

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Moral Dimension of *Qiyun* Aesthetics and Some Resonances with Kant and Schiller

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In this paper, I suggest that the notion of *qiyun* (*qi*: spirit; *yun*: 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 conceptions of aesthetic autonomy and the moral relevance of art onto the *qiyun*-focused context, we see that the reflection on parallels and differences between the two cultural traditions helps to better understand the moral dimension of *qiyun* aesthetics.

Keywords: *qiyun*; *shenhui* (spiritual communion); Confucian doctrine of sincerity; moral relevance of art; Kant; Schiller

It has been argued that the notion of *qiyun* (spirit consonance) in Chinese painting is merely an aesthetic criterion, not relevant for moral enlightenment, and that aesthetic autonomy and moral cultivation are two disparate categories.¹ In this paper, I 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 that it embodies a dimension of moral cultivation through spiritual communion between artist, object, audience, and work.

In Section I, I first show that the notion of *qiyun*, as applied by the tenth-century landscapist and theorist Jing Hao in landscape painting, and further developed by the Northern Song art historian Guo Ruoxu (c. 1080) and the early Yuan connoisseur Tang Hou (c. 1255 – c. 1317), involves a moral dimension. Then, I move on to point out that the moral relevance of *qiyun*-focused landscape painting is reflected in these two aspects: (i) the way landscapists and audiences contemplate the world and seek spiritual communion with it, and (ii) the experience of (Confucian) sincerity (*cheng*), which leads kindred minds to achieve spiritual

¹ The notion of *qiyun*, originally proposed by Xie He (active 500 – c. 535) in his six laws of Chinese painting, can be interpreted as having 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 related to the artist's *qiyun*; and *qiyun* implies the spiritual communion and sympathetic response between artist, object depicted, work, and audience. For a detailed analysis, see Xiaoyan Hu, 'The Notion of "Qi Yun" (Spirit Consonance) in Chinese Painting', *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 8 (2016): 247–68.

communion and resonance during artistic practice or appreciation. In Section II, I examine the efficacy of projecting Kant's and Schiller's conceptions of aesthetic autonomy and the moral relevance of art onto 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, assess problems with earlier Chinese scholars' adoption of Kantian ideas in their writings on the Chinese aesthetic tradition, and illuminate some limitations of Kantian aesthetics.

I. *Qiyun*, Spiritual Kinship, and Sincere Will

In proposing the notion of *qiyun* in his six laws of painting in the context of figure painting, Xie He does not give it a moral dimension. However, that dimension of *qiyun* does feature in texts written by Jing Hao, Guo Ruoxu, and Tang Hou. In Jing Hao's *Notes on the Art of Brush (Bifa Ji)*, the application of *qiyun* in landscape painting involves a moral dimension relating to the *qiyun* of depicted natural objects.² He believes that natural objects such as pine trees share congenial attributes with the virtuous, a view that can be traced back to Confucius, who 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'.³ Jing Hao also suggests that capturing the object's *zhen* (internal reality), 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 the worthy play of art.⁴ 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)*. In his writing on the origin of Chinese painting, he cites the Han scholar Lu Ji's (261–303) 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 matter at the initial stage of painting.⁵ However, Zhang Yanyuan neither thinks that the landscapes in the paintings he has seen have *qiyun*, nor does he directly endow *qiyun* with a moral dimension.

Guo Ruoxu echoes Zhang Yanyuan in claiming that paintings depicting sages and worthies or recording moral figures' historical stories directly serve the moral function of '[appraising] critically their worth or folly or [shedding] light on their stability or disorder' by reminding observers of the moral importance of the models.⁶ Zhang Yanyuan's classification of the two kinds of people capable of masterpieces ('nobles with official positions' 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' and lodged lofty and refined emotions within their works.⁷ 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 [*shenhu*]; "something that happens without one's

² See Kiyohiko Munakata, *Jing Hao's Pi-fa-chi: A Note on the Art of Brush* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1974), 13–14.

³ See Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: The Essential Analects; Selected Passages with Traditional Commentary* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 36 (*Analects* 12.19).

⁴ Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 141, 146.

