

⁷ *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, transl. by VINCENT YU-CHUNG SHIH, Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1983, p. 3. Cf. STEPHEN OWEN, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992, p. 293.

end, just as persons were ordered in the official histories, with biographies of writers and artists following behind the paragons of virtue and those of public merit.

As to calligraphy and painting which were regarded as even more personal and thus less serious activities than writing, the following quotation from Zheng Xie (1693 - 1765), one of the foremost literati painters of late imperial China, indicates the same priority. (It is even more remarkable as Zheng Xie is generally regarded as an eccentric.)

Calligraphy and painting are considered fine arts, but are also vulgar occupations. Is it not a vulgar thing for a man who cannot do some service to the country and improve the life of the people to occupy himself with pen and ink for the amusement of other people? It was harmless for Su Dongpo [Su Shi], who took the entire universe into his heart to paint a tree or a rock with a dry brush. But Wang Mojie [Wang Wei] and Zhao Ze'ang [Mengfu] were merely two painters in the times of Tang and Song. If you examine their poetry and prose, you will not find a single line that has to do with the welfare of the people.⁸

Due to their Confucian education, moral cultivation and public service were the primary goals of pre-modern Chinese literati;⁹ literature and the arts were realms to be roamed in (*you yi*)¹⁰ for recreational purposes after the fulfilment of the more important duties. In dealing with other people, scholars should not be scornful but – according to the passage from the *Analects* quoted in the beginning – respectful, earnest, and truthful.

This was the ideal, what was reality like? Seen from a historical and comparative perspective, we may assume that the realization of this ideal in Chinese

⁸ ZHENG XIE, *Zheng Banqiao Ji*, Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1979, p. 22; translation in: *The Wisdom of China and India*, ed. by LIN YUTANG, Taipei, 1968, p. 1081. See also KARL-HEINZ POHL, *Cheng Pan-ch'iao: Poet, Painter and Calligrapher*, in: *Monumenta Serica Monograph*, Series XXI, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1990, p. 50.

⁹ These goals should be pursued irregardless of success or failure, as is said in *Mengzi*: "When the men of antiquity realized their wishes, benefits were conferred by them on the people. If they did not realize their wishes, they cultivated their personal character, and became illustrious in the world." (*Mencius* VII. A 9.6; LEGGE 1970, vol. 2, p. 453).

¹⁰ *Lunyu* 7.6; LEGGE 1970, vol. 1, p. 196.

history has been as difficult as the realization of charity and brotherly love as the main ideals in Christianity, which is to say that common practice was far off from this ideal. The tendency only to conform outwardly to the rules of behaviour (*li*) without the corresponding feeling (*qing*) has already been criticized by Xun Zi in his chapter on *li*. This means, politeness and modesty often were nothing but external forms or formalities. Today, we can still see signs of this in the stereotype formulas of modesty or the requests to correct faulty views and such at the end of books and articles. And when it says in the *Analects*, "Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue"¹¹, we may safely assume that already at the times of Confucius "fine words" as well as "insinuating appearances" were more common than the standards of "earnest and truthful" human conduct.

In the public realm it was probably not much different. As to Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, we know that their relationship was marked by envy and competition. Literati of non-princely origin most likely did not behave much differently. From the Wei-Jin until the Tang period, selection of candidates for the civil service was carried out on the basis of status and lineage. Concretely, men of merit from powerful clans were recommended and accordingly confirmed "from above". The evaluation and classification of persons was the duty of so called "unpartial and just" officials (*zhongzheng*)¹². It is self understood that in spite of the "just impartiality", implied in the title of these officials, in reality it was partiality and nepotism that marked the selection process.

Although an impartial selection of outstanding persons became the purpose of the civil service examinations established in the Sui-Tang period, the overall pattern, from Tang times on, did not change much. Success in the examinations only guaranteed the entry into the gentry class, the appointment to respectable positions, however, still proceeded according to recommendations (the recommender being

¹¹ *Lunyu* 1.3; LEGGE 1970, vol. 1, p. 139.

