How “Chinese” Was Kant?

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When Nietzsche called Kant the “Chinaman of Königsberg”,[1] were his mental capacities already beginning to slip, or was he just looking for laughs? Kant, after all, was *German*. He was born in the then bustling Prussian port city of Königsberg (now called Kaliningrad), lying on the Baltic Sea, about 75 miles northeast of Gdansk, across the Gulf of Danzig. Königsberg is over 5000 miles from Beijing, and even further from the now bustling Chinese port city of Hong Kong.[2] Kant claimed his paternal grandfather had immigrated from Scotland,[3] but there is no parallel evidence to suggest that any of his ancestors were Chinese. Moreover, he could not have had more than a minimal, second-hand knowledge of China, since he never travelled more than about thirty miles from his birthplace.[4] Aside from reading, his only contact with anything Chinese would have been through the relatively large minority of Oriental merchants who lived in Königsberg.[5] This did not stop him from *writing about* Chinese philosophy and culture on several occasions.[6] But it is a far cry from his actually *being* Chinese. With such conclusive evidence so readily at hand, it might seem as if the answer to our question can be given here in the first paragraph: Kant, born into what was arguably the most “Western” of all eras in the history of Western culture, the Age of Enlightenment, was *not at all* Chinese, and any suggestion to the contrary would be foolhardy at best, unless it were intended to be merely a joke—albeit, in bad taste.

Of course, Nietzsche himself was not thinking of the sort of historical facts and influences mentioned above. He was rather alluding to a deeper level on which Kant *himself* was in some sense “Chinese”. Although he never provides a clear explanation of just how his now famous epithet ought to be interpreted, a clue might be drawn from his general attitude towards Eastern cultures. In general Nietzsche tends to view them as mediocre, self-satisfied, and rigidly moralistic. Thus, when he wishes to convey the notion that modern European man has ceased striving for greatness, he says: “we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian ...”[7] Most of Nietzsche’s books are

speckled with such cryptic references to Chinese/Asian culture. For example, in *The Will to Power*, he refers to “Chinese ossification” in socio-political matters, and later asks: “is our morality—our modern sensitive European morality, which may be compared with the morality of the Chinese—the expression of a physiological regression?”[8]

Such attitudes would seem at first to indicate that Nietzsche’s habit of calling Kant “Chinese”—joke or no joke—was motivated by a desire to deprecate Kant in the eyes of his readers. But a closer look at Nietzsche’s methodology, with its emphasis on perspectival *reversal*, reveals that it may be more appropriate to interpret such comments in a positive light. In *Ecce Homo*, for example, Nietzsche confides that those at whom he pokes the most fun are often the closest to his heart. He specifies four principles upon which his attacks are based: (1) “I only attack causes that are victorious”; (2) “I stand alone”; (3) “I never attack persons”; and (4) “attack is in my case a proof of good will, sometimes even of gratitude.”[9] For a person who follows these guidelines, the habit of calling a *German* philosopher “Chinese” could actually be considered as a compliment!

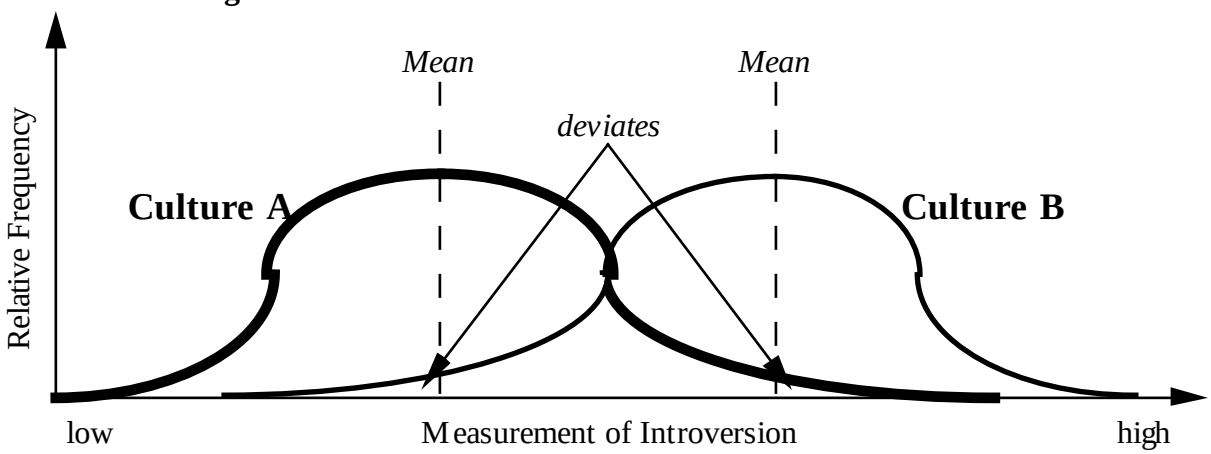
Indeed, it turns out that most of Nietzsche’s references to China or the Chinese are not as negative as the remarks quoted earlier might cause us to expect. Elsewhere in *The Will to Power*, for instance, he groups the Chinese not only with the Jews, for whom he expressed some admiration, but also with his favorites, the Frenchmen, as all sharing the quality of “spirit”; for he maintains that “the Chinese is a more successful type [of human animal], namely more durable, than the European.”[10] Again, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he refers to “Asia’s superiority in the instincts”, with its strong influence on ancient Greek culture, and depicts orientals in general as effecting a deep “reversal” of Western values.[11] Moreover, in the concluding section of the book (§296), he actually applies the adjective “Chinese” to his *own* writing, in a rather self-critical reflection: “Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! ... What things do we copy, writing and painting, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that *can* be written—what are the only things we are able to paint?”

