

INTRODUCTION: HERMENEUTICS, HUMANITIES STUDIES, AND LITERATURE CLASSICS

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In reading literature masterpieces and classics, not only are texts and cultural traditions understood, but also insights into humanity and human existence acquired and known.¹ Every progress in human civilization is made possible by the elevation of the human soul. And every elevation of the human soul is the fruit of education, learning and cultivation, of which reading literature masterpieces and classics, like reading scientific, philosophical, and historical classics, is essential. Thus, Victor Hugo claimed: "What humanity requires, is to be fed with light; such nourishment is found in reading ... Humanity reading is humanity knowing."² He further claimed, "The true division of humanity is this: the luminous and the dark. To diminish the number of the dark, to increase the number of the light. To learn to read is to rekindle a fire: every syllable sparkles."³

All humanities studies and liberal art education aim at, to borrow a Socrates's metaphor, turning the eyes of the soul around and upward. They aim at the improvement, refinement, and elevation of the human soul. They can be of various forms and with different methods. Reading literary masterpieces and classics is one of the ways. Literature masterpieces and classics provide the phenomenological account, hermeneutical interpretation, and critical philosophizing of humanity, effectively and profoundly illustrating what humanity is, as in its substance, function, and existence, and so on. They proffer a profound form of enquiry in which humanity is seen in itself from human the existence and struggle. They provide abundant, profound, and immense resources to turning the eyes of human souls upward.

Not surprisingly, philosophy in Shakespeare's plays proves to have the universality of the philosophy in Plato's dialogue. Philosophy in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* rivals philosophy in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in universality. Philosophy in Cao Xueqin's *A Dream of Red Mansions* (《红楼梦》), Luo Guanzhong's *The History of Three Kingdoms* (《三国演义》) Wu Chengen's *Journey to the West* (《西游记》) and Shi Naian's *The Water Marsh* (《水浒传》) are as profound as philosophy in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* in every province. The fact that through a literature masterpiece and classics truths of humanity are

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¹ Cf. "In understanding tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truth know." Hans-Georg Gadamer. (1991) *Truth and Methods*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Corporation. xxi.

² Victor Hugo. *William Shakespeare*, trans. Melville B. Anderson (1906), Chicago: A. C. McClure & Co. p.7.

³ Victor Hugo. *Les Misérables*. NY: The Modern Library, 1992. p.854.

experienced that we cannot attain in any other way points to the philosophical value of literature masterpiece and classic.⁴

G. W. F. Hegel indicated, "The True is the whole."⁵ And the True of humanity which is the ultimate object of our present enquiry is only actual and can only be expounded in whole. Literature masterpieces and classics such as *Les Misérables*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* constitute a rich matrix of truths and insights of the whole of the True of humanity. As Hugo noted, "Literature secretes civilization, poetry secretes the ideal"; master-pieces of literature permeate "civilization with light."⁶ For this reason, while to philosophize about humanity and human existence is to think things over, as Hegel would say, to think over insights into humanity and human existence revealed in masterpieces of literature is to appropriate the light of human civilization. As the destination of Plato's liberated prisoner from the cave—the philosopher—was the light of the "sun above", the destination of humankind should be the light of enlightenment, of which masterpieces of literature is a rich reservoir.

Conceptually, the concept of masterpiece recommends itself here. A literature work such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Les Misérables*, *War and Peace*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, or *The Water Marsh* is a masterpiece not because it is in the canon of learning and reading. Instead, it is, and ought to be, in the canon of learning because it is a masterpiece. A masterpiece of literature is a classic. A classic is that whose truths of humanity and human existence were true yesterday, are true today, and will be true tomorrow, to recall Hans-Georg Gadamer. In other words, truths of humanity which a masterpiece reveals are significant, profound, and enduring. For this reason, a literature masterpiece is, as Hugo would put it, a manifestation of "the Living Infinite".⁷

Accordingly, literature masterpieces and classics should be objects of philosophizing because they preserve the most authentic, forceful voice of humanity and human existence, as Heidegger would put it. From the point of view of existence as learning, "No one can foresee the quantity of light that will be evolved by placing the people in communication of the heart of the people with the heart of men of genius," as Hugo put it.⁸ Here, "men of genius" refers to those great writers and thinkers, for example, Shakespeare, Hugo, Tolstoy, Stendhal, and Cao Xueqin.

