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Volume 11, 2019

Edited by Connell Vaughan and Iris Vidmar Jovanović

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# *The Moral Dimension of Qiyun Aesthetics and Some Kantian Resonances*

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I suggest that the notion of *qiyun* (spirit consonance) in the context of landscape painting involves a moral dimension. The Confucian doctrine of sincerity involved in bringing the landscapist's or audience's mind in accord with the Dao underpins the moral dimension of spiritual communion between artist, object, audience and work. By projecting Kant's, and Schiller's somewhat modified Kantian philosophy of aesthetic autonomy and the moral relevance of art into the *qiyun*-focused context, we shall see that reflection on parallels and differences between the two cultural traditions helps to better understand the moral dimension of *qiyun* aesthetics.

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<sup>1</sup> Email: [huxiaoyan2013@gmail.com](mailto:huxiaoyan2013@gmail.com) I wish to thank Prof. Simon Hailwood for his feedback on this paper. I appreciate Prof. Joseph Harroff's comments on my paper '*Moral Enlightenment of Classical Chinese Art*' (an early version of the first part of this paper) presented in the American Society of Aesthetics 2018 Eastern Division Meeting in April 2018 in Philadelphia. He remarks that my *qiyun*-focused interpretive framework serves 'to unsettle the dualistic assumptions undergirding pervasive ideals of aesthetic autonomy and the widely held prejudice that Confucianism (unlike its Daoist and Chan counterparts) as a tradition has been largely responsible for introducing so much heavy-handed didacticism and oppressive moral symbolism into Chinese arts in service of a repressive Family-State apparatus'. The second part of the paper was shortlisted by the European Society for Aesthetics for 2019 Essay prize, and presented in the ESA 2019 Annual Conference on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019 in the University of Warsaw, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019 in Bath Spa University, and the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019 in the University of Belgrade. I also thank Dr. Roger Clarke for inviting me to give a talk on this topic in Comparative Philosophy Workshop in Queen's University Belfast on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Many thanks for audiences listening to my presentations.

## 1. Introduction

One may insist that the notion of *qiyun* (spirit consonance) in Chinese painting is merely an aesthetic criterion, not for moral enlightenment, and aesthetic autonomy and moral cultivation are two disparate categories.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will argue that this is a mistake. I attempt to show why *qiyun* in the context of landscape painting should not be regarded merely as an aesthetic criterion, and how it embodies the dimension of moral cultivation through spiritual communion between artist and object, audience and work.

In the first section, I will firstly show that the notion of *qiyun* applied by the 10<sup>th</sup> century landscapist and theorist Jing Hao in landscape painting, and further developed by the 11<sup>th</sup> century art historian Guo Ruoxu (ca. 1080) and the early Yuan connoisseur Tang Hou (active in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and the early 14<sup>th</sup> century) involves a moral dimension. Then, we will see that the moral relevance of *qiyun*-focused landscape painting is reflected in these two aspects: (i) the way landscapists and audiences have

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of *qiyun* is initially proposed by Xie He (active 500–ca. 535) in his six laws of Chinese painting. I have suggested that the notion of *qiyun* includes four dimensions: where the process of creation by painters is concerned, *qiyun* refers to the essential quality of the object depicted; once the painter releases the brush to complete a work, *qiyun* becomes the expressive quality or content of the work; the ability to create a painting replete with *qiyun* is in relation to the artist's *qiyun*; *qiyun* implies the spiritual communion and sympathetic resonance between artist and object (Hu, 2016: 247–268).

of contemplating the world and seeking spiritual communion with it, and (ii) the experience of (Confucian) sincerity (*cheng*) which leads the kindred minds to achieve spiritual communion and resonance during artistic practice or appreciation. In the second section, I examine the efficacy of projecting Kant's and Schiller's philosophy of aesthetic autonomy and the moral relevance of art into a *qiyun*-focused landscape painting context, and show that the differences and parallels between the two cultural traditions help us better understand the moral dimension of *qiyun* aesthetics, increase appreciation of problems with earlier Chinese scholars' adoption of Kantian ideas in their writings on the Chinese aesthetic tradition, and illuminate some limitations in Kantian aesthetics.

## **2. *Qiyun*, Spiritual Kinship and Sincere Will**

Xie He initially proposes the notion of *qiyun* in his six laws of painting in the context of figure painting as dominant genre, while his text does not give *qiyun* a moral dimension. However, the moral dimension of *qiyun* is shared in the texts written by Jing Hao, Guo Ruoxu, and Tang Hou. In *Notes on the Art of Brush (Bifa Ji)*, Jing Hao's application of *qiyun* in landscape painting, involves a moral dimension to the *qiyun* of depicted natural objects (see Munakata, 1974: 13–14). His view that natural objects such as the pine tree share congenial attributes with the virtuous originates in *the Analects*, where



Confucius says that ‘The Virtue of a gentleman is like the wind, and the Virtue of a petty person is like the grass— when the wind moves over the grass, the grass is sure to bend’ (Slingerland, 2006: 36; *Analects*, 12.19). Jing Hao also suggests that capturing the object’s *zhen* (internal reality) which is embodied through *qi* and *yun* requires and accompanies the moral cultivation of the landscapist, and claims that since ‘limitless desire is a threat to life’, by virtue of ‘[enjoying] playing the [*qin*] lute, calligraphy, and painting, [wise people] replace worthless desires with [worthy play of art]’ (Bush and Shih, 2012: 141/146; Yu, 1986: 606).