Given the ambiguity of Nietzsche’s references to things “Chinese”, a more helpful clue as to the intentions of his epithet might be found by recalling that he saw himself as a *psychologist* at least as much as a philosopher (or more appropriately, an *anti*-philosopher). If Nietzsche was serious in suggesting we picture Kant with a Chinese face, he may well have

been thinking as much of his *personality* as of his philosophical disposition. If so, it might be helpful to consider what meaning can be given, from a psychological point of view, to the notion of being “Chinese”. In order to explore this possibility, I will briefly sidestep philosophical issues in order to make use of insights from a recent book, called *Beyond the Chinese Face*, written by Michael Harris Bond, a Western psychologist who has lived in Hong Kong for many years. However, I should point out here at the beginning that the term “Chinese”, as used in this paper (i.e., whenever it appears in quotations marks), does not necessarily describe any particular Chinese person, but rather serves as an ideal generalization that sums up the characteristics or tendencies psychologists have found in *most* Chinese people, or (later in the paper) those interests and ideas that have tended to characterize *most* Chinese philosophers.

Bond uses a simple graph to illustrate the fallacy of treating such ideal generalizations as if they were universally applicable to all cases in a cross-cultural study. Similarly, the two curves in Figure 1 can represent any two cultures, as they relate to each other on a given characteristic.[12]

Figure 1: The Distribution of Introversion in Two Cultures



The key insight to be gained from the graph is that some individuals in Culture A will actually possess the characteristic being compared (in this example, introversion) *more strongly* than the average member of Culture B, while some individuals in Culture B will actually possess this characteristic *less strongly* than the average member of Culture A. Bond calls such people “deviates”, inasmuch as they *deviate* so significantly from the norm of their culture that they surpass even those many “average” people in the opposing culture who fall

on or near the mean in their possession (or lack) of the characteristic in question. If we could not see the face of a certain deviate from Culture A, we would probably assume he or she to be a member of Culture B. This shows how generalizations can be at one and the same time verifiably true (as descriptions of the majority) and yet dangerous to assume (as a necessarily valid description of any particular person). As long as we keep this in mind in our assessment of the extent to which Kant exemplified a “Chinese” disposition (in both his personality and his philosophy), we can explore the question at hand more deeply than in the first paragraph of this paper, yet without running into the absurdity of changing the historical facts of Kant’s life.

Bond neatly summarizes the socialization process for the typical Chinese child as being governed by five key concerns:

> The Chinese child is brought up to regard home as a refuge against the indifference, the rigours, and the arbitrariness of life outside. This feat is achieved by indulging the infant, restraining the toddler, disciplining the schoolchild, encouraging the student to value achievement, and suppressing the divisive impulses of aggression and sexuality throughout development.[13]

There is no need to repeat here the many interesting points Bond makes with respect to each of these tendencies in Chinese parenting. And in any case we do not know enough about Kant’s childhood to make any detailed comparisons. Nevertheless, what we do know is sufficient to suggest that this pattern of pampering the child at a young age, then gradually emphasizing the requirements of duty and increasing the severity of discipline as the child grows up, also describes Kant’s upbringing to a significant extent. His infancy and early childhood seem to have been characterized, more than anything else, by a warm relationship with his mother, of whom he always spoke very highly. For instance, he once told his friend Jachmann that “she planted and tended the first seeds of good in me. She opened my heart to the impressions of nature; she awakened and widened my ideas, and her teachings have had an enduring, healing influence on my life.”[14] Yet life grew increasingly harsh for young Immanuel, the second of nine children. Not only did four of his siblings die in infancy, but his mother herself passed away when Kant was only thirteen.[15] A good deal of pressure also came from the school to which his parents sent him. From age eight, he began attending a special Pietist school set up by the king, called “Collegium Fredericianum”. Discipline was so

strict there that Kant “later told his friend Hippel, that looking back on that enslavement of youth filled him with terror and dread.”[16] The contrast between the early establishment of security at home and the harsh realities of discipline at school must have been enough to match the experiences of many Chinese children today. In this sense, then, his upbringing provides at least some initial, tentative grounds for thinking of Kant as being somewhat “Chinese”.

The success of this kind of upbringing in Chinese cultures, even in their modernized forms, is to a large extent due to the people’s deep commitment to “filial piety”—indisputably one of the hallmarks of any Chinese culture. Filial piety is the duty to respect and be affectionately devoted to the members of one’s extended family, and especially those in any position of authority; it serves as the “glue” that holds together the complex social hierarchy. Filial piety is so strong that it often survives well after the death of one’s grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles, in the form of ancestor worship. Even in Hong Kong, one of Asia’s most modern and technologically advanced cities, two public holidays are set aside each year solely for the purpose of fulfilling the duties of filial piety—though for most Chinese the obligations of filial piety extend well beyond these two days, even to every day of the year. At first sight it might seem that we have here hit upon a typical characteristic of being “Chinese” that does not apply in the least to Kant, whose reputation has never been that of a family man. But let us look at the evidence.

