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assisted by Thomas Hiltbrunner

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**An intercultural and inter-
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The End of Ethical Universalism? Bioethics in the Age of Globalization and the Case of China

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Abstract

This article discusses the role and validity of arguments of culture in biomedical ethics. It is often maintained that any fundamental bioethical consensus is ruled out by the existence of incommensurable value axioms rooted in the different traditions, above all with regard to diverging conceptions of the human being. For example, it is argued that the «Christian» Western culture leads to more restrictive and the «Confucian» Chinese culture to more permissive stances with regard to consumptive embryo research. However, what a «culture» says has always been a matter of interpretation and debate. Confucianism, too, offers more than just one option to answer crucial bioethical questions. There is no established cultural position that would absolve one from a responsible decision. Rather than exerting a one-sided impact on ethics, culture can also be reshaped and changed in view of ethical challenges.

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Biotechnology's role in human medicine is not only the latest, but also the most dramatic chapter in the history of science. It is not the first time that the natural sciences have constituted a challenge to ethics, but the situation that we are confronted with today is of a different nature. As early as 1946, Aldous Huxley, in the foreword to the second printing of his *Brave New World*, predicted that the «sciences of life», contrary to the sciences of matter like physics and chemistry, «modify the natural forms and expressions of life itself», and thus cause a «really revolutionary revolution». This revolutionary revolution, Huxley says, «is to be achieved, not in the external world, but in the souls and flesh of human beings» (Huxley 1972, p. x; emphasis H.R.). The essential point of the new sciences is that the objectifying attitude is turned towards the human being itself; the subject of action

becomes his own object through an «experimental self manipulation» (Lenk 1992, p. 199) directly interfering with his biological code and the accompanying consumption of human life for research purposes. This is a constellation which surpasses everything that has until recently been discussed when assessing the consequences of technology. The perspective of being able to intentionally redesign the biological constitution not only of human individuals, but also of the human species, and to instrumentalize human beings confronts us in a more concrete, urgent and direct way than ever with the fundamental question of what we are, what we want to be and how we should deal with ourselves and the other members of our species. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the new developments do not take place in relatively manageable national settings but in the inscrutable jungle of the global bioindustry.

Because of its grave implications, its promises and dangers, the rapid development of human biotechnology has led to intense and controversial ethical discussions that can hardly keep pace with technological progress. The discrepancy between technological innovation and ethical responses to it holds true not only for the West, but also, and often to an even greater extent, for other regions of the world. Nevertheless, bioethical discourses have developed in all continents. While these discourses in non-Western countries closely follow the Western, above all English-speaking, ethical debates with a particular receptivity to utilitarian positions, the flow of knowledge in the reverse direction is poor. This is an unhappy situation, for bioethics, the necessity of local regulations notwithstanding, needs a global perspective. There are several reasons why it is not possible to confine the discussion to local contexts:

- The first reason is that, due to the global migration of people as well as ideas, the world has become more multicultural. The relationship of doctors and patients is no longer more or less exclusively based on a specific cultural system of values as it was in former times.
- The second reason is that modern biomedical technology is itself a world-wide phenomenon in terms of research, production and trade. It has been quickly mastered outside the traditional industrial countries and is being promoted in many parts of the world with huge financial support and liberal legal regulations. Asia in particular is a booming region where large biotechnological capacities have been built up and where challenging and ambitious experiments have been carried out. It is frequently used as a means of exerting pressure for deregulation in Western countries, a well-known example being the promotion of the faked experiments of the Korean cloning scientist Hwang Woo-suk by the American journal *Science*.¹