⁵ Chang Yen-yuan, 'Record of Famous Paintings to A. D. 841', in *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art*, trans. Lin Yutang (London: Heinemann, 1967), 45.

⁶ Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 86, 95–96.

knowing how".⁸ Unlike Jing Hao, who suggests that the moral dimension of *qiyun* is in the natural object, Guo Ruoxu links the moral dimension of *qiyun* to the innate mental talent of the painter, determining his competence to 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 to the object depicted.

Two centuries later, Tang Hou does not claim that *qiyun*-focused artistic creation and appreciation require moral cultivation, as both Jing Hao and Guo Ruoxu suggest, yet one may see from his *Criticism of Painting (Huajian)* that these points are not excluded from his ideas of *qiyun* as the first criterion for painting connoisseurship. He echoes Guo Ruoxu's view in his recognition of painting as 'playing with brush and ink in which lofty-minded men and superior scholars have lodged their exhilaration and sketched ideas'.⁹ In light of Jing Hao's view of the moral dimension of the *qiyun* of natural objects and Guo Ruoxu's suggestion of the artist's moral cultivation, practised through *shenhui* (spiritual communion) with the object, one can understand more deeply why Tang Hou persuades people born into 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 can easily detect a rough continuity between them regarding the moral dimension of *qiyun*.

One may wonder how moral cultivation, as implied by Jing Hao, further suggested by Guo Ruoxu and echoed by Tang Hou, is involuntarily realized in, or at least accompanies, the practice of creating (and appreciating) a painting replete with *qiyun*. As we have seen, Guo Ruoxu insists that creating a painting replete with *qiyun* requires *shenhui* 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 level of spirit-energy.¹⁰ For instance, for painting bamboo, spiritual accord and moral kinship need to be cultivated between artist and object, so as to capture its internal features of humility, rectitude, uprightness, and chastity. It should be noted here that we cannot simply regard capturing the *qiyun* of the natural object as the imposition or projection of human characteristics onto nature, as this would distort our understanding of the equal and harmonious relationship between artist and natural object (in both Confucian thought and Daoist philosophy). As Tu Wei-ming says about *ganying* being analogous to *shenhui*,

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.¹¹

The spiritual communion may occur when the artist paints a landscape in a spirit of reverence through an introvertive contemplation. As Guo Ruoxu's contemporary, landscapist and theorist Guo Xi (1000–1090) suggests, both artist and audience should look at landscape 'with a heart [*xin*] in tune with forest and stream' rather than 'with the eyes of

⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁹ Ibid., 261.

¹⁰ James Cahill 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 his 'Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting', in *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization*, ed. Arthur Wright (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), 87.

¹¹ Tu Wei-ming, 'The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature', in *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader*, ed. Corinne H. Dale (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 37.

arrogance and extravagance'.¹² Having heart-mind in tune with forest and stream means purifying and emancipating the mind as demanded by aesthetic autonomy. This mental purification appears to have moral significance. According to Guo Xi, when looking at natural objects without an appropriate mental state, one will not discover the value of the landscape. Although he does not apply the terminology of *qiyun*, he implies that moral self-cultivation is achieved through intuitive comprehension and absorbed contemplation in both artistic creation and appreciation. He echoes Guo Ruoxu's view that the artist builds an effective sympathetic resonance with the object through intuitive engagement, and the moral cultivation of mind is conducted involuntarily in the process of creating a work replete with *qiyun*.

In contemplating a painting, audiences also echo the mood of the painting initially created by the painter, as if locating themselves in mountains and enjoying the pleasure of travelling forests and waters. As Guo Xi suggests, '[looking] at a particular [landscape] painting [arouses your] corresponding [y, which may be translated as 'idea']. You seem in fact to be in those mountains. This is the [yi] of a painting beyond its mere scenery.'¹³ The imaginative evocation of pictorial *yi* (analogous to Kant's aesthetic idea) plays a key role in this contemplative process.¹⁴ No matter how long ago the work was created, through contemplative engagement viewers may achieve a congenial spiritual accord with the object and feel a sense of affinity or communion with an artist of like mind.