Kant’s parents raised their children in a simple, pietist form of life, encouraging an upright and close-knit family. This enabled Kant to claim later in life: “Never, not even once, have I had to hear my parents say an unbecoming word, or do an unworthy act.... No misunderstanding ever disturbed the *harmony* of the household.”[17] When their mother died, the siblings’ relationships began to drift apart, and the gap widened still further after the death of their father just nine years later. In short, Kant’s adult relationships with his siblings do not seem to have been characterized by much affection.[18] Nevertheless, in spite of the gap that inevitably opened up between him and his siblings, perhaps largely as a result of his academic and scholarly career (but see notes 19 and 20), Kant always held firmly to a surprisingly “Chinese” sense of his own duty as the eldest brother to look after the needs of his younger siblings. For example, at the age of 67, Kant wrote a letter (dated January 26 1792) to his brother, Johann, then aged 56, saying that in spite of his infrequent correspondence “I have

thought of you often and fraternally—not only for the time we are both still living but also for after my death”[19]—a reference, no doubt, to the fact that he had included his brother in the will he had recently drafted. He then goes on to convey explicitly his own sense of duty toward the family:

> Our two surviving sisters, both widowed, the older of whom has 5 grown and (some of them) married children, are provided for by me, either wholly or, in the case of the younger sister, by my contribution to St. George Hospital, where provision has been made for her. *So the duty of gratitude for our blessings that is demanded of us, as our parents taught us, will not be neglected*.[20]

Admittedly, we have no reports from Kant’s neighbors that he was ever seen burning incense to his deceased parents during his daily walks after lunch; in this literal sense it would be absurd to regard Kant as being even a *closet* Chinese. Yet it would be just as inappropriate to deny completely the surprising resonance between the deep Chinese commitment to filial piety and Kant’s own profound sense of duty to his family—a duty to which he held fast even when the inclinations of his own happiness might have tempted him to disown them.[21]

The most these initial reflections on Kant’s personality can do is to provide good grounds for taking this argument a step further, into the realm of Kant’s own private beliefs and philosophical dispositions—provided we walk with care. In traditional Chinese societies the commitment to filial piety is intimately bound up with a belief in ghosts: the reason the deceased must be worshipped is precisely that their *ghosts* are still lingering around, and must therefore be provided for, pleased, and (if necessary) appeased, just as much as when their bodies were still alive. Kant’s private beliefs are extremely difficult to talk about, because he himself rarely committed them to writing. He says in 1798 that, just as he has always recommended to others “a conscientious sincerity in not professing or obtruding on others, as articles of faith, more than they are themselves sure of”, so also in his writings he has exercised the utmost care to express only what he can affirm with certainty.[22] In the first *Critique* he distinguishes between knowledge, belief, and opinion by saying the first requires objective *and* subjective certainty, the second only subjective certainty, and the third neither objective nor subjective certainty.[23] Kant says plenty in his works about his own claims regarding knowledge and belief, but very little about opinion—especially his own *private* opinions on “speculative” matters. Opinions can attain the stature of *beliefs* only if we see

them as directly necessitated by the moral law in our heart. For instance, the question as to whether or not God exists is a question that surpasses all possible human *knowledge*; yet one’s own personal answer should be more than a mere opinion, because God’s existence is intimately bound up with our ability to see the moral law itself as ultimately rational. The question as to whether or not ghosts exist, by contrast, is quite independent (in Kant’s mind, at least) from the rationality of the moral law. Hence, he is content for the most part to keep his opinions on this issue silent—for the most part, but *not* entirely.

In his younger days Kant went through a period of being openly attracted to ideas about the spirit world, especially those put forward by the mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1689-1772). This period of several years during the mid-1760s is actually something of an anomaly for the traditional, “two-part” account of Kant’s life, as falling neatly into a “pre-Critical” dogmatism (before 1770) and a “Critical” period (from 1781 onwards), with a “silent decade” sandwiched in between. Biographers tend to treat the mid-1760s as a temporary conversion to Humean skepticism, in spite of the fact that Kant’s interest in the spirit world during these years bore little if any resemblance to anything Hume would have countenanced. What is never adequately explained is how Kant passed from this sudden state of being a converted skeptic into the silent decade, sparked off by his “proto-Critical” Inaugural Dissertation of 1770. In this work he had presented for the first time, supposedly out of thin air—for it certainly did not come from Hume!—what he was later to call his “Copernican hypothesis”: namely, the basic assumption that, when it comes to epistemology, objects conform to our mind rather than our mind conforming to objects.[24] What the conventional account ignores is that the mid-1760s were for Kant anything but a skeptical “hiccup”; rather they were marked by an internal *struggle* between the Swedenborg who enticed Kant with his mystical visions and the Hume whom Kant would later confess “first interrupted my dogmatic slumbers and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction”.[25]

The outcome of this struggle is nowhere more visible than in Kant’s 1766 book, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, which can be regarded as setting the tone for his entire mature philosophical System. Embarrassing and unbelievable as it may be to Kant-scholars who see their mentor as the arch-enemy of anything that smacks of mysticism, there are good reasons to believe, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,[26] that it was

Swedenborg far more than Hume who gave Kant the key inspirations for constructing his Critical System. In particular, Kant’s reading of Swedenborg’s writings was the true source of the amazing “Copernican” insight, first set forth by Kant in 1770.[27] Of course Kant transformed Swedenborg’s ideas in many ways, adapting their speculative-mystical emphasis to suit his Critical-practical preferences. One of the key differences, for example, is that what Swedenborg attributes to the “spirit world”, Kant translates into the “noumenal world”. And in Kant’s hands this world becomes far more than just a dwelling-place for ghosts: it becomes the kingdom of reason itself, the true home for all rational beings.