- The third reason is that biotechnological research is moveable and is easily exported in order to escape so-called overregulation or a critical public sphere. Restrictions in one country may quickly lead to the relocation of the enterprise to more permissive and cost-effective regions. Western biotechnological global players and renowned scientific institutions have entered into cooperations with Asian companies and medical centers. Local partners offer their capacities and enter into joint ventures with the foreign investors. Whose standards and whose values count in these cooperations? Would it suffice to seek the lowest common denominator?
- Fourthly, the genetic resources in general and the human genetic resources in particular of all parts of the world attract pharmacological interests, for example in places where, due to the non-existence of a public health system, diseases can be studied in their «natural» state, without the «distortion» of medical treatment. This practice raises serious questions of informed consent and of global justice. Without accepted common standards, there will be no way to prevent rape research, gene piracy and the plundering of the biological resources of so-called developing countries.
- The fifth and most important reason for a global bioethical perspective is this. Modern biotechnology with regard to human medicine affects questions of mankind as such. Human cloning, germline engineering, genetic enhancement, international trade with human biological «material», are matters that affect the biological and social future of the human species—even in the case that the advantages of the new technologies should far outweigh their risks. From a principled point of view, positive decisions on the respective issues cannot be taken by individuals, corporate groups, scientific communities or even countries alone. Ideally, every human being, in theory also future generations, should for reasons of justice have the right to agree or not to agree. The principle of informed consent in this perspective does not only apply to decisions on individual therapy. It also applies to decisions on the overall direction of the biomedical sciences. By this principle, the criterion of acceptability by *all* who are possibly affected (*die Betroffenen*) rather than only by the active participants (*die Beteiligten*) can serve as a regulative orientation for generating valid bioethical norms. The norm-generating principle is not different from the principle that urges us to enter the global discourse in the first place.

The search for global standards in bioethics has been on the way for some time already, thanks to the initiative of international organizations like the World Health Organization or the United Nations. However, what is taking place at those levels is negotiation between negotiators. This is of

course an indispensable step in international decision making, but it cannot substitute for a thorough process of mutual understanding and, what is more, an open ethical discourse that puts itself under the regulative idea of acceptability by all affected and aims not only at *Verstehen* (understanding) but at *Einverstehen* (consent).

But is this a reasonable expectation in the first place? Skepticism abounds not only in Western ethics where cultural relativism continues to hold a strong position. It has been recommended, for example, to treat bioethical issues analogously to questions of faith and leave the final decision to the individual conscience (cf. Sass 2002). In the Asian bioethical discourses, too, there is a decided preference for a principle of subsidiarity. The Asian discourse is part of the world-wide bioethical discourse inasmuch as it is embedded in the active participation of the respective countries in decision finding processes on the international level, and inasmuch as it closely follows the Western bioethical debates. At the same time, it is part of specific home discourses. On the one hand, this is due to the impact of local developmental and demographic policies. On the other hand, many Asian voices claim to express distinct cultural ways of approaching and solving bioethical questions that differ from 'Western' positions. They tend to formulate and justify specific biopolicies in the name of culture and reject the imposition of so called 'Western' standards as an attempt to hamper their economic and scientific progress.

Qiu Renzong, the renowned nestor of Chinese bioethics,² has published a book entitled *Bioethics: Asian Perspectives—a Quest for Moral Diversity* which is especially representative of this trend. Under the motto «seeking for common ground, but maintaining the differences» (*qiu tong cun yi*), Qiu pleads for an independent 'Asian' way in bioethics. A similar point was made in the 'Asian values' campaign and the debate about the intercultural validity of human rights in the 1990s. Qiu Renzong's motto, too, belongs to the official Chinese rhetoric of the human rights discourse. This is what he says in his plea for moral pluralism:

It seems to me that after the Cold War and in the process of globalization, some have been anxious to unify not only the actions but also the beliefs and value systems in biomedical and other fields under the rubric of global bioethics or universal ethics. [...] I believe there are some values shared by different moral communities or different cultures which might constitute some common ground for resolving global issues. However, this does not mean that these values constitute an overarching universal ethics or global bioethics, because these shared values can and must be interpreted and applied in different ways in different cultural contexts. For example, Confucian or Buddhist cultures may share with Judeo-Christian cultures such values or rules as «Do not kill the innocent», «Do not steal», etc. However, for Confucians, the rule «Do not kill the innocent» does not include not killing fetuses, whereas for a Buddhist it includes not killing all forms of animals. For Confucians, the rule «Do not steal» does

not include stealing books: Stealing books is not stealing. Obviously not all cultures share the same interpretation of «Do not steal».
Qiu Renzong 2004, p. 1 (Introduction)