Hegel, who held that religion proper, fine art, and philosophy were the three modes through which the World Spirit would arrive at its final realization and self-return, indicated the following:

⁴ Cf. Gadamer, "The fact that through a work of art a truth is experience that we cannot attain in any other way constitute the philosophic importance of art." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁵ G. W. F. Hegel. (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 11.

⁶ Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, pp. 295, 302.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.37.

⁸ *Ibid.* p.307.

Fine art is not real art till it ... has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the divine nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truth of the mind. It is in the work of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key—with many nations there is no other—to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion.⁹

Literature masterpieces and masterpieces such as Shakespeare's plays, *Les Misérables*, *Red and Black*, *War and Peace*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *The Water Marsh* and *Gone with the Wind* vouch for what Hegel said in the above. In them, we read deposited, profound intuitions, ideas and insights not only of their authors' hearts, but also the hearts of nation-peoples and cultures.

Literature masterpieces provide outstanding paradigms of philosophical accounts of humanity and human existence. Notwithstanding, as a discipline of enquiry in itself, literature does philosophy in its own way. When we consider literature as an effective form of phenomenology of humanity, we should not appreciate it as a unique form of philosophical enquiry into humanity with the condition that literature works must have the regular philosophical methods and arguments. Thus, for example, we do not demand literature works to do the kind of phenomenological deduction which the German philosopher Edmund Husserl talked about. Say, we do not demand that a phenomenological account of humanity in masterpieces such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* must bracket what Husserl dubbed as "natural attitude", prejudice, or presumptions. Nor we should demand them to demonstrate the Cartesian method of doubt and philosophizing and the kind of logical rigor of analytical philosophy.

Instead, reading a work of literature masterpiece, we should just let what is presented or given reveals what is the essential and substantial. We need only to hold to the faith that the essence and substance of humanity is presented in human existence and therefore humanity should be seen from the point of view of human existence and in human existence. Plato would tell us that we should not try to grasp humanity in itself through appropriating what it appears to be in existence. Descartes would tell us that we can only recognize the representation of humanity, not humanity in itself. Both philosophers' views are one-sided. We can, and should grasp the essence and substance of humanity in itself through appropriating its phenomena in existence. Masterpieces of literature offer us with masterful presentations and appearances of humanity.

Needless to say, truths and wisdoms of humanity and human existence in masterpieces of literature such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* are mainly revealed through narratives of events, fates of protagonists, literary metaphors and the like. This should

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel. 1997. *On Art, Religion and the Philosophy*, Glenn Gray (Ed.) and intro. by Tom Rockmore. Indianapolis: Hackett. p.29.

not lead us to underappreciate the philosophical substance of masterpieces of literature or the value of studying philosophy in literature. Instead, for an enquiry into humanity and human existence, masterpieces of literature are unique phenomenological, hermeneutic, and critical account in which humanity can be seen in human existence itself and from human existence itself. Equally crucial, truths that we learn from narratives of events, fates of protagonists, and literary metaphors in masterpieces of literature have equal value and dignity as truths that we learn directly from masterpieces of philosophy. The Platonic prejudice in which philosophy and literature/art are antagonistic and antithetical is a philosophical scandal.

Gadamer indicates, "The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but obviously belongs to human existence of the world in general."¹⁰ Indeed, a great philosophical value of reading masterpieces of literature such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, and *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* is that to read them is to experience the being of humanity and human existence in a horizon that is created by great thinkers. These literature classics are literary paradigms of phenomenological, hermeneutical, and critical accounts of humanity. The value of reading them can be appreciated at least as follows.

First, perceptions, inferences, and metaphors are three important ways for us to acquire new insights into humanity and thereby to expand or reconstruct our horizon of human existence. Literature is rich of all three.¹¹ Literature classics are master sources of perceptions, inferences, and metaphors. For example, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a rich resource of perceptions, inferences, and metaphors of poetic existence, poetic love, true love, false love, existential competence, the home of the soul and so on. The same can be said that *The History of Three kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* are all rich resources of perceptions, inferences, and metaphors of what is a hero. Indeed, in literature masterpieces and classics, we read invested intuitions, perceptions, inferences, and metaphors not only of their authors' hearts, but also of the hearts of nation-les and cultures.