Once again, it is necessary to emphasize that Kant’s secret sympathy for Swedenborg, and the subtle influence of Swedenborg’s ideas on Kant’s mature thinking, do not imply that Kant held the opinion that ghosts exist in this world. Even though he probably never experienced the slightest fear that he was being haunted by the ghosts of his ancestors, it is generally accepted that Kant held *some* sort of private belief in a world of real spirits. That doesn’t make him Chinese (see note 21); but it does bring his general world view much more closely in line with the traditional Chinese world view than it is normally believed to be. In other words, we can say Kant *was* “Chinese”, to the extent that he felt a strong sense of filial piety and believed in a world inhabited by spiritual beings; but unlike most Chinese people, his belief in “real spirits”, or *ghosts*, however firmly or weakly he may have held such an opinion privately, did not inform in any way his own *public* understanding of his moral duties.

In this sense, the most influential of all Chinese philosophers, Confucius, actually shares more with Kant than with the average member of most Chinese cultures. For Confucius had a surprisingly “Kantian” attitude toward private beliefs in ghosts and spirits. He never categorically denied their possibility; rather, he consistently emphasized their moral emptiness. In the *Analects*, for example, when Chi Lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead, Confucius responded: “‘While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?’ Chi Lu added, ‘I venture to ask about death.’ He was answered, ‘While you do not know life, how can you know about death?’”[28]

We have now seen several respects in which we can say Kant was “Chinese”, even though he certainly was *not* Chinese. There are at least three other respects in which typical characteristics of Chinese people can be detected in Kant’s psychological and/or philosophical disposition. They relate to his emphasis on duty, to the systematic character of

his mature philosophy, and to the kind of *logic* he employed. Let us now briefly consider these in turn.

Chinese Kant-scholarship has long recognized a basic similarity between Kant and the major school of Chinese philosophy, neo-Confucianism. Confucius, along with most of his interpreters down through the centuries, largely ignored the metaphysical and epistemological questions that have generally taken center stage in the West. Instead, Chinese philosophers tend to emphasize the importance of *acting on principle* (or, according to the *rites*, called *li* in Chinese), with the result that most Chinese people value a person’s *collective duty* as a member of society far above one’s *individual rights* as a human being. Western philosophers, in stark contrast, have typically emphasized rights over duties, with both playing second fiddle to questions of reality and knowledge. Whereas Chinese philosophy tends to define personhood in terms of the duties placed on an individual by his or her position in the social hierarchy, Western philosophy tends to define personhood in more abstract terms of the rights accorded to any human being simply by virtue of being human. Kant actually talks a great deal about both duties *and* rights; but he clearly gives priority in his System to *duty*. He put himself in the minority among Western philosophers by arguing not only that rights are an epiphenomenon of duty, rather than vice versa,[29] but also that “practical reason” has priority over “theoretical reason”.[30] Both of these tendencies appeal to Chinese philosophers, because, quite simply, they are inherently “Chinese” tendencies. Comparisons of Confucian ethics and Kantian ethics have, consequently, served as the springboard for much cross-cultural dialogue, especially from the Chinese side.[31]

For example, one of the most influential Chinese Kant-scholars in this century, at least among Neo-Confucians, is Mou Tsang San. In addition to translating and commenting extensively on the first *Critique*, Mou has put forward a widely discussed argument to the effect that Neo-Confucian philosophy fills a gap in Western philosophy left by Kant’s rejection of the possibility of intellectual intuition.[32] However, his attempt to defend intellectual intuition in terms of *moral* knowledge is based on a gross misunderstanding of Kant’s *exclusively theoretical* notion of intellectual intuition. If the latter were allowed to apply to our moral life as well as to theoretical knowledge, then Kant’s own insistence on the properly basic factuality of the moral law could be regarded in much the same way. Moreover, if the filling of gaps is the reason for comparing traditions, it would be more

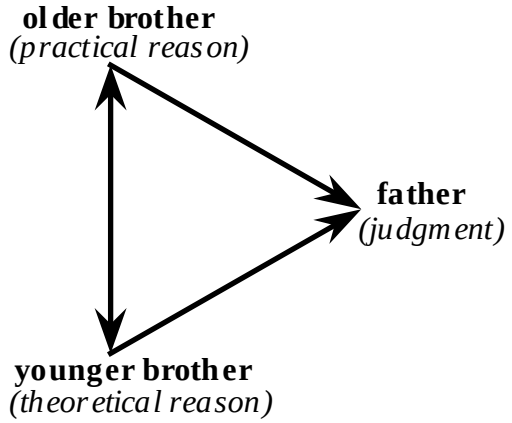
legitimate to regard Kant’s first *Critique* as filling a gap in the Chinese traditions, left by their tendency to neglect metaphysical and epistemological issues.