¹² DIETER KUHN, *Status und Ritus: Das China der Aristokraten von den Anfängen bis zum 10. Jahrhundert nach Christus*, Heidelberg: Ed. Forum, 1991, pp. 394, 400.

held responsible for any mistakes of the person recommended). Later on, particularly in Qing times, the quota for passing the examinations was lowered drastically for the Jiangnan area with the result that for not a few men of high ambitions entry into the gentry class was virtually impossible. In other words, all strata of the administrative structure, including the court and the regions, were marked by competition, intrigues, and envy. The frequent impersonation of the "upright official" (*qing guan*) in plays, novels, and anecdotes suggests that this was a kind of invocation – an expression of a need – rather than a reflection of reality. Thus, victims of intrigues and frustrated candidates in the examinations often identified with Qu Yuan, the prototype of the high-minded but not recognized and brought-down scholar-official. As they could not gain a reputation through public merits (*li gong*), they tried it, just like Qu Yuan did and Cao Pi recommended, through their literary works (*li yan*)¹³.

Literary Criticism

Although from a classical Confucian point of view, literature was, in comparison to morals and politics, regarded as a secondary matter, merely adding some colour to a person already outstanding in other ways, from the Wei-Jin Period on, literature gained a position of its own: in Cao Pi's words, a means for immortal fame. As such, it might even have, as mentioned, become more important than morals or politics, since the road to public merit was often blocked and moral merits constituted more of an ideal rather than a reality. With this elevation of literature, we also encounter an increasing interest in criticizing literature. But because of the above mentioned context – a unity of ethics and aesthetics – we find already quite early the tendency to focus on the person – on the author or artist – rather than on the work, as constituting a main characteristic of traditional literary and art criticism. Thus we

¹³ Some of those might have received comfort in such situations through a passage from the beginning of the *Analects*: "Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?" *Lunyu* 1.1.3; LEGGE 1970, vol. 1, p.137.

have the popular saying, "Literature is like the person" (*wen ru qi ren*). This tendency goes back to some of the earliest comments on literature, such as the saying, "Poetry expresses intention" (*shi yan zhi*) from the *Shujing* ("Book of Documents"), which, paraphrased in the "Great Preface" of the *Shijing* ("The Book of Songs"), became one of the most important concepts in Chinese literature. We encounter similar statements, mentioning the close connection between art and personality, throughout the history of Chinese literature and art in countless variations. Also Cao Pi's view that in literature *qi*, the individual temperament of the author, is the most important thing (*wen yi qi wei zhu*), belongs to that tradition.

The selection of officials according to the criteria of character during the Wei-Jin period has already been mentioned above. This practice did not only become institutionalized for official purposes but was also popular as "character talk" among the literati of that time, as is supported by the abundant anecdotes in Liu Yiqing's *Shishuo Xinyu* ("New Tales of the World"). Therefore, it is not surprising that the evaluation of character likewise became common practice in the rating of poetry and art. Zhong Rong's *Shipin* ("Grades of Poetry"), for example, is the first work which, according to its title, was directed towards the evaluation of poetry, in fact however, it is an evaluation of poets (*renpin*). The following passage from the late Qing critic Liu Xizai (1815 - 1881) on calligraphy, in his *Yigai* ("Outline of the Arts"), shows that this view remained popular for two thousand years. "To write (*shu*) means 'to be like' (*ru*): It is like the writer's scholarship (*xue*), like his talent (*cai*), like his intentions (*zhi*), in short, like the person himself and nothing less."¹⁴

Needless to say, the word "to write" in the above passage could be replaced by "to paint" (*hua*) or "to write poetry" (*shi*). Thus, traditionally, there hardly seems to have been a separation between the man and his work. The main focus of interest has always been on human qualities.

¹⁴ LIU XIZAI, *Yigai*, Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1978, p. 170.