Second, so far as philosophizing is concerned, literary and metaphorical language and the language of logic or of natural science can complement and complete one another. While critical thinking lives in language, as Heidegger insisted, literary and metaphorical language can be employed to expand critical thinking and thought without damaging the critical content of thinking and thought. No wonder, Zhuangzi's *Zhuang Zi* and *Plato's dialogues* employ lavishly literary and metaphorical language. *Zhuangzi* itself is a brilliant philosophical work of critical thinking and logical reasoning. But its language is colorfully, literary and metaphorical. The same can be said of *Plato's dialogues*. They are paradigm of logical reasoning's, but their languages are colorfully, literary and metaphorical. Literary and metaphorical languages create open, indefinite horizon and vision that is

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Methods*, xxi

¹¹ Cf. Richard Rorty. (1989) "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphors, and as Politics", in Avber Cohen and Marcelo Dascal (Eds.), *The Institution of Philosophy* (La Salle, Open Court. 13-33, at 16.

complementary to the kind of closed, definite horizon which logical language creates. Literary and metaphorical languages produces an open, indefinite realm of meaning and significance that is complementary to the kind of closed, definite realm of meaning and significance which logical language produces.

Third, from time to time, as *Dao De Jing* indicates, "The *Dao* that can be defined as so and so is not the real *Dao*."¹² *Dao* here refers to the profound, living truth of existence. When the profound, living truth of human existence cannot be defined in terms of concept and formula, literary and metaphorical language is a better vehicle to preserve it. Truths of humanity and human existence, including particular truths of particular states of affairs of humanity and human existence, may be too profound and rich to be conceptualized and defined. Thus, logical language may be limited in use as analytical and representative tools. In comparison, it is far better literary and metaphorical language is employed.

Fourth, as representative presentations of the *Being* and humanity and human existence, literature masterpieces and classics are bridges for readers to be back to humanity and human existence itself, through which human existence can be seen in itself and from itself. They provide occasions in which truths of humanity and human existence *speak* to readers directly and in which readers may have direct, authentic experiences of truths of humanity and human existence. They provide bridges in which readers can self-reflect their own existences in light of the experiences of those protagonists read. Thus, from the experiences of the protagonists of Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie and so on in *Journey to the West*, we learn truth of searching for human enlightenment. The same can be said of the protagonist Jia Baoyu in *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

Fifth, as artistic presentations of truth, masterpieces of literature are good and effective mediations through which we appreciate the truth, beauty, and good of human existence together. They are good, effective mediations through which we see the falsity, ugliness, and evil of human existence together. They are good, effective mediations in which our intuitions, feelings and sentiments can also play crucial, mediatizing roles. Thus, for example, from the poetic Bao-Dai love in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we appreciate that "love has no middle term; either it destroys, or it saves. All human destiny is this dilemma. This dilemma, destruction or salvation, no fatality proposes more inexorably than love. Love is life, if it be not death. Cradle; coffin also."¹³ Through stories of love in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, We also learn that spring griefs or autumn sorrow of love are all caused by lovers themselves. Meanwhile "come as a pure substance and leave as a pure substance, not sink into some foul ditch or mire [of society] (质本洁来还洁去，强于污淖陷渠沟)"¹⁴, Shi Xiangyun's claim, "Authentic wits enjoy life elegantly at will (是真名士自风流)",¹⁵ and Xing Xiuyan's declaration of having the spirit of red plum flower, "aloof, in

¹² Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, in *Completed Works of Teachers* (诸子集成), Vol.3, footnoted by Wang Xian Gian (1996). Beijing, China: Unity Publishing House. 87/ch.1.

¹³ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, p.869.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 383/ch.27.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 684/ch.49.

ice and show its charm outspreads (浓淡由他冰雪中)¹⁶ teach us some enduring truths of individual authenticity of existence.