Before Jing Hao, the Tang art historian and critic Zhang Yanyuan (847) follows Xie He’s six laws in his *Record of the Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties (Lidai Minghua Ji)*, although he does not apply the notion of *qiyun* to landscape painting.<sup>3</sup> In his writing on the origin of Chinese painting, he cites the Han scholar Lu Ji’s claim that ‘the rise of paintings is like that of sacrificial hymns and songs, to celebrate great deeds’, since historical figures and events were popular subject-matters at the initial stage of painting (Lin, 1967: 45).<sup>4</sup> Jing Hao locates the moral dimension of *qiyun* in the depicted natural object (the pine tree in his text) as seen above, while Zhang Yanyuan neither thinks landscape in paintings he has seen has *qiyun* nor directly links *qiyun* with a moral dimension in his

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<sup>3</sup> For an English translation of *Lidai Minghua Ji*, see Acker, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> For Zhang Yanyuan’s more discussion of painting’s moral relevance, see *Lidai Minghua ji chapter 1* section 1; Acker, 1954: 61–80; Lin, 1967: 43–47.

text.

Guo Ruoxu echoes Zhang Yanyuan in claiming that paintings depicting sages and worthies or recording moral figures' historical stories directly show the moral function of '[appraising] critically their worth or folly or [shedding] light on their stability or disorder' by reminding observers of the moral distinctiveness of the role models (Bush and Shih, 2012: 93; Yu, 1986: 55). Zhang Yanyuan's classification of two kinds of people capable of masterpieces ('men robed and capped and of noble descent', and 'rare scholars and lofty-minded men') appears to have inspired Guo Ruoxu's view that paintings replete with *qiyun* were usually created by 'talented worthies of high position or superior gentlemen in retirement, who cleaved to loving-kindness and sought enjoyment in the arts or explored the abstruse and plumbed the depths', and lodged lofty and refined emotions within their works (Acker, 1954: 153; Bush and Shih, 2012: 95–96). For Guo Ruoxu, the last five laws by Xie He are 'open to study', while *qiyun* 'necessarily involves an innate knowledge; it assuredly cannot be secured through cleverness or close application, nor will time aid its attainment. It is an unspoken accord, a spiritual communion [*shenhui*]; "something that happens without one's knowing how"' (Bush and Shih, 2012: 95; Yu, 1986: 59).<sup>5</sup> Unlike Jing Hao who suggests that the moral dimension of *qiyun* is in

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<sup>5</sup> Soper (1951: 15) translates *shenhui* as 'spiritual consonance'. For an English translation of *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi* with the translator's notes, see Soper, 1951: 1–207.

the natural object such as the pine tree, Guo Ruoxu links the moral dimension of *qiyun* with the innate mental talent of the painter, which determines whether a painter can create a painting replete with *qiyun*. That is, for Guo Ruoxu, the moral dimension of *qiyun* directly relates to the artist's character, rather than the object depicted.

Three centuries later, Tang Hou does not stress the moral cultivation required by *qiyun*-focused artistic creation and appreciation as both Jing Hao and Guo Ruoxu suggest, although, from his *Huajian* (*Criticism of Painting*), one may see that these points are not excluded in his ideas of *qiyun* as the first criterion for painting connoisseurship.<sup>6</sup> He writes that 'The scions of good families must learn to look at calligraphy and painting' (Bush and Shih, 2012: 260; Chou, 2001: 71; 2005: 97). In the light of Jing Hao's view of the natural object's *qiyun*'s moral dimension and Guo Ruoxu's suggestion of the artist's moral cultivation practised through spiritual communion with the object, one can understand more deeply why Tang Hou persuades people born in good families to learn to appreciate calligraphy and painting. In general, considering that Jing Hao, Guo Ruoxu, and Tang Hou are all familiar with the Confucian advocacy of the (moral) cultivation of mind as the basis of human social life, one may understand a rough

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<sup>6</sup> For an English translation of *Huajian*, see Chou, 2001: 64–175; 2005: 94–152.

continuity between them regarding the moral dimension of *qiyun*.<sup>7</sup>

One may wonder how moral cultivation, as implied by Jing Hao, further suggested by Guo Ruoxu and echoed by Tang Hou, is involuntarily realised in, or at least accompanies, the practice of creating (and appreciating) a painting replete with *qiyun*. We have seen that Guo Ruoxu explicitly points out that creating a painting replete with *qiyun* requires spiritual communion between artist and object. That is, valuing *qiyun* above formal resemblance requires the artist to seek or experience the congeniality and resonance with the object at the congenial level of spirit-energy.<sup>8</sup> For instance, for painting the bamboo, a spiritual accord and moral kinship needs to be cultivated between artist and object, so as to capture its internal feature of humility, rectitude, uprightness and chastity. Here, it should be stressed that, we cannot simply regard capturing the *qiyun* of the natural

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<sup>7</sup> *The Great Learning* (Legge, trans, 1914: 1–23), one of the Confucian classics, tells of cultivating the self in eight steps. Among these eight, the first two are investigating things (*gewu*) and extending knowledge (*zhizhi*), and the next two are sincerity of thought (*chengyi*) and rectification of the mind (*zhengxin*).