The second characteristic of traditional Chinese criticism is that it preoccupies itself chiefly with the great poets and artists of the past. The aim is to see their faces and to befriend them through their works. In the book of *Mengzi* there is already a passage which recommends that one should make friends with the ancient worthies through their literary documents:

When a scholar feels that his friendship with all the virtuous scholars of the kingdom is not sufficient to satisfy him, he proceeds to ascend to consider the men of antiquity. He repeats their poems, and reads their books, and as he does not know what they were as men, to ascertain this, he considers their history. This is to ascend and make friends of the men of antiquity.¹⁵

The orientation towards the past, as is well known, characterizes Confucian thinking in general. This tendency is criticized already in the Han dynasty by the sceptic Wang Chong (27-101). In his *Lun Heng* he remarks: "The ordinary scholars explaining omens are prone to magnify antiquity and detract from the present. [...] They trust in falsehoods, provided they be old and far away, and they despise truth, in case it be near and modern."¹⁶ In early Chinese literary criticism, the tendency to value past and distant works higher than those contemporary and nearby, is characterized as its main weakness. In his *Wenxin Diaolong* Liu Xie mentions two interesting examples: Both Qin Shihuang and Han Wudi admired the works of contemporaries (Han Fei and Sima Xiangru) because they erroneously took them to be the works of ancient authors. Once they discovered their mistakes, they changed their judgment, in one case (Han Fei) the author was thrown in jail.¹⁷

The fondness of the past also furthered another ambivalent characteristic in Chinese literature: the inclination to copy past authors, both in the form of quotations or allusions and of plagiarism. Liu Xie already mentioned (in his chap. 47) that:

¹⁵ *Mencius* V.B 8.2; LEGGE 1970, vol.2, p.392.

¹⁶ WANG CHONG, "Xu song", in: *Lun Heng*, quoted according to GUO 1979, vol. 1, p. 164; *Lun Heng*, transl. by ALFRED FORKE, Leipzig: Harassowitz, 1907-1911, vol. 2, p. 226.

¹⁷ SHIH 1983, p. 503.

[...] many writers began to quote the works of past authors to help them in their own writing. It is at this point that we find the line drawn between those who take and those who give, a distinction which we should not allow to become blurred in our minds.¹⁸

Judging from a passage in the *Shi Shi* ("Styles of Poetry") by the Tang monk Jiaoran (730 - 799), there must have already been quite early a keen sense for different kinds of "taking" from "past authors" when he distinguishes between the "stealing of words" (*tou yu*), "stealing of ideas" (*tou yi*) and "stealing of force" (*tou shi*).¹⁹ This tendency reached a peak in the archaist movements during the later dynasties of Chinese pre-modern history.

Cao Pi adds another important aspect in the practice of literary criticism: the inclination to value one's own works higher than those of others. He explains this by the following observations (the passage contains the *locus classicus* of our topic):

It has been the case from the ancient past that men of letters hold another in scorn [...]. The truth is that it is easy for us to see the particular merits in ourselves and that, while literature encompasses a variety of styles, few writers are equally accomplished in all of them; as a result, what is one's own forte often becomes grounds on which one levels attacks on fellow-writers gifted in other ways. A common saying has it that the oldest broom in one's own household is worth a thousand pieces of gold. The disparagement of others proceeds from imperfect knowledge of oneself. [...] Men of average intelligence are given to treasuring what comes from afar and regarding what comes from nearby with contempt; turning their back on facts, they bow to reputations. They are also prone to making the mistake of over-rating themselves out of benighted self-ignorance.²⁰

Cao Pi here criticizes the wide-spread blindness to one's own short-comings. Lack of self-criticism apparently leads many people to view their own works, comparable – so his metaphor – to an old broom with just a few hairs left, as more valuable than someone else's. In its deep insight into human psychology his critique on this form of literary criticism has even today not lost its actuality.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 493.

¹⁹ *Lidai Shihua*, ed. by HE WENHUAN, Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1991, vol. 1, p. 34.

²⁰ GUO 1979, vol. 1, p.158; WONG 1983, p. 19.