Sixth, reading literature classics such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh*, *Les Misérables*, *War and Peace*, *Red and Black*, *Gone with the Wind*, we are fusing our horizon of humanity and human existence with a historical horizon of multi-dimensions. As Gadamer pointed out, "Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired."¹⁷ Moreover, "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves."¹⁸

Here, "To have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it."¹⁹ "The concept of 'horizon' suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to look beyond what is close at hand--not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion."²⁰ No wonder, to imbibe oneself to literature classics such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* is to be possessed by something, which is necessary for one to be opened to the new and unknown. As Gadamer pointed out:

How do we know the guest whom we admit is one who has something new to say to us? Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already possession of us? ... The nature of hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires admission. Rather we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different and the true."²¹

When, Confucius advised us to review the old in order to learn and know the new, he advanced the same idea which Gadamer advocated above: to imbibing oneself into the cultural matrices of learning is basis for us to be opened to the new and the unknown. That being said, literature masterpieces and classics are not simply the old, but the classics that endure the test of time to have truth that was true yesterday, true today, and will be true tomorrow. They endure the test of time to have insights to be beauty and good that were true yesterday, true today, and will be true tomorrow. That is to say, literature classics or masterpieces are the ones that have endured the tests of time and are handed down to us through tradition. Their intellectual authority is formed historically and tested by times. Their insights into truth, good, and beauty are

¹⁶ Ibid, 696/ch.50.

¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Methods*, p.306.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.302.

²⁰ Ibid, p.305.

²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer. (1997), "The universality of the hermeneutical problem," in Todd May (Ed.), *Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy*. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall. 195-205, at p.200.

tested by time and appropriating them is to imbibe insights into truth, good, and beauty that are tested by times.

A word on hermeneutics of reading literature masterpieces and classics is in order. To understand the meanings of the texts of the four Chinese literature classics—*A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh*, solid cultural knowledge is required of a reader. For example, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is credited as the encyclopedia of Chinese culture, a reader would not be able to appreciate the meaning of texts of the novel without solid cultural knowledge. For example, if one did not have any cultural knowledge of traditional Chinese mythology and Confucianism, one would not be able to appreciate the meaning of the story of Goddess Nu Wa melting stones to amend the sky. If a reader did not have knowledge of Confucianism and Chinese history, s/he would not be able to appreciate Jia Yucun's lengthy discussion of human nature. Without knowledge of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, one would not appreciate various philosophical dialogues in the novel. Zhou Siyuan thus says, "Without sufficient cultivation and nurturement of Chinese cultural knowledge, one cannot 'read into' Cao Xueqin's book [*A Dream of Red Mansions*]." ²²

Zhou further points out that without solid cultivation and nurturement of Chinese cultural knowledge, which is dubbed in Chinese language as "*su yang* (素养)", one cannot have a true, deep, and adequate understanding a text of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. He says:

A reader without sufficient cultivation and nurturement of Chinese cultural knowledge cannot understand *A Dream of Red Mansions*. For example, at the outset of the novel, the story of Goddess Nu Wa melting stones seems just to introduce the protagonist The Sone. Yet, we read the words "the Earth falls in Eastern South", and then, moreover, we will read Bao Yu's hilarious, immortal words, "women are made of water, while men are made of earth". ²³

How to understand the meaning of the texts and scenes mentioned here? Zhou points out, to have a true, and adequate understanding, one must know that in Chinese culture, "Goddess Nu Wa is considered to be the mother of Chinese people. She used water and yellow earth to make earth-people, and therefore there is the Chinese people and Chinese decedents. Thus, the references to water and earth are purposive, intentional, and with special thought invested." ²⁴

The concept of cultural *su yang* is warranted being highlighted here. (素养). The concept consists of two words, *su* (素 quality; element; moment) and *yang* (养 nurture; cultivate; preserve). Thus, the concept of *su yang* is of one's culturally cultivated qualities. A person of *su yang* is one of refined and cultured qualities. A person who has solid, good *su yang* (素养) of Chinese culture is one who is well

²² Zhou Ruchang, (2006). *The Artistic Charm of "A Dream of Red Mansions."* Beijing, China: Writers' Publishing House. p.13.

²³ Ibid, p.14.