What philosophical ideas underpin the moral relevance of spiritual kinship and resonance between artist, object, audience, and work? Inspired by Cahill's discussion of painting as a reflection of neo-Confucian *cheng* (sincerity) in Song scholar-artists' aesthetics, I suggest that *cheng*, valued as a basic requirement for scholars cultivating the mind in accord with the Dao, may help us understand the moral significance of the spiritual affinity between artist, object, audience, and work under the notion of *shenhui*.¹⁵ As Guo Ruoxu's contemporary, neo-Confucian scholar Zhou Dunyi (1017–73), claims, 'sagehood is simply a matter of sincerity, [...] sincerity is the foundation of the five virtues, and the source of all virtuous conduct'.¹⁶ In the light of the Confucian philosophy of sincerity, a painting by a pure and lofty mind is 'a reflection of his sincerity'.¹⁷ When forming the mental image of the object depicted in his untrammelled imaginative evocation and releasing the pictorial *yi* (idea) or *yixiang* (idea-image) into the final images replete with *qiyun*, the sincere Confucian artist achieves a mental catharsis and cultivates his moral sentiments along with forgetting the hindrances of all sensuous desires. This mental state is what Zhou Dunyi describes in *Tong Shu*:

Wuyu [no desire] results in vacuity when in quiescence, and straightforwardness when in movement. Vacuity in quiescence leads to enlightenment, and enlightenment leads

¹² Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 151. *Xin* is often translated as 'mind' or 'heart-mind'. It literally refers to the heart as a physical organ, though for scholars it is relatively uncontroversial that *xin* may also refer to not only the locus of emotions, feeling, and desires, but also the centre of perception, intuition, imagination, understanding, reasoning, and cognition typically associated with the English word 'mind'; see Edward Slingerland, 'Body and Mind in Early China: An Integrated Humanities-Science Approach', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 8.

¹³ Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 151, 153–54, with modifications.

¹⁴ For parallels and differences between pictorial *yi* and Kant's aesthetic idea, see Xiaoyan Hu, 'Genius as an Innate Mental Talent of Idea-Giving in Chinese Painting and Kant', *Philosophy East and West* 70 (2020): 354–73.

¹⁵ The Northern Song scholar Wang Qinchen (active in the eleventh century) 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'; see Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 209.

¹⁶ Cahill, 'Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting', 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

to comprehension. [Likewise] straightforwardness in movement leads to impartiality, and impartiality leads to universality.¹⁸

Here, one may note that, although in the *qiyun*-focused context the mental exercise endorsed by the Confucian doctrine of sincerity does not have intrinsic moral value itself, it may unself-consciously enhance the agent's moral sentiments and character.

Four centuries later, 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Some might find it hard to understand that sincerity is cherished as a basis of virtue in East Asia, where Confucian moral principles have influenced people's moral judgements and conduct for more than 2,000 years. A. T. Nuyen's comparison between 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 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.²¹ I agree with Nuyen that conduct conforming to the Confucian virtues is ‘good only if [it is] exercised by a person with sincere will’.²² For instance, if a person does not sincerely will benevolence but shows benevolent conduct just for the sake of reputation, gaining trust, or any other purposes, he or she is not genuinely benevolent.

The spiritual kinship guaranteed by sincere will in engaging in the imaginative evocation of idea-images (*yixiang*) of the object and the *shenhui* with the object and the artist explains why the Southern Song neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200) thinks that the Northern Song artist Su Shi (1037–1101) resembles those ‘bamboo gentlemen’ and ‘rock friends’ in his painting and after ‘a hundred generations, when men look at this painting, they will still be able to see him in their mind’.²³ The *yixiang* of the object initially animated in the painter's mind is evoked in the

¹⁸ Quoted in Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: Free Press, 1948), 271, with both my and Fung's additions. Here, we can see that the emphasis on impartiality and universality resonates with Kant's ethics, although for Zhou Dunyi such notions as impartiality and universality refer to qualities of moral sentiment or character.

¹⁹ Justin Tiwald and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 270. For the quote within the quote and the Southern Song neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi's commentaries on it, see *ibid.*, 229.

²⁰ See Fung, *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 314.

