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Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

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***The Dialectic of Consciousness and Unconsciousness
in Spontaneity of Genius:
A Comparison between Classical Chinese Aesthetics and
Kantian Ideas***

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the elusive dialectic between concentration and forgetfulness, consciousness and unconsciousness in spontaneous artistic creation favoured by artists and advocated by critics in Chinese art history, by examining texts on painting and tracing back to ancient Daoist philosophical ideas, in a comparison with Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics. Although artistic spontaneity in classical Chinese aesthetics seems to share similarities with Kant's account of spontaneity in the art of genius, the emphasis on unconsciousness is valued by classical Chinese artists and critics inspired by the Daoist idea of 'Wu Wei' (acting without conscious intention or effort). As the Qing painter Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) claimed when admitting his failure to copy the Yuan master Ni Zan (1301–1374), Ni Zan's success in natural and untrammelled expression lies 'in between having an intention and not having one'. A similar idea about the dialectic of consciousness and unconsciousness in artistic spontaneity was suggested by Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* (1880), which demonstrated that while self-consciousness might disturb and hinder the naturalness of artistic expression and thus encourage affectation, it does not mean that there is no role for consciousness. Although the views on unconsciousness in art and the co-play of consciousness and unconscious in artistic creation by Schelling, Schiller, Goethe, and even Nietzsche might get inspirations from Kant's hidden view of the unconscious, Kant's emphasis on the harmonious cooperation between imagination and understanding disguises his inexplicit idea of the unconscious. This paper will demonstrate that while in both Classical Chinese and European cultural contexts, artists, critics and philosophers talk about the same elusive relation, the philosophical explanations of the same phenomenon are essentially distinctive.

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1. Introduction

For classical Chinese artists and critics, the painting process is spontaneous, since the artist does not know how his mental faculties work, how aesthetic ideas come about in his mind, how the perfect idea-image suddenly and clearly shows itself in front of his mind's eye, and how the perfect image which is replete with 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) can be successfully released onto silk or paper.² As Kant (1790: 186) claimed, spontaneity is a key feature of genius in creating art. Genius (as innate mental talent) creates art without knowing or realizing any specific rule, and if there is a rule for genius creating art, only the mysterious power of nature appears to endow genius with it. In this paper, I attempt to illuminate Chinese aesthetic ideas of spontaneity in comparison with Kantian accounts of spontaneity. I will suggest that while the Daoist ideas of spontaneity which classical Chinese artists resort to can be understood along similar lines as Kant's ideas of spontaneity of genius in creating art, the similarity masks an important difference. In spontaneous creation, unconsciousness (which includes absence of self-consciousness and indifference to internal and external distractions) is emphasized by Chinese artists inspired by the Daoist idea of 'Wu Wei' (acting without conscious intention and effort). The term unconsciousness can have two meanings. The first concerns 'losing' consciousness when entering a coma or falling asleep. The other refers to a state of acting without self-awareness. My use of unconsciousness concerns this second meaning, of being without self-awareness, the loss of the sense of self, and being indifferent to distractions caused by any external things and internal cognitive faculties. Concerning the dialectic of consciousness and unconsciousness, I will examine the essays and poems written by influential classical Chinese artists and critics, in a comparison with Kantian aesthetics, before discussing three stories by German author Heinrich von Kleist in his *On the Marionette Theatre* (1880). We will see that although

² See Hu, 2016: 247–268. Regarding the notion of 'Qi Yun' in classical Chinese painting, where the process of creation by painters is concerned, 'Qi Yun' refers to the essential quality or internal reality of the object; once the painter releases the brush to complete a work, 'Qi Yun' becomes the expressive quality or content of the work.

Kant does not explicitly explain the role of the unconscious in the spontaneous creation of genius, genius as a chiasm of the conscious and unconscious seems to be hidden in Kantian aesthetics, and gives inspiration to Schelling's and Schiller's ideas of the unconscious in art.

2. Plausible Similarity: Spontaneity of Chinese Art from a Daoist Viewpoint and Comparison with Kantian Ideas of Spontaneity of Genius

Regarding artistic spontaneity, Kant (1970: 186) claimed that only nature appears to provide the rule for art through genius (as innate mental talent). In this section, I will explain the correspondence of spontaneity in classical Chinese artistic creation with the Kantian ideas of spontaneity of genius in creating art, in the process of examining the texts written by influential classical Chinese critics and tracing back to stories by Zhuangzi (late 4th – early 3rd century BC) that are frequently used by classical Chinese artists and critics to emphasize artistic spontaneity.

The significance of artistic spontaneity has been frequently stressed in the texts by classical Chinese critics who liked to use such expressions as 'partake of the divine', 'being endowed by nature', 'being aided by divinities', or 'in harmony with natural creation' to praise excellent artworks. For instance, the Song critic Shen Kuo (1031–1095, ECTOP: 100) praised a painting by the Tang artist Wang Wei (699? – 761?) in his collection: 'the principles of his creation partook of the divine and in a special way he obtained the ideas of nature'. The Song bamboo painter and critic Li Kan (1245–1320, ECTOP: 278) praised the bamboo painting master Wen Tong (1018–1079) as 'a genius endowed by Nature, as well as a sage with innate knowledge, moved his brush as if aided by divinities to achieve subtleties in harmony with natural creation'. For such painters and critics, spontaneity is greatly beneficial: even if appearing to keep within rules, Wen Tong seems to be able to '[roam] beyond the dusty world' and 'indulge in all the desires of his heart without transgressing the rules' (ECTOP: 278).

The creative process through which a painter transmits 'Qi Yun' into painting is a spontaneous achievement in the eyes of classical Chinese critics and painters. When unrolling a painting and observing 'strange mountains and seas, verdant forests tossed by wind, white waters leaping and foaming' on it, Wang Wei (415–443, ECTOP: 39) appears to sincerely doubt whether or how it 'could have been accomplished easily' by remarking that 'it must have come about through divine inspiration'. Wang Wei (ECTOP: 38) claimed that when painters paint, 'what is found in form is fused with soul', and 'what activates movement is the mind'. Thus, he seems to suggest that the mind of the artist who produces a great work appears to be inspired and controlled by the divine power of nature, while an ordinary mind certainly could not fulfil this task which appears unattainable by human efforts. Similarly, in an essay in praise of a painter, the Tang poet Bai Juyi (772–846, ECTOP: 71) commented that 'learning... is achieved by mental art, and skill matching creation comes from natural harmony', and the painter Zhang 'merely received from his mind and transmitted to his hand', and conducted his artistic process spontaneously without consciously knowing how this is being done. The spontaneity of artistic creation appears to be consistent with the Kantian claim about spontaneity that genius (mind) cannot make a specific plan for creation, and the artist does not himself know how the aesthetic idea comes into his mind and how the ideal image is realised by the artwork (Kant, 1790: 187).