In general, early Chinese criticism is more author- and less work-orientated. In Liu Xie's thorough treatise on all aspects of literature, work-related, immanent criticism also plays a role, such as in his so called "six points" (*liu guan*), which are to be considered in a literary work – 1. genre and style (*weiti*), 2. rhetoric (*zhici*), 3. flexible adaptability (*tongbian*), 4. conformity or nonconformity to orthodox principles (*qizheng*), 5. factual and intellectual content (*shiyi*), 6. musical pattern (*gongshang*) – but then, immediately in the next sentence, he directs his attention to the interior life of the author, in fact to the reconstructing of the author's intention:

The writer's first experience is his inner feeling, which he then seeks to express in words. But the reader, on the other hand, experiences the words first, and then works himself into the feeling of the author. If he can trace the waves back to their source, there will be nothing, however dark and hidden, that will not be revealed to him. Although the life of an age may have passed beyond our view, we may often, through reading its literature, succeed in grasping the heart of it.²¹

In this remarkable passage, the process of aesthetic reception by the reader is being seen as exactly the opposite of the process of creation by the artist. This means, on the one hand, that a close reading allows the reader to re-experience the process of creation in the process of reception; on the other hand, it is the goal of the reader – and an essential part of his aesthetic enjoyment – to see the heart (*xin*) of the author. And because in Chinese tradition the heart represents not only the emotional, but also the cognitive, and the moral center of a person, this view of things implies in the first place an evaluation of the person (*ren*) and not so much of his writing (*wen*).

Historical Differences

If we examine the saying "scholars scorn each other" from a historical perspective, we will observe a few differences in degree to which the saying might hold true. A scornful tendency among literati can be noticed as early as the late Zhou in the conflicting views among the adherents of the so called "Hundred Schools" of

²¹ SHIH 1983, p. 509.

philosophical-political thought. The way in which members of other schools were disparaged is implicitly noticable in various pre-Qin works, including some of the Confucian classics. In his second chapter ("Qiwulun"), Zhuang Zi puts it like this: "So it is that we have the contention between the literati (*ru*) and Mohists, the one side affirming what the other denies, and vice versa."²² Here, we might have, historically, hit upon the very root of our topic.

According to a few sources quoted so far, there appears to have been a tendency, prominent during the Han and the Six Dynasties periods, to value ancient, distant, and own works higher than contemporary, nearby, and other people's works. As to the Tang Era, however, it is difficult to confirm this. Particularly regarding the relationship of eminent poets to contemporaries, there seems to have been a different spirit in this period. Histories and anecdotes relate in many cases, especially in view of Du Fu, Li Bai, Yuan Zhen, Bai Juyi, Zhang Ji, etc., the respect and friendship that they held for each other. Because of this situation, the Qing critic Shang Rong turns Cao Pi's saying around, stating that as to the Tang dynasty, "the literati esteemed each other" (*wenren xiang zhong*).²³

The reason for this might be that the Tang – the golden age of Chinese poetry – was a period of remarkable creativity. As to poetry, it was not necessary to measure works according to the standards of antiquity, because in this field new standards were being established. Also, the examination system, which later on would sow the seeds for so much envy and competition, was still in its early stage. Only ten per cent of the literati got their positions in this way.²⁴ (In 754, one year before the An Lushan rebellion, poetry first became a topic of the examinations.²⁵) In spite of this positive

²² *Zhuangzi*, II.3; *The Texts of Taoism*, transl. by JAMES LEGGE, New York: Dover Publications, 1962, vol. 1, p. 182.

²³ GUO 1979, vol. 1, p. 169.

²⁴ KUHN 1991, p. 543.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

picture, we may ask, though, if the high estimation of the literati for each other was not limited to the few outstanding figures, in other words, if the lower-level scholars did not just scorn each other as Cao Pi suggested.