²⁴ Ibid.

imbibed into Chinese culture and has refined knowledge of Chinese culture. For Zhou, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is an encyclopedia of Chinese culture. To understand it, one must have sufficient refined cultivation and knowledge of Chinese culture. What Zhou says about cultural *su yang* as the necessary condition to understand *A Dream of Red Mansions* is true of reading *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* too. One can also say that without knowledge of Chinese culture, in particular, of traditional Chinese concept of political legitimacy, one cannot understand the struggle among the three political parties (kingdoms) in *The History of Three Kingdoms*. Without knowledge of Chinese culture, history, and Buddhism, one cannot appreciate *The Journey to the West*. The list can be longer. The main point is clear: to read the four Chinese literature masterpieces and classics is to read into the heart of Chinese culture, which in turn requires solid knowledge of Chinese culture.

So far as methodology is concerned, it is proper that an emphasis should be to return to the texts themselves; that is to say, the norm is to be back to the texts themselves. There can be variety of ways of reading a text. A hermeneutical reading is the one that allows a text to speak to its readers in its time and space. In a hermeneutical reading, the text has primacy and is primary while a reader's method, standing point and projecting understanding are all secondary. Here, is where a reader should let himself/herself be guided by the text itself is "the first, last, and constant task."²⁵ That is to say, it is necessary for a reader to keep his/her gaze fixed on the text "throughout all constant distraction that originate in" the reader himself or herself and other interpreters.²⁶ As Gadamer says, "All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze 'on the things themselves' (which in case of the literary critic, are meaningful texts, which themselves are again concerned with objects)."²⁷ Also, as Gadamer points out,

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.²⁸

This is what the objectivity of reading a text means in hermeneutics. About hermeneutical objectivity, Gadamer insists,

A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed 'by the things' themselves, is the constant

²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.267.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

task of understanding. The only 'objectivity' here is the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. Indeed, what characterizes the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meaning if not that they come to nothing in being worked out?²⁹

The concept of *objectivity* of reading a text in hermeneutics does not refer to that reading and its understanding should be independent of human subjectivity. Instead, it means working out those proper projections of the meaning and thoughts of a text, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by texts themselves. This leads us to the concept of horizon. Reading literature masterpieces and classics expand one's horizon and vision of humanity and human existence. Meanwhile, to read deeply and understand adequately literature masterpieces and classics such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh* requires readers to have solid cultural knowledge and a proper horizon in which texts are understood. Thus, for example, Zhou thus recommends that in reading *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one should have a Chinese cultural horizon that emphasizes three aspects of "far": broad (horizontal far), high (vertical far), and deep (invertical far).³⁰

As Gadamer indicated, to arrive at a true understanding in humanities studies, "The concept of 'horizon' suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion."³¹ Charles Taylor points out, "Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is to suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us."³² On this point, true understanding of a text of literature masterpiece always involves the fusion of horizons—that is, the fusion of one's horizon and the horizon of the text which one reads.³³

Essays in this volume are mainly from the 2018 University of Texas at San Antonio International Symposium on Chinese Four Literature Classics: *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, and *the Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh*. They also represent different ways of reading the four Chinese literature masterpieces and classics.

Andrew Nathan's paper is a revised version of his keynote speech in the symposium in the same title, "From classics to today: Cultural values in classics and modern survey research" attempts to emphasize that studies of cultural values through reading literature classics and through modern survey research" can be

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Zhou, *The Artistic Charm of A Dream of Red Mansions*, p.17.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.305.

³² Charles Taylor. (1991). *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. p. 37.

³³ Gadamer says, "Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.306.

complementary to one another and complete one another. It demonstrates that studies of cultural values through reading literature classics are qualitative studies while modern survey research is a kind of quantitative studies. From protagonists, and stories in literature classics, we have literary paradigms of specific values and therefore learn about what is a specific virtue. From modern survey research, we learn to what scope a value and in what intensity a value is valued in a society or community.