<sup>8</sup> Guo Ruoxu's idea of *shenhui* may be inspired by the South Dynasties artists and theorists Zong Bing (375–443) and Wang Wei (415–443), and the Tang art historians and critics Li Sizhen (d. 696) and Zhang Yanyuan, and this idea is found in his contemporary artists and critics Shen Kuo's (1031–1095), Su Shi's (1037–1101) and Huang Tingjian's (1045–1105) writings, even though they do not apply the terminology of *qiyun* (see Bush and Shih, 2012: 37–39; Soper, 1951: 127; Peng, 1951: 139–140). Cahill (1959: 87) notes that Mencius regards reading literary works as a means of building the feelings of affinity with the scholars of antiquity, and this affinity is based on what later people call '*shenhui*' (See Mencius, book V, part 2, chapter 8; see also Tu Wei-ming: 1983: 69–71).

object as the imposition or projection of human characteristics onto the external natural world, as this will distort our understanding of the equal and harmonious relationship between artist and natural object (in both Confucian thought and Daoist philosophy).<sup>9</sup>

The spiritual communion may occur when the artist paints landscape in a spirit of reverence through an introvertive contemplation. As Guo Ruoxu's contemporary landscapist and theorist Guo Xi (1000–1090) suggests, the appropriate way for either artist or audience to look at landscape is thus:

Look with a heart in tune with forest and stream, then you will value them highly. Approach with the eyes of arrogance and extravagance, then you will value them but little. (Bush and Shih, 2012: 151; Yu, 1986: 632)

The heart-mind in tune with forest and stream advocated by Guo Xi means a purification and emancipation of the mind demanded by aesthetic autonomy, but this mental purification appears to have moral significance. For Guo Xi, when looking at natural objects without an appropriate mental state or a

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<sup>9</sup> Tu Wei-ming (2004: 37) explains *ganying* as analogous to *shenhui* (spiritual communion): 'the function of "affect and response" (*ganying*) characterizes nature as a great harmony and so informs the mind. The mind forms a union with nature by extending itself metonymically. Its aesthetic appreciation of nature is neither an appropriation of the object by the subject nor an imposition of the subject on the object, but the merging of the self into an expanded reality through transformation and participation'.

sincere attitude, the person will not discover the value of the landscape. He implies that moral self-cultivation is achieved through intuitive comprehension and absorbed contemplation in either artistic creation or appreciation, although he does not apply the terminology of *qiyun* in his writing. Ronald Egan (2016: 285–286) suggests that Guo Xi's account in *Linquan Gaozhi* (*Elevated Emotions in Forests and Streams*) of how to capture the transformation of nature (*zaohua*) through painting echoes Jing Hao's advocacy of conveying landscape's *zhen* (embodied through *qi* and *yun*).<sup>10</sup> Here, one may suggest that Guo Xi echoes Guo Ruoxu that the artist builds an effective sympathetic resonance with the object through intuitive engagement and aesthetic contemplation, and the moral cultivation of mind is conducted involuntarily in the process of creating a work replete with *qiyun*.

The Qing critic Wang Yu (? –1748) echoes Guo Xi's suggestion on the significance of contemplative engagement for a landscape painter,

When the painter contemplates the true visage of the mountain and forests, showing it [by brushstrokes], how can he not be outstanding? ... all the [*shenyun*] [spirit and consonance] of painting come from contemplation of dawn and dusk, the four seasons, the wind, fine, rain, and snow, and the

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<sup>10</sup> Guo Si (d. ca. 1130) compiled his father Guo Xi's notes on landscape in 1117.

appearing and disappearing of the cloud and mist. (Gao, 1996: 138; with modifications)<sup>11</sup>

By contemplating a painting, audiences also echo the mood of the painting initially created by the painter, as if they come to nature, locating themselves in mountains, and enjoying the pleasure of travelling forests and waters. As Guo Xi suggests, when the response to natural objects is one of a spiritual accord, the aesthetic pleasure of the heart-mind being in tune with forests and streams can be gained by sitting in a study and contemplating a landscape painting without leaving the room:

To look at a particular (landscape) painting puts you in *the corresponding mood*. You seem in fact to be in those mountains. This is the mood of a painting beyond its mere scenery (Bush and Shih, 2012: 151/153–154, my emphasis; Yu, 1986: 632/635).

No matter how long ago the work was created, through contemplative engagement, viewers with similar spiritual interests achieve a congenial spiritual accord with the object and feel a sense of affinity or communion with the artist of *like mind*. As Tu Wei-ming (1983: 70–71) says, ‘a smile between two resonating hearts or an encounter between two mutually responding spirits cannot be demonstrated to the insensitive eye or the

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<sup>11</sup> *Shenyun* and *qiyun* are often used interchangeably in classical texts on painting.

unattuned ear.’

What philosophical ideas underpin the moral relevance of spiritual kinship and resonance between artist, object, audience, and work? Peng Lai (2016: 138–139) suggests that Guo Ruoxu’s stress on the artist’s mental disposition may be inspired by his contemporary Neo-Confucianists Zhang Zai’s (1020–1077) and Cheng Hao’s (1032–1085) views on the mind and human nature. Inspired by James Cahill’s discussion of painting as a reflection of Neo-Confucian *cheng* in Song scholar-artists’ aesthetics, I suggest that the sincerity (*cheng*) valued as a basic requirement for scholars cultivating the mind in accord with the Dao may help us to understand the moral significance in the spiritual affinity between artist, object, audience and work under the notion of spiritual communion.<sup>12</sup>