If Qiu Renzong is right, the difference of cultural value systems will rule out a fundamental consensus in biomedical ethics. In fact, his argument is not specifically Chinese. It rather reflects the general value pluralism that is the reverse side of the monism of economy spreading all over the 'globalized' world, where the logic of capital and «identity fanaticism» (Alain Badiou) have entered into a productive interaction.³ As the former president of Siemens, Heinrich von Pierer, commented on a critical statement on human rights by the then Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng, «we may see some things differently, but this is the way the Chinese see it. [...] Whether values will mingle and whether this is desirable at all, I don't know. I think that different cultures can exist next to each other.»⁴

In a time of intensified transnational joint ventures and cooperation, the alleged relativity of individual or cultural value axioms disburdens the economic system from moral responsibility. This is especially true in the field of biomedical research where inconvenient questions of ethical justification are simply exported to seemingly less sensitive surroundings. The German stem cell legislation is a telling example. While embryonic stem cells may not be produced in this country so proud of its 'high level ethical standards', they may be imported from abroad. Furthermore, no German scientist will be prosecuted for taking part in experiments forbidden by German law as long as they take place in other countries. To quote the German proverb *Wasch mir den Pelz, aber mach mich nicht nass*, we 'wash our fur without getting wet'.

The postulation of a plurality of cultural bioethical codes is only the reverse side of an intense transcultural cooperation in bioengineering. China in particular recommends itself as a first rank cooperation partner for Western enterprises that meet with restrictions in their own national environments. In a special issue of *Nature*, Yang Xiangzhong, the director of the Center for Regenerative Biology at the University of Connecticut, writes under the title «An embryonic nation: Liberal views on human-embryo technology make China ideal to become a world leader in this field»:

Therapeutic cloning, stem-cell studies and other research areas that use animal or human embryos are controversial and raise religious and ethical questions [...] As a result, many Western governments are weary of such research. These issues have led to unsupportive policies for cloning-related research, and the high costs of clinical trials for any proteins developed using this technology have forced many scientists and commercial companies to abandon promising research and to lose out on potentially profitable products.

China has a cultural environment with fewer moral objections to the use of embryonic stem cells than many Western countries, and [...] it could take a leading role in this

field. [...] China has probably the most liberal environment for embryo research in the world. [...] In addition, the relatively easy access to human material, including embryonic and fetal tissues, in China is a huge advantage for researchers. [...] Collaborations with China are becoming very attractive to researchers based in the West. While Western researchers focus on animal models, partners at the new Chinese stem-cell research centers could focus on human models.

Yang Xiangzhong 2004, pp. 210, 212

By claiming fundamentally different normative frameworks, the argument of «culture», then, can have far-reaching implications for central global issues like human rights and biomedical ethics. It would entail that the search for a global consensus in these issues has to be replaced by the competition of local regulations, with a comparative advantage for low standards. This competition is lessened on the one hand by identifying areas where the different value systems overlap, and on the other hand by negotiations about certain general standards. As a rule, however, the respective agreements contain reservation clauses in the name of historical and cultural specificities. This refers above all to the concept of the human being, which is where the main difference between «Western» and «non-Western» cultural outlooks is frequently localized. Since this concept again stands in the center of crucial bioethical issues like the status and the dignity of a human being, the weight of community interests as against individual interests, and the beginning of human life, the difference is substantial.