According to Kant (1790: 187), genius 'cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its product into being, but rather it gives the rule as nature (does)'. Thus, spontaneous creation cannot be designed beforehand, and no real plan including aesthetic ideas can be made beforehand in designing an artwork. Just as Bai Juyi who suggested that learning is 'achieved by mental art' and skill originates in 'natural harmony', the influential Song artist and critic Su Shi (1037–1101, ECTOP: 218) wrote a poem to suggest that artists achieve spontaneous creation naturally without learning from any external agent: 'Why should a high-minded man study painting? /The use of the brush comes to him naturally. /It is like those good at swimming, /Each of whom can handle a boat.'

For classical Chinese artists, the rule which nature gives through genius

is called the Dao, and the Dao which applies in art is the same Dao which applies in life and originally discussed by Zhuangzi in his work. The Dao of spontaneity is illustrated in his story of cook Ding cutting oxen, who seems to be ‘going at it by spirit instead of looking with eyes’ (Zhuangzi, translated by Watson, 2013: 19–20). The Dao of spontaneity is shown in the story of woodworker Qing making a bell-stand who appears to be ‘matching up Heaven with Heaven’ (Zhuangzi, 2013: 152).³ Numerous artists and critics seek the same Dao of spontaneity through art by echoing the ideas of Zhuangzi. For instance, Huang Tingjian (1045–1105, ECTOP: 212) wrote a colophon on an ink bamboo painting, disclosing the common point behind those two stories: ‘The cook’s cutting up of oxen and the woodworker Qing’s carving of a bell-stand went with their having clarity in themselves and a concentration of vitality like divinities, so closely united that nothing could come between; only then could they achieve excellence’. In the examination of these two stories, we will see that the mind retains aesthetic freedom (in the Kantian sense) during spontaneous creation. Even though these stories in the original narrative by Zhuangzi was to illustrate how to follow nature to care for life, classical artists and critics found that the Dao of spontaneity which applies in life also applies to art.

The story of cook Ding cutting up oxen is in the third chapter *The Secret of Caring for Life* in *Zhuangzi*. Watching him cutting up an ox, Lord Wenhui feels surprised at his marvellous skill. Ding cuts the ox as if he is performing the classical dance *Mulberry Groves* and keeping time with the classical music piece *Jingshou*, since ‘at every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee’, every sound made during the cutting is ‘in perfect rhythm’ (Zhuangzi, 2013: 19–20).⁴ Lord Wenhui wonders how he has grasped this skill. Cook Ding replies that what he cares about is the Dao (Way) beyond skill. He explains

³ Heaven (Tian) has several meanings in classical Chinese philosophy. In a narrow and physical sense, Tian refers to sky, is opposite to Di (earth), and Tian Di refers to the universe. In a broad and naturalistic sense, Heaven (Tian) refers to nature; see *A History of Chinese Philosophy* by Fung Yu-lan (1952: 284–294).

⁴ The dance *Mulberry Groves* is a classical dance from the period of King Tang of the Shang Dynasty; the much *Jingshou* is a part of a classical composition from the time of King Yao before the Xia Dynasty.

how he has been practising the Dao beyond skill during the nineteen years of cutting up oxen as cook. At the beginning of his cutting, his eyes focus on the whole ox, then, after three years' practice, he no longer sees the whole ox, and he '[goes] at it by spirit' instead of looking at it with his eyes. When going at it by spirit instead of looking through his eyes, his 'perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants' (Zhuangzi, 2013: 19–20). In this state, he just complies with the ox's natural makeup, chops in the big hollows, '[guides] the knife through the big openings, and [follows] things as they are', so his knife 'never [touches] the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint' (Zhuangzi, 2013: 19–20). Thus, his knife which has been used in cutting up thousands of oxen for nineteen years is still brand-new as if just bought from the store. 'There are spaces between the joints [of oxen], and the blade of the knife has really no thickness', and 'if you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about in' (Zhuangzi, 2013: 19–20). This might be regarded as a metaphor or an analogy used by Zhuangzi for later students to imagine what the freedom of the mind is: in the mind where there is no sensuous or rational enslavement, the spirit can soar freely without any constraints. When going at it by spirit instead of looking with eyes, the faculties of perception and understanding appear to stop working, so the mind achieves freedom by getting rid of the slavery of sensuous complaints and rational compulsion, and spontaneity arises. This mental freedom appears to fit in with aesthetic freedom as Kant defined.

As Xu Fuguan (2001: 32) argued, the reason why the Dao of cook Ding cutting up oxen is advocated by Zhuangzi as the universal Dao lies in this: the contradiction and conflict between the cook and the ox has been destroyed and vanished by virtue of cook Ding no longer seeing the whole ox; the distance between the cook's hands handling the knife and his mind has been shortened to a minimum by virtue of his 'going at it by spirit' without the necessity of 'looking with eyes', that is, the boundary between technique and mind has also been erased. Due to the vanishing of those conflicts, cook Ding is able to perform his 'play' freely and spontaneously in cutting up oxen, and by which he seems to realise the 'free and easy

wandering' advocated by Zhuangzi (Xu Fuguan, 2001: 32). Thus, the Dao of cook Ding cutting up oxen which enlightened Lord Wenhui on the aspect of caring for life, applies in explaining the spontaneity of art, in the eyes of numerous later Chinese artists and critics. No matter what he has been practising, the artist achieves the Dao when reaching the spontaneity of 'going at it by spirit' instead of 'looking with eyes'.