Kant’s attractiveness to Chinese philosophers becomes even less surprising once we take note of the “Chinese” character of his emphasis on reason’s “architectonic” structure. In the last few pages of his book on Chinese psychology, Bond lists five basic characteristics of any distinctively “Chinese” culture. The first and foremost of these is “a belief in the naturalness, necessity, and inevitability of hierarchy.”[33] One could hardly ask for a better description of Kant’s concept of “architectonic”, except that the Chinese see hierarchy as nature’s way of structuring *social* relations, while Kant sees it as nature’s way of structuring *rational* relations. Without going into detail here, it will suffice merely to provide a brief glance at the basic backbone supporting the complex hierarchy of relations that constitutes Kant’s architectonic.[34] Despite common assumptions to the contrary, Kant’s first *Critique* does not occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of his overall Critical System. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is the longest and most influential of the three *Critiques* not because the theoretical reason examined therein takes precedence over all other uses of reason, but because Western philosophers had traditionally *taken* it as such; Kant therefore needed to expend far more effort to demonstrate and refute the numerous errors into which philosophers had fallen.

Once it is properly understood, Kant’s view of the role of theoretical reason can be likened to the role of the “younger brother” in the typical Chinese family: an important member indeed, but not one having the authority to make the truly significant decisions. The “older brother” in Kant’s System is, as we have seen (cf. note 30 above), the *practical* reason expounded in his second *Critique*. Most Kant-scholars are well aware of Kant’s view that the disputes inevitably arising between practical and theoretical reason must ultimately be solved by the former—not unlike the responsibility the older brother has to clear up quarrels between himself and his younger brother(s). What few interpreters (Chinese or Western) have fully appreciated is the fact that neither practical nor theoretical reason is for Kant the ultimate authority governing the Critical System itself. On the contrary, the third *Critique* (and, it could be argued, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*) reveal, as it were, the “father-figure” who ultimately has the last word: *judgment*, the application of reason in real-life experiences. This, Kant says, is the standpoint of “Critique” as such.[35]

Rather than straying into a discussion of the many implications of these hierarchical relations, we can use the following diagram to summarize the basic analogy being proposed here:

Figure 2: Reason’s “Family Hierarchy” in Kant’s Critical System[36]



A noteworthy fact about the analogy summarized in Figure 2 is its lack of any reference to the role of women in the family. This is appropriate inasmuch as women play an explicitly subordinate role in both traditional Chinese culture and Kant’s own understanding of male-female relations[37]—yet another respect in which Kant was more “Chinese” than modern. However, traditional Chinese women do have important functions, even though they enjoy little or no *authority*; and in the same way there *are* substantive elements in Kant’s System that are never accorded anything like an equal status to the aforementioned “masculine” members of Reason’s family. The mother could be likened to *logic*, inasmuch as the whole structure of reason’s architectonic springs forth from her womb. And the sisters could be likened to the lowly faculty of sensibility (for the first *Critique*) and to inclination (for the second *Critique*). Of course, such analogies are fanciful and of only limited value. Nevertheless, the ease with which Kant’s conception of the structure of reason can be translated into the hierarchical relations of the Chinese family, together with his frequent emphasis on such relations being *natural* and *inevitable*, clearly sets Kant apart as one of the West’s more “Chinese” thinkers.

Still more evidence for such a conclusion can be found by turning now from the masculine (hierarchy) to the feminine (logic). Of the many interesting psychological aspects of Chinese culture discussed by Bond, the one that is perhaps most helpful in discerning a

“Chinese” side to Kant’s *philosophical* disposition is his treatment of the relative importance of what could be called “synthetic logic” and “analytic logic”. The latter is based on the laws of identity (A=A) and noncontradiction (A≠-A), whereas the former is based on the opposite laws of nonidentity (A≠A) and contradiction (A=-A). Without quite using these technical terms, Bond gives clear evidence of the psychological preference for synthetic logic in Chinese culture, as opposed to the emphasis put on analytic logic in Western cultures. In commenting on the results of Rorschach ink-blot and other psychological tests on children, he says:

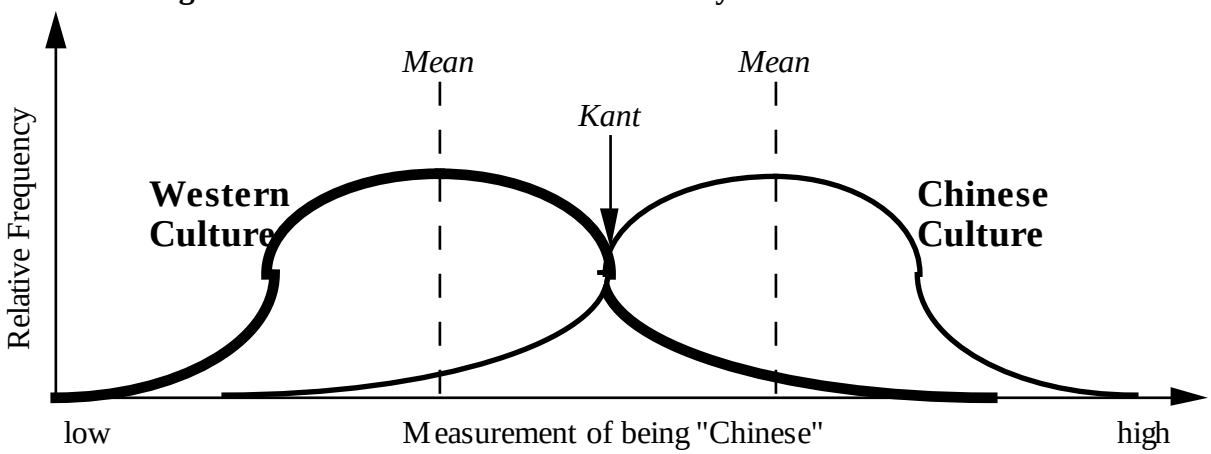
> Apparently the stimulus as a whole has more salience for Chinese; the parts of the whole for Americans.... The Chinese were ... more likely to pair objects on the basis of similarities in the total appearance of objects ... The American children, by contrast, preferred the analytic style of grouping ... In short, the Chinese tend to perceive on the [*synthetic*] basis of the overall pattern uniting the objects, Americans on the [*analytic*] basis of a characteristic shared by the objects. American children join the objects after decomposing them into parts; Chinese children join the objects after considering them as wholes.

Kant’s writings abound with examples of synthetic relations, which he employed much more fully than most other Western philosophers have. Synthetic relations are detectable by the fact that they are typically expressed in sets of *three*, as opposed to the divisions of *two* or *four* characteristic of analytic relations. Each of the categories, for instance, is divided into three “moments”, in both the first and second *Critiques*. The fact that there are a total of *four* such synthetic relations in each table of categories shows that Kant was not *merely* interested in synthetic logic—i.e., he was not “Chinese” in an extreme sense—but sought for a *balance* between the two kinds of logic available to human rationality. Similar resonances could also be explored in the third *Critique*, where Kant appeals to “common sense” as a *collective* basis for judgments of beauty, emphasizes “purposiveness without a purpose”, and makes various other paradoxical claims. The latter would not need to be stretched too far in order to see them as compatible with the Chinese Daoist emphasis on the “Way” that cannot be expressed.[38]

We have now seen ample evidence for identifying Kant as a Westerner with some distinctively “Chinese” characteristics and tendencies, thus lending some qualified approval to

Nietzsche’s reference to Kant as the “Chinaman of Königsberg”. Clearly, we have not found enough evidence to merit labelling Kant as a full-blown “deviate”. His influence on Western thought and culture has been far too strong to make that claim plausible. But we *have* had sufficient reason to conclude that Kant stood *on the borderline* between these two ideals: that is, he appears to be something of a *synthesis* of the generalized, and perhaps to some extent fictional, conceptions of the typical “Chinese” and “Western” personality types. Returning to Bond’s model, mentioned near the beginning of this paper, we can therefore conclude our investigation by placing Kant just at the point where Chinese and Western tendencies cross (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Kant’s Position on the Boundary between Two Cultures



This is an inevitably tentative hypothesis. But it enables us to give a plausible answer to the question with which we began. How “Chinese” was Kant? Not *very* “Chinese”, really. But he was “Chinese” enough to serve as the basis for some potentially meaningful cross-cultural dialogue, dialogue that can give us a glimpse of *one world*, where all philosophers—indeed, all *humanity*—can strike the transcendental balance he struck between theory and practise, between rights and duties, between the empirical and the transcendent, between East and West.

NOTES

[1]See e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), §210.

[2]Suggesting a possible comparison between Königsberg and Hong Kong might appear to be outlandish at first. But in a recent article in *Newsweek* (May 23, 1994), entitled “Free-Trade Zone or Fortress?” (p.40), Andrew Nagorski raised just such a possibility. His conclusion, that *modern*-day Kaliningrad does not deserve such a comparison, does not rule out the possibility that the Königsberg of *Kant’s* day did.

[3]See e.g., Kant’s letter of October 13, 1797, to J.A. Lindbolm, in *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1922), volume XII, p.206 [tr. Arnulf Zweig, *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p.237]. The standard, Academy edition of Kant’s works will be referred to hereafter as “*Ak*.”, with references to translations following in square brackets. In the letter cited above Kant says: “I have known for quite some time that my grandfather, who lived in the Prussian-Lithuanian city of Tilsit, came originally from Scotland, that he was one of the many people who emigrated from there, for some reason that I do not know, toward the end of the last century and the beginning of this one.” For a detailed account of Kant’s Scottish ancestry, see William Wallace, *Kant* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), pp.8-11.

[4]In *Ak*. VII.169 [*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*] Kant mentions the seasickness he experienced during a short voyage to Pillau, a small town northwest of Königsberg, where the Peninsula joins the Baltic Sea. (See also *Ak*. IX.195.16 [*Lectures on Physical Geography*].) This is the furthest Kant is known to have travelled from his home during his entire lifetime. His determination to avoid travelling whenever possible seems to have been based on a maxim not unlike that suggested by the Chinese proverb: “A thousand days at home, peace. A moment abroad, trouble.”