Chinese bioethicists often argue that only a born human being is a human being in the strict and ethically relevant sense. As the *locus classicus* for this view, they quote the statement by Xun Zi, one of the great antique Confucian philosophers (ca. 310–230 BC), that «Birth is the beginning of man, and death is the end»⁵. As Li Ruiquan (Lee Shui-chuen), a leading Taiwanese «New Confucian» bioethicist, says, being a human presupposes «interaction with the members of a moral community»⁶. According to Qiu Renzong, this is the «accepted Confucian view». Only a born human is a «person», then, and deserves «full» respect as distinct from only «modest» or «due» respect for the unborn «pre-person» or the dead «post-person» (Qiu Renzong 2006, p. 56). That «human» counts as a relational rather than substantial category then paves the way for liberal standards in human biotechnology—if one *becomes* a human being by membership in a community only, there can, for example, be fewer restrictions for consumptive embryo research. When asked whether an embryo is a human being and whether embryonic stem cell research involves killing a human being, Qiu Renzong and the Chinese stem cell biologist Pei Xuetao answer as follows:

(Qiu Renzong:) According to the Confucian understanding and according to the great majority of the Chinese an embryo is not a human being. What is called a human be-

ing? For Confucianism, a human must have form, spirit, consciousness and in particular self-consciousness, and he must be capable of social contact. Neither an embryo nor a fetus in the womb has this capability. An embryo, physically as well as motorically, does not even match a higher animal, neither a cat nor a dog. Of course it can later develop this capability. But as long as it is an embryo, it is not a human being. This is why there is no problem of killing here.

(Pei Xuetao:) According to my understanding, the question whether an embryo is a human being and whether embryonic stem cell research means the killing of a human has to be viewed in connection with the culture of a country, the religion and the social customs. The definition of a human being is in constant flux. Thus, many define a human being from a physiological and many from a sociological perspective. How a human becomes a human distinguishes him from other animals, and one has to fully consider his social characteristic and the human consciousness. In catholic Western countries it is assumed that [human] life starts with the fertilization of the egg cell [...] For many countries including China, however, one has to consider both the physiological and the social characteristic of the human being. In this case, the fertilized egg is not yet a human being. We can speak of the beginning of life, but not of the beginning of a human. From this perspective, [embryonic stem cell research] cannot be equated with «murder» since the religions and the cultures of the states show big differences. One has to combine the definition of life and the definition of sociality with each other.⁷

Its distinct anthropology would give China a cultural advantage over the «Christian West», in the field of one of the most momentous modern scientific developments. What is more: lacking the Christian notion of a creator god, China in general would not have to struggle with respect for «creation». As again Li Ruiquan explains, referring to the Confucian classic *Zhongyong*, «man forms a trinity with heaven and earth» (*ren yu tiandi can*),⁸ which he interprets in terms of a human co-creation of the world. Man himself is allowed to «play god» (*banyan shangdi*) in order to «make good the insufficiencies of nature» (*bu tiandi zhi buzhu*).⁹ Confucian China is thus much better prepared to welcome and support the newest key technologies able to redesign the world than is the West with its transcendent god. Anyone familiar with Max Weber's influential interpretation of Confucianism and Daoism (Weber 1991) will realize the thrill which this argument must have for a modern Chinese intellectual: Weber's cultural explanation of the superiority of «Occidental rationalism» is turned upside down—now it is China which has the edge on the West. And Li Ruiquan wholeheartedly welcomes the progress of biotechnology, including the prospects of human cloning for therapeutic, scientific and reproductive goals.

Cultural differences and their practical consequences are sometimes exposed in a very provocative manner. Mao Xin, for example, a Chinese representative to the WHO, defended the overwhelming support of Chinese geneticists for eugenics, which he claimed to have discovered through a survey, by the argument, «The Chinese culture is quite different, and

things are focused on the good of society, not the good of the individual. It would shock people in the West, but my survey reflects cultural common sense.»¹⁰

This picture of bioethical cultural pluralism could be enriched by further examples from Judaism, Buddhism, Shintoism etc. There has perhaps been no other field in the history of science where ethics and culture are so directly interwoven as in modern biomedical technology. Is this a dilemma in which the search for a global consensus on bioethical principles is hopelessly stuck, a dilemma, moreover, aggravated by the fact that questions of culture are loaded with questions of identity? Is the difference of culture a fixed frame for an ethics with a global orientation, a borderline that cannot be transcended? Is the cultural pluralism of a globalized world with an irreducible variety of interacting and competing centers the final refutation of the possibility of ethical universalism? Or is globalization, reversely, a serious challenge to ethical relativism? In what follows, I would like to give some arguments against the first and for the second alternative, referring above all to the Chinese case.