The Dao of 'matching up Heaven with Heaven' is illustrated by Zhuangzi in the story of woodworker Qing carving a bell-stand to be found in the 19th chapter *Mastering Life* of *Zhuangzi*: woodworker Qing made a bell-stand by carving a piece of wood, and everyone who saw the completed bell-stand felt surprised by its striking beauty as if it had been made by gods or spirits rather than by human efforts. When the marquis of Lu saw it and asked Qing how to make it, Qing explained that until his mental state became still enough by fasting the mind for a certain period of time, he did not even go to the mountain forests to look at the nature of the trees in search of wood:

'If I find one of superlative form and I can see a bell stand there, I put my hand to the job of carving; if not, I let it go. This way I am simply matching up "Heaven" with "Heaven". That's probably the reason that people wonder if the results were not made by spirits.' (Zhuangzi, 2013: 152)

Here, matching up Heaven (nature) with Heaven (nature) appears to follow the rule suggested by Kant which nature gives in spontaneous creation. According to Kant (1790: 187), 'by means of genius nature does not prescribe the rule to science, but to art; and even to the latter only insofar as it is to be beautiful art'. Additionally, when Kant claims spontaneity as a key feature of genius, he does not explain how spontaneity could be achieved for genius, but rather emphasizes that genius experiences aesthetic freedom during spontaneous creation. Similarly, mysterious and elusive spontaneity of 'matching up nature with nature' appears to merely belong to the pure and free mind of gifted artists whose work makes audiences wonder if it were made by divine power. In making the bell-stand, Qing gradually got rid of the distractions of thinking of possible 'congratulations',

‘rewards’, ‘titles’, and ‘stipends’ (which he might achieve once he has completed the bell-stand), and of considering whether his skill for making a bell-stand is good enough. The final state of forgetting self and all external and internal distractions which Qing achieved appears to be the state of ‘[smashing] up [his] limbs and body, [driving] out perception and intellect, [casting] off or [doing] away with understanding, [making] [himself] identical with the Great Thoroughfare’, as mentioned in *The Great and Venerable Teacher*, the sixth chapter of *Zhuangzi* (Zhuangzi, 2013: 53). On the one hand, this state is essentially without the distraction of any purpose, or any sensuous interest, or any rational or differentiable concept, so it appears to constitute aesthetic freedom which Kant claimed is necessarily demanded by spontaneous creation of genius. On the other hand, it should be stressed that forgetfulness includes absence of self-consciousness and indifference to internal constraints and external distraction, which is advocated by Zhuangzi as the ideal state of attaining the Dao, but is not explicitly discussed by Kant.

3. Possible Marked Difference: the Dialectic of Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Spontaneity in Classical Chinese Aesthetics

Although I suggest that spontaneity in classical Chinese art inspired by Zhuangzi’s philosophy shares a similarity with the Kantian account of spontaneity (of genius in creating art), there is nothing about unconsciousness explicitly discussed in Kant’s accounts of spontaneity of genius in creating art. In spontaneous creation of art, the dialectic of concentration (with conscious intention and effort) and forgetfulness (in a trance-like state without conscious intention or effort) is valued by classic Chinese artists and critics, as Su Shi (1037–1101, ECTOP: 212) illustrated in a poem in praise of Wen Tong painting bamboo:

‘When Wen Tong painted bamboo,
He saw bamboo and not himself.
Not simply unconscious of himself,

Trance-like, he left his body behind.
His body was transferred into bamboo,
Creating inexhaustible freshness.
Zhuang Zhou is no longer in this world,
So who can understand such concentration?’⁵

The dialectic of concentration and forgetfulness in spontaneity was applied by several gifted artists, and was also stressed by several critics. When the mind concentrates on the object depicted and the spirit is completely absorbed, the artist seems to conduct himself with his conscious intention. When forgetting everything in a trance-like state of becoming one with the object, the artist appears to discard his conscious intention and act unconsciously. When the artist suddenly gets ready for painting, the spontaneous process of producing the final work seems to be conducted without the distraction of conscious intention and the constraints of conscious effort. However, it is also true that the artist’s conscious intention and effort plays a role during the process of formulating the perfect idea-image in the mind, controlling the hand to respond to the mind, and finally releasing the image through brush and ink onto silk or paper. Thus, on the one hand, conscious intention or intentional consciousness gets involved as if it was not engaged; on the other hand, acting unconsciously appears to dominate spontaneity as if any conscious intention and effort were discarded. For instance, as the Qing painter Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715, cited and translated by Nelson, 1983: 410) claimed when admitting his failure to copy the Yuan master Ni Zan (1301–1374), Ni Zan’s success of natural and untrammelled expression in paintings lies ‘in between having a (conscious) intention and not having one’.

On the one hand, it is commonly believed that artists must concentrate on the targeted object first. Being absorbed in the object of art, it might be suggested, leads to a state of fusing the subject and the object with conscious intention or efforts. For instance, according to the Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan (847, ECTOP: 61–62), commanding his own spirit, and focusing on the object depicted, the artist may produce a real painting rather

⁵ Zhuang Zhou refers to Zhuangzi.

than a 'dead painting'.⁶ As the Song artist Huang Tingjian (1045–1105, ECTOP: 219) observed, the calligrapher Zhang Su achieved artistic success by '[being] able to become absorbed spiritually'; 'if the mind is able not to be distracted by external things, then one's original nature will be preserved intact, and all things will emerge in profusion as if reflected in a mirror'.

Zhuangzi once illustrated the significance of smashing external distractions by using the simple example of betting for different prizes in an archery contest. When the prize is more valuable, the shooter's mind has more distraction, and it is more difficult for him to get the stake. When one bets for tiles, he shoots with skill; when he bets for fancy belt buckles, he 'worries about the aim'; when he bets for real gold, he becomes 'a nervous wreck'. Although in these three situations, the shooter's skill stays same, the value of the prize lets 'outside considerations weigh on his mind', so 'he who looks too hard at the outside gets clumsy on the inside' (Zhuangzi, 2013: 148). That is, if the mind is distracted by the external prize, that means the spirit does not become absorbed, there is intangible resistance between the shooter and the object (Xu Fuguan, 2001: 74–75). The same principle applies in art.

However, mere concentration does not appear to be enough for the artist. To get rid of all internal and external distractions, the artist needs to forget self and everything else. Forgetting self and everything else, refers to forgetting the self, the object depicted, the painting action, the work, the technique, anything else which might constitute internal or external distractions.⁷ Thus, on the other hand, forgetting everything appears necessary for classical Chinese artists when creating art, so as to avoid the image being 'stopped in the hand' or 'frozen in the mind' (Zhang Yanyuan, 847, ECTOP: 62). As Zhang Yanyuan (ECTOP: 62) suggested, 'The more one ... consciously [thinks] of oneself as painting, the less success one will have when painting', while 'if one revolves thought and wields brush

⁶ A real painting is not merely imitating formal likeness, rather a painting which is replete with 'Qi Yun'.

⁷ External distraction is from outside of the self, and it might include the object depicted, the brush, the ink, the painting place and time, the painting material (paper or silk), weather, and surroundings, etc. Internal distraction is caused by the play of internal cognitive faculties such as reason, intention, or consciousness.

without ideas fixed on the act of painting, one will have success'. Following Zhang Yanyuan's suggestion, the artist should paint without consciously thinking of painting, and the work appears more successful with less distraction produced by conscious intention and rational cognition.