As Guo Ruoxu’s contemporary Neo-Confucian scholar Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) claims, ‘sagehood is simply a matter of sincerity, [...] sincerity is the foundation of the five virtues, and the source of all virtuous conduct’ (Cahill, 1959: 96). In the light of the Confucian philosophy of sincerity, a painting by a pure and lofty mind, is ‘a reflection of his sincerity’ (Cahill, 1959: 96). When the artist has Confucian sincerity in animating the mental image of the object depicted in his untrammelled imaginative evocation, and releasing pictorial *yi* (idea) or *yixiang* (idea-image) into the final images

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<sup>12</sup> The Northern Song scholar Wang Qinchen echoes his contemporary Guo Ruoxu’s suggestion of painting as mind-print and further suggests that the ideal mental state for art, is letting the mind be ‘in accord with the Dao’ (Bush and Shih, 2012: 209).



replete with *qiyun*, he is achieving mental catharsis and cultivating his moral sentiments along with forgetting the hindrances of all sensuous desires in the secular world. As Zhou Dunyi asserts,

*Wuyu* (no desire) results in vacuity when in quiescence, and straightforwardness when in movement. Vacuity in quiescence leads to enlightenment, and enlightenment leads to comprehension. Likewise straightforwardness in movement leads to impartiality, and impartiality leads to universality. One is almost a sage when one has such enlightenment, comprehension, impartiality, and universality. (Fung, 1948: 271)<sup>13</sup>

The Ming Neo-Confucian scholar Wang Shouren (1472–1528) further emphasizes the significance of sincerity for the *Doctrine of the Mean*: “Only those of the utmost Sincerity in the world are able to fathom their natures”, and thereby understand the transformations of Heaven and Earth’ (Tiwald and Norden, 2014: 270; the *Doctrine of the Mean*, chapter 22). For him, sincerity of thought is necessarily involved in the process of investigating things and extending knowledge; when thought is of the utmost sincerity, the mind is also rectified (Fung, 1948: 314).

Some might find it hard to understand that sincerity is cherished as a basis of virtue in East Asia where Confucian moral principles have

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<sup>13</sup> Here, we can see that the emphasis on impartiality and universality resonates with Kant’s ethics, although for Zhou Dunyi such adjectives as impartiality and universality refer to qualities of moral sentiment or character.

influenced people's moral judgment and conduct for more than two thousand years. A. T. Nuyen's (2011: 526–537) comparison between the Kantian good will and Confucian sincerity (sincere will) may help Western readers understand the meaning, centrality, and significance of sincerity for the Chinese (and other nationalities practising Confucian ethics). As Nuyen (2011: 526–537) argues, Confucian sincerity or sincere will 'conditions other virtues through will', and is 'equivalent to' Kant's good will, in terms of acting as an essential condition of other virtues.<sup>14</sup> I agree with Nuyen (2011: 532) that conduct conforming to the Confucian virtues such as *ren* (benevolence or humaneness), *yi* (rightfulness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), *xin* (trustworthiness or integrity), *zhong* (loyalty or faithfulness), *jing* (respect), and *yong* (courage), 'are good only if they are exercised by a person with sincere will'. For instance, if a person does not sincerely will to

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<sup>14</sup> For Kant, the person of 'good will' is the person who acts for the sake of duty – such a person's motive for action is determined by reason according to the moral law that binds all rational agents universally rather than by desire for expected consequences or by emotion, feeling, sentiment or inclination. Kant (6: 394/405) makes duty instead of virtue the fundamental notion: the good will defined in terms of duty is completely good in itself without qualification or limitation, and virtue is 'the moral strength of a human being's will in fulfilling his duty'. One may think that, contrary to Kant's duty-based ethics, Confucian ethics is a virtue-based ethics, and 'sincerity' signifies the virtue of such dispositions as telling the truth, although, as mentioned above, Nuyen convincingly argues that there are parallels between Confucian sincerity (sincere will) and Kant's good will. Chung-ying Cheng (2010: 98) argues that the Confucian ultimate principle of *ren* is 'the perfect virtue for all virtues and also the duty of virtue for all duties of virtues'. Following Chung-ying Cheng's suggestion of *ren* as the duty of virtue, the sincere will conditioning *ren* appears equivalent to Kant's good will.

be benevolent but shows benevolent conduct just for the sake of gaining a good reputation, other's trust or any other purposes, he is not regarded as genuinely benevolent.

The spiritual kinship guaranteed by sincere will in engaging in the imaginative evocation of idea-images (*yixiang*) of the object and spiritual communion with the object and the artist is what the Southern Song Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200) means by his comment on Su Shi's painting:

As for [Su Shi], he possessed lofty and enduring qualities and a firm and immovable appearance. One might say that he resembled these “bamboo gentlemen” and “rock friends” [which he painted]. After a hundred generation, when men look at this painting, they will still be able to see him in their mind. (Bush and Shih, 2012: 202)

Penetrating the strength and momentum of the brushstrokes, the *yixiang* of the object initially animated in the painter's mind is evoked in the imagination of the congenial and ‘sincere’ viewer. The congenial and ‘sincere’ viewer appreciates the sincerity of the artist conveying *qiyun* and his emotions crystalized in every stroke, through contemplating the *qiyun* of the object or work and having a sympathetic resonance with it. His poetic reflection evoked by the *qiyun* of the work enables him to feel the sense of affinity with the kindred spirit (of the object and of the artist) conveyed

through the painting.