First of all, it is only at first glance that the globalization of biotechnology, its spreading over different regions and continents, complicates the matter. At closer inspection it does not add to the confusion that we already have in the «Western» home discourses but is only a new variant of an ongoing debate. Regardless of established different normative mainstream outlooks, the reactions in all countries and cultural settings to the new biotechnological developments are in fact, from a structural point of view, more or less of the same kind: There are «pros» and «cons», hopes and fears, utilitarian and deontological arguments, traditionalist and modernist responses, re-interpretations and adaptations of traditions, and there is engagement and disinterest and lobbying by stakeholders of all kinds. And there is no argument whatsoever from the non-Western discussions that in its consequence would outweigh the so-called «technological imperative»: the «can implies ought» theorem that has been invented in the Western sciences in order to immunize the natural sciences against moralizing criticism.¹¹ In comparison with this theorem, even the most «permissive» Asian arguments are not of new quality. What they foster is rather a global variant of an already existing complementary system of unhampered economical and technical rationality on the one hand and relative value axioms, be they individual or cultural, on the other.¹²

Furthermore, skepticism concerning the fruitfulness of inter- and trans-cultural dialogue is obviously fuelled by a monolithic and essentialist understanding or misunderstanding of «culture». It is true that in this dialogue we frequently take roles—those of «the» Westerner, «the» Buddhist, «the» Chinese, «the» Christian, «the» Moslem etc. Such collective identity forma-

tion is a fact that cannot be easily dismissed and has to be taken into account. Still, we are not simply marked by cultural identities. We respond to social and political surroundings that are not necessarily culture-specific, we have biographies that are not simply functions of external influences, and we can speak for ourselves. In fact, what bioethical positions like the mentioned ones represent is not the cultural heritage itself but in most cases a predominant interpretation that does not go undisputed in the respective home discourses. There have always been a variety of conflicting readings of what, for example, «Christianity» or «Confucianism» mean. The ethical traditions do not speak for themselves, the more so since today's problems have not historically been on their agenda. Moreover, since their main concern has been to curb rather than promote human hubris, it is not very likely that they really support liberal stances in biotechnology. It is astonishing to see how these basically restrictive ethics are today subject to permissive reinterpretations in order to be on the side of technical development. Buddhists find ways to justify «scientific» cloning, although it implies killing, an act with negative karmic effects.¹³ Cloning also finds advocates among modern Daoists (cf. Qiu Renzong 2006, p. 60), despite the fact that Daoist literature abounds with critique of instrumental reason. The Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*, to give an example, rejects the usage of tools like the carpenter's curve, the plumb line, the compasses, the square, and glue because they violate the idealized naturalness of things.¹⁴ He who uses «mechanical devices» will also have a «mechanical mind» and will «not be carried by the Dao».¹⁵ This fundamental critique has been repeated not only in other Daoist texts, but also by the Tang Confucian Han Yu (768–824). The Daoist maxims of «non interference» (*wuwei*) or «knowing to stop» (*zhi zhi*)¹⁶, if taken seriously today, would lead to an immediate moratorium in many fields of ethically disputed research and practices or at least to a minimization of risk.