Also in view of the Song Dynasty, we gain the impression that, irregardless of the increased fractionalization in philosophy, politics, and poetry, a rather fair and respectful behaviour dominated at least among the outstanding literati. For example, the high esteem that political opponents like Wang Anshi and Su Shi held for one another, was and still is being hailed today. It is also well-known that Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan respected one another greatly in spite of their serious differences in the exegesis of the Confucian teachings. Lu's lectures in Zhu Xi's *Bailudong Shuyuan* ("White Deer Grotto Academy") has always been praised as a hallmark of ideological tolerance.²⁶ At the same time, we also know, that Zhu Xi's and Lu Jiuyuan's students liked to attack one another.

In Ming and Qing times, the modes of interaction among the literati appear to have deteriorated. The reasons for this, on the one hand, may have been the already mentioned abuses in the civil service examinations. On the other hand, poetry and painting of the Ming were influenced by archaistic schools. It was a period when the orientation towards antiquity, as an essential part of the Confucian worldview, culminated. In comparison to the pre-Tang and Tang periods, in Ming and Qing times, poets could now choose among a great variety of models to emulate, e.g. the many styles of the Tang and Song periods. Because of these archaistic tendencies, including the already mentioned ills of copying, alluding, and plagiarizing the ancients, the Ming and Qing periods hardly produced any novelties in poetry. The notorious orientation towards the past, however, considerably contributed to the conflicts in the literary field. These were not only carried out between the different archaistic schools but also between archaist and non-conformist (e.g. the Gong'an school) or orthodox and heterodox schools. For the time of transition from Ming to

²⁶ WING-TSIT CHAN, *Chu Hsi: Life and Thought*, Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1987, pp. 7-8.

Qing, Ye Xie (1627 - 1703) remarks in his treatise *Yuan Shi* ("On the Origins of Poetry"):

Towards the end of the Ming, everyone, whom one could call a poet, was busy copying their predecessors. They were incapable of equaling the inspiration (*xinghui*) and spiritual essence of the old masters. Instead, they plagiarized their sentences, stole their words, and produced imitations of earlier models. Like little children learning to speak, they only babbled in imitation. The sound may be similar, but it is far from real speech. In the face of this, one can only turn away and throw up.²⁷

In connection with his thesis that one is able to see the faces of the ancient poets (mainly Tao Yuanming, Du Fu, Li Bai, Han Yu, Su Shi) through their writings, Ye Xie writes:

I have read the poetry collections of several well-known writers of recent times from beginning to the end, and always found the poems to be good work; but reading them over several times, I never could make out what their faces looked like. I don't think that this is how a real author should be.²⁸

Ye Xie's assessment is characteristical for the modes of criticism during the Qing. In this period, one can clearly notice a tendency to debase contemporaries and to esteem writers of old. In the Qing we also have of a few short treatises, such as by Zhao Yi (1727-1814) and Qian Daxin (1728-1804), which discuss Cao Pi's saying, that scholars scorn each other.²⁹

Lin Yutang and Lu Xun

Let us briefly look at the modern period, i.e. the 1920s and 1930s of this century. Considering the development among the Chinese literati in the Qing period as mentioned above, the mud-slinging in literature circles during and after the May 4th

²⁷ YE XIE, *Yuan Shi*, Shanghai: Qing Shihua Edition, 1978, vol. 2, p. 571. KARL-HEINZ POHL, "Ye Xie's 'On the Origin of Poetry' (*Yuan Shi*): A Poetic of the Early Qing", in: *T'oung-pao* 1992: LXXVIII, p. 6.

²⁸ OWEN 1992, p. 577.

²⁹ ZHAO YI, "Wenren xiang qing", in: *Gaiyu Congkao*, 40.8, (p. 464); QIAN DAXIN, "Wenren wu xiang qing", in: *Shijiazhai Yangxinlu*, SBBY, 18.12.