²¹ A. T. Nuyen, ‘The Kantian Good Will and the Confucian Sincere Will’, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38 (2011): 526–37. 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 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’. Immanuel Kant, ‘The Metaphysics of Morals’, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), AA 6:394, 405. One might 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. Chung-ying Cheng argues that the Confucian ultimate principle of *ren* (benevolence or humaneness) is ‘the perfect virtue for all virtues and also the duty of virtue for all duties of virtues’; see his ‘Incorporating Kantian Good Will: On Confucian *Ren* as Perfect Duty’, in *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy*, ed. Stephen R. Palmquist (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 98. 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.

²² Nuyen, ‘Kantian Good Will’, 532.

²³ Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 202.

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 or her poetic reflection evoked by the *qiyun* of the work enables him or her 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 artist and spectator. Moral cultivation through *qiyun*-focused landscape art is endorsed by the sincerity (conditioning virtues as explained in Confucian ethics) involved in the 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 aesthetic contemplation.

II. Reconciling Aesthetic Autonomy and Moral Relevance

As seen above, the Confucian sincerity involved in bringing the scholar-artist's and audience's mind in accord with the Dao and engaging in *shenhui* with the object or work guarantees that the spiritual affinity between artist, object, audience, and work has a moral dimension. In this section, I point out 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 that the texts do not provide a systematic analysis of these issues, the parallels and differences between the Chinese aesthetic tradition and Kant's 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 suggests that beauty is independent of 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 judgement. Jane Kneller agrees with Karl Ameriks 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 possibly art as well) 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), whereas the latter is based on the rational law or categorical imperative.²⁴ Paul Guyer argues that, for Kant, aesthetic experience has both moral psychological and moral epistemological relevance, 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'.²⁵ 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 an 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 noteworthy that, in Chinese landscape art, although landscape or some natural plants are read as having virtues, the natural object itself cannot simply be understood as the symbolic signifier of human moral attributes as mentioned above. In

²⁴ Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60–71; Karl Ameriks, 'On Paul Guyer's Kant and the Experience of Freedom', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60 (1995): 361–67.

²⁵ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 34, 36.

addition, the pictorial *yi* (idea) as analogous to Kant's aesthetic idea is not necessarily required to reflect the moral content.

Even if the aesthetic idea in an artwork does not involve a sensible representation of practical reason and moral conviction, both the artist and the audience may cultivate their moral sense owing to an analogy between the form of our reflection on beauty and that on morality, and thus moral cultivation is a kind of indirect duty for anyone encountering or creating beauty (in nature or art).²⁶ We now need to see whether further aspects of Kant's account of the analogy between the form of our reflection on beauty and that on morality may be projected into the *qiyun*-focused artistic context.

Kant claims that 'beauty is the symbol of the morally good'.²⁷ For Kant, beauty pleases (i) immediately ('but only in reflecting intuition' rather than in concept), (ii) without the involvement of any interest (sensuous, practical, intellectual, or moral satisfaction dependent on the concern for the existence of the object, concept, or action), and (iii) as the reflection or result of the freedom of the imagination 'in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding' in aesthetic judgement; such (subjective) aesthetic pleasure is (iv) universally valid for everyone (but not by means of any universal concept).²⁸ According to Kant, morality acts for the sake of duty, willed through practical reason in conformity with the categorical imperative, which requires the maxims of moral action to be universalizable and treat humanity as an end in itself rather than a mere means. The moral good pleases (i) immediately in reflecting on concepts rather than on intuition, (ii) independently 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'.²⁹ Thus, the symbolic relationship between beauty and morality does not consist in or relate to the content of each. Nevertheless, the parallel between the form of our reflection on beauty and that on morality lies in the analogy between the four aspects just mentioned: immediacy, disinterestedness, freedom, and universal validity in both aesthetic judgement and moral judgement.

Having seen Kant's analogy, let us move to examine its projection within the *qiyun*-focused context. There are two aspects to this. First, one may see that the immediate and disinterested aesthetic freedom experienced by landscapists and spectators of landscape painting is morally significant, since it is fulfilled through *shenhui* and endorsed by the Confucian doctrine of sincerity. We will see that there are some issues with this projection and it also challenges the Kantian dualism of separating aesthetic freedom and moral freedom.