In sum, *qiyun*-focused landscape art requires the artist to have spiritual resonance with the object, and also enables congenial communion between the artist and spectator. Moral cultivation through *qiyun*-focused landscape art is endorsed by the sincerity (conditioning virtues as explained in Confucian ethics) involved in imaginative evocation of idea-images of the natural object when the congenial artist is engaging in spiritual communion with the object, or the congenial audience is sharing the sense of affinity with the artist and the subject-matter of the work in artistic contemplation.

### **3. The Reconciliation of Aesthetic Autonomy and Moral Relevance**

As seen above, the Confucian sincerity involved in bringing the scholar-artist's or audience's mind in accord with the Dao and engaging in spiritual communion with the object or work guarantees the spiritual affinity between artist, object, audience and work has a moral dimension. In this section, I suggest that although classical texts about *qiyun* aesthetics written on a more pragmatic basis suggest that the Chinese approach remains focused on the lived experience and practice of artists and appreciators and do not supply a systematic analysis of these issues, the parallels and differences between the Chinese aesthetic tradition and Kantian ideas regarding the moral relevance

of art may help us better understand the moral dimension of *qiyun*.

Although by positing different grounds for beauty and morality Kant's aesthetics suggests that beauty is independent from morality, his accounts of aesthetic autonomy and the relationship between beauty and morality do not rule out the possibility of moral cultivation through art. He suggests that an intellectual interest in the beautiful does not contradict his insistence on the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment. Jane Kneller (2007: 60–71) agrees with Karl Ameriks (1995: 361–367) that the intellectual interest in the beautiful that Kant also calls love is 'at least an attunement favorable to moral feeling' and suggests that for Kant, our intellectual interest in the beautiful (nature and art) is akin to our moral interest in the good, even though the former is free, analogous to an intellectual love (which is neither pathological, nor practical) and the latter is based on the rational law or categorical imperative. Paul Guyer (1993: 34/36) argues that for Kant aesthetic experience may contribute to moral psychology and moral epistemology, since aesthetic experience 'serves the purpose of morality most directly by improving our propensity for moral feeling', and 'aesthetic phenomena can offer sensible representation of practical reason, of specific moral conceptions, and finally, of the general relation between moral reason and moral feelings'. I agree with Guyer and Kneller that Kant implies the possibility of moral cultivation through art. Since Kant defines the aesthetic idea as the representation of imagination, his notion of beauty as expression

of the aesthetic idea may leave space for moral relevance, although the aesthetic idea is not necessarily a signifier of morality. Similarly, it is worth stressing that in Chinese landscape art, although landscape or some natural plants are read as having virtues, the natural object itself cannot be simply understood as the symbolic signifier of human moral attributes as mentioned above. In addition, the pictorial *yi* (idea) as analogous to Kant's aesthetic idea is not necessarily required to reflect the moral content.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the aesthetic idea in an artwork does not necessarily involve a sensible representation of practical reason and moral conviction, Weijia Wang (2018: 853–875) argues that both the artist and the audience may cultivate their moral sense through reflecting on aesthetic freedom which is analogous to reflection on moral freedom, and thus moral cultivation is a kind of indirect duty for anyone encountering or creating beauty (of nature and art). We now need to see whether further aspects of Kant's account of the analogy between our reflection on beauty and that on morality may be projected into the *qiyun*-focused artistic context.

Kant (KU 5: 353) claims that 'beauty is the symbol of the morally good'. For Kant (KU 5: 354), beauty (i) pleases immediately ('but only in reflecting intuition' rather than in concept), (ii) without the involvement of any interest (sensuous, or intellectual or moral satisfaction which depends on concern for the existence of the object, concept, or action), (iii) as the

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding the parallels and differences between pictorial *yi* and Kant's aesthetic idea, see Hu, 2019b.

reflection or result of the freedom of the imagination ‘in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding’ in aesthetic judgment, and (iv) such (subjective) aesthetic pleasure is universally valid for everyone (but not by means of any universal concept). According to Kant, morality acts for the sake of duty, in categorical imperatives willed through practical reason according to rational law, and as universalizable maxims or principles treats humanity as an end in itself rather than a mere means. The moral good (i) pleases immediately in reflecting on concepts rather than intuition, (ii) being independent of any antecedent interest (but ‘necessarily connected with an interest [...] that is thereby first produced’), (iii) as the reflection or result of the freedom of the will (instead of the imagination) ‘in accordance with universal laws of reason’, and (iv) with universal validity for everyone ‘by means of universal concept’ (KU 5: 354). Thus, the symbolic relationship between beauty and morality does not consist in or relate to the content of each. Nevertheless, the form of our reflection on beauty as analogous to that on morality lies in the analogy between the four aspects of immediacy, disinterestedness, freedom, and universal validity in both aesthetic judgment and moral judgement just mentioned.

Firstly, regarding the immediacy and disinterestedness of aesthetic freedom and moral freedom, it seems that in the *qiyun*-focused context aesthetic freedom and moral freedom converge in the mind’s pursuit of accordance with the Dao. For a Chinese landscapist or a spectator of

landscape painting, the moment of enjoying aesthetic freedom in an aesthetic experience seems to be that of simultaneously cultivating moral freedom.