Movement seems historically consistent. Yet due to the general paradigm shift in Chinese society, we notice different accents. The veneration of the ancients ceased to play a dominant role, not implying, however, that contemporaries were now respected instead. Quite the contrary: the veneration of the far and distant took its place, that is to say, the more Western, the better. Foreign criteria became the standard of something new which was yet undefined but which was expected to set the tone for the modern period. This included not only literature and arts but also ideology: The claim of absolute validity of a new and foreign orthodoxy replaced what was traditionally Chinese. Hence the criticism by Wang Chong, Cao Pi, and Liu Xie against these tendencies still applies. This, at least in part, explains the polemical excesses of this period in which also an extraordinary figure such as Lu Xun indulged. Instigated by an article of Lin Yutang, published in 1934, with the title *Zuo Wen yu Zuo Ren* ("To Write Literature and to Behave Properly"), Lu Xun in 1935 (one year before his death) wrote seven articles under the title *Wenren Xiang Qing* ("Scholars Scorn Each Other").³⁰ The topic obviously must have hit a nerve with him. Lin Yutang, in his article, mocks at the quarrels among men of letters as in the following passage, which could very well serve as a modern illustration of the situation depicted by Zhuang Zi above:

The scholars like to scorn each other. Like women they criticize the looks of face and feet. [...] That's why the different literary cliques insult each other, such as colloquialists against the classicists, classicists against colloquialists, folk-literature against Bolshevik literature, Bolsheviks against proponents of a "third category". All are heading against each other like setting out from different enemy camps, they are forming groups and fractions, are throwing spears against lances. In streets and alleys as well as in newspaper jottings they abuse each other.³¹

³⁰ They are all included in his collection *Qiejieting Zawen*, vol. 2, in: *Lu Xun Quan Ji*, vol. 6, pp. 298, 335, 373, 377, 381, 399, 403.

³¹ LIN YUTANG, "Zuo wen yu zuo ren" in: *Wode Hua*, Shanghai: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1934, pp. 442-443.

Lin Yutang's and Lu Xun's points of view exactly reflect the patterns of literary criticism as outlined earlier. Although Lin Yutang, in his article, does not subscribe to the view that "literature is like the person" (*wen ru qi ren*),³² he does not, instead, argue for the autonomy of literature but – in accordance with the Confucian tradition – raises the point that decent human behaviour is more important than any literary merit. For writing in a bad style would not be a grave mistake in itself, but being a depraved person certainly would. And so he says, "If you can't be a man of letters, you can still be a decent human being".³³ He recommends, for example, to engage oneself in social affairs for the common good, like teaching ignorant children and such. Thus, for Lin Yutang, *ren* (being human) and *xing* (behaviour) are more important than *wen* (literature). In accordance with the quotation from the *Zuozhuan*, he is concerned with *li de* (establishing virtue) and *li gong* (public merits) and not with *li yan* (words). Decent human behaviour, he says, is like the main course in a meal, literature is only the dessert. That's why he also calls for taking literature not too seriously. As is well known, he opposed political literature and advocated for humour in writing instead.

Lu Xun, on the other hand, defends the role of the uncompromising critic. He stresses that, faced with the meagre literary fare and the flood of printed nonsense in his day, one should not – in reference to Cao Pi's saying or to Zhuang Zi's relative equality of things – simply accept any point of view. For him the contemporary political struggle, in which literature forms an important weapon, does not permit any relativism. To refer to the saying *wenren xiang qing* in calling for a decent way of social intercourse is nothing but a strategic means of the other side in the political struggle.³⁴ Finally, using this slogan for blaming others, he says, is not without

³² For example, Lin likes the plays of the late Ming playwright Ruan Dacheng, but concedes that the author had been a depraved person. LIN 1934, p. 445.

³³ LIN 1934, p. 446.

³⁴ The ideological rigorism with which Lu Xun in his late years battled against people of every creed and kind, is remindful, on the one hand, of the uncompromising attitude of neo-

problems because it always implicates its user as well. (Caution also with this article!)