The detached mental freedom experienced by *qiyun*-focused artists in artistic practice appears consistent with Kant's aesthetic freedom.³⁰ However, regarding the free play of the faculties of the mind, Chinese texts on painting do not give as sophisticated and systematic

²⁶ Weijia Wang, 'Beauty as the Symbol of Morality: A Twofold Duty in Kant's Theory of Taste', *Dialogue* 57 (2018): 853–75.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), AA 5:353.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, AA 5:354.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Xiaoyan Hu, 'A Kantian Reading of Aesthetic Freedom and Complete Human Nature Nourished through Art in a Classical Chinese Artistic Context', *Asian Philosophy* 29 (2019): 129–31. Elsewhere, I argue that the overcoming of self-consciousness involved in genius's artistic spontaneity is advocated by *qiyun*-focused Chinese artists and critics, while the role of unselfconsciousness implied in genius's creation may constitute a paradox in Kant's aesthetic theory, and it is difficult to see how the contradiction between genius as chiasm of the unconscious and conscious and genius as the unity of imagination and understanding can be overcome within the strict rationalist confine of Kant's philosophy; see Xiaoyan Hu, 'The Dialectic of Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Spontaneity of Genius: A Comparison between Classical Chinese Aesthetics and Kantian Ideas', *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 9 (2017): 246–74.

an analysis as Kant does, and there are essential differences between their philosophical occupations. Although the carefree *shen* (spirit) of the artist apparently corresponds to 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 *shen* of the artist to respond to the *shen* of the object depicted.³¹ 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 suggests that, seen from the outside, the harmony in Confucian *li* (ritual or propriety) might correspond to a harmony inside (that is, internal to the mind of the agent practising the ritual), and 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 state of the agent engaging in aesthetic judgement, although this harmony is inter-subjective and also includes the harmony of human beings with nature.³² Similarly to *li* (ritual or propriety), the notion of *yun* (consonance or harmony of *qi*) is inter-subjective, and it also involves the harmonious sympathetic resonance between subject and object, which is absent in Kant's philosophy. Nowhere does he consider the subject–object relation in terms of the harmonious resonance brought about by the fusion of the spirit–energy of subject and object.

On the other hand, in the *qiyun*-focused context, this aesthetic freedom has moral significance, since, as mentioned in the last section, this autonomy is endorsed by or is at least in harmony with the Confucian sincere will, which conditions virtues and is analogous to the Kantian good will endorsing moral freedom.³³ That is, for a sincere Chinese landscapist or a sincere and congenial spectator of landscape painting, the moment of enjoying this aesthetic freedom seems to be that of simultaneously realizing or cultivating the 'enlightenment', 'comprehension', 'impartiality', and 'universality' of his or her moral sentiments and getting rid of mundane desires. In the Chinese context, this moral relevance is not based on an analogy between the reflection on aesthetic freedom and that on moral freedom. As mentioned above, the Kantian dualism between aesthetic freedom and moral freedom cannot be found in the Chinese context, where sincere artists and congenial audiences engage in a detached mental state in accord with the Dao, which penetrates everything. This marks a significant difference between Kant's ideas and Chinese philosophy rather than another superficial parallel.

Schiller defends the Kantian view of aesthetic autonomy and has more confidence in the moral significance of art in terms of habitualizing morally significant inclinations, so one might ask whether his modified Kantian ideas regarding the reconciliation of aesthetic autonomy and moral relevance have greater similarity to this reconciliation in the *qiyun*-focused context. For Schiller, when artists pursue morality, the moral purpose will destroy the autonomy or heautonomy of appearance of the object depicted, and thus weaken or even inhibit the beauty of the work, since 'the form of the object will be determined by the idea of

³¹ See Hu, 'Genius as an Innate Mental Talent', 361, 365–67.

³² See Christian Helmut Wenzel, 'Beauty in Kant and Confucius: A First Step', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33 (2006): 100; 'Aesthetics and Morality in Kant and Confucius: A Second Step', in Palmquist, *Cultivating Personhood*, 329. For a discussion of the aesthetic dimension and moral relevance of (ideal) Confucian *li* in comparison with Kant's ideas, see also Christian Helmut Wenzel, 'Aesthetic Education in Confucius, Xunzi, and Kant', *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy* 3 (2018): 59–71.