Concentrating on the object (with conscious intention) in an absorbed state and forgetting everything in a trance-like state (as if acting unconsciously without any conscious intention) might appear paradoxical at first sight, but both work for artistic spontaneity, by serving the purpose of getting rid of all external and internal distractions to achieve the aesthetic freedom required by spontaneity. Intentional and conscious concentration seem to be the starting point, then forgetfulness in a trance-like state of acting unconsciously follows. Thus, spontaneity occurs when the artist gets rid of any distraction of intentional self-consciousness and external environment, and paints unconsciously as if the interference of any conscious intentions and efforts has been smashed, although the mind does not lose the consciousness of commanding the hands to control the brush to release the perfect image at the same time. This process is described in the story of Wen Tong painting bamboos in an essay by Su Shi's brother Su Zhe (1039–1112).

Wen Tong lives as if a recluse in a bamboo grove every day, 'looking and listening without awareness' as if nothing '[affects] (his) mind', regarding bamboos as his intimate friends and companions, drinking and eating, and lying down and resting among the bamboos; at first he concentrates his spirit on carefully observing the different shapes and numerous changes of bamboos in different days and moments, later he '[enjoys] them without consciousness of doing so', and then at an unpredictable moment when he feels ready as if he has already forgotten the brush in his hand and the paper, he paints bamboos instantly and spontaneously (ECTOP: 208). Wen Tong got absorbed in bamboos first, then forgot everything, entering a 'trance-like' state, and the 'inexhaustible freshness' of the bamboo in his works appears to be the spontaneous product of Wen Tong finally being 'trance-like' in becoming one with the bamboo. In this trance-like state when the artist appears to have forgotten everything but has achieved the unification between the self and the object, he appears

to lose his consciousness of knowing whether he becomes the depicted object or the depicted object becomes him.

When the state of being completely absorbed in painting and forgetting self and everything else is interrupted, the painter feels pressure from cognitive faculties or faces resistance from external influences, and thus might suddenly lose his ideal state to paint. This can be seen in the story of Fu Shan (1607–1684):

At the night of the Middle Autumn Festival, Fu Shan ‘asked his servants to take out a huge bowl of ground ink and put it on a tea table. He motioned to the people to leave and started painting alone. A friend stood in the distance and spied upon him. He was seen dancing and jumping as if he had gone crazy. The friend hurried back and took hold of him by the waist. He cried out and signed, “The guy has destroyed my refined mood, what a pity it is!” And so he threw down the brush, crumpled up the paper, and stopped.’ (Xu Ke, 1869–1928, translated and cited by Gao Jianping, 1996: 83)

As seen in the story of Wen Tong painting bamboo, both concentration (being conscious) and forgetfulness (acting unconsciously) work for unification of the subject and object. According to Xu Fuguan (2001: 74–75), the painter suffers from conflicts between the self and object unless he achieves a unification with the object. Unless completely absorbed in or united with the object depicted, the artist is unable to get rid of external and internal distractions, and spontaneous creation will not be achieved. The same Dao for cook Ding’s performing the cutting up of oxen and for Wen Tong’s spontaneously painting bamboo is ‘going at the object by spirit’ instead of ‘looking with eyes’, and the same reason lies in that the spirit can move freely where perception and understanding stop (disturbing). When the painter achieves the unification with the object, he gets rid of sensuous constraints and rational compulsion. Although by getting rid of enslavement to sensuous constraint and rational compulsion the artist appears to achieve aesthetic freedom in the Kantian sense, it should not be ignored that the emphasis on acting unconsciously in artistic spontaneity and the unification of the artist and object does not appear in Kant’s discussion of aesthetics.

4. Daoist Origin of Acting Unconsciously and Reaching Unification of Self and Object

Compared with concentration, forgetfulness in a trance-like state of unconsciousness that includes absence of self-consciousness and indifference to internal and external distractions, appears more mysterious. However, numerous classical artists and critics do emphasize the role of unconsciousness in artistic activity.

The Song critic Dong You (active early 12th century) emphasized the role of unconsciousness in a colophon on the paintings by Li Cheng (919-967). In Dong You's eyes, later imitators who try to follow Li Cheng's style by imitating the traces of his brushwork and exploring the composition of his painting do not realise that the art of Li Cheng owes much to 'forgetfulness' (ECTOP: 210). In another colophon, Dong You continues to emphasize (unconscious) forgetfulness: Though the painter might have become familiar enough with horses during everyday observation, it is only when he is able to 'forget' horses (be unconscious of horses), that he will avoid 'the hindrance of looking at horses' (ECTOP: 215). According to Dong You, at this stage, myriads of forms of horses appear to 'disappear abruptly as if extinguished and non-existent', while the perfect image will 'suddenly emerge' in front of his eyes (ECTOP: 215). Without consciously knowing how this occurs, 'the true horse' will be ready to be released onto silk or paper.

As the Yuan master Wu Zhen (1280-1354, ECTOP: 279) stressed in a poem, unconsciousness appears to dominate his artistic creation: 'When I begin to paint I am not conscious of myself, /And suddenly forget about the brush in my hand. //If the butcher or wheelwright were to return, /Would they not recognise this feeling again? ...' In another poem, Wu Zhen (ECTOP: 279) reiterated the significance of unconsciousness in artistic creation by commenting that Wen Tong 'did not see bamboo' when painting bamboo and Su Shi 'was not aware of poems' when writing poems.

In the Daoist terminology, acting without deliberate intention or conscious effort is called 'Wu Wei'. Wu Wei might be literally translated as doing nothing, but this does not get the true meaning across. In *The Classic*

of the Way and Virtue, Laozi's (ca. 571 BC–471 BC) idea appears to centre around 'Wu Wei'. Laozi (translated by Lynn, 1999: 54, my emphasis) tells us that 'the sage tends to matters *without conscious effort* (Wu Wei), and practises the teaching that is not expression in word'. Wang Bi's commentary on this is 'that which by nature is already sufficient unto itself will only end in defeat if one applies conscious effort [Wei] to it' (Laozi, 1999: 54). Later, Laozi (1999: 56/117, my emphasis) explains why Wu Wei is advocated by pointing out its benefit.

'Because [the sage] *acts without conscious effort* (Wu Wei), nothing remains ungoverned ... The Dao in its constancy engages in *no conscious action* ('Wu Wei'), yet nothing remains undone.'