Therefore, the permissive stances in bioethics in the name of «Chinese culture» can easily be confronted with ideas that themselves can claim to be part of the same tradition. As Nie Jing-Bao says,

[...] the assumption of a monolithic and unified Chinese culture in general and a single medical ethics in particular is a myth [...] Is there really a unique Chinese mentality? And if there is, does this mentality truly dominate each individual and pervade everything of Chinese life? For me, the answer to both these questions is «no».¹⁷

Caution is also in place with regard to appeals to the Confucian «heritage» in particular. Let me take Mengzi (ca. 370–290), the «second sage» of the school after its founder, and surely an authority for its adherents, as an example. According to Mengzi, there is an «essence» or «true condition»

of the human being (*ren zhi qing*), which consists in his moral nature (*xing*). It is obviously independent of the actual performance of moral acts and, by implication, of the stage of human development. Mengzi claims that the <beginnings> of morality are innate to every human being prior to any socialization and learning. Inhuman acts do not affect this moral nature. As Mengzi says, «When others see someone [behaving] like an animal, they think that there was never any talent in him. But how would this be man's true condition!»¹⁸ To be a human, therefore, is not defined by any achievements, but by innate moral possibilities. This idea contradicts the assumption that in Confucianism a human being is only constituted by interaction with members of the <moral community>. It rather suggests that it is constituted by the *potentiality* for such an interaction, the role of social communication for the development of individuality notwithstanding. The *potentiality* rather than *actuality* model of the human being as an *ens morale* would lead to quite different bioethical consequences than those drawn by Qiu Renzong and others. Thus, to ascribe full dignity already to an embryo and fetus does not at all contradict Confucian assumptions about <personhood>, but would be in line with Mengzi's moral anthropology.

As to the idea of human co-creatorship of the cosmos, the above quoted idea from *Zhongyong* 22 can be read quite differently than in Li Ruiquan's interpretation. Tu Weiming, for example, takes it as a plea for a partnership with nature rather than a license to change nature at will.¹⁹

As a matter of fact, an objectifying attitude towards nature is not at all alien to Confucianism. According to Xun Zi, man is a deficient being which, as opposed to an animal, has been left unfinished by nature. He has to compensate the insufficiencies of his innate constitution through his <art> (*wei*) which means to reshape nature in a way that he can «make use of it» in the first place. Man «brings to perfection» (*cheng*) what nature has only «brought into existence» (*sheng*). He becomes a molder of the world on one level with <heaven and earth>—the idea that we also find in the *Zhongyong*.²⁰ Nature in its original state, rather than being valuable in itself as is claimed by the Daoist critique of human civilization, is only the material basis for the existence of man. In the form of man's spontaneous natural inclinations (*xing*), it is even something <evil> that has to be overcome. This theory can certainly serve as an entrance door for a manipulative stance towards nature. But we must not overlook the fact that the main thrust of Xun Zi's argument is ethical. Nature must be put under control, not only in order to safeguard the survival of the human species, but also in order to cultivate human nature itself and subdue its natural «passion for profit» (*hao li*). To Xun Zi, the unleashing of instrumental and economic rationality that we witness today not only in Western but also in <Chinese modernity> is nothing but the embodiment of Nature itself: that is, of crude

self-interest. His above-quoted statement on birth and death as the beginning and end of human life, too, is formulated in the context of the never ending task of human cultivation. It is certainly not meant to set limits to the ethical responsibility of man, as the statement is interpreted today in <liberal> Chinese mainstream bioethics.

These examples must suffice to show that cultural legitimations of political, economic or scientific practices should not always be taken at face value. <Cultures>, because of their diachronically as well as synchronically heterogeneous composition, offer much more than only one alternative. Even within one and the same cultural context one has to choose between these alternatives—giving reasons that cannot themselves be considered cultural and therefore need to be justified in turn. It is not my impression that the Chinese decision finding in bioethical questions can be described as following standards that represent something like <Chinese culture>. It is rather my suspicion that arguments like those mentioned might not be genuinely cultural in the first place, but simply reflect, in cultural disguise, a readiness to bow to the pressures of the <technological imperative> for all kinds of pragmatic reasons such as economic development programs and—an important factor in the Chinese case—population growth.