³³ My point here is not that there is a monolithic classical Chinese notion of 'moral freedom', or, if there is, then it is more Kantian than, say, Aristotelean. Even if one supposed it possible to abstract a common classical Chinese notion of moral freedom, there is little reason to suppose it would fit very clearly within the context of *qiyun* aesthetics. My aim, rather, is to point to certain resonances and differences between a notion of morally significant freedom at work specifically in *qiyun* aesthetics and in the Kantian position.

practical reason, not by itself, and will thus become heteronomous'.³⁴ 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'.³⁵ In addition, Schiller suggests that beauty (as living form or appearance of freedom) stimulates the play drive to exclude any sensuous constraints or rational bounds and thus the most vibrant physical power of sensibility (which supplies content) and the mightiest intellectual powers of reason (which offers form) cooperate well with each other.³⁶ Frederick Beiser 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*.³⁷ For Schiller, aesthetic freedom, which furnishes aesthetic determinability in aesthetic experience, refers to the freedom of free choice exercised in aesthetic play when sensibility and reason are in harmonious cooperation and reciprocity, without one overcoming the other.³⁸ Thus, aesthetic freedom is significant in guiding human beings to enter the rational realm, where they perform duties out of (cultivated and internalized) joyful inclination (in most untragic situations, and against inclination merely in rare tragic situations).³⁹ The exercise of aesthetic autonomy can promote the restoration of a whole human nature, and this whole nature is also demanded in moral judgement, because 'when a person does his duty from inclination he will be heautonomous, acting from the necessity of his own nature'.⁴⁰ Although, as mentioned above, Guyer and Kneller argue that Kant's aesthetics implies the possibility of cultivating moral sentiments through aesthetic experience, Schiller's modified Kantian account emphasizes more explicitly that morally significant inclination can be exercised through aesthetic experience. Schiller's view of internalized inclination as conforming to moral duty and cultivated and habitualized through art appears to parallel the Chinese view of moral sentiments or virtues conditioned by sincere will, which may be fulfilled involuntarily but also actually willed voluntarily through art. However, again, Schillerian unity within dualism cannot be found in the *qiyun*-focused aesthetic context, where moral sentiments are exercised in aesthetic contemplation through sympathetic resonance and spiritual communion between the artist, object, audience, and work, and endorsed by the sincere will. Even so, the similar emphasis on the cultivation or habituation of moral sentiments or inclination through aesthetic experience also signifies the moral significance of art.

The second aspect of the comparison with Kant's views on the analogy between beauty and morality concerns the promotion of moral community through aesthetic community. Here,

³⁴ Friedrich Schiller, 'Kallias, or: Concerning Beauty; Letters to Gottfried Körner', trans. Stefan Bird-Pollan, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 156. Schiller distinguishes aesthetic autonomy/heautonomy and moral autonomy; see Schiller, 'Kallias', 148–74, 177–83; see also Frederick Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 219–23.

³⁵ Schiller, 'Kallias', 156.

³⁶ See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. M. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 100–109, 122–27; see also Schiller, 'Kallias', 152, 163.

³⁷ See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 223.

³⁸ See Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education*, 144–53, and Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 154–56, 232–34. I have argued that balanced human nature nourished through art can also be found in the *qiyun*-focused context, and also pointed out the issues of projecting Schiller's account regarding the restoration of complete human nature through art into this context; see my 'Kantian Reading', 134–41.

³⁹ See Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity', trans. Jane V. Curran, in *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity' in Its Cultural Context: Essays and a New Translation*, ed. Jane V. Curran and Christophe Fricker (New York: Camden House, 2005), 145, 154, 158; Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 144–45, 211–12. Beiser points out that what Schiller means by inclination in his discussion of performing duty from inclination is not natural inclination but the cultivated, habitualized, internalized inclination gained through aesthetic education; see Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 176–79.