The detached mental freedom experienced by *qiyun*-focused artists in artistic practice appears consistent with Kant's aesthetic freedom on the one hand (Hu, 2019a: 129–131). However, regarding the free and harmonious play of the faculties of the mind, Chinese texts on painting do not have as sophisticated and systematic an analysis as Kant, and there are essential differences between their philosophical occupations. Although the carefree *shen* (spirit) of the *qiyun*-focused artist parallels Kant's notion of spirit as the animating principle of genius (the union of the imagination and understanding), the first criterion of *qiyun* requires the spirit (*shen*) of the artist to respond to the spirit (*shen*) of the object depicted (Hu: 2019b). Harmony (of the imagination and the understanding) in Kant is intra-subjective, since it is inside the mind of an individual, although it is universally shared by all individuals involved. Christian Helmut Wenzel (2006: 100; 2010: 329) suggests that the harmony in Confucian *li* (ritual or propriety) seen from the outside might correspond to a harmony inside (that is, internal to the mind of the agent who practicing the ritual), and thus may be 'the mirror image of the harmony in the free play of our cognitive faculties, imagination and understanding' defined by Kant as the mental status of the agent engaging in aesthetic judgment, although this harmony is



inter-subjective and also includes the harmony of human beings with nature.<sup>16</sup> Similarly to *li* (ritual or ceremony), the notion of *yun* (consonance or harmony of *qi*) is more inter-subjective, and involves the harmonious sympathetic resonance between subject and object, which is absent in Kant's philosophy.

On the other hand, this aesthetic freedom can reach a harmonious consensus with the Confucian sincere will which conditions virtues, endorses moral freedom and is analogous to the Kantian good will as mentioned in the last section. However, as mentioned above, in his philosophical system, Kant distinguishes aesthetic freedom and moral freedom, claiming that the former is the freedom of the imagination in accord with the understanding, while the latter is the freedom of the will in accordance with the categorical imperative of reason (KU 5: 354). This Kantian dualism cannot be found in the Chinese context where artists and audiences engage in a detached mental state in accord with the Dao which penetrates everything.

Although Schiller defends the Kantian view of aesthetic autonomy, he has more confidence in the moral significance of art, so one might ask whether his modified Kantian ideas regarding the reconciliation of aesthetic

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<sup>16</sup> *Li* (ritual or propriety) along with music have an aesthetic, ethical and political significance in Confucian philosophy. For a discussion of the aesthetic dimension and moral relevance of Confucian *li* and how calligraphy embodies aesthetic and ethical appropriateness of Confucian *li*, see Mullis, 2007: 99–107.

autonomy and moral relevance has greater similarity to this reconciliation in the *qiyun*-focused context.<sup>17</sup> Guyer (1993: 116) notes that ‘Schiller understood Kant’s idea that the aesthetic can serve the purposes of morality only by remaining free of constraint, including constraint by morality itself’. For Schiller (2003: 156), when artists pursue morality, the moral purpose will destroy the autonomy or heautonomy of appearance of the object depicted, and thus interfere and even inhibit the beauty of the work, since ‘the form of this object will be determined by the idea of practical reason, not through itself, and thus will become heteronomous’. Therefore, he advises artists that a moral end or content is ‘best hidden’ in the form of art, and beauty should ‘appear to come from the nature of the thing completely freely and without force’ (Schiller, 2003: 156). In addition, Schiller (1982: 100–109/122–127; 2003: 152/162) suggests that beauty (as living form or

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<sup>17</sup> For Schiller (2003: 152–153/156), morality as self-determination through practical reason according to the moral law, is ‘the agreement of an action with the form of pure will’, while beauty as appearance in self-determination through its own nature, is ‘the analogy of an appearance with the form of pure will or freedom’. In aesthetic contemplation, even though aesthetic freedom in sensuous appearance (read by reason cooperating with sensibility) appears analogous to the moral autonomy possessed by rational beings, Schiller clearly distinguishes the autonomy/heautonomy of beauty and moral autonomy (See Schiller, 2003: 148–174/177–183; Beiser, 2005: 219–223; Houlgate, 2008: 42–45). ‘What Schiller means by autonomy is that the self-determining object follows the law of its own nature (that is nature in artfulness/lawfulness), while heautonomy means the law of the nature of the object is created by the object itself and the law of self-determination derives from its own inner nature, referring to artfulness/technique in freedom, as “an intensification of autonomy”’ (Hu, 2019a: 137).

appearance of freedom) stimulates the play drive to exclude any sensuous constraints or rational bounds and the play drive exerts the most vibrant physical power of sensibility (which supplies content) and the mightiest intellectual powers of reason (which offers form). Frederick Beiser (2005: 223) points out that in his letters to Körner Schiller initially uses the idea of heautonomy to define the beauty of the object, but applies it to human nature in his letters on the aesthetic education of man. For Schiller (1982: 144–153), aesthetic freedom, which furnishes aesthetic determinability in aesthetic judgment refers to the freedom of free choice exercised in aesthetic play when sensibility and reason are in harmonious cooperation and reciprocity, not one overcoming another (see also Beiser, 2005: 154–156/232–234).<sup>18</sup> Thus, aesthetic freedom is significant in guiding human beings to enter the rational realm where they perform duties from (cultivated and internalised) joyful inclination (in most untragic situations, against inclination merely in rare tragic situations) (see Schiller, 2005: 145/154/158; Beiser, 2005: 144–145/211–212).<sup>19</sup> The exercise of aesthetic

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<sup>18</sup> I (2019a: 134–141) have argued that balanced human nature nourished through art can also be found in the *qiyun*-focused landscape painting context, and also pointed out the issues of projecting Schiller's account regarding the restoration of complete human nature through art into the *qiyun*-focused context.