However, it is not only the assertion of a unitary Chinese position that lacks plausibility, but also its counterpart, monolithic assumptions about the West. To take the aforementioned arguments concerning the delayed beginning of human life as an example, they are not uniquely Chinese but have their Western equivalents, not only in the sciences, but also in ethics. To show the qualitative rupture in the development of an embryo up to which consumptive research would not constitute a moral problem is, after all, an endeavor, as is well known, that has been undertaken by Western researchers and supporting bioethicists, among them also bioethicists with a Christian background. This endeavor fits in with the traditional theory of delayed ensoulment. This was the historically dominant Christian understanding of the beginning of a human being, before it became untenable due to the discoveries of the natural sciences, above all the discovery of the egg cell which suggested a conception model. It is not without irony that while the official churches have endorsed the conception model, the same natural sciences that had helped to jettison the theory of delayed ensoulment are revitalizing secular versions of it today.

The fact that cultural arguments lack explanatory, let alone normative power does not mean that we can ignore them altogether in the global bioethical discourse. It would be a fruitless endeavor to take a purely systematic approach to bioethics by postulating formal universal criteria of morality without taking into account the existing different pre-conceptions of the addressees of such an ethics. Nevertheless, for empirical as well as for

normative reasons, we cannot blindly rely on cultural self-presentations. The very concept of culture, so much misused in current bioethics, would require a much more differentiated application. We not only have the «cultural traditions» going back to the past as embodiments of established world views, which, as I have tried to show, are moreover never monolithic but manifold and subject to interpretation. We also have the manifold «cultures» located in the present, like professional and expert cultures, and to be part of them is often the truly determinant factor when choosing bioethical options—a Buddhist geneticist, for example, might have more in common with his Christian colleague than with a Buddhist monk. Last but not least, there is a culture that belongs to the future: this is the culture that we *do not yet have* and are badly in need of—a global culture of solidarity and respect. Such a future culture can be promoted by reflecting on the ethical challenges and dangers of Huxley's «revolutionary revolution». The relationship between culture and ethics, after all, is not a one-way road: cultural difference may be built up as a challenge to ethics, but ethics can also be a productive challenge to culture.

Notes

- ¹ This is what Editor-in-Chief Donald Kennedy writes in his editorial to the relevant volume of *Science*: «Plainly, these findings may affect the U.S. ethical debate. [...] Science is, after all, an international activity. The Korean success reminds us that stem cell research, along with its therapeutic promise, is under way in countries with various cultural and religious traditions. Our domestic moral terrain is not readily exportable: U.S. politicians can't make the rules for everyone, and they don't have a special claim to the ethical high ground. And of course, political decisions in the United States may carry real penalties for its own scientific enterprise. Harvard's Doug Melton, a leader in stem cell biology whose institution has just made a major commitment to it, says it this way: «Look, life is short. I don't want spend the rest of mine reading about exciting advances in my field that can only be achieved in another country.»» (*Science* vol. 303, 12 March 2004, p. 1581)
- ² The best account of the Chinese discourse is Döring 2004.
- ³ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*, Paris: PUF, 1997, quoted in Gresh 1998.
- ⁴ *Die Zeit*, No. 15, April 7, 1995, p. 14 (Nass/ Sommer 1995).
- ⁵ *Xunzi jijie*, in: *Zhuzi jicheng*, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1978, Vol. 3, Chapter 19, p. 238. See Qiu Renzong 2004, p. 186.
- ⁶ Lee Shui-chuen (Li Ruiquan) 2001. Li Ruiquan's position has also an implication for end-of-life decisions: if old and degenerating people are no longer capable of more than minimal interaction, their «right to uphold their moral status» is decided on by their family members (id., p. 176).
- ⁷ Pei Xuetao and Qiu Renzong, «Renlei ganxipao yanjiu de kexue yu lunli zhi zheng» («The conflict between science and ethics in human stem cell research»), <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/32306/54155/57487/4637851.html> (interview from July 27, 2006).
- ⁸ *Zhongyong* 22, see Legge 1893, p. 416.
- ⁹ Lee Shui-chuen 1999, pp. 130–132.