⁴⁰ Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 223.

too, I find differences behind the parallels between *qiyun* aesthetics and Kant's philosophy. 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 judgement.⁴¹ 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'.⁴² The universal validity and communicability of aesthetic judgement 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.⁴³ Thus, it may be concluded that Kant's idea of the universal validity and communicability of aesthetic judgement 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.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Kant emphasizes the universal validity of moral autonomy. As mentioned above, Kant's view of beauty as the symbol of morality suggests that 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 their 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 doubts the feasibility of the Kantian idealistic transition (or leap) from beauty to morality, claiming that, since beauty (as the 'presentation of existence' or 'appearance of reality') and morality (practised in 'actual existence'), 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.⁴⁵

In the *qiyun*-focused context, however, 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 a kindred mind are stimulated to echo the painter's mind, and this may simultaneously enable or encourage their moral elevation. Unlike with Kant's account of the free play of imagination and understanding and the *sensus communis*, the morally relevant aesthetic communicability is predicated on the spiritual kinship between artist, object, audience, and work, which are united under the notion of *qiyun*. In addition, it is worth noting

⁴¹ See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, AA 5:217–19. For Kant, taste is one of the four requisites for genius creating the beautiful art (ibid., § 50, AA 5:320). Guyer argues that genius is 'an optimal combination of freedom and taste'; see Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 295. In the process of creating art, the aesthetic judgement firstly occurs in the work's producer (genius is the innate mental talent of a gifted artist who makes genuine art). If an artwork is regarded as beautiful, this is judged by its first observer, the artist, as beautiful, and the universal validity of taste defined by Kant will guarantee that the beauty of the artwork would also be appreciated by anyone else with taste. Cannon claims that, to create beautiful art, genius (as the productive faculty) is subordinate to taste (as a non-productive faculty for judging); see Joseph Cannon, 'The Moral Value of Artistic Beauty in Kant', *Kantian Review* 16 (2011): 116–18, 124; 'Reply to Paul Guyer', *Kantian Review* 16 (2011): 135–39. However, Guyer argues that taste is internal to genius, and objects to Cannon's suggestion that genius is subordinate to taste; see Paul Guyer, 'Genius and Taste: A Response to Joseph Cannon, "The Moral Value of Artistic Beauty in Kant"', *Kantian Review* 16 (2011): 127–34.

⁴² Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, AA 5:216.

⁴³ See ibid., AA 5:238–40, 293–96; Christian Helmut Wenzel, *An Introduction to Kant's Aesthetics: Core Concepts and Problems* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 81–85.

⁴⁴ See Bart Vandenabeele, 'Common Sense and Community in Kant's Theory of Taste', in Palmquist, *Cultivating Personhood*, 308–20.

⁴⁵ See Zvi Tauber, 'Aesthetic Education for Morality: Schiller and Kant', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40 (2006): 26–28, 36–39.

that natural objects are part of the aesthetic and moral community of beings. However, as mentioned above, Kant's aesthetics does not endorse a fusion of the spirit-energy of the artist or audience and that of the aesthetic object.

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 realizing the aesthetic state as his republican ideal. In Schiller's aesthetic state, human beings transcend natural desires by taking pleasure in creating or appreciating from. 'The love of form' enables them to value things beyond the satisfaction of physical needs, and through aesthetic practice they exercise their rationality and sensibility together; this helps them achieve a harmony of spirit and nature.⁴⁶ 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 realized.⁴⁷ However, Beiser thinks that the moral cultivation through art that Schiller envisages is narrowly confined to an elite class, and his aesthetic state appears to be politically utopian. He claims that Schiller's aesthetic approach to realizing his ideal republic is a kind of elitism that 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 when most people in society are corrupted and unwilling to accept aesthetic education, or when there is no influential artist able to create the powerful artwork to inspire people to engage in aesthetic contemplation.⁴⁸

The issue of elitism being worsened by problematic political situations can also be found in the *qiyun*-focused context, where the attempt of scholar-artists to build an aesthetic community free of political corruption sometimes fell into retreat from worldly reality. This was especially the case 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 contemporary and later artists and connoisseurs with congenial spirits may have spiritual resonance with those 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 enthusiastically states, the aesthetic state 'exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure Church and the pure Republic, only in some few chosen circles'.⁴⁹ As mentioned above, Zhu Xi praises the spirit of Su Shi, expressed in his painting, and suggests that, even when 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

⁴⁶ See Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education*, 160–219.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 204–19. For Schiller, the dynamic state satisfies citizens' demands of as sensuous animals, and limits their actions within a legitimate scope; 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, but encounters compulsion from the rational law when the rational law is against individual inclination.