For example, from Jia Yuanchun's home-coming visit in Chapter 18 of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and her interaction with her grandmother, her parents, siblings, and relatives, we learn about the traditional Chinese value of deference to authority. From the protagonist Ping Er (平儿)'s adjudication of the case that some Rose cream was stolen from Lady Wang's living quarter in Chapter 61 of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we have a paradigm of the traditional Chinese value of avoiding conflicts and emphasizing internal harmony of a family. From the famous Liu Bei (刘备), Guan Yunzhang (关云长), and Zhang Yi-de's (张翼德) 'pledge of brotherhood' in *Tao Garden* in Chapter 1 and Guan Yu's lonely riding a thousand miles to return to Liu Bei, by overcoming various difficulties, including fighting and killing six famous generals who dared to be in his way in Chapter 27 in *The History of Three Kingdoms*, we learn the traditional Chinese value of group solidarity and loyalty. About the value of loyalty, one can certainly take General Lü (Lv) Bu (吕布), who was called by General Zhang Fei as "the family slave of three family names (三姓家奴)", as a paradigm example of disloyalty and betrayal. It is in contrast to General Guan Yunzhang's personality, whose loyalty is not bended before force nor corrupted by seduction and wealth or social ranks. General Lü Bu's is one of betray and falling to the seduction of wealth, social status, and female beauty. General Zhang's label of him as the family slave of three family names epitomizes General Lü's deplorable personality. Meanwhile, Nathan points out, the modern survey research in nine Asian countries, we learn to what scope and in what intensity certain traditional values are still held by those surveyed communities and peoples. We thus learn to what extent present communities still remain traditional. For example:

The *Asian Barometer Survey* (ABS) is an applied research program that aims to gauge public opinion on issues such as political values, democracy, and governance across Asia. Our regional survey network encompasses research teams from 13 East Asian states (Japan, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia), and 5 South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal). Together, the Asian Barometer Survey covers virtually all major political systems in the region, systems that have followed different trajectories of regime evolution and are currently at different stages of political transition. The mission of each national research team is to administer surveys conducted under a common research framework and with a common research methodology so as to compile

reliable and comparable micro-level data on the issues of citizens' values and attitudes toward politics, power, reform, and democracy in Asia.³⁴

Modern survey research does not indicate what a particular cultural value is. Instead, it shows to what extent a value is held by peoples and cultures as a value. Thus, for example, the above surveys do not show what the value of group loyalty, deference to authority, and avoiding conflicts is but indicate to what extent these values are still held in the surveyed communities and cultures as cultural values.

Xunwu Chen's paper, "The problem of *Being* in *A Dream of Red Mansions*" Chen's paper provides a philosophical reading of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. It explores the discourse of the *Being* of humanity and human existence in the novel. The paper demonstrates that centered on the question of how one ought to take hold one's existence amid fate, *A Dream of Red Mansions* bring traditional Chinese philosophies of humanity including the *Yin-Yang* metaphysics, the Five-agent metaphysics, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into a profound dialogue about *the Being* of humanity and thus explores a wide range of subject-matters of humanity and human existence fate, human nature, human existential interests, dispositions, desires, mind, body, identity, love, happiness, duty, obligation, task, subject, object, situation, authenticity, substance, origin, home, belonging, causality, necessity, contingency, freedom, virtue, laws of existence, social norms (e.g., justice, prudence), enlightenment, truth, falsity, absurdity, illusion, alienation, self-knowledge, self-deception, sentiment of being, good life, happy life, wise life, social role, essence and existence, human and the world, person and society, self and the other, culture and nature, the poetic and the worldly, the transcendent and the immanent, and so on.

Engaging prominent scholars of *A Dream of Red Mansions* including Wang Guowei, Liu Zaifu, Zhou Ruchang, and Wang Meng, Chen's paper rejects the general belief and popular concept that Cao's philosophical horizon and vision in *A Dream of Red Mansions* is Buddhist. The paper demonstrates that instead, Cao's philosophical horizon and vision is a fusion of the horizons of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, *Yin-Yang* metaphysics, the Five-Agent metaphysics, and existentialism and the philosophical vision of the *Being* of humanity and human existence rekindles the traditional Chinese philosophical tenets of fate and humanity, what we think, choose, and act define what we are, and existence is an enduring struggle. The paper demonstrates that *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a summit of philosophy of the *Being* of humanity and human existence and thus becomes the home of the souls of millions of its readers; it is a literature masterpiece and classic because its philosophical insights into the *Being* of Humanity and human existences were profound yesterday, are profound today, and will continue to be profound tomorrow.