Wang Bi's commentary on it reads thus:

'It complies with the Natural. In either getting its start or achieving its completion, every one of the myriad things, without exception, stems from what is done in this way.' (Laozi, 1999: 117–118)

Wang Bi seems to suggest that 'Wu Wei' (acting without conscious effort) overlaps with spontaneity.

Laozi (1999: 105/143/170, my emphasis) points out the defects brought about by 'Wei' (acting with specific intention and conscious effort):

'One who acts on [the numinous vessel] will destroy it; one who tries to grasp it will lose it... One who takes all under Heaven as his charge always tends to matters without deliberate action. But when it comes to one who does take conscious action, such a one is not worthy to take all under Heaven as his charge... One who takes *deliberate action* (Wei) will become ruined; one who consciously administers will become lost. This is why the sage *engages in no deliberate action* (Wu Wei) and so never becomes ruined, does not consciously administer and so never becomes lost.'⁸

⁸ Here, the numinous vessel is the metaphor of the Dao.

The advantages of ‘Wu Wei’ are repetitively emphasized by Laozi (1999: 142/137, my emphasis) who also indicates that Wu Wei is grasped by few people:

‘[The sage] brings about the completion of things *without taking (conscious) action* (Wu Wei) ... The softest things under Heaven gallop through the hardest things. That which has no physical existence can squeeze through where there is no space, so from this I know how advantageous it is to *act without conscious purpose* (Wu Wei). The teaching that is not expressed in words, the advantage that is had by *acting without conscious purpose* (Wu Wei), rare is it that anyone under Heaven ever reaches them’.

Laozi’s (1999: 159) emphasis on acting without conscious intention and effort appears to mainly apply to a king ruling his people. Compared with Laozi, Zhuangzi’s explanation of ‘Wu Wei’ appears more vivid and initially applies to caring for life since Zhuangzi likes telling stories or making up dialogues with a message for people. The stories of cook Ding cutting oxen, and woodworker Qing carving a bell-stand, which greatly enlightened artists as mentioned above, all appear to explain the Dao of ‘Wu Wei’. Without consciously doing anything for any intention or purpose, everything is achieved. This appears to be the Dao for everything in the universe. According to Zhuangzi (2013: 193), when someone attains the Dao of spontaneity, he appears like an innocent baby ‘[acting] without knowing what it is doing’ and ‘[moving] without knowing where it is going’. An innocent infant spontaneously practises ‘Wu Wei’ by following nature without conscious effort, so he ‘howls all day, yet its throat never gets hoarse’, ‘makes fists all day, yet its fingers never get cramped’, and ‘stares all day without blinking its eyes’ (Zhuangzi, 2013: 192). This idea by Zhuangzi echoes Laozi’ idea about behaving as an innocent infant.⁹

⁹ Laozi (1999: 65/84/103) suggests that one should ‘rely exclusively on your vital force, and become perfectly soft’ as an infant; he describes that the sage ‘alone [is] quiet and indifferent, in an entirely pre-manifest state, just like an infant who has not yet smile’.

In Zhuangzi's (2013: 193) eyes, the baby's 'body is like the limb of a withered tree', his 'mind like dead ashes'. On the one hand, the body as if dried wood and the mind as if dead ashes is a metaphor originally used by Zhuangzi to illustrate his idea of fasting the mind into emptiness and stillness by discarding sensuous desires of the physical body and by dismissing discriminative understanding and rational judgment, so the state of 'body as if the limb of a withered tree, and mind as if dead ashes' is the ideal state of aesthetic freedom for Chinese artists. On the other hand, the benefit of acting unconsciously which not only includes acting without awareness of the self and internal constraints, but also involves acting without awareness of external distraction and appearing indifferent to one's environment is noted and applied to art by classical Chinese artists. Appreciating this, we can find it easier to understand the reason why acting unconsciously is stressed in Chinese art when discussing the dialectic of concentration and forgetfulness.

In his book *Trying Not to Try: The Art of Effortlessness and the Power of Spontaneity*, Slingerland blended the classical Chinese Philosophy of spontaneity with contemporary psychological and cognitive sciences in order to shed light on guiding modern people to live a spontaneous way of life. According to contemporary cognitive science, human cognition is classified into two systems: hot cognition and cold cognition. The actions under hot cognition appear to be unselfconscious, fast, intuitive and improvisational. In contrast, due to the positive involvement of reason, the actions under cold cognition seem to be 'slow, deliberate, effortful, and conscious, corresponding roughly to our "mind", that is, our conscious, verbal selves' (2014: 28). Although Slingerland (2014) discussed the limitation of hot cognition and merely following hot cognition, and explained why humans need cold cognition, he suggested that the Daoist philosophy of spontaneity inspires people, especially artists, to explore the potential benefits of hot cognition, to maximize the positive power of the unconscious, to go with the flow, and let hot cognition and cold cognition cooperate. According to Slingerland (2014: 36), when a person reaches the

and the sage 'who is a river valley for all under Heaven, never separates himself from constant virtue and always reverts to the infant'.

spontaneous state, he appears to '[shut] down active conscious awareness and control' and maximally reduce or smash the rational distraction brought by reason occupying the mind 'while [maintain] background situational alertness'.

In order to maximize the positive power of the unconscious (or hot cognition) and arouse artistic spontaneity, some artists resort to alcohol which appears to stimulate or inspire them to get access into the trance-like state of forgetting self and any distractions. For instance, the Tang master Wu Daozi (ca. 680–759), regarded as the sage of painting, loved wine, and his intoxication triggered by wine 'stimulated his vital breath' (Zhang Yanyuan, 847, ECTOP: 62). The Tang painter Wang Mo ranked by the Tang critic Zhu Jingxuan (ca. 840) in the untrammelled class started to paint when being completely drunk, then he spattered ink onto silk or paper, stamping with feet and smearing with hands, laughing and singing at the same time (Nelson, 1983: 397).¹⁰ Similarly, Su Shi liked to improvise a painting when inspiration was triggered during drinking. The Yuan painter Wu Taisu (active 14th century, ECTOP: 186) preferred 'a state of exhilaration' when being slightly tipsy. However, this is not a common practice for all artists. Drinking alcohol is one of possible ways to help the artist enter the trance-like state of forgetting himself and everything else and painting without conscious effort, to reach the unification of oneself and the object.