As to Lin Yutang's and Lu Xun's relationship, it is, lastly, worth noting that in spite of their political and literary differences and occasional quarrels, they basically retained a respectful attitude toward each other. Even if Lu Xun relentlessly derided the minor lights of the contemporary literary scene, he did not hit any unfair attacks against Lin Yutang, whom he, for a while, had co-operated with in the *Yusi* journal. In his anthology *The Wisdom of China and India*, published 1942 in America, Lin Yutang, likewise, pays respect to Lu Xun by including so called "epigrams" of Lu Xun's and introducing them with friendly criticism:

It is because he is more a warrior than a "literary man" that in reading his writings, one continually smells blood, gunpowder, and sweat and tears [...] These ideas are incredibly naive and hardly show a sense of discernment either of the East or of the West. [...] But China needed a man like Lusin [i.e. Lu Xun; K.-H. Pohl] to wake the millions up from the self-complacency and lethargy and accumulated inertia of four thousand years. Perhaps China needs still more Lusins.³⁵

Conclusion

Is our topic a purely Chinese problem? Our initial question was, if Cao Pi's saying refers to a significant part of the Chinese "cultural-psychological structure" or to universal patterns of behaviour. Some of the elements discussed above, such as focus on the author/artist, orientation toward the past, priority of moral over artistic issues, ideological (or religious) orthodoxy, appear to be part of the context of literature in almost all pre-modern cultures. The mentioned unity of aesthetics and ethics (*wen dao heyi*, or, as it is usually put, *wen yi zai dao*) seems, however, to have been particularly prominent in China. In this context, criticizing literature or art, on the one

Confucian guardians of morality. On the other hand, his giving offence and biting attacks against the pervading pettiness of his day recalls images of pre-modern eccentrics.

³⁵ LIN 1968, p. 1085-1086.

hand, meant criticizing the man and his morals. On the other hand, this practice might have turned into a popular pastime because, since Cao Pi, literary merits had become equal to moral and public merits (if not more so than these) as important means for gaining everlasting fame. The Chinese examination system with its high competition and well known short-comings might also be considered a specifically Chinese factor, although its actual influence on our problem would still have to be more thoroughly researched. (Cao Pi's saying was coined long before the examination system was established.) Yet there seems to have been a basic tendency, possibly because of competitive reasons, to entertain a critical attitude towards contemporaries and to overrate, instead, the rather "harmless" writers of old. Be that as it may, the recent appeal to Chinese writers by Li Ruihuan (Chairman of the People's Consultative Conference), "writers should love each other, respect each other, support each other and help each other", clearly shows that the question still is an issue in China today. In its most recent proclamation of March 27, 1995,³⁶ China's Writers Association (*Zhongguo Zuojia Xiehui*) also adopted his appeal.

The historical survey, however, also made clear that the distribution of sources indicating the matter in question is uneven. For this reason, it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion. The problem that scholars scorned each other possibly only concerned the minor figures; the greater ones, however, largely appear to be an exception to this rule: They mostly valued each other, often being readers who figuratively "understand the music" (*zhi yin*), as Liu Xie also asked for in his chapter (48) on the "Understanding Critic".

When we look at the question from a somewhat cross-cultural and self-critical perspective, we may even ask if the Chinese literati have not actually quite early (in the 2nd to 3rd century A.D.) come upon a psychological problem which – of course – does not only afflict the Chinese world of letters. Moreover, they also rather early

³⁶ *Wenyibao*, April 1, 1995.

came up with reasons and explanations which, in fact, with their insight into human psychology, still hold today. The problem certainly also concerns our own academic and, in the narrow sense, our own Sinological world, as well. (According to Tu Weiming's definition of a "Cultural China", *Wenhua Zhongguo*, the Sinologists belong to the third and most outer circle of Cultural China anyway.) It is of course the duty of a critic to give a critical opinion – this is also Lu Xun's point. Yet, while reading some reviews by Western scholars, which tend to be more devastating in the West than in China, one sometimes wishes that those colleagues who feel a calling to criticize others may be hit by the insight that, figuratively speaking, we all use water for cooking. In China it was mainly the great literati of the golden ages of Tang and Song who respectfully and understandingly associated with each other, at the same time creating works of stunning originality and lasting value. If there should, indeed, be a connection between the quality of the works and the behaviour of the intellectuals of a certain period, then we – as Sinologists – might still have to wait for such a "golden age". But, who knows, ours is still a young discipline – maybe it is just around the corner ...