- ¹⁰ Interview with *New Scientist*, October 24, 1998 (Coghlan 1998). The interview was immediately disseminated through the Western media because it so neatly fits in with Samuel Huntington's «clash of civilizations».
- ¹¹ Edward Teller, the constructor of the hydrogen bomb, is quoted saying that «the technical, the scientific human being» «*should* construct everything that he can construct, and *should* do everything that he *can* do». (Quoted after Lenk 1992, p. 20) To my knowledge, the corresponding explicit maxim «can implies ought», which turns upside down an argument by Immanuel Kant, goes back to Joshua Lederberg, the American geneticist who in 1958 received the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for developing the technology of «transduction»—the insertion of genes into alien cells. Lederberg is the immediate father of the manipulation of the genetic material of living beings in today's genetic engineering.
- ¹² Its classic Western expression is the complementarity of existentialism and scientism; cf. Apel 1988, pp. 56–63.
- ¹³ Cf. Schlieter 2006. Next to Thailand, Schlieter has also studied the Buddhist discourses in Singapore and Sri Lanka. He comes to the conclusion that the permissive stance of these countries and leading Buddhist ethicists in biomedical research is in direct contradiction to nearly all classical Theravada and Mahayana texts. While these texts take the position that human life comes into existence together with the melting of the male and female fertility stuffs, which means that stem cell research or therapeutic cloning involves the bad act of killing, contemporary ethicists follow the conviction—also to be found among Western natural scientists—that a human embryo comes into existence only with the formation of some proto consciousness together with the initial appearance of the primitive streak. According to Schlieter, this can only be explained by the fact that the political decision to promote the new technologies has long been made and that the Buddhist discourse has adapted itself to these circumstances.
- ¹⁴ *Zhuangzi* 8, quoted after *Zhuangzi jishi*, *Zhuzi jicheng*, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1978, Vol. 2. Cf. Watson 1968, p. 100.
- ¹⁵ *Zhuangzi* 12, Watson 1968, p. 134.
- ¹⁶ *Laozi* 32, quoted after *Laozi zhu*, in: *Zhuzi jicheng*, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1978, Vol. 2.
- ¹⁷ Nie Jing-Bao 2000, pp. 250, 251.
- ¹⁸ *Mengzi* 6A8, quoted after *Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, A Concordance to Meng Tzu*, Repr. Taipei, 1973.
- ¹⁹ Tu Weiming 2001. Li Ruiquan's position is also called into question in Shih Wei-ming 1999.
- ²⁰ *Xunzi* Chapter 17. Cf. for this theory Roetz 1984, §21, and Roetz 2009.

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Clash of Cultures — Clash of Morals?

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Abstract

In our paper, we confirm the epistemological plurality of knowledge and knowledge cultures. At present, we observe a conflict between different systems, among them the rift between science and humanities. Science seems to be successful theoretically—it explains «reality»—and practically—it produces instrumental, applicable or functional knowledge. It is for this reason that its reign appears to be unquestioned.

We deliberate one example of this conflict that is of specific concern for ethics: the right to health care. How do different rationalities clash? What is health for the «South», what is it for the «North»? We confront ourselves with both views. For the first perspective, the right to health care is but a theoretical concept hardly put into practice in many social contexts. It cannot be considered isolated from other social and cultural rights, and does not have a high priority on the agenda of knowledge societies. For the second perspective, health care is one goal of research and development. However, research priorities must meet the needs of those who pay for the (public) funding, and must improve the standards of health for those taxpayers first who suffer from diseases mostly present in the developed countries. Innovation, competition, and the protection of property rights also play into the health research and development. Global health issues are certainly of concern, too, and will be met by the development of New Technologies (Life Sciences, Nanotechnologies).

In the ethical analysis of this clash, we draw on the current social analysis, summarized as the condition of globalization and transition to a «knowledge society» already beginning to cover all social sectors and interaction. This cultural transition is the background for the problem of knowledge cultures, which in part poses also an ethical problem. We propose that the