As we have seen in Wen Tong's story, when reaching the unification of becoming one with the bamboo in the trance-like state of acting unconsciously, the painter does not know whether he becomes the object or the object becomes him. Similar to Wen Tong painting bamboo, Luo Dajing (active ca. 1224, ECTOP: 220) recorded that the insect painter Wu Yi admitted that at first he concentrated on observing insects, but when

¹⁰ Regarding the untrammelled class, The North Song critic Huang Xiufu (ca. 1060) placed the Untrammelled (Yi) class as the first class in the grading system of Chinese painting, and this has been accepted by later artists and critics. According to Huang Xiufu (ECTOP: 100–101), the work in the untrammelled class is thus: it appears 'clumsy in the regulated drawing of squares and circles, and disdains minute thoroughness in colouring', while 'its brushwork is abbreviated yet its forms are complete, and attain naturalness', and 'none can take it as a model for it goes beyond expectation'.

painting, '[he did] not know whether [he was] an insect, or whether the insect [was him]', so this spontaneity appeared to be 'the working of Creation as it produces things' and cannot be taught as 'a transmittable method'. In this trace-like state, when the artist has forgotten self and everything else but has achieved unification between the self and the object, he appears to lose his consciousness of knowing whether he becomes the depicted object, or the depicted object becomes him.

The trance-like state in the unification of the self and object favoured by artists and advocated by critics can find philosophical origin in a dream of Zhuangzi recorded at the end of the second chapter of *Zhuangzi: Discussion on Making All Things Equal*. Zhuangzi (2013: 18) once dreamt of a butterfly, and when he woke up he appeared to be in a trance-like state, wondering whether he was Zhuangzi or the butterfly:

'Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakeable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou.'¹¹

This story illustrates what forgetfulness might be like and describes what the identification or unification of the self with other things is by suggesting that there is no difference between Zhuangzi dreaming he was a butterfly and a butterfly dreaming it was Zhuangzi. According to Zhuangzi, by releasing this identification of the self with other things in the universe and becoming one with the universe, human beings appear to achieve absolute happiness and freedom (Feng Youlan, 1948: 109). This story has an enchanting aesthetic charm in the mind of numerous Chinese throughout history, and more importantly, it enlightens artists to grasp spontaneity. Obviously, this unification of self and object advocated in spontaneity of Chinese art and inspired by Daoist philosophy is not discussed in Kantian aesthetics.

¹¹ Zhuang Zhou refers to Zhuangzi.

In general, although unconsciousness is stressed in spontaneity of Chinese art, the role of consciousness in conducting painting is not neglected. When spontaneity is ignited, the perfect image might suddenly show in front of the artist's mind's eye. At this moment, the painter needs to immediately and consciously rise to wield the brush to capture the perfect idea-image and release it onto paper or silk. As Su Shi (ECTOP: 207/277) described, 'it is like the hare's leaping up when the falcon swoops; if it hesitates in the slightest, all will be lost'.

Although the interplay of concentration (consciousness) and forgetfulness (unconsciousness) appears paradoxical and elusive, the power of the unconscious and the benefit brought by harmonious co-play of consciousness and unconsciousness are also favoured by Chan Buddhism. For instance, Eugen Herrigel (1985) tells his experience of learning the art of archery in Japan, where artistic spontaneity is interpreted by referring to Zen (Chan) Buddhism. In the foreword of Herrigel's (1985: 5) *Zen in Art of Archery*, D.T. Suzuki explicitly pointed out that 'the mind has first to be attuned to the unconscious' to capture the art of archery. As Suzuki (1934: 58/48) claimed in his work *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, real spiritual freedom cannot be achieved 'unless we break through the antithesis of yes and no', no conflict of such duality brings about 'spiritual emancipation', and due to real spiritual freedom, the mind is fully controlling itself instead of being 'divided against itself'. Breaking through the antithesis of yes and no appears to be to minimize of the compulsion and limitation brought by cold cognition as Slingerland defined it. By entering a world of 'no contradicting distinctions', one might finally reach 'a higher form of affirmation', and spontaneously apply the wisdom into the art of life (Suzuki, 1934: 58).

In *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, Suzuki focuses on the power of the unconscious brought by Chan meditation.¹² At the beginning of the work, Suzuki (1974: 1) praised a poem by the Japanese Haiku poet Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694). It is interesting that Bashō's spontaneous creation appears to fit in with Daoist emphasis on the trance-like state of

¹² Classical Chinese artists either resort to the Daoist fasting of the mind or Chan Buddhist meditation to cultivate their mind as pure and free as possible.

unconsciousness, the loss of the self, and reaching a state of unity with nature. Considering Bashō was very familiar with Zhuangzi and the poems by classical Chinese poets in the Tang dynasty and the Song Dynasty, his ideas of artistic spontaneity for creating poetry might have been inspired by Zhuangzi and even Su Shi. One of Bashō's poems explicitly praises Zhuangzi and his dream of a butterfly. The echo of Zhuangzi's trance-like spontaneity can be found in the words by Hattori Tohō (or Dohō) (1657-1730, cited by Barnhill), one of Bashō's disciples:

‘The Master said, “Learn of the pine from the pine, learn of the bamboo from the bamboo.” In other words, one must become detached from the self.” If one understands this idea of “learning” in one's own way, the result will be no learning at all. “To learn” means to enter into the object and to feel the subtlety that is revealed there.... For example, no matter how clearly one represents an object, if the poem lacks the feeling that arises naturally out of the object, the self and the object would form a duality and the feeling would not have attained genuineness. Instead, the poetic meaning would have come from the self.’

Tohō's summary of Bashō creating Haiku is very similar to Su Shi's praise of Wen Tong painting bamboo. As Barnhill commented, ‘such a mind, free of the artificial self, merges with the object without obstruction.’

5. A Similar Emphasis on Unconsciousness in Three Stories by Kleist

One might note that the dialectic of consciousness and unconsciousness in spontaneous creation is not merely emphasized by classical Chinese aesthetics and Japanese aesthetic ideas of poetry. In *On the Marionette Theatre* (1880), over the course of three stories Kleist (1880: 18) suggests that self-consciousness might disturb and hinder the naturalness of artistic expression and thus cause affectation, so conscious intention is better forgotten; ‘in the world of animate matter, as self-consciousness becomes

dimmer and weaker, to the same extent gracefulness manifests itself more and more radiantly and dominantly’.

The first story by Kleist is about a successful dancer telling the first-person narrator that he got enlightened from a puppeteer making puppets dance. The dancer once wonders if the puppet master must grasp a certain skill by placing himself (his soul of dancing) in the gravity centre when making the puppets dance, but dismisses this by saying that the puppet master’s job ‘can be done entirely without spirit’ (Kleist, 1880: 4). In the dancer’s eyes, the puppets without (their own or the puppeteer’s injected) soul or consciousness dance much more flexibly, naturally, and freely than human beings. Compared with puppets, human dancers are unable to get rid of the disturbance of consciousness. In order to avoid appearing conspicuous, human dancers inevitably apply their conscious efforts, and any trace of intentional efforts will affect the naturalness of movements, while mechanical and unconscious puppets are not affected by consciousness and appear much more natural and graceful.