[5]Willibald Klinke, in *Kant for Everyman*, tr. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), says the population of Königsberg during Kant’s life “included many Eastern races” (p.15). This, no doubt, is because Königsberg was situated on a main trade route between Western Europe and the East. Kant himself refers to these merchants on at least one occasion: as an example of “truthfulness” in *Ak*. VIII.422 [*Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treatise of Permanent Peace in Philosophy*, tr. Gabriele Rabel, *Kant* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.289], he cites “those Chinese shopkeepers who write in golden letters over their shops: ‘No Cheating Here’.”

[6]A rare reference to Chinese philosophy can be found in Kant’s essay, “The End of All Things” (*Ak*. 335-6 [tr. Lewis White Beck, *Kant On History* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill,

1963), p.79]), where he cites it as an example of how speculative philosophy can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with mystical experience. He states wryly that “Chinese philosophers strive in dark rooms with eyes closed to experience and contemplate their nihility.” (Had Kant never heard of Confucius?) A similar identification of Chinese philosophy with a caricature of the Buddhist tradition comes in his *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, tr. Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p.86, where Kant lumps together “the mystical self-annihilation of China, Tibet, and India”. See also *Ak*. II.252 [*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*] and II.437,439 [*On the Different Races of Men*].

[7]*On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), §I.12.

[8]*The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), §§127, 395; cf. §§143, 745. Very brief, passing references to Asia(ns)/Orient(als) in general or to China(dom)/Chinese in particular also appear in §§91, 129, 191, 216, 274, 866, 1050, and in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§32, 50, 52, 56, 188, 208, 245, 267.

[9] “Why I am so Wise”, *Ecce Homo*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), §7. See also §1 for some good examples of Nietzsche’s dependence on perspectival reversal. Eberhard Scheiffele explores Nietzsche’s use of perspectival reversal in some detail in “Questioning One’s ‘Own’ from the Perspective of the Foreign”, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, tr. and ed. Graham Parkes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.31-47. Parkes’ book contains three essays on Nietzsche and China; unfortunately, they all focus on how Nietzsche has been used and interpreted by Chinese scholars, and say little or nothing about what Nietzsche himself thought of Chinese culture. (For the most notable exception, see p.40 of Scheiffele’s essay.) Walter Kaufmann is one of the few commentators on Nietzsche who says anything significant about his view of the Chinese. He calls attention to Nietzsche’s account of the influence of oriental religion on Greek culture [*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp.152-4], and later adds: “In the *Dawn* [§206], Nietzsche persists in his gigantic scheme for a future mixed breed and considers the advantages of an ingredient of Chinese blood” (p.293).

[10]*The Will to Power*, §§864, 90.

[11]*Beyond Good and Evil*, §§238, 46.

[12]Figure 1 is adapted from Michael Harris Bond, *Beyond the Chinese Face* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.3. A number of other recent books have provided similar psychological and/or philosophical comparisons of Chinese and Western ways of thinking. Bond himself, for instance, has written a more in depth study, *The Psychology of the Chinese*

People (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986). The limitations of space placed on the current paper unfortunately preclude a thoroughgoing treatment of all the available works; so I am taking Bond’s work as a representative study and using it as the primary springboard for answering the question at hand. More philosophical approaches can be found in: Charles A. Moore (ed.), *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967); Thomé H. Fang, *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co., 1980); Robert E. Allinson, *Understanding the Chinese Mind: The Philosophical Roots* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); see also the works listed in note 31, below.

[13]Bond, p.6.

[14]Quoted in Klinke, p.16.

[15]Klinke, pp.15-16, 56-59; see also Wallace, pp.11-16.

[16]Klinke, pp.18-19. In a small treatise on education Kant refers to youth as “the most troublesome” years of life: “for we are then under strict discipline, can seldom choose our friends, and still more seldom have our freedom.” Quoted in Roger Scruton, *Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.2.

[17]Quoted in Wallace, p.11, emphasis added. An emphasis on harmony is one of the main characteristics of Chinese culture. See e.g., Fang, pp.i-ii and *passim*.

[18]See Klinke, pp.56-59.

[19]*Ak*. XI.320 (Zweig, p.185). Johann Heinrich Kant (1735-1800) had been raised by Kant’s uncle (Klinke, p.56), and was now a pastor in Altrahden; he had not seen his older brother since 1758 (Zweig, p.31).

[20]*Ak*. XI.320 (Zweig, p.185), emphasis added. See also the letter of December 17, 1796 (tr. in Klinke, p.58). As evidence of the intellectual gap between Kant and the rest of his family, Zweig notes the fact that his sister’s children “signed Kant’s will with X’s”, indicating that they “must have been illiterate” (Zweig, p.31).

[21]Kant’s “filial piety” was, of course, rooted in the Christian tradition, so it does not in any way prove that Kant actually experienced any historical Chinese influence. But proving such influence is not the point of this essay. The point is to note those areas of resonance that might cause us to mistake Kant for a Chinese, if we could *not* see his true (historical) “face”.

[22]*Ak*. VII.9 [tr. Mary J. Gregor, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (New York: Abaris Books), p.17]. Kant adds: “I have always pictured this judge as standing at my side to keep me not only from error that corrupts the soul, but even from any careless expression that might give offense.”