<sup>19</sup> For Schiller, severe rationalism has as destructive an effect on human beings as hedonism does, so his aesthetic freedom in balancing sensibility and reason is supposed to lead human beings to an idealistic and healthy middle path between stoicism and Epicureanism, and the significance of art lies in its function of enabling human beings to be self-conscious in their willing of free choice (Beiser, 2005: 144–145/211–212).

autonomy can promote the restoration of a whole human nature, and this whole nature is also demanded in moral judgment:

when a person does his duty from inclination he will be heautonomous, acting from the necessity of his own nature, though here his nature is not equivalent to only his natural or phenomenal being but also comprises his rational or noumenal being (Beiser, 2005: 223–224).<sup>20</sup>

Although as mentioned above Guyer and Kneller have argued that Kant's aesthetics implies the possibility of cultivating moral sentiments through aesthetic experience, Schiller's somewhat modified Kantian account appears more explicitly to stress that morally significant inclination can be exercised through aesthetic experience.<sup>21</sup> Schiller's view of internalised inclination as conforming to moral duty and cultivated and habitualised through art appears to parallel the Chinese view of moral sentiments or virtues conditioned by the sincere will that may be fulfilled involuntarily but also actually willed voluntarily through art. Schillerian unity *within dualism* cannot be found in the *qiyun*-focused aesthetic context where moral sentiments are exercised in aesthetic contemplation through sympathetic

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<sup>20</sup> Beiser (2005: 176–179) also stresses that what Schiller means by inclination in his discussion of performing duty from inclination is not natural inclination, but the cultivated, habitualised, internalised inclination gained through aesthetic education.

<sup>21</sup> Kantian scholars have argued that Kant's ethics does not rule out the role of moral sentiments in moral perfection (see Denis, 2006: 519; Sherman, 1977: 121–186).

resonance and spiritual communion between the artist, object, audience and work, and endorsed by the sincere will. Even so, the similar stress on the cultivation or habituation of moral sentiments or inclination through aesthetic experience also signifies the moral significance of art.

Secondly, behind the parallels between *qiyun* aesthetics and Kant's philosophy, there are differences concerning the promotion of moral community through aesthetic community. For Kant, that aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic freedom originally aroused in artists could apply to spectators is based on the universality of the free play of imagination and understanding in aesthetic judgment (KU 5: 217–219). In order to arouse a corresponding response in spectators, the artist starts from the universal standpoint, since he not only 'wants to submit the object to his own eyes', but also speaks with 'a universal voice and lays claim to the consent of everyone' (KU 5: 216). The universal validity and communicability of aesthetic judgment shared by the artist and spectators is based on a *sensus communis* (common sense) shared by human beings, which is 'essentially different from the common understanding that is sometimes also called common sense', since the free play of imagination and understanding as the faculties of mind along with the *a priori* principle of purposiveness are the grounds for justifying this universal agreement of aesthetic taste (see Wenzel, 2005: 81–85; KU 5: 238–240/293–296). Thus, it may be concluded that Kant's transcendental idea of the universal validity and

communicability of aesthetic judgment explains the sense of aesthetic affinity felt by the artist and audiences. This universal validity and communicability of aesthetic taste works (*a priori*) to establish an aesthetic community (see Vandenabeele, 2010: 308–320). On the other hand, Kant stresses the universal validity of moral autonomy. As mentioned above, Kant's view of beauty as the symbol of morality suggests the form of reflection on beauty is analogous to that on morality. Everyone in an aesthetic community may have the same potential to achieve moral cultivation through his/her reflection on aesthetic freedom which is analogous to that on moral freedom. That is, the aesthetic community may indirectly trigger a moral community. However, Zvi Tauber (2006: 36–39) doubts the feasibility of the Kantian idealistic transition (or leap) from beauty to morality, claiming that since beauty (as the presentation of appearance, above reality) and morality (practiced in actual reality), as Kant understands them, are ontologically different, aesthetic experience which is indifferent to real existence cannot have a moral effect unless accompanied by moral education.

In the *qiyun*-focused context, we have seen that an aesthetic community contributes to the establishment of a moral community in a practical sense, since in the process of appreciating the work, viewers of kindred minds are stimulated to echo the painter's mind, and this may simultaneously enable or encourage their moral elevation. In addition,

natural objects are part of the aesthetic and moral community of beings. Unlike with Kant's account of the free play of imagination and understanding and the *sensus communis*, the morally relevant aesthetic communicability is based on the spiritual kinship between artist, object, audience and work, which are united under the notion of *qiyun*. This is absent in Kant's aesthetics which, consistently with his overall transcendental philosophical system, focuses on the subject, although of course Kant does not deny that aesthetic judgments involve objects (Hu, 2019b).