⁴⁸ See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 128–29, 164.

⁴⁹ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education*, 219.

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.

III. Conclusion

Having seen the moral dimension of *qiyun* aesthetics suggested in Jing Hao's, Guo Ruoxu's, and Tang Hou's writings, we have further seen why *qiyun* cannot be regarded merely as an aesthetic criterion. In the *qiyun*-focused context, the sense of affinity or community aroused between the artist, object, work, and audience is the result of the *shenhui* of kindred spirits during aesthetic contemplation. The Confucian doctrine of sincerity involved in bringing the landscapist's or audience's mind in accord with the Dao during aesthetic contemplation underpins the moral dimension of *shenhui* between the artist, the natural object depicted, and the congenial audience stimulated by artworks; that is, it establishes the moral dimension of *qiyun* aesthetics. I appreciate Joseph Harroff's comments on my view on this topic: the *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.⁵⁰

The moral significance of *qiyun*-focused art is not merely for individuals; it also 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 Kant's and Schiller's modified Kantian views of the relationship of art and morality into the *qiyun*-focused context, we have seen two main problems and differences behind the apparent parallels. First, the untrammelled mental state of the *qiyun*-focused landscapist or audience in aesthetic contemplation apparently parallels the mental state of the Kantian artistic genius. However, regarding the free and harmonious play of the faculties of the mind, whereas the Kantian harmony is intra-subjective, the criterion of *qiyun* requires more inter-subjective harmony and also refers to the harmonious sympathetic resonance between subject and object that is missing from Kant's account. Moreover, since the Confucian sincere will, analogous to Kant's good will endorsing moral freedom, underpins the moral relevance of *shenhui* between artist, object, work, and audience, sincere aesthetic contemplation simultaneously cultivates moral sentiments and realizes morally significant autonomy. Although Kant thinks that the form of reflection on moral autonomy is analogous to that on aesthetic autonomy, the detached mental state in accord with the Dao experienced by *qiyun*-focused artists and congenial audiences does not fit within the Kantian dualism between aesthetic autonomy and moral autonomy. The cultivation and habituation of moral sentiments through *shenhui* appears to resonate better with Schiller's view of the internalized inclination as conforming to moral duty and exercised by art, but even this apparent similarity is still superficial since the former does not approve of Kantian dualism, let alone unity within dualism.

⁵⁰ Comments delivered by Joseph Harroff as discussant of my paper 'Moral Enlightenment of Classical Chinese Art', an earlier version of Section I, given at the American Society for Aesthetics Eastern Division Meeting (April 2018).

Second, with regard to the establishment of moral community through aesthetic community, the Kantian conception of beauty as the symbol of morality idealistically assumes that everyone with taste may cultivate a moral sense through aesthetic experience owing to an analogy between the rule of reflection on beauty and that on morality, while *qiyun* aesthetics of landscape art shows that an aesthetic community may contribute to the establishment of a moral community. However, Kant's transcendental philosophy does not guarantee a transformation of aesthetic community into moral community as a practical necessity, while in the *qiyun*-focused context the moral significance of aesthetic autonomy is *always*, for an aesthetic and ethical community, constituted by the artist engaging with sincere will, the congenial audience, and even the natural object depicted, who share a sense of spiritual affinity. That is, in the Chinese context, morally relevant aesthetic communicability is built into a picture based on the spiritual kinship between artist, object, audience, and work. That natural objects are part of this aesthetic and moral community helps explain why, for the Chinese, 'landscape itself is instruction, and more effective than any moralizing'.⁵¹ Although we have seen that Schiller's account of aesthetic education appears closer to these Chinese ideas regarding the moral and even political significance of aesthetic community, again, unlike Schiller's transcendental unity within dualism, in the latter context the attuned souls or kindred minds are united under the pursuit of *qiyun* and in sincere and congenial *shenhui*. Even though this aesthetic and moral community may be regarded as confined to a class of elite intellectuals, *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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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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⁵¹ François Jullien, *Living off Landscape, or: The Unthought-Of in Reason*, trans. Pedro Rodriguez (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 65.

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