[23]*Ak*. III.848-59 [tr. Norman Kemp Smith, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp.645-52]. (References to the first *Critique* will cite, as here, the original pagination of the second German edition, given in the margins of *Ak*. III.) A fourth epistemological category could be added to complete this list: *ignorance* (in the sense of *error*) is the affirmation of (supposed) truth characterized by objective “certainty” and subjective *un*certainty.

[24]See *Ak*. II.387,398-406 [*On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, tr. G.B. Kerferd and David E. Walford, *Selected Pre-Critical Writings and Correspondence with Beck* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), pp.47, 62-74] and III.xvi-xviii [Kemp Smith, pp.22-3]. See also my book, *Kant’s System of Perspectives* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), pp.67-9.

[25]*Ak*. IV.260 [tr. Lewis White Beck, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), p.8]. Beck suggests in a footnote (p.8n) that it was not until roughly 1772 that this “new direction” actually began to take shape in Kant’s writings.

[26]See my pair of articles entitled “Kant’s Critical Mysticism”. The first in this series, subtitled “The Critical *Dreams*” [in *Philosophy & Theology* 3:4 (Summer 1989), pp.355-83], gives a detailed summary of Kant’s main argument in this 1766 book on Swedenborg’s mystical visions, and shows how it reveals a significant degree of sympathy on Kant’s part for the mystic’s general world view (though *not* for Swedenborg’s practical application of that world view, in the form of psychic communications and cultic religion).

[27]Once we see the close connection between the new insight of 1770 and the Copernican Revolution fully developed in 1781, and once we recognize that, far from being a sudden discovery, Kant’s threefold “Critical” method of doing philosophy can be seen operating throughout his writings, from the earliest works to the latest, it seems reasonable to suggest that the two periods of Kant’s life be renamed “pre-Copernican” and “Copernican”. I develop this argument further in “Kant’s Critical Mysticism: The Critical *Dreams*”.

[28]James Legge (tr.), *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), volume 1, pp.240-1. See also p.201. Reading this in connection with Kant’s metaphorical distinction between the empirical “land of truth” and the “stormy ocean” of speculation (*Ak*. III.294 [Kemp Smith, p.257]) makes it interesting to note that the Chinese have never had much of a navy!

[29]See *Ak*. VI.203-372 [Part I (“The Doctrine of Right”) of *The Metaphysics of Morals*], especially 239-42.

[30]Kant devotes an entire section to this theme near the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason*. See *Ak*. 119-21.

[31]This paper is not the place for a discussion of the many forms this dialogue has taken. But further discussions of the key issues concerning Kant can be found in numerous books and articles, such as: Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), especially Li Zehou’s chapter, “Some Thoughts on Ming-Qing Neo-Confucianism”, pp.551-69; Herbert Fingarette, “Following the ‘One Thread’ of the *Analects*”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Issue* XLVII:3S (September 1979), especially pp.379-82, 395; and Kirill O. Thompson, “*Li* and *Yi* as Immanent: Chu Hsi’s Thought in Practical Perspective”, *Philosophy East & West* 38.1 (January 1988), pp.30-46. In most cases, these and other comparative studies focus primarily on the task of showing the extent to which the Chinese (especially Neo-Confucian) tradition can match up to the Western (especially Kantian) tradition (see e.g., Moore, pp.86, 321, and Li, pp.551, 553-4, 557-8). In *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, Hansen claims the only true similarity between Kant and Confucius is that both reject utilitarianism (p.389); he takes the novel approach of emphasizing their *differences* (pp.123, 165-6, 353, 415) and suggests some qualified similarities between Kant and Daoism (pp.284, 298). In contrast to both of these approaches, I am here examining the extent to which *Kant* matches up to *Chinese* culture and its philosophical tradition.

[32]See Mou’s *Chih-te chih-chüeh yü Chung-kuo che-hsüeh* (*The Intuition of Noumenal Reality and Chinese Philosophy*). A rare account in English of Mou’s interpretation on Kant can be found in Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Punishment: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp.30, 57-8, 248-9.

[33]Bond, p.118.

[34]The details can be found in *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, which is a thoroughgoing interpretation of this aspect of Kant’s philosophy.

[35]See *Ak*. V.211 [*Critique of Judgment*]; cf. *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, p.355.

[36]This diagram is formed on the basis of the mapping rules set forth in *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, pp.76-91, and in my book, *The Tree of Philosophy* (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press, 1993), pp.69-83. It is important to note that, although synthetic relations can generally be expressed in terms of threefold distinctions, and hence mapped onto a triangle (as in Figure 2), the synthetic *component* in such relations is only the third term. Traditional Chinese philosophers are not fond of making threefold distinctions in the manner of Kant or

Hegel. But as we shall see, they *are* fond of using synthetic logic, understood as the logic of paradox. For a more detailed examination of the differences between analytic logic and synthetic logic, see *The Tree of Philosophy*, Chapters 9-12.

[37]See e.g., *Ak*. II.228-43 [*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, section III], and VI.276-84 [*The Metaphysics of Morals*].

[38]Lao Tzu’s Chinese classic, *Tao Te Ching* [tr. H.G. Ostwald from Richard Wilhelm’s German edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p.27], opens with the lines: “The DAO [Way] that can be expressed is not the eternal DAO. The name that can be named is not the eternal name.” The resonance between the Daoist world view and that expressed by Kant in the third *Critique*, the apex of his Critical System, would be worth exploring in more detail.