Jinli He's paper, "Wang Guowei and *A Dream of Red Mansions*", explores the view of Wang Guowei (1887-1927) on *A Dream of Red Mansions* with reference to Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's philosophies. Wang Guowei (王国维) is recognized

³⁴ Andrew Nathan, "From the classics to today: How much have values changed?" in this volume.

as one of the four masters of learning about *A Dream of Red Mansions* in early last century, and the other three are Hu Shi (胡适), Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) and Shou Pengfei (寿鹏飞). Wang's *Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions* (《紅樓夢評論》) is still recognized as a classic of commentaries on *A Dream of Red Mansions* among scholars of the novel in China today and is of great influence. Wang's philosophical affinity to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is underscored by the allegation that when he first read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, he understood nothing what Kant has said; read again, still progress is nowhere; then he read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and after that, read Kant, finally understood Kant.

In the essay, Jinli He points out that while Wang read *A Dream of Red Mansions* as a work of tragedy, his concept of tragedy was inspired by two German philosophers—Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; in particular, Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy plays a fundamental role in Wang's drawing from Western philosophers; meanwhile, Wang's *Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions* (紅樓夢評論 *Hongloumeng Pinglun*, 1904) indicates that Wang is heavily indebted to Nietzsche too and the relationship between his view and Nietzsche's philosophy is ever closer than to the relationship between Wang's thought and Schopenhauer's. That being said, He's paper then focuses on exploring the idea of "tragedy" in the thoughts of Wang, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. It argues that while being indebted to Schopenhauer, Wang's thoughts in his *Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions* in effect deviate from Schopenhauer's philosophy and represent a double movement back into Wang's own cultural sensibility—feeling for this world (人間情怀 *renjian qinghuai*). The double movement in *Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions* occurred in Wang's evoking of, but also departing from Nietzsche too. In the movement, Nietzsche's "spirit of tragedy" was brought into the earth of Chinese culture.

Wang read *A Dream of Red Mansions* as a tragedy and his concept of tragedy is evidentially influenced by Nietzsche. His affinity to Nietzsche lies also in another aspect. A celebrated part of Wang's commentary on *A Dream of Red Mansions* is his exploration of desire (欲 *yu*) as essential to human living in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. For him, the essence of human existence consists of externalization of human desires. As he said: "What is the essence of life? It is desire. As human nature, it is never satisfied enough (无厌 *wu yan*), and originated from lack of its object. Lack of the desired object leads to suffering. ... When one desire is satisfied, others follow ... Thus, life, desire, and suffering constitute a trinity."³⁵ According to Wang, "The desires of life precede life. Human living is nothing but discovery of such desires. The downfall of human beings is driven by desires and free will."³⁶ While jade is a central theme of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, what does jade represent? Wang insisted that in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, "Jade (玉 *yu*) represents desires (欲 *yu*) of

³⁵ Wang Guowei. (2008): "Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions," in *Masters' Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions*. Changchun, China: The Time Art Publishing House . 22-39, at p.23.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.27.

life. ... Whether human beings will downfall because of desires or liberate themselves by transcending desires depends on their will.³⁷ Thus, in Wang's view, human existence is driven by desires, struggle of desires, by desires, and for desires. The essence of human living is the struggle of desires, by desires, and for desires. The ultimate human liberation is the liberation from human desires. Wang's view here reminds readers of Nietzsche's concept of existence as will to power. By this token, Wang is philosophically at home with Nietzsche also in another aspect, in addition to his concept of tragedy is indebted to Nietzsche's.

Meanwhile, Wang's relation to Schopenhauer is exhibited in his extensive treatment of Schopenhauer in his *Commentaries on A Dream of Red Mansions*. In the *Commentaries*, Wang followed Schopenhauer to categorize tragedy into three kinds: "First, those that are produced by extreme evil persons who use their powers and strengths utmost to destroy the good. Second, those that are produced by blind fates. Third, those that are produced by joint forces of various peoples and social groups."³⁸ Wang categorized *A Dream of Red Mansions* in the third category of tragedy. Also, in the *Commentaries*, Wang quoted Schopenhauer as saying that that "the human will is exhibited utmost in desires of men and women for each other."³⁹ But he resisted Schopenhauer's concept of freedom from the will. Thus, overall, Wang is at home with Schopenhauer in some aspects, but differ from Schopenhauer in other aspects. Wang's relation to Schopenhauer exhibits what He dubs as "The double movement".