The second story depicts how a young man loses his grace due to his narcissistic self-consciousness. Before consciously realising his grace, the young man appeared naturally graceful, until one day when he was bathing, he accidentally looked at himself in the mirror and was reminded of a statue he saw before. After that he consciously tries to copy the statue again but fails, and then he tries several times in vain. Self-consciousness appears as ‘an invisible and incomprehensible force’ to cause so unbelievable a disturbance in the boy (Kleist, 1880: 14).

The third story describes that the dancer failed when confronted with a chained fencing bear. Every time the dancer tried to deceive it with feints, the bear appeared to know exactly what the dancer’s mind was thinking, so it did not follow the trick. As the dancer felt, the bear ‘held my eyes, as if he could read my soul in them, always with his paw raised and ready for battle; and if my thrusts were not meant seriously, he did not move’ (Kleist, 1880: 16). Different from the former two stories which interpret the advantage of unconsciousness, and the constraints and disturbance of consciousness, the third story appears to praise the merit of infinite absolute consciousness which only god appears able to grasp. As Rushing (1988: 532) indicated,

‘the bear’s ability to read his opponent’s mind’ suggests that ‘he is metaphorically equivalent to God’ of having infinite consciousness.

Kleist (1880: 18) uses an analogy with the intersection of two lines: extreme consciousness appears on the one side of a point, and unconsciousness appears on the other side, while they intersect and complete a circle. According to Kleist (1880: 18), grace ‘is manifested most purely in that humanlike form which has either no consciousness at all or an infinite consciousness —which is to say, either in the puppet or in God’. Thus, he finally suggests: ‘[eating] again from the tree of knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence’ as ‘the last chapter in the history of the world’.

Kleist’s three stories have been interpreted along several different lines.¹³ According to Rushing (1988: 530), those three stories by Kleist ‘correspond to the three “chapters” of the history of the world’. The puppets dancing unconsciously in the first story represent the ‘original nonconscious state’, —‘the earthly paradise’ before Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden (1988: 530/529). The young man losing his gracefulness due to consciousness in the second story is read as the Fall, —‘a metaphor for becoming conscious’; the state of fallen men is the state when human beings live after being expelled from Eden and before being able to go back to Eden, and suffer from knowledge and reason (Rushing, 1988: 529–530). The bear defeating the dancer-fencer in the third story appears to ‘achieve a state of infinite consciousness’. Thus, in Rushing’s eyes, the three states of being unconscious, being self-conscious, and being infinitely conscious represented by the three stories respectively correspond to ‘the prelapsarian state of perfection, the present imperfection of fallen man, and the possible eschatological phase of re-achieved perfection’. Following Rushing’s analysis, the three states of being unconscious, being self-conscious, and being infinitely conscious appear to be separate and incompatible. This might not be the original meaning of Kleist, since he clearly made the analogy with the circle, which appears to suggest the compatibility of unconsciousness and infinite consciousness.

¹³ See Ray, 1979: 521–531.

In Rushing's (1988: 533) interpretation, Kleist seems to suggest human beings return to paradise by becoming infinite conscious rather than by regaining unconsciousness. Rushing (1988: 530) is pessimistic about realising infinite consciousness, since he mentions that Rousseau, Kant and Schelling all share the 'pessimistic interpretation of the fall (caused by consciousness, knowledge, and reason), in which there is no hope of climbing out of the fallen state through the use of reason'.

6. Kant's Hidden View and Post-Kantian Views on the Unconscious in Artistic Creation

In spite of the Western pessimistic view on infinite consciousness as Rushing claimed above, Nietzsche's accounts of two types of intoxication in art seems to suggest the potential to exploit unconsciousness in artistic creation and appreciation. Intoxication in art advocated by Nietzsche appears to share some similarity with the trance-like state which Chinese artists seek, in terms of identifying the role of unconsciousness in art and the significance of dismissing the distance between the artist and the object. According to Nietzsche, there are two types of intoxication: One is the Dionysian, which is a state of intoxicated ecstasy, while another is the Apollonian, which is an illusionary or dream-like state. Whether the intoxication is ecstatic Dionysian or dream-like Apollonian, it seems to be a kind of unconscious psychological state (which might occur in the process of creation or appreciation), giving artists or spectators a feeling of liberation and freedom. Apollonian intoxication obscures or offsets the distance between oneself and the illusionary world, while Dionysian intoxication releases inhibition between oneself and the outer world and suspends one's customary judgment and identification of the real world (Ridley, 2006: 13–19). Therefore, unconsciousness in either Apollonian illusionary intoxication or Dionysian ecstatic intoxication plays its role in not only enabling creators to endow art with life spontaneously and enthusiastically, but also hypnotizing appreciator to enjoy orgiastic transcendence beyond individual existence. Compared with the emphasis on unconsciousness in artistic spontaneity by classical Chinese aesthetics,

Nietzsche appears to enhance the role of unconsciousness in artistic intoxication as the antidote to pessimism about existence. On the one hand, Apollonian intoxication appears to offer a redemptive power by providing a glorified illusion required by human beings to live in an ‘orderly and beautiful’ world, since it appears to endow existence with a rational or orderly interpretation and provide the solution to an unsatisfactory reality (Young, 1992: 135/139; Ridley, 2006: 14). On the other hand, Dionysian intoxication seems to glorify existence by virtue of exciting or refreshing our passion for life, and also enables us to enter into the orderly and beautiful world of Apollo by joining the joyful ‘chorus’ to reach a reinvigorated effect of ‘nullifying the ordinary world of everyday experience’ (Ridley, 2006: 15). Thus, the Apollonian and Dionysian intoxications are complementary in constituting a new and beautified existence, while this new and beautified existence found in the artistic world is fundamentally illusory. In this sense, unconsciousness in Nietzsche’s intoxication appears transcendental and idealistic.¹⁴

Kant’s hidden view on the unconscious in the fields of philosophy of mind, aesthetics, moral philosophy and anthropology was revealed by scholars.¹⁵ Gardner (1999: 387–390) suggests that the conception of the unconscious is hidden in Kant’s ‘transcendental synthesis’ and ‘representations outside self-consciousness’. The idea of ‘genius as a chiasm of the conscious and unconscious’ in Kant’s aesthetics was argued by Otabe (2012: 89–101). As Otabe (2012: 91) noted, for Kant, art is beautiful only when ‘art which is essentially grounded on a determinate purpose is not bound by the purpose, and presents itself as contingent’. Additionally, the difference between beautiful art and mechanical art defined by Kant (1790: 185–186) lies in the fact that ‘although [beautiful art] is certainly intentional, must nevertheless not seem intentional’. Following this notion of beautiful art, artists perhaps need to find balance between conscious intentionality and unintentional contingency, which sounds very similar to Wang Yuanqi’s comment on Ni Zan’s success of spontaneous artistic

¹⁴ Nietzsche’s concept of the unconscious appears transcendental in comparison with Freudian scientific naturalism (Gardner, 1999: 398–402).