Regarding the promotion of moral community through aesthetic community, again one may find more plausible parallels between *qiyun* aesthetics and Schiller's ideas, since he advocates aesthetic education as a bottom-up approach to realising the aesthetic state as his republican ideal, which has the advantage of avoiding government interference and bypassing ethical religion. In Schiller's (1982: 160–219) aesthetic state, human beings transcend natural desires by taking pleasure in creating or appreciating form, and 'the love of form' enables them to value things beyond the satisfaction of physical needs; through aesthetic practice they exercise their rationality and sensibilities together and this helps them achieve a harmony of spirit and nature (see also Beiser, 2005: 159–160). In his view, the aesthetic state is much better than either the dynamic state or the ethical state, since only in the aesthetic state can human beings avoid the compulsion of sensuous

nature and the rational law and their freedom of will in accordance with complete humanity is respected and realised (Schiller, 1982: 204–219; Beiser, 2005: 162–163).<sup>22</sup> However, some critics such as Beiser (2005: 128–129/164), Georg Lukács (1971: 139) and Kai Hammermeister (2002: 59–60) think that the moral cultivation through art Schiller envisages is narrowly confined to an elite class, and his aesthetic state appears to be politically utopian. For instance, Beiser (2005: 128–129/164) claims that Schiller’s aesthetic approach to realising his ideal republic falls into ‘resignation to a grim political reality’ and ‘recognition of the ideal’s purely regulative status’, since it appears unrealistic when the government is repressive, or most people in society are corrupted and unwilling to accept aesthetic education, or there is no influential artist able to create the powerful artwork to inspire people to engage in artistic contemplation.

The issue of elitism often worsened by problematic political situations is also found in the *qiyun*-focused context where the practice of scholar-artists building an aesthetic community to avoid political corruption sometimes fell into retreat from worldly reality. This was, especially the

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<sup>22</sup> For Schiller, the dynamic state enforces laws to protect individuals’ private interests and legal rights from being infringed by punishing illegal actions which violate other’s interests and rights, so it satisfies citizens’ demands of as sensuous animals, and limits their actions within a legitimate scope, rather than caring about their internal motives and moral characters. The ethical state cares about individuals’ internal motives and characters instead of actions and private rights, where citizens as rational beings and co-legislators are treated as ends rather than means, but encounters compulsion from the rational law especially when the rational law is against individual inclination.



case in periods when the political situation appeared dangerous for scholars serving the government, and the elite adopted art as a way of escaping political corruption and maintaining individual inner-peace. For instance, in the Yuan Dynasty when China was ruled by the Mongolians, many Yuan scholar-artists chose to withdraw from the world and live the life of a recluse or semi-recluse, far away from political affairs. Even though the individual moral self is purified by lodging lofty emotions and thought within art, and later artists and connoisseurs with congenial spirits may have spirit resonance with those earlier artists when contemplating their works, the aesthetic community did not involuntarily promote the establishment of a politically effective moral community.

Despite this charge of elitism, however, whether in Chinese texts in relation to *qiyun* aesthetics or in Schiller's letters, the moral and even political significance of art is affirmatively and optimistically valued. As Schiller (1982: 219) enthusiastically states,

where is [the aesthetic state] to be found? As a need, it exists in every finely attuned soul, as a realised fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure Church and the pure Republic, only in some few chosen circles.

As mentioned above, Zhu Xi praises the spirit Su Shi expressed in his painting and suggests that even though a hundred generations have passed later audiences will be able to see his mind in the painting and feel the sense

of spiritual kinship and community. Although this aesthetic, moral and even political community stimulated by art may be criticized for being confined to the life of intellectual elites, it is endorsed by numerous artists and critics and is able to transcend the boundary of time and space and illuminate and unite every ‘finely attuned soul’ throughout the long history of Chinese art.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the *qiyun*-focused aesthetic context, the sense of affinity or community aroused between the artist, object, work and audience is the result of the spiritual communion and resonance of kindred spirits during aesthetic contemplation. Confucian idea of sincerity underpins the moral dimension of spiritual communion between the artist, the natural object depicted, and the congenial audience stimulated by artworks. The moral significance of *qiyun*-focused art is not merely for individuals but works for an aesthetic and ethical community, since a congenial spectator with sincere will may experience an intimate spiritual kinship with the artist when contemplating the *qiyun* of the work, and his moral self will also be nourished during the process of viewing the painting and feeling the sense of affinity with like minds. In the process of projecting Kantian views of art and morality into the *qiyun*-focused context, we have seen these differences behind the parallels: Firstly, Kant distinguishes aesthetic freedom and moral freedom,

while in the *qiyun*-focused context the convergence of aesthetic freedom and moral freedom is predicated on the mind's pursuit of accord with the Dao. Regarding the free and harmonious play of the faculties of the mind, harmony in Kant's philosophy is intra-subjective, while the notion of *yun* is more inter-subjective and involves a harmonious sympathetic resonance between subject and object, which is absent in Kant's philosophy. Although according to Confucian ethics moral sentiments and characters potentially fulfilled through art are conditioned by the sincere will as analogous to Kant's good will, Schiller's view of internalised inclination as conforming to moral duty and cultivated through art appears to better resonate with the valuing of moral sentiments cultivated and habitualised through spiritual communion between artist, object, work and audience in the *qiyun*-focused context. This parallel still looks superficial, since the latter does not approve Kantian dualism, let alone unity within dualism. Secondly, similarly to Kantian philosophy, *qiyun* aesthetics suggest that the aesthetic community contributes to the establishment of the moral community, although morally relevant aesthetic communicability is based on the spiritual kinship between artist, object, audience and work, and natural objects are part of this aesthetic and moral community of beings. We have seen that Schiller's account of aesthetic education appears to offer closer parallels with the Chinese ideas regarding the moral and even political significance of aesthetic community, although in the latter context the attuned or kindred

minds are united under the criterion of *qiyun* and the sincere will engages in aesthetic contemplation and congenial spiritual communion. Even though this aesthetic and moral community may be charged as confined to the class of intellectual elites, *qiyun* aesthetics transcends the boundary of time and space in terms of uniting congenial minds in the past, present and future.

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