Michelle Zhang's paper, "Interpretation of *Journey to the West* as a Mind Theory" explores the Daoist presence in the Chinese literature classics, *Journey to the West*. It is a renovating attempt of a scientific reading of *Journey to the West*. It argues that *Journey to the West* treats Buddhist and Taoist scriptures as canons for cultivating the mind; doing so, the novel explicitly states that the protagonist Sun Wukong is resolved to cultivate *Xuan* (玄). Thus, the paper argues that in reading *Journey to the West*, one must treat *Xuan* as a faculty of the mind, which is conspicuously absent in reading the text in the past and today. Equally crucial, to have a proper understanding of the concept of *Xuan* in *Journey to the West*, a read need to refer back to Laozi's *Dao De Jing* on the condition of a recognition that texts in *Journey to the West* pertaining to the problem of mind give rise to a tri-part model of the mind, which consists of a thoughtless state of mind free of concepts, a mindful state of mind filled with concepts, and a dualistic mind faculty that goes between the other two (*Xuan*). By this token, the paper argues that in *Journey to the West*, the protagonist Tripitaka represented the thoughtless mind, while the protagonist Wukong represents the dualistic *Xuan*. This understanding thus makes it possible to explain the relationship between Daoism and Buddhism in *The Journey to the West*. Without the Buddhist Tripitaka, Wukong would be lost due to his desires that drive *Xuan*. Without the Daoist Wukong, who had insight into the forms of the Way, Tripitaka would fall for distractions and misunderstandings. Thus, only when Buddhism and Daoism are

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, pp.30-31.

³⁹ Ibid, p.35.

combined, we can get the true Buddhist sutras. Zhang's reading of *Journey to the West* challenges traditional reading of the novel as a work that advocate basic Buddhist philosophy and tenets. Correspondingly, protagonists in the novel are read as messengers of Buddhist philosophy. For example, in traditional reading, the name Sun Wukong (孙悟空) homophones with the words "xun wu Kong (寻悟空 searching for emptiness or awakening to emptiness). The name Zhu Bajie (猪八戒) homophones with the words "zhu ba jie" (诸八戒 the eight prohibitions), referring to the Buddhist eight prohibitions: prohibition of killing life (戒杀生), prohibition of stealing (戒偷盗), prohibition of sexual intimacy (戒淫邪), prohibition of false words (戒妄语), prohibition of wine (戒饮酒), prohibition of luxury dressing (戒着香华), prohibition of sleeping in bed that is high and big (戒坐卧高广大床), and prohibition of eating in wrong time (戒非时食). In traditional reading, *Journey to the West* is understood to teach the Buddhist doctrine of searching for enlightenment. Indeed, the title of the novel, *Journey to the West*, symbolically connotes a journey to Enlightenment or a journey of searching for enlightenment.

Mengyuan Li's paper "Hermeneutics and novels in Ming-Qing Dynasties" is not about the Four Chinese literature classics—*A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh*, but a historical examination of the hermeneutical commentaries on novels in Ming and Qing Dynasties. It points out that literature commentaries on novels in Ming-Qing dynasties and Anglo-American literary criticism share various common points, and one of them is that both strives for hermeneutical understanding of the true meaning of the texts, and thoughts in symbols; to do so, a reader must go beyond language and depart from subjectivity to allow the novel to speak to him/her. Returning to the text, focusing one's gaze on the text, and dig deeper and deeper into the meaning of the text, all of them is the necessary to understand the meaning of a text appropriately and adequately. Li's paper is complementary to other papers on the four Chinese literature classics. It is one stone for two birds. On the one hand, it proposes hermeneutical reading of novels in Ming-Qing dynasties. On the other hand, it explores what is a hermeneutical reading of the text.

In short, essays in this volume indicate that literature classics such as the four Chinese literature classics—*A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The History of Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Water Marsh*—constitute a rich realm of forms, insights, truths, wisdoms, illumination, voices, lessons, perspectives, horizons, and visions. In front of them, one should remind oneself of Robert Frost's beautiful lines: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep/ But I have promises to keep/ Miles to go before I sleep/ and miles to go before I sleep."⁴⁰ So should be John Keat's chiasmatic lines: Beauty is truth/truth beauty/that is all Ye know on earth/ and all ye need to know.

⁴⁰ Robert Frost (1967), *Robert Frost's Poems*. NY: Washington Square Press . p.198.