¹⁵ See *Kant’s Philosophy of the Unconscious* (2012).

creation between having a conscious intention and not having one. In addition, according to Otabe (2012: 96), concerning the genius' ability of formulating the Kantian aesthetic idea as 'representation of the imagination' being 'free from "constraint of the understanding"', Kant (1790: 194) appears to imply that artistic spontaneity 'breaks free from [the artists'] consciousness'.

Although Kant's implication of the unconscious in his discussion of aesthetics is not explicit, Otabe indicated that Schelling's and Schiller's respective ideas of the unconscious in art might be regarded as reverberations of Kant's hidden view on the unconscious. Perhaps inspired by the Kantian view that intentional art should appear unintentional, Schelling (1858: 618; cited by Otabe, 2012: 97) classified art or artistic activity into two categories: conscious activity which is 'practiced with consciousness, deliberation, and reflection' and unconscious activity which is 'inborn by the free gift of nature'. The former named as 'art without poetry', can 'be taught and learned, received from others, and attained by one's own practice', while the latter called as 'poetry in art', 'cannot be [taught or] learned, [or] be attained by practice' (Schelling, 1858: 618; cited by Otabe, 2012: 97). Art without poetry defined by Schelling as the product of mere consciousness of the artist is not art in the proper sense of the word, but seems to be mechanical art defined and despised by Kant. In a genuine work of art, 'the artist seems to have presented...as if instinctively, apart from what he has put into it with obvious intent, an infinity [of intentions] which no finite understanding can fully develop', and this infinity is realised when the self or ego of the artist 'begins with consciousness and ends in the unconscious' (Schelling, 1858: 613; cited by Otabe, 2012: 97). Here, Schelling appears to emphasize the co-play of consciousness and unconsciousness. The poetic 'infinity' or 'inexhaustible depth' beyond finite intentions or understandings brought by involuntarily applying unconsciousness is also valued by classical Chinese aesthetics (Schelling, 1858: 619). One of differences lies in the fact that classical Chinese critics used the (Daoist) terms concentration and forgetfulness to describe the co-play of consciousness and unconsciousness.

As Otabe (2012: 99) indicated, in his letter to Körner on May 25, 1792, Schiller (1849: 173; 1890: 372) appears unhappy with Schelling's idea that artistic creation begins with consciousness and ends in the unconscious, and argues from his own experience of creating poems that while the 'musical' unconsciousness appears to engross his self at the very beginning of his creation, consciousness is also involved in artistic creation since the artist needs the play of consciousness to help realize the unconscious idea in the artwork. By claiming that 'unconsciousness combined with reflection constitutes the poet-artist', we can see that Schiller (1890: 372, cited by Otabe, 2012: 99) favours the cooperation of unconsciousness and consciousness in artistic creation. It seems that Schiller agrees with Schelling in terms of artistic creation as the co-play of the conscious and the unconscious, but disagree with Schelling where he puts consciousness at the beginning and unconsciousness at the end of the creative act. Classical Chinese artists would not agree with Schelling's idea of putting unconsciousness at the end, since both concentration and forgetfulness work during spontaneous creation. In his reply to Schiller, Goethe (1801, initially cited by Schiller, 1890: 374, cited by Otabe, 2012: 99) admits that he agrees with Schiller in terms of art as the cooperation of unconsciousness and consciousness, while he emphasizes the role of unconsciousness by claiming that 'I think that everything that is done by genius as genius, is done unconsciously'.

Although Otabe tried to argue that Kant's hidden view of the unconscious inspired Schelling and Schiller by making some plausible connection between their ideas, it seems obvious that the role of the unconscious in the process of artistic creation is not explicitly recognized by Kant. 'The mental powers ... whose union (in a certain relation) constitutes genius, are imagination and understanding' (Kant, 1790: 194). For Kant, imagination appears meaningless for artistic creation if not in harmony with understanding. The imagination seems to break away from constraints that actual nature gives and creates another nature above any rational concept (which might be the source of the imagination), although its freedom conforms to the lawfulness of the understanding, and the understanding builds a harmonious association with the imagination (Kant, 1790: 192–

197). The essence of ‘the imagination’s free conformity to law’ is a kind of ‘psychologically felt freedom from any form of constraint ... not just epistemological independence from concepts’ (Guyer, 1993: 286–287). The paradox between Kant’s inexplicit view on the role of the unconscious in genius creating art and his emphasis on the harmony between imagination and understanding cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as we have seen, the same phenomenon of artistic spontaneity noted in distinct cultural contexts appears to inspire essentially distinct philosophical understandings in each case. Although artistic spontaneity in classical Chinese art inspired by Daoist philosophy might be illuminated by referring to Kant’s aesthetics of genius, the differences lie in the fact that in terms of exploring the positive power of unconsciousness in spontaneous creation, classical Chinese artists inspired by the Daoist ideas of spontaneity pursue a trance-like state of forgetting self and everything else and reaching unification of self and object. Kant does not explicitly discuss the significance of exploiting unconsciousness for genius creating art, while the dialectic of unconsciousness and consciousness in artistic spontaneity is valued in classical Chinese aesthetics. Kant’s explicit advocacy of the harmonious co-play of imagination and understanding in aesthetics disguises his inexplicit view of the role of the unconscious in the aesthetic field, while his hidden view on the role of unconsciousness in genius creating art seems to have inspired the discussions on the dialectic of unconsciousness and consciousness by later thinkers such as Schelling and Schiller. Although in both Chinese and European cultural contexts artists and critics noted the significance of unconsciousness in artistic creation and the dialectic of consciousness and unconsciousness, we have seen that the relevant philosophical explanations are essentially distinctive.

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Abbreviation: ECTOP: *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (2012).

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